

SEE INSIDE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HOLIDAY ADVENTURE SERIES!



F. D. MANN



T. HAMILTON

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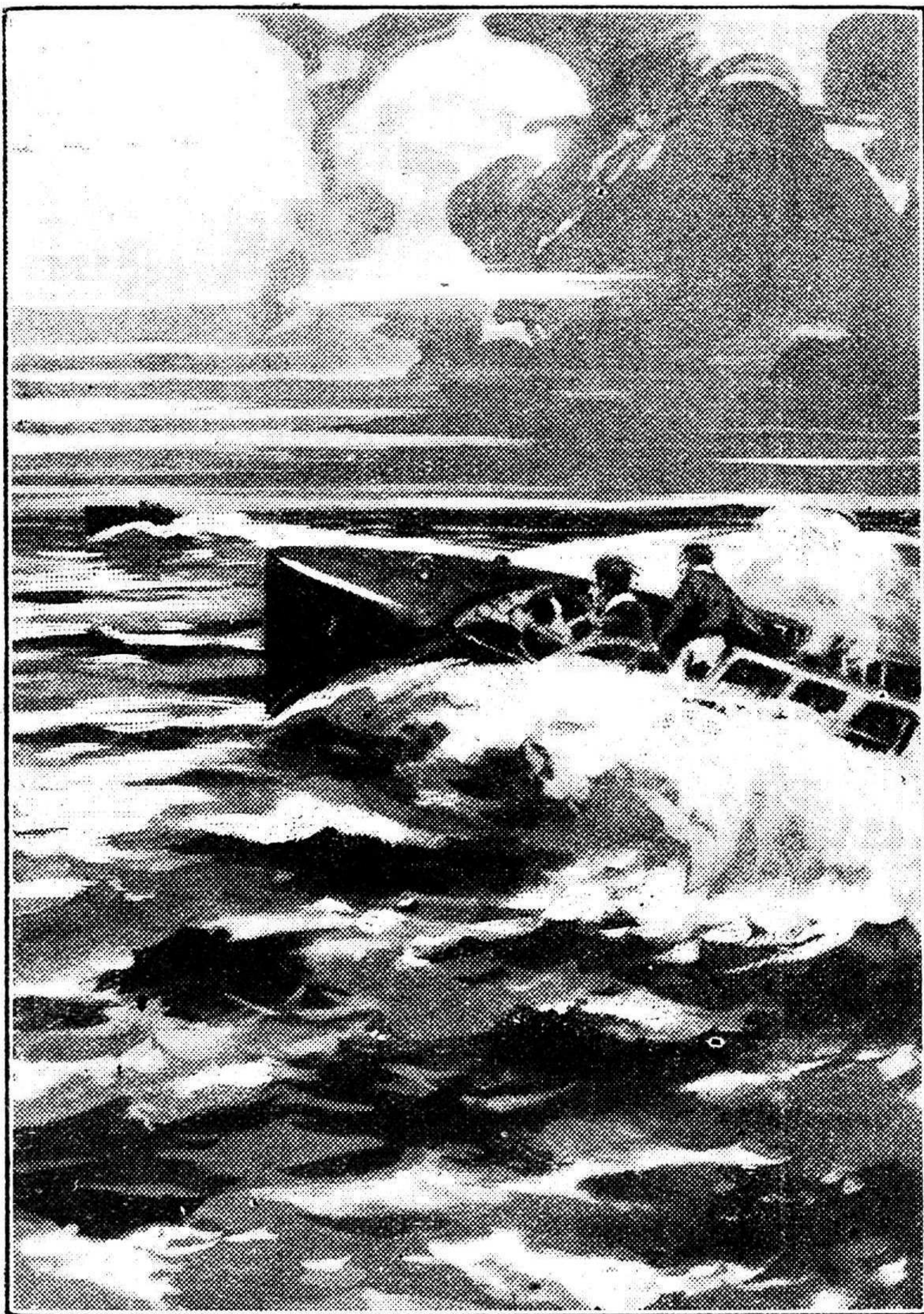
How Yung Ching is kidnapped while bathing.

THE
**DRAGON'S
FANGS!**

This week's thrilling story
of Chinese Mystery at ST.
FRANK'S College.

NEXT WEEK begins our
Grand Holiday Adventure
Series, entitled:—

**The Schoolboy
Crusoes!**



I opened the throttle to its widest extent, and the way we tore along made the blood race through my veins.

The Dragon's Fangs!



(THE NARRATIVE
RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY
NIPPER.)

The stirring events described in this story lead on to the Grand Holiday Adventure Series, which **BEGINS NEXT WEEK!** These summer annual trips to the far corners of the earth have now become a feature that is looked forward to by readers with the keenest possible delight. I need hardly mention that the Author makes a thorough study of those parts of the world to be visited by the Juniors for weeks beforehand. **NOW IS THE TIME** to get your friends and acquaintances to begin reading these stories. I want you to spread the fame of their fascination far and wide, so that as many as possible can derive the same pleasure that is given to you.
—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER 1.

SOMEWHAT SWELTERING!

ST. FRANK'S fairly seethed! It was afternoon, and a holiday. The sun blazed down relentlessly from a clear blue sky. Hardly any wind stirred, and the air fairly quivered with the tremendous heat. It was like August at its hottest—although the date, actually, was somewhere near the beginning of June.

There was no cricket this afternoon, and most of the fellows were very thankful for this. Cricket is a glorious game, but even the most enthusiastic followers would not have particularly cared for the sport on such an afternoon as this. The heat was so stifling that one didn't know what to do for the best.

Out of doors the sunlit air was heavy and oppressive. Insects buzzed by the thousand,

and it made a chap perspire to walk even a hundred yards. It was not much better in the shade.

And indoors the heat was overpowering. The classrooms were stifling, and everybody was thankful that there were no lessons. Even the junior studies were like ovens, and the Remove passage in the Ancient House was like the flue of a gigantic furnace. The heat in here moved sluggishly along, for there was practically no draught.

Outside, in the Triangle, numbers of fellows were sprawling about in the shade, reading, chatting, and generally doing nothing. Others had gone off to the River Stowe, either to bathe or to take out boats. They almost wished they hadn't, for the heat on the river was as bad as anywhere else, and the insects were certainly far more numerous.

"By my life!" exclaimed Solomon Levi, as he opened the door of the end study in

the Remove passage. "This is the hottest yet, Dick. Believe me, it couldn't be much warmer than this in Palestine!"

"You're welcome to go there, if you like!" said Dick Goodwin, feebly fanning himself with an exercise book. "Palestine, by gum! Ay, lad, Palestine was all right thousands of years ago—for the Jews, I mean—but I don't reckon they'd care much about it now. They're not Eastern as they used to be, and they wouldn't care to change all their customs and habits!"

"Sure enough!" agreed Solomon. "And I've got an idea that we couldn't make enough money! Still, it's too hot to argue about the Jews! Blow them! I'm one, and you can take it from me that I'd like to be blowed! Phew! Gimme ice!"

Levi had opened the door in the hope that a faint draught would be caused. But he was disappointed. The air from the passage seemed hotter than ever. The only person in the study who was not affected was Yung Ching, the genial little Chinese junior. He squatted there, quite content, poring over his lesson books.

Dick Goodwin looked at him in wonder.

"By gum!" he said. "See thee, lad, it makes me hot to look at you! Swotting at lessons on an afternoon like this! Eh, but it's queer. You don't even seem to be hot!"

"Me allee lightee!" said Yung Ching smiling.

"That's how I feel!" observed Levi.

"What?"

"All alight!" explained Levi. "Can't you smell burning?"

Dick Goodwin sniffed.

"There is a faint niff of scorching wood!" he replied. "Your head must have started first!"

"By my life, that's the limit!" gasped Solomon. "I heard that joke before my ancestors went into the Ark! I won't say anything about the insult—I'm too blessed hot to wipe you up!"

"Justee nicee!" said Yung Ching. "Notee hot. Heap plentee comfortable. Velly much like China!"

"Is that so?" breathed Levi. "I'll never go to China!"

"Eh, lad, we ought to do something!" said Dick Goodwin. "We can't stand this all t' afternoon, tha' knows! We shall melt. Can't you think of something to do? Haven't you got any ideas?"

"I reckon my brain's overheated!" replied Levi. "And, anyway, we can't do much. You're forgetting that we've got to stick like glue to Chingy. A fine study companion he is. Can't be left alone!"

"Me notee mind!" said Yung Ching. "You goee. Me allee lightee. Me plentee safee. No wollee!"

"Ass!" said Solomon. "I'm not wolleeing! But if we go out, you've got to come with us!"

"Me leamee," said Ching.

"You've done enough leamee!" said Levi.

"And it's a pretty good idea to go out, too. But what's the good? It's simply like going

out of a saucepan into an oven—one's just as hot as the other!"

They certainly didn't know what to do—and it was actually Edward Oswald Handforth who solved the problem.

Levi and Co. had been aware of certain distant noises for some little time, but had been too languid to take any notice of it. They might easily have guessed that these noises proceeded from Study D, further down the passage. There was nothing to be alarmed about. Handforth and Co. were merely chatting.

"If you chaps think you're going to dictate you've made a bloomer!" roared Handforth, with extraordinary energy considering the heat. "I'm leader of this study, and I'm going to have my way!"

"All right—have it!" said Church weakly.

"You're welcome!" murmured McClure, sipping some lemonade.

"Oh, so you're going to argue?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"Who's arguing?"

"Don't start now!" snorted Handforth.

"I say that this weather's too hot! Can you deny it? It's too hot for anything!"

"Awful!" said Church. "What on earth can the weather people be up to? Like their nerve to send weather that doesn't suit you, Handy. If I were you, I'd write a letter to the 'Times'!"

Handforth glared.

"You—you fathead!" he snapped. "Trying to be funny now! But you can't be—it's not in your line! For the last ten minutes I've been trying to think of some method of getting cool——"

"And working yourself up into a fine heat over it!" observed McClure. "Take my advice, Handy—flop down and say nothing! The very exertion of speaking is enough to make a chap hot! I'm not moving out of this study until the evening, anyhow!"

Handforth smiled.

"No?" he asked sweetly. "You're not moving?"

"Of course not!"

"But I've got an idea that you're coming with me!" said Handforth. "In fact, I'm jolly certain you're coming! Because, if you start making a fuss, it'll only take me three seconds to punch your nose into the middle of next month! I'm not standing any rot!"

"Coming?" repeated Church, with slight interest. "Coming where? What dotty idea have you got now? I—I mean, what's the wheeze, Handy?"

"It takes me to think of something decent," said Handforth. "We can't rest here—too much heat! We can't practise cricket—too much heat! We can't go outside—too much heat!"

"We seem to be in an awkward position!" remarked Church. "If we can't stay here, and we can't go outside, what's to become of us?"

"Oh, we shall melt to spots of grease!" said McClure feebly.

"We're going to Caistowe!" roared Handforth.

"But you just said——"

"Blow what I just said!" snapped Handy. "Great pip! I never knew such chaps for quibbling. We need a bathe! At least, I do! I need a bathe badly!"

Church looked at Handforth critically.

"Very badly!" he agreed.

"What?"

"You need a bathe—you said it yourself!" replied Church. "One look at you is enough to convince anybody that you could do with a jolly good rinse! It must be the dust and the heat——"

"Are you making out that I'm dirty?" howled Handforth.

"But you just said so——"

"I'm hot—I need cooling!" snapped Handforth. "That's what I meant! And you knew it all the time! And you're hot—and you need cooling! So we're going off to Caistowe at once. Come on!"

"But—but it's too much fag!" protested McClure. "Why the dickens can't we have a cold bath upstairs?"

Handforth looked at his chum contemptuously.

"A cold bath upstairs?" he repeated. "You—you babbling lunatic! Can you swim in a cold bath?"

"But we weren't talking about swimming——"

"I don't care what we were talking about—we're going to swim!" said Handforth firmly. "A cold bath is only meant for invalids and chaps who are lazy! And as for the river—it's not worth diving into! Nothing but insects and weeds and water lilies! And you're always getting coshed by some fathead who can't use a pair of oars!"

"It's always easy to steer clear of a boat!" said Church. "Of course, if you get in the way——"

"I don't want any insults!" put in Handforth. "Now, are you coming or not? I'll give you just one second! Say the word, and we'll go! If you refuse I'll chuck you out on your necks! Now, it's up to you—take your choice! I'm not an unreasonable chap—you can please yourselves."

"We'd rather stay here!" said Church.

"Oh, all right—stay!" snapped Handforth gruffly. "I'll jolly well go alone. If I get drowned, don't blame me! You—you rotters! Let me go alone, will you? Take that!"

Biff!

Handforth was always volcanic in action, and he generally let fly without warning. Happily, both Church and McClure were on the alert—they knew what was likely to come. Church saw a huge fist shoot towards him, and he dodged just in time. The fist crashed upon the back of Church's chair.

"Yow—yaroooh!" howled Handforth wildly.

"Hurt much?" asked Church, dodging round the table.

"You—you cad!" hooted Handforth.

"Why the dickens didn't you keep still? Couldn't you see me sloshing at you?"

"That's why I didn't keep still!" explained Church. "All right—don't get excited! We'll come to Caistowe with you. Anything for a quiet life!"

Handforth was instantly mollified.

"Oh, all right!" he said briskly. "Come on!"

He forgot all about his hurt fist. As a matter of fact, it was hardly hurt at all—for his fists were like iron. Both Church and McClure were astonished by the fact that Handforth's knuckles were clear. They expected Handy's knuckles to be smothered in hard corns—from the effect of so much use.

"We'll start off at once—on bikes!" said Handforth, as they left the study. "We shall get a bit hot, but think of the glorious reward at the end! A dip in the sea—a swim in the jolly old waves! Why, it's enough to make a chap hustle, even on a hot afternoon like this."

And, after all, there was something in what Handforth said. The prospects of a bathe were certainly alluring. The only trouble was that Caistowe Bay was nearly three miles away. However, after the dip, the juniors would be able to loll about until the cool of the evening, and ride back in comfort.

They were just out of the passage when a hail came to them.

"Whither away, brethren?" inquired Solomon Levi.

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Oh, just going to Caistowe for a bathe."

"By my life!" said Solly.

"What?"

"That's a good idea, you know!"

"Of course it is," said Handforth. "I thought of it!"

"Any objections to our coming along with you?" went on Levi.

Handforth considered.

"Well, you can come if you like," he said condescendingly. "Of course, you'll have to behave yourselves—and you'd better understand from the start that I'm not standing any rot!"

"You're too kind!" said Levi solemnly. "Believe me, such generosity is too much! But we'll come—and if we don't behave ourselves you are at liberty to walk away! We'll make up a party, and do the thing in style."

Dick Goodwin was quite willing, and Yung Ching simply had to go. For he couldn't be left behind.

Both Levi and Goodwin had promised Nelson Lee that they would not let the Chinese boy be by himself. And, as they wanted to go out, Yung Ching would have to go out with them.

Of recent weeks there had been many stirring adventures at St. Frank's in connection with Yung Ching. The Chinese boy, in fact, had caused more commotion than any other fellow in the history of the school. It wasn't

his fault, but there was no denying that he had caused a rare amount of excitement.

For it was only a few days since Fu Chow had been captured with all his fiendish associates. Fu Chow had made several attempts to murder Yung Ching. And even now the Chinese boy's danger was not over, for he had other enemies!

Nelson Lee had decided that he should leave St. Frank's as soon as it was conveniently possible. The famous Housemaster-detective was already in communication with Ching's guardian—Mr. Tsen Wang, of the Chinese Embassy.

Fu Chow had been dealt with, but there remained the Yen-Shan Tong—a powerful Chinese secret society, which had designs upon him. They did not wish to murder him, but they were certainly anxious to take him away from the school. The worst danger was over, but it was advisable that Yung Ching should leave.

And, in case anything happened to him during his last day or two at the school, Nelson Lee had extracted promises from his study-mates that they would be with him constantly.

I was always on the alert, too.

I had taken part in nearly all the adventures so far, and Nelson Lee had told me to keep my eyes well skinned for the first sign of any trouble. But now that Fu Chow was under arrest I had no particular fears. And there was certainly no danger in Yung Ching going to Caistowe.

It would have been unwise for him to have ventured out alone—he was, in fact, strictly forbidden to do so. But to accompany a whole party was quite all serene. The Chinese did not work in the daytime, and, in any case, they would not take any action when Ching was surrounded by fellows. So far as I could see they could not have any opportunity.

The party for Caistowe gathered members as it made its way out into the Triangle. I joined in—for, to tell the truth, Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and I had received the same brilliant brain wave as Handy. We were just starting off for Caistowe when we ran into the other party.

Pitt joined in, too, and last, but not least, Archie Glen thorpe. Archie, the Genial Ass, decided that it would be a frightfully good stunt—only the fag of getting to Caistowe was positively foul.

However, he started, and we saw to it that he finished!

CHAPTER II.

THE DRAGON STRIKES!



"O H, ripping!"
Reginald Pitt
uttered that re-
mark as we stood

upon the esplanade at the
little coast town of Caistowe.
We had just stowed our

bicycles in a big clump, under the care of

an old longshoreman. And there Caistowe Bay stretched out, a ripple of sparkling, flashing water.

A breeze was blowing here—cool and fresh and sweet, and the waves were breaking with hissing surges which made us feel even cooler to listen. The tide was in, and this made it all the better. For at low water the sea was generally flat and listless.

"My hat! Now for a dip!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "What a perfect idea of mine! If it wasn't for me you wouldn't have been here at all!"

"Well, it didn't require a very large brain to think of a lathe on an afternoon like this!" remarked Jack Grey. "Besides, Nipper suggested it first—"

"Not at all!" I said hastily. "It was Handy's idea—let him take the credit. It's too hot to argue. But it was worth the sweltering bike ride—we shall have a topping reward!"

"Oh, rather!"

"I mean to say, the old briny looks somewhat inviting, and all that sort of thing!" observed Archie, eyeing the sea with approval. "In fact, the whole scene, don't you know, is perfectly priceless, what? A dip on an afternoon like this is just the bally thing to make a chap sprightly!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Large quantities of energy restored, and so forth," went on Archie. "Absolutely! The old tissues rejuvenated! Well, laddies, what about it? What about the staggering business? Shall we trickle to the disrobing department? I must admit that my clothing is most frightfully clammy!"

"Right you are—come along, Archie?"

Some of the fellows hurried off, but just at that moment I happened to spot an acquaintance coming along. He was a gentleman in a cool looking white suit and a peaked cap. This gentleman was Mr. Fielding, and he held a position of some importance in Caistowe. But the most interesting point about him was that he owned two or three highly powerful motor-boats. On more than one occasion Nelson Lee had used Mr. Fielding's boats when on a chase.

"Well, Nipper, how are you?" asked Mr. Fielding, as he came up. "How do, boys? Just come along for a bathe, I suppose?"

"That's it, sir," I replied.

"How's Mr. Lee?"

"Oh, fine, sir," I said. "You look pretty well."

"I mustn't grumble," smiled Mr. Fielding. "The sea air does a man good, you know. I've been doing a lot of cruising lately. How would you boys like to come for a little ride after the dip?"

"How would we like it!" I echoed, grinning. "By jingo! We'd simply love it, sir! Do you really mean it?"

"Of course," said Mr. Fielding. "I've got one of my boats down at the jetty now—you can see her from here. She's fast, but not like my new one. I'll take you for

a trip in the big fellow one of these days."

"When shall we come along, sir?"

"No need to hurry—say in about a couple of hours," said Mr. Fielding. "I shall be knocking about somewhere—you're bound to see me."

He nodded and went off.

Mr. Fielding had always been genial and good-natured, and we appreciated this offer of his to take us for a trip in his motor-boat. Of course, he had not made the invitation general—only to Sir Montie, Tommy and myself. The other fellows had gone off to the bathing tents.

"Begad! This is rippin', dear old boys!" said Sir Montie approvingly. "A bathe is all very well, but I must admit that a ride in a motor-boat seems frightfully attractive."

"You bet!" I said briskly. "And that boat can shift like the wind—and then some!"

I glanced across at the jetty. It was only a short distance away, and comparatively near to the bathing tents. Close beside the jetty lay Mr. Fielding's motorboat, gently rocking at its moorings. It was ready to leave at a moment's notice once the engine was started. A solitary chap in a jersey and peaked cap squatted near by, on the jetty. He was evidently looking after the boat.

"She's not Mr. Fielding's best, but I'll bet she can buzz," remarked Tommy Watson.

"Buzz?" I repeated. "Haven't I just said that she can shift like the wind? That boat is the 'Flying Bat,' and I've been in her before. If Mr. Fielding's newest boat is fuster, it must be a terror!"

We paid no more attention to the boat then, but passed down on to the beach, and were soon getting rid of our clothes in the bathing tents. Then, attired in the ordinary regulation swimming costume, we emerged, and made for the sea.

