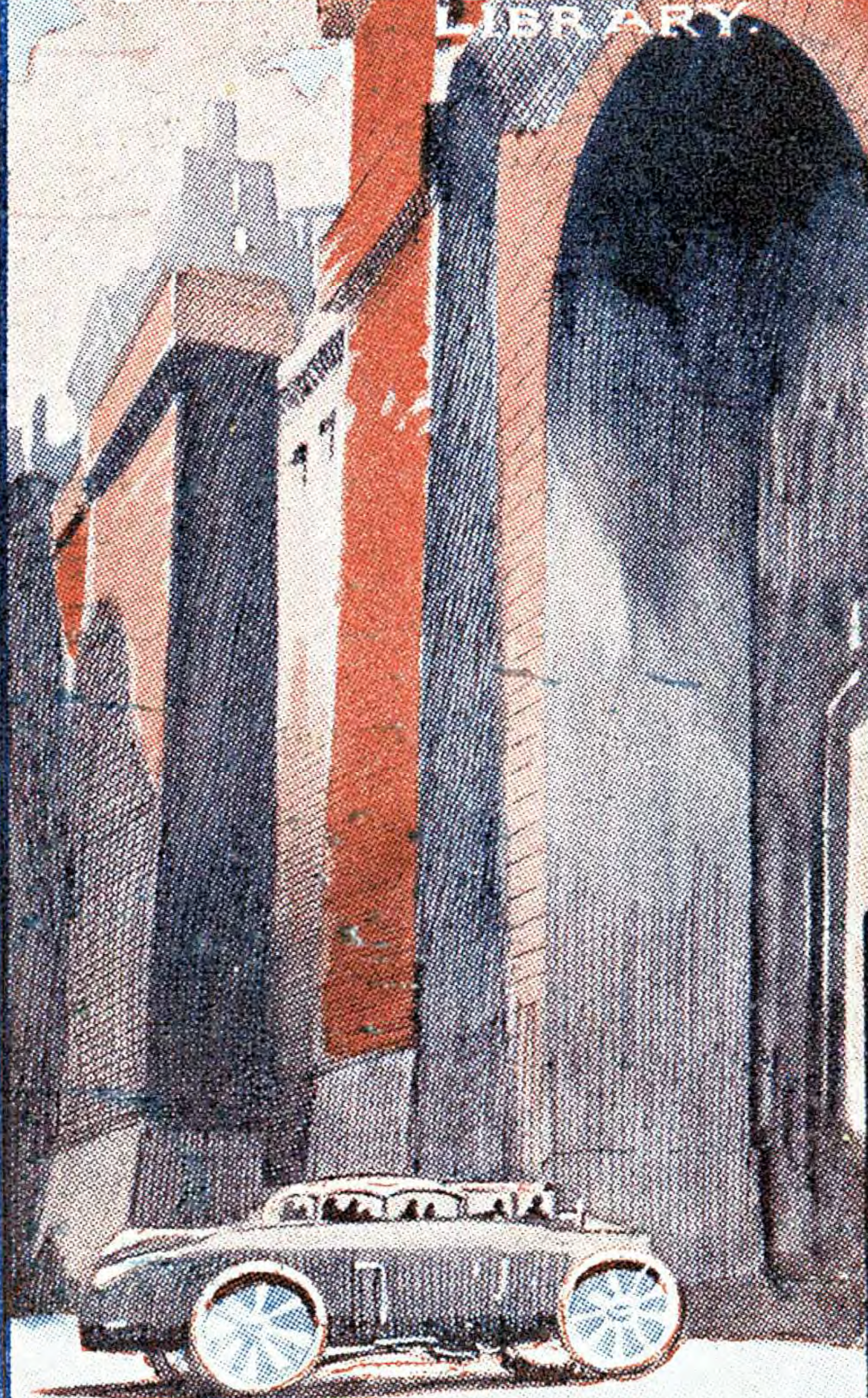


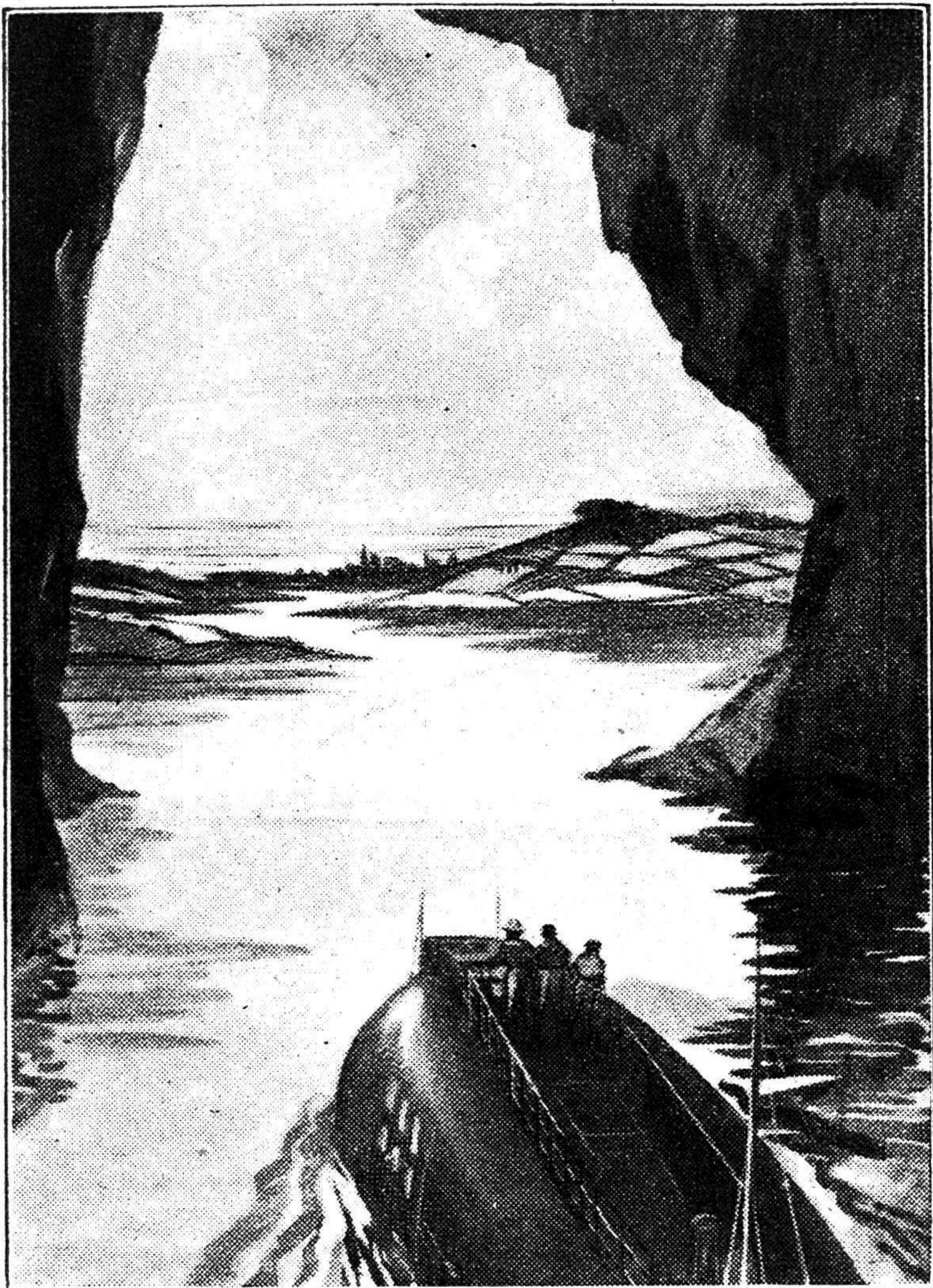
THE NELSON LEE 2^D LIBRARY.



And then, at length, we entered St. Edmund City. We knew at once that we had arrived at the capital. For we came upon a great, imposing gateway. This gateway was a huge, towering, red stone structure, superbly designed.

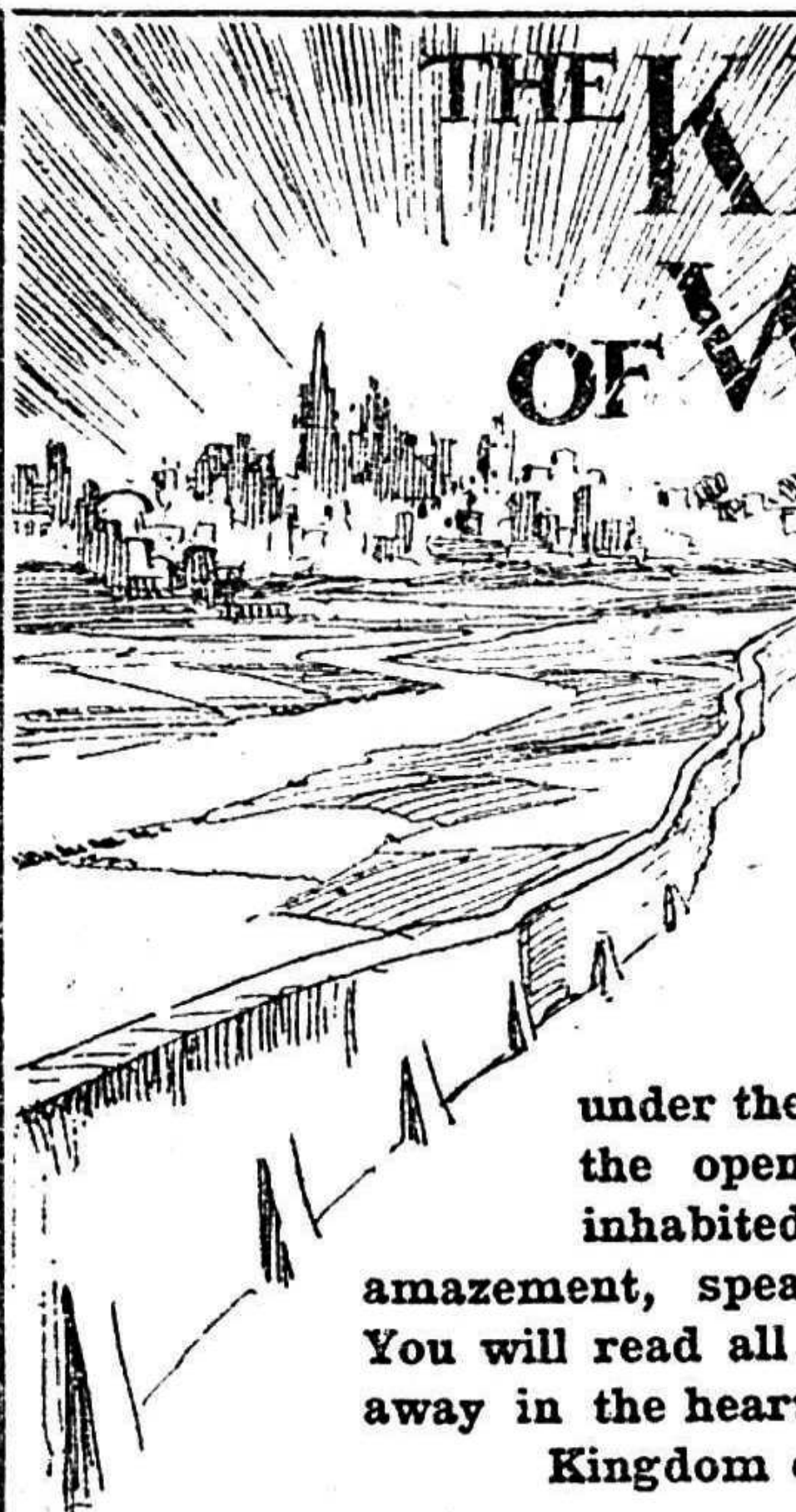
THE KINGDOM OF WONDER

This Week's Splendid Long Complete Story of Schoolboy
Adventure in a Newly Found Kingdom in the Antarctic.



Right in front of us lay a glorious land of green fields and hills and valleys. . . And the wide river flowed on its way like the Thames itself.

THE KINGDOM OF WONDER!



By means of a mammoth submarine aeroplane the Holiday

Party, comprising the Boys of St. Frank's, Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, etc., have penetrated the wild mountains of Antarctica. They have followed the winding route of a hot stream through caverns

under the mountains, and as they emerge into the open they come upon a fertile country inhabited by white people who, to their amazement, speak an old-fashioned style of English. You will read all about this quaint new world, hidden away in the heart of the South Polar regions, in "The Kingdom of Wonder!"—THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ALMOST BEYOND BELIEF.

BOB CHRISTINE shook his head.

"It's no good, Handy, it can't be done!" he said firmly. "It may work with some of these other chaps, but not with me. You can't pull my leg!"

Edward Oswald Handforth glared.

"I'm not trying to pull your silly leg!" he roared. "It's true—absolutely true! If you don't like to believe me, you can go and eat coke!"

"Don't get excited!" put in De Valerie. "I'm inclined to agree with Bob. We can swallow most of the yarn—we can believe that you saw civilised human beings, but you're not going to kid us they spoke English!"

"Never!" said Bob Christine.

"It's too tall, old chap," observed Armstrong.

"Oh, absolutely!" remarked Archie Glenthorne. "In about five different tones, old dear! Absolutely, don't you know. English, what? Reeled forth by a pair of merry blighters in the South Pole? I mean to say, it simply can't be swallowed, as it were."

"You—you——"

"No offence, old onion, but there you are!" went on Archibald. "The old bean, so to speak, absolutely refuses to absorb the stuff. That is to say, the brain-box jibs at the very idea!"

"Of course, it does!" said Christine. "Trying to spoof us like that! Just as

if these people could talk English! Do be sensible!"

Handforth clenched his fists, and fairly danced.

"All right—don't believe me!" he bel-lowed. "D'you think I care? Ask Church! ask McClure! They heard, too, and they'll —"

"Yes, rather," said Church. "It's quite true, you fellows."

"We heard the two men speaking," de-clared McClure. "As plainly as you can hear me now!"

"And they used English words?"

"Yes!"

The juniors looked very dubiously at Handforth and Co. The famous chums of Study D were somewhat flushed and excited. There was no question that they firmly be-lieved what they had been saying. But it was very tall.

"English, don't you know!" said Archie dreamily. "I mean to say, the thing's most dashed stiff, old birds! Somewhat perpen-dicular, if you grasp the old meaning. A chappie can swallow a most frightful lot, but there's a limit. Absolutely! Even Phipps won't believe—"

"Who cares about Phipps?" snapped Handforth crossly. "If you fellows don't like to believe this thing, you can do some-thing else. I don't care! You'll find out before long. And then you'll owe me an apology. And, what's more, I'll punch every fellow's nose who doesn't beg my pardon!"

Reginald Pitt grinned.

"I can safely assure you, O dear one, that the apologies will be forthcoming from every humble throat!" he said cheerfully. "I'll be the first to grovel at your number tens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I don't care!" said Handforth bit-terly. "You can't even speak to me with-out chucking in an insult! I take size seven—not ten! But I shall jolly well expect those apologies!"

The juniors continued talking with much animation. The subject of their conversa-tion was indeed, a most fascinating one. Extraordinary things had happened, and these extraordinary things wanted a lot of swallowing. But Nelson Lee himself had vouched for the truth of nearly everything—and it was, of course, impossible to doubt Nelson Lee's word.

The crowd of St. Frank's juniors were in a very peculiar part of the world. They were not so very far distant from the South Pole, and they were lounging about in the saloon of the Golden Rover.

I don't know whether it's necessary for me to go over all the adventures which had befallen us recently, but I'll just set down a few facts. It may be a bit tedious, but you can't have all honey. And it's neces-sary to go into some details, in order to refresh your memories.

Well, in a nutshell, there were twenty of St. Frank's chaps, including myself, and we were having a fine time on the Golden Rover. The other members of our party consisted of Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, and Phipps. Phipps was Archie's valet.

Then, of course, there were five more—the regular members of the Golden Rover's crew. Mr. Raymond Gray, owner, in-ventor, and chief pilot; Major Barrance, Mr. Gray's nephew, and assistant pilot; Jack McGregor and Hawkins, the engineers; and Snowball, the cook.

And the Golden Rover herself was a super aeroplane—a kind of wonderful air-ship out of a story-book. But it was not one of these impossible contrivances, but a machine built on sound principles, and not differing greatly from the design of an or-dinary cross-Channel express.

But the Golden Rover was at least four times as big as any ordinary aircraft. She was made entirely of metal—an alloy of aluminium which had a glorious, golden lustre. This metal was amazingly light and strong, and Mr. Raymond Gray had dis-covered that it was far more suitable for aeroplane construction than any other material.

The Rover was like a modern yacht. She contained luxurious cabins and state-rooms, a roomy saloon, store-rooms, a kitchen, and almost everything one could wish for.

And the aeroplane could fly at a height of twenty or thirty thousand feet with ease, and her normal cruising speed was nearly two hundred miles an hour. All out, she could go at two hundred and fifty.

There was another remarkable feature about this craft. She was an amphibian in the truest sense of the word. For she could fly in the air, and she could dive into the sea. Not merely float on the sea, but dive. To be exact, she was a submarine in addition to being an aeroplane.

Having alighted upon the water, it was possible to draw the great planes in until they were mere stumps. Other mechanical changes were made, and then the Golden Rover would be able to dip below the sur-face.

It is hardly necessary to say that the juniors had been enjoying themselves tre-mendously. We had come on this explora-tion trip as a holiday. Most of the fellows did not particularly care what discoveries were made—it was the novelty of the thing which attracted them.

Mr. Raymond Gray had been in this part of the world before. As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee and Dorrie and I had accom-panied him. Together we had found a wonderful cavern amid the ice of the Ant-arctic. But we had been compelled to leave, owing to various matters, before any real exploration could be accomplished. So now we had come back to complete the work.

This cavern was a most remarkable place, for it seemed to be situated within a gigantic mountain, and could only be reached by way of a hot river which flowed out into the open through an underground tunnel. This tunnel was so big that the Golden Rover had been able to proceed up it, against the current, under her own power.

The river was evidently heated by some natural phenomenon at a great distance within the mountain. No doubt volcanic action was the chief cause. But the fact remained that the river was hot—not too hot to be navigable, but yet hot enough to prevent it freezing.

And within the cavern itself the strange heat absolutely nullified the natural coldness of this Antarctic zone. As a result, the air within the cavern was almost tropical. And peculiar forests grew here—forests of remarkable trees, which in some respects resembled fungus. There was no beauty about the place. On the contrary, one was inclined to be depressed by the sinister aspect of the whole scene.

The cavern was supplied with a natural light of its own—a fountain of volcanic fire which rose up from a central basin. This fire fountain, of course, added to the heat of the strange underground world. And unnamed reptiles and monsters grew amid these surroundings.

We had encountered one or two of these monsters, but they had never really menaced us. By what we could see the denizens of this underworld were unlike anything known to science.

But we had ceased to take any interest in the cavern. For only a short time previously fresh discoveries had been made—discoveries which thrilled us through and through, and which made us limp with wonder.

There was no question that Handforth was really and truly the first discoverer of this new marvel. And he did not allow anybody to overlook the fact. Handforth was a very important individual just now.

"Look here, I'm a bit mixed up about this valley you talk about," said Bob Christine. "Let's have the whole yarn again, and then we shall be able to sift out the truth from the imaginary stuff."

"I haven't imagined anything," snapped Handforth. "So you'd better not start accusing me of trying to spoof you. Of course, I don't mind telling all about it if you want me to. I'm a reasonable chap."

"Well, we won't argue about that!" grinned Christine. "Go ahead!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Proceed with the stuff, old tulip. Kindly allow the words to flow. I mean to say, I was enjoying forty of the best and brightest when you trickled back from the unknown realms. As a matter of fact, I'm dashed muddled about the whole bally business. Absolutely!"

Handforth nodded.

"All right—I'll tell the yarn again," he said briskly. "As you know, Mr. Lee and a few of the others went off exploring this morning—leaving us behind. Well, I thought that was a bit of nerve. So I went off exploring on my own, but in a different direction. Church and McClure went with me. I thought I might as well take 'em, to keep the bounders out of mischief!"

"You mean they went with you to keep you out of mischief?" said De Valerie.

"No, you fathead!" snapped Handforth. "The asses didn't want me to go. But I insisted—I had a terrific idea that I was going to make some marvellous discoveries. And now my name will go down in history."

"Never mind your name!" interrupted Christine. "That's of no interest now. Tell us what you discovered."

"Of course, my chief idea was to do something worth while," said Handforth. "I was pretty certain that I could beat Mr. Lee at his own game. It's not my way to boast, but we might as well have the truth while we're about it. And so I went off exploring—"

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Christine. "He jaws, jaws, and jaws—and doesn't get an inch further! You'd better tell the yarn, Church."

"Right!" agreed Church promptly. "After we'd been going through the cavern a good way we found a tunnel at the far end which led out into the open air. We really found this because we'd got lost, and didn't know our way back—"

"Who's telling this—you or me?" roared Handforth. "If you want a thick ear, Walter Church, you'd better say so! We found this tunnel, and when we got out into the open we were absolutely staggered to find that the air was still warm. Even with the blue sky above us there was so sign of frost and snow."

"And we were in a most wonderful valley," put in McClure eagerly. "I can't tell you chaps how wonderful that valley is! It's got to be seen to be believed. It's not exactly a valley, but a basin—a tremendous cup in the mountains—"

"We shall get to the truth soon!" said Christine. "First it's a valley, then it's a basin, and now it's a cup! Before long you'll be describing it as a saucer! What the dickens do you mean?"

