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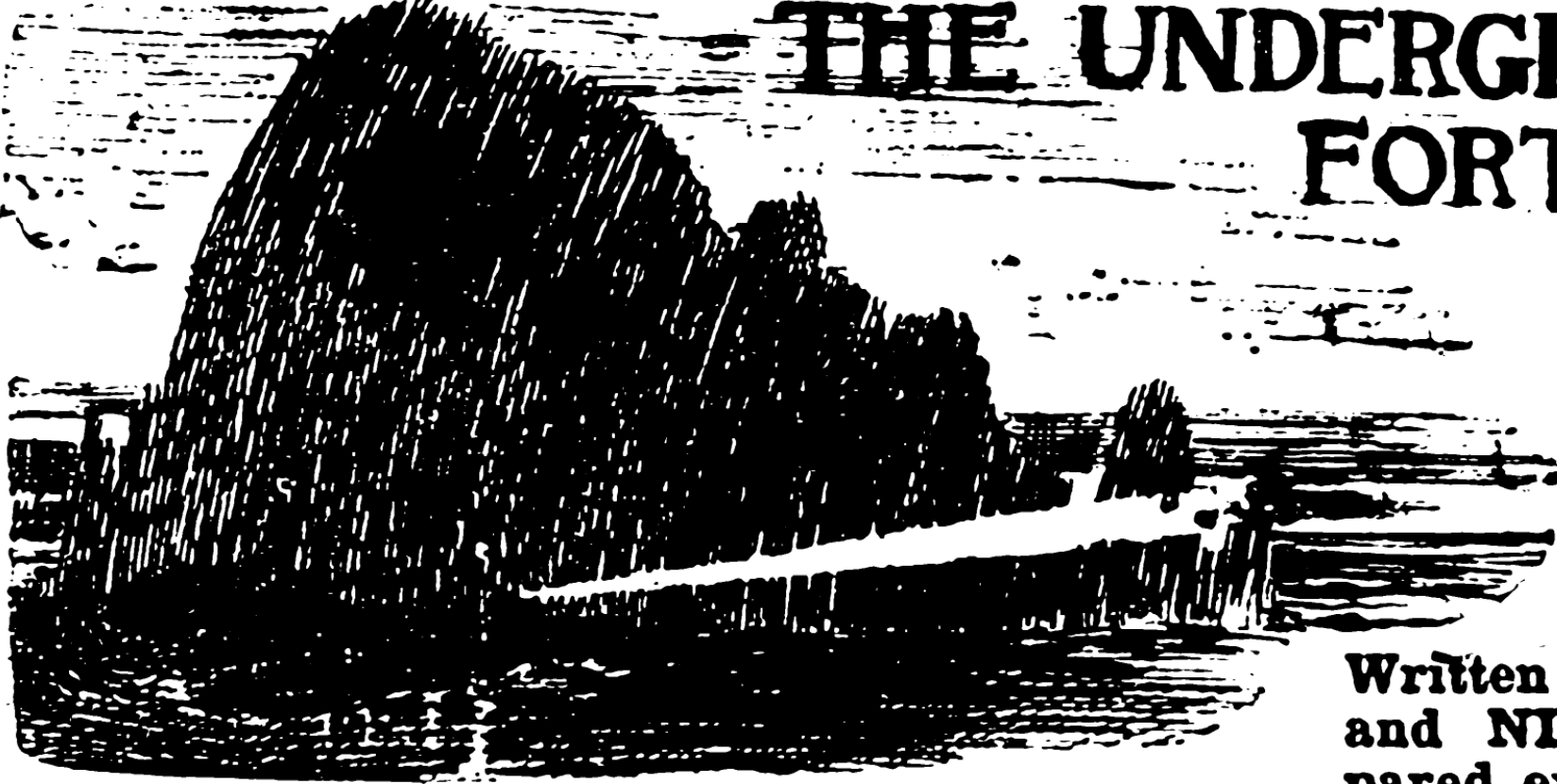
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THE UNDERGROUND FORTRESS.

Another Episode
in Nelson Lee's
Great Campaign
against "The
Circle of Terror."

Written by NELSON LEE
and NIPPER, and Pre-
pared expressly for Pub-

lication in the "Nelson Lee Library," by the Author of "The Abduction of Lady Marjorie," "The Circle's Great Coup," "The Island Stronghold," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

(Recorded by Nipper.)

THE MEETING AT SCOTLAND YARD—THE
DECISION—ON BOARD THE X 55.

NELSON LEE, the world-famous criminologist—and my respected guv'nor—reached over and selected another cigar.

"The expedition is going to be a stiff one, gentlemen," he said easily, "but we stand to gain a very important result. By this one blow we may possibly get hold of the High Lord himself; and, in any case, we shall strike the Circle of Terror such a blow that it will be materially weakened."

It was quite a select party, and the scene was the chief inspector's private sanctum at Scotland Yard. Nelson Lee and I were present. It was the guv'nor who had called the meeting, in fact. In addition, there were Detective-Inspectors Lennard, Morley, and Fuller. These three were all well known to us. On many occasions they had worked with Nelson Lee in different cases.

One or two other Scotland Yard detectives were present in the apartment, but I needn't name them.

The consultation was one of great importance, for vital questions were to be decided. These questions dealt with Nelson Lee's great fight against the Circle of Terror—the most powerful criminal society which ever menaced the peace-loving population of Great Britain.

"You know most of the facts, gentlemen," continued the guv'nor, lying back

in his chair. "The Circle gained possession of a new type of submarine, invented and owned by a certain Captain Maxwell. I was requested to recover the vessel, and, after a considerable amount of trouble, I did so."

"A deucedly smart piece of work, Mr. Lee!" said Detective-Inspector Lennard, with a nod. "I wish I'd been there to help you. You dished the Circle beautifully! They think the submarine's gone to the bottom, don't they?"

The guv'nor nodded.

Nipper and I were on board the liner Angonia when the Circle's submarine—as it was then—held her up in the Irish Sea. By a ruse, I succeeded in getting aboard the little craft, and was carried in her to an island off the coast of Scotland. My real identity was never suspected. I was supposed to be a special agent from America. I met the High Lord himself, and he suspected nothing."

"A risky business, Mr. Lee—infernally risky!" remarked the chief superintendent, stroking his neatly pointed beard. "You took your life in your hands that trip. The only wonder is that you came through alive."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"During my battle with the Circle of Terror I have taken my life in my hands many times," he said quietly. "Nipper, here, is no exception. He has shared every risk with me, and has proved his pluck often enough."

"It's not pluck, sir," I grinned. "I happen to have a decent nerve—that's all."

"Call it what you like, Nipper; it makes no difference," said the gov'nor. "But we are not here to discuss your qualities, young 'un. We have got to formulate a plan of action. As I was saying, I was taken to this island—Cathrey Island, as it is called."

"You did a smart piece of work there, didn't you?" asked Detective-Inspector Morley, crossing his legs. "You brought the submarine out with the supposed intention of looting a big ship, and calmly handed her over to one of our destroyers?"

"That's right!" nodded Lee. "Now, gentlemen, that is really the most important point of all. The High Lord himself is on this island. He knew that the submarine went out on a special mission. If I had handed the vessel over openly, the Circle's chief would have known that his island stronghold was unsafe. Accordingly, I caused a report to be widely circulated to the effect that several bodies had been picked up somewhere off the coast of Scotland. The Circle of Terror naturally believe that those bodies were dead. As we know, however, they were not. The submarine was taken secretly into port, and every Circle man on board was made a prisoner."

"That was a cute dodge of yours, Lee," smiled the superintendent. "It had the exact desired effect. These Circle of Terror brutes have no suspicions now. They merely think that the submarine foundered, with the loss of all hands. Therefore they have made no attempt to abandon the island."

"That is the position exactly," agreed Nelson Lee. "During my short stay upon the island, I was permitted to learn several valuable secrets. For example, this barren rock is in reality a veritable fortress. It is protected from attack by a large number of machine-guns. Any party attempting to land by daylight would undoubtedly meet with disaster."

"Prow! A tough proposition!" murmured Lennard.

"Tough is scarcely the word, my dear fellow," said Lee. "This island is completely fortified. It is a place where a hundred workmen are constantly employed in the nefarious work of the great criminal society. There are great workshops beneath the rocks, all supplied with up-to-date machinery and electrically lit throughout. I did not enter these, but I know they exist. Outwardly, the island appears to be a mere waste of tumbled

rocks, with scarcely a single patch of vegetation; but within it is honeycombed with tunnels and caverns."

"But such excavations would have taken years——"

"My dear Lennard, these tunnels I speak of—these caverns—were made by Nature," put in the gov'nor. "They have merely been adapted by these Circle scoundrels. A cut here and an excavation there was all that was needed to transform the place. Moreover, there is a narrow inlet between the rocks which leads into a perfect, natural harbour. From the sea this harbour is invisible, but it exists, nevertheless. I was really astounded by the singular qualities of Cathrey Island. The High Lord's steam yacht lay at anchor all the time I was there. Any other ship, passing quite close to the island, could see nothing of it. She is there now; in all probability, and it is one of our objects to seize her."

"But how do you propose to get to work, Mr. Lee?" asked the superintendent thoughtfully. "It seems to me that we want a man-of-war for this job!"

"Precisely! That is what I propose!"

"But, my dear Lee——"

"Surely we can secure a naval craft to assist us in this expedition?" went on the gov'nor quickly. "The Circle of Terror is a menace to the whole country. The sooner the vile organisation is wrecked, the better it will be for everybody. The island must be captured at once. It will be a difficult task—a perilous task; but I am quite ready to take my share of the risks. Actually, it is an affair for the police; but I wish to participate in the adventure."

The chief nodded.

"I quite understand your argument, Lee," he said. "By hook or by crook, Cathrey Island must be seized; and it is so fortified and protected that it will be necessary to make full preparations before venturing on the mission. Considering that this island was discovered by you yourself, it is essential that you should lead this expedition. I intend to place my men completely under your command. For the time being you will be under the commission of the Government. You have merely to propose your plans, and I will see that they are carried out."

Nelson Lee flushed with pleasure.

"I appreciate your confidence in me," he said quietly. "I will do my best to justify it. Nipper, of course will come

with us. I can't do anything without Nipper," he added, with a smile.

I was rather glad I'd come to this meeting. The gov'nor and I were having quite a number of compliments paid to us. Not that they weren't justified—in Nelson Lee's case, I mean. He had displayed extraordinary ingenuity in battling with the Circle of Terror, and it was nice to hear that he was to be placed in sole command of this projected mission to Cathrey Island.

"I don't quite see how the job's going to be worked," observed Detective-Inspector Morley, absently twisting his mustache. "Machine-guns, you say? A hundred men on the island? By glory, it's going to be a stiff piece of work, Lee! Why can't the place be bombarded, so as to reduce it to such a state that the garrison will surrender?"

"It could be bombarded quite easily," replied the detective. "But, my dear Morley, ammunition is rather useful; there's no sense in wasting it."

"Wasting it?"

"Exactly! A Dreadnought's biggest guns would make very little impression on the rocks of Cathrey Island," said Lee grimly. "You haven't been there, old man; you don't know what we're up against. Every tunnel entrance is hidden from the sea by intervening masses of rock. A week's bombardment would do little else but chip the rocks, and a landing-party would be simply wiped out."

"That's very cheerful!" said Lennard drily. "How, in wonder's name, do you propose to capture the island?"

"It ought to be quite simple——"

"Simple!"

"Yes, if the plan I have in my mind can be carried out," said the gov'nor. "But, before entering into that, I wish to refer to another matter. For some little time I have been in possession of a certain vital piece of information, and I now propose to reveal it to you. I think you have all heard of Professor Cyrus Zingrave?"

Everybody smiled.

"You're joking, Mr. Lee," remarked the superintendent. "Who hasn't heard of that clever rogue? Thank Heaven he's dead! It was mainly owing to your efforts, Lee, that the League of the Green Triangle was smashed and beaten. It was rather a pity that Zingrave couldn't be captured, but everybody was relieved, nevertheless, when they learned that the infamous professor had lost his life. But

why have you mentioned his name now?"

"Because it is necessary that I should do so," smiled Nelson Lee. "The High Lord of the Circle of Terror is a mysterious individual. His identity had remained hidden since the Circle commenced its nefarious operations. Not even the members of the society itself know who their chief actually is. But it so happens that I do."

"You know him?" asked the superintendent keenly.

"Yes, and so do you!"

"I assure you, Lee, I haven't the slightest idea of this man's identity," said the chief, leaning forward in his chair. "That has been one of the open sores which refuse to be healed. The police have never known who—— But, good gracious, you can't mean to suggest——"

"Exactly!" nodded the gov'nor, enjoying the situation. "But I don't suggest it—I state it as a positive fact."

"That Zingrave is alive—this so-called High Lord of the Circle of Terror?" ejaculated the superintendent, rising to his feet. "I can't believe it, Lee! The thing's impossible! Zingrave died——"

"The world believed so, but the world believed wrong," interjected Lee gently. "That is my revelation, gentlemen. I thought it necessary that you should know. We are fighting our old enemy, the professor. It is his brain that is responsible for this epidemic of organised crime. Until he is captured, we shall never be free from these criminal leagues. First it was the Green Triangle; now it is the Circle of Terror. If the Circle is smashed to atoms, Zingrave will organise another society on similar lines. We must get hold of the professor!"

Everybody in the room was looking extremely amazed. It was rather good to see these hard-headed Scotland Yard officials being bowled over, so to speak, by a mere "amateur." The gov'nor and I had known the High Lord's identity for some little time, but I hadn't thought that he would let the police into the know yet awhile. I realised, however, that the time had come when it was necessary to be frank.

"Zingrave alive!" muttered Detective-Inspector Lennard, almost blankly. "My dear Lee, if anybody else had told me that, I should have called him a liar! I should have laughed in his face. It was I who had most to do with that confounded Green Triangle, and I fondly

imagined that the whole thing was dead and gone. And now it turns out that the Circle of Terror is merely a more highly organised edition of the original league!"

"You have put it very neatly, Lennard," smiled the gov'nor. "It doesn't really matter what these criminals call their society. Zingrave is at its head, and Zingrave possesses a master brain. There's no sense in blinking at the fact, gentlemen. Professor Cyrus Zingrave is the most complete criminal of modern times. His powers of organisation are simply astounding. His facility for hiding his tracks are a constant source of amazement to me. On numerous occasions, I have been right at his heels and then he has vanished. He has an almost uncanny faculty of scenting danger from afar, and he is inordinately cautious in all things. To trap him will be an extremely delicate task. The precautions he takes are such that we might even have him under lock and key, and yet he will be absent an hour or two afterwards. You know all this as well as I do. And you will understand what I mean when I say that the expedition to Cathrey Island promises to be an epoch-making event, for, in truth, we stand an excellent chance of capturing the professor red-handed. Even if we don't capture him, we shall deliver a stunning blow."

