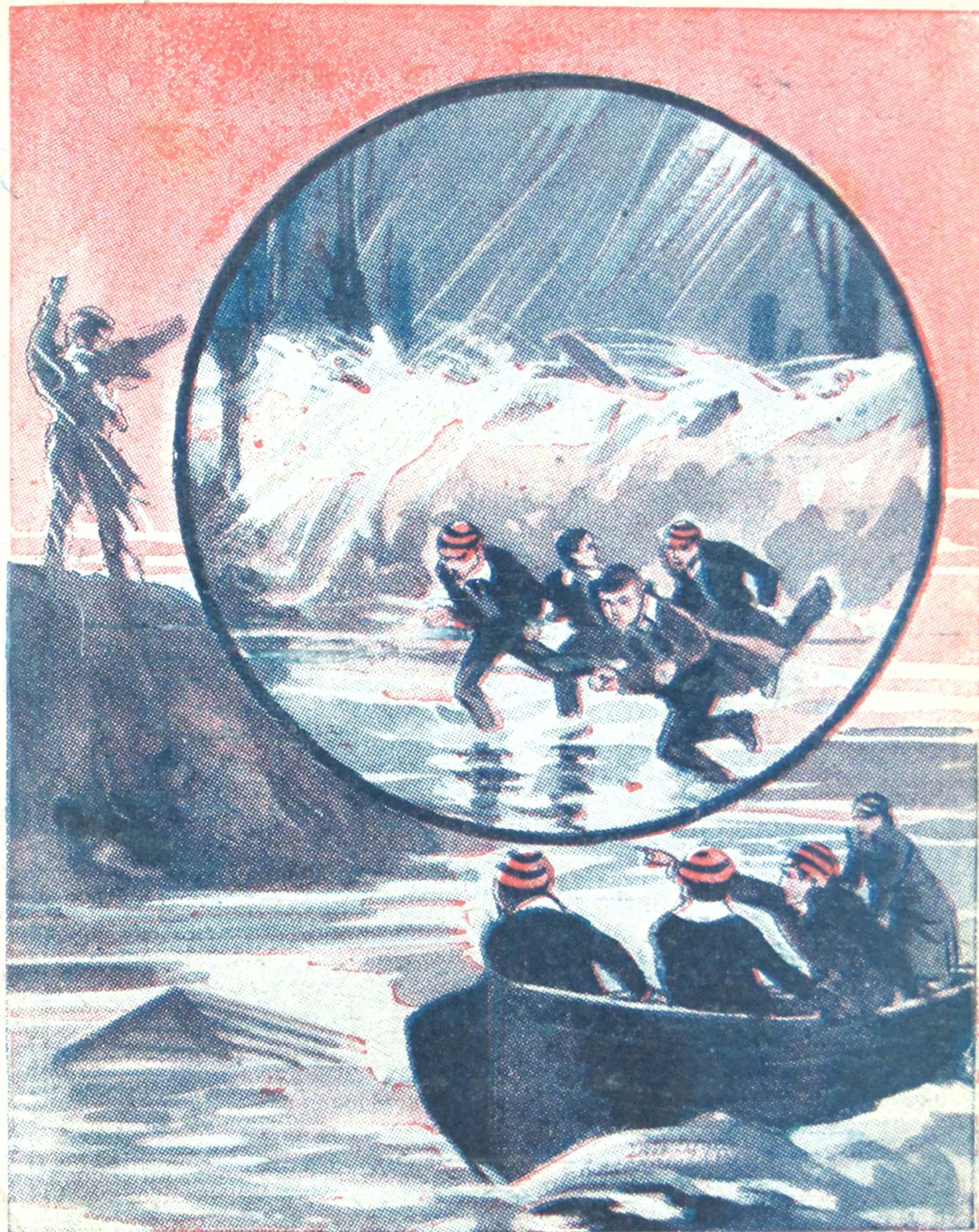


No. 137.—GRAND LONG MYSTERY AND SCHOOL STORY!

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## **THE FLOODED SCHOOL!**

Another Tale of NELSON LEE and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.  
By the Author of "The Problem of the Copper Frog," "The Mystery of the  
Unstamped Letter," etc., etc.

January 19th, 1918.



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# THE FLOODED SCHOOL!

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE.

*Nelson Lee and Nipper are at St. Frank's College, to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Secret Society, the Fu Chang Tong, whose hatred they have incurred. Although living in the school in the characters of master and pupil, Nelson Lee and Nipper, nevertheless, find many opportunities to utilise their unique detective ability in various mysterious and adventurous cases.*

## CHAPTER I.

(Set down by Nipper.)

### THE COMING OF THE GREAT FLOOD.

**R**AIN—rain—rain!  
And still more rain after that! Never, in all my born days, had I known rain to come down in such terrific torrents. I don't exactly mean that it was pouring with tropical fury; but it rained day after day as steadily as a clock ticks.

For a week past the sky had been leaden, and it had poured thousands of tons of water down upon the long-suffering countryside almost every hour. At St. Frank's we had been having frost and snow, and the weather had been enjoyed by everybody. Rain's all very well when it behaves itself. But just now it seemed as though it had got beyond all bounds.

The clerk of the weather was either mad, or he had gone away on a holiday. Anyhow, the elements seemed to be doing just as they liked. And we poor humans were helpless—we couldn't do a thing. What was the good of grumbling? The rain only seemed to come down more spitefully.

The River Stowe, which ran at the bottom of the playing-fields, had already

played a dirty trick. It had run over its banks, and the football-ground was nothing but a sodden marsh. This hit the St. Frank's chaps more than anything.

For days I had heard nothing but growls from everybody. Misery reigned supreme. Everybody was talking about serious floods. The people at Bellton, the village which lay in a hollow, were positively alarmed. Some, indeed, had already shifted to Bannington.

And to-day, just to emphasise the fact that it held the whip-hand, the weather was worse than ever. Wind had come—a cold, miserable, cutting wind. But the fellows had been kept indoors for so long that they had got fed up to the neck.

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and I, in sheer desperation, had decided to go for a walk as soon as lessons were over. I won't deny that we had a selfish motive; for we went over to Holt's Farm to purchase some new-laid eggs for tea.

We had put on our thickest boots and our mackintoshes, and we were just in that state when we didn't care a hang if the rain hissed down in sheets. We'd grown used to it, and simply ignored it. It seemed to be a necessary evil.

We had got our eggs, and were on the way home—cheerful, in spite of the ele-



nents. Most of the fellows had been getting their spirits back, for the rain had lasted so long that it wasn't any good remaining glum.

"Never mind, dear boys," said Tregellis-West, as we trudged along through the mud. "If we can't have footer, we'll have some boatin' on the playin'-fields, begad!"

"It won't get so bad as that, you see!" I said. "I shouldn't be surprised if it's a fine day to-morrow."

"Wouldn't you, Benny?" asked Sir Montie, mildly. "I should be frightfully surprised—I should, really. I'm resigned to the worst. It's goin' to be a second flood!"

"Fathead!" grunted Tommy Watson.

"We haven't had a flood yet!"

"Dear boy, I mean a second Great Flood—the world's goin' to be submerged, begad!" explained Montie. "We shall have to make an Ark of the football-buildings——"

"Oh, dry up!" I grinned.

"Dear fellow, I'd give anythin' to," sighed Tregellis-West. "But how can I dry up when it keeps rainin' cats an' dogs? Just look at those meadows over there—they're sheets of water already."

We paused, and looked away towards the river. It was a dreary, drab scene enough. The river itself was scarcely distinguishable, for the marshes on either side of it were completely flooded.

"Old Warren was talking about the locks this morning," remarked Watson, as we walked on again along the little country lane. "He seems to be a bit anxious about them. If they bust, there'll be the very dickens to pay."

"Locks are made to stand floods," I said. "And what does old Warren know about it, anyhow?"

"Why, he was here when the last flood happened, about ten years ago," replied Tommy. "There were lots of people drowned at that time, and Bellton was nearly swept away."

"How cheerin'!" said Montie. "An' what about the school?"

"Oh, St. Frank's is safe enough," said Watson. "The school buildings are on slightly higher ground, you know, and they'd escape any serious inundation—that's a good word, ain't it?"

"Dear boy, you remind me of Jappy," said Tregellis-West. "He's always stringin' out long words, you know. I always feel frightened when he's talkin'

to me, in case I shouldn't know what the words meant!"

I grinned.

"Inundation ain't a long word," I remarked. "Let's hope nothing like that happens here. There's certainly a pond in Bellton High Street, but you can't call it serious——"

"Begad! What on earth's that?" asked Sir Montie, coming to a sudden stop.

Above the steady hiss of the rain we heard a low, roaring noise, which reminded me of the surf on a rocky beach.

It was most extraordinary, and grew louder every minute. We were some little distance from the village itself, having taken the lane from Holt's farm which led round the back of Bellton Wood. The river was away to our right, and the level of the lane was about similar to that of the river. A high bank divided the marshes, however, and the lane was only muddy—although the marshes themselves were flooded.

The roar increased, and from the direction of the village we distinctly heard a chorus of alarmed shouts and cries. The sounds were a long way off, and were borne along with the wind in waves.

"What the dickens——" began Tommy.

"It sounds like water!" said Tregellis-West. "It must be rainin' a lot harder over there——"

"Oh, don't try to be funny, Montie!" I interrupted. "There's something queer about that noise. By jingo, it's getting louder all the time! I wonder—— No, I don't suppose it's that."

"What?" asked Watson bluntly.

"I was thinking of the locks."

"Do—do you think they've busted?" yelled Tommy, with a start.

"Well, listen——"

"Great Scott! Look there!" shouted Tregellis-West abruptly.

He was pointing up the lane, and Tommy and I stared in a fascinated kind of way. Quite a distance from us, but clearly visible, a rolling mass of water was surging along like a tidal wave!

It was brownish-white with foam, and looked like a solid wall, four or five feet high. It was sweeping the hedges like blades of grass before it, tearing up bushes by the roots, and causing the saplings to bend and shiver and snap. The larger trees withstood the strain, but shuddered before the onslaught.



"Good heavens!" choked Tommy Watson, going pale.

Just for a moment I was rooted to the ground. The oncoming mass of water was not confined to the lane itself. The marshes presented the same appearance. The whole stretch of land on both sides of the river was attacked by the all-powerful rush.

"It's the flood—the flood!" I gasped breathlessly.

"Dear fellows, we're in danger," was Sir Montie's calm remark. "Begad, we'd better run for it, you know. There's a steep bank just round the curve——"

While he was speaking we commenced running with every ounce of speed we were capable of. Behind us roared the oncoming flood, now a deafening, hissing volume of sound. I'd never experienced anything like it in all my life, and I'll admit that I was just a bit scared.

"The locks must have gone!" I panted, as we ran.

The remark was unnecessary, for the truth was obvious. This was the first mad torrent of water from the swollen river. In a short while, of course, the rush would be over, but we were catching the full brunt of it.

The locks near the Bannington road were big ones, but they had been unable to bear the enormous strain. Suddenly giving way, millions of tons of water had been released. And this monstrous wave was the result. It was sweeping along the valley, carrying all before it.

We ran like mad, hoping to gain the high ground in time.

But our efforts were puny; we might as well have stood still and waited for the inevitable. As we ran, the flood rushed behind us, and then we were overwhelmed. I really can't describe what happened afterwards.

I'll try to, of course, but it won't give you much idea of the actual occurrence. The three of us were swept from our feet like corks in a drainpipe. Tossed up and down, we plunged beneath the surface of the muddy water. Bushes, branches of trees, and all manner of odds and ends were dotted around us in the foam.

The flood was so swift that it was utterly impossible for us to keep our feet. Helpless, terrified, we were carried along with the dreadful rush.

"We shall be drowned!" gasped Tommy Watson wildly.

"It's shockin'!" spluttered Sir Montie, his head coming out of the water for a moment. "Oh, begad! Ain't this water got a horrid taste? Benny boy, we're bein' swept—— Uggggh!"

Montie's face was enveloped once more as an eddy caught him and whirled him under. The water was as cold as ice, but we hardly had time to notice it. We were fighting—fighting to gain the mastery of the flood.

We might as well have tried to stop the waves on the seashore. All our efforts were useless.

But the flood, although terribly fierce and powerful, was not deep. I mean that we should have been able to find our feet easily if the water had been still. Our only danger lay in being swept beneath the surface so many times that we weakened with exhaustion.

This undoubtedly would have been the case if we had been carried along for a sufficient length of time. But we were dashed through the topmost branches of the hedge, and carried round the rear of Bellton Wood. Here there was a sloping bank, leading down into a kind of gully.

And, with terrific speed, we shot down the bank and disappeared into a foaming vortex of muddy water. When we came to the surface we found that we had escaped the full rush—in short, we had been flung into a kind of backwash.

"Great Scott! Are we still alive, dear fellows?" gasped Montie.

"Make—make for those rocks over there!" I spluttered, jerking a lump of turf from my face. "Oh, my goodness, what a time we're having!"

The gully was enveloped completely: beneath us the water must have been seven or eight feet deep. The place was a miniature lake. Our macks and other clothing made swimming difficult, but the distance wasn't far.

"Strike out," I said pantingly. "You all right, Tommy?"

"Yes, fathead!" gasped Watson. "As right as you are, anyhow!"

We struggled against the current, and at last managed to find our feet. A rough, sloping cliff lay in front of us—and this afforded plenty of foothold. Sloping away from the top was a short stretch of rough grassland, with Bellton Wood beyond, a dense mass of trees.

We dragged ourselves out of the water, and we couldn't help experiencing a rummy sensation. Often enough, in



sunny weather, we had scrambled up that cliff from the gully. But then everything had been dry, with no water nearer than half-a-mile. The whole aspect of everything was now changed.

We stood there among the rocks in the gathering dusk, with the rain still hissing down in torrents. The first burst was over, but a terrible amount of damage must have been caused. Not that we thought of that at the moment; we were too much occupied in seeking safety ourselves.

The spot was a very gloomy one at the best of times, for the shadow of the wood overhead cast a depressing dreariness over the whole scene. Now, in the present circumstances, the place seemed positively repellent.

The flood was swirling among the rocks at our feet, but we were now out of danger. It would be quite easy to reach St. Frank's by cutting round the wood and coming out opposite the main gates.

"Thank goodness we're all right!" I exclaimed buskily. "We ought to consider ourselves jolly lucky——"

Just as I was about to finish speaking I paused abruptly. From the very ground beneath my feet, so it seemed, a sound came. I caught my breath in. The others had heard it, too.