"The basin description was about the most correct," I said, pushing forward. "I saw this valley, you know, and I was greatly impressed with it. It seems to be a kind of oval, and I should reckon it's about eighty or ninety miles long and at least fourteen miles wide."

"Are you trying to kid us you could see ninety miles?" asked Armstrong incredulously.

"Yes!"

"Oh, draw it mild—"

"We could see ninety miles," I insisted. "Not distinctly, but we could see all right."

And I'll tell you why. This basin is a tremendous hollow in the mountains. As far as I can see, the whole place is surrounded by gigantic peaks in one continuous circle. The mountains rise up on all sides of the basin—they tower above, tens of thousands of feet high, with snow and ice on their upper slopes; and with the summits entirely obscured in clouds. You really can't imagine it—you've got to see it."

"We emerged at the extreme end of the basin," said Handforth. "The mountains on either side looked comparatively near by, although they were twenty or thirty miles away. And those in the distance looked like shadows—ghostly and indistinct. But the air in that valley is so terrifically clear that we could see forests and rivers and fields for miles and miles."

"But why isn't it all frozen over?" asked Christine curiously.

"Obviously, because of that warm river," I replied. "There may be other reasons that won't be apparent until we've made careful investigations. But the fact is clear enough. The valley reminds me of England more than any other country—green trees, meadows, hedgerows, and everything else. Forests and valleys and grassy downs. I tell you, it's a bit staggering."

"I'm dying to see it!" said Talmadge.

"Same here!"

"You'll see it before long," I said. "Mr. Gray means to take the Rover along the river in the morning, and it's pretty certain that we shall be able to get out. If we can't, we shall have to go on foot—through the tunnel that Handforth discovered."

"Oh, it'll be a lot better to take the Rover," said Handforth. "But about this valley. We saw figures in the distance—men moving about—you know. And then two of these men came out of a wood near by. Church and McClure and I crouched down in some bushes and watched."

"Did you see these chaps closely?"

"Yes."

"And heard them?"

"Yes!" replied Handforth, glaring round. "Oh, you can look sceptical if you like! I don't care! Those two men came within ten feet of us, and they looked just like a couple of English yokels—only they were dressed differently."

"Oh, I don't know!" put in Church. "The dress was queer to us, but when you come to analyse it, the style was very similar to ordinary wear. Boots—stockings—breeches, and a kind of smock, with a belt round the middle. And both the men wore queer-looking straw hats. One was clean-shaven, and the other had a trimmed beard."

"Dash it all!" murmured Archie. "It's most deucedly thick, old dear!"

"Of course it's thick," admitted Church. "I know it. I don't blame you chaps for not believing us—I can hardly believe it myself—and I saw it! I keep thinking that

I must have been dreaming, and that it didn't really happen."

"That's because you're a fathead!" said Handforth. "It did happen. And, what's more, these men spoke English! We heard them clearly. One fellow said to the other that he was morose, or something, and he told him to cheer up."

"That's right," agreed McClure.

"Well, it's too much for me to swallow!" said Christine bluntly. "I believe everything about the valley, and the men, too. But it seems absolutely impossible that these chaps can talk English! It's beyond reason—it's not possible to credit such a thing!"

"There might be one explanation," said Pitt thoughtfully. "According to what I have heard, when Mr. Gray and Mr. Lee were here a year or two ago—on the original trip—there were some enemies buzzing about at the same time. That's right, Nipper, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said. "I came on that trip and a crowd of rotters belonging to the League of the Green triangle were after us because they thought the cavern contained piles of treasure."

"Well, wouldn't it be possible for some of those men to get left behind?" asked Pitt. "They'd naturally find their way into the valley, and Handforth heard them talking. That would account for the English."

"But, as far as I know, nobody was left behind," I said.

"You—you pitiful fathead!" said Handforth witheringly. "These men we heard didn't speak ordinary English—they used 'thee' and 'thou,' and all that sort of thing!"

"Oh, well, I give it up!" declared Pitt. "We'll wait until we can see for ourselves—and then we shall be satisfied!"

The conversation kept on, however, for the juniors could talk of nothing else. However, their jaws were busy in another way presently, for dinner was served—that is, late dinner.

We had no means of telling the time of day in this cavern, for the light remained the same always. And so we generally reckoned things by the mealtimes. According to our usual routine, it was now nearly time to go to bed.

Nelson Lee, therefore, had decided to put off all further exploration until we had had a good sleep. It was no good going off now. We should take our proper sleep, have breakfast, and then start.

But it was a long time before the fellows dropped off to sleep that night. They were all eager and excited, and could hardly contain themselves.

But at last they dropped off, and shortly afterwards the Golden Rover lay there placidly in the river, silent and slumbering. Only two people were awake—for Nelson Lee

had insisted on a watch being kept all the time.

What fresh wonders was the morrow to bring?

CHAPTER II.

THE ENTRY INTO THE NEW WORLD.



LORD DORRIMORE lit a cigarette and chuckled.

"Well, we're having some good sport!" he said cheerfully. "I'm not tryin' to think what's on the list

for to-day, because it's so good. I'm past bein' surprised. But I've got an idea that it'll be infernally amazin'."

"There is no doubt, Dorrie, that the valley is a most remarkable place," said Nelson Lee. "I am rather doubtful if we shall be able to get into it on the Rover. It will be all the better if we can, because we shall take our home with us. Moreover, we have a goodly supply of weapons and ammunition."

"Includin' a few machine guns an' some nice bombs, and so forth," said Dorrie. "But surely you don't expect trouble?"

"I don't expect it, but it is always best to be prepared," replied Nelson Lee. "We have no reason to fear that the inhabitants of this new land will be hostile. They are certainly not savages—we have clear proof of that. But it would be very unwise to penetrate into their domain without weapons of defence. We are going into the unknown, Dorrie and that is always a risky proceeding."

Everything was ready for the start.

The Rover was now in the centre of the warm river and her engines were gently ticking over in readiness for the actual trip. At present the vessel was a water craft with half her huge body below the surface. And she was provided with a deck, very much after the style of a submarine. At the present moment it was crowded. I stood against one of the rails with Tommy Watson and Montie and a few more fellows.

We were all on tenterhooks with anticipation. We did not know what discoveries were to come to-day—but, like Dorrie, we believed that our entry into the strange new world would be accompanied by many new shocks of surprise.

"I wish they'd get a move on!" said Handforth impatiently. "It's no good sticking here; we might just as well be getting on."

"We're just starting!" said Church.

The Golden Rover was slipping smoothly through the black-looking water. That strange glow which filled the cavern was quite familiar to us now, and we had almost begun to forget what real daylike was like. But we had lost all interest in this cavern.

At first we had regarded it with many

thrills, but now those thrills were lacking. We had grown accustomed to the place, and all we thought of was this new wonderland which lay beyond.

I suppose it's the same with everything. People nowadays cease to be surprised at wireless telegraphy—because they're used to it. In the future there'll be some new scientific marvel, and then that will become a back number as soon as something else crops up.

We had all been tremendously animated by the discovery of this strange and glorious valley beyond the cavern, and our only anxiety was to get out of this dismal place, and to explore the new realms.

And we slipped down the river at slow speed. To be absolutely correct, we slipped up the river, for we were going against the current, and the Rover's engines were thrusting her forward powerfully. We could have gone at a much greater speed, of course, but there was no hurry, and it would have been very unwise to go dashing up-stream at a big pace. For we did not know what unknown snags might be in the fairway.

The water seemed quite deep—but to be absolutely on the safe side the motor-boat had gone on in advance, in charge of 'Orace, the mechanic—we always called Hawkins by that name. Phipps was with him, Phipps being a very capable man. And they were taking soundings of the river depth.

And so we progressed in this way. The juniors were on the deck, and in spite of themselves they could not help being amazed at the fresh sights which constantly came before their eyes.

A turn of the river, and a break in the forest, brought that extraordinary fountain of fire into view—a thin column of brilliant sparks which rose hundreds and hundreds of feet into the air. From the river we could not see the surroundings in detail, for trees intervened, and the fountain itself was over half a mile away.

And then we came to that part of the river where the stream took two courses. Both channels were wide, and at first sight one would not know which course to take. However, the right-hand branch of the river had already been explored by Nelson Lee, and this was not navigable further up, for the way was barred by a low waterfall.

The other branch of the river had not yet been explored. The gov'nor was hoping that this would prove to be the main stream which ran through the great basin, outside. If so, there was a decided chance that we should be able to get through. But if this proved to be impossible, our only course would be to proceed on foot. This would be far less satisfactory, however.

We soon found out that our hopes were to be justified.

As we progressed up the river we came nearer and nearer to the great sloping walls of the cavern. The rocks seemed to close in upon us, and it would not appear possible

that there could be any outlet. Yet the river came through—a great, smooth-running body of water.

And if there was space for that, why not for us?

We watched eagerly as the extremity of the cavern came into view. And then a number of shouts went up as we caught sight of a black opening in the rock wall. The river came flowing through this silently and immensely. And the opening was so large that the Golden Rover would probably be able to pass through without submerging.

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee. "This is better than I had hoped for. But I do not think the way can be as smooth as this all along."

"Why shouldn't it be?" asked Major Barrance. "Well, we've never been to this part of the cavern before, and I don't anticipate any trouble. We'll have the searchlight full on, so there'll be no fear of butting into anything."

We grew nearer, and just before entering the tunnel the Rover's searchlights were switched on. They cast glaring beams of light into the blackness. And the motorboat, ahead, was lit up brilliantly.

"The water seems to be deep enough!" remarked Tommy Watson. "And the roof of the tunnel is a long way overhead. There's tons of room for us to pass through."

"Of course there is!" said Handforth. "And it's not very far, either—only two or three hundred yards."

"We can't judge by that other tunnel, you know," I said. "The exit tunnel there may be only a quarter of a mile, but here it might be as far as two miles. It all depends upon the formation of the rock. Still, we shall see."

It was not long before the Golden Rover turned a bend in the tunnel. And then the juniors shouted out in excitement and surprise. For in the far distance a white patch of light could be seen—a brilliant patch of irregular shape.

"Hurrah!"

"It's the exit!"

"Absolutely!"

The searchlights of the Rover were switched off for a moment or two, and then the tunnel exit could be more plainly seen. This way through the base of the mountain was very different to the entrance from the snow wastes out beyond—where the ice lay heavy over everything, and where the general atmosphere was so cold that one could not live without piles of furs.

We were now almost within sight of the new world.

We were strangely thrilled by the thought of this. I had paid one short visit to this remarkable valley already. But we had not penetrated far, for Nelson Lee had deemed

it better to go in one body, and, if possible, to go on board the Rover.

It was possible.

And we stood there, hushed by the thrill which passed through us. We anticipated all manner of remarkable things. The very fact that this valley could exist was staggering in itself.

A verdant, gloriously green valley in the very midst of the Antarctic wastes!

This seemed to be a miracle, without anything else. And yet, really, I suppose the thing had a perfectly natural explanation. This warm river, for example, came from some big distance beyond. It was undoubtedly of subterranean origin—a great natural spring. And it was a hot spring.

And no doubt there were other methods by which that basin in the mountains was heated. After all, it did not much matter to us—we were not concerned in any scientific explanation.

We were quite satisfied that the valley was there, and that it promised further adventures. The why and wherefore of the matter were of secondary consideration—to us.

Scientists would have marvelled. They would have gone almost dotty with excitement, trying to discover exactly how this valley came to be heated. But we didn't care a jot.

We only knew that it was entirely surrounded by impassable mountains—mountains so high and rugged that no human beings could hope to climb them. For their summits were lost in ever-constant cloud-banks, and they were covered with icy wastes which would have killed any human beings who tried to conquer them.

"I don't suppose an aircraft could have got over those summits. Not that they were so miraculously high, but because of the cloud-banks and the windstorms which constantly raged about those frozen peaks.

Within the valley everything was peaceful—this was proved by the fact that the forests were so green, the meadows so fresh, and the flowers so coloured. They would never have been in that condition if violent storms were the order of the day.

In some queer manner those surrounding peaks protected the basin from the elements. Violent storms which raged outside passed completely overhead. They had no place in this valley of peace.

And this was quite easily understood. Storms generally come from a long distance. They swoop across the globe's surface, gathering in intensity as they progress. But as soon as a storm struck these surrounding mountains it was smashed up. It could not penetrate down into the warm depths of the verdant basin.

I thought of all these things as we slipped through the tunnel—going steadily and evenly against the river current. And now we were getting nearer and nearer to the exit.

At last the searchlights were switched off once more—for they were no longer necessary. We were just about to emerge. And we all held our breath—particularly those fellows who had not yet seen a sign of the valley.

And then, like coming out of a dark passage into a lighted room, we swept out.

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"Look—look at it!"

The juniors stood there, on the deck of the Golden Rover, filled with wonder. For the scene which lay before us was entrancing in the extreme. It was so unexpected,

miles and miles. It reminded me of California, where the air is as clear as crystal, and where one can see long distances with the naked eye. Overhead was the blue sky.

And, towering up into the very heavens, were those surrounding peaks—vast, mysterious, terrible. The actual summits were invisible, owing to the enshrouding cloud-banks.

It need not be imagined that this picture was tropical in aspect. There was nothing resembling a hot country. The chief impression one obtained was that the whole valley—the whole country itself—was fashioned after the style of England. There were the



"Thou art welcome, strangers," said one of the men. "How thou comest here is a mystery to us. But we will make thee free in our village, and send word post haste to St. Edmund City of thy arrival!"

because even though we knew what was coming, we could not believe that such a place as this really existed.

Right in front of us lay a glorious land of green fields and hills and valleys, woods and spinneys, and here and there a stately forest. And the wide river flowed on its way like the Thames itself. Trees which closely resembled willows grew along its banks. And there were profusions of reeds and water-lilies and everything that one sees in a temperate zone.

But the water-lilies and the reeds were gigantic in size—that was the only difference. No doubt this was caused by the warmth of the water. And along these grassy banks we caught sight of rabbits—real rabbits! It was little wonder that we gazed upon the scene spellbound.

And so clear was the atmosphere that we could gaze right down the valley for

same woods, the same hedges, and the same hills and dales. It was a wonderful picture to look upon.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded Handforth triumphantly. "What did I tell you?"

"By Jove, you were right!" said Christine, when he found his voice. "It's—it's amazing! I never thought it could be like this, you know! Why, if you don't look at those mountains, you get an idea that you're in Sussex or Devonshire! It looks just the same!"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, a chappie commences casting the old optic round the offing for signs of a bally village, what? The old country hostelry, and all that kind of rot! It seems to me, dear lads, that this is somewhat extraord.!"

If this place had been wildly luxuriant—

with masses of palm and tropical growth—the fellows would not have been so surprised. It was the home-like nature of the scenery which gripped them. They could not bring themselves to believe that they were far down in the Antarctic—where no civilised being had previously trod. We were the first to discover this land of amazement.

The South Pole had been reached, it is true—but this section of the wild icy waste lay in a spot which was not on the route taken by the various Antarctic explorers. And so they had missed it. And, in any case, they could never have entered, for the only method of so doing was by using a vessel like the Golden Rover.

"Shall we land, sir?"

"Oh, yes, sir—let's go ashore!"

"Hurrah!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"We will not land just yet, my boys," he said, smiling. "There is no hurry; and I want to meet some of the inhabitants of this wonderful country. We must not assume that we shall be treated with hostility."

"Of course not!" said Dorrie. "They'll welcome us with open arms—as travellers from the outside world. They'll be only too bally pleased to give us a fearfully royal welcome."

"But how will these people know that there is an outside world?" inquired Mr. Raymond Gray. "Perhaps they think that this valley comprises the whole universe. Never having been able to cross the ice, they may think that this basin—"

"Oh, look—look!" shouted De Valerie suddenly. "I can see something moving on the hillside over there!"

We all gazed in the direction indicated. A long, grassy hill rose up three or four miles away. And upon these slopes we could see a number of little dots. They were moving slowly, and looked just like a flock of sheep—although, of course, that was out of the question.

Nelson Lee raised his binoculars, adjusted them, and then uttered a short exclamation.

"Upon my soul!" he murmured.

"What are they, sir?" I asked.

"Sheep!"

"Sheep!" yelled everybody.

Then my original surmise, so seemingly impossible, was right, after all! I gazed through the binoculars as soon as I could get them. And, without a doubt, those dots upon the hillside were fine, healthy-looking sheep! They sprang into sharp prominence through the glasses.

And it was while I was looking at them that I saw something else. I became rigid, and I could hardly hold the glasses in my excitement.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I muttered dazedly.

For there, nestling among some trees on the hillside, was a house—a neatly built little cottage with a thatched roof! It

looked exactly like a cottage one may see in Surrey or Sussex. And as I gazed out through the glasses a figure appeared out of the doorway. And I could swear that the figure was that of a woman—a woman dressed in ordinary English clothing!

I dropped the glasses, and felt limp.

"Oh, this is too much!" I muttered. "I must be seeing things."

"What's that, old man?" asked Dorrie curiously.

"Up there—on the hill-side!" I exclaimed. "A cottage—with a thatched roof—and a woman standing in the doorway!"

"By gad!" said Dorrie.

He seized the binoculars and focused them. And then, a few moments later, he turned to me with amazement in his eyes.

"Young man, we're dreamin' all this!" he said firmly. "I've pinched myself about a dozen times, but it's no good—it can't be true! I'm willin' to believe things up to a certain point, but this is too bally thick!"

Others had noticed the thatched cottage by now. It was really too far distant to be seen distinctly with the naked eye. But those who could not borrow the glasses need not have worried. For a moment or two later we all received the biggest surprise of all.

The Golden Rover had been making better progress since we had emerged from the tunnel. The motor-boat, going on in advance, had greatly increased its pace, this being an indication that the channel was clear and safe. And the Rover was now making fine headway up the stream.

There were hills on either side of the river—hills which sloped gently upwards. And both banks were heavily wooded, so that we could see practically nothing of what lay ahead—the river bending and turning with charming irregularity. It was entrancing.

But now I noticed that those in the motor-boat ahead had turned and were waving wildly. Then we swept round a gradual bend in the river. And we found ourselves gazing upon this most staggering of all sights.

There, nestling along the river-bank to the left, was a perfectly wonderful little village. If we had seen mud-huts we shouldn't have been so surprised; if we had seen buildings of solid gold, and glittering with diamonds, we should not have been very startled.

But these were little cottages—old-fashioned English cottages! There was a waterfront, with a tiny quay, and two or three little boats were tied to it. And there, lounging against the railings near the river, were several figures of men. Beyond there was a road—and in the very centre of the picture a most picturesque inn!

This little inn was provided with a sign which swung from a post in the middle of the courtyard. And, as clear as a bell, we

could see what this sign was. There was a picture of a running fox—and above this were the painted words: "The Leaping Fox." Below the sign we saw something else—"Fine Ale!"

And we all stood on the Rover's deck, our minds reeling.

CHAPTER III.

THE KINGDOM OF ST. EDMUND!



WHAT could this be? For a time we had no voices. We could not bring ourselves to believe that this scene was an actual reality. It seemed to be a freak of

the imagination. A civilised country among the Antarctic ice—and not only a civilised country, but a country which had English villages, with English inn signs. It was all so staggering that we stood there, upon the Rover's deck, and stared in silent wonder.

And then we noticed that the men on the water-front were moving. They were shouting to one another. A panic seemed to set in.

They were running here and there. People were coming out of the cottages, and running down the little street in mad excitement. There were children among them—little white children, looking for all the world like those of England.

The men all appeared to be dressed in some rough kind of woollen knickers, with long tunics covering the upper parts of their bodies. It was a very simple dress, and quite picturesque.

The women reminded me of old historical pictures—skirts which reached to the ankles, with gaily coloured stripes and ornamentations, and bodices which were laced in front.

"By gad!" said Dorrie, breaking the silence. "This is beyond me."

"It is so astounding that I cannot think clearly," said Nelson Lee. "But we must not lose our control, Dorrie. This place is English without doubt, and Handforth was obviously right when he declared that he had heard those two men speaking our own language."

"Of course I was right, sir!" yelled Handforth. "These fatheads wouldn't believe me, but perhaps they do now!"

"We've got to!" said Pitt, taking a deep breath. "My only hat! This is the most marvellous thing I have ever known!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean to say, the whole thing's bally well marvellous, what? This is just what I was saying, dear old chappies, don't you know. The country village, and the cheery old hostelry! Absolutely the stuff! I mean, the old brainbox ain't quite capable of dealing with it!"

By this time Mr. Gray was directing the Golden Rover towards the river bank. Her

engines were cut off, and now we glided silently and smoothly towards the shore. At last we touched, and in a few moments the vessel was made fast.

"Boys, stay on board until I give the word," said Nelson Lee firmly. "Remember, do not dare to come ashore!"

"Oh!"

The fellows were very disappointed, but they could not go against the gov'nor's order. Nelson Lee himself and Dorrie and Major Barrance stepped to the extreme end of the Rover, and lightly leapt ashore. All three carried revolvers, in very handy positions.

There was no indication of trouble, but it was better to be prepared.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the Major found a large gathering of people in the open space in front of the inn. They were silent and round-eyed. They gazed at these newcomers with a kind of awe and wonder. For if we were surprised to see them, they were just as surprised to see us.

