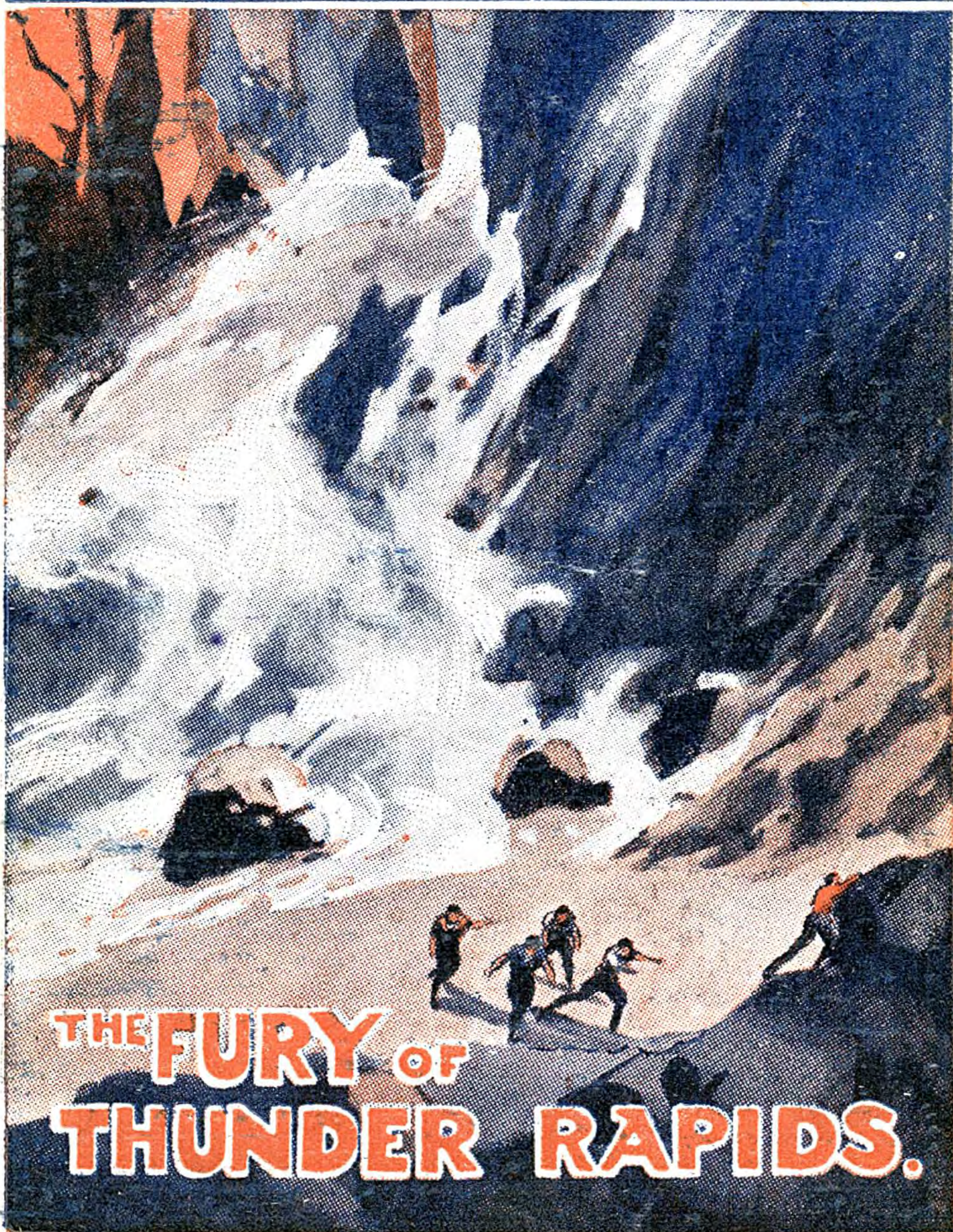


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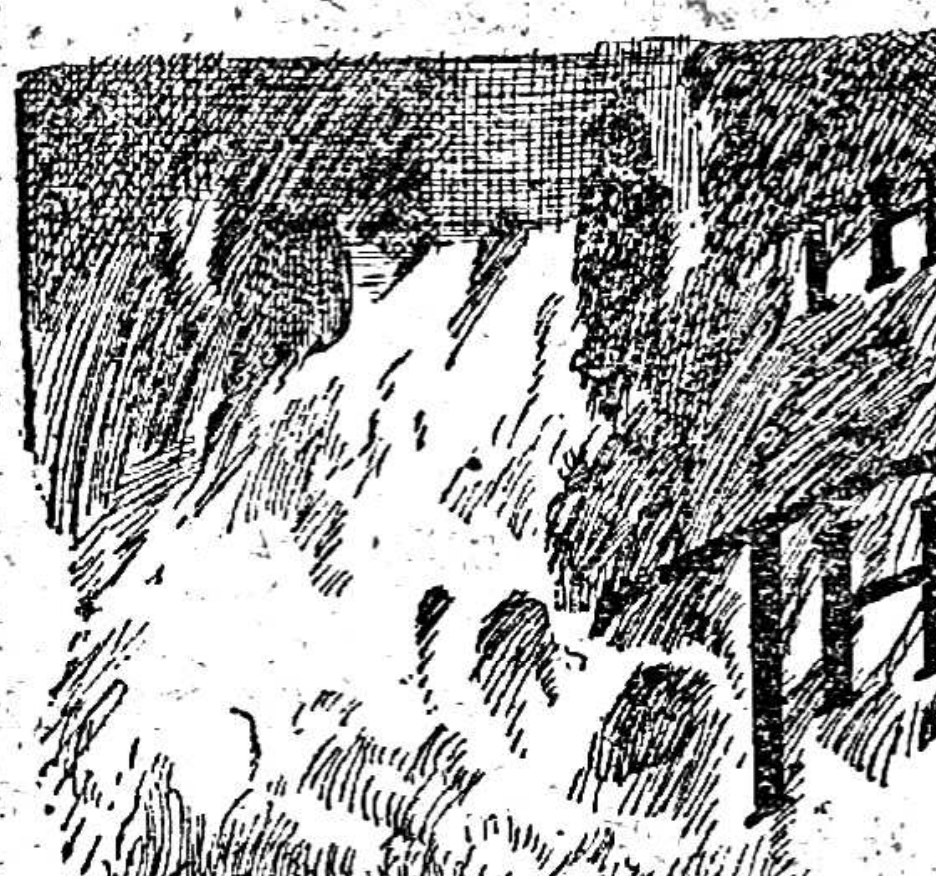
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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

CUT OFF FROM THE WORLD!

BO-OOM!

It was like the report of a heavy siege gun, and the echo reverberated thunderously among the mountains. The very ground upon which we stood shook and trembled, as though by an earthquake.

"That's the second time to-day!" said Reginald Pitt, staring across the valley. "Something pretty big seems to be happening over beyond the hills. I've got an idea they're real earthquakes——"

"No; it was only a landslide," I put in. "A pretty big one, too, to judge by the earth tremors. This last one was even more violent than the other."

"And we're prisoners!" said Handforth.

"Eh?"

"Prisoners for life!"

"Oh, come off it——"

"Well, it's true—so what's the good of kidding ourselves different?" demanded Handforth. "We're hemmed in this giddy valley, and there's no way out of it. If we had a decent aeroplane we might do the trick. But we're just

about as helpless as a collection of beetles in the bottom of a jam jar."

Sir Montie Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez.

"Really, dear old boy, that's a frightfully objectionable remark," he said severely. "I distinctly refuse to be likened to a beetle, begad!"

"Well, after all, the comparison was rather apt," I said. "This valley is something like a jam jar when you come to think of it—on every side there are sheer precipices rising up thousands of feet, and all we can do is crawl about here, along the bottom of the jam jar, so to speak, and look up at the sky. We certainly can't get out."

"It's a horrible position," said Tommy Watson. "What on earth are we going to do? Stay here until we die? What about our people? What about getting back to St. Frank's? I'm blessed if I can realise it fully, even yet."

And, to tell the truth, most of the other juniors were just the same as Tommy Watson. They simply couldn't realise the thing. And yet it was clear enough, and no amount of thinking or talking would make any difference.

Here we were, twenty of us, bottled up in an unknown valley, right away

in Athabasca, in the shadow of the Caribou Mountains, in North-West Canada. Whether we should ever get out and reach civilisation remained a problem.

Looking out across the valley, I beheld a picture of exquisite beauty—meadows, with patches of glorious flowers, woods, and a fair-sized river running between green banks. Nothing, indeed, could have been more picturesque.

But, somehow, the beauty of this scene did not appeal to us as it had done originally. For we knew that we should probably be compelled to live in this valley for years—all our lives. And yet, while we thought in this way, we instinctively felt that it would never actually come to this.

There were twenty of us in the valley, as I have already said. There were twelve St. Frank's juniors, including myself. The other eight members of our party were Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrmore, Umlosi, Mr. Farman, the millionaire, three Montana cowboys, and our half-breed guide, Leon Ascara.

In the first place, we had come to this valley in search of gold—and we had certainly found it. For the valley was worth millions. Gold lay in the creek beds in almost a virginal condition. We had staked out claims, and it had been our intention to file these claims later on, when we reached civilisation. But should we ever do so?

We had met with a series of adventures which were as startling as they were extraordinary. Battles with the Indian tribe which we found in the valley, encounters with four ruffianly rivals, and battles with Nature itself. And these last had been the most appalling of all.

Jake Crasher, the leader of the rival gang, had attempted to betray us—and, indeed, he had succeeded in his dastardly object.

He and his four companions had left the valley, taking with them an enormous amount of gold. And it was their idea to imprison us in the valley for life. They had blown up Caribou Pass—the only exit from the valley.

But, in doing this, the scoundrels had encompassed their own destruction.

The explosion had started a veritable cataclysm. The mountains themselves had thundered down, and Jake Crasher

and Co. were killed on the spot in the general upheaval.

And we, in the valley, were sealed up.

That was just the position. How we should get out remained a problem which seemed impossible of solution. Even Nelson Lee, astute as he was, could find no key to this puzzle.

I find it difficult to set down in cold words the appalling nature of the landslides which had been taking place. I do not merely mean that parts of the mountains got into movement. Literally, millions of tons of rock collapsed, in four or five places at different times.

And, even now, two days after the main catastrophe, we still heard rushes and noises like explosions. These falls were happening in the mountains outside the valley. And they were evidently of a serious nature.

"Of course, there is just a faint chance that Providence may work in our favour," said Nelson Lee, speaking to Dorrie. "These enormous landslides hemmed us in. But another landslide may provide an exit."

"That's rather improbable, isn't it?"

"Decidedly so," agreed Lee. "But not altogether impossible, Dorrie."

"Well, there's nothing like looking on the bright side," said his lordship cheerfully. "Upon my word, old man, we're havin' some queer times this journey, ain't we? The narrowest escape of all was when we got underneath that fall of cliff, an' escaped underground, pushed out by a subterranean spring."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "And now, Dorrie, we must consider this matter seriously. For it is serious. I don't believe in sitting down and accepting the position. Even though we are convinced that our efforts will lead to nothing, we must work—work all the time—and try to conquer these frowning precipices."

"You're quite right, Mr. Lee," put in Big Jim Farman. "No good ever comes of sitting down and moping. By glory! There might be a chance. I guess we'll do everything we can, anyhow."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"And we must think of the boys, too," he went on. "If, by a piece of luck, we manage to get out of this valley to-day or to-morrow, we shall still be able to rush across the American

continent, and catch a fast liner back to England, and we should arrive only a few days late for the commencement of the autumn term at St. Frank's."

Lord Dorrिमoro grinned.

"By gad!" he said. "Are you thinkin' about the bally old school now?"

"My dear man, we must think of everything," replied Lee.

"But it's of no importance——"

"I don't agree with you," interrupted the detective. "It is very important indeed, Dorrie. I am responsible for the safety of these boys, and I am worrying greatly over them. If we, ourselves, were in this predicament, I should not mind so much. But the presence of so many juniors gives me great concern. And I cannot help thinking that some Providential happening will set us free."

Umlosi had come up, and he nodded.

"Wise words, O Umtagati," he rumbled. "Thou art surely right in what thou art saying. Dost thou think we shall remain in this wondrous valley until we die? Wau! I tell thee that we shall be free ere many nights have passed."

"Another optimist," remarked Dorrie calmly. "That's the style! My goodness! What should we look like if we all sat in a circle and mourned? Even taking it at the worst, this valley ain't so bad. I dare say we can manage to enjoy life."

"Certainly, the position is not one that need cause us any actual alarm," said Nelson Lee. "We are in no immediate danger. But it seems a terrible pity that all our plans should be ruined. We will suppose, for a moment, that we get out of the valley."

"That's supposin' a good deal, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," said Lee. "We know that our dugouts are all drawn up in safety on the bank of the Ghost River. Therefore, our wisest plan will be to get out of the valley as near the big waterfall as possible. Then we can climb down, and secure our dugouts at once."

"It sounds easy, old man."

"Yes, but it won't be easy," continued Nelson Lee. "If we get out of the valley in any other direction we shall find ourselves beset with endless difficulties. For example, we shall be in a

wild, mountainous country, and we shall be compelled to make a detour of a great many miles before reaching the Ghost River. Therefore, we must concentrate all our efforts upon scaling the precipice at the nearest point to the waterfall."

"Well, that's sound enough," agreed Mr. Farman. "I don't like to think that all this is so much hot air, but when I look at these cliffs—well, I guess I feel shaky. Say, it can't be done, Mr. Lee——"

"Now, now!" put in Dorrie severely. "That won't do, Big Jimmie. We're determined to get out, so we can't have any talk about the thing not being done. Is anything impossible? No, by gad! At least, not where Lee's concerned. He can perform miracles."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Not always, Dorrie—not at all, in fact," he said. "But determination will carry one a long way. When we look at this problem we are inclined to lose heart. That's fatal. We've all got to make up our minds that we shall conquer these cliffs. We've got to be united and determined."

Nelson Lee's words cheered the others up greatly.

"What do you think about these landslides?" asked Big Jim.

"Well, after all, they're only natural," replied Lee. "You see, Crasher started something which no human being could ever hope to stop. That first explosion brought about a terrible fall of rock. Mountains tottered and fell. Soon after the first shock everything was quiet. But enormous masses of rock were still left undermined. And these vast masses fell at different intervals."

"We've heard two this morning," said Dorrie. "But what's the good of it when they tumble to pieces outside the valley? I want to see one of these cliffs crumble to dust."

He turned, and waved his hand towards the frowning precipice which rose sheer from the valley on all sides.

And then, while they were all looking, and while there was a moment's silence, a peculiar growling rumble made itself heard. A group of juniors, who were some distance off, turned and gazed across the valley.

"Here comes another!" exclaimed Pitt quickly.

The rumble increased, and the very earth upon which they stood commenced trembling. It was exactly like an earthquake shock. And then, without any warning, the rumble changed to a roar—a deafening, devastating turmoil of sound. It resembled the crashing and booming of thunder during the height of a tropical storm.

Over in the direction of the Ghost River—which lay just outside the valley—an enormous cloud of thick haze was rising. It was dust, caused by the force of the collapse.

The earth shook ominously. Then we all saw one of the cliffs cracking up. It fell in enormous pieces of rock, which came thundering down into the valley. The cliff did not actually go to pieces, but it cracked and tottered.

Then the whole enormous sound died away—only to be resumed again before we could say a word. If we had only known it, this fall was the biggest that had happened so far. The gorges and canyons of the Ghost River were crumbling to dust—but we could not see it.

We were awed by the might of Nature.