It was some little while before the meeting recovered itself from the surprise which Nelson Lee had sprung. The ignorance of Scotland Yard regarding the High Lord's identity had been a thorn in the side of that famous institution for months past. These officials were highly pleased to learn the truth—but that pleasure was rather modified by the knowledge that the chief enemy was the notorious Zingrave.

"Needless to say, Lee, every effort will be made to carry out your plans successfully," said the chief superintendent. "Now, what do you propose? I shall take the liberty of criticising your suggestions, and may even alter them in some ways. But it is rather early for me to speak."

This proved to be the case. For, after the gov'nor had described his ideas at length, the superintendent declared that no alterations were necessary. This was a compliment. The gov'nor's plan of action was approved in every detail.

"I shall want some good men with me," concluded Lee, tossing his cigar end into the fire. "You, Morley—and you,

Lennard. The pair of you will have to come along. You don't mind taking risks, I know—and there will be plenty on this job."

"You can be sure that I shall choose only the most capable officers," said the superintendent. "And you wish to start to-morrow morning, Lee?"

"Not a minute later."

"It will be brisk work, but I'll do my best," said the other. "So far as my men are concerned, they will be all ready this evening. I'm not quite so sure about the naval people. The Admiralty's rather slow when you particularly want them to be smart. But I'll buck them up on this occasion."

And thus it came about that Nelson Lee and I found ourselves standing on the dockside at Sheerness the following morning.

Nelson Lee had made certain preparations, and now everything was in readiness for the start of the great adventure. For, by the look of it, this particular game promised to be of unusual importance. The gov'nor and I were not entering into it alone; we had many first-class helpers with us.

Naturally, I was agog with excitement. I can't take things so calmly as the gov'nor can. I don't pretend to. And so, as we stood upon the dock, I was bubbling with anticipation and eagerness.

The day was lovely—and perhaps that made my spirits soar. We'd been having rotten weather during the last three or four days. But now the winter sun shone with spring-like brilliance, and the sea reflected the cold blue light of the cloudless sky.

Moored to the quay was a vessel which was not exactly pleasing to the eyesight. I disapproved of her, and told the gov'nor so. And he told me, in turn, not to grumble; we were lucky to get a warship of any sort.

This vessel was the X 55, and she was an old-type torpedo-boat-destroyer—one of the almost obsolete coal-fuel boats which had been relegated to unimportant naval work. A great many of the new-type T.B.D.'s are, of course, run on oil-fuel. I should have preferred one of these boats myself. But the X 55, although grimy and untidy, looked as though she could do a bit of damage if necessary.

Her commander was a young chap named Lieutenant Wallace, and he was under special orders from the Admiralty. It was his job to take us up to Cathrey Island. After that he would be, in some degree, under Nelson Lee's command.

The boat was, for the time being, at the disposal of the police authorities, and the gov'nor was leading the whole party. This consisted of Nelson Lee and myself, Detective-Inspectors Lennard and Morley, and eighteen other picked Scotland Yard men. The gov'nor and I had arrived at Sheerness in advance, and as soon as we got on board the X 55, Lee had a few private words with her young commander.

An hour after that the Scotland Yard crowd trooped on board. The accommodation wasn't exactly luxurious, but we didn't grumble. Destroyers aren't made to carry passengers, anyhow.

And we slipped away from Sheerness, and were soon steaming northwards at a nice, even pace. As I stood at the rail, gazing across at the sun-bathed shore, I wondered how we should fare.

At all events, I was pretty certain of one thing—there wouldn't be any lack of thrills.

CHAPTER II.

(*Nipper continues.*)

THE CATHREY ISLAND—THE TWO LANDING PARTIES—THE CAPTURE OF THE YACHT.

THE night was as black as pitch.

The sea lay calm and still, and only the faint, soft lapping of the water could be heard against the grimy plates of the X 55. The destroyer lay at anchor, with all lights doused.

We were just off Cathrey Island, a mere black smudge upon the surface of the sea. At a distance of twenty fathoms we were totally invisible. I stood on deck with the gov'nor and Detective-Inspector Lennard.

We spoke in the merest whispers, for sounds carry easily over water. We were all looking keenly and searchingly in the direction of the island. It stood out gloomily against the sky-line, and nobody in ignorance of the facts would have believed that such a barren rock was, in reality, a hive of criminal industry.

The island seemed to be utterly and absolutely deserted. Not a spark of light showed from any quarter, and only the

sound of the softly breaking waves came to our ears. The shores, for the most part, were rock-girt and inaccessible. But, as Nelson Lee knew, just beyond the jutting point the concealed gap led into a perfectly natural little harbour.

"It ought to be successful, if we take proper care," remarked Lennard softly. "Of course, it'll be thundering risky. If we're collared, Lee, it'll be all up with us. There's no doubt on that point."

"My dear fellow, there's no need to look on the black side," smiled the gov'nor. "We mustn't go ashore with the expectation of being captured—although it's just as well to be prepared for such a contingency. We're here to make ~~this~~ affair a success. And the very first consideration is to get hold of the yacht."

"Supposing she's not there, sir?" I asked.

"In that event, young 'un, we sha'n't capture her, shall we?" said the gov'nor easily. "But the yacht has not been seen for days. I am practically convinced that the vessel is lying low in this concealed harbour. And, in all probability, Zingrave is aboard her at this present moment."

"Let's hope we get hold of them at the start," remarked Lennard. "That'll simplify matters a heap. I'm going ashore with your party, I believe?"

"Yes—and it's close upon time for the start, too."

"When you like, old man—I'm ready."

Lennard and the gov'nor moved quietly across the deck. Silent preparations had been going on for half an hour past. And now, as we soon learned, everything was in readiness.

The destroyer's two whalers—she was carrying two of these boats at present—were both in the water. They were manned by members of the crew, and in each were eight Scotland Yard men. In addition, Detective-Inspector Morley was in command of one batch, and Nelson Lee had charge of the other.

Inspector Lennard and I were with Nelson Lee. We were bound for the south shore, and it was our task to take possession of the yacht as a preliminary. Morley's party had been instructed to land on the north shore—right on the other side of the island. After that they had to await a signal.

Morley's boat started away first, for it was reckoned that it would take the best

part of an hour to get round to his landing point; for it was necessary to move very slowly, without giving the slightest indication of the boat's approach.

Our own whaler had to proceed in exactly the same way. The guv'nor and I and Lennard—and all the other Yard men—were fully armed. The naval men were merely carrying us ashore; they would take no active part in the affair. This wasn't a naval proposition, and if the X 55's crew were called upon to act, it would be in an emergency.

The whaler slid away from the destroyer's side, and moved without a sound in the direction of the island. All the oars were muffled, and every man had been given careful instructions not to cause the slightest sound of a splash. There was no particular need for hurry, but there was need for secrecy.

Nelson Lee and I sat on the bows, and Lennard in the stern. The guv'nor was looking intently at the shore through night glasses, and after a few minutes he turned to me.

"I can't quite see, Nipper," he remarked softly. "The gap is somewhere among the rocks ahead, but it is so cunningly hidden that it is well-nigh invisible in this dense gloom. We shall have to wait until we get nearer."

"We'll find it, guv'nor," I whispered confidently.

The boat crept onwards, and we kept our eyes open for any sign of an alarm on the island. If our approach was discovered it would be bad for us. In all probability, machine guns would be fired, and— Well, I didn't care to think of that aspect of the case.

I found myself wondering if we had come to the right island. It seemed impossible that this barren rock could be inhabited. It was merely a waste of tumbled crags and boulders.

As far as I could see—and that wasn't far—the whole coast line in front of us was so rugged that a landing was out of the question. We seemed to be making straight for a line of beetling cliffs, in which there was not the slightest sign of an opening.

But the guv'nor didn't alter his course, and he must have known what he was doing. We crept nearer and nearer, and, after a while, I heard the guv'nor whisper a word of instruction. We bore to the left a trifle, and then went straight on again. This seemed quite pointless to me

at the time—but I soon found out the reason.

Apparently we were making for a high wall of rocks. But when we were within a short distance of them, I noticed that they opened out, and a deep gully lay revealed.

We entered this silently, and proceeded for about five minutes, the oars being scarcely used at all. The rocks echoed, and it was necessary to be extremely cautious.

"Are we going right, sir?" I breathed softly.

"Yes, young 'un. After another minute or two we shall probably come within sight of the yacht itself," replied Nelson Lee, right into my ear. "But we had better not talk—not even in whispers."

And so we progressed slowly but surely. The gap seemed to widen after a while, and then we turned a point where the rocks jutted out. And, right before us, we saw two faint gleams of light.

I knew at once that they came from portholes in a big vessel. Zingrave's yacht lay before us; Nelson Lee's calculations had been correct. At first, I was rather surprised that there should be any lights showing, but then I realised that there was no reason for complete darkness upon the yacht.

The vessel was completely hidden in this snug retreat. In the direction of the sea there were high, towering rocks, and they completely hid all that lay behind. Without having positive knowledge of the real situation, anybody would swear that there was no landing place on this side of the island.

And yet Professor Zingrave's yacht lay here, unseen from outside, quite secure from any observation. There was a landing-stage beyond, but we saw no sign of this. The guv'nor, however, had stood upon it more than once—and he knew exactly where it lay.

The island itself was quite black, and no sounds came to our ears except the soft breaking of the waves upon the strip of shingle which lay beyond.

We proceeded with greater caution than ever, and when one of the sailors caused a slight splash, we remained still for a full minute. Everything depended upon the silence of our approach. Success could only be attained by springing a complete surprise. If we ourselves were surprised, our project would end in dire failure—disaster, indeed.

Nelson Lee had told us that there were look-outs stationed at various points. These men, although invisible, were at their posts. It was necessary to approach under their very noses, and without their knowledge.

The whole adventure, in fact, was fraught with perils.

Our first objective was the yacht. Possibly a look-out was stationed on deck. If so, our task would, indeed, be a difficult one. But the gov'nor did not fear much trouble in this direction. The vessel lay at anchor some distance from the shore, and there was no sign of movement or life as we slid nearer.

The yacht, I could see, was not so very large, but it was a fast looking craft, and was spick and span. As we glided past the stern I could faintly see her name boldly painted in gold lettering: "Morning Mist."

"I don't suppose the yacht had always been called the Morning Mist; she had probably changed her name upon several occasions—and her appearance, too.

I held myself ready for instant action in case of discovery. But the whaler crossed her way along the port side until at last she lay alongside the gangway. This was in position, and a small dinghy was tied there.

We did not allow the whaler to scrape in the slightest degree as we pulled up. Several hands held her just clear of the gangway platform. And then, without a single word being spoken, Detective-Inspector Lennard and his men crept up the ladder. The gov'nor and I followed close on their heels.

It had been arranged that Nelson Lee himself should lead the party, but it hadn't been possible for him to get out of the whaler first. But when he and I found ourselves on the deck, Lennard and his men were waiting.

We had boarded the yacht successfully.

The decks were deserted and silent; the bridge was in a similar state. It was clear, however, that steam was up, for a lazy haze of vapour was rising from the single funnel.

I don't know exactly what I expected—but I did not anticipate such an easy victory as we gained. The Morning Mist, in fact, was seized without any real difficulty. In elegant language, it was a walk-over.

Having made sure that the decks were empty, and that no watch was being

kept, Nelson Lee led the way down the companion. Lennard and five men had gone for'ard, to attend to matters up there.

The state-rooms and cabins were all still and dark. So far we hadn't seen a soul, and I began to believe that the yacht was quite deserted.

But when we came to the engine-room hatch, we heard voices below. Carefully lifting the hatch, Lee gazed down. I caught a glimpse, too. The yacht was only small, as I explained before, and the engine-room wasn't so far down.

Three men were below us. They were lounging in a group, smoking and talking. Steam was up, and they apparently had orders to keep the boat ready for instant departure, in case of necessity.

The gov'nor drew out his revolver, and motioned to his men to prepare themselves, also. Then Lee drew the hatch back, and rapidly descended the iron ladder. I was hard on his heels—or rather, his head, for he was just below me.

"Hallo! What the——"

One of the engineers began speaking, but he stopped abruptly as he caught sight of Nelson Lee's revolver. The whole thing had been done so quickly that the Circle men were taken completely by surprise.

I was already in the engine-room, and the three Yard men who were with us, came tumbling after me.

"Just a word of advice, my friends," said Nelson Lee calmly. "You are outnumbered—you are completely helpless. You had better give in——"

"Who—who are you?" stammered one of the men.

"That question is unnecessary," said the gov'nor smoothly. "The situation is rather acute, and I am not anxious to waste any of my bullets. But I assure you we are here for a certain purpose—and we will stand no nonsense. Do you surrender at once, or——"

"The police!" breathed one of the men hoarsely.

"Exactly!" smiled Lee. "This is just a little raid."

The three Circle fellows acted sensibly. They surrendered without hesitation. What else could they do? There were five useful-looking revolvers knocking about in the near vicinity—all of them handled by determined men. I

wasn't exactly a man, but I was just as determined as the others.

The engineers felt themselves under no obligation to risk grave injury by resisting. And so, three minutes later, they were handcuffed and helpless. Nelson Lee was looking rather pleased with the way things had gone.

"Who else is on board this vessel?" he asked crisply.

The chief engineer shook his head solemnly.

"You don't get me to answer any questions," he said. "You've got the three of us right enough—but we don't give any information—savee?"

The guv'nor smiled.

"You imagine that rescue will come?" he exclaimed. "Possibly, my friend—but not probably. This raid has been organised with great care, and I don't think it will be a failure."

"You don't know the High Lord —"

Before the man could get any further a heavy iron door was suddenly thrust open, and I instinctively jerked my automatic pistol into position. But I needn't have worried. Two men strode through into the engine-room.

"Now then, hands up—well, I'm hanged!"

For the intruder was Detective-Inspector Lennard.

"I was expecting a decent scrap in here," he explained cheerfully. "It seems that I've arrived too late. We've got a couple of the beauties in the stoke-hold. That makes five, doesn't it?"

"What a head for figures you've got, Mr. Lennard!" I grinned. "But do you mean to say that there were only two men in the stoke-hold?"

"That's all—just keeping things going, I suppose. The crew seems to be ashore, mostly," said the inspector. "Anyhow, there's not another soul on board."

