

No. 185.—ENTHRALLING SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE YARN!

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Jack Mason stood safe upon the raft, the sole human being on the whole expanse of sea!

JACK MASON'S LUCK!

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S. By the Author of "Going to the Bad," "The Ancient House Burglary," "The Arabs of El Safra," etc.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST DAY OF TERM.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grinned.

"Looks like rain," he said genially.

"Nothing to grin at, is it?" demanded Church, surveying the sky with a certain amount of misgiving.

Handforth regarded Church rather witheringly.

"My dear chap, what does it matter what the weather is?" he asked. "Have you overlooked the fact that this is the last day of term—absolutely the last giddy day? We break-up to-day and go home for the merry old Christmas holidays. Rain! I don't care if it snows!"

"Well, I shouldn't care if it snowed," admitted McClure. "Snow's different from rain. Handy—besides, it's Christmassy. It would be rather ripping if we went home in a snowstorm."

The three chums of Study D, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, were standing in the Triangle. They had only just come down, and breakfast wasn't ready yet. Others juniors were down, too—it was quite surprising how quickly everybody had jumped out of bed on that particular morning, in spite of the cold.

There were no lessons, of course, and both Houses at St. Frank's were full of that buzz and bustle which always prevailed on the last day of term. Everybody was genial, and House rows were distinctly "off."

"Here's Tregellis-West and Nipper," remarked Handforth, turning towards the Ancient House steps as Sir Montie and I emerged. "Hallo, you chaps! What's the matter? Anybody would think it was the first day of term, instead of the last!"

Sir Montie and I had certainly been looking very thoughtful, as though preoccupied. And Handforth's sarcastic remark reminded us that our faces ought to be broad and our smiles large.

"Dear fellow, I don't expect you to understand," said Sir Montie condescendingly. "But Nipper and I are thinkin' of greater things than breakin'-up. This is a time of great worry an' stress—"

"Dotty?" inquired Handforth staring.

"Not that I am aware of, dear old boy,"

replied Tregellis-West languidly. "Of course, Nipper and Watson often hint that my brain is somewhat deficient, but they ain't just. My brain's all right, once it starts workin', but it requires a good push-off, you know. It's workin' now—it is, really."

"Well, I don't care what it's doing," said Handforth. "And I'm blessed if I can understand why you fellows should look so absent. Watson's just the same—he was like it last night in the dormitory."

"I expect it's because of Mason," remarked McClure. "Mason's gone off on his holidays before the rest of us, the cheeky bounder. Went last night without saying a word."

Handforth smiled knowingly.

"Don't you believe it," he said. "If Mason's gone on his holidays, why is old Mr. Strong still at St. Frank's?"

"Is that a riddle?" I inquired politely.

"Very innocent, ain't you?" said Handforth. "There's something queer about Mason's disappearance last night you can't diddle me. Most of the chaps are too excited to think of anything but their own affairs, but I don't get excited. I'm a calm chap. And I can see that something unusual happened yesterday."

"Well, you needn't jaw about it, Handy," I said. "As a matter of fact, Mason went away last night because he couldn't help it, but there's no need to spread a yarn that anything queer has happened. No sense in making a mystery out of nothing, you know."

Handforth shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not my business," he said. "I don't care if Mason's gone to Timbuctoo—I wish him joy. What about our bags, Church? Somebody's pinched one of mine, or it's got mislaid, so I shall have to borrow yours."

"Oh, will you?" said Church warmly. "What about me?"

"My dear chap, you'll have to make do with what you can," replied Handforth. "You don't suppose I'm going to carry a parcel, do you? If you don't let me have that bag of yours, I'll punch your giddy nose!"

Handforth and Co. strolled off, arguing, and Sir Montie and I continued our walk in the Triangle, and we were joined a minute later by Tommy Watson and Reginald Pitt, who had just emerged from the lobby.

"Rather a good thing it's the last day of term," I said thoughtfully. "As Handforth remarked, the majority of the fellows are too excited to think of much, and so that affair last night attracted practically no attention."

"Yes, old boy, it's quite good," said Sir Montie. "It wouldn't be nice to have the thing talked about. Has your guv'nor made all the arrangements for to-day? He said he was goin' to."

"You leave it to him," I replied confidently. "Mr. Lee won't let the grass grow under his feet, I'll bet. Poor old Mason! He's on that rotten old steamer now, on his way to London."

"He'll be rescued this evening, so there's nothing much to worry about," remarked Watson. "But what I'm thinking of is this—who's going to London to see the giddy business through?"

"We are," I replied promptly.

"All of us?"

"I don't see why not," I went on. "The guv'nor and I will spend the holidays at Gray's Inn Road—or we might accept an invitation from Mr. Sexton Blake, who is a great friend of ours. Anyhow, we shall be in London. Montie has to go through London to get up to Tregellis Castle, and Pitt's people live in town, don't they, Pitt?"

"Yes," replied the Serpent.

"So do mine," said Watson.

"Well, what's to prevent us all going up together?" I asked. "If this Wapping business keeps us until late, you can all come along to the guv'nor's place in Gray's Inn Road until to-morrow—a telegram or two will do the trick."

"Rats!" said Pitt. "You'll have to come to my pater's place. He'd be jolly pleased to have you there, I can tell you."

"Well, we won't argue about it," I said. "The chief point is that we're going up to London together, by the eleven-twenty train—or perhaps not until the twelve-forty—either will do all right. It all depends upon whether Mr. Lee gets his plans fixed up all right. We shall all go to London together—we four chaps, the guv'nor, and Mr. Strong."

"That's ripping," said Pitt, his eyes gleaming. "And we shall rescue poor old Jack in the evening. By George! Won't we have a fine time after we've got him back. I hope we succeed!" he added, with sudden gravity.

I couldn't help looking at Pitt rather curiously. To hear such concern in his voice was unusual. It was only recently that he had shown signs of anxiety concerning Jack Mason, his study-mate. And Pitt had changed in other ways, too. Instead of being a cunning, scheming rotter, he had become a keen-witted fellow with a great number of good points.

The process had been gradual—and, for that reason, certain. This was no flash in the pan. Pitt had turned out to be one of the best. And it was certainly true that Jack Mason, the boy from Bermondsey, was largely responsible for the improvement; or, I might say, the transformation.

The reason for our conversation in the Triangle that morning was a very grave one. There had recently been a series of somewhat startling events at St. Frank's—mainly concerning Jack Mason and his uncle.

This latter gentleman was Mr. Simon Grell, and he had been making strenuous efforts to obtain possession of a gold locket. His reason for this was quite an obvious one, for some Arabic signs scratched on the metal related to a hidden treasure.

And the previous evening Mr. Grell had succeeded in getting hold of the locket, and in disappearing with it.

That locket had another significance, for until just recently half of it had been in Mason's possession, and the other half in the keeping of Sir Crawford Grey. Sir Crawford, owing to the recent discovery that Mason possessed the missing half, entertained the hope that the lad was his own son.

This was by no means certain, and the evidence so far was only superficial. Lady Crawford had been killed in a railway accident thirteen years before, and it had been believed that Sir Crawford's baby son had perished at the same time.

But owing to the affair of the locket the possibility had presented itself that this Bermondsey boy, Jack Mason, was the baronet's own flesh and blood. It seemed as though Providence itself had taken a hand in the human affairs of these two—Mason and the old baronet.

For Jack's presence at St. Frank's was due to Sir Crawford. The pair had come together some months earlier in the West End of London, when Jack had saved Sir Crawford from being run over by a motor-bus. The old gentleman had been strangely attracted towards the boy, for he had reminded him of his dead wife. Never for a moment had Sir Crawford believed that the resemblance was anything more than coincidence.

But now, in the light of these recent events, the whole matter had taken on a different aspect. Mason had no father and mother alive, so far as he knew—and that was another significant point. He had been brought up by his uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Simon Grell—a very precious pair indeed.

Grell, by means of his cunning, had learned that Jack might turn out to be Sir Crawford's son. And Grell had instantly acted, for he had seized Jack Mason, and had taken him to Caistowe, there placing him on board a small tramp-steamer named the Foreland, which was bound for London.

Owing to the keenness of Reginald Pitt the truth had been discovered, and Nelson Lee and I, accompanied by others, had hastened to Caistowe to rescue the kidnapped junior.

But we had found that the Foreland had already sailed, and so the guv'nor's plans had to be altered. He now intended meeting the boat upon its arrival, rescuing Mason, and dealing with Simon Grell.

It was really the only thing to be done,

for the steamer could not be chased or stopped. A search-warrant was necessary, and other formalities had to be seen to. Nelson Lee was already in communication with the local police and with Scotland Yard. He was pretty sure that everything would be satisfactory by the time we arrived in London. Poor Mason, of course, was probably having a rotten time of it on the ship, but it couldn't last for long and that was one comfort.

So, instead of being full of the holidays, like the other fellows, we were only thinking of the proposed adventure in London, when Jack Mason would be rescued from the clutches of his rascally uncle—who had seized him because he intended demanding a large sum of money from Sir Crawford for his return. In the eyes of the law, Grell was Mason's uncle—until it was proved otherwise. And Grell considered himself safe in making his demand. He wanted the money, actually, to enable him to go with a companion to Africa in search of the treasure. It was a piece of startling impertinence, but Grell held the upper hand. At least, he thought he did, but I had other ideas.

All our plans were turned topsy-turvy, however. For a place of news arrived which made everything else seem to fade into insignificance. It was something totally unexpected, and took us unawares.

Pitt had gone off to see about some packing, or, rather, preparation for packing, for there was not much time to do anything before breakfast. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West went along to Study C, and I seized the opportunity to run along to Nelson Lee's room in order to ask how things were going. I knew that the gov'nor was in telephonic communication with all sorts of people.

When I entered his study I got quite a shock.

Nelson Lee was standing at his desk, staring straight in front of him, and his cheeks were unusually pale. When he looked at me I saw that there was an expression of strange consternation in his eyes.

"You shouldn't have come now, Nipper," he said quietly. "I have just received a piece of shocking news."

"About Mason, sir?" I asked quickly.

"Yes, my lad; at least, I fear that Mason is affected," replied the gov'nor. "Perhaps it is just as well that you came, however, for you will have to learn the news sooner or later."

"But what's happened, sir?" I asked huskily, startled by his look.

"I think I hear Mr. Strong's footsteps in the passage—I sent Tubbs for him," replied Nelson Lee. "You will have to wait a moment, Nipper."

It was intensely aggravating, but I couldn't do anything else but wait. Sir Crawford Grey entered the study. I'd better explain that Sir Crawford was known at St. Frank's as "Mr. Strong"—this little deception having been mainly adopted for Jack Mason's benefit.

"Dear me! Is anything the matter, Mr.

Lee?" asked Sir Crawford curiously. "You are looking quite agitated."

"I have reason to be, my dear sir," interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "I am afraid that I have some very bad news for you, although it may not necessarily be grave. It all depends upon the result of further inquiry. I urge you to steel yourself for the information."

"You are startling me, Mr. Lee!" exclaimed the baronet quickly. "Pray be frank—this suspense is worse than any shock."

"Yes, let's have the news, sir," I put in.

"Well, I have just had reliable news over the 'phone that the steamship Foreland was in collision in a fog-bank during the night, soon after leaving Caistowe," replied Nelson Lee gravely. "The vessel was sunk, and—"

Sir Crawford staggered back, and clutched at the desk.

"The ship was sunk!" he shouted hoarsely. "Great Heaven above! You are not telling me that—that Jack is dead?"

"Oh, gov'nor!" I gasped, horrified.

"Dear me! I was afraid of this!" exclaimed Nelson Lee sharply. "No, there is not the slightest evidence that Jack has been killed. Some survivors have been landed at the small village of Wrexton, further along the coast."

"And is Mason amongst them, sir?" I panted.

"I have not been able to ascertain, although I tried my utmost," replied the gov'nor. "The survivors number five, but I have not been able to find out whether one of them is a boy. I sincerely hope that Jack is safe."

From the gov'nor's tone I knew well enough that he was doubtful, and was only trying to break the news gently. As for myself, I was almost stunned. Sir Crawford stood perfectly still, his face ashen. This piece of news was so totally unlooked-for, so ghastly, that we were momentarily robbed of our composure.

"Is this news verified, Mr. Lee?" asked Sir Crawford at last. "Is there not a possibility that it is a ghastly error? Some other ship, perhaps—"

"No, I am afraid there can be no doubt that the vessel was the Foreland."

"But the sea is calm—there has been no wind!" said the baronet. "I never dreamed of a disaster at sea, Mr. Lee."

"It appears that the ship collided with another vessel in the fog," replied the school-master-detective. "There has been no fog inland, but, I understand, a considerable mist round the coast. I know no details, and I am afraid the telephone will be most unsatisfactory."

"Where is this village—this Wrexton?"

"About fifteen miles away, I think—possibly more," replied the gov'nor. "I suggest that we visit the village at once, Mr. Strong. We can do the journey within half an hour easily. What do you say?"

"Decidedly—decidedly!" replied Sir Crawford agitatedly. "I will be ready within

five minutes, Mr. Lee. Dear Heaven! I hope the boy is safe!"

The baronet retired from the room, walking rather unsteadily. He was merely going to don his boots, his great-coat, and his hat. Nelson Lee turned to me, and shook his head gravely.

"I am worried, Nipper," he said. "I do not wish to be unduly pessimistic, but the absence of any news concerning Mason is most disconcerting. That is why I intend paying a visit to the spot at once."

"Do you think Mason's—drowned, sir?" I asked in a low voice.