But they were not exactly afraid, neither did they show hostility. They looked at the trio in front of them with absolute stupefaction.

Nelson Lee raised a hand.

"We have come peacefully!" he exclaimed, in a clear, steady voice. "We are friends, and would like to be friends with you. May we have the pleasure of speaking with your leading townsmen?"

On the Rover's deck, we listened intently, and watched with eager eyes.

Two men separated themselves from the crowd, and came forward. They were powerfully built men, with square jaws and rugged features. They came to a halt a few yards from Nelson Lee and the others.

"Thou art welcome, strangers," said one of the men. "How thou camest here is a mystery to us. But we will make thee free in our village, and send word post haste to St. Edmund's City of thy arrival!"

"You are generous!" exclaimed Lee quietly.

For the life of him he did not know what else to say at the moment. These men were talking English in the old Quaker style, and Nelson Lee was at a loss for words. He was filled with wonder.

"Thou art men from beyond the ice," went on the man. "That is surely true, since thou art none of our own people. And thou hast come in a wondrous craft, indeed. I am astonished that thy language is English, even as ours."

"You're not so astonished as we are, by gad!" said Dorrie.

"Thou hast come peacefully, and we will greet thee peacefully," went on the man. "My name is William Beckett, of Cobham Bend. The village that thou seest before thee is Cobham Bend."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Major Barrance. "William Beckett, of Cobham! An English name and an English village! I

don't mind admitting, Mr. Lee, that this is a little bit too steep for me."

"It is certainly most remarkable," said Nelson Lee. "Yes, Mr. Beckett, we have come from beyond the ice. We did not expect to find any inhabited region in these frozen wastes. Therefore, the discovery of this valley is all the more astonishing."

The men were listening intently. And now the crowds had drawn nearer, and were catching every word that Nelson Lee spoke. They could understand him perfectly, of course, but his method of speech no doubt seemed very strange to them. Possibly more strange to them than their speech seemed to us.

"How didst thou come?" inquired William Beckett. "And, since thou hast come over these plains of ice, whence comest thou?"

"We are from the great world beyond," said Nelson Lee. "We come from England."

"Oh!"

"From England!"

"The land of our ancestors!"

All sorts of exclamations came from the listening crowds.

"Thy words are of great interest," said William Beckett. "Thou art surely welcome, my great masters. I am but a humble man, and Cobham Bend is merely a small village in the kingdom of St. Edmund."

"Where is your capital?" asked Lee.

"St. Edmund City lies but ten miles from here," replied William Beckett. "This is a great day, indeed, for our country. Thou wilt be greeted as honoured guests by His Majesty the King."

"Help!" murmured Dorrie. "So they've got a king!"

"It will please us greatly to appear before your king, Mr. Beckett," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Perhaps you will be good enough to send a messenger at once, announcing our arrival."

"Thy wish shall be accomplished, my master," said the other. "Hi, Master Chiswell, get thee off without delay. Run fleet-footed, and obtain an audience with His Majesty's Chamberlain, and inform him that great and wondrous guests have arrived in a strange craft from England herself. 'Tis the most wonderful day of days! Get thee gone, Master Chiswell."

"As, that I will," exclaimed a small, wiry-looking man in the crowd.

He dashed away, with many shouts from the crowd, and in a few moments he was lost to view.

"Thou wilt accept the hospitality of our village?" asked Beckett, waving his hand towards the inn. "I would give us great pleasure if thou wert to honour us, my masters."

"Thou art the friends of all friends!" said the other. "For thou hast come from England—thou hast come when we never expected to see thee. In the Kingdom of

St. Edmund thou wilt receive naught but hospitality and courtesy."

"Well, that's good, anyhow," said Dorrie. "By the way, what about the capital? Is it situated on the river?"

St. Edmund City lies on the left bank of our great river, sire," replied William Beckett. "'Tis a wondrous city, as thou wilt discover. A city of no less than ten thousand inhabitants."

"Well, hardly as big as London," said Major Barrance. "But, still, for a country like this I dare say it's a big place. Well, Mr. Lee, what shall we do? Might as well let the boys come ashore, eh?"

"Yes, there's no reason why they should be delayed," replied the gov'nor.

He could see quite easily that there was no fear of any hostile attack. These people were peaceful in the extreme, and regarded the newcomers with interest and a kind of awe. At first they had been rather afraid, but they had got over that by now.

And there was no reason why they should even attempt to harm any of us. We were obviously a peaceful party, and we were travellers from England. In some extraordinary way these people themselves were English—but although I racked my brain for some sort of explanation, I could not possibly think of one. I decided to give it up—we should learn in due course.

Major Barrance went striding down towards the river bank, and he waved his hand.

"All clear, young 'uns!" he shouted. "You can trot ashore!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors needed no second bidding. They leapt off the Rover's deck, and came rushing up to the spot where Nelson Lee was standing. We were all dressed in grey or white flannels, and looked our best. And we stared about us with tremendous interest—and I took particular notice of the people.

At close quarters I could now see that they were typically English in appearance, although, somehow, they seemed rather more coarse than our own villagers. The men were big and burly and muscular. The women, although English-like, were by no means good-looking. But the children were quite nice to gaze upon. They were all dressed well, and evidently prosperous.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Handforth, looking round. "This jolly well beats everything, you know. Hallo, you kid! What's your name?"

The juniors had found themselves surrounded by these people of St. Edmund. And one small boy was staring up at Handforth in undisguised amazement.

He made no reply as Handforth addressed him.

"What's your name?" repeated Handy. "Name, you fathead!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" muttered Church. "You can't get the kid to speak

if you yell like that! I say, youngster, what do they call you?"

"Tommy!" replied the youngster nervously.

"Tommy!" repeated Church. "Great Scott!"

"Nothing surprising in that!" snapped Handforth. "His name's Tommy, and he looks exactly like one of the kids in Bell-ton! One of the blacksmith's sons, I believe! Well, I can't get the hang of this at all."

"Absolutely not!" put in Archie. "I mean to say, the whole dashed thing's somewhat off the mark, if you know what I mean. Hardly absolutely believable, and so forth. What do you say, Phipps?"

"I am quite astonished, sir," said Phipps.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But, dash it all—astonished! Somewhat mild, Phipps! Hardly the exact old term to use, what? Personally, I might say that the brain department is positively foggy!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps. "That is not surprising, considering the extraordinary nature of our surroundings."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "We're bally well near St. Frank's, Phipps. I can't help thinking it, you know. All these coves are simply waltzing round all dressed up for a dashed carnival, and what not! We're not in the Antarctic, Phipps—absolutely not!"

"I can appreciate your difficulty, sir," said Phipps. "It is very hard to realise that we are not in England. And yet, although these people are English, there is something extremely quaint about the people themselves, and about the village. It has an old-world air."

"Phipps, you've got it!" said Archie. "I mean to say, you've absolutely biffed the old nail on the head! Old-world, what? Absolutely! It seems that we've staggered into the year seventeen hundred and twelve, or it might even be seventeen hundred and fifteen. I'm not the chappie to make a fuss over three bally years!"

Some of the other juniors were going up and down the village streets extremely interested in everything about them. And by now other inhabitants had appeared. Most of them looked very breathless and hot.

And we could easily guess that they had hurried in from outlying parts, as soon as the news of our arrival had reached their ears. We didn't even know what this kingdom was like, how big it was, or how many inhabitants existed, all told. We had struck the most outlying village, it seemed. And this, no doubt, was a very unimportant place.

The village streets were built almost exactly in the same style as the streets one sees in England herself. Many of the cottages were at least fifty or sixty years old. They were built on the old-fashioned principle—with low doorsteps, and tiny windows.

Most of them had thatched roofs, and they

looked very picturesque, with trees growing in the gardens, and with little hedges separating them from a highway.

But the most astonishing fact of all was that in the chief street there were a number of shops! These shops very closely resembled the village shops of the English countryside.

They were very small, and their windows were filled with all kinds of merchandise. There was a baker's shop, with loaves of bread, and cakes, and curious-looking home-made biscuits. Fatty Little was attracted to this establishment at once.

Another shop displayed an assortment of gardening tools—spades, forks, and things of that nature. They differed from our own tools—but only in their manufacture. They seemed to be roughly constructed, and were certainly hand-made.

The names over the shops were painted in neat, even characters, and they were all purely English, just as one sees at home. Such as Smith, or Barratt, or Crowson. Even now we could not contain our wonder.

The shops, however, were not provided with window-glass. The windows were open to the air, but we could see that they were all provided with shutters. Many, indeed, were barred—which seemed to indicate that thieves existed in this realm just the same as they did elsewhere.

And I now noticed that the cottages themselves had no glass. The windows were open, with little curtains behind, but all the windows had shutters. It seemed that this remarkable valley was never troubled with severe winds. Window-glass was really not necessary, for the temperature probably varied very little during the year.

"If this is one of the outlying villages, what must the capital be like?" asked Pitt. "Why, there's many a village in England just as sleepy as this. I'm not pretending to understand anything, and I've given up wondering. I'm just going to enjoy myself. Before long we shall be guests of the king!"

"My goodness!" said De Valerie. "It seems like a farce, you know—like one of these giddy musical comedies! Fancy these people having a king!"

"Well, it's only natural," declared Pitt. "There's a country here, and they've got to have somebody to rule over it. Hold on! Take care of Fatty! The greedy ass is buzzing into that shop!"

Fatty Little, in fact, was already in. He had been persuaded not to be tempted by the cakes and the biscuits, but he could not hold himself back. And so, while the other fellows were looking the other way, he opened the door and dodged inside.

The place was empty except for himself.

"Great doughnuts!" murmured Fatty.

"What a lovely niff!"

The shop certainly did smell very nice, and Fatty gazed longingly at the piles of eatables. And he became very impatient.

He rapped upon the counter vigorously—for the shop was provided with similar fitting to an ordinary English country bakers. There was no response to Fatty's hammerings.

"Shop!" he shouted.

A moment later the door opened, and a man appeared. His very coat proclaimed his calling, for it was covered with white powder.

"Thou wilt honour me by partaking of my poor supplies, O young sire?" he asked politely.

"You bet!" said Fatty. "How much are they?"

"Thou wilt eat thy fill without payment," replied the man. "For thou art surely honouring my humble establishment by entering."

"You're a brick!" exclaimed Fatty eagerly. "And now I come to think of it, my money wouldn't be much good to you because it's probably different to yours. Thanks! My hat, they look ripping!"

He had sampled some of the cakes, and they proved to be extremely palatable. They were not quite sweet enough for Fatty's usual taste. But he always enjoyed anything between meals. And he hadn't experienced the thrill of entering a tuck-shop for weeks and weeks.

The cakes, so far as he could judge, were made from ordinary flour, although they seemed to have a little different taste. They contained fruit, too, and Fatty didn't trouble to investigate what kind of fruit it was.

"I say, these things are great!" he declared. "You're a stunner, you know. I sha'n't want more than six of these, and then about two dozen of those biscuits, and a few—"

"Here he is!" cried a voice from the doorway. "You—you glutton! Coming here and scoffing everything in the shop! Collar him!"

"Hi, look out—"

But before Fatty could protest any further, he was seized, and slung out of the shop like a sack. And he was held down in the middle of the road by Handforth and five or six other fellows. The villagers looked on in astonishment and alarm. Perhaps they thought that Fatty was in danger.

"Lemme go, you rotters!" roared Fatty. "That chap was just giving me a snack, and—"

"Well, you can't have a snack now," said De Valerie. "We're not going to have you giving us a bad reputation in this village! You had a whacking great breakfast, and you'll have to wait until lunch-time. We don't want gluttons—"

"I'm nearly starving!" howled Fatty. "And those cakes are ripping—and the chap was going to give me some for nothing!"

But Fatty was drawn away from the establishment, and he was not allowed to approach it again. After that he was kept

constantly surrounded by a kind of body-guard. However, he needn't have worried.

For very shortly afterwards we were called together by Nelson Lee, who informed us that a special meal had been prepared in the Jumping Fox, the village hostelry. The landlord was making a special feast in our honour.

It turned out to be a simple repast, but very appetising.

Meat was provided, with bread. The meat was cold mutton, and was very palatable to us after having lived for such a long time on tinned foods, and other unfamiliar dishes. The mutton was excellent, and splendidly roasted. And with it we had large earthenware mugs of beer.

At first Nelson Lee was rather against this, but he soon found that the beer was very mild—indeed, it seemed to be quite non-alcoholic. In all probability, a stronger quality was kept for those who required it.

The meal took quite a long time, for we were talking with our hosts with much interest and animation. They asked us countless questions about England. And we, in return, asked them questions about their own country.

We heard that the City of St. Edmund was a wonderful place—a city of brilliant lights and marvellous shops, where people went about in the best of clothing, and where only the rich and influential could live.

St. Edmund City, too, was the centre of the army, where soldiers held full sway. By what we could understand, half the male population of the whole country were soldiers.

This seemed a great mystery to us. Why should a peaceful little state like this require an army at all?

We asked questions regarding this point, but could receive no definite answer—we only obtained vague references to the "New Anglians." We didn't know who the New Anglians were, or where they entered into the picture.

And then, before we could make any further inquiries, there came the sound of wheels grinding upon the roadway. By what we could hear, there were many of them. And most of the juniors made a dash outside.

Handforth was the first out—as usual. He generally managed to be in the forefront of anything. And he came to a halt just outside the quaint doorway, and stood there, gasping.

"Great pip!" he said faintly. "What the—"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What—what are they?"

The juniors all came to a halt, and there was every reason for Handforth's amazement, for they were gazing upon a scene which took them quite by surprise, and which caused them to stare with wide open eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

KING JASPER, THE WAR LORD.



IN the roadway, just in front of the inn, stood four strange-looking vehicles. Everything in this region had been so English-like that we were hardly prepared to see something of a revolutionary character. Yet there was no doubt that these vehicles were dissimilar to anything we had ever seen, or even imagined.

In the first place, they were made of burnished metal. They gleamed so brightly that they glittered and shone. The wheels were enormously large, reaching almost to the height of the covered carriage portion. And these wheels were beautifully true, and engineered so perfectly that one could not see a fault.

The vehicles had no animals to draw them—which seemed to indicate that they were power driven. There could be no question of this, indeed, for there were two men upon the front of each.

These men were enclosed in a kind of driving space, which was completely shut off from the rest of the conveyance. And beneath the main body of the vehicles there were large cogs to be seen—cogs and driving wheels. Altogether, they seemed to be very complicated pieces of machinery.

"Why, they're motor-cars!" gasped Handforth.

"They can't be!" said Church. "Not ordinary motor-cars, anyway. But just look at the men! My hat, they look a fierce lot, if you like!"

The men accompanying the strange coaches were all attired in a vastly different fashion from the inhabitants we had already seen. Indeed, it was not difficult to tell that these men were soldiers.

They were in gorgeous uniform—the chief colours of which were green and orange. All sorts of ornamentations were fitted to the tunics and the sleeves and the headgear. They looked wonderfully smart, and were well trained. Their faces were hard-looking and rugged.

But, although it was evident they were accustomed to severe discipline, this was relaxed now. The men stared at the St. Frank's fellows in undisguised amazement. Indeed, they appeared to be almost stupefied.

Probably they had thought that the report was unfounded—that these simple villagers had received a kind of scare over nothing. But at the very sight of our party, the soldiers knew that we were indeed visitors from the outside world.

Then Nelson Lee and Dorrie appeared, and they were just in time to see a metal door slide silently up into the roof of the nearest coach. And two men emerged. These were obviously high court officials.



"I say, these things are great!" declared Fatty Little. "You're a stunner, you know. I sha'n't want more than six of them, and then about two dozen of those biscuits, and a few——"

They were attired in clothing which fairly dazzled the eyesight—rich robes of glorious colours. And as soon as they appeared the village folk backed away, bowing and curtsying.

Nelson Lee walked off, with Lord Dorrimore.

"I think we'd better break the ice, old man," murmured Dorrie.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"We are strangers within your kingdom, gentlemen," he said, saluting. "We come from England—far across the icy wastes and the seas. We had no knowledge that you lived here, but we are gratified to find English-speaking people in these regions. My name is Nelson Lee, and my friend is the Earl of Dorrimore."

Both the newcomers started with surprise.

"This is truly amazing!" exclaimed one of them. "I greet thee in the name of King Jasper of St. Edmund. Thou art welcome to our country, my noble strangers. The fact that thou hast come from our own England—the land of our ancestors—is indeed wondrous news."

"We are friends, and we wish to have safe escort to your capital," said Nelson Lee.

"Thy wish shall be granted, Master Nelson Lee," said the other. "My name is Sir Humphrey Everard, and I occupy the post of King's Equerry. My companion is the Most Noble the Marquis of Thornton, the King's Minister for Interior Affairs."

"My hat!" murmured Handforth. "Big pots!"

"But isn't it absolutely startling?" breathed Church. "Sir Humphrey! And a marquis! Just like we have in England!"

"Well, why not?" asked Handforth. "These people say that their ancestors used to live in England, so I suppose they've been carrying on in the same old way. Still, it's a bit startling, as you say."

In a very short time matters were arranged.

Nelson Lee declared that it would be impossible to go to the capital in a body—for a certain number would be required to remain behind with the Golden Rover. It was, therefore, decided that about twelve of us should accompany the court party by road, while the rest would go on board the Rover, and do the trip by river.

For this purpose a number of the king's soldiers were told off to go on board the airship to act as guides, and also as an escort of honour. There was no doubt that the people of St. Edmund were doing things in style.

We were beginning to realise that they were far from being the sleepy lot we had at first imagined. And it was, after all, rather wrong to judge them by the inhabitants of a small, outlying village. It was similar to judging London by the appearance of an insignificant fishing village on the Suffolk coast.

These well-trained soldiers told of a powerful capital, and the two court officials were obviously well educated, and perfectly gentlemanly in their bearing.

We learned that the journey by river would probably take longer, for there were many twists and turns in the watercourse. It was arranged that half the juniors should come with the party by road, and the other half were to go on the Rover. Of course, there was a good deal of squabbling and excitement. All the fellows wanted to go by road—they wanted to see how these strange-looking vehicles went.

But it was impossible for us all to travel by this means, and Nelson Lee settled all argument by naming the fellows who were to travel in style with the Marquis of Thornton and Sir Humphrey Everard. I was included among the lucky ones, also Sir Montie and Archie and Handforth and Co. and Pitt.

Mr. Gray would take charge of the Rover with Major Barrance. And so, in a very short time, we started off.

By this time we were getting more accustomed to the truth. We had had time to get over our initial amazement. We took these people for granted, and could only wait patiently for an explanation of their presence in this strange Antarctic land.

We started off almost immediately afterwards. I could not help feeling that it might be a bit risky in leaving the Golden Rover in this way. We never knew when we should see her again. We could only hope that everything would be all right,

and that these people would treat us as friends. Nelson Lee evidently trusted them, so it was all right.

The interior of the coach I entered was richly decorated with some kind of plush material and glittering fittings. The seats were springy and comfortable, and there was ample accommodation for six of us.

"This seems a bit queer!" said Tommy Watson softly. "I wonder how the dickens the thing runs! And did you notice that the wheels were all made of metal? We shall kick up an awful row, and jolt terrifically!"

"It seems like it," I agreed. "But I don't suppose there's any rubber in this place. And even if there is, the people have probably never discovered the value of it."

While I was speaking the coach started forward. There was a curious whirring sound, and a click, and then we glided off. The wheels ground gratingly upon the stones, but I was very surprised to find that the motion was quite smooth. The coach was sprung in a very effective manner.

And I was rather startled by the speed it attained.

"Why, we're going along like a blessed Rolls-Royce!" exclaimed Pitt. "I wonder how these things are driven? I didn't see the engine, and there doesn't appear to be any throbbing or vibration."

"By what I can see, they must be driven by some kind of clockwork," I replied. "That's about the only reasonable solution. Didn't you notice the cogs and things? It seems to be all machinery underneath, and there can't be any other explanation. We're going along all right, anyhow!"

The sides of the coach were open, and we looked out upon the scenery with great interest. We were travelling along a fairly narrow country road—a road which reminded me of England. Of course, a great many of the trees and hedges and plants were of a different character. We saw strange trees, unfamiliar grasses, and meadows full of remarkable-looking vegetation.

It wasn't the verdure which reminded me of home—it couldn't, because it was vastly different. But everywhere was set out and arranged in almost the same manner as an English countryside. There were the hedge-rows and the lanes themselves. It could be easily understood that these had been originally planned and developed by people who had used England as their model.

That was the reason for this reminiscent aspect of the whole country. But it had been modelled upon an England of many hundreds of years ago. The cottages, the general aspect of the whole scenery, was old English.

The modern things we had seen in this land were totally unlike the modern things of our own civilisation. We were astounded, for example, by the efficiency of these glittering coaches.

We could not even name the metal they were made of. And we could only form random guesses at their motive power. We only knew that they were very comfortable to ride in, and speedy in motion. And before long we discovered that we were yet to test them in their real element.

For, after travelling about a mile, we suddenly turned out of the wooded lane into a much broader highway. This was a wide, superbly manufactured road. In many respects it beat anything I have ever seen at home.

The centre of the roadway was made of stone and gravel, after the fashion of the highways we knew. But on either side ran a wide, separated pathway—a kind of smooth track twenty or thirty feet wide. And this was as smooth as a table-top, and perfectly clean, being of a brownish-grey colour. One glance was sufficient to tell me that these pathways were composed of some manufactured substance.

