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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

T. T. ON HIS HIND LEGS.

"SPIRITS!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, with a sniff.

"Eh?"

"What's that?"

Jack Grey and Augustus Hart regarded Pitt curiously. The three juniors were standing in the lobby of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. It was evening—a dull evening, with a promise of rain in the air.

"Spirits!" repeated Pitt. "What rot!"

"My hat!" said Grey. "Are you a Pussyfoot?"

"A—a which?" gasped Pitt.

"A chap in favour of prohibition."

"Rats to prohibition!" exclaimed Pitt easily. "We're not old enough to discuss such a subject, in any case. Prohibition doesn't interest chaps in the St. Frank's Remove that I know of."

"But you were talking about spirits—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where does the laugh come in?" inquired Hart.

"Why, you ass, I wasn't talking about spirits of that sort," grinned Pitt. "I wasn't referring to the fiery brand. Spirits are jolly good in the case of illness, and it's quite likely that beer is a ripping drink for a man when he's thirsty. Never having tasted it, I can't say anything from experience. But just

now I was talking about the other kind of spirits."

"Ghosts?" asked Grey, staring.

"Yes."

"But you're not a believer in spiritualism, you dotty ass!" exclaimed Grey. "Only a day or two ago you were saying what a lot of rot it is."

"That's quite right," said Pitt. "But I was just thinking about Tucker's meeting this evening—in the common-room, you know. It's due to start in about five minutes, but I can't see much of an audience flocking about."

Hart and Grey chuckled.

"T. T. will probably lecture to the thin air," grinned Hart. "Or there might be a few spirits knocking round, to lend him their ears. I can't imagine why the ass is always wanting to spout."

"Oh, it's a kind of craze with him," said Pitt. "He tries it on in the study sometimes, but Jack and I generally close him up with a snap. Last week it was ancient history, on Monday he was jawing about anthropoid apes, and now he's branched off on to spiritualism. He'll end up in a lunatic asylum, I expect."

The three juniors chuckled—as they thought of Timothy Tucker's coming lecture—which was now almost due to commence. Tucker was a most extraordinary boy, and his one mania seemed to be to deliver lectures on the most learned subjects. Occasionally he would draw a big audience—they came just for

the fun of the thing—but more frequently he found it necessary to do one of two things—abandon his lecture, or address the empty air.

Tucker did not seem to be fully appreciated, and he was always astounded when the juniors failed to listen to his learned words. He certainly did not realise that he was taken as a joke, and that nothing he gave voice to was regarded as being serious.

T. T. was a curious junior in every way—curious in his looks, curious in his habits, and curious in his manner.

He spoke on all manner of learned subjects, but generally managed to get a good deal of his points wrong, which really added to the humour of the situation. And he never learnt by experience.

"Shall we listen to the ass spouting for a bit?" inquired Hart.

"Not likely!" said Pitt. "I'd rather have a bit of fun—there seems to be nothing doing at present, and it would be a good opportunity. But who could we work a jape on?"

"Blessed if I know," said Grey. "It might be funny to hear T. T. after all."

They stood talking for a few moments, and then got into conversation with several other juniors. Other grins were apparent, and many of the grins turned into roars of laughter.

Meanwhile, Timothy Tucker was in the common-room. The school clock had just chimed eight, and that was the time fixed for the lecture. Owing to the dullness of the evening, it really seemed as though the time was nearer nine than eight.

Timothy Tucker consulted his own watch after hearing the big clock chime, and he came to the conclusion that the clock was right, because it corresponded with his own watch.

"Dear!" he murmured, blinking round the common-room. "This is most remarkable! It seems that nobody has turned up! Quite so! It is just possible that there has been a mistake; the fellows don't seem to realise how important this subject is."

He turned over one or two of his notes, and just then Handforth and Co. strolled in, talking noisily.

"There's a set of chessmen in the cupboard," said Handforth briskly. "I'll bet my best Sunday boots that I can make the pair of you sing small in less than half an hour—and I'll have you 'checkmate' before supper."

"Rats!" said Church. "I can play chess."

"And so can I."

"Comrades and brothers!" commenced Timothy Tucker, seizing his opportunity. "No doubt, you will wonder why I am standing upon this platform—"

"We sha'n't wonder for long," remarked Handforth grimly. "You'll only be standing there for about two ticks, my son! Clear off!"

"My dear sir—"

"We don't want any of your beastly tommy rot here!"

"The position is this—"

"Oh, I don't care what the position is," said Handforth. "Somebody was saying that you were going to deliver a lecture on spiritualism; and if you think we're going to stand any rot of that kind, you've made a bloomer."

"But my dear Handforth, you fail to comprehend the exact position," exclaimed Tucker, blinking at the chums of Study D through his big spectacles. "I wish to enlighten my schoolfellows on a most important subject. And I intend to give this lecture—"

"And we intend you to scoot!" said Handforth. "If you're not down from that giddy table in twenty seconds I'll yank you—"

"Hold on!"

Reginald Pitt made that remark, and he came in the doorway. He was followed by fully fifteen or sixteen other Removites, and they were all looking as grave and solemn as owls.

It was obvious that something was in the wind.

"We're the audience," said Pitt gravely. "We have decided that it will be to our benefit if we congregate and listen to the learned words of our trusted comrade, Professor Timothy de Brainless Tucker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hush!" said Pitt severely. "This is no time for hilarity."

Handforth glared.

"You dotty idiot!" he exclaimed. "What's the idea of all this twaddle?"

"Fair youth, you must not use such expressions," said Pitt, with an elaborate wink. "You must stay here and listen to the wondrous words of the oracle—I mean the orator! Let him get busy, and we will present him with our ears!"

"Professor Tucker, proceed!" said Hart solemnly.

Timothy Tucker beamed.

"This is most welcome, my dear comrades!" he exclaimed. "I hardly expected to obtain such splendid support as this. It exceeds all expectations. The subject is a serious one—admitted. Quite so. However, I think that you will be able to compose yourselves for a sufficient length of time to hear my lecture out. I can assure you it will be most interesting and instructive. H'm! Quite so!"

"Well, get on with it!" said Handforth, dimly realising that something special was afoot.

This was quite clear, for such a crowd of fellows would never have attended one of T. T.'s lectures otherwise.

"Well, comrades and brothers, Spiritualism is a subject which has been under repeated discussion recently," exclaimed T. T., waving his hand eloquently. "I do not wish you to suppose that I am standing upon this platform for the purpose of preaching the doctrines of Spiritualism. By no means!"

"That's one good thing!" said Church.

"On the contrary," exclaimed Tucker, "the position is this: Spiritualism, in my opinion, is a form of mania. Those people who believe in spirits and ghosts and visitations from beyond the veil are on the verge of lunacy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Furthermore, I would like to mention that it has been generally noticed that when a person embraces Spiritualism as a hobby, it generally becomes his religion," proceeded T. T. firmly. "I declare that no such things as spirits exist. People who see ghosts are merely sufferers from hallucinations and delusions. They are figments of the brain, and have no real existence."

"Don't you believe in ghosts?" asked Pitt curiously.

"No."

"Don't you believe in spirit rappings?"

"My dear sir, I must request you not to be so absurd!" said T. T. "If I were a believer in ghosts, I should not be standing upon this platform talking as I do. Ghosts, I repeat, have never existed—they have never been seen. People only imagine they see ghosts."

"Supposing a ghost walked out of the corner cupboard now?" asked Pitt.

"Would you believe it was a real ghost, or that it didn't exist?"

"My dear sir, your questions are quite absurd; in fact, they are preposterous!" said T. T., blinking. "When I hear you make such remarks as those—when I see you standing in front of me—I can feel only a wave of pity sweeping over me. Your face, my dear sir, sends a cold shiver down my back! Your voice causes me to feel numb with agony. Therefore, I must request you to be silent."

"Smash him!" advised Handforth.

"Let the learned gentleman proceed," said Pitt. "Talking about ghosts, I've just been wondering, if there is any truth in the old story that two monks were once buried alive immediately under this room!"

"Good heavens!" gasped De Valerie.

"What's that?"

Everybody held their breath.

From beneath the floor came a horrible low groan. It was hollow, long drawn out, and ghostly. The juniors looked startled, and Timothy Tucker seemed to swallow something hard. His spectacles dropped from the bridge of his nose, and he adjusted them hastily.

"Did—did you hear something?" whispered Pitt huskily.

T. T. gave a nervous laugh.

"My dear sir, you are giving way to your imagination!" he declared. "What sound was there to be heard?"

"Didn't you hear a horrible groan?"

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Tucker.

"What absurd nonsense! Merely because we are talking of spirits, that is no reason why you should allow your imagination to get the better of you. I heard nothing—at least, I—I—"

He paused, for the groans were apparent again.

"This is getting awful!" muttered Pitt. "We—we can't stand it! I suppose all this talk about ghosts has set the beggars off! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we saw one next. In this dim light—"

"Look!" screamed Hart suddenly. "Look!"

He pointed with a shaking finger to a dim corner of the room.

"Good—good gracious!" gasped Pitt. "I—I don't see— My dear sir, you must not make such wild noises."

"The ghost of the old monk!" panted De Valerie hoarsely.

And, sure enough, something dim and almost shapeless appeared in the corner. Timothy Tucker stared at it, gulped, and shook in every limb. He could faintly see that the form resembled that of an old monk.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "I—I—I—"

Considering that he did not believe in ghosts, his behaviour now was somewhat contradictory. He determined to stand his ground, although the other juniors were streaming out of the room.

But the thought of remaining there alone, with that dim thing with him, was altogether too much for his nerves. With a wild howl he leapt down from the table and dashed headlong out of the common-room.

"Dear, dear!" he panted, as he ran. "This—this is truly appalling!"

He pushed his way through the juniors, and sped down the passage as though a thousand demons were at his heels.

Some of the fellows had remained in the common-room, and their scared expressions left them, and they grinned, and finally roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old T. T.!"

"The chap who doesn't believe in ghosts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled, and the ghost walked towards them. He threw his cloak off, and the grinning face of Nicodemus Trotwood was revealed. Pitt grabbed hold of Nick, and hugged him.

"Great, my son!" he exclaimed. "You did it first-class!"

"Still, it was a bit of a dirty trick on the poor chap!" said Trotwood. "I didn't think he'd take it so jolly seriously. 'I was expecting him to make a valiant rush at me.'"

"Those groans of yours did the thing," grinned Pitt.

"Why, they nearly scared me," said De Valerie. "How on earth you made them sound underneath the floor is more than I can imagine. I always knew you were a ventriloquist, but this fairly takes the bun!"

"There was nothing in it," said Trotwood modestly. "I'd better shove these togs back in the property-room before anybody sees me. Poor old Tucker was properly dished. I feel a bit sorry for him."

"Rats! A lesson like that does him good!"

The juniors passed out of the common-room, chuckling. T.T.'s great speech on the subject of Spiritualism had not been an unqualified success.

Meanwhile, Tucker himself reached the opening, and dashed across the Triangle, his one idea apparently being to get as far away from the common-room as possible. He reached the gateway, and was about to dash out into the lane, when he came to a full stop. A startled gulp left his lips, and he stood there with staring eyes.

A strange apparition faced him.

A huge man, attired in a white drill suit which appeared to be too small for him—a man of gigantic proportions. And he was black—absolutely black! His face looked awful to Tucker in his present state of nerves.

"Dear, dear!" he exclaimed faintly. "It's another ghost!"

He fell back against the gatepost, too weak to run another yard. But this ghost was just as solid as the other. It walked forward solemnly, grasped Timothy Tucker, and lifted him from the ground.

"Thou art scared, O simple youth!" came a deep, rumbling voice. "Am I so fearful to gaze upon?"

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF OF THE KUTANAS.

TIMOTHY TUCKER wriggled convulsively.

"This—this is absurd!" he panted. "I must request you to release me, my dear sir. My attitude is most undignified. Admitted. Furthermore, your face frightens me! It is a face one only sees in terrible nightmares!"

"Wau! Thou art complimentary, O youth of snakelike wriggles!" exclaimed the black giant pleasantly. "It is not my intention to harm thee, and thou need fear nothing. It is well."

Tucker wriggled more convulsively than ever.

"It is far from being well!" he declared. "It is certainly a relief to find that you are solid flesh and blood. But, at the same time, I must insist upon being released. How dare you handle me in this disgraceful fashion? How

dare you? Unless you release me on the instant, I shall be compelled to take disciplinary measures——"

"Thou art using wondrous words, my son!" interrupted the black man gravely. "I am acquainted with many strange and extraordinary words in thy bewildering language, but there are many which puzzle me mightily. Wau! Thou may rest upon the ground once more. Maphap you can tell me where it is possible to find N'Kose, my father?"

Tucker panted rather heavily, and attempted to straighten himself.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I must tell you, my dear sir, that you have upset me considerably—quite considerably. Exactly. As for knowing where your father is, I have never seen the gentleman!"

The black giant gave a rumbling chuckle.

"Thou art surely mistaken, fair youth," he said. "Thou hast not seen N'Kose, my father?"

"I've never heard of Kose, or whatever you call him!"

"I refer to He of the Shimmering Eye!" said the visitor gravely.

"He of the which?" gasped T. T.

"In thine own language my father is known as a great chief, passing under the name of Lord Dorrimore," said the black giant. "Maphap thou canst tell me——"

"Oh! Lord Dorrimore!" said Tucker, staring. "Dear, dear! I am absolutely staggered, my dear sir! I am positively bewildered! It is indeed astonishing to a degree that you should be a son of Lord Dorrimore!"

"Hallo! Who's the visitor?" asked Tommy Watson, strolling up to the gateway at that moment. "I don't admire his tailor, anyhow! Why, great Scotland Yard! It's—it's old Umlosi!"

Tommy Watson fairly jumped with excitement. He didn't rush up to Umlosi, but he turned round, and waved his arms as though he had suddenly gone crazy.