But at that moment I came to a halt, and stared.

"Is it real, or do my eyes deceive me?" I asked faintly.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "How truly frightful!"

An apparition had just appeared from a bathing tent near by. It was, as a matter of fact, a youthful form which we could easily recognise as belonging to Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne. He lounged down the sands elegantly, and his monocle was firmly fixed in his eye.

"I mean to say, cool breezes,—and all that!" he observed languidly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What is it?"

The juniors yelled. For Archie was attired in a bathing suit which fairly took the shine out of any lady's swimming costume I had ever seen. It seemed to be made of pure silk, and glinted and shimmered in the sunlight.

The colours were almost blinding, being a



Archie was attired in a bathing suit which fairly took the shine out of any lady's swimming costume.

kind of draughtboard mixture of red, green and yellow squares. And, to make the whole thing more ludicrous, Archie was wearing a cap to match.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie paused, and screwed his monocle more firmly home. He suddenly realised that he was the object of all the laughter—and only a few minutes earlier he had been assuring himself that the whole populace would be simply dumb with awe and admiration. This was hardly the right effect.

"Dash it all!" he protested. "I mean to say, deucedly bad form! Kindly desist, dear chappies! Possibly something is wrong? Have I left a button undone? Have I committed some frightful bloomer like that? The fact is, Phipps ought to have rallied round—but the bally cove trickled off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, there's something awfully wrong, Archie!" said Pitt solemnly.

"What?" gasped Archie. "I mean to say, what? Kindly lead me back into the obscurity of the old canvas department—that is to say, the tent! This, don't you know, is not only frightful, but foul! Under the public gaze, and something fearful is wrong! I'm all flustered! Absolutely!"

"The swimming suit's wrong, Archie," said Pitt.

"What? The swimming suit? I mean—"

"Taken as a whole, it's not such a bad affair if you deliberately enter the water

with the idea of scaring the fish," went on Pitt. "But when it comes to looks, the colours are a bit too jazzy!"

"But what about the buttons?" asked Archie anxiously. "I mean, you mentioned something was wrong, old onion! I gathered that some portion of the old carcase was showing—"

"Nothing so terrible as that!" grinned Pitt. "You're quite hidden, Archie. All we can see is a dazzling mass of red and green and yellow. In fact, it's so brilliant that I'd rather look at the sun!"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "Somewhat terse, and so forth. I mean to say, the old costume is hardly deserving of such dashed caustic words. I might even mention that the whole bally thing cost me quids. Absolutely quids! But I'll admit that Phipps was dubious. Yes, Phipps cast a large assortment of doubts upon the advisability of appearing before the populace!"

"Phipps has got some sense," I grinned. "Still. It can't be helped now. In you come, Archie!"

Once in the water Archie was practically hidden—for he did not splash about in the shallows. For all his elegant ways, Archie Glenthorne was a fine swimmer, and he lost no time in striking out across the bay. He became another being, and most of the fellows regarded him with disappointment. They had been waiting for something amusing.

It was Handforth and Co. who provided the entertainment.

Handforth, as usual, insisted upon having his own way. And he suggested that Church should bob down, and Handy would leap over his back. The scheme was to have a game of leap frog.

"Jolly fine wheeze!" said Handforth. "All you've got to do is to bend down, and when I jump over your back, I dive in. See? It's fine sport—I'll show you how it's done!"

"Too jolly kiddish!" said Church doubtfully.

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "We've been swimming a good bit, and we can't swim all the time. Besides, larking about in the water is all right. And who do you think's looking at you? Jolly important, ain't you? I suppose you're got an idea that the whole town is staring straight at us?"

"The whole town will be, before you've done!" muttered McClure.

"What's that?" asked Handforth gruffly.

"Oh, nothing!"

"All right—that's nothing, too!" roared Handy.

He lunged forward at McClure, intending to administer a fitting punishment—for he detested his chums to mutter things to themselves. He always had an inkling that these mutterings contained insults which dared not be voiced aloud. And, as a matter of fact, this generally was the case.

Handforth again failed, however. This

certainly was not his lucky afternoon. Unfortunately, he stepped into a hole—which, of course, he couldn't possibly be aware of, as he was standing up to his waist in the waves, so, instead of punching McClure, Handforth merely disappeared beneath the surface.

"Hallo!" said Church. "Where's he off to now?"

Handforth came up, spluttering.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "What do you mean by that?"

"My hat!" said Church. "We didn't do it!"

"Couldn't you have warned me about that hole?" howled Handforth.

"Oh, sorry!" said McClure sarcastically. "Churchy, it's the first time I knew we had eyes that could bore through four feet of muddy water! The fact that the water is muddy can be explained by Handy being—H'm! Well, I'd better not—"

"Well, finish!" said Handforth grimly.

"Oh's let us get on with that leap frog!" said Church.

Handforth decided to do so after a moment. And Church bent down—slightly. He waited, fully expecting dire results. But Handforth merely stared at him, and uttered a snort.

"What's the good of that?" he asked. "You're not bending down far enough!"

"I can't get down any further," said Church.

"Like this, you ass!"

Handforth seized Church, and pushed him down—apparently unaware of the fact that Church's head went beneath the waves. The water smothered him entirely, except for the lump caused by his bent person.

"There, that's better!" said Handforth. "Hold still—"

He was in the act of jumping—but Church, as it happened, was in the act of rising at the same moment. Consequently, they collided with fearful force. Handforth's knee caught the unfortunate Church a slish on the ear that half brained him. Church collapsed backwards and disappeared under the surface. And Handforth went in head first, and for a moment or two only a wildly waving pair of legs could be seen.

McClure looked on, enjoying the whole scene.

And then Handforth came up.

"Yow—yaroo!" he roared wildly.

"What on earth—Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Church.

For to his surprise he found that Handforth had found something in his investigations under the surface. A tiny crab was clinging to his nose—and apparently clinging to some purpose, for it was some few moments before Handforth succeeded in tearing it away. His first thought seemed to be that McClure had placed the crab in position.

"You—you fathead!" he roared. "I'll teach you to go on like that when I'm

simply gasping with agony! Look at my nose!"

"I can see it," said McClure. "It's plain enough!"

"I'm in pain!" said Handforth, rubbing his nose tenderly. "I'm absolutely bitten by that rotten crab! And it was all Church's fault, the fathead—Great pip!" he added, suddenly. "Where is he?"

"Eh?" grasped McClure.

"Where's Church?" asked Handforth, turning pale. "I caught him, you know, with my knee—a fearful cosh! He must have sunk! Quick—find him! Yell for the ambulance!"

Without waiting further, Handforth took a deep breath, and dived under the surface. If he had taken the trouble to glance behind him he would have seen Church standing there tenderly rubbing his ear. Church saw no reason why he should publish his whereabouts. If Handforth liked to make silly mistakes, it was his own lookout. And then Handy came up.

"He's not there!" he spluttered wildly. "I've groped everywhere. Haven't you sent for the ambulance, you idiot?"

"Not yet," said Church. "Why should I?"

Handforth stared at him blankly.

"Why, you—you funny fathead!" he bellowed. "I—I thought you were drowned. Thank goodness you're safe! Oh, my hat, I'm glad!"

He grabbed Church's fist, and shook it warmly. That one little grip proved, beyond all else, that Handy had a very affectionate regard for his chums. But he couldn't help being himself, after all. He suddenly dropped Church's hand, and stared at him with glittering eyes.

"And now I'm going to punch you on the nose," he said grimly. "I'm going to slaughter you on the spot! Pretending that you were dead—just to spoof me! You—you rotter! I'll—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Church. "My head's singing now—that blessed knee of yours is like a battering ram. Look here, if you want that giddy game, we'll go into more shallow water."

"Right you are!" said Handforth promptly.

They got a bit nearer to the beach, and Church bent down. And as he did so, he winked significantly at McClure, and both juniors were somewhat astonished by the fact that Handforth did not jump to the wheeze. But he certainly deserved something.

He got it.

Church made a beautiful back, and Handforth leapt over in fine style, and dived head first into the water on the other side. Then he came to a jarring halt, his legs in the air, and strange gurgles came up from the deep.

Handforth flopped over all limp, and then sat up. The water was just high

enough to reach his neck. He gazed round dazedly, and feebly beat the water with his hands.

"Help!" he moaned. "My neck's broken! Oh, my goodness! I—I hit against a rock, or something!"

Church and McClure remained as grave as judges.

"That's impossible old man," said Church, with concern. "It's all sand here, you know. You shouldn't have gone over so forcibly. Still, I think we've had about enough of that leap frog business—let's go for a swim."

And without waiting for Handforth to reply, Church and McClure plunged into deeper water with the intention of swimming to another part of the bay. But they paused, attracted by a loud, aggressive purring.

It sounded like the hum of an aeroplane, and Church instinctively glanced up. Then he discovered that the noise was being made by a motor-boat—a sleek looking racing craft which was coming in from seaward. The boat was shooting towards the shore at a tremendous pace.

I saw it, too, and for the first moment I thought that Mr. Fielding was stunting—and I considered that he was most unwise to come dashing so close to the bathers.

But a glance at the jetty showed me that the "Flying Bat" was still there. This other motor-boat was a stranger. There appeared to be two men in it, crouching low. And the craft held on to its course, and came shooting towards the clump of school-boy bathers at an appalling speed.

"Hi, look out, you chaps!" I yelled. "The chap must be dotty!"

"Either that, or he's lost control," said Pitt, who was the only fellow near me. "Look at the way he's coming in! He'll crash on the beach with terrific force—No, by Jove! He's turning. Look! My hat! Doesn't she look grand!"

Pitt couldn't help speaking in a voice of admiration, although he knew that the actions of this boat were foolhardy in the extreme.

For the craft came right on at full speed towards the bathers. Then, at the last moment, the helm was pushed over hard, and the insistent drone of the engine died away. She had been throttled down, but was still travelling at great speed.

Round swung the boat, and the swimming juniors were compelled to dash wildly to safety. It was rather surprising that none of them were hurt. The steersman of the motor-boat, however, was clever, and he selected a course which carried the boat round in a sweeping circle, and almost within grounding distance of the beach.

Then the other man in the boat leapt up. He stood there—and I gave a big start as I saw, on the instant, that he was a Chinaman! He held a rope in his hands, and at the end of this rope was a noose.

"Chingy!" I shouted. "They're after

I didn't say any more, for I was breathless with excitement. Yung Ching was quite near to the shore, and standing in water which reached to his waist. And the motor-boat came so near that the man with the rope had an easy task. The line suddenly swung out. Accurately, it coiled over Yung Ching's shoulders, and drew tight. And the next moment the Chinese boy was jerked half out of the water, and carried along at great speed.

The jar must have hurt him, and he was helpless. Hand over hand, the Chinaman pulled the rope in—for he could see that Ching was trying his utmost to free himself from the rope.

He failed—and a minute later the Chinese boy was roughly hauled over the side of the boat, and flung back into the well. The engine roared with full power—and the sleek racing craft tore straight out to sea!

CHAPTER III.

TWO ON THE TRAIL!



REGINALD PITT turned to me with a scared look on his face.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Did—did you ever see anything so quick? We couldn't do anything—

there wasn't time to move a finger!"

"The cunning rotters!" I exclaimed fiercely. "Nobody on earth could have been prepared for such a move as that. They've got Ching at last—they've taken him away, and we're done. They must have had spies on the watch, who warned them Ching was bathing. These Chinese are cunning enough for anything!"

"But how could they be warned—out there?" asked Pitt.

"Wireless, I suppose," I said briefly.

I stared out after the rapidly moving boat. All the other fellows were shouting with excitement and dismay. The incident had been so sudden and unexpected that the juniors could hardly realise what it meant.

But Ching had been kidnapped.

Under our very eyes he had been carried off, and we had not been able to move a hand to avert the disaster.

Indeed, until the very moment of action, not one of us had realised the reason for the motor-boat's dash so close inshore. If we had known it in advance we should have had time to take Ching to a safe distance. Nobody was to blame. The whole thing had come as a surprise.

And then, suddenly, an idea hit me.

"Can't we do something?" asked Pitt. "It's awful, you know. Letting Ching go like this—can't we warn somebody, or send out messages—"

"We can do better than that!" I inter-

rupted grimly. "Quick—come along old man! Speed's required!"

"Speed!" repeated Reggie. "But what

"The 'Flying Bat'!" I said briskly.

"Oh, my only aunt!"

Pitt stared at me afresh, and with dawning understanding.

"The 'Flying Bat'!" I repeated. "It's there—absolutely ready to shoot off at a second's notice. And it's the only chance—the only possible way in which we can hope to get Chingy back. Come on—we'll find Mr. Fielding on the jetty, as sure as guns!"

"What about the others?" gasped Pitt.

"No time!" I snapped.

I should have liked Montie and Tommy to come, but they were almost on the other side of the bay, having gone off with some of the other fellows. And, in any case, it would be better for Pitt and I to accompany Mr. Fielding alone. For the boat would be lighter.

This was the only thing we could do, as I said. It was a chance. By chasing the kidnappers direct, it was more than likely that we should be able to overtake them, and compel them to surrender Yung Ching.

Pitt and I dashed out of the water, rapidly dressed, raced up to the esplanade, and then tore along the jetty. Not much notice was taken of us in the general commotion. We arrived at the spot where the old fellow was squatting near the motor-boat. I faced him breathing hard.

"Where's Mr. Fielding?" I asked breathlessly.

"That ain't no good you a-looking for Mr. Fieldin' now," said the old chap. "I reckon as 'e's gone into the town. Told me as 'e'd be back in a hour. That was ten minutes past."

"An hour!" said Pitt, aghast. "Then we're done!"

"No, we're not!" I snapped. "Jump in!"

Pitt looked startled.

"But—but we can't go off alone—"

"Can't we?" I said grimly. "We can—and we will. I've handled a motor-boat before to-day, and I'm easily capable of steering this craft. It's a pity Mr. Fielding isn't here, but it can't be helped."

"Here, young gents!" said the old man. "You can't try any o' them tricks. You ain't got to go off in that there boat—"

But I considered that the situation demanded instant action, and I took no notice. I had been in this boat before, and I knew its workings. I soon discovered that everything was ready for instant starting up. And I seized the starting handle, and gave it a swift tug.

"Purrrrrr!"

It spoke much for the efficiency of the engine that it started up on the instant, with a fierce, powerful, throaty roar. The old fisherman on the jetty danced with rage and concern—but I hardly noticed him.

Cast off!" I yelled.

Pitt threw off the ropes, and I flung myself into the driving seat, and the next instant put the gears in action. The motor-boat simply jerked forward like a live thing, and for a few seconds I was in danger of losing control—for I was not accustomed to driving at such a speed, especially to start off with.

"My only hat!" said Pitt pantingly.

But we were all right after a moment. And I opened the throttle still wider. The "Flying Bat" nearly lifted itself out of the water, and streaked across the bay towards the open sea like a thing alive.

And I saw the juniors on the beach—all of them waving wildly. For they knew what this meant—they knew that we were going in chase, and they were fired up with tremendous enthusiasm and excitement.

They probably knew, too, that I was at the helm—for they had seen Pitt and me dashing on to the jetty. But neither Pitt nor I could afford to give any time to the shore just now.

Our attention lay ahead—towards our quarry.

And so swiftly had we acted that the escaping motor-boat was still in sight—low down on the horizon, but it was a speck that we could not mistake. I opened the throttle to its widest extent, and the way we tore along made my blood race through my veins.

It was gorgeous—exhilarating.

"We shall do it!" I shouted, above the roar. "This boat's faster than their's!"

"Good!" yelled Pitt excitedly.

Fortunately, the sea was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond, for on this blazing afternoon there was scarcely a breath of wind. The motor-boat tore across the water with such terrific speed that we ate up the distance. Had the sea been at all choppy we could not possibly have maintained such a pace.

And I was finding that the "Flying Bat" was easier to handle than I had imagined. Once I had got the hang of the controls, I had no trouble at all. Of course, I had piloted these craft before.

But I think the "Flying Bat" was the most powerful I had managed so far. If Mr. Fielding's new boat was better than this, it was certainly a goer! But the "Flying Bat" fulfilled requirements.

For we were in chase of the Chinese kidnappers, and, what was more, we were overhauling them—not gradually, but quite rapidly. The speck on the horizon had become a distinct boat, and we could even see the wake of whitish foam curling away in the rear.

The whole thing had been done so quickly that even now it was difficult to realise what had happened. Reginald Pitt, I knew, cool though he usually was, had been quite taken out of his depth. The speed of the thing wanted a bit of realising. And



Handforth had found something in his investigations under the surface. A crab was clinging to his nose—and apparently clinging to some purpose.

Pitt looked at me with his face flushed, and his hair waving in the terrific wind which our speed was causing.

"Well, you've done it!" he said loudly, because of the rush of air. "But what the dickens can we do, Nipper? I mean, what good will this do us? We can't possibly get Ching away—"

"We don't know what we can do until we overtake that boat!" I interrupted. "Anyhow, I did the only possible thing. Chingy was captured, and whizzed out to sea before we could do a thing. Well, this motor-boat was handy, and so I grabbed it. If we can't get Chingy back, we might be able to find out where he's been taken to."

Pitt nodded.

"Yes, by Jove!" he said. "That's right! And jolly important, too! If we can discover where Ching is taken, it ought to be pretty easy to rescue him afterwards. I say, what a game!"

"A pretty game, I reckon!" I said tensely.

We continued to overtake the Chinese, and by now it was fairly evident that they were aware of the fact that we were in chase. For we were not overtaking them so rapidly. This meant that the engine of the

fleeing motor-boat was now going all out. It was a race between the two craft.

"We shall need all our speed to do it!" I panted grimly.

"But we're getting nearer!" declared Pitt.

He glanced back, and was astonished to see that Caistowe Bay had receded right into the background. The pier was a toy-like affair, and the hotels on the front looked like dolls' houses. We were already several miles from the shore, and making straight out into the Channel.

And there, quite a long distance ahead, the enemy sped before us. It needn't be imagined that we were rushing up to them swiftly. We weren't. I had to coax every ounce of speed out of my engine—and, even so, the distance between the two boats lessened only gradually.

"Who do you think's done this?" asked Pitt.

"The Tong!" I replied.

"Not Fu Chow?"

"No—Fu Chow is under arrest——"

"But his men might have done the trick——"

"I don't think so," I put in. "Fu Chow's pretty well out of the picture now. He's shot his bolt, Reggie. You see, his aim was to kill Yung Ching, and if these rotters were his emissaries, they wouldn't have hauled Chingy on board with a rope. They'd have finished him off then and there."

"Yes, I expect you're right!" agreed Pitt. "So these rotters are members of the Yen-Shan Tong? Why the dickens do those chaps want to kidnap Yung Ching? What's the idea. It's still a bit of a mystery."

"Of course it is," I agreed. "And it's no good asking me questions. Hallo! Hallo! What's this?" I asked suddenly. "Just cast your eye over to port, my son!"

Pitt bobbed up, and shaded his eyes against the sun.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "A steamer!"

"A private yacht," I went on. "A large one, too! I wonder if those chaps are making for it? If so we shall overtake them long before they arrive. This is beginning to look exciting, old man!"

"Beginning!" said Pitt. "Isn't it exciting enough already?"

I took another look at the steamer in the distance. It was quite a long way out, and nearly hull down. But in the clear air of the afternoon we could see her fairly distinctly. And by her lines I knew at once that she was a private yacht.

And it seemed to me that she was at anchor. No smoke was appearing from her funnel, and the flags were flapping idly. I could see this vaguely, but the signs were obvious. Moreover, she maintained the same position.

It became clearer as we progressed that the motor-boat was indeed making for the yacht. There was no doubt about it. And

I was more determined than ever to get hold of Yung Ching at once.

If he were taken on board the yacht we should never have a chance of getting at him—for we should have to deal with dozens of enemies—not merely a couple.

But, while my thoughts were in this stage, I could not help realising that we were most unfitted to wage battle at all.

We could not get the better of even two enemies.

For it must be remembered that we were quite unprepared, and didn't possess a weapon between the pair of us. We suffered no discomfort owing to our wet bathing costumes being next our skins, for in dressing, we had not time to take them off. The afternoon was so warm that we only felt pleasantly cool.

"We're doing it!" said Pitt grimly. "Quickly, too! I believe something's gone wrong with their giddy engine!"

And this certainly did seem to be the case. For during the last minute or so we had been getting nearer and nearer with much greater speed. The fleeing boat was not maintaining its previous rate.

And I knew that the clash would come shortly.

Some little distance away, on the right, a black object stuck out of the water, silent and almost motionless. It merely rolled lazily from side to side as the swell swung it.