And while I was looking, a huge coach came by in the opposite direction—a conveyance much larger than those which carried us. It swept along at a great pace, and with hardly a sound.

The next moment we were speeding along one of these tracks. The difference in the running was remarkable. We glided along smoothly and silently—practically as silently as a modern motor-car.

"Well, this is rather rich!" I said, smiling. "These people have developed their cars in a different way to us. Instead of putting tyres on the wheels, they've put something just as good on the road."

"It is amazin', dear old boy, it is, really!" said Tregellis-West. "I presume that these coaches are not supposed to leave the special tracks. But they made an exception this time in our honour."

"That's about it," I agreed. "Obviously, villages like Cobham Bend don't receive visits by these conveyances very often. Well, it's all jolly interesting, and we never expected anything like it. Why, this adventure is turning out to be more amazing than any we have yet experienced."

"Rather!" cried Tommy Watson.

We didn't speak much after that, for we were so interested in watching the scenery and the various villages through which we passed. These little towns were quite different from the sleepy place we had first encountered.

They were on the main road, and were much more heavily populated. And everywhere we caught sight of the soldiers. They seemed to be present in many hundreds. And we could not understand why a country like this should require an army at all. It was a puzzle which would probably be solved later.

And as we progressed we noticed that the fields and woods were disappearing. There were houses everywhere, and the further we went the more modern they became. It

was only the old dwellings and cottages which reminded us of England. The newer ones were built in quite a different style. Yet, in their chief features, they did not differ greatly from the accepted principles.

And then, at length, we entered St. Edmund City.

We knew at once that we had arrived at the capital. For we came upon a great, imposing gateway. And before we could pass through, a halt was called, and the gates had to be opened.

This big gateway was a huge, towering, red stone structure, superbly designed. The workmanship was well nigh perfect. The gates were all glittering metal—and this made me wonder if the people here had discovered the secret of rustless iron. And the metal certainly appeared to be iron by its cold glint.

Once inside the city, we were quite enthralled.

We found ourselves passing through wide, imposing streets. People were walking about busily, as though intent upon the labour of the day. No particular attention was given to us.

Now and again people caught sight of our faces at the windows of the coaches, and these people would stop and stare. But we had gone before they could take a good look.

Obviously, nothing was known of our intended arrival.

We passed many imposing buildings. They were not gorgeous or dazzling, but very soundly built and exquisitely designed. And the general run of the living houses and the business establishments was of a high order. Yet in places old buildings still remained.

In fact, I couldn't help being reminded of London itself—where one may pass along a busy city street and find tumble-down buildings rubbing shoulders with the most modern steel-construction edifices. These people here were developing their central city in just the same way as other nations.

During the course of this ride we saw hundreds of people, and the majority of them seemed to be well dressed and well cared for. The majority of the men wore stockings and breeches and tunics, with open necks. And practically all the men were wearing comfortable-looking sandals upon their feet. But the clothing differed greatly in style and colour. One man would be wearing quite a bright green, and another a dazzling red. The effect of all these colours was most brilliant to the eye.

In fact, the clothing of the inhabitants provided a striking contrast to the men's clothing of an English city. Here, apparently, the men loved colours as much as the women, and I must say that I preferred it. The whole city had an air of being in the midst of a carnival week. And there can be no doubt that bright colours tend to make things cheerful.

We turned into another wide thorough-

fare, and here we saw that the river was bordering the road on one side—a wide stretch of river, with green fields and forests on the other side. The city occupied one bank only.

And now we found ourselves going much more slowly. And we could see an imposing building of white stones. There were towers and domes reaching up to the sky, and we had little doubt that this was the king's palace.

I was not particularly impressed by the general appearance of the people. They seemed to be rather a coarse-looking lot. They were powerful, and their faces were by no means handsome.

But we could really tell nothing by this. They were all white, and very obviously of British stock. And this fact alone made us feel that we were among our own people, and not in the midst of an unknown race.

"Here we are!" said Tommy Watson softly.

The coach had come to a halt, and we found that the others had pulled up, too, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie had alighted. We jumped down, and found that numbers of people were hurrying up from all directions.

Sir Humphrey Everard frowned severely.

"We cannot allow the public to bother us!" he said stiffly. "If thou wilt come with us, His Majesty will give thee audience at once."

"Thank you!" said Nelson Lee. "We will come."

And, surrounded by a bodyguard of the soldiers, we walked briskly into a paved courtyard. Then we entered a fine stone building, and were escorted along a wide passage into a great chamber. It was furnished in a splendid style, with soft lounges and massive tables and chairs.

The Marquis of Thornton went off at once, and we easily guessed that he had hurried away to acquaint the king of our arrival. And we were intensely curious to see what this king would be like, and how he would greet us.

We had not long to wait.

The marquis returned within five minutes, and bowed.

"The king awaits thy presence, my wondrous friends," he said, in a stately way. "He desires to grant thee an audience at once."

"We are honoured!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

"Well, I must say he seems to be a business-like chap, this king," murmured Dorrie, as he moved forward. "No messin' about—no waitin'. I've got an idea that I shall rather like him. An' I'm simply dyin' to hear how these people started a kingdom on their own."

We had come to a slight pause at the end of the big apartment, for the Marquis of Thornton had met a distinguished-looking man with a small, pointed beard. This new-

comer was dressed in a rich uniform, and upon his breast there were many decorations. He was regarding us with open curiosity and interest. In fact, I thought he stared quite a lot—but this was not surprising.

"Kindly allow me to introduce General Horton, chief of the Army of St. Edmund!" said the marquis, with a grand sweep of his arm. "General Horton, these gentlemen are visitors to our kingdom from our mother country."

"'Tis splendid, indeed!" exclaimed General Horton. "Thou wilt surely understand, brave strangers, that we are of exceeding wonderment. For 'twas never believed that we should receive emissaries from the England we only know of through the writings of our ancestors. 'Tis a great day!"

"I quite agree," said the gov'nor. "There is one favour I would beg of you gentlemen. Our vessel will be due in the river very shortly, and I trust that you will place a strong bodyguard on the Embankment. For no doubt the public will display unwonted curiosity."

"I have already suggested to General Horton what should be done," replied the marquis. "A special body of picked soldiers will be placed in charge of your splendid ship. Thy friends will be brought ashore, and escorted into the presence of his Majesty. Thou need have no fear, Master Lee. 'Twill be well. But we must not tarry. His Majesty awaits!"

It was very quaint to hear the peculiar method of speech of these people. It made us think that we were listening to some old-time play, or something of that kind. In many ways, however, the speech differed from the old-style English. The St. Edmund people had made alterations of their own.

Now and again, for example, we heard a word that was quite meaningless to us. These valley people had undoubtedly coined words for themselves, and it would take us some little time to find out their exact meaning.

But we did not think of this now.

We were passing along rich corridors—on the way to the King.

The whole party of us went, including the juniors. And the latter were in a state of subdued excitement and anticipation.

"I'm blessed if I can get the proper hang of it!" murmured Pitt, as we walked along. "This palace, for example—it's a ripping place, you know. Nobody would expect to find such splendid buildings. And the King—just fancy them having a proper King!"

"That's what makes it seem so strange," I said. "And the names are all so familiar and commonplace to us—General Horton, Sir Humphrey Everard! They're just the kind of names that one sees in England."

"But why are there any titled people?" asked Tommy Watson. "How can they have the authority to give themselves earldoms and—"

"My dear chap, they've formed themselves into a separate nation," I interrupted. "There's no doubt that they were lost to the world hundreds of years ago. And so, cut off from outer civilisation, they developed on their own. And, naturally, they kept things up in the same old style as they had known in England. They set up a king and a parliament, and carried on."

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie. "At the same time, old scream, it's most dashed remarkable. I mean to say, it's absolutely priceless, and what not! Perhaps the bally old King will hand round a few honours, to suit the occasion! It would be most frightfully topping to have Handforth a duke, don't you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd jolly soon make my weight felt, anyhow!" said Handforth. "A duke's a responsible person, and if you chaps cackle again, I'll jolly well show you the shape of my fist!"

"Cut it out, Handy," I put in. "You can't do any punching here. We're just about to enter the King's presence——"

"Blow the King——"

"Silence, boys!" commanded Nelson Lee, turning his head and frowning. "Kindly remember that you must comport yourselves with dignity. It would not be well for these people to gain a bad impression of England's boyhood."

I grinned.

"Now we're told off, my son!" I murmured.

Handforth opened his mouth to speak, but before any words could come two great doors were flung open by a pair of gaudily attired flunkies. And they stood at rigid attention.

The Marquis of Thornton waved his hand. "The King awaits thy presence!" he said smoothly.

And we passed into the audience chamber, wondering and filled with curiosity.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore led the way, and the boys brought up the rear. We were greatly impressed by the lavish nature of the decorations in this chamber. Indeed, by what I could see, it was something more than an audience apartment. It was indeed, the very throne room of the palace.

Apparently, the king intended to impress us.

And then we saw his Majesty seated upon his throne at the far end of the great apartment. In many respects the place reminded me of an old-fashioned English chapel—a place with stone pillars and arched roof. There were long openings, with wonderful windows. Even if they had no windows in the country villages, they certainly had them in the capital. They were coloured, and opaque, but plenty of light came through.

We proceeded up the great room, and at last were right in front of the King himself. I looked at him with frank interest. He was a powerful man—big, with a square

cut face and hard, glittering eyes. My first impression was not very favourable, but this may have been fancy.

King Jasper was a man of about forty-five, clean-shaven, and obviously in the full vigour of his prime. He was attired in royal robes, and he waved his hand in a condescending kind of way.

"Welcome, strangers from afar!" he exclaimed, in a deep voice. "Thou art surely the most wondrous visitors our city has ever received. I would wish thee to be at ease in my presence. For I would fain have much converse with thee."

"What-ho!" murmured Archie. "I mean to say, dashed priceless, what?"

Numbers of gorgeously attired flunkies flitted about us, and placed chairs at our disposal. And we sat down, and felt rather honoured. Handforth sprawled himself about as though visiting kings was an everyday pastime. He lounged in his chair, crossed his legs, and looked round.

"H'm, not so bad!" he observed. "I shall have to have a chat with the king myself soon. But I'll let Mr. Lee have the first go."

This was exceedingly kind of Handforth—but, of course, he took very good care that Nelson Lee did not hear the words. And then I was all attention, for the guv'nor and King Jasper were talking. And I particularly wanted to hear what their conversation was about.

CHAPTER V.

THE KING'S STRANGE SECRECY!



KING JASPER THE SECOND OF ST. EDMUND was a good speaker, and he was quite at his ease. He had been greatly surprised by our appearance at first but now he

was looking at Nelson Lee with perfect calmness. And I thought I detected a cunning light in his eyes.

But surely this could not be the case with a king?

His Majesty was very curious concerning ourselves—he didn't seem particularly disposed to give any information on his own account. Nelson Lee was answering his questions, and Dorrie was lending a hand now and again.

"You have come from England?" the King was asking. "That, indeed, is strange news, my friends. For England is but a myth to our people. We know that our ancestors were of English blood and stock. But the present generation knows nothing of the home country. Thou wilt be granting me a favour by enlarging upon the subject."

"It will give me great pleasure to tell you much concerning England and the world in general," said Nelson Lee. "But if you are interested in the world, your Majesty,

we are trebly interested in your own little kingdom. Never in our wildest dreams did we expect to find such a country amid the endless snows of the Antarctic."

"Thy words are not at all clear to me," said the king. "But I judge the speech of thy country differs somewhat from the speech of mine. But now that thou hast come here, what is thy intention? 'Twill be no benefit to me if thou takest back word of my kingdom. For perchance 'twill mean that my powers will be removed by the great emperors beyond."

"I do not think you need fear that, sire," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "This land is so completely cut off from the outside world that you will probably be left to live in peace and prosperity as hitherto. It is not our intention to interfere with your affairs in any way."

"That, indeed, is good hearing," said the King. "Perchance thou art wondering why this nation came to be formed? Thou art curious to know how it came about that a branch of the English people settled in this wondrously fertile valley amid the ever-present ice?"

"We're simply dyin' to know the truth of it," said Dorrie.

"I will give thee a brief outline of the facts," exclaimed the King. "Later it will give me vast pleasure to escort thee round our historical department. There you will find records and writings of our nation since its inception. Fortunately, all the facts are known concerning this lost branch of the British people."

"But how did you first get here?" inquired Lord Dorrimore.

"According to our great historians, a powerful pilgrim ship set off from the shores of England in the year sixteen hundred and eighty-four," replied King Jasper. "This ship was called St. Edmund, and she was a big and mighty craft. We know of no ship within our own experience, since 'tis impossible to build such vessels for our river. But we have pictures of this ship—pictures which were drawn by men who sailed in her. And from generation to generation the records have been preserved."

"I see!" exclaimed Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "You understand, Dorrie? A pilgrim ship! A vessel which set off across the ocean in the seventeenth century. I am beginning to see light!"

The King nodded.

"This ship contained eight hundred and fifty souls," he said. "In addition, there were a hundred men belonging to the crew. 'Twas indeed a mighty craft."

"For those days, perhaps, but not so mighty in modern times," smiled Lord Dorrimore. "No doubt you will be surprised, old man, to learn that ships leave British ports every day containing thousands of passengers. Plenty of 'em can carry thousands of tons of merchandise, too."

"'Tis wonderful!" said the King. "But

I will tell thee of the St. Edmund. This great vessel sailed with men, women, and children, with the object of forming a colony in some strange country known as Argentine—a wild and desolate land towards the south of the great American continent."

"Well, you seem to know a bit about geography, anyhow," remarked Dorrie.

The King smiled.

"We have books—maps—all manner of things which tell us of the big world," he said. "We know of great countries many thousands of miles distant—China, the Indies, France, Spain! We read of these things, but 'twas never our fortune to see such lands. For we have been hemmed in within the icy barriers which thou hast seen encircling our valley."

"And, of course, you could never cross the ice?" asked Lee.

"In past years many adventurous parties have set off, in vain attempts to find the outside world," replied the King gravely. "Some of these foolish souls have returned, but most of them perished amid the snow and ice—amid the fierce storms of the frozen region."

"I can quite understand that," said Nelson Lee. "Even the most modern expeditions from England, equipped with every facility, failed time after time to penetrate this icy waste. And those who succeeded of recent years really discovered little—or practically nothing. It is easy to understand that your own task—the task of discovering the outside world—was impossible."

"We gave up all hope of ever seeing those in different countries," said King Jasper. "Thou may imagine our wondrous surprise, therefore, when we learned that strangers from the Great Beyond had appeared within our land—strangers who had come through the mystic cavern in a magic vessel."

"Precisely," said Lee. "But, concerning this pilgrim ship, sire. Can you tell us a few more details with regard to it?"

"Ah, yes!" said the king. "Thou art anxious to hear? 'Tis well! The St. Edmund, according to our records, met with fearful storms in the outer ocean. The vessel was blown hither and thither in the great wind. The hurricane raged for many days and weeks. And the sails and masts of the St. Edmund were swept away, leaving her a helpless hulk. And thus, with all these souls on board—our ancestors—she drifted in amongst the southern ice."

"But surely the vessel became icebound?" inquired Lee.

"It seems that a miracle took place," replied the king. "Thou wilt remember that these are but stories which have been handed down by our historians. We can know nothing from personal experience. But 'tis written that a great waterway opened for the St. Edmund—a wondrous channel, through which the ship drifted until she was many miles within the grip of the

all-destroying ice. And then, most extraordinary of all things, the water became warm, and the ice in the vicinity melted. 'Twas the miracle."

"Due to volcanic action!" said Dorrie, nodding.

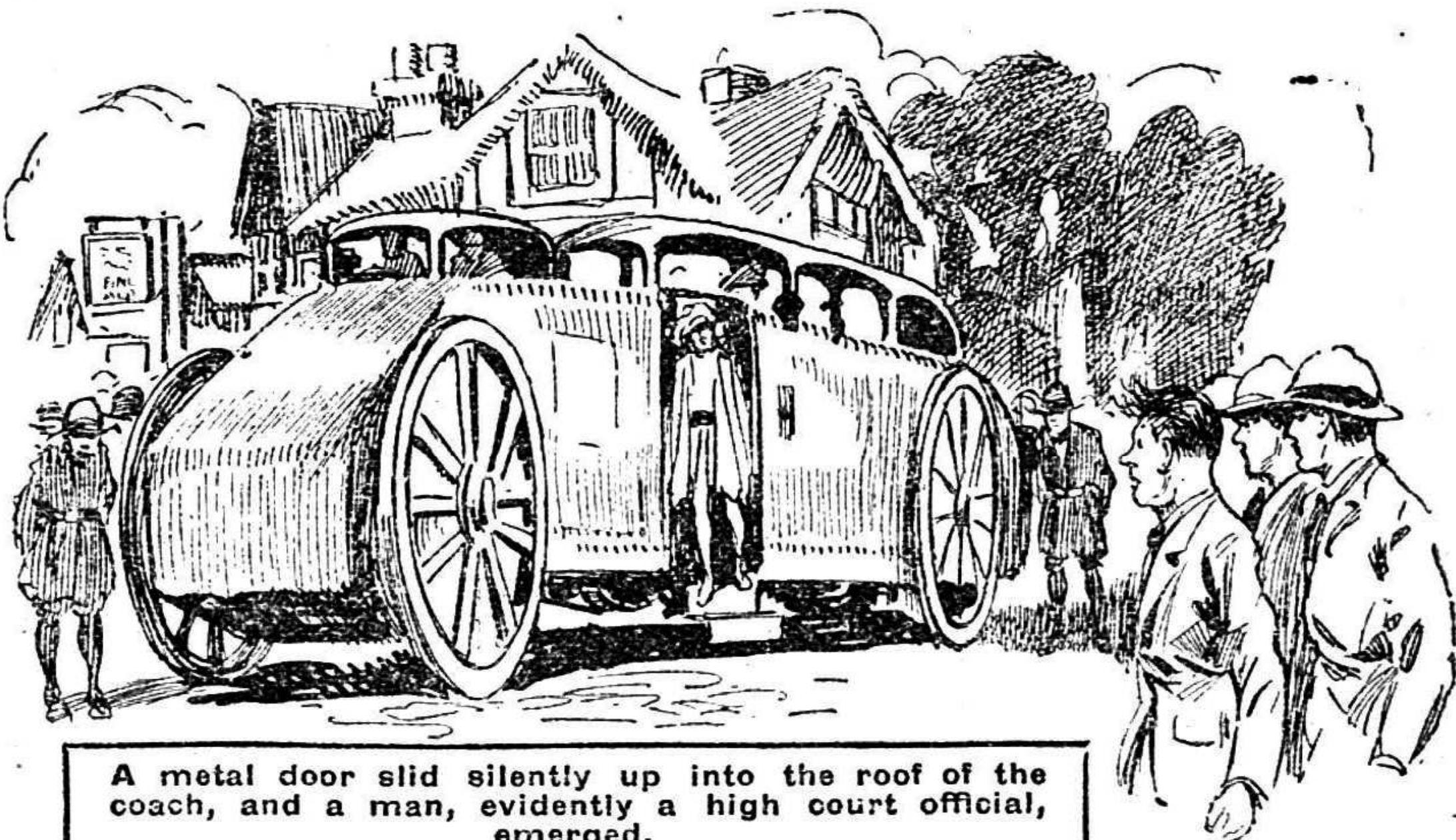
"The St. Edmund drifted on--until, at length, she lay within a cavern of mystery and terror," continued the king. "But here 'twas warm and comforting. Our ancestors, starving and exhausted, were enabled to land. And this they did, travelling through forests of fungus until the country thou hast seen spread before their eyes. And here they settled."

"Amazing!" said Nelson Lee. "And yet, after all, it is perfectly reasonable and

upon colonising," replied King Jasper. "They brought beasts with them on board. The origin of the rabbits remains a mystery. But perchance some of the children carried them as pets. Thus they became loose, with the result that many of our country districts are now infested with these little animals--although doubtless they provide excellent food for the poorer class."

"To say nothin' of bein' converted into coney seal for makin' fur coats!" smiled Lord Dorrimore. "However, that's beside the point. You must let me congratulate you on the astonishing progress that has been made. Why, hang it all, you've done wonders in two-fifty years!"

The king shook his head.



A metal door slid silently up into the roof of the coach, and a man, evidently a high court official, emerged.

straightforward. I can quite see how everything took place. The St. Edmund, with her cargo of humanity, set out for the Argentine in order to build a colony. But the cruel storms of the Southern Atlantic gripped her, and carried her into the Antarctic region. There she became the sport of an ocean current which carried her deeper and deeper into the ice. No doubt the volcanic cause of the hot stream was in a great state of disturbance--thus making this stream more powerful than usual. And the St. Edmund was carried to within easy reach of this valley."

"Thou hast spoken wisely," said the king. "'Tis even as thou sayest, my friend."

"What about the sheep?" asked Dorrie. "We saw numerous flocks of mutton on the way, to say nothin' of sundry rabbits!"

"Thou wilt easily understand that the pilgrims on this great ship were intent

"We have progressed but slowly," he replied. "Thou wilt recall that our forefathers modelled their towns and villages upon those of England. And as we have increased and multiplied these towns have grown larger and larger. Originally there was but a ruling chief of the settlement. But for over a hundred-and-fifty years past a king has ruled over the country of St. Edmund."

