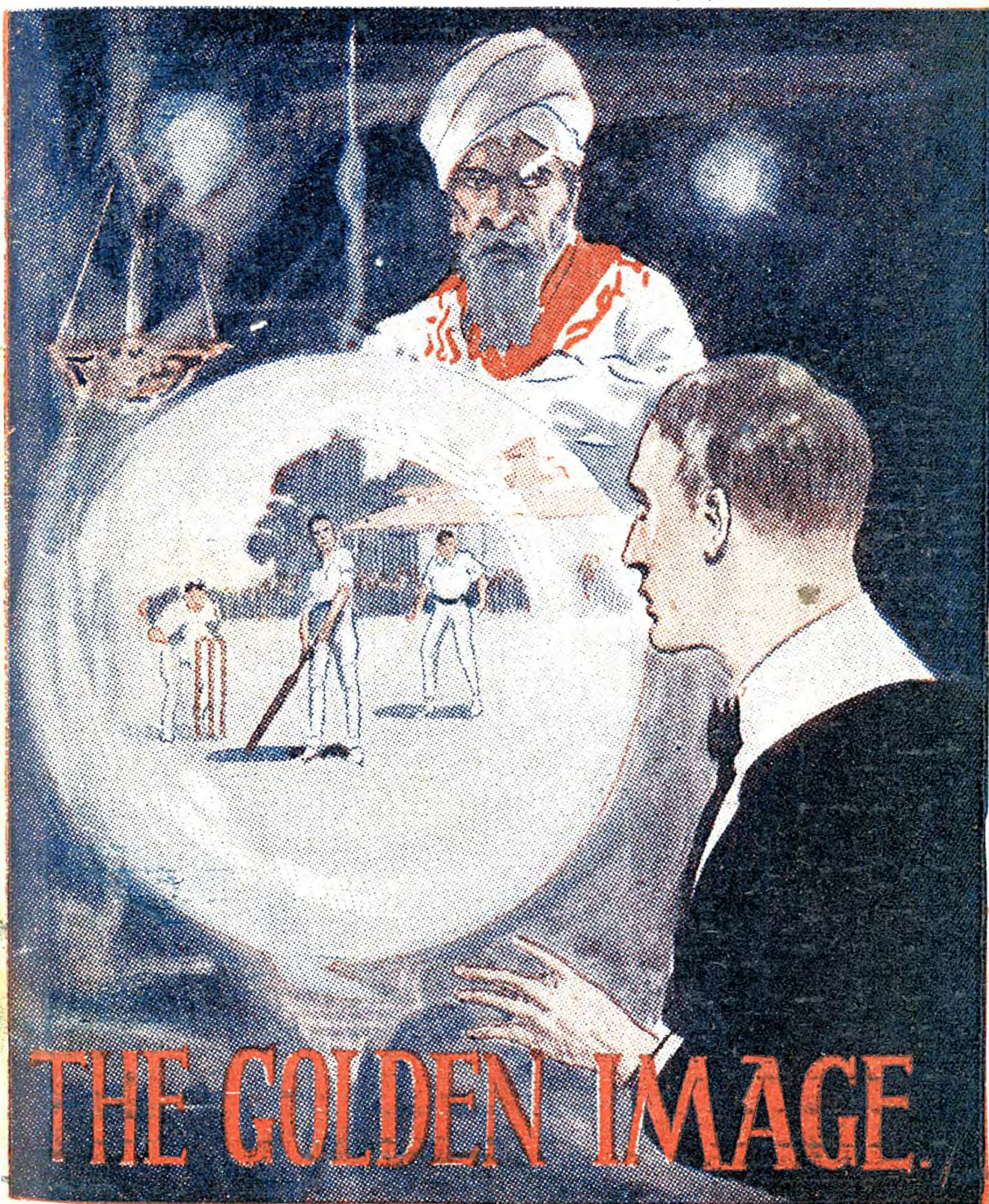


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

MAINLY ABOUT CRICKET.

"**A** SECRET?" said Tommy Watson inquiringly.

"Yes, my son, and I'm going to tell you chaps all about it," I replied. "We don't have secrets in this study, and I've decided that it will be better if you know the truth; but you've got to give me your word that you won't let the cat out of the bag."

"Dear old boy, we don't know what the cat is yet!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

I stirred my tea thoughtfully, and looked at my chums.

We were seated at the table in Study C, in the Ancient House of St. Frank's. It was to be a rather hurried meal, for the weather outside was glorious, and we were all anxious to get out to the cricket ground for practice.

"This secret is known only to two fellows at present—that is, Handforth and myself," I went on.

"Then it won't be a secret for long!" declared Watson. "Handforth can't keep anything—he's a terribly reckless chap!"

"But he's given his word, and I'm pretty certain he won't forget himself," I said. "Of course, Brewster and Glynn and Ascott, and a few other River House chaps—they all know the secret, but at St. Frank's it's hidden."

Tommy Watson grinned.

"A jolly fine secret—I don't think!" he remarked. "If all the River House chaps know about it——"

"My dear chap, you don't understand," I interrupted. "Brewster and Co. wouldn't give the secret away for worlds—because it's to their advantage to keep it. To get straight to the point, it concerns Jerry Dodd."

"Oh!" said Watson. "So he's got some mysterious and dark secret, has he? Then Teddy Long was right!"

"Teddy Long?"

"Yes, the young ass was spreading a yarn that two men had come to see Dodd—two queer-looking specimens who seemed to have come out of a museum—according to Long's yarn. When he started jawing to me I punched his head! I don't want to hear Dodd's business."

I grinned.

"My dear chap, this is not connected with business at all," I explained. "And my little secret isn't even remotely associated with those men who came to see Dodd. The whole question is one of cricket."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "But Dodd can't play!"

"He doesn't even know what a cricket bat is called!" added Watson. "He's the biggest duffer one could wish to see. Look at the way he made an ass of himself the other day. Dodd knows as much about cricket as this tea-table!"

I leaned forward and winked.

"That's all you know!" I said mysteriously.

"Eh?"

"I'm not suggesting that your knowledge is equal to the tea-table!" I chuckled. "But if you think that

Jerry Dodd is a duffer, you've made a mistake. And now I've told you."

Sir Montie adjusted his pince-nez, and regarded me wonderingly.

"But, my dear old fellow, you've told us nothing!" he declared. "If you are tryin' to make out that Dodd is a cricketer—well, I seriously think you ought to see a doctor. In himself, Dodd is quite a decent chap; but at cricket he's the most frightful duffer I've ever come across."

I became serious.

"Now, my sons, I'm not going to talk in a loud voice," I said softly. "The window's open, and they say that walls have ears. So we've got to speak quietly. And it'll probably surprise you when I explain that Jerry Dodd can play cricket better than we can. According to Handforth, he's a terror!"

My chums stared in astonishment.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Watson. "You can't spoof us like this, Nipper. I saw Dodd with my own eyes——"

"So did I, and I thought the same as you," I interrupted. "But the cute beggar was hoodwinking us. He tried to make us believe that he couldn't play."

"But why on earth should he do that?" said Watson. "If he's so keen on cricket, as you say, he would have shown us his best form."

"That's what one would naturally think," I agreed. "But, as you know, Jerry Dodd is a new chap in the Remove. He came from Australia, and he's devoting himself almost entirely to studies. His father wants him to put in all his time at books, and to give sport the cold shoulder."

"What a queer idea!" remarked Sir Montie.

"Well, there's something to be said for it," I exclaimed thoughtfully. "If a chap is a good cricketer he's liable to put his heart and soul into the game, and to let his studies rip. I daresay you've noticed the same thing with many fellows. If they're good at sports, they're often backward with their books. The two things don't always go together. And Dodd's father insisted upon him devoting himself entirely to study. In fact, he gave the Head instructions to this effect; and, as a matter of fact, Jerry Dodd has been forbidden by the Head to become a member of the junior Eleven!"

"Well I'm blessed!" said Watson.

"Knowing he could play cricket well; and knowing also that he wasn't allowed to join the Eleven, Dodd thought it better to make us believe that he was a duffer," I explained. "That's the whole idea. In reality, he's just the opposite. He's as hot as mustard, and just the chap we want in the team."

"And yet we can't have him?"

"Well, it seems like it just at present," I admitted. "But there's always a way out of every difficulty—and we'll find a way out of this one. We're going over to Bannington on Saturday to play the Grammar School—and we've got to whack them."

Sir Montie shook his head.

"That's a frightfully difficult proposition, old boy," he said. "We tried to whack the Grammar School here, but they whacked us instead. Begad! What a shockin' disaster—to be beaten on our own ground!"

"Horrible!" said Watson. "And we shan't be able to get our revenge, either. The Grammarians are in tip-top form this season. They've got some fine batsmen, and two wonderful bowlers. Our chances are pretty slim, I'm afraid."

I nodded.

"That's what it looks like at present," I admitted. "But if we can only get Jerry Dodd in the team we shall be all serene."

Tommy Watson gave an expressive grunt.

"Oh, rot!" he said. "Are you trying to make out that Dodd could win the blessed game for us? Have you seen him play?"

"No."

"Then you're an ass!" said Watson bluntly. "You know Handforth, I should think! You can't believe what he says. You say that Handforth told you that Dodd could play?"

"Yes; but I'm not relying on Handy's word alone," I replied. "I'm not quite such a duffer as that. Handforth saw Dodd on the River House practice ground, and his eyes were pretty well opened, I believe. You see, it was half holiday, and Dodd had nothing to do, and he happened to be strolling near the River House School. He got pally with Brewster and Co., and they invited him to have a go at the nets. Handy saw all this through the

hedge. And, to his amazement, Dodd not only knocked the bowling all over the field, but he got Brewster's middle stump out three times in succession; and Brewster is the star batsman of the River House Junior Eleven!"

"Phew!" whistled Watson. "A howler as well as a batsman! And Handforth told you this?"

"He did."

"Then you can't believe it!" said Tommy. "You know how Handforth exaggerates everything?"

"Yes, I know that," I said. "And so, at the first opportunity, I slipped down and had a word with Brewster and his chums, and this is the important part, my sons. Brewster told the same story!"

"Begad!"

"Brewster admitted that Dodd was a perfect terror," I went on. "He was frightfully cut up because I knew the truth—you see, he's afraid that we shall play Dodd against his own team, and that would spell disaster for the River House. Brewster says that the Australian chap is a perfect wonder!"

My chums were convinced at last.

"Have you spoken to Dodd about it?" asked Watson.

"Yes, of course; but he says he's forbidden to play," I replied. "But we'll see about that when Saturday comes. Naturally, I shall seize an opportunity to put Dodd to the test. I've got to see with my own eyes what he can do."

"And we mustn't say anything about this?"

"Not a word," I replied. "It would only cause a lot of talk among the chaps, and Dodd doesn't want that. If he can't play it's better that he should be considered a duffer and then he won't be bothered with questions. But I mean to get out some scheme before Saturday; and Dodd will come along with us to Bannington."

Shortly afterwards we went out to Little Side, where most of the other junior cricketers were already at practice. I had surprised my chums with my revelation regarding Jerry Dodd—for Jerry was regarded as "an absolute ass in all matters connected with cricket."

And while we were disporting ourselves on the practice ground, Jerry Dodd himself was bottled up in Study F with his books. In spite of the warmth

of the evening he had closed his window, and was now sitting at the table glaring at his books; and with his hands pressed tightly over his ears.

Jerry Dodd was doing his utmost to concentrate his thoughts. He wanted to shut out all sounds. But in spite of himself other thoughts kept obtruding. He found his mind wandering away from the subject in hand. He could see the cricket field, with the white-clad figures on the green turf.

And it was almost as much as he could do to restrain himself from flinging his books across the room and rushing out. It was only dogged determination which kept him there. He hated the whole thing.

But Jerry Dodd had a strong will, and a great determination. It was his father's wish that he should stuff his head with knowledge that he didn't personally require. He had come all the way from Australia to St. Frank's, he had made up his mind that the Headmaster's first report should be a good one. He was anxious to make progress—to show his father that he was doing his best.

And although it was so hard for him, Jerry was making good headway. He was rather surprised at himself, and Mr. Crowell, the Remove Form Master, was quite delighted at the new boy's rapid progress.

But it was hard—very hard.

Jerry only advanced in this way because he had promised that he would do so. It was very much like torture to him. Ever since childhood he had lived in the open air, and to be confined in this stuffy little room, learning things which made him angry and impatient, was like putting him behind prison bars. He wanted to escape; but he was kept within that apartment by the strength of his own will.

He generally had a struggle like this when he first brought his books out. But later, when he got thoroughly into the work, he became resigned. But somehow, this evening, he couldn't settle himself.

And, at last, he rose to his feet in desperation, tucked his books under his arm, and strode out of the Ancient House. There was a grim look on his face, and his lips were set as he passed out through the lobby. Handforth happened to be there.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's wrong, Doddy?"

"Nothing!" replied the colonial boy bluntly.

"Who are you going to murder?"

"By jings!" said Jerry Dodd fiercely. "I don't figure on murdering anybody; but I'd like to get hold of the guy who wrote these books! Golly! He ought to make a fine living as a torturer!"

Handforth grinned.

"Oh, swotting!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you chuck those books aside and enjoy yourself? I'm blessed if I'd turn my hair grey like that!"

Jerry Dodd set his jaw.

"It's got to be done," he said. "I've made up my mind to do it, chum, and I don't reckon it's my way to give in. I'm not over pleased with the amount of knowledge that's inside my head, so it's up to me to improve things. It's blamed hard, but that doesn't matter so much."

"Oh, well, it's your funeral—not mine!" said Handforth. "Personally, I'm going out to the cricket——"

Jerry Dodd didn't wait to hear any more. He felt himself weakening, and the influence of the other juniors might have due effect. The only way for him to stick to his work was to be alone—away from all temptations.

And he set out resolutely, passed through the gateway, and strode down the lane. But he only went a short distance before turning off across a meadow. And after a comparatively short walk he arrived at a very peaceful little scene.

Close behind lay the dense bulk of Bellton Wood. Just in front the River Stowe flowed lazily on its course. There were willow trees in plenty, and the river banks were grassy and very soft. And this little spot was curiously formed. It was a kind of hollow at a bend of the river.

The trees on the other bank completely obstructed the view. Bellton Wood, behind, had the same effect. Thus, the spot was quiet and secluded, and was hardly ever visited. Even the boats from St. Frank's generally went the other way of the river.

Jerry Dodd breathed a sigh of contentment as he sat down on the grass, and opened his books. It was better here—even quieter than in Study F.

Nothing would disturb him, and he would be at peace—and under the open sky.

This was not his first visit to the place—he had chosen it after much searching. And it was now a regular habit of Jerry's to come down here on fine, sunny evenings to bury himself in studies. He couldn't hear the cricketers on Little Side—he couldn't see them—there were no shouts of Removites and Third Formers to worry him. There were no distractions at all.

Unknown to the Australian boy, his movements were causing a certain amount activity on the part of two extraordinary looking gentlemen who were apparently not mere stray visitors in the district.

