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THE LOST PEOPLE.

A Grand Tale of Schoolboy Adventure and the Discovery of a New
World in the Heart of Antarctica.

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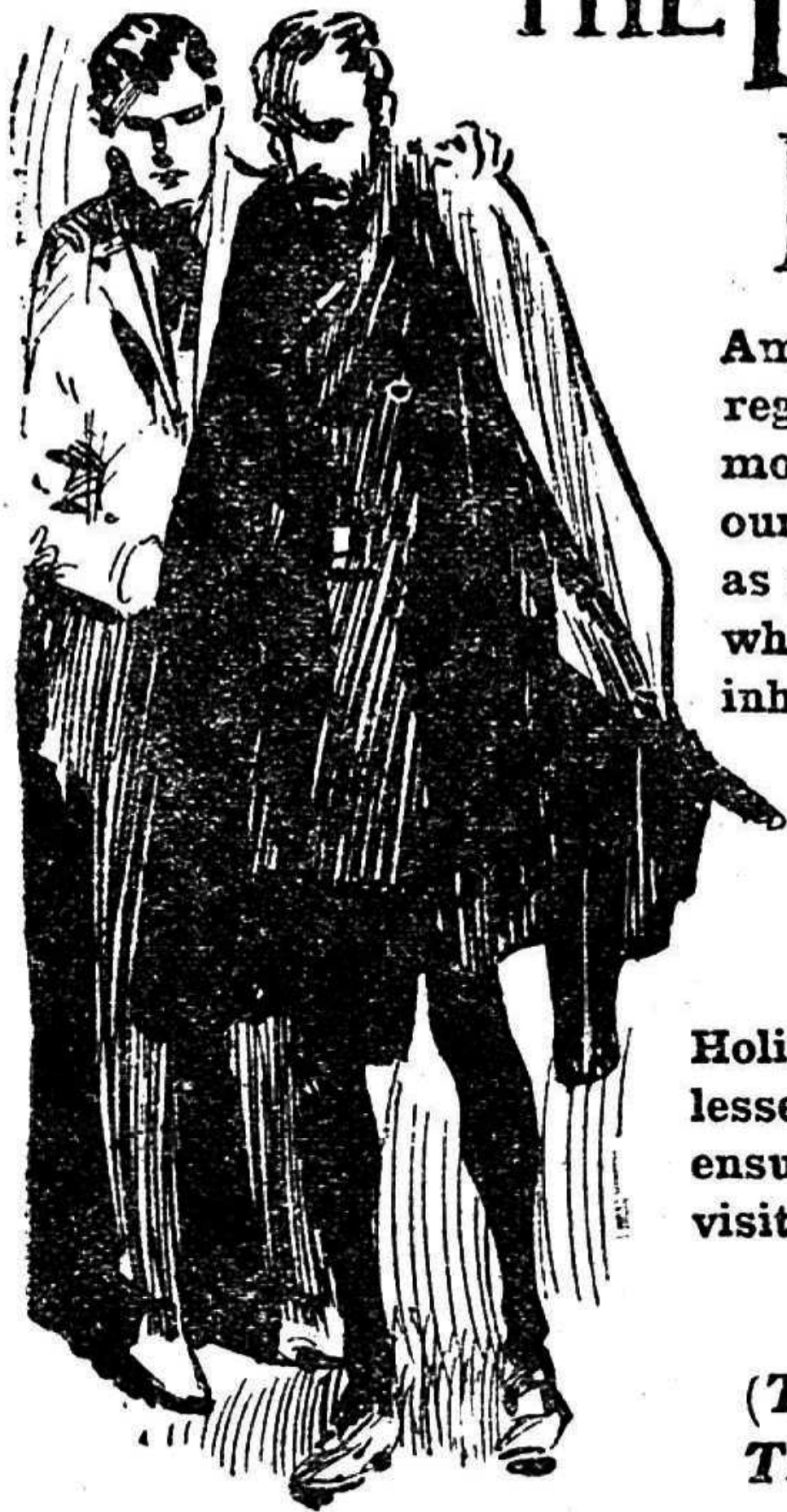
EVERY WEDNESDAY.

AUGUST 26, 1922.



With a swoop and a plunge, the Rover disappeared below the surface.

THE LOST PEOPLE !



Amid the snow and ice of the Antarctic regions, hemmed in by impassable mountains and warmed by a hot stream, our adventurers discover a new country as temperate and fertile as England, and, what is even more strange, a country inhabited by English settlers who have been isolated from the rest of the world for three centuries. From a small colony these people have developed into two separate kingdoms, a huge wall dividing them. So far, the Holiday Party is only acquainted with the lesser of these two kingdoms, and in the ensuing story, "The Lost People," they visit the more wonderful country beyond the great wall.—THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED
THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CITY OF ST. EDMUND!

"I MEAN to say, not quite, what?"

"Pardon, sir?"

"Well, the fact is, Phipps, absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, adjusting his monocle, and regarding Phipps with a languid air. "Not quite the precise goods, if you grasp my meaning!"

"I am afraid I cannot do so, sir," said Phipps.

"But, dash it all," protested Archie. "I mean, what about it, Phipps? Brains, and all that? I thought you were a dashed heady kind of cove—bursting with large consignments of brain cells and what not!"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, sir, but I am afraid you have overrated my ability," said Phipps gravely. "I must confess that I cannot quite follow the trend of your remarks."

"You mean that the jolly old point escapes you?" asked Archie. "Well, to be absolutely exact, old bird. To be precise,

and all that. It strikes me that we're not quite in the exact sort of element, Phipps. Bally decent, and all that kind of rot, but there you are! There's something wanting, don't you know. There's something jolly well lacking!"

Phipps nodded.

"I think I comprehend now, sir," he said. "You mean that among these strange people, we are not quite at home."

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely, Phipps," he said. "And then, again, absolutely not! At home, what? Well, any chappie with a few tons of brain would gather that we're a considerable distance from the dear old hearth—from the homestead, and what not! In other words, we're lambs that have strayed a few billion miles from the fold! Wanderers over the surface of the globe, if you get my meaning!"

"We are a very long way from England, sir," replied Phipps. "Many thousands of miles, in fact. We are down in the region

of the Antarctic ice—although one would not imagine so, to view the landscape.”

“Absolutely not!” agreed Archie. “The landscape is positively priceless, and I must admit that we’re having a somewhat ripping time. All the same, Phipps, the old bean has been somewhat busy.”

“You have been thinking, sir?”

“Absolutely!” replied Archie. “And I have come to the conclusion, darling, that King Jasper is several kinds of a blighter. That is to say, he’s one of the ones—one of the chappies who might be termed a nasty piece of work!”

“King Jasper is our host, sir,” said Phipps, rather shocked.

“Gadzooks!” exclaimed Archie. “So, as it were, he is! Host, what? It’s most dashed bad form to issue sundry comments regarding a chappie’s host. All the same, Phipps, I must be firm. I am a laddie who says what he thinks. Absolutely! Every time!”

Phipps looked rather thoughtful.

He and Archie were in one of the many comfortable ante-rooms of the royal palace in the kingdom of St. Edmund. They were quite alone, and Archie had been having a little nap.

Not that he required one. He had slept like a top throughout the night, and now it was only mid-morning. Outside, the air was clear and transparent, and the temperature was even and quite delightful.

The busy life of St. Edmund City was going on as usual, and the people, in their picturesque garb, were attending to their business. It would be difficult for one to realise that this place was many degrees below the Antarctic Circle. It was, in fact, within the region of the everlasting ice, and not a very great distance from the South Pole itself.

It would seem rather strange that Archie Glenthorne, a St. Frank’s junior, should be in this strange place—accompanied by Phipps, his valet. But there were other St. Frank’s fellows, too—including myself, Handforth and Co., Reginald Pitt, Christine and Co., Fatty Little, and others. There were twenty of us in the party—twenty St. Frank’s juniors.

And then, of course, there were Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, and Mr. Raymond Gray, to say nothing of the crew of the Golden Rover.

For this strange land—containing a lost contingent of the British nation, so to speak—had been discovered by us in Mr. Raymond Gray’s great aeroplane. Amid the endless ice, we had found a vast basin, hemmed in by lofty mountain peaks. These ice-covered mountains were absolutely impassable—and they held a secret which no members of the outside world had known until now.

For there, in that inner space, lived not only the subjects of King Jasper of St. Edmund, but also another people, known as the New Anglians. These latter were unknown to us so far—we had not met them.

For we were in St. Edmund City, and we were honoured guests in the palace of King Jasper the Second. We had been in the palace for two or three days now, and the experience, novel at first, was not absolutely to our liking.

For we had discovered that the king was a heavy drinker, and his nobles of the Court were equally bad. And the whole atmosphere of the palace was not exactly savoury to our tastes.

However, we were guests, and could not say much. At first we had been filled with amazement to find that this great basin in the hills was fertile—and we had been still more staggered to find English-speaking people living there. It had seemed utterly impossible and preposterous.

And yet, after all, there was a perfectly simple explanation.

This great basin, extending for eighty or ninety miles, and being forty miles in width, was kept warm and temperate by heat from the very earth itself. There was some volcanic origin which we had not yet discovered. Even the river which flowed through the valley was hot.

And the people themselves had developed from a big shipload of pilgrims who had set forth to start a colony in the Argentine in the seventeenth century. This ship had vanished and had never been heard of again—until now.

For we had learned that the vessel was caught in fierce hurricanes, and was driven down into the Antarctic ice—a mastless, sailless hulk. And there, caught in a current, she had been driven into a deep channel. The ice had closed up behind her—but in some strange way the sturdy old ship had found herself within the grip of the warm river. And all the souls on board had been able to get into this wonderful, fertile valley.

But, of course, there was no escape. There was absolutely no method of returning to civilisation, for the icefields were too wide to be conquered. And so, during a period of nearly two hundred and fifty years these outcasts had lived in the hidden valley.

It was only natural that such a large number of people should increase. And, during the course of time they had become separated into two distinct nations—both English speaking, but living in their own parts of the valley. And by what we could see, the New Anglians were by no means friendly towards the inhabitants of St. Edmund.

We were not very surprised, for the St. Edmund crowd did not particularly impress us. We were rapidly coming to the conclusion that we had come to the wrong country first. We believed that the New Anglians were by far the nicer people. And we meant to make certain on this point.

Phipps and Archie were holding their little conversation in private. The other juniors were either in the palace grounds, or visiting the business section of the city.

For they walked about just as they pleased. And the people were now becoming accustomed to these strangers in their midst. The Golden Rover lay in the river, just facing the royal palace.

"But it's no good grumbling, Phipps," went on Archie, standing up and stretching himself. "I mean to say, it doesn't do any dashed good, and it's a most frightful waste of breath. Well, old lad, what about it? The young master would rather like to stagger forth among the populace."

"Very good, sir," said Phipps. "I presume you do not wish me to accompany you?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "You are required, Phipps. The tissues are frightfully restored, and I'm feeling at the top of my form. But it strikes me that we are somewhat conspic."

"You mean conspicuous, sir?"

"Precisely, Phipps," said Archie. "The old flannels, if you gather my meaning, are not quite the things to wear. When a chappie is in Rome, don't you know, he's got to do what the bally old Romans do! You get me, Phipps?"

"You mean to imply, sir, that we ought to be wearing the same kind of clothing as the people of this city?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Brainy lad! The old bean is awakening into activity, Phipps. Well, there you are. We shall now proceed to flow forth, and pay sundry visits to tailors and what not!"

Phipps shook his head.

"I strongly advise you to give up the idea, sir," he said.

"But look here, Phipps—I mean to say, dash it all!" ejaculated Archie. "Give it up, don't you know! That's quite imposs. And why? Kindly state the reasons for—"

"I think it will be far more dignified, sir, to remain dressed in your present attire," interrupted Phipps. "These people are greatly impressed by our appearance, and I think it would quite destroy the effect if you attired yourself in the customary garb of the city."

"I must disagree, Phipps!" said Archie firmly. "Of course, I'm most beastly sorry and all that, but there you are! I wouldn't offend you for worlds, but I think you are several kinds of a priceless cuckoo!"

"Thank you, sir," said Phipps solemnly.

"Not at all!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I suspect, old lad, that you are attempting to be considerably sarcastic. But there is nothing doing. The young master ignores such frightful ignorance. The old napper is made up, Phipps—Archie attires himself in the garb of the natives!"

"Very well, sir," said Phipps. "I would not presume to argue with you. If you will prepare, we will venture out and—"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie severely. "I refuse, Phipps. I mean to say, a chappie has simply got to produce a few chunks of dignity now and again. I go alone, laddie! Absolutely alone! I decline to have

you buzzing round. And that, as it were, is absolutely that!"

Phipps bowed.

"Very well, sir," he said quietly.

And he silently slipped out of the apartment, leaving Archie gazing after him in considerable concern.

"Now that was bally uncalled for," murmured Archie. "The chappie oozed away before I could conclude the ticking-off business. Besides, I was going to relent, and all that sort of rot! As it is, I shall remain firm, and decline to recognise the blighter!"

Archie stalked out, his head up in the air. His mind was now firmly made up. He would have listened to reason, perhaps, if Phipps had remained longer. But now there was no getting out of it. Archie would proceed to a clothing establishment, and he would obtain a complete rig-out.

Several juniors met him as he passed through the palace corridors. But he took no notice. He was making a bee-line for the shopping section of the city. He would show Phipps who was master!

All the juniors were allowed to walk about as they pleased. They had free access to all parts of the palace, and they took advantage of their liberty to the full.

After all, it didn't matter much to them whether the people were classy or not. Nobody interfered, and it had to be admitted that the visitors had been treated as honoured guests.

Whatever we thought of the St. Edmund folk we kept to ourselves. Archie had opened his mind to Phipps, but he would not have done so to anybody else. Archie regarded Phipps as a part of his own composition.

He passed out of the palace, and then along the wide street towards the centre of the city. He failed to observe that Handforth and Co., and Pitt and one or two others were watching him.

"There's something in the wind, my son," said Pitt sagely.

Handforth sniffed the air.

"I can't smell anything!" he said. "The air seems all right—"

"You're always too jolly literal!" grinned Pitt. "There's something doing, I mean. Didn't you notice the way Archie streaked out just now? There he goes—like a giddy lamplighter!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Handforth. "And I'm blowed if I can see why he looks like a lamplighter!"

"That's merely an expression, you ass!" said Pitt. "But have you ever seen Archie buzz along like that unless something very special is afoot? From previous experience, I judge that he's had a tiff with Phipps, and has decided to do something off his own bat. I vote we follow and see the fun!"

"Good idea!" said Church promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"A giddy waste of time!" said Handforth. "I'm not going—I've got something better

to do than chase a fathead like Archie—
Hi! Come back, you rotter!"

But the other fellows had walked on in a body, leaving Handforth talking to the empty air. This was one of the surest methods of making Edward Oswald comply with any suggestion.

He had stated that he wasn't going—but he went. And as the juniors progressed along the street, Handforth argued. But as nobody took any notice of him, he finally gave it up in disgust. And then somebody pointed out that Archie had turned into a big shop where they sold clothing.

"I say, this'll be rich!" grinned Pitt. "The ass has made up his mind to buy some native clobber! It'll be no end of a lark if he comes out all dressed up in the same way as the inhabitants. We'll chip him right and left!"

"Rather!" agreed Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "If that silly lunatic has dressed himself in native clothing, I'll biff him on the nose! It's likely we're going to stand that kind of thing! It was a jolly good idea of mine to follow him!"

"Oh, great!" agreed Pitt. "You're first class when it comes to ideas, Handy! But we won't argue on the point."

Archie Glenthorne had paused for a moment or two before entering the shop. Here, in this city, there were large shops just the same as one can see in England, or any other country. In many respects the shops of St. Edmund City were like those of London. There were the same familiar English names over the doors, and the buildings themselves were reminiscent of old-time England.

Archie had no difficulty in finding the place he wanted. This particular shop displayed all kinds of clothing. They were mostly woollen, for they had no cotton in this hidden land. Some garments were made of a material closely resembling linen, and it was quite possible that a substitute for cotton or flax had been discovered.

The men of St. Edmund were nearly all attired in stockings and breeches, with a loose tunic covering the upper part of the body. The neck was quite open, and these tunics were of thick, woolly material, and in all manner of bright colours. Gay patterns were woven into the texture of the stuff, and the effect, altogether, was rather pleasing.

As a matter of fact, it was these bright colours which had mostly attracted Archie's attention. He was rather partial to anything "jazzy," and he fancied that he would look somewhat stunning in one of those tunics.

He considered it to be a tremendous advantage for these St. Edmund people to be able to talk English. They used the style of language which had been known in the old country over two hundred years ago. Although they had progressed in some ways, in others they had remained curiously

stationary. The language, for instance, had hardly altered.

And this was not altogether surprising. The people had had no outside influences to guide them. Cut off from the world they had been compelled to carry on in their own way. And it was only natural, perhaps, that they should keep to the same customs and manners which had been known to their forefathers.

But in quite a few respects the inhabitants of the great warm basin had progressed. They had made discoveries which were even unknown to modern science. And they had coined one or two words of their own.

Upon the whole, however, there was little change, and Archie considered that a vote of thanks was due to the St. Edmund people for making intercourse so easy. It was quite a simple matter to buzz into a shop and purchase anything that took his fancy. He took the shops as a mere matter of course.

And having decided to buy an outfit, he lounged into the first big clothing establishment and gazed round with interest. The place was fairly large, with all sorts of articles displayed for sale, hanging from various hooks. And there were signs, too—written in old English characters which were quite quaint to see. A stout little man came forward.

"What ho!" said Archie. "How goes it, old bean? I mean to say, here we are, what? On the spot, and all that sort of thing!"

The proprietor of the shop looked very startled. Customers of this kind were a novelty to him. He knew at once that Archie was one of the peculiar people who had entered the country in a strange flying monster. And Master John Bodley—to give the outfitter his name—hardly knew what to say.

"What about it?" asked Archie chattily. "The old glad rags, and so forth! Kindly produce large assortments of body covering, old dear!"

"Thou art welcome in my humble establishment, sire," said the outfitter nervously. "Thou hast honoured me greatly by entering."

"What?" said Archie. "I mean to say, what? The fact is, old tulip, I've just trickled in about some of the gay attire. Shove forward the old stock, and I'm all attention. Trot it out, laddie, and I'll give the bally stuff the jolly old once over!"

"Thou art puzzling me by thy strange talk, my noble sir," said Mr. Bodley. "But methinks thou are seeking some clothing?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Dash it all, I've been simply reeling out yards of the old information for hours past! I've been positively standing here, exhausting the vocal chords, and so forth. Well, that's settled! I mean, how about producing the old stock?"

"You would care to see some examples of my merchandise?"

"Now, that's a dashed good word! It

sounds so frightfully important, and all that kind of rot! Well, proceed, old onion!"

The outfitter slightly recovered his composure. He understood about a quarter of what Archie was saying, but he gathered the trend. Several faces were looking in through the window of the shop, but Archie didn't notice them. Those faces belonged to Handforth and Pitt and a few others.

"'Tis wondrously good of thee to honour me in this way," said Mr. Bodley humbly. "I am thy servant, and will obey thy bidding."

"There's no need to be so dashed groveling," observed Archie. "A chappie doesn't want you to be a servant, old son! Nothing like it! Just show me the stuff, and I'll proceed to yank out quantities of cash. Absolutely! It strikes me that this thing is somewhat rich, if you gather what I mean."

He indicated a tunic which was hanging from a hook near by. The thing was blue, with red stripes running down it. The outfitter took it down, and displayed it with a certain amount of pride.

"'Tis surely an excellent article," he exclaimed.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "At the same time, I would prefer something a bit more jazzy, as it were. You gather the scheme? Green lines, with quantities of yellow, and just a touch of orange, and so forth! Something, as it were, that will be calculated to startle the lads of the village!"

The unfortunate proprietor was rather at a loss.

"Thou art surely speaking strangely, young sir," he said. "Methinks thou art attempting to be merry. For yestermorn, when two of thy friends spoke to me, I could understand well."