"It would be foolish to ignore the possibility," said Nelson Lee quietly. "We know that Mason was practically a prisoner on board, and, therefore, in a sudden confusion, he would stand less chance than the others. I am terribly afraid, Nipper, that a tragedy has occurred. I pray that my fears are groundless."

"It's—it's terrible, sir!" I muttered. "Shall I tell the others? Shall I tell Pitt and Montie—"

"I do not see how we can avoid it," interrupted the gov'nor, going to the door. "Yes, Nipper, you may as well tell them, only do so quietly and in private. On no account allow the story to get abroad. And tell your chums that there is no reason for undue alarm. Mason will possibly turn up safe and sound, after all."

The gov'nor did not wait for any more, but hurried off to get his car ready. I thought about asking him to let me go, too, but I was afraid to. I didn't want to be in the way during such a grave journey. Besides, I realised my presence at St. Frank's would be required. I should have my hands quite full in keeping my chums and Pitt in hand.

Nelson Lee and Sir Crawford started off less than five minutes later—just as the breakfast-gong was sounding. I couldn't get the other fellows alone just then, and so I decided to wait until breakfast was over.

Then I got them into Study C together and explained the reason for my pale, troubled face—for they had seen that something was wrong.

Needless to say, they were terribly startled. Pitt, if anything, was more affected than Tommy and Montie—although this was scarcely to be wondered at, for Mason had been Pitt's own particular chum.

"It's no good worrying," I said firmly. "All we know is that the ship has been sunk, but that doesn't mean to say that Mason has sunk too. It's quite likely that he's rescued, and will be brought back by the gov'nor. If so, it'll really be all the better, because we shall be saved heaps of trouble."

I did my best to lighten the blow, but Reginald Pitt, at least, was not deceived. He knew that the chances were all against Mason having been rescued, and he scarcely said a thing; he seemed completely bowled over.

Packing was forgotten completely, and we

waited, filled with anxiety and suspense, for the return of Nelson Lee and Sir Crawford Grey.

What news would they bring?

CHAPTER II.

THE TERRIBLE TRUTH!

WREXTON was a tiny place on the coast, miles from anywhere, so to speak. There was no railway-station within three or four miles, and no 'phone either, for there was no post-office there—except a tiny shop where one could procure stamps.

The place was actually nothing more than a few fishermen's cottages bunched together on the shores of a small bay. And it was in this bay that a boat had put in its appearance in the early dawn, carrying the survivors from the Foreland.

Such news spreads quickly, and all manner of stories concerning the collision were soon in circulation. That is why Nelson Lee was not positively certain of the actual state of affairs.

According to his information, five men had been saved. As a matter of fact there were eight survivors, only two or three men having perished—for the Foreland had been a small steamer, and undermanned at that.

Nelson Lee's car descended a long, winding hill into the village just after nine o'clock. There was a certain animation about the place, the fisherfolk standing at their doors and talking together.

There was one small inn in the place, and Nelson Lee soon learned that the shipwrecked men had found accommodation there. The landlord of the place was only too willing to tell all that he knew.

"Yes, gentlemen, it was the Foreland that went down," he said, standing close against the car, out in the road. "The captain was saved, an' he's in my parlour now. Several poor fellers was in a bad state, but I reckon they'll pull round. Sittin' in a boat with soakin' clothes in this weather ain't the treatment to do a man good."

"But is there a boy here—a schoolboy?" asked Sir Crawford quickly.

The landlord looked surprised.

"A schoolboy, sir?" he repeated. "From off the wreck?"

"Yes, yes!"

"You're mistook, sir. There wasn't no schoolboy," said the landlord. "Leastways, I ain't seen a sign o' one."

"Not a sign of any boy?" persisted Lee.

"No, sir—they was all men."

"Poor Jack—poor Jack!" exclaimed Sir Crawford dazedly. "He has been drowned, Mr. Lee. Oh, what a terrible catastrophe—what a ghastly ending to all my hopes!"

Nelson Lee set his teeth grimly.

"We will interview the captain, Sir Crawford," he said. "I have no doubt that we

shall be able to gain some further information from him. You must not despair yet. There was probably another boat, and that may have found its way into another bay or port."

"I don't think so, gentlemen," said the landlord. "Still, there's no tellin'."

He escorted the visitors down the stone-flagged passage into the low-ceilinged parlour. Here two rough-looking men were seated before a roaring fire, with glasses of hot rum at their elbows.

"Good morning!" said Nelson Lee. "I wish to have a few words with the captain of the steamship Foreland, which was in collision during the night."

"That's me, sir," said one of the men. "My name's Cap'n Davis. Wot might yours be?"

"I'm a Housemaster from St. Frank's College and my name is Lee," replied the detective. "My inquiries are of an important nature, Captain Davis."

Lee had been eyeing the man narrowly without appearing to do so. And he had seen Captain Davis give a distinct start at the mention of St. Frank's College.

"I don't know wot inquiries you should make, sir," said the skipper. "I'm waitin' to hear from my owners. It was the fault o' that blamed schooner, nosin' through the fog like as if she was blind drunk. Stove a hole through our plates big enough to drive a 'bus through."

"How soon did the vessel sink?" asked Sir Crawford quickly.

"She filled afore we could turn round a'most," replied Captain Davis. "We only just got a boat clear by chance, an' some o' my poor fellers were sucked down afore they could be rescued."

"We are interested in a schoolboy named Jack Mason," said Nelson Lee steadily. "He was on your ship, Captain Davis, and we wish to know if he was rescued. I should advise you to be perfectly frank."

Captain Davis laughed unpleasantly.

"I don't know nothin' about no boy!" he exclaimed, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I don't know wot the gent's talkin' about, Bill. Do you?"

"Ain't the faintest idea," replied Bill—probably the mate."

"Then—then poor Jack went down?" asked Sir Crawford huskily.

"There was no boy on my ship," said the skipper roughly. "Wot's the good o' this talk? I don't carry passengers—least of all swell schoolboys. My ship wasn't a fust-class liner."

"Then the lad was not on board?" asked the baronet, his eyes gleaming.

"Course 'e wasn't."

"Thank Heaven for that——"

"My dear sir, you must not take that statement as being true," interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "Please do not raise hopes in your breast which are certainly doomed to disappointment. Jack Mason was on board

the Foreland when she sailed from Caistow last night."

"I s'pose you know best, hey?" demanded Captain Davis gruffly.

"In this case I do."

"Then I say that no boy was aboard my ship!" declared the skipper. "You'll be callin' me a liar next."

"That is quite possible!" snapped Nelson Lee curtly. "In fact, Captain Davis, I tell you to your face that you have been lying——"

"Wot!" roared the skipper, jumping up.

"I advise you to remain calm," went on Lee icily. "By maintaining this attitude, Captain Davis, you are doing yourself no good whatever. This tragedy has occurred, and you must surely realise that you are making your position highly dangerous by professing ignorance. I am not suggesting that the poor lad was deliberately left to his fate, but I know positively that he was on board. Why do you not admit the truth?"

The captain set his teeth.

"Becos it ain't the truth," he replied sullenly.

"Do you deny that you are acquainted with a man named Grell?"

"Yes—leastways, I only know 'im to speak to," said Davis, rather confusedly. "Grell's no friend o' mine."

"Did he not visit your ship last night?"

"Wot's that got to do with it?"

"Everything."

"Well, there's no 'arm in my sayin' that Grell did come aboard for a few minutes," growled the skipper. "But as for any boy, you must be dreamin'. I've told you all I can, so——"

"You have not told me all, by any means," interrupted Lee. "Again let me urge you tell me the truth. I understand that the Foreland is sunk in comparatively shallow water, and you may rest assured, Captain Davis, that a very thorough investigation will be made. If that lad's body is found imprisoned within the sunken vessel your position will be a very grave one indeed—unless you are frank now."

There was a moment's silence. Captain Davis had obviously been taken aback, and his look was one of uneasiness and alarm. His attempt at bluster was palpable, and Nelson Lee was certain that he had been lying. He had admitted that Grell had gone aboard the previous night—he could scarcely

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deny the fact—and having admitted that much, he tacitly admitted the other. Pitt had seen Mason taken aboard by Grell, and there was not the slightest doubt that the poor lad had been on the vessel at the time of the collision.

"I should like to know who you are, to talk about my position?" demanded Captain Davis harshly. "I ain't responsible to you —"

"You are responsible for the life of the boy you carried on board your ship, you scoundrel!" shouted Sir Crawford. "You are the captain, and it is your duty to save every soul on board! You will go to the gallows for this, you infernal rascal!"

"I don't know nothin' of any boy!" persisted Davis uneasily. "The ship was ripped open, an' she sunk in a few minutes. I ain't denyin' that there might 'ave been a kid on board—it's quite probable 'e was."

"You are telling a different story now, my friend," said Nelson Lee grimly.

"How can a man think clearly when 'e's accused o' such things as wot you've been sayin'?" growled the skipper. "It's just struck me that this boy might 'ave come aboard on the quiet—a stowaway. I've 'ad such things afore, and I wouldn't say as it wasn't the case this time. If that boy was brought on board my ship it was done unknown to me—an' 'e must 'ave been stowed away somewhere without my knowin' it. That's all I can say."

"Were you on board when Grell arrived?"

"Yes," replied the captain. "Him an' a pal o' his, named Starkey, came to 'ave a word with me. I was asleep when they come on deck, an' the crew was ashore. I ain't sayin' as Grell mightn't ha' shoved the boy down somewhere without my knowin' it. It's possible—although I can't say nothin' for sure. Any'ow, it's noos to me that any kid was aboard my craft."

There was just a faint possibility that Captain Davis was telling the truth; that he was, indeed, in ignorance of Mason's presence. Grell might have placed the lad in some remote corner of the ship, unknown to the captain—but this theory was most unlikely, and Nelson Lee did not entertain it. He preferred to believe that Captain Davis was lying—and that, of course, was actually the case.

"Very well, captain," he said quietly. "I can do nothing but accept your story for the present. You may be sure, however, that the whole matter will be put before your owners and thoroughly investigated. I know that the boy was on board, and my main object in coming here was to learn if he had been rescued."

"We've seen no sign of 'im, sir," said Captain Davis. "If 'e was stowed away at the time of the collision, as you say, 'e's gone down with the ship—that's certain. I hope you're wrong—that's all."

Inwardly, Captain Davis's feelings were bitter. He called himself a fool for ever

having listened to the soft tongue of Simon Grell. Davis knew well enough that Mason had been concealed below, but so long as he stuck to his story that the lad was a stowaway he was safe. Mason had gone down, and the fact alarmed Captain Davis more than he admitted to himself.

Realising that no more information could be obtained, Nelson Lee led the way out of the parlour, and returned with Sir Crawford to the motor-car. The baronet walked as though stunned, and appeared to be quite dazed.

"I am terribly sorry that our inquiry has had such a tragic result," said Nelson Lee gravely. "There can be no doubt, Sir Crawford, that the poor boy is dead. I refrain from saying anything further, since I know that every word pains you exceedingly."

Sir Crawford looked up dully.

"Oh, what a ghastly catastrophe, Mr. Lee," he said, his voice a mere whisper. "I do not know how I shall be able to stand this awful shock. There is no hope now—no hope whatever. That poor boy—Heaven has been unkind!"

They took their seats in the car, and Nelson Lee made no further comment as they drove back towards St. Frank's. There was no need to make further inquiries. The captain of the ship himself had stated that Mason, if aboard, had perished. And who could know better than the captain?

The schooner which had been in collision with the Foreland had not been seen since, but it was presumed that the vessel was still out in the fog—or it was quite possible that she had gone to the bottom too. In any case that side of the affair was of no importance.

Nelson Lee was greatly shocked by this news of Jack Mason's untimely death. He knew that a gloom would be cast over the whole school, in spite of the fact that the Christmas holidays were just commencing.

And there was another aspect of the case to be considered.

Simon Grell, hearing the news, would have no occasion to visit the London Docks—by which means Nelson Lee had hoped to entrap him. Grell would lie low, and there was no way of finding out where he was. And he had the gold locket, which was now trebly valuable—from a sentimental point of view alone—to the bereaved Sir Crawford.

The whole affair had taken a turn which had never been deemed possible. This tragedy was terrible, and Nelson Lee himself was far more affected than he would have believed possible.

Jack Mason had been one of the best fellows in the Ancient House, and it was very hard that he should have been taken just when there was a possibility of proof being forthcoming that he was the son of Sir Crawford Grey.

Nelson Lee's heart was heavy within him as he drove in at the gateway of St. Frank's.

Naturally enough, I was on the watch, keenly anxious, and Watson, Tregellis-West, and Pitt were with me.

"What's the news, sir?" asked Pitt huskily.

We dreaded to hear the answer, for the absence of Mason in the car seemed sufficiently convincing. Nelson Lee climbed out of the driving-seat and looked at us steadily. He also saw that other fellows were drawing near and their curiosity was aroused.

"Come into my study, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly.

We followed him in, and Sir Crawford Grey accompanied us. And then, amid a dead silence, the gov'nor told us the dreadful news. We were all immeasurably shocked, and Pitt's face had gone as white as a sheet.

"Is there no hope, sir—none at all?" he asked, gulping.

"I'm afraid not, Pitt," replied Nelson Lee gently. "My poor lad, you must not worry— But my words sound hollow and cruel. It is only natural that you should worry, for Jack was your friend."

We heard all the details as Nelson Lee had heard them, and we knew quite well that to entertain any hopes now would be futile and mad. Pitt stood still for a few moments, staring straight in front of him.