These curious gentlemen, strange to relate, had been carefully concealed behind the thick hedge which bordered Bellton Lane. They had been waiting there for some considerable time, and when Jerry Dodd appeared, on his way to his favourite spot by the river, they became instantly alert.

"Aha! That is the boy, Mr. Midge!" exclaimed one of the strangers, in soft tones.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly!" agreed Mr. Midge mildly.

He was a strange looking specimen, this Mr. Midge. Extremely small, he was attired in a suit of clothes which appeared to be several sizes too large for him. His trousers hung in bags, his coat sleeves descended over his hands, and his bowler hat half obliterated his face.

This face—what could be seen of it—was bird-like in appearance, Mr. Midge possessing a thin nose which closely resembled a beak. And he held his head forward in a perky, inquisitive fashion.

Mr. Podge, on the other hand, was the very antithesis of Mr. Midge. This gentleman was of truly tremendous proportions, being not only large in build, but extremely fat as well. He was like a mountain of flesh, and when he walked one almost expected the earth to quiver and shake.

He possessed a perfectly bald, pink head, with a ruddy clean-shaven face, and he was fortunate in the ownership of several extra chins. One would have been excused for thinking that Mr. Podge had been melted into his suit, for he overflowed out of every available

opening. His coat was too tight, his trousers too short, and it was rather wonderful that his buttons held. His suit was one of loud grey checks, with the artistic addition of a red waistcoat and a tiny soft hat which perched on the top of his bald head in a most precarious manner.

"Our vigil has not been in vain, Mr. Midge!" puffed the fat man laboriously. "It is now our task to wait—and then follow. Under no circumstances must we allow this boy to escape us."

"I agree, Mr. Podge—I certainly agree!" piped Mr. Midge mildly. "But do you not think we are wasting time? The boy is already down the lane, and — Good gracious! He has turned off the road, and is even now making his way across a meadow. We must hasten, Mr. Podge!"

The two queer-looking specimens of humanity looked about them with exaggerated care, and then pushed through a gap in the hedge, and walked down the road. Mr. Podge led the way, and Mr. Midge came trotting in the rear very much after the style of a monkey following its keeper. At length they arrived at the spot where Jerry Dodd had disappeared. They passed through another gap in the hedge, and were just in time to see the junior vaulting over a gate on the other side of the meadow.

There was an anxious light in Mr. Midge's meek eyes.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "We must hasten our footsteps, Mr. Podge!"

"Not at all—there is no need for haste, Mr. Midge!" replied Mr. Podge calmly. "Under no circumstances must we allow ourselves to be seen by this boy. If we did so, his suspicions would be at once aroused."

Mr. Midge still looked worried.

"But he will escape, Mr. Podge—he will undoubtedly get beyond our reach!" he protested. "Please be reasonable, Mr. Podge. We must waste no time here. It is our duty to—"

"Tut—tut! You will allow me to conduct this matter as I think fit, Mr. Midge!" puffed the fat man firmly. "Have you no confidence in our methods? Are not those methods infallible? Have we ever been known to fail?"

"Never, Mr. Podge!" said Mr. Midge obediently.

"Then why are you in such an unnecessary hurry?" demanded Mr. Podge. "This boy may turn round at any moment, and he would suspect our intentions if he caught sight of us. No, Mr. Midge, we must be careful."

"I agree, Mr. Podge—I certainly agree!" admitted Mr. Midge meekly. "But while we are arguing, Dodd is leaving us in the rear. He has already crossed the adjoining meadow."

Mr. Podge snapped his fat fingers.

"Do we care?" he asked contemptuously. "Do such matters worry Messrs. Podge and Midge? No, my dear sir! It will be child's play for us to pick up the boy's trail and discover his actual destination. As I said before—child's play, Mr. Midge!"

Mr. Midge said nothing, but he still looked anxious. By this time Jerry Dodd had completely vanished, and the two human bloodhounds crossed the meadow in rather a curious way. Mr. Podge was in advance, and he kept his gaze fixed upon the ground—closely watching the almost invisible trail which Jerry Dodd had made in the grass. Mr. Midge trotted behind.

Not that it was necessary for them to take this trouble—for they had seen the junior leaping over the gate at the other side. At length they arrived at the gate, and looked over with an air of exaggerated caution. A peaceful scene lay before them—a grassy slope leading down towards the river, with Bellton Wood on one side, and with clumps of trees growing here and there. But there was no sign of Jerry Dodd. He had completely vanished from view, and there was apparently no method of telling which direction he had taken.

Mr. Midge gave vent to a sigh.

"As I feared, we are baulked!" he said sorrowfully.

"Nonsense, Mr. Midge—nonsense!" said Mr. Podge, laboriously, climbing over the gate, and heavily dropping to the other side. "Are you suggesting that we are beaten? Do you imagine for one moment that we shall fail to pick up the boy's trail? Nothing, I can assure you, will be simpler."

"I trust that you are right, Mr. Podge."

And Mr. Midge waited, with a somewhat doubtful expression on his bird-like face, for Mr. Podge to show him how simple it was to pick up the trail.

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

MR. PODGE uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Aha! What have we here?" he exclaimed softly. "Did I not tell you, Mr. Midge? Did I not declare that we should be successful? See! This will lead directly upon the boy's trail."

Mr. Podge was kneeling on the ground just on the other side of the gate, and he pointed dramatically to a little collection of nutshells. Mr. Midge regarded them without much enthusiasm.

"I fail to follow your train of thought, Mr. Podge," he said mildly.

"My train of thought!" echoed Mr. Podge, scornfully. "Tut tut! You are ridiculous, Mr. Midge—quite ridiculous. I regret that I should be forced to speak so, but it is an undoubted fact. This is a deduction I am making—a clear, transparent deduction which can lead to only one result."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly," murmured Mr. Midge humbly. "I must confess, however, that I am quite in the dark."

Mr. Podge rose to his feet, moved round for a few paces, stowed his big lens away, and then turned to his companion with a pleased smile upon his fat, ruddy face.

"These nutshells, as you will observe, were strewn upon the ground quite recently—within the last five minutes, we may assume," he puffed. "It is clear that they were not here this morning, for they are perfectly dry, and there was a shower just before luncheon."

"An astute suggestion, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge, admiringly. "The sun, however, is shining powerfully, and the sun has, I believe, some drying properties—"

"Tut tut—an absurd objection!" said Mr. Podge. "These shells were shrewn upon the ground, as I said before, only a short time ago. Do you follow my line of reasoning? These shells indicate that nuts have been partaken of—Spanish nuts, by all appearances. And is it not a well-known fact that schoolboys eat a large amount of nuts?"

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge," agreed the little man. "I follow you now."

"Good! We are getting on!" said Mr. Podge importantly. "We have arrived at the one obvious conclusion—

namely, that Dodd paused here for a few moments to crack a number of Spanish nuts, and to consume the kernals."

Mr. Midge nodded, and looked eagerly inquisitive.

"Exactly!" he agreed, gazing up at his companion with a light of intense admiration in his eyes.

"Very well—so far so good!" said Mr. Podge. "I have also observed that one or two nutshells lie in the grass to our right—which further indicates that the boy continued on his way, cracking nuts as he walked. We have, therefore, but to follow this trail of nutshells, and they will lead us to the spot where Master Dodd is to be found. What is your opinion, Mr. Midge?"

Mr. Midge was almost speechless with admiration.

"Marvellous!" he said. "Your powers of deduction, Mr. Podge, are truly wonderful. But—pardon my impatience—do you not think it is time we made a move?"

The importance of this had evidently not struck Mr. Podge. He seemed quite reluctant to leave the spot. And, instead of acting upon Mr. Midge's advice, he produced his large magnifying lens, and went down heavily upon his knees in the grass. After a careful examination of the ground, he rose.

"I regret there are no other clues!" he said, puffing somewhat. "And now, Mr. Midge, we will follow the trail. There is no hurry, as you seem to imagine. Progress was never made by hurrying. We must live up to our motto—Slow but sure. Absolutely sure. We do not know the meaning of the word failure."

"It sounds strange and unfamiliar to my ears!" declared Mr. Midge.

Mr. Podge led the way across the meadow. Strangely enough, traces of nutshells were to be observed on the way—proving quite conclusively that their quarry had indeed passed in this direction. But when the opposite hedge was growing near, all traces of the nutshells came to an end. And Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge halted.

"This is unexpected!" said Mr. Podge frowning, and impatiently fingering his fat chin. "Most ridiculous! Why on earth did the boy cease eating nuts at this point? But no matter—we are not beaten, Mr. Midge. We have never been beaten. This is merely a check!"

Mr. Podge waddled round in circles,

apparently with the object of finding the trail once more. While he was engaged in this occupation, Mr. Midge suddenly started and stared fixedly at a portion of the hedge which lay at short distance to his left.

A figure was moving behind the hedge. Mr. Midge could distinctly see the movements, and then, through a little gap, he saw a boy in Etons. He drew his breath in sharply, ran towards his huge companion, and tugged at his jacket.

"Wait—wait!" said Mr. Podge. "I am concentrating my mind——"

"But I must insist, Mr. Podge!" said Mr. Midge grimly. "Dodd is just behind the hedge, and it is quite unnecessary for us to spend further time here. Indeed, unless we are very careful we shall be seen. I suggest that we take cover."

Mr. Podge looked doubtful.

"An easy matter for you, Mr. Midge, but somewhat more difficult for me!" he observed. "Yes, you are right—I see the boy myself. Come, we will creep near to the hedge."

They went with soft footsteps towards the hedge, and stood there motionless. Mr. Podge removed his ridiculous little hat, revealing a head which was completely devoid of hair. And this projected considerably above the top of the hedge.

Mr. Podge did not seem to worry over this matter—he certainly did not realise the possibility that his head might be seen. Certain movements from the other side of the hedge told the pair that Jerry Dodd was close at hand.

It was impossible actually to see the boy, for the hedge was thick, and only a momentary glimpse of a foot, or a hand could be seen at one time. And to the surprise of Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge, the junior seemed in no hurry to depart.

"We must keep quiet—and perfectly still!" murmured Mr. Podge. "Do not move Mr. Midge—for if we can see the boy, it stands to reason that he can see us. Stand perfectly still, and wait. It is the best method."

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Podge—undoubtedly."

They waited. The sun was hot, for the evening was not at all advanced, and the sun was fairly high in the sky. It was shining, moreover, fully upon them, the shade being on the other side of the hedge.

And then, while they were standing in this manner, a gaily coloured butterfly hovered for a few moments overhead, and then settled gracefully upon Mr. Podge's bald scalp.

Before Mr. Podge could even lift a hand, an extraordinary thing happened. There was a swish of feet through the grass, a sudden whizz, and then an enormous butterfly net came shooting downwards. It descended fully over Mr. Podge's head, and the butterfly was certainly entrapped—but so was the face of Mr. Podge.

"Good Heaven's!" he gasped.

The next moment a junior schoolboy came wriggling through a gap at the bottom of the hedge. He wore big glasses, he possessed a shock head of hair, and he held his head on one side in rather a curious fashion. In point of fact, the junior was no less a person than Timothy Tucker of the Remove.

Tucker was looking just his usual self. His big spectacles, which were slightly green tinted in hue, were perched upon his nose in a most careless way, as though they would fall off at any moment. Wisps of his dark hair were escaping from beneath a faded straw hat which looked as though it had seen many seasons' hard wear. The rest of Tucker's clothing was in keeping—excellent quality, but untidy and dusty. The cheerful lunatic of the Remove was never careful about his personal appearance.

He blinked at Mr. Midge in astonishment, for he was almost a head taller than that gentleman. Then he looked up in even greater astonishment at the enormous bulk of Mr. Podge, who was now struggling out of the folds of the butterfly net.

"Dear me!" said Tucker mildly. "H'm! How extraordinary! The position is this, my dear sirs——"

"Confound you and your butterflies!" bellowed Mr. Podge, tearing the thing away and throwing it on the ground. "Boy! How dare you? Do you know who I am?"

"Really, my dear sir, I have not the faintest idea," said Tucker mildly. "I observe that you have done considerable damage to my net, and I must request you to make that damage good. I insist! Yes, my dear sir, I insist!"

"You impertinent young rascal!" puffed Mr. Podge. "Not content with half smothering me with that wretched

net, you have the audacity to demand compensation! How dare you? What are you doing here—by what right do you wander about these fields?"

"I'm afraid we have made a slight mistake, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge nervously. "This boy is not Master Dodd—"

"Have you no sense, Mr. Midge?" snapped the big man. "Have I not eyes of my own? I can perceive quite well that this boy is not whom we thought him to be. He has no right here!"

"Admitted, my dear sir—admitted!" said Timothy Tucker. "The position is this. At the moment I am hunting for butterflies, and I am unfortunate enough to be somewhat nearsighted. Pray accept my full apologies for having netted your head as well as the butterfly. I can truthfully say that such was not my intention. Quite so—quite so!"

Mr. Podge glared.

"Go!" he said, pointing with a quivering finger. "Go at once!"

Tucker looked a mere midget compared to Mr. Podge, and he thought it would be wisdom on his part to go at once. He picked up his net, and discovered that it was not so badly damaged, after all. And, to his joy, he found that the butterfly was still vainly attempting to escape.

"H'm! This is most fortunate!" murmured Tucker. "Admitted, my dear sir. A wonderful specimen which will greatly beautify my collection. Quite so! H'm! I have to thank you, my dear sir, for assisting me so ably in obtaining this beautiful insect!"

"Boy, you are mad!" snapped Mr. Podge. "Get out of my sight!"

"How dare you?" demanded Tucker, in his shrill, thin voice. "Do you dare to insinuate that I am insane? You had better understand, my dear sir, that it will be necessary for me to put you through a course of disciplinary treatment if you dare to insult me! The position is this——"

But Mr. Podge was already exasperated beyond endurance, and he suddenly picked up Tucker as though he were a feather-weight, lifted him high, and dropped him over the hedge. T. T. landed on all fours, and Mr. Podge and Mr. Midge heard him murmuring to himself.

"We have failed, Mr. Podge," said Mr. Midge sadly.

Mr. Podge glared.

"Such mistakes as this cannot be avoided," he declared. "We followed the trail of nuts, and we were not to know that the wrong boy had been eating them. We must now search round for further clues."

But although Messrs. Podge and Midge searched round for quite a long time, they found no other clues. They came across no sign whatever of Jerry Dodd. And this did not say very much for their wonderful methods. For Jerry Dodd was only a short distance away, reclining easily on a grassy bank, buried in his books. But neither Mr. Podge nor Mr. Midge thought of acting in the most direct way. They went off into Bellton Wood in search of trails and clues.

Jerry Dodd was thoroughly settled to his work now. He knew nothing of these two extraordinary men who were trying to locate his whereabouts. He had heard that two such persons had called at the school, but he had not seen them. And certainly he could not possibly imagine what their business would be. But it seemed quite certain that the strangely assorted pair were deadly serious in their designs.