The guv'nor and I passed through into the stoke-hold, and there found two grimy-looking individuals who were handcuffed like the engineers. Nelson Lee nodded with approval as he eyed them.

"Just fetch those other captives in here, will you, Lennard?" he said briskly. "We might as well have them all together. And detail two of your men to remain on guard over them. We don't want to stop here a minute longer than is necessary."

The matter was soon arranged. The five prisoners were placed together, and two of Lennard's henchmen were told off to remain in the stoke-hold, on guard. It was highly necessary for a watch to be kept over the captives.

A thorough search of the yacht revealed the fact that no other Circle man was on board. The five we had encountered had obviously been left in sole charge for the time being.

"I had been hoping that we should find Zingrave himself on board," remarked Nelson Lee, as we held a short consultation in one of the dark state-rooms. "However, we can't expect to gain everything at one blow. We must be thankful that our enterprise has prospered so well at the start."

"What's the next move, sir?" I asked eagerly.

"Having gained possession of the yacht, the real adventure commences," was the guv'nor's grim reply. "This has been merely a preliminary skirmish. The capture of the island itself will be difficult—but there is no reason to fear that it cannot be accomplished."

"I suppose we'd better be ~~making~~ a move," suggested Lennard, in a low voice. "Morley and his lot will have landed by this time, I expect, and we don't want to keep them waiting too long."

And so, a minute later, we crept up on deck, and once more boarded the whaler. Two men were left in the stoke-hold, and a third on deck. The rest of us made silently and stealthily for the landing-stage.

CHAPTER III.

(Nipper continues.)

THE LANDING—THE SURRENDER OF THE GARRISON—THE GUV'NOR LEAVES.

WE stood upon Cathrey Island.

At close quarters, the rocks which rose on every hand seemed more formidable than ever. How the dickens we are going to progress was a puzzle to me. But Nelson Lee was quite confident.

He had been there before, of course. He spent quite a time on the island. He had seen the place in daylight, and at night. And the guv'nor's eyes were pretty useful articles.

He had mentally planned this raid

even at that time. And he had memorised every pathway and turning. And now, in spite of the gloom, he assured us that he could lead the way to the cavern entrances.

I'll admit that I was a wee bit sceptical.

The slightest slip or mistake, might mean disaster. The situation was extremely tense. We were in the enemy's territory—and this enemy, although not of the Teutonic variety, was every bit as formidable.

We were raiding the Circle of Terror's chief stronghold, and if we were captured, there would be no mercy for us. The one great feature in our favour was that this attack was a complete surprise.

In spite of the fact that we should be tremendously outnumbered in a fight, the odds were really in our favour.

For Cathrey Island possessed one disadvantage.

Right beneath the rocks there were caverns—converted into modern workshops and living quarters. All of these were lit by electricity. The underground caverns were reached by means of natural tunnels.

According to the gov'nor's knowledge, there were three tunnels—three only. If these entrances were all blocked, the whole island's garrison would be bottled up.

The idea, therefore, was to place a body of men before each tunnel at once. If the alarm was given afterwards it wouldn't matter a hang, for we should have the Circle crowd at our mercy. The great danger lay in the fact that there were possibly look-outs.

The landing-stage proved to be quite a small affair. It was deserted, and a wide path led towards the rocks in the background. It was quite clear that no attack was anticipated. The community, it seemed, was below, in the burrows.

Talking was strictly prohibited, even in the merest whispers. The gov'nor and I—everybody, in fact—wore special shoes with soft rubber soles. We made no sounds whatever as we walked.

And the friendly darkness concealed our moving forms.

Nelson Lee led the way, and the inspector and I followed close behind. The others came after us in single file. The whale had remained at the landing-stage, in instant readiness for departure—in case of emergency.

We soon found ourselves creeping up

a winding pathway which seemed to be hewn out of the solid rocks. And then, quite suddenly, Lee stopped dead. I saw him pointing upwards.

Some little distance up the path, and clearly visible to us against the sky-line, stood the figure of a man. He was motionless at first, but after a few seconds I saw him shifting his position.

"One of the look-outs!" I told myself.

And the fellow was standing on the path, right ahead of us!

Nelson Lee did not hesitate a moment. He placed his mouth close against my ear, and whispered a few soft words.

"Don't move until I come back!" he said, in the faintest breath.

And then, before I could detain him, he crept onwards and disappeared into the gloom. I felt rather alarmed, but I did not think of following him. I could only crouch there and keep my gaze fixed upon the solitary figure of the sentry.

Lennard, behind me, was obviously puzzled, and I thought it safe to whisper a word of explanation. So I repeated the gov'nor's tactics, and placed my mouth close against the inspector's face.

"The gov'nor's gone on ahead!" I breathed. "There's a sentry up on the path, and he needs a bit of attention. You can bet he'll get it!"

"Hope it's all right!" grunted Lennard.

I looked up again. The look-out still stood in the same position, except that his arms were now resting on a ledge of rock which rose alongside. He certainly had no suspicion that strangers were so near. I distinctly saw him yawn, and then he turned with the probable object of pacing up and down.

But just then a black figure rose up from the very rock itself. It gave one spring, and the next second the sentry was jerked over with a thud. But only a slight, sobbing gasp reached my ears.

And then complete silence.

Two minutes slipped by—three—and just as I was becoming slightly anxious I saw Nelson Lee returning. He crept up to me, and was as cool as ever.

"Took the fellow by surprise beautifully," he murmured. "I found it necessary to use the butt of my revolver rather severely—but this is no time for delicate measures. I don't think he'll bother us."

"You—you haven't—"

"My dear Nipper, you need not be alarmed," whispered Lee reassuringly. "The sentry will be himself again in less than an hour. Follow me carefully."

The look-out having been disposed of, we continued our way. Presently we arrived at the spot where the Circle man had been standing. He wasn't standing now. He lay against the rocks quite peacefully, with his wrists bound to his feet, and his mouth covered by a rough, but effectual gag.

Only about twenty yards past this spot we came to a small crevice in the rocks. At least, it seemed small at first. But I soon found out that it widened very considerably just within the opening.

And then, bearing to the left, we saw an almost straight tunnel leading into the very bowels of the island. Right in the distance a dim yellowish glow was visible. But no other human being was within sight.

The sentry had very obviously been guarding this tunnel, and we were all very pleased at our early success. So far we had not received the slightest sign that our presence had become known.

The glow at the end of the tunnel was caused, possibly, by a hidden electric lamp. There was no danger of any light being seen from outside, for the rocks completely concealed the tunnel entrance.

We made no attempt to venture within.

Three of Lennard's men were placed on the spot. We had brought with us three tiny machine-guns, of the Lewis type, and one of these was left here. The gov'nor and I, and the rest then proceeded on our way.

How Lee could be sure of his direction was a puzzle to me, but he did not falter once. His memory was remarkable, and at the end of another six minutes we found ourselves in close proximity to the second tunnel.

This one was not guarded. At all events, in spite of careful scouting, no sentry could be seen. And so we were compelled to creep boldly up and take the chance. We just entered the tunnel, and here the inspector was left with his two men and the other machine gun.

It was necessary for two guns to be at this spot. For the tunnel was extremely wide and uneven. One gun would

scarcely have been sufficient to stop a sudden rush.

Nelson Lee and I left Lennard almost at once, and ventured out by ourselves.

"So far so good!" whispered the great detective. "We must now go to the spot where we have arranged to meet Morley. The other entrance, Nipper, is some little distance from here—and we mustn't lose any time."

"Isn't there a wireless station——"

"Yes, but we'll attend to that later."

Two of the tunnels were guarded, at least, and it seemed likely that our project would be successful. It all depended upon how Detective-Inspector Morley had fared. If he had been unable to land, it was possible that the whole plan would fizzle out. But I didn't think for a moment that we should fail.

It was a ticklish business crossing the rocks to the north end of the island. There was no well-defined path, and Nelson Lee led the way more by instinct than anything else. Anyhow, we found Morley and the others waiting patiently for us at the arranged spot—a place where two pillars of rock jutted up into the sky.

"We've been waiting here twenty minutes or more, Lee," whispered Morley. "How have things gone with you?"

"First rate!" replied the gov'nor. "The yacht's ours, and we've got two tunnel entrances already manned."

"Good business! Any alarms?"

"None. And you?"

"Haven't seen a sign of anybody," breathed Morley. "I'd half made myself believe that we'd landed on the wrong island!"

The gov'nor chuckled.

"You'll know differently before long, even if you don't now," he replied. "There is only one more tunnel to man, and it's not far from here. You've brought those two guns along, I suppose?"

"Of course!"

After a brief discussion, we moved along, and, in single file, progressed until we reached the third tunnel. This differed considerably from the others. It was in the form of a great cave at the entrance, and would necessarily need a considerable amount of guarding. Some little distance within the cave narrowed down to a tunnel similar to the others.

Both the guns which Morley had brought were placed in position. Every-

thing was now in readiness for the surprise. We were all feeling intensely pleased, for we now had the Circle scoundrels bottled up.

There only remained the wireless operator. It was highly necessary that he should be dealt with, and so the guv'nor started off with two men. The wireless station was only just on top of the hill, and he reckoned to be back within the space of ten minutes. It wasn't really surprising that we had only encountered one sentry. He had been placed in a position overlooking the yacht, and any others had been apparently considered unnecessary.

Zingrave, in spite of his cleverness, had never considered the possibility of a determined night attack. Indeed, why should he anticipate such a thing? The High Lord had not the slightest idea that this stronghold of his was known to the police.

Nelson Lee returned, with only one man, at the end of eight minutes exactly. The wireless operator had been seized without difficulty, and was now helpless.

"The general signal had better be given at once," said Lee, after he had briefly explained the result of his execution. "There is no object to be gained by delaying action."

The signal was quite a simple one.

At the same second, both the small machine-guns barked aggressively. The noise they created was simply terrific in the confines of the cavern. The sound must have been heard over every inch of the island.

It was a shattering roar, and continued for about twenty seconds. A dead silence followed.

"That ought to wake 'em up," I said breathlessly. "By Jingo, things 'll get exciting in a minute or two!"

They did!

As we stood listening, we heard quite clearly two answering volleys in the distance. Lennard and the other Yard men were loosing off a few bullets into the respective tunnels.

If there had been any doubt regarding the number of men who occupied the caverns below, that doubt was soon dispelled, for from within the cave we heard a wild confusion of shouts. The cavern suddenly became ablaze with electric light, and the forms of running men could be seen emerging from the farther end.

"I call upon you to surrender!" shouted Nelson Lee loudly. "If you attempt any resistance, it will only end

in needless bloodshed! In the name of the law——"

A furious shout interrupted the guv'nor's words. The men we could see were dressed in overalls mainly, and they were all looking scared and angry. But one or two other men, who were clearly leaders, gave some sharp orders. It was a tense moment.

"We have guns with us!" said Nelson Lee warningly.

"Hang you!" roared one of the leaders. "We'll never surrender! Rush these fools before they can act, men!"

The rush began at once.

Fully thirty men came charging across the cavern. If they were allowed to reach us, we should have been overwhelmed in a moment; but quick as a flash Nelson Lee fired several rounds of the small machine-gun, Detective-Inspector Morley did the same.

The bullets flew wide, and touched nobody. The guv'nor did not wish to cause needless injury, and possibly death, and the effect was quite satisfactory. The charging men came to an abrupt halt, uttering wild cries of terror.

And then, with one accord, they scuffled back into the tunnel like frightened rabbits. We heard them charging back to their subterranean domain. Two of the leaders, however, remained behind. They were quite well dressed, and both kept their heads.

Away in the distance came the rattle of other machine-guns.

"You hear that sound?" said Nelson Lee grimly. "There is only one way out of this position, my friends! Everybody here is trapped. If you choose to be obstinate, it will be annoying; but the result will be the same in the end. I advise you to surrender without delay!"

"You are Nelson Lee!" snarled one of the fellows.

"It doesn't matter who this gentleman is," put in Morley curtly. "You are up against the police, and it happens that you're defeated. Be sensible, and knuckle under. We're not anxious to have trouble, any more than you are!"

Neither man spoke. Instead, they turned and disappeared after their companions. We were left in sole possession of the cave.

"They fondly imagine that they're going to get out by one of the other tunnels," smiled Nelson Lee. "They'll soon find out their mistake! I fancy we

shain't have long to wait before they came in."

The gov'nor was right in his surmise.

In less than half an hour the whole island garrison had surrendered. Our "bag" consisted of thirty-six men; Lennard took forty, and the Scotland Yard man in charge of the other tunnel had twenty-nine to his credit. This totalled up to a hundred-and-five men altogether.

It was a splendid catch.

The Circle men, finding how completely they were at our mercy, behaved in the most docile manner. Their leaders were sullen and angry, but they attempted no tricks. The prisoners were placed in batches of fifteen, with a man in charge of each batch, fully armed.

To prevent any attempt at breaking away, each collection of fifteen were roped together in single file. Thus they were quite helpless, and could only do as they were ordered.

In this way, the several batches were marched down to the yacht without any trouble. Nelson Lee and I boarded the *Morning Mist* during the progress of the transfer, and everything was bright and brisk.

Secrecy was no longer necessary. Everybody talked loudly and cheerfully. The full electric lights of the yacht were on, and there was any amount of good-humoured talk. Detective-Inspectors Lennard and Morley were simply hugging themselves with satisfaction.

The raid had been a complete success.

The prisoners were packed without ceremony into the foreward hold. There they would be compelled to remain until the yacht reached a certain Scottish port. Nelson Lee had already used the Circle's wireless instruments to send out a message, making arrangements for the yacht's reception in the early morning.

The gov'nor and I were chatting by the rail when Lennard approached us, rubbing his hands together. Perhaps they were cold, but the action was more probably an expression of keen satisfaction.

"Splendid, Lee!" he exclaimed, taking out his cigarette-case. "I hadn't hoped for such success as this! Have a cigarette, old man? The brutes are all packed away. The island's absolutely cleared."

"We shall be starting off within the hour," said the gov'nor, lighting the proffered cigarette. "Look here, Lennard! We'll have a glance round while we're waiting. The yacht won't be ready for departure just yet."

"A look round the island, you mean?"

"Well, not exactly the island, but the interior of it," smiled Lee. "I'm not quite satisfied about Zingrave."

"He's bunked, hasn't he?"

"So we are told," said the detective. "But the professor is a slippery customer, Lennard. I shall feel more satisfied after I've searched through the caverns."

One of the Circle men—a controller—had given us certain information. It seemed genuine enough, but we didn't accept it without question. According to this man, the High Lord had left the island by aeroplane the previous day. But for this fact, the controller had sullenly added, we should never have met with success. Owing to the High Lord's absence, the look-out had been lax.