And this object, as I knew, was the Caistowe Bank bell-buoy. The sand bank out here was a fairly treacherous one, and this buoy, with its tolling bell, served as a warning to the small fishing craft which sometimes used these waters. Big ships seldom came anywhere near.

On the other hand—that is to port—the steamer loomed nearer and nearer. But we were not able to give it much attention just now. For we were rapidly overhauling the enemy, and all our attention was needed in this direction.

Pitt suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Good egg!" he shouted. "A find!"

"What?"

"Look here!" yelled Pitt. "These ought to be handy!"

He had left his seat and was investigating a locker close by. And as I gave a swift glance at him I saw that he was hauling out a tremendous spanner, about a foot long, and a huge hammer. I nodded with approval. Pitt couldn't have found anything better.

"Fine!" I said. "Grab one, and shove the other next to me."

It will be seen by this that we were both determined.

We had come on this chase, and we didn't mean to give it up without having a scrap. If it was at all possible to rescue Yung Ching, Yung Ching was going to be rescued.

We were not speeding along quite so steadily now, for there was a bit of a roll on the water, and we were also beginning to

feel the effect of the other boat's wake. We bounced up and down, leaping this way and that, and Pitt was obliged to cling to anything to hold himself steady. I had the steering wheel.

And now we were quite close to our quarry.

The escaping motor-boat was within about two hundred yards, and the man who had lassoed Yung Ching was standing up and waving his arms in our direction. We took absolutely no notice.

"Warning us to clear off!" said Pitt. "Rats to him!"

We drew nearer and nearer, and then I set my jaw firmly. For something I had been half expecting was now an actual fact. The Chinaman in the other boat had pulled out a revolver!

It was evidently a plated article, for the sun glinted on it significantly as he brought it forward, and levelled it. And we had no weapon of this kind to retaliate with.

"It's only bluff!" said Pitt. "Yes, I can see that gun! But the rotter wouldn't dare to fire!"

As if in answer to Pitt's statement, a puff of whitish smoke suddenly appeared at the revolver's muzzle. The terrific purring of our engine, and the swish of the scudding waters made it impossible for us to hear any report.

But we knew the revolver had been fired.

"The murderous hounds!" yelled Pitt. "But he missed, anyhow!"

"Yes—but he might not miss next time!" I exclaimed. "What shall we do? Turn back?"

Pitt stared at me.

"Do you want to turn back?" he demanded.

"No—I'm game to go on!" I replied.

"But I don't want to expose you to—"

"Rats!" grunted Reggie. "We'll buzz on, and show these rotters that we're not scared!"

"I mean to ram them!" I said fiercely. "It won't hurt us much, but it'll crumple up their stern and wreck the steering gear. It's the only thing to be done, and we're going to do it!"

But Fate destined otherwise.

Puff! Puff! Puff!

Three times the revolver was fired, and now we were at much closer range, and racing along at a tremendous speed in the very rear of the other boat. Even as the shots were fired I jerked the steering wheel, and we hissed round in a curve. It was more of a leap than anything else.

The movement probably saved our lives—or one of our lives. The bullets splintered through the woodwork of our port side as we reared up. I didn't actually see anything, but I heard the thudding noise as the lead struck.

And then, suddenly, Pitt uttered an ejaculation.

"Poof!" he panted. "I can smell

petrol! Why, what— Great Scott! Look at this! Look here!"

From some unknown source the spot near Pitt's feet was becoming flooded! It was only too clear that those bullets had penetrated the petrol tank! This was an absolute disaster.

I knew that something had to be done on the second.

The petrol flooded out, and I could smell the fumes surging round the pair of us. And the engine, after running all out for so long was tremendously overheated. These fumes were deadly.

At any moment the petrol tank was liable to explode!

It may seem that I was unnecessarily alarmed, but I knew the fearful nature of the peril. If that explosion did actually take place, there wouldn't be a dog's chance for us. Both Reggie Pitt and I would be killed on the spot.

Those revolver shots had altered the whole affair.

It was no longer possible for us to continue the chase—it was no longer possible to ram the enemy. There was one thing to be done—and one thing only. And that was to get out of this boat in the shortest possible space of time!

"We've got to dive overboard!" I gasped. "Quick!"

"What!" shouted Pitt, staring. "But—but—"

"We're going to explode!" I yelled.

"We can't stop—it's too dangerous. We can slip over the stern without those rotters seeing us—and they won't notice our heads bobbing about in the foam astern. They'll think we're still following!"

Pitt didn't argue—he knew better.

With me, he crawled to the stern, bending low so that those in the other boat could not see our movements. I had left the steering wheel, and the boat was now going erratically. We quickly divested ourselves of our clothes, wearing only our bathing suits.

"Now!" I shouted tensely.

Together, we dived overboard, and there was no fear of us being caught by the "Flying Bat's" propeller—for by the time we struck the water she was yards away. We found ourselves fighting for breath in the surging sea, left behind by the rushing motor-boat.

When I managed to open my eyes, I found Pitt near me, and the motor-boat was at least a hundred yards off. Uncontrolled, she had veered round, away from the enemy. The latter had put on full speed, and was tearing away. The Chinese evidently guessed that something was badly wrong with the "Flying Bat."

And then—

Flash—flash! Boooooo—oo—m!

The explosion was appalling—and my hasty action in leaping out of the motor-boat was justified. I knew well enough that Pitt thought I was dotty, but this proved

that my quickness of action had saved both our lives.

We saw a blinding flash of lurid fire, near to the water. It was followed by a tremendous puff of blackish smoke and thousands of particles of wreckage. These atoms were flung into the air in every direction.

And, immediately afterwards, came the deafening report.

It was tremendous, and told full well that nothing living could have continued living had it remained on board.

And the whole thing was over so quickly that it seemed difficult to believe that it had really happened. A tiny wave surged over my face, and some water got into my eyes.

By the time I could see again—only a few seconds later—the surface of the sea was empty. The only indication of that dreadful explosion was the lazily drifting cloud of smoke, now on its way skywards.

And, right away in the distance, the motor-boat was speeding off.

"They think we're dead," I said grimly. "The murderous rotters think we went up into little bits with the 'Flying Bat'—"

"Well, what difference does it make?" asked Pitt, who was keeping his head above water close beside me. "We escaped the explosion, and I'm rather sorry."

"Sorry," I echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it would have been a quick death, at least!" exclaimed Pitt bitterly. "What hope is there for us out here? We're miles from the shore, and boats don't come this way. We can't swim for much more than an hour, although we're fairly decent at it. We shall gradually get exhausted, and—"

"My dear ass!" I interrupted. "When I dived overboard I knew what I was doing. We should have had to dive in any case, but I could see that we had an easy way of escape. What about that chap over there?"

I pointed a dripping finger, and Pitt swung round in the water.

"The Caistowe Bank Buoy!" he ejaculated.

"Of course!"

Pitt looked at me with an expression of intense relief in his eyes. He had had his back to the bell-buoy, and had completely forgotten its existence. But there it lay, still rolling lazily—and only about half-a-mile away from us. In such water the swim was dead easy.

And, without any further ado—for we were both rather chilled—we made off with powerful strokes towards this haven of refuge. The water out here, in the open sea, was not so warm as the water of Caistowe Bay. But the absence of any clothing made our swim easy. It was fortunate that we were wearing swimming costumes.

We arrived at the buoy without mishap—

but I had kept my eye on the fleeing motor-boat all the time. I wanted to get higher, however, for with my head level with the surface of the water it was very difficult to see anything. And the spray got into my eyes, too.

We reached the buoy—now a huge affair, it seemed—and hauled ourselves up on to a kind of ledge which ran all the way round it. We clung to the metal work—and found that this latter was uncomfortably hot. The blazing sun was beating down with relentless fierceness out of the cloudless sky.

"Get round the other side—better there!" I exclaimed.

The buoy, a mere black dot at a distance, was a great mass of girders and floats. There was plenty of room on it for a couple of dozen shipwrecked unfortunates such as ourselves.

But I paid no heed to the buoy at the moment. I was staring across the sea in the direction of the motor boat. And, sure enough—just as I had expected—it was now only a stone's throw away from the private yacht. And as I watched, the boat crept alongside.

"I'd give anything for a pair of decent binoculars!" I exclaimed. "Thank goodness it's a clear day—we can see a bit, anyhow. Yung Ching's being taken on board that yacht, Reggie."

"Not a doubt about it," said Pitt. "And we're stuck here, helpless! Talk about rotten luck! And what the dickens will Mr. Fielding say about his boat?"

"When he hears the details he'll say nothing," I replied. "In any case, the loss will be made good, so he can't grumble. We've had bad luck, old man, but perhaps things will turn out all right in the long run."

We had, indeed, had some tremendous excitement, and it was hardly surprising that we were now feeling a bit worn out. The explosion of the "Flying Bat" was a very real disaster, and I was filled with rage against these Chinamen.

The boat was a valuable piece of property, and it had been ruthlessly destroyed. The Chinese did not care a snap about the boat, or about us. They were probably congratulating themselves upon the success of their methods—for, without a doubt, they believed that we had perished.

And, as we watched, we saw that the motor-boat was being hauled bodily up on to the yacht—the boat was evidently a part of the yacht's equipment. There could be not the slightest doubt that Yung Ching was on board the big vessel now.

She was light grey in colour, with a cream funnel ornamented at the top by two orange-coloured hoops. It was impossible to mistake the general lines of the yacht, and I knew that I should know her again anywhere.

But, of course, at such a distance it was impossible to see her name, or to notice any minute details. We could only be certain of her general shape and colour. And very soon she steamed away.

"Well, we know something, anyhow," I declared. "Once we get off this buoy we shall be able to send a warning out—by wireless—and it ought to be pretty easy to locate what this yacht is, and where it belongs to. It's rather a pity we couldn't distinguish her flag."

"It seems to me that we're done," said Pitt. "We're finished!"

And there was something in what he said. For after the yacht had disappeared we had the whole surface of the sea to ourselves. In no direction was there the slightest sign of a sail.

Only the unbroken sea, hazy towards the horizon, and smooth and glassy in our immediate vicinity. The sun beat down relentlessly, and our position was not exactly an enviable one.

How was it possible for us to be rescued?

CHAPTER IV.

LORD DORRIMORE'S PROPOSITION.



ST. Frank's still seethed.

It was later in the afternoon, but the heat, if anything, was worse than it had been before.

Hardly a soul moved about.

A great silence pervaded the school, except for the incessant buzzing of myriads of insects.

The sun glared down slantingly, although it was still high up in the sky. In the Triangle there were deep patches of shadow and spaces which were brilliantly flooded with sunlight.

A faint hum sounded outside, in the lane, and a cloud of dust appeared over the top of the school wall. And then, a minute later, a grey racing car, of very rakish design, swung into the gates.

It glided over towards the Ancient House, and came to a stop.

From the driving seat emerged a tall, somewhat lean figure. He had been in a reclining attitude—for in the seat of this car he was almost able to lie down. He was a gentleman of uncertain age—anything between thirty-five and forty-five might have been right—and he was attired in a well-cut lounge suit and a light fawn dust coat and a peaked cap.

"Well, here we are!" he remarked. "All bright an' smilin', by gad!"

He glanced round, and could only see a stout form sitting just inside Mrs. Hake's tuck shop, absorbing huge quantities of lemonade through a straw. The Triangle, otherwise, appeared to be deserted.

The newcomer stopped the engine of the

car, and then removed his cap and fanned himself. And just then, Tubbs, the Ancient House page boy, put in a hasty appearance. Tubbs was probably on the look-out for a tip.

"Yessir?" he said brightly. "Want to see somebody, sir? Oh, beg pardon, sir! I mean, my lord!"

"So you remember me, Tubbs, eh?" said Lord Dorrimore languidly. "I don't want to be inquisitive, but you might let me know what's happened? Have all the natives of the place fled? There seems to be a distinct shortage of youngsters!"

Tubbs grinned.

"I reckon they're all out, me lord!" he said. "'Tain't surprising, neither, on an afternoon like this 'ere! Most of the young gents is on the river, I believe, or else taking their ease under the trees. Fair stoowin' to-day, me lord!"

"So it is, young man—so it is!" said Lord Dorrimore, nodding. "Well, what about Mr. Nelson Lee? Has he ventured out somewhere?"

"Mr. Lee's in his study, I think, sir!"

"That's better!" said Dorrie. "Buzz along, an' let him know that I've blown in. He doesn't expect me, but that's nothing. I'm lucky to find him on hand. Go on, sonny—this might speed you a bit!"

He placed a half-crown in Tubbs' willing palm.

"Thanks, me lord!" gasped the page boy. "You allus was a generous gent! You'd best come straight along, sir!"

Lord Dorrimore considered that this was an excellent idea, and he accompanied Tubbs into the Ancient House, and then along the hot, deserted passages to the House-master's study.

Tubbs knocked, and announced the visitor with an air of great importance.

Dorrie strode in, and found Nelson Lee reclining languidly on the comfortable lounge. The famous schoolmaster detective had divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, and looked quite cool.

"Why, Dorrie!" he exclaimed, rising. "This is really a delightful surprise! I knew you were in town, but I hardly expected you to visit me so promptly. Come in, old man—make yourself at home!"

"Just what I'm doin'!" said Lord Dorrimore, as Tubbs retired. "By the way, I suppose you haven't got a long drink knockin' about—somethin' juicy, with chunks of ice loose in it?"

"Try some of this lemon squash!" smiled Lee, as he shook hands. "It is quite refreshing, although lacking the ice. I must say, Dorrie, that you are looking better than ever!"

Lord Dorrimore regarded Lee critically.

"I can't say the same!" he exclaimed. "By gad, man, you're seedy! Positively seedy! Lines under the eyes—sallow complexion—wrinkles on the brow! What you need is a change—sea air an' nothin' to worry you!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I could do with a bit of a change," admitted Nelson Lee. "But just now, Dorrie, I'm busily engaged in a matter of some importance, and I must clear it up—"

"You were busy when I came in?" asked Dorrie, grinning. "You looked it!"

"I was glancing through some notes of this particular case," said Nelson Lee. "I can assure you, my dear fellow, that the task was not a congenial one. I have been greatly worried of late, and things have not gone according to my desires."

Lord Dorrimore sat down, and made himself comfortable by removing his dust coat and then propping his feet on Nelson Lee's desk. He lounged back, and lit a cigarette, after passing his case to Lee.

The famous sporting peer was just himself—careless, free and easy, and extremely genial. By some people Lord Dorrimore was considered to be a bit of an easy-going fool. But this, after all, was more or less of a pose. Actually, Dorrie was very keen, and had all his wits about him.

"Another of your blessed detective cases?" he asked. "Can't you get free of those confounded things down here?"

"This case is as perilous as any I ever undertook," said Nelson Lee. "I can tell you frankly, Dorrie, life has been very strenuous down here of late. I'll just outline the affair to you."

The detective did so, and Lord Dorrimore was quite astonished.

"Attempts to blow up the school—Chinamen lurking in woods—death dodgin' round every corner!" said his lordship. "Yes, by gad, you have had a pretty stiff time of it. An' where's this interestin' little Chinees now?"

"He went out with a whole crowd of boys—to bathe in Caistowe, I believe," said Nelson Lee. "I only fear activity on the part of these Chinese at night—and, in any case, the chief danger is now averted, since Fu Chow is in the hands of the police. There is nothing likely to happen to Ching in the broad daylight—especially in the company of a dozen juniors."

Dorrie nodded.

"The subject, although doubtless enthralling, fails to interest me," he said lazily. "Sorry, old man, but I'm bored absolutely stiff by detective stunts an' all that kind of rot. Give me a few tigers to polish off, an' I'm there. But to get to business. What about the holidays?"

"The holidays?"

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "When do you break up here?"

"Oh, not for two or three weeks, at the earliest."

"That's bally awkward!" said his lordship, frowning. "An' I've made all sorts of plans. Still, they can wait over, I suppose. We shall have to do a dash as soon as you're at liberty."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"What harum-scarum idea have you got now?" he inquired.

"No harum-scarum idea at all—but a sound one," replied Dorrie. "The old Wanderer comes into it, of course, She's as fit as ever, and fairly itchin' to get under steam."

"You mean your private yacht?"

"I do," said his lordship. "She can be prepared for sea within twenty-four hours, if necessary, although a couple of days would be more comfortable. Still, we've got plenty of time, it seems—"

"But, my dear man, what's the suggestion?" broke in Nelson Lee. "You're surely not suggesting that we should go to some wild corner of the earth again? We've had some stirring adventures at different holiday times, eh?"

"By gad, rather!" said Lord Dorrimore, his eyes sparkling. "Up the Amazon—into the unknown regions of that tremendous river! The South Seas, an' plenty of excitement! The United States an' Canada, an' then up in the North-West territory—"

"In the Wanderer?" chuckled Lee.

"Well, you know what I mean!" said Dorrie. "These holiday adventures. We've had some tophole times, old fellow. An' I want another sample this summer—I'm fairly on the edge, waitin' for it."

"I will admit that the prospect attracts me."

"Good lor' man, it couldn't do anythin' else!" declared Dorrie. "I don't know if I'm in my second childhood, or what, but there's nothin' I enjoy so much as goin' off on an adventure with a crowd of schoolboys on board! I've felt bally lonely since last summer—potterin' round the Congo district, an' then up into the Sahara. I'm keen on this thing, Lee—deucedly keen. I want to carry off a gang of your youngsters. An' then we'll have some rippin' times."

Nelson Lee laughed outright.

"Upon my soul, you're just about right when you talk about second childhood—you're nothing but a schoolboy yourself!" he grinned. "And you infuse some of the same enthusiasm into me. But what, exactly, is this latest proposition of yours?"

"Nothin' startlin'," admitted Dorrie. "I thought about takin' the youngsters to a part of the world they haven't visited before—that's all. Man alive, it's a first-class education! It'll do 'em a world of good! I suggest a kind of all-round voyage. We'll go through the Mediterranean, have a look at the pyramids, for example, then go through the Suez, explore Java, drop into New Guinea for an afternoon, an' then potter for a while among the Solomon Islands. A first-class holiday. I'll take a film chap with me, and we'll make pots of money when we come back!"

"What about your millions?"

"Oh, I don't want any money—but we can make pots, all the same," said Dorrie.

"You can do with your share, I daresay,

an' mine can go to charity. But we don't want to discuss details of that kind. I tell you, Lee, it's the idea. Absolutely it! We can get back in time for the Autumn term, and I'm not takin' 'no' for an answer. How's that?"

"Well, it seems to be pretty final," smiled Lee.

"It is—absolutely!"

"Well, Dorrie, I'm not going to argue—because, to tell the truth, the proposition attracts me enormously," said Nelson Lee. "I accept your invitation on behalf of Nipper and myself—"

Dorrie grabbed at Lee's fist.

"Good man!" he said gleefully. "Put it there!"

They shook hands warmly.

"And I don't think you'll have much difficulty in collecting a party of school-boys," smiled Lee. "Your trips in the Wanderer are famous, Dorrie, and the youngsters will be falling over themselves in their eagerness to become members of the expedition. They ought to be exceedingly grateful to you—"

"Oh, pull up!" growled Dorrie.

"I won't!" said Nelson Lee. "Do you realise, old man, that your generosity in these matters is almost unprecedented? How many other boys, belonging to other schools, have such glorious opportunities? You come along with your yacht, you provide every possible necessity and luxury, and give the party a royal time from first to last. And you foot the bill every time! You don't seem to realise that the whole thing is enormously expensive—"

"I realise that the yacht costs just as much to run whether I want it alone, or whether she's full!" interrupted Dorrie pointedly. "An' as for the grub—well, what does it amount to? A few quid extra! I'm goin' on this trip, whatever happens, an' I like to have a few others to share the joys. That's all! Where's the generosity? Tell me that!"

Nelson Lee smilingly shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's no good telling you that!" he said. "You're one of those men, Dorrie, who do kindly actions without knowing it. I can tell you the boys will be overjoyed, an'—"

"Just thought of somethin' else," put in the millionaire-peer. "That old rascal of an Umlosi! He'll be with us. He's dodgin' about Cairo, somewhere, an' he means to come to Alexandria or Port Said an' jump on board when we touch at either of those ports. I'm going to send him the tip when to be there."

"The whole scheme is most pleasing," said Nelson Lee. "The change will do me quite a lot of good, Dorrie— Yes? Who is it? Come in!"

An urgent tap had sounded upon the door, and in answer to Nelson Lee's invitation, Tommy Watson burst in. He was looking flushed and excited and very hot.

"Yung Ching, sir!" he gasped "He's been kidnapped!"

"By gad!" said Dorrie.

Nelson Lee looked at Watson steadily.

"Tell me what happened, my boy," he said, his voice quiet and firm.

Tommy Watson babbled out the story of how Yung Ching had been bathing, and how the motor-boat had dashed inshore, and whisked the Chinese boy out of the water. Lee and Dorrie listened intently.