"And I saw him taken on board," he muttered, his voice quivering. "Oh, what a fool I was! Why didn't I risk everything and pull him back? It's my fault—all my fault! I was a coward—a funk—I ought to have rushed forward and saved him before he was taken—"

"Do not talk so wildly, Pitt," interrupted Nelson Lee, going over and patting the boy's shoulder. "You were a coward? What nonsense! You acted in the most courageous manner, and this tragedy was entirely unforeseen by us all. Had I had the slightest fear, I should have followed the Fereland last night at all costs. But it is too late to talk now. The disaster has happened."

"It's horrible, sir—horrible!" choked Pitt.

He sank into a chair, and the next moment he was sobbing as though his heart would break, his face buried in the cushions of the chair.

We stood looking at him in dull astonishment, momentarily forgetting the tragedy. Could this possibly be Reginald Pitt—the fellow who had been known as the Serpent? I had never thought it possible that he could be so affected. I had never dreamed that he cared so much for Jack Mason—the boy he had tried his best to injure during his first few weeks at St. Frank's.

It was an indication of the complete change in Pitt's character. The lad was totally different now, and this blow had unnerved him—had robbed him of that coolness which had been so characteristic.

It was pitiful to see him. Sir Montie and Tommy were terribly upset but they did not reveal their feelings in this manner—neither did I. Not that we did not care.

We felt the blow in the most unmistakable fashion. But poor Pitt was bowled over, and I felt a lump in my throat as I heard those sobs.

What a difference there would have been in that room had we known the true story of that collision in the fog!

CHAPTER III.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED.

JACK MASON in fact, was in the same position as that once occupied by the late lamented Mr. Mark Twain—the report of his death had been "grossly exaggerated." He was just about as dead as I was!

And I intend to describe exactly what happened to him—because I think it's necessary. I shall have to go back somewhat in the thread of the yarn, and tell of the events which occurred at the time of the collision itself, but this won't matter in the least.

Jack Mason was a prisoner on board the Fereland. But the only man who knew it was Captain Davis. The skipper had made up his mind to tell the mate in the morning, but so far he hadn't done so. Afterwards he had been very pleased that he had kept his own counsel.

The position selected for the "stowaway" was a little store-room in the after part of the vessel, where no member of the crew ever penetrated, unless ordered to do so by the captain. It was quite a strong place, and Davis had decided that Mason need not be bound hand and foot during the voyage.

The captain was not altogether a sound ~~at~~, and he had really not seen much harm in taking Mason to London. Grell had only given him a few facts of the case, but he was not particularly interested. What did interest him was the sum of money which had passed into his pocket as a consequence of this little piece of work.

Davis saw no reason why he should inquire into the matter too closely, and he was quite safe. If Mason's presence aboard became known, and the police came on to the vessel as soon as she reached London, Davis had merely to say that he had no knowledge of any boy aboard.

A search would reveal Mason, of course, but Davis would have the ready explanation that Mason was a stowaway, and was on board without the knowledge of the skipper. The boy's own story would obviously not be given much credence.

The crew knew nothing, and they would all corroborate Davis's statement. As for Jack himself, he was utterly miserable. He knew nothing of the efforts which had been made to rescue him, and his thoughts were excusably pessimistic.

The last he knew was that he and Pitt had been attacked in the lane near St. Frank's. Pitt had been bowled over, and he Mason—

had been made a prisoner. What had happened?

Jack was terribly afraid that Pitt had been badly hurt, and the thought worried him. And there was Mr. Strong, too—for it is necessary to remember that Jack Mason only knew Sir Crawford Grey as "Mr. Strong." And he was totally in ignorance of the disclosures which had been made regarding the locket which led Sir Crawford to believe that Jack was not the orphan he thought himself to be.

Altogether, the prisoner on board the Foreland was in no happy frame of mind when he felt the vessel plugging steadily through the water, vibrating in a manner which indicated that her engines were not exactly in the best of order.

Jack knew that he was going to London, but he hadn't the faintest idea as to why he had been kidnapped, or what would happen in London when he arrived.

The whole affair was mystifying and worrying. But the one thought which gave Mason comfort was that Nelson Lee was at St. Frank's; and Nelson Lee, of all men, was most capable of dealing with such an affair as this.

But the "stowaway" did not feel inclined to take things lying down. Before the steamer had left Caistowe he was examining his prison. He had some matches, and he struck one or two of these and gazed about him.

The only exit was by means of the door, and this was a heavy affair, fitted with a stout lock on the other side. Jack knew at once that he could do nothing—as yet. But he had reason to believe that the captain would come down with some food later on. Then, possibly, he would be able to get out.

But as the lad considered the position he rapidly saw that he would be no better off even if he did escape. He couldn't swim ashore, and he couldn't lower a boat. He was a captive on the ship, and it was really of little consequence what part of the ship he occupied.

Jack recognised that his position was pretty well hopeless, and he came to the conclusion that it would be an idle thing to attempt escape when the captain came. Indeed, he would probably make his position worse, for Davis would be naturally incensed. Until he saw some positive avenue of escape it would be better to remain submissive. There was really nothing else to be done.

He sat upon the floor in darkness and discomfort, for there was nothing soft for him to lie upon, and the cold was really intense. The Removite was shivering, and chilled in every limb.

Possibly he dozed as he sat. At all events, he lost count of time, and suddenly realised that the door was being unlocked. He got to his feet stiffly, and blinked as the light of a lantern flashed into the store-room.

"Here we are, my lad," said the gruff voice of the skipper, not unkindly. "Why, durn me if you ain't blue all over! I meant to come afore, kid, but this blamed fog kep' me at the wheel. It's only because I'm

kind'erted that I'm down 'ere now. I couldn't abear to think o' you sufferin'."

This was probably banter for the most part; but there might have been a few grains of sincerity in the skipper's remark. For he brought with him three thick, warm blankets, a plate of bread and meat, and a tin mug of hot tea. Jack felt almost grateful as he saw this.

"No need to look scared," went on the captain. "You won't come to no 'arm, youngster. Git this 'ot tea inside o' you to begin with."

"I didn't expect you'd think of me at all," said Mason huskily.

"Why, only shows that you don't me," replied the skipper. "I ain't a 'ard-hearted brute like Simon Grell. You needn't 'ave no fear that—"

"Can't you tell me why I'm being taken to London?" asked Jack, half eagerly.

"That ain't my business, young feller-me-lad," replied Davis. "I'd tell you in a minute if I knew, but I don't. You don't look a bad sort o' kid, and I'm 'arf sorry I took the job on. Still, I can't make you walk back, so you'll 'ave to put up with it now. I'll make things comfy— By thunder! Wot's that?"

The captain half leaned out of the doorway and anxiously looked up the passage. Several raucous shouts rang down from the deck, and the thudding of heavy feet could be heard. In addition, both the skipper and Jack Mason heard the engine-room telegraph sharply clang "full speed astern."

"Something wrong," growled Davis harshly. "I must go, boy—"

Cr-r-r-rash!

It was a deep, rending sound, like the tearing of heavy sheets of metal and the splintering of woodwork. Captain Davis and Jack Mason were flung down violently, and the lamp went out. There was just one moment of silence, and then a perfect pandemonium of yells and shouts sounded on deck.

The skipper swore furiously, and blundered away, but not before he had slammed the door of the store-room. In the darkness he did not see that the lamp prevented the door closing. And the skipper, in that moment of crisis, was thinking of his ship, and not of the prisoner.

Jack was quivering with excitement. He knew well enough that an accident had happened, and he believed that the Foreland had struck some rocks in the fog. At all events, the door of his prison was open, and he hurried out.

Feeling his way along the passage, he reached the companion at once, and nimbly got to the deck. He could see nothing; for a dense fog blotted out every object more than a yard distant. But yells and curses filled the air.

Running forward blindly, Jack suddenly became aware of the fact that the deck was splintered and wrecked. Voices appeared to be coming from immediately below him. He peered forward and downwards.

Whether the mist swirled away for a few moments, or whether Jack's eyes had be-

come more accustomed to the conditions, he didn't exactly know. But he saw the fore-castle of a wooden sailing-ship right before him. It was wrecked and splintered, embedded into the side of the old tramp steamer.

The two vessels were locked together, but this state of affairs wouldn't last for long. Water was pouring in through the gaps at a tremendous pace, and it would enter in one great body as soon as the two ships drifted apart.

Both vessels were damaged, but the Foreland was positively doomed. Her plates were as rotten as cardboard, and the bows of the sailing-ship had dug their way clean through.

Jack was wildly excited, and he acted in a manner which surprised him considerably when he thought over it afterwards in cool moments. The main idea which dinned through his brain was to get away—to escape from this ship which was a prison.

And, unseen by a soul, he took a flying leap down on to the fore-castle of the other ship. Jack didn't realise the desperation of that act at all at the moment; it seemed quite a natural thing to do.

But barely ten seconds later the two ships drifted apart and lost one another in the fog. The sound of the rushing waters, as they tore into the Foreland, could plainly be heard. The old steamer was filling like a riddled bucket.

The leap which Jack had made had been nothing in itself, the distance being comparatively slight. He landed squarely on a sail, which had probably tumbled down as a consequence of the impact. At all events, Jack was grazed upon the stiff, rough canvas, and he lay for some moments hardly daring to breathe.

The confusion around him seemed worse than ever; the hoarse cries of rough men sounded on all sides. But these were different men. The Foreland, crippled and sinking, had vanished into the enveloping mist.

After a while Jack became less excited, and wondered if he had bettered his position or made it worse. He told himself that it was probably better, because this vessel might be making for one of the small south-coast ports. And, in any case, it was splendid to know that Simon Grell was defeated. Jack would not fall into his rascally uncle's hands again!

This thought, coming to him suddenly, gave him much comfort. And he burrowed his way into the mass of canvas and lay quiet. His common-sense told him that this was no opportune time for him to reveal his presence aboard. It would be far better to remain hidden until the confusion had passed.

And so he lay there, protected from the cold, and, indeed, half smothered by the heavy folds of thick canvas. This had the effect of deadening all sounds on deck. The voices, loud and harsh at first, became less pronounced, and only one or two sounded now and again.

Finally everything was quiet except for the splashing of the water against the ship's

sides. Jack knew little about the sea, but something told him that this schooner was not being handled right. She was not being steered well, for she appeared to lie broadside to the waves, which broke almost continuously, with much noise, against her side.

Naturally, the vessel rolled, but she seemed to do so sluggishly. The absence of voices and trampling feet made Jack wonder, and at last he pushed the canvas aside and cautiously looked out.

Everything was dark and misty. Try as he would, he couldn't see far in any direction, although the fog was certainly not so bad as it had been. After a while he found that he could look along the deck for a few yards.

And then he saw that it wasn't level!

The vessel was visibly down by the bow, and everything was ghostly silent, that is, so far as human voices or movements were concerned. There were countless other noises, but they all seemed isolated.

Jack rose to his feet and ventured to walk forward a few paces. He expected to be challenged, but nothing happened. It was his idea that the schooner was under sail again and making for the nearest port. Through the fog Jack could see the star-board side-light gleaming dimly.

But how could the ship be under sail, he wondered. She was certainly not perfectly controlled, but the steering gear might have got out of order. Jack moved forward again, and then nearly tumbled off the fore-castle. He stood there for some few moments, listening, and staring into the fog.

An uneasy feeling was stealing over him—a sensation of utter loneliness and isolation. The absence of human voices was no longer a comfort to him, but something to be dreaded. He wanted to be found now, and he cleared his throat and gave a lusty hail.

There was no answering sound except the continuous splash of the sea.

Jack felt something move against his feet, and he looked down with a start. Then his fears were allayed, for he saw that the "something" was a cat.

The animal was purring loudly, and proceeded to rub itself against Jack's legs, as though pleased at having found company.

"All right, old son," said Jack, bending down and stroking the cat.

Again he gave a hail, but there was no reply. And he moved forward amidships, finding it necessary to grasp some support occasionally. The rolling was not severe, for the sea was calm, but Jack was unaccustomed to ships.

He arrived at the poop, and paced the quarter-deck in solitary state, except for the cat, which had closely followed him.

And now the truth came to him.

While he had been lying under the canvas the officers and crew had taken to the boats, abandoning the ship! They had known nothing of Jack's presence, and so had not searched for him. Apparently they had taken to the boats in a panic, but the fact that they had gone was significant.

For it meant that the ship was sinking, and Jack now noticed that the list was far

were pronounced, and a soft, steady, roaring noise impressed itself upon his ears.

The schooner was going down, and the only person on board was Jack Mason! Not a boat remained, and he was shut in by the enveloping mist.

The position was startling enough to any experienced seaman, let alone a mere school-boy. Jack breathed quickly, and his blood seemed to run cold when he realised the dreadful truth.

He was alone—alone on a sinking ship!

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE MERCY OF PROVIDENCE.

JUST for a few moments Jack Mason stood quite still, hardly able to grasp the full peril of his position.

But then activity returned, and he knew that he must do something to save himself. There was nobody else to rely upon now. And yet there was no boat, and he hadn't the faintest idea how far from land he was, or what dangers there were to face.

But he had read stories of people being left alone on abandoned ships, and he was not the fellow to sit down and bemoan his fate. It was left to him to act, and there was only one thing to be done.

He certainly had no desire to leave matters until it was too late, until he was sucked down with the sinking ship. He must construct a raft somehow or other—anything that would keep him afloat until daylight came. Then perhaps some passing ship would see him and he would be rescued.