"Nipper!" he roared wildly. "Montie!"

Sir Montie Tregellis-West and I were chatting against the Ancient House steps—in fact, we were learning about the jape which had just been played upon Tucker, and we were duly grinning. But Tommy Watson's wild gyrations interrupted things, and attracted our attention.

"What's up with him" asked Pitt curiously.

"Begad! I think the dear fellow must have been stung by a wasp!" remarked Sir Montie.

"Nipper!" roared Watson again. "Come here—quick! Umlosi's arrived!—he's here! Come and give him a yell!"

"Umlosi!" I gasped. "Oh, great!" I streaked across the Triangle, with Montie and a host of other juniors after me. I arrived at the gateway, and fairly hurled myself at the king of Kutana-land—Umlosi, the great warrior.

"Wau! It is indeed wondrous to see thee again, O Nimble One!" exclaimed Umlosi, grasping me, and squeezing my shoulders until I nearly winced. "How art thou, my brave son? It is the great and glorious pleasure to see thy shining countenance once again. I greet thee, Manzie!"

"Good old Umlosi!" I said heartily. "Welcome to St. Frank's!"

"And thou, too, O noble youth of the glass eye!" said Umlosi, addressing Sir Montie. "And thou, whom thy brothers call Tommy—it is well to see thee so sprightly and alive. I am pleased, my young masters."

Umlosi was undoubtedly pleased to see us—just as we were delighted to see him. The other fellows crowded round, eager to hear the black giant talking. For he was indeed a distinguished guest at St. Frank's.

Umlosi was a native of Africa—a ringed man—a king in his own country, Kutana-land. He was the constant companion of Lord Dorrimore, when that famous explorer was in any part of Africa. He regarded Dorrie as some superior kind of being, and was his willing slave. The adventures they had passed through together would fill a dozen volumes.

"This is most astounding!" said Tucker, blinking. "Really, I fail to understand."

"What can't you understand?" I asked.

"I have seen Lord Dorrimore, and I respect him highly—notwithstanding the fact that he is a member of the bloated aristocracy!" said T. T. "I must admit that he is a gentleman, and a fine man. But it is wonderful that he should be the father of this enormous black man."

"The—the father?" I ejaculated.

"Exactly!"

"Dorrie is Umlosi's father?" I yelled.

"My dear sir, this black gentleman informed me so, at all events——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You—you ass!" I roared. "Umlosi always calls Dorrie his father—but that's merely a sign of respect. You must be dotty to think that Lord Dorrimore can have a son of this quality!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thou art joking at my expense, O Nimble One!" said Umlosi, his black face wrinkled into a smile. "No matter. I know thee well, O imp of mischief, and I forgive thee. Mayhap thou canst take me to N'Kose?"

"Yes, rather," I said. "This way, old man. You'll see Umtagati, too!"

"It is well!" said Umlosi. "I am almost as eager to see Umtagati the great wizard, as I am to see N'Kose. It is indeed well. Lead thou on, Manzie, and I will follow. This is a great day!"

We passed across the Triangle in a sort of triumphal procession, the Removites hanging round in crowds. When we got into the lobby the electric lights were blazing, and Umlosi's appearance caused everybody to grin hugely.

His white drill suit was much too small for him, and it seemed perilously near to the point of bursting in several quarters. He had evidently failed to have his suit made to measure. Clothing of any sort was a bore to Umlosi—but convention compelled him to attire himself fully when living in England. A panama hat was stuck at the back of his head, and a flaring green tie adorned his neck. He had apparently quite overlooked such an unimportant detail as a collar.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bell. "Who's this awful looking tramp?"

"Goodness knows!" said Gulliver, standing in front of Umlosi, and eyeing him with elaborate and well calculated insolence. "Awful bounder!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood pushed forward.

"Shockin' bad form—that's what I call it!" he said sneeringly. "It's a bit thick if we've got to have dirty niggers in the school!"

"Dry up, Fullwood, you cad!" I said sharply.

"Rats! I'm goin' to say what I like."

Fullwood and Co. were determined to act up to their reputations—they were cads of the first water, and nothing would alter their characters. It pleased them to insult Umlosi because he was black.

"Be thou silent, O youth of the big mouth!" rumbled Umlosi. "It is not my way to overlook insults; but I will forgive thee on account of thy small years. Thou art unaware of thy words."

Fullwood grinned.

"Oh, am I?" he sneered. "Don't you believe it! I'm goin' to make a protest to the Head. I don't see that we should be compelled to stand a nigger bein' planted on us! We drew the line at niggers in this school! My people would faint on the spot if they knew that I was compelled to rub shoulders with a bally negro!"

The words themselves were not only insulting, but the tone in which they were uttered was ten times more so. Fullwood spoke with withering scorn and contempt, and Umlosi stood quite still. He showed all his perfect white teeth in a smile.

"My memory serves me well, I believe," he said. "Thou art the youth who spoke the words of insult when I visited this noble kraal of learning many moons ago. Wau! Thou art in need of another lesson, it seems."

"You'd better not touch me, you dirty nigger!" said Fullwood sourly. "I'll jolly soon have you kicked out if — Why, look out! What the thunder — Lemme go, you black rotter!"

But Fullwood had asked for trouble, and he was finding it. Umlosi suddenly shot out one brawny arm. His fingers caught hold of Fullwood's coat, and the next moment the cad of the Remove was lifted up as though he were a feather.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serves the cad right!"

"Duck him in the fountain, Umlosi!"

"Make him apologise!"

Umlosi held Fullwood aloft. The cad's struggles were absolutely futile, and comical to watch. He kicked, he wriggled, and he yelled. But Umlosi held him at arm's length with apparently no effort—just as a man will hold a struggling puppy.

"Wau! Thou art in need of a lesson, O youth of the insulting tongue!" said Umlosi gravely. "Methinks thou would be better out of harm's way!"

He lifted Fullwood still higher, and calmly and deliberately hooked him on to a great stake which projected from the wall fully eight feet from the floor. The ease with which he accomplished this feat—with one hand was irresistably funny. Fullwood's efforts were insect-like in their futility.

"So! Mayhap that will please thee!" rumbled Umlosi, standing back and surveying Fullwood with grave pleasure. "Thou hast surely nothing to grumble at, O thou of insults, for art thou not in an exalted position?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do the same to those other cads, Umlosi!"

"Hear, hear!"

But Gulliver and Bell had mysteriously disappeared. Fullwood yelled and struggled and kicked. But he was firmly hooked up by the thick material of his Eton jacket, and his struggles were useless.

"Let me down!" he roared frantically. "I'm not going to stand this treatment——"

"You're hanging it—not standing it!" grinned Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Umlosi passed on, smiling all over his black face, and I directed him to Nelson Lee's study. Lord Dorrimore was at St. Frank's already, and he had informed us that Umlosi would be coming down later, but we had not expected him until the morrow.

I tapped upon Nelson Lee's door, and entered.

"A visitor, guv'nor," I grinned.

Umlosi stalked in, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore jumped to their feet. Dorrie stared for a moment, and then grinned.

"You black chunk of Silkstone!" he said severely. "What's the meanin' of this? Who told you to find your way down here to-day? I was comin' up to town to-morrow to fetch you——"

"It is even as thou sayest, N'Kose," said Umlosi, shaking his head. "But I grew weary of waiting. I was bewildered by the great noises and bustle of thy vast city. So I entered upon the wondrous kraal that moves with the speed of lightning, and came hither, to seek thee."

"You old bounder!" said Dorrie. "By the 'kraal that moves with the speed of lightning' I suppose you mean the train? How the dooce you managed to get down here without killin' yourself fairly beats me. Didn't you fall out of the train? Didn't you push the engine off the rails? Didn't you murder a few of the railway officials? Some of 'em could do with a sudden an' gory death, by the way!"

"Thou art pleased to be humorous,

my father" said Umlosi. "I will admit that I left the moving kraal before the time, thinking I had arrived at the station, as thou callest it. Wau! I fell with many bumps, and there was much excitement. However, I am unhurt, save for one or two bruises in spots which may not be mentioned!"

"There you are!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I knew he couldn't get down here without falling out of the train!"

"It is splendid to see thee again, Umtagati, my master," exclaimed Umlosi, shaking Nelson Lee's hand. "I am with my honoured friends, and I forget my worries. I long to be back in the great forests; but I fear that the time is far distant ere I shall have my wish granted."

"We don't know, old friend," said Nelson Lee. "It's quite possible that we shall be in the forest sooner than you imagine. It all depends upon the plans of N'Kose. We shall see."

"It is well," rumbled Umlosi. "I await the time with patience."

Meanwhile, Ralph Leslie Fullwood had succeeded in reaching the floor once more—with the assistance of Gulliver and Bell. The other juniors preferred to see him hanging up, and would not lend a hand. Fullwood was simply furious, and his face was red with hot anger as he strode into Study A1.

"The black beast!" he snapped. "I'm not goin' to stand that treatment, I can tell you. No jolly fear!"

"You can't do anything else," said Gulliver. "After all, you asked for it, you know. You did sauce the black rotter——"

"I don't see why we should have niggers mixin' with us!" said Fullwood hotly. "What's more, I'm going to get up a protest!"

"A which?" asked Bell.

"I'm goin' to get a lot of chaps to sign a bally petition!" declared Fullwood. "I'm goin' to do it now! Somethin' after this style. 'We, the undersigned, strongly protest against the presence at St. Frank's of a nigger, an' we demand that he shall be removed within two hours.' That's the style of thing!"

"You ass!" said Gulliver. "The Head wouldn't like it."

"I don't care what the Head likes," said Fullwood. "We've got a right to protest if we want to! St. Frank's is a

school for the sons of gentlemen, an' we ain't supposed to mix with beastly negroes! If the Head doesn't take any notice of the petition, we'll put it before the board of governors!"

"Draw it mild!"

"But he will take notice of it—he'll be forced to," went on Fullwood unpleasantly. "He can't do anythin' else. When he finds that we're determined, he'll give instructions for that black beast to travel!"

Fullwood sat down at the table, and soon drafted the petition. Then he signed it with a flourish, and held out the pen to Gulliver.

"You next!" he said.

"Look here!" said Gulliver. "I'm not sure that this blessed thing's any good! We might get into trouble——"

"Don't be a dashed fool!" snapped Fullwood. "Half the Remove will sign this thing, an' we can't all be punished! Besides, the Head wouldn't dare to punish us. He knows jolly well that we've got every reason to protest."

"Hear, hear!" said Bell. "I'm beginnin' to think you're right, Fully."

"I know I'm right!"

Bell put his signature down, and Gulliver followed suit. Then the cads of the Remove took their precious document out, and hawked it up and down the junior studies, appealing for signatures.

The venture was not an entire success.

Fullwood went into Study D to begin with. Handforth and Co. read the petition, hurled it into the passage, and hurled Fullwood after it. The door slammed, and Fullwood picked himself up, somewhat dazed.

"Best give it up!" advised Gulliver wisely.

"You—you idiot!" snarled Fullwood, jumping to his feet. "I'll make those cads pay for this! I can't stop now!"

He entered other studies, and, although he was not treated as drastically as Handforth had treated him, his mission was not an unqualified success. As a matter of fact, it was a dismal failure.

For some unearthly reason the Remove did not seem anxious to get rid of Umlosi, and Fullwood was quite surprised. He had more insulting names hurled at him during that half-hour than he had had during the whole previous month.

However, he obtained a certain number of signatures.

Merrell and Noys and Marriott, for example, signed the petition. Teddy Long added his scrawl, and one or two other Removites—meek fellows—were forced to sign. They did so under threat of dire consequences if they refused.

At last, Fullwood gave it up.

"Well, we've got a good few, anyhow," he said. "There are a dozen names here—quite sufficient to let the Head know the sort of feelin' there is in the Remove. I'm goin' to take it to him at once, an' demand that Umlosi should leave the school to-night. We bar niggers!"

"I'm not sure that it's advisable——"

Fullwood did not listen to good advice. He had the idea in his mind that Umlosi was a common black ruffian, and he was too obtuse to realise that most of the other juniors held different views. Astute enough in most things, Fullwood failed to see that his precious petition was not likely to succeed. He was so vindictive against Umlosi that he marched straight to the Head, confident of success.

Tap!

"Come in!" came the voice of Dr. Stafford.

Fullwood had reached the Head's study, and he entered it in response to the Head's invitation. Dr. Stafford was sitting at his desk, with the receiver of the private school telephone to his ear.

"What do you want, Fullwood?" he asked.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" asked the junior. "It's important."

The Head nodded.

"Just one moment, Mr. Lee," he said into the instrument. "Now, Fullwood, what is it you require? I must request you to make haste."

Fullwood was full of confidence.

"I just want to put this petition before you, sir," he said firmly.

He placed the document before the Headmaster. Dr. Stafford adjusted his glasses, picked up the sheet of paper, and examined it. He read it through twice apparently, and then looked up.

"H'm! This is quite interesting, Fullwood," he said.

"I'm glad you think that, sir."

"Judging from the fact that your signature is at the top, I gather that you are the author of this concoction?" went on Dr. Stafford. "Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"You originated the petition?"

"I did, sir," said Fullwood. "I think—a lot of the chaps think—that it's a bit too thick to have a rotten nigger in our midst. It's not fair to the chaps. St. Frank's is a school for gentlemen—"

"It is, at least, a recognised fact that this school is intended for the sons of gentlemen," interrupted the Headmaster. "I am greatly pained to discover, Fullwood, that you are an unmitigated young cad."

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Fullwood blankly.

"It is difficult for me to imagine that you have had the astounding audacity to bring such a document as this into my presence," went on the Head grimly. "I am more than amazed, Fullwood, and I can only imagine—"

"But—but—sir—"

"Silence! Do not interrupt me, boy!" ordered the Head. "You talk in this document of being a gentleman, and you protest against the presence of Umlosi as my guest. You appear to overlook the fact that Umlosi is one of nature's real gentlemen in spite of his colour. He is a king in his own country—a great chief ruling over an important tract of territory. In writing this petition, Fullwood, you have shown yourself to be utterly lacking in the instincts of a gentleman. I cannot, under any circumstances, overlook such behaviour."