"Oh, I think I've got you!" said Archie nodding. "The old speech, what? Rather too thick, as it were? Right ho, old dear! I mean to say, right ho in chunks! Considerable alterations will be effected! We will begin to converse in the bally old language of the country."

"I am at your service," said Mr. Bodley, hardly knowing how to deal with this customer.

"'Tis dashed good!" said Archie, resolved to do his best. "I mean, old scream, what about the doings? Thou wilt please me in vastly consignments if thou wilt buzz forward the old tunics and what not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth and Co., and the others outside, absolutely couldn't contain themselves any longer. They had heard every word, and Archie's attempt to speak the language of the country was somewhat priceless. As for Mr. Bodley, he was in a worse state of bewilderment than before.

Archie turned, and he jammed his monocle into his eyebrow.

"Well, I mean to say," he protested warmly. "This, as it were, is not only the limit, but about three hundred and sixty-three miles beyond it! Absolutely! Pray stagger away into the offing, dear lads!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We're coming inside!"

"Absolutely not!" replied Archie firmly. "Thou wilt vamoose, and all that kind of thing! Methinks—Gadzooks! I'm bally well getting into the frightful stuff automatically! This is somewhat disturbing!"

The juniors marched into the shop grinning.

"Now then, Archie, out of it!" said Handforth. "You ought to have more sense than to bother this poor old chap——"

"That, as it were, is a most dashed insult!" said Archie. "I'm purchasing large wardrobes of glad rags, and you chappies are not required! In fact, I insist upon your sliding forth at once!"

But the juniors insisted upon remaining. What was more, they helped Archie to choose a complete outfit, much to the satisfaction of Mr. Bodley. He was able to understand Pitt quite well.

And in less than half an hour Archie was a changed person.

He had retired into an inner apartment, and when he emerged Handforth and Co. nearly fainted on the spot. Archie was wearing a pair of red stockings, green breeches, and a tunic which was a mixture of violet and pink, with touches of orange. And the whole effect was rather trying to the vision.

"Help!" gasped Pitt. "You—you fat-head! You can't go out like that—you'll strike the population blind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, how about it?" asked Archie. "Decidedly taking, what? I mean to say, most frightfully bright, and all that, but a chappie has got to do as Rome does, and all that!"

"But the people don't dress like that!" grinned Pitt. "At least, they don't wear such a mixture all at once. Green might go with red, for example—but the colours you're wearing clash horribly!"

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely!" he agreed. "But—you see, I wanted to create something of a sensash. There's nothing like making yourself deucedly dazzling to attract the optics. Laddies, we will stagger forth!"

And they did stagger forth, literally. They laughed so much that they couldn't walk straight. And when they got out into the open, even Archie himself was rather dismayed.

The interior of the shop was rather dim, and he had not been able to appreciate the colours at their true worth. But now

they positively yelled at him. He looked down at himself, and his eyeglass dropped.

"I mean to say, what?" he gasped. "I've got an idea that Phipps will expire!"

"It's a wonder we're not dead already!" moaned Church. "Oh, my goodness! You're a scream, Archie! If you go to the palace like that, you deserve——"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I deserve to be sent to penal servitude for life! But there you are! The fact is, laddies, I didn't quite gather the colours! I shall proceed to ooze back into the establishment——"

"No, you won't!" grinned Handforth. "You're coming with us."

He was seized firmly, and in spite of all his protests, he was dragged along the main street. The inhabitants crowded round, laughing and shouting. They knew that this was a joke, and they appreciated it highly. Archie didn't. He began to realise, when it was too late, that he had made an ass of himself.

And he was feeling weak and faint by the time the palace was reached. And here Handforth and Co. allowed him to get free. Archie, gathering all his remaining strength, whizzed into the courtyard as fast as he could go.

He shot through the corridors, and arrived at his own room, breathless, hot, and in a panting condition. And as he entered, Phipps caught sight of him. Phipps positively shuddered.

"Oh, Master Archie!" he exclaimed reproachfully.

"Water!" murmured Archie. "Phipps, old lad, kindly proceed to rally round! The young master is on the point of collapse!"

"Has anything happened, sir?" asked Phipps stiffly.

"Happened!" echoed Archie. "Well, I mean! Gaze, Phipps, I've been shoved round the old town, as it were—held up as a fearful example, and all that sort of thing! I've had a poisonous time, old dear! I might even say that the experience was the foulest I've ever encountered!"

"I am sorry that you permitted yourself to become exposed to such ridicule," said Phipps coldly. "I might say, sir, that your appearance is most unbecoming. You have certainly ruined your reputation as a smart young gentleman."

"But, you don't mean it, Phipps!" said Archie. "The idea was to please the natives, as it were. Somehow, Phipps, it didn't work. I give you full permission to take the garments, and bury them! And I shall be awfully obliged if you will yank forth the good old white flannels!"

Phipps brightened up.

"Very good, sir!" he said briskly. "We will change at once, sir!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, with feeble relief.

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE IN THE AIR!



LORD DORRIMORE looked at Nelson Lee keenly.

"What's wrong, old man?" he asked. "You've been sitting there as silent as a stuffed owl for the last five minutes. There's somethin' on your mind. Let's have it."

"Well, as a matter of fact, there is," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile. "And I shall take this opportunity to have a little confidential chat with you. No, Mr. Gray—please don't go. I want you, too."

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Raymond Gray were in the saloon of the Golden Rover. It was very quiet and peaceful there, for the great aeroplane was lying placidly in the river, moored close to the embankment in front of the king's palace.

Mr. Gray had been attending to one or two mechanical details that morning, and he was now satisfied that the Rover was in her best condition. He looked after the vessel as a mother looks after her baby. It was his one joy.

"It so happens that we have a little time to ourselves," went on Nelson Lee. "Before long some members of the king's suite may put in an appearance. It is just possible that General Horton will come on board. And I should like to discuss this matter now."

"What matter?" asked Dorrie.

"I am referring to the attitude of King Jasper and his immediate associates," replied Nelson Lee. "We have been here long enough to form some kind of opinion as to their character."

"Well, if it comes to that, I can say a few words on the subject," observed his lordship. "Personally, I think they're a pretty low-down lot. An' it's rather a good thing for England that they're hemmed in in this place."

"I agree precisely," said Mr. Gray. "This so-called kingdom is really quite a miniature affair, and the whole population does not amount to more than fifteen thousand. A goodly number. I will admit, but the people are not of the same quality as one would expect from good old British stock."

"They seem to have deteriorated in a marked degree, by being cut off from the rest of the world," said Nelson Lee. "And that is not very flattering to us. But I cannot believe that these people are the descendants of good old English men and women. Perhaps we shall find out the truth soon. The king and his ministers are a worthless, drunken lot."

"They are!" agreed Dorrie. "I sha'n't forget the banquet the other night. A more disgustin' scene couldn't be imagined. But what's the idea, old man? Are you thinkin' about makin' a move?"

"Yes," replied Nelson Lee. "You remember our first interview with King Jasper? He informed us that his subjects were the descendants of those pilgrims who set out from England in a ship named the St. Edmund? He also told us that a great many undesirable ruffians were separated from his own people in a kind of penal settlement."

"Exactly," said Dorrie. "These people here have built a massive wall, stretching right across the country. An' behind it, accordin' to the king, these undesirables live in mud hovels, an' are only a few stages removed from savages. A very bright selection of lies!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, lies," he agreed. "If we had not been able to see things for ourselves we should have had no reason to doubt the king's word. But the king did not know, then, that the Golden Rover was able to fly—he believed her to be merely a sea-going craft."

"We rather surprised him," smiled Mr. Gray.

"Scared him into a blue funk, you mean!" chuckled Dorrie.

"And, at the same time, we learned the truth regarding that high wall," said Nelson Lee grimly. "From the air we were able to see into the adjoining kingdom—for there can be no doubt that this great natural basin is separated into two states. One is called St. Edmund, and the other New Anglia. And New Anglia, instead of being a penal settlement, is really a far better country than this. It is splendidly developed, with well-made roads, picturesque towns, and a truly imposing capital."

"In other words, our merry monarch attempted to spoof us," said Dorrie, as he lit a cigarette. "It strikes me he's jealous of his pal over the garden wall, an' he wanted to have us on a piece of string!"

"The king did not like to admit that this was the inferior state," said Nelson Lee. "That is probably the truth of the matter. The man is no good. I do not like him, and I do not trust him, neither do I trust his lieutenants. I believe that we shall find things very different in New Anglia. I am convinced that the people there are of a much finer quality than the people here. We will see."

"So we're goin' for a trip?"

"Not just yet," replied Lee. "During yesterday and to-day I have noticed a very cunning look in the king's eyes. Frankly, I do not like it. I am almost certain he is hatching some plot against us. Above all, he would like to keep us here—and I think he would give a great deal to be able to seize the Golden Rover."

Mr. Raymond Gray stiffened.

"The man had better not try anything of that nature," he exclaimed warmly. "The Golden Rover remains in my charge!"

"Of course," agreed Nelson Lee. "But you must remember, Mr. Gray, that we shall



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he absolutely helpless if the king chooses to take drastic action. I shall, therefore, take steps to make ourselves secure. The first move will be to get the whole of our party on board."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "That's the best thing."

"It's the only thing," said Nelson Lee. "Man alive, we cannot afford to give this tyrant even an inch of rope. He is a tyrant—we have discovered in many ways that he taxes his people in the most gross fashion, and his soldiers enforce the law with an iron hand. The population seems to be contented at first glance—but I have been making a few discreet inquiries. My eyes have been opened. King Jasper is a brute."

"Do you think he might have the audacity to interfere with us?" asked the inventor.

"I think the man will do anything if he can gain by it," replied Nelson Lee. "King Jasper would dearly love to seize the Rover—but it is more than he dare do, for he does not know how to control it, or what disasters it might bring to him. But he may decide upon a bold move at any moment—and I am determined to forestall him. This evening we shall all gather together on board. The boys will cease to live in the palace."

"I think they will be rather glad," said Mr. Gray. "For, by what I have seen, they aren't greatly impressed by their royal host. Until now it has really been impossible to refuse the king's hospitality."

"He will probably be greatly offended—but that cannot be helped," said Nelson Lee. "We must chance that. And to-night, when we are once more together, we will slip silently up the river and take to the air. And we will make a closer inspection of New Anglia."

"That's the ticket!" said Dorrie. "I think——"

The door of the saloon opened, and Snowball's grinning face appeared. Snowball was the Golden Rover's cook—a cheerful darkey, who took everything as it came, and who always grinned.

"Dere's two gents up on de deck, Massa Gray!" he exclaimed. "I guess dey's sure askn' fo' Massa Lee. Golly! I'se nebber seen such queer lookin' folks in all ob my life!"

"I expect he means the king," said Dorrie calmly.

And a moment later Major Barrance appeared. He was Mr. Gray's nephew, and the second pilot of the Rover.

"His Majesty awaits!" he said, smiling. "Shall I bring the boulder down here, Mr. Lee? He's got General Horton with him, and they would like to have a chat. I told them I'd make inquiries."

"I think we had better see the gentlemen at once," replied Lee.

And, almost immediately afterwards, King Jasper entered the saloon, closely attended by General Horton. The latter was the chief of the army of St. Edmund, and his appearance was not very impressive.

"'Tis well!" exclaimed the king, as he bowed. "Thou art free to speak with me, Master Lee? I would ask a favour of thee and thy good friend."

"We shall be only too willing to meet you, I dare say, your Majesty," said Nelson Lee.

"Thou art honoured guests in my country," said the king. "Thou hast been received with acclamation by my subjects. I have showered upon thee every favour that a royal guest should demand. In return, I should like thee to honour me by remaining in my kingdom."

"I do not quite understand," said Nelson Lee.

"Yet thou art a man of sense," said King Jasper. "Thou art here with thy companions, and 'tis my wish that thou shouldst remain. If thou wilt have me speak more plainly, I will do so. I do not desire thee to pay any visit to the neighbouring kingdom of New Anglia."

"Look here, old man, it can't be done," put in Lord Dorrimore. "We don't want to offend you, but I can't see any adequate reason why we should deny ourselves the pleasure of droppin' in upon your neighbours. They are probably dyin' to make our acquaintance. An', by all appearance, they seem to be a healthy lot of chaps.

By what I could see of New Anglia, it's a good country."

The king frowned, and bit his lip.

"New Anglia is an enemy of this state," he said curtly. "Thou art my guests. 'Twill be an insult to me if thou do insist upon this visit. Mayhap it will be as well if I should acquaint thee of the true position."

"You have already told us one story concerning New Anglia," said Nelson Lee. "Are we to understand that you were attempting to fool us?"

"'Tis not for us to quarrel," said King Jasper. "My friends, the people of New Anglia, are not on good terms with the people of St. Edmund. If thou make this journey to the neighbouring State thou wilt be doing an act of enmity towards myself."

"I do not agree with you," said Nelson Lee firmly. "Furthermore, your Majesty, we cannot promise anything."

"Of course not," said Dorrie. "Be reasonable, for goodness' sake."

The king glanced at General Horton.

"Thou wert surely right, general," he said. "Our guests are inclined to be obstinate. 'Tis well to know the truth! Let it be so, Master Lee. That has given me a full understanding. Well, 'tis for me to tell you that thou wilt leave St. Edmund at the peril of my severe displeasure. I have many soldiers under my command. I have ways of making those who are obstinate submit to my king's wishes!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lee grimly. "Is that a threat, sire?"

"Take it as thou wilt!"

"It is certainly a threat," put in Mr. Gray. "I am deeply grieved that there should have come any unpleasantness of this nature. We are your guests, and it is trebly unfortunate that a dispute should arise."

"'Tis not of my making," said the king.

"Come, come," smiled Nelson Lee. "We will not quarrel, your Majesty. Let things remain as they are. It is absurd to have any misunderstandings and arguments. We are your guests, and we are enjoying your hospitality. It is well. Let us remain on good terms."

"And thou wilt agree to my wish?" asked the king eagerly.

"For the moment, yes," said Nelson Lee. "I can promise you that we shall not leave your kingdom without giving you warning."

"'Tis good!" said the king, with a note of relief in his voice. "But thou wilt do well to remember that the power is in my hands to enforce my wishes. Beware of displeasing me!"

And, with a sweep of his robe, he passed out of the saloon. He was followed by General Horton, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Gray looked after them with grim expressions.

"You knuckled under, old man!" said Dorrie regretfully.

"Nonsense!" replied Lee. "I hedged, that is all—solely on account of the boys.

They are still in the palace, and, above all, we wish to avert any precipitate action on the part of the king."

"By gad, you're right!" said his lordship. "A rascal like that might get up to any sort of mischief. He thinks he's a kind of tin god, an' there's no question that he's in a position of supreme power here. If he likes to say a few hundred heads are to come off, those heads will come! An' it's pretty rotten for a country when the king happens to be a blackguard!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"After this, we must hesitate no longer," he said. "Indeed, I shall not even wait until this evening. I shall act at once. The boys must be collected together without a moment's delay and brought on board."

"I agree!" said Mr. Gray. "I do not like the look of things, Mr. Lee. Indeed, I am quite anxious."

Nelson Lee was anxious, too. He was sorry that he had not insisted upon collecting the boys together earlier. But the position was rather difficult. It was awkward to take the boys away from the palace when they were the king's guests. But the signs were ominous. Action had to be taken without delay.

"We'll go ashore now," said Nelson Lee briskly. "Dorrie, you will go in one direction and I'll take another. Every member of our party must be rounded up—and the thing must be done without allowing the king to know what we are about. Mr. Gray, you will remain on board, I think? Perhaps it would be as well to get ready for a somewhat hurried departure."

"Quite so!" said Mr. Gray. "I understand, Mr. Lee. As you say, a hurried departure may be necessary."

"Things seem to be gettin' excitin'," observed Dorrie. "I've got an idea that we shall meet with a few bags of trouble before we get up into the air again. Hallo! Here's old coalbox. He'll have a few cheerin' remarks to make, I dare say."

Umlosi had just appeared, and he was not looking particularly happy. He was attired in his usual white drill suit—and he somehow seemed to be several sizes too large for it. He carried his trusty spear in his right hand. Under no circumstances would Umlosi part with it. He even slept with the thing.

"Wau! Thou art looking well pleased, N'Kose," rumbled Umlosi. "Yet methinks grave troubles are brewing—"

"There you are—I knew it!" grinned his lordship. "Old worrycuts! If you haven't got one thing to grumble about, you've got another! An' you're the only chap among the whole crowd of us who speaks like these St. Edmund fellows. Well, go ahead—what's bitin' you?"

"Thou art pleased to be funny, my master," growled Umlosi. "Naught is bitin' me. But my snake tells me that ere long we shall be in the midst of much battle!"

"Good!" said Dorrie. "Blood by the gallon, I suppose?"

"There will be the flowing of blood!" replied Umlosi. "It makes thee amused, mayhap, to jest over these matters. But 'tis seldom that my instinct is wrong. Thou knowest full well—"

"Yes, old man, I do know," said Dorrie, suddenly becoming serious. "An' I don't mind admittin' that I'm worryin', too. I wouldn't care a hang if all these boys were on board. But they're not—an' there's no tellin' whether we shall be able to collect them up."

A few minutes later Nelson Lee and Dorrie went ashore. They could not help noticing that a larger number of soldiers than usual paraded the wide embankment. Was this a sign of coming disaster?

CHAPTER III.

THE KING'S TRUMP CARD!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE sighed with relief.

"This, so to speak, is absolutely top-ping!" he observed. "I have come to the conclusion, Phipps, that flannels are the right thing, after all. How does the young master look?"

"Quite presentable, sir."

"Everything all serene, what?"

"Quite, sir."

"Good!" said Archie. "And now, after the frightful times of strenuous activity, we'll proceed to indulge in a few assorted winks. In other words, Phipps, what about some dreamless?"

"It is hardly the time to sleep now, sir," said Phipps.

"No?"

"I should not advise it."

"But, I mean to say, dash it!" protested Archie. "In other words, dash it very considerably! You don't seem to realise, old onion, that the tissues are at a dashed low ebb! They require a frightful lot of restoring, and there's nothing like the good old pillow for the job."

"But it is close upon time for luncheon, sir," said Phipps.

"So it is!" agreed Archie. "Brainy lad! You know, these sort of things positively slide out of the old memory. A chappie forgets meal-times, and all that kind of rot! Right ho, Phipps! Right ho! We will proceed to saunter until—"

"There he is!" exclaimed Handforth, bursting into the apartment. "Why, of all the asses, look at him!"

Handforth came to a halt in front of Archie, and glared at him rather aggressively.

And behind Handforth there were a number of other fellows, including myself. Edward Oswald had been spreading a tale that Archie was worth quids to look at. And Handforth now regarded Archie with no uncertain disfavour.

"You—you babbling lunatic!" roared Handforth.

"Absolutely!" gasped Archie. "That is to say, what about it? Shockingly terse, if you know what I mean!"

"You prize fathead," said Handforth witheringly.

"I mean to say, this is somewhat poisonous!" exclaimed Archie, adjusting his monocle and drawing himself up. "It seems to me that something's got to be done. Something, as it were, must be accomplished. What do you say, Phipps? We can't allow—"

"You—you hopeless dummy!"

"That, to be absolutely final, is—well, absolutely final!" said Archie, with a gulp. "The old marrows are fairly quivering, don't you know. A chappie who is simply bubbling over with the red blood of the Glenthorne's can't stand this sort of thing. Absolutely not! I'm a most peaceful cove, but when it comes to about five hundred insults, I ooze over! I absolutely burst the bonds of constraint, and let fly!"

"What's that?" said Handforth, glaring.

"In other words, honour demands a few choice apologies!" said Archie. "You have been—"

"I've been looking at you!" interrupted Handforth. "What's the idea of changing? I brought all these chaps here to show them what a blithering idiot you look, and now you've got back into flannels! What's become of that jazz costume you were wearing? What have you done with it?"

"Phipps, this frightful chappie is bothering me," said Archie stiffly. "Pray deal with him as you think best! I mean to say, a chappie simply can't allow himself to—"

"Oh, so here you are?" said Lord Dorrimore, striding in from the corridor. "How many? One—two— Seven altogether! Well, that's not so bad. Come on, my lads!"

