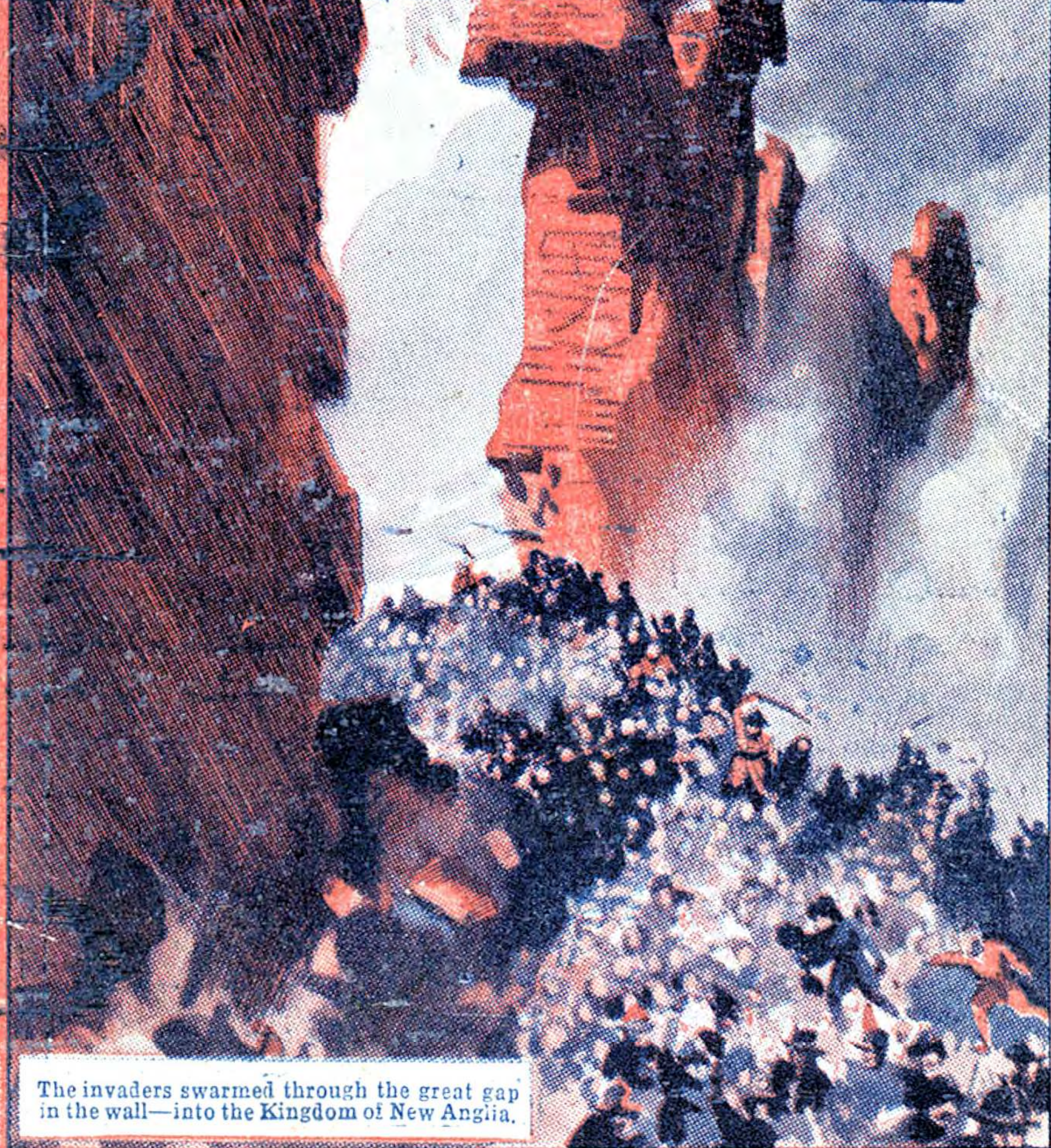


"THE MISSING VALET!" This Week's Detective Story of NELSON LEE!

# THE NELSON LEE 2<sup>D</sup>

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The invaders swarmed through the great gap in the wall—into the Kingdom of New Anglia.

## THE RIVAL KINGS

A THRILLING STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE AND DISCOVERY IN A WONDERFUL NEW COUNTRY OF ANTARCTICA.