Fullwood was staggered.

"But—but you don't understand, sir!" he panted. "This—this black chap is a nigger—a beastly savage—a cannibal! It ain't right that we should have to rub shoulders with such a chap at St. Frank's!"

"After the words I have just uttered, Fullwood, I am more than surprised that you should make such a remark," said the Head, rising to his feet. "It is apparently of little use talking to you, so I will adopt other measures."

He seized a cane and swished it through the air.

"Hold out your hand!" he commanded sternly.

Fullwood backed away.

"Look here, sir, I—I—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the Head.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

"Ow—yow!" howled Fullwood wildly.

"Oh, by gad! Yaroooh!"

"If you continue to make those absurd noises, Fullwood, I will punish you more severely," snapped the Head.

"You will understand that Lord Dorrimore is my honoured guest, and any friend of Lord Dorrimore's is my friend also. If I learn that you have been using insulting language against Umlosi, I will flog you before the whole school!"

Fullwood backed away, his hands hot and tingling, his brow sullen.

"What about the other fellows, sir?" he asked. "They signed, too."

The Head nodded.

"Quite so, Fullwood," he agreed. "I have caned you for being insolent to my face. You will write me five hundred lines for having the unparalleled audacity to sign this impudent effusion. Every other signatory will also write me five hundred lines. I shall instruct your Form-master, Mr. Heath, to see that they are done. You may go."

"Yes, sir!" muttered Fullwood thickly.

He went out of the Head's study, boiling with rage, and racked with pain. At the end of the passage he met Gulliver and Bell. They regarded him curiously, and did not seem very surprised to note his condition.

"So it didn't work?" asked Bell.

"The old fool!" muttered Fullwood savagely. "He jawed at me for ten solid minutes—called me a cad, and goodness knows what else, an' then swished me like the very deuce! Confound him!"

"Well, I was rather doubtful about it from the first," said Gulliver.

"Don't crow, you rotter," snapped Fullwood. "Swishin' me wasn't enough. The Head gave me five hundred rotten lines."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Funny, ain't it?" snarled Fullwood.

"Rather!" grinned Gulliver. "I had an idea—"

"You won't grin for long!" interrupted Fullwood, with relish. "It may interest you to know that you've got to do five hundred lines, too—both of you!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Five hundred lines each!" said Fullwood savagely.

"But what the thunder for?" demanded Gulliver, looking fierce.

"We've done nothing! Of all the rotten nerve——"

"We won't do any lines," declared Bell.

"Won't you? Mr. Heath will see about that," said Fullwood. "The Head's going to tell Heath to see that we turn in the lines—every fellow who signed that petition has got the same punishment!"

Gulliver looked furious.

"Well, of all the rotten tricks!" he exclaimed hotly. "You make us sign that beastly thing, and then you land us into this cart!"

"I couldn't help the Head givin' you lines, could I?"

"You could have told the old rotter that we weren't to blame," snapped Gulliver. "You ought to have taken all responsibility on to your own shoulders, an' then everythin' would have been all right."

"Oh, don't howl!" sneered Fullwood.

He walked away, and Gulliver and Bell gazed after him with feelings that could not be expressed in mere words.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMTE DE PLESSIGNY AGAIN.

UMLOSI was enormously popular with the majority of the fellows, and the next day he enjoyed himself tremendously. He went all over the school, escorted by willing guides. He tried his hand at cricket, and caused shrieks of laughter.

The fellows merely regarded this visit in a humorous light; but I knew better. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi were not at St. Frank's just for the fun of the thing. Dorrie had come with a specific object in view.

The summer holidays were near, and I had a pretty shrewd idea that Dorrie was thinking about some special trip. However, I consumed my impatience and waited until his lordship was ready to reveal his little secret.

Meanwhile, the affairs of Mr. Clement Heath, the master of the Remove, were

reaching a head. Mr. Heath was quite a decent chap, and he was very popular in the Remove. He had been having some strange adventures of late.

His real name, of course, was Arthur Kirby, and he was the brother-in-law of the one and only Edward Oswald Handforth; but nobody in the school knew this, except Handforth and Co. themselves.

Handy's sister, Edith, had run away with Kirby and they had got married. Owing to the fact that undermasters were not allowed to be married, Mr. Kirby had installed her in a little cottage at Edgemore, and was himself using the name of Heath.

Handforth, more by blundering than anything else, had discovered this secret, and, of course, he and his chums were keeping it mum. Occasionally they ventured to take tea at the cottage with Edith.

But Mr. Heath had another secret—a secret which Handforth knew very little about. This concerned Mr. Heath's dealings with the Comte de Plessigny. Much to Mr. Heath's satisfaction, the affair seemed to be over.

While the juniors were interested in the doings of Umlosi, Mr. Heath made his way to Greyhurst Cottage, in Edgemore, to have tea with his young wife. He arrived somewhat warm, for the day was baking.

Edith was looking very charming in a white silk afternoon gown, and nobody would have believed that she was Handforth's sister. Handforth was big, clumsy, and rugged of countenance. Edith was small, dainty, and extremely pretty.

"Well, dear, I've finished with that infernal count—thank goodness!" remarked Mr. Heath, as he sipped his tea.

"Oh, yes, Arthur," said Edith. "I want to hear all about it."

"But I told you——"

"Not properly," said the girl. "I want to know everything."

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better tell you the whole yarn," smiled Mr. Heath.

"As you know, the trouble started about that diamond I found in the wood. It was worth about thirty thousand pounds, and I thought we were on velvet. I took it to the count and he promised to have it cut and polished. Then he discovered that the diamond was stolen property——"

"But I know all this, you silly!"

"Well, you wanted to hear everything, so I'm telling it," said Heath, helping himself to a tea-cake. "The count discovered that the diamond was stolen—actually, the property of the Marquis of Layham. This was a bit of a shock, but I learned that there was a reward of five thousand pounds offered for any information leading to the recovery of the stone. It was even impossible to claim this, because the diamond had already been tampered with, and the count told me that if I went to the police I should be arrested, or something equally pleasant."

"It's all a puzzle to me," confessed Edith.

"Well, I don't expect you to fully understand," said Mr. Heath calmly. "Still, I'm on the subject, so I'll finish. Finally, the count told me that he wanted some information about Lord Dorrimore—in short, he wanted me to act as a spy; and, if I refused, he threatened to tell the police and have me arrested."

"That was perfectly horrid of him," declared Edith firmly.

"It was villainous," said Mr. Heath. "That's the only word to describe such conduct. He succeeded in unnerving me at the time, and I was mad enough to obey his instructions. But, fortunately, the information I gave him was absolutely useless—simply because Nelson Lee discovered what I was doing, and actually caught me red-handed in the act of eavesdropping."

"Oh, that was terrible!" said Edith, looking worried.

"I felt an utter cad; I felt that I should never be able to look a gentleman in the face again!" said Mr. Heath. "But Mr. Lee is a splendid man. After I had told him everything he sympathised with me and excused my conduct. He realised that I had been forced and he told me to ignore the count."

"And instead of that you went to the count's house, and had an awful quarrel!" said Handforth's sister severely. "That was silly of you, Arthur."

"Silly! Of course it was silly," said Mr. Heath. "But I was so enraged that I hardly knew what I was doing. The count had me thrown off his premises, but your young brother and his chums lent me a hand in the nick

of time. I'll never see that infernal rascal again. I've finished with him for good."

"And all our dreams have fallen to pieces—like most dreams," said Edith, with a little sigh. "You had made me so hopeful, Arthur; but, of course, we were very foolish to build such castles in the air."

Mr. Heath smiled ruefully.

"I suppose we were," he confessed. "But now that we know everything, it's quite impossible for us to think of having that five thousand pounds reward. You see, little girl, I didn't really find the diamond—it was only planted there for a purpose. In any case, the count has got the diamond, so we may as well dismiss him from our thoughts."

Edith sighed again.

"Yes, that's right," she said slowly. "Oh, but I know everything will be all right, Arthur. And I'm ever so much happier because we shall never be troubled with the count again—Oh, I wonder who that can be?"

A knock had sounded upon the front door, and a few moments later old Mrs. Miggs, the housekeeper, entered the comfortable sitting-room.

"There's a gentleman to see you, sir," she announced.

She handed Mr. Heath a card, and the Remove master glanced at it rather curiously. Then he started, looked at the card again, and uttered a low exclamation.

"What is it, Arthur?" asked Edith quickly.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Mr. Heath. "This is the last thing I expected!"

"Who is it, dear?"

Mr. Heath handed the card across the table.

"The Comte de Plessigny," he replied grimly.

"Oh!"

The girl took the card and regarded it wondering. Then she looked up at her husband's firm, frowning face.

"Please, Arthur, don't be hasty!" she exclaimed. "I don't want you to—"

"It's all right, Edith—don't get excited," said Mr. Heath. "I feel like taking the count by the scruff of his neck and pitching him into the road. But I sha'n't do that. I'll let him come

in, and I'll talk to him quietly. Of all the confounded impudence!"

The Remove master was furious, but he held himself in check. It was the limit in effrontery for the comte to come here now—after what had happened. Mr. Heath knew that he could not make a scene in Edgemore, and so he remained calm.

"Please ask the gentleman to come in, Mrs. Miggs," he said quietly.

The old housekeeper left the room, and almost immediately afterwards ushered the Comte de Plessigny in. He was looking the same as ever—neat, scrupulously attired, and immaculate to a degree. His monocle was in his eye, and he was smiling with all his old charming geniality.

"I am grateful, my dear young friend," he said, extending his hand to Mr. Heath. "I thank you for your kindness in admitting me."

Mr. Heath ignored the proffered hand.

"What do you want?" he asked bluntly.

"So? You are offended with me?" asked the count. "I understand—and I am not angry. It is a pity. And this delightful young lady is your wife? I am most charmed to meet—"

"Look here, Plessigny, I don't want you to pass any remarks concerning my wife," interjected Mr. Heath coldly. "In fact, there is no time for pleasantries of any kind. What is your business here? I'll tell you plainly that I think you are a scoundrel, and I don't want you in my house!"

The comte smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are frank, my dear sir—you are delightfully candid," he murmured.

"So. It is all to the good. Perhaps, when I have finished, you will be rather more moderate in your tone. I hope so sincerely."

"Why have you come here?" demanded Mr. Heath.

"Well, in the first place, I wish to offer you a humble and complete apology," said the comte smoothly. "I realise that I have treated you badly—even worse than that—and I am hoping that you will be able to forgive me."

"It is rather too late for this sort of thing," said Mr. Heath.

"Dear me! I hope not. I earnestly trust that you will accept my apology," said Plessigny, his expression full of con-

cern and trouble. "Listen. I will explain. I took advantage of you in a manner which, I suppose, was rascally and unprincipled. I have realised that I acted like a scoundrel."

Mr. Heath nodded.

"I am glad you know that," he said coldly.

"I do know it, my dear young friend—I do know it," declared the count.

"Furthermore, I have been seeing the whole matter in a different light. I have had the truth brought to me. I blackmailed you. I forced you to undertake work which was distasteful to you, and which would be distasteful to any gentleman. I am deeply sorry Mr. Heath. You were right to refuse to spy upon Lord Dorrimore—you acted with perfectly honourable—"

"I fail to see what you are driving at," interrupted the Remove-master.

"Am I so involved?" said the comte.

"I am attempting to explain. I will be more straightforward. My young friend, I have come to the conclusion that you are brave and faithful to your own instinct to refuse to undertake the task I set you. You were fully justified in your anger and in your refusal to carry out my instructions. I admire you exceedingly for your courage."

"That's very nice of you," said Mr. Heath.

"I see you are still angry with me!" exclaimed the count regretfully. "It is a pity—yet I do not blame you. A man who has acted wrongly is never trusted. You do not trust me. I am sorry. I admire you for your determination—for your pluck. You were right from the very start, and I beg that you will forgive me for my own misguided actions. Please believe me when I say that I am torn with trouble and anxiety concerning this hateful affair. Can you not forget it—can you not overlook my wickedness? I am deeply sorry for what has happened."

Mr. Heath glanced at Edith, and she smiled at him. It was clear to see that the girl had already granted the count's request. She had forgiven him. And Mr. Heath had great difficulty in remaining cold.

Plessigny's voice was so charming, his expressions of regret so sincere and deep, that it was impossible to turn a deaf ear to his appeal. His whole attitude was one of humiliation and sorrow.

"I appreciate this action on your part,

of course," admitted Mr. Heath. "I am glad that you have come, sir. Certainly, I forgive you; I cannot very well do anything else, since you have expressed such earnest regret."

The comte rubbed his hands together. "Splendid—splendid!" he exclaimed. "Ah, my dear friend, you have delighted me! You have lifted a weight from my mind. You forgive me! So! It is well—it is glorious. And now I come to a more pleasant subject. I wish to prove to you that I am indeed grateful for your kindness. I wish to make full reparation—to show that I am not a mere talker."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Heath.

"Ah! I will explain," smiled the comte. "I have done you an injury—not physically, perhaps. Nevertheless, I have injured your honour, in your own eyes. I have been forgiven, but now I wish to convince you of my sincerity—of my heartfelt gratitude. I am rich, you are—well, I do not wish to be indelicate, but I am afraid you do not possess many of this world's good things—"

"If you are suggesting that I should accept money from you, sir, I am afraid you are wasting your breath," interrupted Mr. Heath firmly.

"I am sorry. I was thinking of offering you a little present—a matter of a mere thousand pounds," said the comte gently. "You will accept. So? You will do me this great honour?"

The Remove-master shook his head.

"I cannot accept money from you, sir," he said. "I appreciate your kindness, and I am beginning to see you are honestly sorry for your previous behaviour. At the same time I cannot accept money. You have apologised, and I have accepted that apology. It is sufficient."