A wild, eerie cry reached our ears. It was muffled and horrible. It ceased, and was not repeated.

"What--what was that?" asked Watson, shivering.

"There's somebody here," said Sir Montie, looking round. "I'll swear that was a human sound, dear boys."

But we could see all round us clearly, and there was not a living soul within sight. We had the place utterly and absolutely to ourselves.

"Jolly queer," I exclaimed, in a low voice. "What did it sound like to you, Tommy?"

"Seemed like the cry of a ghost——"

"You ass!" I cut in sharply. "Ghosts don't make noises like that. Besides, there aren't such things as ghosts."

Watson looked round uneasily.

"It—it was thundering uncanny, anyhow," he muttered nervously.

We had all caught that feeling, and I dare say it was the desolate nature of our surroundings that brought it on. I only know that we all had a tremendous desire to get away from the place as quickly as possible.

And, without wasting a moment, we commenced scrambling, helter-skelter, up the cliff. To be quite frank, we dreaded to remain on that mysterious spot.

## CHAPTER II.

(*Nipper continues.*)

IN WHICH MY CHUMS AND I GO ON A BOATING TRIP TO BANNINGTON.

WE felt rather sheepish when we arrived at the top of the steep slope. Although we didn't admit it—even to ourselves—we knew that we had fled from the lower ground—actually fled.

"It must have been the water," I remarked, shivering.

"The water?" asked Sir Montie. "Which was the water, Benny boy?"

"Why—er—that queer sound," I replied. "A stream running down between two of the rocks, I suppose. Water does make rummy noises, you know."

The others nodded. But they knew—and I knew—that my explanation was totally wrong. The most important thing, however, was to get to St. Frank's without losing a minute. We weren't anxious to develop pneumonia, or something of that sort.

We looked awful scarecrows—drenching wet, capless, and coated with brown mud all over. An ordinary wetting isn't so bad, but the flood had churned up the mud shockingly, and we were in a terrible condition.

The clothing we wore was utterly ruined—every scrap of it, except, perhaps, our mackintoshes. But we were thankful to be out of the flood alive. The adventure might well have had a tragic ending.

"Come on!" I said, between my chattering teeth. "Let's run!"

We did run, as hard as we could go. Skirting the wood, we worked our way round, and presently came out on the meadow opposite the main gates. This was rising ground, and was not affected by the released water.

Once through the hedge, however, we found that the lane was a running stream—but only to the depth of three or four inches. The Triangle, too, was flooded. The whole expanse was a sheet of water. Warren, the porter, was ploughing his way across it with unutterable disgust.

He gazed at us speechlessly as we entered the gates. It was now nearly



dark, and I suppose we must have looked rather weird in the half-light. But Warren soon recovered his breath, and gave a gasp.

"Lor' save us!" he ejaculated. "You gave me quite a fright——"

"We've been nearly drowned, Warren, dear boy," panted Sir Montie. "Please look another way. I'm in such an appallin' state that I don't want to be gazed upon by anybody!"

"Blow me, if you ain't some o' the young gents!" gasped Warren. "What 'ave you been a-doin' of, young masters?"

"Can't stop to tell you, old son," I said. "Heard any news from the village?"

"Not yet, young sir——"

We didn't give Warren a chance to say anything further; or, if he did say it, he addressed the rain-laden air. We were scudding over to the Ancient House, and Sir Montie groaned when he saw that the lobby was simply crowded with excited juniors. There was a yell as we were sighted.

"Here they come!" roared Handforth, of the Remove. "I'll bet it's those Study C asses! They're the only chaps out, anyhow——"

"Great Scott! What's happened to 'em?"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a confusion of yells as we came into the radius of electric light and left the dusky Triangle behind us, and we couldn't possibly blame the fellows for laughing as they did. We looked like nigger minstrels who had had a ducking and had been chucked into a mud bath afterwards.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who's been giving you a wash?"

"Rats! Don't chip 'em!" shouted Owen major. "I reckon they must have been caught in the flood or something."

"Oh, no!" I said sarcastically. "We don't look as if we've been caught in the flood, do we? We dived in, just to see if the water was dirty."

Sir Montie groaned aloud.

"Be sporty, dear boys!" he pleaded. "Pray let us get through. I'm simply dyin' to get into a hot bath—I am, really! We're all shockin'ly cold, an' I believe we're contractin' rheumatic fever or lumbago."

"Hold on! We want to ask you ques-

tions," bellowed Handforth. "What about the flood? We can't get to hear anything about it——"

There was a commotion from behind the crowd.

"Now, boys—now, boys!" came the stern tones of Mr. Alvington—in other words, the guv'nor. "Let me pass, please! Good gracious! What a terrible state you boys are in! What have you been doing?"

"We were caught by the flood when it came along, sir," I explained, still shivering. "We couldn't possibly help being swept away——"

"Of course not! I quite understand that," said Nelson Lee, with concern in his voice. "Follow me at once, boys! I only hope no serious consequences will come about. You must have a bath, and get to bed at once!"

We pushed through the excited crowd of fellows, and as we followed the guv'nor, Montie looked at me and actually winked.

"I don't think, dear fellow!" he murmured.

"You don't think what?"

"Why, I'm not goin' to be put to bed like a little boy!" said Tregellis-West. "'Tain't likely, is it? There's nothing wrong with us, really! Once we've had a bath an' got into clean things we shall be all right."

And as a matter of fact we were. A hot bath and a change of clothes worked wonders. We had been exerting ourselves ever since our soaking, and we hadn't had time to contract chills. We were quite fit by the time we had got into spare suits, and as hungry as hunters.

"Why, I think you're quite well, boys," smiled Nelson Lee, who came into the dormitory just as we were ready to go down. "If you feel feverish, however, you must go to bed without delay."

"Well, I am a bit feverish, guv'nor," I grinned. "I'm feverish to get down to Study C and have a good feed! We'd bought a dozen eggs, but they're busted up completely now. I say, this flood looks jolly serious, doesn't it?"

We were in the dormitory by ourselves, and as Tommy and Montie were in the secret, I could speak freely to the guv'nor.

He nodded gravely.

"The situation is very serious indeed, young 'un," he replied. "I have just



had a telephone message from Bellton, but I doubt if communication will be possible much longer. The telegraph-poles in the village are in a rocky state, I understand. Bellton itself is badly flooded."

"Deep, sir?" asked Sir Montie. "What about the poor villagers?"

"They are having appalling hardship," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Nearly all the cottages on the Caistowe Road are submerged. They are low-built, you know. And in the High Street the water is close upon five feet deep."

"Phew!" I whistled. "That's simply rotten!"

"The shops are washed out almost without exception," went on the gov'nor, "and the inhabitants have had to take refuge in the bedrooms. Bellton is quite isolated, I believe, and the flood is getting worse."

We all had long faces.

"Anybody drowned, sir?" asked Watson, rather huskily.

"I don't know, my boy," replied the schoolmaster-detective. "But it is quite possible that there have been some tragedies. We are extremely fortunate at St. Frank's. The level of the ground here is only slightly above that of the village, but we are escaping the worst part of the flood. There is no peril of the water rising higher than a foot or two at St. Frank's, and even that is improbable. We shall receive further news, I dare say, in the morning."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez slowly.

"Can't we do some rescue work, sir?" he asked. "Can't we go to the village and help some of the poor people there?"

"You may be sure, Tregellis-West, that everything is being done already," said the gov'nor. "Large parties have already come from Bannington, and the homeless people from the flooded area are being given shelter."

Sir Montie's face brightened.

"That's made me feel more comfortable, sir," he declared. "Begad, I couldn't have eaten a morsel of tea if you hadn't told me that! Well, dear boys, I suppose we'd better get down!"

But, before descending, I told the gov'nor about that cry we had heard. He listened gravely, and suggested that some unfortunate man had been swept to death by the flood. But I told "Old Ayy" that the sound had come from

the very ground itself. He was puzzled, but advised me not to think about the incident. There was possibly a natural cause for the uncanny sound.

We had a ripping tea, in spite of the lost eggs. Fellows from other studies brought all sorts of contributions—sardines and sausages and bacon, and I'm blessed if I know what else. We consumed the meal in state, with a big audience crowding round us, listening while we related our adventures between mouthfuls.

That night there was general excitement. Prep. was completely forgotten by everybody in the Lower School, and not a junior got to sleep until an hour after the usual time. The rain was still hissing down outside without a pause.

In the morning, however, the sky was leaden, but it had ceased to weep. The air was comparatively clear, and there was a strange scene visible from the dormitory windows.

The Triangle was nearly a foot under water now, and the playing-fields were submerged to a depth of over three feet. The effect was queer. Hedges and fences and trees stuck out of the water in the most extraordinary fashion. As I gazed out with Sir Montie and Tommy, I saw Warren passing through the gateway into the Triangle—in a boat!

"Begad," said Sir Montie, in surprise, "the water must be frightfully deep!"

"Not necessarily," I replied. "That's a flat-bottomed boat. It doesn't draw more than seven or eight inches. Warren's got sense. He doesn't want to get his tootsies damp. Look at the pole he's using. It doesn't go in more than a foot."

Warren punted the boat across to the College House steps, and used them as a landing-stage.

"High old times—what?" chuckled Hubbard gleefully, looking out.

"Rather!" said Handforth. "It's a half-holiday this afternoon. We'll go out boating across the playing-fields! Doesn't it sound rummy?"

The juniors were a thoughtless crew, but there was nothing surprising in that. Boys don't look into things very deeply. The Removites were in high glee. The flood at St. Frank's was a novelty. They revelled in it. The depression had gone, and everybody was as keen as mustard. And now that the rain had stopped there was nothing to gumble at.



At breakfast-time we learned further details of the flood.

The water was higher in Bellton, but the stranded villagers were all being cared for. Two or three people had been injured, but nobody killed. Further down the valley, however, there had been some deaths, and there were any number of sheep and pigs drowned, to say nothing of poultry. But it's impossible for a serious flood to come without tragedy accompanying it.

Telegraphic and telephonic communication was cut off from Bellton and the school. The railway, from Bannington downwards, was out off. No trains were able to come through Bellton, for the cutting was a deep river by this time.

Morning lessons at St. Frank's were a farce. Nobody paid any attention, and the masters made no attempt to subdue the juniors. Permission was granted for the boys to use the school boats in the "grounds," but nobody was to venture beyond. On the river itself the current was terribly strong.

Just before dinner the guv'nor sent for me, and I went to his study, wondering what was in the wind.

"Ah, Bennett," he said, as I appeared, "I want you to do me a favour. Shut the door! I want you to go over to Bannington this afternoon, by boat."

"Any old thing, guv'nor!" I said. "Another supply of cigars?"

The guv'nor chuckled.

"None of your cheek, Nipper!" he remarked. "I shouldn't send you to Bannington for cigars. A new boy is due to arrive this afternoon, and he can't come to Bellton, owing to the flooded condition of the railway. The position, therefore, is rather awkward."

"I suppose he'll get out at Bannington?" I asked. "Who is the chap, anyhow? A little kid for the faggery, sir?"

"No, Nipper. The new boy will go into the Remove. His name is Burton; Tom Burton, I believe. He is the son of a retired captain—a merchant service skipper of the old school. Came into a fortune, I believe, or something of that sort. At all events, my boy, Burton is to board in the Ancient House, and I'll leave you to find him a study. It would be rather nice if you met him at Bannington."

"I don't mind, guv'nor," I said. "Of course, under ordinary circumstances, he could find his own giddy way. But it's

a bit difficult with all this water about, isn't it?"

"Exactly!" nodded Nelson Lee. "You may take your chums with you, of course. Pick your way carefully, and avoid the main stream. You'll be able to work round and strike the Bannington road, if it is possible to distinguish it. Near the town there is a hill, and that, of course, is high and dry. So I advise you to moor your boat there and walk in Bannington, to the station."

"Is Bannington flooded, sir?"

"Only slightly, in the lower part of the town, which you won't need to visit," replied Lee. "Bring Burton back, Nipper, and deliver him at the Ancient House. After that, of course, you can leave him to his own devices, if you choose."

"Right you are, sir!" I said cheerfully.

So, after dinner, Tregellis-West and Watson and I went on our trip. Several other fellows—Handforth particularly—declared in no uncertain terms that it was a bit offside that we should be allowed to go right to Bannington, while the other juniors were compelled to remain within bounds. But as Handforth was always grumbling at something, we didn't take any notice of him.

Warren had brought all the boats into the Triangle, and several fights were in progress among the juniors as to who should go for a row first. I, having a special mission to perform, had a boat reserved for me, and I started off with my chums in state.

We glided off across the Triangle, scraping the gravel now and again; but, once on to the flooded playing-fields, we were able to use the oars, and got along in fine style. The sun was attempting to break out at times, but it was weak and watery, and there was a promise of more rain in the air.

But the floods were still rising, and wouldn't subside for days, even if the rain held off all the while.

It was strange, rowing over the spots we had often trodden by foot. As far as the eye could see in every direction lay sheets of glassy water, with trees and buildings sticking out of it in the most bizarre fashion. The only really dry pieces of ground were the hills about Bellton Wood.

We took it in turns at steering, and managed to keep clear of the river



proper. This could only be distinguished by the swift current, which in places was whirling dangerously.

All manner of articles were floating down the stream—planks, hen-coops, bushes, portions of wooden fencing, and occasionally big trees. Although we were in good spirits, we couldn't help feeling depressed occasionally. The whole aspect of the countryside was one of desolation and waste.

"Just look at Bellton!" said Montie seriously. "Ain't it shockin'?"

The village was clearly visible. Some of the low cottages were nearly submerged, only the chimney-pots protruding above the water, but the majority of the buildings were habitable on the upper floors. Boats were passing up and down the space which had once been the High Street.

"I suppose it'll get right again?" asked Tommy Watson.

"You ass! Of course it will!" I replied. "Why, in some districts they have floods like this every two or three years! Some of the ramshackle buildings will collapse, of course; but that may be a blessing in disguise. Anyhow, Bellton will look itself again when the river goes down."

We continued our journey, and crossed the current much higher up, where it was flowing fairly sedately. Lower down, near the weir, the river was a dangerous torrent—a death-trap if any boat was caught in its clutches.

The hill we were making for stood out distinctly across the great stretch of water. There were plenty of other boats, of course, for there was no other way of communicating with the isolated village of Bellton.

We ran ashore, so to speak, easily, and tied the painter of the boat to a tree which grew near by. Then we jumped out, and had a little argument as to who should remain with the boat whilst the others went to meet the train.