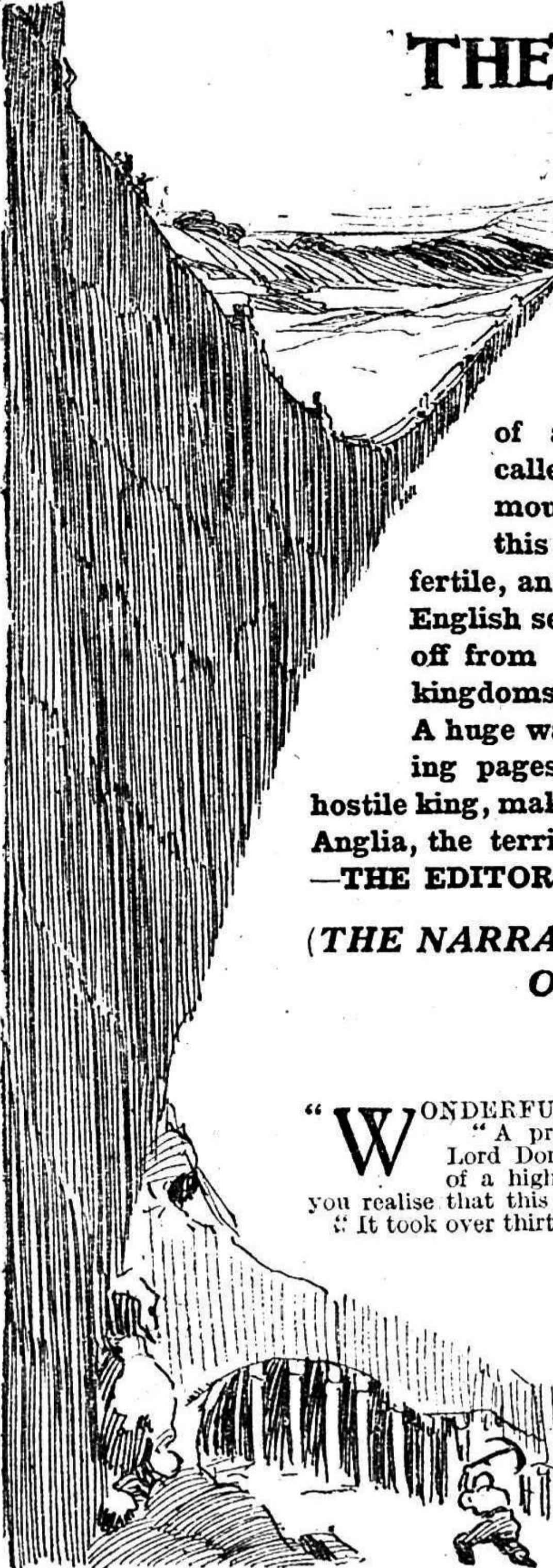




**Then Handforth charged into the men like a mad bull, and then—boom, boom! An explosion rent the air like a crash of thunder.**



# THE RIVAL KINGS!



A thrilling story of two kingdoms, discovered by the Holiday Party in their cruise to Antarctica by means of a mammoth aeroplane-submarine, called "The Rover." Sheltered by huge mountains, and warmed by a hot stream, this newly found country is wonderfully fertile, and is inhabited by descendants of early English settlers, who for centuries had been cut off from the rest of the world. One of these kingdoms is about to make war on the other. A huge wall separates them, and in the following pages you will read how King Jasper, the hostile king, makes a gap in the wall and invades New Anglia, the territory of his neighbour, King Arthur.  
—THE EDITOR.

**(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGH-  
OUT BY NIPPER.)**

## CHAPTER I.

### THE GREAT BARRIER.

"**W**ONDERFUL!" exclaimed Nelson Lee admiringly. "A pretty decent view, anyway, old man," said Lord Dorrimore. "By gad! It's like bein' on the top of a high buildin', an' it rather staggers the mind when you realise that this thing runs for forty miles an' more!"

"It took over thirty years to build, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee.

"An' I can believe it!" exclaimed his lordship, nodding. "They must have been an industrious lot, too, to get it finished even in that time. But it certainly serves its purpose. By what I can see, this wall is about





the most effective barrier that could be imagined."

They were standing overlooking forests and meadowland and cultivated fields, which lay far below. For they were over a hundred and fifty feet high—on the top of a wall.

But it was no ordinary wall, as can be imagined.

It was the great dividing barrier which separated the Kingdom of St. Edmund from the Kingdom of New Anglia. And this wall stretched across country, over hill and dale, for a distance of nearly fifty miles.

At all points it reached a height of one hundred and fifty feet, and it was fifty feet wide at the base, and thirty feet wide along the summit. The traffic of any ordinary street could pass along the top of this wall with ease and safety.

Standing beside Nelson Lee and Dorrie, and pointing out various spots of interest, was King Arthur the Third, of new Anglia, himself. He was a tall, well-built man, and he took a great deal of pride in his present task. And Lee and Dorrie were quite interested.

There were others there,—including Handforth and Church and McClure, and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and Archie Glen-thorne, and myself. In fact, there were eight juniors, and we had come out with the gov'nor on this little jaunt.

It was the first real day of our stay in the Kingdom of New Anglia, and we were looking forward to a most interesting time. Little did we imagine that our stay was to be fraught with danger and grim adventure.

New Anglia seemed to be the most peaceful country one could possibly visit. It was like a slice of England of the old-fashioned period. There were houses and cottages built in the style of two hundred years ago, and the people themselves were dressed in a very picturesque and attractive manner.

I have described in other records the adventures of our party previous to our arrival in this remarkable country. So it's hardly necessary for me to go all over it again. I have also mentioned that something rather startling took place in New Anglia itself—but that happened on the second day after our arrival in the capital. And I shall come to that in due course.

We had flown south, over the Antarctic ice, in Mr. Raymond Gray's wonderful aeroplane, the Golden Rover. And, altogether, there were nearly thirty of us—the greater number being St. Frank's juniors. Other members of our party included Phipps—Archie Glen-thorne's valet—Umlosi, and Mr. Gray's nephew, Major Barrance. We had already had some narrow escapes.

We had really come over the ice in order to re-discover a strange cavern which lay beyond any point previously visited by mankind. This cavern was quite warm, and a hot river flowed through it. We had discovered, since our arrival on the scene, that this cavern was only a minor part of the strange phenomenon.