The sunshine was rather warm, and Jerry had been concentrating on his studies to such good purpose that he had already conquered the problems he had set himself out to solve, and now he was feeling rather sleepy. This was the effect of the sun.

But Jerry Dodd did not believe in sleeping at his work. The grass was certainly very inviting, and he thought it would be rather enjoyable to lay back and doze for a minute or two.

But the flies were troublesome. They buzzed round about him irritatingly, and he suddenly brought his hand to the back of his neck with great swiftness.

"By jings!" he muttered.

He had felt quite a little sting, and as he brushed his neck, his hand knocked something off.

"That must have been a nasty tempered beggar!" muttered Jerry. "I suppose they begin coming out at this time of the evening."

He went on with his work, rubbing his neck occasionally. To his relief it was not swelling, and his suspicion that a wasp had stung him was unfounded. He felt nothing now.

Persistently he went on with his

work. But somehow or other, the words of the book became blurry. He found his mind wandering, or, to be more exact, his brain refused to perform its normal functions. More than once his eyes closed, and he forced open the lids with difficulty.

He felt that it would be better for him to lay his head back for a moment. He did so, stretched out on the grass languidly, with his books in a heap close beside him. The result was inevitable.

Jerry Dodd slept.

CHAPTER III.

A STAGGERING EXPERIENCE.

THE Australian boy looked about him.

He was in a tiny glade of the wood, where the sunlight only entered at mid-day. All round, trees pressed closely near the little clearing, their foliage meeting overhead and forming a natural arbour. Although the evening was still young, within this shaded place it seemed as though twilight had fallen.

It did not seem to be a real place at all; but a dreamy, mystical spot where everything was strange. And standing right in front of Jerry Dodd, there was an Indian—impassive, motionless and silent.

At least, Jerry Dodd took him to be an Indian. He was a wiry-looking man with brown, wrinkled skin and pitch black hair. It was difficult to tell his age, for although he was clean shaven, his face was all puckered into thousands of little wrinkles. His eyes were deeply set below bushy brows.

He was attired in oriental costume—rich silks of quiet colours, with a turban on his head. Perhaps he wasn't Indian at all—but Burmese. There was just a faint touch of the Chinaman in his appearance. Yes, he was certainly more like a Burmese than an Indian.

Jerry Dodd sat there looking up at this apparition in a lazy, dreamy kind of way. He didn't feel particularly surprised to see the man. Somehow he fitted in with the surroundings, and with Jerry's own peculiar sensations.

The Australian boy almost expected the Indian to fade away as he stood there. He surely must be some image of the imagination. Jerry Dodd felt that his own brain was not working as it ought to work.

He couldn't remember things. He didn't seem to know how he had got into this glade, or what had happened before his arrival. It was a very queer thing. Was he in England, or somewhere in the far East? Jerry couldn't remember; he didn't seem to know anything beyond the fact that he was here.

Right back in his mind he had just an occasional glimpse of a big building with many figures moving about near it. Some of the figures were shouting—some were attired in white. What could the place be? A hospital—a school—yes! Just for a faint instant Jerry had a flash of remembrance.

A school! Of course! But what school, and where; and then it all slipped away, even while he was thinking of the subject. He brought his mind back to himself, and looked at his clothing. Why was he here; who was he? He gave a sudden start. Extraordinarily enough he couldn't seem to remember his own name! The sensation was uncanny in the extreme.

It was ridiculous, too; and there was that Indian gazing down at him all the time, like some wrinkled statue bedecked with clothing. Jerry Dodd closed his eyes, moved slightly, and shook himself. He had a kind of presentiment that when he opened his eyes again the strange figure would have disappeared, for, of course, it was only an imaginary one.

He opened his eyes—and there was the Indian, just the same.

"By jings!" said Jerry, his voice sounding peculiarly husky in his own ears. "I'm either going dotty, or seeing things! Say, chum, what's the game? Who are you, and what do you happen to be doing?"

Naturally, the figure wouldn't reply. Jerry Dodd was quite sure of this. But he was somewhat startled when the Oriental relaxed from his stiff position and performed an elaborate salaam.

"Golly!" muttered Jerry Dodd blankly.

"Have no fear of me, O illustrious youth!" exclaimed the Indian, in deep tones. "Be thou of good heart, and all will be well. It is not my intention to harm thee; but thou must obey me in all things!"

"Say, this is a bit too much for me!" said Jerry Dodd, scrambling to his feet and feeling rather unsteady for a

second or two. "Who are you, and how in the name of jumping kangaroos did you get here? If it comes to that, how did I get here—and where are we, anyway?"

The Oriental salaamed again.

"It is not for thou to ask questions," he said solemnly. "Thou art here—it is sufficient. And thou wilt do as I say without question and without resistance. I am thy friend, O illustrious one, and thou need not be in fear."

The whole thing was more unreal than ever. Jerry Dodd looked about him, half expecting to see a dozen more of these silken-clothed individuals dodging about. But he and the Indian were absolutely alone.

"But what's the game?" asked Jerry wonderingly. "What are you going to do with me? There must be somethin' wrong—I can't remember a blame thing. Say, chum, when did you first see me? What was I doin'—"

"Time is valuable, and it is unwise to waste these moments on idle speech," interrupted the Indian gravely. "Come with me, O my son, and I will lead thee to a place where thou wilt see many wonders; and remember—thou must do my bidding. Everything thou art called upon to perform, thou must perform."

Jerry Dodd felt an uncomfortable feeling run down the back of his spine. The eyes of the Indian were boring right into him. Jerry felt as though his own will power would be taken away. He shook himself, but this did not have the effect of removing that curious, helpless sensation.

"Come!" said the Indian. "Obey!"

He turned his back upon Jerry Dodd and walked through the trees. Just for a second the junior had a struggle with himself; but he could not resist that order. He followed this strange Oriental—followed him meekly, as a dog would his master. His senses were becoming dulled.

He was beginning to lose the idea that all this was unaccountable and extraordinary. He felt that it was right that he should obey the Indian. And it did not occur to him to ask any questions.

Not a word further was spoken. They worked their way in between the trees and undergrowth, the Indian leading the way with swift, stealthy footsteps. They went right through the heart of the wood, where no trail or footpath

existed. And then Jerry suddenly found himself looking over a great expanse of undulating grass land, with patches of gorse and heather dotted about profusely.

And there was not a house in sight—not a human being. This was Bannington Moor; but it might have been in the heart of Burmah, for all Jerry Dodd knew.

"Wait!" commanded the Indian. "We must make one or two necessary alterations, O my son."

"Just as you like," said Jerry mechanically.

The Oriental bent down and produced a long, light rain-coat from behind a bush. He donned this, and then, removing his turban, replaced it with an ordinary felt hat. The turban he tucked somewhere in his clothing.

"Now we will proceed," he said.

They passed out into the open, and went across the grass with swift footsteps. Jerry Dodd did not feel himself. He hardly had any desire to ask questions, or to take heed of his surroundings. As before, the whole adventure seemed to be strangely distant and unreal. It was as though he were looking on at a play—but it was a play seen through a haze.

He didn't know exactly how far he walked. The sun was shining quite warmly, and several hours would elapse before darkness came. And then Jerry Dodd found himself walking down a steep path—almost down the side of a cliff.

He didn't trouble to wonder where he was, or why the scene changed so abruptly. Actually, he was descending the rough path into the old disused quarry on the Moor. Down below lay boulders, masses of stone, chalk, and many weeds. The quarry had been neglected for thirty or forty years.

There were tunnels on the South side—one tunnel which led right into the vaults of the old monastery at St. Frank's.

But the Indian did not take this direction. He went towards to north side of the quarry, where the masses of rock were blank and bare. He picked his way nimbly over boulders—sure-footed as a mule. And Jerry Dodd came behind, not quite so agile. And presently the Indian turned into a little cleft—a cleft which was practically invisible until one came within a yard or so.

He squeezed his way in, and Jerry followed. They were now in perfect darkness. But this was soon remedied by the lighting of a flaring torch, which the Indian held well away from him. Jerry found himself walking along a rough floor, with the rock close on either side.

It was not a tunnel, but merely a fissure in the rocks—the two walls of the fissure leaning towards one another and narrowing to a mere slit ten or twelve feet above.

A corner was turned, and then an amazing scene presented itself. For here the fissure opened, and there was a fairly spacious cavern, irregularly shaped and with its roof sloping upwards into the blank darkness.

There were lights here—queer little oil lamps which were burning on pedestals. There was a brazier here, too, filled with red hot embers. And from this a thin column of smoke was ascending. The pungent, aromatic smoke of incense.

There were many cushions—big, soft cushions upon which reclined three other silken attired men with brown skins and piercing eyes. They were not all clean shaven. One had a flowing grey beard, and he appeared to be the most important individual present. For Jerry Dodd's guide salaamed reverently to him.

"Thou hast done well, O Rahzin," exclaimed the man with the grey beard. "Thou art sure that this is the youth we require?"

"Even so, O Mighty One, I am sure!" said Rahzin humbly.

The Mighty One waved his hand, and Jerry Dodd was brought right into the centre of the strange cavern, and placed there, as though for inspection purposes. He was not extremely astonished to see all these queer sights. For he had been prepared for something of the sort by the original appearance of Rahzin.

He took it all as a matter of course, and was only dimly interested. It didn't seem to matter much what took place. He was quite comfortable and content, and had no worries. Certainly he had no remembrance of what had happened before he first saw the Indian in the wood. Everything beyond that was a hazy indistinct blur which could not be fathomed.

"What is thy name, O youth?" asked

the High Priest—for such he appeared to be.

Jerry Dodd heard the question only dimly.

"My name?" he repeated. "By jings! I seem to have forgotten it."

"Is thy name Jerrold Dodd?"

Jerry shook his head helplessly.

"I seem to have heard it—but I couldn't say for sure," he replied. "But, say, what's all this? Where am I, and who are you?"

"Thou must refrain from asking questions, O my young friend," replied the bearded man. "Thou hast been brought here for a purpose—but thou wilt not be harmed. But make no attempt at resistance. I order—thou must obey!"

The High Priest said some rapid words in a strange tongue to his companions. Rahzin and the others closed about Dodd, and proceeded to unfasten his tie and collar. These articles were removed, also his coat and waistcoat.

Then his shirt was pulled down until his left shoulder was fully revealed. And there, on the shoulder blade, a curious little mark could be seen—a birth mark which almost looked like a scar.

"O great Master, this is indeed the wondrous Son of Rhann," exclaimed Rahzin. "Our search need not go further."

"Thou art right," said the High Priest. "Replace his clothing."

Within a few minutes Jerry Dodd was as before, he himself fastened his collar and tie. He was becoming rather more interested now, and he looked at his surroundings with much curiosity. He felt, somehow, as though he ought to be among the hills of Burmah. This was surely no English cavern.

"Boy, thou wilt sit down," said the High Priest.

Jerry Dodd didn't want to sit down, but he felt it impossible to disobey. A cushion was just behind him, and he sank upon it. He now found himself looking upon a great globe of glass—crystal. It had just been revealed by the removal of a black cloth. Jerry could see himself in the glass, strangely distorted and unreal.

"Thou wouldst see into thy future?" asked Rahzin softly. "Watch the crystal, O youth, and thy wish will be gratified. Thou wilt see thyself even as thou wilt be in the years to come."

"Say, that'll be real good!" said

Jerry. "What do I do? Just stare into this and concentrate?"

"Thou hast used the right word—for it is most important that you should concentrate thy mind entirely," replied Rahzin. "See! Thou wilt be transported ten years hence, and thou wilt know what is to occur."

"By jings!" muttered the Australian boy.

He stared hard at the crystal, but, somehow he couldn't see anything except his own distorted reflection. Then he became aware of the fact that the clear globe was becoming filmy; it was being filled with a greyish, smoky haze.

"I don't figure I shall see anything yet!" he remarked.

"Thou wilt see—but thou must have patience," murmured Rahzin.

Jerry Dodd continued to stare into the crystal. Rahzin was close beside him, and the Indian pointed.

"Dost thou not see what the crystal reveals?" he asked, in a low, mysterious voice. "Canst thou not use thine own eyes? Dost thou not see a man—straight, well set up, attired in white clothing? See! He is holding a strange piece of wood in his grasp—and with this piece of wood he is knocking a ball that is made of leather. He is playing the game that is called cricket!"

"Cricket!" repeated Jerry sharply. "Why, yes—sure! I seem to recollect somethin'—oh, say, that's rough! I can't quite get it—it slips away. Cricket? No, I reckon I'm all queer just now."

"Dost thou not see?" whispered Rahzin tensely. "Thou art there—in the crystal—as thou wilt appear when thy age is twenty-five. Watch closely! Thou art now being surrounded by many figures—figures that are cheering and acclaiming thee as a wondrous man of great prowess. It is ordained that thou shalt earn great honours. But now the picture is fading!"

"Sure!" said Jerry.

He didn't exactly know whether he had seen a picture or not. But Rahzin's voice was so queer, and the whole place was so strange that Jerry believed he actually saw an indistinct scene within the crystal.

"Thou wilt come here again—at no great distant date," said Rahzin, covering the crystal with the black cloth. "And then thou wilt see other wonders. And before another moon has risen thou

wilt be one of the selected brethren of the Twin Stars."

The Indian turned, and pointed.

"That must thou worship," he said solemnly. "Salaam!"

Jerry found himself looking at a large, extremely ugly object which was apparently made of wood, and which represented a squatting figure, very much like a Buddha. It was quite repulsive in appearance, and its eyes were blood red.

Rahzin bowed low before this idol, and Jerry Dodd found himself doing the same—not because he wanted to do so, but because some strange influence impelled him. He salaamed before the idol two or three times.

"Thou art in the presence of Rhoon!" said the High Priest solemnly.

"I wouldn't give much for his chances for the first prize at a beauty show!" remarked Jerry Dodd calmly. "By jings! Of all the ugly——"

"Silence, thou young dog!" snapped the High Priest. "Wouldst thou insult the Mighty Rhoon? Ere long thou wilt learn that thou must pay great respect to the God of Rhoon. But it is sufficient for this occasion. Thou wilt now leave!"

"But I'm not coming here again, am I?" asked Jerry. "I can't understand this affair at all. You've got me real puzzled. I don't seem to figure where I am, or what all this means."

"Thou wilt understand later."

"That's all very well—why can't I know now?" demanded Jerry Dodd. "Seeing that I'm the chief figure in this little business, I think I ought to know a few more facts. Where do I come in? And who told you that my father was named Rhann?"

"O foolish youth, thou must not ask questions which will receive no reply," said the High Priest. "And remember—thou art of us—belonging to us. We have thee, body and soul. Thou wilt never escape!"

Jerry Dodd had no feeling of anxiety or fear. He was only filled with a great curiosity—which had come upon him within the last three or four minutes. When he had first entered the cave he had not cared about anything. But now he felt that his mind was becoming more active. It was getting back to its normal state.