We could not help thinking how insignificant a charge of explosive would be compared to this natural collapse. True, the whole thing had been started by an explosion, but the power of these landslides was so appalling that we were left helpless and amazed.

I wanted to rush straight across the valley to the spot where the big cliff had started tumbling. But my better judgment told me to remain still. In any case, I could never have reached the cliff.

For just then it crumpled up more. Although we could hardly believe it, that towering precipice of rock shivered right down from top to bottom. It opened out, leaving a yawning gap—a gully.

At first we could not see this, owing to the clouds of dust which arose. The air was filled with a tumult of noise. Somehow, we did not even feel safe where we stood. We had a kind of feeling that the very earth was liable to open up and swallow us completely.

But this, of course, did not happen.

And then came the biggest shock of all. For something occurred which we had not been expecting or dreaming of. We thought we had considered every

possibility, but this one had certainly escaped us.

The clouds of dust rolled away, caught by the breeze. And we could see that great crack in the cliff.

“Hurrah!” roared Handforth excitedly.

“There’s a way out!”

“The precipice has broken in two!”

“By gad, the boys are right!” said Lord Dorrimore tensely. “Do you see, Lee? The cliff has broken——”

“Good heavens!” gasped Nelson Lee.

It was very seldom indeed that I heard such a tone from the gov’nor. For the moment I had been looking at him, and not at the precipice, and I saw that he was staring with wide open eyes, and with cheeks which had paled.

I turned my head swiftly, and then I gasped, too.

Through that newly made gap in the cliff a volume of water was pouring—not merely a cascade, but a tremendous, all-powerful flood which swept into the valley with appalling force. The water was foaming and swirling, and it created a hissing roar which told of its power.

“Well, I’m hanged!” said Dorrie blandly.

“What does this mean, Mr. Lee?” panted Big Jim Farman.

“It means only one thing,” replied Nelson Lee grimly. “It means that the full force of the Ghost River has found a new course. Perhaps the water-course had become blocked by these enormous falls of rock. And so this water has had to find another outlet. It is coming into the valley, as you see.”

We all stared, fascinated.

We had thought the power of the water enormous. It looked to me like the opening of some gigantic sluice gates. But then, without warning, the aspect of the thing changed.

It seemed as though a vast dam had broken.

Again the cliff cracked up, and now the flood came boiling into the valley with ten times its original force. It is very difficult for me to describe this appalling upheaval as it actually was. But perhaps it will give some idea of the scene when I say that the cliff had cracked up for a distance of four or five hundred yards. And this enormous gap, from side to side, was filled with raging water.

Its depth was well over a hundred feet, and it came pouring into the valley at

such terrific speed that before we could realise our danger the water was half-way across to the spot where we stood.

It came on, uprooting trees as though they were twigs. The crest of the flood was twenty feet in height—enormous waves surging along with only the power that water can attain. For, without doubt, water is the most appalling destroyer of all, provided it comes in sufficient volumes.

Nelson Lee suddenly sprang into activity.

"Quick!" he shouted hoarsely. "Run—every one of you! Our only chance is to get into the hills to the southward! Within half an hour this valley will be a lake! Run, boys, as you have never run before!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"We—we shall be trapped!"

We simply pelted across the grass like so many demented beings. There was no time to grab any of our belongings. Indeed, we did not even think of it. Our tents, our cooking utensils, our blankets—everything was left behind.

And that flood came roaring on.

Nelson Lee brought up the rear, and, constantly, he looked behind him. The juniors, in advance, were flying helter skelter.

"To the left, boys—to the left!" roared Lee.

They surged away to the left, for in that direction the ground rose. It kept on rising until it met the cliffs, which, of course, barred all further progress. However, it was hardly likely that the flood would reach that point.

Sir Montie lagged behind somewhat, owing to the fact that one of his shoe-laces had come undone. It was just like the silly ass to stop to tie it up. He was some little distance to Nelson Lee's right. When he came on again he found his way barred by a stream.

Ten seconds before this had been a little brook, but water had come rushing down it, converting it into a boiling torrent. And, so rapid was the coming of the water, that the whole thing happened in a few seconds.

Montie hesitated, knowing full well that he couldn't jump that stream. And, before he could make up his mind, another volume of water came swelling up behind him. The main flood was still some distance in the rear.

But it was overtaking us with horrible rapidity.

It was touch and go.

It was a question whether we should be ahead of the flood at the crucial moment.

Nelson Lee came to a halt, and frowned as he saw Sir Montie cut off. He, himself, was on the other side of the boiling stream. And Lee knew that every moment was of vital importance.

Sir Montie saw his danger, and decided.

He took a terrific leap, and attempted to cross the stream. The next second he plunged into the water, and fell back. He was caught by the powerful flood, and swept away.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLOOD.

NELSON LEE caught his breath in sharply.

"Heaven help the poor lad!"

But Lee himself went to Montie's assistance—for the gov'nor knew well enough that the junior would surely perish if he was left to his fate. Without hesitation, Nelson Lee plunged into the stream.

With powerful strokes he swam, overtaking Montie at a great rate. And, further down the valley, the main flood was sweeping on, all-powerful, all-destructive. It seemed impossible that these two could escape.

I turned for a moment, and shouted with fear.

"Look!" I yelled. "Montie and the gov'nor! Oh, my only hat! They've got caught in the flood!"

"Good heavens!"

"They'll never get out!"

But Lee had already seized Sir Montie, and was now doing his utmost to reach the river bank. Or, to be more exact, he attempted to reach dry land. For the banks of this stream were already overwhelmed, and it was now a broad watercourse.

"It's all right, sir—you shouldn't have troubled!" panted Sir Montie. "Begad! We shall never be able to get out, sir! It's frightfully—"

"Don't talk, Montie! We'll do our best!" said Leo grimly.

They struggled on, and, out of the corner of his eye, Nelson Lee saw that wall of water rushing noarer. Unless

he could reach the land within a few seconds, it would be too late.

With a superhuman effort, Lee swam against the current. Then, to his joy, he felt solid ground beneath his feet. Gasping and spluttering, the pair waded out of the flood. A sharp hill rose immediately in front of them. It was this hill, indeed, which had enabled them to get out of the water.

For, just before this hill, and after it, the water was spreading out like a sheet, rising higher and higher with every moment that passed. The roar of the oncoming mass of water was like a hundred railway trains in a hundred tunnels. Staggering drunkenly, Nelson Lee and Montie ran up the hill.

Would they be able to do it?

Like a million demons, the flood overtook them. It came round the hill in tearing cascades—in gigantic waves. It was like the fury of a storm on a rocky beach. And the noise was deafening.

One of the waves came surging round, and it caught Nelson Lee and Montie. They were knocked down like two nine-pins, carried twenty feet, and flung on to a grassy knoll. Regaining their feet, they managed to get higher.

And the flood swept past.

Not pausing to speak, or to breathe hardly, they went up the hill. By this time the rest of us were in comparative safety. The full force of the flood had swept by. But it was rising higher and higher all the time.

We watched the course of events with rapidly beating hearts.

"Look!" shrieked Pitt. "They're clear! Oh! They've been caught again! No! They're out of the flood now——"

"Thank goodness!"

"Hurrah!"

We were so excited that we yelled at the slightest thing. And it was quite clear that both Nelson Lee and Montie were comparatively safe. Certainly, the flood was near them, and it was swirling higher all the time—sending out licking waves which could not quite reach the flood's intended victims.

And, at last, Nelson Lee and Montie came struggling up. I went down to meet them, with Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, and nearly all the others. The gov'nor and Montie were literally dragged off their feet.

"Oh, I thought it was all up with you, sir!" I gasped.

"Rather a narrow shave, Nipper, but we are quite safe and sound," said Lee, panting hard. "Upon my soul! Who could ever have suspected that such a thing as this would take place?"

"It's—it's terrible, sir!"

"Begad! An' it was my fault!" gasped Sir Montie. "I mean, about nearly gettin' swept away——"

"You silly ass!" snorted Handforth. "What the dickens did you try to tie your fat-headed shoe-lace for?"

"Dear old boy, I didn't realise——"

"There is no need to have an argument about it, boys," said Nelson Lee. "It's over, and we have more important matters to engage our attentions."

"I'd like to thank you, sir, for saving my life," said Sir Montie quietly.

"My dear boy, you needn't mention it!" exclaimed Lee. "In a time like this we must all do our best for one another. And it won't do for us to remain here, either. We must reach a higher level."

Lee looked round keenly.

"Ah, that will do nicely," he went on, pointing. "We must reach the cliff, and then climb. Do you remember the spot, Nipper?"

"Yes, by jingo!" I replied. "That's the very place, sir."

The previous day, while exploring the frowning cliffs, we had come upon a place where it was possible to climb up. We had, indeed, conquered the precipice for a distance of three hundred feet, the climb being a comparatively easy one. There were plenty of rocks to provide foothold.

But, at the level of three hundred feet, the precipice rose as smooth as a wall. There was a wide ledge which was large enough to accommodate a hundred. Progress beyond that ledge, however, was impossible.

And now, as the water rose higher, we hurried up the rising ground to the cliff face. And then, like so many ants on a hill, we climbed the rocks—until, at last we were on that wide ledge.

"Well, this is something," said Lord Dorrimore, breathing hard after his exertions. "An' we're safe here, you chaps. It doesn't matter how high the flood comes, it won't reach this place."

"Yes, we're quite safe here," said Nelson Lee.

And now we had time to breathe and look about us.

The spectacle which met our gaze was one of devastating destruction. It was a scene of utter desolation.

The whole centre of the valley was a mass of foaming, swirling water, upon the surface of which scum and refuse had collected. Trees were floating everywhere. Where there had been delightful meadows and woods twenty minutes earlier, there was now nothing but this newly formed lake.

And, at the other end of the valley, the water was rushing in at the same enormous speed, and with the same overpowering pressure. Indeed, it seemed to me that the volume of water was even greater.

If it is possible for anybody to imagine what would happen if the River Thames were suddenly diverted from its course and directed into a deep valley—well, one might be able to get an idea of this vast phenomenon.

Millions of gallons of water were pouring into the valley every second—not every minute, but every second!

The Ghost River was about ten times as big as the Thames, and the result can easily be imagined. It was even more staggering when we realised that there was no outlet from this valley.

The terrific flood was pouring in, but there was no way out!

It was like water being poured into a bowl. As long as the water kept pouring in it was inevitable that the bowl must soon fill. And it was not long before we began to fear that even this lofty perch would not be of much use to us.

For quite a few hours we should be safe. But if the water kept rising higher and higher, what would the result be? It would even come to this level—three hundred feet up the cliff face!

"What can it mean, gov'nor?" I asked huskily.

"Yes, Lee, how do you account for this?" inquired Dorrie.

"There is only one possible way of accounting for it," replied Nelson Lee.

"That tremendous landslide we heard was, no doubt, the beginning of it all. I judge that the waterway of the Ghost River was blocked up—completely and absolutely dammed. The river, therefore, had to find a new course."

"And so it came in here?"

"Obviously."

"Well, it might have had more consideration," said Dorrie.

"You see, something was bound to go," continued Nelson Lee. "Just above the river outside this valley the Thunder Rapids sweep down with overwhelming power. And the whole fury of these rapids was concentrated upon this task—the task of breaking a new course through the mountains."

"My hat!" I exclaimed. "Something big must have been happening out there."

"Rather!"

"It's almost impossible to realise it!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"This tremendous body of furious water simply had to burst its way through somewhere," he said. "You saw how the precipice cracked up. No doubt it was weakened at that point—such a thing is quite likely. And so the whole force of the Ghost River has come roaring its way into this valley. It is a disaster such as we had never reckoned for."

"And there's no outlet!" said Mr. Farman grimly.

"None!"

"Well, what's going to happen in two or three hours' time?" asked Dorrie. "I'm reckonin' that we shall be swept off this ledge like matches in a bally gutter!"

"That's about the size of it," I said.

"There is no reason for us to be unduly pessimistic," went on Nelson Lee. "You see, there is a terrible pressure of water in the valley already. It is extremely doubtful if these rocks can stand it. If they can, we are undoubtedly doomed. But if there is another collapse, and the flood is allowed to flow out—well, there is just a chance."

"What a life!" said Handforth.

"Before we know how to turn round, something else happens. I reckon it would just put about the finishing touch on things if a few volcanoes started working."

"We sha'n't get any volcanoes," I said. "But it's quite likely that there'll be further collapses of the cliffs. Let's hope to goodness there are. If so, this disaster will turn out to be a boon."

"A boon?"

"Of course."

"How?" asked Bob Christine.

"Why, if this water gets out, it stands to reason that there'll be a way for us to escape," I said. "If the flood

doesn't escape from the valley, we shall be drowned before night!"

"How frightfully cheerful!" said Dorrie. "By the way, what about our nice little claims?"

"I'm afraid they're done for," said Nelson Lee. "In fact, it is quite likely that the gold will be washed away after this flood has subsided—if it ever does subside."

"That's a pretty piece of news," said his lordship calmly. "After layin' hands on a few hundred fortunes, this bally flood comes on an' washes 'em away!"

"Our lives are of more importance than the fortunes," said Nelson Lee. "We must not think of anything now, Dorrie, except flight from this valley."

"Now you're talkin'!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Flight! If we only had wings the whole thing would be as easy as shellin' peas. We made a mistake," he went on, shaking his head. "We ought to have brought a few aeroplanes out with us. Think of the trouble we should have saved!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Dorrie!" I put in. "We've done the best we can, and now the most we can do is to sit tight and wait. By the by, I wonder what's happening down the river—at Graham Settlement, for example?"

"I should say that consternation reigns supreme," replied Nelson Lee.

"But they can't know anything about it down there," put in Tommy Watson. "Why, Graham Settlement is thirty miles away! These explosions and things were pretty loud, but——"

"You don't seem to understand, Watson," interrupted Lee. "The Ghost River has ceased flowing—beyond this point. The natural water course has dried up suddenly, for the whole force of the river is coming into this valley."

Dorrie broke into a laugh.

"By gad, it must be funny!" he said. "I can just imagine the people down at the Settlement. The river has dwindled away to nothin' at all—that's natural. Since there's no more water comin' down, it stands to reason that the whole stream has dried up."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Exactly," he said. "And, of course, the result is disastrous. All the down river settlements depend solely upon the river. Without it, they might as well not exist. What will these people think

when they find that the river has suddenly dwindled right away?"

It was gradually coming home to us that this gigantic upheaval of Nature was not merely a local affair. Its effect would be felt for hundreds and hundreds of miles. Reports of the amazing occurrence would be published all over the world. In England the people would read it at the breakfast-table.

And here were we, at the very source of the trouble!

Certainly, we should have an amazing story to tell if ever we reached civilisation.

Conversation flagged somewhat now, for we could not find much to talk about, and we were awed by the evidence of the great phenomenon. The flood was rising rapidly. Already there was hardly a trace of green in the valley. The whole floor had been covered, and even the minor hills had now disappeared beneath the water.

Where our camp had stood the flood was probably a hundred feet deep. This lake was a tremendous one. Naturally, we had lost our stores for ever, and would never be able to recover a single article. But we did not consider these things seriously when our very lives were at stake.

Fatty Little was probably the only one who worried.

"I say, you chaps, I've been thinking, you know," he said. "The time's getting on, and we shall be needing another meal before long."

"We shall continue to need it," declared Pitt.

"Great Pancakes!" said Fatty, in dismay. "We—we can't go on without grub!"

"If you explain where we can get it from, we'll all be awfully obliged!" exclaimed Church. "We certainly had some grub in camp, but we didn't have time to bring any away with us. We're dished."