It seemed more than likely that the information was correct, but Nelson Lee did not care to leave the island without making positively sure that the caverns had been cleared.

Accordingly, he and Lennard and I went ashore almost at once in the yacht's dinghy. Morley was left in charge until the "prize crew" came aboard from the ~~X~~ 55.

We found several men on the island, scouting round for any possible stragglers; but the inhabitants of the stronghold had all been roped in.

When we entered the nearest tunnel, I noticed that Lee kept his hand near to his revolver-pocket. Even now we were not quite sure that the danger was over. It was just as well to be on the alert.

The tunnel opened out into a big cavern after we had penetrated some way, and the whole place was brightly illuminated with many electric lamps. Numbers of caves, of all sizes, had been converted into sleeping and living apartments.

If I described the amazing details of this underground "city," I should fill pages and pages, and weary everybody, I expect. So I'll content myself by giving a very brief outline of the astounding place.

The kitchens were astonishingly well equipped. There was everything there for the feeding of a small army. Beyond, the caverns opened out into numerous great workshops and engine-rooms.

We found lathes and oil-engines, and electrical machinery of all kinds. There was one department which was devoted entirely to the manufacture of explosives—bombs, and all such articles. The Circle

had apparently been preparing for more ruthless war than ever.

Another cavern seemed to be fitted up solely for the purpose of cutting diamonds and precious stones. Another department was devoted to the preparation of counterfeit coin, and everywhere the tools had been laid down abruptly.

The whole army of workmen had surrendered as they stood. This was quite easy to understand. The knowledge that a strong force of police had taken possession of the island must have struck terror into the hearts of these rascals. The machine-guns, in all probability, had taken all the stuffing out of them.

The island itself was provided with many powerful weapons of the same variety, but these had been useless under the circumstances. They were mounted in special fortified crannies among the rocks, and only provided for an attack from the open.

The guv'nor and Lennard and I searched everywhere, but we came across nobody except an occasional Scotland Yard man. The enemy had been completely cleared out, and as for Zingrave, it was quite obvious that he had flown.

"Just a pure stroke of bad luck, Lennard," remarked Nelson Lee, as we stood in one of the caverns. "Zingrave certainly had no suspicion of this attack. But we mustn't grumble. Even though we have not roped in the High Lord, our success is enormous."

The inspector was looking somewhat awed.

"Enormous!" he echoed. "My dear Lee, it's simply stupendous—staggering! Who in the name of all that's amazing would dream that such a place as this existed? This island is, without doubt, the Circle's greatest stronghold. I shouldn't be surprised if the whole infernal movement collapses——"

"Don't make that mistake, Lennard," interrupted the guv'nor. "The Circle won't collapse yet awhile. We have delivered a stunning blow, I will agree, but it is not a vital one. Just over a hundred men—that's what our bag amounts to. The Circle's members run into thousands, Lennard. This island is merely one of many bases. I'm not saying the others are as big, or as complete; but they exist. I'm fairly convinced that we have taken possession of Zingrave's most important centre, and the effects will be very marked. The Circle's activity will certainly diminish;

but, as I explained before, unless we get hold of Zingrave himself, our success will be only partial."

"I think we've done jolly fine, anyhow," I put in enthusiastically. "This is a terrific coup, guv'nor! Think of the booty! The island—all this machinery—piles of stolen property—the yacht! Why, it'll take the Circle months and months to recover from a punch like this!"

"We don't want the Circle to recover at all, young 'un," said Lee grimly. "However, there's no need to discuss the matter at length now. The first consideration is to hand over our prisoners to the authorities. To-morrow, of course, we will examine these caverns very thoroughly."

Nelson Lee's arrangements were simple.

He and Lennard were to accompany the yacht into port, and formally hand over the batch of captives into the hands of the police. With these men disposed of, the Morning Mist would return to Cathrey Island.

I was to be left behind, on board the X 55, with Morley and several other Yard men. Nelson Lee would be back during the afternoon of the following day, and then the exploration would begin.

By the time the guv'nor and I and Lennard reached the yacht, after our preliminary glance round, we found that steam was fully up, and the "prize crew" already at their stations. The destroyer had crept into the harbour, and was moored near to the Morning Mist.

And so, while I went aboard the X 55 to get some sleep, Nelson Lee and Lennard started off in the yacht. I little imagined, as I yawningly bade the guv'nor good-bye, that he was destined to go through some very terrible perils before he saw me again!

CHAPTER IV.

(Recorded by Nelson Lee.)

THE SURPRISE—PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE'S TRUMP CARD—A CHASTLY SCHEME.

THE Morning Mist was quite a good boat. She was making excellent speed, and everything was going well.

Detective-Inspector Lennard and I were in one of the state-rooms, chatting and smoking. Nipper, as he has ex-

plained, had been left behind on the captured island.

My plans had gone swimmingly right from the start. My only cause for regret was the fact that Professor Zingrave himself—the chief prize—had eluded my fingers. This was galling, but unavoidable.

The yacht was running short-handed, but this was of no consequence. The weather was good, and our journey was a very short one. The special crew consisted of men from the X 55—two engineers, two stokers, two A.B.s, Stoker Petty Officer Hales, Seaman Petty Officer Sims, and Lieutenant Scott. The latter was temporary captain, and he handled the yacht well.

At present the vessel was speeding through the darkness, well on its way to port. Dawn would break before so very long, and we reckoned to drop anchor during the early morning. Having disposed of our human cargo from the for'ard hold, we should return immediately to Cathrey Island. That was the programme.

Lennard stamped on his cigarette-end and stretched himself.

"Well, it's been an interesting night, Lee," he remarked, yawning. "I suppose we'd better congratulate ourselves and pat one another's backs. But the credit's yours, old man—every bit of it!"

"Nonsense!" I laughed. "We all took part in the capture."

"I'm not going to argue, Lee," yawned Lennard. "I'm as sleepy as a dog. That bunk looks invitin'. I suppose you'll snatch forty winks now? You've earned a hundred, more or less."

"It would be just as well to take advantage of the opportunity," I replied. "We shall feel all the fresher for a brief sleep."

Lennard rose from his chair, and crossed the state-room.

"I'd like a whisky and soda before turning in," he remarked, yawning again. "Didn't I see some in the saloon? I'll just go—go—go—Aaaah! What in Heaven's name—"

I stared at the inspector in surprise.

Quite abruptly he had staggered, and had clutched at the table for support. His voice became husky and faint, and then failed altogether. He stood there, apparently choking—gasping vainly for breath.

"What's the matter with you, man?" I demanded sharply.

At the same second I sprang up and hurried to his side. As I did so, something seemed to clutch at my throat. My brain reeled, and an agonising pain filled my lungs.

In a flash I knew the truth.

"It's gas—poison-gas of some sort!" I choked. "Hold up, Lennard! Open the door, man—open—"

While I was speaking Lennard fell to the floor like a log.

The whole cabin became duplicated in my vision; I seemed to see two of everything. Instinctively, I knew that in another few moments I should collapse. And, with a husky cry, I swayed towards the door.

But I never reached it.

I only remember thrusting out my hand in a vain attempt to grasp the handle. After that oblivion came abruptly.

As I afterwards learned, I remained unconscious for forty minutes. When my senses returned, they did so quickly. The effects of the strange gas wore off in a few seconds once consciousness had come back. My first clear impression was that I was bound so tightly that my arms and legs were throbbing with acute pain. And, looking at me from across the saloon, was Lennard in a similar plight.

And he was not the only one.

The big saloon contained Lieutenant Scott, Stoker P.O. Hales, Seaman P.O. Sims, the engineers, the stokers, and the seamen. In short the eleven of us were all tightly bound, and sat facing one another in helpless attitudes.

Only Lennard and Scott and myself were conscious.

"Thank Heaven you've come to, Lee!" I heard the inspector saying huskily. "We're beaten, old man. The tables have been turned! The whole rotten crowd has been released from the hold, and they're overrunning the ship like rats!"

"It's a mystery, Mr. Lee," put in the lieutenant helplessly.

"I don't think we need seek far for the solution," I remarked grimly. "You were right when you said that the tables have been turned, Lennard. It seems to me that we have been fooled. I don't pretend to know how—I don't blame anybody. But it's more of the professor's devilry—you may be sure of that."

"I think I must be dreaming!" muttered the inspector hoarsely.

The affair seemed more like a nightmare to my mind. Yet one fact stood out with aggressive clearness. The yacht was once more in the hands of the High Lord or his agents. The Circle of Terror, by some foul trickery, had played the trump card of which we had been in ignorance.

Just as we had surprised the island's garrison, so had we been surprised ourselves. In spite of the knowledge that this development meant disaster, I could not help feeling a certain amount of admiration for the man who had worked the trick.

How it had been done was a complete mystery to me, and I did not even attempt to fathom it. I only knew that some very effective gas had been used. Obviously, we had all been rendered helpless at one and the same time. Thus it had been child's play to rope us up and man the yacht with engineers and stokers from amongst the captives. The remainder of those men were now walking about the yacht with absolute freedom. We were hopelessly outnumbered.

Detective-Inspector Lennard was about to make a further remark when the door of the saloon opened, and a small man in a neat yachting costume entered. He was spruce, and tidy, and seemed to be very much at his ease. His cap was set upon his head at a slightly rakish angle; a cigar reposed between his lips; his neatly trimmed iron-grey beard gave him a somewhat distinguished appearance.

"Ah, you have recovered the use of your wits, Mr. Lee?" he remarked silkily. "I am rather glad of that. I am anxious to point out to you the childish folly of your enterprise."

The man was Zingrave himself.

Although his appearance was altered, he made no attempt to disguise his voice. Lennard glared at him with suppressed fury, but Zingrave merely smiled with all his accustomed urbanity.

"Your feelings must be somewhat raw—I am well aware of that," he observed, gently knocking the ash from his cigar. "You will permit me to inform you that the yacht is in my possession—that it never left my possession!"

"You—you were on board all the while?" panted Lennard.

The professor nodded.

"Exactly," he smiled. "I was on board all the while."

"But—but we searched——"

"You may have searched for a month, and you would not have found me," interjected Zingrave, with a smile. "I am not such an easy bird to catch. As you are well aware, Mr. Lee, I have a somewhat highly developed faculty for taking precautions. Arrest does not appeal to me."

Zingrave strode nearer, and, although he still smiled, his strange, black eyes gleamed with hatred and fury.

"You shall pay for this night's work, my dear Lee," he said quietly. "Every man here will pay for it! I shall not be foolish enough to minimise the extent of your success. You have wrecked many of my most cherished plans; you have rendered Cathrey Island useless. The months of labour on that seemingly barren rock have been in vain. The whole incident will cost me some hundreds of thousands. You have interfered—and the Circle of Terror is ruthless!"

"Vent your malice upon me," I said quietly. "I take full responsibility for what has occurred. My companions here merely carried out instructions——"

"I make no exceptions," interjected Zingrave curtly. "You shall all suffer the same penalty—make no mistake on that point. This blow is a severe one—but the Circle can stand it. The island is, of course, of no further use—neither is this yacht. I have already made arrangements to leave it within the next hour."

Detective-Inspector Lennard snorted.

"You confounded scoundrel!" he exclaimed hotly. "Do you imagine that you'll escape? You may possibly elude capture for a few hours, but no longer. This melodrama may appeal to your theatrical mood, but——"

"Your words are amusing, inspector," interrupted Zingrave smilingly. "You are scarcely in a position to talk to me of capture. Never for one moment did you stand the slightest chance of enjoying success. I have had this vessel in my power from the very instant you boarded her."

"That is an interesting statement," I said calmly. "Would it be impertinent of me if I asked you to explain?"

These suave words sounded somewhat out of place, but I did not intend to be

outdone by Zingrave. He was famous for his immobile composure, and I knew that an outbreak of anger or abuse would have no effect whatever.

Moreover, I was very curious. I could not imagine how Zingrave had turned the tables—and I wanted to know. Lieutenant Scott and one or two of the others—who had come to themselves—were looking on grimly and with a certain half-awed interest.

Zingrave seated himself on a corner of the table.

"I am a man who takes misfortune optimistically," he said, removing the cigar from his lips. "The loss of Cathrey Island is the greatest misfortune the Circle has ever suffered. But there will be compensations. You, my dear Lee, will be removed from my path—and that will be something in the nature of a triumph. But you wish to know how you were defeated?"

"I am curious certainly."

"The explanation is quite simple—especially when you remember that this yacht is no ordinary vessel," replied Zingrave calmly. "It has been converted to my own purpose in several interesting ways. It is a great pity that I shall have to sacrifice her. When you boarded her with your men, I was, at that very moment, in one of the state rooms."

"By thunder!" muttered Lennard huskily.

"It annoys you, doesn't it?" went on the professor. "You see, gentlemen, I don't allow myself to be exposed to any surprise attack. I became aware of your movements only just in the nick of time. It was too late for me to take any defensive action—and so I adopted another course."

"In that state-room there is a false bulkhead. It was specially made to my orders, and, behind it, there is a small secret apartment. I concealed myself there, and waited. You will understand that this retreat was prepared well in advance; it has been ready for months—although I never expected to use it. No amount of searching would have revealed my presence—and from the moment I entered that tiny apartment I had the whole yacht at my mercy."

"While you were like a rabbit in a hole?" asked Lennard gruffly.

"Exactly," smiled Zingrave. "Within this bulkhead there is a cylinder of compressed gas. Tubes lead from this cylinder to the engine-room, to the stoke-

hold, to all the principal state-rooms—in fact, to every important part of the vessel. Each tube is fitted with a turn-cock. Do you understand?"

"It was clever—brutally clever!" I said, half admiringly.

"I am glad you used the adjective," said the professor, with a nod. "The Circle of Terror needs to be brutal, Mr. Lee. I merely waited until the prisoners had come aboard, and until the vessel was well out to sea. And then, at the right moment, I turned on several taps—thus filling the engine-room and stokehold and other parts of the ship with deadening—but harmless—gas. Rather a cute dodge, eh? I had the yacht at my mercy—but you couldn't guess that."

"You—you—"

"Now, inspector, don't lose your temper," said Zingrave smoothly. "You cannot be blamed for what has occurred. How could you suspect such a thing? Within one minute nearly every man helpless. I merely emerged, released my men from the hold, and the rest—Well, you can imagine the rest."

This was quite an easy matter. I bitterly realised how completely we had been fooled. And yet the disaster had been unavoidable. Nobody can accuse me of being careless; but whatever precautions I could have taken, nothing could have warned me of this impending catastrophe.