At last Tommy Watson agreed to remain in charge, and Sir Montie and I trudged away into Bannington. The roads were muddy, of course, but quite above the flooded area. We arrived at the station in good time, and had to wait twenty minutes. The train, however, was nearly twelve minutes overdue.

From what we could gather, the flood

was only a local one—that is, it wasn't serious anywhere except in the Stowe valley—which, after all, was only a minor locality. It affected St. Frank's and Bellton more than any other place.

The train came in, and Sir Montie and I saw a boy descend clumsily from a first-class compartment. He was dressed in Etons, but they didn't fit him at all—at least, he didn't know how to wear them properly.

He was a big-limbed sort of chap, and struck me as being of the type who couldn't enter a room without knocking everything over.

As we approached him we saw that his face was as brown as a berry. His eyes were open and frank, with a kind of innocent expression in them. I took to him at once, instinctively.

"I suppose you're Burton?" I asked, getting straight to the point.

"You've got my name," he replied in a big, gruff voice. "Souise me, you're from St. Frank's, I'll bet!"

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "How did you know, dear boy?"

"Well, your caps give the game away, don't they?" laughed Burton. "What's wrong up the line? I hear there's been a heavy sea."

His manner was wonderfully jolly, and his face was the very personification of geniality. His eyes twinkled with natural good-humour.

"Bellton's flooded," I said. "The only way of getting to St. Frank's is by boat just at present, and we've come along to do the honours. We're going to convey you to the school in state. I'm Dick Bennett, of the Remove. But I'm rude—this cheerful image is Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregellis-West, Baronet—also of the Remove!"

The new boy's eyes opened wide.

"Bust my tops'l!" he exclaimed with great heartiness. "That's a good name, ain't it? Why, you're kidding me. You're not a baronet, are you?"

Sir Montie sighed.

"It's shockin', but it's true, dear fellow," he admitted apologetically. "It was horrid of Benny to string out my name like that. I'm afraid you'll think me an appallin' swanker, Burton. But I'm not—I'm not, really!"

"Well, wash my scuppers!" exclaimed Burton. "You've given me a surprise."

"Dear boy, we're a lot more surprised



than you are," said Tregellis-West gently. "I hate to be rude, but I haven't the slightest idea what your scuppers are. An' do they really need washin'?"

The new boy's face expressed dismay.

"There! My dad told me to be careful," he exclaimed, in a startled voice. "But I can't forget; I'm blowed if I can. He told me to speak properly. And I've been talking like a fo'c'sle hand!" I grinned.

"My dear chap, this is a free country, and every chap's got the right of free speech," I said. "It doesn't matter to us how you talk. Some of the fellows at St. Frank's might jeer at you—such as Fullwood and his crowd—but jeering from them is rather a compliment. But I must admit you seem to be a bit original."

"It ain't my fault, you know," he said confidentially. "My father was the skipper of a big sailing ship before he went into steam, and soon after that he retired. Ever since I was a little nipper I used to run about the ship, and mix with the hands. And I picked up all sorts of expressions I oughtn't to have done. And, souse me, I'm blowed if I can get out of 'em. Why, my dad always calls me 'Bo'sun' now!"

"Bo'sun!" said Sir Montie vaguely. "Begad! That's a queer name, ain't it?"

"It means 'boat-swain' really," said Burton. "But when I was about three—as soon as I began to talk, in fact, my dad called me Bo'sun—and that's been my name ever since. I've never had a mother, not that I remember, and the dad spoilt me."

Burton's openness concerning his childhood was rather amusing, and he didn't seem to mind telling us his whole family history. But the station platform at Bannington was hardly the place to go into details.

"Well, look here, Bo'sun," I said cheerfully. "we'll get along——"

"Great marlinspikes!" exclaimed Burton. "You ain't going to call me Bo'sun, are you?"

"My dear chap, the name suits you down to the ground," I grinned. "Why, with a few whiskers, you'd look a bo'sun to the life! I'll bet anything that you're known all over St. Frank's as 'Do'sun' before to-morrow night!"

"Shiver my bows!" murmured Burton.

Sir Montie eyed the new boy through his pince-nez with open wonder and astonishment. His weird expressions were startling, but I could quite understand why he used them. Having lived as a child upon a big sailing ship, he had naturally picked up all manner of rough terms, and it would be years before he dropped the habit; especially if he made no attempt to put the brake on.

I could see that Tom Burton would create quite a sensation at St. Frank's. But he was such a huge, lumbering lump of good nature that he would get on well with nearly everybody. And his very size would protect him from the sneers of cads like Fullwood or De Valerie or Merrell.

"I'm sorry I came!" exclaimed Burton suddenly, as he found Sir Montie's eyes upon him. "I've a good mind to go back by the next train. I told my dad that I should be out of place at St. Frank's—and I shall be, too! You fellows are shocked, I know. I didn't think I should have to be with baronets——"

Tregellis-West went very red.

"Dear boy, forgive me!" he said earnestly. "If anybody's been rude, it's me. I was starin' at you in the most ill-mannered way, begad! You're the very sort we want at St. Frank's—you are, really. There ain't many really decent chaps like you knockin' about."

"Don't be an ass, Burton," I chuckled. "You're the right sort."

The Bo'sun's innocent eyes sparkled with joy.

"Souse my main-deck! You're too good to me!" he exclaimed, with hearty enthusiasm. "I hope you'll let me be a messmate of yours?" he added anxiously.

"Begad! A messmate?" asked Sir Montie mildly.

"A—a chum, I mean."

"Oh!" said Sir Montie. "Of course—er, Bo'sun. You're a chum of ours already, ain't you? Come along, an' we'll soon introduce you to a rippin' chap named Watson. We're goin' to row you home. Don't bother about your luggage—it's a frightful bore, lookin' after luggage. That'll come on afterwards."

And, seizing the Bo'sun's arms, we marched him out of the station.



## CHAPTER III.

HANDFORTH MAKES HIMSELF A BIGGER AND THAN USUAL—AND THERE IS AN ADVENTURE WHICH NEARLY BECOMES A TRAGEDY.

**E**DWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH uttered a snort.

"You're an ass, Arnold McClure!" he exclaimed warmly.

"Why shouldn't we go further? I suppose I can handle a boat, can't I?"

"You know jolly well that we're forbidden to go beyond bounds," said McClure, with equal warmth. "The river's dangerous, and we don't want to get capsized. What do you say, Church?"

"Why, we'll stick to the rules," he said promptly. "Handforth's off his chump to suggest——"

"Did you say I'm off my chump, Walter Church?" demanded Handforth darkly.

"Ain't your ears big enough?" growled Church.

The redoubtable leader of Study D stood up, and commenced to roll up his sleeves.

"Look out, you giddy fathead!" roared McClure, in alarm. "You'll have the boat over in half-a-tick! The water ain't deep, but I don't want to get drenched! Sit down, you cuckoo!"

Handforth still continued to stand in the boat, which was floating placidly near the sports pavilion. But Handforth was about the clumsiest chap at St. Frank's, and he stepped forward deliberately—with the cheerful intention of punching Church on the nose.

The boat rocked wildly, and Handforth sat down much sooner than he expected. Incidentally, he nearly toppled overboard, and only just saved himself by clutching at McClure, whose cap flopped into the muddy water with a splash.

"Look what you've done!" howled McClure.

"I don't care!" roared Handforth. "You shouldn't rock about so much! Do you think you can play about as you like in a boat of this sort?"

"Well, my hat!" said Church faintly. "Leave him alone, Clurey. He's past all hope! Nearly capsized us, and then says we're to blame!"

"What about my cap?" bellowed McClure.

He fished over the side, and recovered his headgear, which, fortunately, was

only wet on the outside. It had floated like a bowl, and was still wearable. Handforth snorted again, but remained in a sitting posture.

"You wait till I get you chaps on dry land!" he said threateningly. "You're taking advantage of me—that's what you're doing! You think you can insult me as much as you like now we're in this boat. I tell you, I'm going further out!"

"And then we shall get caned!" growled Church. "Rate to you! Why the dickens can't you stick to the Head's orders?"

"The Head," said Handforth, with a wave of his hand, "ain't the right chap to give orders. What does he know about our wants? Why should he make the bounds so jolly narrow? What's the good of all this water if we can't use it?"

The question, being difficult to answer, remained unanswered.

"Besides," went on Handforth warmly, "Bennett and those other silly asses have gone to Bannington. If they can go, we can. I vote we slip away and meet 'em. We can have a squint at the new fellow——"

"But Bennett can handle a boat properly," argued Church thoughtlessly.

"Does that mean to say I can't?" roared Edward Oswald. "It seems to me, Church, that you're asking for trouble. My hat, you'll get it before long! You wouldn't like to go head-first into this water, would you?"

"Look here, Handy, don't be silly," said Church uneasily. "You can handle a boat all right, but—but the current's jolly strong——"

"I don't care! We'll keep out of it, that's all," said Handforth. "I've had enough of this fatheaded argument. Never knew such chaps for arguing in all my life! It's a wonder I stand you!"

Privately, Church and McClure wondered how they stood Handforth. He was certainly hard to get on with; and, if it hadn't been for his genuine good-nature, he would have had no chums at all. But Church and McClure regarded it as a duty to look after their leader. Fortunately for them, Handforth didn't know that they held this view.

"Well, let's see what the water's like round the old monastery ruins," said Church carelessly. "Grab the oars, McClure."

Handforth laughed grimly.



"That's a fine game, ain't it?" he asked. "You leave those oars alone, McClure. I'm going to break bounds. What are bounds made for, anyhow? If the Head's orders were reasonable, I'd keep to 'em in a minute. But I don't see why I should be sat on!"

Handforth had got his faithful chums in his power. Had they been on dry land they would have refused, point-blank, to accompany him if they didn't want to. But they couldn't very well step out of the boat and leave him to himself. Where he went they had to go; and argument was evidently useless. Handforth was always more difficult to deal with if his will was thwarted. It saved a lot of trouble, therefore, to give in at once.

The boat was pushed through a gap in the top of the hedge at the lower end of the playing-fields, and the invincible trio started off on their trip. Several shouts from other juniors, in various boats, were loftily ignored. Out of sheer bravado Handforth had already decided to go for quite a long row.

And Church and McClure, having resigned themselves, rather enjoyed the adventure. It was no good being gloomy, anyhow.

Once away from the school grounds, Handforth obligingly handed the oars to his long-suffering chums, and took the tiller-ropes. Then he sat back in luxury, and steered.

"You just work away at the oars," he said comfortably. "You can trust me to steer all right. We'll just go round in a big circle, and then come back. My hat, we can see Bellton from here!"

They looked at the village with interest, and Church and McClure rowed on easily and steadily. It was no good asking Handforth to turn if he didn't want to. They went right on over the flooded meadows and marshes until St. Frank's was nearly out of sight. Handforth was steering in the direction of Bannington, and he took especial delight in fouling floating bushes and tree-branches. As a matter of fact, he attempted, in every case, to steer clear of them.

At last they cut across the stream. Church and McClure didn't know it, but Handforth had his own ideas. He had caught sight of a boat in the far distance, and he had no idea that it contained Nipper and Co.

But it was then that disaster overtook

the boating-party. Church had glanced round, mainly because Handforth seemed to be looking everywhere except ahead. And Church nearly dropped his oar in dismay.

"Look out, you ass!" he shouted. "What's that whacking great thing floating towards us? There'll be a collision in half-a-tick——"

"By George!" said Handforth, startled. "All right; leave it to me, my sons. I'll steer clear all right."

This assurance did not give his chums much comfort. They were practically in mid-stream now—that is, right upon the bosom of the Stowe itself. And, coming towards them with the current, was a big, wooden structure, which looked strangely out of place in the water.

"It's a chicken-house!" said McClure. "A chicken-house or some sort of hut. If we hit that, Handy, we shall be smashed up. Why the dickens don't you steer round it? Pull the left rope, you ass—the left rope!"

Handforth, in spite of his confidence, was rather flustered.

"Fathead! That would only make matters worse!" he snapped.

And he pulled the right rope. Possibly the boat would have scraped clear. But Church and McClure, in great dismay, used their oars violently. In consequence, the boat took no direction at all, but remained in practically the same position. Between the three of them they got into a hopeless muddle—which is usually the case when people lose their heads. Handforth lost his more completely than the others did. And before they could realise it, there was a terrific crash, and all three were thrown down in a heap.

The boat had hit the oncoming chicken-house—which was a substantial wooden structure—bows-on. The shock was considerable. And as the trio were scrambling up, really frightened, the nose of the boat slid round and the frail craft was caught broadside.

She tipped and the water swirled in over the gunwale in a rush. The boat simply slipped under water in a few seconds, and left Handforth and Co. struggling desperately. They were not on a mere flooded meadow, with the water merely waist-deep. The river itself was beneath them, deep and treacherous.

"Oh, my hat!" spluttered Handforth wildly.



Exactly how they managed it, they didn't know; but they all three scrambled upon the floating structure, and sat astride the roof, dripping and pale. Their haven of refuge was precarious at the best.

"Don't—don't shift about!" panted Church desperately. "You'll have us overturned, Handy! Oh, you are—you are! I knew we should have an accident! The boat's gone, and there's no telling what'll happen to us!"

"That's right—blame me!" gasped Handforth. "It was your fault, you see! Why the thunder couldn't you leave the steering to me? We shall have to float down now until we get to Belton or somewhere."

"What—what about the weir?" asked Church, shivering.

Handforth turned deathly pale.

"Great gans! I forgot that!" he said huskily. "Oh, my goodness, we shall be swept over! It's only just over a mile down! We'd better swim for it while we can!"

"Swim!" exclaimed McClure shrilly. "Do you think we could swim in this current, you mad idiot? Besides, we should have to swim for miles over these flooded meadows! Look, there's a boat over there! Let's yell!"

Handforth, quite subdued for once, knew that his chum's advice was good, and he commenced yelling on the instant, waving his arms wildly at the same time. The boat, which was some little way off, was steering straight towards the unfortunate trio, and an answering wave could be seen.

"They've spotted us!" gasped McClure. "But they can't get here in time! We're being swept down by the current! Oh, we shall be drowned!"

The occupants of the other boat were Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson, and the new junior. Tom Burton had been introduced to Watson, and they were now proceeding leisurely towards the school. The frantic wavings of Handforth and Co., however, had put a stop to their genial conversation.

"Somebody's had an accident!" exclaimed Nipper briskly. "How like the dickens, Montie! We shall have to go to the rescue. The current's jolly strong, but—Great Scott, what about the weir?"

"It's over a mile down," said Tommy Watson. "but that's not far in a current

like this. I don't mind the risk, but it would be a fat-headed thing to get ourselves overturned as well! Why, I believe it's Handforth!"