"Thou wilt take the boy away, Rahzin," said the High Priest, waving his hand. "When we require him we shall know—and he will come. But that will

not be yet. The time will arrive when the youth must return, and when the great event will take place. Until then, he must go back among his companions. Begone!"

Rahzin caught hold of Jerry Dodd's arm, and pulled it.

"Thou wilt come!" he said firmly.

"Oh, just as you like," said Jerry Dodd. "But I reckon I'd like to know—say, what the thunder——"

He had walked forward while speaking, and his foot caught in a fold of the thin carpet which had been laid upon the floor of the cavern. He pitched forward, tripping over one of the squatting figures, and then collided with a full tilt with a kind of Oriental table. The table went flying.

One or two objects were scattered about, and Jerry Dodd himself lay full length on the floor, with a bruise on his shin, and in considerable pain. Just against his right hand there was a dull little object. Jerry didn't see exactly what it was, but he took hold of it mechanically, his intention being to replace it on the table.

But at that moment he was seized roughly by two of the Indians, and jerked to his feet.

"Clumsy youth!" exclaimed Rahzin angrily.

"It was an accident, I reckon——"

"Silence! Thou must not speak!" said the Indian. "Come!"

He jerked Jerry Dodd roughly, and the latter was forced to follow. The little object was still in his fingers, and he had quite forgotten it. Mechanically he dropped it into his pocket. He didn't even know that he had done so. He was still in pain, and somewhat bewildered.

A moment or two later he was out in the tunnel, with Rahzin in front of him holding a torch. Jerry's mind cleared a bit now, and he wondered what he had done with the thing which he had held in his hand. He didn't remember dropping it, but he must have done so. He certainly did not know that it was in his pocket.

Then he was suddenly dazzled by a burst of sunlight—and he realised, with a shock, that it was not night-time. Actually, he had only been within the cavern for about fifteen minutes. But it seemed much longer to him.

It was evening now—it had been evening all the time. The sun was slightly lower, and the shadows longer. The

Indian led the way up the steep quarry path until he was nearly at the top. Then he commanded Jerry to stand still.

And Rahzin raised his head above the level of the moor, and gazed round searchingly. Nobody was within sight.

"Come!" said the Indian. "Thou wilt follow as before."

They crossed the moor, and then once again plunged into the thick wood. Rahzin had now discarded his raincoat, and was attired as Jerry had first seen him—in full Eastern costume.

The Australian boy was now feeling rather tired, and he moved his limbs sluggishly. He felt that he would give all he possessed to be able to lie down and take a rest. He looked upon Rahzin as an ordinary inhabitant of the wood—he belonged there, and did not seem out of place.

"Say, can't we take a rest?" he asked wearily. "There's no sense in walking on like this, chum. We can sit down here, and——"

"Thou wilt not rest—yet!" interrupted the Indian. "Presently thou wilt be able to do so—but thou must have patience. Follow me. Obey!"

They continued on their way, and in a surprisingly short time they reached the little glade in the wood where Jerry had found himself at first. He stood there facing the Indian, who now took up a stiff attitude with folded arms.

"Lie down, O youth," he said. "It is well for thee to rest."

"By jings! That's welcome," said Jerry Dodd, with a contented sigh.

He lay down in the long, dry grass. He didn't want to close his eyes—because he didn't feel sleepy. He merely wanted to rest. He found himself very comfortable and content.

The glade became somewhat dimmer. And Rahzin stood there, perfectly silent and motionless.

"I reckon this is just fine!" said Jerry lazily.

"Rest, O my son—rest!" murmured Rahzin.

Jerry Dodd continued resting. He looked at the Indian with languid interest. And then, strangely enough, the Oriental figure seemed to become unsteady. Jerry Dodd was still looking at him, but he wasn't so solid now. The Indian became blurred, and finally seemed to fade away into nothing whatever.

Jerry Dodd lay back. The trees were fading, too, and then almost before he knew it the whole scene went dark and gloomy.

The Indian had gone, and there was a chill feeling in the air.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN IMAGE.

WITH a sudden start, Jerry Dodd awakened.

He was feeling rather cold, and he shivered slightly. The sun was weak, and a faint mist was beginning to creep over the marshy meadows on the other side of the river. The Australian boy sat up abruptly, rubbing his eyes, and taking in a deep breath.

"The Indian!" he muttered. "I reckon—Great jumping kangaroos!"

Jerry Dodd stared down at his side blankly. There were his books, the pages of one flapping idly in the faint evening breeze. He was in the exact spot where he had gone to sleep. He wasn't in the wood—in that curious, unreal glade. He was just where he had dozed.

"By jings!" he gasped blankly. "A dream!"

He sat there staring before him, hardly able to put his wits together. Of course it had been a dream—there was no other possible explanation. But it was so vivid that Jerry felt rather queer.

He was not generally a boy who suffered from nightmare, or extraordinary dreams. And why should he, of all fellows, go to sleep and have a weird nightmare about Indians and caverns and ugly-looking idols?

Jerry Dodd stood up, and exercised his limbs for a moment or two. He hadn't been reading any sensational stories, or even any classical works on India. He hadn't studied the subject at all. Then why had he dreamed such a peculiar dream as this?

He pulled out his watch, and looked at it.

"Well, say, this is the limit!" he muttered. "I must have been asleep there for close upon two hours! Golly! I shall be late for calling over!"

He felt decidedly angry with himself as he gathered his books together. He was not thinking of his work now—his mind was fully concentrated upon that dream he had had. He felt that he

could remember all the details. The first lucid memory of the dream was when an Indian had appeared before him. Jerry could see the Indian quite distinctly in his mind's eye. But he couldn't remember what the man had been called, although he had had a name. That had already slipped away.

The Colonial boy had an uncontrollable desire to talk to somebody—to tell his dream to others, and ask what they thought of it. He had heard that dreams were sometimes significant—and this was so marvellously vivid that he knew it could not be any ordinary, commonplace nightmare.

He felt that he wanted advice, and he gathered his books up, and hurried off towards the school. He was still abusing himself roundly for having been idiot enough to sleep out there, on the grass.

"I ought to have had more sense!" he told himself angrily. "Golly! What a darned fool! I come out here to stuff my head with knowledgo, and all I can do is to go and dream about Indians and idols, and all that blessed rot!"

It was not long before he arrived near the playing fields—for he was returning by the towing path along the river, having crossed by the bridge soon after leaving his little private hollow.

As it happened, one of the first fellows that Jerry Dodd saw was myself. Most of the other juniors had gone, and I had just pulled up the cricket stumps, and had them tucked under my arm. I waited for the Australian boy to come up. When he did so his face was flushed with a strange excitement.

"Say, Nipper, chum, I want to tell you something," he said eagerly.

"Right you are! Tell away!" I said. "I'm all ears!"

"It's something I don't want the other fellows to know."

"Don't worry about that I'll keep any secrets you like!" I said. "You can talk as we stroll along. The rest have gone in. Something about the cricket, I suppose? By the way, I shall want you to show me what you can do—"

"Say, give cricket a rest!" put in Jerry Dodd. "What I'm figuring on tellin' you is connected with a dream."

"A dream!" I echoed. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, there's a little place just down the river which I have chosen," ex-

plained Jerry. "It's a kind of hollow where I go when I want to be quiet."

"Where you can stew away at your books, I suppose, without any interruptions?"

"Sure! That's just it," agreed Jerry Dodd. "Well, I was there this evening, and I did a bit of work, and then I happened to lay back. The sun was warm, and I reckon I must have fallen clean off to sleep."

"Naughty boy!" I said severely.

"Say, I'm real serious!" went on Jerry Dodd. "I went to sleep, and I dreamed for practically two hours——"

"Rats!" I interrupted. "Dreams don't go like that, my son. You may have slept for nearly two hours, but your dream only lasted about thirty seconds. That's what they say, anyhow!"

"Well, I don't reckon it matters a heap how long I dreamed," said Jerry. "The main thing is the subject of my nightmare."

"You can't have a nightmare in the daytime," I objected.

"Ain't you goin' to take me seriously?" demanded Jerry Dodd, grasping hold of my arm. "This dream was just about the most vivid thing I've ever known. I dreamed that an Indian appeared before me, and I was in a forest glade."

"An Indian!" I repeated. "A Red-skin, do you mean?"

"No; a kind of Hindoo fellow—a regular dusky son of the East," replied Jerry Dodd. "How he got there I don't know; but things are always like that in dreams. What this forest was, or how I came to be in it don't matter anythin'. But this Hindoo chap took me along to a cavern. And there were others there—just the same sort. And they were all worshippers of a darned ugly idol——"

"Well, I've had dreams just as queer as that," I said, looking at Jerry fixedly. "The fact of the matter is, my son, you've been swotting too much. You ought to ease off a bit, and take more recreation. If you go on at this rate you'll suddenly find yourself eligible for the county asylum. Weak brains soon turn, you know!"

Jerry accepted my banter good-naturedly.

"I wouldn't be sayin' so much about this dream if it was just the ordinary kind," he said. "By jings! I wish I could explain it properly. I've had

dreams before, but they've always been hazy. But this was so vivid that I could almost believe that it really happened. I can see those Hindoos now——"

"No, you can't!" I put in. "Take my advice, Doddy, and forget all about 'om. It won't do you any good to dwell on this nightmare of yours. But I'll tell you what," I added suddenly. "If you like I'll take you along to Mr. Lee. Tell your dream to him, and he'll probably give you some advice."

The Colonial boy's eyes sparkled.

"Say, that's a great idea, chum," he declared. "But do you think Mr. Lee will be annoyed? I don't figure he'll like being disturbed——"

"That's all right," I said. "He won't mind."

As a matter of fact, I had a somewhat selfish object in taking Jerry to see the guv'nor. Nelson Lee would soon perceive that the new boy was working too hard, and that it would be wise to allow him more recreation. Perhaps I could get the guv'nor to remove the ban which at present prevented Jerry Dodd from playing cricket.

And so, shortly afterwards, I steered Jerry down the passages of the Ancient House, and we came to a hall before Nelson Lee's study. I tapped, and walked in, my companion following.

Nelson Lee was there, and he looked up inquiringly.

"I've brought a patient, sir," I said calmly.

"A patient, Nipper?"

"Say, sir, I'm sorry to trouble you, but it was Nipper's idea," said Jerry Dodd. "I guessed you wouldn't like bein' disturbed."

"Not at all, — Dodd. I'm always pleased to see any of the boys," said Nelson Lee cheerily. "Sit down; make yourselves comfortable. I suppose you have come with some particular object?"

"You bet we have, sir," I replied. "To cut it short, Doddy has been seeing things!"

Nelson Lee looked rather surprised.

"I'm afraid I fail to understand, Nipper," he said. "Perhaps Dodd had better explain the matter himself."

"Sure!" said the Australian boy. "Well, it was this way, sir. I was out working by the river—studying, you know. I went to sleep in the sun, and I dreamed. I had a regular queer dream."

"And you have come to tell me all about it—eh?" smiled Nelson Lee. "I'm afraid you've been doing too much work, my boy. In the first place a healthy lad like you ought not to drop off to sleep in the evening; and in the second place you ought not to be troubled by dreams. Was this one particularly vivid?"

"That's just it, sir," said Jerry Dodd. "It was the queerest dream I've ever struck. But, somehow or other, it don't seem to be quite so clear now. I reckon I'm losing the hang of it."

"That's generally the way with dreams," said Nelson Lee. "After a while they become less distinct, and it is only with great difficulty that the details are remembered. What was the subject of this dream of yours?"

"Well, I kind of reckon I was among Indians, sir—Hindoos," replied Jerry Dodd. "I met one of them in a forest glade, an' he took me right away to a kind of cavern among the rocks. Not long ago I could remember everything, but it's gone now. I could see the forest, and the way we got to the cavern. There was a sort of cliff—But that's misty now."

"But what about the cavern, and the Hindoos?" asked Nelson Lee.

"There were three or four of them, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "Sittin' on cushions, and all the rest of it. By kangaroos! A queer lookin' lot, too! There was incense burnin' in a brazier, and rummy looking lights. An' one of these Hindoos showed me a crystal, and kind of made out that he could tell me my future."

"That was certainly interesting," smiled Nelson Lee. "I take it there was nothing particularly horrible about the dream?"

Jerry shook his head.

"Not horrible, sir," he replied. "But just almighty strange. These Indians figured that I was theirs, an' that they'd want me again. An' there was a big idol—with red eyes. Two glittering red eyes."

Nelson Lee sat forward, suddenly alert.

"Like stars?" he asked sharply.

"Say, that's right, sir!" replied Jerry Dodd. "That's what they figured, too! The Twin Stars—one of the Hindoos called 'em that!"

"Indeed!" said Lee keenly. "Have you ever studied this subject, Dodd?"

"Never, sir!"

"Have you ever read books about Indian or Burmese religion?"

"I don't know a darned thing about it, sir," said Jerry. "Those subjects don't interest me at all."

"It is peculiar, Dodd—most peculiar," said Nelson Lee slowly. "Knowing nothing of this subject, it is rather remarkable that you should dream in this way. I should like you to give me more details."

Jerry Dodd looked rather helpless.

"I reckoned on doing that, sir," he replied. "But I'm darned if the dream isn't fadin' away. I can't seem to get the thread of it proper. That's what I can't understand, because it was as clear as daylight ten minutes ago."

"It is hardly usual for a dream to slip from the memory so rapidly," said Nelson Lee. "Now, for example, how did you get to this cavern you speak of?"

"By jings! You speak as if I really went there, sir!" smiled Jerry. "At first I know everythin', and I could describe it all. But all I can remember now is being in the cavern. I reckon the Indian took me through the forest."

"Where was this forest situated?"

"That's got me beat, sir."

"You have no inkling at all?"

"Not the faintest, sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "I've got a sort of notion that we went across a kind of plain; but it's all filmy and indistinct now. What I can mostly remember is the cavern where the incense was burning. I can see that clear, sir."

"Tell me about it," said Nelson Lee. "These Hindoos—did they speak English?"

"I kind of reckon they must have done, sir," he said. "Anyway, I understood their talk in the dream. They showed me a crystal, and I was supposed to see my future in this blamed thing."

"And did you?"

"I don't figure I saw anything much," replied Jerry Dodd, shaking his head. "I can't seem to recollect. Oh, but say! There's something else, sir," he added suddenly. "I fell over a mat, and went sprawling."

"Oh, you remember that?"

"Sure, sir!" said Jerry. "I remember catching my shin, and bruising it. And I picked up something from the floor—a little, brown metal thing which



The butterfly was certainly entrapped—but so was the face of Mr. Podge.

had fallen from a table. I can remember picking that up."

"And what did you do with it?"

"That's got me beat again, sir," said the Australian boy. "By jings! I sort of feel several kinds of a fool, comin' here with this darned story! I apologise, sir, and I hope you won't—"

"There is really no need to apologise, Dodd," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I am quite interested in this astonishing dream of yours—for it is astonishing. Although so many details are lacking, it is evident that this dream was astoundingly vivid and clear. Where did you first meet the Indians?"