Curiously enough, Jack had not thought of the possibility of both ships being sunk. The *Foreland*, without a doubt, was at the bottom by this time; she had probably plunged to a watery grave within ten minutes of the collision. But this other ship had seemed practically whole, and Jack had never anticipated this state of affairs.

He did not know that her bows had suffered severely from the collision, and that water was pouring steadily into her forward hold. The captain and crew, no doubt, had believed that matters were more serious, or they would not have abandoned the vessel so hurriedly.

But she could not last long, and Jack awoke to life with a vengeance.

He half believed that he would perish; that he would be unable to construct any raft that would keep him above water. A raft is not such an easy thing to make as some people imagine, and Jack was handicapped by the fact that he knew nothing whatever of this ship.

It was dark and the fog was thick; it would be necessary for him to grope about for the various articles which were needed for the manufacture of something which would give him support in the water.

The lad's excitement had passed now, and he faced the situation coolly and steadily. The test had come, and Jack Mason did not fail. He knew well enough that death would

almost certainly follow if he plunged into the water with only a spar, or something of that nature, to support him.

It was December, and the sea was icy. He couldn't endure a long immersion in the water; after an hour or two at the most he would become numbed and frozen and would slip down to his death.

The chance of being picked up was remote, unless the fog cleared. This did not seem likely by the look of it. Jack, of course, was unaccustomed to sea fogs, or he would have known that this was probably a belt of mist, which might drift off at any moment without warning.

But even if the fog did go his position would not be much improved. Ships did not pass in crowds, and if this sinking schooner went to the bottom and left Jack struggling in the water, it was very unlikely that he would be seen.

All this was perfectly clear to Jack Mason, and he knew, therefore, that his only chance of surviving was to construct a raft upon which he could stand clear of the water. Even this exposure would be bad enough, for he would certainly be wet through with spray in no time. The situation was a desperate one, and there was no sense in overlooking that fact.

And there was no telling how long the schooner would last. She might go down at once, within ten minutes, or she might remain afloat for an hour. These thoughts were worrying, but there was no sense in anticipating disaster.

Jack set to work with a will, the cat keeping close to him constantly. The animal apparently knew that the ship was doomed. As Jack worked he wondered whether he had acted wisely or foolishly in jumping from the *Foreland*. It almost seemed as though he had merely jumped out of the frying-pan only to land in the fire.

But, upon second thoughts, Jack felt sure that his action had been for the best. The *Foreland* must have sunk within a minute or two, and probably a great number of the crew had perished. Here, at least, Jack was safe so far, and he had no intention of looking upon the worst side of things.

He was alive, and he meant to remain alive if it could be managed. The deck was littered with all sorts of debris, and Jack remembered reading a sea story in which a party of shipwrecked men constructed a raft with empty barrels.

There were three or four here, rolling about rather dangerously as the ship lurched. With great difficulty Jack managed to bind some long spars to the barrels, and in the end he constructed a platform about four feet wide by eight feet long. The whole thing might capsize as soon as he launched it, but that would have to be chanced. And the launch in itself would be no easy task.

Somehow or other he must get the thing overboard, and quickly, too, for the sailing-ship was now assuming an acute angle, being right down by the bows, her stern clear of the water.

He was so busy at his task that he lost

count of time, and forgot to worry about the possibility of the ship sinking under his feet and sucking him down into the vortex of icy waters.

The chilling numbness had left him, too, the exercise putting him into a glow of warmth which almost made him cheerful. He was perspiring freely, indeed, and at last surveyed his handiwork with much satisfaction.

"A pretty rotten job, but it's the best I can do," he told himself. "But how the dickens am I going to get it overboard?"

He looked up, having an idea that he might be able to make use of the hand winch, which was provided for use in discharging the cargo. By the aid of this he might be able to sling the raft over the side into the water.

And as he looked up he gave a start.

The dawn had come, and the fog was showing drab-grey instead of black. He had been so busy that he hadn't noticed the change until now. The time was evidently getting on, and the hour must have been between seven and eight.

Jack's watch had stopped because he hadn't wound it, and he had no means of telling the time—not that it mattered at all. But a sudden thrill of excitement came over him, and he looked all round into the enveloping mist. Everything was hidden from him except the sea in the immediate vicinity of the ship.

Now and again he had heard the hooting of a steamer in the distance. At first this had given him sudden hope, but he soon lost it, knowing that a dozen ships might be within a mile; and his position would be scarcely improved.

But for the last hour he had heard nothing, and knew that the schooner had either drifted near the shore, or that he was now out of the track of other vessels.

He was rather surprised that the ship had not sunk yet, but he knew that it would be foolish to entertain hopes. She might slip beneath the surface at any moment, and it was highly necessary to get the raft afloat as quickly as possible.

But it was easier said than done.

By toiling hard he at last managed to get the rough thing close against the starboard side of the schooner, and slung a rope round it, and then hooked it on to the winch fastening. By now daylight had come and the fog had cleared slightly. But the angle of the deck was ominous, and Jack made all haste.

His exertions, however, were such that it was positively necessary to take a breather before long. And then he became aware of a dull noise over towards the port side, and he started.

It was the sound of waves breaking upon rocks. And Jack ran over the deck and leaned against the side, peering through the mist. At first he could see nothing, but then, dimly, he made out the outlines of jagged rocks immediately ahead, that is, to the port side of the ship.

And she was drifting that way!

The lad forgot all about his attempts to float the raft, and stood there, watching.

Five minutes passed perhaps, but they seemed like hours to Jack. The rocks crept nearer and nearer, and became more clearly defined. Crash!

It was not at all violent—just a dull thud, which caused the decks to quiver and the rigging overhead to tremble. But the schooner was stationary, except for a rocking motion as it lifted to the waves.

In a rough sea the vessel would have been smashed to atoms on those rocks within ten minutes. But the sea was now comparatively calm, and the schooner had simply drifted aimlessly ashore.

The impact with the rocks had stove her side in, for Jack could distinctly hear a fresh sound of rushing water. The old craft would sink now, and it was quite possible that she would fall back into deep water.

And then the mist cleared as if by magic—although there was nothing remarkable in this. Such fogs are generally shifting about, and for it to lift in this way was quite commonplace.

Jack found himself gazing upon a rough stretch of coast-line, with frowning cliffs immediately ahead, and rocks strewn about in great confusion. There was no sign of any human habitation, and it was several moments before he could realise that this coast was British.

The idea struck him, in fact, that the ship had drifted on to some rocky island, and he wasn't quite sure even now that such was not the case. At all events, that could wait. The most important thing was to get ashore.

The rocks against which the ship had struck were isolated, being some little distance from the shore. Jack gave all his attention to the raft once more, and by sheer physical effort he managed to hoist it so that it was almost balanced. A heavy push then sent it plunging overboard.

But the lad had secured it with ropes, so that there was no danger of it drifting away. It plunged beneath the surface at first, but rapidly came up and assumed an even "keel."

"Ripping!" muttered Jack excitedly.

He knew that he would be able to propel the unstable craft to a point from which he could reach safety. The schooner's crew had taken all the boats, but a couple of oars were lying amongst the litter, and Jack seized one of them.

He didn't forget the cat, but caught it up in his arms and scrambled down a rope slowly and awkwardly. He felt extremely unsafe, once upon the raft, for it bobbed about in the most disconcerting fashion.

At length, however, he succeeded in pushing off towards the shore, using his oar as a paddle. The poor cat, drenched with spray, crouched low, probably knowing that safety lay within sight if it only remained still.

How Jack got the raft ashore he didn't exactly know. It was a terribly long job, for the current carried him half across the rugged bay, finally landing him at a spot he had never expected to arrive at.

The cat was ashore first. It simply

streaked across the rocky beach and vanished before Jack had got his foot ashore. He didn't mind much, for the animal was not exactly handsome, and as long as it was safe Jack was content.

His feelings as he set foot upon solid ground were deep, for he had almost given himself up for lost on one or two occasions. But now he was safe, and he watched the raft drift back into the waves quite contentedly. It had served its purpose, and nothing more had been expected of it.

The next thing was to find out where he was, and he suddenly became aware that he was enormously hungry and rather faint. His desperate position had made him forget fatigue; but now that the danger had passed he was feeling the effects of his perilous adventure.

Fortunately he was not wet through. Only his feet were really soaked, and his legs had been splashed well past the knees. But Jack was remarkably fortunate in having escaped so luckily, and he was intensely grateful.

He set his teeth, and marched up the beach to the cliff. He found that he would be able to climb the rocks to the summit, and he set about the task with a will. The exertion warmed him up again, and by the time he was at the top of the cliff he was glowing in the cold, wintry air.

Glancing back, he saw that the old schooner was now on her side, but still well above the water, helpless on the rocks. Right down the beach a group of men were hurrying to the spot; but they had not seen Jack. At all events, they made no sign. For a moment or two the lad was half-inclined to go down and meet them, but the sight of some houses in the distance decided him otherwise. He hurried towards them, passing over rough downs until he arrived at a small road.

His feelings were higher than ever now, and he presently found himself in the street of a little village. He meant to inquire where he was, but knew that such an inquiry would look curious and it would be necessary for him to explain. However, it had to be done, he decided.

But it was unnecessary, after all, for before he saw anybody he noticed an old sign-post at the corner of a branch road, and he glanced up at it. That first look told him, at all events, that he was in England. For the sign read: "To Hallbury Station, 2 miles."

That was quite good enough for Jack. There was obviously no station here, or the sign-post wouldn't have that inscription. Jack set off at a brisk pace, feeling in his pocket for money.

He found that he had six or seven shillings on him, and he hoped that this would be enough to secure him a breakfast and leave a balance for the train-fare to Bellton or London—whichever was the nearer.

Or, he decided, he could easily send a telegram to Nelson Lee at St. Frank's. This, he knew, would instantly bring a result. Full

of joy at having escaped from death, he trudged along the road resolutely.

He wondered if those at St. Frank's knew that the Foreland had gone down. But, even if they did, they wouldn't connect it with him, for Jack had no idea that Reginald Pitt had seen him taken on board.

Hallbury, he found, was quite a decent little town. He could see it nestling in a hollow as he approached, and the first thing he encountered was the station—which couldn't have been better.

He immediately made inquiries, and found that he was barely forty miles from St. Frank's, and that a train would take him to Bellton, via Bannington, within forty minutes—that is, it would draw into Hallbury in forty minutes' time. The journey itself took an hour and a half.

There was a little refreshment-room on the station, and he eagerly purchased some sandwiches and some hot coffee. The coffee was vile and the sandwiches were stale—but Jack Mason thought he had never tasted nicer food or drink in his life.

He was feeling wonderfully refreshed when he took his seat in the train. He hadn't sent any telegram, although he would have preferred to do so. But there was no office at the station—at least, it wasn't open—and the post-office was right in the town.

However, perhaps it would be just as well to give everybody a surprise—for Jack was quite sure that Mr. Strong and Nelson Lee were worrying over him, to say nothing of Pitt and the other fellows.

Altogether, Jack Mason had passed through a remarkable adventure, but he didn't seem to be much impressed, for the first thing he did after leaving Hallbury was to close his eyes and fall sound asleep.

CHAPTER V.

BACK FROM THE DEAD!

NELSON LEE cleared his throat.

"You must try to control yourself, Pitt, my boy," he said kindly. "I am greatly touched by this grief on your part, but matters will not be mended by giving way to despair."

"But—but Mason's dead, sir!" muttered Pitt huskily. "There's no hope at all—he went down in that ship. Is there any hope, sir?" he added, looking up quickly. "Just a spark of hope—"

"No, Pitt, I am afraid that I can give you no comfort whatever," replied Lee. "It would be cruel for me to tell you that there might be a chance, because everything points to the fact that the poor boy met his death."

Sir Crawford Grey rose to his feet, pale and ill.

"But there is a chance, Mr. Lee—a faint, slimy chance, I will admit," he said. "Poor Jack has not been found, and is it not possible that he has been picked up by some outward-bound ship?"

"It is possible, of course," agreed Nelson



There was a deep, rending sound like the tearing of sheets of metal. The next moment the lamp went out, and Captain Davis and the boy were flung to the deck!—(See p. 8.)

Lee. "But you must remember, my dear sir, that the lad was a prisoner on the Foreland and had practically no chance of escape. The vessel sank with extraordinary rapidity, and it would be foolish for us to assume that he is still alive. If, indeed, he did get out of his prison, he must inevitably have been plunged into the sea. And death would have been swift and sure."

"But he might have grasped some spar?"

"Again, such an event is possible," agreed Nelson Lee. "But what chance would the lad have in a fog, and with the water at so cold a temperature as it is at this time of the year. No boy could stand such exposure for more than an hour."

"You are right, Mr. Lee," said Sir Crawford sadly. "I am foolish to allow such hopes to enter my breast. Great Heaven! What a terrible disaster to come upon me at such a time as this. It is cruel—it is ghastly!"

The baronet sank back in his chair, and I walked silently across to the window. Sir Montie and Tommy were standing there, and they looked at me miserably as I joined them. Pitt was still sobbing occasionally, but he had got over the first shock, and was now dumb with grief.

"Dear boy, hadn't we better go?" suggested Tregellis-West. "We can't do anything, and I want to express my feelings freely. It can't be done here, you know. Poor old Pitt! Ain't he shockin'ly cut up? I never thought he cared so much for Mason, begad!"

"This crisis has shown us Pitt's true character," I said quietly. "There's no acting about this—he's half-dotty with misery. I don't know what the dickens we're going to do now. How about telling the other fellows? The school will have to know before long—"

"Say nothing for the present, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee, who had heard my remark. "The school is in ignorance of the disaster, so far, and no report will be made today. It would be a pity to send the boys away on their holidays with such news fresh in their minds."