"Come on?" I repeated. "What for? It'll be time for luncheon soon, and we shall all be wanted—"

"Luncheon can wait," interrupted Dorrie. "You're all required on board the Rover at once—just a kind of family gathering. You'd better come, too, Phipps. An' we'll waste no time."

Phipps looked at his lordship keenly.

"You suspect—danger, sir?" he asked.

"Not exactly danger, but you never know!" replied Dorrie. "We'll have some lunch on the Rover to-day. Can't explain much now—but there's no time to chuck away. Can I rely on you chaps to go straight on board?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll see to it, Dorrie," I said.

"Good!" replied his lordship. "I'll search round for some more."

He hurried out, and the juniors looked at me rather wonderingly.

"What's the idea of this?" asked Bob Christine. "There can't be any danger,

surely? It's impossible! How could there be any danger here? These people are all friendly."

"I'm not so sure about that," I replied. "And it's not exactly wise to discuss it here, anyway. We'll stroll out unconcernedly—so that we sha'n't attract too much notice. Come on, Archie!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "But I think it's up to this frightful chappie to withdraw the insults—"

"They can wait until later on," I put in. "There no time to lose now."

We passed out of the apartment without any particular hurry. I noticed that one or two soldiers were standing at attention in the corridor. I had never noticed them there before. And the fact struck me as being significant. There were further soldiers just outside in the courtyard.

Lord Dorrimore had appeared with a group of other juniors. Umlosi was not far distant. And on every hand the soldiers were standing. They regarded us in a way that was quite new. These men were powerful, brutal-looking fellows, and without their uniforms they would have been a ruffianly-looking crowd.

"I don't like the look of those chaps!" I murmured. "Why on earth are they gathering here in such numbers? And why are they looking at us so closely? There's more in this than we suspect, my sons."

"Yes, but they can't do anything!" said Watson. "We're the guests of the king, and they wouldn't dare to lay fingers on us. Besides, why should they? It's all rot to get the wind up!"

"You can bet the gov'nor is anxious," I said. "He wouldn't round us all up without a good reason."

We did not hurry ourselves as we made our way towards the gates. And before we reached them I saw Nelson Lee coming from another direction, accompanied by Armstrong, Griffiths, Fatty Little, and one or two others. It was rather unfortunate that we should all be passing through the courtyard together. But we had come from different directions, and it was quite a coincidence.

And then we were suddenly attracted by a call from a window in the upper part of the palace. Looking up, I saw King Jasper there with one or two of his Court nobles beside him.

"Hold!" he shouted loudly.

At the sound of his voice all the soldiers sprang to instant attention. They carried no weapons that we could recognise—at least, nothing in the nature of fire-arms. But each man was provided with a heavy, wicked-looking club. These clubs were a part of the usual equipment—but they had not been generally worn until this morning.

"I would speak with thee, strangers!" went on the king.

"What do you wish to say?" asked Nelson Lee, looking up.

"Hast thou chosen to ignore my wishes!"

replied King Jasper. "'Tis not my desire to harm thee or thy friends. If thou wilt undertake to remain in this kingdom—if thou wilt promise not to visit the State of New Anglia—"

"What if I promise?" asked Nelson Lee. "What guarantee will you have that such a promise will be kept?"

The king uttered a furious exclamation.

"'Tis of little use talking!" he shouted violently. "Soldiers of St. Edmund! I command thee to seize these strangers, and to cast them into prison! Cause no injuries, but make certain of thy work. The man who fails to obey my imperial orders will be beheaded forthwith!"

"That's just about bent it!" said Lord Dorrimore calmly.

"The infernal scoundrel!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Boys, there's going to be trouble! Make a dash for the Rover, and get on board—"

"What!" yelled Handforth. "They've turned on us. By George! I'll jolly soon show them something! Take that, you rotter!"

Biff!

One of the soldiers had come tearing by, and Handforth's right swung round, and the man caught the full force of it on his nose. He crashed to the ground, howling with surprise and pain.

And the next moment the fight was at its height.

We all found ourselves grappling fiercely with the soldiers. Handforth was still fighting with all his strength. Two men were attempting to hold him, but he was like a whirlwind. He was in his element now, and he battled with all his strength.

I was fighting, too—but I knew from the very first that the whole thing was hopeless. There were so many soldiers that we should never have the slightest chance of forcing our way on to the Golden Rover. But we would certainly show these treacherous wretches that we were not going to knuckle under easily.

The king had turned his men against us. We had never lifted a finger—we had done him no injury whatever. And yet, for purposes of his own, he had suddenly decided to make us prisoners. Nelson Lee had scented this just too late—there was now no time to get on board our own vessel.

Most of the juniors were overpowered in a very short space of time. This was not surprising, since three or four soldiers attacked each fellow. Handforth went down struggling and hitting. But he went down.

Even Archie was fighting. He was not quite such a helpless fellow as he would have people believe. When it came to the point, Archie could use his fists with very good effect.

And he was capable of giving a display of energy which nobody would suspect he possessed. In this instance, for example, he suddenly squared his shoulders, and allowed his eyeglass to drop.

"Gadzooks!" he shouted. "So that's the game, what? You poisonous blighters! Take that, old bird! I'm frightfully sorry, but these things have got to be done! A chappie must let fly now and again!"

Crash!

Archie's fist thudded upon the chin of a soldier who attempted to seize him. And the next moment Archie was hitting out right and left. He put up a fine fight, but the final result was inevitable. He went down at last, bursting with indignation, and very angry.

"This, don't you know, is rotten!" he gasped. "When about two dozen ruffians sit on a chappie's chest, it's time to yell a large assortment of protests. I mean to say, the whole thing's rotten form!"

He was dragged to his feet, and held grimly.

"Thou wilt be wise to offer no resistance!" said one of the soldiers. "Odds death! But these strangers are of goodly fighting blood!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "The red gore of the Glenthornes, what? You'll kindly allow me to state, you bally worms, that King Jasper is a most poisonous reptile! Absolutely! And that's that!"

"Thy tongue is long!" snapped one of his captors.

"Not absolutely," said Archie. "That is, we Glenthornes may be somewhat fiery, and all that, but dash it, we're not talkative! What with one thing and another, and this and that, I'm most frightfully enraged! The old veins are standing out like knotted cords, and so forth!"

"By George!" shouted Handforth, from near by. "These—these cads have got me now! Good old Umlosi! He's going it all right!"

Umlosi was, indeed, fighting with all his customary vigour. As a matter of fact, he had been longing for a scrap for weeks. As Dorrie had remarked, Umlosi had been wilting away, for lack of a fight. He was a born warrior, and he needed a good scrap every now and again to keep him in form.

His chance had come, and he was taking advantage of it. At least four St. Edmund soldiers lay groaning about him—two of them seriously injured. Umlosi was not hesitating to use his spear with deadly effect.

"Come, thou scum!" he shouted defiantly. "Dost thou think it possible to capture a warrior of the Kutanas? Wau! Take that, thou ugly pig! Mayhap it will make thee howl!"

"That," was a deadly thrust of his spear, and the point went home in the shoulder of one of the soldiers who had attempted to spring on Umlosi from behind. His spear was flashing this way and that.

But now the soldiers were beginning to understand that Umlosi was a somewhat deadly proposition. They backed away, and no longer attempted to rush him. Such tactics were too costly.

Whizz—whizz!

Two of the powerful clubs of the St. Edmund soldiers shot through the air. Umlosi saw them coming, and he dodged with ease.

"Thou rats!" he shouted defiantly. "I fear not thy foul tricks!"

Crash!

This time Umlosi had no chance. Half a dozen of the clubs were hurled at him. Two struck him on the body, and the third smashed against the side of his head. He swayed, staggered, and then fell, half stunned.

In a moment, a dozen soldiers were upon him, and he was held down by sheer weight of numbers. But for the king's order, Umlosi would have been battered to death on the spot.

But the king had instructed that nobody was to be harmed. And the soldiers were evidently afraid of their monarch. If they had disobeyed, beheading might have been the punishment.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie, of course, had put up a stiff fight. But I had been so much engaged myself that I had not been able to see very much. Both the gov'nor and Lord Dorrimore fought like tigers. And the fight, instead of being a very brief affair, as our enemies had supposed it would be, was a fairly long business.

But, at last, it was over.

This was inevitable. No matter how we battled, it was impossible to alter the result. Against such odds we were bound to succumb. And from the window above, King Jasper had been viewing the whole proceedings. The mask was now thrown off, and he had revealed himself in his true colours.

Hitherto he had made a pretence of being friendly. But now we knew that he was a deadly foe. And the main reason for this attitude was connected with the neighbouring kingdom of New Anglia.

For some reason which we could not understand King Jasper was determined at all costs to prevent us visiting that country.

And every member of our party was made a prisoner.

While this big fight had been going on in the courtyard, the other few members of our party had met with a similar fate. Major Barrance and Jock McGregor and the other two members of the Rover's crew were seized. Crowds of soldiers had gone on board the aircraft, and they had taken our friends by surprise. They were brought into the courtyard soon after our own battle was over.

And by the time we were all together the wounded soldiers had been carried away. And we were placed in a big line—each of us so secured that we could not do any further damage.

For strong metal manacles had been brought. They were not like our modern handcuffs, but clanking chains. These were bound round our ankles—so that we could walk, but we were like a lot of chained

convicts. Our wrists were secured in a similar way—behind our backs.

And we were all placed in a row, and we stood there—rather a forlorn looking lot.

This was indeed a sudden change in our fortunes.

Only half an hour earlier we had been the guests of the king—now we were his prisoners. Our comfortable stay in the Kingdom of St. Edmund was not turning out quite so satisfactorily after all.

"Oh, the miserable rotters!" shouted Handforth huskily. "We'll pay them out for this—"

"How can we?" growled Church. "We're all chained up, and I expect we shall be kept prisoners for the rest of our lives."

"Do not lose heart, boys!" called Nelson Lee. "The position may seem bad at the moment, but there is no reason to fear the worst. The king will regret this high-handed action, and you may rely upon me to see that you will soon be released."

"Hurrah!"

"Never say die!"

"Down with King Jasper!"

"Down with the whole rotten crowd!"

The juniors were quite defiant, although in the hands of the enemy. They howled and hooted—and shouted all manner of uncomplimentary remarks at the king. And a few moments later King Jasper himself appeared. He was looking flushed and excited—and perhaps a little nervous, too. I think he was rather startled at his own daring.

"Well, Master Lee!" he exclaimed, halting in front of the gov'nor. "What dost thou say?"

"Nothing—now!" said Lee curtly.

"Oh—ho! So thou art quelled!" sneered King Jasper. "'Tis as I suspected. Now, my friends, thou wilt do as I desire. Since thou art unwilling to respect my wishes, perhaps thou wilt obey my commands."

He turned away without another word, and I could see that Nelson Lee had been fairly itching to say more. But the gov'nor had controlled himself. For the moment we were the under dogs—and there was no sense in making this scene worse than it actually was.

In a few minutes several army officers appeared—they had taken good care to remain in the background while the fight was on. And now they strutted up and down like fighting cocks, and issued orders.

Two long lines of soldiers were formed up. And we were placed between them, in single file. Then, at the word, we were marched out of the courtyard and into the main streets.

Crowds had collected, of course—for news of the battle had swept throughout the city. And the people had gathered along the roadsides, wondering and half scared. For they had known nothing of the king's jealousy and his fear of our visiting New Anglia.

And this news going through the city had taken everybody by surprise. We were treated as guests of the country—and to suddenly learn that we had been made prisoners by the king's men sent a thrill throughout the whole capital.

And there was also a change.

As we marched through the streets, closely guarded by the soldiers, we could see that the public now looked upon us with signs of open hostility. Why? Not because we had committed any act of unfriendliness towards the country—but merely because we were prisoners.

These people knew nothing of the actual facts. But the sight of us being marched

building which was surrounded by a high wall. We knew this to be the prison. It did not differ greatly from any other prison. All the windows were closely barred, and the gates which led into the prison yard were heavy and strong.

They swung open, and we were admitted.

We had been fully expecting that we should all be separated—that we should be placed in different cells. But we were glad to find that this was not the case. For after passing through a dark, cold passage, we were thrust into a great bare apartment, one after the other. It was only just large enough to hold us all—and then the door was closed with a slam and locked.



Biff! Handforth's right swung round, and the soldier caught the full force of it on the nose. He crashed to the ground, howling with surprise and pain.

along in chains was sufficient to change their friendliness to hostility. From this minute we should not be safe in the capital. The whole population had become our enemies.

"What a rotten lot!" said Reginald Pitt bitterly. "We didn't think much of them from the start—but now we know them at their true value! If ever we get out of this fix, we'll make things warm for a few of 'em."

"And they're all English, too—at least, they come from English stock!" growled Tommy Watson. "I wouldn't mind so much if they were a crowd of foreigners. But it's so humiliating to be shoved through the streets like this!"

Not one of the fellows, however, thought of asking for any act of kindness. The chains hurt considerably as we walked. But the pain was suffered in silence.

And at last, after passing through the centre of the city, we arrived at a big stone

CHAPTER IV.

SEIZING THE GOLDEN ROVER!



"SKUNKS — that's what they are!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "The whole bally crowd—a set of miserable skunks!"

"I am fearful for the safety of the Rover!" said Mr. Gray, his voice filled with anxiety. "She is left utterly unguarded. And if these people attempt to manipulate her, they will assuredly come to grief. And with the Rover wrecked, we shall be doomed to remain in this place for the remainder of our lives."

"The infernal hounds swarmed on board before we could do anything to protect ourselves," growled Major Barrance. "If we had had only a short warning we could have got out into the river. But Jock and I had no idea that things were so acute."

"My dear Barrance, I'm not blaming you for anything," said Nelson Lee. "This misfortune has overtaken us, and we must make the best of it. I am particularly concerned about the boys—"

"Don't worry about us, sir," said Bob Christine. "We're unimportant, anyhow. If the Rover was only in your hands it would be all right. I think it's a good thing we're all together, though."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "And there's no need to be pessimistic. We shall gain the upper hand before long."

"I sincerely hope so, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "I am glad to find that you boys are taking things so well. It is the right spirit. Keep on smiling, and remain cheerful."

"Rather, sir!" I declared. "You can trust all the chaps to keep a stiff upper lip. But, by Jove, I'd like to tell these St. Edmund rotters what I think of them. I'd like to do a few things, too!"

Conversation flagged somewhat.

It was not very easy to talk, for we were all feeling sore and worried. This change in our fortunes had come so unexpectedly, and so abruptly. If the juniors were concerned, Nelson Lee and Mr. Raymond Gray were ten times more so.

For the responsibility of the whole party rested upon their shoulders.

Nelson Lee had charge of the St. Frank's boys, and Mr. Gray was the chief pilot of the Golden Rover. If any mishap occurred to the airship, we should indeed be in a sorry plight.

The very thought was appalling.

I pictured to myself what would happen if the king and his men went on board and attempted to start the engines. By some miracle they might perhaps succeed—for, of course, they were quite unfamiliar with such mechanism, and it would be rather marvellous if they got the Rover going.

They would never be able to control her, and she would either smash herself against the stonework of the embankment, or she would do something equally disastrous.

And if she was wrecked beyond repair there would be no escape. We should be in the same position as these castaways. For two hundred and fifty years they had remained hidden away in this secret basin of the mountains. So it stood to reason that our chances of getting away would be nil.

But surely the king would not be so mad as to monkey with the Golden Rover? He had sense enough to realise that such a thing would be fatal.

And before I could think much further the door of the prison was opened and half a dozen soldiers entered, with General Horton close behind. He was looking very important now.

"Oh, so you are all quite comfortable?" he exclaimed sneeringly. "'Tis as I expected! Possibly thou wilt be more amenable to reason. Thou wilt be delighted to

learn, Master Lee, that his Majesty is desirous of granting thee an audience."

"Indeed!" said the gov'nor coldly. "For what purpose?"

"Thou wilt learn," replied the general. "I have further instructions that Master Gray shall accompany thee—since that worthy gentleman is the chief controller of the wondrous ship of the air."

"Has the vessel been harmed?" demanded the inventor quickly.

"Nay—his Majesty will allow no one to lay a finger upon the craft," replied General Horton. "Thou need have no fear, my friend. 'Tis not his Majesty's way to interfere with things that are unknown to him."

Mr. Gray gave a little sigh of relief, and we were all feeling more content. And the very fact that the king wanted to talk with Mr. Gray and the gov'nor seemed promising.

The general gave a few commands, and some of the soldiers stepped forward and released Nelson Lee and Mr. Gray from their chains. Then, in the midst of the soldiers, they were marched out of the cell. The door clanged, and we heard the footsteps of the party echoing down the passage.

"So that's all right!" remarked Dorrie. "I feel deucedly slighted for being left out of it, but it's no good grumbling. It seems to me, my lads, that things are goin' to brighten up a bit."

"You think we shall escape?" asked Church eagerly.

"Well, I wouldn't say that," replied Dorrie. "But you can bet your last penny that Mr. Lee will do his best to work things. When it comes to a matter of brains, Mr. Lee's all there—an' a bit extra! An' I shouldn't be surprised if he brings off something. In any case, there's no need for us to be alarmed. We're in no danger."

And we felt very much bucked up.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee and Mr. Gray were being escorted out of the prison. Just outside stood one of those strange coaches which we had already ridden in. They appeared to be driven by some kind of clockwork, and they were quite effective, running smoothly and silently on the well-made roads.

In a very short time after leaving the prison the two captives were ushered into the throne room of the king's palace. And there sat King Jasper, with an expression of gloating satisfaction upon his puffy face.

"So," he exclaimed sneeringly. "Thou art come! It is well for you to realise that I am granting thee a great favour by permitting this audience. But I have an offer to make thee—an offer thou wilt do well to accept."

"You have treated us with villainous trickery," said Nelson Lee coldly. "We were your guests, and you—"

"Waste not thy words!" interrupted the king. "I have no time for dallying. Now that thou art my prisoners, I will have no hesitation in telling thee of my plans."

"Go ahead!" said Lee grimly.

"I lied to thee regarding the kingdom beyond the great wall," went on his Majesty. "'Twas policy for me to lie at that time. But now I will tell thee the truth. New Anglia is a greater country than this! New Anglia is a richer country—more powerful, and I would rule over it!"

"I thought your aim was something of that nature," said Lee.

"Thou art wise!" sneered the king. "For many years have I been attempting to gain power so that I can attack New Anglia and overthrow those who govern the country. And now the time is just ripe for the great war. It was planned that this war should commence ere long."

"I gathered that something of that kind was afoot," said Nelson Lee. "Otherwise your kingdom would not have been so overflowing with trained soldiers."

"Thou hast come at the right moment to help me," said his Majesty. "It flashed into my brain that this strange machine of thine will be of mighty use. 'Tis my desire to overthrow King Arthur and his government. Then shall I reign in his place—then shall I reign over the two kingdoms!"

"Perhaps your dream will not come true——"

"'Tis no dream!" interrupted the king. "I have planned everything—I will compel New Anglia to surrender. And the power is in my hands. Thou hast given me the power! For with this marvellous airship I shall fly over New Anglia's capital and reduce it to wreckage—or surrender."

"Methinks, King Arthur will prefer surrender!" said General Horton.

"Ay, that will he!" shouted the king exultantly. "Terror will be struck into his coward's heart! And he will flee from his capital, leaving my soldiers free to enter. 'Twas most unwise of thee, my friends, to tell me of modern things in thine own land. 'Twas foolish to talk of air vessels which have been used in warfare to drop explosives upon enemy towns. For thou hast given me a tip of the finest nature."

"How do you propose to bomb this city?" asked Mr. Gray calmly. "Personally, I am at a loss to understand your optimism. In the first place, you will not be able to fly over New Anglia——"

"Methinks 'twill be different!" interrupted the king. "Thou wilt be compelled to obey my commands. I have explosives in plenty. Our ancestors knew the ways and means of manufacturing gunpowder. But we, in these modern days, have improved upon the original powder, and have produced an explosive four times more powerful."

Nelson Lee grimly reflected that King Jasper would be rather surprised if he knew that the Golden Rover contained considerable quantities of high explosive—deadly material a hundred times more powerful than gunpowder. It would be better to keep such a fact secret.