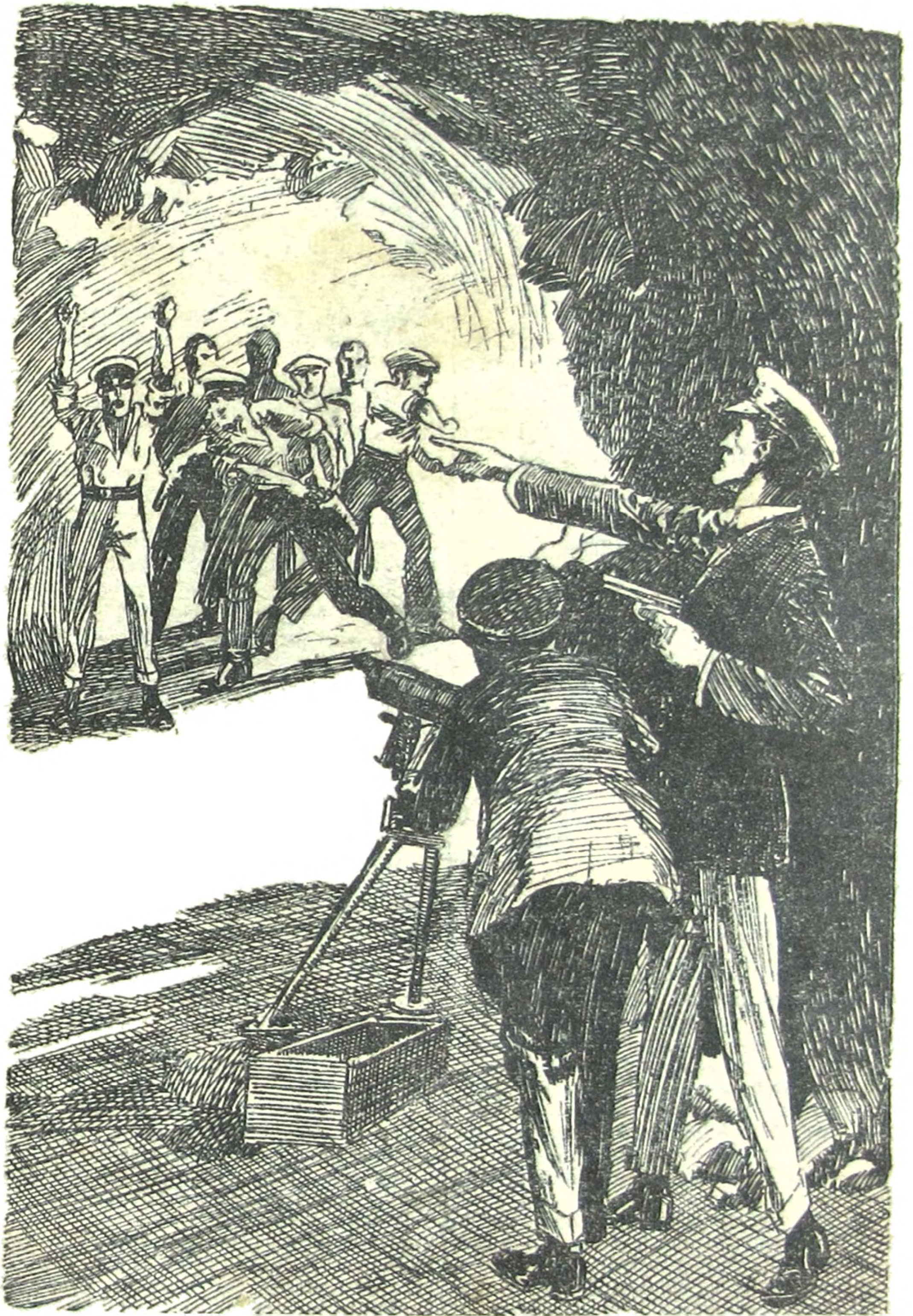
The idea of the gas cylinder and the tubes was astonishingly simple. Yet, at the same time, it was astonishingly effective. Zingrave did not exaggerate when he said that he had the yacht at his mercy. It was the literal truth.

And I had little doubt that he would now display that ruthless brutality which was the watchword of the Circle of Terror. Frankly, I did not expect to live another hour.

"The yacht, of course, must be abandoned," went on the professor. "To enter any port would be fatal. And, since the vessel cannot be retained, I have no intention of allowing it to fall into other hands. It shall be used, therefore, as a means of meting out punishment to those who are responsible for all this upheaval. The punishment, I may add, will be drastic."

"Murder, I suppose?" asked Lennard angrily.

"I will not spoil the effect by telling you my plans," replied the professor.



"Everybody here is trapped!" said Nelson Lee calmly.—(See page 11.)

"For the present I will simply say that you made a grave mistake when you tried to checkmate the High Lord! I have already sent out a wireless message to one of my secret bases on this coast. Oh, yes, the Circle has other stations in addition to Cathrey Island. Just before dawn this yacht will arrive at a certain latitude. And there we shall find three powerful motor-boats awaiting our approach. The last act in this drama will be extremely interesting."

Zingrave said no more, but turned on his heel, and left the saloon.

"I can't understand the fellow," remarked Lieutenant Scott. "He can't possibly mean to do us any serious injury, can he? That bluff of his——"

"It wasn't bluff, lieutenant," I put in quietly. "We must all resign ourselves to a grim fate. Personally, I have an idea that the ship is to be scuttled—and that we shall be left in this saloon, helpless as we are. Or, possibly, the professor's plans may be even more fiendish."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Scott, with a pale face. "That'll be murder! I'm not afraid of death—a destroyer officer hasn't got to be—but I'm hanged if I care for the idea of being drowned like a mongrel in a sack!"

"It was bluff!" growled Lennard hopefully.

I don't think the inspector really meant what he said. He knew as well as I did that Professor Zingrave was not the man to utter idle threats. And I soon found out that my surmise was not precisely correct.

For several men entered the saloon, picked me up bodily, and conveyed me to the upper deck. Here, without ceremony, I was hoisted high into the rigging, and finally bound securely to the mast. My captors offered no explanation of this extraordinary treatment.

During the next twenty minutes Lennard and all the others were dealt with in a similar fashion. In short, we were all lashed to the masts, high above the deck. Escape was simply out of the question.

"What in thunder does this mean, Lee?" gasped Lennard, who was quite near to me. "The brutes have pulled these cords so tight that I am in the most infernal agony. This seems to be a piece of mad devilry."

"Not so mad as it seems, perhaps," I replied. "I'm sorry for this, old man.

Somehow I feel responsible for having dragged you——"

"Shut up, for goodness' sake!" grunted the inspector. "How the deuce were you to know the whole game would be smashed to pot? Zingrave's the cleverest crook on this earth, Lee! He's got us beaten this time!"

Conversation was rather difficult, and so we didn't attempt much. Lennard had complained that the cords dug into his flesh. My own plight was very similar. I wondered what the nature of our punishment was to be. The petty officers and men were not quite so calm as we were.

From the other mast came a continual string of abuse. The language, I regret to say, was of such a nature that it would be impossible to include it in this narrative. Yet I could not altogether blame the men for giving vent to their feelings so violently. Down on the decks the Circle men were moving about in large numbers. They were being marshalled into columns, and I could easily see that the yacht was soon to be abandoned.

Presently the vessel came to a stop. On every side the gloomy sea stretched away, with not another sail in sight. But I soon became aware of the fact that three motor-boats were alongside. Two were large, and the other comparatively small. Into the former couple close upon a hundred men were packed—fifty in each—and they thrudded away at once.

Zingrave and five other men—apparently his chief lieutenants—entered the smaller motor-boat, and this little craft shot away into the darkness with extraordinary speed.

Not another word had been spoken to us. The yacht had been abandoned completely. We had been left there, tied to the masts. There was no sign that the vessel had been scuttled. She drifted slowly and sluggishly with the motion of the sea.

"What's the meaning of this, Lee?" asked Lennard, after a while. "There's nothing particularly ruthless in this that I can see. Why, we shall be taken off by the first boat that sights us——"

Boom! Boom!

Almost simultaneously two dull explosions sounded—one from the fo'c'sle and the other from the stern. The yacht shook from end to end, and thousands of sparks shot up into the air.

"Great Scott!" gasped Detective-Inspector Lennard. "That's blown a few

plates out, I'll swear! The—the devils!"

But the inspector was wrong. I knew it in a moment. The force of the explosions had been comparatively slight, and they had expended their strength upwards, through the decks.

From fore and aft dense volumes of smoke arose. A yellowish glow showed at both spots. These glows spread rapidly, and in less than two minutes it was only too obvious that the *Morning Mist* was blazing fiercely at her two extremities.

The fires gained power with every second that passed, and they were spreading inwards.

The full horror of the situation almost rendered me dumb, for the truth was appalling—ghastly! We had been lashed to the masts, helpless, and it was Professor Zingrave's plan to literally roast us alive!

CHAPTER V.

(*Nelson Lee continues.*)

THE INTERNAL EXPLOSION—THE MORNING MIST SINKS!—THE RISING TIDE!

DAWN was just breaking.

The two fires on board the *Morning Mist* were each separate and distinct, and they were not fierce as yet. The sea on every hand was deserted and gloomy. Help from another ship was out of the question.

Within twenty minutes or so the yacht would be blazing amidships, and then, of course, the flames would roar upwards with the fury of a furnace. I almost cried aloud with helpless rage as I realised the cunning and diabolical nature of Professor Zingrave's plot.

He did not intend us to die quickly. We were to be tortured first—that was the idea. As the flames spread inwards, we should be scorched and seared by the lurid tongues of fire until finally death mercifully came to us!

Even if another ship became aware of our plight, it would be well-nigh impossible to rescue us, for it would be impracticable for a rescue party to approach the yacht without going to their own deaths.

Which ever way I regarded the situation, there was no hope. I understood clearly now why we had been tied to the masts, high above the deck. We were being submitted to acute mental torture

before death came to us. Knowing Zingrave's character as I did, I was not altogether surprised. But surely he had surpassed himself on this occasion!

Lennard said very little, and Lieutenant Scott, after one outburst, relapsed into silence. The petty officers and men, however, kept up a continual string of abuse at our departed enemy. This was not only a source of relief to their feelings, but it gave them something to do.

The fires were growing slowly but surely in intensity. Already the flames were leaping upwards, and great wafts of scorching air set us choking and gasping. The yacht meanwhile was drifting with the sea.

In the dull grey dawn I could see a hazy line over to port. It was the coast, I knew, and we were drifting towards it. But before any rescue could arrive we should be quite dead. I reckoned that fifteen minutes would see the end so far as we were concerned.

The fore'sle fire had gained the strongest hold, and flames and sparks were leaping up with ever growing intensity. Fortunately the wind was blowing broadside, and the heat and sparks were blown well over to starboard. If the yacht shifted her position in the course of her slow drifting, death would come very quickly indeed.

Glaning round, I saw that the other fire was still about the same—a dull, shullen glow. Before long it would burst out as fiercely as the other.

A great rage filled my heart, but I allowed none of my feelings to find expression in my face. What purpose could be served by making a fuss? The better course was to accept the situation quietly and without panic.

For quite a considerable time the fires seemed to burn without intensifying. The yacht drifted all the while, but no other sail hove in sight. The dull grey of the dawn became lighter, but our position remained as desperate as ever.

It was a pity our agony of mind should be so prolonged. Death was apparently inevitable, and it was sheer torture to remain in our helpless predicament while the fires smouldered at either end of the ship.

The climax came abruptly.

From aft a violent explosion suddenly shook the whole vessel like a twig in the breeze. The masts swayed and shook, and my bonds were wrenched cruelly. At the same time a million sparks flew up,

and some of them came dangerously near.

The stern fire, which had hitherto been quiet, now blazed up with appalling fury. The explosion had been internal, and I could not guess at the cause. Possibly a store of ammunition had blown up, or a supply of oil. At all events, the explosion had been severe.

"Just about the finish, old man!" panted Leonard huskily. "By George, talk about martyrs at the stake——"

The inspector broke off as a wave of choking fumes, terribly hot, came wafting upwards.

I seemed to be in a more acute position, somehow. Glancing down, I noticed that the masts were no longer upright. In short, the yacht was listing heavily to starboard, and from below came the sound of rushing water—even above the dull roar of the flames.

The explosion had caused the vessel to spring her plates!

She was sinking—sinking rapidly.

With a swaying motion, the Morning Mist canted dizzily over. I thought that she was about to turn turtle at once, and felt relieved. Death by drowning was infinitely preferable to the ghastly torture, which had seemed inevitable.

But the yacht righted herself slowly and laboriously, and once again assumed an even keel. The fires roared and crackled with terrific fury. Within the last minute they had gained power in an amazing manner. Already several men on the other mast had lost consciousness because of the choking fumes, but so far nobody had been actually scorched. This was the end, surely!

But the hand of Providence took charge of affairs from that second. I am quite convinced of that. Never in my career before had I been so positive of death. There was no escape! There could be no escape!

But deliverance came, and our safety was assured in the most surprisingly simple manner.

No miracle occurred. The yacht merely sank—that was all. She went to the bottom in a totally unexpected fashion, sinking with an almost level keel. The first intimation we had of this fresh development came in the shape of tremendous masses of steam.

It rolled up in vast clouds, accompanied by countless sparks. The wind, luckily, carried the greater portion of this over-
side without enveloping the masts. At

the same time, we were all choked and smothered, and breathing was well-nigh impossible.

Such confusion reigned that I find it most difficult to describe the happenings of the next few minutes.

I only know that we were all enveloped in the masses of steam, that a terrible hissing roar filled our ears, that the yacht abruptly plunged into the depths with a sickening dive.

Although my brain was reeling, I had enough sense left to know that in less than a second I should be submerged in the icy water. But the second passed, and then came a terrific jar.

It was so severe that I uttered a cry of intense agony, for my bones were jerked cruelly tight. And then all motion ceased, and I think I must have swooned for a few minutes. The scalding masses of steam had had effect.

My thoughts were confused when I looked about me once more. It was broad daylight now, and a voice seemed to come to me from a far distance.

"Wake up, Lee! Wake up, old man!" It was Detective-Inspector Leonard, and I opened my eyes wider. The grey sea lay all around, and the impression was most singular, for the level of the water was only just below me!

Not a trace of the fires remained, and in a flash I realised the truth. At one blow we had been saved from two dire perils—death by fire and death by drowning. The seemingly impossible had happened.

The tragedy had been averted. But how?

The cause of our deliverance was surprisingly simple. Professor Zingrave, in spite of his cunning cleverness, could not have prepared for such a contingency as that which arose.