"And that's not all, sir," went on Watson, before Lee could say anything. "Nipper and one of the other chaps—Pitt—were fairly near by, and Nipper buzzed round to the jetty and jumped into Mr. Fielding's motor-boat."

"Yes!" said Lee quickly. "Go on!"

"They went in chase, sir!" said Tommy breathlessly. "That's all we know—both the motor-boats whizzed out to sea at a terrific speed, and we haven't seen or heard anything of them since. Mr. Fielding's in a big way about it, and he's waiting in Caistowe. I offered to come over and tell you."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I will come to Caistowe at once!" he said briskly. "I'm sorry, Dorrie, but it's necessary for me to hurry off—"

"Let me run you over in my car," offered Dorrie promptly.

"Good man!" exclaimed Lee. "There's no time to lose!"

CHAPTER V.

RESCUED!



"PHEW! This is getting pretty tough!"

Pitt made that remark as he leaned back against the hard metalwork of the Caistowe Bank Buoy.

That metalwork was hot, and the sun beat down mercilessly. There wasn't the slightest trace of a cloud in the sky to bring any shade or relief.

A couple of hours had passed since we first took refuge on the buoy, and during this time we had not seen any sign of a sail—not even a trail of smoke on the horizon. We were utterly and absolutely done.

And it was still afternoon—getting rather late, perhaps, but the sun was high. I reckoned that it was about teatime, in the ordinary way of things—and in June this means that the sun is a very long way from losing its power.

We had been rather inclined to grumble at the heat of the sun, and we were suffering considerable pangs from thirst. But our plight might have been ten times worse than it actually was.

"This heat's awful!" exclaimed Pitt, shifting his position. "I'm parched! I'd

(Continued on page 25.)

Brief Notes about Our "FOOTBALLERS"

Being a short account of the careers of the famous footballers whose photographs we are presenting to readers with this number. Specially written for "The Nelson Lee Library" by "Rover."

F. MANN.

T. HAMILTON.

THERE is no doubt that Huddersfield Town owe a great measure of their success to their brainy inside-right, Frank D. Mann, who, though somewhat thinly thatched in the upper regions, is not as old as many folk believe.

As a matter of fact, Mann is thirty-one, having been born at Newark in March, 1891. He, like the majority of other great footballers, started the big ball rolling as a schoolboy, and played for his school until he left, when, to fill in his leisure, he played for a time for the junior club, Newark Castle United.

With the United he did not remain attached long, however, and in 1906 he went to Newark Castle Rovers, with whom he played for a season, scoring twenty-three goals before he again left to join Newark Town. His first real step to football fame, however, came in the season of 1909, when he appended his signature to amateur forms for Aston Villa. Before this he had assisted both Leeds City and Lincoln City, and had covered himself with glory in both teams.

Before the end of 1909, Mann had signed professional forms, and it was as a professional player, in 1912-13, that he was transferred to Huddersfield.

Whilst with the "Townies," Mann has been instrumental in twice helping them to the Cup Final, and has also assisted the team to win promotion from the Second to the First Division. With the possible exception of Bullock, he is the most popular player at the Leeds Road ground. Height, 5 ft. 7½ ins.; weight, 12 st. 2 lb.

THOMAS HAMILTON is probably the highest priced player on the books of Preston North End, for when he was secured from Kilmarnock at the close of the 1921 season the amount of his fee was rumoured to be somewhere about £5,000.

Hamilton first saw the light of day in New Cumnock, Scotland, and as a junior he assisted Cronberry F.C. He joined Kilmarnock in 1914, and played with the team consistently until 1920-21 season, when he was transferred to Preston. It was in the early part of that season, as a matter of fact, that Hamilton received his first distinction in being selected to play for the Scottish League against the Irish League, and it was his display in that match which attracted the attention of several prominent English clubs. Bolton Wanderers unsuccessfully angled for his signature, offering to pay £4,500 as the price of it. But because this was either not enough, or because Hamilton did not care for the air of Bolton, the offer was refused, and Preston got what Bolton desired.

Whatever the price, however, Hamilton, during his sojourn with the Deepdale team, has proved himself worth every shilling of it. From the time of his first appearance with the Prestonian's first string until the end of last season he has rendered the club excellent service, and has very seldom been "off form." He is a stalwart right-back who uses his head just as expertly as his feet, and possesses a magnificent physique. His dearest ambition now that he has appeared in an English Cup Final is to represent his country in an international match. Height, 5 ft. 11 ins.; weight, 12 st. 10 lb.

A Killingly Funny Pen-picture of St. Frank's
in the Stone Age!

By REGINALD PITT.
See Inside!

NIPPER'S MAGAZINE

No. 28.

THE JOURNAL OF THE REMOVE OF ST. FRANK'S
Edited by Nipper.

June 3,
1922.



THE BOAT-HOUSE, ST. FRANK'S



HOW HE RAN THE BALLOON

MY dere, dere diry, is it possbul I behole the unco agane? It is more than I xpected. Such a time as I have had.

I gess Robson Cruso an Jules Verne wish they had been in little Georgie's shoes, but it is a cerious bisness for a small boy of my own age to go up in a balloon alone—more curious than I antisipated.

It is offul amusing for bout a minit an' a half, after that it is simply friteful. I ast Betty was my hair turned white—I thot it would be; I am postive I shall never be the careles, rash, idol child I was before I took that ride.

Yes, it is deliteful for a minit or so, being in a balloon all to yourself, going up like a thousan of brick, waving your hankerchef and watching the peple growing small, seeing the transe crall along like a snake, the fields an' rivers an' trees an' fenses getting litler an' litler.

But Oh! how lonsom a little boy is when he has rozen about a mile an' finds he can't stop the plagy thing, and there is nuthing around him xcept nuthing, and he is that cold his fingers are num.

But I had put a little basket in the car with a fu santwitches an a small bottle of lemonade.

I thot I had bet-ter go up the ropes wile my fingers

could feel, an' cut a small hole or two in the gas bag, like I had read of, so it would stop going up tords Greenland.

Dear, dear, you would never dreme it was the forth of July in six or seven hours—you would sertanly say it was Chrismas.

I am glad now my sisters was not there to holler an' screme while I went up the rope, gack-nife in hand, for I might have dropped. It was ticklish bizness, but it was that or freze to deth, so I managed it, sure's your alive!

I jaded 2 holes an' come down the rope an 'et a santwitch' an put a coat around me, which was in the car, an went to slepe.

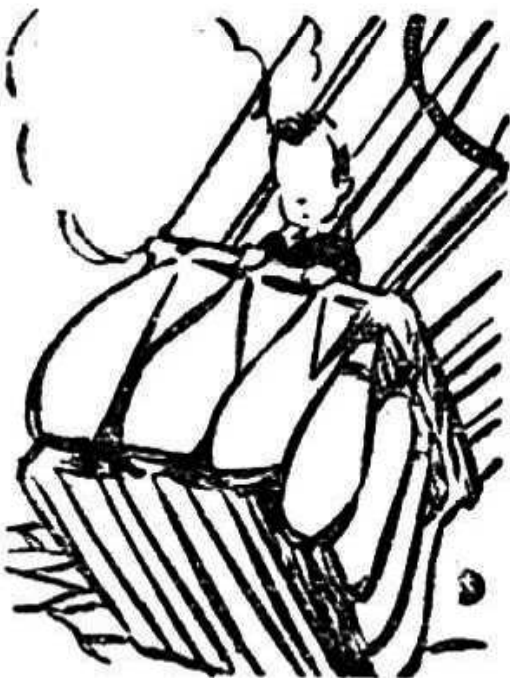
When I woke up I dremed I was in bed an' Betty was tucking me up, but I soon sat up an' looked around to see how I was coming on.

It was night. The moon shown butiful. I was saling along as nice as you please rite over something that was bright an' smoothe as silver; when I came closer, witch I soon did, for the balloon was settling sloly, I saw it was a lake or oshun.

Then I felt I was a gone case, domed to be drownded, an' his mamma would never kno what became of her only son.

I felt very bad. I thot of all the axdents I had got into—how much anxiety I had cawsed my dere parents, an' I tuded an tuded to throw over a sand bag like the aeronaut had xplained to listen her, but they were too much for little Georgie. So I resined myself an' et 2 more of my remaning santwitches.

Then I looked over the edg of the car an' saw a black spot in the shining water. I said to myself "it is a whale"; but in less 'n 5 minits it proofed to be a very small iland about as big as a feild an' before I



It is deliteful for a minit or so.

could say "Gack Robsin," that balloon lited rite down on it like a bird on a tree.

It dragged along enough to set your teeth on edg, but I gumped out like litening, you bet, an' I cot the rope witch I had cut when we went up an tide it round a poor little pine tree gust big enuff to hold it—and there we were!

I made it very sucure with lots of nots so it could not play me a trick an' get away, an' then I got in the car an' lay down for it was warm down there, and I was offul used up and drowsy.

When I awoke it was broad dalite. I stood up an' took an observashun.

"Hallo, Georgie," said I, "this is a good goke! being recked on a dessert iland! O if I had my diry what lots I'd have to write in it!"

I must go to work at once an' take an inventory of what I've got to bild me a hut an' subsist on. So I et 2 more of the sanwitches, witch left 1.

I was offul hungry; it was a grate temp-tashun to ete the last but I resisted. I was dredful thirsty, so the first thing was to surch for water. There was lots of it all around the iland, but I was afrade it was salt.

There was no other, so I waded in an' tasted of it to seo where I was, wether I was in mid-oshun or one of the lakes between the United States and Canada, *it was fresh.*

I then set to work at once to save my stores an' bild my hut, like Robson Cruso; but alas, a balloon is not worth a penny whistle beside a ship—there were no nails—no see biskit—no peices of old iron—no salt beef—but I konsoled myself at last by gust making up my mind to use the old thing itself for my house.

Then I wanted to bild a picket fence around it to keep off wild animals, but there were no pickets to be had nor no wild animals so far as I could obsurve; so I started out to walk around the iland to look on the wet sand if there were any tracks of cannibulls.

I walked a good way without seeing any tracks or any canoos on the water; then I came back an' on my way I found a surtin sign of civilsashun that made my heart beet—an ole tin can, a tomatto can, rusty an' bent, but I said I must not waste it, I may need it much. So I filled it with water so I could stand a seege if the cannibulls arriv. By that time I was hot an' wery.

I climed into the car, et my sole remain-ing santwitch, drank a little of the water an' when I remembered that it was the glorious Forth, an peple were having pic-

nicks an' marching an' firing cannon an' having such golly fun, an' how I would have no supper, nor see no fireworks an' was lost an' starving on a dessert iland, I cride a little, tho I tride to be brave as folks lost in such places ought to be.

I could not help it, though I winked and winked to kepe the tears back, wunking did no good.

I took a nap, an after that I felt some better. I ast myself? "What would Robson Cruso do?"

"Ah," said I, "he would get a stick an' cut a noch to mark the days so he would know how many days he staid there."

So I fixed a stick an' cut a noch, an' after that I spent the rest of the afternoon watching for a vessel to heve in sight.

No vessel heved.

I found some clamshells, but there was no clams in them. I was very hungry.

It grew dark an' I crept to my car, cuvered myself with the other felloe's coat, an' slept sound all night long, I was that tired an' home-sick.

Morning came. I made skanty brekfast on watter. My stummick hurt me, so I remembered bout the Injuns making their belts titer to stop the nawings of hunger, but I had no belt, so I had to let her naw.

I cut another noch in my stick, and walked about trying to find a bread-frute tree, but there was none on that island. There was nothing but sand an' little recked pine trees—my stummick aked offul.

I thot of the wreckles way in which I had often given my mince-pie to Towser.

I wondered what our fokes would have for supper and were they trying to find little Georgie. Perhaps they were glad to get rid of him when he was such a trial to them.

They never would find him, even if they looked a month or a year. Oh, how little boys plan to run away from nice, kind, comfortable homes, little know how they will suffer when they are cast away on a dessert iland!

I continyud to feel hungry. I thot of a grate many things, speshally jam tarts and mincepies. I also continyud to look for a ship. The sun set. I felt worse an worse.



I put my handkerchief on my noched stick and waved.

I staid by the shore; then all of a sudden I saw one not far oph—a ship I mean. I ran an' got my noched stick an' put my hankerchief on it an' waved, but I nede not have trubbled; they told me afterward they were steering strait for the queer thing hiched to the tree.

It was most dark when they dru near. They lowered a boat, an three men got in an rode ashore.

"Hallo," said they, when they saw me.

"Hallo yourselves," said I, very glad to see them.

"Well, I'll be blowed," they ansered, "did you ever?"

"Hardly ever," said I, "gust once, in fac. Got anything to eat on bord your ship? My balloon come down here where there isn't even a bread-frute tree or a watter-melon patch. I'm starving."

An' then I came mity near crying, witch I wouldn't for anything, but stratened up, and asked them:

"Are you Merican or British tars?"

They said they were British tars, who belonged in Canady, but they were saling for Buflo; would I like to go there? So they took me on borde where the captin was eting his supper; he was very polite.

He ast me would I sit right down without scremony? I did. There was fride fresh fish an' fride potatose, bread an' butter an' coffy; a most delishus meal, but I had read how peple when picked up ot to ete but little to begin on, so I refused fish an' neggs an potato the 4th time, an choked oph on my fifth slice of bread.

He sent the men to take the balloon aboard after I told him whose it was, an' cost sevral thousan pounds.

It took us 4 days an' nights to reach Buflo, but I past the time plesently talking with the salors, who made a pet of little Georgie, not knowing his reputashun for being a bad boy.

I told them about my sisters, the new baby, the telegraf oprator, an' lots of things witch intrested them, an' they told me about the see-serpent, the murmades, how to tie a salor's gnot, to go up the mast, an' so 4th.



I sat right down to a most delishus meal.

I tride to make as little trubble as posbul, but I fell overborde twice in a deep place, so they had to go in for me, an' I lost Ben's silver watch in the water, what his mother gave him, but I promised him a better one when I got home.

The salors drew an nankor an' a ship on my arm in injy ink, so my parents would know me next time I got lost.

The captin took me to the cars telling the conduckter I would be pade for when I got there, like I was a C.O.D. I spose cause I had been in the water so much.

I rode an rode all day, it was gust getting dark when I got off at our stashun. I had made the captin prommis he would not telegraf I was in town, for I wished to cirprise the famly.

Oh, how my heart beet when I drew near; it seemed I had been away an adge—a censury! I went sofly in the back yard an' peped in the dining-room windo.

My! what lots of good things there was for supper; an' there they sat about the table like mummys, not eting enuff worth the cooks trubble.

Mamma had a hankerchief to her eyes, Bess was pail an silent, Betty was sniffing as she handed the toste to Lil an' Montagu—such a set!

So I bounced rite in the open windo like I was a Ingy-rubber ball, an' I said:

"You'd have a better appetite, you fokes, if you had been cast away on a desert iland like I was. O, my, how hungry I am—give me suthin to ete."

Good grashus—but my pen fales me—I will draw a curtin over the seen. Only one thing strikes me as pecoolyer—bad boys' famlys seem gust as glad to get them back when they have been lost as if they were not such dredful children.

P.S.—It's well the captin took charge of that balloon; the aeronaut has sude my father for seven thousan pounds, but now all papa will have to pay will be for the paches that will have to be sode on where I cut holes with my gack-nife.

My sisters are going to give the captin a silk flag, an' a nice watch to each one of my frends, the British tars; they are golly (my sisters).



So I bounced right in like I was a injy-rubber ball.

Final Instalment.**Thrilling New Serial.****THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SQUASHED NOSE*****The Amazing and Staggering Adventures of the World's greatest Criminal Detective and his Boy Assistant, Splinter.*****By EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH.****TRACKETT GRIM versus PROFESSOR FULLER CRIME—MASTER MISCREANT.****SYNOPSIS.**

Within the Secret Headquarters of the Brotherhood, Trackett Grim has made many amazing discoveries. But he has fallen into the hands of the enemy, and finds himself in an enclosed iron cage. There is no hope of escape. This stronghold is situated far underground, and can only be reached by means of an underground river, direct from the sea. There is an alarm clock fitted to a revolver, and when the clock reaches the hour of nine, the revolver will go off—and the muzzle is pointed at Trackett Grim's heart! Now

READ ON.

The Surprise!**TICK-TICK!** Tick-tick!

The clock ticked away steadily, and Trackett Grim's fascinated eyes were glued to the hands on the dial. At nine o'clock the fatal shot would be fired—operated by that cord from the alarm hammer.

And the time was now eight-fifty-nine and forty-five seconds!

In other words, there were only fifteen seconds left!

Fifteen seconds! And there was no means of escape. It was terrible. Trackett Grim clutched at the iron bars of his cage, and the breath came and went in his throat in great big sobs.

"Windy, ain't you?" said the man on guard callously.

He was a brutal-looking ruffian, and he was accustomed to this sort of thing. On the average he saw men killed like this ten times in an evening. The Brotherhood was always putting its enemies out of the way.

"You babbling ass!" roared Trackett Grim. "I am prepared for my end! I am brave and calm! Bah! Do you think I care for any of you?"

"Five seconds left!" said the man, with a sneer. "Just time to say your prayers! This is what comes of interfering with the Brotherhood, Mr. Busybody Grim. You were warned, and you took no notice. Now beware!"

Zrrrrrrr!

The alarm hammer was working.

"It is the end!" howled Trackett Grim wildly.

Crack!

The revolver spoke with a sharp crack, and Trackett Grim uttered a dread scream and crumpled up in a heap at the bottom of the cage.

The man on guard laughed with brutal amusement.

"Another of 'em!" he said. "Down he goes!"

He touched a lever, and the cage shot down into the Council Chamber. Professor Fuller Crime, the master miscreant, came forward and looked down gloatingly upon the celebrated detective's still form.

"At last!" he said triumphantly. "At last!"

He opened the door of the cage and dragged the detective out by one of his feet. The other members of the Council gathered round, laughing in demoniacal amusement. Then a startling thing happened.

In a flash Trackett Grim leapt to his feet and snatched the Professor's revolver.

Turning the Tables!

"Ha, ha!" cried Trackett Grim. "This is where I score! You thought I was dead, didn't you? You thought your foul scheme had worked, didn't you? But you were wrong! I have the upper hand now!"

"Curse you!" snarled Professor Fuller Crime. "Curse you a thousand times! Foiled! Foiled at the post!"

"You pitiful fathead!" exclaimed the detective contemptuously. "This is where you finish your worthless career! I hold the trump card—and you shall all perish if you do not at once surrender!"

Trackett Grim pointed steadily.

"You will all get into that lift!" he ordered. "Now then—look slippery!"

Professor Fuller Crime led the way, grinding his teeth so forcibly that for a moment Trackett Grim wondered what the grating noise was.

But all the miscreants walked across the room and entered the lift.

Splinter to the Rescue!

By the time they were all in the lift there was not much room, but Trackett Grim squeezed in. And as he closed the door the lift shot upwards at lightning speed. It reached the top, and Trackett Grim was surprised to find that he was now out in the open, on the top of the frowning cliffs. The stars shone brightly overhead, and the night sky was completely overcast with heavy cloud banks.

"Now's our time!" roared the Professor. "Grab him!"

Like an avalanche the members of the Brotherhood fell upon Trackett Grim. Swiftly, he fired his revolver, only to find that the cartridges were blank! The next moment he was a prisoner, and he struggled wildly.

"Help!" he howled. "Rescue, you chaps!"

How did Trackett Grim know that any chaps were near? Marvellous to relate, there was an answering hail at once, and crowds of policemen swooped down, led by Splinter—Trackett Grim's faithful assistant.

In a trice the villains were seized and hauled away.

"Jolly good, sir!" said Splinter.

Nearing the Finish.

One by one the Brotherhood members were kicked over the edge of the cliff into the sea. And there they were compelled to swim to the waiting steamer. Trackett Grim and Splinter, with the police, went in a boat. And soon they were on board. Hardly had they reached the deck when the whole cliff went up into the air with a shattering roar. The explosion was appalling, and the steamer rocked.

"I arranged for that before I left!" snarled the Professor. "You shall not find any evidence, curse you!"

The Chief of the Brotherhood gloated with triumph, and he was taken down.



One by one the Brotherhood members were kicked over the edge of the cliff.

stairs into a cabin. And Trackett Grim and Splinter were about to leave when the Professor drew something from his pocket. It was about the size of a walnut, and glittered.

"Now my time has come!" he hissed. "This is a bomb, and the explosive it contains is a thousand times more powerful than T.N.T. It is my own invention, and the secret of it will die with me!"

So saying, he hurled the bomb into the fire.

"Stop!" yelled Trackett Grim. "You dotty lunatic——"

"Too late!" roared the Professor, with a yell of fiendish laughter.