"Obviously, you propose to manufacture

these explosives and to drop them upon the capital of New Anglia," said Nelson Lee. "I have no doubt that you imagine that you will compel us to control the Rover."

"Indeed, yes!" said King Jasper.

"And what if we refuse?"

"Thou wilt die!"

"I think not!" said Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "You would not be so foolish as that. No good purpose would be served by killing us—and you would remove all hope of attaining your object——"

"But the boys!" interrupted the king. "The boys who are with thee! Are they of use to me? No, my friends! 'Twill be bad for them if you refuse! I am not making an idle threat. Thou wilt agree to this proposal, or three of those boys will be brought forth into the courtyard of the palace and beheaded before thine eyes. Then, perchance, thou wilt agree! But 'twill serve no purpose to end three promising young lives."

Nelson Lee and Mr. Gray exchanged glances. There was no mistaking the king's cold, brutal tones. He meant this—he would really execute three of the St. Frank's juniors if the plan was not accepted.

For King Jasper held the trump card, and was playing it cleverly. By constantly holding out this threat, he would gain his end. He knew it. Nelson Lee would never consent to have the boys sent to their doom for no reason whatever.

The king could read the inward dismay of the two captives.

"Thou art thinking deeply, my friends!" he said. "'Tis well thou shouldst! Three boys will I execute if thou refuse. Then thou wilt have another chance. And three more boys will perish by the sword! I am determined—and thou art anxious to preserve the lives of thy party. So 'twill be to our common vantage if thou dost agree without question."

"You are clever, King Jasper," said Nelson Lee quietly. "You have hit us upon our weakest spot, and to refuse is impossible. Mr. Gray and I will operate the Golden Rover at your command."

The king shouted with triumph.

"'Tis as I said!" he exclaimed gloatingly. "But listen well! Lend me thine ears! Shouldst thou attempt to trick me—shouldst thou attempt to make any false move—the boys will die! At the first sign of treachery on thy part I will give the order for their execution."

"Your threats are needless," said Nelson Lee curtly. "We have agreed."

"Dost thou give thy word that my orders shall be obeyed?"

"I do not give my word!" replied Nelson Lee. "Indeed, if an opportunity arises, I shall make every effort to turn the tables, King Jasper. You may as well know that now, and then we shall be on equal terms. But you need not fear. While your vile threat stands good, my hands are tied. I dare not risk the lives of the boys."

"Thou art speaking wisely, Master Lee," said the king. "I am not a man to delay. Thou wilt be taken on board this vessel at once—and thou wilt demonstrate to me once again the capabilities of this flying marvel. I do not fear that thou wilt cause wreck and destruction. For your lives will be lost as well as mine if the ship comes to grief. And thou art fond of life."

"We cannot attempt any flight unless my engineer is released," said Mr. Gray coldly.

"Thou art attempting to fool me——"

"Not at all!" interrupted the inventor. "There must be a man in charge of the ship's engines. Release him, and I will do as you bid. But McGregor must be at his post."

"He shall be released, and brought to the ship under escort," replied the king.

And, while this conversation was going on, we were all talking animatedly in the prison. For by this time we had recovered our composure, and were beginning to be a great deal more hopeful.

It seemed that things were not quite so black as we had first thought. Even if Nelson Lee was not able to spoof his Majesty, it was pretty certain that the gov'nor would do something to improve our plight.

"I've got an idea we sha'n't be here long!" declared Handforth. "I expect Mr. Lee's making some kind of a bargain. And before long we shall all be released, and everything will go on as before."

"Good! I wish it would!" groaned Fatty Little. "I haven't had a bite to eat since this morning, and unless we get some grub soon I shall faint! Great doughnuts! And to think I could have filled my pockets with grub! If I had known we were going to——"

"Oh, dry up, Fatty!" said De Valerie. "You won't do any harm, even if you starve for a week! You could live on your own blubber!"

"That, as it were, is a frightfully poisonous idea!" protested Archie, with a shiver. "Blubber, what? A foul word, dear old lad! A word, don't you know, that sends the quivers right up and down a chappie's spine!"

"Well, it's the only word to use——"

"Absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "I mean to say, Fatty Little is a most stupendous blighter, as it were, but he is largely composed of flesh and quantities of fat. Blubber is something to do with whales——"

"Fatty's a whale!" growled De Valerie. "He's an elephant as well, and if he starts talking about grub again, I'll sit on him!"

"A somewhat priceless scheme," said Archie. "A kind of lounge, what? I mean to say, when a chappie attains the size of Fatty, he becomes deucedly soft and luxurious! It wouldn't be a bad idea to take it in turns, and use Fatty as a kind of couch for the good old forty winks."

"I suppose that's funny!" sneered Fatty Little. "I didn't know Archie was a humorist before. I don't want to talk

about grub, if you chaps object to it. I've got a will—I can control it! I don't care tuppence about doughnuts or beef patties or sausage-rolls. I can easily do without mentioning cakes and pastries——"

"Dry up, you ass! You're mentioning them all the time!" roared Handforth. "It's far more important to talk about escaping. Now, I've got an idea——"

"Forget it!"

"You—you fathead!" roared Handforth. "It's a great wheeze! I suggest that we all howl at the top of our voices. The warders will think we're dying, or something, and they'll come rushing in. Then we can spring on them, and overpower them!"

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "And what shall we do then, Handy? Go outside, and be collared by the soldiers. The best thing we can do is to sit tight until we get word from the gov'nor."

"Somebody's coming now!" exclaimed Church quickly.

There were certainly sounds outside the door. And a second later it opened, and General Horton appeared, with a number of soldiers.

"I have come for Master McGregor!" said the general curtly.

"Hoots, mon, I ken ye wilna ha' me!" growled Jock gruffly.

"What do you want with Master McGregor?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"'Tis the king's desire that he shall come," replied the general. "'Twill be well for all that the man should obey."

Jock didn't like it, but Dorrie persuaded him that it would be far better to go. And he departed, the prison door closing once again. And now we had something else to talk about.

For Jock's departure meant only one thing—he was required to take control of the Golden Rover's engine-room!

But why?

What scheme was afoot now?

CHAPTER V.

NELSON LEE'S STRATAGEM!



THE Golden Rover lay placidly in the river near the embankment.

And Nelson Lee and Mr. Raymond Gray were marched over the specially erected wooden staging, closely guarded by a number of soldiers. The king was already on the Rover's deck, and he was strutting up and down as though he owned it.

He was glorying in his triumph.

"Thy engineer has been sent for, Master Gray!" he exclaimed, as the pair came on deck. "Within fifteen minutes he will be with us. 'Tis good, since I am anxious for a good test. Thou wilt obey my commands, or——"

"No more threats, please," put in Mr. Gray coldly. "They are becoming somewhat monotonous. I presume that we shall be allowed to go below without hindrance? It would be foolish to make an attempt to—"

"Fear not, my friend," interrupted the king. "Thou shalt have full liberty. I give thee this, because 'tis impossible for thee to betray me. Remember the fate of the boys if aught ill befalls."

"We shall remember!" said Nelson Lee. "When Master McGregor comes, be good enough to send him below without delay."

Lee and Mr. Gray were allowed to descend into the vessel's interior. As King Jasper

now—almost at once—we shall lose the opportunity."

While they were still talking, Jock McGregor came down, and he was looking more morose than usual. But he had practically nothing to say. He was only too glad to get back to his beloved engines.

"Jock, you will carry out orders in just the same way as ever," said Mr. Gray. "The ship is in command of this puppet king, but we are in such a position that we cannot afford to defy him."

Jock nodded, and vanished.

"That's one advantage of having a silent engineer," smiled Mr. Gray. "He always accepts orders without question, and in all



We were all placed in a row like a lot of chained convicts, and we stood there—rather a forlorn-looking lot.

had said, he did not fear that anything untoward would take place. For if it did, three of the juniors would be brought out and put to death. It was a terrible threat.

"Do you think that scoundrel means it?" asked Mr. Gray, when he and Lee were in the Rover's navigating chamber. "Surely it could not be a real threat? I cannot imagine such a horror!"

"I have not the slightest doubt that the king is in earnest," replied Nelson Lee gravely. "No other member of his court would dare to execute the order. But Jasper himself would not hesitate. At the same time, Mr. Gray, there is just a chance that we might be able to turn the tables."

"But how?" asked the inventor eagerly.

"I do not quite know yet," replied Lee. "But I have not given up hope—and I will certainly take a risk if I think there is any prospect of success. But unless we act

my experience I have never known him to object."

Soon afterwards Nelson Lee went on deck. He found the king there, pacing up and down still. Along the whole embankment there were hundreds of soldiers. And with the king there were two or three of his ministers—the Duke of Brays, the Lord Chamberlain—Sir Humphrey Everard, the king's equerry—and General Horton. They thought a tremendous lot of themselves.

"Well?" shouted the king, as Lee appeared. "How long wilt be before thou art ready for this trip?"

"Very soon now, your Majesty," replied Nelson Lee. "I shall not be coming with you—since I would prefer you to feel more secure. I shall remain with General Horton upon the embankment. It is my intention to instruct him in the various evolutions of the craft. From ashore I can point out

the different movements. It will be far better—and I think it will also serve as an indication of my submission to your rule.”

The king smiled.

“’Tis well!” he said. “Thou art giving way even better than I had hoped for, Master Lee. Fear not! If I see that thou art doing thy best to please me, thou wilt be duly rewarded. What is thy object in remaining on shore on this trip? Would not these instructions do later?”

“I will certainly come if you wish,” replied Lee freely. “It really makes no difference. In any case, I shall be a passenger, since Mr. Gray is the pilot. I thought it would be more to your liking if I utilised every available moment on your behalf. However, I will come.”

“Nay!” said the king. “Do as thou wilt—’tis better for thee to judge.”

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders, and turned to General Horton.

“We’ll go ashore,” he said, “and from a convenient point we will watch the ship as she moves. I will explain to you how the ship is controlled. It will be better for you to see at a distance.”

“Thou art the master—I the pupil!” said the general.

He went ashore with Nelson Lee, and they took up a position near the wooden staging. And soon afterwards the king was invited below by Mr. Raymond Gray. And soon the deck of the Rover was deserted. And the great craft slid silently out into the main current of the river.

Her engines were working now—but quite slowly.

Nelson Lee could see, of course, that the wings had been drawn in, and that the craft was prepared for the water—and not for the air. But to the men of St. Edmund it meant nothing. They were not acquainted with the Golden Rover’s appearance.

“The ship is not rising!” remarked the general, as he watched the Rover closely. “No doubt ’twill soon do so.”

“I think not!” replied Nelson Lee grimly.

“What meanest thou?”

“Mr. Gray is making other experiments,” said Lee. “Watch, general, and you will see. Perhaps you will be surprised. I only trust that you will be impressed. Watch closely.”

General Horton was looking rather startled.

“If thou hast played us false——” he began harshly.

“Watch!” put in Lee.

The general gazed over the water at the Golden Rover. He had been expecting to see the aircraft skip over the water and then rise into the air. But it did nothing of the sort. Having arrived in mid-stream, the vessel commenced to slowly go up the river against the current.

Then she became stationary.

And quite suddenly, without any warning as to what was to happen, the rear part of the craft tipped up. Then, with a swoop

and a plunge of foam, the Rover disappeared below the surface.

“Odds death!” gasped the general, white to the lips. “The ship has foundered!”

“The king—the king!”

“His Majesty will die!”

Tremendous excitement surged up and down the embankment. The soldiers forgot their discipline in their horror. Other spectators gazed at the spot where the Golden Rover had disappeared. They were filled with terror at the abruptness of the ship’s disappearance.

But Nelson Lee remained quite unmoved.

He had arranged this little affair beforehand with Mr. Gray. Normally, the Rover only submerged slowly. But, at a pinch, she could be made to plunge down with a sudden rush. And this method had been chosen now—since it was far more picturesque and effective.

The general turned upon Lee in a fury of excitement.

“What—what is this?” he shouted wildly.

“Thou hast sent King Jasper to his death!”

“No!” replied Nelson Lee. “If that was the case, General Horton, I should have sent you, too. But I preferred you to be ashore. There are many things you do not know of our modern science. I have told you of a few wonders, but you are in ignorance of the majority.”

“A waste of words, and the king is dying,” screamed the general.

“The king is alive!” interrupted Nelson Lee. “But his life lies in your keeping, General Horton. It will be well for you to understand that now.”

“What meanest thou?” grated the general. “What service can I render to bring his Majesty back to life?”

“I will tell you,” said Lee. “It is within my power to bring the Rover back to the surface. It may seem magic to you, but I am speaking the literal truth. Your king used a certain threat. I make use of a similar one. If every prisoner is not released at once and brought to me here, your king will die. Bring these companions of mine out of prison and all will be well. But they must come quickly or it will be too late.”

The general looked bewildered.

“Thou art talking madness!” he said hoarsely. “What canst thou do even with thy friends by thy side? ’Twill not be possible for thee to raise a sunken ship from the river bed by a mere word——”

“Do as I say, and your king will be saved!” interjected Lee curtly. “It can make no difference, anyhow. If the king’s life is not saved you can imprison us all again—and do your worst. But bring the prisoners here—and soon after they arrive the king will be restored to you, alive and well. Fail, and I will not answer for the consequences.”

This was a master stroke of Nelson Lee’s. General Horton was in a fearful predica-

ment. He did not know what to do. He believed that the king had gone to his death—but there was just a chance that Nelson Lee might be able to keep his word.

And King Jasper's life was in his—General Horton's—keeping! If he failed to bring the prisoners out, and the king died, the wrath of the populace would fall upon him. And if he did bring the prisoners out, and still the king failed to appear, it would be all to the good. For the people would vent their wrath upon these strangers.

Therefore, there was only one thing to be done.

The prisoners had to be released from confinement! Not that this would be much good—for General Horton believed that the Golden Rover had plunged to her doom in the river bed.

The general turned to Lee in a fever of fury.

"Thou shalt pay for this treachery, thou dog," he snarled. "Ay, I will fetch thy companions—but 'twill be ill for them. For they will be torn limb from limb! And thy friends will suffer the same fate! Naught else will appease the fury of the people!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am prepared to risk that," he said. "Bring the prisoners here, and your king will be restored—safe and sound. But make all haste."

The general roared out a number of orders, and in a moment three or four subordinates were dashing off to the prison with a body of soldiers. And in the meantime, General Horton and the crowds gazed at the river.

The surface was placid and still.

There was no sign of the Golden Rover. She had vanished into the depths, and it seemed impossible that it should ever reappear. For this was another secret that Nelson Lee had kept from the king and his Court. They had no knowledge that the aircraft could submerge below the water in safety—that she could rise again at the will of her pilot.

Thus, to those who were watching, it seemed that the vessel had foundered. General Horton had not sent for the prisoners because he believed that Nelson Lee could bring the Rover back to life—he had sent for them because he wanted them to bear the brunt of the people's fury. And this was exactly what Nelson Lee had anticipated. He had no fear that the juniors would be interfered with immediately. And before any trouble could arrive the Rover would reappear.

It was well thought out—a masterly stratagem.

It seemed a long time to Lee before there was any sign of the returning soldiers. But they came at last, and we were in their midst—Handforth and Co., Pitt, Christine, Archie, Phipps, and all the rest of us. We were filled with wonder and astonishment that our release had come so quickly.

Nelson Lee saw us as we approached, sur-

rounded by soldiers. He came forward to meet us.

"Now, thou serpent!" shouted General Horton. "Here are thy friends! Bring back King Jasper to life, or thou wilt be stripped into ribbons!"

"Be patient, general!" said Nelson Lee sternly. "There is no reason for such alarm on your part. The king will be restored. But I have one further stipulation to make before I cause the Rover to reappear. That you will order your soldiers to retire for a distance of not less than two miles. Not one man must remain within reach. Make haste, or it will be too late."

Nelson Lee did not dare to hope that the general would comply with this order. The gov'nor had uttered it as an afterthought, for he was rather alarmed by the large number of soldiers who were in the vicinity.

It was a chance shot—and it went home.

The general was so wild with anxiety that he hardly knew how to act. He gave the command for the soldiers to retire. The people would deal with these strangers if the king did not return. And hardly had the soldiers retreated into the distance when a curious ripple appeared on the surface of the water near the shore.

"See!" exclaimed Lee calmly. "Will you believe now?"

Inwardly, Nelson Lee congratulated himself and Mr. Raymond Gray. They had timed the thing exactly—their judgment was accurate. And the Golden Rover slowly and glitteringly appeared.

It was the signal for loud shouts of amazement and joy. It was a marvel which these people could not understand. The vessel had sunk—and now she was coming to the surface again.

But, although the ruse had succeeded so far, there was no guarantee that it would be a complete success. Nelson Lee did not delude himself that the thing was accomplished.

Even now, just when victory seemed assured, there was a bare possibility that the soldiers would return—that the crowds might surge forward—and that all of us would be seized and held.

If this turned out to be the case, it would be ghastly luck indeed.

General Horton turned to Nelson Lee with amazement in his eyes.

"This—this is staggering!" he exclaimed. "How dost thou perform these miracles? The ship was sunk—and now it appears! Truly thou art a wondrous people! And the king is saved!"

"Yes, the king is saved," replied Nelson Lee smoothly. "But remember—if there is any attempt to recapture my party, the ship will sink once more below the surface. A signal from me will be sufficient. Do you believe that?"

"'Tis difficult to know what to believe!" replied the general huskily.

Nelson Lee noted that the Rover was now well out. He turned to Horton.

"Watch!" he said calmly. "This will convince you, perhaps, that I have the power to do as I say. And it will warn you not to attempt any trickery. The prisoners must remain free. Watch!"

Nelson Lee raised his hand.

A second or two later, the Golden Rover commenced settling down again in the water. Nelson Lee did not inform General Horton that he had previously arranged a signal with Mr. Raymond Gray.

The general clutched at Lee's sleeve.

"Nay!" he exclaimed. "Let it not sink again!"

"But you fully understand?" asked Lee.

"Yes, yes—I understand!"

Again Nelson Lee raised his hand, and at once the Golden Rover commenced rising further out of the water. And at last she came completely to the surface, and then edged in towards the landing stage. At last she touched, and as she did so the door opened on her deck, and Mr. Gray appeared.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Come—come!"

Nelson Lee whirled round.

"Boys—all of you!" he roared. "Make one rush—and if it comes to a fight, fight gamely!"

The juniors sent up a rousing cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Down with the rotters!"

"Hurrah!"

And we dashed forward.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIVAL KINGDOM!



HANDFORTH charged forward like a whirlwind.

"Now it's our turn!" he bellowed.

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, you chaps!"

"Chuck General Horton into the river!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Grab him!"

The juniors made a rush, and before General Horton could even turn round he was fairly charged into the river. The way he went off the landing stage and into the water was enough to make the fellows yell with laughter—under ordinary circumstances. But now they were too excited to take any particular notice.

"Gadzooks and what not!" panted Archie. "I mean to say, this is somewhat fearful and frightful! Pray desist, old darlings! Why, dash it all—look out! I shall be in the bally river in two poisonous seconds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows could not help howling here, for Archie nearly plunged headfirst into the river. He only saved himself by clinging wildly to Handforth—with the result that Handforth nearly went in, too.

General Horton was howling for help, but

no particular notice was taken of him. It was unnecessary. The landing-stage was near by, and it was quite easy for the general to grab hold and thus save himself from being drowned.

Phipps led the way on to the Rover—but not because he was afraid to be left behind. He had seen that several soldiers were coming out of the doorway—after knocking Mr. Gray down. And the king was coming out, too. The king looked purple with fury.

Phipps went forward valiantly. He seized one of the soldiers, whirled him round, and delivered a punch fairly in the middle of the chest, which sent the man hurtling backwards.

Phipps turned to King Jasper.

"Now, sir—get ashore!" he said curtly.

"If you don't make haste, you'll be treated rather roughly, I'm afraid. We've got the upper hand now, and we're not putting up with any more of your tricks!"

The king gobbled with rage.

But before he could utter any intelligible words, Handforth and Pitt and two or three others leapt on to the Rover's deck. King Jasper was seized by many hands. He roared with fury and alarm.