"Oh, by chutney!" groaned Fatty.

"It's no good, my son—we've got to starve," put in Handforth. "But you needn't worry; you're capable of standing it better than we are."

"Eh?"

"You've got so much fat," explained Handy. "You've got such an enormous lot of unwanted tissue that you can start consuming yourself inwardly. You'll last for weeks without pegging out."

Fatty glared.

"You—you ass!" he snapped. "I need more than anybody else. As a matter of fact, I've got some grub on me now—I always carry some in my pockets, you know. I—I was just wondering whether I ought to share it out."

"Yes, you ought!" roared all the others.

"I—I'm not greedy!" said Fatty. "In a time like this it's necessary that we should all have something. But, of course, I need more than you chaps. I've got more to sustain. Still, I'll share it out equally."

The food was given into Nelson Lee's charge, and it was quite surprising what a lot Fatty had stuffed in his pockets. There was just about a mouthful each, when it was sent round; but even this was better than nothing.

And we didn't eat it then and there.

We decided to wait until we were starving with hunger—if such a time ever came. We should appreciate it all the more.

And as we looked down into the valley we saw that it had again changed its aspect. The water was higher—it had crept up to the cliffs on nearly every side. Directly below us the flood was lapping against the rocks.

Away to our left—exactly opposite the spot where the flood was entering—the water had risen three or four hundred feet up the cliff face, for the ground was lower in that direction.

The flood still surged in at the same speed, and this, of course, was quite understandable. The Ghost River was rushing down the Thunder Rapids just as it had always done. But, instead of continuing along its original course, it was emptying itself into this valley.

And with so much water constantly coming in, it was only natural that the flood should rise with overpowering velocity and speed. We began to give up hope. Even now the water was less than two hundred and fifty feet below us.

Steadily, steadily it was rising.

CHAPTER III.

NATURE SOLVES THE RIDDLE.

NELSON LEE looked very grave.

"I'm afraid our time'll soon come now, Dorrie," he murmured, so that the boys could not hear. "We must do all we can to appear

cheerful and light-hearted. But, frankly, I fear the worst."

"Yes, old man, you're right," said Lord Dorrinoro.

There was every reason for Nelson Lee's grave fears.

Two hours had elapsed. The situation remained unchanged, except for one important fact. The flood spread out over the valley just the same as before. But now, instead of seeming distant, it was upon us.

Foot by foot, yard by yard, it had risen. And now, looking over the edge of our place of security, I could see the water only twenty feet below. And, even as I watched, it leapt higher.

The great basin of the valley was filling, just as a bath will fill when the taps are turned on. And the tap in this case was going at full pressure. Unless a natural plug was pulled out we should be swamped.

That such a disaster could occur seemed incredible. That a great valley of this kind could fill with water in such a short space of time seemed ridiculous and impossible. But it had done so.

Before our very eyes the miracle had happened.

"How long do you think we've got?" asked Dorrie softly.

"Half an hour, at the outside."

"By gad!" said his lordship. "That's frightfully bad!"

I heard the low spoken words. Half an hour! Personally, I thought the gov'nor was wrong, for it was my belief that we should be swept off the ledge within twenty minutes. There would be no escape for us, of course.

The water was terribly deep now, and even if we swam, what could we do?

Sooner or later, we should all sink. The flood beneath us was not furious. It had only been a raging torrent when it first swept into the valley. Now it came up gradually, lapping at the rock with a kind of deliberate maliciousness which seemed to indicate that it was waiting for the moment when it would have us in its grasp.

But hope, even now, was not dead.

Square-Deal Reeve was talking intently with Twirly Sam and Ace-High Peter. The three cowboys were squatting together, with their backs against the rock. They had been very quiet since we had come up on the ledge.

"See hyar, boys, I guess we ain't goin' to accept this durned thing as it stands," murmured Square-Deal. "I'm allowin' we'll do everythin' we can to make this flood look kinder mean. D'you get me?"

"Nope," said Twirly. "Say, we're sure finished."

"This is where we quit!" added Peter.

Square-Deal Reeve looked grim.

"This hyar flood sure gets my goat," he observed. "An' I ain't allowin' it to hev all its own doggone way. Guess you boys hev got ropes?"

"Sure," said Twirly Sam. "I always carry mine slung around my body. It's kinder handy, I figger."

"Gee," said Peter. "I left mine behind."

"That's bad," exclaimed Square-Deal. "But I've got mine, an' we ought t' be able to do somethin' between us. Now, see hyar. I've bin takin' a peek at them rocks overhead. Ther's a kinder juttin' out bit a hundred feet above."

"Waal?"

"I guess I kin sling a rope around that piece o' rock without no sorter trouble," went on Reeve. "Now, this is the idea. After that rope's made tight, we kin knot a hull collection of other bits o' rope to it. Got me? Then, when this flood lifts us off'n the ledge, waal, we kin hang on t' rope until we get to a higher level. Then, mebbe, we'll be able to fix tight to another piece."

"Sufferin' coyotes!" said Twirly Sam. "That's suro a dandy stunt."

Square-Deal communicated his idea to Nelson Lee.

"Splendid!" said the detective quickly. "That is indeed an excellent suggestion, Reeve. I do not say that we shall be any better off ultimately, but there is more than a chance that the scheme'll work."

The juniors were very excited when they saw the preparations. For it gave them a glimmering of fresh hope. But when I thought of the icy coldness of the water I doubted.

For a certain time we should be able to hang on. But it would be hours before the flood rose any distance beyond this ledge. And, one by one, we should become numbed, and we should drop off. But anything was better than

tamely giving in, and accepting our fate.

Square-Deal succeeded in looping his rope round the projection, as he had planned. And, by this time, the flood was much nearer. The other rope was cut into portions, and knotted to the main piece. Thus we should all have an end to hang on to. It was a desperate idea, but the only possible one.

Nelson Lee refrained from saying anything to the boys just now. But he fully intended addressing us all with a few quiet, reassuring words. But this was to be delayed until the last moment.

And the last moment had nearly arrived.

During the last few minutes it seemed that the water was rising more swiftly. It came lapping upwards—until, at last, it swirled over the edge of the ledge with a triumphant little hiss.

Our feet were wetted, and the flood continued its upward course. The juniors, pale and scared, had nothing to say. For this seemed to be the end of all things. And it was just at this crucial moment that our attentions became distracted by a noise which sounded like a sharp explosion.

It came from the extreme left of the valley—at the high cliff opposite the rushing flood. We all stared in that direction. A huge boulder of rock, hundreds of feet in size, detached itself from the cliff, and fell.

It hit the flood with an enormous splash, sending a great ripple of water rushing across the lake's surface.

Then came another piece of rock, followed by others.

And, before our eyes, that great cliff began to crumple. We knew why. The pressure of water had proved too great. The valley was now full, and the weight of this awful body of water must have been stupendous.

That gigantic precipice, looking as though it could stand anything, had cracked up under the huge force.

Once started, it went like a house of cards.

The whole cliff, for a distance of three hundred yards, broke into atoms. It crumbled to fragments with a roar greater than any we had yet heard. And, simultaneously, the water commenced pouring out in one maddened cascade.

Indeed, it was flowing out of the

valley basin at a much greater speed than it was entering. The flood was simply pouring itself away. What destruction it was causing in the country beyond the mind could hardly realise.

The effect upon us was instantaneous.

The water left our ledge within a second, and almost before we knew it the surface of the flood was ten feet below us. At the crucial second this fresh event had occurred, and Square-Deal Reeve's idea was not even tried.

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth hoarsely.

"It's happened!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Hurrah!"

"The flood's going away!"

We all shouted at the top of our voices. At the first moment we had hardly realised what this was to mean. But now we fully understood. Like the breaking of a gigantic dam, the cliff had collapsed, letting the collected volume of water roar away.

With overpowering fury the flood rushed out of the valley.

For some little time the cliffs kept crumbling away, making the gap even bigger. But then, as the water went down, so the force became less, and the crumbings ceased. We had thought that the valley had filled quickly, but we were positively staggered by the speed at which it emptied.

Within half an hour we were able to climb down from our ledge and stand upon the water-soaked grass at the foot of the cliff. In every direction trees were appearing out of the flood—battered and torn, but many of them still maintaining an appearance of freshness.

Woods came into being once more. Here and there a hill stood out. And the flood was lowering itself more swiftly every moment. In places, where little depressions existed, miniature lakes were formed, and it would take months for these to dry up. In all other places the ground was becoming clear.

Exactly two hours later the valley was looking more like its old self.

And long before evening the flood had completely gone down, and that gigantic burst of water through the newly made gap had simply become a swiftly flowing torrent. The surplus water, in fact, had gone.

And now the Ghost River, pouring into the valley at one end, was flowing through and making its exit at the far

side. It had once more become its normal self, but was now upon a new course.

We were all thankful and overjoyed at our deliverance. For our highest hopes had been realised. Not only had we been saved from death by drowning, but there was a decided chance that we should be able to escape from the valley.

Of our stores and camp there was not the slightest sign.

All this had been washed away. And it did not come as a very great shock to us when we discovered that there was not the slightest trace of gold. The little creeks where the sandy beds were covered with gold had ceased to exist. They had been wiped out of existence by the flood.

"Well, we're not millionaires after all," I said. "It would have been rather exciting to take a few hundred thousand back with us, but it's evidently not to be. Personally, all I want to do is to get away."

"Begad, rather!"

"If we don't go now, we might be trapped again," said Pitt. "There's no telling when these disasters will stop. For all I know, the whole valley might collapse, and swallow us up. I vote we clear out at once."

"How?"

"Why, down the river."

"On its new course, you mean?"

"Of course," said Pitt. "Goodness knows where it'll take us, but we shall get out of this valley, at least."

"How do you reckon we're going down the river?" I asked.

Pitt started, and grinned.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten! We haven't got any dugouts, or boats, or anything!"

"That's just it," I agreed. "Whether we shall be able to fake up some boats is a different matter—we can trust the gov'nor to do somethin'."

Nelson Lee, as a matter of fact, was already thinking deeply on the subject. It still wanted several hours of daylight before the day would be over. And Leo was determined to utilise those hours.

"Look here, everybody," he said, addressing us all, "I think it is quite possible that further landslides might occur. Therefore, we want to get out of this valley as quickly as possible."

"Hear, hear!"

"We have no boats, and it is certain that our dugouts are destroyed," went on Lee. "There is only one way in which

we can escape, and that is by constructing a raft."

"A raft!"

"Yes," said Lee. "It will necessarily be a large raft, and we shall have to chance whether we meet with disaster or not. In any case, we shall get out of this valley, and that is the main thing. There is work for everybody, for it will be no light task making this raft. Fortunately we have a good stout hatchet, with which we can hew down some straight tree trunks."

"But we haven't!" put in Dorrie. "That hatchet was swept away——"

"I don't think so, old man," interrupted Lee. "You see, I fixed the blade deeply into a big tree-trunk after I finished chopping some wood yesterday. The tree still stands intact, and I fancy I can see the axe, too."

"Oh, good!" I exclaimed. "It's lucky you fixed the axe in the tree, sir, or it would have been buried in the slime and mud."

The centre of the valley was literally a morass. The mud had settled on everything, converting the grassy slopes into a slimy mass, a foot or two deep. But, round the outskirts of the valley, the water had risen slowly, and practically no mud existed. We made our camp just against a wood.

I call it a camp because we stopped there. But, of course, there was no camp at all, really. Square-Deal Reeve volunteered to fetch the axe, and a most unpleasant task it proved, for he had to wade through mud which came up to his knees. But he returned with his spoil.

And then the manufacture of the raft was commenced.

It proved a heavy task, as Nelson Lee had said. A large number of straight tree-trunks were selected, and these were hewn down. They had to be carried a good way, too, for the raft would be no good at this spot.

The actual construction took place near the water, so that the heavy structure could be floated with ease.

We all worked with a will, the juniors taking their share, and doing everything possible to help. By the time darkness descended we were all thoroughly worn out and exhausted with our labours.

We slept like logs.

It was impossible to go on throughout the night, of course. Without blankets we were in a rather bad position. And

there was nothing dry which we could make into beds.

However, by great good fortune, the night proved to be very mild—indeed, close. And the clouds overhead indicated that a break in the weather was imminent. But we didn't much care about that.

At dawn we were all active and alert. We had slept like tops, in spite of the drawbacks, and only felt stiff. Several of the fellows contracted colds, but these did not concern us very much. Nobody really was any the worse for the enforced exposure.

We were able to feed. The nature of our food was not quite ordinary, but, at the same time, we satisfied our appetites. There were all kinds of fruit trees in the valley, and plenty of nuts. And so we managed to make two or three good square meals—living the simple life.

By midday the raft was completed.

Considering the fact that we only possessed an axe, the structure was a triumph for its designers. It was a massive affair, sixteen feet long by ten feet wide. On the top of it a rough platform of smaller branches had been placed, so that we should not be wallowing in water. A guard rail was constructed all round the raft. And, fore and aft, great supports had been placed. These were provided for the purpose of wielding the roughly made sweeps, or oars. It would be possible, Nelson Lee believed, to keep the raft under control by this means.

"Well, we're all ready now," said Lee, at length. "Happily, there have been no further catastrophes. We shall probably have an exciting trip down the river, but I see no reason why we should not make it a successful one."

"Everything in the garden is lovely," declared Dorrie. "Yesterday we thought we were bottled up in this valley for good. Then we believed that we should all drown. And now—lo and behold!—we're just starting off on a joy-ride into the open country. So many changes are bewilderin'."

Dorrie was right. Most of us hardly knew whether we were on our heads or our heels. But we certainly did know that a way out of the valley lay clear, and that we should probably escape.

Launching the raft was a task which occupied a full hour.

Several round tree-trunks had been provided to act as rollers. The big raft was

pushed upon these logs, and edged forward, foot by foot, until it finally floated clear.

And then we all embarked.

The raft was so big and stable that it was possible to move about without upsetting the balance. The juniors were delighted with the whole idea, and looked upon this as a ripping adventure.

And the prospect of reaching civilisation thrilled us all.

If only we succeeded in getting out into the open country there was an excellent chance of us reaching Graham Settlement. Once there we should be all right. The Settlement was a biggish place, and we knew for a fact that we should be able to get a motor-launch to take us down to the more populated regions.

They were up to date in the Settlement, and did not rely upon the antiquated steamboats similar to the one we had seen at Fort Dorwent. Motor-launches went up and down the river regularly during the summer months.

But could we reach the Settlement?

That was the one doubt which still remained in our minds. After all our adventures it would indeed be remarkable if we failed on the last lap, so to speak.

Personally, I was full of optimism.

"Everything's all right," I declared. "We're going down the river now, and before long we shall be living in luxury in a hotel—then we shall get on a train, with sleeping cars and dining cars complete. A few days' trip to New York, and then homeward bound on a liner—and St. Frank's almost at the beginning of the new term!"

Tregellis-West sighed.

"Dear old boy, it seems to be true, it does, really. I don't mind admittin' that I'm in a shockin' condition. It's extremely fortunate that we haven't got any mirrors, or I should be frightened by my own bally reflection! Look at my collar—look at my clothing——"

"Just like a scarecrow!" grinned Pitt. "Begad!" said Montie, in distress. "Am I really as bad as that, dear fellows?"

"A bit worse," replied Pitt cheerfully. "But what does it matter? After all, you're the smartest out of the whole bunch of us—if that's any consolation to you. Just look at Dorrie—take a glance at Mr. Lee!"

I couldn't help chuckling as I looked. I hadn't noticed it before, but now the

question arose, I observed that both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore were terrible frights. Their clothing was torn and stained, they were both wearing three or four days' growth of beard, and on any English highway they would have been mistaken for a couple of particularly disreputable tramps.