"Why, in that cavern, sir," replied Jerry Dodd.

"Rats!" I put in. "You said something about a forest just now."

"A forest?" repeated Jerry, puckering his brow. "Say, that's slipped away! I can't seem to recollect anything about a forest."

"But you just said—"

"You do not seem to understand, Nipper, that this dream of Dodd's is rapidly passing out of his mind," said Nelson Lee. "I am very glad that you brought him to me at once—before the dream had completely disappeared. Although his story is lacking in details, it is, nevertheless, significant and impressive."

"Say, does it mean anything, sir?" asked Jerry anxiously. "I've heard that dreams are sometimes a sort of warning—"

"My dear boy, you must not allow such ideas to remain in your head," interrupted Nelson Lee. "If this dream of yours means anything, it means that you have been studying too much. I commend you for this, Dodd, and I may say that I am very pleased with the way you are devoting yourself to your work. You are showing a determination which is at once both praiseworthy and an indication of your will-power. For I am quite certain that studying does not appeal to you."

"I reckon my dad wanted me to get busy on the job, sir," said Jerry.

"Exactly; and you have been doing your utmost," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps you have been working just a little too hard, you need more recreation. You must not overdo it, Dodd. That is even worse than slacking."

"Couldn't he try his hand at cricket, sir?" I asked casually.

"I am afraid not—"

"But it would be a great help to him," I went on. "Blow all the cobwebs out of his brain, you know, and make him fresh for another spell of Latin or mathematics or Greek mythology, or whatever he happens to be doing. There's nothing like a game of cricket for making a chap's brain feel fresh."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I'm afraid cricket does not appeal to Dodd," he replied. "In any case, Nipper, nothing can be done at the moment. And now, Dodd, you must go and forget your lessons completely for this evening. And do not dwell upon this dream—try to forget it. And do not tell any of the other boys."

"That advice won't need to be told twice, sir," smiled Jerry. "I don't reckon I'd care to be chipped by the fellows. They wouldn't understand, and they'd sort of have the laugh on me."

A minute or two later, Jerry took his departure from Nelson Lee's study. I went with him, and parted with the Australian boy in the Remove passage. He went straight along, out into the Triangle, and for a time he walked about in the cool twilight.

He was successful in dismissing all thoughts of the dream, and this was not so difficult. For Handforth and Co. were in the Triangle, and Handforth was doing his utmost to drive Church and McClure out of their minds. An argument was in progress, and Jerry stood by listening with great interest.

And then, after Church had received a punch on the nose, and after McClure had fled, Handforth marched into the Ancient House. Jerry turned round grinning and found himself facing Timothy Tucker.

Tucker was peering at him inquisitively through his green tinted glasses. And Jerry Dodd grinned even more broadly. He couldn't help being amused at this extraordinary specimen of youthful humanity. Timothy Tucker was certainly a character—with his head cocked on one side and with his untidy clothing.

"Dear me!" said T. T. mildly. "I am delighted to meet you, my dear sir. H'm! H'm! Admitted! The position is this—"

"I reckon you're makin' a mistake,

chum," said Jerry Dodd, good naturedly.

"Nothing of the kind," said Tucker. "Do you know who I am, my dear sir? Don't you realise that I am he of the big head? H'm! That is so, my dear sir. I have had a most remarkable experience—most remarkable. Admitted!"

Jerry grinned.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"There is no trouble—far from it!" replied T. T. "This evening I was out catching butterflies. Fortunately I have secured some beautiful specimens. Quite so! And while I was on my journeys I met two most remarkable individuals. It has been a habit of mine to study humanity. I have read deeply on the subject. Now, if you follow the theory of Darwin, you will realise that man originally sprang from the monkey. Consequently, we are all monkeys now—that cannot be denied. We may be different in form and in general appearance, but we are monkeys, nevertheless. Quite so!"

"My dear chum, there's no need to go into lectures about the origin of man," grinned Jerry Dodd. "You were saying something about a couple of men you met."

"Exactly—exactly!" said T. T. "Unfortunately, I caught one of them in my butterfly net—a huge man with a great deal of unwanted bulk—to be exact, fatty tissue. A most astonishing individual."

"Say, that net of yours must have been an out size!" chuckled Jerry.

"Really, my dear sir, I suspect that you are attempting to be facetious," said T. T. severely. "How dare you! You've got to realise who I am—you've got to realise that my brains are of the highest possible quality. It was the big man's head I caught—not his whole person. Such a thing would be impossible. H'm! Let me see! There were two men—one enormously large, and one absurdly small. Quite so!"

"My dear chap, it doesn't interest me in the slightest degree," interrupted Jerry. "The best thing you can do is to toddle away and put your butterflies to bed. This cool air doesn't seem to agree with your eighty horse power brain!"

T. T. blinked.

"How dare you?" he said. "How dare you suggest that my brain is

similar to that of a horse—a low type of animal which, during the last five hundred centuries has become the slave of man. The horse, my dear sir, when it originally roamed upon the earth's surface, was a wild beast of the most savage description. And you have the audacity to tell me that my brain is of the power of eighty such beasts! How dare you insult me? I must protest against this! Dear me, I was speaking to you, my dear sir!"

But Jerry Dodd, laughing uproariously, was already retreating into the Ancient House. He had no more time to spend upon T. T.

When he arrived at Study F, he found that Tom Burton was there. The electric light was full on, and the Bo'sun was reclining in an easy chair, reading the latest issue of a weekly boys' journal.

"Oh, here you are, shipmate!" he exclaimed, as Jerry appeared. "Conroy was here a minute ago, but he's gone ashore."

"I didn't see him," remarked the new boy.

"What's this about a dream?" asked the Bo'sun. "Somebody told me that you had a queer kind of dream. It was Nipper, in fact, and he asked me to keep it quiet if you said anything about it. He doesn't want the thing to get all over the ship."

"Dream?" repeated Jerry Dodd, frowning. "By jings! I seem to remember having had a dream of some sort, but I couldn't tell you what it was about. It's gone—I've forgotten the whole darned thing."

"Souse me!" said the Bo'sun. "It hasn't taken you long to forget, shipmate."

"That's the queer part of the thing," said Jerry. "I was trying to remember a minute or two ago, and I reckon I'd just got hold of something when it slipped away. You know what it's like to think of a thing and let it go before you can grab a real hold of it. I figure that's how it was this time."

And it was quite true that Jerry Dodd could remember absolutely nothing. That strange dream of his about the Hindoos and the cavern, had gone right away from his mind. He knew nothing about it. Not the faintest recollection of the dream was now in his mind. This was extraordinary. For it would surely seem certain that Jerry

Dodd would still have the main trend of the dream in his mind.

"Mr. Lee reckons I've been doing too much work," said Jerry, as he sat down. "I reckon I shall have to ease off a bit. It's been hard—almighty hard. But I thought it was necessary to go into the thing without any thoughts for other affairs."

"That won't do," said the Bo'sun, shaking his head, and picking up a pencil from the table. "You've got to mix work with pleasure. By the way, let's have your pocket knife for a minute."

"It's yours!" said Jerry Dodd obligingly.

He put his hand into his pocket feeling for the knife. Then a little expression of surprise came into his eyes—a puzzled look. He withdrew his hand, but it did not contain the knife.

Instead, he held a very curious little object between his fingers.

It was heavy, so heavy that Jerry wondered why he had not noticed its weight. This was probably because he had been in the habit of carrying a second knife—a much heavier one—in that same pocket.

He now looked at the object with wonder and astonishment. It was metal—dull and tarnished—and it represented a little squatting figure, repulsively ugly, not unlike a Billikin. The thing was oblong, with a flat base. In the head two small red pieces of glass were fixed—representing the eyes of the image—and these glittered strangely in the electric light. They seemed to fascinate the junior in a queer manner.

"By jings!" he ejaculated blankly.

"What's that, shipmate?" asked Burton. "You seem to be surprised."

"Say, I can't understand—I'm puzzled," exclaimed Jerry. "Where did this thing come from?"

"Why, you just took it out of your pocket!"

"Sure, but I didn't put it there!" said the colonial junior. "I've never seen the thing before—I've never set eyes on it until now!"

Tom Burton looked astonished.

"That doesn't seem right," he said. "It was in your pocket, Dodd, and you must have put it there. What's wrong with your memory? Swab my main-decks! A chap doesn't find things in his pocket—"

"But I tell you I've never seen it

before!" interrupted Jerry. "Golly! What a horrible-looking object! It's a kind of image—one of them Oriental things. What do you think I'd better do with it?"

"Well, if it's not yours, you'd better take it to Mr. Crowell," suggested Burton.

Jerry Dodd was still looking intently at the image, and he was more puzzled than ever. He finally decided that he would take it at once to Nelson Lee, in preference to Mr. Crowell. Jerry felt that Lee would understand better. The Australian boy had a very great respect for his Housemaster.

The little idol did not bring any memories back to him. It meant nothing. He had never seen anything like it before, and why it should be in his pocket was an intangible puzzle.

He presented himself in Nelson Lee's study a few minutes later. He did not notice that the schoolmaster detective had an open book of reference on the desk—a book dealing with India and Burmah and Oriental religions.

"Yes, Dodd?" asked Lee, looking up. "What do you want?"

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but I thought I'd best hand this over to you," replied the junior. "Maybe you can explain things."

Nelson Lee took the little image from Jerry Dodd's hand. Then he started, his eyes became grim, and he looked at his visitor sharply.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, in a tense voice.

"That's just the puzzle, sir; it was in my pocket."

"In your pocket?"

"Sure, sir!"

"But that is no answer, Dodd," went on Lee. "How did it get into your pocket—where did you obtain it in the first place?"

"That's fair got me beat, sir," said Jerry. "I didn't obtain it. I've never seen it before. Somebody must have put it into my pocket—it wasn't there earlier in the evening, I'll swear to that."

Nelson Lee looked at Jerry Dodd very curiously.

"Does this image bring back anything to your mind?" he asked quietly.

"No, sir."

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee. "Very curious! Well, Dodd, you had better leave the thing in my charge."

If anybody claims it I will at once hand it over. In any case, it does not appear to be a matter of importance."

"Say, that's good!" exclaimed Jerry Dodd, with relief. "Maybe one of the fellows was trying to be funny. Thanks very much, sir."

"By the way, Dodd, there's just a question or two I should like to ask," said Lee, "about that dream of yours. Can you tell me——"

"Dream, sir?" repeated Jerry frowning. "I can't remember it now, sir, it's completely gone. The whole darned thing has slipped away."

"Was it about a Chinese opium den?" asked Lee keenly.

"I couldn't tell you sir, I've forgotten the lot."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"Very well, Dodd, I will not question you any further," he said. "But there is just one little thing I should like you to do. Pull up the leg of your left trouser, and show me your shin."

"By jings!" ejaculated Jerry. "What for, sir?"

"Never mind what for; do as I say."

The Australian junior, full of wonder, did so. The shin was in perfect condition.

"Now the other one," said Nelson Lee.

It was different this time. On the shin a distinct bruise was visible—not particularly painful to Jerry, but it was, nevertheless, a recently acquired contusion.

"How did you obtain that bruise, Dodd?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Say, I couldn't tell you sir," replied Jerry Dodd. "I don't remember how I got it or when I got it, and it fair beats me how you knew it was there. It's a real puzzle. How did you know?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Perhaps I will explain that a little later on," he replied. "For the present, Dodd, you may go. By the way, if you are troubled with any further dreams come to me at once, you understand? At once."

"Sure, sir," said Jerry, more puzzled than ever.

He passed out of the study, and Nelson Lee stood perfectly still, staring before him.

"By James!" he muttered tensely. "What an extraordinary state of affairs! That was no dream of Dodd's

—it actually happened! And the boy doesn't know it, that is the amazing part of the whole thing!"

Just at that moment I happened to come into the study, and I found Nelson Lee standing before his desk with the little metal image in his hand. The gov'nor was about to put it away, but he did not do so when he recognised me.

"Come in, Nipper," he said, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "I am rather glad you came at this moment. I wish to speak to you about Dodd."

"Why, that's queer," I said. "I wanted to speak about Dodd, too. It's concerning the cricket, sir——"

"Never mind the cricket now, Nipper," interrupted Nelson Lee.

"There is something of much greater importance to discuss. Dodd came to me a few minutes ago, and it appears that he has completely forgotten all about that dream."

"Well, that's not so very startling, sir," I said. "Dreams do fade away after a bit. This one of Jerry's was a bit strange, but he's been studying too hard."

Nelson Lee looked at me squarely.

"Now, Nipper, I am going to tell you something," he exclaimed quietly. "You have never had any suspicions about this dream, have you?"

"Suspicious?" I repeated.

"You really took it to be a dream?"

"Why, gov'nor, what are you getting at?" I asked. "Of course it was a dream! How could it have been anything else? There aren't any Indians roaming loose about this district, with funny caverns and incense and crystals——"

"Wait a moment, Nipper, I have something to say," put in Nelson Lee. "I am telling you this because you know the whole story. Dodd told us that in his dream he bruised his shin. Do you remember that?"

"Why, yes, sir!"

"On Dodd's right shin there is a distinct bruise," said Nelson Lee significantly.

I stared.

"A bruise?" I repeated. "But it wasn't real, sir, it was only—— Great Scott! You're not suggesting that it actually happened?" I added breathlessly.

"You may further remember that

Dodd mentioned a little metal object," went on Lee grimly. "He fancied he put it in his pocket, at least, he didn't know where it went to after he had picked it up. Dodd has forgotten the dream now, but he just brought me this, he found it in his pocket, and could give no account as to how it got there."

Nelson Lee held out the little image, and I regarded it blankly.

"The idol with the twin stars!" I exclaimed. "Great goodness! And—and Dodd doesn't know how it came to his pocket?"

"The boy knows nothing whatever," said Nelson Lee. "But it is quite obvious, Nipper, that this is the little metal thing which Dodd referred to in his dream. In brief, it was no dream at all, but an actual happening."

I was fairly staggered.

"But—but I don't follow, sir," I said. "How could it have happened? And what is this idol, anyway?"

Nelson Lee examined it thoughtfully.

"To begin with, it is made of solid gold," he said smoothly. "The stones representing the eyes are rubies of exceptional quality, and the whole image is not worth one penny less than five hundred pounds!"

"Five hundred pounds!" I echoed faintly. "And Dodd found it in his pocket?"

"Exactly, Nipper; but you need not be so startled," said Nelson Lee. "All this proves one thing—Dodd passed through an actual experience. It was not merely a fancy of his imagination, as he himself believes."

"But I don't see that it's possible, sir," I protested. "How could he have met these Indians and been taken to a cave? And, if it really happened, why doesn't he remember it?"

"Those are questions which I cannot answer just now, my boy," replied Nelson Lee slowly. "There is a mystery here which will apparently tax all my ingenuity. I have told you this so that you shall know something of the truth. Do not speak of it to the other boys, and above all, say nothing to Dodd himself."