For that internal explosion, which seemed to us to be a death-knell, was actually the cause of our escape, for the yacht had gone to the bottom. The bottom, fortunately, happened to be only just below the surface.

The yacht had drifted aimlessly, at the mercy of the seas, and at the time of the explosion she had been floating over a sand-bank! Thus, when she sank, the bed of the ocean was only just beneath the waves. At low tide, indeed, the shoal was easily distinguishable from the deeper water all around.

The Morning Mist sank evenly, and the terrific jar I had felt had been caused

by the sudden contact with a sand-bank. The vessel was now lying upon the sea bed, and her decks were just a-wash. The fires, of course, had both been extinguished simultaneously.

The fo'c'sle was still jutting out of the water, but the rest of the vessel lay just beneath the sea. Being lashed to the masts, we had all escaped. Two of the X 55's men were slightly scorched, and others had burns where sparks had fallen. These casualties were among the men who were tied to the other mast.

Considering the peril we had been in, the injuries were trivial. Our spirits, of course, were high. Everybody had expected certain death, and this deliverance was almost like a miracle.

But, of course, the series of events had been quite natural.

I wondered how long we should have to wait before we were sighted by another boat. It might be hours. It was on the cards that the whole day would pass without a sail coming into view.

The rugged shore was visible, but it was a mere blur. In all probability we were not discernible, for nothing of the yacht showed above the surface except the forepeak, the masts, the bridge, and the single funnel.

However, I was extremely thankful for this respite, and it was no time for grumbling. There was a bare possibility of our perishing from exposure, but I did not anticipate such a fate.

Although we were out of the track of coasting vessels, we were nevertheless visible to passing shipping. Any boat which came into sight would certainly investigate, and it was possible that the glare of the fire had been seen from the shore. If so, some boats might be putting out.

We could do nothing but wait, and send up a prayer for having been spared.

The morning was cold, the wind chilling every one of us to the marrow. Our ropes had ceased to cause pain, for a dull numbness had set in. Now and again spray would come hissing upwards, and this did not add to our comfort.

But these trials seemed insignificant after the experience we had passed through. Lennard and Lieutenant Scott and I spoke occasionally, and from the other mast the stokers and sailors kept up a continual conversation.

In one way, the position was ludicrous. The eleven of us were alive and only superficially injured. Yet we could not

move a finger to help ourselves. We could do nothing but keep a constant watch for the first sign of coming rescue.

One man—Petty Officer Hales—was lashed to the foremast in a low position. The waves were breaking over him continually, and his plight was serious. It soon became evident that it would shortly become even more so, for the tide was rising!

Unless rescue came very promptly, there would be one death at least, for the poor fellow would be submerged by the waves, and we should be compelled to see him perish before our eyes. It was an appalling thought.

Hales was a sturdy fellow, and he gave an exhibition of extraordinary cheerfulness under grave circumstances. He joked continually, and made light of his peril. Never for a moment did he display fear.

Yet he must have known that death was certain unless aid came within the next hour.

Now and again the yacht quivered as the waves struck her, and I was becoming fairly certain that she was shifting her position on the sand-bank. Once the vessel swayed bodily, and assumed a slanting angle.

"Things aren't rosy, Lennard," I said, with chattering teeth. "The sea is rising by the look of it, and a few heavy waves will just about settle matters. The yacht is by no means secure."

"She'll topple over, you mean?"

"I am afraid the possibility is only too evident."

"Well, it's no good growling," said the inspector huskily. "Our position's a heap better than poor Hales, at all events. If we topple over, it'll be all up with us—that's all! Why the thunder doesn't a sail come in sight?"

Even as he was speaking, a great wave struck the bridge and the superstructure. The vessel shivered violently, and tilted until I began to fear that the end had come. But the immediate peril passed, and once more we experienced a spell of comparative calm.

It couldn't last, however.

An hour, at the outside, would see the end of the adventure—one way or the other. I found myself wondering what had happened to Zingrave and his men. Undoubtedly the High Lord had won this particular trick.

But the game wasn't over yet!

CHAPTER VI.

*(Nipper picks up the thread again.)*THE STRANGE SEAPLANE—THE SHELLING
OF THE STEEL DOOR—THE CAVE.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR MORLEY removed the cigarette from his lips, and blew out a cloud of smoke. He did so with an air of extreme satisfaction, which couldn't possibly be mistaken.

"It's a big coup, Nipper, and we've got your guv'nor to thank for it," he remarked, patting me on the back. "The only cause for regret is that Zingrave himself has eluded us."

I shook my head.

"He didn't," I said promptly.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Zingrave wasn't on the island at all," I replied. "How could he elude us? It was just a piece of rotten luck that he happened to be away—that's all. But I'll bet a quid that the guv'nor collars him yet!"

"I wouldn't take you on, young 'un," said Morley easily. "I should lose my money, I'm afraid. Lee will get Zingrave in the end—but how long will the game go on? That's the trouble. If we could only lay hands on the professor, the rest of the Circle would collapse."

"Well, let's have a walk round, and squint at the place by daylight," I remarked. "This island's a surprise packet, and no mistake. It's a wonder to me we collared it so easily!"

Of course, at that time, I hadn't the slightest idea that the poor old guv'nor was meeting with misfortune. I fondly imagined that he was in port by this time—on his way back to the island, in fact.

It was morning, and the sun was shining rather weakly, but with a certain amount of wintry warmth.

There were many signs of activity. The old destroyer lay in the tiny harbour, and a boat was slipping across the water towards the shore. Morley and I had landed about ten minutes previously, and were now standing on the landing-stage.

In full daylight we could appreciate the natural qualities of this retreat. The sea was quite hidden; it seemed as though we were on the shore of a small lake. For the gap which led to the open sea was concealed by a turning in the rocks.

Even if a stormy sea was raging, any

vessel would find a peaceful haven in this sheltered cove.

The island itself was grim and barren. Scarcely a shrub or a blade of grass was to be seen anywhere. There were rocks everywhere—jagged masses rising in all shapes and sizes. Even the footpath was only just distinguishable.

"We're going down those caverns when Mr. Lee comes back," I observed, as the inspector and I walked along. "Suppose we trot up to the wireless station——"

"Hallo! What's that?"

Morley stopped, and stood listening.

"Why, the yacht can't be back yet——"

"No, no—can't you hear a low humming?" asked the inspector sharply.

We both listened, and now I could distinctly hear the sound. Upon the air a dull, droning throb sounded. There was no mistaking it.

"An aeroplane of some sort," I said. "One of our naval patrols, I suppose. I can't see her—— Yes, there she is!"

Morley nodded, and we both looked up with interest.

The aeroplane had come into view from behind a towering mass of rocks. It was a considerable height up, and was making straight for the island. The sunlight gleamed upon the planes, and we could distinctly see the whirl of the big tractor screw.

She came right overhead, and then, abruptly, the engine was cut off.

"I can't see the distinguishing circles on the plnes," remarked Morley, shading his eyes. "It must be a privately owned craft, by the look of it. And she's a seaplane, too."

There were no wheels fixed to the landing chassis. Instead, we could distinctly see the big, clumsy looking floats. The machine was coming down in wide circles and at a dizzy angle.

"We shall soon know who she is," I said. "The pilot's going to alight in the harbour, I believe. Either that, or he's just doing a joy-dive. But the silly ass seems to be making for the rocks higher up!"

Until that moment I had been looking on with mild interest; but now, all in a second, my heart seemed to jump. The seaplane was behaving in a very strange fashion. For the pilot had brought the machine out of its circular dive, and was gliding deliberately towards a flat

portion of rock about three hundred yards from the spot where Morley and I stood.

"He can't land there!" I gasped.

"He can—but not comfortably," said Morley grimly.

We both stood quite still, rather startled. It was quite obvious now that the pilot intended to land on the solid ground—although the machine was built for sea work. There was not room enough for the seaplane to turn, anyhow.

I could see that the machine was not out of control. The airman was, in fact, bringing it down with superb skill. The seaplane descended to within about ten feet of the ground, and then it suddenly "stalled." That is to say, it assumed a horizontal position, coming out of the gliding angle abruptly.

Naturally, the machine dropped like a stone—"pancaked," as it is commonly termed. Both Morley and I heard a crash, and we saw the floats and the landing chassis buckle up to splinters. Except for this, however, the seaplane was unharmed.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I gasped.

The thing had been done deliberately—and cleverly. Only a very skilled pilot could have brought his machine down in that way. And, as the inspector and I commenced running up the path, we saw two men scramble out of the cockpits and rush between the rocks.

"They must be Circle men!" I panted breathlessly. "It's a trick, Mr. Morley! There's more in this than we know of!"

"You're right, lad—you're right!" rapped out the inspector. "But why on earth the fools should come here is a mystery. They've lost their machine, and they'll be collared in less than five minutes!"

"Perhaps they're going to blow the island up!" I suggested, as we pelted along. "It's quite possible, you know. There may be charges of dynamite all over the shop, with a button to explode the lot at one particular place. Zingrave would rather have the island demolished than allow it to fall into our hands!"

"It's not that, Nipper—it's not that!"

Morley was panting, and conversation was rather difficult. Just then we turned the path, and came into full sight of the seaplane. It was quite a big machine, and superbly constructed. Obviously, it had been abandoned.

We didn't trouble to examine it, but

hurried towards the entrance of one of the tunnels—which was quite near by. From the direction the men had taken, they had obviously entered the tunnel.

And then we received a bit of a shock.

For an extraordinary thing had happened. Just within the entrance of the tunnel a great steel door barred all further progress! It was as solid as the rock itself.

"Good heavens!" gasped Morley, staring.

I was too surprised to say anything. We had never suspected the presence of anything like this. The two Circle men had entered the tunnel, and had lowered this door so that they could not be pursued.

"We must rush to the other tunnels!" rapped out the inspector. "I don't pretend to know what this means, but it's a time for prompt action."

Without waiting a second, we turned and pelted away across the rocky ground. The second exit lay about two hundred yards away, and we reached it after a little trouble, for the intervening ground was extremely rough.

And when we got there we found that this tunnel was blocked in exactly the same way! We had half expected it, and it was morally certain that the third exit would present the same aspect.

All the same, we rushed there at full speed. It wasn't ever possible to get into the cave—which narrowed down to a tunnel later on. For just within the entrance stood a third door—this one much larger.

"We're shut out altogether!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "Those two chaps have diddled us, inspector. But what's the good of it? They've only hemmed themselves in!"

"Not they!" snapped Morley. "There must be another exit—one that we don't know of. Confound it! I wouldn't have had this happen for worlds! What will Lec say when he gets back?"

The inspector was greatly worried, and he gnawed at his moustache angrily.

"Why didn't they put these doors into position last night?" he growled.

"It's jolly queer— Oh, of course," I added suddenly. "They couldn't put them into position during the raid."

"Why not?"

"Well, the machine guns were placed further in than these doors—so, even if they had been shut, the position wouldn't have been any better," I said rapidly.

"Don't you see, Mr. Morley? The attackers would have been bottled up as well, and the Circle chaps would have had to surrender in the end."

"H'm! That's so!" admitted Morley. "But what is the game now? I'm hanged if I like it, Nipper!"

We stared at the steel door helplessly, our thoughts in a whirl. It was quite plain that something big was afoot. Zingrave would never have sent these men on such a perilous trip for a mere triviality. The very fact that the seaplane had been abandoned proved that the project was an important one.

It was galling to be shut out in such a way. There were only two men to be dealt with—and we couldn't get at them! They had gone down to the workshops for some reason. Even now they were possibly preparing some devilry.

But what?

The reason for this surprise visit was obscure.

"Look here, Mr. Morley," I said eagerly. "There's only one thing to be done. We shall have to smash one of these doors down!"

The inspector glared at me.

"How, you young idiot?" he snapped tartly.

"Well, it's possible——"

"Yes, after hours of work——"

"No; we can have it down in less than ten minutes!" I interrupted keenly.

"Why can't we bombard it?"

"Bombard it?"

"There's a small one-pounder gun on the destroyer," I went on quickly. "If that could only be unshipped and brought up here, a few shells would simply bust the door in a couple of minutes. The other guns can't be trained on this target from the ship, because of the rocks in between."

"By George! It's a good suggestion!" exclaimed Morley briskly. "It's a thundering good suggestion, Nipper! But we shall have to be quick about carrying it out!"

We were quick!

In a very few minutes we reached the landing-stage, and from there it was possible to shout our requirements across to the destroyer. The gun I had referred to—I'm not sure what calibre it was—was brought ashore with all possible speed.

The naval fellows worked like fury, and rushed the gun up to the nearest

steel door with great smartness. Then, without any delay, the range was set, and a shell went shrieking towards the target.

We were all standing well clear. There was a deafening crash as the shell exploded on the door, and we rushed up to see the result.

A clean hole had been torn in the steelwork, and the rest of the door was buckled and warped. Three more shells were fired in quick succession—and these proved sufficient.

For the door was completely demolished, in addition to a considerable amount of the rock in the near vicinity. The dust and smoke choked everything and everybody, but we didn't stop for that.

Morley and several of his men entered the tunnel without hesitation—all of them armed. Needless to say, I was among the crowd, well in front. For I was anxious to know what had been happening.

Two of the Yard men had been left in charge in the underground workshops, and we were very concerned as to their fate. We expected to find them brutally shot down. And our expectation was realised.

All the electric lights were full on, and we met nobody. But in the biggest workshop two figures were lying upon the floor. They both moved as we blundered in at full speed.

One of them, Detective-Sergeant Norton, was shot through the leg, and he had been bleeding rather badly. His wound, however, was not very serious. But his companion had fared somewhat severely. For he had been shot in the stomach and was unconscious.

"The brutes!" gasped the sergeant hoarsely.

"What happened, Norton?" asked Morley, bending over the other.

"Why, two men took us by surprise, sir—loosed off their revolvers before we could turn," replied Norton hotly.

"They went through that other cavern," he added, with a jerk of his thumb. "I tried to follow, but my leg hurt me so terrifically that I couldn't move. Poor Roberts caught it badly!"

Two men were left with the injured pair, and Morley and I and three others hurried into the adjoining cavern. It took us just ten seconds to discover what had occurred.

A large portion of the rock-wall was

swung back. There was a dark cavity beyond, and we knew at once that this was a secret receptacle. The door was made to fit to a hair's breadth, and, when closed, could not be detected.

The cavity itself was quite empty, save for numerous shelves and cupboards. From the appearance of these, we judged that the place had been cleared out. Right at the back another secret door stood slightly ajar. This one was only four feet high, and very narrow.

"This was a mistake, I'll warrant!" said Morley sharply. "The rascals meant to close this door, but were careless in their hurry. Either that, or they never suspected that we should be so hot on their track."