Nipper granted.

"That explains it, then," he said. "Just like Handforth! If they ain't careful, they'll get drowned! Come on! You sit tight, Bo'sun!"

Tom Burton opened his mouth, but hesitated.

"Shall—shall I row?" he asked nervously. "I don't want to put myself forward, messmate, but I'm a dandy with the oars. I've handled boats in all sorts of rough seas——"

Nipper was as keen as a razor.

"I can row a bit myself," he said, "but I dare say you're better, Bo'sun. Come on! Grab hold!"

The Bo'sun took both oars, notwithstanding Nipper's protests. But the next moment Nipper was glad, for Burton gave a display of oarsmanship which simply amazed the others. Nipper himself was one of the most skilful oarsmen at St. Frank's, but he freely admitted that he couldn't hold a candle to the new boy.

The boat simply flew through the water. Burton went like clockwork, and so rapidly that the other members of the boat's crew watched in sheer fascination. It was an amazing performance.

The Bo'sun's strength, too, was something to wonder at. He seemed to be making no effort, but the boat's speed told clearly enough that he was putting terrific "beef" into his work. A hissing wake trailed away behind.

"By Jove," said Nipper admiringly, "you're an absolute wonder!"

He knew quite well that the Bo'sun was doing much better alone than he could have done with Nipper's help. He worked the two oars as though they were one, rowing with astounding precision.

Indeed, the little craft seemed to skim over the water as though propelled by a powerful engine. Sir Montie and Tommy Watson were too astonished to speak at all. With never a flag, the Bo'sun continued his plucky effort.

He knew well enough that the adventure was dangerous, but there was a smile upon his sun-browned face and his eyes shone with pure joy.

Hand over fist, the boat overhauled the drifting wooden shed, and Nipper could now see that the three soaked figures were those of Handforth and his two



chums. And Handforth was not satisfied even yet.

He commenced waving and edged his way along the roof towards the end. Those in the boat heard a distinct yell of warning from Church and McClure. But it was too late! Handforth could be nothing but ram-headed, and once again he had brought disaster.

The chicken-house gave a lurch, swayed, and then turned turtle. The three terrified juniors plunged into the swollen river, and were left struggling in the water.

"Begad, they'll drown!" exclaimed Sir Montie huskily.

"Souse my scuppers," muttered the Bo'sun, "I shall have to use my full strength, after all!"

Nipper and Co. simply gasped as Burton plied his oars even faster than before. It was now the strength of sheer determination. The new boy was proving his character in a manner which would never be forgotten.

He was using his utmost effort to go to the rescue of three fellows he had never seen in his life before. It seemed impossible that any human being could propel a boat with such speed, considering its load.

And almost at once, so it appeared, Handforth and Co. were overtaken. Nipper, steering, sent the craft so that the struggling juniors could grip it as it drew up on a level with them. Three pairs of hands clutched desperately, and they all gained a hold.

"Careful!" warned the Bo'sun, resting on his oars. "Go easy, messmates! If we're upset now, there'll be no escape for us."

Handforth and Co., soaked and exhausted, were dragged aboard. They lay in the boat panting heavily, too spent to speak a word.

And now the Bo'sun was using his skill to save the whole party from disaster. Ahead could be seen the boiling, foaming water of the weir. The current had caught the boat fairly, and it was being whirled onwards to destruction. Even now the issue was in great doubt.

"We shall have to help you now, Bo'sun," said Nipper quickly.

"I'd rather do it alone, Bennett," rumbled Burton. "I don't mean any offence, messmates, but we'll stand more chance—souse me if we won't! We shall get muddled if we all go at the oars."

Nipper nodded, and not another word was said. The boys sat tense and anxious. All depended now upon the Bo'sun's skill.

Ahead lay almost certain death. Over to the left were many flood-swept trees, sticking out of the water with their branches torn away, leaving jagged, treacherous stumps. There was no safety in that direction, although a great expanse of calm water lay beyond.

To the right, and fairly close, a sloping hill met the water, and the current swirled foamingly along the rough stubble at the foot. Burton took one glance, and then nodded to himself. In that direction only could safety be reached.

But the current here was of terrific strength. When the Bo'sun attempted to turn the nose of the boat, he hardly effected any change.

"By the cox'n's whiskers," he muttered, "it's going to be a struggle!"

He worked with the fury of a grim, settled determination. The perspiration poured down his face in streams.

Nipper, sitting idle, felt inexpressibly mean. He wanted to help, to do something; but there was only one set of oars, and he knew that they could be in no better hands.

Everybody thought that the new boy's efforts were useless, but almost imperceptibly the boat was being turned against the current, and it edged slowly and surely towards the jutting hill.

Burton snapped his teeth and compressed his lips. Then he used his last remaining effort. The boat seemed to give a jump, and it simply hissed across the current and shot like an arrow towards the haven of safety.

Crash!

It was all over in a moment. A hidden boulder had torn a deep gash in the side of the little craft. It overturned, and flung its occupants in a tangled heap into the water.

But the situation had been saved. They felt the muddy bottom, and were only waist-deep. The hissing flood swirled round them, and tried to tear them away in its grip. Church, indeed, was being carried off. But Nipper, striking out, made a grab for him and pulled him back in the nick of time.

When Nipper struggled ashore, he found Tom Burton lying upon his back, panting heavily. The new boy had col-



lapsed from sheer exhaustion, but there was a smile upon his face and he looked supremely contented.

The party was saved!

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE BOYS' HILL COMES IN HANDY—  
THE MYSTERY OF THE WILD MAN.

**A**N hour had passed. Tom Burton had practically recovered, and was decidedly uncomfortable. Nipper and Co. and Handforth and Church and McClure had heaped praise upon him until he begged them to stop. He persistently declared that he had done nothing worth shouting about, and this modesty on his part only made them shout the more.

Two important facts had been discovered.

The boat was crooked, for there was a gaping hole in one side of it nearly large enough for a boy to crawl through. The second fact was even more startling. In short, the party was marooned!

Upon investigation, Nipper had found that the hill was completely isolated from the rest of the high ground. The slope on which Bellton Wood stood was separated from the hill by a wide expanse of water. This, at the far end of the "island," was quite calm, but the distance was too far for the boys to swim. Burton declared that he could do so easily, but the others positively refused to let him make the attempt.

It was exasperating to be within sight of safety, but to be helpless. Bellton Wood was clearly visible in the distance, but it was beyond reach. Nobody, apparently, had seen the disaster, for the spot was a very deserted one. The Bellton boats were all on the far side of the river, quite out of sight.

Usually these hills were a mere wild waste of ground, sloping down from the wood. In the summer time the boys picnicked in the hollows, but these were now ten or twelve feet under water.

The only thing to be done was to keep in motion, so that a chill should not be contracted. It might be hours before any rescue was effected. Indeed, dusk was already coming on, and it was quite possible that the boys would have to remain on the hill during the whole night. A search-party would never think of looking for the missing juniors here.

Handforth, for once, was only too anxious to admit his faults.

"It was my doing all along," he declared again and again, penitently. "Church and McClure tried to stop me, but I wouldn't listen to 'em. And now we're all in a hole! Anybody can knock me down if he likes!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" said Nipper. "You've done the right thing and owned up to your fault. That's enough; nobody wants any more."

"An' we've all got to thank the Bo'sun for havin' saved us, begad," said Sir Montie. "I can't believe it even now, y' know! It's simply amazin'! We ought to be dead by this time!"

Tom Burton laughed.

"Why, you don't need to thank me!" he exclaimed, in his big voice. "That current was ticklish, I'll admit. But it didn't collar us, did it? And I'm not sure even now that we can't fake things up."

"How do you mean?" asked Nipper curiously.

The Bo'sun pointed.

"If we get to that other hill, mess-mate, we're all right, aren't we?" he asked.

"Of course!" replied Nipper. "That's Bellton Wood there! Once on that high ground we can skirt round the wood and enter the gates of St. Frank's in the usual way. There's only about a foot of water in the Triangle. That's the courtyard in front of the school."

The Bo'sun eyed the smashed boat reflectively.

"We could get across in five minutes," he said. "I'm scared if we don't do it!"

Nipper stared.

"We can't repair that boat!" he said. "My dear chap, it's beyond all hope. No; we'd better keep up this dance until we're rescued. We're half dry already, and if it doesn't come on to rain again we shall be O K."

The boys were, indeed, partially dry. Constant exercise, although tiring, had kept them warm. They were not seriously affected by their immersion. Nipper had kept everybody on the move almost since the moment of landing. This was really the only way to avert grave consequences.

But it was obviously impossible for them to run or walk about the whole night through. Human endurance has a limit. The ground was soaking, and to



lie upon it would be fatal. The only possibility would be to climb the trees which grew upon the hill, and seek a little rest there. But even this would be risky.

"That boat doesn't look beyond repair to me," said the Bo'sun slowly. "We can make a shot at mending it, anyhow, messmates. There's nothing like perseverance. That's what my dad always tells me."

The "messmates" looked on wonderingly. Handforth and Co., under ordinary circumstances, would have cackled unceasingly at the new boy's strange style of address. But they had a very heartfelt respect for him—they were grateful. And they wouldn't have dreamed of chipping him.

"If you say you can do it, Burton, I reckon that's good enough," exclaimed Handforth heartily. "I ain't surprised at anything you do. But I'd like to know how you're going to start the job."

The Bo'sun pulled the boat over, and carefully examined the jagged hole. He didn't speak for some time, but wrinkled his brow thoughtfully. It was a bit of a problem, for the smashed portions had been swept away.

In the locker, at the stern, some old lengths of tarred string had been discovered. This, and a rusty screwdriver, caused Burton to smile. He looked up, and nodded brightly.

"We'll do it," he declared. "Leave it to me, messmates."

The dusk was now very deep, and Burton had great difficulty in seeing his work. The others looked on, and helped when possible. Nipper very soon began to see what the new boy was doing.

He had torn up one of the pieces of wood from the stern seat. This he placed across the jagged hole, and lashed it securely into position. Then, bit by bit, he filled in the other spaces. The juniors were sent to collect strong twigs, and these were nearly all found a place.

Every atom of the string was used up. The main plank served to fill up the greater part of the cavity, and all the other pieces of wood were jammed against this, twisted cunningly into position here and there.

The Bo'sun displayed great skill in the manner in which he performed the job. It was slow, tedious work, for it had to be done thoroughly. A hurried repair would have been worse than use-

less, for it would have collapsed at the most awkward moment, in all probability.

The fact that there were no efficient tools was a great handicap. But Burton didn't grumble once. He performed his work cheerily, and kept the others in good spirits all the time.

Strip by strip, the gap was filled up. Not a single atom of wood was placed in hurriedly. Each piece was made perfectly secure. And, at last, the repair neared completion.

At the best, it was a hopeless botch. But its sole purpose was to carry the party across the wide stretch of flooded grassland. After that, a proper repair could be made at leisure.

"She'll leak," declared the Bo'sun. "She'll leak like a sieve. But I reckon we'll be able to get across all right."

"Hadn't we better go in two parties?" asked Nipper.

"I don't reckon it'll make much difference, old mate," replied Burton. "And the second journey might prove too much. We'd better all go at once."

Darkness, of course, had now set in completely. The last vestige of daylight had departed long since. A faint moon was rising behind the clouds, however, and the boys were just able to see what they were doing. The rain mercifully held off.

The party was now anxious to test the experiment. They were all ravenously hungry, and keen to get back to St. Frank's at the earliest possible moment. But the Bo'sun positively refused to hurry himself.

"Why, we might mess the whole thing up," he declared, when Tommy Watson showed some sign of impatience. "You reckon I'm doing this too well? Great marlinspikes! We'd look fine if we all collapsed in the middle of the flood, wouldn't we. There'll be a big pressure on this patch, and I've got to make it strong."

For another half-hour Burton laboured. He had been filling up the crannies, one by one, with surprising patience and perseverance. The others were satisfied with the repair long before he was. But this bluff son of the deep sea knew what he was doing, right enough.

It pained him more than he admitted to make such an ugly botch of the repair. But the fact that he had repaired it at all was greatly to his credit. And,



at length, he straightened his back with a sigh.

"She'll do, messmates—she'll do," he exclaimed. "I reckon we can launch her just as soon as you like. It must be gettin' near eight bells."

"Bogad! Eight bells!" said Sir Montie mildly.

"Not quite so late as that," chuckled Nipper. "Seven bells would be nearer the mark, Bo'sun—that's half-past seven, sea time, isn't it?"

Burton nodded.

"I thought it was later," he said. "Well, shall we launch her?"

"Rather!" said everybody.

And, without further delay, the boat was placed into the water. The current, at this spot, was strong—for it was where they had landed. But, by towing the boat round the "island," calm water was reached. The repair stood the test splendidly, for hardly a drop of water looked through.

"We shall ship plenty when we're all aboard," declared the new boy, shaking his head. "You mustn't go by this, messmates—she's empty now. Pile in, but be careful not to stave her side through."

The juniors climbed in with great care. Burton took his place last. And then, with firm strokes, he commenced rowing towards the dimly visible bulk of the jutting hill opposite.

The boys could hear the water trickling through the interstices of the patchwork repair. But it only came through slowly. There was danger, of course, of a sudden collapse, and everybody was on tenter-hooks.

If the patch gave way, the boat would fill in about three seconds, and they would all be precipitated into the water.

Sir Montie could feel a spurt of icy coldness hissing against his leg. But he didn't utter a word of complaint, and made no attempt to shift the position of his foot. Such a course would have been perilous.

And, gradually, the other hill grew nearer.

Not a word was spoken until the journey was over half-completed.

"We're all right now, in any case," murmured Nipper. "Even if we do collapse, we shall be able to swim this bit."

"Fathead!" said Church. "I can't swim more than a dozen yards!"

"Oh, we can haul you along," said Nipper cheerily.

But no such course was necessary. The Bo'sun's repair held good—just. As the rocky side of the Bellton Wood hill was nearest an ominous hissing was heard by all. Nobody spoke, but Church looked uneasy.

The bottom of the boat became awash with muddy water, and it grew deeper and deeper. The frail craft continued its course sluggishly, Burton plying the oars with great caution. Any sudden swerve or jerk might have caused a fatal collapse.

Water was spurting through the smashed side in volumes now—but the "shore" was close. And the Bo'sun, after one glance behind him, worked with sudden vigor. The boat hissed forward, and grated against the stony ground just as a loud rending sound came from the repair.

"Bust my mains'!" murmured the Bo'sun, "she's just done it, old mates—and only just, too. Still, a miss is as good as a mile, I reckon—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper, as he stood up.