But, as Pitt had said, what did it matter?

In our present position appearances counted as nothing. Fortunately, Mr. Farman, Dorrie, and the gov'nor all had heaps of money on them, so we should be able to buy everything we wanted as soon as we got to a place where things could be bought.

But we were anticipating matters by such thoughts as these. We hadn't got out of the valley yet, and there was no telling what adventures were to befall us on our raft.

But we started full of hope.

When everybody was on board, the raft was pushed out into the current, and the sweeps were got to work—Lee and Dorrie at the rear, and Square-Deal Reeve and Twirly Sam in the bows—if one can use such a term in connection with a raft.

At first we went slowly, but then the current caught us fairly, swung the raft round, and soon we were being swept down the Ghost River towards the valley exit. Whether we should make a successful journey of it or not remained to be seen.

We were off into the unknown.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INDIAN GIRL'S APPEAL.

WITH a swirl and a roar our craft was swept into the rapids.

For we discovered that the opening through the precipice was indeed a rapid, and a very tricky one. The water, flowing through the valley, gathered itself together into a swiftly, raging torrent.

And there, through the opening, it rushed down a series of rock-strewn rapids with the speed of an express train. I honestly believe that these waters were even more violent and dangerous than the all-powerful Thunder Rapids.

We could do nothing.

Certainly Nelson Lee tried hard to control the raft, but his efforts were like those of a midget. The raft was lifted upon the breath of the torrent and hurled along to what seemed certain destruction.

The watercourse was a narrow one, the rock cliffs rising up on either side of us in frowning masses. At several points it seemed as though these cliffs were about to fall, so precarious did they look.

But we hurried by, still safe and unharmed.

Square-Deal, in front, suddenly gave a big yell.

"Hold tight!" he roared. "I guess this is wher' we hit somethin'!"

Right in the middle of the watercourse an ugly, jagged rock was standing out, like a gnarled tooth, and our raft was bearing down straight upon it. Lee and the others at the sweeps exerted every effort to steer the raft clear.

And this time their energy was not entirely wasted. For the clumsy craft swung round slightly—but not enough to get us clear. A surging side wave, however, hit the raft with a crash which sent it shaking and shivering. The spray descended upon us in a cataract.

And we were set whirling away on an eddy amid the boiling torrent. We all clung desperately to the rails.

Crash!

It was fortunate that the guarding rails had been provided, or several of us would have been flung into the rapids. The raft struck that rock a glancing blow, reared up dizzily, and for a moment it seemed that it was about to overturn.

But it regained a level keel, and swung on upon the breast of the foaming current. One or two ropes had snapped, and the raft was slightly weakened, but nothing of a more disastrous nature had occurred.

"My hat!" I gasped. "That was a near shave!"

"I thought it was all up," muttered Watson, white to the lips.

We had all thought so, and we were all white, if the truth be told. Getting out of the valley was not so easy as most of the fellows had expected.

If we had hit that jagged rock head on nothing could have saved us from utter and complete destruction. The raft would have disintegrated into a hundred portions, leaving us struggling in the foam.

But now the way seemed better, although we were still roaring down the rapids faster than any torpedo-boat

destroyer. The feeling of helplessness which gripped us all was more than we could really understand. We just clung to the raft and waited—waited for one of two things.

Deliverance or destruction.

Sometimes I thought it would be destruction, and then I hoped for deliverance. We were speeding through the mountains now—through passes and gorges which had been dry for countless centuries. The Ghost River had found its way along this course, and Heaven only knew where it finally led to.

The fact that everything in front of us was unknown made us all on the tip-toe of expectancy. We did not lose sight of the fact that at any moment we might come upon a devastating waterfall, down which we should plunge to our death.

But these things had to be chanced.

Through a rocky gorge we roared, and on both sides we could see evidence of the flood which had preceded us. And, to our infinite relief, the gorge widened out presently, and the current became slower.

The water was deep, so that our raft had plenty of space, and here there were no rocks to tear at us as we passed. We must have travelled seven or eight miles by this time.

A bright prospect opened out in front, seeming to indicate that the mountains were soon to be left behind. And this, as a matter of fact, proved to be the case. And whatever happened now we had left the valley behind us.

The gorge took a gradual turn, and we swept round upon the top of the current. And, as we rounded that bend, we saw before us a great vista of green, with dense forests and natural meadows in the distance.

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed. "We're coming out into the open country."

The raft swung round and went tearing down the river. At the farthest point of the curve, however, so great was the force of the stream, that we were pushed right out of the main current until we found ourselves in slowly moving water.

And, five minutes later, we grounded, in spite of all Nelson Lee's attempts to keep us in the current. The first part of our exciting trip was over, and we

now found ourselves upon a rocky shore, with grassland and trees behind us. The river was away to the left.

As we had grounded, Nelson Lee decided to take a rest here. In addition, the raft needed one or two slight repairs. And so, ten minutes later, we were all ashore, glad to feel solid ground beneath our feet.

"By jingo! I never expected to feel this again!" exclaimed Pitt, as he stamped about. "I thought we were done for as we were coming down those rapids. My only hat! I can't understand, even now, how we escaped destruction!"

Bob Christine gave a nervous laugh.

"Oh, I'm getting used to it now!" he said. "I've got an idea that nothing can hurt us. We've come through so many dangers that it's pretty well certain that we shall be all serene now, right to the finish."

"It's no good talking like that, Christine, old son," I said. "We might go through a lot more adventures yet, and then come to grief when we are actually within sight of deliverance. Look how often it's happened in wars that a man has gone through a whole campaign without being scratched, and then gets killed on the very day the peace is signed, or an armistice declared."

"Yoa, that's true enough," said Bob Christine. "We mustn't shout too soon."

However, we were all thankful to be safe so far. And we certainly had good reason to believe that our troubles, in future, would not be so stupendous. The river seemed to flow on smoothly now, and the rapids were left in the rear.

But this was a new watercourse—brand-new, having only been formed the previous day. There was no telling what snags lay in our path, and what dangers we should have to encounter.

I looked round me with interest.

The country, here, was very different to any that we had seen so far. It was desolate and absolutely barren of any sign of humanity. Away in the distance the mountains rose, with the lower hills crowded with pines. And, between us and this mountain range, lay a great stretch of waste land.

I cannot call it anything else, since the whole aspect was like a desert, except for the fact that great patches of trees

rose here and there. But the grassland was coarse and rough, and weeds grew in profusion as far as the eye could see. For cultivation purposes such ground was evidently useless. Rocks lay everywhere, in fantastically shaped piles.

Just near the river a little hill rose to our right, hiding all view in that direction. Beyond the river rose great, rocky hills. And it was impossible to see down the stream owing to the curve.

Nelson Lee and Square-Deal Reeve and the others busied themselves with the task of repairing the damage to the raft. It was not such a very long job, for only one or two ropes had parted. When these were tightened up, the raft was practically as good as it had been originally.

"Well, I don't see that there's any reason for us to stop here," remarked Dorrie. "We might just as well be gettin' a move on. If we're destined to go over a waterfall we might as well get it finished with!"

"I guess you're right, sir," said Twirly Sam. "I'll sure allow I'm durned anxious. Say, I'm kinder hankering after some fresh faces."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Leo abruptly. "What was that?"

"What was what?"

The gov'nor was staring at that little hill away to the right. I could see nothing that could have caused him to utter the exclamation. But he strode forward.

"What's wrong, sir?" asked Pitt.

"I don't think I am given to imagining things," said Nelson Lee. "But, curiously enough, just as Twirly was talking about seeing fresh faces, I saw a face appear round that big piece of rock, on the little hill."

"Old man, you're dreamin'!" said Dorrie.

Nelson Lee didn't reply, but ran quickly up the hill, and vanished behind the rock. We waited for him to return. And he did so within a moment. But he was not alone. His companion took us quite by surprise.

For it was—a girl!

She was an Indian girl, with her hair arranged in two dark plaits. Her dress consisted of a neat affair made from hide of some description, and she was wearing moccasins upon her feet. At first sight her dress appeared almost like that of a white girl, and it was only at close quarters that we saw the difference.

She looked quite neat and trim, and she was undoubtedly pretty—far prettier than I thought an Indian girl could be. She allowed herself to be led by Nelson Lee, very frightened and troubled.

"Well, by gad!" said Lord Dorriemore.

"A girl!" shouted Handforth.

"Well I'm blessed!"

"My only hat!"

"An Indian girl!"

"Don't make such a noise, boys—you'll frighten her!" said Nelson Lee, as he came up with his strange charge. "I don't know whether she understands English, but it is most improbable. I only brought her here because I'd like to know how she got into this desolate spot. Leon, you must question her."

Leon Ascara nodded.

"Me spik to her in Cree," he said.

"Me soon find out what she do here. Wa! Wa! I know this girl, me! She daughter of chief's big man. Her name Nela—moch good girl, an' everybody lak her."

"Go ahead, Leon," said Lee.

"She spik Ingleese li'l bit," said the half-breed. "I teach her. She very sharp girl. Know a heap, I guess—"

"Me wan' spik to chief," said the girl, in a low, musical voice. "No spik in Cree. Me lak spik Ingleese wit' chief."

"Puzzle—who's the chief?" murmured Dorrie. "I think you'd better officiate, Lee, old man."

"You may speak to me, if you wish," said Nelson Lee, addressing the girl. "I am the chief—at least, I am in charge of this party. What do you wish to say?"

The Indian girl hesitated.

"Me see you com," she replied. "Me watch from hill. Me moch miserable, and get away from others. Not tink anyting, then, wa! You com down river on raft! Me surprised lak I don't know."

"I dare say you were rather astonished to see us," said Lee.

"Muskis dead!" said Nela.

"Oh! The chief is dead?" asked Lee.

"Him killed," replied the Indian girl.

"Wa! Him moch bad man. Red men hate him—him always want fight. No peace wit' Muskis. Him to blame for everyting. An' we all afraid of you."

"There is no reason why you should be afraid of me," said Nelson Lee

gently. "I realise, in fact, that you have had a rather difficult time, but it was really your own doing. Your people attacked us, Nela, and all we could do was to defend ourselves. Do you blame us for that?"

"No—only do w'at you can," replied Nela. "Nassi Indians not have quarrel wit' you. They moch angry with Muskis. My fat'er an' all other big men of tribe wanted mak friens wit' you. Moch angry when Muskis attacked."

"I gathered something of that sort," said Nelson Lee. "It appears, then, that your tribe, as a whole, was not anxious to harm us—but Muskis, the chief, insisted that you should all regard us as enemies."

"It jus' lak you say," replied the Indian girl eagerly. "Yesterday we all moch sad at leaving valley. Men quarrel, and blame Muskis for everyting. They kill him and all men who agreed wit' him. They dead. My people peaceful—all they want is to live quiet."

"Well, Nela, they will certainly not be interfered with," said Nelson Lee.

"We want go back to valley," said the Indian girl.

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Lee. "There have been some strange things happening in the valley, Nela. It was flooded, and the Ghost River now flows right through the valley. But the valley itself is still much the same, or will be when the effects of the flood have passed away."

"Wa! I not know this," said Nela. "The Ghost River flow through valley? That moch bad—I no onderstan' things lak this. But we leave everyting in valley. Our crops, an' all that we grow. We starving now."

"I'm greatly concerned to hear that," said Nelson Lee. "You are starving?"

"We not eat for t'ree days," said the Indian girl quietly.

"But why?"

"This country bare—no food—noting to kill," replied Nela. "If we go back to valley, all happy. Me saw you, and me ask you to let us go back. If I tak news to others, all filled wit' joy."

"Then, Nela, you can go back at once to your tribe, and tell them that they are at liberty to return to the valley just when they please," said Nelson Lee. "We shall not bother you there, and you can all live in peace."



Crash! The raft struck that rock a glancing blow, reared up dizzily, and for a moment it seemed as though it was about to overturn.

"You tak moch gold?" asked the girl.

"We have taken no gold at all, for the flood washed it away," replied Nelson Lee. "Later on, perhaps, one of my friends might return—but he will do so peacefully, and you will not be harmed."

The Indian girl's joy was great, and before many minutes had elapsed she took her departure, after expressing gratitude. She and her tribe would be able to go back to the valley, and they would not be harmed.

"Woll, I feel better for that," said Nelson Lee. "I was worrying about those Indians, for we drove them out. Certainly we could do nothing else, because they were exceedingly aggressive."

"Old Muskis is dead, anyhow, and he was the cause of all the mischief," said Dorrie. "I'm pretty certain that the others will be peaceful enough. But what's that you were sayin' about a friend of yours goin' back?"

"I guess he meant me," smiled Big Jim Farman. "And I reckon you were right, Lee. I'm dead certain to go back to that valley before long—I want to locate that gold. And, say, you can be quite sure that if any gold is discovered it will be shared equally between every member of this party."

And so, after all, there was still a prospect that our journey to Athabasca would not be in vain. Mr. Farman would be able to come out at his leisure, with a well-fitted expedition. And the journey would be simple now, since he would just come down the Ghost River, and float right into the valley.

But we did not think of such things at the moment—gold did not interest us. Our only thoughts were to get to civilisation. And Graham Settlement represented all this to us.

The settlement was only a matter of twenty miles distant—but should we be able to reach it? That was the question.

Without pausing, we pushed the raft back into the current, and away we went on our journey. Even now, after all our adventures, there was still a grave doubt as to whether we should get out of this wild and mountainous country.

For several miles the river flowed along a sinuous course between rocky hills—where, not so long before, dry valleys had existed.

Then the new watercourse bore away

to the west, and we soon became aware of the fact that some more rapids had to be negotiated. For we could hear a distant rumble, and the river ahead, was flecked with foam.

We pulled ourselves together for the ordeal, fully realising that this time there might be no escape. As a matter of fact, the rapids proved easy. We swept down at a great speed, but there were no treacherous rocks or falls. And then, quite suddenly, we received a big surprise.

The river turned sharply, and the water fairly raced down a gulley to a gigantic pool beneath. We roared down the gulley, and struck the pool with terrific force. Dizzy, blinded with spray, and thinking that death was coming upon us, we clung desperately to the craft. Control was out of the question.

Then, twirling round like a top, the raft was carried upon the bosom of the great stream, which soon became almost placid. Nelson Lee, looking about him, gave vent to a big shout.

"Do you see?" he roared. "This is the original watercourse of the Ghost River! The stream has found its way back to its old course again!"

"Well I'm hanged!" said Dorrie.

And it was true.

Looking up the river, we could see the muddy bottom of the dry watercourse. And there, to the right, the river came tearing down through the gulley. After making this wide detour, through the valley and round the mountains, it came back!

This meant, that at Graham Settlement, and at all other spots down the river, the river was now flowing as usual. But what had happened when the water surged out of the valley in that gigantic flood? Without a doubt, a great deal of damage had been caused.

We saw evidences of this on both sides of the river. Trees had been torn down, quite fifty yards up the banks, rocks displaced, and all manner of things of that kind. The water, when it was released, swung down like a tidal wave, sweeping everything before it.

Here, of course, it didn't matter, but where there were houses and buildings near the river bank it would be a different tale. All our faces were glowing with hope and joy as we swept on.

Surely our perils were over now?

Back on the old course, the Ghost

River was flowing down at an even rate of about twelve miles an hour. It was a broad, deep stream—a huge volume of water gliding along between steep banks.

For two or three hours we swept down without anything of an exciting nature taking place. We encountered no rapids, and our trip was uneventful. Then we swung round a wide bend.

"Look!" yelled Pitt suddenly. "Houses! Hurrah!"