The little door was pushed open, and, beyond, we could see a flight of steps leading downwards in a gradual slope.

"Going down, Mr. Morley?" I asked eagerly.

"Of course!"

The inspector took out a small electric torch, and switched it on. Then he instructed two of his men to follow, and plunged into the narrow cavity. I followed close at his heels, and the other two came behind.

We scarcely knew what to expect. As we progressed downwards, I found myself wondering why the Circle men—the whole crowd, I mean—had not escaped by this exit during the raid.

The only possible conclusion I could come to was that the great stone door of the strong room had been locked, and the exit, therefore, was unavailable. In all probability, Zingrave alone kept the key. Learning of the raid, he had despatched two of his men by the sea-plane with the key.

These fellows had succeeded in their object—they had delayed pursuit while they effected their purpose. What was that purpose? Again, the answer was not difficult to seek. The secret room had probably contained a great number of valuables, or documentary matter which would involve other Circle bases if it fell into the hands of the police. Therefore, at any cost, the stuff had been removed.

Owing to the fact that I had suggested the shelling of the steel door, we were now hot on the track of the two rogues. Should we be too late? Somehow, I had an idea that the fellows had skipped.

The stone steps led downwards in a tortuous manner, first veering to the

right, and then to the left. From the very nature of the tunnel, it had been at one time a fissure in the rocks. Many of the steps had been roughly hewn, while others were made by the hand of man entirely.

The air was not pure by any means, and we were soon perspiring freely. It was necessary to adopt a crouching attitude nearly all the while. But at last, just as I was wondering how many more hours we should be, we emerged into a broad cavern.

The roof was low, and on the other side we saw a narrow archway. On the further side of this we saw daylight streaming in. In less than a minute we were standing in a little cave, with the sea gurgling and splashing amongst the rocks at our feet. It was quite empty.

"N.G.!" I murmured ruefully. "What a blessed pity!"

We were standing just within the cave, and the open sea was hidden from us by intervening rocks. But we were apparently on the west side of the island. A narrow channel led outwards, with comparatively calm water lapping its sides.

Just then I noticed a petrol can up one corner. The stopper was off, and it had evidently been thrown over there carelessly.

"A motor-boat!" I said promptly. "The rotters have given us the slip, Mr. Morley. That's as clear as daylight!"

The inspector snapped his fingers.

"They can't have got far," he exclaimed. "The best thing we can do is to hurry back with all speed. The destroyer will be able to do some scouting, and I dare say she'll find the boat!"

It was quite useless remaining in the cave, and so we all turned back, and made our way up the narrow steps again. It would have been futile to attempt climbing over the rocks outside, for we should only have lost ourselves and caused needless delay.

At last, hot and dusty, we emerged into the rock strong room, and passed through into the big cavern. Here we found the X 55's doctor attending to the injured men.

Detective-Sergeant Norton had only sustained a flesh wound in the leg, but the other poor chap was still unconscious. The doctor, however, declared that he would get over the wound before so very long.

Five minutes later Morley and I were

being pulled towards the destroyer. But, as it happened, we didn't find it necessary to depart from the harbour. You'll understand why presently.

CHAPTER VII.

(The narrative concluded by Nelson Lee.)

THE NAVAL PATROL BOAT—A GOOD CATCH—
AN EXCELLENT FINISH.

"**A** T last!" Detective-Inspector Lennard breathed the words with a sigh of untold relief. The reason for that sigh was not far to seek. For, steaming towards the sunken Morning Mist, we could see a small naval patrol boat.

Frankly, I was rather surprised.

I had hardly expected to be delivered so promptly, for only a bare fifteen minutes had elapsed since I had mentally decided that we had an hour at the most. The stricken yacht was tilting dangerously, and every wave which struck her caused the masts to shiver in the most alarming fashion.

The patrol boat had sighted us a few minutes earlier, and it had been an anxious time. Just as we were beginning to think that she would pass by, her course was altered, and she came steaming up.

Petty Officer Hales was nearly exhausted by this time, for the icy waves had been sweeping over him in a continuous succession. But he was still conscious, and his spirits were revived by the knowledge that rescue was within sight.

At a short distance the patrol boat hovered to, and sent a whaler over to us, with an officer and several men. Their astonishment was considerable when they came to close quarters.

"Well, I thought the Germans had done their worst—but this simply knocks everything!" exclaimed the officer, as the whaler came alongside. "How long have you been like this?"

"Only an hour or two," I replied, from my lofty perch. "But you are wrong in supposing it is the work of the U-boat murderers. This outrage was committed by an internal enemy—the Circle of Terror!"

"By Jove!" gasped the lieutenant.

He and his men were astounded, and they lost no time in cutting us free. We were quite helpless for some little time. Our limbs were numbed and stiff, and the agony caused through the restored circulation of the blood was exquisite.

It was not until we were on board the patrol boat, and had exercised our limbs vigorously, that we were relieved. Poor Hales was utterly exhausted, and he had been put straight into a bunk.

I briefly explained the facts to the young captain. But I preferred to leave the matter to Lieutenant Scott. The Morning Mist lay on the sandbank, some little distance away, forlorn and deserted.

Zingrave's plot had failed, and I decided to return to the island as soon as possible. Some hot beef-tea put new life into us all, and Lennard and I at least were quite ready for further action.

As a preliminary, I asked the captain if I might make use of the wireless instrument. He consented at once, and I got into communication with the Admiralty authorities ashore. And I received a piece of information which cheered me considerably, and which made Lennard rub his hands with satisfaction.

A first-class destroyer, it seemed, had encountered two big motor-boats soon after dawn—each of them being packed with men. Receiving no satisfactory explanation, the destroyer's commander had taken the motor-boats into port. And here, of course, the police had immediately taken the whole crowd into custody.

"I'm pleased to hear this," said Lennard cheerily. "It pained me to think of that infernal bunch getting away. But what of the third motor-boat—with Zingrave aboard?"

I shook my head.

"That boat hasn't been seen," I replied. "The professor isn't so easy to catch, Lennard."

The inspector grunted.

"It was a near thing for him, anyhow," he remarked. "He thinks we're roasted by this time, of course. I say, Lee, I'm rather uneasy about the island. Do you think Zingrave will venture back there?"

"It is possible," I said—"quite possible. That's why I'm anxious to return with all speed. I'm glad we left Nipper and your men there, Lennard. I don't

think there's much chance of anything serious happening. At the same time, I want to make all haste."

I had a talk with the captain, and he fell in with my requirements at once. And we were soon heading for Cathrey Island again.

By the time the sun was well up the patrol boat was nearing the island, and Lennard and I were feeling almost ourselves. Only three of Zingrave's intended victims were actually bowled over by their experience. The others, Lennard and myself included, experienced no ill-effects.

I needn't mention that our wrists and arms and legs were appallingly tender—that goes without saying. A few bruises are scarcely worth mentioning, after all. And we were not only bruised, but chafed abominably.

"I shall be sore for a fortnight," remarked the inspector ruefully, as he stood by the rail. "I can feel those confounded ropes round me now!"

"Be thankful you're alive, you grumbler!" I laughed. "I tell you candidly, Lennard, I gave myself up for lost. It was an extraordinary stroke of good fortune, the yacht being kind enough to sit on that sandbank. It was one of those lucky slips which very seldom occur."

The inspector nodded.

"And our prisoners didn't get away, after all," he remarked. "That's splendid, Lee. Upon the whole, we ought to congratulate ourselves. We hardly expected to rope Zingrave in, did we? Except for his escape, our plans have gone with absolute smoothness. But I shall be glad when I see the island again!"

"Why, do you suspect that it has been blown up during our absence?" I grinned.

"I don't know, old man—I'm bothered if I can think clearly this morning," replied the inspector, shaking his head solemnly. "Zingrave's a cunning dog—as you know. He's up to all manner of devilish tricks. I'll tell you straight, I sha'n't be a bit surprised if some dramatic incident has happened on the island."

A few minutes after Lennard's remark the grim rock hove in sight. It stood out from the sea, a mere blur at first, but took shape shortly afterwards. Not any sign of life was visible.

I borrowed a pair of binoculars, and focussed them. The island sprang into clear view, and now I could see one or two figures moving about the rocks. Sweeping the glass round, I regarded the rugged western shore. It was barren and rough, providing no landing place for any—

And just then a small motor-boat shot out from between two points of rock. I didn't recognise the craft; it certainly did not belong to the X 55. And it had come from the west shore of the island!

"What do you make of that boat, Lennard?" I asked quietly.

The inspector took a long look.

"Don't know who she is," he remarked, still holding the binoculars to his eyes. "It seems queer, Lee. That's the west side of the island, isn't it? Two men in the boat, it seems. They're not my fellows, I'll swear."

"I'll have a word with the captain," I said.

I did so immediately, with the result that the patrol boat altered her course, and sped towards the island in such a way that the motor-craft would be headed off. I saw at once—with rising suspicions—that the little vessel sheered round.

"They're trying to elude us," said Lennard sharply.

"I can see that."

"Ten to one, it's a Circle boat—"

"I am of that opinion myself," I interrupted. "We must act promptly, Lennard."

Again I spoke to the commander, and there was brisk activity among certain members of the crew. One of the little quickfiring guns sent a shell screaming across the bows of the motor-boat.

We were much nearer now, and we saw the enemy's craft—for I was sure it belonged to the Circle—alter its course with such abruptness that it heeled over dangerously. Another shell was sent, and this one had effect.

The motor-boat shut off its engines, and slowed down.

By this time it was possible to see the two men's faces. They were strangers, and they were looking angry and alarmed. They gesticulated, and hoisted the British flag. But this bluff availed them nothing.

The patrol vessel bore down, and I leaned over the rail.

"By James!" I rapped out suddenly.

In a flash I drew my revolver. One of the men in the motor-boat had deliberately hurled a small metal box into the sea. It sank immediately. The fellow bent down and was in the act of casting a big leather trunk overboard.

Crack!

My automatic spoke viciously, and the man with the bag uttered a shriek, and gripped his wrist, allowing the bag to drop back into the boat. The other man grabbed his bag at once.

"The fool!" I muttered angrily.

Again my revolver cracked, and again my aim was true. The second man dropped the bag, and sank back into his seat.

"What's the idea of that little pantomime?" asked Lennard curiously.

"I don't know," I replied. "But I should judge that the bag contains something which the Circle people don't want us to capture. It's a great pity that box went to the bottom."

The men in the motor-boat tried no more tricks. They had had enough. And when they were brought on board the naval boat they were subdued and sullen. Both had injured wrists—one rather seriously.

"It was your own fault," I said curtly, as I faced them on deck. "What were you doing with those bags? Where did you come from?"

"The island, as you know," growled one of the fellows.

"You are members of the Circle of Terror?"

"No!"

"Of course not!" said Lennard sarcastically. "Now, my men, if you're sensible, you'll be straightforward. I am a police officer, and you must consider yourselves under arrest. What did that box contain?"

One of the men sneered.

"Something you'll never find!" he said harshly.

"I don't doubt that," I put in. "And I can see that we are wasting breath by questioning you. If you had acted sensibly at the start, you would have been uninjured at this moment. You had better get your wounds attended to."

The fellows were escorted below by one of Lennard's men, and I turned to the collection of articles which had been brought up from the motor-boat. There

were two leather bags, a box, and several larger packages. All of them were fairly heavy."

"Loot, I expect," said Lennard, with satisfaction.

His surmise was correct.

But neither he nor I expected to find the haul which was displayed before our eyes. We had apparently arrived on the scene in the nick of time to prevent the Circle men escaping with an extraordinary haul of famous stolen property.

For the bags and packages contained precious stones and jewellery of all sizes and varieties. Lennard recognised several articles at once, and we knew that we were examining the booty from many daring robberies.

The whole collection of stuff was worth every penny of three hundred thousand pounds! It was an astounding coup—and we gained all the more satisfaction because its capture had been unexpected. It was little wonder that the Circle men had made a desperate attempt to get away.

My triumph was all the more complete now, and I made no attempt to conceal my keen satisfaction.

"This is splendid, Lennard," I said enthusiastically. "It's a good thing I used my revolver when I did. Otherwise the whole job lot would have gone into the sea. The Circle would prefer to lose it altogether than allow it to fall into our hands. I'm sorry about the box, for I believe it contained something of even greater importance than this jewellery. However, we can't grumble."

"Grumble!" exclaimed the inspector gleefully. "Why, my good old Lee, I'm feeling as lively as a monkey! But what was Nipper up to, I wonder? The young rascal must have been asleep!"

"I don't think so," I replied—"but we shall soon see!"

Nipper's story proved the inspector's words to be totally wrong. Nipper had not been asleep; on the contrary, he had displayed considerable shrewdness in dealing with the two Circle men who had dropped from the skies. The fact that they had escaped cast no reflection upon Nipper's astuteness.

Zingrave, of course, had sent his men

on the hazardous expedition in a vain attempt to salve the booty. The professor had probably known that the chances of success were slight—but he had taken no risk himself.

I may as well add here that the infamous High Lord completely eluded capture. He had disappeared completely, leaving not a single trace. Sooner or later he would turn up again.

Undoubtedly I had scored a big success—nobody could deny that.

The island stronghold was taken; a large amount of stolen property had been recovered; Zingrave had been forced to flee, with many of his most precious

schemes knocked on the head. The Circle was weakened considerably, over a hundred of its members being in the hands of the police. Only Zingrave and his chief men had escaped from the island.

The whole venture had panned out excellently.

But what was the next move to be?

Things were getting hot, and I confided to Nipper my opinion that, before so very long, they would get very much hotter! I hadn't done with the Circle of Terror yet!

And, I fancy, the Circle of Terror hadn't done with me!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Will deal with Another Splendid Adventure
of **NELSON LEE** and **NIPPER** AT
ST. FRANK'S, under the Title of:

The Mystery of the Pink Package.

Set down by **NIPPER**, and Prepared for
Publication by the Author of "Fullwood's
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BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

The Principal Characters in this Story are:
TOM CRAWLEY, light-weight boxer, and stoker on board *H.M.S. Flyer*, who has been captured by the Germans, as also has his father, though several months before;

BOB RANDLE, who has been sent to France with his regiment; and

MARY THWAITES, daughter of old Fisherman Thwaites, with whom both Tom and Bob are in love. Tom is taken to Zeebrugge at the time of a British aerial bombardment. The next morning he comes face to face with his father. A few days afterwards Tom is sent for; and Bob Randle, who is also a prisoner in the camp, finds out he is being tried by court-martial on a charge of assaulting one of the guards. Old Fisherman Crawley asks him where Tom has been taken to.

(Now read on).