"Wilt thou dare to lay fingers upon the royal personage?" he thundered.

"We wilt!" shouted Handforth. "Blow the royal personage! You're a giddy drunken rotter! In with him, you chaps! Come on! One—two—three!"

The king was seized by many willing hands, and he was utterly incapable of dealing with this avalanche. He was lifted off his feet, and then hurled up into the air, with his arms and legs flying. He described a complete arc, and then descended into the river in a most ungraceful dive.

Splash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of the gravity of the situation, the juniors howled. To see the king of St. Edmund floundering in the water like this was extremely entertaining. He was a rogue—a treacherous rascal. And it was sheer joy to the fellows to see how he was being paid for his misdeeds.

But in the excitement of this affair, the juniors failed to observe that the soldiers were returning—not all of them, but a few, led by one or two officers. From afar they had seen what was taking place, and were coming to the rescue.

"Come, boys—quickly!" shouted Nelson Lee, in an urgent voice.

But even as he was speaking, the soldiers dashed up. And in a few moments we were engaged in a fierce battle—half on the landing-stage, and half on the deck of the Golden Rover.

Some of the soldiers had thrown themselves into the water to the rescue of the king and General Horton. And the rest were bent upon smashing us to atoms in revenge for this fearful act.

But Umlosi was there—and Umlosi was just as ready to fight now as he had been

before. His faithful spear was glittering and scintillating as it flashed up and down.

Man after man fell. And Lord Dorri-more, from the outskirts of the crowd, whipped out his revolver, and fired three or four times.

Crack—crack—crack—crack!

Men fell, howling with agony. Dorrie had only aimed at their feet. One or two were grazed, perhaps, but none severely injured. They were probably yelling with fright more than anything else.

And the other soldiers were soon tired of Umlosi—for the great Kutana chief was not fighting to scare. He was fighting to kill. He did not believe in going into a battle with gloves on.

The whole affair was over almost as soon as it had begun—just that one brief, terrific scrap. And then we tumbled down into the Golden Rover's interior—one after the other.

Nelson Lee had kept his eyes open. Not one was missing—every member of the party was present. And, at last, the final enemy had been flung aside, and the door of the Rover was slammed to. Nelson Lee yelled out the word. And Mr. Raymond Gray, at the controls, gave a whoop of joy.

And down went the craft—down below the surface, and out of reach of all attempts on the part of the soldiers to harm her.

We knew that these people had explosives. Indeed, Nelson Lee had been expecting trouble of that kind almost at any moment. Perhaps the only reason for our safety lay in the fact that King Jasper and General Horton had been quite near to the Golden Rover all the time. To throw explosives at her would mean deadly peril to the king.

And so we had escaped.

We did not descend far—in fact, we couldn't, because we soon grounded upon soft mud. And the Rover lay there, with all her electric lights blazing. Nelson Lee had rushed into the navigating-room, and he was wringing Mr. Gray's hand.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I never believed the scheme would work as it has done. To think how we fooled them, Gray! By a simple ruse like that we turned the tables completely, and everything is all right."

"Not so simple, Mr. Lee," smiled the inventor. "It was your plan from the start—and I must congratulate you upon its efficiency."

"You can always trust Lee to do something bally smart!" said Dorrie, lighting a cigarette. "Personally, I was expectin' it. I know him of old. When it comes to tight corners, he's several kinds of a marvel!"

In the engine-room, Jock McGregor and 'Orace were waltzing together—out of sheer joy. Jock had never done anything like this in his life before—and he afterwards regretted it for many a year. For he lost his dignity for good, in the eyes of his

mechanic. But Jock didn't lose 'Orace's respect.

The saloon was simply a pandemonium.

This can easily be understood when it is remembered that Handforth was there, telling everybody that he had saved us all from disaster. Of course, we didn't believe it—and neither did he—but that made no difference. Handforth always loved to give himself the credit for everything.

Archie Glenthorne was lolling back in one of the lounges, feebly asking for water. He was tremendously upset because Phipps had not come to his aid. Phipps had something better to do. He was preparing a few drinks for everybody. Nevertheless, he took Archie a cooling lime juice before he served any of the others.

"Absolutely!" breathed Archie, as he seized it. "The stuff, Phipps! Positively the real goods! Kindly oblige by bringing about ten more gallons! The young master is dashed dry, and in need of further revivers!"

By the time we came to sort ourselves out, it was found that we had suffered practically no casualties—just a scratch or two here and there, but nothing to make a song about.

And almost before we could realise it, we were on the surface once more—in mid-stream. And now the Golden Rover was being prepared for the air. Her wings were being extended, and the other alterations were being made. And, ten minutes afterwards, we soared up into the sky—watched by thousands of enraged spectators from the shore.

The king by this time, no doubt, had been carried into his palace. We could easily imagine his feelings. After everything had gone in his favour, then had come the reverse. I couldn't help grinning.

"Poor old Horton!" I said. "I wonder if his head is still on his body? I'll bet it's booked to be removed, anyhow! He'll certainly be executed for letting himself be spoofed!"

"He deserves something worse than beheading!" said Handforth. "But I'm not going to think about it. I'm watching the crowds, and——"

"What about some grub?" asked Fatty Little mournfully. "We've had nothing but drink—and what's the good of a glass of rotten lime juice when a chap's hungry? If ever I feel faint and giddy, there's only one remedy—piles and piles of grub!"

"You'd better go and see Snowball," grinned Pitt.

"The rotter!" said Fatty indignantly. "He's locked himself in the kitchen, and won't let me in! And there's a most glorious niff coming out through the keyhole! He says he's preparing something particularly good!"

"Then have patience, my son—and wait!" said Pitt.

And we had to wait. But not for long, for a splendid meal was served by Snowball

in less than half an hour. And by this time the Golden Rover was two or three thousand feet up, and cruising at her slowest speed. She was flying over St. Edmund City. And I dare say the inhabitants were staring up at us in fear. The king, no doubt, was a bit scared, too.

For he knew he had intended using the Golden Rover to conquer the kingdom of New Anglia. Now he would fear that we should side with the New Anglians. We should certainly see what manner of people they were, anyhow.

Nelson Lee was rather cautious.

"We shall land in the centre of the other kingdom," he declared during the meal. "And we shall travel there at once, for we shall probably be far safer in that region than in this."

"Do you think they'll be friendly, sir?"

"I have no doubt that they will greet us with a big welcome," replied Nelson Lee. "But we must take nothing for granted, and I shall act with caution. Before I allow any of you boys to leave the vessel, I shall make it quite certain that it is safe for you to do so."

"Oh, sir!"

"You can say 'Oh, sir,' as much as you please," smiled the gov'nor. "But I am not going to have a repetition of this affair. Within the Rover you will be safe. We have learnt our lessons, and we shall take it to heart. In New Anglia we will act differently. Lord Derrimore and I will go out and greet the inhabitants. If anything happens to us, it won't be much of a disaster."

"Not at all!" said Dorrie cheerfully. "In fact, it'll probably be most entertainin'! We don't mind bein' beheaded, and all that sort of thing, do we? Jolly decent of you to choose me, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We were all in the best of spirits. In fact, we were bubbling over with exuberance. This was not to be wondered at, considering the nature of our recent adventures. Only a short time previously we had been guests of honour in the City of St. Edmund. Then we had been hurled into dungeons deep, so to speak, and after being in the depth of gloom in addition, we had now found our liberty again. The events had been happening with quite remarkable rapidity.

And very soon we stared out of the windows of the saloon, to find that we were already flying over the rival country. We had passed over that vast wall. And, spread below us, lay the fair country of New Anglia—with fields and meadows and trickling brooks and scenery which beat anything we had seen in St. Edmund.

And we noticed that all the people in the various towns and villages were staring up at us as we passed over. Many of the inhabitants were running about in a kind of panic.

This wasn't to be wondered at, for the

aeroplane must have seemed a somewhat startling apparition to these people. We did not travel at a great height, and were only going at a slow speed.

We were enabled to make a survey of the whole great basin during this flight. And it seemed to us that New Anglia consisted of about two-thirds of the whole fertile valley. A third of it was cut off by that high wall—and this smaller section was the land of St. Edmund.

According to all appearances, it stood to reason that New Anglia should be the better country.

And we soon found out that our surmises were correct.

Mr. Gray, at the controls of the Rover, caused her to descend gently and lightly in the main square of the capital. This was a truly magnificent place.

A great wide square, with a perfect roadway, and with imposing buildings on every side. Glorious trees lined the sidewalks, and near by there was a fine cathedral, the tower of which was built after the same style as Big Ben.

Mr. Gray would not have taken the risk of descending if people had been about. But at the very approach of the great craft the population fled—diving into houses in every direction. And when we got over the square, it was as bare as a table.

It was a perfectly easy landing—and a better one could not be imagined. For we could also rise up from this spot if we needed to do so. The Rover came to a standstill, and her engines ceased ticking over. We were in the city of the New Anglians—in the centre of the capital.

But it seemed to be a deserted city.

There was no doubt, however, about the superiority of it. It was like visiting London after spending a certain time in a third-rate provincial town. There was absolutely no comparison between this city and St. Edmund City. One was a mere ghost of the other.

And we learned, to our surprise, that this place was called New London! The country was New Anglia, and the capital was New London! We were in a second edition of England, but on a very much smaller scale.

We crowded at the windows, watching the square.

And the people began to trickle back slowly, in twos and threes, and in groups. We noticed that the children were the first to appear. Not the very young children, but particularly the boys.

And after them came men. We could see that they were all dressed in a very similar fashion to the men of St. Edmund. But the clothing appeared to be richer and of a far better quality.

This, however, was not of much importance. We examined the people themselves. And we could soon tell that these New Anglians were of a totally different type to the others. They were refined—distinguished—stately looking. In every respect, they

were the very opposite to the St. Edmund's. While the latter were coarse, the New Anglians were genteel.

"I reckon it'll be safe enough to go among this lot, sir," exclaimed Pitt, as he turned from one of the windows. "Why, they're all gentlemen, by what I can see. They're fine-looking people."

Nelson Lee found this out for himself soon afterwards.

For he and Dorrie stood upon the Golden Rover's deck. From this elevated position, Nelson Lee made a speech to the people—saying how we had come from England, and how we had sojourned—to our cost—with the St. Edmund's. And, gradually, the crowds grew nearer and nearer, gaining confidence.

And at length Nelson Lee and Dorrie went down and mixed with the people. And then came two couriers from the king's palace. This was only a short distance away—in fact, the frontage of the palace formed one side of the central square. And the building itself was palatial.

The two couriers were very polite and brought greetings from the king—and they wanted to know who these strangers were, and what extraordinary ship this was they had come upon.

And the king was anxious to learn whether they were friends or enemies.

Nelson Lee soon gave the desired information. He explained that we were friendly, and that we had come from another country—the country which these people had heard of, but had never seen, or had never even communicated with.

And Nelson Lee was so impressed with the general aspect of the people and the king's couriers that he almost permitted the fellows to venture out of the Golden Rover.

But he concluded that it would be better to wait—to be absolutely certain.

And so, much to our disgust, we were compelled to remain bottled up. But we had plenty to see—and plenty to hear.

These people talked in exactly the same way as the other people—only their voices were more refined, and it was clear that they received a better education. It was like the West End compared to the East End.

Only about half an hour had elapsed before the two couriers reappeared. And now they introduced themselves as the Earl of Goring and the Duke Somerley. They were members of the King's Court, and his intimate advisers.

"Thy story has interested his Majesty strangely," exclaimed the Duke Somerley. "'Tis a wondrous story indeed, and in the name of the people of New Anglia I greet thee with welcome and rejoicing."

"We are honoured!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "We have met with treachery and indignity in the neighbouring kingdom. But we are convinced that here we shall be received with courtesy and politeness."

"Thou wilt, indeed," said the duke. "For



"I bring tidings of vast urgency, sire!" exclaimed the man, panting hard. "The accursed men of St. Edmund are massing for a deadly attack on our country."

those men of St. Edmund are a scurvy lot. Presently thou wilt learn the truth concerning the state of St. Edmund. And thou wilt be vastly surprised, methinks. But come. His Majesty has requested me to escort thee into his presence."

"We are very pleased to accept the invitation," said Nelson Lee. "We will come."

"But wilt thou not bring thy friends?" inquired the duke.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I fear it would be rather unfair to his Majesty," he replied. "Later, no doubt, they will all have an opportunity of enjoying the king's hospitality. But we would prefer to see his Majesty alone."

"It is for thee to command!" said the duke bowing.

And, leading the way, he started off for the palace. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore then found that they were provided with an escort of glittering troops of the royal household.

And they went in state towards the palace

CHAPTER VII.

A HINT OF COMING TROUBLE!



LORD DORRIMORE nudged Lee as they walked along.

"A bit of a change, what?" he murmured.

"A very welcome change," replied Nelson Lee. "I sus-

pected from the first that the rascally King Jasper was lying to us. Here we shall find

the actual truth concerning this strange section of the British race. I am convinced we did not obtain the truth from Jasper."

"My dear man, he couldn't speak the truth if he tried," said Dorrie. "By gad! What a wonderful place! Just look at it, old son! Did you ever set eyes upon such buildings? I've a dashed good mind to settle here for the rest of my days!"

The picture that had opened out before them was certainly entrancing.

They had just entered the main gates of the palace. They did not find themselves in a courtyard—as in the case of the St. Edmund Palace. They saw before them the most beautifully-kept gardens, with glorious flowers, and playing fountains. The place was a paradise of beautiful things.

And the palace itself was built of a kind of white marble—glittering and scintillating in the sunlight. The architecture was of the most perfect character. The main entrance lay at the top of a flight of magnificent steps.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie were ushered in, and then they found themselves passing along a great hall. After this they went down a wide corridor, and then they turned off into a beautifully-appointed reception-room.

There was no display here, as in the case of King Jasper. They were not presented to the king as he sat upon his throne. For this was not a state occasion, and did not call for any special ceremony.

And Lee and Dorrie received a bit of a surprise.

For they found two people awaiting them—not only the king—but the queen. His Majesty, King Arthur the Third of New Anglia proved to be a tall, handsome man of about forty-five. His face was kindly, and he wore a neatly-trimmed beard and moustache.

And the queen was a delicate-looking lady of about the king's own age, with fair curls about her head. Somehow, she reminded Lee and Dorrie of a type seen in the paintings of old masters. She was attired in flowing robes of rich material.

The Duke of Somerley introduced the two visitors, and the king rose and bowed. And when they were introduced to the queen, she graciously offered her hand to be kissed.

And the little ceremonies over, both the king and queen became intensely curious to learn how these travellers had come to their country, and how they had discovered the marvellous secret of flying.

For well over an hour Nelson Lee and Dorrie talked in turn—for their listeners could never be satisfied. The more they heard, the more they wanted to hear. They were absolutely entranced by the stories of England and the modern world.

"For centuries our people have been waiting to hear such news as this," exclaimed the king, at length. "And now, when least expected, thou hast come into our midst. 'Tis a wondrous day for New Anglia."

"We have told you much concerning England," smiled Nelson Lee. "And perhaps you will not consider it out of place, your Majesty, if we ask you for information concerning your own country?"

"Thou art welcome to ask what question thou wilt!" replied the king readily.

"We have told you that we entered this wonderful valley by way of the black cavern," said Nelson Lee. "Thus we came upon the kingdom of St. Edmund without knowing that this greater country even existed. And at first we believed that St. Edmund was the only kingdom."

"'Twas a natural mistake," said the queen.

"And we wondered that such people as those in St. Edmund could be descended from good old yoeman stock of England," said Nelson Lee. "We saw the great wall which divides the two countries, and King Jasper informed us that this wall had been built by him for the purpose of keeping out the New Anglians—whom, he declared, were ruffians and blackguards."

"By my sword!" exclaimed King Arthur angrily. "That scoundrel has a fine audacity. Thou wilt be surprised, gentlemen, when I tell thee that this Jasper is naught but the son of a common herdsman! The forefathers of the people of St. Edmund were cast out of this land two hundred years ago!"

"That is more like the true story!" smiled Nelson Lee. "I shall be greatly interested to learn, your Majesty, how your ancestors came to be hemmed up within this wonderful valley?"

"'Tis a simple tale, after all," replied the king. "That which thou learned from the rascally Jasper is partly true. 'Twas indeed a pilgrim ship which set forth from English shores in the seventeenth century. 'Twas a ship filled with goodly Quakers—men and women and children of wondrous faith and gentle upbringing. They carried with them beasts and birds for the making of their new land. For 'tis written in our records that this new colony was to be situated in a promising country named Argentine."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee. "And the ship became caught in a southern current, and was drawn down into the ice?"

"'Tis so!" said King Arthur. "But the latter part of that lying rascal's story is false. Need I ask thee if thou wilt believe my word? Hast thou not seen the difference between my people and the people of St. Edmund? Is it not writ clearly upon the faces of all?"

"Yes, by gad!" said Dorrie. "Your people are a finer race altogether, an' those bounders in St. Edmund are a scurvy lot!"

"Apt words!" said his Majesty, smiling. "The true story of what took place two hundred years ago is this. Thou wilt realise that there was much trouble when our people first decided to make this valley into a growing colony. They could do naught else, since escape was impossible. The chief

trouble arose from the behaviour of some of those men who had formed the ship's crew."

"The sailors?"

"Thou hast used the correct word," replied the king. "These men, so our history tells us, were ruffians of the worst type—men who had been pirates on the high seas, and who were the scum of the earth. They were thrown into this fair land with those peaceful Quakers and their womenkind and their children. 'Twas impossible to kill them, or even to commence warfare—since we have read that 'tis a creed of the Quakers to decry fighting and the killing of mankind."

"Quite so," said Nelson Lee. "Our modern Quakers are similar. Do I understand that your people are Quakers even to-day?"

"Nay!" replied the king. "In the course of years we have changed. Our religion is principally the same, but not so extreme. We have learned that if warfare comes, we must fight. 'Tis the only way—for the men of St. Edmund are cunning, treacherous brutes."

"And these, no doubt, are the direct descendants of the villainous crew of the St. Edmund?"

"Thou hast spoken truly," replied King Arthur gravely. "'Twould weary thee if I were to tell thee all that took place. In those early days when the colony was being formed, our forefathers had many and terrible difficulties to overcome. And they were hampered by the plundering villainies of the ship's crew. Not only did these scum steal the goods of the peaceful Quakers, but they even stole many of their womenkind. 'Twas a black period indeed."

"I can well understand it!" replied Nelson Lee.

"But after fifty years—when the children had become men, and when other children had become men, these offspring of the pirate crew became a menace to the poor community," continued the king. "At that time we had a chief of the Quakers—a direct forefather of mine own. He proclaimed himself king over the community. He was King Arthur the First. And he was a man of power and strength—a man who cared naught about fear."

"So I should imagine!" put in Lord Dorri-more.

"And King Arthur proclaimed a decree in all the land, that every man belonging to the ship's crew, and every child and grandchild of such men were to be cast out, and thrust into the northern section of the great valley," said the king solemnly. "The whole community welcomed the idea, and 'twas accomplished. Blood flowed in vast quantities, but 'twas better to have it done with at once. The men of the St. Edmund and their children, and their children's children, were kept to their own section of land—and none were allowed to cross a given

barrier line. For many, many years a deadly feud raged. Along this borderline men were killed frequently."

"I can picture the whole sequence of events," said Nelson Lee. "In the course of time these ruffians naturally increased—and they proclaimed a kingdom of their own, calling it St. Edmund."

"Thou art right," said the king. "It mattered little to us, since we were always powerful enough to laugh at the threats of these ruffians. But 'twas a constant menace, nevertheless. Our people would be peaceful, but were never allowed to be, owing to the plottings of our neighbours. Many of our leaders attempted to bring peace during the past years—but 'twas never accomplished. The St. Edmund people are enemies, and will always remain so. 'Twas my grandfather who built the vast wall which thou hast seen stretching from one side of the valley to the other. 'Twas a stupendous task—but well worth the trouble and expense."

"Since that has been built you have had no trouble?"