We all craned our necks.

There, nestling snugly on the left riverbank, a collection of wooden houses could be seen. Some of them were in a state of wreckage, and a big jetty which jutted out into the river was also a ruin. We could see the figures of men moving about. And, with one united voice, we yelled with sheer relief and joy.

Graham Settlement was in sight.

CHAPTER V.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THIRTY-SIX hours' later I woke up.

I honestly think this was the longest spell in bed I had ever had. And I was not alone, for every other member of our party slept the same time. We were all accommodated in the roomy log house of the principal trader.

This place was also a kind of hotel, where the accommodation was not particularly elegant, but quite comfortable. I haven't any clear recollection of arriving, although I can remember crowds of excited men and women swarming round our raft as we came ashore.

The truth is, the reaction set in the very instant we found that the Settlement was in sight.

We all became limp and excessively tired. The excitement and tension of the last few days had been almost more than we could bear. We all thought we were all right. But, suddenly finding safety within reach, every ounce of strength seemed to ooze out of our bodies.

And so, upon getting ashore, we dragged ourselves to the trader's log house, and fell asleep where we sat. Whether we undressed ourselves and got to bed, or whether we were undressed by others, I don't know.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie and one or two

more managed to relate a few of their adventures before going to sleep. But the whole story did not come out until after we aroused ourselves.

And then we found the entire population of Graham Settlement anxious for news. For they, themselves were literally staggered by what had taken place. We heard all sorts of stories concerning the destruction which had been caused when the river came down—after vanishing for many hours.

The Ghost River had swept down in one violent torrent, causing widespread terror and destruction along the banks. But we learned, much to our satisfaction, that a motor launch was still available. It was only by luck that this was the case, for every other craft had been swept away.

This particular boat was high and dry ashore, and some distance from the river, its owner being engaged in repainting it and making adjustments to the engine. And so it was spared.

We lost no time in arranging with the proprietor to take us down to Brownlow Landing, forty miles further down the river. Here there was a branch line of the railway. Once there, we should soon reach the main lines, and the "outside."

We didn't stay very long in Graham Settlement, and it is certainly not my intention to go into any details. Everybody was kind to us, and it was a glorious experience to be eating eggs and bacon for breakfast, and good meat and vegetables for dinner. It was ripping to drink coffee and tea once more.

We didn't tell the full story concerning the valley—and, certainly, we made no mention of the gold. Everybody thought that we had just been on a trip along the Ghost River, and that we happened to be caught by that great landslide. We held back all mention of the dynamite explosion.

Jake Crasher and his companions were dead—we were positively convinced of this. They had brought destruction upon themselves. And now our main intention was to get back to England as soon as possible, for we had already stayed longer than our time.

The original idea of going back to Mr. Farman's ranch in Montana was abandoned. And Big Jim Farman himself declared that he would come as far as New York with us.

After two days at the Settlement we were all feeling ourselves. Montie was decidedly worried because of his personal appearance, but we all laughed him to scorn. He certainly could not buy any new things in this place.

The motor-boat trip seemed a very tame affair after our previous adventures. Indeed, we were all quite bored by the time we arrived at Brownlow Landing. Here we found quite a nice hotel, where we stayed for one night.

The train would take us away on the following morning. Fortunately, we found the telegraph in operation here, and Nelson Lee spent some time in getting into communication with a New York shipping office.

By a rare piece of good luck, he managed to secure berths for us on a liner which would be leaving on the evening of the very day we arrived. And we should have to fairly race across a portion of Canada and the United States in order to get to New York in time.

The next day we started off from Brownlow Landing, going for two or three hundred miles in a slow train along a single line track. Square-Deal Reeve, Twirly Sam, Ace-High Peter, and Leon Ascara had taken leave of us at the landing, and we were very sorry to part company.

We had had some ripping times with those cowboys of Roaring Z Ranch, and we all liked Leon Ascara very much. For he had proved himself to be straight and honest. He was a very good fellow.

"Well, we're off at last," said Tommy Watson, as he sat back in his seat. "My only hat! We've had some excitements, if you like! And they've all been rushed into the last week or so."

"I never thought we should get out alive," said Pitt. "Well, we're off for England, Home and Beauty!"

If Pitt had only known it, his homecoming was not to be as he pictured it just now. For Reginald Pitt, in the near future, was to pass through a time such as he had never imagined possible.

But I must not deal with that now.

Arriving at a big junction, we stayed there a few hours, and then boarded one of the big expresses. By this time we were looking a little more respectable, having obtained new clothing, and complete new outfits.

Sir Montie, although he didn't admire the cut, was fairly well satisfied. He

was, at least, presentable. Until now he had been in a state of misery, wondering what on earth people would think of him.

There's no need for me to go into any details regarding our somewhat tedious train ride to New York. Neither is it necessary for me to describe the voyage across the Atlantic. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, but we had no excitement. We had had enough of that in Athabasca.

And now that we were on the homeward trip, we found it difficult to realise that all those extraordinary adventures had really happened. They seemed far away, and dreamlike. When we thought of them it seemed as though we were recollecting the incidents out of a particularly lurid adventure story.

But they had certainly happened to us, and we discussed our trials and troubles many times during the voyage home. Considering everything, it was most remarkable that we should be able to arrive in England so soon.

Indeed, we found that we could turn up at St. Frank's within a week of the commencement of the Autumn term.

Our adventures in America and Canada had been of a startling nature, but they had come upon one another with great rapidity. In thinking them over, it seemed to us that treble the amount of time must have been occupied.

But to know that we were all safe, and that we should all return to St. Frank's, filled us with keen pleasure. Handforth and Co. were particularly talkative on the matter. They were determined to create a sensation.

"If possible, we'll get to St. Frank's before the others," Handforth confided to his chums. "That's the idea. If we don't, they'll take all the credit, or something."

"Credit for what?" asked Church.

"Why, for getting out of that valley alive!"

"The credit belongs to Mr. Lee," said McClure.

"Mr. Lee?"

"Yes!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "The valley broke up of its own accord, and——"

"Yes, I know, but Mr. Lee suggested making the raft, and all the rest of it," put in Church. "In any case, it doesn't matter much who tells the yarn. Nobody can rob us of any glory."

Handforth shook his head.

"I don't know so much about that," he said. "Didn't I suggest a few things?"

"I don't remember 'em."

"You—you rotter!" snorted Handforth. "You don't remember 'em? Why, if it hadn't been for me we should have been in that valley still."

Church and McClure sighed.

"Oh, have your own way," said Church. "But how on earth you get ideas into your head fairly beats me. You'll be saying next that it was your wheeze to manufacture that raft."

"Well, I did suggest something of the sort," said Handforth. "I'll admit that Mr. Lee thought of it first—only he happened to speak about it before me. Anyhow, we're not going to argue."

"Good!" murmured Church.

"What?"

"Oh, don't keep it up!" said McClure. "As for that idea of yours, about getting down to St. Frank's first, I'll admit that's pretty decent. If we all go down together the other chaps will do the jawing!"

There was something sarcastic in this remark, but Handforth didn't notice it. McClure knew quite well that if a hundred fellows arrived at St. Frank's at once, Handforth would certainly do most of the talking. He couldn't be kept back. He was always ready with his tongue.

"Well, to cut it short," said Church. "We can decide all this when we arrive."

We did arrive in London at last. We were bronzed, healthy, and in the very highest of spirits. Our nerves had been strained somewhat during those perilous times in the valley. But the voyage across the Atlantic set us up wonderfully again. And we arrived in England in better health than we had ever been before. It was in the very early hours of a Friday morning that we stepped ashore at Southampton. And we left the train at the London terminus at breakfast time. London was looking just the same as ever—in fact, rather more attractive. It was a sunny, warm autumn morning, and everything looked very good to us.

"And now we're going straight to my place," said Lord Dorrimore. "I've arranged everythin' by wire, and we shall find breakfast ready. After that you can disperse just as soon as you like."

"Oh, good!"

"We can all do with breakfast, you know," said Fatty. "Let's hope it'll be something good. By chutney! Ain't it all right to be in London again? I can't really believe that we were ever on the Ghost River."

When we arrived at Lord Dorrimore's superb West End mansion we found that a particularly appetising breakfast had been prepared. It was consumed very heartily, as may be imagined.

And then visitors began to arrive—not by ones and twos, but by dozens. Handforth's father and mother were the first on the scene. Then came Watson's people, Christine's pater, and fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters of most of the other chaps. All the families had been wired that we should arrive at this time, and that we should go straight to Lord Dorrimore's.

There were many happy reunions. I was particularly delighted to see Tinker—and, later, Sexton Blake himself. The famous Baker Street detective and his assistant dropped in to welcome the guv'nor and me back. They knew that we had been having some stirring adventures.

Reginald Pitt was just a little disappointed. His own people hadn't turned up, and he had been confidently expecting to see his parents. He did get a telegram, but it was never opened.

It was handed to him while he was talking with two of the other fellows, and, at that particular moment, a sharp knock came at the door. Somebody said that it was Pitt's people, and Pitt himself rushed forward, stuffing the wire into his pocket.

Then he was carried off by Dorrie for some reason—just a little whim, I expect—and Pitt forgot all about that telegram. It still lay in his pocket, forgotten and unopened.

In the meantime, Handforth was talking with his father.

"Well, Edward, I am very pleased to see that you are looking so well," said Sir Edward Handforth. "Had a good time, I suppose?"

"Top-hole, pater."

"That's splendid!" said his father. "I'm glad you arrived to-day, because this is the only chance I've got of seeing you. It just happens that your mother and I are going straight off to Paris by the afternoon boat."

"Oh!" said Handy, in dismay.

"Rather a pity, but business compels me to leave," said Sir Edward. "I'm afraid you won't see much of us, young man. Still, we've caught you now—and, in any case, you'll have to go back to St. Frank's."

"When do you reckon I'd better go, pater?"

Sir Edward pursed his lips.

"Well, you see, there'll be nobody at home except the servants," he said. "There's no reason why you shouldn't get down to St. Frank's to-day, my boy. What do you say?"

Handforth was rather disappointed.

"Must you really go to Paris straight off?" he asked.

"Absolutely imperative," said Sir Edward. "I've got a business appointment that can't be missed."

In one way Handforth was glad, but he was certainly sorry to hear that he would not be able to spend any time with his people. However, this fitted in well with his own scheme, except for the fact that he would not be able to take Church and McClure with him. Upon due thought he decided that this was all the better.

He sought his chums out.

"Oh, here you are, Handy," said Church. "We were just looking for you. That idea of yours can't be worked, after all. We've got to go home, you know, and there's no need for us to be at St. Frank's until Monday morning. To-day is Friday, and we might just as well stay in London over the week-end."

"Of course," said McClure.

Handforth grinned.

"You can stay," he said. "I'm going to St. Frank's."

"To-morrow?"

"No; to-day."

"To-day!" yelled Church.

"Yes."

"But—but—"

Handforth explained the position.

"And so I'm off by the afternoon train," he concluded. "I shall arrive at St. Frank's in heaps of time to tell everybody about our adventures. Of course, I sha'n't get there until after lessons. But it'll be top-hole to see all the chaps again."

"Rather!"

"Still, it's a bit thick," objected McClure. "You might as well wait

until we all go, Handy. I'll tell you what—you can come to stay with my people until Monday."

"Rats!" said Handforth politely.

And, before another hour had elapsed he took his departure. As he could not spend any time with his own people, he saw no reason why he shouldn't be off at once. And so he arrived at Bellton at about four o'clock in the afternoon.

The little Sussex country station was looking just the same as ever, except for the fact that the trees were turning slightly brown with the first tinge of autumn. Handforth strolled through Bellton as though he owned the place.

He felt tremendously important, and he was only waiting for the moment until he saw some of the fellows. He was hugely anxious to make an impression. The fact that he had just come from North-West Canada made him a person of great renown, in his own estimation.

The village High Street was in no way altered. Handforth was quite surprised. Exactly what changes he expected to see he didn't know. But he was disappointed by the fact that everything was precisely as usual, even to the fat butcher in his little shop, and the short-sighted chemist behind his counter.

Handforth walked on, and arrived in Bellton Lane. Here, surely, he would meet some juniors. But he didn't. A thrill went through him, however, as he saw Morrow, of the Sixth, coming down.

Handforth tried to look unconcerned.

Morrow came up, and paused.

"Back, then, kid?" he said cheerfully.

"Back! Of course I'm back!" said Handforth. "Everything all right here?"

"Just the same as usual," said Morrow. "Glad to see you're looking bright and chirpy, youngster. Don't forget you've got to be pretty smart this term."

And Morrow passed on, leaving Handforth staring after him blankly. The Sixth-Former hadn't even asked him how he had enjoyed himself in America and Canada! It seemed that Handforth wasn't so very important, after all!

"The—the awful rotter!" muttered Handforth indignantly. "I thought he was going to ask me all about everything!"

He strode on, arrived within sight of the gates of the famous old school, and felt pleased when he saw that Chambers and Bryant and Phillips, of the Fifth, were lounging there.

Handforth came up, and the three Fifth-Formers regarded him calmly.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Handforth importantly.

"From this moment our peace flies away," said Chambers. "My dear Handforth, what on earth possessed you to come back this term?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"We've had three days of delightful peace at St. Frank's," said Chambers.

"At first we couldn't understand it, but then we realised that your absence was the cause. Your voice, you know, is just like a foghorn!"

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth. "I've just come back from Athabasca!"

"From where?" asked Bryant politely.

"Athabasca!"

"Suburb of London, I suppose?"

"You—you ignorant ass!" snorted Handforth. "Athabasca is a part of Canada—the North-West, right up in the hills. I've had some terrific adventures there, with Red Indians, and goodness knows what else. If you like, I'll tell you all about it at once."

Chambers yawned.

"I suppose you've been dreaming," he observed. "I heard a rumour that you'd been out to Montana, or some such outlandish place. Personally, I prefer Bournemouth! I had a ripping time there with my people!"

And Chambers and Co. strolled away.

"Great pip!" said Handforth blankly.

The fact that he had just come back from such stirring adventures did not seem to interest anybody! And he had been expecting the fellows to buzz round him like a swarm of flies, appealing for yarns.

He had pictured himself condescendingly obliging the crowd by relating his adventures. And now, indeed, he was not even stared at! All the fellows he had met regarded his presence as quite an ordinary matter.

Handforth was not only disappointed, but thoroughly indignant. He marched into the Triangle, and the first person he saw was a junior in Elons. But he was not an ordinary junior.

His skin was dark, and it was obvious that this junior was a native of India. He was quite handsome in his own way, extremely well built, and he revealed two rows of beautifully white teeth as he smiled. Handforth glared in return.

"New kid, I suppose!" he said gruffly.

He passed on without giving the boy time to answer. And then he was greatly gratified to hear a yell from the steps of the Ancient House. Hubbard and Armstrong and Griffith were standing there, and Hubbard was pointing.

"Here's Handforth!" he roared. "Come on, you chaps!"

Handforth's heart rejoiced. A rush of juniors surrounded him. He was soon the centre of a grinning mob. Certainly, a large percentage of that mob consisted of Third-Formers, and other grubby fags. But any sort of celebration was better than none at all.

Singleton and Jack Grey and Tom Burton pushed their way through the crowd.

"Hallo, Handy! Jolly glad to see you!" said Jack Grey warmly. "Where are the others?"

"Oh, they're not coming down till Monday," replied Handforth.

"Pitt's all right, I suppose?" asked Grey. "He's my study chum, you know, and I'm awfully keen about seeing him."