He was staring at a spot above him, at the top of the steep hill. The others turned, and looked. And there, outlined against the sky, between two clumps of trees, a strange, weird figure stood.

It was quite motionless, and the weak moonlight shone upon it eerily. Two or three of the boys caught their breath in sharply. Church shivered.

And, undoubtedly, there was some excuse for the juniors' attitude.

The figure on the hill-top seemed to be something—something unearthly. It looked like that of an old man, bent and infirm. Hair lay in tangled masses upon the shoulders, and water was dripping from the hands, as they hung loosely from the figure's sides.

"What—what is it?" asked Tommy Watson hoarsely.

"Dear boy, I'm startled—I am, really!" murmured Sir Montie. "It reminds me of—of 'Sindbad the Sailor,' bogad! This cheery-lookin' merchant must be the Old Man of the Sea—what?"

Montie's description wasn't so far off the mark.

"Rats!" muttered Nipper. "You chaps seem to think it's a ghost, or something. I expect he's some poor old





The frenzied old man gave the plank a push and it slid into the water.  
"Now you will go!" he snarled. "You will go to your death!"—(see p. 26)



villager, who was caught by the flood. Let's run up and see, anyhow."

Nipper's calm tones acted upon the boys, and they all scrambled from the boat, and commenced ascending the hill, the Bo'sun was just behind Nipper, who led the way. But the juniors had only completed half the distance when the strange figure turned abruptly, and vanished.

"Great pip!" muttered McClure. "It—it was a ghost——"

"Rot!" snorted Nipper. "He's run off, that's all!"

By the time they arrived at the top of the slope they were all puffed, but feeling all the better for their exertion. And, near the dark trees of the wood, they saw their strange quarry. He had paused in his flight, and was looking back.

"Come on!" said Nipper grimly. "I'm going to see who he is!"

They hurried on, and, once again, the dripping, ragged figure ran before them. Right round the edge of the wood the fugitive went, and the boys rapidly overhauled him. Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West recognised the spot at once. It was just here, at the foot of the cliff, that they had struggled ashore when the flood caught them the previous evening.

The strange old man ran on blindly, as though unaware that a rough, sloping cliff lay immediately in front of him. Nipper, just behind, yelled out a warning, but the fleeing figure did not turn.

The boys reckoned that they would have their quarry cornered at the cliff-edge. But to everybody's astonishment the old man leapt clean into space, and plunged down the short cliff.

A loud splash sounded, and the boys rushed to the edge. The weak moonlight was playing upon the flood below, and a great many ripples were causing the muddy water to lap against the rocks.

But there was no sign whatever of the wild, hairy figure!

"Great Scott!" panted Nipper, gazing downwards. "Where the dickens can he have gone to? I—I wonder if——"

"If what?" asked Handforth huskily.

"Well, this water ain't very deep, and the old chap might have dived in head first," said Nipper. "Supposing he caught his head on a chunk of rock?"

The Bo'sun took a deep breath.

"Souse my main-deck!" he said quickly.

And, before the others could prevent him, he scrambled down the rough, sloping face of the cliff, and plunged straight in. The water came up to his shoulders, and he turned as Nipper made as if to follow him.

"Don't you come, messmate!" said Burton. "It ain't necessary for two of us to do a job like this."

As he finished speaking he dived. It seemed a terrible time before he came up. When he did so he was alone. Time after time he bobbed under the surface, but his efforts were all fruitless.

In some astounding, uncanny fashion, the old man had disappeared!

## CHAPTER V.

(Told by Nipper.)

IN WHICH THE WIND BECOMES A GALE, AND SIR MONTIE AND I SEE SOMETHING QUEER FROM THE DORMITORY.

**T**OM BURTON was forced to give up his efforts, for it was useless remaining in the water. I can't deny that I was feeling just a bit scared. Sir Montie and Tommy and the others, too, were also somewhat pale.

What was the explanation of this mystery? Had the old man dived to his death? Had he been swept away by the flood? Or was McClure's half-whispered suggestion the real solution?

McClure had asked if the thing had really been a man, after all; he had put the idea into our minds that we had been chasing something which wasn't human. And, certainly, the figure's strange disappearance lent certain colour to this wild supposition.

"Oh, rot!" I said, shaking myself impatiently. "You're an ass, McClure. Ghosts! There ain't such things, you chump! Either the old chap's slipped away safely, or he fell in the flood. We heard a splash, anyhow. But it's no good us staying here all night. The Bo'sun's done his best."

"The old fellow ain't anywhere near land," declared Burton. "I reckon he must have been swept away, old mates. It's pretty rotten, but I don't see that we can do anything else."

"Yes, we can," I put in briskly. "We can hurry off to St. Frank's—that duck-



ing hasn't done you any good, Bo'sun. It doesn't matter about the boat—we can leave her where she is."

And, without further ado, we hastened off round the wood—rather glad, in fact, to get away from this spot. Sir Montie and Tommy and I couldn't help remembering that unearthly cry we had heard the previous evening.

Once round the wood, we cut off across the meadow straight for the school. Only the lower end of the meadow was under water, but the lane was like a young river, the flood being over a foot deep.

The lights of the school were very welcome to us, and we entered the gates with a feeling of relief. It wasn't very late, but the gates ought to have been closed by this time. They were wide open, however, and we splashed towards the Ancient House, feeling dog-tired.

The wind, which had been rising considerably during the last hour, was now blowing and whistling angrily, carrying with it a few drops of rain from the scurrying clouds. I shivered when I thought of our late predicament. But for the Bo'sun's skill, we should still have been upon that bleak, unsheltered "island." It wasn't pleasant to wonder how we should have fared during the long night.

Just as we were wading towards the Ancient House steps, the big door opened and several figures stood outlined in the bright electric light which gleamed within the lobby. I recognised the guv'nor easily, and there were several prefects with him.

Nelson Lee heard the splashes of our feet, and quickly came out.

"Who is that?" he asked sharply, peering into the darkness.

"It's all right, sir," I said cheerfully. "We've just brought the new fellow back, as you asked—"

"Good gracious! It is the boys!" exclaimed the guv'nor in relieved tones. "Ah, but what of Handforth and Church and McClure?"

"We're here, sir!" bawled out Handforth. "As large as life, sir, only a bit damp. This is where the band begins to play," he added under his breath to his chums. "Look out for squalls, my Bucks! We shall get it in the neck!"

Church and McClure were not particularly despondent. Canings and lines seemed mere trivialities compared to their late experience.

We found that Mr. Alvington was

just on the point of starting out with four prefects on a search. They were merely waiting for Warren to bring a boat round. It was a great relief for the guv'nor to find that we were safe and sound.

All sorts of stories had run through the school. Some fellows were quite convinced that we had been carried off by the current, and we were eagerly pressed for the story of our adventures.

Nelson Lee, however, handed us over into the care of Mrs. Poulter, the homely matron of the Ancient House. The good old soul bustled about, and we were soon supplied with dry clothing. Having changed completely, we went into Mrs. Poulter's own sitting-room and sat down to a hot meal, with a glowing fire blazing near us. Handforth and Co. were hugely pleased. It seemed as though they were to receive no punishment, after all.

It was now past bedtime, and the other juniors had gone to the dormitory in a disgusted frame of mind. Their curiosity had been unsatisfied, and nobody thought of sleep.

Nelson Lee and the Head came to us when we had finished supper, and they smiled with relief and pleasure. One glance had told them that we were practically none the worse for our chilly experience. Out of all the lot of us, only Church showed signs of having caught a cold.

Tom Burton sat in his chair, red and uncomfortable, as I related a true and full account of what had happened. The Bo'sun didn't like it at all, and his feelings overcame him at last.

"Sense me, but I didn't do anything to talk about," he protested. "Don't you believe half he says, skipper!"

The Head, who had been addressed, adjusted his glasses wonderingly.

"But I do believe it, Burton," he said. "Bennett, I know, would not give you praise which you do not deserve. Bennett is a level-headed boy, and he is not addicted to exaggerating. I quite understand that your plucky conduct, Burton, saved the lives of the whole party. Your action is beyond all praise, my boy. I am proud of you! The whole school is proud of you!"

The Bo'sun turned redder than ever. "Shiver my bows," he murmured, "I—"

He paused, not knowing what to say, and the Head glanced at Nelson Lee.



"Dear me! The boy's expressions are extraordinary," he murmured, aside. "He will soon drop them, I dare say. Well, Burton," he added to the Bo'sun, "you have made a splendid beginning at St. Frank's. I hope you will be comfortable and happy under this roof."

"By hokey, I reckon this craft'll suit me right down to the water-line!" said the new boy eagerly. "I'm—I'm glad you think I've started well, sir. I shall get on fine with these messmates——"

"I—er—beg your pardon, Burton?" said the Head mildly.

"These shipmates—chums—friends, sir!" gasped the Bo'sun. "Oh, corks! I'm getting properly mussed up, skipper."

Nelson Lee chuckled, and Burton was allowed to get over his confusion. I and the other fellows were grinning hugely. The Bo'sun's manner of speech was certainly novel and quaint.

But he was such a huge, clumsy, good-natured fellow that it was positively difficult to be cross with him. And the Head had every reason to be grateful to the new boy in the Remove—and so had we!

Before going up to bed, I managed to speak to the guv'nor alone for a minute or two. I told him of the queer incident of the wild figure behind Belton Wood.

Nelson Lee listened carefully.

"You saw this figure clearly, young 'un?" he asked.

"Not exactly clearly, sir," I replied. "It was dim, you know. The chap seemed to be as old as Methuselah, with hair all over him like a giddy gorilla. And he dived right into the water, and didn't come up again! I tell you, we all felt a bit queer. Burton dived in, but he didn't find anything!"

Nelson Lee nodded slowly.

"I hardly know what to think, my boy," he said. "At all events, we can do nothing to-night. Go to bed now, and to-morrow, perhaps, we shall be able to get some news. The man was a villager, probably."

"That's what I thought, sir."

And feeling tired, but fit otherwise, we all went to the Remove dormitory. Burton, as was usual, would occupy the special little bedroom which was set apart for the use of new boys on their first night at the school. The Bo'sun was very glad of this, for he would not be present during the second recital of his doings. The new fellow was very simple and modest.

In the dormitory we found everybody awake. A chorus of inquiries greeted us as we entered. Fullwood and Co. and De Valerie looked rather disappointed. They had probably expected us to be mere wrecks.

Handforth did most of the talking now, and for once he didn't say much about himself. As a general rule the sayings of Edward Oswald Handforth concerned the doings of his mighty self. Now, however, he spoke with great enthusiasm of Tom Burton. He created great wonder, in fact, by actually calling himself a silly ass for leaving the school grounds—or waters.

Naturally, Handforth piled it on a bit thick. The story, as related by him, was somewhat embroidered. The fellows listened with bated breath, and there was only one fault to find with Handforth's tale.

Being very fond of his own voice, he genially started all over again as soon as he had finished, going into fuller details. He sat in bed, hugging his knees, talking with great enthusiasm.

And one by one the juniors fell off to sleep. It was all very well to listen with interest, but the same yarn a second time lost its charm. And Handforth's voice, although not exactly musical, was monotonous.

In about twenty minutes I was feeling very dozy myself. The words of the speaker were a long blur in my ears; but I became aware that the voice had stopped, and a snort followed.

"Ain't you chaps listening?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

Silence, except for a few general snores.

"Well, I'm blessed! If they ain't the limit!" declared Handforth, snorting again. "I've been making myself hoarse just for the sake of you chaps, and you all drop off to sleep!"

It was rather exasperating, and Handforth, feeling injured, snuggled down into his bed and dropped off to sleep in a few minutes. As a matter of fact, he had tired himself out by his vocal efforts.

The wind roared round the Ancient House angrily. It had risen still higher, and sudden gusts swept down with terrific velocity. The whistle of the gale as it tore round the angles of the building was stupendous at times.

I was just half asleep and half awake, on the point of going off soundly, when there came the sound of a rending crash



from somewhere outside. It wasn't anything slight, and I sat up in bed wondering.

"Dear boy, is the house blowin' down?" came a sleepy inquiry from the next bed.

Sir Montie was sitting up.

"Blessed if I know!" I replied. "I suppose one of the trees went over. By jingo, it couldn't have been another burst of the flood, could it? I'm going to have a squint out of the window, Montie."

I slipped out of bed, and found that Fregellis-West had followed my example. The other fellows were all soundly asleep. We stepped to the window and pushed the curtains aside. It wasn't necessary to raise the sash, for we could see fairly distinctly.

The moon was higher now, and was clearly visible between a break in the hurrying clouds. The soft, pale light bathed the stretch of water below us. Trees and hedges were bending nearly double under the force of the wind.

"Can't see anything wrong," I murmured.

"It ain't the flood, anyhow," said Sir Montie comfortably. "Perhaps it was the Head's fence, dear boy."

I looked over towards the Head's garden, and then I nodded.

"No, Montie; it's not the fence," I said. "Don't you remember that old chestnut-tree behind the foolshed? It's blown down, and must have smashed up the shed in doing so. Oh, well, it's nothing serious—"

"Begad," murmured Montie abruptly, "did you see—"

"Yes—yes!" I cut in. "Great Scott! It's that old man!"

While we had been watching, a weird, strange figure had come into view from the rear of the gym, and now it commenced paddling swiftly and stealthily across the Triangle towards the angle of the College House.

The figure disappeared, and we caught our breath in.

"Well, that proves one thing all right," I whispered, almost with relief.

"The old fellow didn't die, Montie."

"That's the same man who pumped into the flood behind the wood! It's jolly queer, old son!"

"Dear Benny, the chap must be amphib—amphib— Begad, I've forgotten the bally word; but it means that he can live in the water just as easily as he can

live on the land," said Fregellis-West lucidly. "But I was wonderin' why he has honoured St. Frank's with a visit."

"On the pinch, I expect," I said grimly.

"The pinch, dear boy?" repeated Sir Montie. "Why should that poor old fellow come nosin' about St. Frank's? What is there to pinch, anyhow?"

"It's no good asking me riddles," I went on. "The man hasn't any right in the school grounds, and I'm going to skip along to the gov'nor's bedroom. I don't suppose he'll be asleep yet, and somebody ought to know."

So, a few minutes later, Sir Montie and I tapped at the door of Nelson Lee's bedroom. Nelson Lee was asleep, as it happened, but he awoke at once and came to the door in his dressing-gown.

He heard what we had to say, and decided to go downstairs at once. We had slipped on our gowns, too, and we accompanied the gov'nor. There was no sign of an entry having been made, and we were just going upstairs again when Nelson Lee thought of the larder.