For, having penetrated through the cavern, we found ourselves in a really extraordinary valley. It was a vast basin amid the mountains. It stretched eighty miles in length, and was half this distance in breadth—a great oblong haven entirely surrounded by enormous mountain peaks, where the ice and snow were everlasting. These peaks were always clouded.

But the valley itself was a place of beauty.

That same hot river flowed through the place, and probably there were other natural causes for the peculiarly temperate atmosphere. It was a fact, however, that frost and snow were unknown in this valley—although it was situated in the very midst of the Antarctic waste.

And it had never previously been discovered because no ship could get near it, and even the South Polar expeditions would have had no chance of discovering the valley—for the surrounding mountains were absolutely impassable.

We had entered within the Golden Rover. For this wonderful aeroplane was capable of diving beneath the water. We had penetrated into the cavern through a dark tunnel. And we should have to leave in that same way. But for the present we were staying—greatly interested and entranced.

Not that our visit had been devoid of adventure.

As a matter of fact, we had had plenty of it. For we had originally found ourselves in the Kingdom of St. Edmund. The King, his Court, and all the people were of a low type. They were of English stock, but they had developed into an arrogant, brutal people.

And it was only after grim fighting that we had escaped from the clutches of King Jasper.

Now, however, we were among friends. For the people of New Anglia were a different type altogether. They were peaceful, kindly, and altogether likeable. The King and his nobles were real gentlemen.

And the reason for this was not far to seek.

We had learned the history of these two nations.

It will only take me a few moments to tell this remarkable story. If you don't want to read about it, you have my full permission to skip the next few paragraphs. But I won't be long, anyhow.

It all started about two hundred and fifty years ago, in sixteen hundred and something. A big sailing ship, called the St. Edmund, left a British port for the Argentine, carrying hundreds of souls on board, men, women, and children. With them went beasts and birds and other living things, including pets. For these people were pilgrims, and they had intended starting a colony in the new country.

The St. Edmund never reached the Argentine.



She had been caught in fearful storms, and she was driven right down into the Antarctic zone. There, with her masts and sails gone by the board, she had been gripped in a strong current, which ultimately took her right into the icefields. But here, owing to some volcanic disturbance, the vessel found herself within that hot flow from the strange river. And, in some way or another, all the people on board discovered the hidden basin amid the cruel ice.

Of course, they could never get away. It was impossible to get over the ice and back to civilisation—or even to the open sea.

And so these Quaker pilgrims had remained. And they had formed their settlement in this strange colony. They could do nothing else. It was the only course open to them.

And, after all, this land was not such a bad place. There were forests and streams, and the soil was wonderfully rich. The pilgrims discovered that crops came up with surprising abundance. The animals that had been brought in the ship found the climate very much to their liking. And, in the long run, everything went on as smoothly as oiled wheels.

The population increased, and these early English pilgrims began to thrive and flourish. They liked the place—and they were content. It wasn't much good being anything else, for there was no better hole to go to.

And during the course of the two hundred and fifty years of the colony's life, matters had developed considerably. As soon as things had settled themselves down somewhat, some genius had hit upon the idea of making the place into a miniature kingdom.

Instead of a man being set up as a governor, he was called a king—and given full power to rule. Either that, or he made himself king—and perhaps this is the most probable. In those days, chaps were inclined to be somewhat despotic.

But the real trouble was caused by the descendants of the pilgrim ship's crew.

These men, by what I could gather, had been a cut-throat crowd—a set of blackguardly ruffians of the worst possible type. And it is hardly surprising that their descendants turned out to be undesirable characters.

The Quaker element—that is, the peaceful citizens of the place—couldn't very well kill off these undesirables. For one thing, warfare is totally opposed to the Quaker creed. And in those early days of the settlement, religion was very much to the fore.

And, after the St. Edmund men had committed all manner of atrocities—after they had made themselves into a thorough nuisance to the country—the reigning king at that time had drastically given them the order of the boot.

He had bunged them forth into the bally old wilderness—as Archie Glenthorne had

described it. The entire section of people who were descendants of the St. Edmund crew were placed in the northern part of the valley, and kept there. And within a comparatively recent period this vast wall had been built right across the basin.

It stretched from cliff to cliff, and passed across forty miles of country. Thus the St. Edmunds' were completely barred off from New Anglia. They were regarded as a forbidden people, and were left to themselves—and they had formed a kingdom of their own, and were ever jealous of their peaceful neighbours.

That was the position as we found it.

King Jasper and his subjects were always jealous of their rivals.

By what we had seen in St. Edmund city, soldiers formed the greater part of the country's population. And there could be no doubt that King Jasper was preparing for a big war—if ever he got the opportunity.

We were all the more surprised, therefore, to find that New Anglia was almost unprepared. It reminded me of the time when Germany was getting ready to let herself loose on France and England. She was all ready for it, and we were jogging along in the same old way, trying to persuade ourselves that nothing would ever happen.

King Arthur had seemed somewhat amused when Nelson Lee pointed out that New Anglia was in danger of being attacked. And this brings us down to the moment I am speaking of—as we stood upon this high wall.

Thank goodness, that's over!

And now to business.