THE COURT-MARTIAL.

"**A** H!" exclaimed Bob, drawing a deep breath. Then he straightened himself up.

"Tom is being tried by court-martial now, Mr. Crawley," he said. "And if there is any sense of justice left, the Germans will not punish him."

With that he was hustled forward, and a moment later the iron sheeted door of his cell clanged to on him.

Thomas Crawley, with bowed head, passed into his stone-walled den, and dropped moodily on to the immovable truckle bed with which it was fitted.

With clasped hands he sat there staring silently at the wall; his lips murmuring an unspoken prayer.

He loved his boy Tom, and he prayed that the lad might be spared to him.

Yet a numbing agony tore at the strings of his heart, for he felt that his boy's life hung on a single thread that the slightest breath might break.

He listened intently, wondering if he might hear anything that was going on in the court; but the only sounds that came to him were the challenging voices of the guards, as they were changed.

And so the bitter minutes dragged their spaces wearily along.

It was true. At the very moment the prisoners were driven into their cells. Tom Crawley, with steel handcuffs upon his wrists, but minus the shackles that had been taken from his ankles, was marched through ice-cold stone corridors to the court in which the trial was held.

Armed men marched before him, behind him, beside him. Armed men filled the court, and guarded the door.

Everywhere the hated field grey uniforms swarmed.

Tom had been given no food since the day before, save a little water and a crust of dry black bread, which he could not eat.

His face was pale, there were dark circles round his eyes, in which the orbs glittered brilliantly.

It was with some curiosity that he took stock of his surroundings.

A series of tables had been set end to end along one side of the court, and at these the presiding officials sat, chief among them the officer who had appeared in the yard, at the end of Tom's fight with the Hun.

The commandant, a stern looking man, whose hair was touched with grey, and whose breast was adorned with the Iron Cross, eyed him fixedly.

A command was given, and Tom was hurried forward, and placed before his judge.

An armed soldier stood on each side of him. Two more took their places close behind.

Bracing himself up, and squaring his boyish shoulders, Tom looked round for the man he'd fought, and he saw him standing a few yards away.

He, too, was guarded. He carried neither belt nor arms.

At sight of him Tom could not forbear a smile. The Hun's face was bruised and cut, one eye was almost closed, and the discoloured patch around it was evidence enough of Tom's smart handiwork.

A call in German, and a hush fell on the court. The officials busied themselves with papers, and the cross-examination of Tom's enemy at once began.

Tom tried hard to follow it, but the fluent German was too much for him. Only a word here and there sounded familiar to his ear. With folded hands he listened and waited.

For a quarter of an hour or longer the Hun replied to questions directed at him. Then other witnesses were brought forward and interrogated in turn.

Soon the work was done.

A pause.

The commandant began to write, and having finished, looked directly at the prisoner.

"Thomas Crawley," he said, and his English was clear, crisp and precise, spoken with the very slightest accent, "you have assaulted a soldier of the Fatherland. A prisoner of war who strikes a German soldier merits the punishment of death. What have you to say?"

"As to what, sir?" asked Tom.

To his surprise, his voice sounded firm, and rang echoing through the stone-walled room.

"You cannot deny the charge. The evidence is overwhelming."

"I do not deny it."

"You plead guilty then?"

"I do not consider that I have committed any crime, sir. It wasn't my fault. He behaved brutally to many of the prisoners. He used the butt end of his rifle, without provocation. He came up to me, and boasted of his boxing powers. He challenged me to fight. Ask any of the men who were on guard in the exercise yard at the time, and if

they speak the truth they'll bear me out. He wanted to make a show of a British boxer. He set on me, and I knocked him down, and afterwards, we stripped and fought. You, yourself, must have seen that he'd taken off his tunic, and rolled up his sleeves. I didn't do that for him. It was a fair stand up fight, man to man, and I beat him. I'd beat him again, if I had the chance, or any other German here, if it comes to that.

The commandant's thin lips curled cruelly.

"He is not on his trial now," he said, and there was a cut as of a whip in his utterance. "We know how to deal with him. As a prisoner of war, you should have known your place. You admit striking him?"

"Yes."

"That will do."

The commandant, ignoring Tom, then turned to the other officers. There was a brief interchange of views, in an undertone.

Again the commandant wrote on the paper before him.

Another pause.

Tom, his heart beating high with expectancy, nerved himself to face what he knew must come with all the courage there was in him.

"Seaman Thomas Crawley"—how measured the commandant's utterance—"the court finds you guilty of the gravest charge that can be brought against a prisoner of war. Extenuating circumstances have nothing to do with the case. An example must be made——"

"Let it be a good one then, sir. The case of Nurse Cavell was bad enough——"

"Silence! An example has to be made. And the sentence of the court is that you be led from this place to the place of execution, and shot at sundown."

A thrill ran through Tom. Something clutched at his heart, and for a moment a mist formed before his eyes. It seemed as if life were suspended within him for awhile.

A cruel hand gripped at his arm, and a German voice uttered a guttural command in his ear.

So Tom came back to earth.

"One moment, sir!" he cried, regain-

ing his composure, and shaking himself free. "What about him?"—pointing at the man who had brought this fate upon him. "He made me fight. Isn't he to be punished, too?"

The commandant bared his lips, and his eyes darted fire.

"Ah, yes," he cried. "Since you are about to die, I will give you the satisfaction of knowing that he has been sentenced to— He will be transferred from here to the front. He will join the 20th Regiment of the Guard. To-morrow he will be in the front line trenches before Ypres."

Tom saw the Hun's face change from a florid red to an ashy green.

Fear, despair, and arrant cowardice were depicted on the soldier's brutal face.

Tom laughed.

"Cheerio!" he cried mockingly at his enemy. "If I go to-night, you'll follow me to-morrow."

A low cry of terror burst from the Hun's trembling lips, and then Tom was taken away, and shut up again in his cell.

After the door had closed upon him, he raised his eyes to the small window above him which he could not reach. He saw a shaft of watery sunlight linger upon the bar-protected panes.

He knew by the slant of it that the sun would soon fade away, and after it had gone the span of time to sundown was short, indeed.

He had only a little time to live, and his brain seemed to become wonderfully clear. Upon the mirror of his brain he saw reflected pictures of Weathersea, of home, and in them moved those whom he held most dear, those whom he would never see again.

And he prayed for them, wished them well, prayed that his father and Bob might go back when the war was over, and tell them all that Tom Crawley had met his fate like a man.

And after all, what did it matter if he went now, or some few years later?

Life seemed of light value in this cruel war. Death reigned supreme, triumphant everywhere, and justice hid his very face from shame.

"The Lord's will be done," his lips murmured, and so he sank into a profound ecstatic reverie.

THE EXECUTION.

WHAT was happening?

When the cell door opened, and armed Huns called him forth to join Bob Randle, and a host of other prisoners of war who were already marshalled in the stone corridor outside, Fisherman Crawley wondered what all the fuss was about.

Were the Germans about to remove him, and all these other men from the Antwerp gaol, to other quarters, perhaps in Germany?

Thomas Crawley did not know, but resigned himself to his fate, with a deep drawn sigh.

He found Bob Randle standing a few paces away.

"What does it men, Bob?" he asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Crawley."

But they were soon to find out.

Down into the exercise yard they were marched, and there they were lined up to form three parts of a square.

The fourth side of the square was made by the stone wall of the prison. In the sky, shining over the tops of the gloomy building, was a ruddy afterglow thrown out by the setting sun.

Deep shadows of purple and grey hung in the angles of the prison house and the boundary walls.

Behind the prisoners, shutting them in, were German soldiers, fully armed, the steel of their bayonets striking silver streaks of light.

The prison bell began to toll, and as the reverberating notes boomed upon the air, the prisoners shuddered and exchanged awestricken glances.

Then came a word of command, the measured tread of nail-studded boots, and a firing party marched within the square, and formed up twenty paces from the wall.

Thomas Crawley averted his eyes, and a hoarse cry broke from his lips.

"My son! My boy! My Tom!" he cried.

"Steady, sir! Be brave!" cried Bob Randle.

Then came more footsteps, and the commandant, and the officers of the prison guard appeared, and took their stand within the square.

And last of all a solemn marching echo of steps, and Tom Crawley, wearing only his shirt and trousers was led forward.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

His hands were tied behind his back.

He walked firmly, his head thrown back, his eyes bright, but not with fear.

He looked about him for a sight of Bob and of his father, but failed to see them.

And so he was set apart from all the others, facing the firing party, with his back to the wall.

"The brutes! The cowards! The villains! They are going to murder my son!" cried the fisherman, shaking in his agony and impotent rage.

"Silence!" commanded an officer, threatening him with his revolver.

And then—then, before anyone could speak a word of protest or make a sign, a command was given, and the firing party raised their rifles to their shoulders.

Another second or two and all would be over, and his brave boy shot dead by the German murderers.

"Bob, they sha'n't do it. If they kill him, they shall kill me, too! I gave him—I shall be with him in death—"

Thomas Crawley's voice rang out the words, and he sprang out of the line, and leapt towards the doomed sailor.

"Stop, sir— You can do no good— Mr. Crawley—"

But the brave fisherman of Weathersea had leapt in front of the platoon, and had flung himself with his arms round his son's neck, daring the Huns to drag him away, defying them with voice and gesture.

For a moment Bob Randle hesitated, then he leapt forward, too, and stood in front of father and son with his arms upraised.

"Commandant!" he shouted, his voice ringing like a trumpet. "You sha'n't do this thing, you sha'n't— If you want to kill this boy, you must kill us all—"

And the platoon awaiting their orders, held back their fire.

A USELESS SACRIFICE.

AS fisherman Thomas Crawley and Bob Randle sprang in front of the rifles of the firing-party, protecting young Tom Crawley by the intervention of their bodies, cries of consternation burst from the lips of the assembled prisoners.

"Shoot them down!" cried a German officer.

"Madmen! They will both be killed as well!" groaned one of the civilian prisoners.

And, indeed, there was hardly a man present who believed that Thomas Crawley or Bob Randle would be spared. They had deliberately and openly defied German military authority, than which there is no more heinous offence in German eyes.

It would avail nothing. They would be dragged apart, bound, set beside the doomed prisoner, and shot down with him as an example to the rest.

Groans burst from the lips of the unhappy prisoners. Every man sympathised with the father and the friend, but better one life than three they thought.

Meanwhile, the platoon held their fire, waiting for the word of command.

The commandant, utterly taken aback by the unforeseen incident, stood for a moment silent and irresolute.

"Hold your fire!" he commanded then, and, taking a stride forward, he said, pointing at fisherman Crawley and Bob Randle, "Drive those rascals away!"

A Hun leapt forward to obey the command. Fisherman Crawley was seized and dragged away, struggling desperately.

"Spare my son!" he pleaded. "Shoot me down if you like, but spare my boy! My span of life is at its end. He is young. He did no wrong!"

"Silence!" growled a bully in field-grey as he drove the butt-end of his rifle into the fisherman's back.

Bob Randle resisted, too.

"This isn't justice!" he fumed, his eyes flashing defiance. "It's blackguardly, brutal murder! Set me free, and put rifle and bayonet into my hands, and I'll fight the best man among you for young Crawley's life! You cowards! You bullies!"

It took four men to hold him, small though he was. Crawley, too, fiercely battled for the mastery, and of a sudden, with a tremendous heave, broke away, hurling his captors right and left.

Then round he swung. The Hun who had used the butt of his rifle on him stood near, and with an insolent sneer raised the weapon threateningly.

Thomas Crawley's blood was boiling in his veins. He saw red. He didn't care at that moment whether they shot him down or cut him down, for life was not

(Continued overleaf.)

over sweet to him after all he'd suffered and seen.

His one thought was retaliation, and so he struck the point of the rifle aside, and felled his enemy with a smashing blow in the face that dropped him like a shot.

Futile effort! Again he was seized, and this time they began to kick and cuff him, the yard being in an uproar.

It was more than the less restrained of the onlookers could stand.

Some of the khaki-clad prisoners sprang to the rescue, and Crawley was set free.

Randie, too, got his arms free and sprang to Tom Crawley's side once more.

"Old man, they shan't murder you without our making an effort to save you!" said he.

Tom's lips trembled.

A hot flush drove the pallor from his cheeks. Tears welled into his eyes, and commenced to run.

"It's good of you, old man," he murmured, "but you've made a useless sacrifice. They'll shoot us all now! And who'll go back to the dear old lady?"

Bob winced.

"We must take our chance," he said.

At that moment the commandant

was standing by, and the

field-grey moved forward.

Crawley was seized, Bob Randie, too, and order was rapidly restored.

"This," cried the commandant, his voice ringing like a trumpet, "is a dandy! You prisoners must kneel or the guards will cut down the first man who attempts to move!"

With an effort at self-control that almost purged their aching hearts, the knees of prisoners stood at attention.

"Place those two men beside the condemned prisoner" ordered the commandant, and the command was at once obeyed. "Bind their hands behind them!"

A pause while the order was executed. The three men now stood side by side, facing the firing-party.

Tom Crawley was in the middle. His father and Bob were set on each side of him.

The commandant stepped forward, and, glancing sternly at them, said, his voice shaking slightly:

"The command of this prison has been given into my hands, and I am re-

sponsible for the maintenance of good order and discipline within its walls. "The prisoner"—nodding at Tom Crawley—"was condemned to death for striking one of my guards. The sentence was just, although there had been provocation. I am sorry to have to enforce the sentence, but as a representative of the German Higher Command I have no alternative. You two Englishmen have violently opposed the carrying out of the sentence, and have almost provoked a mutiny. I have the power to execute you without trial, and that power I shall now exercise."

He was turning away when Thomas Crawley cried:

"I am his father! Would you have me stand by and see my son shot down in cold blood?"

"And I am his friend," said Bob.

The commandant took no notice of them, but ordered up an additional platoon, and these men took their stand beside the original firing-party.

"You dear dad, good-bye!" said the fisherman, raising his eyes towards the heavens. "And God bless you."

"God bless you, dad! And I will

say Amen."

"Present arms!"

With a swing and a click, the rifles were raised shoulder-high, and the end of all things seemed frightfully near for the doomed men.

THE AIR RAID.

WHILE the foregoing incidents were taking place, a distant humming or drone had made itself heard within the prison yard.

Nobody had paid the slightest attention to it, for the noise of passing aeroplanes was common enough.

But now, with a loud bark and hiss, one of the air-defence guns of the city spoke spitefully.

Again! And again!

Whoof! Boom! Whir! Boom!

So the guns flashed, and shells went whirring skywards, where the clouds were touched by the blood-red glow of the setting sun.

(To be continued.)