"Oh, Pitt's all right; you needn't worry," said Handforth. "Everything here looks the same. We've had some terrific adventures——"

"My hat! Let's hear all about them!" said Singleton. "Lemme see, you went to California, didn't you?"

"No—Montana."

"Oh, it's the same thing——"

"It's not the same thing, you ass!" snorted Handforth. "We went to Montana and had all sorts of adventures with cattle rustlers——"

"Cattle which?"

"Rustlers—thieves, you ass!" said Handforth. "Then we went up to Canada, and went right up the Ghost River to a valley where we found savage Red Indians, and all sorts of other things. I can tell you, we've had some exciting times."

"You lucky bounder!" said Hubbard enviously.

"Lucky!" repeated Handforth.

"Why, you fathead, we were nearly

dead two or three times. You're the lucky ones, for seeing me back here again!"

"I don't call that lucky!" said Armstrong.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're going to be funny, I'll punch your silly nose!" roared Handforth. "I tell you we had some terrific times, and it's only by a marvellous piece of chance that we got out of our troubles. In fact, if I hadn't been there —"

"There wouldn't have been any troubles at all?" inquired Grey innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass!" bawled Handforth. "If I hadn't been there they might have been imprisoned in a valley for all time! But I thought of a ripping idea—at least, Mr. Leo suggested it first although I thought of it as well. Anyhow, we got out."

"Jolly lucid, ain't it?" asked Armstrong.

But, gradually, Handforth told his stirring tale. And it was quite true that the listening juniors became greatly interested, and wanted to hear more details. This gratified Handforth exceedingly.

He was even more gratified when, on going into the Ancient House, he met Mr. Crowell, the Remove Form-master. Mr. Crowell said that he was very pleased to see Handforth back safe and sound, and he congratulated Handy upon his return. He rather spoilt the effect, however, by warning Handforth that it would be necessary for him to behave himself better than he had done during the last term.

Handforth was the honoured guest at a big feed in Study E that evening. Jack Grey was the host, and the study was crowded out with other guests. And they listened with more or less close attention to Handforth's stirring account of everything that had taken place. The juniors were hardly to be blamed, perhaps, for casting a good many open doubts upon Handy's version of the adventures.

Yet, to tell the truth, Handforth didn't exaggerate much. The adventures themselves had been so amazing that there was scarcely any room for embellishment. However, Handforth

was the hero of the hour at St. Frank's, and so he didn't mind.

"How do you feel about it?" asked Grey, at length.

"About what?"

"Coming home," said Grey. "Would you rather stop out there, or be here, at St. Frank's?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, there's more chance out there for a fellow with brains," said Handforth carelessly. "Of course, I couldn't stop—I had to think of the school. You couldn't get on without me in the Remove."

"Ahem! Of course not!" said Grey, remembering, in the nick of time, that he was addressing a guest. "It would be awful without you, Handy!"

"There's the football, too," said Handforth. "Football's just starting for the season. You couldn't get along without me in the team—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was some little time before peace was restored. Handforth insisted on punching every fellow who had laughed. But, as Grey pointed out, this was impossible, for everybody had joined in. And Grey diplomatically suggested that Handforth should tell some more hair-raising episodes.

Edward Oswald obliged, and the gathering in Study E finally broke up with most of the juniors being thoroughly convinced that Handforth was undoubtedly the finest weaver of "fairy tales" who had ever been born.

CHAPTER VI

VERY MYSTERIOUS.

REGINALD PITT looked rather worried.

"I can't understand why my people haven't come along," he said. "Still, I expect there's a good reason, and I shall go home before long. What are you chaps going to do?"

"Well, I'm booked to spend the night with Sir Montie," said Tommy Watson. "Nipper's going with Mr. Lee to Gray's Inn Road, I think. They're going to be together over the week-end, and then we shall all descend upon St. Frank's on Monday."

"That's the idea," I said. "You'll come on Monday, too, I suppose, Pitt?"

"Yes," said Pitt. "I'd like you to

see my people, Nipper—I don't think you've ever met them, have you?"

"No," I replied. "Thanks, old man. I'll come to-morrow, or Sunday——"

"I was going to suggest that you go with me now," exclaimed Pitt. "We live in Duncan Square, you know. You can easily get to Gray's Inn Road from there—bus'll do you all right."

I shook my head.

"No, that would hardly be right, old son," I said. "When you go home, you ought to be alone with your people just to begin with. I wouldn't like to butt in. I don't mind coming on a bit later—say in half an hour. As it happens, that'll just suit me, because the gov'nor has gone out with Dorrie, and they're going on to Gray's Inn Road afterwards."

"Good!" said Pitt. "That'll do me down to the ground. Strictly speaking, I ought to have gone home before lunch, but you know what it is—a chap can't get away. You'll be along in about half an hour, then?"

"Yes," I replied.

We were standing in the big hall of Lord Dorrimore's mansion. Pitt was certainly looking a bit worried. He had fully expected his father, at least, to meet him, for he had sent a telegram from Southampton saying that he was going straight to Dorrie's address. But neither his father nor mother had appeared. And, in all the bustle, Pitt had completely forgotten about that telegram. It was stuffed in his pocket with his handkerchief on the top of it, so even when he felt in his pocket he wasn't reminded.

Luncheon was over, and the majority of the fellows had gone off to their various homes. And Pitt soon left, too.

He had no reason to be very greatly concerned, for he reckoned that his father and mother had been expecting him to go home after staying an hour or so at Lord Dorrimore's. Strictly speaking, he ought to have gone before.

So he hurried now, and it was not long before he arrived in Duncan Square. He took a taxi, being rather flush, and as soon as the vehicle pulled up, he paid off the cabby, and opened the big gate. There were several houses all the same kind, but Pitt did not hesitate. He walked up the drive, and then gave a brisk rat-tat upon the door.

He stood there, upon the step, thinking of all the things he had to say to his people. And he smiled once or twice as he pictured what they would say, and what they would do.

His father was a big business man in the City, and rich enough to maintain this big, West-End establishment. As a rule, Mr. Pitt was too busy to take much interest in his son.

In fact, it was quite likely that his father would not be at home just now—Pitt suddenly realised this. However, he would soon get back from the City, in any case, for the afternoon was getting on.

At all events, Pitt would see his mother—a kindly lady of fifty. Reginald was her only son, and she had always taken a loving interest in him. And, as Pitt stood there, he suddenly became serious.

He remembered the times when he had not been decent—when he had been several kinds of a rotter. But those times were all left behind him, and for a long time now he had been making good.

"Dear old mater!" he muttered. "Why didn't she come and meet the boat train, I wonder? I was dead certain she'd be there, at least. The dad's too busy, of course. My only hat! Supposing they're away?"

The thought suddenly struck him, and he was rather dismayed.

Perhaps this would account for their non-arrival at Dorrie's. Perhaps his father and mother were down at the seaside, or in Scotland—or even on the Continent! He knew they went sometimes, and he realised what an ass he had been not to think of this possibility before.

He suddenly became quite convinced that he had hit upon the solution, and he was impatient to know the absolute truth.

"Why the dickens can't somebody come?" he muttered impatiently.

He used the knocker again.

"Old Marshall's jolly slow!" he murmured. "I suppose the old bird's got another attack of his giddy rheumatism."

Marshall was Mr. Pitt's old butler, and he had been in the service of the family for practically all his life.

But when the door was opened, a

moment later, Pitt beheld a portly individual who regarded him with stern disfavour. He was certainly a butler, but not Marshall. Pitt was rather surprised.

He walked straight in, past the man.

"Now then, what's the meaning of this, young man?" asked the butler sharply.

"Well, I suppose I've got a right to come in, haven't I?" asked Pitt. "What's happened to old Marshall?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the butler. "My name is Hawkins. What do you want here?"

"Hawkins?" repeated Pitt. "Well, that's a good old English name. As for what I want here, I've come to stay."

"Oh, indeed!" said the butler grimly.

Pitt grinned. This man was a newcomer, and it seemed that he didn't know that the son of the house was expected. He was regarding Pitt suspiciously, and with rising anger.

"Where's the mater?" asked Pitt.

"I beg your pardon."

"My mother," repeated Pitt. "Is she at home?"

"Look here, young gent, I don't know what your game is, but I can tell you pretty plainly that you've got to get outside," said Hawkins. "If I'd have taken care, you wouldn't have got past me."

Pitt grinned again.

"Well, I did get past you—so that's that. Perhaps you can tell me at once whether your master and mistress are at home?"

"The master is at home," said the butler curtly.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Pitt. "That's better than I thought! So the pater's here!"

"I've already told you that I don't know what your game is," declared the butler. "But if you don't take your hat and get off—well, I shall be compelled to put you out!"

"Look here, old chap, you can keep your hair on," chuckled Pitt. "You're a new butler, I suppose, and you don't happen to know who I am. Well, I'm Mr. Pitt's son, and I think I've got a perfect right here, haven't I?"

The butler stared.

"Mr. Pitt's son?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"That doesn't tell me anything," said Hawkins sourly. "You're trying to play a game with me, and it won't work—"

"What do you mean, it doesn't tell you anything?" interrupted Reginald Pitt. "You say my father's at home, don't you?"

"No."

"But you just—"

"The master is not your father," said the butler grimly. "The master's not married, as a matter of fact. Look here, if you tell me what the idea is, I might let you go, but I'm not standing any more of this nonsense."

Pitt was bewildered.

"Your master's not my father!" he repeated blankly. "But—but this is Mr. Pitt's house—this is where my pater lives—where I live!"

The butler's face cleared.

"Oh, I see!" he exclaimed. "The fact is, you've made a mistake, young gent. You've come to the wrong house—that's what you've done. Pitt? I never heard of the name before. This house doesn't belong to Mr. Pitt."

"What!" gasped Reginald.

"Mr. Simon Raspe is the master here," went on the butler. "This house belongs to Mr. Raspe."

Pitt gave a gulp.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he exclaimed. "I—I thought— Oh, my goodness! It's the first time I've made such a fat-headed bloomer! I didn't think I'd been away so long that I should mistake my own giddy house! I say, I'm awfully sorry for worrying you like this!"

"That's all right, young gent," said the butler, smiling. "I don't mind now that I understand."

He looked at Pitt rather curiously—with an expression which the junior could not quite understand. But he didn't say any more, and opened the door. Pitt passed outside, grinning.

"Of all the frightful asses!" he muttered. "Just fancy me making such an awful blunder. Thank goodness Mr. Raspe didn't come out. I should have felt an awful fool!"

He chuckled to himself at the absurdity of the situation, and passed down the drive. As he did so, he looked at the flower-beds and the bushes. The front garden was rather a big one, for these

were old-fashioned, detached houses, standing in their own grounds.

And, in spite of himself, Pitt was impressed. He remembered every detail, and this garden was set out in exactly the same way as his father's. It was rather peculiar that there should be two houses just the same but it explained how he had made the mistake.

He arrived at the gate, opened it, and walked out upon the broad pavement. Then he turned, and looked at the gate with much curiosity. And, as he looked, he stared—he stared very hard.

"Number fifty-nine!" he muttered, as he turned his attention to the gatepost. "Well, I'm hanged!"

He gazed at the gate again.

"Windermere!" he exclaimed. "Why, what on earth— That fool of a butler must have been drunk, or something! But—but he distinctly said that this house belonged to a man named Simon Raspe! What can it mean?"

The problem was certainly one which Pitt could not fathom. In the house itself he had taken it for granted that he had made a bloomer. He fully be-

lieved that he had entered the wrong house by mistake. But now he discovered that he had been right all the time!

This was really his father's house!

Number fifty-nine—Windermere! Both the number and the name of the house were correct. And yet he had been turned out—the butler had told him that the name of Pitt was unknown to him!

Furthermore, the man who lived there was Mr. Simon Raspe! What in the world could it mean?

It was not long before Reginald Pitt found out that something of a very startling nature had occurred during his absence in America. And, from that moment, Pitt was involved in a strange and mysterious set of circumstances which were destined to lead to many adventures.

And these adventures would continue after he had arrived at St. Frank's for the new term. In fact, the junior, without hardly realising it, would shortly be mixed up in a complex mystery which would even tax the remarkable powers of Nelson Lee himself!

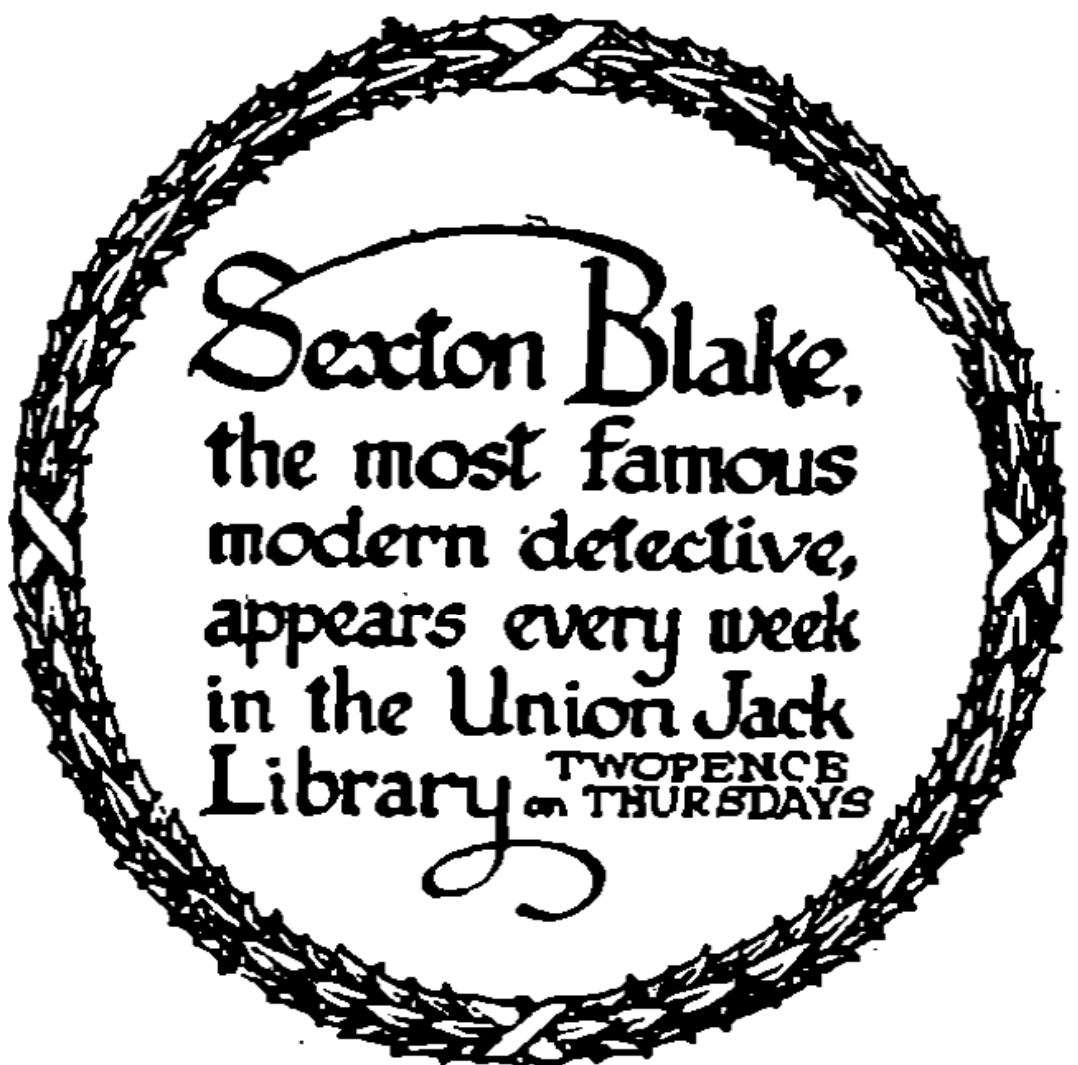
THE END.