The king was smiling with pride and confidence as he pointed out the villages and towns which were distinctly visible from our point of vantage. Then he turned, and walked right across the wall to the other edge.

"And here thou can gaze upon the country of St. Edmund!" he said "'Tis a poor place, as thou wilt see. Tell me, my good friends. What danger can come from this miserable people?"

"Well, they can do a good lot of damage if once they get loose!" remarked Dorrie. "They're a powerful, brutal-lookin' lot. An' King Jasper appears to have a formidable number of soldiers."

"I dare say he can muster between five and six thousand, if necessary," said Nelson Lee. "And five thousand men, your Majesty, would create absolute havoc if they were let loose within your kingdom."

The king smiled.

"Wilt thou tell me how the men of St. Edmund can break their way into my country?" he asked. "'Tis impossible."

"Well, judging by the look of this wall, I should say 'tis—er—it is!" exclaimed Dorrie. "By glory! I'm bally well gettin' into your style of speech! I shall be sayin' 'thee' an' 'thou' next!"

"Thine own speech is strange to us!" said the king. "But no matter. One must



expect such differences. But I was tellin' thee, good friends, of the impossibility of any invasion."

"It may seem impossible, but perhaps there is a way by which your rivals may overcome the difficulty," said Nelson Lee. "There is no doubt that King Jasper is your deadly enemy, and all his subjects hate the New Anglians like poison. If ever a war comes, it will be a terrible affair."

"It can never come," said King Arthur.

"But why are you so sure?"

"I have the fullest confidence in this great protective barrier," replied our host, indicating the massive wall. "'Tis so high that no body of men could scale it. One man—perchance two—might succeed during the hours of darkness. But an army—never!"

"And so you do not trouble to have an army of your own?"

"'Tis even so," replied the king. "An army would be costly for the nation—and I am proud that New Anglia is free from heavy taxes and poverty. For many scores of years the people have lived in comfort and in peace. And a needless army would necessarily bring great taxation—discontent—and national trouble. 'Tis better to have things as they are."

"Looking at it from that point of view, yes," agreed Nelson Lee. "But if it comes to a war—as I am convinced it will—you will be unprepared, and then these men of St. Edmund will sweep through New Anglia like a forest fire, destroying all before them. They will seize your capital, and the country will be theirs."

"Thou art indeed pessimistic," said King Arthur. "Even in mine own Court I have one or two nobles who are of the same opinion as thyself. But 'tis impossible that we should suffer the horrors thou refer to."

"You mean, that this wall is as good as an army?"

"Verily!" replied the king. "'Tis as strong and sturdy as the hills themselves. It cannot be conquered. And thou art surely not thinking that I allow the wall to be left unguarded—even for one moment? No! Eyes watch the country of St. Edmund by day and by night."

"From these towers, I presume?" asked Lee.

"Yes."

"How many are there?"

"Forty—one for every mile of the wall," replied the king. "And in each tower there are twenty men—picked men, who are patriotic and brave, and ready to die for their country."

"And these men are your sole guard against invasion?" asked Nelson Lee. "They form the entire New Anglian army?"

"Yes, with the addition of mine own personal troops," replied the king. "The latter, as thou wilt understand, are chiefly maintained for purposes of state. They are not fighting soldiers."

"And what would happen if King Jasper's men found a way over the wall?"

"In that case, vast trouble would follow," replied our host. "But 'twill never happen, good strangers. 'Tis impossible. If King Jasper is foolish enough to make any attempt to scale the wall, my own soldiers will beat them back. For 'tis easy for ten men on the top of this wall to conquer a hundred men climbing it. Thou can understand?"

"Of course," said Nelson Lee. "I can follow your argument perfectly, your majesty. If these enemy soldiers try to scale the wall, they will be beaten back by the garrisons of these watch towers."

"Thou hast spoken the truth," said the king.

I was looking up and down the wall with interest. We could see several of these watch towers—two comparatively near—we were standing between them. Others dotted the wall into the dim distance on either side. They were square, solid-looking knobs, standing out from the wall itself. At a distance they looked quite small and insignificant.

But at close quarters they were roomy, comfortable, strongholds. There were apartments for sleeping, feeding, and recreation. And the twenty men of each garrison had what would termed in the British Army a "cushy" job. Theirs was a life of ease and peace.

Not since the wall had been built had there been the slightest attempt to attack it. The very sight of this wall was enough to make any enemy realise the hopelessness of the job. Rearing upwards for a hundred and fifty feet, the stone sides were as smooth as glass. There was not a notch or a crevice in which any human being could find a grip.

A hundred and fifty feet—sheer! And at the top, a low parapet, over which the guarding soldiers of New Anglia could keep at bay a formidable army. It was small wonder that King Jasper and his fiery soldiers had never plucked up enough courage to start an invasion.

They were powerful enough to crush New Anglia. But this wall was always the terrible problem. It could not be conquered. It was absolutely impregnable. It served New Anglia better than a big army.

Left quite to itself, the barrier wall would not serve for even a month. For these jealous enemies of New Anglia could demolish any given section of it. With a sufficient number of strong men, a gap could be made with comparative ease. And then the enemy would come pouring through.

But it couldn't be done.

For King Arthur was wise enough to keep that great wall constantly patrolled. The Kingdom of St. Edmund was always under the watchful eye of the New Anglian soldiers. Not for one moment of the twenty-four hours of each day was the vigilance relaxed. It was ever constant.