"I don't think we'd better let ourselves be seen much, sir," said Watson.

"Why not, my boy?"

"Well, our faces give the game away, sir," replied Tommy. "The chaps will be asking us all sorts of questions, and we can't tell lies. I think we'd better get off to London as quickly as we can."

"No doubt you are right, Watson," said Nelson Lee. "The position is extremely difficult, and I scarcely know what to advise—"

"Great Scott!" I yelled.

I was staring out into the Triangle, and the exclamation had left my lips involuntarily. Just for a few seconds I thought that I was off my head, and I went hot all over and quivered in every limb.

For Jack Mason had just entered the gateway.

"What is the matter, Nipper?" asked the gun'or sharply.

"Nun-nothing, sir!" I gasped. "I—I didn't

mean to yell out like that. Let's be going, you chaps!" I added hurriedly.

Mason had passed out of view of the window by now, and I knew that the others in the room couldn't see him. I rushed to the door, and Sir Montie and Tommy followed me. Nelson Lee looked after us with a frown, but Sir Crawford and Pitt took no notice.

Outside in the passage my chums seized me.

"You—yon unfeeling rotter!" said Watson, glaring.

"I must admit that Tommy is quite right," said Sir Montie severely. "I'm surprised at you, Nipper—I am, really! Fancy yellin' out like that—"

"I think I'm dotty!" I exclaimed, breathing hard.

"I jolly well know you are!" snapped Watson.

"I saw Mason," I said deliberately. "I saw him come in at the gateway—as briskly as anything—"

"You saw Mason!" gasped Sir Montie.

"Yes."

"Dear fellow, it's too bad of you," said Tregellis-West sadly. "You oughtn't to imagine these things durin' such a time of grief. It was somebody else you saw, old fellow. Mason's dead, poor chap—"

"Come along to the lobby!" I said huskily.

To tell the truth, I half-believed that I had been dreaming, for after the evidence we had received it seemed utterly impossible that Jack Mason could have appeared at St. Frank's.

I had heard of visions, and I found myself thinking queer things as I hastened down the passage. Visions have often been seen at the moment of a person's death. Perhaps Jack Mason had died at that very moment! But I wasn't convinced—it seemed too preposterous.

We entered the lobby and found it deserted, except for Owen major. He regarded us curiously.

"Anything up?" he asked. "Any ghosts about, or what? Have you been putting white paint on your faces?"

"Did—did you see Mason just now?" I gasped.

Owen major jerked his head towards the study passage.

"Yes," he replied shortly. "Mason came in a minute ago."

"What?" shrieked Watson.

"Oh, begad!"

Owen major stared more than ever.

"Blessed if I can see anything to yell at," he said impatiently. "Mason ain't a ghost, I suppose? He looked a bit untidy, I'll admit, but that's his business. I thought he went away for the holidays last night."

We didn't wait to hear any more, but rushed down the Remove passage like three maniacs. The door of Study E was ajar, and we piled in one after the other. And there, standing in the middle of the study, was Jack Mason!

"It's—it's his spirit!" panted Watson fearfully.

"Where's Pitt?" asked the apparition, in almost matter-of-fact tones. "I've been anxious about him——"

"Anxious about him!" I shouted. "He's all right; but we've been worried terribly over you, Mason—we thought you were dead—we thought you'd gone down on the Foreland. Oh, my goodness! It's ripping to see you alive!"

Jack Mason smiled.

"I've had a narrow squeak," he said wearily. "I thought you'd be worrying somehow. Where's Mr. Strong? I hope he hasn't left the school yet, and I hope that I haven't caused anybody a lot of trouble——"

"Dear fellow, there's goin' to be an explosion soon!" said Sir Montie solemnly. "Pitt will go nearly off his head when he finds you're safe. Begad! It's too good for words—I'm so frightfully pleased I don't know what to say. Dear old boy, let's feel if your hand's solid!"

The next moment we were vigorously shaking hands with Mason, and there was no longer any doubt in our minds that he was real enough. In some miraculous fashion he had escaped—and had come to tell us the news in person.

"I'm glad I didn't say anything in the gov'nor's study," I exclaimed, with glittering eyes. "By jingo! What a surprise we'll give 'em! Mr. Strong will be sent into a fit with delight if we don't set to work carefully."

"And so will Pitt!" put in Watson.

"Pitt!" echoed Mason. "Why, Pitt isn't cut up, is he?"

"You don't know how you've changed Pitt this last month or two," I said quietly. "We all thought you were dead, Mason, and Pitt absolutely broke down and sobbed. He's a splendid chap, and you'll never be able to thank him when you find out what he did for you last night."

Mason's eyes gleamed.

"I'm glad," he said slowly. "Good old Pitt!"

"I'll go along first," I went on. "You'd better come with Tommy and Montie, Mason. Stand just outside the door while I break the news. I honestly believe that if you walk straight in you'll cause a terrific commotion."

Mason couldn't quite believe it, but I decided that it would be better to give a hint in advance. And we went down the passage again and halted outside Nelson Lee's door. I placed my finger to my lips, and then tapped on the panel.

"Oh, it's you, Nipper," said Nelson Lee, as I entered. "Good gracious! You're looking quite excited, young 'un!"

Sir Crawford Grey was now bending over Pitt, talking to him quietly. They both looked up at me as they heard the gov'nor's words. And I suppose I was looking rather excited, too.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Sir Crawford. "Dear me! Have you heard any fresh news, Nipper? I sincerely trust so."

"Well, sir, I have got a bit of news," I admitted cautiously.

"Concerning Jack?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it—what is it?" demanded Pitt, almost fiercely. "What news have you heard, Nipper? Is he alive? Has he been saved? Get it out, man—I can see you've heard something startling!"

"You mustn't anticipate, Pitt," protested Nelson Lee, in distress. "You will only receive a fresh disappointment——"

"I don't think so, sir," I interrupted serenely. "Pitt happens to be right. Jack Mason has been saved!"

"What?" shouted Pitt.

"Good gracious me!" gasped Sir Crawford. "Upon my soul! I—I hope your information is correct Nipper—I pray Heaven that it is correct! Dear me! I really do not know what to say!"

"I only hope that Nipper has not spoken prematurely," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Tell me, young 'un, where did you get this information? Why are you so sure of its authenticity? I can scarcely believe that Mason is alive."

"You will in a minute, sir," I grinned. "Smile, everybody—there's nothing to worry over at all. I thought I'd better break the news gently, because it's a bit startling. Mason is not only safe, but he's here!"

"At—at St. Frank's?" shouted Pitt excitedly.

"Yes, I'm here all right," said Jack Mason, entering the study. "I didn't know that you were so concerned——"

But his voice was drowned the next second. Pitt dashed up to him and grabbed his hand. Just for the time his emotion was such that he couldn't articulate his words, but the warmth of his grip was eloquent enough. And Jack was in Sir Crawford's embrace almost immediately—much to his surprise and embarrassment. He hadn't known that "Mr. Strong" cared for him so much.

"My boy—my boy!" exclaimed the baronet fervently. "Thank Heaven that you are safe! But I am amazed—I am bewildered. This sudden appearance is like a miracle, for we had given you up for lost!"

"You have evidently a remarkable story to tell us, Mason," said Nelson Lee. "How you escaped from the Foreland is quite beyond my comprehension—for I observe that you have not even received an immersion."

"I've had an awful time, sir," said Jack Mason quietly. "But I can't understand how you knew I was on the Foreland at all."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I think it would be as well if we had explanations all round," he said. "We are naturally anxious to hear your story, Mason, and so we should like you to relate it at once. Afterwards you shall hear our side."

"One moment, Mr. Lee," interrupted Sir Crawford concernedly. "Perhaps Jack is hungry and thirsty—would it not be better to provide him——"

"That's all right, sir," interrupted Jack. "I had some coffee and sandwiches at Hall—"

Jury Station, and I'm all right for a bit. I want to tell you everything, and to know all the rest before I have anything else to eat."

So, without further delay, Jack Mason related exactly what had occurred, and we listened with great interest. He told the story in simple language, and tried to make out that he had done nothing at all remarkable.

But we knew well enough that this was only his modesty, for it was quite evident that he had acted in a manner that was worthy of the utmost praise. In conclusion, he put in a word for Captain Davis, of the *Foreland*.

"I don't think he's actually bad, sir," said Mason. "It was my uncle who took me on board the ship, and Captain Davis didn't much care for the idea of keeping me a prisoner. He was giving me some warm blankets and some food when the collision occurred, and told me that I shouldn't be harmed. I don't think it would be fair to prosecute him; my uncle was to blame entirely."

"Not entirely, Mason," said Nelson Lee. "Captain Davis acted in a disreputable manner by imprisoning you in the first place, but I don't think he realised the gravity of the offence, and I am sure we shall not trouble to prosecute him, since you do not wish it. As for your own part in the affair, I can only tell you that I am filled with the greatest admiration."

"Admiration!" echoed Sir Crawford, his eyes gleaming. "Why, bless my soul, the lad is a wonder! You have covered yourself with glory, Jack, and I cannot find words to express my intense pride. You were in a most frightful predicament, and yet, by your own efforts alone, you managed to extricate yourself unharmed. But you must not think that we did not attempt to aid you."

"How did you know I was on the *Foreland*, sir?"

"It was Pitt's doing," replied Sir Crawford. "Pitt distinguished himself wonderfully last night—"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Pitt.

"You may say what you like, my boy, but the fact remains that you proved your pluck and loyalty in a most remarkable manner," said the baronet. "It seemed that sheer disaster had occurred; but Heaven has been merciful. My boy, I am grateful that you have been spared."

And Sir Crawford placed a gentle hand upon Jack's shoulder.

Mason listened wonderingly as he learned that Reginald Pitt had followed Simon Grell and Jake Starkey to Caistowe on the previous evening. He learned how Pitt had seen the rascals transfer him to the *Foreland*, and how Pitt had hurried back with the news. We had attempted a rescue, but had arrived too late.

But Nelson Lee had not been dismayed. He knew that the steamer was bound for London, and had made all arrangements to have the vessel met. If the ship had made its voyage Jack would have been in no danger, for he

would have been released upon arrival, and Grell and Starkey would have been captured.

"At all events," said Nelson Lee, "you are safe, Mason. I am not quite so sure about your uncle; he will have no occasion to visit the docks now, since he must know that the vessel has gone to the bottom. He will probably assume that you are dead, as we did. Captain Davis himself believes that you perished."

Jack looked worried.

"I can't understand why my uncle tried to get me away, sir," he said slowly. "And it's not necessary to go after him now, is it? I'm safe, and he can't do me any further harm—"

"My dear lad, you do not understand," interrupted Sir Crawford. "Your uncle stole a gold locket from this very room last night—a locket which is of the utmost value to me. Half of it was yours, I am told—"

"Why is there another half, sir?" asked Mason, in surprise. "I had heard that that sealed package of yours contained the other half of my locket, but I couldn't believe it. It seems so impossible."

"You may well say that, Jack," replied Sir Crawford. "But there is a secret concerning that locket which may prove something absolutely wonderful. I hardly dare speak of the matter now—until some reliable evidence is forthcoming. It is most important that the locket should be recovered, so that inquiries may be made."

"Our main difficulty is that we do not know where Grell is situated," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Close inquiry, perhaps, will aid us in locating—"

"Why, I think I can tell you something, sir," put in Jack quickly. "My uncle was talking with that man Starkey, and he said that they would stay at lodgings in Wapping until the ship arrived."

Nelson Lee turned quickly.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "This is very interesting, Mason. Did Grell mention any address? Think carefully."

"Well, sir, it wasn't an absolute address," replied Jack. "My uncle said that he and Starkey would stay at Mother Somebody's, in George Terrace, Wapping."

"Dear me! That is quite sufficient," said Lee grimly. "I have little doubt, Mason, that the name was Hackett—Mother Hackett's?"

"That's the name, sir," replied Jack promptly. "How did you know?"

"It is a somewhat notorious lodging-house," smiled the gov'nor, "and Mother Hackett is very well known to the police. So Mr. Grell is staying there? Our troubles are greatly reduced, for we can lay hands upon Grell at once. I really think that we had better start for London without delay—er—Mr. Strong."

Sir Crawford chuckled.

"Don't you think that my little deception has gone far enough?" he asked. "I have a mind to tell the boys the truth, Mr. Lee."

"It would certainly do no harm," admitted Nelson Lee smilingly.

"What deception, sir?" asked Jack, looking puzzled.

"I must plead guilty to having played a little trick upon you, Jack," said Sir Crawford, placing his arm round the lad's shoulders. "When you saved my life some months ago I readily saw that you were not in prosperous circumstances, and I felt that you would be embarrassed if you knew that I was rich. So I called myself 'Mr. Strong,' and made you believe that I was quite poor."

"But—huh aren't you Mr. Strong?" asked Jack amazedly.

"No, my boy—that is merely a name," replied the baronet. "I thought that you would be uncomfortable if you knew my real name—which is Sir Crawford Grey. But I am not a terrible person, and—"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Tommy Watson bluntly. "Then—then you're a baronet, sir—like old Montie?"

Sir Crawford chuckled.

"Exactly—exactly!" he agreed. "Like old Montie. Baronets are quite common, I can assure you, Jack, and you won't think any the worse of me, will you? I was unduly sensitive, perhaps, and I deeply apologise—"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Jack, flushing. "You needn't do that! It doesn't make much difference what your name is, does it? You're just the same, and I shall always look upon you as the first real friend I ever had in the world."