To My Readers.

After their numerous adventures in North America, the holiday party is not sorry to be back at the old school again. In spite of their hardships and narrow escapes in the Wild West, they had had a grand time seeing fresh sights and forming new friendships. But the best of holidays must end eventually, and just now there will be many unwilling school-boys who, in common with the boys of St. Frank's, are facing the new autumn term with no great enthusiasm.

With the new term begins the "footer" season, and, accordingly, our new series will have a strong football interest, in which Reginald Pitt, the finest right-winger St. Frank's has ever had, will figure very prominently. When Pitt returns home after his adventures in America, he discovers that a terrible misfortune has befallen his father. I will not go into details here, but you will find it fully described in next week's story, entitled "HIS HOUSE IN DISORDER!"

THE EDITOR.

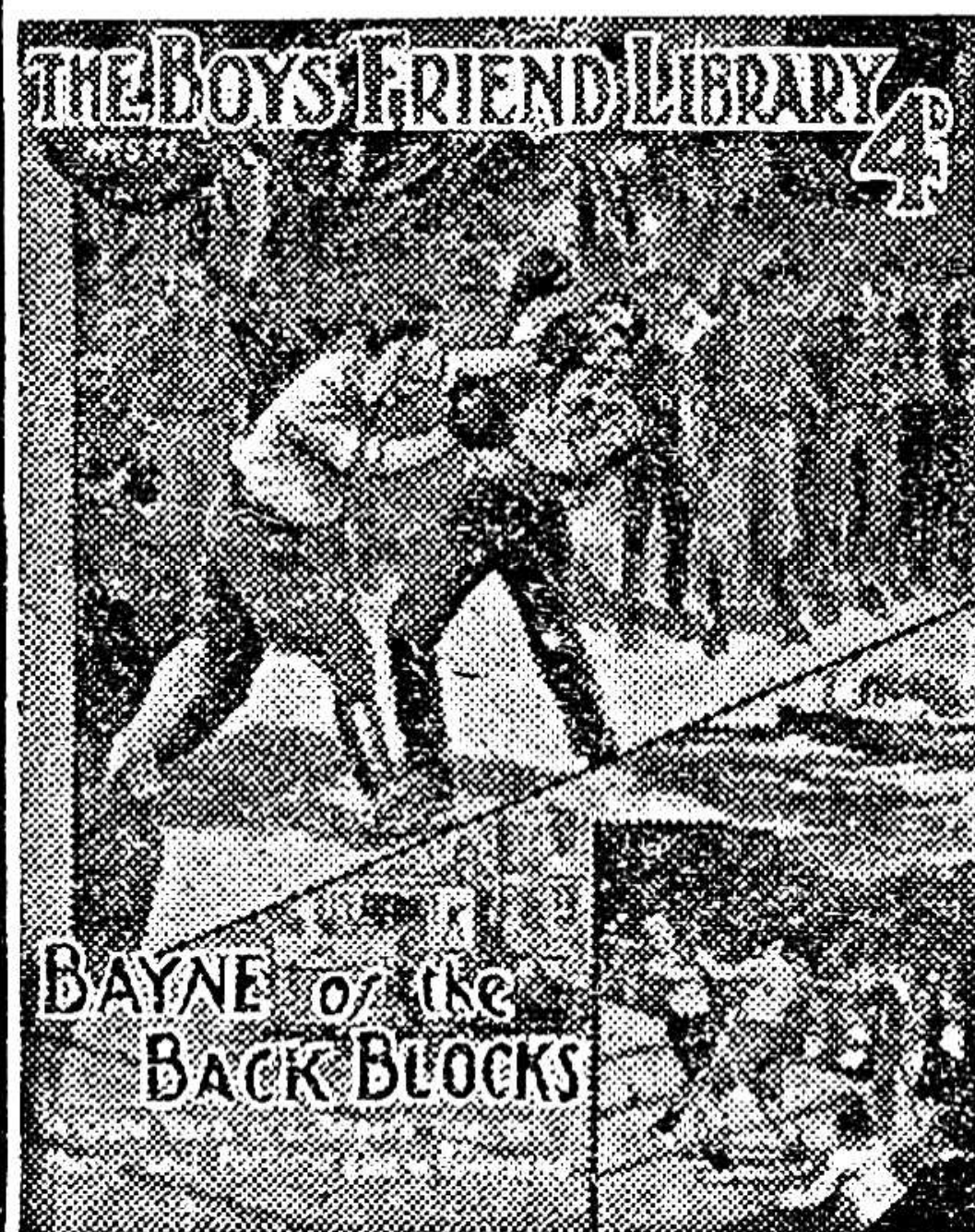
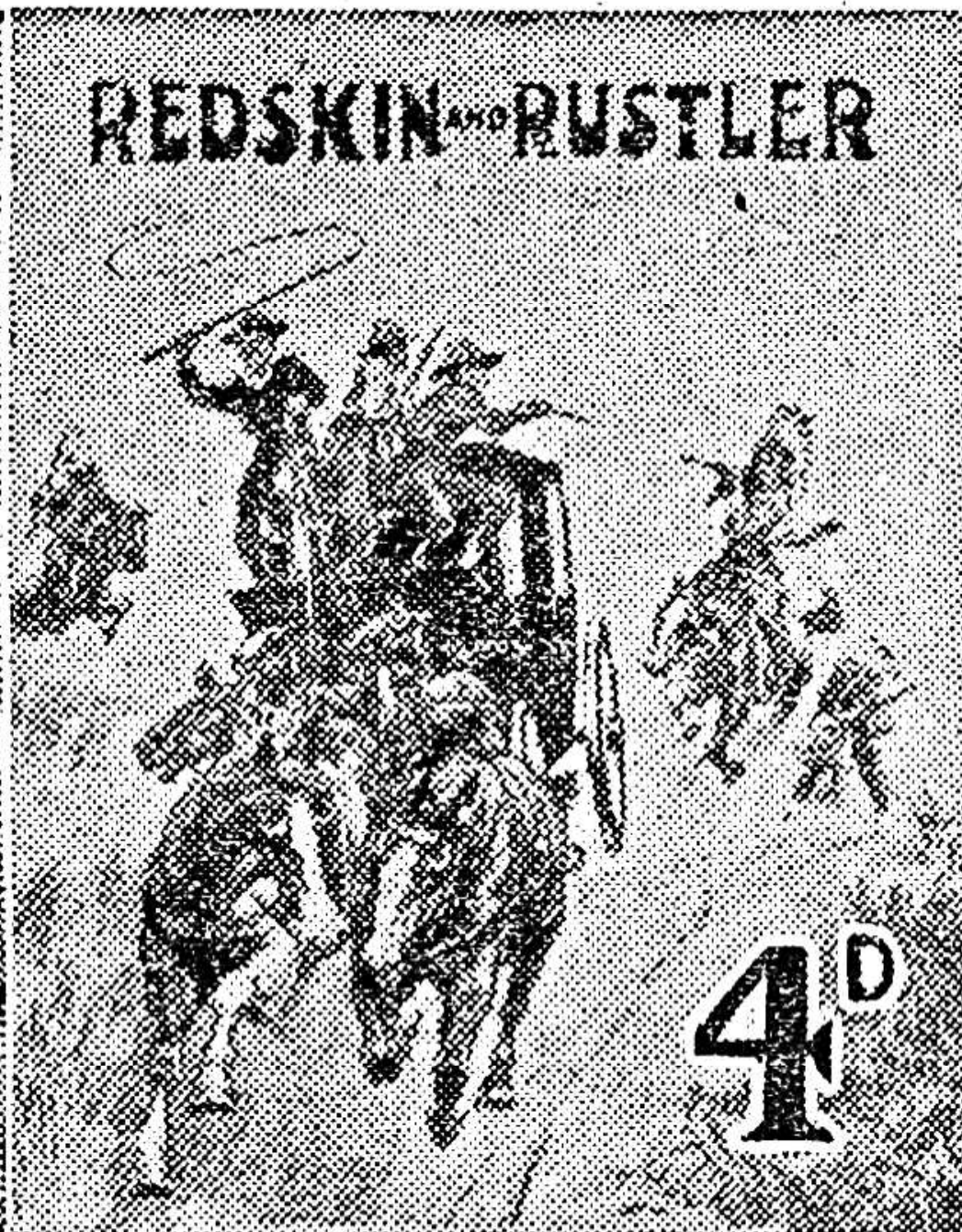
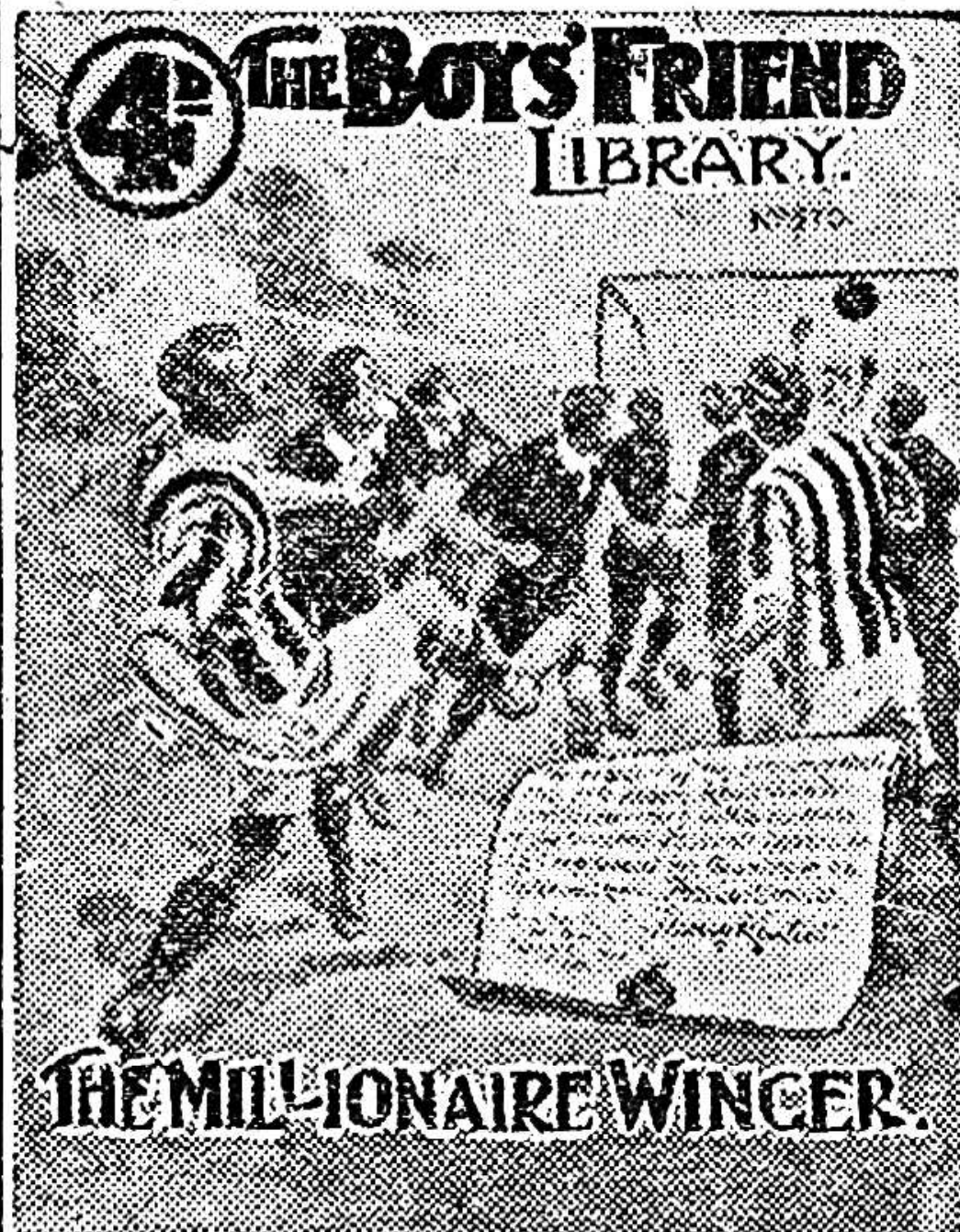


THIS WEEK:

"The Case of the Channel Swimmer."

A QUARTER OF A MILLION WORDS

of grand reading matter is waiting for you behind these covers.



These are four of the fine New Volumes, now on sale, in the "BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY." (For complete list see page ii of cover.)

The Ghosts of Marsh Manor



BEGIN TO-DAY THIS THRILLING NARRATIVE OF

Nelson Lee.

THE GREAT DETECTIVE OF GRAY'S INN ROAD.

CHIEF CHARACTERS.

NELSON LEE, as *Mr. Herbert Drake, B.A.*, secures a position as games master at Marsh Manor School in order to investigate strange visits of ghosts at the school.

NIPPER, Lee's assistant, comes to the school as Barton, a backward boy.

THE REV. OCTAVIUS CHARD, Headmaster of Marsh Manor School.

ADOLPHE MALINES, a Belgian refugee, living near the school, who has invented a new method of colour photography.

JULES TROCHON and MADAME TROCHON, compatriots and neighbours of Malines.

INGLEBY-CHARTERIS, wealthy stockbroker, who befriends the Belgian refugees.

MONSIEUR VILOTTE, French master at the school, an avowed enemy of the Belgians, and against whom suspicions are directed.

SEYMOUR, GURLING, and TULK, boys at the school, who seem to know more about the ghosts than they will admit.

SOL CLITTERS, forger and desperate character, whose reappearance causes Nelson Lee to return suddenly to town, where he meets with an unexpected disaster at the hands of the master criminal.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER VII. (Continued.)

In Which Nelson Lee Came Very Near To His End.

"YOU mentioned Marsh Manor, Lee," said the doctor. "Do you know the actual Manor House itself?"

"Do I not, when I've taken a situation there as one of the masters?"

"What, have they turned the old house into a school? Dear me, that seems a desecration!" said Dr. Hartop. "I practised in the next village for years, and used to spend a good deal of time at the house when Miss Varnay lived there. The secret passages interested me very much, and I discovered quite a number of them."

Nipper and his master looked at each other, and the boy's face bubbled over with delight.

"I say, we've touched lucky!" he cried. "Shall we tell Dr. Hartop what's going on down there?"

Nelson Lee nodded over his Bovril, which was already putting new life into him, and Nipper rapidly unfolded an outline of the doings of the White Abbot.

Dr. Hartop was intensely interested, and entered into every detail with a zest that was almost boyish.

"Give the doctor a cigar," said Lee, "and see if there's a siphon in the cabinet. Now, doc., you're the very man we wanted to help us out. You can't tell us who the beggar is, but do you know how he could possibly get into the house?"

"He can't," said the doctor, in a tone of quiet decision. "You see, when the mansion was built out of the abbey ruins, the site chosen was, as you know, the length of a meadow away. I have spent hours in the vaults, and I'll defy you to discover any subterranean connection. There would be no necessity for it. It would have been far more feasible to suppose that if the builder had wanted an outlet, in case of need, he would have connected up with the old gateway, which is practically the only portion of the original abbey remaining. And there, again, I have examined the vaults beneath it, and the original stonework is as solid as on the day it was built. No; it is quite obvious to me that your ghost lives in the Manor House."

"But there are only two people for it," said Nelson Lee. "Either Miss Monica Chard, on whom my suspicions first fell, or Vilotte, the French master. And against that there is the undoubted fact that someone was playing the fool there before Mr. Chard came on the scene at all, so how do we go?"