"No, no! Oh, no!" said the comte quickly. "It is not sufficient. My dear sir, I must offer you something—a present of some other nature. You will allow me to buy something for you—"

"That, of course, is a different matter," said Mr. Heath. "At the same time, I beg of you not to spend a penny—not a farthing. I want nothing, sir. The whole matter is over and done with."

"One moment," said Plessigny, with a little chuckle. "Ah! A wonderful idea! A really splendid idea! You

will accept a little present if it costs me nothing? Yes? Of course! I will give you the Layham diamond—"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Heath, with a start.

"I will give you the diamond—"

"But it is stolen property!"

"Yes, yes—to be sure!" smiled the comte. "I am not suggesting that you should be dishonest—I know you too well to do anything of that nature. But there is a reward offered—five thousand pounds. You will claim that money."

"I don't quite see how you can suggest that," said Mr. Heath. "The diamond has been tampered with—"

"Tut-tut! It is nothing!" declared Plessigny. "I have made it right—I have planned everything. So. At nine o'clock this evening there will be two detectives from Scotland Yard in Bannington. They will bring the reward with them—they will pay it to you. I have arranged it. I originally intended to meet these gentlemen personally, and fixed the time and place. But you will be able to go in my stead—it will make no difference."

"It is really too much—"

"Nonsense," interrupted the count, waving his hand. "I am only too eager to do some slight service in return for my further questionable conduct. I wish to make some reparation. In this manner I can do so. You have merely to be in the smoking-room of the Grapes Hotel at nine o'clock precisely—that is all."

"How will these officials know me?"

"Oh, that is a mere detail," said Plessigny. "The smoking-room is generally quiet at that time, and you will easily recognise the two strangers when they appear. There can be no mistake—and there will be no questions asked. You will simply hand over the diamond, and you will receive the reward. It is simple—it is child's play. You will accept? You will honour me?"

Mr. Heath smiled.

"Since you put it that way, sir, I can scarcely do anything else," he replied. "Yes. I will certainly accept this offer of yours."

The comte jumped up and grasped Mr. Heath's hand.

"Thank you—thank you exceedingly," he exclaimed, with wonderful warmth. "I shall feel now that I have discharged

my debt. The diamond? Yes, yes, of course! It is here! I have it with me."

He produced a little leather case, opened it, and revealed a white bundle of cotton wool. From this he extracted the magnificent Layham diamond—a wonderful stone of glorious purity, without a flaw, and as large as a plover's egg.

"Isn't it splendid!" exclaimed Edith, in spite of herself.

"That stone is worth a fortune," declared the comte. "It's intrinsic value is perhaps thirty thousand pounds—but the Marquis of Layham values it at a much larger figure. It is yours, Mr. Heath, to deliver to the police. I know that I can trust it in your keeping—and I am delighted with your broad-minded view. You have honoured me more than I can say, and my gratitude cannot be expressed."

He prepared to depart, and it was easy to see that he was quite delighted. A few minutes later he had gone, and Mr. Heath and Edith were left alone with the Layham diamond. It really seemed that the Comte de Plessigny had turned out trumps.

But would everything turn out all right?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SON OF HIS FATHER.

"I'll race you!" yelled Chubby Heath, of the Third.

"Rats! I'll be in hours before you," roared Owen minor.

The two fags had just left the dressing-sheds, and they raced towards the river bank at full speed.

Splash! Splash!

Owen minor was in the water a shade before his companion, and they struck out with much commotion. The fags generally enjoyed themselves in the water when the weather was amenable—and this evening the air was mild, and the sun was shining with full glory. Bathing was a necessity; in order to keep cool.

Chubby Heath and Owen minor were good swimmers, and they were soon having an impromptu race down the stream. Their objective was a small boat which had just pushed out from the landing stage. It contained Lemon and

Dicky Jones, of the Third. The pair were attired in swimming costumes, although they hadn't been in the water up till now. The other two fags raced neck and neck.

"Yah! I'll whack you hollow!" gasped Owen, as he swam.

"Will you?" spluttered Heath. "You wait, you boasting bounder!"

They forged on with renewed efforts, and Chubby Heath succeeded in grabbing hold of the boat a fraction of a second before Owen could do so.

"Whacked you!" he roared triumphantly.

"You—you ass!" gasped Owen. "My foot got caught in some reeds——"

"Rot! I beat you fairly!"

The two Third-Formers were on the point of having a wrestle in the water—at least, Owen minor was inclined to be somewhat warlike. He grabbed his chum, and Heath grabbed the boat.

The result was disastrous.

"Look out, you silly asses!" howled Lemon wildly.

"You'll pitch us out if you ain't careful!" shrieked Jones.

They were unable to say any more. For Heath was rocking the boat to such an extent that it was impossible for the two fags to keep their feet. One after another they pitched into the water.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Owen minor.

Dicky Jones could swim well, but Lemon was not quite so expert. In fact, he had been rather backward in swimming until just recently. He now considered himself to be as good as any other fellow, and was inclined to be overconfident.

He could certainly swim, but the one thing he lacked was endurance. He was quite good for a short period, and in a sharp spurt he was probably capable of beating even Owen minor himself.

And because he had given several displays of this speed, Lemon had an idea that he was the best swimmer in the Third. This was totally wrong. He had only swam in shallow water, and had always had a crowd of other swimmers near him.

This evening he felt somewhat venturesome, and he struck off down the stream at full speed—just to show off. He wanted to make the other fags realise his superiority. He simply shot down stream with the current.

"My hat!" exclaimed Heath.

"Lemon's going it!"

"The silly ass!" exclaimed Owen, frowning.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, he's going straight down to the pool," said Owen. "I warned him about it before. It looks lovely on a calm evening like this—but it's jolly dangerous, except to strong swimmers."

"Oh, Juicy can swim all right," said Jones.

"Well, I don't like it," replied Owen.

"Hi, Lemon! Come back, you ass."

But Lemon took no notice. Probably he didn't hear. At all events, he kept straight on, swimming towards a wide part of the river, where the water was clear and deep. It looked quite peaceful and safe.

But it wasn't.

Even I had felt the strong tug of the current at this particular spot. And I was easily recognised as the second best swimmer in the Remove.

Of course, the best swimmer was Tom Burton. He was, in fact, the fastest swimmer in the whole school—and the cleverest. There wasn't a fellow to touch him.

The Pool was very deceptive. The water was clear and perfectly still, and nobody would have dreamed that there was any danger. But just at that point there was a very strong undercurrent—a current which pulled a fellow down, in spite of all his efforts. And the water was so deep that some of the superstitious villagers declared that there was no bottom.

This was sheer twaddle, but I knew well enough that the river bed was a long way down. If once a fellow got into difficulties at that spot, and help did not happen to be at hand, it was a serious business.

"I don't like that silly young ass going down to the Pool," said Owen, looking worried. "There's a rotten current—"

"Oh, rats!" said Heath. "He can swim rippingly."

"For short distances—yes," said Owen minor. "But he'll be pretty well fagged out by the time he gets there, and when he turns to come back he'll find the current too much for him."

"Well, let's swim down to him," said Jones.

Owen minor shook his head.

"Not me!" he said decidedly. "I'm not a funk, or anything of that sort, but the Pool's too good for me. I wouldn't risk it. I don't want to get drowned, I can tell you. And you chaps had better not go, either."

"Oh, he'll be all right," said Heath. "He knows the danger as well as we do, and he won't be ass enough to swim in the dangerous part."

But Lemon was feeling particularly reckless, and he swam vigorously, feeling fit for anything. He felt in the mood to swim over the Channel just then. Nothing was too difficult for him.

He felt a supreme contempt for the Pool, and grinned as he struck out for that particular portion of the river. He would prove to all the other fags that he was better than the best of them.

Afraid of the Pool? What rot!

There was nobody there at the moment—not anybody on the towing path, even. The other Third Formers were far behind, up in the safe part of the river. Some of them had decided to fetch the boat, and row down—in case Lemon got into trouble.

But the boat had drifted into the reeds, and the fags had some difficulty in getting it out. In any case, they would not be able to get down the river in time to render any assistance, if Lemon found himself in danger.

They were too far away.

Lemon realised this, but not from any thought of possible danger. He simply wanted an audience. He wanted the other fags to know that he had swum right across the treacherous Pool, and that he was such a good swimmer that the current had no effect upon him.

He was in the Pool now, and he revelled in it. The water was delightfully cool and refreshing. Willow trees overhung the stream, and a more peaceful spot could scarcely be imagined.

Just a little further down the river was narrower and the current faster, but quite safe.

It was in this smooth, placid-looking spot that the danger existed.

And the foolhardy junior soon found this out.

He was right in the centre of the river, and it was his intention to swim further down, turn back, and cross the Pool once more on his way back. He succeeded in getting over the danger zone quite

easily, and scarcely knew that there was any possibility of a fellow being dragged under at that spot.

He turned just where he had intended, full of triumph and confidence, and struck up stream vigorously. But his stroke did not contain that energy which it had done five minutes earlier. His big spurt had taken some of the strength out of him, and now that he found himself fighting against the current he had a different proposition to deal with. It came to him as a surprise.

It often happens that a fellow is out for a cycle spin, and he romps along beautifully—until he turns back for the homeward journey, and discovers that he has a strong wind against him. He failed to realise that the wind was all in his favour on the outward trip. Thus the return journey is trebly hard.

It was just the same with Lemon.

He turned back, feeling quite fit to swim for ever. Then he felt the tug of the current. He discovered that it was necessary to strike out with all his strength in order to make any headway.

On the top of this, he was rather fagged—more fagged than he would like to admit. He did not fully realise that he was attempting a task which was far too heavy for his powers.

And then, as he entered the Pool, he felt the undercurrent. He felt something tugging at his feet—something intangible, which appeared to be pulling him down into the dark, mysterious depths.

For the first time, Lemon's confidence failed him.

The banks seemed to be miles off, instead of within an arm's reach. His companions, high up the river, were in another world. Two minutes earlier they had been close at hand. The fag felt that he was isolated—alone—almost helpless.

He did not give way to panic, but it came to him that the task of swimming up the river again was too much for him, and he wisely decided to give it up. So he struck out as strongly as possible for the bank.

But he was too late!

Even as he swam, he felt on the verge of collapsing. He had used his strength, and he was incapable of swimming with sufficient energy to carry him through that deadly current. His feet sagged lower, and he made no headway.

The current was pulling him down—pulling him into the depths!

He realised, with a gasp of horror, that, in spite of all his efforts, he remained in the centre of the stream. He was simply splashing about, and not approaching the bank at all.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped the fag.

He gazed round wildly, and knew that help was far distant.

With a feeling of sickening horror, he knew that the Pool was too much for him—he knew that he would never be able to get into safe water unaided. He would not be able to even reach the bank!

"Help!" he screamed wildly. "Help—help!"

His voice was shrill and high with terror—for, at last, he had given way to sheer panic. It was the worst possible thing he could have done, for he made no further attempt to swim steadily.

He splashed about wildly, and went under. Down he went, into the dark water. But only for a few moments. Struggling, kicking, fighting with all his waning strength, he came to the surface.

And he screamed—screamed piteously.

Then once again he went under the surface. The fact was, Lemon was on the verge of drowning. The other Third Formers, up the stream, faintly heard his scream, and they stared down towards the Pool in absolute horror.

They had only just got the boat freed, and they instinctively knew that it would be impossible for them to reach their Form-fellow before he went under for the last time. Nevertheless, they used every effort.

But other ears had heard that scream, too.

A Third Former was in the meadow, bordering the river. He was a youngster named Kerrigan—quite a mild, inoffensive kid. He generally kept to himself, and did not join in with the numerous japes and escapades for which Owen minor and Co. were famous.

Kerrigan heard that scream, and he looked up, rather startled.

He had been searching for a few specimens, for Kerrigan was a youthful naturalist, and he had quite a unique collection in his desk. He generally spent all his available time on fine days in roaming about the fields and woods.

But now all thoughts of specimen



"If you refuse to come with us, Mr. Heath, I shall be compelled to use handcuffs," said Detective-Inspector Watts.

hunting left him, and he ran swiftly to the river bank, just opposite the Pool.

At first he could see nothing, except a disturbance in mid-stream. He knew well enough that this spot was pretty dangerous, and he was not much of a swimmer himself. He would not even risk an ordinary swim up the safe part of the river, and he regarded the Pool as a truly terrible place.

"I thought I heard somebody yelling," he muttered. "I know I—"
"Oh, my hat!"

At that moment Lemon appeared. He came to the surface, splashing and kicking, but with weakened efforts. He saw the junior on the bank, and he gave a gasp of hope and relief. He waved his hand weakly.

"Help!" he gasped faintly. "Oh, help!"

Just for a moment Kerrigan's heart came into his mouth. He knew that it was courting disaster to enter the water at that spot; but he also knew that Lemon was drowning before his eyes. And there was nobody else near.

The fag did not hesitate.

Without even pausing to throw off his jacket, he dived straight into the water—or, to be more exact, he jumped. Then he struck out clumsily—awkwardly—for the centre of the Pool.

Handicapped by his clothing, it seemed that he would make no headway. But he did. Somehow or other, he forged towards the drowning junior. His action was one of the pluckiest it could be possible to imagine.

"Hold up!" he panted. "I'll be there in a jiff!"

Lemon, by sheer desperation, kept to the surface. Then, even as his strength was completely giving way, he felt a hand grasping his hair. He had used his last ounce of energy, and he simply became limp.

The other fag, already battling fiercely with the current, felt the dead weight of Lemon's form dragging him down. But Kerrigan set his teeth, and struck out for the bank. The boat, with several juniors in it, was still a long way off.

It was touch and go, and if help had not been quite near at hand, both Lemon and Kerrigan would have been drowned. The lad would have given his life in a plucky attempt to save the other.