"I could wish for nothing better," said Sir Crawford quietly. "But stay! I do wish for something better, lad. I pray to Heaven that I shall be more than a friend to you before long. There is a chance that— Oh, but I mustn't speak now!" he added, shaking his head. "I am filled with high hopes, but the matter is not certain. There, there, lad! You look puzzled, and I'm not surprised. But all will come straight before long."

Jack knew that his curiosity was not to be satisfied. Already he was filled with wonder, and couldn't in the least understand the affair of the gold locket.

And Nelson Lee, after glancing at his watch, laid down the law.

"Now, Nipper," he said briskly. "Take Mason away and get the matron to supply him with a hearty meal at once; or you can rake something up in your own study if you like. After that you must get yourselves ready quickly, for we start for London by one o'clock, if possible. I thought about going by train originally, but the weather is fine and we might as well go by motor-car."

"Who, sir?" asked Watson eagerly.

"Sir Crawford, Mason, Nipper, Montie, and yourself," replied the guv'nor. "Of course, Pitt is at liberty to come if he wishes to." Nelson Lee turned to Pitt. "But I don't know your arrangements, my boy."

"I'd love to come up with you, sir—with Jack," said Pitt eagerly.

"Then you shall," smiled Lee.

"Thank you, sir," said Pitt, gratefully. "Oh, isn't it simply splendid!" he added with shining eyes. "An hour ago everything was terrible, but now I feel that I could jump for joy."

"You'd better go in the Triangle, then," chuckled Nelson Lee.

Good humour was completely restored; the change in us all was remarkable—most particularly in Sir Crawford Grey. The worried lines had left his face, and he was looking not a year older than fifty.

Pitt came with us while we gave Jack some breakfast—or, at least, a meal, for it was getting on for dinner time. And in due course we got ourselves ready and reported at Nelson Lee's study by a quarter to one.

Jack Mason was looking wonderfully fresh, considering the nature of the adventure he had recently passed through. Dressed in a new suit, washed and tidy, he seemed as though he had spent the night in bed, instead of on the sea, struggling to escape from death.

We didn't waste much time over bidding the other fellows good-bye. As a matter of fact the rest of the juniors were busy with their own concerns, and they didn't notice that anything special was going on. It was quite usual for motor-cars to take juniors home for the holidays.

At last we started, and we little guessed that this trip was to mean a great deal more than appeared on the surface—at least, for Jack Mason.

CHAPTER VI

TRAPPED!

JAKE STARKEY filled his pipe with a rather shaky hand.

"I don't like it, Simon," he said nervously. "The boy's dead—as dead as wot this 'ere piece o' beef is on the table. An' we're responsible, in a way o' speakin'. There'll be trouble—"

"Stow your lip!" snapped Simon Grell savagely. "You always was a croaker, Jake. There's no danger, you fool. We sha'n't come to no harm. How was we to know that the ship would sink? We didn't try to kill the kid, did we? It means the loss of five thousand quid to us, more or less."

"Yes, but you put the boy on board," said Starkey. "If the truth ever gits out, Simon, we shall find ourselves in a queer fix. Wot about Davis? As likely as not he'll give us away."

Grell shook his head.

"Cap'n Davis won't be such a blamed fool," he said confidently. "He'll keep his tongue between his teeth an' say nothing. He's got himself to think of, don't forget. Why, if the truth came out he'd suffer more than we should."

But Starkey was not comforted. He was very nervous, and made up an attempt to hide his feelings. The rascally pair were seated

in a rear apartment at Mother Hackett's, in George Terrace, Wapping.

It was getting on towards evening; in fact the blinds had already been drawn and the incandescent gas was alight.

Grell had heard the news of the sinking of the *Forland* some hours before, and it had put him into a bit of a panic at first. Soon afterwards he learned that the schooner which had been in collision with the *Forland* had run ashore, derelict, further along the coast.

According to all reports, the captain and most of the crew had been saved. Two men had been drowned, and their bodies had been recovered. But there was no mention whatever of Jack Mason. Without the slightest doubt the lad had gone to the bottom with the steamer, locked in the store-room.

From Simon Grell's point of view there could be no doubt whatever. Jack, being a prisoner, had had no chance at all. The ship had sunk within five minutes, and the lad couldn't possibly have escaped.

After the first alarm, Grell became calmer. He began to see that he was safe, for nobody except the captain knew that Jack Mason had been on board—and Davis, of course, would keep his own counsel.

"We're all right in any case," Grell declared. "Supposin' the kid's body is found, wot then? Why, Davis will say he didn't know nothin' about the boy bein' aboard, and every member of the crew will bear out the statement. It'll be took that Jack was a stowaway, an' there's nobody to blame for his death but himself. From the way you talk, Jake, anybody might think that we tried to kill the kid."

"Now, that's silly," objected Starkey. "I never said nothin' o' the sort. At the worst, we can only git into trouble for stowin' the kid on board. It might mean a couple o' years in gaol—an' I ain't anxious for that."

Grell snorted.

"I tell you they can't touch us," he growled. "It's a pity the boy's dead, because I wanted to make Sir Crawford pay a pretty price for him. There's just a chance that Jack is old Grey's son, but it ain't been proved. So far as the law goes, the boy is my nephew, an' I brought him up. I'm his guardian, an' I've got the right to say where he's to be. My idea was to give him into Sir Crawford's charge in exchange for a tidy sum. But that idea's knocked on the head now."

"An' wot are we goin' to do?" asked Starkey.

"I wanted that money to pay our expenses out to Africa," went on Grell thoughtfully. "Well, it's no good grumblin'. We shall have to do the best we can without the money. Arter all, we've got the locket, an' that's the main thing."

"Supposin' there ain't any treasure——"

Simon Grell swore.

"You're always supposin', durn you!" he snapped harshly. "The treasure's there—I heard Sir Crawford say so hisself—an' it

can't be recovered without this 'ere locket. Understand? I've got the locket, an' I'm goin' to study it careful, an' copy down the Arabic writin' so that we shall be safe. We'll leave all the actual plannin' until later on, but I don't intend to waste no time."

As Grell was speaking he removed the locket from his pocket and examined it with interest. While he was doing so Jake Starkey bent over his shoulder, and they were both silent for a few minutes.

"You see, Jake," said Grell at last, "this treasure was hidden by some poor Arab chap wot dled of thirst on the desert. You can see wot it says here——"

"Ow can I see?" growled Starkey. "I can't read that queer-lookin' lingo."

"Well, I can't read it proper," said Grell. "Still, I've sailed in a good few ships travellin' to Morocco and such-like places, and I've picked up a bit of Arabic. I can read enough to make it certain that this treasure is worth fetchin'. I mean to get hold of a pal o' mine this week, and we'll git the thing clear—he can talk Arabic like a native, and read it, too. If this thing only comes off, Jake, we're rich for life, and there's no reason why it shouldn't come off."

"I've never understood how you found out about it fust," remarked Starkey.

"That's only because you're so blamed dense," said Grell politely. "When I went down to that school to begin with I never thought of the locket. I wanted to know what Jack was up to, bein' at such a swell place. Then I saw this locket—at least, half of it. An' it set me on another game. It's worth all the risk we've had, Jake. We had some trouble down there, but all the danger's over now. We're as safe as houses, in spite of that smart 'teeo down at the school. He thought that he could spoil our little game, but he didn't know the man he was dealin' with."

While Grell was speaking, footsteps sounded on the stairs outside, and Grell, after a quick glance at his companion, slipped the locket into his waistcoat pocket. Starkey almost went pale.

"Who—who's that?" he whispered.

"Nervous agin!" snapped Grell. "It might be that feller I was talkin' about just now—the man wot can read Arabic like a native. I asked him to come round, but I didn't think he was in London this week."

Grell was certainly not alarmed, and he proceeded to knock the ashes from his pipe as the door opened and somebody entered. Grell did not even trouble to look up at first, but he did so as Starkey uttered an ejaculation of amazement.

"By thunder!" gasped Simon Grell.

For, standing in the doorway, was Jack Mason!

Just for a moment both Grell and Starkey stared at the boy as though they couldn't believe the evidence of their own eyes. This was staggering—Jack was not dead, and he had actually come to his uncle!

"Come in 'ere!" exclaimed Grell hoarsely. "How did you get 'ere, boy? How did you escape from that steamer?"

Grell recovered himself far more quickly than Starkey, and walked round the table and grabbed Jack Mason's hand. He dragged the boy further into the room and slammed the door. Truth to tell, the rascal was rather alarmed. Jack Mason alive was far more dangerous than Jack Mason dead. He knew too much.

"Have you told anybody anything about that ship?" demanded Grell fiercely.

"What if I have?" asked Mason.

"What if you have?" snapped Grell. "Why, I'll twist your confounded little neck for you if you've breathed a word. You might git your uncle into trouble. The police wouldn't understand the thing like I do. They wouldn't know that I've got a perfect right to stow you on board a ship if I want to. I'm glad you ain't killed, Jack, although I thought you'd gone down. Who've you told?"

"Mr. Nelson Lee, for one," replied Jack steadily.

"You young hound!" snarled Grell, twisting Jack's arm fiercely and drawing him towards him. "You're lyin' to me——"

"I don't think so, Mr. Grell," said Nelson Lee, entering the room. "And you will save yourself a lot of trouble if you submit quietly. Your words to Mason were perfectly convincing, and we are well aware of the fact that you deliberately kidnapped the lad from St. Frank's College."

Simon Grell had started back, his eyes glittering evilly. If he imagined that he would be able to make a bid for freedom, he was very much mistaken, for Nelson Lee was not alone. A burly individual in an overcoat and bowler came immediately behind the schoolmaster-detective. And out in the passage I stood with Sir Montie and Tommy and Pitt. We were all in this affair, and we wanted to see the last of it. The burly individual was our old friend, Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard.

Grell was sensible enough to see that any resistance would be out of the question. And so he attempted bluff. With a gruff laugh he sat down and pretended to be busy with filling his pipe.

"I'd like to know what you mean by bursting into a honest man's lodgin' an' makin' out that you own the blamed place?" he asked sarcastically. "This boy is my nephew, an' you daren't touch him. If you do, I'll have the police on you."

"You had better start straight away," said Nelson Lee quietly. "This gentleman is Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, and it largely depends upon your attitude now whether you are forthwith arrested——"

"On what charge?" roared Grell violently.

"On several charges," put in the inspector. "I am aware of the fact, Simon Grell, that you kidnapped this boy from St. Frank's College, and that you also committed a theft at the same school last night. Oh, yes, my

dear sir you are in a quite difficult position, so you need not imagine otherwise."

Grell clenched his fists.

"You can say wot you like," he growled. "I don't know nothin' about asy theft. I wasn't near the school last night. As for the boy, he's my nephew! An' I've got a right to do wot I like with him."

"Within certain limits, no doubt," agreed Nelson Lee. "But a man has no right to kidnap even his own nephew, Mr. Grell. You need not think that bluff will aid you in the slightest degree. It won't. There is plenty of evidence that you grossly assaulted two lads last night, with the help of your companion, Starkey. One of those lads was knocked down, and the other you took away with you. However, it rests with you whether the matter remains private or passes into the hands of the police. Mr. Lennard is at present here unofficially—as a friend of mine—but there are several officers within easy call."

"Wot do you mean—rests with me?" demanded Grell roughly.

"I mean that if you are straightforward there is just a chance that you will not be given in charge," replied Nelson Lee. "Do not imagine that this leniency is out of consideration for you. It will be solely for the lad's benefit, since it would be unfortunate to have the facts made public that you, his uncle, are an unmitigated scoundrel."

Simon Grell nearly choked.

"I have been straightforward," he growled. "You'd best clear out of this room afore I lose my temper."

"I shall certainly not clear out until you have handed me the locket which you stole from St. Frank's College last night," said the guv'nor grimly. "You have already denied that you were there, but I should not advise you to stick to that story."

"I'll stick to the truth," rapped out Grell. "You think you can frighten me, comin' here an' accusin' me of bein' a thief. You can go to the dickens, the whole crowd of you!"

"You worthless scoundrel!" shouted Sir Crawford Grey angrily—for the baronet was also with us, and had stood silent until now. "I can see that kindness is useless with such a man as you. Nipper, would you mind calling the policemen who are on duty outside?"

Grell caught his breath in sharply, but he was obstinate.

"You can't give me in charge for nothing!" he muttered.

"Why not hold him, sir, and search him?" I suggested practically. "I don't see why we should put up with any of his nonsense. Let's search him!"

"Yes, rather," said Pitt quickly.

"Dear boys, it's a rippin' idea, it is really," said Sir Montie.

Nelson Lee glanced quickly at Lennard.

"By Jove, I think the boys are right," he said. "If you do not produce the locket at once, Grell, you will be forcibly searched. That is final."

Jake Starkey laughed huskily.

"You'd best give up, Simon," he growled. "What's the good of lyin' any more? There's no way out, you might as well take the locket out o' your weskit straight away. It'll save trouble in the end."

"You durned fool!" snarled Grell.

It was quite impossible for him to keep up the game any longer after that. He took out the locket and flung it upon the table, cursing under his breath. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow. Just when he thought that success was complete, this disaster had occurred.

"There you are, Sir Crawford," said Detective-Inspector Lennard. "I think we'd better hand the man over to the police, after all. We gave him his chance, and he didn't accept it—until forced, he chose to deny that he stole this locket. I think it would have been far better if I had come here in my official capacity."