"I leave it to you, partner!" laughed the doctor, in the language of bridge. "You are sure of the servants?"

"Absolutely."

"You don't think the Belgians have anything to do with it?"

"Absurd!"

"And you say you have seen it yourself?"

"As plainly as I see you—a figure rather above the medium height, with a most ghostly, iridescent shimmer."

"Anybody in the room the science-master occupied before he went away?"

"No one. The door is locked, and Mr. Chard has the key."

"Oh, as for doors, they don't count in that house!" said the doctor. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I made a lot of notes, and I'll rough you out a plan of what I discovered. There are three secret doors on that first floor corridor and a way leading from your study to the rooms you say are occupied by the Frenchman. You'd never find it unless you were shown."

"How so? There are twenty panels on the party-wall. Which of them is it?"

"None of them," said the doctor, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "In this case the passage is reached by a trapdoor in the centre of your den."

"Which is occupied now by a large table."

"Any carpet on the floor?" queried the doctor.

"No; polished boards and a few rugs."

"Then shift the table, and in the very middle of the room you'll find two of the floorboards are cut to a short length. Press them both simultaneously and see what happens. They will reveal a short stair, of five steps, leading into a narrow gallery, which comes up in the same place in the adjoining room. Try it one night, and I promise you the Frenchman will have the fright of his life."

"I believe, after all," said Nelson Lee, "that the net is going to close round Monsieur Vilotte. Is there any reason, doctor, why from that same passage that you have described there should not be another gallery, which would bring me to the far end of the corridor?"

"No reason at all. The fact that I did not discover such a thing is no proof of its non-existence."

"This suggests great possibilities, Nipper. Get me some more Bovril, there's a good chap!"

And Nipper, radiant with delight at seeing his beloved master gradually returning to his normal condition, hopped back to the kitchen.

CHAPTER VIII.

Who Was It?

LEE obeyed his medical adviser to the letter, and the whole of next day he lay extended on the padded Chesterfield, smoking great quantities of tobacco and thinking hard, after wiring Mr. Chard that he had met with a motor-smash.

Several times he removed the bandages and examined his battered cranium, and, wonderful to relate, the swelling had almost subsided, and, by brushing his hair over his temple, it was scarcely discernible.

"I'll have a hot bath, Nipper, and tomorrow I shall be as right as a trivet," he said. "I'm inclined to think we shall have to make a clean breast of it to the Rev.

Octavius, to account for our double absence; but he's a capital sport, and we may trust him with our secret."

"Then are we going down again?"

"We're going by the first available train to-morrow afternoon, which will enable us to reach the Manor House after dark. I have an idea that if we can gain our quarters without Vilotte knowing that we have returned, we may see some fun. Sunday's an awkward day for travelling, so you'd better look up the guide. We've no baggage to bother us, anyhow."

"But suppose Mr. Watson sends us news of Sol Clitters?" suggested Nipper.

"If so, everything will depend on what that news is," replied his master. "Now, my beamish boy, light the geyser and turn on the bath, and see that we've got something in the house for breakfast."

He had already dictated and dispatched a letter to Mr. Chard, in which he said, among several other things:

"Strange things have happened which I can explain to you fully. If you could make it convenient after church on Sunday evening to walk a little way along the Huntingdon road we might have an interview unobserved, which I am sure you will agree is desirable when you hear what I have to tell you."

Poor Mr. Chard re-read that letter several times during the day, greatly disturbed in his mind, for, apart from the disappearance of the new boy, Barton, other things had been happening which drove him well-nigh to his wit's end.

As Nelson Lee approached the booking-office he suddenly stood quite still. At the next window the figure of a tall, square-shouldered man carrying a green morocco bag with yellow metal mountings had caught his eye, and he heard him ask for a first-class return to Peterborough, with a slight American twang in the voice there was no mistaking, adding:

"How long is it available?"

The clerk replied, "Two months, sir," and, dropping his face over the notecase he had just taken out of his pocket, he looked at the figure under his own hat-brim.

The passenger pocketed his change, took up his ticket, and walked with an easy, confident stride out of sight in the direction of the platform.

"Take two third singles, Nipper," whispered the great detective, slipping a note into the boy's hand, and walking quickly to the other door of the booking-hall, he followed the first-class passenger with his eyes from the shelter of the closed bookstall.

He did not need the glimpse he caught of the man's profile, as he stood there looking along the platform before he opened his carriage door, and for a moment Lee, dumb with astonishment, made no response to the plucking of his own sleeve as Nipper joined him.

"Mark that fellow well just getting in now," he whispered at last. "Have you got him?"

"I've got him, yes," replied Nipper. "Who is he?"

"Sol Clitters!" was the astounding reply. "Now, then, watch where I go, and join me without our appearing to have any connection whatever."

Taking out a white silk handkerchief, Nelson Lee wrapped it round his neck, turned up the collar of his overcoat, and, leaning heavily on his stick, shuffled slowly with an invalid's gait to the rear of the train, where he selected an empty third-class carriage.

Meanwhile, Nipper, making a detour round the station, got in just before they examined the tickets, and a look of satisfaction-passed between them as they knew their manœuvre had not been seen.

"You don't mean what you said, guv'nor," exclaimed the boy incredulously.

"It's a fact," replied Lee. "And you've got to follow him and find out his burrow."

Nipper's eyes sparkled, for he loved those independent commissions, which he always executed with success.

"As soon as you've located him, hire a car and drive to Marsh Manor. Get out before you reach the village, and present yourself at the Head's private door," were his final instructions, and all the way down on that irritating journey, where the train stopped at every station, they discussed the affairs of that master criminal, who, lolling back in his padded seat, smoked endless cigarettes and laughed silently with the air of a man who finds everything going well with him.

It was dusk when the train reached Huntingdon, and with a parting squeeze of his shoulder Nelson Lee got out, leaving Nipper alone, nor did he move until the train had passed on its way.

Then he chartered a motor from the "George," and, dismissing the driver a mile short of Marsh Manor, started along the lonely road on foot.

He had not gone far when the sound of someone coming towards him made him listen, and, recognising the footfall, he went up to the approaching figure, which loomed dimly out of the darkness.

"Good-evening, Mr. Chard," he said. "Your presence here tells me that you received my letter."

"I did, Mr. Drake," replied the Rev. Octavius. "I hope you have recovered from your injuries, and I am heartily glad to see you again, for things have been going from bad to worse."

"You surprise me, sir. What has happened?"

"I have seen the so-called ghost myself," said the headmaster, and we are in great trouble. Barton has disappeared, and we can find no trace of him, and, to crown all, four parents have written to me to give notice of the removal of their sons from my school."

"Dear me, this is all very bad, sir," said the new games master, in a tone of commiseration, although the darkness fortunately hid his smile. "That is very unfortunate

about the four pupils, but make your mind easy on the score of Barton. You will see him again to-night."

The Rev. Octavius Chard took hold of the speaker by the lapel of his overcoat, and came to a stand in the middle of the road.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said sternly. "How do you come to know Barton's whereabouts? Who are you?"

"I am Nelson Lee, the detective, sir, and Barton is my assistant, Nipper, of whom you must have heard," was the reply. "I must ask your forgiveness for having deceived you up to this point, but in return for what I hope to accomplish I beg you will not breathe a word of my identity to a living soul. I am in great hopes that we shall be able to see you safely through your trouble, but these things are not solved in a moment. Please tell me where, when, and how you came to see the ghost."

"It was last night," said Mr. Chard, when he had recovered from his astonishment, and they leaned side by side on a gate, from whence the lights in the Manor House were visible not very far away.

"Misfortunes never come singly, Mr. Lee."

"Drake, if you please, for the present," corrected his companion.

"I beg your pardon—yes, I understand," said the Rev. Octavius. "I had received the letters, and was sitting alone in my study in no very enviable frame of mind, you may be sure. We had scoured the country, the other masters and myself, without result. I was tired and greatly distressed, with visions of my school leaving me, or of my leaving the house. Finding no comfort even in my pipe, I lay back with my eyes closed until, opening them suddenly, there before me on the other side of the table was a shining figure in a white robe. The cowl was pulled over the face, which was completely hidden by the black shadow thrown from the light of the hanging lamp, and both arms were raised in a threatening attitude, one of the hands grasping a gleaming knife."

Nelson Lee nodded to himself, but without interrupting the speaker.

"I am not exaggerating, for all these details are firmly impressed upon my brain, and will never leave it," continued Mr. Chard. "You know I have always pooh-poohed the possibility of such a thing, but now I am obliged to admit that I was wrong."

"And then?" prompted his listener after a pause.

"Why, for possibly a whole minute I sat spellbound, thinking it an illusion, until the figure crouched as if about to spring, and then I think I must have shouted as I jumped up in search of a weapon. The nearest, of course, was the fire-irons, but as I snatched the tongs and turned to face the apparition there was nothing there. It had gone! Now, sir, that is the solemn truth. Can you give me the explanation of it?"

"I cannot, Mr. Chard," said Nelson Lee slowly. "With the whole of my world-wide experience behind me I am at a loss to know how it is done. Of course, there is one thing upon which I am prepared to stake my life, if that were necessary—the figure you saw, which the boys have seen, and which I followed, as I told you, is a human being."

"You're quite certain of that?" said Mr. Chard dubiously, and Lee realised that at last the Rev. Octavius had really got the wind up.

"I am quite certain," he replied firmly. "We are confronted by a plot of amazing cleverness, where every advantage is taken of the possibilities of an ancient house, but how they do it and why they do it I'm hanged if I know. My own adventures in town have been singularly dramatic, Mr. Chard, and they have not ended yet by any means, though possibly, when Barton arrives, he will throw some light on them. Meanwhile, I have learned more about the Manor House than I knew before, and I have a strong suspicion of the ghost's identity, which I hope a few days will prove to be correct."

"I sincerely hope you are right," groaned the headmaster, "or else I shall have to leave the house altogether."

"Do nothing in a hurry, sir," said Lee. "I am sure you will regret it if you do."

"Whom do you suspect?" demanded Mr. Chard.

"I know I can rely on your discretion, sir. It is Vilotte, the French master," said Nelson Lee, "and I want to get to my room to-night without his seeing me."

Mr. Chard gave a gasp of astonishment, but Lee gripped him by the arm and whispered:

"Hush! Stay where you are as though you'd been alone all the time!" And, vaulting noiselessly over the gate, he crouched down in the tangled growth of the ditch in the field.

The wind had suddenly brought to his nostrils a whiff of tobacco that touched a cord, and he had seen the glowing end of a cigarette approaching along the grass-bordered road.

He had not been in his hiding-place ten seconds when the voice of the Frenchman broke the silence.

"Ah, Monsieur Chard!" he said in French. "Still watching for the runaway? He has not arrived yet, then?"

"I have seen nothing," said Mr. Chard, in the same language, which he spoke perfectly.

"It is difficult to understand," said Vilotte, resting his elbows where Nelson Lee's had been a moment before. "Do you not somehow connect the boy's disappear-

ance with the absence of Monsieur Drake?"

"In what way?" said Mr. Chard sharply.

"Ah, I do not pretend to say in what way, but to me the whole thing is strange, and I do not believe that Monsieur Drake intends to come back."

"On the contrary, he writes that he will be here to-morrow," said the headmaster.

"We shall see," grinned the Frenchman. "I have not told you before, monsieur, but I have seen Drake stealing about the house in his socks when he thought everyone was asleep. Sometimes those big men of strong physique are not so strong in their heads. I think you will find that the ghost has frightened him—this wonderful ghost. It is odd that neither I myself nor yet Mr. Jackson have ever seen it," and he laughed contemptuously.

"Now, how on earth," thought Nelson Lee, "did you know I was creeping about in my socks, unless you were creeping about in your own?"

"Will you do me the pleasure of taking supper with us in my house, Monsieur Vilotte?" said Mr. Chard.

"A thousand thanks, monsieur! I shall be delighted!" said the Frenchman, and they walked back to the school again.

"Bravo, Octavius!" chuckled Lee, coming out of his concealment. "That was done to clear the coast for me, and now I shall be able to examine Vilotte's room undisturbed."

The bell had just rung for the boys' supper, which they took in the dining-hall on Sunday nights, and, going round to the entrance on the playing-field side, Lee watched his opportunity, and gained his own study unseen.

Turning the key, he lifted the table to one side, found the two short boards of which Dr. Hartop had told him, and flashed his light down into the secret way.

The first thing he did was to examine the trapdoor itself, which had opened upwards.

"By Jupiter!" he muttered. "It's a providential thing I concealed my identity, for I've been in the habit of receiving unknown visitors. The spring has been recently oiled, and that clever contrivance of the weighted counterpoise moves without a sound."

Then he went down the five wooden steps, and had to bend almost on all fours as he threaded the passage beneath the floor, which ended, as the doctor had told him, at the foot of a similar short ladder.

He had just released the spring and found his head and shoulders immediately beneath Vilotte's table when the room door opened and the French master came quickly in, humming a gay tune.

A table-cover hung down in heavy folds, and Lee remained motionless where he was, heard Vilotte strike a match and light a candle; but, as he left the door open behind him, the watcher knew that he had not come to stay.

Passing through into the bed-chamber, he
(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

heard him brush his beard before the looking-glass, plunge his hands into the toilet-jug, and wipe them hurriedly on a towel. Then he returned, picked up his oboe in its case, blew out the candle, and hurried away.

"What a blessing I was where I was!" thought the detective. "They're going to have a little music after supper, and monsieur will be in his element. Now for a thorough investigation of this place."

The first thing he did was to go into the bed-room and open the wardrobe. The thing he had half thought he might find was not there. No white monk's robe was to be seen, nor did he discover anything incriminatory as he burrowed to the bottom of the Frenchman's box, with deft hands that left everything precisely as he had found it.

The odour of stale Caporal tobacco, which he detested, hung about the rooms, and, disappointed with his search, he returned to the trapdoor under the table, and lowered it carefully into its place.

As he reached the bottom rung of the ladder his foot slipped, and, putting out his hand to save himself, the solid wall in front of him swung open and precipitated him on to his knees in the entrance of another passage, just wide enough for a man to walk in, and which evidently led immediately beneath the corridor itself.

"The doctor never said anything about this," he mused. "Possibly he did not know of its existence, but the Frenchman evidently does. Where's the other end of it, I wonder? I think I've struck a clue at last."

Making a rapid calculation of the distance from the centre of Vilotte's study to the mouth of the passage he had discovered, he paced it very carefully, until it terminated abruptly in a flight of stone steps this time, and he knew that he was not far from Mr. Chard's green-baize door.

The steps led up to the right hand, a sliding panel at the top of them, made of extraordinary thickness, to deaden the hollow sound that would have betrayed its existence to anyone hammering upon it from the outer side, flew back at a touch, and he found himself in the lobby that led to the servants' staircase.

It was not six strides from the door round the corner which had once belonged to Mr. Williams, the science-master, and double that distance from the staircase down which he had first seen the ghost descend, and across the square, thoughtful face of the great investigator there passed a smile of triumph. The whole thing was clear as daylight to him now. The monk's disguise was hidden in some unknown cavity, no doubt, but the rascal's method was obvious.

(To be continued.)



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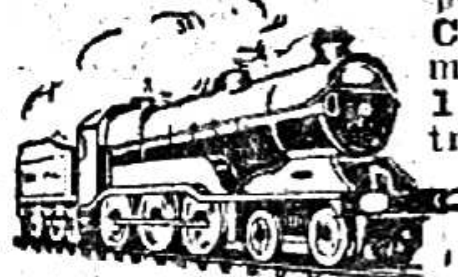
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