But, suddenly, without any warning, a huge form came charging down the river bank. It was a black form, clothed

in white drill. Umlosi had seen the peril of the two juniors as he and Lord Dorrimore strolled along the towing-path. And Umlosi did not wait to ask any questions and make any comments.

He simply jumped into the river, gave about six enormous strokes, and reached the struggling pair.

"Have no fear, O young reckless swimmers!" he exclaimed. "You are safe now. It is well! Struggle not, and you will be safe."

"Oh, thank goodness!" said Kerrigan faintly.

It was amazing the way Umlosi handled the fags. The current had no effect upon him whatever. He was like a fish in the water, and, with a junior in each hand, he swam towards the bank, where Lord Dorrimore was waiting.

"Good man!" said Dorrie approvingly.

A moment later the two fags were lying on the grass in the sun, and Umlosi was shaking the water from himself as though he were a great dog.

"Steady on with that splashing!" said Dorrie. "You thunderin' idiot! You're simply ruinin' this suit of mine!"

"What is a mere suit of clothing compared to two young lives?" demanded Umlosi. "Wau! I am full of admiration for the child who is clothed. His bravery was even as the bravery of the great Kutana warriors."

"Yes, the kid's got plenty of pluck," agreed Dorrie. "The way he dived in was worth a fiver to see. Nobody could do that unless he had courageous blood in him. Well done, young 'un! You're made of the right stuff!"

Kerrigan sat up, looking somewhat dazed and pale.

"Is—is he all right?" he asked faintly.

"Of course he is!" laughed Dorrie. "Now then, you young scamp, sit up and look happy. You've got this brave chum of yours to thank for saving your life. If he hadn't lugged you up at that moment, Umlosi would have been too late."

Dorrie's last words, of course, were addressed to Lemon. The fag was just sitting up, quite unhurt, and only a little scared. He had probably swallowed some water, but it was quite pure, and would do him no harm.

"I—I thought I was drowning!" he muttered.

"An' so you were, my son," said Dorrie severely. "What the dooce do you mean by monkeyin' about in a dangerous spot like that?"

"I—I thought I could swim the Pool, sir!"

"Well, you shouldn't think these things," said Dorrie. "The best thing you can do is to look lively and take a run along the towing-path. By the time you get to the boathouse you'll be yourself again. And don't forget that you've to thank this youngster here for saving your life."

"Yes, I know it, sir," said Lemon huskily, turning to the other fag. "Kerrigan, you're a brick!"

"Oh, rot!" said Kerrigan. "I didn't do anything!"

"You silly ass! You lugged me out just as I was going down for the last time," said Lemon. "When we get dressed I'll give you my pocket-knife. It's a ripping thing, with five blades. I saved up for five weeks to get it, but I'll give it to you. You're absolutely a good 'un!"

Lemon ran off—somewhat unsteadily, but there was nothing really wrong with him. There was not the slightest fear of his catching cold, for he was glowing from his exertions, and the sun was still hot. Kerrigan stood with a pool of water forming round his feet; and he pulled out his watch, and gazed at it ruefully. There was even a suspicion of moisture round his eyes.

"It—it won't go any more now!" he exclaimed. "I only had it put right a week ago, too! Still, it can't be helped—"

"Don't you worry about the ticker, my son," grinned Dorrie. "I'll buy you a new one to-morrow—a better one than that."

"Oh, will you, sir?" said the fag eagerly. "Thanks awfully, sir! And I've got to thank Mr. Umlosi for pulling me out of the river."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "Mr. Umlosi, step forward!"

The black giant showed all his teeth in a grin.

"I need no thanks, O brave one of small years!" he said. "Thou art indeed possessed of much courage. I did nothing. For me the task for a trifle—there was no danger. Have I not swum in deadly currents—in treacherous rapids in shark-infested seas? This is nothing;

it is not to be mentioned. Wau! I have spoken!"

"Well, it was jolly decent of you, all the same," said Kerrigan. "I suppose I'd better go and change now. These togs are pretty well messed up."

"Don't you worry about togs," said Lord Dorrimore. "You can get another suit at any old time. But think of Umlosi! Where's he goin' to get another rig-out the size of this one? I'm afraid he'll be in a hole!"

"I'm very sorry!"

"That's all right, young 'un," said Dorrie calmly. "Umlosi doesn't care much about clothing. He'd rather be without any, if the truth must be told. By the way, what's your name, kid?"

"Kerrigan, sir."

"Kerrigan, eh!" said Dorrimore. "There was a famous explorer named Kerrigan. He died five or six years ago. You're lucky to be named the same as a fine man like that. Colonel Kerrigan was—"

"My father, sir," said the fag quietly. Lord Dorrimore became serious.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You are the son of Colonel Kerrigan?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Good!" said Dorrie. "I'm proud to meet you, sonny. As a matter of fact, I knew that Colonel Kerrigan was your father as soon as you spoke. I've been intending to rout you out ever since I came to St. Frank's. But I didn't expect to find you in this way. You're a true son of your father, lad!"

"I—I hope so, sir!" said the fag.

"An' what are your other names?"

"Stanley Livingstone, sir."

"Splendid! Two of the most renowned explorers, eh?" said his lordship. "Stanley Livingstone Kerrigan. It's a name to be proud of, my son. One of these days, perhaps, you'll be as famous as your father. I want you to tell me all sorts of things about your dad—"

"It is not for me to interrupt thee, N'Kose," said Umlosi. "But, methinks the lad will become ill unless he changes his clothing. Mayhap, thou hast forgotten his wet condition, and thou art keeping him talking—"

"Just like me!" said Lord Dorrimore. "You'd better get along, sonny. Rush indoors and change your things. I'll have a jaw with you later."

"Thank you, sir," said Kerrigan.

He ran off, and Dorrie looked after him thoughtfully.

"I'm jolly glad!" he said. "I'm jolly glad I met the kid in such a way. He's true grit—just like his father!"

CHAPTER V.

ON THE STROKE OF NINE.

MR. CLEMENT HEATH walked into the Grapes Hotel at exactly ten minutes to nine that same evening. It was still broad daylight, of course, and everything was dry and dusty and hot. The saloon was well filled with thirsty customers, but the clink of glasses and the hum of conversation did not attract the Remove-master.

He walked straight through to the smoking-room, and looked round.

"Good!" he muttered.

The apartment was quite empty, except for himself. One or two newspapers were lying about, and Mr. Heath seized one of these and seated himself upon a lounge. He glanced at the clock, and compared it with his watch.

"Well, I sha'n't have long to wait," he murmured.

He did not feel like reading, and, actually, he did not read at all. He merely held the newspaper in order to appear at his ease. He was thinking hard, and his thoughts were very busy.

He kept a constant watch upon the clock, and at last it pointed to the hour of nine. Still the smoking-room was empty, and Mr. Heath wondered if there was any truth in the count's promise that two detectives would arrive from Scotland Yard in order to take delivery of the Layham diamond.

Mr. Heath fingered it as it lay in his pocket. He was naturally eager to obtain possession of the five thousand pounds reward; but, at the same time, he felt one or two doubts.

Was the count playing squarely with him?

In any case, it was too late to think of withdrawing, and Mr. Heath knew that his only course was to sit tight until something happened. But the count had given the diamond into his charge, and that was certainly an evidence of good faith.

The door of the smoking-room opened, and two men entered. They were somewhat grim-looking men, although by no stretch of the imagination would one suppose them to be detectives.

One man was short and stout, and a grizzled moustache dropped down over the corners of his mouth. His companion was a fellow who looked like an assistant from a grocery shop. Both were attired in blue serge suits. One wore a bowler, and the other a soft felt.

But Mr. Heath knew at once that they were the men he wanted to see—detectives from Scotland Yard. These gentlemen by no means correspond with the popular conception of a detective. They are clever, and know their business well, but they don't look like sleuth hounds.

Mr. Heath rose to his feet, and the two men approached him. They seemed pleased that they were alone, and they lost no time in getting to the point.

"Excuse me, sir," said the stout man. "Is your name Heath?"

"Yes," said the Remove-master.

"Thank you," said the stout man. "I am Detective-Inspector Watts, of Scotland Yard. 'I may as well inform you at once that I hold a warrant for your arrest——'"

"A—a warrant for my arrest!" ejaculated Mr. Heath.

"Yes, and it is my duty to tell you that anything you may say is liable to be taken down and used as evidence against you," said Detective-inspector Watts, using the formal preliminary. "I should like you to come——"

"Wait a moment," interrupted Mr. Heath grimly. "You say you hold a warrant for my arrest?"

"I do."

"On what charge?"

"It's not necessary for us to enter into any discussion here," said the Scotland Yard man. "I should advise you to walk out of here quietly, and accompany us to the police-station. You want to avoid a fuss, and I want to avoid it. There's no necessity for the whole hotel to know our business. If you come quietly, the whole thing will be kept private."

"Yes, I quite understand that," said Mr. Heath. "But I want to know what the deuce you mean by holding a warrant for my arrest. I've done nothing——"

"Come, come!" said Watts. "This won't do, Mr. Heath. The charge

against you is one of blackmail and conspiracy——”

“Indeed!” interrupted Mr. Heath, remaining quite calm. “That’s very interesting. Blackmail—eh? I should be grateful for a few details. We might as well speak here—there’s nobody else in the smoking-room at the moment.”

“Just as you wish,” said the Yard man. “Bates, you’d better search this gentleman’s pockets at once——”

“One moment!” interjected the Remove master. “Why am I to be searched?”

“We suspect you having possession of the Layham diamond.”

“There’s no need to search me for that,” said Mr. Heath. “Here it is.”

He produced the stone, and handed it over. Detective-inspector Watts took it with some surprise, and examined it closely.

“You seem to be taking this pretty coolly, my friend,” he said. “I don’t exactly know what your game is, but I’d better warn you that we’re not inclined to stand any nonsense!”

“You won’t have to,” said Mr. Heath. “You’ve got that diamond, and I give you my word that I don’t intend to do anything foolish. At the same time, I must tell you that I’m perfectly innocent of the charge you prefer against me. Who have I been blackmailing? And what evidence have you got that I am guilty?”

“Quite sufficient evidence; I can assure you,” replied Watts grimly. “Do you admit having written this letter?”

The detective put a letter into Mr. Heath’s hand, and the Remove master gave a quick start. It was not a guilty start, but one of surprise.

The letter was in his own handwriting.

He read it through quickly, and was somewhat staggered. For the communication was addressed to the Marquis of Layham, and it demanded the sum of fifteen thousand pounds!

The letter made an appointment in the smoking-room of the Grapes Hotel for nine o’clock, and the marquis was informed that if he brought the money, he would have the diamond returned to him. If he failed to do so, or if he informed the police, his life would be in danger. The letter, in actual fact, threatened the marquis’s life—if he failed to comply with the demand. And the letter was written in Mr. Heath’s

own caligraphy, and it contained his own signature!

“Well?” said Watts. “Did you write that?”

“No,” said Mr. Heath. “I did not.”

“I’m sorry that you should find it necessary to deny something which is absolutely obvious,” said the detective grimly. “We can serve no good purpose by remaining here. You must come with us——”

“I’m not coming with you,” interrupted Mr. Heath warmly. “I did not write this letter, and I never saw it before in all my life!”

“Do you admit that the handwriting is yours?”

“No; but it looks like mine.”

“In fact, you maintain that this is a forgery?”

“I do!”

“Well, I’m afraid it won’t do for us,” said the Scotland Yard man. “Man alive, why don’t you give up this senseless attitude? The letter fixes an appointment in this hotel, at this hour. You are here, and the diamond is with you. You must be mad to deny the truth!”

Mr. Heath said nothing. He realised that the Comte de Plessigny had shown his claws! He had come to Mr. Heath apologetic and penitent. Yet, actually, he was simply setting a trap for the young master to walk into—a trap which had apparently caught Mr. Heath in its toils.

However, things were not so serious as they seemed.

“You will come with us immediately,” said Detective-inspector Watts. “If you refuse, I shall be compelled to use handcuffs——”

“One moment!” said Mr. Heath smoothly. “Mr. Lee!”

He turned, and spoke in a louder voice, and a door at once opened on the other side of the room. Detective-inspector Watts evidently expected some trickery, for he grasped Mr. Heath’s arm.

“Hold him, Bates!” he ordered sharply.

Bates took the other arm, and Mr. Heath was held. He was quite calm, however, and he smiled as Nelson Lee approached the little group. The famous schoolmaster detective was looking perfectly at ease.

"Why, it's Watts!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Pleased to see you, inspector. A good few months since I dropped into the Yard for a chat."

"Hang me if it isn't Mr. Nelson Lee!" exclaimed Watts. "Why, this is great. I didn't expect to see you here, Mr. Lee. I suppose you were after this young man, too? We've got him all right."

"So I observe," said Nelson Lee. "But I am afraid there is something slightly wrong, Watts. Mr. Heath is not the type of man you believe him to be. I can vouch for him with perfect confidence."

The Scotland Yard man looked serious.

"I'm afraid you don't appreciate the position, Mr. Lee," he said. "This man wrote a threatening letter to the Marquis of Layham, and fixed this appointment for to-night. The marquis is outside now."

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee. "It is just as well to have him here. I shall be quite pleased to have a chat with him, Watts. And you might let me see this letter which Mr. Heath has written."

"Mr. Lee, it's all wrong!" protested Heath. "I didn't—"

"My dear man, don't excite yourself," said Lee calmly. "May I have a look at that document, inspector?"

Watts hesitated.

"I wouldn't show it to anybody else, but I know you're all right, Mr. Lee," he said. "I'm sorry to find that you've been hoodwinked by this fellow. He's not what you think him to be, I'm afraid. I might mention that we found the Layham diamond on him ten minutes ago."

Nelson Lee nodded, and took the letter. After reading it through he examined it more closely, held it up to the light, and scrutinised it through a powerful magnifying lens. Finally, he handed it back to Watts, and smilingly shook his head.