"Have you any idea what it means, sir?" I inquired curiously.

"To tell the truth, Nipper, I have none," said Nelson Lee. "I intend to investigate the matter thoroughly but quietly. And perhaps, before so very

long, I may be able to arrive at a solution. The problem is one which greatly interests me."

Shortly afterwards I left Nelson Lee's study. I was still filled with astonishment. I could hardly believe that what the gov'nor had said was true—that Jerry Dodd had actually passed through the experience which he thought to be a dream.

But the bruise on the shin and the golden idol proved otherwise. What was the mystery of that strange little image?

CHAPTER V.

SEEING WHAT HE CAN DO.

JERRY DODD looked supremely happy.

He was attired in rough and ready clothing—very different from his formal Eton suit and stiff, white collar. It was the following evening, and Jerry was just off to indulge in a little exercise and recreation.

To be exact, he was seated on the back of Bud, his clever little pony—the pet he had brought to St. Frank's with him. The Australian junior was attired in breeches, with a comfortable flannel shirt, open at the neck, and adorned by a loosely tied scarf. He looked the true colonial type now.

It had been a hard day for him. He had been "swotting" for all he was worth, with the intention of taking an easy hour during the evening. It was his plan to take Bud out on Bannington Moor, and to give the pony a long, healthy run.

And Jerry Dodd was always happy when he was with his clever little pet. Bud knew his master well—the understanding between the pair was almost uncanny. The pony would obey the slightest word, and it understood what Jerry required merely by the intonation of his voice.

They trotted round from the stables into the Triangle. Here Jerry pulled up and stood looking about him for a moment or two. Bud pawed impatiently at the ground, for he was anxious to be off.

"All right, old son, I figure we'll be going pretty soon," said Jerry Dodd, leaning forward and patting the pony's graceful neck. "But I just want some of these fellows to come round and

admire you. By jings! You're a beauty!"

Some of the fellows did come round, including Reginald Pitt, Handforth and Co., Christine, Lawrence, and a few others.

"Lucky bounder!" said Pitt. "We shouldn't mind having ponies to go rushing about the country on—better than a bike, any day. Just off for a trot round, Doddy?"

"Sure," said Jerry. "I reckon Bud needs exercise."

"Which way are you going?" I put in, strolling up.

"Oh, any old way—towards the moor, I think."

"Couldn't do better," I said. "Turn to the right outside the gateway, and go straight down the lane past the Mount. You'll come to the moor almost at once, and you can go for a good old romp."

"That's just the idea," agreed Jerry. "Well, so long, chums."

"Hold on, old scout," interrupted Pitt. "I was going to ask a favour—that pony of yours looks a regular little peach. Have you got any particular objection to me trotting round the Triangle with him?"

Jerry Dodd grinned.

"Say, you're as welcome as rain after a drought," he replied cheerfully. "If you think you can ride Bud, I reckon you're at liberty to have a try."

"Thanks awfully," said Pitt.

Jerry dismounted, and the other juniors looked at Pitt enviously as he prepared to set his foot in the stirrup. Handforth, in fact, glared at Pitt somewhat ferociously.

"Of all the nerve!" he exclaimed. "I was going to ask Dodd to let me have a ride. It's just like you to butt in!"

"Rats!" said Pitt cheerily.

"Hold on, chum, there's just one thing I'll need to say," put in Jerry Dodd. "It's up to me to warn you that it may not be so darned easy to ride round the Triangle on Bud as you think. He might raise a few objections. So don't blame me if there's just a little trouble."

"Trouble!" echoed Pitt. "Why, Bud's as quiet as a giddy clothes-horse!"

Pitt leapt lightly into the saddle, found the other stirrup, and then made a peculiar noise with his mouth—evidently an encouragement to Bud to

get a move-on. Bud, however, refused to obey.

"Gee-up, my beauty!" said Pitt coaxingly. "Come on, Bud, come on!"

The pony turned his head, looked at Pitt with almost human expression in his eyes, and then he put his ears back.

The next moment he was off trotting quietly across the Triangle. Jerry Dodd stood watching with a grin on his face—a grin which the other fellows couldn't understand just then. But they understood a moment later.

For without the slightest warning Bud altered his character. Instead of being a meek and gentle pony, he became a veritable broncho, a mass of highly animated springs and violent explosions.

He reared up, rolled sideways, then came down upon his forefeet, and shot Reginald Pitt with considerable force right over his head to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's not the way to ride a pony. Pitt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt sat up looking rather dazed.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "Who—who did that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But now the juniors were laughing at Bud, and not at his unfortunate victim. For the pony, having got rid of its unwanted rider, walked round and put his head down towards Pitt and gently caressed him, as though to express his regret at having acted so drastically, and to show that there were no ill-feelings.

"You—you blighter!" exclaimed Pitt breathlessly.

He scrambled, up dusty but unhurt.

"Care for another shot?" grinned Jerry Dodd. "He took you by surprise that time, but I don't figure you'd have much chance, anyway. Bud sort of objects to strangers on his back. That's one of his little ways."

Pitt grinned.

"Once is enough for me, thanks," he said. "I'll leave him to you, Dodd."

"Why, you silly ass!" said Handforth scornfully. "Do you mean to say that you give it up? Just as if there's anything clever in riding a blessed pony! Why, I'd go round the Triangle on him, and I'll bet he couldn't get me off!"

"Good!" chuckled Church. "Go it, Handy!"

"On the ball, old son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've no objection," put in Jerry, "but you saw what happened to Pitt, didn't you? Don't blame me, chum, if you lose a chunk of skin!"

Handforth sniffed, walked up to Bud, and leaped into the saddle. Bud looked round, gave a distinct wink, and trotted off without ado. Handforth clung tight, knowing what was coming. Bud soon commenced his tactics; up went his hind quarters and Handforth clung desperately to the pony's neck. Then down came Bud again, he reared up and Handy nearly slithered off backwards. But, somehow or other, he clung tight.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And then, like a suddenly released arrow, Bud sprang forward, careered across the Triangle in a series of jumps and swaying movements. Handforth shot off at full speed, nearly turned a somersault, and landed flat on his back. He sat up with a comical expression of dismay on his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try again, Handy!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth. "Where—where am I?"

Bud looked round meekly, and Handforth shook his fist in the pony's face.

"You—you rotter!" he panted. "I've a good mind to punch your nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bud evidently took this as an insult, for just as Handforth had got to his feet, the pony trotted forward and lowered his head. Then he gave Handforth a shove in the back which sent the junior flying.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say, Bud, that'll do," grinned Jerry Dodd. "Come here, chum!"

Bud trotted over as obediently as a well-trained dog. Then Jerry leapt into the saddle, waved his hand, and disappeared out of the gateway. He realised that Handforth might cause trouble, and it was better to fade out of the scene.

He chuckled to himself as he cantered quietly along, enjoying himself hugely. It was a mild, sunny evening, and Jerry Dodd was enjoying his ride. He had practically forgotten his "dream" of the previous evening. Certainly, it did not worry him, and he had no idea of any danger now.

Jerry went along the lane until he passed the Mount, a large private residence standing by itself, and so on to Bannington Moor.

He thought he was alone, and that he would not be disturbed; but shortly after he trotted on to the moor, he happened to glance in the rear. And then he stared; four cyclists were approaching.

"By jings!" muttered Jerry. "What's the idea of this?"

He was in no danger—those cyclists were not enemies. In point of fact, they were merely Handforth, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West and myself. I was carrying a bat under one arm. Watson had some wickets, and Handforth carried a ball in his pocket. We had come on Jerry Dodd's track for a very definite purpose.

"Now, my son, we've got you!" I said grimly, as we dismounted.

"I reckon I'm kind of puzzled," said the Australian boy. "What's the idea, chum?"

"Cricket!"

"Eh?"

"We're going to find out what you can do," I explained. "So far we've only had Handy's word to go on—and he's rather given to exaggeration."

"Why, you silly ass——" began Handforth.

"No rows now, Handy!" I put in. "We've come here to put Doddy through his paces. We're going to find out what he can do with a cricket bat."

"All right, I'll leave my affairs till afterwards," said Handforth darkly. "I sha'n't forget the way I was chucked off that blessed pony. It was Dodd's fault, and I'm going to punch his silly nose for him."

This, of course, was an idle threat. I winked at Jerry with my offside eye. He grinned and dismounted.

"Say, Bud, you can just run along for a bit," he said confidently to the pony. "Keep within hail, and don't eat too much grass!"

Bud trotted off, and was soon contented grazing. Jerry Dodd looked at us with a kind of quiet amusement in his eyes.

"Well, chums, I don't figure that I'm particularly cute with the cricketing materials, but I'll do my best," he said. "Rather a good idea of yours to come out here. We're out in the open, but I figure we're sure private."

"That's just the idea," I agreed. "It's not likely that any of the other chaps will come out this way this evening, and so we shall be able to put you through your paces without anybody else knowing. There's a nice smooth stretch of grass here—not up to the standard of a well rolled pitch, but it'll do in an emergency."

The ground, in fact, was wonderfully smooth just here, the grass being fairly short and thick. Tommy Watson proceeded to hammer in the stumps, and a minute or two later we were ready.

"We're going to try you at batting first," I said. "I'm going to bowl—and I may as well warn you in advance that I shall send you down some of my hottest balls."

"Good!" said Jerry. "The hotter the better."

"Nipper's red pepper at bowling," grinned Watson. "Watch out, my son!"

Jerry Dodd took up an easy position before the wicket, and I retreated a little way to take my usual run. I was determined to do the best I could, instead of giving Jerry a few easier ones to start with.

I took a short, swift run, and then then sent down the leather, travelling at full speed. With cool precision Jerry Dodd's bat went up. It swung down—Clack! The ball went soaring away into the distance.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "That was a rippin' hit!"

"Top hole!" I said. "Good man, Doddy!"

Tommy Watson went hurrying after the ball, and came back panting. He was perspiring freely, but he did not mind this.

"By jings—that's the stuff to give 'em!" he declared. "I don't mind chasing the ball if you can whack it like that every time, Dodd!"

And then Jerry proceeded to make us all perspire freely. No matter what balls I sent down he knocked them everywhere. I couldn't touch his wicket—I couldn't even scare him. He accepted everything with the same calm, easy manner. Now and again, of course, he only got in a short hit, but he kept his wicket intact.

"My hat! That'll do!" I said, at last. "You're Colman's super refined! About the hottest beggar I've ever seen. Why, with you in the Eleven, we'd whack all comers!"

"I wouldn't figure on that," said Jerry. "Cricket's a rum game, chum. I might be bowled out first ball in a regular match—there's no tellin'."

"Well, let's see what you can do with the ball," I said shortly. "Tommy, take that bat, and face the cannonade!"

Watson was not particularly keen. And a moment later his middle stump went flying. Again and again he tried to deal with Jerry Dodd's bowling, but it was tricky, clever and deadly accurate. Jerry seemed to know every aspect of cricket from A to Z. It is not common for a good batsman to be a good bowler. But Jerry was undoubtedly a past master of both.

He didn't find it quite so easy to get me out. I stood up to his bowling for ten minutes, but I couldn't do much. I certainly couldn't make any big swipes. I had to guard my wicket with the utmost care, being afraid to launch out.

"You'll do!" I said, after I had been bowled. "My son, this is a revelation. I've seen a few cricketers in my time, but you fairly beat the lot. You're a demon at the game!"

"And he's not in the Eleven!" said Watson indignantly.

"Sorry, chums, but my pater wants me to stuff my head with book knowledge," said Jerry Dodd. "I guess I'm not allowed to join the Eleven——"

"We'll see about that!" I interrupted grimly. "In any case, you're going to play for us against Bannington Grammar School on Saturday!"

"Say, but look here, Nipper——"

"'Nuff said!" I repeated firmly. "If the Head won't let you play—and you've got to ask for his permission—we'll jolly well kidnap you."

"By jings!" said Jerry, rather startled.

"We'll carry you off for the afternoon—and take all the blame," I declared. "There's one thing certain—St. Frank's won't play against Bannington without you in the Eleven! We've got to win that match!"



CHAPTER VI.

NELSON LEE'S SURPRISING ADVENTURE

BELLTON LANE was quiet and peaceful, with only a faint breeze disturbing the tree tops of the dense wood. The darkness was quite black here, although out in the

open the brightly shining stars served to dispel the complete gloom of night.

Nelson Lee walked thoughtfully up the lane. Here, in the shadow of the wood, it was almost impossible for the famous detective to see a couple of yards ahead of him. The road was hard and rather dusty, and Lee was wearing a pair of light tennis shoes with rubber soles. His movements, therefore, were noiseless.

He had been for a walk—a late stroll. St. Frank's was asleep, for the hour was close upon midnight. Nelson Lee never retired early—scarcely ever before one a.m. Six hours sleep was the utmost he allowed himself, and it was sufficient.

Nelson Lee had been thinking over the curious events connected with Jerry Dodd's imaginary dream. And the detective was trying to arrive at some solution of the problem—he was endeavouring to puzzle out how those strange events had taken place, and how it was that Jerry had believed an actual happening to be a dream.

Lee could not quite settle himself to any definite line of reasoning, and as he walked along there was a puzzled frown on his forehead. He was not smoking now, although shortly before he had thrown away a cigar end.

As Nelson Lee was walking his thoughts strayed for a moment, and he came to a halt. The night was very quiet, only the slight rustle of the trees disturbing the complete stillness. The countryside lay absolutely asleep, not even the barking of a dog or the crowing of a cockerel disturbing the brooding peace.

But, almost subconsciously, there came a curious sound to Nelson Lee's ears—a faint, elusive kind of chanting, not altogether unmusical which seemed to fade and swell alternately.

Nelson Lee stood quite still, half-believing that his ears were deceiving him, and that he was hearing sounds which were merely in his own head. But no, this was not the case. He soon became convinced of that.

His ears were trained to catch any sound which was not as it should be. And this strange chanting was certainly mystical. It irresistibly reminded him of the East, but such a thought as this was absolutely absurd.

Standing quite motionless, listening intently, he came to the conclusion that the sounds were fairly close at hand—

and not in the distance, as he had at first imagined. The chanting—if chanting it actually was—was low and very quiet. Those who were responsible were afraid to raise their voices. They thought, possibly, that they were safe in murmuring in this mournful, mysterious way. For the whole neighbourhood was asleep, and nothing was stirring, except Nelson Lee.

He came to the conclusion that the chanting dirge was located somewhere within the deep recesses of the wood. At the slightest sound of approach the sounds would stop—that was certain. Any ordinary person entering the wood would give himself away at once, and probably no trace of anything strange or unusual would be found.

But with Nelson Lee, it was different. He had spent a great deal of time in the forest regions of Africa, and other wild countries. He was as accomplished as an Australian black tracker. He could move through a wood as silently as a shadow. This quality is only possessed by those who have had much experience of woodcraft.