Quick as lightning Trackett Grim and Splinter dived through the porthole. Splash! Splash! They reached the water, and dived straight into the depths.

Down they went—down to the sea bed. And when they rose to the surface, they gazed round. Under the sea they had been aware of a dull boom. But now there was nothing in view. The steamer had vanished.

"Good heavens!" gasped Trackett Grim.

But the truth was all too clear. That bomb had blown the steamer to dust, including everybody on board. Trackett Grim and Splinter were safe, but the Brotherhood of the Squashed Nose was dead for all time.

Trackett Grim's great campaign had ended in complete victory. There was nothing beyond the powers of this marvellous detective. And some day we shall have much pleasure in recording other of his staggering adventures.

THE END.

ST. FRANK'S IN THE STONE AGE!

A FLIGHT OF FANCY.

By REGINALD PITT.

ST. FRANK'S COLLEGE was bathed in the sunshine of the perfect summer day. Across the green sward lay the deep and impenetrable mass of primeval forest known locally as Bellton Wood.

Three juniors were just coming out of the Ancient House. They were Cecil de Valerie, Tommy Watson, and Archie Glenthorne. All were wearing the usual skins, and the lower parts of their legs and feet were bare.

Archie, however, was extra smart, for he was decorated rather lavishly with woad.

"Behold!" said De Valerie. "'Tis a day of glory! Methinks we wilt engage in ye merrie game of cricket. What sayest thou, my brothers?"

"Yes, verily, 'tis good!" exclaimed Watson.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie.

They strolled towards the green sward, chatting amiably the while.* But, ere they could move far, three other figures hove into sight, making their way round the College House. These buildings were of massive stone structure, vast pieces of granite being placed one on top of the other, and towering high.

The three fresh figures which appeared were those of Handforth & Co., of Study D. It were by no means passing strange that these three young Britons were quarrelling in a most unseemly way.

"Ye babbling lunatics!" shouted Handforth. "By my halidom! Sayest thou one word more, Church, and I wilt



Archie was decorated rather lavishly with woad.

smite thee on the mezzard! Thinkest thou I wilt suffer thy nerve?"

"Oh, shut thy trap, Handy!" exclaimed Church gruffly.

"Oddsbodkins!" roared Handforth. "Take that, thou varlet!"

Biff!

Handforth swung his hefty club through the air, and it whizzed down and struck the unfortunate Church upon his mezzard—which, in simpler words, was his skull. He lay felled, and groaned.

"Thou hast hurt him, thou hasty one!" cried McClure in alarm.

"Thinkest thou I care for the wretch?" demanded Handforth. "Ha! What have we here? 'Tis interesting, methinks! The valiant Nipper appears to be in much of a to-do! Perchance a battle is approaching!"

Even at that moment, Nipper and many other boys had come from the direction of the forest. For 'twas a half-holiday, and the party had been hunting. And, verily, their success was considerable.

For they dragged with them a comely deer, which would doubtless provide food for many days. It was the task of the schoolboys to kill their own meat, and it may be said that never did they go hungry.

"What thinkest thou of this, my brothers?" asked Nipper, proudly, brushing back his long, curling locks. "Gaze upon it with thine eyes! Hast ever seen the like? But two hours hence did I smite the beast with mine trusty blade!"

And Nipper patted his weapon with affection—a long implement of stout stone with a keen edge. Even now 'twas blood-stained. Many were the exclamations of approval, but Handforth sniffed.

"Thinkest thou this impresseth me?" he demanded. "Away, thou scurvy knave! 'Twas only last moon when I did kill a roving mastodon—of such dimensions that this deer seemeth but a mouse by comparison!"

"Thy mastodon was but a baby!" said Nipper. "And mayhap thou wilt be merry when I inform thee of the thing which I have even seen this day."

"What hast thou seen?" put in Watson.

* It surprises us to learn that the Ancient Britons spoke English. We can only conclude that Reggie has made a ghastly bloomer. Still, we'll excuse him.—Ed.

"In yon forest I did come across a mighty plesiosaurus," said Nipper impressively. "Yes, 'twas a mighty reptile indeed! The brute lay in the swamp close upon the river. Methinks 'twas hungry, and mayhap it will search for food by night!"

"Let the thing come here—I will show thee what contempt I have!" said Handforth, with scorn.

'Twas impossible to make further converse for even then were the boys called in for lessons. And Mr. Crowell, attired in his flowing skins, did look impressive with his vast black beard, reaching nigh unto his stomach.

The boys did congregate in the classroom. This was a vast apartment, open to the skies, with grass underfoot, and stone forms upon which to sit. And 'twas right quick that the scholars did commence their lessons. Upon slabs of granite they carved figures and such like, under the instruction of the Form Master.

And, meanwhile, the seniors and all the other boys were similarly engaged. The Headmaster sat in his own study—a truly luxurious apartment, with crude matting upon the floor, and chairs cut from logs. And furthermore this room was graced by a roof, and there was also a rich lounge, consisting of many grasses upon which were strewn rich skins.

And then, in due course, did the lessons finish. The boys were free to partake of the evening meal. And for this purpose they retired to their studies. These were stone hovels with doors through which one was compelled to crawl. And in the study which was marked D—strange and mysterious noises did proceed.

But 'twas usual for such sounds to come from this study. And shortly Church and McClure appeared, one with an eye that was black, and the other with an ear which swelled in a fearsome way. And Handforth, triumphant, returned his trusty club to the loop round his waist.

"Now perchance thou wilt prepare grub!" he shouted fiercely.

And, shortly, did Church and McClure return, bearing with them slabs of meat and roughly made loaves which were like unto bullets. And soon was a fire burning, and upon the fire the meat was grilled.

And when 'twas nearly ready to be consumed a strange thing did happen.

Into the opening of the study a vast head was projected—a head which was at once fearsome and horrid. In one gulp the meat was grasped.



But Handforth snorted right forcibly, and did wield his club well and truly.

"The plesiosaurus!" howled Church wildly.

"Help!" shouted McClure. "'Tis our last minute, methinks!"

But Handforth snorted right forcibly, and did wield his club well and truly. Down it came again and again upon the head of the plesiosaurus. But all to no purpose, for the mighty reptile seized Handforth and dragged him out into the open. It could now be seen that the plesiosaurus was in size similar to the school itself. It towered high, and Handforth was whirled aloft, and then did the reptile release its grip.

The unfortunate Handy soared high like a kite, and vanished over the forest—to fall with a mighty splash into the River Stowe. 'Twas lucky for him that his hurts were slight. And Handforth did go to the wise man of the village—he who made strange mixtures of herbs in the cauldron—he who made strange and mystic potions.

The wise man was fourscore years and ten in age, and his beard did reach to the ground in straggly locks. And he did give unto Handforth a potion which caused his hurts to vanish, and which gave him a mighty strength.

And 'twas near the gates that Handforth dealt punishment to three vicious knaves who went by the names of Fullwood and Gulliver and Bell. They were engaged upon the forbidden game of put and take—wielding a top of stone, and spinning it in such a way that at times one wretch lost the skins which covered him, only to win them back shortly after. 'Twas well for Gulliver that Handforth appeared, or that rash young knave would verily have gone naked.

(There are about ten pages more just like this, but, with all due respects to Reggie, I think we've had just about enough! Ed.)

(Continued from page 15)

give anything for a long drink! And here we are—stuck here—and we shall probably have to stick here until we're exhausted!"

"Cheer up!" I said briskly. "We're not dead yet, old son! And we ought to be thankful for this blazing sun—"

"Thankful!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, with a gasp.

"Yes!" I replied. "It's keeping us warm and fit—a little bit thirsty, perhaps, but we can't have everything. The sun has dried us completely, and if we're picked off before evening we sha'n't take any ill effect."

"That's true enough!" admitted Reggie.

"And what should we have looked like if the day had been cold and wet?" I asked. "Think of that! Supposing the sky was clouded, and a chill breeze was blowing? These conditions are quite common in June, you know. Why, by this time we should have been chilled to the marrow and well on the road to pneumonia."

Pitt confessed that my remarks were strictly true. Although suffering some discomfort from the heat, the general weather conditions were entirely in our favour. And we had come to no harm. But should we continue to be unharmed? If nightfall came, with its accompanying chill atmosphere, we should undoubtedly take cold. Attired only in thin swimming costumes there would, of course, be not the slightest protection for us.

And so it can be easily realised that our anxiety was great as we scanned the horizon for a sail.

"It's like being on a giddy desert island!" said Pitt. "We're marooned, and about our only chance of being picked off is for one of the local fishing boats to come in sight. Even then we might not attract it."

"Don't you get the wind up, Reggie!" I said cheerfully. "Have you forgotten Mr. Fielding?"

"Mr. Fielding?"

"And the guv'nor?" I added.

"The guv'nor?"

"Yes, parrot," I exclaimed. "Mr. Fielding knows that we went off in his boat, and so did the other chaps. I've been thinking about the probable course of events. Now, what was likely to happen after we shot off in chase of those rotters?"

"Well, I suppose there'd be plenty of excitement—"

"Well, that's certain," I agreed. "And I'll guarantee that some of the chaps whizzed away to St. Frank's on their bikes to tell Mr. Lee of what had happened, and it wouldn't take long before the guv'nor arrived in Caistowe. Confab with Mr. Fielding—out with the new motor-boat—and then a search for us. They ought to be coming into sight within half-an-hour!"

Pitt looked at me eagerly.

"By jingo, I believe you're right!" he exclaimed. "Yes, that's about the size of

things. So we've got more than one chance of being picked up. But I reckon we'd better seize the first opportunity."

"Rather!" I agreed. "We can't afford to leave anything to chance. The very first thing afloat that comes within sight will know of our position. And we'll go on board—even if we're taken to France. And that's quite likely, you know. It would be madness to stay on this buoy with nightfall approaching."

Although I appeared so cheerful I was, at the same time, filled with anxiety. This anxiety was not so much for our safety, but for the safety of Yung Ching. I was confident that our danger was slight—we should be rescued within a short time. But what about Yung Ching?

How would he fare?

He was in the hands of his enemies at last. They had fairly got hold of him, and my chief worry was to get into communication with Nelson Lee and tell him all about it. The guv'nor would know what to do.

Fortunately, we knew a few things. For example, we knew that Ching had been taken on board a private yacht which was grey in colour, with a cream funnel with orange coloured bands.

It ought not to be so very difficult to locate a vessel of that description. And, once found, Yung Ching would be found. The position was altogether improved by the fact that the Chinamen believed us dead. Therefore, they also believed that Yung Ching could never be found, since there were no witnesses to show what had become of him after being taken on board the motor-boat.

I went hot, however, when I thought of these Chinese demons. With utter callousness they had been content to see us blown to atoms—as they thought. But, later, our reward would come.

The dramatic events had happened so rapidly that it was hard to realise that both Reginald Pitt and I had been very near to death. Pitt was evidently thinking in the same way, for I found him looking at me with a serious expression.

"I say, that was jolly smart of you," he said.

"What was?"

"Why, the way you made us dive overboard as soon as the petrol tank started leaking," said Reggie. "If I'd been alone, I should have made frantic efforts to locate the leak and plug it. And then, of course, I should have gone up to the sky in about fourteen hundred lumps!"

"You would!" I exclaimed grimly. "But, you see, I spotted at once that the leak was too serious for us to remedy. And I remembered that the engine was seriously over-heated—she'd been running all out, you know. Just one spark was enough to set that petrol off. And the exhaust pipe was close upon red hot near the engine ports. My one idea was to get as far away from

the motor-boat as possible. Leaking petrol is a horrible danger Reggie."

Pitt nodded feelingly. He tried to make out that I had saved his life—but that, as I explained, was sheer rot. We hadn't been in any real danger, I assured him. By diving overboard at once we had averted disaster.

And then, while we were talking, I suddenly pulled myself up on the narrow little ledge, and stared out towards the open sea. I detected a faint smudge on the horizon.

"Is that a cloud, or smoke?" I asked.

Pitt shaded his eyes and stared.

"Well, it looks a bit hazy, but I should put it down as smoke," he replied. "My hat! A steamer! But it's not likely to come anywhere near us!"

We continued to stare at the smudge, and as the minutes passed it looked more prominent. We moved about a bit on the metal edge, and the iron was almost too hot for our bare feet. The sun had lost only a little of its power, and we were still warm all over. The hot day was in our favour.

Once or twice I had thought about diving in and swimming round the buoy to get a cooling. But it was better, perhaps, to keep dry, and to suffer the slightest discomfort. For it was possible that some salt water would enter my mouth—and I was quite thirsty enough already.

"By George!" said Pitt. "That smudge is getting more prominent, you know! Yes! it's smoke all right—a steamer!"

And, sure enough less than ten minutes later the steamer itself came up gradually over the horizon. She was hull down at first, and I believed that she would remain in this position. I could hardly hope that the vessel would come any nearer to us. But the black shape came nearer and nearer.

And at last we could distinguish her size and shape. She was steering a course which would bring her within a reasonable distance of the buoy—unless, of course, the direction was altered.

"About two or three thousand tons, I judge," I exclaimed, gazing through my cupped hands. "A dirty old tramp steamer, by the look of her. But it doesn't matter what she is—we'll get on board if we can. But I hope she isn't German, because I don't want to be carted off to Hamburg or Kiel!"

Pitt grinned.

"She's more likely to be an old coasting tub," he said.

And this was my opinion, too. At the same time I hardly dared to hope that the steamer would come near enough for us to be spotted. And there was very little chance of our being picked off.

But as the time went by the ship came nearer and nearer. She now altered her course slightly, and it was fairly clear that

it was her captain's intention to hug the coast. She would therefore pass comparatively near to the Caistowe Bank. The danger zone was really behind us—not to seaward.

We could now make out her frowsy superstructure, and rust-stained sides. She was a disreputable-looking craft, and was probably laden with a cargo of coal or scrap iron. She was certainly not a classy boat.

"Not much good waving yet," said Pitt. "They won't see us—"

"How do you know?" I exclaimed. "They're bound to keep their eye on this buoy—it's the very thing they would do. They've got telescopes, don't forget—we haven't. And although we can't see them, it's dead certain they'll see us if we wave."

"You're right!" said Pitt. "But hadn't we better climb to the top?"

This was a good suggestion, and very soon we were clambering up the ironwork sides of the gently rolling buoy. And at last, perched on the top, we proceeded to wave our hands as vigorously as possible.

Of course, there was no sign of reply from the steamer at first. But then we noticed a significant thing. After we had kept up our movements for about five minutes the old tramp altered her course—deliberately. She swung round, and came straight in our direction.

"Hallo! That looks hopeful!" exclaimed Pitt eagerly. "Do you think she's spotted us?"

"Pretty certain," I replied. "There you are—they're running up a signal of some kind. Yes, we've been spotted! I expect the skipper is on the look-out for a nice fat tip. He'll get it, too—later."

There was not the slightest doubt that we had been seen, and that rescue was coming. And Pitt had mentioned to me that he had had a few qualms. On the quiet, so had I. If we had not been picked up by nightfall it would have been almost impossible for us to last until the morning. Without clothing as we were, the chill air of the night would have finished us. The exposure would be more than we could stand. And we were both suffering torture from thirst.

It was, of course, merely a matter of minutes now before rescue came. The captain of the steamer did not bring his craft too close—perhaps he was afraid of the sand-bank. But she came to a stop, and a boat was lowered.

It came pulling across the calm sea in our direction. And we could now see that the steamer herself was British right enough—a small coasting vessel of the type that one sees constantly passing up and down the Channel.

The boat grew nearer, and at last we could distinguish three figures within it—two men pulling at the oars, and another man in a greasy uniform and a peaked cap. And

at length the boat came within hailing distance.

"It's all right, thanks—we'll swim this bit!" I shouted. "You can turn now!"

Pitt and I jumped in at the same moment, and swam with swift strokes to the boat, side. We were hauled on board, and the occupants of the boat gazed at us with much curiosity.

"Well, young gents, how'd you get in this fix?" asked the officer.

"We came out on a motor-boat," I replied guardedly. "But the petrol tank struck a leak, and the boat exploded. We only just jumped overboard in time."

The officer regarded us somewhat doubtfully.

"Queer kind of costume to wear in a motor-boat, ain't it?" he asked. "Still, it's none of my business. You're lucky to be taken off that buoy at all. It was only by chance we saw you waving!"

We didn't say much else before the ship was reached, and when at length we stepped on deck, we found the captain awaiting us. He was a big, bluff individual, with a face which was not only weather-beaten, but showed distinct signs of alcohol.

"Thanks for taking us off that buoy," I said. "We're from St. Frank's College, near Caistowe, and we'd like to get back as soon as possible."

I explained as many details as I thought necessary—there was certainly no reason why I should tell this man anything about the Chinamen and the chase, and the revolver-shooting. The story wouldn't have been believed, anyhow.

"Oh, so that's the way of things?" said the captain, with a grin. "Reckless young shavers! Might have been the death of you! Well, I've been to a lot of trouble getting you off, and it's delayed me the best part of an hour—"

"It's all right—you'll be compensated," I put in. "Don't worry, captain—you'll get a nice big tip for this later on. I suppose you couldn't put into Caistowe, and shove us ashore?"

The captain grinned wider than ever.

"Anything else as you'd like?" he asked sarcastically. "No, young gents, I can't put in to Caistowe. I'm bound for Portsmouth, and we'll probably tie up there at seven or eight o'clock in the evening."

I thought rapidly—time was valuable.

"How much would you want to drop us at Caistowe?" I asked.

"It couldn't be done for any money!" replied the captain firmly. "I can't go out of my course, and even if you was to offer me a hundred quid, I wouldn't do it! Why, darn me, you ought to think yourselves lucky to be took to a place as near as Portsmouth. You might have been carted off to Swansea, or one of them ports."

We said no more, but succeeded in obtaining some clothing—and, what was much more necessary, something to drink. And we found that we could do with a hearty meal,

too. The fare was not excellent in quality, but it went down all right.

An hour later we were absolutely ourselves—as fit as fiddles, and all anxiety to get ashore. To our sorrow, the wireless apparatus on board was out of order. Messages could be received, but none could be sent out. That was just our luck—because I should have liked to send a wireless to the gov'nor.

The clothing we had obtained was too large for us, but comfortable enough, and, although we looked rather queer, we felt all right. And now we were filled with impatience while the old tramp plugged along like a snail.

But we had been wise to leave that buoy.

Probably Nelson Lee would come searching for us in Mr. Fielding's motor-boat—but we could not be certain of this. And we were assured, at least, of getting ashore within a few hours—and it was only a comparatively short train trip from Portsmouth to Bellton.

It was evening now, and although Portsmouth was so near it seemed ages before we even approached the famous port. It's not necessary for me to go into details, because nothing of interest took place.

But when at last we were nearly at the end of our trip, something did happen which is well worth recording. To be more precise, we spotted something which proved of great interest.

We were right among the shipping at this time, plodding along towards the docks. On every side lay naval vessels, yachts, and all manner of other craft. They were mostly at anchor, and the scene was very peaceful on this calm summer's evening. Pitt and I were standing against the rail, trying to consume our impatience, and taking an active interest in everything about us. Then I suddenly grew rigid, and I stared across the water to a vessel that lay at anchor in the distance.

"Look at that yacht over there—just beyond the destroyer!" I said quietly.

"What do you make of her, Reggie?"

Pitt followed the direction of my gaze.

"Why!" he exclaimed, with a start. "It's—it's— Yes, that's the yacht that Yung Ching was taken aboard!"

"Without the slightest doubt!" I replied tensely. "Yes, and she's flying the Chinese flag, too! Grey paint—white funnels—orange hoops! There can't be two boats like that!"

"But—but this is fine!" said Pitt. "Yung Ching's on board, and we might be able to save him even now! I had no idea we should find that yacht here, lying off Portsmouth."

"Neither had I—but there she is! Our luck's well in, old man. What we've got to do is to get ashore as quickly as possible, make a bee-line for the nearest public telephone, and ring up St. Frank's! The gov'nor must be told about this."

I was enthusiastic, for there was a distinct chance of rescuing Yung Ching at once. But I knew that it would be foolish for me

to act alone. This was essentially a job for Nelson Lee.

It seemed ages before we could get ashore. But, not so very much later the captain announced that he was going ashore, and we were at liberty to go with him if we liked. We accepted the offer with alacrity.

We gave him our full names and other particulars, and I assured him that he would hear from us again, on the morrow. Then, after a little formality with the dockyard authorities, we found ourselves in the open streets, free to do as we pleased.

And it wasn't long before we found a public telephone. We both wedged ourselves into the box, and I gave Nelson Lee's 'phone number at St. Frank's. We waited eagerly to get through.

Would the gov'nor be there? Much depended on this.

CHAPTER VI.

EVENTS MOVE RAPIDLY!



WHILE we were fuming at the slowness of the old tramp steamer, and while we were pacing up and down the grubby deck, other events were taking place in

Caistowe.