"It's not genuine," he announced.

"Eh?"

"This letter is a forgery——"

"I told them so!" exclaimed Mr. Heath warmly.

"I can't believe that you are right, Mr. Lee," said the inspector doubtfully. "We've had specimens of Heath's handwriting, and this letter was undoubtedly written by him. Quite apart from the letter there's the fact that Heath came here at nine o'clock to keep the appoint-

ment—with the diamond on his person. You can't get over that!"

"I think I can," said Lee. "I may as well tell you, Watts, that I advised Mr. Heath to come here, and to have the diamond on him. So, you see, I'm a party to the little deception. I hope you won't arrest me too!"

The detective-inspector stared.

"I don't understand," he said bluntly.

"I think you will in a moment or two," said Lee. "To begin with, Mr. Heath came here with a very different object in view. He knew nothing about this threatening letter—I am certain of that. He was sent by the Comte de Plessigny in order to obtain possession of the five thousand pounds reward which the Marquis of Layham has offered for the return of his diamond."

"Yes, but——"

"Wait!" interrupted Lee. "I will go into details."

He did so, and Mr. Heath listened with interest. Lee explained how the comte had come to Mr. Heath, and how he had told him to keep the appointment at the Grapes Hotel. He also explained that Mr. Heath had been suspicious.

The Remove master had pretended to swallow the whole yarn, and the count had left him feeling quite confident that his cunningly laid trap would succeed. But Mr. Heath was not quite so simple as he had been at one time.

Inwardly, he had felt that there was something wrong in this offer. He instinctively knew that the comte was not genuine. And so, instead of blindly keeping the appointment, he had gone straight to Nelson Lee.

He had told Lee everything, and the detective had advised him to keep the appointment—just in order to see what would happen. It was quite obvious, now, that a very cunning scheme had been devised in order to get Mr. Heath into serious trouble. That was the long and the short of it.

Fortunately, Mr. Heath had smelt a rat, and he had not been so easily caught. He had been very wise in going to Nelson Lee.

Lee pointed out to the Scotland Yard man how absurd it was to suppose that Mr. Heath had written a letter to the marquis, and had then requested Nelson Lee to be on the spot. The thing was obviously a fake.

And Detective-inspector Watts, after a short talk, realised that this was the

truth, and that Mr. Heath was quite innocent.

In short, there had been no attempt at blackmail, and that forged letter had only been sent to the Marquis of Layham in order to get Mr. Heath into grave trouble.

The inference was that the Comte de Plessigny had written the forgery; but there was no evidence of this. It was impossible to have Plessigny arrested, for there was no proof against him.

The wily count had made himself quite secure, even if his scheme went wrong—as it had done. So the only thing was to let the matter drop. Mr. Heath was all right—he had got into no trouble—and the Marquis of Layham had his diamond back again. So everything was quite in order.

The marquis was there, and after Watts had withdrawn for a time, he returned to the smoking-room with the old nobleman. The marquis was a breezy, genial individual, and he shook hands with Nelson Lee and Mr. Heath very warmly. It was easy to see that he was overjoyed at the turn of events.

"My dear young sir, I am delighted to find that you are the victim of a plot, and not the originator of a plot," he said, addressing Mr. Heath. "Owing to your instrumentality, I have got my diamond back, and I shall be most honoured if you will accept the reward which I have—"

"I'm afraid it is quite impossible for me to do that, sir," interrupted Mr. Heath.

The marquis raised his eyebrows.

"Eh?" he asked. "How is that?"

"Well, it is hardly for me to claim any reward—or even to accept any," he said. "Plessigny found the stone, although, of course, he used it for his own nefarious ends. But for my part in the affair, I have no doubt that he would have disposed of it, and you would never have seen it again. But I did not find the stone, therefore I cannot claim—"

"You are not claiming anything," interjected the marquis. "I have got my diamond back, and it was owing to your efforts that I have done so. Therefore, I regard it as only right and proper that you should accept the reward. Regard it as a present, if you wish. It doesn't matter to me. I shall be honoured if you will favour me by accepting—I shall be deeply offended if you refuse."

Mr. Heath could hardly do anything further. Moreover, he was overjoyed at the thought of receiving the five thousand pounds. Personally, he considered that he was not entitled to it; but, at the same time, he knew well enough that the comte would have stuck to the stone if Mr. Heath had not been aware of its existence.

The marquis wrote out his cheque for five thousand pounds, handed it to Mr. Heath, and there was quite a little celebration. Mr. Heath succeeded in getting away at last—highly delighted with the result of the evening's work. Nelson Lee went with him, and the pair directed their footsteps towards the house occupied by the Comte de Plessigny.

CHAPTER VI.

DORRIE LETS OUT THE SECRET.

NELSON LEE offered Mr. Heath a cigarette, as they walked along.

"I don't suppose that we shall obtain any satisfaction from this visit," he remarked. "At the same time, we may as well have the matter out with the count. There are one or two points I should like to discuss with him."

"I'd like to see him handcuffed!" he exclaimed. "The infernal rogue! Deliberately attempting to get me arrested on a charge of blackmail and conspiracy. Why, he's liable to a long term of imprisonment."

"He would be if there was any chance of proving that he wrote that forged letter," said Nelson Lee. "But how can we prove it? How is it possible, indeed, for us to bring forward any evidence to show that the count has been conspiring against you?"

"It's rather difficult," admitted Mr. Heath.

"The Comte de Plessigny has been snapping his fingers at the police for quite a number of years," said Nelson Lee. "When he was younger he was a constant thorn in the side of Scotland Yard, and they could never lay a finger on him. For the last five or six years he has been very quiet, and evidently possesses a large amount of money. Somehow, I suspect he came down to the

neighbourhood of St. Frank's with a definite object—not entirely connected with the Layham diamond. He seemed enormously anxious to learn what Lord Dorrimore's plans are for the summer holidays."

"I can't understand it," said Mr. Heath, shaking his head. "There's another point which has been puzzling me, too. Several days ago, the count came to the little cottage in Edgemore—at least, I thought it was the count. Shortly afterwards, however, I discovered that the man was a fraud—apparently a criminal in disguise, who had attempted to obtain the diamond from me —"

Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"Thank you!" he said.

"I don't quite understand."

"You just referred to me as a criminal," smiled Lee.

Mr. Heath looked rather surprised, then an expression of astonishment came into his eyes. He paused in his walk.

"It—it wasn't you?" he asked quickly.

"Yes."

"But—but——"

"You must forgive me for playing the little trick," smiled Nelson Lee. "But I had been observing your connection with the count for some little time, and I wanted to satisfy myself that your own activities were perfectly honourable. During that little visit I learned quite sufficient to satisfy me—and, incidentally, I met your charming wife. You're a lucky man, Heath!"

Mr. Heath blushed.

"I—I didn't want anybody to know!" he said lamely.

"Not exactly a question of modesty, but of wisdom—eh?" chuckled Nelson Lee. "You didn't want the school authorities to know of your little secret. Well, I don't blame you, and now that the term is nearly over it won't matter so much if the truth does leak out—although you may rely upon me to be discreet. On that day you mention, I ran into the Comte de Plessigny myself."

"Great Scott! That was rather unlucky," said Mr. Heath. "What did he say when he saw his double?"

"I didn't give him much opportunity to say anything," replied Lee. "I simply took out a card, handed it to him, and passed on. There was nothing on the card except the three words 'The Seven Stars.'"

"What did those words mean?"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"I really don't know," he confessed. "The card was given to me by somebody a few months ago, and I passed it on to the count for no other purpose than to appear somewhat mysterious. Well, here we are, I think."

They had arrived at the Comte de Plessigny's residence. They walked up the path, arrived at the door, and Nelson Lee rang the bell.

The door was opened by the comte's manservant, Duncan.

"We wish to see the Comte de Plessigny!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but his excellency left for London this afternoon, interrupted the man, speaking as though he were repeating well-learned lines. "I do not know where his excellency is at the moment, and he has left no definite address. I am sorry, sir, and I must request you to communicate by letter."

"One moment," said Nelson Lee. "You say the count has gone to London? Have you any idea when he will return?"

"His excellency will not return at all," said the manservant. "The tenancy of this furnished house expires at the end of this week and everything is now left in my hands. His excellency will not be in Bannington again, sir."

Nelson Lee and Mr. Heath knew that it was quite useless to remain, so they took their departure, and commenced the walk to St. Frank's, which was quite pleasant on such a glorious evening.

"So the comte has slipped away—eh?" said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "H'm! I suspected something of the kind. Well, Heath, the best thing we can do is to forget all about him. You may consider yourself very lucky that you have come to no harm owing to your dealings with the man."

"Harm!" echoed Mr. Heath. "Why, I'm five thousand pounds to the good, so I can't grumble!"

"Hardly," smiled Nelson Lee.

Mr. Heath was supremely happy, and when near to St. Frank's he begged Nelson Lee to excuse him, and he rushed off to tell little Edith of his good fortune. Everything had turned out splendidly, and there were many rosy prospects for the young couple.

Nelson Lee walked on to St. Frank's in a cheerful mood. When he arrived he went to his study, and found it

already in the possession of Lord Dorriemore. Dorrie had a visitor in the diminutive person of Stanley Livingstone Kerrigan.

"Hallo, old man," said Dorrie, looking up. "I'm just havin' a chat with this youngster. Just like you to come in and interrupt. It's past his bedtime already, an' he can't be here long——"

"My dear fellow, I'm not interrupting," said Lee. "Go ahead."

"I'm hardly started yet," said Dorrie. "Now, look here, young 'un; I don't want you to think that I'm nosin' into your business or anythin' like that. I'm just interested in a professional kind of way, although it's a bit strange to refer to explorin' as a profession. You see, I've done a lot in that line myself, an' I'm naturally greatly interested to hear about your dad."

"I'll tell you everything I can, sir," said the fag.

"You won't be hurt at all?" asked Dorrie. "I don't want to bring up painful memories, you know."

"Oh, that's all right, sir," said Kerrigan. "I was only seven or eight when my dad went over to South America, and I don't remember him very distinctly. You see, he'd been in Africa for years, and he only came home for a few months."

"An' you've always lived with your aunt?"

"Yes, sir—Aunt Janet."

"Poor kid," said Dorrie. "You never had any mother, an' only a father for a month or two? Your mother died before you could understand things, didn't she?"

"Yes, sir. She died when I was a little baby."

"It's pretty rough," said his lordship. "Now, I'd like to hear about your dad. Is there any definite information about where he died?"

Kerrigan shook his head.

"Nothing very definite, sir," he replied. "My dad went out to explore the Amazon, in Brazil, about five years ago. He wanted to go into the forests and find out all sorts of things. But he never came back," added the fag simply.

"He died out there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"Well, I don't know exactly," said the fag. "Aunt told me all about it,

but it doesn't seem very clear to me. Dad caught fever, or something, and died before any help could reach him. He was thousands of miles up the Amazon at the time, far away from civilisation."

"H'm! It's pretty bad," said Dorrie. "As it happens, I was thinking about taking a trip up the Amazon this summer——"

"Oh, sir!" said the fag, flushing with excitement.

"Makes you start a bit—eh?"

"Yes, rather, sir! I've often wanted to go——"

"Well?" asked Dorrie. "You often wanted what?"

"I—I didn't mean——"

"Nonsense! Carry on!"

"I don't like to be beastly cheeky, sir, but it would be simply lovely if you could find out where dad died," said Kerrigan, his eyes gleaming. "It's impossible for me to go out to the Amazon, but if you're going——"

"Nothin's impossible, my lad," interrupted Dorrie. "I am going. An' a party will probably go with me. Everythin's ready; my yacht's waitin' with steam up, an' there's nothin' to do but to get on board. I've been makin' plans an' arrangements for weeks past, an' now all the project needs is Mr. Lee's approval and a party. Once everything is fixed, it won't take five minutes to get the party up. I was just wonderin' if you'd care to come."

Stanley Kerrigan's eyes opened wider.

"To—to the Amazon, sir?" he asked blankly.

"Yes."

"The real Amazon, sir—in Brazil?" asked the fag incredulously.

"Of course."

"I'd—I'd do anything to go, sir," panted the junior eagerly. "Oh, my hat! I—I must be dreaming! Just think of it—going out to the Amazon, where dad went to. Oh, it—it's glorious!"

"An' you'll come?"

"Rather, sir—thanks awfully, sir!" gasped Kerrigan. "I—I don't know what to say; it—it seems like a dream! Oh, but—but——"

"But what?"

"Aunt Janet may not let me go," said the junior, with blank dismay.

Dorrie grinned.

"Don't you worry about Aunt Janet. I have already met the good lady, and

my proposal has the seal of her approval. She has intimated that she would have no objection to your comin' with us, Stanley. So, if you like to accept the invitation, you'll be an honoured guest."

Kerrigan was too overcome with excitement and joy to say anything for the moment. Then an impulse seized him, and he rushed forward and hugged Dorrie's broad chest. His lordship was rather taken aback.

"Oh, sir, I—I don't know what to say!" panted Stanley. "It's—it's wonderful! We're going to the Amazon—to—to dad!"

"Steady, youngster—steady!" said Lord Dorrimore gently. "You mustn't get too excited about it. We shall go to the Amazon, and it's quite possible we shall learn something concernin' your father. But I don't suppose we shall find him. Your father is dead, an' you must not talk wildly."

Stanley looked at Dorrie, with his face flushed and his eyes gleaming.

"Oh, I know dad's dead!" he said. "But we shall go to the place where he was—where he explored! I've been dreaming about going out to Brazil for years, but I didn't think I should be able to go until I was a man!"

"Then it's all the better," smiled Dorrie. "You won't be alone, of course; there'll be plenty of other youngsters on board, an' we shall have a really rippin' trip—just a fine holiday adventure. If I can please you, it'll please me, too—because I have a tremendous respect for your father, an' one day you'll make good; you'll become a bigger explorer than any of us."