And here the window was wide open, and there was ample evidence that the place had been ransacked. The gov'nor laughed as he closed the window.

"Merely a bedraggled tramp, my boys," he said smilingly. "The rascal took advantage of the wild night to commit a petty theft. He has got the food, and a chase would be hopeless. Moreover, it would not be worth while."

And so we returned to bed. But somehow I couldn't quite bring myself to believe that the weird-looking old man was a casual tramp.

## CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WATCH—THE MYSTERIOUS CREVICE  
—NELSON LEE VANISHES.

THE morning broke rough and stormy.

Rain was again falling, although slightly. But the wind, if anything, was a trifle more boisterous than on the previous night. The aspect of the countryside was ugly and miserable.

The regular routine of work at St. Frank's was greatly upset. The school grounds were in a shocking state. The water was higher than before by several inches. If the flood rose much more, the Ancient House would be invaded.



by the muddy flow. The College House, being slightly lower, was already invaded in certain portions.

Warren, the porter, was working at double pressure, and he reported, soon after breakfast, that a drum of paraffin had disappeared from an outhouse. It had obviously been stolen during the night.

Nelson Lee, when he heard this piece of news, was thoughtful. He informed Nipper just before lessons, and the pair were not guessing when they suggested that the oil had been stolen by the pantry thief.

"But why, gov'nor?" asked Nipper. "The chap couldn't drink paraffin, could he?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, he could, Nipper, but it wouldn't be a wise proceeding," he replied drily. "The theft seems to point to the fact that the man needed the oil for lighting or heating purposes. The drum contained three gallons, I believe. There is an element of mystery about the affair which rather attracts me."

"Who do you think the blighter is, sir?"

"I am not going to conjecture, my lad," said Nelson Lee. "First of all, you brought me the story of a strange, unearthly cry from the bowels of the earth. You heard that cry near the cliff at the back of Bellton Wood. Next you saw a strange figure disappear into the water at the very same spot. The figure didn't come to the surface again. And that was suggestive, Nipper."

"Suggestive, gov'nor—of what?"

"I'll leave you to think it out for yourself," remarked the schoolmaster-detective. "Well, we know no more, except that the hairy gentleman honoured St. Frank's by a visit last night. He took food and oil—which, again, is suggestive. It is quite possible that the unknown will continue his depredations."

"Why, do you think he will come again, sir?" asked Nipper.

"There is a distinct possibility of such an event, Nipper," said Lee. "From what you have told me, and from what has happened, I gather that this strange creature is located near the wood. He came here for food—and obtained it. Why did he want food?"

"I dare say he was hungry?" suggested Nipper brilliantly.

"Exactly. Well, Mrs. Poulter reports

that only a comparatively small quantity of food was in the larder last night. The plunderer, therefore, obtained a mere biting-on, so to speak. It is more than likely that our mysterious friend will come again to-night, with hopes of a better haul."

"But, of course, the larder will be locked——"

"On the contrary, my lad, I shall give orders to have the window left partially open," said Nelson Lee calmly. "Furthermore, there will be a quantity of food placed within easy reach."

"Why, that's encouraging the beggar."

"No doubt. But I want to watch for the man, young 'un, and follow him to his lair," said Nelson Lee. "I have an idea that the experiment will be worth while. At all events, no harm will be done by keeping a careful watch."

Nipper looked rather disappointed.

"If you're going to play that game, gov'nor, I'd like to be with you," he said. "There's no telling, you may run into danger——"

"There is very little fear of that," interposed the detective. "However, if you are so eager, you may as well keep watch with me. Come downstairs at half-past ten. You may bring your chums, if you choose. At ordinary times I wouldn't allow such licence, but at present everything is more or less upside-down, and strict routine cannot be maintained."

Nipper went off to lessons shortly afterwards, and he told his chums of the scheme later on. They were interested, but not exactly enthusiastic. Tommy Watson hinted that he would rather be snugly in bed than waiting in the cold for somebody who might not turn up. But, in response to Nipper's remark that he could remain in bed if he wished, Tommy merely sniffed.

Morning lessons had been more or less of a fiasco, for it was quite impossible for the boys to settle themselves seriously to work. In the afternoon the wind died down considerably, and by evening it was merely a boisterous breeze. The rain, too, had cleared off again.

The general situation was very much the same. Bellton village was still isolated, and the only way of reaching it from St. Frank's was by boat. One or two cottages had collapsed, but there was nothing more exciting to be told.



The St. Frank's fellows were already beginning to get tired of the flood. It had been novel at first, but the novelty was wearing off. By the time the water subsided they would have had more than enough.

The Bo'sun got on famously in the Remove. He was popular at once, and his queer terms amused the juniors tremendously. Only such like Fullwood or De Valerio sneered at him—and they only did that behind his back. He was far too formidable to sneer at openly.

Burton had taken up his quarters in Study F, with Conroy minor, a thoroughly decent fellow, who had been on the look out for a study-mate for some time. He welcomed the Bo'sun with open arms, so to speak.

The new boy persistently referred to Study F as his cabin, and he caused much hilarity by naming the Remove classroom "the fo'c'sle." He had so many invitations to tea that he was quite confused; and decided, in the end, to remain in his own study with Conroy minor. This put a stop to all argument.

Nipper told the Bo'sun what had been arranged for the night, and he eagerly asked to be included in the programme. Nipper was rather dubious, but smiled after a moment or two.

"Oh, it doesn't matter a jot," he said. "We'll all go down together, Bo'sun, and Mr. Alvington won't send you back. Of course, we may have all our trouble for nothing."

"That won't matter, meemate," said Burton cheerfully. "If there's some excitement, I want to be in it. And it's queer about that old fellow, isn't it? By hokey! He slipped into that water like a fish. I want to see what sort of a swab he is."

And so it was arranged that the Bo'sun should watch with the others. Nipper would have preferred to be alone with his old chums, if the exact truth be told; for he could be free and easy with Sir Montie and Tommy, as these two were in the secret. But Nipper was very anxious to oblige his new friend.

Nobody else was told, for there would only have been a lot of comment and jealousy. Handforth, for one, would have insisted on going. And Handforth would be of far greater use sleeping in bed. He wasn't cut out for delicate work.

To judge by appearances, the Bo'sun

ought to have been far clumsier than Handforth. He was bigger in every way. Fullwood declared that the Bo'sun's arms were like those of a bargee; but, in point of fact, Burton was absolutely delicate in his manners compared with the redoubtable Handforth. One expected him to knock things over as soon as he touched them, but he was really very gentle.

It wasn't likely, therefore, that he would jeopardise the success of Nelson Lee's plans. And, later on, he might prove useful. The others were to find that the Bo'sun's presence was highly necessary!

There was a little more talk in the dormitory than usual that night, especially as Burton was taking his place in the Remove sleeping quarters for the first time. His bed was placed next to Tommy Watson's, and he referred to it as his bunk.

By half-past ten, however, the dormitory was quiet. Everybody seemed to be asleep—and everybody was asleep excepting Nipper and the Bo'sun.

These two sat up almost at the same moment, and slipped from their beds. Sir Montie Tregellie-West and Tommy Watson was fast asleep, notwithstanding their resolve to keep awake.

"Rouse up, you lazy bouncers!" whispered Nipper, shaking them in turn. "We're late as it is."

Sir Montie yawned.

"It's shockin'ly cold, Benny," he remarked plaintively.

"Rats! Get up!"

"Dear boy," I think I shall stay in bed—"

"Do you?" asked Nipper grimly. "I don't!"

And, without ceremony, Nipper yanked the bedclothes completely off, leaving his noble chum exposed to the cold air. Sir Montie sighed deeply, and commenced dressing with meek resignation.

Watson, seeing the fate of his chum, slipped from between the sheets with surprising alacrity, and within a very few minutes the quartette were dressed. Then they stole from the dormitory, and quickly put their boots on when they reached the ground floor. Nelson Lee was waiting in the lobby.

"Dear me! Four of you?" he exclaimed questioningly.

"Burton wanted to come, sir," said Nipper, with a wink. "You don't mind, do you?"

"I suppose Burton has as much right



to come as you other boys," said Nelson Lee, with a smile. "You must consider yourself very privileged, Burton. Escapades of this sort are most unusual at St. Frank's."

The Bo'sun looked nervous.

"I—I'll go back to bed if you order me to, skipper."

"So I am 'skipper,' now, Burton, eh?" chuckled Nelson Lee. "Don't worry yourself, my boy; I sha'n't send you back to bed. Come, we will take our places. The marauder may not come at all to-night, but I fancy that he will."

The detective was quite right.

For the watchers had not kept up their vigil for longer than twenty minutes before the sound of gentle splashing came from outside. Nelson Lee and the boys were crouching in a big dairy, next to the pantry itself. The window was wide open, but this could not be observed from outside, for a big wirework covering was over the window-frame.

Through this the figure of the approaching man could be seen. The moon was rather brighter to-night, and it shone at intervals between the clouds. The intruder was the ragged old man with the long hair.

The boys were all excited—excepting Nipper, who was well accustomed to such situations. Lee, at the window, saw the stranger come and steal stealthily to the larger window, which had been left partially open.

After five minutes the plunderer took his departure, carrying a well-filled cloth bag over his shoulder.

"Now, boys, be careful not to make any sound," said Nelson Lee, under his breath. "I am going to follow this man, and you may come behind me if you choose. I don't suppose you will come to any harm. On no account, however, give the quarry any warning."

The detective pushed back the wirework covering on its hinges, and stepped out. The water nearly reached his knees at this particular point, and it was a ticklish task following the marauder without making any sounds. This, indeed, was well-nigh impossible; but the thief himself was splashing away to such an extent he could certainly hear nothing else. Having gained his booty, he was making off with all haste.

It was a queer little procession. Lee followed the man, just keeping him in sight, and the boys, led by Nipper, just

kept Lee in sight. And so they proceeded until Bellton Wood had been reached.

Here, of course, they were well above the level of the flood, and were walking on practically dry ground. Nelson Lee became aware of the fact that the queer, ragged figure had crept down over the cliff edge.

The detective hurried forward, threw himself flat, and cautiously peered over the edge of the sloping, jagged gully. And there, just below him, half-way down the steep slope, he saw the stranger.

He appeared to be pushing his cloth sack through a crevice in the rocks. Was this place a cache? Was this where the mysterious man stored his looted provender? At all events, when he rose, he had rid himself of his burden.

He did not look up, but walked down to the edge of the water. And then, to Lee's astonishment, the fellow walked deliberately into the flood—and vanished!

A few bubbles on the surface—nothing more.

"Dear me!" murmured the detective softly. "This is remarkably singular."

It had been no slip—no accident. The strange man had purposely stepped down into the water, just as though he had been descending a staircase. Lee was reminded of a scene in a revue which he had once seen. Members of the chorus had walked down a wide staircase right into a big tank of water until they were totally submerged. The trick was a simple one, although effective.

Nelson Lee nodded grimly, and smiled.

Then he slithered down the rocks, and halted against the crevice. Here he peered into the black cavity. Curious sounds reached his ears—dull, echoing sounds. Then he became aware of a faint, yellowish glow. It seemed to be right in the heart of the cliff.

He remained listening for some moments, and the sounds grew faint. Behind him, the water of the flood lapped the rocks. Lee could hear stealthy sounds just above, and he knew that Nipper and the others were near.

He looked up, in order to warn the boys to remain quiet.

And, just at that second, two wet and slippery hands—as cold as ice itself—clutched him round the throat from behind.

Nelson Lee uttered a choking cry.

He was pulled back, and was off his balance in a second. There was no



chance of recovering his equilibrium. Down he went, backwards, the death-like hands still clutching him. He fell into the water with a great splash, and he was drawn down—down—until he disappeared below the surface.

Nipper and the Bo'sun and Sir Montie and Tommy, creeping up cautiously, heard the startled cry. They dashed forward, and arrived at the cliff-edge just in time to see the detective drawn below the water.

The water was converted into foam for a few seconds, and then it became calm once more. Nelson Lee had plunged into the flood—and he had not come up!

## CHAPTER VII.

THE CLIFF-DWELLER, AND HIS HOME—THE PLANK—IN THE CURRENT'S GRIP.

**N**ELSON LEE had passed through many startling adventures in the course of his strenuous career.

But this incident, coming so unexpectedly, had taken him completely off his guard.

He felt the icy water close over his head, and he instinctively snapped his mouth shut, and held his breath. The clutching hands were released from his throat, and he received a heavy, violent shove.

His head banged against something, and he attempted to rise in the water. Again his head touched rock, and he knew then that he had been pushed into a narrow, submerged tunnel.

Another blow from the rear sent him floundering forward. He stumbled, and felt some rough steps at his feet. Up these he staggered, and emerged, in a couple of seconds, into a warm, close atmosphere.

Lee took a deep breath. A yellow light was above, and he shook the water from his eyes. But, just then, his hands were seized and twisted behind him, and as he attempted to twist round, his wrists were fiercely bound.

"Up—up with you!" grated a harsh, trembling voice.

For the moment Nelson Lee was helpless. He walked up the remaining steps, and then found himself in a low, rock cavern. The place was illuminated by a small oil-lamp, and a rusty oil-stove was burning against one of the rock-walls. The floor-space was littered with

many objects—boxes, a smashed chair, a pile of straw, and similar things.

The detective was not surprised. He knew that this could be the only explanation. He was in a rock-cavern, the only exit to which was by means of a narrow stairway, leading to a cavity lower down. This cavity, of course, was submerged by the flood, while the cavern itself remained well above the level of it. The crevice he had seen from outside was well-nigh invisible here, owing to the formation of the rock. But the space was only wide enough to allow the passage of a small dog; no human being could have crawled through. Thus, to gain the open air, it was necessary to plunge through the water.

But who was this strange cliff-dweller? Nipper had described him as an old man, and Lee had been of that belief himself. But his captor was possessed of appalling strength. His grip was like that of a vice.

Lee and the weird stranger faced one another in the yellow lamp-light. Water ran in streams from them both. The detective was quite calm, and he studied his companion with interest.

The man was fully six feet in height, and he had great, powerful arms. His hair was long and matted, and reached his shoulders. His face was almost concealed behind a mass of iron-grey whiskers. From beneath bushy eyebrows his eyes glittered evilly.

"You infernal spy!" he exclaimed, his voice shaking with fury.

"When you have calmed down, my friend——"

"Your friend—your friend!" snarled the other. "You mad fool, to come here!"