"Wait!" said Sir Crawford quietly, picking up the locket. "There are a few questions I have to ask of this man. I have reason to believe, Grell, that this lad here is not your nephew. You brought him up as such, but I should like you to tell me the truth regarding his real identity."

"I don't know what you mean!" growled Simon Grell. "The boy is the son of my wife's sister, an' I'm his guardian."

"That's right, sir," put in Jack wonderingly. "I never told you that he wasn't my uncle—"

"No, my lad, but I have suspicions," said Sir Crawford. "We intend to treat you leniently, Grell, and the least you can do is to tell us what you know concerning the boy who believes himself to be your nephew."

"He is my nephew, an' that's all I'll say," snapped Grell.

"I should advise you to alter your decision," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It may interest you to know, Mr. Grell, that I have made some inquiries concerning a railway disaster which occurred thirteen years ago. Since you are not implicated in that affair, there is nothing to prevent you speaking."

Grell's eyes gleamed suddenly.

"If I tell you wot I know, wot shall I get as a reward?" he demanded.

"You have no right to demand anything, or expect anything," replied Nelson Lee. "But I have no doubt that Sir Crawford will give you your liberty, and that, in my opinion, is a reward which is not in the slightest degree deserved."

"Do you promise that I'll go free?"

"Yes—if you are quite frank."

"That's good enough," said Grell easily. "Well, it don't matter to me, I shall be glad to git rid of the kid. To the best of my belief, Jack Mason ain't Jack Mason at all."

"Who who am I, then?" asked Jack amazedly.

"Ain't you got any sense?" asked Grell. "Why, you're Norman Grey, the son of this gent here—the son of Sir Crawford Grey!"

CHAPTER VII.

JACK MASON'S LUCK!

THE most astounded person in the whole room was Jack Mason himself. He stood perfectly still, his face pale with excitement, staring straight before him, as though dazed. Grell's statement had almost bowled him over.

As for Sir Crawford, he stepped forward eagerly, trembling with emotion.

"You say 'to the best of your belief'?" he asked. "What do you mean by that, Grell? Are you not certain?"

"I've got to be careful," replied Grell. "All I know is wot my wife's sister told me—or, rather, wot she told my wife. I wasn't there at the time, so I can't know, can I? I've allus had an idea that Jack wasn't my real nephew, but I can't tell ye who he is. He may be your son, or he mayn't be—that's for you to prove. All I can say is that I've heard he ain't no real relation o' mine."

"Then I think we may take it for granted that Jack is my own son—my own boy!" exclaimed Sir Crawford, in an unsteady voice.

"But—but it can't be true, can it?" asked Pitt huskily. "Oh, my hat! Talk about a surprise! Jack Mason your son!"

"It's too good to be true!" muttered Jack chokingly. "Oh, I can't believe it—it's too much to hope for! There must be some mistake."

"Wait a little while, Mason," said Nelson Lee. "We shall get this matter cleared up before so very long. I have been making inquiries, and I have learned positively that a certain Mrs. Mason was a survivor in a big railway disaster about thirteen years ago. Her two-year-old boy was also saved—you, Mason. Further inquiries elicited the fact that this Mrs. Mason was the sister of your wife, Grell."

"That's all right," agreed the man. "She was travelling on that train. A fair shockin' smash it was, too. But where does this gent come in?" he added, nodding to Sir Crawford. "I've bin goin' by the locket—that's why I believe that Jack is Sir Crawford's son. He had one half, an' the boy had the other, which looked very significant, to my mind."

"Your deduction was a fairly obvious one, Grell," said the baronet. "I was travelling on that train, too—travelling with my dear wife and son, who was just two years old. I believed that my little boy had been burnt to atoms in one of the blazing coaches. My wife, I know, perished. We had been examining the locket at the time of the accident—it was in my baby son's hand. Only half was recovered, and I supposed that the other half was lost for ever. That is my side of the story, Grell—what is yours?"

"It strikes me that the most hopeful thing about the case is that your son, Sir Crawford, was never actually found," put in Inspector Lennard. "He was presumed dead, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"His remains were never discovered?"

"That is so—although remains of some sort were brought to light, of course," replied the baronet quietly. "It is a distressing subject for discussion, but I suppose it is necessary. There were many poor souls consumed in the blazing coach, and it was utterly impossible to recognise anything resembling a human relic."

"That's exactly what I mean," said Leonard. "Your son never came to light, Sir Crawford, and it was only natural that you should believe that he had been killed. Mr. Grell, I have no doubt, will be able to tell us exactly what happened."

Grell shook his head.

"I can't do that," he said. "I can't tell you exactly. The best I can do is to repeat wot I've heard from my wife. It was years ago, an' my memory ain't good for such things as that."

"Well, do your best," said Nelson Lee.

Grell paused to light his pipe.

"You've treated me well, gents, an' I'm goin' to do wot I can," he said, sitting back in his chair. "Edith—that's my wife's sister—was on that train you've bin speakin' about. She had her little nipper with her—ther was visitin' some friends, I believe. Well, when the accident happened, Edith wasn't hurt much—not tore about, I mean—but the kid was killed on the spot."

"Do you know what became of it?" asked Sir Crawford.

"It's no good puttin' them questions," said Grell. "I can't fill in no details. I only know the bare outline, so to speak. It's bin a family secret, as you might say, an' I ain't never told a soul till now. Wot was the use? It's different to-day, because it looks as things are goin' to be set right. Well, as I was sayin', Edith's baby was killed. Naturally, she was half-mad at the time. Not only the shock of seein' the kid wiped out, but the shock o' the accident itself was all the worse for her. She went into hysterics, like wimmin will."

"And what did she do?" asked the governor keenly. "Surely, you can tell us that, Grell?"

"Yes, sir, I can tell you that," replied the other. "She got hold of somebody else's baby—a youngster of about two years. I ain't got a word to say agin Edith. She was a good woman, an' didn't pinch that kid deliberate. She was half-dazed at the time, an' just grabbed hold of the first baby she set eyes on. She might have believed it was her own, but I don't think so. She just took it up in a kind o' fit, without knowin' whose it was."

"I can quite understand that," said Nelson Lee. "The poor woman was utterly distracted, as you intimate, and could scarcely be held responsible for her actions. Well, and what followed, Grell?"

"She fainted dead away, I think, on the embankment—with that strange kid in her

arms," replied Simon Grell. "It was stunned, I believe, an' didn't cry nor nothin'. Edith was found by a party of rescuers, and took straight into the relief train wot come up behind. How was they to know it wasn't her kid? She was clutchin' it, an' they naturally thought it was hers."

"Exactly—exactly!" exclaimed Sir Crawford eagerly. "But how was the baby clothed, Grell—that is the question. I remember every detail of little Norman's attire, and can tell you if—"

"I can't say a word about the kid's clothes," declared Grell. "I never took no interest in them sort o' things."

"But you saw the clothing afterwards, probably?"

Grell removed the pipe from his teeth.

"Well, I got a kind o' idea that there was a little frock-thing, such as babies wear, knockin' about the house," he said thoughtfully. "White it was, with blue stripes—queer kind o' blue stripes, too, not like the ordinary."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed the baronet. "This is proof, indeed! My little son was wearing the very article of attire you have described, Grell. I really think it is unnecessary to proceed further—"

"I should like to hear the full story," interrupted Nelson Lee. "For example, why was the lad brought up by you, Grell, and not by Mrs. Mason?"

"Well, there's a good reason for that," said Grell. "Poor Edith was never the same woman arterwards. She was fair worried to death, I believe—worried over that kid. She knew she'd done wrong, but swore she didn't know wot she was about. An' the worst of it was, she didn't know whose baby she'd taken—there wasn't a sign on it to prove anything—except that half-locket—an' that, as you know, wasn't much use for identifyin' purposes."

"Not at the time—but it is now," said Sir Crawford feelingly.

"That's right enough," agreed Grell. "Poor Edith suffered badly from the shock of the accident, too, an' she was in her grave six months arter the smash. Not havin' anybody else, she gave the kid to my wife to bring up—to her own sister. An' we brought up the child just as if he was our own nephew, an' called him Jack Mason—Jack bein' the name of Edith's own kid wot was killed."

"Well, there is really very little more to be discussed," said Nelson Lee. "There is not a shadow of a doubt, Sir Crawford, that this lad here is your own son. It is not merely a chance—but a certainty."

There were tears in the baronet's eyes as he turned to Jack.

"My boy—my son!" he exclaimed softly. "Thank Heaven that you have been restored to me after all these years!"

But Jack Mason hung back.

"I—I can't believe it, sir," he said huskily.

"But you must believe it, my dear lad—it is true," said Sir Crawford. "It was something more than chance which led to that meeting of ours when you saved my life in Piccadilly Circus."

The next moment the fellow we had known as Jack Mason was in his father's arms, and when he looked up his cheeks were rather tear-stained, but his eyes were brimming with joy.

For the time being he seemed quite incapable of speech, and I wasn't surprised. This amazing revelation had knocked him over, so to speak. It was more than he could believe, and it would probably be some days before he could fully bring himself to the realization that he was Norman Grey, the son of an immensely rich baronet.

It was a change, indeed!

Fullwood and Co., and the other St. Frank's fellows who had been inclined to sneer at Jack because he had come from Bermondsey, would find it necessary to draw in their horns. But I was certain of one thing. This startling change in Jack's fortunes would make absolutely no difference to him—except, of course, that he would be immeasurably happier.

"How ripping!" exclaimed Pitt, grasping Mason's hand. "I don't know what I ought to do, but I congratulate you, old man. You're the best friend I ever had, and I hope we shall always pull together."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't," said Jack, finding his voice. "But I can't think of it all without feeling dizzy. It means that everything is changed for me now. I shall have a home, I suppose—"

"You suppose?" echoed Sir Crawford, with a chuckle. "Bless the boy! You will have a home that will be a real home, Jack. Dear me! I suppose I shall have to call you by that name always now, shan't I? Your real name is Norman, of course; but Jack sounds more affectionate, eh?"

"It is not necessary for me to say how delighted I am," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "This happy reunion is more splendid than I could have wished for, Sir Crawford, and I can only say that the whole case has concluded splendidly. As for Mr. Simon Grell, he undoubtedly deserves to spend a few years in gaol, so that he may meditate over his wrong-doing."

Grell smiled sheepishly.

"That's right!" he said. "Rub it in—I don't mind. But you promised me that you wouldn't take no action, and I'm sure that you won't go back on your word. Maybe I don't deserve it, because I've played it pretty low down over this business. I'm sorry if I treated you bad, Jack."

"You may consider yourself very lucky, my man," said Detective-Inspector Lennard grimly. "If I had my way, you'd soon be in the dock. But I can't act without Sir Crawford's help. If he doesn't like to prosecute, you're safe."

"No, I shall not prosecute," said Sir

Crawford. "I may as well say that Grell's expression of regret, and his frank confession that he has acted badly, has impressed me. It is Christmas-time, and we must not be harsh. It is a time of goodwill towards all men, and I only hope that you, Grell, will benefit by this experience."

"I shall, sir," said Grell solemnly.

"There is one other point I wish to mention," said the baronet. "You have brought my son up, Grell, and I intend to recompense you. I am well aware of the fact that your guardianship was of a very questionable character, but we will let that pass. I wish to be under no obligation to you, and so I intend to hand you a cheque."

Grell sat up suddenly.

"You're goin' to give me a cheque?" he asked suspiciously. "Money!"

"Exactly!"

"After all I've done?"

"It makes you feel rather ashamed, eh?" said Sir Crawford quietly. "Yes, Grell, after all you have done—I am returning good for evil. I shall take Jack out of your care completely, and you will never see him again—not that you mind that. Here, take this, and we will say no more."

The baronet had produced a cheque-book, and he quickly wrote out a cheque and handed it across the table. Grell picked it up and stared at it, and Starkey opened his eyes wide as he looked over Grell's shoulder.

"Two hundred quid!" he gasped. "Garn! It's a bad 'un!"

"Is this for me—straight?" asked Grell huskily.

"Yes, my man, it is," replied Sir Crawford. "I have already told you why I have given it to you, and I hope that you will make good use of the sum. That is all I have to say. You can cash the cheque in the morning."

Grell rose to his feet.

"You're a white man, sir," he said earnestly. "Why, durn me, it makes me feel as mean as a man can feel. I don't deserve it—I know that as well as anybody, an' I shall always remember you as bein' a real gentleman."

"That, indeed, is very gratifying," said Sir Crawford smoothly.

"I call that rippin'—I do really," said Montie, looking round with great approval. "I think it's simply splendid, an' I hope that the worthy Mr. Grell will not play any more shockin' tricks."

After that we took our departure, leaving Grell and Starkey rather overcome. Lennard was inclined to believe that the two hundred pounds had been simply thrown away—a sheer waste of good money—but he shrugged his shoulders and remarked that it wasn't his business. The chief inspector wasn't mean, but he didn't uphold such extreme generosity as this.

But he forgot that Sir Crawford was so overjoyed at finding his son that he was almost ready to give Grell a thousand. Sir Crawford overlooked all Grell's misdeeds, and

only remembered that his boy was restored to him. And Grell certainly had played a big part in the whole affair.

The inspector parted from us shortly afterwards. He had only come because the gov'nor had had an appointment with him. It had also been a wise policy to have Leonard on the spot, in case of trouble.

We all drove to Gray's Inn Road, where a late tea was all ready prepared for us. Mrs. Jones, our housekeeper, having had a wire containing full instructions. The gov'nor hadn't given up his place in Gray's Inn Road, although we didn't know when we should use it again regularly.