"Oh, rather sir!" said Stanley, with boyish enthusiasm. "I mean to explore everything—the North Pole, and all the places where people haven't been to!"

"But people have been to the North Pole," smiled Lord Dorrimore. "Besides, that's a nasty, cold place to go to. Well, you'd better come along to bed, an' don't get dreamin' all sorts of things. Go straight to sleep, like a good boy. To-morrow we'll have another talk, an' you'll soon have to be gettin' ready for the trip."

"Yes, sir," said the fag. "Oh, it's fine!"

He went out of the study, hardly knowing where he was, or what he was doing. He was rather dazed by the glorious news.

CHAPTER VII.

GLORIOUS PROSPECTS.

STANLEY KERRIGAN of the Third did not fall asleep until the school clock chimed out the hour of midnight. He lay in bed, thinking over all that Lord Dorrimore had said. Once or twice he half believed that he had been dreaming.

All the other fags were asleep, of course. And when Kerrigan awoke in the morning his first thought was that he had imagined all that had occurred the previous night. He couldn't believe that Lord Dorrimore's invitation was actual reality.

By the time he had half dressed, however, he knew that it had been no dream, and that he was really booked to go out to the Amazon for the summer holidays—booked to go out as a guest on a magnificent steam yacht. There would be every luxury; he would be with a party, and everything would be simply great.

Stanley simply couldn't keep it to himself.

"I say, you chaps," he said, addressing Owen minor and Heath.

"Hallo!" said Owen. "Feeling all right this morning?"

"Yes, of course I am," said Kerrigan. "Why shouldn't I?"

"That ducking you had——"

"Oh, that didn't hurt me, you ass."

"It was jolly plucky of you, and we're going to make a celebration to-day," declared Owen. "We're pooling funds in the Third, my son, and we're going to stand a terrific feed—and you'll be the guest of honour."

"Rather!" said Lemon. "He saved my life!"

Stanley looked uncomfortable.

"Oh, I say, chuck it!" he protested. "There's no need for you to make a fuss over nothing. I was just going to tell you something. I'm all fixed up for the summer holidays."

Chubby Heath sniffed.

"That's nothing to boast about," he said. "I'm fixed up, too; and I'll bet my holiday will whack yours into a cocked hat! I'm going out to Italy with my people. We shall see Naples, and Rome, and Lisbon——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass!" grinned Owen. "Lisbon's in Spain."

"Rats! It's in Portugal!" yelled Jones.

"Well, I don't care where it is," said Heath. "Perhaps it ain't Lisbon, after all. But I jolly well know I'm going to Italy with my people—and that beats anything you chaps can talk about!"

Owen grunted.

"We've heard nothing else but Italy from you for days!" he said. "I'm blessed if I'd go to a beastly place like Italy, even if I was invited. There's nothing else there but onions, and garlic, and macaroni!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!"

"You funny idiot!"

Chubby Heath and Owen Minor nearly came to blows.

"You haven't let me finish what I was saying," exclaimed Kerrigan, in time to avert the quarrel. "I'm not going to Italy, but I'm going somewhere better."

"Better?" said Heath. "What rot!"

"I'm going out to Brazil."

"What!"

"I'm going up the Amazon, in Lord Dorrimore's private yacht," said Stanley. "Some other fellows are coming, too, and we're going to have a ripping holiday. There'll be snakes, and wild animals, and Indians, and cannibals, and—and all sorts of things! Italy's not half so good!"

The fags stared.

"I suppose you dreamed all this?" asked Heath.

"No, it's true."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is true, really," persisted Stanley.

But his Form-mates were not inclined to take the story seriously. It seemed rather too tall a yarn. Kerrigan gave it up at length, and when he got downstairs he found Handforth and Co. chatting in the lobby.

Or, to be more exact, Handforth was roaring; and Church and McClure were listening. Handforth was laying down the law, as usual, and his faithful chums were suffering in silence.

"I say, Handforth!" said Kerrigan.

"Clear out of the way, you kid!" said Handforth warmly. "I don't want to be interrupted by any beastly fag!"

"I didn't mean to interrupt you, Handforth," said Stanley. "I was only going to tell you something."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Handforth.

"I'm going out to Brazil for the summer holidays."

"That's frightfully interesting!" said Handforth. "And what are you going for—to pick some nuts?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth laughed at his own joke, which he considered fairly smart.

"We may find some nuts there, of course," said Kerrigan. "I'm going out in Lord Dorrimore's private yacht, and there'll be some other fellows, too. We're going up the Amazon—right into the heart of the forests."

Handforth seized the fag firmly.

"Are you trying to pull my leg?" he asked.

"No, of course not."

"Then what's the idea of this tosh?"

"It's not tosh!" said Stanley. "Lord Dorrimore told me all about it last night. It's true, Handy; honest Injun! Lord Dorrimore's yacht is going up the Amazon, and he's promised to take me with him. Oh, it'll be a splendid holiday!"

Handforth and Co. were all attention at last.

"My hat! It's really true, then?" asked Church eagerly.

"Yes, I told you it was."

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, Church, honour bright!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "A trip up the Amazon! A giddy holiday in Brazil! Oh, my goodness! Don't some chaps have all the luck? I can't believe it's true, though; somebody's been spoofing the kid."

"I don't know so much about that," said McClure. "Lord Dorrimore went out to Africa last year, and we had a magnificent time. I wasn't hoping for anything like it again, but—but—"

"Oh, this is too good to be true," said Handforth flatly. "Africa was decent enough, but Brazil! Think of it! Right up the Amazon, into the heart of the untrodden forests! Why, I simply can't believe it!"

"Did Lord Dorrimore say anything about anybody else coming?" asked Church eagerly.

"Yes," said Stanley. "He said there would be some other fellows."

"Then we might stand a chance!" yelled Church. "Oh, my hat! If only we can get invited, think of the ripping times—"

"Hallo! What's the excitement

about?" asked Reginald Pitt, strolling into the lobby. "Well, I'm blessed! You're all looking as red as beetroots, and you're simply shivering with excitement! What's happened?"

"Nothing—yet," said Handforth. "But we're going to Brazil——"

"Eh?"

"For the summer holidays," explained Handforth, taking things for granted, as usual. "Lord Dorrimore is going up the Amazon in his ripping yacht, and we're going with him. Just a little trip, you know," he added carelessly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt roared, and De Valerie roared, and Jack Grey and two or three others roared. They certainly didn't take Handforth seriously.

"What's the matter, you cackling asses?" demanded Handforth.

"Oh, nothing," said Pitt. "We appreciate the joke, that's all!"

"What joke?"

"Well, you can't kid us with a yarn like that," grinned Pitt.

"But it's true, Pitt—it is, really," said Stanley. "Lord Dorrimore told me all about it, and I'm going. But he didn't say anything about Handforth."

"Oh, well, it's only natural that I should go," said Handforth. "You don't expect me to stop behind, I suppose? Not likely! If there's going to be a trip up the Amazon, I'm going to be there!"

It was some few moments before the other two juniors could believe the story, and even then they were rather sceptical. When they discovered that the only source of information was a Third Form fag, they naturally concluded that it was nothing more than a rumour.

"Nipper ought to know about it," said De Valerie. "He's pally with Lord Dorrimore, and if Nipper doesn't know anything about this Amazon stunt, it'll be pretty certain that the whole thing is spoofo."

"Good!" said Handforth. "Let's find Nipper!"

This was not a very long task. The crowd of juniors came along the Remove passage, burst into Study C, and found me there, chatting with Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West. Curiously enough, we were just discussing the coming holidays, and wondering if there would be anything special doing.

The crowd surged into the study.

"Here, steady on!" I said. "What's the meaning of this invasion?"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie, backing away. "Pray be careful, dear o'd boys! You are frightfully rough, Handforth—you trod on my toe——"

"Blow your toe!" said Handforth.

"Are we going up the Amazon?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Amazon?" I repeated. "Explain yourself, you ass!"

"There you are—he doesn't know anything," said Church. "It's all spoofo."

"What's spoofo?" I demanded.

"Why, young Kerrigan, of the Third, is spreading a yarn about that Lord Dorrimore is going on a yachting trip up the Amazon," said Pitt. "We wouldn't believe it, so we came to you for information. Is it true?"

"I don't know," I said. "There's no telling what Lord Dorrimore will do. A trip up the Amazon sounds first class. I've heard nothing about it from Dorrie or the guv'nor, and it's quite possible that the whole thing's a yarn."

Handforth snorted.

"Where's that fag?" he roared.

"Kerrigan?"

"Yes!"

"He's just outside the door——"

"Collar him!" roared Handforth. "We're going to bump him, and then frog-march him down the passage. We'll teach cheeky Third Formers to spread yarns about like that. The awful nerve!"

"Hold on, Handy!" I put in. "It's quite likely that the kid's been telling the truth. I've heard nothing about the trip, I'll admit, but I'll rush along to the guv'nor's study, and make inquiries."

"Good wheeze!"

"Buzz off, my son—and buck up!" said De Valerie.

I lost no time in hastening down the passage. To tell the truth, I was rather excited on my own account. I knew well enough that Dorrie had some project in his mind, but he had given me no hint of it so far.

A trip up the Amazon would be something novel and interesting. There would be plenty of excitement and adventure in Brazil, particularly if Dorrie intended any exploration. I wanted to learn the truth.

But at that moment it was utterly impossible for me to even guess at the amazing adventures which were destined

to befall Lord Dorrimore's party. It would start as a mere holiday trip; but it was destined to become famous all over the world as the most wonderful exploration tour ever entered upon.

I reached Nelson Lee's study, and burst in. The only occupant of the apartment was Umlosi. He was lolling luxuriously in the easy chair, looking extremely bored. He sat up, and regarded me appealingly.

"Thou art a wise youth, Manzie," he rumbled. "Know thou when we are destined to leave this wondrous kraal? My spirit longs for the forests, for the sun of tropical climes. I am weary."

"That's because you've got nothing to do," I explained. "Time hangs heavily on a chap's hands—especially if he happens to be an active beggar, like you. We will soon be starting on a trip, Umlosi. We're going to Brazil, aren't we?"

Umlosi shook his head.

"I know not," he said. "N'Kose, my father, he is even as the mystery man. He speaks no word, but nods his head in a strange manner. There is something brewing, O, nimble one. My wits are incapable of learning the truth."

"Hasn't he mentioned anything about the Amazon?" I asked.

"N'Kose has mentioned many things, and many places," replied Umlosi. "Thou must have patience, even as I. When it suits my father to speak, he will speak. Ere long he will gladden our hearts; but I gather that his scheme must have the approval of Umtagati, thy master."

"Well, here's Umtagati now," I said. "I say, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee was just entering the study, and behind him came Lord Dorrimore.

"What is it, Nipper?" asked Lee.

"I'll speak to Dorrie now, sir," I said. "Young Kerrigan, of the Third, is going about with a yarn that he's been invited to go on a holiday trip up the Amazon. The fellows won't believe it."

"Then the fellows ought to be swished!" said Dorrie. "It's true enough, Nipper. We're goin' to the Amazon—always providin' that your guv'nor agrees. It's just possible that he may set me down as an escaped inmate of Colney Hatch, and flatly refuse to have anythin' more to do with me. I've got to chance that."

"Then—then we're really going to Brazil?" I asked eagerly.

Dorrie nodded.

"I think we may look upon it as settled," he said.

I didn't wait for any more. I simply rushed out of the study and pelted back to the crowd of juniors in the lobby. They were eagerly awaiting for the result of my inquiries. They pressed round me as I came up.

"Well?"

"What's the news?"

"Is it true?"

"Every word of it," I said. "We're going up the Amazon——"

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth.

"I shouldn't start cheering until I knew a bit more," I said. "It's quite likely that you won't be invited, Handy—so you'd better not be too previous."

"Of course I shall be invited," said Handforth. "If I'm not invited, I'll jolly well come without any invitation! The Amazon! I've been longing to go there for years! I wouldn't miss it for quids!"

"Rather not," said De Valerie. "I was reading a book about the Amazon last week, and it's a marvellous place. Trees as tall as sky-scrapers, and vegetation as thick as barbed-wire entanglements!"

"That sounds cheerful," remarked Watson.

I winked at him.

"The Amazon!" I said. "Anybody who wants to come back alive, had better not risk a trip up the Amazon. It's a terrible river! Hundreds of miles from its mouth it's like a sea, and the heat there is awful. Mosquitoes, beetles, flies, insects of every description—they simply swarm in millions. Then there are poisonous snakes, and scorpions, and goodness knows what else!"

"That makes it all the more exciting," said Handforth. "But what about the fever?"

"Oh, the fever!" I said. "My dear chap, fever out there is awful. If a party of fifty goes into the forest, it's a lucky thing if twenty return! Take my advice, Handy, and stay in England—go to Bournemouth, or Ilfracombe, or Brighton!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you ass!" he said. "Trying to scare me off, I suppose? Well, it won't work. I know jolly well that Brazil is a rummy place—especially up

the Amazon. But we shall be as right as rain in Lord Dorrimore's yacht—simply a glorious treat—miles better than going to Africa!"

"Well, I agree with you there," I said. "It's not absolutely certain that the trip is going to be made yet, so I should advise you to say as little as possible. Don't get shouting too much."

"And, in any case, nobody has been invited—except Kerrigan, of the Third," said Pitt. "It's queer that he should know about it first."

"Lord Dorrimore told me about it last night," said Stanley.

"Cheek!" snorted Handforth. "Of all the beastly nerve! A blessed fag being invited before anybody else! I suppose he pushed himself forward——"

"I didn't, Handforth—honestly, I didn't," said the fag.

"Then what's the meaning of it?"

"If you'd only use your brains, you'd know," I said. "Kerrigan's pater went out to the Amazon four or five years ago, and he died out there."

"Oh!"