Nelson Lee entered the wood like a ghost. He made not the slightest sound. His progress was slow, but he knew that he was going in the right direction. The chanting was already louder in his ears. It was coming from a point only a stone's throw away from him. But all was pitch blackness ahead, under the dense canopy of the wood's foliage.

And then Nelson Lee's keen eyes noticed a slight change. The blackness was slightly diffused. And after he had moved forward a few more paces he became aware of a strange, ruddy glow—so slight as to be almost imperceptible. He edged his way methodically through the trees, and not a twig crackled under his foot—not a leaf stirred as he moved.

Quite abruptly, the faint glow became a definite, exposed light. For Nelson Lee, parting the branches of a thick bush, found himself looking straight down into a cup-like hollow. It was a quaint little depression in the wood, where no trees grew. Even in broad daylight it would have been difficult to discover this secluded spot. From one year's end to the other no human being visited the place.

And there, in the centre of the hollow, stood a tiny brazier, with glowing charcoal contained within its bars. The light it gave out was insignificant. But, in

that pitchy darkness, it seemed almost powerful. Nelson Lee could distinguish three men crouching round the brazier.

For a second, Lee rubbed his eyes, hardly able to believe that they were not deceiving him. These men were dark—Hindoos or Burmese. Although Lee could not see very distinctly, he was inclined to the latter view.

All the men were attired in rich Eastern clothing—silks, and gaily coloured turbans. And they were chanting monotonously over the brazier. There was no rhyme or reason in this proceeding, but Nelson Lee had experienced this kind of thing before. He did not seek any explanation.

It was sufficient to know that these men were here. Indians—in Bellton Wood—at midnight, and chanting with fanatical solemnity! It was an extraordinary state of affairs, and almost unbelievable.

And Nelson Lee was seeing it with his own eyes.

And the detective could not help thinking of Jerry Dodd, and the latter's strange experience of the previous evening. Lee could not help thinking of the golden image with the two ruby eyes—the Twin Stars.

What connection was there between Jerry Dodd and the idol?

How were these dark men concerned with the Australian boy? Why were they here, and what was the object of their presence?

Nelson Lee knew well enough that these Burmese were not in the district merely for pleasure. They had some definite object—and that object, no doubt, was a grim one. They were undoubtedly interested in Jerry Dodd. But why? What possible reason could there be for such a singular state of affairs?

Nelson Lee realised he was up against something of a very unusual type. He did not act now. It was too early for him to make any decisive move. And so, as quietly as he had approached, he slipped away from the hollow, leaving the three Indians still chanting monotonously over the brazier.

So quiet had been Nelson Lee's movements, that the strangers did not know anything of his presence. And, within a few minutes, Nelson Lee was back in the lane—with much food for thought.

He had known since the previous night that Jerry Dodd's dream had been a reality, and that the Indians really

existed. Now he had seen them with his own eyes—and he was more puzzled than ever.

The chanting still continued—but so faintly that no ordinary ears would have heard. It had only been Nelson Lee's trained hearing that had detected the unusual sounds. And even he would probably have missed them had the breeze been a little stronger.

He walked slowly and thoughtfully up to St. Frank's, let himself quietly in by the master's gate, and went straight into the Ancient House. He did not linger in his study, but retired at once to his bedroom.

"There is something here that must be fathomed!" he told himself grimly. "My greatest difficulty is in discovering how Dodd can be associated with these men of the East. It is a most puzzling affair.

He did not switch on the electric light, but partially undressed in the dark. Then he slipped on his dressing gown, and sank into an easy chair near the open window. He filled his pipe, lit it, and lay back.

He did not sleep—he sat there thinking deeply.

For perhaps half an hour he remained in this one position, quietly enjoying his pipe, and with no desire to slumber in his active mind. Then the pipe went out, its contents burned through.

But Lee still held it between his teeth. And he remained there, fighting out the problem—and arriving at no decision. His data was meagre and limited, and he knew that he would have to make more discoveries before arriving at any well-defined train of reasoning. And, at last, he decided to turn in.

And then, at that very moment,—just as he was about to move, his quick ears detected a faint, unusual sound.

It was so slight as to be almost indistinguishable. But Nelson Lee was keenly on the alert, and he held himself tense, listening. His mind flew back to the Indians in the wood. He had not thought for a moment that they would disturb the peaceful calm of St. Frank's.

Perhaps he was wrong—perhaps he had jumped to a hasty conclusion. The sound was repeated, and Nelson Lee knew that it was caused by the opening of a lower window. The intruder, whoever he was, performed his work with the utmost care. But Nelson Lee was

alive to every unusual noise, and he knew that something was amiss.

He waited for two or three minutes. Then, quietly and stealthily he rose to his feet, and moved across to the door. By the sound he judged that the midnight marauder was making an entry by means of the little window which led into the lower passage, near the lobby.

Nelson Lee emerged upon the landing, and his slippered feet made no noise. He reached the top of the stairs, and stood for a moment listening. No sound came to his ears, except one or two of those little creaks which are to be heard in all big houses during the still hours.

He commenced descending the stairs. The lobby, below, was quite dark. At last he reached the bottom. Then, holding himself tense, he suddenly switched on an electric torch. The light shot across the lobby in a silver beam.

It revealed a portion of the floor and the opposite wall, but no human figure. Nelson Lee shifted the light about quickly. Then something happened.

A large brown object, which glistened in the white electric light, shot across the lobby floor. The torch was jerked out of Nelson Lee's hand, and he rapidly caught his breath in. He knew what that brown object was.

A man—an Indian, devoid of clothing except for a cloth round his middle. His skin gleamed in the light as though it were polished, and he moved with lithe agility. And then Nelson Lee found himself grappling with this strange and uncanny intruder. The man did not attack Lee—his sole object was to extinguish the light, and in this he was successful, for the torch crashed to the floor.

Only one tiny glimpse had Nelson Lee received, but it had been sufficient to tell him what this figure was. Then he went to the attack, his intention being to capture the man, and demand an explanation.

But it was not such an easy task.

The instant Nelson Lee commenced his struggle, he knew the truth. The body of his antagonist was as slippery as a newly-landed eel. Lee could not obtain a grip anywhere; his fingers clutched helplessly at the fellow's skin.

The Indian was greased—from head to foot!

Not many people have had the experience of trying to hold a greased

human being—particularly one which is anxious to avoid capture. Nelson Lee's task was an impossible one, and he knew this from the first. The more he tried to deal with his opponent, the less chance he stood of success.

The brown man did not make a sound, except for his heavy breathing. And with a quick, sudden jerk he freed himself, and vanished into the blackness. Nelson Lee judged that he was making his way to the open window, and the detective hurried off in pursuit. He arrived at the window, and stared out into the starlit Triangle. Everything was quiet, and not a sign of any human being could be seen.

"The slippery rascal!" muttered Lee tensely.

Two hands, with long, wiry fingers, came round his throat from behind. This was absolutely unexpected, for Lee had not believed that the Indian was still within the building. Lee jerked himself round quickly, and the fingers tightened over his throat. But only for a moment.

With a sudden heave, Lee was sent hurtling backwards. He crashed against the wall of the passage, and fell to the floor. He caught a glimpse of a black shadow leaping in one bound through the window. Then it disappeared.

By the time Nelson Lee had picked himself up, the extraordinary intruder had vanished. And Lee knew that it would be futile for him to go in pursuit. So, closing the window, he went upstairs to bed—fully convinced that the Indian would not make any further attempt that night.

Nelson Lee was startled by what had occurred. The light was full on in his bedroom now, and his first action was to bathe his neck—for it was considerably bruised. Then, at last, he paced up and down the room, smoking a cigarette.

"The idol—undoubtedly the idol!" he told himself grimly. "That can be the only possible explanation."

There was nothing else to be thought. The Indian was one of the three Nelson Lee had seen in the wood, and that peculiar chanting had probably been a kind of preparatory move. No doubt the Burmese gentlemen had been invoking the aid of Buddha before their emissary went on his errand.

The man had come for the golden image—which Jerry Dodd had brought away unknowingly from the mysterious

cavern. And, though Nelson Lee had not met with any great success in his present investigation, he was by no means downhearted.

On the contrary, his senses were those of high elation.

"This is a problem that will tax my energy and my wits!" he told himself. "There are many things that I must make clear. Firstly, why are these men interfering with Dodd? Secondly, how is it that Dodd passed through a most remarkable experience, and believed that experience to be a dream? Yes, there are many points to be thrashed out—many knotty problems to be solved."

And Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

Here was a problem after his own heart—the most mysterious case he had ever been called upon to handle!

Meanwhile, Jerry Dodd, of the Remove, was sleeping peacefully in the dormitory—unconscious of the smouldering fires which would shortly be stirred into flame. The Australian boy had settled down very quietly at St. Frank's. But, before so very long, he was destined to provide the old school with more excitement than it had seen for many a day!

The first episode in the affair of the mysterious Burmese was over. And, of course, later on Nelson Lee got well and truly on the track. But of this I can say nothing now. Those episodes must be recorded in their correct places.

THE END.

ANOTHER FINE STORY OF JERRY DODD at St. FRANK'S

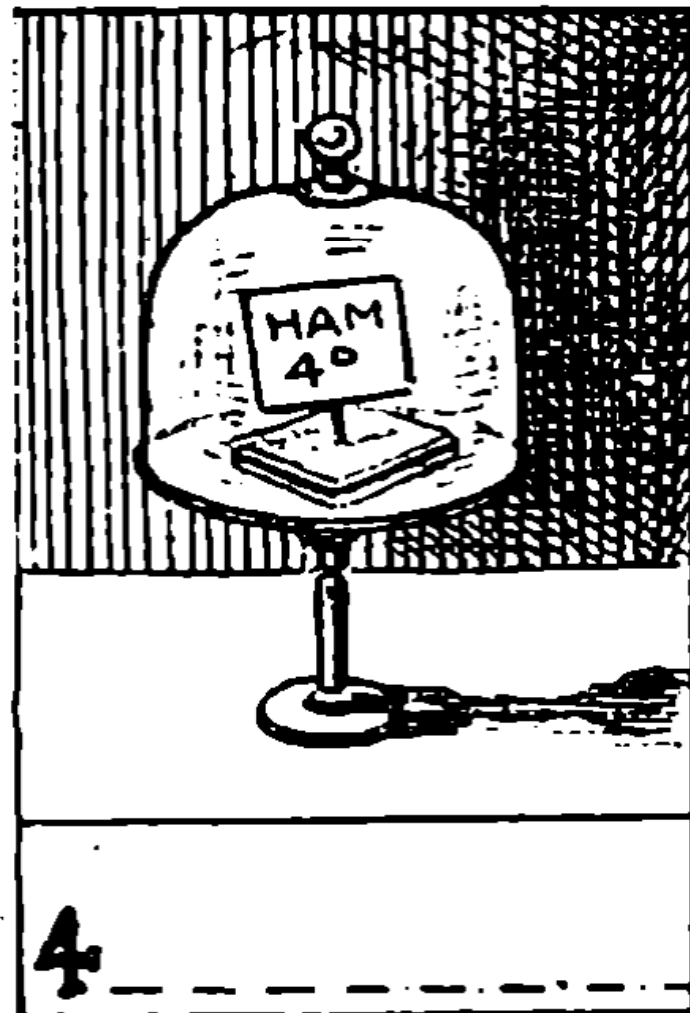
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(Continued from Last Week.)

The German Submarine.

"**I** SAY, old man, this won't do, you know," he said. "We'll have to lie up a day or two longer. You wouldn't last the course. You'd crack up in a couple of miles."

"Oh, I'll be all right by to-morrow," replied Jack, in as strong a voice as he could summon up. "Let's rest here a bit. What a desolate coast!"

It was. From their seat on the low cliff they commanded a view for many miles in either direction. Nothing broke the monotony of the shoreline, nor was there even a smudge of smoke on the horizon. Away over the ocean rim ships were going up and down the narrow seas, but here, far down the Gulf of Carpentaria not even the sails of a schooner were visible.

Below them the sea broke continually on the reef which almost closed the mouth of the bay. Looking down through the clear water they could see that no isolated rocks made the passage of the reef dangerous, and once inside a vessel might lie snug and safe though a hurricane blew without.

"Yes, it would have been an excellent harbour for a tin fish," murmured Harding thoughtfully. "No one comes here once in a blue moon, and if anyone had I reckon that Jerry would have treated 'em as they proposed to treat us. By Jove, d'you see that shark? What a whopper!"

The great fish had come out of the shadow of the reef and cruised slowly through the opening. They could see it clearly. Also they could see the smaller fish which gave the monster a wide berth. Apparently it was not hungry, for it glided lazily along almost awash, its big dorsal fin cutting the surface. They watched it curiously for a while.

Suddenly it swung about, remained perfectly still for a minute, then darted away at full speed through the entrance and out to sea.

"The brute scents something to eat, or

Jack never finished the sentence for, as he lifted his head, he saw something that cut him short. Half a mile or so out was a commotion in the water. Something large and long and black was heaving up to

the surface, thrusting an odd glistening rod before it. For a moment the couple on the headland thought of a whale with a harpoon sticking in its back, then they realised the truth. It was no whale, but a submarine!

"Lord! We're in the soup!" ejaculated Jack. "We must bolt back. The 'bush will be our best chance. See, they've come on deck. They see us. They're wagging a flag. They think we're their own lot."

"They won't think so long, then," said Harding with a chuckle. "See who has turned up on the other side. It's the dear Braun, and he's wagging them as hard as he can. Old bean, we had better begin our strategic retreat. When those fellows aboard understand the glad tidings Braun is trying to impart the darlings will begin gunning for us. Take my arm. Allons, mon enfant!"

They made along the shore at the best pace Jack could endure. But before they reached the house Jack's strength had given out and Harding had almost to carry him in. As he set him down on the threshold he turned and saw the nose of the sinister craft sliding slowly into the harbour.

"Well, the unexpected has happened. At least we know now what Braun waited for," said Professor Maxwell. "What a pity Jack is so weak. We cannot retreat while he is in this condition. It appears to me that our best hope lies in negotiation. These people are—technically, at least—pirates, but they have common sense."

"Negotiate?" said Harding. "Why there must be at least a dozen, probably a score or more of men aboard that craft. They'll shoot us down."

"Perhaps—but not after I've talked with them," replied Maxwell calmly. "They're lowering a boat. Come inside and we'll make Jack comfortable. The first performance will begin in a few minutes."

Pistols for Two.

THE boat from the submarine pulled to where Braun stood, took him aboard and waited alongside. There was a pause while the group on her deck talked and gesticulated. Glasses were turned in the direction of the house, though

nothing but a portion of one gable could be seen from the vessel, the isolated rock behind which it lay concealing it.