For the garrison of twenty men in each



watch tower, although having an easy time, were not absolutely idle. Men were compelled to patrol the top of the wall at regular intervals. And from this high position the country for many miles could be overlooked and watched.

Any body of troops passing along could be seen long before they reached the vicinity of the wall. And so, after all, there was a great deal in what King Arthur said. While this wall existed all was right.

But even then, at that very moment—plotters were at work!

The juniors were greatly interested in the whole affair. It was rather a mistake to bring Handforth—because the famous leader of Study D could never go anywhere without getting himself into trouble.

Other parties of fellows had gone off to different parts of the country to look at famous local beauty spots, and to generally enjoy themselves. But Handforth and Co. had come with us.

And thereby hangs a tale!

## CHAPTER II.

### ABSOLUTELY FOUL!



**N**OT so bad, but nothing to yell about!"

This was Handforth's opinion of the scene from the top of the wall. He never had any eye for beauty, and would pass the most glorious spots without even glancing at them. Or if he did glance, he would merely sniff.

"I'm a bit fed-up with the whole thing!" he went on. "The best thing we can do is to go back. I forgot to ask if there are any theatres in New London."

"There are!" said Church. "Why, there's a whacking great place just near the palace square. These people have got their theatres just the same as other countries. Why shouldn't they have?"

Handforth nodded.

"Right!" he said. "We'll buzz back."

"Now?"

"Now!"

"But look here——"

"I don't want any arguments!" said Handforth firmly. "We're going back, and we'll buzz into the first cinema we come to!"

"Ha, ha, ha,!"

"What's the giddy laughter about, you cackling hyænas!"

"There aren't any cinemas in this country!" grinned McClure.

"But Church said——"

"I said we could go to a theatre—but not a cinema!" grinned Church. "They haven't discovered the art of photography at all—not motion photography, anyhow. But I dare say we shall be able to enjoy ourselves later on. Of course, we're not going now."

"Oh, aren't we?" said Handforth. "I say we are!"

"Look here, don't be an ass!" put in Tommy Watson. "We can't go back without Mr. Lee and Dorrie—it wouldn't be right. Besides, it's about ten miles to the capital"

"Well, what about it?" snapped Handforth. "We've got some of those giddy clockwork motor things down on the road. Four brought us out, and we can easily pinch two of 'em and scoot back. Come on!"

Handforth marched away along the wall. He always took things for granted. He seemed to have an idea that he only had to say the word, and everybody would fall in with his suggestions.

The wall was absolutely bare on the St. Edmund side, presenting a blank face which no human being could hope to climb. But on the New Anglia side there were many flights of steps at intervals, which made it easier for people to walk up and down, if they wanted to. And at the top of each flight of steps a sentry was constantly on duty.

Handforth marched to the nearest set of steps.

"We shall be back in about half an hour," he said cheerfully. "And then we can look round for some sort of amusement. Why, what the—— Hi! You—you rotters!"

Handforth had suddenly discovered that he was walking alone, and that he had been talking to the thin air. And yet he had fondly imagined that half a dozen other fellows were meekly following him. And he certainly took it for granted that Church and McClure were with him. Even if the others jibbed, his own chums were generally faithful.

He dashed back like a charging bull.

"What's the meaning of this?" he belated. "I thought we said we were going back?"

"No, we didn't!" said Pitt. "You said it!"

"And you chaps think that I'm gong to stand rot of this kind?" said Handforth grimly. "Well, I'm not! Understand, Walter Church—understand! If you don't come with me, I'll jolly well chuck you off the top of this wall!"

Before Church could reply, Handforth whirled round to McClure.

"And you'll go with him!" he thundered. "And now come on!"

"But look here, Handy!" protested Church. "Try to be sensible!"

"What do you mean?" snapped Handforth. "Try to be sensible. That's as much as to say that it's an effort for me! I'm always sensible! A chap with brains can't help it!"

"Well, we won't argue!" said Church. "If we get talking about brains and sense there'll be some trouble. Mr. Lee will be going presently, and we'll wait for him—— Yaroooooh!"

Biff!



Handforth waited no longer. His famous right came round, and Church received it on the nose. He sat down with a heavy thud, and howled. McClure backed away somewhat hastily—just a little measure of precaution.

"Satisfied?" asked Handforth, rolling up his sleeve. "I hate doing this kind of thing, but if you chaps haven't got any sense, it's up to me to drive a bit in! And I'm not standing any rot!"

"You—you dangerous lunatic!" gasped Church, jumping up. "Why, I might have gone over backwards—and one slip on the edge of this wall, and it would mean death!"

Handforth sniffed.

"I didn't know you were funky on the top of a giddy wall!" he said tartly.

Church dashed forward, and—Crash! Handforth wasn't looking for it, but he found it. Church's fist caught him beautifully between the eyes, and Handforth saw a really magnificent assortment of stars. He was so surprised that he simply stood there with his mouth open.

As a general rule, he could knock Church and McClure about with impunity—and they put up with it. They were not cowards by any means, but they had found that it was not of much use to hit back. Because it only made things worse, and nothing in the world would ever alter Handy.

But now and again they would break out. These occasions were few and far between, and Handforth was always tremendously surprised. He never seemed to realise that a break must come occasionally.