"But little," said the king. "We shut off the St. Edmund country completely. 'Twas impossible for the wretches to invade our territory. And so, for over half a century we have had peace. Our people have been able to nearly forget the people of St. Edmund. They have lived their lives, and we have lived ours. 'Tis as it should be."

"I am greatly pleased that you have told me all this," said Nelson Lee. "Needless to say, I am very greatly interested, and my pleasure will be even greater if you will permit me an opportunity of looking into your history books and records. The subject is fascinating in the extreme."

"And now I would hear more of the great world."

The king would not be satisfied. He was almost like a child in his eagerness. And, after all, it was quite natural. Here were some people who had come from beyond the everlasting ice—from that world which the New Anglians had only read about. Each generation had dreamed of seeing the strangers coming into the land. And now they had come.

We were within the true country now—previously we had been harboured in the stronghold of a low race. The difference was so great that it was hardly believable.

We knew, instinctively, that we should never meet with any treachery from King Arthur and his subjects. They were the descendants of fine old British stock, and they had had no outside influences to spoil them. Every man and woman was pure bred to the backbone. And it was little wonder that the people were, as a whole, healthy and prosperous.

As soon as Nelson Lee had left the king's palace, he returned to the central square. But he did not return alone. The king and

queen accompanied him—all escorted by a hundred glittering troops.

And then, at last, we were allowed to emerge from the Golden Rover. Until now we had been fuming within the saloon.

In the meantime, crowds had been collecting in greater numbers—and we had become more and more impatient.

"I say, you know, this is jolly thick!" declared Handforth. "I can't understand why we can't go out! These people seem to be as right as rain. Anyhow, I'm going to chance it!"

"You mean you're going out?" asked Church.

"Yes!"

"Look here, Handy——"

"It's no good you trying to hold me back—I'm going!" said Handforth firmly. "That's final—understand? If you chaps start kicking up a fuss, I'll jolly well biff you!"

"But Mr. Lee distinctly said——"

"Blow Mr. Lee!" said Handforth rebelliously. "Mr. Lee didn't understand. And, anyhow, if I get into trouble, I'll jolly well have myself to blame. Don't breathe a word—I'm going to sneak out!"

Handforth started moving down the saloon. Then he turned back, and glared at Church and McClure fiercely.

"If you yell out a warning, I'll never speak to you again!" he hissed.

If Church and McClure had taken this

literally, they would probably have yelled in unison. But they knew very well that Handforth would adopt quite different measures. And as the two juniors did not wish to go about the streets of New London adorned with swollen noses and thick ears, they kept silent.

And Handforth stole off.

He reached the door which led out at the side of the body. To his astonishment, he found Phipps lounging there. Handforth was somewhat dismayed.

"Er—Phipps—I think Archie wants you!" said Handforth.

"I am afraid I cannot go now, sir."

"You—you rotter—— I—I mean, good old Phipps!" gasped Handforth. "I'm feeling frightfully thirsty, you know. Just run along and get a glass of that lime juice, will you?"

"I think Snowball will attend to you, sir," said Phipps.

Handforth glared.

"You rotter!" he roared. "I know your game! You're jolly well standing here so anybody can't get out!"

"Precisely, sir," agreed Phipps calmly.

"Why, you—you——"

"Dash it all, kindly simmer, old darling!" exclaimed Archie, strolling up. "I mean to say, language, and all that! Frightfully

(Continued on next page.)

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bad form, considering that Phipps jolly well belongs to me, what? That is to say, Phipps—"

"Hurrah!" came a roar from one of the juniors. "They're coming!"

Handforth forgot everything, and rushed to a window. And then we all saw the imposing procession coming down from the palace. And five minutes later we knew that we were released.

The whole crowd of fellows tumbled out like so many rabbits out of a warren. In fact, they were so eager that the worthy inhabitants were rather startled.

But we were all warmly welcomed, and we knew that we were going to enjoy ourselves immensely in the kingdom of New Anglia.

One of the first things we learned was that the king had placed a superb mansion at our disposal—a splendid place adjoining the palace itself. Here we were provided with servants, and everything that the hospitality of a king's palace could shower upon us.

By the next day we were feeling quite at home, and we had settled ourselves down to the prospect of a fortnight's stay in the kingdom. After that, according to the gov'nor, we should all get on board the Golden Rover once more and start off for England.

But during this fortnight we meant to enjoy ourselves.

But was this period to be as peaceful and quiet as we imagined?

Towards the end of that day a breathless man came tearing through the city streets. He made his way to the palace, and it so happened that Nelson Lee was with the Duke Somerley when the man was shown into his presence. And the fellow had a strange story to tell.

"I bring tidings of vast urgency, sire!" exclaimed the man, panting hard. "The accursed men of St. Edmund are massing for a deadly attack upon our country."

The duke laughed.

"Thou art needlessly alarmed!" he said. "The men of St. Edmund can do naught—"

"I beg of thee, sire, to take this seriously!" pleaded the man. "I live with

my family near the great dividing wall. We have heard sundry strange noises of late. And only this day a vast portion of the wall collapsed—with thunderous crashes and much damage."

"Odds death!" exclaimed the duke, startled.

"'Tis a matter of vast seriousness!" continued the man. "Even as I speak with thee, I fear the enemy has penetrated into our domain!"

The duke was quite pale by now.

"Is this very grave?" asked Nelson Lee.

"'Tis vital!" replied the duke. "New Anglia is not a warlike country, Master Lee, and we have but few soldiers ready for battle. We have trusted to the great wall to keep us guarded from the activities of King Jasper and his plundering soldiers. But if this wall has been smashed down, disaster might follow!"

Only five hours later three other men arrived in the city. And these men brought the startling news that the men of King Jasper were pouring into New Anglia by the thousand. The breach was a reality, and New Anglia was invaded by the enemy. Already many outlying villages had been looted and burned. The brutal soldiers of King Jasper were advancing with deadly purpose.

Nelson Lee heard the news, and spoke with Lord Dorrimore.

"It seems to me, old man, that it's up to us to lend a hand," he said quietly.

"Every time!" agreed Dorrie.

"These people are the weaker—although stronger numerically, no doubt. But they are peace-loving, and have done nothing to cause this bloodthirsty invasion. It is our duty, Dorrie, to assist."

"Absolutely!" agreed Lord Dorrimore heartily. "Besides, here we've got a rippin' chance of gettin' one back on old Jasper! In fact, we'll get busy at once, an' see what we can do when it comes to beatin' back an invadin' army!"

And thus it was decided.

When all the juniors knew about it there was fresh excitement. The capital was already in a ferment. The enemy was marching on, and something like panic ensued. But we were on the spot—and we meant to get very busy!

THE END.

— NEXT WEEK'S STORY WILL CONTAIN —

A Thrilling Account of the Invasion of NEW ANGLIA by
the Army of King Jasper, and will be entitled:—

THE RIVAL KINGS!

Nipper's Magazine

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August 26, 1922.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—I have great pleasure in announcing a series of articles on sport by our old friend, "Rover." The first of these articles appears on the next page, and should prove inspiring to my numerous chums who are connected with amateur football clubs. Next week, "Rover" will deal with the all-important question of how funds can be raised by amateur clubs.—Yours sincerely, NIPPER (The Editor.).

Famous Antarctic Explorers.

SIR ERNEST HENRY SHACKLETON

BORN AND BRED BY THE SEA.

ANOTHER great British Antarctic explorer whose tragic death is still fresh in our memories, was Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton. Born at Kilkee, on the West coast of Ireland in 1874, Shackleton's early boyhood was spent beside the great rollers of the Atlantic and it was only natural that he should afterwards make the sea his profession. His father was a doctor, and sent his son, Ernest, to Dulwich College to be educated. From here he joined the merchant service, and afterwards the Royal Naval Reserve, where he obtained the rank of lieutenant.

AS THIRD OFFICER OF THE DISCOVERY.

Shackleton's first taste of Polar exploration began in 1901, when he took part in Captain Scott's first expedition to the Antarctic. He was then twenty-seven, and was appointed third officer of the Discovery. After two years battling with interminable snow and ice, defying the freezing blizzards and penetrating those lonely wastes where man had never been before, Shackleton, much against his will, was obliged to return home with a bad attack of scurvy.

LAYING PLANS FOR ANOTHER EXPEDITION.

Though Scott failed to reach the South Pole on this occasion, Shackleton was certain that his leader had discovered the best route to that most southern point of the globe. With all the knowledge and experience gained on his first Antarctic adventure, Shackleton busied himself in the next few years in preparing for another expedition to the South Pole, this time to be commanded by himself. At that time he was little known, but with dogged perseverance and characteristic energy, he finally succeeded in raising sufficient funds to equip an expedition for the Antarctic.

AS COMMANDER OF THE NIMROD.

It was in January 1908, that he sailed from England in the Nimrod on a voyage that was

to make him suddenly famous. Unable to effect his intended landing at King Edward VII Land, owing to the passage being blocked by an enormous ice pack, Shackleton made his starting point at Ross Island, and from thence proceeded along the route he had formerly traversed with Scott. Advance depots of supplies were then laid over the Great Barrier leading to the Magnetic and Geographic Poles. His preliminary work completed, Shackleton set out for the Pole on October 28, 1908. Supplies for ninety-one days were taken, and these were carried on sledges drawn by four Manchurian ponies.

THE GREAT TREK OVER THE ICE MOUNTAINS.

By November they came to some ice-clad mountains, through which there was an opening leading to the Pole. The ice here was full of dangerous crevasses, and after many narrow escapes and the loss of all their ponies, the party arrived at a great tableland, 7,400 feet above the sea on December 8. The discovery of coal in these mountains showed that this cold and bleak land was at one time a country of warmth and sunshine. Gradually the party advanced until on January 6, 1909, they had reached the great height of 10,500 feet. They were then overtaken by a terrible blizzard which lasted for sixty hours. On January 9, they were only ninety-seven miles from the Pole. By this time their rations were running low, the weather was very severe and all the party were sick. They could advance no further, and so were compelled to turn back. On his return to England in 1909, Shackleton was knighted. To him belonged the credit of first reaching the South Magnetic Pole, and of getting within an ace of the Geographic Pole.

AN ATTEMPT TO CROSS ANTARCTICA.

In 1914 he was about to start on another expedition, and when war broke out he offered his services to his country, but was told to proceed on his quest. His plan was to cross Antarctica from the Weddell to the Ross Sea. Unfortunately, his ship, the Endurance, was crushed by the ice off the Caird Coast. In spite of the disaster, Shackleton discovered much that was new about the Antarctic.

HIS LAST VOYAGE.

Through the generosity of an old schoolfellow, Shackleton was able to set off again to the Antarctic, and in September 1921, he sailed from England in the Quest, but unhappily it was his last voyage, for he died of heart failure while still at his post, off the Island of South Georgia, on January 5, 1922. Here he was buried, mourned by a nation which was justly proud of her son.

YOUR FOOTBALL CLUB

WHAT IT MAY BECOME

An Interesting Chat to Junior Footballers

ONCE again the talk is all of football. The game is in the air; with the new season which commences on Saturday, the winter craze takes possession of its enthusiasts, and we shall have nothing but football from then until the closing days of April when the season culminates in a blaze of glory with the decision of the Final for the English Cup. The big clubs are buckling on their harness, so to speak, looking forward confidently to a season of success in the coming campaign; the smaller clubs, such clubs as you, my reader, belong to, are doing the same. In your own way, you are just as anxious to do well as those bigger organisations are, and if you go about it as you should do there is no reason why your efforts should not be crowned with success.

Small Beginnings.

The manager of a big London football club, once remarked to me, that in the junior footballers of to-day we have the internationals of the future, a sentiment with which I am in entire sympathy and agreement. In that same way, we have, in the junior clubs of to-day, the league autocrats of the future. Most of the clubs that are so familiar to us—clubs like Liverpool and the 'Spurs, whose names are household words, and are known all over the world—had the same small beginnings as your club has. At one time they were nearly all small junior organisations with no particular prospects in life save what they were doing at the time, with no hopes of ever becoming anything bigger than they were then.

Your club has the same chance of success if you only go the right way about organising it. And, just to fire you with an ambition to do your best, I am going to tell you how some of those big clubs started, and how you, too, may progress like they have progressed. I am not going to say, of course, that your own particular little football club will blossom into Leaguers at once. That will take years, however hard you work, and probably you will all be grown men when the desired result comes about. If your club at some future time becomes a power in the land it will be a source of great satisfaction for you to say, "Well, I was one of the lads who made it so. If it hadn't been for me and others like me, such and such a club would never have been anything better than juniors."

The Spirit of Success.

That is the spirit that makes for success. That is the spirit which has caused our bigger clubs to rise to the very pinnacle. The 'Spurs, which are one of the most successful and wealthiest clubs in the country at present were originally an enthusiastic team of schoolboys who gave the best part of their pocket money to the club secretary. Bolton Wanderers, another club well up the rungs of the ladder of success and fame were, in the first place, a merry band of youngsters who attended the same Sunday School. Clapton Orient grew

out of a set of chums who played football on a refuse heap. Fulham, Barnsley, Newcastle United, all these owe their inception to enthusiastic youngsters such as you yourselves are at present.

But what is the secret of this success? How did they rise? How can we do the same? you ask. The answer is simple. In the first place your club must have esprit de corps. By that I mean to say that all its units must work harmoniously, that you must all do your level best both on the field of play and in the club room, and exert every nerve to place the club above its rivals. To be successful, every lad belonging to the club must be a pal of his neighbour; you must be a happy little band of brothers. And in all matters you must put the club first. You must be prepared to make sacrifices in regard to your pocket, and in every other sense. Those are the fundamental principles of success and without you are prepared to observe them to the letter you can never hope to become anything really big.

Organisation.

But this is not all. Your club must be efficiently organised. You must have a president—an adult, who, besides contributing towards little necessities when occasion arises, should take a personal and intelligent interest in the club and its members and who will turn up at its meetings and give his lads the benefit of his advice and experience. Then you must have an efficient secretary—a lad who will work hard in the interests of the club—and an efficient committee, say four members, who will draw up sensible rules, and will decide questions which arise and do their best to put things right.

Next on the list comes the captain. Every team must have a captain of course. He should be selected, not because he happens to be a particularly brilliant player, but because he knows the game thoroughly and has judgment. Above all, there must be no quarrelling and bitter feeling. Every man in the club must do his own little bit and do it thoroughly.

Do that, and you will have a model football club with all the ingredients of success. And it is no difficult matter if you are at all enthusiastic—and you should be—and wish to get on. You will find many obstacles in your path as you go along, of course, but if everything goes as it should go, then you will overcome them. One of the biggest of these, the biggest indeed, will be the money question. If you progress as I hope you will progress, you will find yourself in need of a ground, a bigger club-room, new tackle, and what not, and money must be raised to get them. That is where the esprit de corps, I was speaking about comes in. There are heaps of ways in which an enthusiastic band of youngsters can raise capital, if they only pull together and work with a swing.

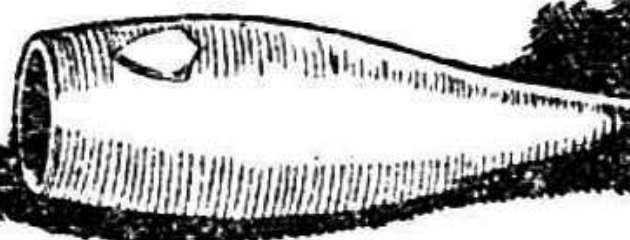
Concerts is one, whist drives another, and there are many others, too, of which I will talk next week. There is no reason, if you do carry out the teaching I have striven to give here, why your club, at some future date, should not rise to be a power in the football land.

"ROVER."

THE HOLLOW CLUB

OR

THE CLUE OF THE GLOVED HAND



A THRILLING & UNUSUAL STORY of the FAMOUS DETECTIVE
NELSON LEE AND HIS ASSISTANT NIPPER

CHAPTER I.

THE GLOVED HAND.

NIPPER, assistant to Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective of Gray's Inn Road, entered the smoke-room of the Junior Ajax Club, in Grafton Street, W.

He had been to Lord's, watching the cricket, and had looked in at the club, in the hope of finding his master, who occasionally dropped in there in the evenings, when not hard at work on some case.

Nipper was not disappointed.

In company with two other men, Nelson Lee was seated in one of the deep leathern armchairs, a cigarette smouldering between his fingers, and a disreputable black cat perched upon his knee.

His companions were respectively a peppery, but good-hearted, retired Army man, Colonel Vereker, and a young aristocrat, with smooth-shaved face and canary-coloured hair, named Reggie Head.

"I thought I might find you here, guv'nor," Nipper said, as he sank into a vacant chair. Then after, for a few moments, they had discussed the latest cricket news, "There's something in the evening papers that might interest you. The Clifford Hall necklace has been stolen."

Nelson Lee ceased fondling the head of the purring cat, and nodded. He waved aside the newspaper Nipper proffered, though his keen eyes had grown hard and bright.

"I know. I have seen the report," he said. And, as he saw that the colonel and Reggie Head were regarding him expectantly: "The necklace is one of the most famous strings of diamonds in existence. The stones were purchased separately some few years ago by Sir Gilbert Clifford-Hall, and presented to his wife on an anniversary of their wedding day, and, in all, they cost

rather more than fifty thousand pounds."

The colonel whistled.

"And now the stones have been stolen!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," Nelson Lee nodded. "A reception was held at Sir Gilbert and Lady Clifford-Hall's residence, in Kensington, last night, and the diamonds, which had been taken from the care of Sir Gilbert's bankers, were worn by his wife.

"When she retired at between midnight and one o'clock in the small hours, Lady Clifford-Hall handed the stones to her husband, who locked them in the safe in his library. At shortly before dawn, Sir Gilbert, who had been troubled all through the night with neuralgia, put on a dressing-gown, and made his way towards the library to obtain a bottle of camphorated chloroform he had left there. He thought he heard someone moving stealthily about within, and he quietly stole back to his dressing-room for his revolver.

"Thinking he might, after all, be making a mistake, and not wishing to alarm his wife, he made no effort to arouse the servants. Grasping the revolver in one hand, and carrying a candlestick in the other, he returned to the library, opened the door and entered.

"It was to see the dark figure of a man standing before the safe. The door stood wide, and it was discovered afterwards that the lock had been completely burned out, evidently by means of a powerful oxy-acetylene blow-lamp. The intruder, who was masked, was holding an electric torch, and by its light admiring the Clifford-Hall necklace, which he had in his other hand.

"The cracksman wheeled about, as Sir Gilbert uttered a startled exclamation. The latter fired at the burglar, and knows that he hit him, though not seriously. Evidently with the idea of obviating finger impressions,

the man was wearing light-hued gloves, and Sir Gilbert remembers seeing a red stain dye the back of one of them, showing the bullet had ripped across the fellow's hand."

"But he got away? What?" asked Reggie Head, who seldom read anything save the sporting page in his newspaper.

"Yes. Before Sir Gilbert could fire again, the burglar whipped up a heavy paper-weight and hurled it at him. It struck him upon the temple, and he remembered no more until he found his wife and a crowd of half-dressed servants about him. Of course, the cracksman had gone, and the necklace had gone with him."

It was at that moment that another member of the club joined the party.

He was a tall, lean athletic-looking man of about thirty, named Justin Brent, who was reputed to be of independent means through a fortune left him some years before by an uncle who had died in Australia.

"Hallo, Brent!" Nelson Lee said. "We were just discussing the Clifford-Hall robbery. It's another where a powerful blow-lamp was used to master a safe. There have been quite a number where these methods were employed just recently."

Justin Brent seated himself, drawing off one of his gloves, then lighting a cigarette.

"Yes. Quite an interesting case," he drawled, as he beckoned a waiter and ordered a drink. "Is that a late paper?"

Colonel Vereker thoughtfully watched Nelson Lee, as, once again, he abstractedly stroked his feline friend. The cat, which belonged to the club, was usually one of the most ill-tempered animals that could well be imagined. It was the hero of a hundred fights, and had lost best part of an ear in one of these encounters.

"It's curious, Lee, how that cat takes to you," the colonel said. "If anyone else attempted to touch it, it would claw their hands to pieces."

Nelson Lee's eyes had been idly fixed upon Justin Brent's gloved hand, as he raised a whisky-and-soda to his lips.