"So it took them a hundred years to get things into shipshape order," said Nelson Lee. "By that time, of course, the population had increased enormously, I suppose?"

"'Tis as thou sayest," replied His Majesty. "Our ancestors discovered that the soil of this valley is wondrous rich. Foodstuffs which grow slowly in England spring up in an amazingly short time here. Thus there was plenty of food for all, and every reason to encourage rapid population. Our learned

men of these days are now vastly worried, since they declare that within a hundred years we shall be overcrowded within the confines of our valley."

"Well, you're no different to most other countries," smiled Nelson Lee. "Even in England we have our population worries. I am greatly interested in your history, sire, and it would please me enormously to dip into your records. In the meantime, it would please us all to see round your city."

"Thy wish shall be granted, Master Lee," replied the king gravely. "I am proud of my country, and thou wilt understand my pride. Seest thou the view from yon window. 'Tis superb!"

He indicated the largest window in the apartment, and the Marquis of Thornton at once went across and opened the window to its widest extent. And then the king invited us to gaze out.

"Wilt come?" grinned Handforth.

"Yea, verily!" replied Pitt with a chuckle.

But Nelson Lee gave them a severe look, and they indulged in no more pleasantries. The gov'nor and Dorrie were standing at the window, and the king himself condescended to join them.

The view was certainly a splendid one.

Standing there, they could see right over the city, and over the grassy plains beyond. In the extreme distance there were many hills and dales, with little wooded patches here and there. And the river could be seen, too. The whole scene was most entrancing."

"Wonderful!" commented Lee. "But I cannot quite understand the high wall, sire. Surely, it is a wall that I can see?"

He pointed, and we all looked. And then we noticed that something ran right across the countryside in the far distance. Now that the gov'nor had mentioned it, I could easily recognise this something as a stupendously high wall. It seemed to be built of stone, and, reckoning for the distance, I judged it to be at least two hundred feet in height. And a wall of this character, it must be admitted, is something of a startler.

The king frowned darkly, and I saw his lips draw up tight.

"'Tis naught!" he replied stiffly.

"It looks to me like somethin' pretty big!" said Dorrie. "Anyhow, a wall like that would keep most people on one side of it. By gad! I suppose it's the wall of the state prison?"

"By no means," replied King Jasper. "The prison lies in the centre of the city itself. I will explain to thee how the great wall came to be built. But 'tis an unsavoury subject, as thou wilt appreciate. When our nation was in the process of formation there were certain knaves and ruffians who caused dire trouble. For years and many years the people put up with these vile wretches. But well over a

hundred years ago the reigning monarch of the day—King William—decided to sort out the ruffianly element. This he did, and he confined them to the southern section of the valley. He barred them off by building this vast wall. They are not permitted to mix with our own people, for they are ruffians—they are brutes and murderers."

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie. "That's a first-rate idea, you know! I think we ought to recommend it to our own secretary, Lee! Bar off about two counties in England, and shove all the undesirables in that section! As soon as anybody breaks the law, off he goes to the barred-off region. Great!"

"I am afraid it could not be successfully managed in England," smiled Nelson Lee. "But it is certainly successful here."

"Thou wilt understand that we have nought to do with these people now," said the king. "Not a word has passed between the two peoples during the past fifty years. They live in their own country, and we live in ours. Nevertheless, it is necessary for me to keep a powerful army. In case these brutes break loose, I must have some protection for my people."

"So that accounts for the soldiers!" said Nelson Lee. "How many of these ruffians are there?"

"Many thousands, but a mere handful in comparison to our own numbers," replied the king. "They live in hovels—in dwellings that would disgust thee. The Kingdom of St. Edmund is clean and pure. We will not have it contaminated by these undesirables."

Nelson Lee looked away at the high wall thoughtfully. The idea of shutting off a big section of the nation was a strange one—but perhaps it had been necessary. There was no escape from this valley. Brutal characters could not be shipped abroad and packed away to the colonies.

And it was quite likely that there had been minor revolutions in the past history of St. Edmund. And one of the reigning monarchs had taken firm, decisive action, shutting off the anarchist element and keeping them to themselves.

I could easily guess what Nelson Lee was thinking about. It would not be so long before we examined that section of the country beyond the wall. For, in the Rover, we could soar over the wall with ease, and see everything. The king did not know this. None of these inhabitants of St. Edmund were aware that the Golden Rover could fly.

They regarded the vessel as a seagoing ship solely. And Nelson Lee intended to spring a surprise on the king by taking him on a trip into the sky. It would be a wonderful experience. For, without doubt, this lost branch of the English nation knew nothing of the wonders of flying.

It would be impossible for me to go into full details of the happenings of that wonderful day.

Events crowded upon one another in rapid succession.

The Golden Rover arrived while we were still in audience with the king, and the other members of our party were brought up into His Majesty's presence. And I noted that neither Mr. Raymond Gray nor Jock McGregor nor 'Orace 'Awkins were among the party. They had remained on board, guarding the Rover.

But the rest of us had a tremendous time.

We were taken round the city in a series of those surprising clockwork-like coaches. And the whole place was in a fever of excitement and amaze. All the people knew of our arrival by now. We were stared at as though we were so many freaks. At first it seemed to be rude, but I realised that Londoners would have done just the same if a crowd of these St. Edmund people had driven through Whitehall and the Strand and Fleet Street.

But it was a ripping time for us.

Crowds, too, stared wonderingly at the Golden Rover. There was not very much to see, since the vessel was over half-submerged. When the Rover was shortened down, so to speak, for sea travel, she was not very imposing—merely a bulging body, with a deck on the top. The better part of her was below the surface.

We were all impressed by the city. It was not so very large—no larger than an ordinary sleepy English country town. But there were many things which took us quite by surprise.

The place was a mixture.

In parts we saw old-fashioned things which had been obsolete in England for a hundred years. In other parts we saw things which have not even been invented in the modern world. The lighting arrangements of the city, for example, were quite wonderful and clever.

There were great towers at intervals among the main roads—imposing structures, which we did not understand at first. But when the gloom of the evening came on—it never got absolutely dark in this region—those towers sprang into life. Balls of fire appeared at the summits.

These were absolutely dazzling, and cast a wonderful glow in all directions. We couldn't see how these lights were obtained, for there seemed to be no lamps. The secret, no doubt, was that some kind of gas was used. But this was not the case.

We learned, afterwards, that the lights were obtained by a remarkable chemical action—an invention of a St. Edmund scientist, who was even now experimenting with further marvels. Nelson Lee decided to take these wonderful discoveries back to civilisation with him.

In the evening it was announced that a grand banquet would be given in our honour by the king. All the nobles of the court were invited, and we were certain of distinguished company,

We were established in suites of rooms in the palace, and there was no doubt that we were being treated in a royal fashion. But things happened so quickly that we hardly knew whether we were on our heads or our heels.

Then came the banquet itself. It proved to be a glittering affair, with enough food to supply an army. Fatty Little was in his element, and declared that he wouldn't mind if we remained in St. Edmund for the rest of our days.

But Nelson Lee was not very comfortable.

He and Dorrie occupied the seat of honour next to the king. The food was of an excellent kind, and the guv'nor had nothing to say against it. But all manner of wines and ales were served in glittering metal tankards and cups. And these wines were distributed freely among the juniors, in spite of Nelson Lee's earnest request that the boys should be provided with water, or other non-alcoholic drink. The king laughed the objection aside.

And so Nelson Lee looked at the juniors, and took matters into his own hands.

"Boys, you have His Majesty's permission to drink freely of this liquor," he said quietly. "But you have not my permission. At the risk of offending His Majesty, I must insist upon your refraining."

"All right, sir!" chorused the juniors.

As it happened, the king was in close conversation with Major Barrance, and did not hear. This was just as well, since it avoided any unpleasantness. And the banquet proceeded.

It certainly was a banquet, too!

One of the regular, old-fashioned sort that one sometimes reads about.

In many respects, indeed, it was an orgy. The king's court behaved themselves in a manner which would have been very discreditable to a pack of roughs in a low-class public-house. They drank until they were almost incapable of sitting in their places. They laughed, joked, and proved themselves to be anything but gentlemen. And this was something of a shock, for these men were the nobles of the court.

The king himself became more than slightly inebriated. And, at last, Nelson Lee could stand it no longer. I had seen the growing signs of displeasure for some time.

He stood up and desired the king to excuse all the juniors, since it was their time for retiring. The king was inclined to object at first, but Nelson Lee was very insistent.

And so, five minutes later, the juniors were packed off to their own suite of bed-chambers. I was there, of course, and Phipps came with us to look after Archie. Nelson Lee was not allowed to leave the banqueting-hall. If he had done so he would have annoyed the king.

And so we left the disgusting scene.

And our opinion of King Jasper and his nobles had gone down enormously.

CHATER VI.

APOLOGISING TO HANDY!



HANDFORTH looked round critically.

"Well, it's not so bad, but I'd rather be on board the Rover!" he exclaimed frankly. "Why can't we go there? I'm a

bit fed-up with all this splendour and display! And I'll bet I sha'n't sleep properly!"

"Don't you worry, Handy," said Church. "I'm not thinking about sleeping. Did you ever see such a set of rotten boozers?"

Handforth glared.

"They drank like fish!" he said hotly.

"Dukes and earls! All jolly well reeling about like a lot of pub-haunters! If we've seen a glimpse of St. Edmund society, well, I've had enough!"

"Same here!" exclaimed Pitt. "And the king, too! Fancy the king making an exhibition of himself! Mr. Lee was properly disgusted, and so was I. It's a good thing we came away."

"Rather!" agreed De Valerie.

"Oh, I don't know, there was tons more to eat!" said Fatty Little regretfully. "I've seen chaps boozy before, and it doesn't affect my appetite. I think Mr. Lee was a bit wrong, you know. I was just starting on something particularly nice when I had to leave it. Still, I managed to grab a few things!"

Fatty produced a number of cakes, and started to begin on them. Handforth regarded him wrathfully.

"You—you glutton!" he roared. "Put those things down!"

"He's doing it!" chuckled Pitt.

"I jolly well bar this!" snorted Handforth. "He's not content with eating like an elephant at the table, but he's got to bring grub about with him! I vote we collar the fat ass and bump him!"

"It wouldn't be dignified, Handy," I interrupted. "Besides, Fatty's manners were perfect in comparison to those of the court nobles. But we mustn't judge them too harshly. Perhaps that sort of thing is quite normal in this country. It may not be considered undignified at all."

"Then I don't think much of their manners!" said Handforth warmly. "Well, where are we? Where's my bed?"

We had been escorted into a large apartment, which appeared to be a kind of ante-room. There were several doors leading out of it. Upon investigation, we found that these doors led into various other chambers. And there were plenty of beds—huge, comfortable things, gloriously decorated, with down cushions and snowy-white sheets. The

people of St. Edmund had made no alterations in sleeping arrangements; they were doing the same as their forefathers had done.

"Oh, well, this isn't so bad," said Handforth. "I'll have this bed, and you chaps can look out for yourselves."

Handforth indicated a bed which was capable of accommodating about a dozen. In the end it was decided that he and his two chums should sleep in it. Phipps was busy here, for he had charge of us, and he allotted the fellows to their various sleeping-quarters. And in a very short time we were all comfortable between the sheets.

So many strange things had been happening during this day that we had ceased to feel any surprise. And we were tired out, too, and most of the fellows were soon asleep. Only sundry sounds from Handforth's bed disturbed the silence. For instance, there was a sudden bump, followed by a yell.

This indicated that Church was on the floor, having been kicked out of bed by Handforth—not because there was insufficient room, but because Church had made some remark concerning Handy's feet.

At last Church was allowed to get in again. But this did not bring peace, for McClure, who was nearly asleep, happened to fling out an arm, with the result that Handforth received a severe thump in the eye.

In the ensuing commotion at least four fellows threatened to throw boots and other similar articles unless Handforth became quiet. And then, suddenly, Handy jumped out of bed.

"You rotters!" he roared. "Hi! I've got something to say to you before you go to sleep! Nipper—Pitt—all of you! What about that apology?"

"What?"

"Eh?"

"Look here, Handy——"

"It's no good trying to get out of it! I'm not going to be put off!" said Handforth firmly. "I'd forgotten all about it until now, but that doesn't mean to say I'm ——"

"What apology?" snapped Pitt. "Oh, my goodness, can't we get to sleep? What's the idea of causing all this commotion?"

"No commotion at all!" said Handforth. "You distinctly told me that I was dotty ——"

"You must hear the truth sometimes!" said De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right—cackle away!" said Handforth bitterly. "I don't care! But I'm jolly well going to have that apology, or I'll yell all night!"

I got out of bed, and sighed.

"Let's apologise!" I said, in a tired voice. "It's no good arguing. Handforth wants an apology, and we sha'n't get any rest. Goodness knows what bee he's got in his bonnet now!"

"Didn't you disbelieve me when I told you that these people talk English?" demanded Handforth. "Don't you remember—in the cavern? You all cackled at me, and you promised to apologise if I was right! Well, I am right, and you've jolly well got to beg my pardon!"

Pitt grinned.

"After all this time he remembers a detail like that!" he said. "Shall we apologise, or shall we smother him?"

"Better smother him!" said Christine promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"I mean to say, a chappie can't buzz off into the old dreamless," complained Archie. "It's most dashed disturbing, if you know what I mean. Old lads, kindly gag the blighter!"

"Good wheeze!"

Handforth stalked up and down in his pyjamas.

"You miserable rotters!" he sneered. "You promised to apologise, and then you refuse. You know you're in the wrong all the time——"

"Grab him!" I exclaimed firmly. "We've had enough of this. There are twenty of us here, and we ought to be able to deal with this matter without trouble. We'll shove the fathead out into the ante-room. He'll have to sleep on a couch, and make the best of it!"

"Good!"

"Here, look out!" roared Handforth. "You—you idiots——"

Before Handforth could protest further he was fairly bowled over. His famous fists were of no avail. He was swept off his feet, half-smothered, and then carried by sheer force into the ante-room. Archie was sitting up in bed, looking on with mild interest.

"I mean to say, dashed drastic, what?" he murmured.

"It's no good being anything else with Handy!" said Church.

I turned towards the other fellows as soon as Handforth had been expelled. A minute later we were grinning with sheer joy. And, in the meantime, Handforth was thumping for all he was worth upon the door. He couldn't get in, because we were forcing our weight against it.

"All right!" I said. "Now!"

We opened the door abruptly, and it was rather unfortunate for Handforth that he was hurling his full weight against it at the same moment. He came charging through like an avalanche, and hit the floor with a frightful thud.

"Yaroooh!" he howled, sitting up.

"Sorry, old man!" I grinned. "Very careless of you to rush in like that! I was just coming to apologise!"

"Oh!" said Handforth, staggering to his feet. "That—that makes a difference, of course. Well?"

"I beg to humbly crave your pardon!" I said meekly.

Handforth smiled.

"That's all right," he said condescendingly. "Just as long as you admit you're in the wrong; that's all I want."

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Now I shall sleep beautifully," I said, in a dreamy voice. "Knowing that I bask in the sunshine of your approval, all is well. Next, please!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By this time Handforth had backed into the ante-room, and was sitting on one of the lounges. I bowed low, and retired. Then Pitt came forward, looking very humble. He made a sobbing noise in his throat.

"I—I want to apologise," he said brokenly. "But—but I'm afraid that you won't smile on me again! And that would break my heart—to say nothing of giving me a pain! I dare say the smile would act in the same way!"

Handforth frowned.

"Considering that you have apologised, I'll let you off," he said loftily. "Don't try to be funny, or I'll biff you one!"

Pitt backed away, holding his heart. And then Archie Glenthorne came forward. He didn't exactly come forward—he was pushed. Archie, in fact, had strongly protested against being yanked out of bed. But he couldn't help himself. And Archie thought it would be better to get through with it.

He adjusted his monocle, and surveyed Handforth mildly.

"Well, old scream, what about it?" he observed.

"Eh?"

"I mean to say, kindly accept large consignments of regret, and all that sort of thing," said Archie. "I don't know what the bally thing's about, but there you are! One apology herewith! Pray acknowledge, dear old tulip!"

"Right!" said Handforth. "You're forgiven, Archie!"

Archie sighed with contentment.

"And now to retire to the old couch!" he said languidly. "I mean to say, the old eyelids are somewhat saggy, don't you know! Forty of the best will come in frightfully useful."

Archie was dragged away, and Handforth looked rather astonished as De Valerie came forward. De Valerie had tears in his eyes, and he pleaded with Handforth to grant him a free pardon.

Handy did so at once, and by now he was beginning to realise that this was rather more than he had bargained for. But there was no getting out of it. He had demanded an apology, and he couldn't grumble.

One by one the juniors came to him. And by the time he had forgiven a dozen, he was nearly dropping off to sleep. The thing was getting monotonous. And at last he jumped and glared.

"All right; that's enough!" he said firmly. "I don't want any more apologies. Considering the lateness of the hour I'll overlook the rest. You're all forgiven, my sons!"

"Well, that's a good thing——" began Pitt.

But just then the main door of the ante-room opened, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore appeared.

"Why, not in bed yet, Handforth?" said the gov'nor, in surprise.

"I—I couldn't sleep, sir!" said Handforth, with a gasp. "I—I mean, these chaps have just been apologising——"

"Well, we don't want to hear about your troubles, my son," interrupted Dorrie. "It may interest you to know that we've just escaped from the saloon bar! A frightfully cheery crowd, these court nobles!"

"That's what I judged," I remarked.

"They've brought the thing down to a bally art," went on Dorrie. "Six of them under the table, you know, an' all that kind of thing. We left the king gugglin' like the deuce, an' if he's capable of walkin' straight, I shall be surprised. Oh, a most goey crowd!"

"I just wanted to come in, boys, to see that you were all comfortable," said Nelson Lee. "I am pleased with you for the way in which you respected my wishes during the banquet. I may as well tell you that I was thoroughly disgusted with the behaviour of our hosts. The scene has by no means impressed me favourably. In future we shall live on board the Golden Rover."

"Oh, good!"

"That's what we would like, sir!"

"You must not take too much notice of what you saw," went on Lee. "It is never wise to judge a people by the doings of the court circles. I rather fancy we should fare better among the middle classes. For the court nobles of St. Edmund seem to behave very much as our own nobles behaved in the seventeenth century. I am thankful that things are different in England to-day."

Nelson Lee and Dorrie soon retired, and we were allowed to sleep. But I didn't go off at once. I lay in bed thinking of all the things that had happened, and I wondered what events would take place on the morrow. Most of all, I wanted to see over that high dividing wall—I wanted to find out what kind of people those outcasts were.

CHAPTER VII.

BEYOND THE GREAT WALL!



KING JASPER did not appear until quite late the next day.

Considering his orgy of the banquet, this was hardly surprising. Many of the fellows reckoned that the king would not turn up at all. But he was compelled to do so, if only for the sake of appearances.

We, of course, were out in good time. And the St. Frank's fellows, including myself, divided up into three or four parties, and went round the town.

It had been all very well, going over St. Edmund City in state the previous day. But we preferred to go on foot, where we could see much more of the town, and we could enjoy ourselves in a far more complete manner. We had breakfasted at the palace, and now there was nothing further to be done for two or three hours. The King's Equerry offered to supply us with escorts of soldiers, but we declined.

We had been supplied with money—quite considerable sums in the St. Edmund currency. The coins were well cast, and they were designed after the fashion of English coinage. There were several different kinds, and they all contained the king's head on one side, and a crow on the other. And they were named in the same old familiar way.

We had crowns, half-crowns, and shillings. These coins were made of some alloy of metal which looked very much like bronze. In England they would not be worth much. But if copper was scarce in this community, it could easily be understood that such coins assumed a big value.

There were guineas, too—and these were smaller coins, pure white in colour. They were not silver, but seemed to be a form of platinum. If this was the case, they were worth much more than a guinea according to home standards. Every fellow was supplied with a similar amount. We now felt we could do a bit of shopping if we were so inclined.

And we were hugely interested as we went about the city. Crowds followed us, and we were objects of interest wherever we went. The experience was very entertaining, and we couldn't help being amused by the speech of these people. It seemed so old-world and quaint. But we did not like their appearance much. The whole population seemed to be rather coarse and ill-mannered. We were disappointed, because we had expected to be different.

During our tour round the city we came across many busy factories. Here all sorts of things were being made—furniture, food-stuffs, and a hundred and one other things. We came upon a gigantic metal foundry, where men were wielding hammers and other implements. It all reminded us of stories we had read of bygone England. And yet, here and there, we saw things that were even more modern than our own.

At last, fully satisfied with our trip, we all collected together on the embankment facing the palace. We had arranged to do this before starting out. And we were just in time to see the king emerging from the palace.

It was an affair of state.

The Golden Rover lay close in, and special planking had been fixed so that the deck could be reached without trouble. Lord

Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were standing on the Rover. And the whole way from the palace courtyard to the staging was lined with row after row of soldiers.

We watched with great interest.

The king went on board with Sir Humphrey Everard and General Horton. These two were immediately followed by the Marquis of Thornton and the Lord Chamberlain—who was known as the Duke of Braye. He had been one of the worst offenders at the banquet the previous evening.

That banquet, in fact, had deprived us of any respect we had felt for the king and his nobles. The juniors were no longer awed by the presence of these gorgeously attired individuals.