"You—you frightful rotter!" he bellowed. "You hit me!"

"Yes, and I'll jolly well hit you again if you say much!" snapped Church. "I'm fed-up with your tommy-rot! The fact is, Handy, you've got swelled head! You think you're everybody! But you're not. You're only an ass!"

Handforth gulped. Now and again he was told off—but hardly in such frank and open terms as this. The other fellows stood by in a ring, waiting with great interest to see what the developments would be. Reggie Pitt was already laying odds that Church would have to be carried home in an ambulance.

"By George!" said Handforth thickly. "By George!"

Quite contrary to what Church had imagined, Handforth was not furious. He had become as cool as ice. This was just the trouble with Handy. You could never tell how he was going to act.

"I mean to say, this is somewhat fearful!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "The chappie has positively got a glint in his eye! Kindly observe, dear old lads! Steel, and what not! The cold eye of calculative fury, and all that sort of rot! Several packets of frightfulness are looming in the offing!"

"Take my advice, Churchy, and bunk!" shouted Watson.

"Rats!" said Church. "He can't hurt me! Handy, you'd better be careful—we're not far from the edge of this wall. If you want to fight, I'll meet you down in that meadow. But we can't scrap up here!"

"We can't," agreed Handforth icily. "We're not going to. It won't be anything like a scrap—but I'm going to slaughter you on the spot! You'll be smashed into little bits within five seconds."

Handforth hurled himself forward, whirling his fists. He intended to deliver about six blows in rapid succession which would sweep Church up and finish the whole affair. But, as usual, Handforth's calculations were all wrong.

Church saw what was coming, and thought it far wiser to remove himself into safer quarters. And so, at the precise moment that Handforth arrived, Church dodged with much skill.

"Whoa! Hi! Look out——"

Handforth found it utterly impossible to stop himself. He had reckoned upon Church stopping him—and Church had deserted his post. The result was that Handforth shot through the air, and sailed gracefully over the edge of the wall. And as he fell he let out one mighty howl.

"Good heavens!" shouted Pitt hoarsely.

The grinning faces went deathly white in a second. The comedy, in a flash, turned into a tragedy. Just for one awful second the juniors stood there, frozen with the horror of it.

Pitt and I were standing quite near the edge. Fascinated, and feeling strangely isolated, we saw Handforth drop like a stone. Immediately at the base of the wall were many trees, with solid ground beneath.

We saw Handforth's body crash through the tree-tops like a stone. And then he had gone—the trees remained just the same, except for that one broken little gap in the foliage.

"He—he's killed himself!" stuttered Pitt huskily.

"Handy!" shouted Church, rushing wildly to the edge of the wall, and staring down. "Oh, he's—he's gone! It was his own fault! I—I couldn't help it! I didn't know he was going over like that——"

"Steady!" I put in. "Don't get into a panic, Church. You couldn't help it, old man. Handforth ought to have had more sense than to rush at you like that. But I'm afraid the poor chap's done for."

Church couldn't speak.

"In a second he was sobbing, and the tears welled into his eyes. He didn't mind who saw—in fact, it was impossible for him to control himself. And McClure was equally affected.

It was impossible for Handforth to live after that dreadful fall. It was a sheer drop of a hundred and fifty feet—it was like falling from the top of an enormously



high building to the roadway. Even if Handforth lived, he would be smashed up, and could never recover.

In spite of their constant quarrels, the three chums of Study D were very fond of one another. And Church and McClure were filled with grief that their leader should have met with such an awful fate.

"Can't—can't we do something?" sobbed McClure. "He—he may still be alive! Oh, poor old Handy! Fancy him doing a silly thing like that! I was afraid of it all the time!"

"Come on—we'll rush down!" shouted Pitt.

Handforth had fallen down the New Anglia side of the wall—and this was fortunate, for we were able to get down without trouble.

We raced to the nearest flight of steps, and fairly hurtled down them. Nelson Lee and Dorrie were still with the king, some distance away—and they knew nothing of this tragic occurrence.

"Where did he fall?" panted Watson, as soon as we reached the ground.

"There—among those trees!" exclaimed Pitt.

Growing right near the base of the enormous wall were large clumps of trees. Some of them were very thick and bushy, and it was in the midst of one of these big clumps that Handforth had fallen.

The absence of any sound or movement from that bush was ominously significant. For it seemed that Handforth had fallen to certain doom. If he had only injured himself, he might have cried out.

On the other hand, perhaps he was unconscious—for I hardly dared to believe that he was dead. Such a thing as that would be too dreadful.

With Church and McClure leading the way we tore into the trees—hurling the branches and twigs aside. Our anxiety for Handforth was tremendous.

And when we got through that thick clump we hardly dared to look on the ground. The trees were very bushy, and it was only with great difficulty—and after much fighting—that we succeeded in forcing our way through.

And then, quite suddenly, we came upon a little open patch.

"Good heavens!" shouted Church huskily.

He came to a halt, with McClure at his side. And just then Pitt and I came up. And we halted, too, for there was something just in front of us which took us absolutely by surprise. A most unsavoury odour hovered in the air.

There, standing in the centre of the little clear patch, swaying slightly from side to side, was a figure. It was the figure of nothing human, to judge by its outward appearance.

Black, shapeless, with an enormous chunk of irregular substance for a head. Then suddenly it moved forward, and two arm-like objects were raised.