He threw himself forward, and Lee, caught unexpectedly, crashed to the rock floor. In a few moments his feet were tied by a piece of old rope. The detective was now helpless; the advantage had been with his captor all the while.

He was sure that this strange man was insane. A hermit, probably, who had lost his reason owing to years of solitude——

"You cur—you police-spy!" exclaimed the cliff-dweller harshly. "You have discovered my hiding-place, but you sha'n't take me back—you sha'n't! Hang you, I'll take your life first! Oh, yes, I heard you at the crevice, and I took measures to render you helpless. You



are in my power now, and you shall not escape."

Lee began to readjust his views. This hairy individual didn't seem very mad; he could talk lucidly, at all events. He spoke, rather, as though he were a criminal, fearful of the law's grim arm.

"You do not understand," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I am a master from St. Frank's, and I——"

"Bah! Am I to believe that?" interrupted the other. "A master, eh? A spy—an accursed police-spy. A warder from the prison! That's what you are. But you sha'n't take me—you sha'n't reap the reward of your dirty spying."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"You are amusing," he said, determined to remain calm. "You seem to imagine——"

"Imagine! That's what Will is always saying," snarled the man. "Will is always saying it. But I don't imagine these things. I have known of your spy-work for weeks past—weeks past! And now I've got you!"

The detective's captor had worked himself into a frenzy. He was talking wildly now, at all events. His imagination was more vivid than he realised, and Lee knew that his position was greatly imperilled by this curious old man's insane rage. He believed that somebody had been on his track for weeks; and, now, finding Lee, he supposed that his conviction had been well founded.

To argue with him was impossible. To attempt to explain the position was equally impossible. Lee could only remain quiet, and trust that his captor's frenzy would die down, and leave reason behind. Then, perhaps, the situation might be explained. And, meanwhile, the boys would possibly adopt some plan.

But the occupant of this cavern was determined to act without delay; he was bent upon wreaking his vengeance while his madness lasted.

"Now I've got you!" he repeated, his eyes gleaming. "Do you think you'll escape? Do you think you'll get out of this place? Oh, yes, you will get out of it—but you'll go to your death!"

Nelson Lee realised that the situation was really grave.

"Let us be calm," he said quietly. "A few words will explain——"

"I will hear nothing—nothing!"

The old man sprang forward, and

pulled Lee's handkerchief from his pocket. He bound this securely round his prisoner's mouth. Then, twisting round, he looked towards the other side of the cavern.

"The very thing—the very thing," he muttered exultantly.

Crossing over, he grasped a heavy, wooden plank, about six feet in length, which rested upon two boxes. There were some plates lying upon it, and an old tin saucepan. But the plank was jerked up, and the plates and the saucepan went crashing and clattering to the floor.

"A ride—yes, a ride down to the weir!" muttered the cliff-dweller, with a wild kind of joy. "There will be no escape for you—only death!"

He placed the plank upon the floor, and rolled Lee on to it. Then, with trembling fingers, he proceeded to lash his victim to the plank, using odds and ends of rope and string. In less than five minutes Nelson Lee was completely helpless; he could scarcely move an inch.

He knew only too well what his fate would be if this maniac was allowed to have his way. The current ran fairly sluggishly outside, but quickly gathered speed further along, running with the swiftness of a mill-race. Once in that stream, the plank and its burden would rush down into the main stream; and if Lee did not drown then, he would be dashed over the lower weir, to die helplessly in the seething smother.

The old man did not pause for breath after his labours; he lost not a second in putting his plan into execution. For he commenced to drag the plank across the floor towards the jagged opening which marked the stone stairway.

Down these steps Lee was jerked in a series of heavy bumps. He felt his feet plunge into the icy water, and knew that the lower end of the plank was submerged. The frenzied old man gave the plank a push, and it slid completely into the water.

"Now you will go!" he snarled. "You will go to your death!"

With a mighty heave, which must have taxed even his great strength, he sent the plank with its burden shooting forward through the water.

Lee felt himself nearly choking, for he had had no time to gulp a breath. He seemed to be rising, and then, with a rush, he bobbed to the surface. The plank was broad, and Lee was upon the



upper side; had the plank overturned, the detective would have been submerged completely, even when floating.

The handkerchief round his mouth and nose was soaking, and would hardly pass any air through it. But Nelson Lee could feel that he was caught by the current, and that he was being carried steadily down to the swifter stream.

## CHAPTER VIII.

(Told by Nipper.)

IN WHICH I MEET WITH A MISHAP, AND THE BO'SUN GIVES A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE OF HIS PLUCK—THE CAPTURE OF WILD FARRINGTON—AN EXPLANATION.

**I** SCARCELY knew what to do. Ten minutes had elapsed since we had seen the gov'nor disappear beneath the surface of the water—drawn down, it seemed, by the queer old man we had been following.

Nelson Lee had completely vanished, and the whole affair was utterly startling and uncanny. Both the Bo'sun and I had plunged into the water at the start. It was only five feet deep, but we had found nothing.

And now, desperate and wild with anxiety, we stood upon the cliff-edge again, having scrambled up. I had never felt so helpless in my life before. But, somehow, I had a strong conviction that the gov'nor wasn't dead.

Only the previous night we had seen the old man dive beneath the water—but he had turned up again two or three hours later. Surely, then, Nelson Lee would repeat that performance?

At the same time, my mind was filled with doubt and worry. It was awful to stand up there, helpless. Burton and I didn't think of our dripping, soaking condition. We had no time for such trifles.

"Bust my main-deck!" exclaimed the Bo'sun huskily. "It's a queer go, moss-mates. He's gone—swallowed up completely. And I'll box my compass if I can make head or tail of it! It fair knocks me out o' the rigging!"

"Dear fellows, it's the most amazin' thing I've ever seen!" exclaimed Sir Montie anxiously. "Poor old Alvy! He's gone, begad!"

"He's—he's drowned!" panted Tommy Watson.

"I don't believe it!" I said between my teeth. "I don't—"

And then I paused. Right below me, it seemed, and from the very earth itself, there came the sound of something smashing—as though some crockery had been broken in the very bowels of the earth.

I started. A suspicion of the truth had come to me, and, without any attempt at caution, I plunged down to a spot where I had seen a crack in the rocks. It was situated about midway between the cliff-top and the water.

I had to pay dearly for my rashness. Although the slope was steep, I foolishly imagined that I could jump down it hastily. I slipped, clutched at the air, and fell with a crash which jarred every bone in my body.

The distance wasn't far, of course—merely to the ledge where the crevice was situated. But, in falling, I had twisted, my shoulder caught the rocks heavily. Just for a second I really thought that my arm was broken. After the first agony, however, I knew that my injury amounted to a severe bruise and a sprain.

"Great marlinspikes!" came the Bo'sun's voice from above. "Are you hurt, Bennett?"

"Only—only a bruise!" I gasped painfully. "It's all right—I was too hurried, that's all. Hold on a minute while I listen at this hole here."

I stuck my head into the cavity as far as possible. And, a second later, I completely forgot my pain, and almost yelled with relief. A faint yellowish glow came upwards, and, with it, the blurred sounds of human voices.

That meant that the situation wasn't a quarter so bad as I had imagined. What a silly jackass I'd been!

Of course, there was a cavern, or something, in the cliff. That wasn't surprising. For the side of this old gully was practically composed of rock. The spot was hardly ever visited by a soul, summer or winter. The entrance, in normal times, was at the base of the sloping cliff; but now, owing to the flood, it was submerged. There was nothing simpler.

I listened intently, remaining still for fully three or four minutes. But I could not distinguish a word which was spoken. At last, realising that my chums ought to be told, I commenced scrambling up.

"Oh, glory!" I gasped. I had been in one position, and had forgotten my sprained shoulder for the moment. But now, as I moved, an excruciating pain shot through me. The



sprain was worse than I had imagined. I couldn't move my left arm an inch without terrific agony.

But, somehow or other, I managed to crawl up. At the top I gasped, and the Bo'sun helped me up on to my pins.

"Thanks!" I panted. "I caught my shoulder a terrific bang, and I can hardly move my giddy arm now. Old Alvy's right beneath us."

"Begad! Are you dreamin', dear fellow?" asked Montie mildly.

I explained as briefly as possible, and there was general relief. But just then we heard a gurgling of the water below.

"He's coming up!" ejaculated Tommy Watson excitedly.

The guv'nor was! But we were shocked when we saw his predicament. There was an abrupt splash some yards out; and there, in the moonlight, we saw Nelson Lee tied hand and foot to a long, broad plank. Something covered his mouth, and he was obviously incapable of crying out.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed hoarsely.

The others stared speechlessly. For the moment we were all too amazed to do a thing. And, as we watched, the long plank drifted from the "shore" and was caught abruptly in the swifter current.

"Shiver my scuppers!" gasped the Bo'sun. "Doesn't this lead into the main fairway, Bennett? Why, Mr. Alvington will be carried over the weir—"

"Oh, begad!" shouted Sir Montie, horrified.

I seemed to go cold all over. This place, of course, was comparatively near to the spot where we had all landed after that perilous fight with the current. Nelson Lee, helpless, would drift down in less than five minutes, and would be sent whirling over—

"I'm going to swim to him!" I shouted wildly.

And then I groaned. My sprained shoulder made it utterly impossible for me to swim a stroke. I was physically incapable of doing so. Sir Montie and Tommy, although handy in the water, couldn't possibly fight with such a current.

"Souise me! This is where I step in, ain't it?" said the Bo'sun, ripping off his jacket hurriedly. "You're crocked,

Bennett. Leave this to me, old mate! By hokey, I'll soon have——"

"But you can't swim against the current, Bo'sun," I choked.

"There's no time for arguing," said Tom Burton quietly. "See here, the plank's gone right past already. We'd better run down this slope for all we're worth. I'll strike out from the far end, and head the plank off. That's the only way, messmates. Once she gets in the current, there'll be no saving her."

Without waiting for us to reply, the Bo'sun set off like a deer, throwing his waistcoat off as he ran. We raced after him, and saw him take a clean, neat dive into the murky water.

The Bo'sun struck out with swift, steady strokes which amazed me. I prided myself that I could swim, but I suddenly realised that I couldn't. Compared to the Bo'sun, I could only wallow.

He was like a fish, and his strokes carried him out with astounding rapidity. From this spot we could see the plank, moving fairly swiftly now. It was a race—a race between the new boy and the plank.

If the current carried Nelson Lee past, it would be madness for the Bo'sun to pursue it. He would merely get into the current himself, and would be swept down to certain death.

And all depended upon his efforts now. If he failed, Nelson Lee would plunge to destruction. But the Bo'sun was making tremendous progress. He left a wake behind him like a miniature destroyer.

"Begad! It's—it's amazin'!" said Sir Montie tensely.

"He'll do it—he'll do it!" I muttered.

But I wasn't sure, even then. I watched with straining eyes, and had an overpowering desire to plunge into the water myself. But common-sense told me that I could have done nothing, even if I hadn't been crocked.

It was touch and go with the Bo'sun, and he could cut through the water like a shark after its prey. The current was not excessively strong here, and that was the only hopeful factor. Once beyond the bend, the Bo'sun could not proceed further, unless he wished to go to his death.

If he could only reach the plank now, everything would be all right.

We saw him alter his course slightly, and then he made even faster progress.

For he had seen that an almost super-human effort was necessary. The plank, with its living burden, was gaining speed. It might, even now, slip past the swimmer's fingers.

There was just a moment of ghastly doubt.

We saw Burton reach the plank. His hand shot out, but failed to grasp its objective. The plank wobbled dizzily, and turned slightly. The next moment it swung right round, and the Bo'sun flung up his arm.

He had done the trick! But now the greater task was before him. He had to swim back, hauling his burden. He commenced the arduous task straight away, and his progress was so slow that he scarcely seemed to be moving. He fought the current, however—he fought it successfully.

After five minutes continuous work he was much nearer to us. And then, through sheer exhaustion, he paused, clinging to the plank. We saw him fumbling, somehow or other, and I understood.

The Bo'sun had taken his knife out, and was slashing through the ropes which bound Nelson Lee. Almost at once the gov'nor shook himself free, and we distinctly saw him shake hands with his rescuer in the water.

"Oh, my goodness!" I gasped. "It's all right now!"

The plank drifted with the current, and Nelson Lee and the Bo'sun struck out easily for the sloping, grassy bank which formed the shore. I found it hard to realise that this place was really a dry little valley, quite a long way from the river itself.

The pair staggered up towards us, and Burton sank down, panting heavily. The gov'nor, who was comparatively fresh, bent over him with deep concern.

"My boy, I am afraid that words are useless at a moment like this," he said quietly. "Your action was noble and courageous. You risked your own life to save mine, and I owe you a debt which I can never repay."

"Souse me, I don't want thanks, skipper!" said the Bo'sun, sitting up. "Why, it was only a little swim. I—I enjoyed it."

"You nearly went to your death—and you know it, Burton," replied Nelson Lee. "But for your plucky action, I should have been swept to a terrible

doom myself. The scoundrel who placed me in that position shall suffer dearly, I can assure you."

"Bennett wanted to go in, sir," put in Tommy Watson quickly. "But he bruised his shoulder, and his arm's crooked. Besides, he couldn't swim like Burton, and he wouldn't have done any good."

The gov'nor looked at me.

"You have all done your best, and you have done splendidly," he said. "What is wrong with your arm, my boy?"

I explained, and as the Bo'sun got to his feet, Nelson Lee gave us a brief outline of what had happened in the cavern.

"I am firmly convinced that the man is half insane," concluded the gov'nor. "That is some excuse for his action, certainly, but he is a dangerous criminal to be at large. As soon as we get to the school I shall make plans for his immediate capture."

And, without further delay, we hurried off towards St. Frank's. We were to find, however, that our work was to be made easy. For, as we slipped over the school wall into the Triangle, we saw the wild figure of the cave-dweller creeping stealthily towards the College House. Not satisfied with one plundering visit, he had come on another!

Nelson Lee acted promptly. He dashed forward, and we followed. The old man saw us, and attempted to escape. But it was too late. Within three minutes he was down, lying in a foot of water, and Nelson Lee and three of us on the top of him. He was secured, hand and foot, raving and shrieking.

The capture had been sooner than we had expected, but it made little difference, really. The old man would have been caught before morning, in any case. A secure prisoner, he was locked in a cellar, with Warren mounting guard over him.

And in the morning, when we were all feeling practically fit again, although my shoulder was black and blue, the police arrived from Bannington.

The prisoner was recognised at once. He turned out to be a man known as "Wild" Farrington, a criminal who had been sent to penal servitude for a brutal attempted murder. He was not



insane, but practically upon the verge of it.