Nelson Lee and Tommy Watson, in Lord Dorrimore's racing car, were whizzed to the little seaside town in record time. And

there, on the esplanade, they found a crowd of St. Frank's fellows excitedly talking. And a little distance off, Mr. Fielding, the motor-boat owner, was talking with a harbour official. They both looked round eagerly as Dorrie's car drew up.

"I'm glad you have come, Mr. Lee—very glad," said Mr. Fielding, as he shook hands. "This business seems to be utterly extraordinary. Nipper and one other boy have made off in my boat, the Flying Bat. Where they've gone to I don't know—"

"By what I can understand, Mr. Fielding, they went in chase of an unknown boat, which kidnapped a little Chinese boy who is a pupil at St. Frank's," put in Nelson Lee. "I think you can trust Nipper with your craft. He has been in charge of a motor-boat upon several occasions."

"Good gracious! I'm not worrying about the boat!" said Mr. Fielding. "I don't care a hang if she is lost! But I'm concerned about Nipper. Why hasn't he returned? He's been gone for practically an hour, and there's no sign."

"I must get the full details of this affair, and then see about going out in search," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "I don't exactly know how—"

"We can go in my new boat if you like, Mr. Lee," offered Fielding. "I'm quite eager to do anything possible. My new boat is faster than the Flying Bat, and she is quite ready to sail at once."

(Continued on next page.)

Editorial Announcement.



My Dear Readers,—You are all, I know, looking forward to next week's story, "THE SCHOOLBOY CRUSOES," as though you were one of Lord Dorrimore's party. Nowhere will you read such entrancing stories of adventure in tropic climes as in this holiday series. The great difficulty is to compress within our little book all the wonderful events and experiences contained in our programme. For this reason we are starting this series much earlier than in previous years and the author is increasing the length of each story by 5,000 words! "Nipper's Magazine" will continue to appear as usual, but, owing to the longer complete stories, it will be temporarily reduced to four pages, and will deal with the humorous side of the holiday adventures. Next week's story will describe the voyage, adventures in Egypt (including a visit to the Pyramids), a midnight attack in the Suez Canal, and other exciting events up to the time when the party are wrecked on an island in the Pacific.

Do not forget that we are **GIVING AWAY** two more splendid photos of famous footballers.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

(Continued from page 28.)

Nelson Lee, of course, accepted the offer very promptly. And after he had heard various accounts of what had taken place, he started off. Only Lee, Dorrie, and Mr. Fielding went. They were soon shooting out to sea in Mr. Fielding's new motor-boat—a fine, speedy vessel.

It was evening, the sun was fairly low, and not a breath of wind stirred. The surface of the water was like that of a pond. The swift racing boat covered the water at a great speed, but she was not going all out.

She could easily have travelled at double this pace, but it was quite unnecessary. Mr. Fielding was behind the controls, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore gazed out in all directions, keenly on the look-out.

"Of course, there's no tellin' what that young beggar would get up to!" remarked Dorrie. "Anyhow, Lee, there's no need for you to get the wind up. Quite probably Nipper has gone into another port—as far as Brighton, perhaps. An' instead of bein' here, we ought to be at St. Frank's—waitin' for him to communicate."

Dorrie was nearer the mark than he imagined when he said this. For, as a matter of fact, it would have been the very best thing under all the circumstances. But Nelson Lee didn't know the circumstances, and so he was out searching.

"If we can find no sign of Nipper before dark, we shall certainly return to St. Frank's," said the detective. "But I cannot agree with you, Dorrie. I do not think Nipper would go into any other port—unless compelled to do so. His first thought, whether successful or unsuccessful in his quest, would be to return to Caistowe."

"Perhaps he ran short of juice?" suggested Dorrie.

But Mr. Fielding looked round, having heard the remark.

"That's quite impossible," he said. "The Flying Bat's petrol-tank was full—enough to carry her a couple of hundred miles."

"In that case it is almost certain that Nipper will return," said Nelson Lee. "I half believe that he is cruising about in these waters. We know that he went off in chase of another motor-boat. I commend Nipper for his promptness. But whether he has succeeded in rescuing Yung Ching or not is another matter. I fear that the hope is rather a forlorn one."

By this time the boat was well out to sea, and Dorrie suddenly pointed.

"What's that over there?" he said. "That looks like a boat of some kind."

"No, it's a buoy," put in Mr. Fielding—"the Caistowe Bank Buoy."

"No good to us, then," said Dorrie cheerfully. "We want two boys!"

They skimmed over the water, and in a very short time the buoy became clearly visible, and could not be mistaken for anything else. Just as I had anticipated, Nelson Lee was making the search.

But we had only been taken off a short while earlier—indeed, the old tramp steamer, with Pitt and I on deck, was even then hull down on the horizon, right in the distance; and Nelson Lee saw her—but never dreamed for a moment that we were on board. If Tommy Watson had got to St. Frank's earlier we should have been rescued by the guv'nor. But Tommy had delayed—he had been too excited to hurry off immediately, and the other fellows had not thought of it.

Nelson Lee really had no chance to wonder if we were on that tramp steamer. For something else claimed his attention at that very time—something which made him grave and intensely troubled.

He happened to glance over the boat's side, and caught sight of something a few feet distant. It flashed by, owing to the speed of the boat. But even so, Lee was apprehensive.

"Mr. Fielding at once throttled down completely.

"What's the idea, Mr. Lee?" he asked curiously.

"I don't quite like to say—but we shall soon know if my fears are well founded."

Both Dorrie and Mr. Fielding looked at Nelson Lee in wonder, but the motor-boat was turned, and she glided silently back over the smooth water. Her engine was throttled down so much that it could hardly be heard.

Lee was standing up now, and gazing over the expanse of limpid greeny blue sea. It looked extremely beautiful in the evening light. But the detective had no eye for the scene of beauty. He was looking for something else.

"Slightly more to port!" he said quickly.

The boat veered round—and then both Dorrie and Mr. Fielding saw the something which had caused Nelson Lee to originally ask Mr. Fielding to turn.

It was nothing much—simply a piece of white wood with jagged edges, which was floating idly in the water. As the motor-boat slid by, Nelson Lee reached right over and seized the scrap of wreckage.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Fielding, turning pale. "You—you don't think — But that is impossible! How could the boat have been wrecked?"

"I am not suggesting that it was," said Lee quietly. "But it is just as well to satisfy ourselves, Mr. Fielding. Do you recognise this scrap of wood? Is it anything like—"

"It appears to be a portion of the 'Flying Boat'," interrupted Mr. Fielding huskily. "I may be mistaken, but— Look there! Upon my soul! There seems to be— Yes! I was not wrong!"

Lee and Dorrie could not quite understand what he meant, but as he spoke he opened up the engine, and the powerful boat swung round and skimmed across the water. But only for a short distance.

Again Mr. Fielding throttled down—and now the boat was literally passing through

a mass of wreckage. There were pieces on all sides—floating idly. They were grim testimony of some recent disaster.

Piece after piece of woodwork was picked up—and then, at last, Dorrie fished something on board which caused Mr. Fielding to utter a gasp of horror. It was a ragged portion of a seat cushion.

"Great Heaven above!" said Mr. Fielding hoarsely. "There can no longer be any doubt! Yes, that cushion belonged to the 'Flying Bat'! I would recognise it anywhere. But what does it mean? What horrible tragedy could have happened?"

Nelson Lee was pale, but he gripped himself hard.

"It seems that only one thing could have happened here," he replied quietly. "The boat was blown up—a dreadful explosion took place. Nothing else could account for this scattered wreckage. Furthermore, I have noticed that one or two portions were blackened and scorched."

Dorrie looked at Nelson Lee gravely.

"And Nipper?" he said. "Man alive, it can't be possible——"

"Dorrie, the least said the better!" interrupted Nelson Lee, in a voice that told much. "If the boat exploded, I fear that there is no hope for those two boys. The whole boat went to atoms in a flash."

"But surely we should find some—some remains——"

"It is possible—but not at all certain," said Lee. "Clothing will not be found since both boys were in swimming costume. But we will look. Old man, this is more terrible than I had feared."

There was something in his voice which seemed to grip Lord Dorrimore, and he offered no comment. But he seized Nelson Lee's hand, and clasped it warmly. For at that moment they both believed that the worst had happened.

The motor-boat, with Mr. Fielding nervously operating the wheel, was sent this way and that. All three men knew that they were looking for something horrible. They didn't want to find remnants of the boat now. They knew that the "Flying Bat" had been blown up. They were looking for remains of a more gruesome description.

Needless to say, none were found.

There weren't any remains. Reggie Pitt and I, at that very moment, were cooling our heels on the deck of the old tramp steamer, waiting to go ashore at Portsmouth. But the gov'nor thought we were in the watery deep, in about "fourteen

hundred different lumps," as Reggie had put it.

"No, it is useless," said Nelson Lee, at length. "I did not for a moment believe that we should find any remains, Dorrie. But there can be no doubt that a disaster took place. Mr. Fielding, you will have to let me compensate you for the loss of your boat——"

"Good gracious, Mr. Lee, why talk of that?" asked Mr. Fielding, greatly distressed. "In any case, the boat was insured. And what does the cost matter? I am thinking of the boys—they have undoubtedly been killed. But what could have caused this tragedy? What ghastly thing could have made the vessel blow up?"

"Apparently the petrol tank exploded——"

"Yes, but why—why?"

"I'm afraid we shall never know the exact truth," said Nelson Lee quietly. "The petrol might have exploded through one of a dozen reasons. Perhaps the tank sprung a leak—perhaps the boys were careless. Perhaps the disaster was caused by some act of treachery on the part of the men Nipper was following. This, I believe, must be the correct solution. Nipper was not the boy to make a hash of things. But it is terrible—terrible!"

The detective said no more, but lay back in his cushioned seat, and stared straight before him. Lord Dorrimore, acutely uncomfortable, sat still and tried to smoke. And Mr. Fielding directed the motor-boat direct to Caistowe at full speed. Of what further use was it to cruise about in the open sea?

"It seems to me that I've brought rotten luck, Professor!" said Dorrie, after a while. "I didn't even see Nipper, either. Poor kid! This has absolutely messed up all my plans—the summer holiday trip, an' everythin'! Queer how things can be changed in an hour or so, isn't it?"

Nelson Lee didn't reply, and Dorrie relapsed into a gloomy silence. He always called Lee "Professor" when he was feeling particularly friendly. It was just a little habit of his.

And Dorrie, who was a man of light-hearted cheerfulness, was so unutterably miserable at the turn of events that no further words would come. He stepped ashore, when the time came, with a face as long as a fiddle.

And he drove Nelson Lee back to St. Frank's without offering any comment. He didn't feel like conversation—and he knew that Nelson Lee felt like it even less.

The motor-car ride was one of the most miserable Dorrie could remember.

The crowd of juniors at Caistowe—who had waited—had not been told anything. At least, Lee had only told them that the search had had no definite result. And so the fellows cycled back to St. Frank's in a state of uncertainty.

Lee jumped out of Dorrie's car in front of

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the Ancient House, and looked at his lordship listlessly.

"Coming in?" he asked, in a dull voice.

"Suppose I'd better!" said Dorrie gruffly.

These were the only words they had spoken to one another since they had left the motor-boat. And Lord Dorrimore followed Nelson Lee into the Ancient House, and then along passages to the school-master-detective's study.

Fellows who passed them wondered what on earth was the matter. Grins were directed at Dorrie, but he took absolutely no notice. As he approached Lee's study,

"As large as life, sir!" I replied, from the other end.

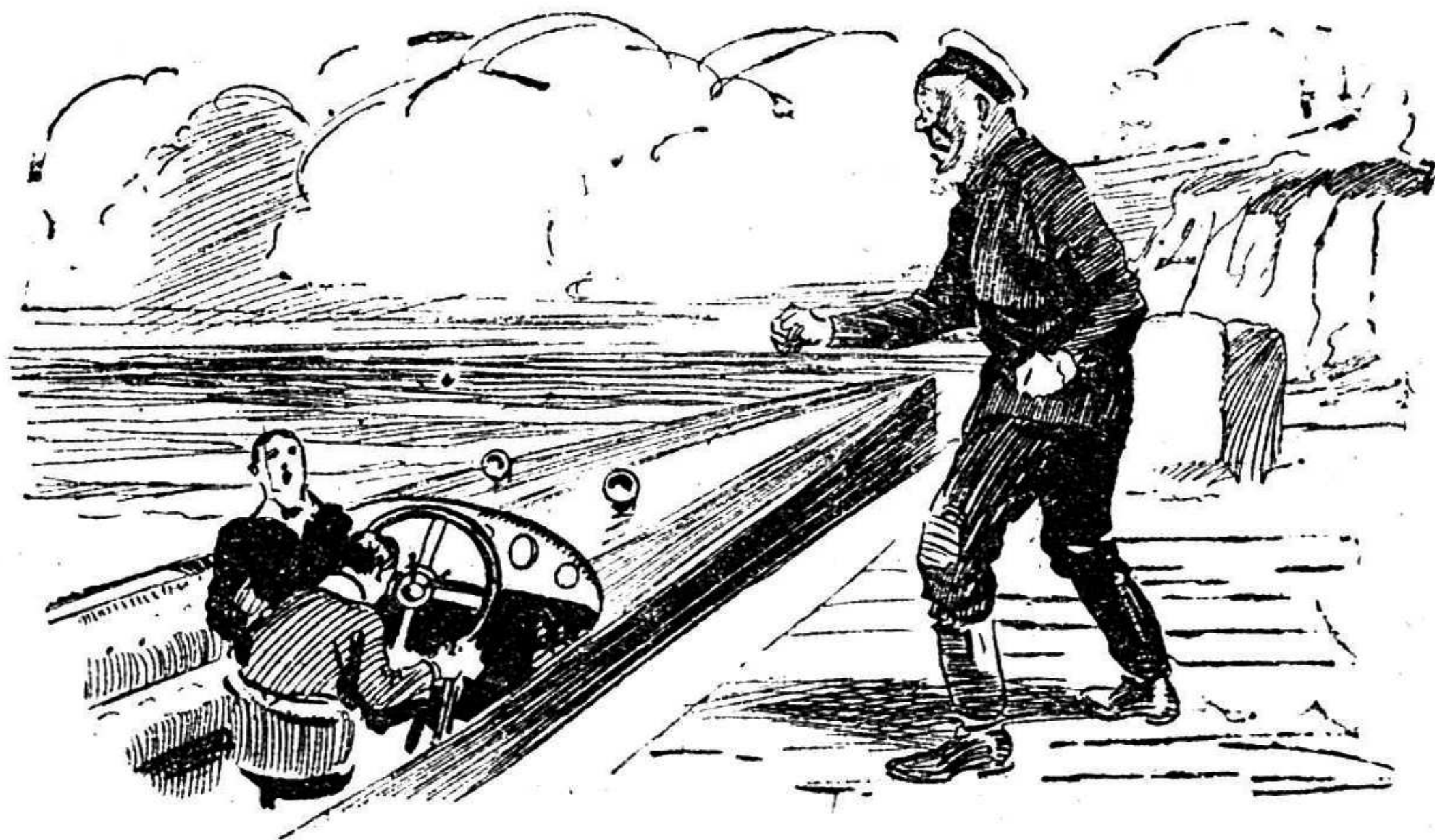
"Thank Heaven you are safe, my boy," said Lee fervently.

"What!" yelled Dorrie, with joy in his voice. "What's that? Is that Nipper?"

"Yes."

"Good gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "The infernal young scamp! Making us believe he'd been blown to smithereens, an' then calmly ringin' up! Tell him that when I get near him I'll punch his head!"

Nelson Lee smiled. He really felt like doing an impromptu war dance in the middle of the study. He could never



"Here, young gents!" said the old man. "You can't try any o' them tricks! You ain't got to go off in that there boat——"

he became aware of an insistent ringing.

Nelson Lee heard it, too, and knew that it was caused by the telephone in his room.

Just for one second his heart jumped, but he crushed the hope aside. What made him hope at all? Weren't there hundreds of other people who could ring up—hundreds of people he didn't want to speak to?

He entered the study, and Dorrie followed, the latter closing the door. Lee sat down at his desk, grasped the instrument, and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Well?" he snapped curtly. "Who is it?"

"That you, guv'nor?" came a well-known voice over the wires.

Nelson Lee nearly dropped the receiver, and his face flushed.

"Nipper!" he shouted thankfully. "Is that you?"

remember being quite so relieved as he was at the present moment. For he had been certain in his own mind that Pitt and I had perished. And my voice, coming so distinctly over the wires, was like a voice from the dead.

But within a few moments Lee was his old, calm self.

"Dorrie is here, Nipper," he said. "We have just got back from Caistowe—after discovering wreckage of the Flying Bat. We believed that you and Pitt had died in the explosion of the motor-boat. Is Pitt quite safe?"

"As safe as I am, sir," I replied. "But how did you know that the boat had been blown up?"

"We found many scraps of wreckage, as I have already told you," replied Lee.

"Where are you now?"

"In Portsmouth, sir," I said quickly.

"And, what's more, I want you to come over at once. Pitt and I were picked up by an old tramp, and landed here ten minutes ago. You've got to come over by the fastest thing you can get hold of."

And then, in a few tense sentences, I told the gov'nor that we had located the vessel where Yung Ching had been taken on board. I went into no details, for there wasn't time. And, indeed, the gov'nor stopped me.

"That's enough, Nipper," he said briskly. "I'll come over at once—without any delay. You can tell me the full story when I arrive."

"Good enough, sir!" I said. "We'll be at the Broadhurst Hotel—it's a fairly small place not far from the docks. It's just across the road from here."

A minute later Lee had rung off, and he looked at Dorrie with gleaming eyes.

"This is more wonderful than I had hoped for, old man!" he exclaimed. "Nipper is not only alive, but he has succeeded in locating Yung Ching. You see, his action in giving chase was fully justified. I must get over to Portsmouth at once. It won't take me very long—"

"Especially if I take you in my racer," put in Dorrie. "No, not a word! Hang it all, I'm in this! It seems to me I've jumped right into a pile of excitement. Good! All the better—a quiet life doesn't suit me!"

There was only one delay before the pair

started off for Portsmouth. Nelson Lee met the evening train at the quiet little Belton Station. And from this train stepped Mr. Tsen Wang, of the Chinese Embassy. He was looking grave and troubled.

Mr. Tsen Wang was Yung Ching's guardian, and Lee had 'phoned to him a few minutes after hearing the news of Ching's disappearance. For it was necessary that Mr. Wang should know.

But he brightened up considerably when Lee informed him of the course of events. There was still a distinct hope that Yung Ching would be rescued. And the trio, in Dorrie's racer, commenced their dash to Portsmouth in the quiet dusk of the evening.

CHAPTER VII.

NO SIGN!



REGINALD PITT glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"About time your gov'nor was here," he said. "They've had time to do the trip by now, I should think."

"Hardly," I said. "It's ten-to-one they're coming in old Dorrie's racer—but even Dorrie can't do miracles. I give them

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 32.)

about another twenty minutes. My son, things are getting exciting."

Pitt grinned.

"Of course, they've been quiet up till now?" he said sarcastically.

"Comparatively," I replied. "Just you wait!"

"Well, I don't want anything more exciting than that explosion," said Reggie, with feeling. "And that spell on the Caistowe Buoy wasn't exactly peaceful."

We were both pacing up and down in a private room at the Broadhurst Hotel. We could not keep still, for so much was at stake that we were both filled with anxiety all the time. By hook or by crook, we meant to rescue Yung Ching from the hands of his kidnappers.

We were both looking a peculiar pair. We had not kept on our borrowed clothing from the tramp steamer, but had obtained fresh outfits from a large establishment in the town. We had no money, of course, but the manager communicated with the Broadhurst Hotel, and was satisfied that we were all right.

As a result, we were now wearing ready-made lounge suits which did not exactly fit us, and our appearance, of course, was most unusual—for St. Frank's boys. But we were, at least, attired in gentlemanly costume.

A good meal had made us feel better still, and now we merely had to wait.

It seemed a long time—but, in reality, it was quite short.

Only five minutes more had elapsed before we heard the powerful purring of a racing car outside the hotel. We dashed to the open window, and looked out. And we were just in time to see Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore getting out of the car, accompanied by Mr. Tsen Wang, the Chinese attache.

"Good!" I exclaimed. "They're here!"

We hastened out, and went into the hotel lounge—and found Nelson Lee in conversation with the manager. I rushed up to the guv'nor grabbed his arm.

"Here we are sir—all alive and kicking!" I exclaimed cheerfully. "And the sooner we get busy the better."

"I am heartily glad that you are alive and kicking, as you say, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "At one time I had feared the opposite. But we will go along to your private room before we discuss anything else."