**The result was that Handforth shot through the air, and pitched gracefully over the wall.**

"By George!" exclaimed the figure faintly. "Help!"

Church gave a cracked whoop.

"It's—it's Handy!" he yelled wildly.

"Handy!" shouted Pitt. "But—but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy!"

In spite of themselves, the juniors couldn't help bursting into roars of laughter. The very fact that Handforth could stand up, and that he could say "By George!" proved that he was fairly alive and well.

And his appearance was so startling that the juniors could see the humour of it. The unfortunate Edward Oswald was entirely smothered from head to foot with mud—thick, horrible, clinging mud.

Great masses of it clung to his head, and he was so plastered in other parts of his person that not a trace of his clothing was visible. Even his hands looked like chunks of mud.

But there, in the upper part of the object, an opening had appeared. This, as we could see, was Handforth's mouth. He managed to rub some of the awful stuff from his face, and at last he was able to see.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "I—I'm dead!"



"Poor old Handy——"

"I mean, I'm dying!" hooted Handforth.

"Look at me——"

"Impossible!" said Pitt. "We can't see you at all! Is it a part of your regular training to take mud-baths, old man? Leaping off high walls seems to be a hobby of yours!"

"You heartless wretches!" said Handforth bitterly. "Here I am, slowly dying, and all you can do is to jeer at me! Oh, my hat! This—this stuff is awful!"

"I mean to say, somewhat poisonous!" observed Archie, holding a handkerchief to his nose. "Fumes, and what not! I trust, dear old tulip, that you are not frightfully hurt? But I must say you look dashed awful!"

"Come and lend me a hand, instead of jawing!" snorted Handforth.

"What?" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, what? A hand, don't you know. But, old scream, I shall get most dashed messy, and all that kind of thing! One large bath required! Gadzooks! The atmosphere, as it were, is bally well polluted."

Archie backed away, and he could not be blamed. The air in Handforth's vicinity was quite awful. That mud was a fearful proposition, but it had certainly been the cause of Handforth's salvation.

For we discovered that just through these thick bushes there lay a deep, stagnant pool. Falling into the bushes had broken the full force of Handforth's drop—and it was sheer luck that had caused him to fall feet first.

And having dropped through the bushes, he plunged straight into this stagnant pool. He finished up at the bottom, in the mud, and, strangely enough, he was hardly hurt. A few bruises, and one or two scratches was the sum total of his hurts.

But Handforth didn't appear to be grateful.

The way he went on about the mud was most unreasonable. He declared that we all ought to have gathered round and helped him. He seemed to expect that we ought to get ourselves in a similar state—just for the sake of keeping him company.

In the end, we led the way along the road towards a little village which lay half a mile away. We had seen this village while on our way to the wall. And we took good care that Handforth kept his distance.

Just on the outskirts of the village there was a comfortable little inn—an old-fashioned spot surrounded by trees, and very picturesque. The inn itself was called the Blue Dragon—and very reminiscent of England.

But, most important of all, there was a pond on the opposite side of the road.

Handforth plunged himself into this, and when he emerged he was looking not quite so black. He had now become drab—and the smell still hung about in the most tenacious manner.

But the innkeeper, a cheery old soul, who informed us that his name was Master Tom Stockley, obliged with a great tub of cold water. Handforth dropped into this, and emerged—himself.

But it took a long time. And even after he had been supplied with blankets—and after his clothing had dried—there was still a faint odour hovering about him. He was avoided by the other fellows all the way home.

Tom Stockley, the innkeeper, had done his best. And he considered that we were the best customers he'd ever had. For he had received large sums of money—in the New Anglian coinage, of course—for his trouble.

We were to remember Tom Stockley later on.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE ENEMY MOVES.



**K**ING JASPER of St. Edmund paced up and down impatiently.

"'Tis a sorry business, waiting for news that fails to arrive!" he snapped.

"Bah! These officers of mine are but nincompoops! Ere long I will—Odds death! What comes here?"

General Horton, the commander-in-chief of the St. Edmund forces, had suddenly appeared out of the surrounding gloom. The scene was a distant outpost in King Jasper's country. It was situated within a mile or two of the big wall—but entirely hidden from unwelcome observation by a forest. This forest extended up a rather narrow valley.

Thus it was possible to enter the trees three or four miles from the wall, and at a point from where any movement could not be observed by the sentries. Thus, in full daylight, King Jasper's soldiers could approach to within half a mile of the wall without being seen. Not that this was of much use. The great wall itself could never be reached without the sentries being warned.

It was now evening—but by no means dark. Darkness in this curious southern land very seldom descended. At the most there would be only a kind of glow in the sky. Real inky darkness was practically unknown.

King Jasper was looking fierce and impatient.

It was only just recently—within a day or two, in fact—that he had been beaten by Nelson Lee. For he had reckoned upon getting the Golden Rover into his hands. With the airship at his command, he had told himself that he would be able to bring the New Anglians to surrender within a day or two.

But he had been beaten—and the Golden Rover had flown off.

It was now impossible for King Jasper to hope that his scheme would come to fruition.



And, what was more, the Golden Rover, and all her occupants, were now friends and allies of King Arthur. Jasper knew this, and it did not tend to make him any the more pleasant.