And so the party of us sat down to a merry, joyous meal—Sir Crawford and his son, Nelson Lee and I, Sir Montie, Watson, and Pitt. Our faces were all happy, for all the trouble was over, and the Christmas holidays had already commenced.

"The very instant I saw you, Jack, I felt strangely attracted towards you," said Sir Crawford affectionately. "Gad! I don't know what it was about you that made me feel so anxious to protect you, but the feeling was there, and I couldn't force it away. That is why I took you away from your aunt and sent you to St. Frank's."

Jack opened his eyes wide.

"But I thought somebody left me a legacy——" he began.

"Splendid!" chuckled Sir Crawford. "My dear boy, you must forgive me. I have been guilty of another little deception—in addition to the name. It was I who paid your expenses at St. Frank's, but I was afraid to tell you so, lest you would be offended. You've got a proud spirit, you know—the spirit of your old father, eh? I tricked you into going, lad, and you went meekly."

Jack was quite surprised—and very pleased, too. For it was splendid to know that it was his father who had been paying his fees at St. Frank's.

The meal continued merrily, but I saw that Pitt was looking rather thoughtful. I was pretty sure that he was wondering how we should spend the holidays. In all the recent excitement we had not given the matter much attention. I decided to broach the subject at once.

"Now, you chaps, about our arrangements for Christmas," I said. "Tommy and Montie are going to stay with the gov'nor and me for a few days—ain't you, my sons?"

"Dear fellow, you're quite right," agreed Sir Montie. "It's a high honour, an' I'm feelin' greatly impressed. It's somethin' to be proud of to spend a few days with such a famous gentleman as Mr. Nelson Lee."

"To say nothing of me," I added.

"Exactly, old boy—I did say nothin' of you," said Sir Montie serenely.

"After that, you're all coming down to

spend a day or two at my pater's," said Watson. "That is, if we can fix up the arrangement——"

"Isn't it certain, then?" asked Sir Crawford.

"Not yet, sir."

"Then may I make a suggestion?" went on the baronet. "How are you fixed, Pitt?"

"I haven't made any arrangements at all, sir."

"Splendid—splendid! You'll have to come down to Grey Towers with Jack and me," said Sir Crawford, rubbing his hands genially. "No, lad, I won't take any refusal! You are Jack's own chum—his study-mate—and you must spend Christmas with us. I insist. I can promise you a merry time at Grey Towers."

"It's very kind of you, sir," said Pitt gratefully. "Oh—I don't know—I don't deserve it! Jack hasn't told you how rotten I was to him when he first came to St. Frank's——"

"And Jack won't tell me, either," interrupted the baronet.

"Rather not!" said Jack. "Pitt's been splendid, sir—I've forgotten all about that little bit of silliness of his when I first went down. He's one of the best chaps going, and I'm awfully pleased that he's coming with us."

"And what about Mr. Lee, sir?" asked Pitt.

"Ah, I'm just coming to that," said Sir Crawford. "Will you accept my invitation, Mr. Lee, and bring Nipper down to my country place? I should like you to bring these other lads, too, so that we may have quite a merry party. It would please me immeasurably."

"That is very nice of you, Sir Crawford," said Nelson Lee. "I shall certainly avail myself of your hospitality. Thank you. Nipper, I am sure, will be quite delighted."

"Rather, sir," I agreed promptly.

Sir Crawford rubbed his hands together again.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "This arrangement could not possibly be better. Jack and I, therefore, will go down to Grey Towers to-morrow, accompanied by Pitt. And the rest of you will follow on early next week. How is that?"

.

Mason and his father and Reginald Pitt left for Grey Towers, in Berkshire, and Tommy and Montie and I remained in London for a few days before going down to join the others.

And that Christmas visit was to be far more dramatic and exciting than we had anticipated. Although we didn't know it, some stirring times were ahead!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

OUR POPULAR SCHOOL SERIAL!

The Chums of Littleminster School.

A Magnificent Story of School Life and Adventure.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

The First Chapters.

BASIL HOOD is a new boy at Littleminster School.

On his arrival he makes a friend of

JOHN CHALLIS, a Senior in the Fifth Form.

MYERS and **COGGIN** are two bullies, who, with some others, try to make Challis join the "Clubs," an athletic society. He refuses, and they determine to send him to Coventry. He is persuaded later by Mr. Evans, a master, to join. Challis takes Hood fishing in a punt, which gets cast adrift. Later on Grainger, the Captain, sees Challis at the nets, and asks him to play for the next sixteen against the eleven. Meanwhile Basil suspects Myers of casting the punt adrift, since he found a coin belonging to him near the spot. Unsuspectingly he puts the coin in a drawer in his cubicle. It vanishes, and Basil suspects Myers. Challis plays a splendid innings for the Sixteen against the Eleven, and becomes quite popular. Challis also takes up running, and one afternoon puts up a good show against Grainger. Digby, once a friend of Myers, meets an ill-dressed loafer on the ground and tells him to clear out. There is some mystery attached to this odd visitor. But all interest now centres in the forthcoming match against Ragley.

(Now read on.)

THE CHOSEN ELEVEN.

ONE of the most important fixtures of the cricket season at Littleminster was the visit of the Ragley Eleven.

Ragley was the nearest big public school to Littleminster, and from time immemorial the feud—if this term can be applied to a very keen but friendly rivalry—had existed. It dated from the day when Ragley opened its doors and sent its first challenge to Littleminster.

The challenge having been accepted, the first of a long series of home and away cricket matches had ended in the defeat of Littleminster and complete victory of the new school's eleven over the old.

That defeat rankled even after many, many years. It was because of it, perhaps, that the game between the rival schools took paramount importance in the minds of the boys.

It was the custom of the selection committee to choose the team to play Ragley

a week or so after the trial match, and on the day when the names were posted on the big notice-board the boys crushed forward to read, elbowing one another out of the way, the senior boys taking full advantage of their superior size, weight, and strength to elbow the juniors out, though in this they were not always successful.

For instance, Fawcett, Basil Hood, and Raymond, who named themselves "The Irrepressibles," wriggled forward until they gained the front rank, and once there fought tooth and nail to retain their position, kicking out at all who attempted to force them away.

"Who's in the team? Vernon and Mervash, of course. See, old Grainger's got his name at the bottom of the list. Just like him. No swank about Grainger. Hallo! Chalfont and Digby are down. Good old next sixteen. Andrews heads the bowlers. Galloway plays, too. Poor old Ponsonby's not down. Hard luck he shouldn't be fit to play, for he's a rare sticker in a match that matters. Myers has been left out. Hurrah! Serve him right! And, hallo—He's in. He's in. Bravo! Three cheers for John Challis! Three cheers for Grainger! Bet he did it. And Ryder's down, too. Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! The school will lick Ragley into a cocked hat now that Challis is down. Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The boys shouted the string of comments out at the full stretch of their lungs, and were then seized and hurled forcibly into the background by some stalwarts of the Fifth.

But what did they care? Challis was going to bat for Littleminster against Ragley, and nothing else mattered.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Basil, dancing a jig.

His face was red with excitement, his eyes blazed with enthusiasm.

He pushed his way among the crowd of eager boys who wished to see the list of names for themselves, searching everywhere for Challis.

John was not to be seen.

"Let's go and find him," he cried. "He'll be in his room. Come on!"

They tore through the Hall and up the stairs, making for Challis's study. Basil shyly opened the door, and then saw the big boy at work.

"Oh, it's you, is it, young'un?" cried Challis, smiling, as he always did when he

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

greeted Basil. "Come in. Come in, all of you."

They entered, Basil blurting out:

"Oh, Challis, they've selected you for the school eleven to play Ragley. I hope you're glad."

Challis's cheeks reddened, and he looked at the fag, his pen poised in his hand.

"I don't deserve it," he answered. "Not good enough. I'll only let the side down."

"Not a bit of it," cried Basil warmly. "Grainger knows what he's about. You'll make top score, I'll bet."

"We're all awfully glad, Challis," said Raymond, in turn, "and on the day of the match we'll back you up."

"Thank you," said the big boy simply. "Now run along, there's good chaps. I've got a ticklish sort of proposition here I'm trying to solve, and I can't do it if you stay and bother me. Don't mean to be rude, you know, only if I'm to play cricket I must stick to my studies hard."

They took the hint, and vanished. Outside in the passage they held hurried council.

"Myers wasn't down in the Hall. He doesn't show himself much these days," remarked Raymond. "Seems to have got the hump since the school took Challis out of Coventry. I don't suppose he's heard the news. Let's go and tell him."

So they went to Myers's study, and stood listening outside the door.

Somebody inside was walking restlessly up and down, up and down.

Could it be Myers? They held their breath and waited, listening. "Who's going to open the door?" asked Fawcett, in a low whisper.

Basil, screwing up his courage, turned the handle, and pushed.

"I will," he cried.

Glancing in, the three fags saw Myers facing them, his face white and drawn. For a moment there was silence. Then Myers spoke.

"What do you want?" he hissed, frowning darkly.

"Oh, the school eleven to play Ragley has been chosen, Myers," said Basil. "Thought you'd like to know. You're not in it, you see."

"Get out!" thundered the boy.

"But Challis is," Basil went on. "And, my, aren't the boys pleased. Can you hear 'em cheering? John's going to help lick Ragley, and though they've won the last three games, you know, it's a dead cert—"

But Myers made a rush at him, and the fags bolted, crashing the door to behind them. When Myers wrenched it open they were vanishing beyond the angle of the wall at the stairhead. He saw that he would never be able to catch them, and returned to his room, to resume his pacing up and down, more disturbed in mind than ever. And he had enough to disturb him, for on the table lay a letter which had come to hand that morning. It was from Joe Smart, and it contained threats.

Yes, Myers had indeed something to occupy his mind.

SUSPICIONS.

GRAINGER, the captain of Littleminster School, was a boy of simple character, with very high ideals. One of the best scholars in the school, as well as the best all-round athlete, he attacked all his tasks, whether of work or play, with an enthusiasm that made them almost easy of accomplishment.

And, like every healthy-minded boy, he was a great lover of Nature, often taking a long ramble in the country by himself, if he had no chum willing to accompany him; and these solitary walks of his were a source of never-ending delight.

Therefore it is not surprising to find him on a bright and sunny afternoon lounging upon the stone parapet of the quaint old bridge that spans the Awle, gazing lazily at the swift-flowing water below.

He remained there a long time, and as he looked his eyes were riveted on that part of the river-bank at the bend where Challis had made his plunge with Basil from the drifting punt.

There was no head of water rushing down now, and the sluices of the weir were closed; but still there was sufficient current and depth to make Grainger realise the danger Challis and young Hood had had to face.

"By George," he muttered to himself. "Challis must be a rare cool hand. It needed nerve for him to make the leap. He chose the right moment. I'm beginning to think a lot of Challis."

He shifted his position and yawned lazily. How pretty the scene was! He just loved it, as he loved everything around Littleminster, and he sighed as he thought that very soon he would be leaving the school and the neighbourhood, perhaps never to return again.

Well, well! before that time came he meant to put Challis right with the whole school, providing always, of course, that the boy did nothing to forfeit the good opinion his captain, in common with others, had lately formed of him.

Grainger swung round and leant with his back to the parapet, his arms folded on his breast, thinking deeply.

Suddenly he started, for he saw Myers coming towards him.

And Myers was not alone. Great Scott! What the deuce was the boy thinking about to associate with the howling cad of a fellow who strode along by his side?

For Myers was with the sinister lout whose appearance within the school grounds the other afternoon had so startled Ponsonby, Byfleet, Grainger, and the fags who had watched Challis taking his trial spin upon the cinder-track.

Yes, Myers was with Joe Sharp.

The two were talking, or, rather, arguing, together rather loudly, and, distant though they were, Grainger heard the following words spoken by the Littleminster boy:

(Continued overleaf.)

"It's no use, Smart. If you drive me too far, you'll repent it. I've done my best; I can't do more. You're asking for impossibilities—"

"Nothing's impossible," Smart retorted, looking at his companion with an ugly leer, "and if you get yourself into trouble, you'll only have yourself to blame—"

Grainger's face darkened. He saw Myers puff at a cigarette, though it was a serious offence for any Littleminster boy to be seen smoking out of doors.

Neither of them saw Grainger, who, as they reached the rise of the bridge, stepped forward and barred the way.

"Myers," said Grainger sternly, "throw that cigarette away."

The boy started, coloured guiltily, and then forced a smile.

"It's only a joke, Grainger," said he.

"Throw the cigarette away. That's better. Now, who's this fellow, and what's your business with him?"

Smart, thrusting his hands into his pockets, looked Grainger up and down. A smile

curved his sneering lips. He seemed to revel in the situation.

"That's my affair," said Myers hotly. "What right have you got to spy on me, Grainger? I suppose I can talk to Smart if I like?"

Grainger shrugged his broad shoulders, while he kept his eyes fixed on those of the cad.

"Oh, there's no accounting for tastes," he said coolly. "Only I must say I don't admire your choice. This is the fellow who came up to the school the other day, isn't he?"

"Y-yes," faltered Myers.

"And what if I am?" stormed Smart truculently. "One man's as good as another, ain't he? If I'd 'ad 'is luck, or yours, I'd 'ave gone to Littleminster, I suppose, and you'd 'ave been in my shoes."

"Very ugly shoes, and very common shoes," said Grainger, staring down at the footgear in question. "I can't say that I'd like to be seen in 'em. Also a little blacking and the use of a brush wouldn't do 'em any harm."

(To be continued.)

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