We went there at once, accompanied by Dorrie, leaving Nelson Lee and Mr. Wang talking to the hotel manager. Dorrie looked at Pitt and I with a stern expression on his good-natured face.

"Now, you young scamps, what's the meanin' of it?" he demanded.

"Oh, come off it, Dorrie," I grinned. "It's great to see you again! Just fancy you coming to St. Frank's to-day, too! For

once in your life you've had an opportunity of being useful!"

"Thanks!" said his lordship. "Yes, by gad, I've been on the go all the time. I buzzed down to have a word with your guv'nor about the summer holidays. There'll be somethin' doin' after all. I suppose you fellows are game?"

"Game for anything, Dorrie," I replied. "Why, are you thinking about a trip of some kind?"

"It's got beyond the thinkin' stage, my lad!" said Lord Dorrimore. "We're goin' to have a splendid time—but more anon! Nothin' more now, my lads! The great man has appeared!"

Nelson Lee had arrived at that moment, and it was hardly the time to discuss Dorrie's holiday trip.

Nelson Lee sat down, and looked at me.

"Now, Nipper," he said briskly. "I want you to tell me precisely what happened. Go into full details, and do not leave anything out. As soon as I have all the facts I will make a move."

Lee listened intently as I told him the exact state of affairs. And when I had finished he wasted no time. Jumping up, he declared that the very first thing to be done was to ascertain if the Chinese yacht was still at anchor. It was also necessary to discover what she was, and who she belonged to.

And so the guv'nor vanished for about half-an-hour, and when he returned I could see that he had been successful.

"Yes, the yacht's still at anchor," he said. "She belongs to a rich Chinese merchant who frequently visits England. And she steams for Shanghai at dawn. All the yacht's papers are in order, and there is no reason for any delay."

"But Yung Ching's on board, sir," I declared. "Something must be done."

Mr. Tsen Wang turned to Nelson Lee.

"I beseech you to do everything in your power, Mr. Lee," he said earnestly. "I—well, I am helpless. I can do nothing alone. But I rely upon you. You I hope and expect to do much."

"You can be assured, Mr. Wang, that I will do everything humanly possible," replied Nelson Lee. "And I propose, as a commencement, that we visit certain authorities—the Chief Constable among others. We must obtain authority to board that yacht at once—authority to search her."

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "That's the idea!"

"Rather!" I echoed. "But I suppose you'll have to see the port officials, won't you, sir? The harbour master, or the Customs people, or somebody like that! We'll all go, I expect—"

"Under the circumstances, perhaps it would be as well," agreed Nelson Lee. "I originally thought that it would be better for me to go on this undertaking alone. But both you boys witnessed Yung Ching's trans-

ference from the motor boat to the yacht. And your presence, perhaps, will be essential!"

And so, without any further delay, off we went to visit the officials.

I had an idea that this would be a tiresome task—because I know what officials are. However, it so happened that these particular people possessed quite a lot of sense.

Or perhaps Nelson Lee's wonderful prestige did a lot towards speeding them up. And Mr. Tsen Wang, of course, was somebody of great importance. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that less than an hour later we all found ourselves in a powerful steam launch, accompanied by police and other officials.

We set off over the dark water. It was getting late in the evening now, and only a faint glimmer of the sunset remained. The air was warm, and that trip was a most enjoyable one.

And we grew nearer and nearer to the big steam yacht which lay at anchor. Lights were gleaming from many of her ports, and there were also signs of activity on deck. We found the gangway in position, and after a little delay we all mounted and arrived on deck.

It was the captain who came forward to speak to us first. He was not a Chinaman, but appeared to be some kind of a half-caste, with his sallow complexion and piercing eyes. He was tall, thin, and spoke English perfectly.

He listened with a face that was almost expressionless as the officials explained the reason for the visit. Towards the end, however, the captain looked at us all with mild astonishment. But I had not failed to observe a peculiar glint some little time earlier.

"But this is very strange!" he said. "Gentlemen, I do not know what you mean. This vessel is the private property of Mr. Ho Liang, and he is coming from London by a late train, and will at once proceed on board. We sail at dawn."

"Precisely," agreed Nelson Lee. "But it so happens, captain, that a Chinese boy, named Yung Ching, was brought on board this vessel this afternoon. I have already told you this, and I am now giving you an opportunity to produce the boy at once."

"You had better do so without any trouble!" put in one of the officials.

The captain looked at us steadily.

"There is no kidnapped boy on board this yacht," he said.

"You can't get away with that lie!" I said hotly. "We saw Yung Ching taken away on the motor boat, and we saw him transferred to this yacht. It's no good denying it, captain—you can't do it."

"I deny it absolutely!" said the captain.

"You deny that this boy was ever on board?" asked Lee.

"Yes."

"You deny that the motor-boat was picked up some distance from the Caistowe Bank?"

"Yes," said the captain. "I was on the

bridge at the time, and I saw no motor-boat. The yacht did not stop—she was under steam the whole distance from London."

The officials looked at Nelson Lee inquiringly.

"Well, Nipper?" asked the gov'nor.

"This man is lying, sir," I said angrily. "It's obvious! Do you think Pitt and I don't know what we're talking about? Yung Ching was brought on board this yacht. We'll swear to that!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Pitt promptly.

The captain was becoming angry, too.

"The whole thing is outrageous!" he declared. "This cock-and-bull story has no truth in it whatever. Why should I be compelled to put up with this kind of thing? I must request you to leave this vessel at once!"

But the authorities had something to say. The facts were so significant that they could not let the matter rest there. Nelson Lee, of course, had told them of the many attempts to kidnap Yung Ching, and also to kill him.

And so the captain was informed that he was to stand by while the vessel was searched from stem to stern. The captain merely shrugged his shoulders, and said that the officials were at liberty to go ahead. He pronounced the whole thing to be an outrage, and also declared that Mr. Ho Liang would have something very strong to say about it later.

But this made no difference—the search was commenced.

By the captain's very attitude I instinctively felt that the result would be nil. Nelson Lee thought so too. But if Yung Ching was not here, where could he be? We had already discovered, by searching inquiries, that the yacht had come straight into port. It was hardly likely that Ching would have been taken ashore. In fact, it could not have been done in broad daylight without somebody noticing.

Moreover, it was the object of these Chinamen to take Ching back to their own country. There would be no object in bringing him ashore—especially as the yacht was to sail at dawn.

The search was a long one, for the yacht was fairly large. But, as I had anticipated, the result of the search was barren. There was no sign whatever of Yung Ching, and the officials declared that he was not on board.

Nelson Lee, of course, had taken an active part in the search—but he too was baffled. He was absolutely convinced that the Chinese boy was here somewhere. And he believed that the captain and crew had received word of the impending search, and had hidden Ching away so securely that the searchers were defied.

The captain was full of indignation and anger. Again and again he denied all knowledge of the incident. But this, as I pointed out to the gov'nor later, was the one piece of positive proof that we had—positive proof that Yung Ching was actually on board.

For Reginald Pitt and I knew—we had seen with our own eyes—that the Chinese boy had been brought on board this yacht. The captain's denial was evidence that the whole affair had been illegal. He feared any contact with the law. But, at the same time, he had been prepared for it.

"Well, gentlemen, I think that we have done everything possible," said one of the officials, turning to Mr. Tsen Wang and Nelson Lee. "The boy is obviously not here. There has either been a mistake, or—"

"There has been no mistake," I put in. "Ching is on board."

But nothing could be done. The search having failed, our only course was to leave the yacht—feeling baffled and furious. Both Nelson Lee and I felt the thing keenly as we were taken ashore, and Mr. Tsen Wang was nearly off his head with worry.

"What does it mean, gov'nor?" I asked. "Do you think that Ching was taken off the yacht?"

"No—I believe he is still on board."

"But what about the search—"

"It was as thorough as human skill could make it," replied Nelson Lee. "But, even so, there were many places where Ching could have been concealed. I am absolutely certain that he has been hidden away, and that he is still on board."

"And yet we can't do anything?" I asked fiercely.

It seemed that this was right. Nelson Lee wanted to have the yacht stopped—to prevent it sailing at dawn. But the authorities said that this could not be done. The vessel's papers were all in order, and it was quite impossible to stop her leaving.

And so, with the circumstances as they were, we had to admit ourselves beaten.

We knew that the yacht was sailing, and we could do nothing. It was even useless standing by. The Chinese would be certain to take every safeguard. The official search having failed, there was no hope of a secret search succeeding.

I had had a desperate idea of getting on board the yacht in the dead of night, and I had suggested this scheme to the gov'nor. But he was against it. There would be a strict watch kept, he declared. Of that there could not be the slightest doubt.

And, to cut it short, we returned to St. Frank's feeling thoroughly crestfallen. We had done our best, but Yung Ching had vanished into thin air. This time the Chinamen had scored.

We arrived at St. Frank's late, but this did not prevent us from collecting in Nelson Lee's study, and discussing matters. Under the circumstances Pitt and I were not obliged to go to bed at once.

"The whole affair is most unfortunate!" said Nelson Lee, when we were comfortably settled. "You see, Dorrie, this Chinese youngster has had nothing but trouble ever since he came to St. Frank's. He has had two sets of enemies. One set was determined to kill him. These men were led by a mur-

derous rascal named Fu Chow. He is now in the hands of the police."

"An' what about the others?" asked Dorrie.

"They are members of the Yen-Shan Tong," replied Nelson Lee. "I believe that Mr. Ho Liang is a power in that particular Tong, and probably the majority of the Chinamen on board his yacht are members of the same secret society. They wish to kidnap Yung Ching because the boy's father has been waging war on the Tong for some years. He has imprisoned six of its most prominent members, and caused the execution of others. Yung Ching's father, who is a mandarin, feared that the boy would be murdered, and so he sent him to England. But Ching has had a very hot time since he arrived."

"So it seems."

"Those who tried to murder him were led by Fu Chow, as I have said," went on Lee. "It will convince you of this rascal's determination when I tell you that Yung Ching's elder brother and his sister were struck down some years ago. The truth of the matter is that, in the past, the mandarin married a girl whom Fu Chow had set his savage heart upon. And Fu Chow made a solemn vow that every child of the marriage should be killed before attaining majority. This vow has been kept with regard to the two elder children, and if Fu Chow ever gets free he will do his utmost to kill Ching, too."

"But what of these men who have taken Ching away?"

"They do not desire his life," said Lee. "They are anxious to take him back to China, and to use him as a lever—a hostage—so that they will compel the mandarin to release all the imprisoned members of the Tong. And the only hope of attaining that end was to capture the boy. Well, they have done so at last—and I am certain that he is on board the yacht. He sails for China at dawn."

"The whole thing is terrible, Mr. Lee," said Tsen Wang. "I was entrusted by Ching's father with the boy's life. And I have failed! He has been taken away, and all hope is at end!"

"We have done everything possible," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"I do not care what money you spend," went on Tsen Wang. "You are at liberty to call upon me for any amount—it makes no difference. Anything, Mr. Lee—any amount! But I want you to get Yung Ching away from the Tong men."

"I would dearly like to help you, Mr. Wang," said Nelson Lee. "But everything possible has been done. I feel like taking matters into my own hands and searching this yacht by force—but that, of course, is impossible—"

"In Portsmouth Harbour—yes!" put in Lord Dorrimore significantly. "But what about the open sea, eh, old man? What about the open sea?"

"I do not understand."

"Simple as A.B.C.!" declared his lordship.

easily. "I've got a plan already. Let this bally yacht go—all the better. The blighters will think they've dished us. But we'll follow—in my old tub. Then comes the fun. We'll catch the beggars up, force 'em to stop, board her, grab Yung Ching, an' there you are!"

"You mean—take matters into our own hands?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Absolutely!" said Dorrie. "The law can go to the deuce! There's nothin' like takin' the bull by the horns!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BEGINNING OF GREAT THINGS!



I LOOKED at Nelson Lee eagerly. "Well, guv'nor?" I asked. "What do you think of it?"

"Dorrie's idea is undoubtedly excellent," he replied. "Very drastic, of course—but I am inclined to believe that drastic methods are the only ones possible under these present conditions."

"Of course!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Man alive, it's not a ha'porth of good relyin' on dock officials and police. They can't search for toffee! An' besides, a search like that one this evenin' was a mere farce. The thing wants to be done by a couple of dozen men, an' each one behind a gun! I can supply the men—the crew of my yacht are game enough for anythin'!"

"It sounds rather like piracy on the high seas," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Nonsense," said Dorrie. "We only want to rescue Ching."

"Yes, I know—I quite understand," said Nelson Lee. "The act of stopping this Chinese vessel on the open ocean, and boarding her by force will be fully justified. Our object is to rescue a perfectly innocent boy from a dangerous gang of criminals. And I freely confess, Dorrie, that your suggestion is about the only feasible one."

"Will you do it, Mr. Lee?" asked Tsen Wang anxiously. "It is splendid—it is wonderful! You could succeed in that way! Once you overtake these scoundrels you will be able to get Yung Ching—and then you could bring him back to safety. I will pay every expense—"

"Nothing of the sort, Mr. Wang," put in Dorrie. "This is my show—my idea all along. I'm always out for excitement, an' bally glad when I can get a bit! This strikes me as bein' somethin' pretty special. An' if I can be of any service you're welcome. By gad! The thing's absolutely grippin'!"

We were all worked up by this time—even the guv'nor.

"When can the Wanderer be ready?" he asked abruptly.

"To-day is Wednesday — Wednesday night!" said Dorrie, stroking his chin. "Lemme see. Thursday—Friday—we can sail

on Saturday mornin', first thing. That gives me two clear days to give my captain instructions, an' for him to shove provisions on board, an' other things that might be necessary. Coal, for example—guns, an' ammunition."

"Oh, but—but two days!" said Tsen Wang in dismay. "Saturday! You cannot leave before Saturday? That will be too late!"

"I think not!" put in Nelson Lee quickly. "The Wanderer is a very fast yacht, Mr. Wang, and I am quite convinced that she will have no difficulty in overtaking Ho Liang's vessel. Remember, Ho Liang will have no suspicion—he cannot believe that he is being followed. We, on the other hand, will keep ourselves supplied with information regarding the other yacht's movements. We ought to overtake the enemy easily in the Mediterranean."

"Absolutely the idea!" said Dorrie. "Well, is it a go?"

"I am perfectly willing," replied Lee.

"Then it's settled—all fixed up!" said his lordship smoothly.

"There is, however, one thing I regret," went on the guv'nor. "This afternoon, you remember, you suggested a holiday trip to me—a voyage to the Solomon Islands. That, of course, must now be abandoned—"

"Abandoned!" shouted Pitt and I blankly.

"Abandoned!" repeated Dorrie. "What the— How the— Great glory! What on earth are you talkin' about?"

"You seem to forget that it will be quite impossible for the boys to leave St. Frank's as early as Saturday," said Nelson Lee. "The summer holidays do not commence until another two or three weeks have elapsed. They cannot go now, Dorrie, and if we go on this chase, as you suggest, we shall not get back in time to carry out the original programme."

Lord Dorrimore looked dismayed.

"Oh, but hang it all, that's rotten!" he declared. "Look here, professor, be a sport!"

"My dear Dorrie—"

"Be a sport!" repeated his lordship. "Why in the name of wonder can't the boys come at once? Why can't they come on Saturday? Make one job of it—you understand? We might just as well—"

"But, my dear man, you do not realise what you are suggesting!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "For one thing, the boys could not leave school several weeks before the holidays commence. They could not be ready by Saturday—"

"I'll bet they could, sir!" put in Pitt promptly.

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, perhaps the majority could manage it by Saturday, at a rush," he admitted.

"But I do not see how the plan could be adopted."

"Don't you?" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore.

"Then, by gad, I'll show you! Look here! This is how I've fixed it in my mind. It's not much of a mind, I'll admit, but it man-

ages to work now and again—under pressure. Now, listen! All these boys have got to come at once—the whole crowd—an' we'll start off, chase this bally Chinese junk, rescue Yung Ching, an' there you are! We shall probably be in the Mediterranean then, an' Ching will be as safe as houses with us. It's not necessary for him to come straight back to England, is it?"

"No, no!" said Tseng Wang quickly. "If he is with you it will be good. He will be safe. He may remain with you for long—until you come back to England. Much better that way."

"Then it's all as clear as crystal!" said Dorrie calmly. "Once we have Yung Ching on board we'll simply carry out the original programme. Only a week or two in advance, anyhow—an' a bally lot better, because we shall have a longer holiday. What about it, Lee? Is it a go?"

Nelson Lee was thoughtful.

"Personally, Dorrie, I should like nothing better," he said. "But I do not know whether the Headmaster will approve of this plan. He will probably characterise it as being impossible. It is a very serious matter to ask for fifteen or twenty boys to be released three or four weeks before the term is over."

Dorrie waved his hand.

"All right—just as you like!" he said carelessly. "But look here! If those boys don't come—you don't get my yacht!"

"What?"

"There'll be no chase!" said Dorrie firmly.

"But look here, Dorrie——"

"I'm firm—as firm as a bally rock!" said his lordship grimly. "You get permission for these boys to come along—an' everythin' in the garden will be lovely. You fail, an' the Wanderer stays in dock!"

Dorrie was probably kidding, although he seemed serious enough.

"It is just possible that the matter can be arranged," said Nelson Lee, after a few moments. "The fact that I am a schoolmaster at St. Frank's will probably be the solution to the problem."

"How do you mean, sir?" I asked eagerly, thrilled by the whole scheme.

"I mean that for the first two or three weeks of the voyage—providing we go—I shall keep all you boys at lessons," replied Nelson Lee. "You will attend to your studies in exactly the same manner as you would do if you were at St. Frank's. If I make the Headmaster this promise he might agree—but not otherwise."

Dorrie winked to Pitt and I.

"All right—go ahead!" he said. "Let the young beggars have their lessons. We won't quibble over a detail. The best thing you can do is to settle this matter at once. Trot along and interview Dr. Stafford."

Nelson Lee glanced at his watch.

"It is rather late, but perhaps the Head will still be up," he said.

And he left the study and went in search of Dr. Stafford. By luck the Head had not retired—although he was on the point of

doing so. Lee would not have bothered him so late, but he knew that there was not a moment of time to be lost.

And he put forward Dorrie's suggestion then and there. He explained the difficulties of the position. He made it clear that in order to rescue Yung Ching, it was necessary to sail at the earliest possible moment. And he pointed out that it would be very hard on the boys to be deprived of their trip because of the other mission—which could not be delayed.

The Head was rather startled.

"I quite understand your meaning, Mr. Lee—you have made it very clear," he said at length. "But the proposal is an extraordinary one. Really, I hardly know what to say. Surely I cannot permit a large number of junior boys to leave the school several weeks before the term is over?"

"I shall continue to give them their lessons as usual," said Nelson Lee.

The Head frowned.

"Quite so—quite so!" he said slowly. "But these things do not always work as we would want them to, Mr. Lee. For example, the boys will not pay attention to lessons while they are on board the yacht——"

"You can rely on me, Dr. Stafford, to keep them hard at it—no matter what their desires may be. If it is necessary to consult the governors——"

"No, not at all!" put in the Head. "I can use my own authority in this matter, Mr. Lee. Well, well, I am inclined to agree. But you do not give me much time to consider the matter."

"I understand that you will permit the boys to leave?"

"Well, yes," said the Head. "If you were not going on this trip, Mr. Lee, I could not think of it. But your presence makes it possible. And, as you say, there is so little time that there can be no delay. You will doubtless inform the boys in the morning?"

"That, I think, is Lord Dorrimore's plan," said Nelson Lee. "Even then, the youngsters will have some difficulty in getting prepared by Saturday morning. They must all leave for their various homes by the first train to-morrow—the first train, that is, after communicating with their parents or guardians by wire."

As soon as the news got abroad the whole junior school went nearly dotty. The fellows couldn't believe it at first—they could not credit that such a glorious thing could actually be.