"There are few animals that do not become friendly with me, colonel," he answered, as he gave the cat a final pat and stood it upon the carpet. "I love all dumb beasts, and, somehow, they seem to know it."

"It's just personality. What?" Reggie Head drawled, as he removed his monocle and polished it upon a silk handkerchief. "But, taking you all round, Lee, you are a most wonderful blighter. I often find myself thinking, doncherknow, what a mercy it is for society at large that you have ranged yourself on the side of the law instead of working against it."

Justin Brent looked up from the report of the jewel robbery, which he had been reading.

There was the slightest trace of a sneer

upon his thin, clean-shaved lips, as he laid the paper on one side and shrugged his shoulders.

"Lee is a big success as a detective, but there is a vast difference between a criminal and a criminal-tracker," he said. "I hold that, as a crook, he would probably be a hollow failure."

"Don't be too sure of that," Nelson Lee retorted, not failing to sense the note of contempt in the other's voice. He laughed. "Who knows? One day, I might be tempted to throw up the detective business, and amuse myself on the side of the enemy. Then, Brent, you might wake up one morning and find your plate missing."

It was Brent's turn to laugh, and he did so almost scoffingly.

"If you got past the electric burglar alarms I have fitted in my flat, and the bulldog I allow to go loose about the rooms during the night, Lee," he said, "you would be welcome to my few valuables. Bess, my dog, is a man-eater—at least, she would be if she caught anyone fooling around in my place in the dead of night. If they got away with their life, they would be lucky!"

Again Nelson Lee's glance wandered to the hand Justin Brent had kept gloved. It seemed to interest him. As Brent suddenly became aware of the detective's inspection of it, he concealed the slightest of starts, and thrust it into his pocket.

"I wonder why you think it necessary to protect your flat with alarms and a savage dog, Brent?" Nelson Lee said carelessly. "I should not have thought there would be much to tempt a burglar in bachelor quarters such as yours."

Brent gave him a keen, almost questioning look.

"I have some very fine water-colours and miniatures I should not like to lose," he said curtly. Then, with a laugh, in which there was a lack of real mirth: "If you decide to turn cracksman, at any time, Lee, take my advice and give it a wide berth."

Nelson Lee nodded in an absent manner, and seemed to lose interest in the subject. Soon afterwards, he and Nipper left the club, and, as they walked down Grafton Street, Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"In spite of Brent's burglar alarms, in spite of his man-eating dog, as he calls his bulldog, I imagine I shall before very long pay his flat a visit in the dead of night, Nipper," he said quietly.

Nipper stared at him in amazement, wondering if he had heard aright.

"Do you mean break in—go there without his knowledge?" he gasped incredulously.

"Precisely," Nelson Lee assured him, smiling very grimly.

"But what the mischief for, guv'nor?" Nipper cried, in alarm. "If you were caught, you would be in the dickens of a

mess! Why, even your reputation might not stop you being sent to prison, and—"

"The main thing is not to be caught, Nipper," Nelson Lee interrupted drily. "As for my reasons, they are good and very definite. Did you notice the hand Justin Brent kept gloved to-night? Think that over—it's worth it, I assure you!"

CHAPTER II.

THE "HORSEY" STRANGER—A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

A MAN, attired in a check suit, stock-tie, and horsey-looking gaiters, who chewed at a straw, strolled towards Museum Street, reading a sporting paper.

"'Mornin', Mr. Parsons," said a voice; and, glancing up, the horsey individual found himself confronted by a middle-aged man in sombre dark clothes, who had with him a formidable-looking bulldog on a stout lead.

"'Mornin', mate!" responded the man in the check suit. "Hallo, Bess, old gal! Out for a constitutional again? My! You are a lucky dawg!"

He stooped and patted the muscular and bandy-legged animal, and, in return, she licked his hand affectionately.

"It licks me how she takes to you as she does, Mr. Parsons," said the man in black. "If any other person, save the master and me as much as looked at her, she'd be a-showin' the whites of her eyes, and growling. Do yer know anything good to-day, if I may ask?"

The horsey man responded in a confidential tone out of the corner of his mouth.

"Quick-Silver Filly ought to win the first race to-day at Newmarket," he declared.

"Back her each way, an' you ought to be on velvet, mate, but keep it to yerself. If a good thing gets about too much it spoils the price."

The man in black clothes thanked the other, and passed on with the dog, though not before the horsey man had again patted her and fondled her ears. As soon as the terrier's attendant was out of earshot, the man in the check suit laughed softly.

The laugh was unquestionably that of Nelson Lee, though the man whence it came looked as unlike the famous detective as once could picture. A line or two here and there about the face, a feature or so skillfully painted out, a slight reddening of the nose, and a strip of invisible plaster, which caught up an eyelid and gave the impression of a squint, formed one of the most simple yet most effective disguises the detective had ever adopted. Even Nipper would have had difficulty in recognising his master, had he not seen him leave his rooms in his present character some half an hour before.

For a week, Nelson Lee had been the "horsey man" on and off.

On the first occasion on which he had adopted the character, he had contrived to scrape up an acquaintance with John Forman, Justin Brent's manservant, in a public-house, and "pumping the man and finding that, like most of his class, he liked a little flutter, Nelson Lee had posed as the brother of a man who worked for a well-known racing stable.

Nelson Lee never betted in the ordinary way, but he chanced to know that his friend, Reggie Head, had two horses running that week which were fancied, and, in a terribly confidential tone, he had imparted their names to Forman.

As it happened, both animals had won at remunerative odds, and, from that moment, Forman was "Mr. Parsons" friend for life. Strangely enough, too, "Mr. Parsons" seemed frequently near Museum Street, where Justin Brent's flat was situated, when John Forman took out his master's bulldog for an early-morning airing.

To the surprise of the manservant, in a couple of days Bess was as friendly with "Mr. Parsons" as was he—which was exactly what "Mr. Parsons," otherwise Nelson Lee, had been working for.

"I sincerely hope Quick-Silver Filly doesn't disappoint you, Forman, my friend," Nelson Lee murmured to himself, as he waited for a 'bus that would take him to the corner of Gray's Inn Road. "For it is the last tip 'Mr. Parsons' will give you. He is destined to vanish out of your life from now onwards."

Nelson Lee retired to his room quite early that night, and not even Nipper was aware that he did not actually go to bed. At just after midnight the detective left his bedroom, stole noiselessly downstairs, and letting himself out, stepped into the deserted street.

He walked thence to Museum Street, and, turning into it, paused outside the building wherein Justin Brent's flat was situated.

The block in which it stood, unlike most of the other buildings, possessed a basement. The steady tread of a constable upon his beat was dying away in the distance, but otherwise there seemed not a soul about. And, to Nelson Lee's satisfaction, all the windows in the front of the building were in darkness.

Goloshes covered Nelson Lee's boots, and he went down to the basement door without a sound. This opened into the lower hall, where the quarters of the caretaker were situated. Making use of a skeleton key, the detective had it open in rather less time than it takes to write.

Nelson Lee softly closed the door behind him, and, standing in the hall, flashed the rays of an electric torch upon first one wall, then the other. The light fell upon the main switchbox connected with the electric lighting current for the whole building, which was screwed to the wall just behind the door.

A pair of steps rested conveniently near. Silently Nelson Lee reared and mounted them, so that he could reach the box.

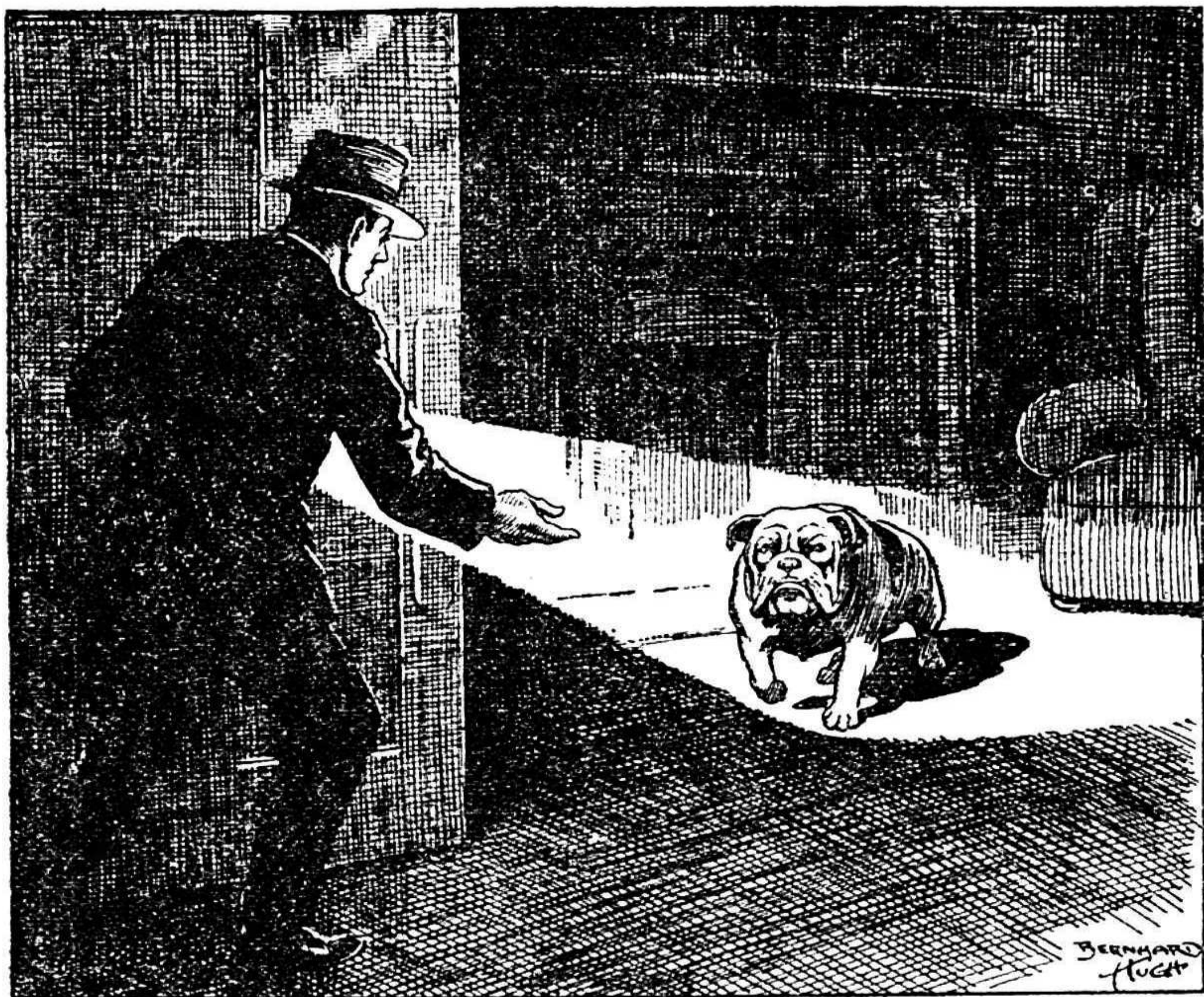
Very gently, he manipulated the mechanism, so that the electric power for all the several flats was cut off.

He smiled very grimly as he descended from the steps, turned, and began to steal up the staircase leading to the ground floor.

Discreet "pumping" of John Forman had

was right in the chance I have taken. If Brent's burglar alarms are served with a current from the ordinary lighting power nothing will happen, for the current is switched off. If, on the other hand, they are connected with separate batteries, there will be an unearthly din, and I shall have to run for it. Ah!"

He had gently pushed open the front door, and there had happened nothing, as he hoped and counted upon. All remained



Another instant of breathless doubt, then, slowly, the dog advanced to him.

acquainted Nelson Lee with the fact that Justin Brent's flat was a ground-floor one, and numbered 5a. With the aid of his electric torch, which he used cautiously, the detective found it, and stood for a moment examining the front door.

He saw that the lock was of an ordinary pattern, and not a Yale, which would have made matters more difficult for him. One of the skeleton keys fitted it, and, with his breath momentarily suspended, Nelson Lee gently turned it.

"Now," he muttered, "we shall see if I

silent. The alarms Brent had boasted of were evidently served from the main current, and had been temporarily put out of action.

With catlike tread, Nelson Lee moved forward into the pitch-dark hall. Once more, information he had skilfully wormed out of Forman proved useful, for he was able to avoid the two bedrooms where the manservant and, doubtless, Brent himself would be sleeping, and to make straight for the door of a room facing him, which Justin Brent was wont to call his "den."

As he tiptoed towards it and allowed the light of his torch to play for an instant before him, he saw that the door was slightly ajar. There came a movement from within the room, and a low, ominous growl.

"Bess!" Nelson Lee whispered softly. "Good, Bess! Quiet, lass!"

Slowly he pushed open the door. He saw the eyes of the usually savage dog gleaming balefully from out of the darkness, and he sensed that she was fairly a-quiver and doubtful as to whether or no she should hurl herself at his throat.

It was a tense and thrilling moment for Nelson Lee. He would have suffered anything rather than hurt the animal, and if she came at him he would have only his hands with which to defend himself.

"Bess, come here!" he breathed, in an undertone, which he made very steady and stern.

Another instant of breathless doubt, then slowly the dog advanced to him, and she allowed the detective, whose scent she had recognised, gently to pat her head. Nelson Lee went farther into the room and closed the door.

Softly speaking to the bull-terrier in a coaxing tone the while the detective flashed his torch about the room.

His attention was drawn to a small writing-desk, and he silently crossed to it, tried the lid and found it was locked. With a small instrument of flexible steel he quickly had the lock mastered, and he raised the lid and began to search beneath the papers which lay within.

But it was evident that he did not come upon that for which he was looking. For presently he drew back, shaking his head; and then walked over practically every square inch of the room, his head held in a listening attitude, as though he might be expecting to hear the shifting under his weight of a loose floor-board.

No such indication rewarded him, and, going down on his knees, he tested the boards stretching beneath the table, but here again he drew a blank. He flashed his light about the room again, and his eyes fell upon a rather handsome pair of Indian clubs, which lay in the fender.

Nelson Lee moved forward and stood for a moment looking down at them. He saw that they were adorned with small silver plates, on which Brent's monogram was engraved.

The detective slipped his torch into his

pocket and picked up the clubs. He weighed them in his hands, and a sharp breath that might have been born of excitement escaped him.

For he had noticed a curious fact. The clubs, which were undoubtedly intended for a pair, were not of an even weight!

Again bringing his torch into use, Nelson Lee examined them more closely, particularly noting a raised rim which encircled the bulging bodies of the clubs near the base. He laid one down, then twisted at that part of the other below the rim, for a certain suspicion had flashed into his mind.

It began to unscrew in his hand. As it came away, the club was revealed to be hollow, and something wrapped in tissue-paper, which had been concealed within, fell to the floor.

Placing the two parts of the club on the table, Nelson Lee picked up the package. As he unwrapped the paper he chuckled very softly and grimly.

It had been wound about a string of peerless diamonds, and as, flashing and scintillating in the light of his torch, the detective allowed it to trail through his fingers, he recognised it as the stolen Clifford-Hall necklace!

He had found that for which he had come in search!

He slipped the necklace into his pocket, then stood for a moment hesitating, as though not quite certain how to act. Then he rescrewed the hollow Indian club together and wrapped the pair in a newspaper he found lying upon a chair.

He prepared to take his departure, then again he paused.

A hard, little smile curled his lips, as he took his card-case from his pocket. He drew out one of the slips of paste-board bearing his name and address, and propped it where it was bound to be seen in the centre of the table.

Wonderful though the influence which he possessed over most dumb animals, Nelson Lee felt a little doubtful of Bess, as he moved back towards the door. He wondered if she would object to his leaving and fly at him as he made to quit the room.

He called her to him, and she came submissively enough. He patted and fondled her, then, opening the door, back slowly out into the hall. A couple of seconds later, the door of the "den" was closed, and Bess had been left on the opposite side.

Nelson Lee's heart was in his mouth as he tiptoed back towards the front door, and heard the bull-terrier energetically sniffing at the chink beneath the door. Would she give tongue? he wondered.

But fortune was with the detective. Bess did not bark, and half a minute later Nelson Lee had quitted the flat, closed the front door, and was gliding back down the staircase leading to the basement. He left by the main door, the clubs tucked under his arm.

Within half an hour he was safely back in his consulting-room.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2s

CHAPTER III.

AN EARLY VISITOR—THE END.

NELSON LEE examined the visiting-card Nipper had just brought him. It was nine o'clock on the following morning, and the detective, who had recently finished breakfast, was seated in his consulting-room.

"Paul Ashley, managing-director, Gold Mines of Kalgoorlie, Ltd.," he read aloud. "Better show him in, Nipper—and watch! You understand?"

"Yes, guv'nor!" the lad answered. "You think—"

"There is the faint possibility, that is all, Nipper," Nelson Lee interrupted, shrugging his shoulders; but Nipper seemed to understand, and nodded.

The younger detective left the consulting-room. A moment later he returned, and ushered in a tall, well-dressed man, with a shock of red hair, a heavy beard and moustache of a similar hue, who wore blue-tinted spectacles.

"It is good of you to make no objection to seeing me so early, Mr. Lee," he said; and his eyes wandered about the room and rested for a moment upon the Indian clubs belonging to Justin Brent, which, with one again in two pieces, lay on the top of a roller desk. "My company has been robbed on a large scale, and, if you will, my fellow directors and myself are anxious that you take up the case."

"Please be seated, and give me the details, Mr. Ashley," Nelson Lee murmured; and the visitor, with a word of thanks, sank into a chair.

"I wonder," he said, as he produced a telegraph form from his pocket, "if you would mind your assistant sending this off for me? I am so worried at the discoveries made at our board meeting yesterday that it slipped my memory, and it is rather important."

Nelson Lee raised his brows, then nodded, and Nipper, seeing the former action, started ever so slightly.

"Certainly, Mr. Ashley," the detective agreed. "Please deal with our client's wire, Nipper."

The assistant accepted the telegram, and the necessary money for its despatch, from the visitor and quitted the room. No sooner had Nelson Lee heard the slamming of the front door than he leant sharply forward in his chair, his keen eyes on the man who had called himself Paul Ashley.

"Why not remove your wig and false beard, Mr. Justin Brent?" he inquired quietly.

The caller sprang to his feet, at the same time whipping out a revolver, which he levelled point-blank at the detective.

"So you have seen through my disguise, but too late, Nelson Lee," he said harshly; and the voice now was certainly that of the detective's fellow clubman. "I see that

you found the diamonds in the Indian club which you stole from my flat. How you contrived to enter it and leave again without my dog attacking you and giving the alarm I do not pretend to understand, though, as the electric current was found switched off this morning, the reason for the silence of the burglar alarms was obvious. I found your card. It is to be regretted that you meddled in my affairs—very much to be regretted!"

"For you—yes," Nelson Lee agreed calmly. "I have suspected you for months, Brent, and last night I proved that you were not the man of independent means you have for years represented yourself to be, but a cracksman—a real-life Raffles!"

"It was unfortunate for you that some months ago I chanced to see you in conversation in Wardour Street with a well-known 'fence'—a receiver of stolen goods, with whom you seemed angry because he had addressed you in the street. It was also unlucky for you that you chose to make use of the same bank as myself. No less than five times over the past year have I chanced to enter the bank at the same time as yourself, and seen you paying in large amounts in bank-notes. The fact made me curious at first, as you would hardly receive remittances from Australia in that form. Then I grew suspicious."

"I realised that shortly before each of these meetings at the bank, some big robbery, in which an oxy-acetylene blow-lamp had been used, had occurred—just about sufficiently long enough before to enable you to dispose of the stolen property to some receiver."

"I wondered for a very long time if I was making a mistake. Then when I read that the burglar at Sir Gilbert Clifford-Hall's place—who had used a blow-lamp—had had his hand damaged with a revolver bullet, I thought of you, and determined to see if your hand was injured."

"That was why I was at the Junior Ajax Club that night, and I did not waste my time. You kept one hand gloved, and beneath the glove I could discern a slight bulge I felt sure was caused by a bandage. Hence my defying your burglar alarms and bull-terrier, and taking an uninvited look round your flat."