Finding that his capture was complete, he told his story, and I learned of it afterwards. It was a queer one. He had been serving his time in the big convict prison which was situated on the far side of Bannington Moor—six miles from the school. Over a year ago he had escaped from the quarry.

The prison authorities believed that he had been helped from outside. The escape had been effected on a misty afternoon, and one of the warders had been severely injured. Farrington had vanished completely, and nothing had since been seen or heard of him—until now.

According to his own story, he would have been safe but for the flood. The flood was responsible for everything—his predicament, his attack on Lee, his capture.

At the time of his "get away" he had been assisted by his son William—who had secured a job, under another name, at Holt's Farm. William had been at the farm ever since. He was a cripple, and generally looked upon as half-witted. But this, of course, had been part of the scheme.

The father and son had fled across the moor in the night. William, knowing of the cavern in the cliff, had prepared it for his father's reception, until it was safe to get clear away. Once in the cavern, the convict had felt himself secure. Nobody suspected the simple cripple at Holt's Farm.

But yet William had taken his father's food regularly, and had never once aroused suspicion. He had begged the convict to go from the neighbourhood on several occasions, saying that all was safe. But Farrington had been nervous, and the cavern, moreover, was quite a comfortable abode. He had remained there, secure and unknown.

And then the flood had come. Farrington had found himself bottled up.

He had soon discovered, however, that he could get in and out as he choose, provided he soaked himself on each occasion.

The son had met with an accident, and that spoiled everything. When the locks had burst, William had been swept away, and had been seriously injured. He had been taken to Bannington hospital unconscious.

Thus, the old man had been left deserted, although unintentionally. He had had no food, for his son had been overdue at the time of the flood. And he had been forced to pilfer by night in order to live. It was in this way that Nelson Lee had got on his track, with the help of myself and the other chaps.

We were rather pleased with ourselves. The convict was a desperate character, really, and it was just as well for him to be locked up again. And his mad, murderous attack upon the gov'nor had left us cold hearted as to his fate. He thoroughly deserved to go to prison again.

But the gov'nor undoubtedly owed his life to the noble efforts of the new boy in the Remove—the Bo'sun. And I was jolly pleased when "Old Alvy" got up on his hind legs, so to speak, and told the whole school of Burton's wonderfully plucky swim.

The Bo'sun was cheered to the echo, and his popularity at St. Frank's was absolutely assured. As everybody agreed, he was one of the best.

The flood subsided much sooner than everybody had expected, for a spell of fine, dry weather set in. It wasn't so very long before the countryside resumed its normal appearance. But there wasn't a fellow at St. Frank's who would forget that eventful, exciting week.

As for the Bo'sun, something rather startling happened.

But I haven't got room to say anything about that here! Before long, you'll know all about it.

THE END.

### NEXT WEEK'S STORY

Under the Title of

## "THE BO'SUN'S' PREDICAMENT"

Will deal with another Adventure of NELSON LEE  
and NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

**BEGIN OUR NEW SERIAL TO-DAY!**

# In the Grip of the Huns.

**A Magnificent Tale of Thrilling Experiences in Germany.**

**By CLEMENT HALE.**

*NOTE.—As the title "In the Hands of the Huns" has already been used, we have altered the name of our Serial to the above.*

The Chief Characters in this Story are:

**GEORGE GRAY** and his brother **JACK**, who are the English Staff of the Berlin Rovers, a football club in Germany.

**OTTO BRACK** is a scoundrelly German member of the team. But another German, named

**CARL HOFFMAN**, is friendly, and advises the Englishmen to leave Germany, which they refuse to do. The Grays are betrayed the next night by their landlord Kutz. They manage to leave the house, but are surrounded by a hostile crowd. Luckily the American Ambassador takes them in his car to the Embassy, and gets them passports. The next morning they go to the station. When half-way to the frontier they are ordered to detain at a way-side station. Here their papers are examined, and they are detained for several hours. They are then told that they are under arrest as spies, and are marched off under a guard to prison. The next day they are released from their cells and taken before the commandant.

(Now read on).

## WITHOUT MERCY OR PITY.

**T**HE commandant ignored the anxious, waiting prisoners, and conferred with his under-officers. The rattle of guttural conversation continued for some eight or ten minutes, while George Gray and his brother vainly attempted to catch the meaning of what they said.

Then the presiding officer sat back in his chair and gazed direct at George. So far, beyond a question or two directed at the younger brother, he had ignored Jack.

"We are satisfied," he said, "that a case has been made out against you. Whether you will be brought to trial on a charge of spying, or not, is a matter for others to decide. For the present I will content myself with ordering you to be removed to the internment camp which is being prepared for prisoners of war, civilians and otherwise, at Oberhemmel."

The words were uttered slowly and distinctly, and the speaker, as he concluded, bent himself over some forms that lay before him and began rapidly to fill them in.

They were orders of commitment to the prison he had mentioned.

A sharp cry rang from Jack Gray's lips.

He gazed askance at his brother.

"It's not fair! It's a crime!" stammered the poor boy. "George, tell him we won't stand it!"

Jack strode forward, but was instantly seized and jerked back to his place, and firmly held.

The President of the Military Court looked up.

"What now?" he snarled.

"Just this, sir," thundered George, "that you may sign whatever you please, and deliver whatever sentence you may feel disposed to cast upon us; but we shall not obey your orders! We are British subjects, and not spies. We have never injured Germany or Germans by thought, word, or deed. And I demand our instant release! Otherwise

"Jah? Otherwise? What then?"

"The matter will be placed in other hands. Reparation will have to be made, and you may find reason to regret your action, sir!"



"I am prepared to answer to those set in higher authority over me!" And the President of the Court saluted gravely. "Meanwhile, the order has been made out, and you will be removed under strict guard. And I should not advise you to attempt to escape, for if you do, our soldiers have orders to shoot you down like dogs!"

"What, they would murder us, when our countries are at peace?" The words were thundered out.

"Peace? Bah! You Englishmen are fools. War has been declared between Britain and Germany. Every Englishman in Germany has been arrested. And you and your brother will be confined until the end of the war—unless our higher command send you for trial on the capital charge!"

He handed the forms to an under-officer, the latter issued a command, and Jack and George were seized and roughly forced towards the door, too bewildered for a moment to realise the extreme gravity of their situation. And at the same moment a frenzied cheer from the excited populace gathered outside the gaol, told that they, too, knew that Germany and Britain were at war.

George felt that he and his brother were now within the toils indeed.

After their committal George Gray and his brother were marched back through the stone corridors and passages of the prison to their cells.

As they went they heard frenzied cheering and wild outcries echoing from the street, and knew how to properly interpret such sounds at last.

Great Britain was at war grips with Germany. The threatening cloud that had overshadowed the British Empire for so many years had burst, and the two nations were to test their skill and prowess on the field of battle.

"If only we could get out of this cursed place, and return to England; if only we could join the Army, and fight," said Jack to his brother, as they paced along between their sullen-faced guards.

"That's just what we in Germany intend you sha'n't do," cried a voice behind them. "Every dog of an Englishman will be interned before the world is four-and-twenty hours older."

George looked at the speaker. He was a coarse-visaged soldier, whose mock-

ing smile of triumph was vastly irritating.

"If you shut us up, I swear that no German prison shall keep us long," retorted George. "We'll escape somehow."

The soldier jeered.

"Our German guards will see to that," he said.

So they tramped on and on, until they reached the cells in which they had been confined, and were once more thrust into them, this time with increased roughness and signs of contempt. Indeed, Jack was thrown so forcibly as to fall prone upon the stone floor.

He rose, hurled himself at the brute who had handled him so roughly, and was brought up short by the iron-sheeted cell door, which banged to in his face.

During the days that followed, for they remained prisoners in this gaol for the better part of a week before they were removed, they languished, to endure the sneers, the jeers, and the hostile brutality of their guards, who seemed to have lost all sense of decency.

Their food, such as there was of it, was flung at them; they were denied comforts and considerations such as the worst criminal has the right to demand, and endured tortures at times in consequence.

To complain was useless.

And, what was worst of all, they had to listen to the insults and gibes of their warders, who told them that Belgium had already been conquered, that France was reeling under hammer blows, and would soon collapse, and that the contemptible British Army would not last a week against the Kaiser's legions.

"We shall take Paris and London. Britain shall beg for mercy on her knees," they cried, and George Gray, biting his lips until he drew blood, would have the greatest difficulty in keeping his hands off the brutes.

He had written out an appeal on his brother's behalf, which he'd addressed to the German commandant of the prison, but had received no reply to it.

And at last one morning he was informed that he and his brother, together with other British prisoners, would start in an hour for the internment camp at Oberhemmel.

(Continued on p. iii. of cover.)

That was good news, at any rate. Any break to the brutal and confined monotony of their prison would be welcome.

Half an hour later they were marched from their cells into the parade-ground, or exercise yard.

Here they found other men, prisoners like themselves, lined up and waiting.

There were women, too, about sixty of them, but they were kept apart.

The prisoners, as far as they could tell, belonged to almost every station of life. Most of them looked grave and worried. Some of the women were weeping, and the guards who strode up and down their ranks every now and then called them to order with some short, sharp, and brutal command.

George Gray and his brother took their places in the line of male prisoners. Then, in spite of orders to the contrary, they all began to talk eagerly together, discussing the situation, and wondering how things were going on in dear old England.

For an hour or more they were kept standing about, while their names were taken, and full particulars of every individual taken down for about the twentieth time since their arrest.

But at last the ordeal was ended, a command was given, guards closed in around them, in front of them, behind them, and off they marched, swinging out of the parade-ground, passing along a gravelled pathway which led under a deep tunnel, above which the main building of the prison stood, into the sunlit street beyond.

It was a glorious day, hot and joyous. The pavement simply flashed in the burning rays of the sun.

The street was gay with bunting, and flags fluttered from every window.

They were the flags of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the various States that make up the Germanic and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

Soldiers swarmed everywhere. The people of the town were walking abroad as if it were a holiday. And all this in celebration of the war.

As he studied the faces of the people George was struck by the joy depicted upon them. Herein lay the fundamental differences between the rival races.

No Britisher would rejoice at a declaration of war like these.

War was to the British a sacred, fearful, and dreadful thing; they entered

it against their inclination, but once in, fought to the bitter end.

The Germans loved it, boasted of their military prowess, laughed at colossal losses in the field as if the sacrifice of their brothers' lives was something to be proud of.

As he thought of and realised these things, for the first time in his life George Gray hated all Germans.

"Jack," he whispered, "it would be a glorious thing for the world if these people were wiped off the face of the earth. Look at the brutes. Why, the women and children are almost as bad."

And then, as they swung round the corner of a street, a mighty crowd came towards them.

It was composed mostly of men over military age, and women of all ages and all classes, together with a smattering of soldiers in the field-grey uniform.

Swiftly they closed in upon the prisoners and their guards, shrieking, shouting, yelling, their eyes blazing, their faces distorted.

"Down with the English!" they roared. "Lynch the cursed spies! Kill them! Kill, kill, kill!"

And they looked as if they meant to carry their threat into execution, too.

"Stand by, Jack," said George Gray. "There's going to be trouble."

At the same moment the officer in command of the escort came riding back, spurning the enraged German civilians as if they were mud beneath his horse's hoofs.

His commands rang loudly. The guards halted and closed in on the prisoners, and the next moment the human avalanche hurled itself upon the walls of armed soldiery who formed the only protecting barrier to the unarmed prisoners whose lives were threatened, and whose peril was grave.

## MOB LAW.

**G**EORGE GRAY never forgot the short ten minutes that followed.

Only a blurred impression remained, but it was burnt so deep in the tablets of his memory as to remain there for all time.

He saw frenzied men and women who  
(Continued overleaf.)



were frantic with blood-lust strike and tear and snatch at the faces of the unfortunate English men and women who were being led into captivity. And sometimes they came perilously close to breaking the line of guards that held them at bay.

George saw fists whirling an inch or two away from his face, and more than once ducked to avoid a punch.

And at first the German guards grinned and enjoyed the fun.

Their only consideration was themselves. As long as they escaped injury, they did not care a rap what happened to the prisoners.

If any of these got thrown down and trampled to death, well, that would be one mouth less to feed, and Germany was at war. Besides, an English man or woman didn't count in their eyes.

But when one of them had his cheek cut open by a flying stone, and another was knocked to his knees by the blow of a heavy stick, whilst others were driven from their places, and hustled by the yelling crowd, they began to take notice.

"Drive those dogs back!" screamed the officer in command. "Use your rifles if necessary."

Your German soldier, take him all round, is quick in the use of his rifle, especially the Prussian. He loves to bully and strike, particularly when the other cannot retaliate.

In a moment a half a dozen of the more aggressive civilians were struck to the ground, and lay there with cracked skulls.

"Down with the English spies! Lynch them! Lynch them!"

A man, or rather maniac he looked, a huge fellow, with rounded shoulders and brawny face, drove in the rank of guards that protected George Gray.

"Ah-ha!" he shouted, and he aimed a blow at George's face.

It was exactly what George wanted. The sturdy footballer had been longing to have a punch at a German face ever since his arrest.

Here was a grand chance. He didn't bother himself much about the finer side of boxing, but warded the madman's

punches off, and then swung and hooked right and left, striking the brutal face before him with astonishing effect. He cut the fellow's cheek, he split his lip, he flattened his nose, and finally he knocked him clean off his feet with a one-two that would have done credit to a world's champion.

Down went the rascal, to howl and shout no more.

But in a moment a dozen filled his place.

They hurled themselves with cries of fiendish hatred upon the daring Englishman.

"Stand by, Jack!" yelled George, hitting hard at every face he saw.

As his knuckles bit home in the yielding flesh, a savage joy thrilled him.

Jack leapt in to take his share in the gruelling.

Others helped. The prisoners of war fought side by side against their enemies, and fought so valiantly that ere a minute had passed there were a dozen bleeding and discomfited civilians lying in the road.

Then the guard, clubbing right and left with the butt-ends of their rifles, anxious to restore order, and to prevent any attempt of escape on the part of the prisoners, drove the infuriated and defeated crowd before them; the ranks closed in again, and onward the interrupted procession went, whilst cries of baffled rage and fiendish malignity deafened the ear.

As they strode along, George looked at his brother, breathing heavily.

"They're rum chaps, these Huns," he smiled. "They treat their own countrymen with the same severity as others, when it suits 'em," he cried; and so it seemed, for they left behind them men whose skulls were cracked and bleeding, and whose faces were cut, who had been struck down by the armed guard.

*(To be continued)*

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