The king and his four attendants arrived on board the Golden Rover. And then I pushed my way through the soldiers, followed by a number of juniors. But only one or two of us were allowed on board. I was one of the lucky ones. The rest of the fellows had to stay behind in charge of Phipps—whom Nelson Lee already regarded as a valuable lieutenant. Nominally, Phipps was Archie's valet, but during our trip he had other responsibilities.

The king was greatly interested in the Rover. He walked up and down the deck, and he and his attendants examined the metal work with expressions of wonder. They were all heavy-eyed, and still suffering from the effects of their orgy.

"'Tis indeed wondrous!" exclaimed the king. "But methinks the interior will be more wondrous still. Thou wilt permit us to see within, Master Lee?"

"After all, it is not for me to say," smiled Nelson Lee. "This craft is the sole property of my friend, Mr. Raymond Gray."

Mr. Gray, of course, was only too willing to take the royal party round the airship. And he also intended to give the king a little surprise. As I have already stated, none of these people knew that the Golden Rover was capable of rising into the air. We had never told them that we had crossed the ice in that way.

It would thus come as a great surprise to them, and we were all eagerly anticipating their remarks when they found that the vessel was in the air. And while Mr. Gray and Nelson Lee showed the visitors about the ship, Major Barrance was busily preparing for the air trip. The Rover slipped from her moorings, and gently went out into mid-stream.

Up on deck, I could see that the whole embankment was lined with watching crowds. The king and his suite, by this time, were below. They were in the saloon—and Nelson Lee was keeping them talking.

And in the meantime the major was busy.

He was in constant communication with the engine-room, and the Rover's motors were gently ticking over. And I could see that things were being done. The Rover's great wings were gradually being extended.



And then we saw His Majesty seated upon his throne at the far end of the great apartment.

They were mechanically perfect, and foot by foot they came out, glittering and gleaming.

And then the propellers were altered for flying. Within ten minutes the great machine lay there on the water, all prepared for taking the air. Major Barrance now waited word from his uncle.

"My hat! I'll bet they'll get a bit of a shock soon!" I grinned. "And so will the people who are looking on!"

"Rather!" agreed Pitt. "They think this craft is only a peculiar looking ship. They'll be scared out of their wits when they find us in the air!"

One point had rather puzzled me at the beginning of our trip. I could not quite understand how the aircraft could carry sufficient fuel to serve her for all her journeyings. But I learned that Mr. Gray was continuing to use the wonderful compressed spirit he had invented for his previous vessel—the Flying Fish. By some scientific process he was able to solidify the spirit, and thus compress hundreds of gallons into a small space. Chemical action brought it back to its original form, and it could be used as required.

According to the major, we had sufficient fuel on board to carry us completely round the world. So there was no necessity for us to economise. We could fly as much as we wished, and still have large supplies of spirit left for the journey home.

Dorrie came up on deck while I was talk-

ing to Pitt. He was grinning cheerfully, and he gave me a dig in the ribs.

"This is where we're goin' to startle the natives!" he chuckled. "We're goin' up in a minute, my sons."

"Oh, good!" I said. "Then we'd better get below."

"No need for that," said Dorrie. "The whole crowd's comin' up on deck for the occasion. We shall fly dead slow for a time, so it'll be quite comfy up here, except for a little breeze. And after a bit we shall dive indoors, and then we'll show his bally majesty what speed is!"

I was very pleased to hear this. The Golden Rover was marvellously built. She could fly in perfect safety at thirty miles an hour, and still keep her height—indeed, she could even climb at this speed. And then she could increase her pace until she was swooping along at two-fifty!

This was not solely due to engine power. The wings were so constructed that they could increase their lifting power and resistance at the bidding of the pilot. The invention was one of Mr. Gray's own.

Before I could say anything further to Dorrie, Nelson Lee appeared, and he was followed by King Jasper and his four attendants—who were, of course, the most important people in the St. Edmund administration.

"Thou hast interested me strangely," said

the king. "'Tis a wonderful vessel, indeed. Maybe thou wilt proceed down the river, and I shall then be in a better position to judge. It makes me long to see the great world."

"Even if you saw the great world, you wouldn't find another craft of this kind," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "She has astonished you, old man, an' she would astonish the native English people in just the same way. The Golden Rover is several kinds of a marvel."

"See!" exclaimed Sir Humphrey suddenly. "We are moving."

"Kindly hold tightly to the railings, gentlemen!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "There is nothing to fear, and you need not be alarmed. But you will probably be surprised."

The Golden Rover was skimming up the river now. We could hear shouts from the banks—for until now nobody had realised that the vessel could travel at such a speed.

I watched the king and his party with great interest.

The Rover's engines roared with ever-increasing power—the propellers hurtled round, and gained speed every second. The king's party were astounded, for when they had gone below they had seen no sign of these propellers.

In fact, until now the ship had been

(Continued on next page.)

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driven under water, like any other sea-craft. But now she had altered her character. And before our guests could make any comment, the great nose of the Rover tilted upwards.

We soared out of the water, the engines going at full speed. The wind rushed past our ears, and then, in a magnificent sweep under Major Barrance's control, the great aircraft banked round.

"By all that is wondrous!" gasped the king, clutching at the rail. "What miracle is this? We are jumping into the air itself!"

"Just flyin', old dear," smiled Dorrie. "Pretty good, eh?"

"It—it is beyond belief!" shouted King Jasper hoarsely.

I grinned with sheer joy. The other members of his party were clutching at the rail, and they looked like a lot of freshly landed fish. Their eyes were staring, their mouths agape, and they were absolutely flabby.

And, in the meantime, the Rover was mounting higher and higher every moment. But Major Barrance was cruising the machine at her slowest possible speed. Although there was a strong rush of air on deck, it was by no means uncomfortable. We could even walk about with perfect freedom and safety. The balance was so steady that there was never any peril of pitching overside.

And by now we were at least four hundred feet up, and still going round in circles. In order to do this the aircraft was banked over, but the very force of gravity kept us steady. But now, at this height, Barrance brought the Rover round on an even keel, and we steered straight over St. Edmund City.

The Rover was running at her sweetest and best. Her powerful engines only made a gentle purr. And as we went over the town we increased our height, until, when we were finally over the outlying districts, we were up a thousand feet.

And now we came sweeping round on the return journey towards the river. The king and his suite had recovered from their amazement in a slight degree. They had found their voices, and they were staring down upon the distant ground with wonder and in awe.

"But this is beyond human power!" exclaimed General Horton, his voice strained and scared. "Heaven above! What a weapon of war! What marvels could not this ship accomplish! Wilt thou tell me, sire, what strange miracle this can be?"

"'Tis useless putting such questions!" exclaimed the king. "'Tis bewitched we are!"

"Not at all!" smiled Mr. Raymond Gray. "The problem of flight has been solved for many years, and ships of the air are traveling by the thousand every day in all parts of the world. This vessel is the very latest development in aircraft, and I am not surprised at your attitude."

"But—but the possibilities are illimitable!" exclaimed King Jasper huskily. "There is no telling what marvels might not be accomplished!"

I was looking over the side of the ship, fascinated by this new aspect of things. We had never flown in the Rover in this way before. Mr. Gray had, of course, but the St. Frank's party had not had the chance.

I could see the crowds in the streets below. They were waving their arms, running, and generally behaving as one would expect people to behave in a past century if a strange monster of the air appeared.

Our arrival from beyond the Great Ice had caused a big stir in the Kingdom of St. Edmund, but our flying in the air literally created consternation and fright. These people were nearly scared stiff.

Major Barrance had had a little chat with Nelson Lee before the trip started, and he knew exactly what to do. And now, instead of flying round the city once more, he directed the aeroplane over in the direction of that enormously high wall.

"Good!" I muttered to Pitt. "This is what I've been waiting for! We shall be able to see what lies in the southern section of this basin—we shall see those miles of country beyond the Great Wall!"

"The king told us," said Reggie. "A gang of cutthroats and ruffians, living in mud hovels, or something."

"Yes, I know," I agreed. "But it'll be interesting to have a look at it."

"I say, look over there!" exclaimed Tommy Watson, pulling at my sleeve. "I can see a steeple, or something—a whacking great tower that looks like Big Ben! Have a squint!"

I turned and gazed over the countryside. We were past the river by now, and we were able to obtain a clear view of that great wall which we had glimpsed from the window of the king's throne-room. It was one of the most marvellous pieces of work I had ever seen.

For this wall stretched from one side of the landscape to the other, as far as the eye could see. Indeed, as we soon found out, the wall was built from side to side of the enormous valley.

It divided the great oblong basin into two sections, and it seemed that the Kingdom of St. Edmund was by far the smaller section. From the air we could see this without difficulty.

And the wall itself was a great deal over a hundred feet high, and the top was wide enough for the usual traffic of Whitehall to pass along it. The wall was entirely constructed of white stone, or some kind of concrete substance.

But it was not this which Tommy Watson had pointed out.

He had directed my attention to a point much further on—right in the heart of this barbarian country. And I certainly agreed

with him, that the tower reminded me of Big Ben.

And now we were flying nearer and nearer to the wall. An exclamation came from the king, and I noticed for the first time that he was looking scared—scared in a different way. His face had gone the colour of putty, and his eyes were shifty. He clutched Mr. Gray's coat.

"I beg of thee to return to St. Edmund City!" he exclaimed, his voice harsh with anxiety. "Do not continue to travel in this direction. 'Tis not my wish!"

"We are anxious to see the country beyond the great wall," replied the inventor quietly.

"But thou must not go!" shouted the king. "I command thee——"

"I am very sorry, but we shall fly on for some little further distance," put in Nelson Lee firmly. "If it displeases you, sire, I regret it. But I can see no reason why we should not use the air beyond the wall as frequently as we use the other."

King Jasper bit his lip.

"'Tis not for me to protest!" he muttered. "Thou art the master here. I am helpless in thy hands."

By this time we were directly over the top of the wall. Gazing down, I could see the white line stretching for something like twenty miles in either direction—right up to the mountains. For we were practically in the centre of the basin, and this was at least forty miles wide.

But now we were gazing with wonder and astonishment at the "barbarian land" on the other side of the wall. It was not at all what we had expected, and it was our turn to be surprised.

We had been looking for a rough, wild sort of country, with a few miserable settlements here and there. Instead, we found ourselves gazing down upon a land of glorious green fields and meadows, where everything was in a state of well nigh perfect cultivation. And, here and there, townships were dotted—gleaming little spots of colour, where the houses looked fresh and neat and exquisitely built. There were roads branching out in all directions—beautifully made roads, which completely took the shine out of the St. Edmund highways.

And in the far distance we could see a great city—a place bristling with tall, imposing buildings. And upon a hill stood a truly superb edifice, with a vast clock-tower resembling that of Westminster.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I exclaimed. "What's the meaning of this?"

Nelson Lee was putting exactly the same question to the king.

"This is not precisely what we were led to expect, your Majesty!" said the gov'nor quietly. "Your words do not quite tally with the actual facts."

King Jasper clenched his fists, and set his teeth.

"I was mistaken!" he said harshly. "'Tis a better country than I imagined!"

"'Tis a better country than your own!" observed Dorrie sweetly.

His Majesty winced.

"Pah! Thou art wrong!" he snapped. "This country of New Anglia is peopled by wretches who should now be under my control. And, by Heaven, they shall soon be driven under my lash. I intend to reign over all—without exception!"

There was something in his voice which caused me to look at him curiously. He sounded like a man who had a mad desire to gain power—like a man who had been thwarted again and again.

And, remembering his conduct at the banquet on the previous night, I could not picture him as being a very satisfactory king for all this fair domain. And now I was filled with a great curiosity concerning the rival country.

For it was quite easy to put two and two together.

King Jasper, not knowing that we could fly through the air, had considered it safe to make any statement he desired regarding the land beyond that great wall. He thought we should never see, and so he had not hesitated to lie.

And it seemed to me that this other country—New Anglia, as it was called—was really miles ahead of St. Edmund, to say nothing of being miles larger. King Jasper had probably been trying for years to gain control of New Anglia. And I suspected that the true position was the reverse of what had been stated.

But it was impossible to know for certain, since we did not land. Not only King Jasper, but all his suite, were nearly raving with anxiety, lest Nelson Lee should cause the Golden Rover to descend into the rival country. Very possibly they feared capture.

But, of course, we couldn't do a dirty trick on them like that. And so they were invited inside, the Rover was sealed tight, and then our guests were given an exhibition of speed. The Golden Rover went at her greatest pace, and we were back over St. Edmund City in less than five minutes.

Finally, we landed, and by this time the king had regained his composure, and professed to be quite delighted with his experience.

But from that moment I suspected him—and so did the gov'nor.

We resolved to pay a visit to New Anglia at the first opportunity.

THE END.

Next Week's Story :
THE LOST PEOPLE
 Will contain a vivid account
 of the Holiday Party's visit
 to **NEW ANGLIA**, King
 Jasper's rival country.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 39.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

August 19, 1922.

My Dear Chums,—In spite of King Jasper's protests, the Guv'nor has decided to pay a visit to New Anglia. I did not like the glint in the eyes of our host when he heard of our intention, and I should not be surprised if the king tries to thwart us.

The article published below on Captain Scott will be followed next week by the story of another great explorer—Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Your old pal,

NIPPER (The Editor).

FAMOUS ANTARCTIC EXPLORERS.

CAPT. ROBERT FALCON SCOTT.

Early Career.

THIS brave Englishman, the leader of two important expeditions to the South Pole, was born at Outlands, Devonport, on June 6, 1868. He joined the Navy when only thirteen, and after serving as midshipman, and then acting sub-lieutenant, obtained his commission as lieutenant at the age of twenty-one. Entering the Vernon School-ship in 1891, he studied torpedo work, and in 1899 became torpedo lieutenant of the flagship of the Channel Squadron.

The Outcome of a Chance Meeting.

It was not until June of 1899 that Captain Scott first took interest in Polar exploration. While chatting one day with Sir Clements Markham, whom he had casually met in Buckingham Palace Road, the future explorer learned that an Antarctic expedition was being formed. This adventure appealed so strongly to him that he immediately applied for command of the expedition. A year afterwards he was given the appointment and promoted to the rank of commander.

His First Expedition.

In July, 1901, he set sail in the "Discovery" for the Far South, and did not return until 1904. Although he did not, on this occasion, actually reach the South Pole, he succeeded in getting 300 miles nearer his objective than any previous explorer, and to him is due the credit for finding the best route to the Pole. It was along this route that Amundsen reached the South Pole within a month of Scott's second, ill-fated expedition. Apart from his plucky journey over the Ice Barrier,

Scott added considerably to our knowledge of the Antarctic by crossing the wild and terrible plateau through the mountain ranges of South Victoria Land. It is interesting to note that Shackleton, afterwards another great pioneer of the Antarctic, served under Scott in this expedition as third lieutenant.

The Call of the Antarctic.

On his return, Captain Scott was knighted and promoted to captain in the Royal Navy, and received many other public honours in recognition of his great work. He was now married and well up in his profession, but the call of the Antarctic would not let him rest content. After hearing of Shackleton's expedition in the "Nimrod," and how his old comrade had got within a hundred miles of the South Pole, Captain Scott resolved to make a second attempt to complete the task he had begun in 1903.

The Second Expedition.

It was in the whaling barque, "Terra Nova," that Captain Scott set out on June 1, 1910, for his second and last journey to the Antarctic. In December, the main party landed at McMurdo Sound and fixed their headquarters at Cape Evans. The next eleven months were taken up in laying depots for the march to the Pole, and in making scientific investigations.

His Objective Gained.

On November 2, 1911, the dash to the Pole was begun. At first all went well, and the second in command, Commander Evans, returned to take back the news that the party was within 150 miles of the Pole. They reached the Pole on January 18, 1912. But they had been forestalled by Amundsen, who had planted his flag at the Pole on December 14, 1911.

His Tragic Death.

The great achievement performed, it was a cruel stroke of Fate that did not allow a single member of this brave band of heroes to return alive. Petty-Officer Evans was the first to succumb on February 17, 1912. Then Captain Oates, who walked out into the raging blizzard that he might not be a burden to the rest of the party. For a short time Captain Scott, Dr. Wilson, the scientist, and Lieutenant Bowers, struggled on, but perished of privation and exposure within a day's march of One Ton Camp. "Had we lived," wrote Captain Scott, in his diary, "I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions, which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale."

THE CASE of the RACING TIPSTER



AFTER Nelson Lee's solution of the Golf Course Murder Mystery, and his unrewarded services to the county police in connection with the death of the man named Whittaker on the 11.45 to South Shields, Inspector Anderson had formed a strong attachment to his unofficial colleague.

From being one of Nelson Lee's most caustic critics, he had become a staunch admirer; and, having the sense to know which side his bread was buttered, saw in the friendship a good deal of profit for himself.

Therefore he lost no opportunity of seeking the company of the famous criminologist, and Nelson Lee never visited the north but Inspector Anderson sought him out and did his best to justify the reputation for hospitality which Novocastrians deservedly enjoy.

On the Sunday morning on which this story begins the inspector found Nelson Lee at the County Hotel; and, after smoking a pipe of tobacco together, the two detectives strolled down to the Petticoat Lane of Newcastle—the quays on the Northumberland side of the Tyne.

Quayside, which, all the week, is the scene of the strenuous work attendant upon arrival and departure of steamships and barges, had now, miraculously become a sort of fair. Here, by Dutch auction, a man was selling currant-grapes, a bunch at a time. Hard by, a no less industrious confrere extolled the innumerable merits of embroidered braces. Beside him was a professor of houp-la, and further along a vendor of lace. From end to end of the quays the string of perspiring salesmen almost touched shoulders, while around them surged a living tide of human beings, mostly men, who occupied Sunday morning seeing the fun, and, tempted beyond discretion, occasionally making a purchase.

But it was at the Walker end that the crowd was thickest.

There, to the number of five, the racing tipsters had their pitches. They differed in size, in costume, and even in race, for one of them was a negro. Their remarks varied from quiet insistence to boisterous assertion; but they were alike in this: that not one of them had ever been wrong.

The inspector, with his unofficial friend, became part of the audience of a little wizened man in tweeds, who was holding a large circle spellbound without needing to raise his voice.

"This chap's a newcomer," said Inspector Anderson; "all the others are old hands at the game."

"What did I give you for the Plate?" the little man was saying. "I gave you Flint Jack for the Plate. And if Flint Jack had run in the Plate he would have won in a canter. Why didn't Flint Jack run in the Plate? Why was he scratched at the last moment? Why was he brought down to Newbury and run in company where he didn't stand an earthly? A lot of people would like to know that, and now I'm going to tell you."

And so the little man went on; only interrupting his discourse to dispose of mysterious envelopes which, as he assured them, contained information straight from the nose-bag.

"Here you are," he said; "worth a quid a time, and I only ask a tikky—a miserable threepenny bit."

The detectives listened to the little man for some minutes. As they turned away Nelson Lee said to his companion:

"Did you notice whose horses that man was talking about particularly?"

The Inspector confessed that he had not.

"Why, all the really useful information he possessed belonged to one stable, the one which is, or was, the property of Sir Jacob Cust."

"What, Sir Jacob Cust, the South African, the man who has disappeared?"

"Exactly. And I'll tell you another. That chap is a South African himself."

"How do you know that, Lee?"

"He used the word 'tikky,' which is Cape-Kaffir for three-penny-bit."

The inspector stopped dead in his tracks.

"Heré," he said, "I'm going back."

Then, in explanation, he added:

"You know as well as I do, Mr. Lee, that this is an important discovery. It was near the time of Sir Jacob Cust's disappearance that this tipster fellow first showed up on the quayside. Sir Jacob was a famous owner of race horses, and this chap poses as an authority on the same subject. Like Sir Jacob, he is, or appears to be, a South African; and, from what you tell me, he knows more about Sir Jacob's stable than any other. It's possible that he knows what any man in the force would give his eyes to find out—where Sir Jacob is now."

It was already getting late for the quayside public, who doubtless spent Sunday afternoon in sleep, and the racing tipster was drawing a threadbare coat over his lurid check shirt preparatory to taking down the linen banner which advertised his infallibility, and seeking his belated midday meal.

Anderson, who was in mufti, took him familiarly by the arm.

"I want a word with you, Jim," he said quietly.

The little man shot a keen glance at the inspector, a glance which took in and sized up the bowler hat, the hatchet face, the broad shoulders, the blue suit, the ammunition boots and all the civilian gear with which the inspector tried, and failed, to conceal his profession.

"I suppose you think," said the little man defensively, "that I've been taking bets? If you think that, you can search me. I—"

"What I think about that," replied the inspector, "is my own affair. It's another question I'm asking you now. Where is Sir Jacob Cust?"

It was a shot in the dark, beyond question, but it found the bull's-eye.

The man called Jim turned stone-white and collapsed in the inspector's arms.

"Hullo," said Inspector Anderson as he laid the man on the cobbles. "Something wrong here! What do you say?"

Before Lee could reply the little man opened his eyes again, and staggered to his feet.

"Wrong?" he questioned. "What do you mean? Only that I worked for Sir Jacob years ago, in S.A., and it gave me rather a start to hear his name again. Nothing wrong about me. I've never done anybody out of a penny. You can ask 'em. If my tips don't click, I give 'em their money back. You can't say fairer than that."

"I agree," Anderson told him, "but the point is this: Sir Jacob, a very rich man, owner of a big stud of race horses, proprietor of several newspapers, a company

promoter, and yet one who has never been interviewed or photographed, one who has such a dislike for publicity that his servants barely know him by sight, comes to England, announces his intention of speaking at several important meetings—and disappears. We of the police are naturally curious; and a reward of ten thousand pounds, which is offered for his discovery, increases our curiosity. We find that you know something about the missing financier, and we are disposed to follow the matter up. The point is, can you help us?"