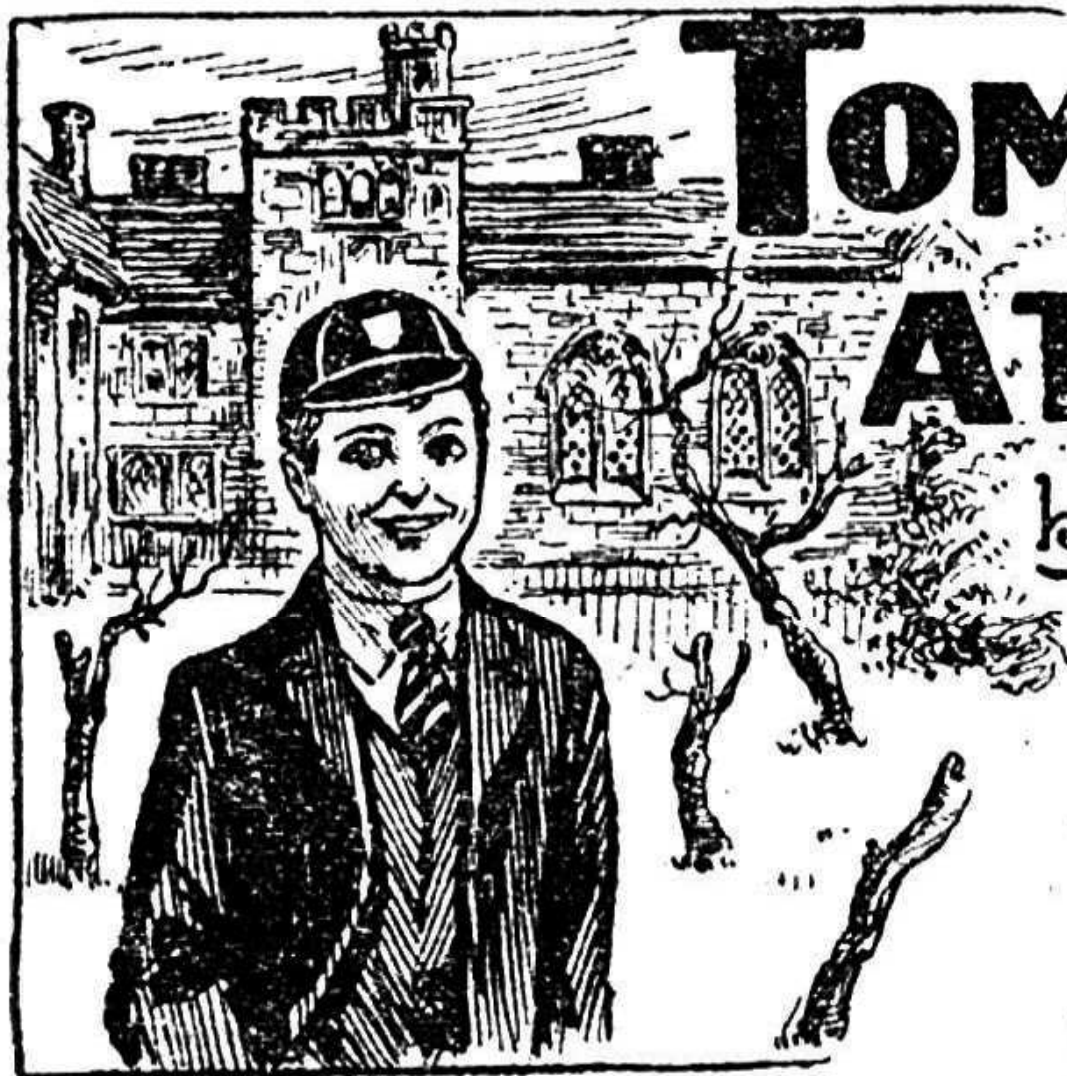
Two days, and then we should start off on an adventure which promised to be exciting at the start, and full of interest afterwards. Little did we know what extraordinary events were to befall!

THE END.

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(Now read on.)

CHAPTER LX.

The tragedy of Ralph's death.

"I be glad to go—glad!" continued the dying boy. "I hope feyther won't get into no more trouble, but that he'll live to be a better man, so as him and mother and me 'ull one day all meet agen and be lappy! Good-bye, Tom. God bless—"

He was going now. There was a quick catching of his breath, and over his face there spread a curious light. It quickly passed. Then came one more effort to breathe—and the battle for life was over.

Poor Ralph was dead!

"Help me to carry him to that bank yonder," said Tom with a sob which he could not keep back.

Gently they bore Ralph to the mossy bank, and laid him down there. Then Tom covered the dead face with a handkerchief, and despatched Sam for the doctor, and McLara for Mr. Wrasper.

Tom remained with Noddy Berrill, the two standing by the body like watchers of old, their hearts too full to exchange a word.

To the spot in due course came the local doctor, Mr. Wrasper, and Detective Clark.

The doctor was not long in discovering that violence had been the final cause of Ralph's

death, and then it was impossible for the story of his father's inhuman treatment to be kept a secret.

The news of the tragedy quickly spread, and the hue-and-cry against Posh Powner was increased.

Men left their work to join in scouring the neighbourhood. Labour at the quarry was stopped, and all hands turned out to assist; so that before Ralph had lain an hour at the inn, where he would be kept until the inquest, the whole district was alive with search parties.

And where was Posh Powner all this time? Not far from the scene of his culminating crime.

Crouching in the wood, he had been a witness of the last moments of his son, and had heard his dying words with a feeling of intense anguish, all the more poignant, because it was the first awakening of his dark, turbulent spirit.

And now what should he do? His limbs, no longer pliant, would not carry him much further to-day. The scene he had witnessed had robbed him for the time being of all his robustness and hardihood.

He wanted a hole into which to crawl and rest—or die! The wood was no longer a safe place for him. Whither, then, should he go?

Suddenly he thought of the chalk-pits near the limekilns—the scene of his attempt on Tom Tartar's life.

In those chalk-pits were several small caves, dug out in times past by men in search of flints.

Through the wood he made his way, and by crawling, creeping, and other wary manœuvres practised by him as a poacher, he managed to reach the chalk-pits unobserved.

There were four pits—one large and three smaller ones. As we have said, they adjoined the limekilns—the latter, indeed, having been constructed there for convenience and saving in the cost of transit of material.

It was into the large pit that Posh Powner made his way, taking care to arrive there during the dinner-hour, when the men had gone home or to the nearest inn.

Not a soul but himself was about. Around him lay picks, shovels, barrows, planks, and all the other paraphernalia of the chalk-digging business.

Selecting from the heap of picks an old half-broken one, which was not likely to be missed, Powner looked round at the caves. Of these there were about a dozen, the majority of them merely holes about five feet high at the mouth.

An inspection of one showed it to be almost twelve feet deep, and loftier inside than it was at the entrance.

"This'll do me," muttered Powner, and at once set to work with his pick on the roof just inside.

In a few minutes a mass of chalk fell, completely blocking up the entrance to the cave.

Powner lay himself upon the ground, and tested the breathing capacities of the place. The air was warm and lacked the freshness of the outside air, but he suffered no actual inconvenience from the fact.

"I can breathe here all right," he thought. "A night of it won't hurt me. I can creep out into the open again early in the mornin'."

When the workmen returned from dinner, they noticed that the mouth of the cave had fallen in; but as that was a thing which occasionally happened without human agency, none of them bothered about investigating the cause of the collapse.

"Good job there was nobody inside!" was the only comment, and then the subject dropped.

CHAPTER LXI.

Wooden Jerry Eats Humble Pie.

FOUR days afterwards Ralph was buried, and it may truly be said that there was scarcely a dry eye in the parish.

There was a large muster round the grave in the old churchyard; the majority of the schoolboys were there, and Cecil and Sir Claude Freshley came to see the last of the poacher's son.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust."

So they consigned him to his last earthly home, the only few feet of earth that were his birthright, and of which no man could rob him, and left him in peace.

There was a silent playground that eve, but on the morrow it resumed its ordinary condition.

Ralph was not forgotten, nor would he be for many a day, but it was not necessary for the boys to go about with lugubrious faces.

Three or four days passed, and nothing as yet had been heard of Posh Powner, nor was there a sign of Foster Moore.

Both had, apparently, vanished for good and all.

The men in the chalk pit went daily to their work and returned at eve.

They mentioned, casually, at home, that the small cave had now quite sunk down and was closed.

Right up to the top of the land above there was a crack, into which a hand might be thrust, and there was no sign of that old fox, the poacher having worked his way out of his self-chosen prison as, in fact, he had.

Meanwhile, Wooden Jerry had lost his job at the school, Mr. Wrasper having sacked him for drunkenness.

Nothing was seen of him for nearly a week; then, early one morning, he turned up again, just as Jane the housemaid was beating the mats outside the kitchen. Hunger had driven him back.

Jane looked at him and really pitied him, for she was a woman.

It would be difficult to find a more forlorn and wretched creature than Wooden Jerry was at that hour.

"And what may you want?" asked Jane.

"A bit o' broken wittles if nothing else," Jerry replied.

"I'll get you some," she said, with as much tartness as she could assume.

She was very kind-hearted, and would not have seen a dog that had bitten her starve.

So she went into the house and brought out to Jerry a huge plate of broken food—all sweet and clean—the better fragments of the dinner of the day before.

He took it, and, humbly thanking her, sat down by the door-scraper to eat it.

Having been so far successful he had hopes of further redeeming his position.

They say that luck favours fools, and Jerry was in some things a bit of a one, as we know.

That morning Mr. Wrasper rose early with the intention of going for a walk, and saw Jerry outside.

Jerry got up hastily, and knuckled his forehead three times in succession.

"I did not expect to see you here," said Mr. Wrasper, gravely.

"It's the only place, 'cept the workhouse, I've got to go to," said Jerry, with a moan.

"Won't you have me back, sir?"

"But how can I take you on again?"

"I'll be humble, obedient, and sober. I'll sign the pledge and keep it."

"But I've got somebody in your place—a smart boy, who does his work well."

"Can't I help—the—the boy?" asked Jerry.

He had come down to something now, but it is no use nibbling humble pie. Make a meal of it, and get it over.

Jerry was ready to eat a whole pie, and bolt it!

He could digest a lot of humility.

Mr. Wrasper took a little time to reflect, and as he stood with his eyes thoughtfully fixed ahead, Wooden Jerry watched his face eagerly.

"Jerry," he said, at last, "before I decide what to do I must think the matter carefully over. Meanwhile, when you have finished your breakfast, you had better go on weeding the garden."

Jerry was overjoyed, and hurried off to the garden, where he played old gooseberry with the weeds for about two hours.

He did more work in that time than he had previously been wont to do in two days.

As a result of his industry and apparent state of repentance, Wooden Jerry was given another chance by Mr. Wrasper. He was told that he might occupy his old quarters, but was given clearly to under-

stand that he would not occupy his former position. He would now merely be an assistant to Perks, the youth who had been engaged in his place, and who was giving every satisfaction in the performance of his duties.

Whatever may have been his real feelings on the matter, Wooden Jerry did not voice them. Having started to eat humble pie, he went through with the job—cleared his plate of it, so to speak—and eagerly agreed to work under Perks, and obey that youth's orders. Regular meals, a roof over his head, and a weekly wage, meant much to Wooden Jerry. He had had a sharp lesson as to what being out of work meant to a man of his age, and he was precious glad to get back on the school staff under any conditions.

Another and more important addition to his staff was being contemplated by Mr. Wrasper.

"It will be necessary for me to get an assistant," he had told the boys; "but to find the man I want will take time. Meanwhile, I must do as well as I can alone, and I shall do very well if I have your co-operation. I rely on you boys to be as good as you can be, and so lighten my labours."

Dinner was just over on the day of Wooden Jerry's return to the school, when Mr. Wrasper made a welcome announcement.

"Boys," he said, "it is necessary for me to go over to Belchester this afternoon on pressing business, and I cannot get back until early in the evening. I am therefore obliged to indulge you with yet another half-holiday. From now until seven o'clock you are free to go where you will. Tartar, I want a few words with you in private."

He and Tom went out together, and a short conversation between them took place in the hall.

"Now, Tartar," said Mr. Wrasper, "don't forget that you may have enemies still in the neighbourhood. Of course the probabilities are against it, but we never can tell."

"I will be careful, sir," Tom replied.

"I may as well tell you that Clark, the detective, has confided in me about the discovery you made in the well."

"I thought he would, sir."

"He did so to see if I could be of any assistance to him," said Mr. Wrasper, "but neither of us can make anything of it. Still, we have a theory. Have you one?"

"I think that Foster Moore was the thief," returned Tom.

"Either he or his son," said Mr. Wrasper, "and whoever was guilty will sooner or later come back for the plunder. You had better keep away from Powner's cottage this afternoon. I am anxious about you, Tartar; for I owe you much, and if anything happened to you I should feel as if my own son were the sufferer. Now, promise me that you will not run any unnecessary risks."

Tom promised, and then went off to join his chums.

"We don't want a finer day than this," said Tom, as he, with Sam Smith, Turrell, McLara, and Willie Gray, started out from the school a

quarter of an hour later. "The question is, where shall we go?"

"Why not go to Hammersley Heath?" suggested Turrell. "About this time last year we got a lot of plovers' eggs there, didn't we, Sam?"

Sam Smith nodded.

"We got over a dozen," he said, "and only took one egg from each nest."

"Right you are!" agreed Tom. "We'll go to Hammersley Heath, and if we have any luck we'll have plovers' eggs for tea when we come back."

So they set off for the Heath. It was a long trudge, but they got there at last, and at once started hunting for nests.

As everyone knows, the plover is a wily bird, and although it lays its eggs on the ground, they take a deal of finding.

After a good deal of wandering without finding a nest, Tom and his chums were about to give it up as a bad job when Turrell accidentally trod upon one and smashed the eggs.

After this little incident good fortune attended them. In less than an hour they had found over a score of nests upon the ground, and with due consideration for the birds taken an egg from each.

"A nice little lot for tea," said McLara. "Jane will boil them for us. Put them all into my handkerchief."

In high glee over the success of their quest, they set out homeward, striking the high road about two miles from the village.

They were just at a bend, or rather half-circle, so that they could not see far either way, when they heard a soft footstep near them.

As they turned to see who it was, a man, seedily attired, went swiftly by, with his head bent and his arm up so as to almost hide his face.

He was walking at a great rate, and speedily disappeared. In fact, he was gone ere they had recovered from the temporary surprise his coming gave them.

"What an odd-looking fellow," said Sam.

"It was Foster Moore," replied Tom quietly.

"Couldn't have been!" said Sam.

"I tell you it was!"

"But that chap has whiskers, and Moore always shaved close," said McLara.

"They were false ones," replied Tom. "I am sure it was he."

"He must be a bold man to come back so soon," said Willie Gray.

"Don't forget that he would not expect us here to-day," returned Tom. "In the usual course, we should now be in school."

"Shall we go after him?" asked Sam.

"No," replied Tom. "Just saunter about as if we hadn't recognised him, and let him get well ahead. I fancy I know what's brought him back."

"What?" asked the others eagerly.

"You'll know in good time," said Tom.

"If I'm not greatly mistaken, we're in for some more excitement soon. Come along! We'll be getting on towards the school."

(Continued on page iii of Cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

CHAPTER LXII.

A Startling Visitor.

DETECTIVE CLARK was still in the district, endeavouring to elucidate the mystery of Diggles's murder, and to run the murderer to earth.

He was getting heartily sick of the job, and he felt anything but happy when, at about half-past six on this particular evening, he left his temporary quarters at the village inn, for a stroll down the road.

"If I don't very soon get on the right track," he mused, "I shall have to abandon the search and report to headquarters that I'm beaten. I hate having to give in, but there seems no help for it."

Sauntering on, he reached the school gates just as Tom Tartar and his companions were returning from their afternoon's egg-hunt.

Bidding Sam and the others go on without him, Tom came across to the detective.

"I want to see you, Mr. Clark," he said. "I've important news to tell you. Foster Moore has returned."

"Never!" exclaimed the detective. "Surely he cannot be such a fool!"

Tom told him what he had seen, and then proceeded to explain his theory of the cause of Foster's Moore's return.

"He's hard up," he said, "and has risked coming back to get the things he hid in the well."

"You and I agree as to who was the thief," said the detective, with a smile.

"Of course, I don't know," said Tom modestly, "but that is what occurs to me. By the way, is there any news of Powner?"

"No, not worth calling news," answered the detective, "but I am satisfied he is still in the neighbourhood. The puzzle is, what part of it?"

"Do you keep a watch over his home?"

"No, but I visit it occasionally, and the silken thread I glued to the door and windows remains unbroken. Nobody has been there since the burial of poor Ralph."

"Putting the silk there was very artful," said Tom. "You will try to catch Moore, I hope?"

"Yes, if he comes to the well," said the detective, "he will be taken. What is the old saying—the thief who goes often to the well is copped at last?"

"No, that is not quite right," laughed Tom. "but it will do for this case. When shall I know what has been done?"

"Not until the morning," replied Detective Clark. "Probably Moore will not visit the well before midnight, owing to the moon. You will hear what has been done the first thing."

Tom bade him good evening, and hurried off as the bell was summoning him to the evening meal, which he was quite prepared for.

Slipping into his seat at the table by the side of Sam, he told him, in a few words, what had taken place.

"Keep it quiet," said Tom, "in case Moore

is not taken. It is possible there may be a hitch in the business."

Sam promised to say nothing, and both devoted themselves to assuaging their appetites for the next ten minutes or so.

There were two waiters now at the "festive board" instead of one—the boy Perks and Wooden Jerry.

Perks was about sixteen years of age, small and wiry, and, although country born and bred, had little of the rustic lad about him.

In the matter of nose he was really aristocratic, for it was a very large nose, of the shape known as Roman.

He had a short body, but long arms and legs, and he had a habit of flapping his arms occasionally as an old rooster does his wings.

He was the head waiter, and he let Jerry know it, giving his orders in a manner that was extremely edifying to the boys, but always in a quiet tone so as not to reach Mr. Wrasper's ear.

Jerry had a big face, but for all that the amount of malevolent hatred of Perks he crowded into it was amazing.

"There ought to be some fun got out of Perks versus Jerry," said Sam.

"There will be, if ever we get time to attend to them," replied Tom.

Tired after their outing, the boys went early to bed, and Wooden Jerry also went to bed as soon as he had got through his work under the direction of Perks, who stood by with his hands in his pockets, looking on while Jerry laboured.

Jerry had just pulled the blankets round him, and was about to blow out the candle which stood on a chair beside his bed, when he distinctly saw the handle of the door move.

Now, that door-handle had from time immemorial been out of order. It needed humouring, otherwise you might turn and turn without getting the door to open.

That was what was happening now. Whoever was on the other side of the door was having trouble with that uncertain handle.

So Jerry had to lay there trembling, watching it move. And, as the handle was of brass, and caught a glint from the lighted candle, it looked to Jerry like a moving eye.

But at last the handle acted, and Jerry saw the door cautiously pushed open.

Then a man's head appeared.

It was the head of Posh Powner!

But how changed from the Posh Powner of old! His cheeks were now thin and ghastly pale, while his eyes were sunk deep in their sockets.

The poacher entered the room, carefully closed the door behind him, then whispered hoarsely:

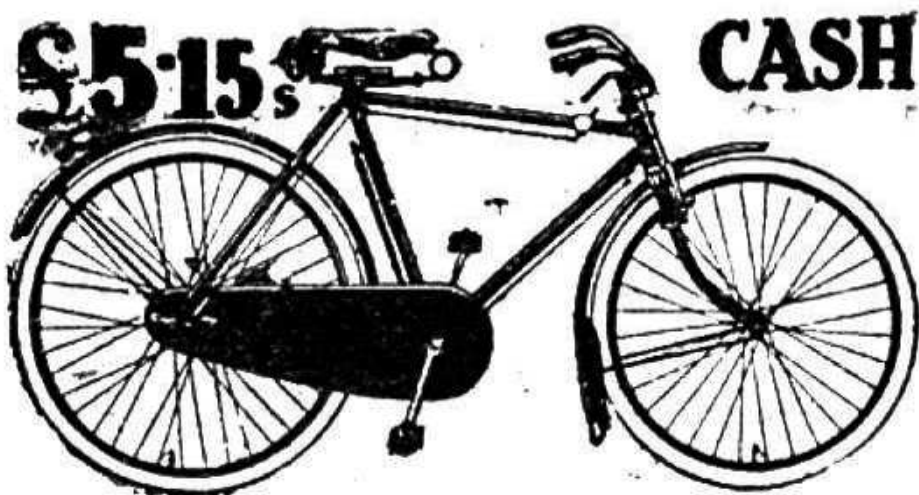
"Quick! Get me some grub! I'm famished!"

"Is it yo-o-ou—or—your ghost?" stammered Jerry.

"It's me," returned the poacher, "or what's left of me. I want something to eat. Get up and fetch it."

As he spoke he came creeping into the room, and with a sigh that was half a groan, sank into a sitting position on the bed.

(To be continued.)

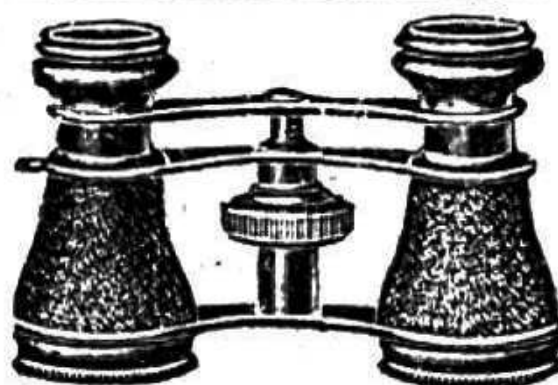


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