"It's only natural that Dorrie should invite him before anybody else," I said

quietly. "Colonel Kerrigan was a famous explorer, and he went up the Amazon to make fresh discoveries. But he never came back alive—and I expect Dorrie means to go there to see if he can discover any trace of him."

This was very near the mark. Lord Dorrimore was not intending the trip to be a mere pleasure cruise. He had a very definite object in sailing from England to Brazil. In his own mind, he had an idea that Colonel Kerrigan, D.S.O., was not dead, and he wanted to go up the Amazon to search thoroughly.

It would not do, however, to say anything about this to Stanley, for if it turned out that the colonel was actually dead, it would be rather painful for the youngster. There was no reason why his hopes should be raised for no purpose.

There were other events connected with that trip, too—events of which I knew nothing at the time. But, as I hinted before, we were destined to pass through an extraordinary period of startling adventure.

And the trip was nearly due to start!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

ONE of the wonderful summer holiday series beginning next week is the story entitled "*Lord Dorrimore's Quest!*" I would ask you, my readers, to make it known to all your friends and acquaintances, so that none shall miss the opportunity of reading the greatest series of adventure stories of the year.

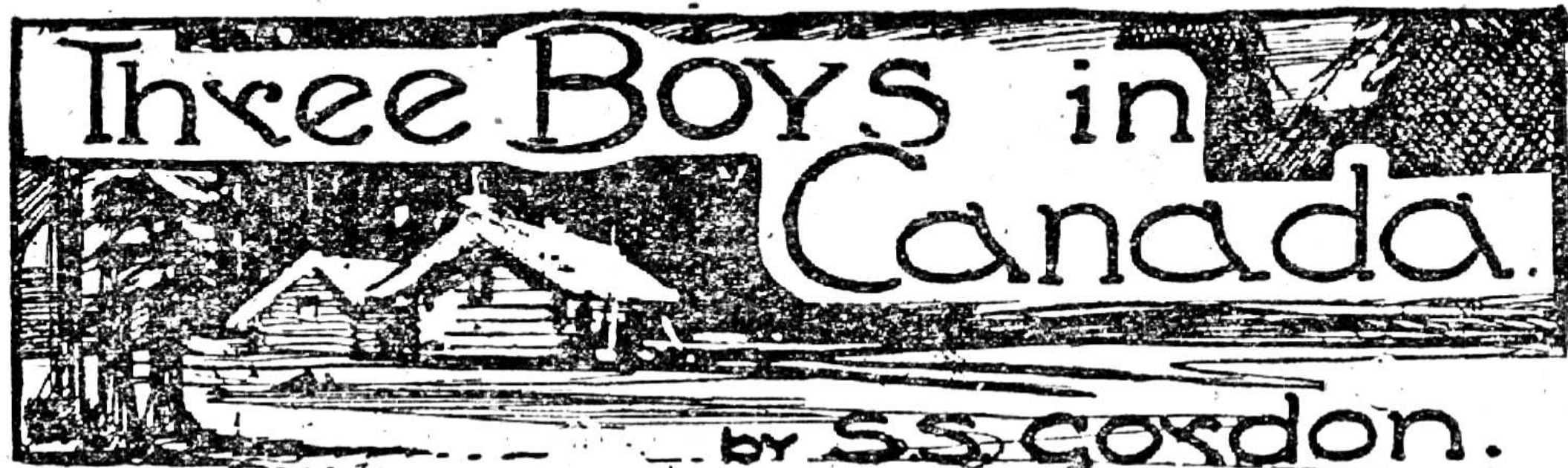
You are all invited to accompany Lord Dorrie and his merry party in the good ship *The Wanderer* on their trip to South America. There are many parts of this remarkable country still unexplored, the thick, impenetrable, virgin forests and deadly fever-stricken swamps in the region of the numerous affluents of the Amazon forming a dreaded barrier to the most intrepid explorers.

Away beyond the impassable zone of forest and swamp lay our quest. It is a country cut off from the rest of the world, in which dwell strange peoples inhabiting strange cities, a country in which roam weird monsters of the animal kingdom, long since thought to be extinct.

I cannot say more; space will not allow. Further, I could not adequately describe the magnificent stories of the coming series.

THE EDITOR.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY!



A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by three ruffians—Connell, Olesen and Snaith. Teddy and Gerald follow the rascals, but are captured and forced to work for the men. They make a spirited attempt to escape. Later, Connell disappears into the forest. Left to the mercy of the other two villains, the boys are bound and put into a canoe, which is pushed down stream in the direction of some falls.

(Now read on.)

Floating on to Destruction.

SNAITH'S plan seemed to meet with Olesen's approval. He forgot all about the flogging, instead, he dealt Gerald and Teddy each a savage kick that knocked all the inclination to resist out of them. Then, dragging Teddy to his feet, he seized the boy's hands, drew them behind him, and lashed them together with a cord taken from one of the bundles of kit.

Teddy could only struggle feebly. Indeed, he felt so hopeless now, that he saw here a chance of ending all the misery.

Gerald was the same. He had not the strength nor the inclination to resist. He also was tied up hand and foot. Then the pair of them were flung down to the ground, and the two ruffians stepped down the river bank to the water's edge.

Soon they had decided which canoe to use. It was the smaller of the two that they placed Gerald and Teddy in. They laid them side by side, Gerald's feet

close to Teddy's head, and Teddy's close to Gerald's. Then, getting into the second canoe themselves, they towed the two wretched boys out to midstream.

Once the swift current had caught the boys' canoe, the villains released their hold on it.

"We'll overtake ye to-morrow," Snaith said. "I guess the first falls ye come to'll see your finish. So long, boys! I'll be able to tell your guardian, Telford, that I've done what he wanted, after all. A pleasant ride down! It's a fine moonlight night for it, anyhow!"

He mockingly waved a hand at the new moon that was showing in the sky. Then he gave the boys' canoe a swift shove, and sent it bobbing merrily downstream.

For a long time both boys lay there side by side and said nothing. They felt there was nothing to say. But, at length, Teddy turned his head.

"Shall we upset the canoe, old chap, and end it all?" he asked huskily. "There seems nothing left to live for. Wonder how old Jack's getting along? Suppose he's missing us?"

"No doubt he's looking for us," said Gerald. "No, old chap; I wouldn't upset the canoe yet—not until we hear the sound of some falls, anyhow. Then we might. But in the meanwhile—well, who knows? While there's life there's hope, they say!"

"Not much hope for us, though," Teddy muttered, lying down again in the bottom of the canoe, however.

Gerald and Teddy lost all count of time as the canoe in which they lay so helpless drifted slowly down the bosom of the Little Slave River. They only knew it got quite dark, and the stars

came out and blinked down upon them, and that at length the moon arose.

The experience was ghostly enough for them. Each bank of the Little Snake was fringed with tall trees now, and as they slid along between these the moon at first peeped through the foliage, cutting them into sharp silhouette. And all the time the trees seemed moving, while they seemed to be quite still.

But they knew it was the reverse, and they were gliding steadily, remorselessly down the flood to—what?

This was a deserted region. Probably no man other than a wandering Indian ever trod on the banks of the river here, for they were far north, and far west, too. They were in that region that is known to the adventurer as north of Fifty-three.

They had not much hope, although Gerald's words were spoken with all intent to cheer Teddy up.

But the words of the brutes who had bound them and laid them here in this canoe would recur to Teddy.

Somewhere ahead must be some falls, for this river was, it had seemed to him for the last few days, nothing but a series of falls. And once over the falls they were doomed. Nay, Teddy thought, they were doomed now.

"We might run past an Indian camp," Gerald said, trying to put in his voice an optimism he did not feel. "For pity's sake, Teddy, talk—say something! This silence is driving me mad!"

"Is there much worth talking about?" Teddy asked miserably. "After all, old chap, we were praying for this, weren't we? When we were being driven like horses by Snaith and Connell, we prayed for a chance to die and get out of our misery. Well, we've got it now! I wonder what the time is? And I wonder how far ahead the next falls are?"

"Well," said Gerald, sitting up in the canoe with difficulty, and scanning the river banks, "if that's the most cheerful thing you can say, perhaps you had better shut up. Hallo! The wind's rising isn't it?"

A faint murmur came to the lads' ears. It sounded like the murmur of a breeze through the trees. And for a long while they sat and listened to it, and noticed that it seemed to grow louder every minute. At length, Gerald spoke again.

"If the wind's rising," he asked, "why ain't the trees moving?"

"Don't ask me," said Teddy wearily. "I'm no good at conundrums."

Gerald was silent again, but he watched the trees as they silhouetted themselves against the rising moon; and he knew well that the murmur that was now filling him and Teddy's ears was not the murmur of any breeze, for there was not a breath of wind fanning his face. And the trees were so still this night that he could almost trace their leaves separately against the moon.

"Teddy," he said at length, in an awed voice. "It's—"

"We've heard that noise before, often enough," said Teddy huskily. "We've heard it every time we've approached falls. Well, good-bye, old chap! It won't last much longer."

There were some falls ahead. Gerald tried to calculate how far in front of the canoe they could be. The murmuring grew steadily louder, and they knew they could not be far.

All the while the canoe kept steadily in midstream, and drifted along towards its end.

"It's a bit thick, having to die like this," said Teddy hoarsely. "I suppose you think me an awful funk; but if I'd only got a chance—my hands and legs free—I'd not mind going under nearly so much. It is a bit like a rat being drowned in a trap, isn't it?"

"It is," said Gerald thoughtfully. "We haven't very far to go now, anyhow. Good-bye, old chap. I'd shake hands if I could. We've been good pals since we met, haven't we?"

"The best," said Teddy. "I—I wonder where old Jack is by now?"

"Well, Jack's better off than we are," said Gerald. "I'm glad I haven't landed him into this as well as you. I'm sorry I landed you into it, Teddy. Of course, it's all my fault—"

"Rot!" said Teddy quickly. "You're—you're a bit upset."

"But I'm not upset!" cried Gerald. "Didn't that blackguard, Johnson, or Snaith, or whatever his name is—say that he meant to do me in? Didn't he say, when he never guessed we were listening, that he had been paid by my guardian to do it on me? Well, then, that's what I mean. You, being my pal, had to share my luck with me."

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

"I'd like to have known why your guardian should have wanted you to be done in," said Teddy.

By now the murmur of the falls had appreciably increased, and it filled the ears of the listening boys. As they talked, perhaps they grew a little hysterical, and talked all the harder, no doubt with a view to making themselves forget the dreadful fate that was so closely in front of them.

"I can't think," said Gerald. "I always thought Mr. Cardone was my friend—and my father's friend before him. All my father's money was held by him, until it was lost."

They were silent again. Perhaps they were praying now, for no Christian gentlemen, such as these two were, would have dared to go to meet their Maker without, as far as possible, having first prepared themselves for the meeting.

Then the canoe swept round a wide bend of the river, and the roar of the falls increased even more, and told them that here were falls such as they have not yet passed in their course down the Little Slave River. The roar they made was like the roar the Devil's Falls had made, many miles south of here, when they had so nearly secured Gerald as a victim; only they had been frustrated by the grim pluck and doggedness of Jack Royce.

But all at once Gerald, who was sitting up in the canoe still, saw something ahead that caused him to catch his breath with a little gasp, lean over the gunwale of the canoe, and stare hard for some time.

At first he thought it must be surely only a firefly—they had seen many of them twinkling on the bank during their voyage. But soon he was convinced that that spark he saw was no firefly. As he looked other similar sparks showed themselves between the trees. And the canoe came nearer to these.

"Teddy!" he gasped, at length. "Teddy, there's some hope! There's some campfires on the river's edge. Look!"

Ted sat up quickly and stared long and hard. Swiftly the canoe came up toward these camp-fires—there were five, they could see now. And they were so close to the water's edge that one, at least was reflected by the river.

Yes, and there were figures moving about those camp-fires—the figures of men.

"I wonder—I wonder if they could hear us, if we yelled?" Gerald asked. "Let's try. The falls are making an awful row, but—yell! Now, old chap, both together. One—two—three! Help!"

"Help—help—help!" shrieked Teddy, and in his excitement he came to his knees in the bottom of the canoe, set it rocking perilously, and nearly upset it in the effort to make those people moving on the bank here his cry.

"Both together!" roared Gerald. "Again! Help, help, help!"

They had to pause soon, for their lungs would not stand much of this. But when they got actually abreast of the nearest camp-fire they opened out their lungs again, and sent such a yell landwards as carried far above the rumble of the too nearby falls.

A man was sitting beside that camp-fire, they could see indistinctly; a man wrapped in a blanket. It was this man who suddenly came to his feet, and stepped down closer to the water's edge.

"Help!" cried Gerald. "Yell again, Teddy! Somebody's heard us!"

They shrieked until their heads swam beneath the strain.

"Then, faintly, showing perhaps how faintly their own cries must have sounded in the ears of the man ashore, a cry came back to them.

"Ahoy! What's up?"

"White man," Teddy breathed. "We're adrift! Help!" he shrieked.

Gerald added his voice again, and, evidently, the man on the bank understood. The watching boys thought they could see him wave a hand. Then he turned his back, and walked away from the river's edge.

"I wonder if he can help us?" asked Gerald. "Possibly he can't. I wonder who he is, and what the camp is?"

The canoe flashed past the camp-fires before they saw the man again. But at length they saw a figure lower down stream, and he was bending over something. Now he was in strong shadow, and the boys could not see what it was he bent over.

(To be continued)

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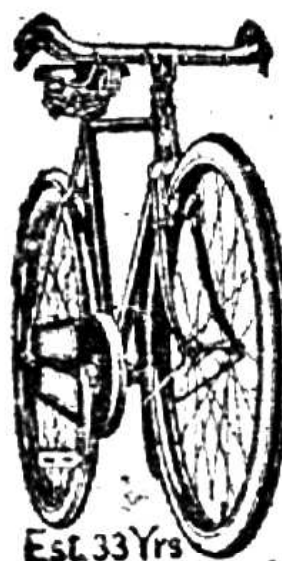
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