The little man laughed hoarsely.

"Don't you think," he said, "that I should be quite as anxious to earn ten thou. as you are. If I knew anything, you may bet your boots that I should be shouting for that reward. I don't. Not a word. I worked for him twenty years ago, when he was plain Jacob Cust; but I doubt if I should know him by sight to-day."

Obviously, there was nothing to be gained by further conversation with the tipster at this stage, and Inspector Anderson was reluctantly compelled to accept the man's statement and bid him good-day.

"I wish," said the inspector as they turned away, "that I had someone who could be set to watch that chap without arousing his suspicion. I am certain he knows more than he confesses; but all my chaps look so confoundedly like policemen, whether they are in mufti or not, that—Well, you saw how he tumbled to my business—he'd size them up the same as he did me."

Lee smiled.

"I think I can manage that," he told the inspector. "I've got young Nipper with me. He's having a game of golf this morning with our friends at Wreckenton, but I sha'n't be needing him too urgently for a couple of days. Why not put him to shadow this tipster chap?"

The inspector looked at him shrewdly. There was that matter of the reward. Supposing that it came their way, how much would Nelson Lee consider due to himself?

Then he put aside the rather unworthy question, and agreed thankfully. After all, the private detective was reputed to care more for the problem than the fees, and, anyway, judging by the two cases in which they had so far been associated, Lee would probably earn the greater part of the reward, even if he did not get it.

And so it came to pass that Nipper, in the role of an apprentice just out of his time, hired a room in the steep and cobbled thoroughfare known as Hood Street, Gateshead. By a curious coincidence, the only other lodger was Jim Trend, the tipster from Quayside and elsewhere.

For a whole week Nipper did not communicate with Nelson Lee; and, in this period, by evincing no curiosity whatever as to the affairs of his fellow lodger, managed to get on nodding terms with the

tipster, and even received the excellent advice—given free of charge—never to have anything to do with horse racing.

Then Lee, who was again in the north, received a letter from the lad, which had been addressed to Gray's Inn Road and forwarded.

"Dear guv'nor," it ran. "I can't find the goods on our friend, and yet I am sure he is on the cross. If A. wants a chance to hold him and search his rooms there will be an excuse all right. Our friend takes betting slips outside Gateshead East Station. He is working with a bookie in St. Mary's Place, Newcastle. Last evening I made up as a pit lad and slipped him one myself, to make sure. But he's very wide-ho. I wouldn't swear now that he didn't spot me. And the make-up was O.K., it was, really. So long. Usual respects to Mr. Blake, if you see him. Please hand young Tinker one in the ribs to go on with. Am running short of pocket money. May I draw on the expenses account? Yours, Nipper."

Lee carefully burned this interesting effusion. In the ordinary way he would have received the closing sentences with a smile; but on this occasion he was very grave.

"My fault," he muttered to himself. "I should have warned the lad that the game was dangerous. He is being careless. I shall have to act, and act quickly."

During his stay in London, although he had been working on another affair, Nelson Lee had not forgotten his first interest in the Quayside tipster. His casual enquiries about Sir Jacob Cust had increased that interest by supporting certain conclusions.

He had discovered, by means of continuous research and consultation with his friend Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, that Sir Jacob Cust had sailed very near the wind in his time. Indeed Sexton Blake's assistant had unearthed five-year-old copies of the "Johannesburg Courier" wherein were details of proceedings against one Jacob Cust and another Joseph Trent for the serious crime of I.D.B.*

In a later issue of the same periodical the said Joseph Trent was reported to have received five years' imprisonment, and it was more than hinted that the chief witness against him was his confederate—Jacob Cust.

Further, a cablegram to the Jo'burg police had furnished the information that Trent released three months before, had taken the name of Trend, and, it was believed, sailed for England.

Here were grounds for a train of conjectures which would explain Sir Jacob Cust's dislike of publicity, and, assuming, as was undoubtedly probable, that Trent—or Trend—had sailed for England to revenge

himself upon his treacherous friend, also explained the disappearance of the financier.

In view of this theory, the strange emotion of the tipster upon hearing the name of Jacob Cust had a tragical significance.

The financier had disappeared within ten days of Trent's supposed arrival in England; and if Trend of the Quayside was indeed Trent, of Johannesburg, then there appeared to be little doubt that the tipster was responsible for Sir Jacob's disappearance.

Hence Lee's fear for his assistant. If the lad discovered anything serious, and Trend knew it, the tipster might be tempted to commit a further crime.

The private detective lost no time in taking action.

His first step was to send for Inspector Anderson and tell the astonished police officer the result of his researches.

"What a case!" exclaimed Inspector Anderson. "I congratulate you, Lee. It's cast iron. Trend's the man all right, and, before nightfall, we'll have him by the heels. If you'll come with me, I'll make the arrest at once."

Nelson Lee agreed, but without enthusiasm. That sixth sense of his, which was largely responsible for his eminence in his profession, did not endorse the confidence of the inspector.

To tell the truth, Lee himself did not know why he doubted the case against Trend; but doubt it he did. Perhaps the reason was that the chain of evidence was too obvious. Nelson Lee had been in the game long enough to mistrust the obvious.

There was no harm, at any rate, in Anderson's suggested action. Lee knew enough of police methods to understand that Trend would be apprehended on the charge of street betting, and held while further evidence was collected to make his arrest on the more serious count quite unquestionable.

Our excellent police force are always ready to take risks, but they do not believe in taking risks unnecessarily.

Hoed Street, Gateshead, turned out to be a cobbled thoroughfare leading to nowhere in particular, and so steep that it was almost impossible for vehicular traffic.

The detectives found, upon enquiry, that Mr. Trend was out, but was expected back very shortly.

"In that case," said Lee to the good lady who opened the door, "with your permission we will step in and wait for him. His room's the front room upstairs, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

Trend's landlady was about to state that she could allow nobody to enter her lodger's room in his absence; but something in her visitor's manner caused her to suppress her objection; and she stood aside, rather helplessly, to allow the detective to ascend the stairs.

*Illicit diamond buying.

Jim Trend's room revealed nothing of its owner's personality. Except for a mackintosh and a cap upon a hook behind the door, pyjamas folded upon the counterpane of the bed, and toilet articles upon the dressing-table, the room contained no evidence of being used.

"Nothing here," said Anderson.

"No," agreed Lee. Then he added:

"Wait here a minute. I'll have a look at Nipper's quarters. If the lad is in, he may be able to tell us something."

To find Nipper's room the private detective was compelled to take the landlady into his confidence. She proved to be a sensible person, however, and not averse to a small present; so that his confidence appeared to be fairly safe.

"You're his employer, you say," she commented. "Well, perhaps you know where he is, because I don't. He hasn't been near this house since yesterday afternoon."

This remark caused Nelson Lee a considerable amount of anxiety, which was increased when he began to ask questions.

It was clear enough that Nipper had had no intention of remaining away overnight. He had gone out directly after dinner on the preceding day "to look for a job," not even taking his raincoat with him. He had promised to be back for tea. And, so far as his landlady was concerned, that was the end of him.

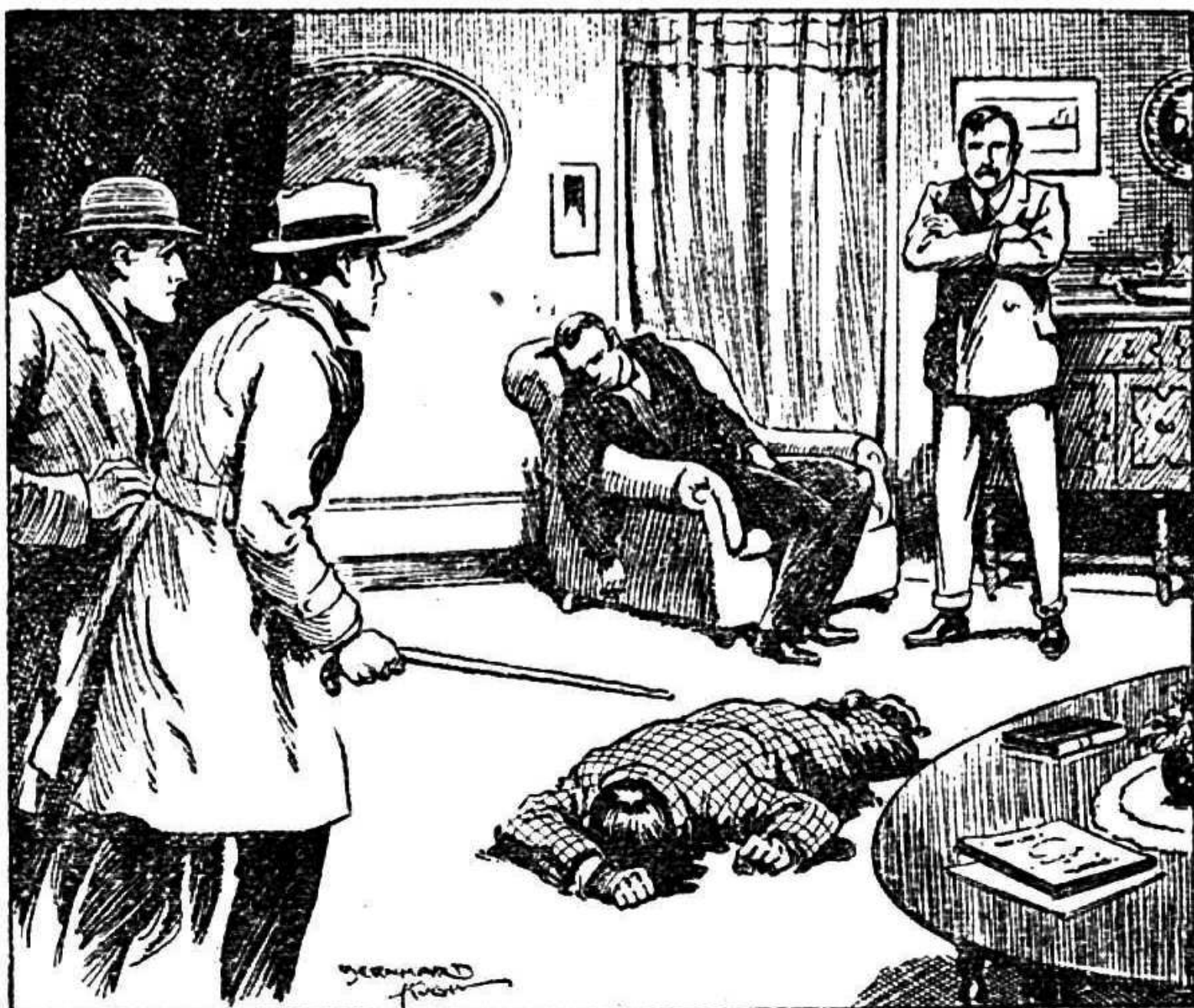
When Lee returned to Trend's room, it was to find the tipster in the act of telling Anderson what he thought of intruders. The tipster's language was forcible, and decorated by expressions which did not all belong to the English language of the classics; but it left Anderson quite unmoved.

"That's all very well," put in the inspector at length, "but, if you will go in for street betting—"

"Street betting!" exclaimed Trend with a relieved expression. "Is that all?"

He had made a mistake, and the inspector was quick to take advantage of the same.

"Certainly," he said. "What did you imagine it was?"



They wrenched the curtains aside, and it was as if they rang up the curtain upon a living picture—a triumph of stage-craft, not a tragic reality.

The tipster rose to the situation adroitly. "I thought," he returned, "that it might be the matter you were talking to me about the other day on Quayside. I mean the disappearance of Jacob Cust."

"And," queried the inspector, "if so—"

The tipster assumed an expression of doubt.

"I don't know why I should take you into my confidence," he grumbled. And then, as if taking a sudden resolution, he added:

"The truth is, I have had a letter from Cust. I know where he is. But if you're not interested—"

"I am interested," pressed the inspector. "Go on."

"Well, there's that matter of the ten thousand pounds reward. Suppose I give you this letter, and it leads to the finding of old Cust, what about the reward, eh? Do we go fifty-fifty?"

The inspector looked at Lee. Would the private detective allow him to take advantage of this splendid opportunity?

Nelson Lee nodded. "Accept," he said. "Right," said Anderson, "I agree. Let's have a look at the letter."

"You're a witness," said Trend to the private detective.

He fumbled in his breast pocket, and produced an envelope addressed to Mr. J. Trend, and bearing the Sunderland postmark.

The notepaper of the letter bore the superscription of the Grand Hotel, Sunderland. The letter ran as follows:

"My old friend,—I understand you are making a living by means of your knowledge of racing, and wondered whether my influence, such as it is, would be of any use to you. If so, pray do not hesitate to use our acquaintance in any way which commends itself to you. At present it pleases me to live quietly for a few days, but I shall certainly take an early opportunity of asking you to call upon me. We will then have a jaw about old times in B.E.A.

"With regards,

"Your old friend,

"Jacob Cust."

Lee had in his pocket-book a photograph of a specimen of the handwriting of Sir Jacob. He placed the letter and the photograph side by side, and examined them by means of a pocket lens.

"Yes," he said at length, "I should say that this letter is genuine.

"Either by accident or design," he went on, "the writer has placed absolute proof within our grasp. You will observe that he pressed the ball of his thumb upon the signature while the ink was still wet. I imagine that that thumbograph will turn out to belong to Sir Jacob; but I also imagine that you will find it hard to follow up this clue. We shall see.

"Now," he went on, turning to the tipster, "I will ask you to allow me a few word in private with my friend here. No, don't go out of the room, stand over in the window where we can see you."

Trend obeyed.

"Anderson," said the private detective as soon as Trend had left their neighbourhood, "this is a serious business. I've got a plan, and I want you to stand by me. Will you do it, without question, whatever it is?"

Inspector Anderson was a good sort, and he trusted Nelson Lee.

He stretched out his right hand. "I'm with you," he said.

"Good. Now I want you to press the street betting charge. If I am right, Trend will try to bribe you not to arrest him. Refuse doubtfully until he reaches a large sum—say a couple of hundred pounds—then give him until to-morrow to find it. That's all."

Nelson Lee turned to the tipster, who stood idly looking from the window.

"I'm going now, Trend," he said. "I am afraid this gentleman will have business with you afterwards. For myself, I have just one question to ask."

Lee walked across the small room and looked right into the eyes of the tipster.

"Just one question," he said slowly, "and I want you to answer it quickly, without thinking. Whose is it, that blood upon your sleeve?"

The tipster turned pale. He lifted his arm and looked with horror at a brown stain which discoloured his shirt-cuff.

"Oh, that," he stumbled, "that—"

"Stop!" commanded Lee. "That's enough. You have failed. But—"

With a face as white as the man's own, and eyes that glittered like sword-points, he still confronted the unnerved tipster. "If you've done anything to that boy," he said between his clenched teeth.

He did not finish the sentence himself, but turned and walked out of the room and down the stairs.

"If you have," completed Anderson, who had been an uncomprehending witness of the dramatic episode, "if you have, Trend, upon my soul, I could be sorry for you."

At half-past eleven upon that night, shrouded in a dense white mist which came from the Tyne, Nelson Lee and Inspector Anderson stood upon the edge of the shrubbery surrounding a fine, modern villa outside Corbridge.

The Inspector had followed Lee's request with complete success. First, as he had fully expected, Trend had laughed at the idea of anything better than a tenner; but, on the way to the station, he had suddenly caved in, and promised that, at midday on the morrow, he would hand Inspector Anderson the magnificent bribe of two hundred and fifty pounds.

The inspector had never taken such a bribe in his life, and felt that Lee owed him at least an explanation in return. There were several questions which he wanted to ask: the principal being the reason for their presence at that particular spot at that particular moment. He felt that he was being treated like a child; but, as Lee remained in the terrible mood with which he had walked away from Hood Street, the good inspector thought it better to stifle his curiosity and await events to give the solution.

And, as it happened, he did not have long to wait.

A sudden movement from Lee, the restraint of the private detective's fingers upon his sleeve, warned the inspector of impending action; and, a few seconds later, he heard a subdued rustling, as some creature, human or otherwise, forced its way through the shrubbery not far from where they were hidden.

The newcomer pursued a course in the direction of the house; and Lee, remaining tense but passive, kept his eyes fixed in

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:

the same line of vision, evidently expecting that some sign or sound would be forthcoming to give them a lead.

Nor was he mistaken. A long whistle sounded from where the newcomer had disappeared. This was repeated several times; then, evidently as a signal in response, the light of an electric torch within the house flashed once, twice, across the French windows.

This brief illumination enabled the watchers to see that the windows were heavily curtained.

A moment later these curtains were parted by the entrance of somebody from outside. A ragged beam of light showed that, for all the deserted appearance of the house, one room at least was strongly lighted. Then—darkness and silence again.

Nelson Lee, followed by the amazed inspector, began to move forward. Then he checked himself, and crouched again in the shelter of the shrubbery.

"What does this mean?" he muttered.

A second individual was moving in the tracks of the first. Clearly, Nelson Lee had expected the one. Equally clearly, he did not expect the other.

Again, after a moment, the previous sequence of events were repeated, except for the signal and response. Again the curtains were parted, and again the detective moved forward.

But, this time, instead of hesitating, they both by one accord broke into a run.

For, from the unseen interior of the strange house, had come to their ears a cry of utter terror, a pistol shot, a crashing of glass, the confused sounds of a terrible struggle.

They wrenched the curtains aside, and it was as if they rang up the curtain upon a living picture, a triumph of stagecraft, not a tragic and gruesome reality.

The man whom they had known as Trend, still dressed in his loud tweeds, lay in the middle of a sumptuous carpet, his attitude eloquent of the fact that he was dead. Indeed, his attitude made it only too clear that his spinal column was broken. A big man in the quiet conventional clothes of a confidential servant sprawled in a chair, insensible, his head lolling ridiculously on one shoulder. At the far side of the room stood a giant in blue serge, a man over six feet high, and very broad. His arms were folded across his chest, and, above them, over the left breast, was a dark stain spreading, purple upon the blue of his jacket.

Presently, while they watched spellbound, he began to rock backwards and forwards upon his feet. Then, very slowly, he sank to his knees.

"You are wounded?" said Lee, who was the first to regain his presence of mind.

"Killed," said the big man, and he actually smiled. "But I have avenged my brother."

"Then you are William Trent?"

"You know?"

"Yes. I discovered that Joseph Trent had sailed to England, and that Jacob Cust was masquerading as Joseph Trent. I asked myself why. With a little faculty for putting two and two together, and a little luck, I came to the conclusion that Cust had somehow got the better of Trent, and was occupying Trent's shoes for fear that some unknown other should discover the fact. Further enquiries revealed that Joseph Trent had been accompanied upon the voyage by his brother, and I reasonably assumed that it was for fear of the brother that Cust continued his masquerade. I made it necessary for Cust, in his role of Trent—or Trend—to find a large sum of money in a short time because I knew that to get that money he would be forced to reveal himself. I suspected him of murder, and I wished to bring the crime home to him."

"Your suspicions were justified. I can tell you that, sir. Jacob Cust added to his earlier crime against my unfortunate brother by murdering him in cold blood. I can tell you no more. I——"

The giant broke off, and a tinge of blood appeared upon his lips.

Lee gently lowered him to the floor, and held a flask to his mouth.

"Thanks. There is just one thing that I want to tell you. I have been watching this house for a long time. I only just

(Continued on page 36.)

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missed—Jacob—once before. There is—a lad here. Safe—I think—"

A tremor shook the dying man from head to foot. Suddenly he gathered strength to rise from his elbow. He stretched out his free hand towards the windows, and his face was transformed by a look of wonderful affection.

And so the big man died.

Lee seized a water jug from a neighbouring table and dashed its contents into the face of the insensible servant.

The man recovered instantly. He had merely received a knock-out blow.

"Quick," said Lee; "you have got a lad prisoner in this house. Where is he. I'll take no denial. If the lad is hurt—"

"No, sir," protested the man, "he is not hurt. He is quite unhurt. Please come with me, sir, I'll lead you to him at once."

And so it came to pass that the three detectives—Inspector Anderson, Nelson Lee, and Nipper, his assistant, drove away in the car which Lee had hired, away from that house of tragedy, back to the sanity and comfort of the County Hotel.

Nipper was none the worse, except for a cut upon the cheekbone. He had suspected the connection between Cust and Trend, had prospected too closely the financier's

house at Corbridge, and had been collared by Cust and the manservant. It was in the ensuing struggle that Cust had struck at Nipper's face, causing the slight wound referred to, and receiving that blood-stain upon his shirt-cuff which had so worried Nelson Lee.

They discovered afterwards that Cust had had a second reason to assume a different identity, in that he had reason to fear meeting shareholders in more than one of his companies.

The question of the reward was a rather difficult one in the circumstances; but it ceased to be important because the estate of Sir Jacob Cust, deceased, was not in a position to pay a thousandth part of it.