Then the boat was manned with eight armed men and after these had been landed Braun and two others were set ashore. At an order the whole gang began to march towards the house. Anson crouched in the storehouse, his back against a pile of cart-ridge boxes, his hand close to the switch of the detnating battery. Harding lounged in the doorway behind Professor Maxwell, who, pipe in mouth, surveyed the advancing Germans, with something like a smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

They came steadily on, though Braun looked a trifle nervous as they drew near. His arm and shoulder were done up in fresh bandages. He walked a pace in the rear of the leader—a small, fierce-looking man in the uniform of the German Imperial Navy. Braun was no longer monarch of all he surveyed, but in the presence of a superior.

When the party were within twenty yards Professor Maxwell held up a hand.

"Halt!" he commanded. "Herr Commander, be good enough to bid your men keep back. Advance alone, and remember that any attempt at treachery will lead to most regrettable consequences."

The commander stopped and seemed to fight for breath. His face grew darkly red with passion. His hand slid to the holster at his belt, but paused as he heard the last words.

"What do you mean by this? I a officer of the German Imperial Navy am! To me this is insult!" he spluttered thickly.

"There is now neither German Emperor nor Navy. You are a pirate!" said the professor. "I suppose you have landed to take away this stuff, but if you want it you will have to listen to reason or lose it all. We have taken the precaution of laying charges of explosives and detonators among the ammunition and the petrol-tanks, and one of my young men only waits my word to blow it and us into the air. That would be a sad end for all your piratical schemes, would it not?"

"I no pirate am!" roared the commander. "I only desire property of my country to take away!"

"If a cruiser happened along you would have some trouble in explaining all that," replied the professor, still smiling. "However, as matters stand, I will make a bargain with you. One of my young men is somewhat the worse for a touch of fever and will not be able to travel comfortably for several days. Leave us alone for that time and keep your men from pursuing us, and you shall have your stuff—all except a rifle apiece and ammunition, and such stores as we need, a mere trifle out of your superfluity. After all, the war is over. Why should we fall out?"

The commander glared, spluttered, and was silent for a minute. Then he made up his mind.

"Very well! It shall be as you desire.

I, Hermann Voigt, give you my word. You will hoist a white flag when you desire to go. In three days—yes, no?"

"Yes, Herr Commander," replied Maxwell. "Allow me to add that we regret the necessity that compelled us to defend ourselves."

Voigt spluttered again, bowed stiffly, barked an order and swung about. A few minutes later he and his men had all gone aboard, taking Braun with them.

"By Jove, you played that well, professor! Do you think we can trust him?"

"Yes. He's an honest enough chap by the look of him, though I wouldn't say as much for the other fellow who looks too much the type of Braun. We'll keep watch and watch as before."

Anson, however, proposed that before they turned in they should help him to stretch wires supported on sticks all around the house, close to the ground. These were led into the house and connected with several empty cans. If any prowler came against them in the dark he would raise an alarm.

However, the night passed, and all the next day without anything happening. The people of the submarine came ashore and walked on the beach, but they did not approach the house.

When it grew dark Anson went out for a stroll. He sauntered in the direction of the under-sea boat, and at last found himself almost within stone's-throw of her. There were men on her deck talking in low tones and the sound of their voices travelled clearly over the water.

Anson recognised Braun's voice and the commander's. They seemed to be arguing about something. They grew hotter and hotter, till at length Braun said something at which the commander swore fiercely. There followed the sound of a blow and a heavy fall, more bad language, then, after a moment's silence, a sentence of which he caught the words:

"Beach—morning—sunrise."

Then they all tramped below.

"I have a notion that means a row," said Anson to himself. "I think I'll be on hand bright and early."

He was. Esconced behind a rock he saw the submarine's boat put off while the sun was yet below the horizon. Four men were in her—the commandant, Braun, the second officer, and one who looked like an engineer. They paddled to the beach and there separated. Braun and the commander walked aside while the other two measured a distance of some twenty paces on the sand.

Light broke in upon Anson. The pair had quarrelled last night, and now they were going to settle their differences in the regulation way—by a duel.

"I hope Voigt nails the beast!" he said to himself. "I have a hunch that will save us trouble. Golly, but they're cold-blooded about it!"

The seconds seemed anxious to be very accurate, so the measuring took some time. Finally, however, it was finished; the places

marked with bits of stick, and the men put in position.

Each held a heavy automatic. The seconds stepped aside and addressed the pair in a formal speech. One of them—the second officer—held a handkerchief, and it seemed to Anson that he turned his head slightly towards Braun and winked. Then he cleared his throat and let the kerchief fall.

Instantly Braun fired. Commander Voigt reeled, fired wildly and fell forward on his face. The seconds ran to him, lifted him, and let him fall again, for he was quite dead. The engineer looked white and nervous, but the other officer was plainly pleased. He grinned and nodded at Braun, who stood stiffly.

"Well, I'm hanged! That was black murder! A put-up job!" growled Anson in his throat. "That hound gave Braun the tip to fire by making that noise. I've a mind to settle the pair of them!"

His fingers closed over the butt of his pistol, but he refrained. Black scoundrels as these men had proved themselves, he could not bring himself to shoot them down in cold blood. Besides, he had his friends to think of. They must be warned. He felt that Braun had now regained the ascendancy which he had lost at the coming of the commandant; and Braun he trusted no more than he did a mad dog.

No sooner had the boat returned to the ship, carrying the body of her captain, than he crept back and told the story of the assassination.

"We must try to get away to-night," he said. "I feel certain Braun will try some underhand game. Now, I'm going up into the bush to lay a trail to guide us in the dark. If we can only get a start, we can diddle them."

He took food and water and set off, while the others made preparations for departure. Night had already fallen when he returned.

"It was rougher than I thought it would be," he said. "I've marked some miles with peg and blazes. We'll take a lantern and do well enough. Hallo! Stand by! There's someone there!"

A shadow moved out of the darkness.

"Please to shoot not!" it whispered, and threw something into the doorway of the hut, then melted mysteriously as it had come.

Harding pounced on the missile. It was a piece of note-paper crumpled into a ball. He spread it out and laid it on the table by the lamp. Professor Maxwell lifted it and read the few lines of writing.

"Sir, I am not a pirate," he read aloud. "I am an honourable man. Therefore, I warn you to go away. My crew do mutiny. I am about to fight with the man known to you. If I fall—as is most likely—they will not keep my word to you. Accept my apologies for that which I cannot prevent. If you escape send word of my end to my Government—if it still has one.—HERMANN VOIGT."

"Poor fellow! He has run straight!" murmured Maxwell. "Well, we had best

take his advice and go at once. All of you take your packs. Anson, we cannot destroy the place, I fear, for that would spoil our chances of escape. We will leave the lamp burning as we have previously. Ready? Let us go, then!"

Anson lingered behind for a moment adjusting a string to the door, then followed them through the window. As silently as ghosts they climbed the cliff to the point where he had begun his trail and proceeded for some little way by groping. Soon, however, they were hidden from possible watchers, the lantern was lit and they progressed more rapidly.

They had gone for nearly two miles and were close to the place where, so Anson told them, they would be able to march along the beach, when the sky overhead was suddenly illuminated by a blinding flash. The dull roll of a heavy explosion followed.

Anson laughed.

"And that's that!" he cried. "I set the trap, and someone has sprung it. I only hope it was Braun, but I don't suppose he would be too forward. Anyhow, they've lost most of what they were after, and, what's more, they won't know till morning that we haven't gone with it. We must make the most of the start."

They marched on, coming at last to the beach. By crossing the bush they had saved miles of tramping along the rocks of the shore. They descended the rocks and made good time along the firm sand, till, at dawn, they halted for a rest. Jack Maxwell was not yet quite his old self. He looked somewhat worn, but he refused to rest longer than an hour, pointing out that by this time the crew of the submarine would be in search of them.

"But why should they trouble further about us?" asked Harding. "They can get away now."

"They may wish to cover their tracks. They know that we will talk and that there will be a search for them. Perhaps they mean to do a little piracy. Anyhow, I have a feeling that they will pursue," replied Jack. "At all events, we'll take no chances."

So they marched on in the ever-increasing heat till towards midday it grew unbearable. There was no shelter on the beach, no cave in the cliff which thereabouts rose sheer from the sands, while even if they had succeeded in climbing to the top the matted bush would have been utterly stifling. Therefore, they made a tent of their blankets and rifles and lay under it for a little till the lure of the blue water rippling over the shallows at their feet called them irresistibly.

Soon they were splashing about in the shallow water, warmed nearly to blood heat, but very refreshing, none the less. They looked longingly at the deep water beyond the sandy bar that fenced the pool, but a huge fin, moving to and fro in the offing, forbade them to venture.

"All out!" cried the professor at last.

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

after they had spent a full hour lolling luxuriously. "Enough's as good as a feast!" Then, in the silence that followed the splashing as they began to dress, all four turned suddenly towards the north-west and stood listening. A sound that was different from the murmur of the surf, an insistent thrumming, very faint but growing steadily in intensity, came down the wind. It was the beat of a ship's engines, and since the ocean was empty so far as they could see, there could be only one source. The submarine was coming, running nearly submerged.

They scanned the face of the waters, and presently saw a tiny speck of grey in the distance. Braun had discovered that they had escaped, and, knowing the lie of the country, had pursued with the intention of cutting off their retreat. If they remained on the beach they would certainly be seen, and as certainly shot down.

Jack Maxwell looked at the cliffs and saw that there was little likelihood of finding a way up in time to conceal themselves in the scrub.

"We can't do it!" he exclaimed. "Lie down! Crawl over there where there is a little hollow. We'll bury the stuff and ourselves. Quick, or they'll be near enough to pick us up with their glasses."

Wriggling along, snake fashion, dragging their baggage after them, they reached the hollow and commenced to cover first their packs and then themselves. The task was easy enough, for the sand was dry. A couple of minutes sufficed to render them invisible to anyone more than fifty or a hundred yards away.

The hum of the engines grew louder and louder. Jack Maxwell, who had contrived his resting-place so that he could view the sea through half-closed eyes, saw the submarine come in sight. It rose higher out of the water and came cruising along as close to the shore as possible.

He saw two figures on the upper bridge weeping the shore with glasses, and recognised Braun by his bandages which showed clearly against the background of blue sea.

"Don't move! They're looking this way!" muttered Jack. "Thank goodness the water's too shoal to allow them to come close in."

For a full minute he lay in suspense, while the two figures swung to and fro, scanning every foot of beach; and the vessel, rolling little to the swell, moved slowly past. Almost he felt those hostile eyes upon him. Then at last the ship passed beyond his range of vision, and he ventured to breathe more freely.

(To be continued.)

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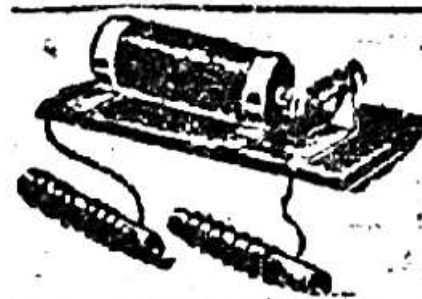
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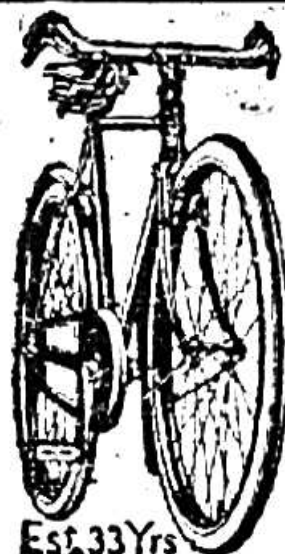
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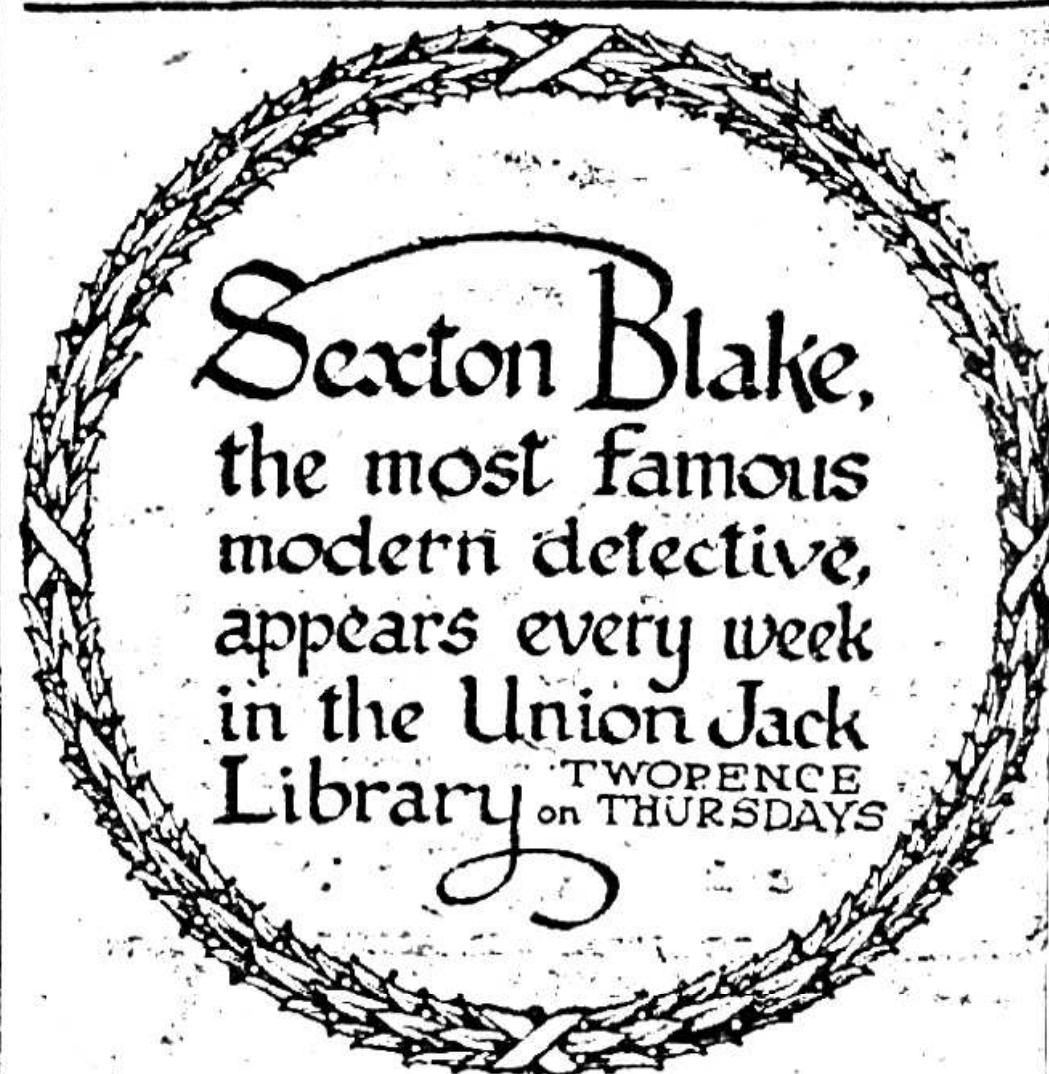
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