"You have told Nipper and the police what you found, I suppose?" Brent asked savagely.

"No, I have not told the police—yet. And as for Nipper, he has only recently left his bed; he suffers at times from fits of abominable laziness, you know," Nelson Lee responded innocently.

"Ah, then only you know about those diamonds, as I hoped!" Brent exclaimed. "Hitherto I have always avoided taking life in my exploits, but it cannot be helped now. I am going to shoot you dead, Nelson Lee. Your assistant cannot be back just yet, and I saw your landlady go out, so

that we are quite alone here. 'Paul Ashley,' the managing-director of a gold mining company that does not exist, will be suspected, but not I, Justin Brent."

He steadied the weapon, marvelling at Nelson Lee's impassive coolness. The detective had not moved a muscle and still sat almost indolently in the chair he occupied near the table. But Justin Brent had taken a little too much for granted.

When Nelson Lee had lifted his eyebrows, it had been a signal, and Nipper had never left the house. After running downstairs, he had opened and slammed the front door, then stolen back to the consulting-room, and was now crouching behind the man who had murder in his heart.

Justin Brent was standing upon a fur rug, and Nipper had taken a grip upon its edge with both hands. Even as Brent steadied his weapon, Nipper tugged upon the rug with all his strength. It was jerked from beneath Brent's feet, his legs flew up, and he crashed prone upon his face, the revolver flying from his hand. In the twinkling of an eye, both Nelson Lee and Nipper were upon him and a metallic click told of a

pair of handcuffs being snapped upon his wrists.

Leaving Nipper sitting upon him, Nelson Lee reseated himself, and calmly drew the telephone towards him.

"You must be a fairly clever cracksman to have kept out of the hands of the police for so long as you have, Brent," he said, shaking his head at him. "But in the art of disguise you do not exactly shine. The moment you entered I could see where you had failed to fasten down the edge of your wig at the back. Then again, you see, I was fully expecting a visit from you, and had taken necessary precautions."

He gave a number to the Exchange.

"Is that Scotland Yard?" he asked, a few seconds later. "I want Detective-inspector Jarvis. That you, Jarvis? Good! Nelson Lee speaking. I believe you are on the Clifford-Hall case? If you care to send round to my rooms, I can hand you both the stolen necklace and the man who committed the robbery. Good-bye!"

He smiled at the astonished gasp that floated to him over the wire.

THE END.

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(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Ralston's Assailant.

HE was just such another rough fellow as Posh used to be, and, as far as outward appearances went as likely to do mischief to anybody who offended him.

He caught their glances, and a bit of a flush overspread his face, but he said nothing.

Jerry did not like his company, and took his ale into the bar, where he stood talking to the landlord until other customers came in. Then he finished his ale and was just departing when Walt Powner came out of the tap-room.

"Hi! mister," he said, "you haven't told me how my cousin died."

"It's too long a story for me," hastily replied Jerry. "I can't wait. Good-morning."

He hurried off, and the cousin looked after him with a scowl.

"Is there anybody here," he asked, addressing the other customers, "who'll tell me how my cousin Posh died?"

"Him and Foster Moore, the school usher, died together," said one.

"Gimme the whole story," said Walt Powner. "I wants to know all about it."

One of the customers—a bibulous old villager—quickly put Walt Powner in pos-

session of the main facts bearing on the fate of his cousin.

"And who be that there Tom Tartar you made menshun on?" he asked when the story was finished.

"A young gent at Mister Wrasper's school. A rare good plucked young gent., too."

"Good plucked 'un or not," growled Powner, "it seems to me he druv my cousin Posh to his end."

He turned to the landlord, ordered another mug of ale, and retired to a corner of the taproom to drink it at his leisure and ruminate on the story the bibulous villager had related.

Meanwhile, Wooden Jerry, with the idea in his head that he had discovered the assailant of Ralston, hurried back to the school. He was bursting to confide his discovery to somebody, and, chancing to run against Sam Smith, he confided in him, knowing full well that Sam would convey the information to Tom Tartar.

Ralston, it seemed, had been found by an early-rising farm-hand walking, or rather tottering, towards the village ere it was light. He said that he had been assaulted, and that he wished to get home. The labourer assisted him to his lodgings, where he fainted away again.

Recovering quickly, he declined to have the assistance of a doctor, but sent for the constable, who, in turn, was despatched for the inspector.

Whatever took place between these men remained a secret.

Now, Wooden Jerry was quite certain in his mind that the man who had assaulted Ralston was Walt Powner, and he told Sam Smith so.

Sam, of course, lost no time in relating the yarn to Tom, who, whether he believed it or not, certainly did not like the idea of another member of the Powner breed being in the locality.

"I'll go and have a look at the chap," said Tom, "and after I've seen him I'll go and tell Mr. Ralston about him."

As soon as he could slip away, Tom went down the village on the off-chance of seeing the relative of his old enemy.

Luck favoured him. The fellow was standing at the ale-house door smoking a pipe.

He stared at Tom indifferently at first, but gradually a scowl settled on his face.

"Is your name Tartar?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Then you give me none o' your cheek," said Walt Powner, "for I won't stand it."

"And don't you give me any of yours," returned Tom. "I can see that you are a Powner. There's not such an ill-bred lot on earth, I should say."

Tom passed on, and a few minutes later was at Ralston's lodgings.

Ralston's head was bandaged, but beyond being a trifle pale, he did not appear to be suffering.

"Hallo, young Tartar!" he said cheerily. "Want to speak to me about something?"

"I heard you were waylaid and assaulted last night," said Tom.

"That's not quite the correct yarn," laughed Ralston, "but it will serve. Fact is, I hit out at a chap, and he hit back. Wish I knew who he was, but I don't."

"There's a cousin of Posh Powner's come into the village," said Tom. "I've just seen him outside the beerhouse. Do you think he was the man who attacked you?"

"Is he marked at all about the face?"

"No—anyway, I didn't notice any marks."

"Then he isn't the man. The chap who struck me got a couple of beauties from my stick right across his cheek, and the marks will be there for days yet. But, in any case, I don't want a noise made about the affair. We don't want to alarm the enemy. So keep your mouth closed and your eyes open, my boy. Mum's the word. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Ralston," answered Tom, and presently took his departure.

That night, after darkness had fallen, Mr. Achilles Chopps strolled along the deserted country road, smoking a cigar and ruminating over many things.

Reaching the one street of which the village of Peddleton consisted, he passed two or three of the inhabitants, who bade him "good-night," a salute he amiably returned.

"Such a civil gentleman, that Mr. Chopps," was the general opinion expressed of him.

He was nearing the school when from out the shadow of a tree stepped a man.

"Who are you?" he cried. "Stand!"

There was very little of the tutor in his voice. It was more like that of a commanding officer.

"I've been looking for you, sir," was the answer.

"Who is it? I can't see your face," said Chopps.

"It's Thowlers, sir," was the answer.

"What do you want? I thought you were at Bangley."

"I was there, sir, but things have got warm. We scattered and cleared out."

An exclamation of anger escaped Chopps, but after a moment or so he said, quietly—

"All lost?"

"No, sir; nothing lost but the tubs. We've got the things away."

"Then we must do the rest at once."

"Pardon me, sir. I'd wait a bit. You've no idea how the sharks are swarming everywhere. They'd take a bite at us here and a bite at us there until nothing would be left."

"I fancy, Thowlers, that one of you must have muddled this business."

"We did our best, sir."

"Or is it possible that there is a traitor among you?"

Thowlers fidgeted about the road without offering any reply.

"I know what is in your mind," said Chopps; "you are thinking that there was one."

"Well, yes, sir," replied Thowlers. "We found out that Farrell was playing a double game."

"And what did you do?"

"We gave him a chance for his life. He had to fight us one by one. He had the choice of cutlass or pistol, and he chose the pistol. He stretched out Marbey and Trench, but I was more lucky. I got his first shot through the fleshy part of my arm, and he got mine somewhere near his heart. It was more of a chance shot than anything else. He died at the turn of the tide, and was buried with the others in a quiet spot where they'll never be found. I thought I'd better come and tell you about it, sir."

"Quite right," said Chopps. "Well, I must go in now, Thowlers, but I'll come out again presently and give you instructions for our next move. Just wait behind those trees. I'll be back in a quarter of an hour or so."

And Chopps hurried off towards the school gates.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Stowaways.

"BOYS," said Mr. Wrasper, a few mornings later, "I have been thinking of giving you an outing for a day—to Bangley Cattle Fair."

A chorus of "thank you, sir," followed this cheering announcement.

"It takes place the day after to-morrow," said Mr. Wrasper, referring to a printed bill in his hand, "and there will be the usual amusements after the early morning sale of cattle. I advise you all to keep such pocket-money as you may have left. To those who have none I am willing to make a small

advance, to be returned to me when they get the next remittance from home."

The announcement was as much of a surprise to Mr. Chopps as to the boys.

It was made in the schoolroom at the conclusion of the morning lessons, and Tom happened to be looking at him at the time.

The usher positively changed colour.

After the boys had been dismissed, Chopps addressed Mr. Wrasper on the subject.

"The fair," he said, "I believe is an annual one?"

"It is," was the reply.

"And the excursion is an annual affair also, I presume?"

"No; I have never taken the boys there before."

"Indeed!"

"They want a change—you know the old saying about all work and no play."

"Oh, yes. Will the boys go by themselves?"

"Oh, dear no. We must accompany them."

There was an accent on the "we," but not so marked as to call for any comment.

Chopps, after a moment's pause, said:

"I should prefer staying at home."

"And I," returned Mr. Wrasper, "would prefer not having the whole task of looking after the boys placed upon my shoulders."

That ended the matter.

Chopps had either to go or to rebel.

The latter he could not do without obvious consequences, and, as he did not care to leave the school just at present, he said no more.

In the evening Mr. Wrasper went into the question of funds with the boys, and having ascertained who were impecunious, he made a list of the advances required.

"Which you shall have on the morning you go to the fair," he promised them.

Bangley was sixteen miles off, and accessible by rail. As cheap trains were being run, there was quite a crowd at Peddleton Station on the eventful morning.

Besides the Wrasper school contingent, there were nearly fifty people there, all with beaming faces and bent on enjoying themselves.

But there were some on the platform who looked on with a feeling of bitterness.

The Bouncer boys had got wind of the affair, and Snacks, Winks, Raddles, and a lad named Jebbs had stolen out to see the start.

Yellow with envy they looked on at the assembled crowd, and glared at the Wrasper boys, who stood about in knots talking and laughing together.

To the credit of our friends, be it said, they did not crow over Snacks and Co., but were a wee bit inclined to be sorry for them.

Presently the signal was seen to drop, and the distant scream of a whistle was heard.

The train came in, already half-filled with excursionists. Doors were opened, and in poured the waiting passengers.

"Here, I can't stand this!" said Hantle-boy Snacks. "Let's go to Bangley fair!"

"We haven't the tickets," replied Winks.

"We can say we lost 'em," said Snacks.

It was a desperate proposal, but it was a moment of excitement, and the boys yielded to the tempter.

Snacks jumped into an empty first-class carriage, and the others followed, closing the door.

"Right away!"

Off went the train. The fatal step was taken!

For good or ill, the Bouncer boys had started on the journey.

"We are in for it now," said Raddles, sinking back against the cushions. "I wonder what they will do to us?"

"What can they do?" snorted Snacks. "If they don't believe we lost our tickets, let 'em do the other thing! They can't hang us, anyway!"

"Do we stop anywhere?" asked Winks uneasily.

"Sure to," said Snacks. "What's it matter?"

"When we do, it'll be better to get under the seats, won't it?"

"Of course it will, you fool!" returned Snacks. "Wasn't I just going to suggest it?"

"How should I know what you were going to suggest? I've never known you suggest anything over brilliant!"

"Do you want your head punched?"

"Oh, shut up, you two!" interposed Raddles.

"Shut up yourself!"

And so they went on, worrying each other as the train rattled along; for these amiable youths, cronies though they were, were forever wrangling amongst themselves.

When talking is going on time flies apace, and as the train was going at a high rate of speed, it did not seem very long ere the scream of the engine-whistle announced the near approach to a station.

"Under seats!" shouted Snacks.

Down they went, and wriggled amongst the dust and fluff of many months, for the carriage was an old one and not often cleaned.

There they lay trembling and quailing, while the train rolled into a station, where there was more shouting and the tread of many feet, and in a little while on went the train again.

Snacks and the other three crawled out from their place of concealment.

"That's all right!" he said. "We're safe so far."

"How many times do we stop?" asked Winks. "I don't want much more of that beastly hiding. I'm nearly choked with dust!"

"Oh," replied Snacks. "Bangley is the next station—at least, I think it is."

But the next station was not Bangley—nor the next. In quick succession the train rattled through two stations, and then once

more there was a whistle and a slackening of speed."

"This must be Bangley," said Snacks. "Now, what you've got to do is to listen to what I tell the ticket-collector, and back me up. I had all the tickets and lost 'em—d'you hear?"

"Oh, yes—we hear," grumbled Winks. "It's a precious thin yarn, though, and I'll bet the collector won't swallow it. I wish I hadn't come!"

Snacks clenched his fist as if to strike Winks, but thought better of it. He dropped the window and tried to open the door.

The guard had locked it.

"Here, hi, porter!" cried Snacks, "let us out. What station is this?"

"Portwell," was the reply.

"What?"

"Portwell!" repeated the porter.

"How far are we from Bangley?"

"It's three stations behind, young feller! You've come past it!"

Snacks went cold all over.

"Oh, lor!" he groaned. "Blest if it wasn't the first station we stopped at!"

"Let us out, please!" gasped Raddles. "We're for Bangley."

The stationmaster at this moment came up, and asked what was the matter. The porter having told him, he unlocked the door, and the four boys stepped out.

Their dusty, dishevelled state aroused the stationmaster's suspicions.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Let's have a look at your tickets."

"Er—er—we've lost them!" stammered Snacks.

"Lost 'em, have you? Where did you lose 'em?"

"Er—we don't know."

"Quite sure you had 'em when you started?"

"Oh, quite sure!"

"Humph! Search the carriage, Bob."

Bob, the porter, did so, and of course found no tickets.

By this time the stationmaster thought it as well to despatch the train, and, having done so, he ordered the four Bouncerites to follow him into his office.

Arrived there, and having closed the door, the stationmaster fixed Snacks with a stern, stony eye, and said:

"Now, young feller-me-lad, out with it straight, and no lies! You meant to bilk the company, didn't you?"

"We got in—ha—a—aving no money," stammered Snacks.

"Same thing, young man," said the station-master. "You know what you have made yourself liable for?"

"No—o—o—o!"

"Travelling first-class, too. Why, you stand a chance of getting three months for it."

On hearing this the whole of the Bouncerites set up a chorus of dismal howling,

which the stationmaster stopped with a threatening motion of his hand.

"Silence! What's the good of that?" he asked. "Give me your names and addresses, and I will communicate with your friends."

"We all come from one place," said Snacks.

"Very well—write it down."

Snacks did so, and the stationmaster, having inspected the writing, opened the door.

"Go and take an hour's walk," he said, "and when you come back I'll let you know what we shall do with you."

Opening the door to them was like setting free so many caged birds. The four cleared out like a shot.

"Come back in an hour, eh!" said Snacks as soon as they were clear of the station.

"Not likely! We must foot it home, you chaps. We shall be there before dark."

"But you don't know the way!" protested Winks.

"I can easily find it, fathead!" retorted Snacks, with withering scorn. "We came along east, so we've got to go back west."

"But how will you know which is west?"

"Ain't I got this?" answered Snacks, producing a small pocket-compass, of which he was inordinately proud. "Now, come on if you're coming! No more jaw! Follow me, and I'll pull you through!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

In Charge of Mr. Chopps.

THE boys of Wrasper's school arrived at Bangley in the highest spirits, fully determined to get all the fun they could out of the day's excursion.

Bangley was an important market town, and its ancient cattle and pleasure fair was famous throughout that part of the country.

All the agricultural interest for miles around was represented there, and the farmers and yokels literally swarmed in the streets.

Mr. Wrasper tried to keep the boys together, but they soon divided into parties and got separated.

Fortunately, Mr. Wrasper had previously arranged for them to meet at the station, in case "any of them should go astray."

They all went astray, even Mr. Wrasper, who vanished mysteriously.

Mr. Chopps, however, stuck to Tom's little party, which consisted of Johnny McLara, George Hammerton, Sam Smith, and Pubsey Wrasper.

Willie Gray went off to spend the day with a relation he had living in the town.

Chopps endeavoured to treat Tom in his old cheery, friendly style.

"I feel almost like a boy myself," he said.

"Really, it is a very amusing scene."

The amusing scene he referred to was a

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

(Continued from page 40)

collision between a pie-man and a bull, to the manifest disadvantage of the former, whose stock-in-trade was lying all over the road.

But the assumed gaiety of Chopps did not deceive Tom.

He could see the man was playing a part.

In any case the boys did not care for his company, but they had to put up with it.

On the way to the fair they passed a public-house, with a number of men standing by the door.

They were not exactly loafers, and yet they were not what would be called respectable men. Tom judged them to be of the class that hang about seaport towns—working a little, idling much, and, perhaps, going occasionally for a short voyage.

On approaching these men Chopps dropped a yard or two behind the boys, and began to hum a tune. This, to Tom's idea, was a certain indication that he was a bit embarrassed.

And he associated that embarrassment with the men outside the public-house.

On seeing the party they all stared for a moment, and then put on a very pronounced "don't-know-you" expression of face—a sure sign that they knew somebody there, but had good reason to pretend otherwise.

That somebody could not be any other than Chopps.

Tom let his companions go on, and when level with the public-house suddenly wheeled about and looked at Chopps.

He caught him in the very act of winking at the men by the door.

It was embarrassing to both parties, but both were equal to the occasion.

Tom faced about again and walked on. Chopps, quickening his stride, took his position at Tom's side.

"Like me, Tartar," he said, "you are interested in men connected with the sea?"

"Perhaps I am, sir," answered Tom drily. They said little more until they reached the ground which served as a market and a fair.

The upper end was laid out with pens and rails for sheep and cattle—the shows were at the lower end.

Business for the day was very nearly over.

There were a few pigs and sheep waiting for a purchaser, but the big cattle had all been sold or taken home by their owners.

The pleasure fair was getting into full swing. There was one booth which bore the title of "Shooting gallery," and Chopps asked the boys if they would like to have a shot.

"I'll pay for half a dozen each for you," he said.

Such an offer was not likely to be refused, and they entered the booth.

It was fitted up in really good style. The bottom end was sheet-iron, and there were targets, and imitation birds, rabbits, and ducks to shoot at.

(To be continued.)

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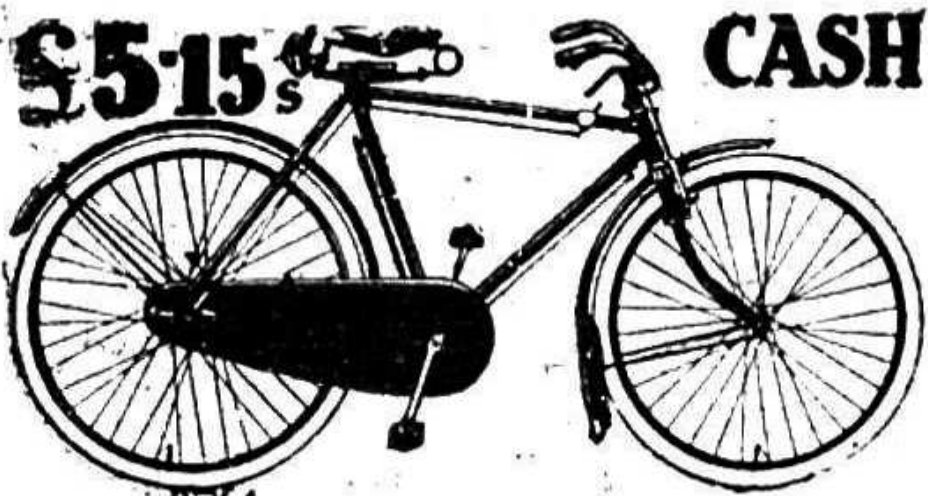
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