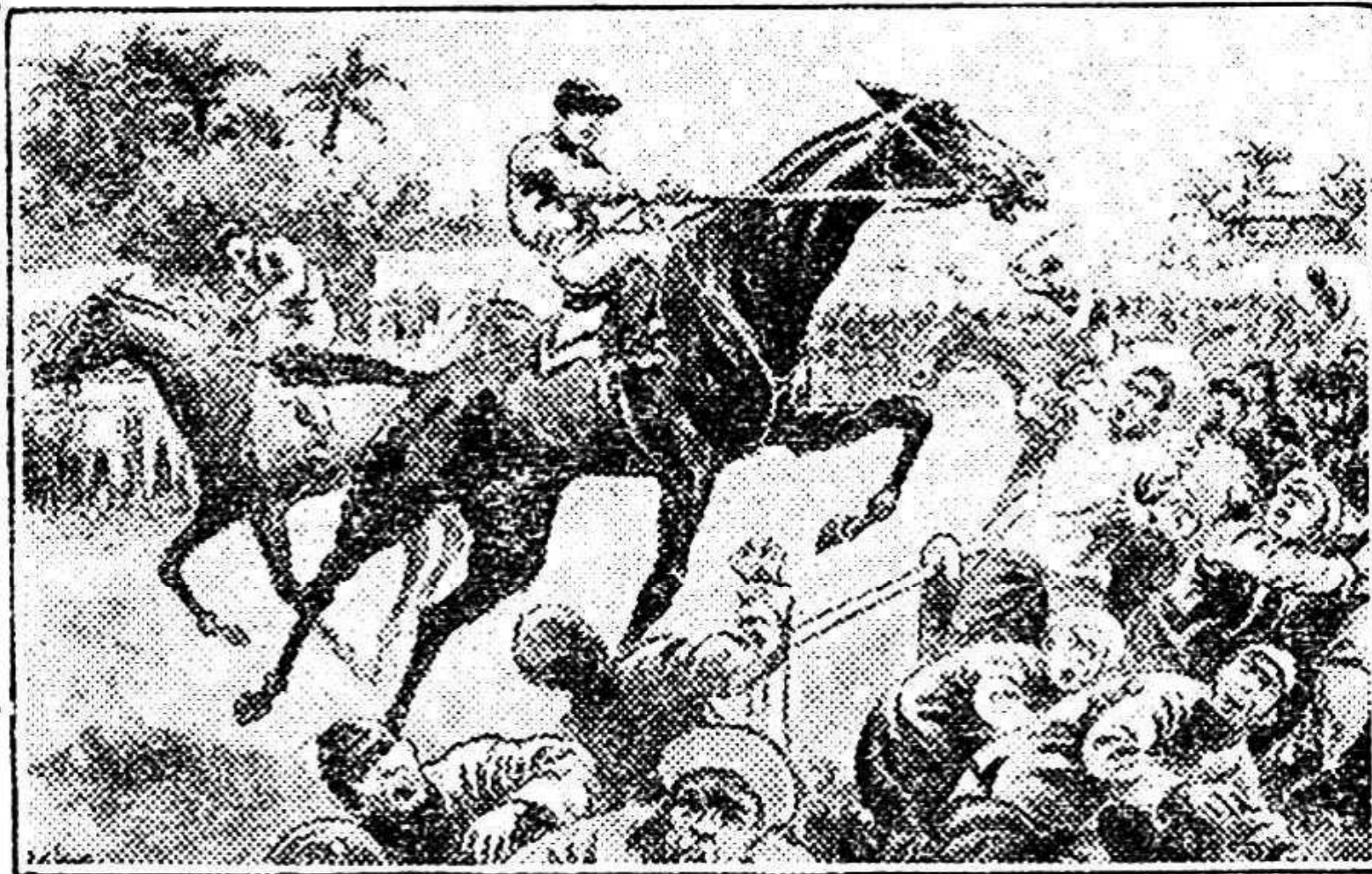
Questioned by Anderson as to when he suspected the true identity of the racing tipster, Lee replied:

"When I saw that the ink used by Cust in his letter to Trend was the same as the ink in the bottle upon Trend's table. Fairly obvious, wasn't it?"

But the inspector disagreed. He did not like to admit that he had failed to observe the obvious.

THE END.

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SCHOOL LIFE!



FIRST CHAPTERS.

Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor at Wrasper's School, is a man of angelic appearance, but behind his innocent exterior there lurks something foreboding and mysterious. Shortly after his arrival at the school his alleged uncle comes to stay with him. Tom Tartar, the leading spirit at the school, makes some startling discoveries concerning the new usher.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Terror of Perks.

"YOU shall pay dearly for this outrage!" yelled Bouncer. "Such violence is monstrous and——"

"You should keep to the path like other folks!" interrupted the game-keeper.

"This is a free country," hotly retorted Mr. Bouncer, "and the monopoly of land by such men as Sir Claude is scandalous! The general public have as much right to——"

"Oh, get out of it!" again interrupted the keeper. "I've no time to argufy with such as you. Stebbins, shove them young rips along!"

"Advance another step at your peril!" cried Mr. Bouncer, raising his huge, flabbily-rolled umbrella threateningly. "Dog! Villain! Low ruffian! I defy you!"

"Ho! You do—eh? We'll see about that!"

And, with a dexterous twist, the head keeper got possession of the umbrella; then, seizing Bouncer by the scruff of the neck, he commenced to run him forward.

Tom and his chums drew aside to let them pass, and then burst into a roar of laughter as the pupils of Bouncer's Select Academy for Young Gentlemen started off after their headmaster at a run, followed by another of

the keepers, who gave them a gentle reminder now and then with a curly ground-ash stick which he also carried.

"What have they been doing?" Tom asked the third keeper, who remained behind.

"It ain't so much what they does," was the reply, "but the way they does it!"

"Been cheeky—eh?"

"Cheeky as ye like! Boys will be boys, an' 'tis only nat'ral for 'em to run about a bit. But when we axes 'em civil to keep clear o' the pheasants, we don't want no tongues put out at us, an' that red-nosed old bloke spoutin' about the rights o' man. Right or wrong, we shoves 'em on!"

"An' when we shoves," put in the second keeper, who had just returned, "they've got to go!"

"So it seems!" said Tom, and, laughing over the incident, he and his chums resumed their way schoolwards.

For the next few days matters remained quiet. Ralston kept to his cottage, being visited now and then by one or other of the men he had called his "business friends."

Mr. Chopps duly carried out his school duties, but was rarely seen between whiles. As for "Uncle Josiah," he was not visible at all.

It was generally understood that he was ill in bed, although his ailment was not serious enough to necessitate a doctor being called in.

But though things were quiet, it was the tense sort of quiet which precedes a storm. To put it in another way, it was like the quietude observable when two armies are secretly preparing for action.

Perhaps the quietest person in the place at the time was Perks.

The boy did his work, but he went about the house in a dumb, dismal way that was rather oppressive to his fellow-servants.

Perks would sit in the kitchen and sigh and groan, with his eyes on the fire, and

the only notice that he took of remonstrances was to be a little quieter for a while.

"I suppose," said the cook, talking to him one evening, "that you are in love again."

"In love!" replied Perks, sharply. "Not me! I hate everybody. What's the good o' livin'? How would you like to do it with a rope round your neck?"

"Deary me!" exclaimed the cook. "What's the boy talkin' about now? Where's the rope?"

Perks got up and walked out, and that evening returned to the kitchen no more. He did not even arrive to supper.

The cook thought she had better speak to Mrs. Wrasper about him.

"I think," she said, "he is sickening for the measles or something."

But Mrs. Wrasper, when spoken to, merely said:

"The boy is eccentric, that's all. He does his work, and that is all we need trouble about."

She would have altered her mind about its being merely eccentricity if she had seen Perks in Chopps' room that very night.

The boy was on his knees in a supplicating attitude—weeping and begging to be "set free."

"Set free from what?" asked Chopps, who was lying back in an easy-chair, smoking a cigar.

"Oh! you know what!" growled Perks. "I am not allowed to say what it is."

"This is a free country," said Chopps. "If you don't like your situation, run away."

"It's not my situation I'm speaking of," groaned Perks, "but—"

He stopped, and Chopps turned his eyes sharply upon him.

"But what?"

Perks covered his face with his hands.

"I've taken an oath—an awful oath—and you know it!"

Chopps got up from his chair and came over to the boy.

"Perks," he said, "here I know nothing—nothing! In this house you are only Perks, the knife-boy, and I am Mr. Wrasper's assistant. Outside, I am something else, perhaps, and if that in any way concerns you it was your own fault."

Perks groaned again.

"You were too clever," continued Chopps. "You wanted to know too much, and when you had got hold of it of what use was it to you?"

He paused for a reply, but obtained none.

"All it did for you," resumed Chopps, "was to make you a slave. Who's your master?"

"You!" muttered Perks.

"Right—your master and the master of many others. Get up. Don't snivel there. Go about your business. Do your work. Obey me, and no harm shall come to you."

"Can't they hang me?"

As Perks put this question he looked up with a fear-stricken face.

"Who are they?" asked Chopps.

"The judges," replied Perks.

"Well," said Chopps, "they might try, perhaps, but I am not certain they can do it. But we can."

Perks began to wail again, and Chopps, giving way to anger, placed his hand roughly over his mouth.

"Have done with it. Silence!" he hissed.

"Don't I tell you that you have only to obey and no harm will come to you. Here, take a drop of this."

Letting go of the boy, he opened a cupboard and took out a bottle and a very tiny glass.

"About twenty drops will do it," he said, as he slowly poured out some thick, rich-looking liquid.

Perks shrank back.

"I don't want it."

"You fancy it is poison," chuckled Chopps.

"Now, do you think I would harm you here? Drink it up."

Perks did so, and a warm glow diffused itself over his body.

"It's nice," he said.

"Too nice for boys in a general way," said Chopps. "It is one of the rarest liqueurs made. Do you feel better?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go, and don't come snivelling here any more."

Perks, feeling and looking better, went out of the room hurriedly enough, and Chopps walked into an inner chamber or bedroom, where Uncle Josiah was lying in bed with his head tied up in a handkerchief.

If looks went for anything he had certainly been ill, and was not exactly well just yet.

Chopps sat down by the bedside.

"You look better," he said abruptly.

"I am better," was the reply. "It's the last time."

"An old yarn," said Chopps; "but it's the last time with me. If you venture again to make a beast of yourself, and bring on delirium tremens, I'll put you in a mad-house."

"Oh, don't say that!" groaned Josiah.

"I will," said Chopps. "I've got the certificate ready."

"Signed by two rascals who would sell their souls for a shilling," returned Josiah angrily.

"Well, what of that? They are duly qualified medical men and their certificates are as good as any others."

Josiah quaked so much that his very bed trembled.

The annoyed Chopps went on quietly with his snarlings and warnings.

"I've let you off two or three times," he said: "but no more."

"I'm not mad," said Josiah, "and never was."

"Two duly qualified medical practitioners say you are," retorted Chopps, "and that's

enough. It won't do, old fellow. You've got to obey."

"I will," said the other, humbly. "I'll never drink again."

"That's all right."

What a power over others this little cherub-like man had!

What was the secret of it?

CHAPTER XXV.

Ralston's Amazing Discovery.

RALSTON had hidden himself from the world for a day or two, confining himself to receiving visitors, who came entirely on business.

They were the sharp-looking men whom Tom had seen in his company, and the object of their visit they kept secret.

When they spoke it was in a whisper, and the most curious of listeners at the door of the room would not have heard a word.

Sometimes, however, the voice of Ralston reached his landlady's ears, and by the tone of it that estimable woman judged he was "letting somebody have it."

One of the men, also, on leaving, spoke out louder than usual.

"It's dreary work lying out among the hills," he said; "and in the dark a man can't see so clearly as in the day."

"You're to see something soon," was Ralston's answer, "or I'll find somebody else to do it."

The banging of the front door showed that the man had gone away in a bit of temper.

The next day and evening nobody called, and at ten o'clock, a late hour for the people of the village, Ralston rang his bell.

"I'm going out," he said to his landlady, "and if anybody calls tell them to come again at three o'clock."

"At three, sir!" exclaimed the woman, aghast. "To-morrow afternoon you mean, sir?"

"No—in the morning," was the cool reply. "I'll take the key of the door."

The woman would have demurred, but Ralston had a quiet, determined way about him, that effectually dried up the springs of ordinary resistance.

Having put on his coat and hat, and armed himself with a stout stick, he drew out the key from the lock.

"If I am not back by breakfast-time," he said, "go to the constable, and ask him to tell the inspector to look for me in the quarry hills."

"Yes, sir," said the woman, with a puzzled look. "And if he shouldn't find you?"

"Then he won't, that's all," said Ralston.

He bade her good-night, went out, and closed and locked the door.

A dark night outside, the inn shut up, and only a light or two visible in the upper windows.

A solemn hour and Ralston on a serious mission.

"I'll try what I can do to track 'em down," he muttered.

Although it was very dark his eyes soon got used to the gloom, and he could see his way along the road.

About a quarter of a mile from the quarries he turned aside into a lane on the right.

It was narrow and particularly dark, and a stranger would have hesitated before entering it; but Ralston knew that it led to the top of the quarries without any break.

He could not, therefore, lose his way.

But despite his knowledge he had to proceed with great caution, for the way was rough and full of ruts made by the passing of carts during the rainy season.

Resolutely grasping his stick, and with an occasional feel at a pocket in which was a more effectual weapon, he plodded on, the ground rising and the lane winding.

Half-way up this lane there was a solitary cottage, as he knew.

It was occasionally inhabited by one of the odd quarrymen, but it was supposed to be vacant now.

Ralston came upon it suddenly, and might have passed it by but for his observing that the gate of the garden stood open.

There was not much in this, you will say, but to a man accustomed to observe everything there was something peculiar in it.

He called to mind having seen that gate closed and padlocked a week or two ago.

Where now was the padlock, and who had opened the gate?

He stopped short and listened.

At first nothing but the sighing of the wind and the sighing of the trees fell upon his ears, but presently he thought he heard a faint murmuring in the house.

"Have I dropped upon the nest?" he asked himself, exultingly. "What daring devils they are to use such a place!"

He crept through the gate and up to the door of the cottage, when he stooped down and put his ear to the keyhole.

Then he was sure that somebody was talking inside. Not one person—but a dozen at least.

"By George!" he thought, with his blood at boiling pitch, "I have lit upon them!"

He was a bold man—but not bold enough to endeavour to get in there alone.

He knew that his life would not be worth a straw if he did so; but he could lie in wait and watch.

He turned from the door, and halfway down the path came full butt against a tall, powerful man, who had just entered the gate.

The meeting was unexpected on both sides, and surprise was the emotion shared by them.

"Who the deuce are you?" asked the man.

"A friend," replied Ralston quickly.

"Give the pass-word!"

"All right—here it is!"

He aimed a blow at the man, but his fist fell short. And then came a return blow from a cudgel, which caught Ralston on the side of the head.

It half-stunned him, and he felt the blood running down his face. He struck out with his stick, however, and this time with better effect, for the man staggered back with a cry of pain, and then yelled out:

"Ware, hawks! Lend a hand here!"

Ralston struck him again, and he fell heavily to the ground.

From inside the cottage came the rush of feet and voices calling out in anger.

Flight was Ralston's only prudent course against such odds. He rushed away, and almost unconsciously chose the backward route to the village. It was downhill, and in that direction he might find friends and assistance.

But ere he had gone far he began to feel weak and faint. The loss of blood was telling upon him.

His pace slackened, and presently he heard the sound of many feet swiftly overtaking him.

Ralston knew that if they caught him it meant—death! He had no doubt whatever about that.

He blundered on for about a hundred yards, getting weaker and weaker, and at last tripped and fell, rolling into a hollow, under the branches of some thorn-bushes.

Loss of blood, excitement, and the peril of the moment operated together, and the utter darkness of unconsciousness settled down upon him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Posh" Powner's Cousin.

ON the morning succeeding Ralston's adventure, Wooden Jerry stole out, over the garden-wall, down under the hedgerow, and by a circuitous route to the village.

A convenient gap in the hedge of the grounds at the back of the beerhouse enabled him to arrive at his destination without being observed.

To further this object, and to assist other visitors, the back door was very early set ajar.

Passing into the house, and treading his way like one certain of his route through a series of passages into the tap-room, he sat down on one of the settles.

On the opposite side, facing Jerry, sat a man who had the half-gamekeeper, half-poacher appearance which always settles on the country loafer.

"Mornin', mister," said Jerry.

"Mornin' to you," was the answer, somewhat sulkily given. "Now, my girl"—this to a slatternly servant girl who had made her appearance—"draw me a pint o' ale"

"Master'll get it," replied the girl; "he's out for a minute."

"A nice sort of landlord," growled the stranger, "to be out when his customers are waiting for him."

"He heard a gentleman living in the village had been brought home half-dead," said the girl, "and he's gone to see if it's true. I suppose he can do that without your leave, mister?"

The man muttered something unintelligible, and settled himself in a corner, apparently for a nap.

Wooden Jerry asked the girl who it was that had been hurt.

"His name is Ralston," she said, "and he's been nigh murdered. They say some poacher chaps did it."

"Poachers are a bad lot—ain't they, Sue," said Wooden Jerry; "you remember Posh Powner?"

"I should think so," said the girl. "We ain't like to forget him about here."

"What's come to Posh?" asked the stranger.

Jerry and the girl turned on him in surprise.

He was sitting up, quite wide awake, and evidently interested.

"Did you know him?" asked Jerry.

"Yes," said the stranger; "we are cousins. My name is Walt Powner."

"And haven't you heard what came to him?"

"No."

"Why, where have you been living?"

Walt Powner gave his head a curious sort of twist as he slowly replied:

"I've been sick and took care on."

"Ha!" sighed Wooden Jerry, "very kind of somebody. When I'm ill nobody takes care of me."

"They'd take care of you—if you went the right way to work," said Walt Powner. "How about this cousin of mine—he and I used to be pals—before I was took—ill. Now that I'm better I thought I'd give him a look up."

"You won't find him here," said Jerry. "You'll never see Posh agen."

"Dead?"

Jerry nodded.

"What did he die of?"

At that moment the landlord appeared. The girl had informed him what drink was wanted, and he brought it with him.

"I've been up to see Mr. Ralston," he said; "somebody gave him a stiffish knock last night, but it won't kill him."

"Who did it?" asked Wooden Jerry.

"Ah! That's what he don't know, and we don't know," replied the landlord.

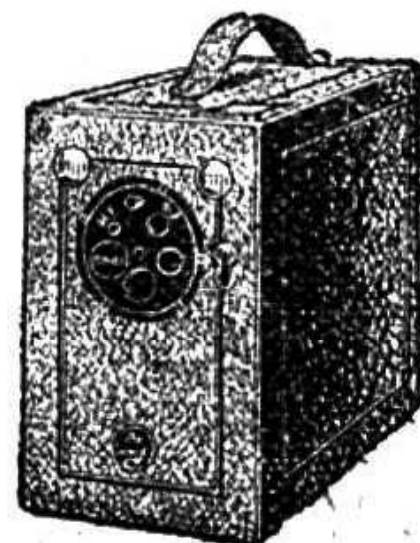
He glanced at the man who called himself Walt Powner, and Jerry did the same.

Evidently the same suspicion was in their minds.

(To be continued.)

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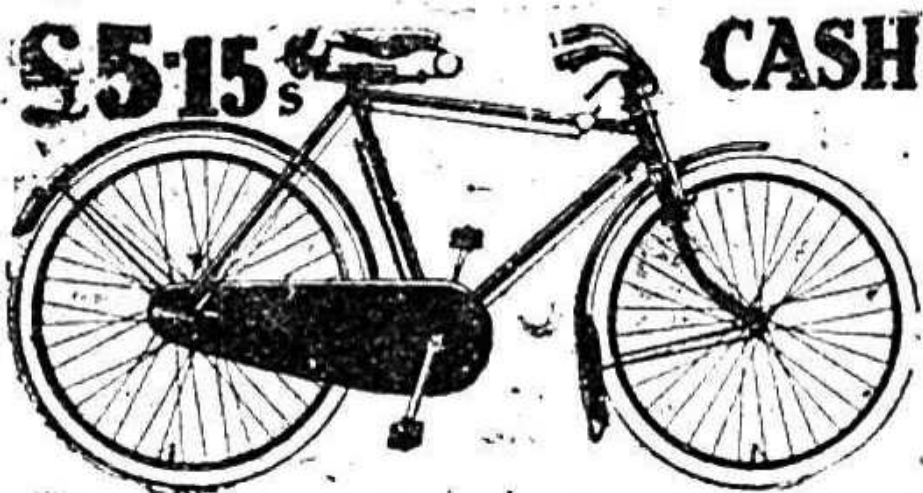
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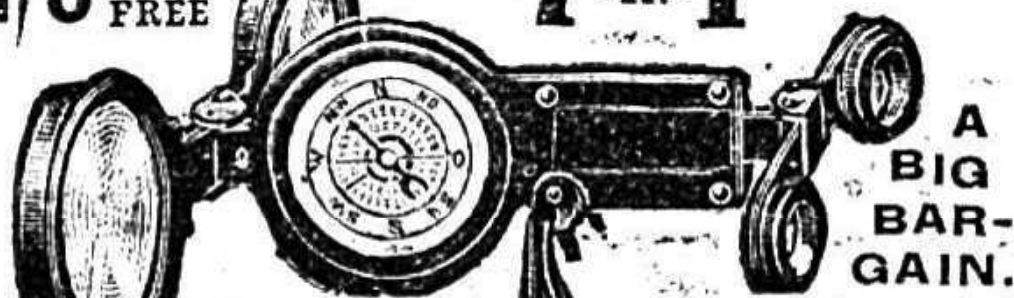
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