"'Tis well thou hast come!" he grunted, as General Horton saluted. "Thou hast kept me a long time, general."

"Sire, I regret the delay!" said General Horton. "But 'twas impossible for me to arrive sooner. I was delayed by—"

"Stay thy tongue, man, and attend!" interrupted the king. "I wish to hear no excuses. I am in no mood for dalliance. What hast done? Is the plan prepared for immediate execution?"

"Thou wilt be disappointed, sire," replied General Horton. "My lieutenants inform me that 'twill be unwise to make the attempt now. We must wait for another three or four weeks, until the full excavations are completed—"

"Bah!" thundered the king. "Thou art all the same—thou art all bungling fools! I say the plan must be carried out now—this very evening! Bring thy lieutenants to me—and I will speak with them!"

"Thy commands shall be obeyed, sire," said the General stiffly.

"And make thee haste, or 'twill be ill for thee!" snapped his Majesty.

General Horton was only absent for a few moments. In the meantime, King Jasper paced up and down, clenching his fists. The spot was quite hidden, and there, among the trees, was a little wooden building. Here all was peaceful and quiet, and it seemed strange that any big activities should be on the board.

But appearances are deceptive.

There were very big operations being executed here.

General Horton soon came back, with another man—a much younger man, in the uniform of the St. Edmund army. He saluted smartly as he came to a halt before the king. The latter scowled.

"Thy name!" he rapped out.

"Sire, I am Lieutenant Crayshaw," replied the officer.

"What hast thou to say?"

"'Tis out of the question for thy wish to be accomplished, your Majesty," said the lieutenant. "We have progressed well with the work. But 'twas arranged that the great day should come later—"

"Odds life!" thundered the king. "What care I about arrangements? This thing must be done now—'tis my command!"

Lieutenant Crayshaw bit his lip. He inwardly commented that these kings were the most unreasonable persons, and it was quite impossible to argue with them. That was just the trouble.

"Since thou hast commanded it, sire, 'tis but for us to obey!" he said. "But 'twill be hard if the scheme fails—"

"Bah! There will be no failure!" rapped out the king. "We have been preparing for months—we have been doing this work

so that the great wall shall be demolished. And 'twill be so much wasted time—months of wasted labour if we wait until the whole excavation is completed. So we might as well see what can be done now. For we still have a chance of winning."

"But why should we be precipitate, your Majesty?" asked Lieutenant Crayshaw. "'Tis not for me to be curious."

"Nay, thou art within thy rights in demanding to know why this change must come," interrupted the king. "I will tell thee, lieutenant. Thou hast heard of these strange men from the outside world?"

"Ay, and with amaze, sire!" said Lieutenant Crayshaw. "'Twas not my good fortune to see these wondrous folk. But I have been told that they are good to look upon, and that they have a most amazing craft which can even fly in the air."

"Thou hast been told correctly," said the king. "I presume thou hast been attending to thy business beneath the ground?"

"'Tis so, your Majesty."

"Thou art a good soldier, Lieutenant Crayshaw!" exclaimed the king, calming down somewhat. "But when thou art in possession of all the facts, thou wilt understand my anxiety. These men from England, with their great machine which flies, have sided with the accursed New Anglians. And they will use this airship to battle against us."

"Is this ship a vessel of war, sire?"

"Man alive, hast thou no wit?" snapped the king. "Think what could be done with such a ship? They have but to fly over an invading army, and 'twould be ill for the foot-soldiers. For can they not drop explosives, and cause havoc and panic? Also, these strangers will warn King Arthur of the preparations we have been making. And mayhap he will become alarmed. Mayhap he will realise the folly of having no army. Within a month he can do much."

"So thou art anxious to strike the blow now, sire?"

"Ay, 'tis the time!" replied King Jasper. "They are quiet now—they will not be difficult to overcome. But in a month, 'twill be impossible to win. That is why my orders have been given on this day. 'Tis a chance, my soldiers! 'Tis a chance for us to smash through, and break the resistance of these wretches!"

"Long life to your Majesty!" shouted Lieutenant Crayshaw eagerly.

"So! Thou art becoming imbued with enthusiasm!" said the king, with approval. "'Tis well, my friend. And now thou wilt understand the nature of my anxiety. Thou wilt lead me to these works beneath the ground."

"'Tis risky, sire!" said the lieutenant anxiously. "'Tis enough for a soldier to be killed in these tunnels, for the earth falls on occasion, notwithstanding the props which support it."

"Thinkest thou I care for danger?" ex-



claimed the king sharply. "I will go, lieutenant—and no time must be lost!"

The lieutenant saluted, and a moment later he was leading the way through the wood. The trees joined overhead, so that nothing could be seen of their movements from any distant hill, or the top of the high wall.

And presently they came upon a kind of cave mouth. It was very wide and tall, and it seemed to be set in a little cliff. But everything was surrounded by trees, and gloom pervaded all.

Once in the cave, it was found that a tunnel descended steeply into the earth—a great tunnel, twelve feet in height, and fifteen feet wide. It was a finely executed piece of work, for all this was man-made. The sides and roof of the tunnel were supported by massive logs.

Lieutenant Crayshaw and the General had halted to set light to great torches. And now, with these illuminating the scene weirdly, they passed on their way—descending deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth.

It was a very long walk.

But at last the little party arrived at their destination. Now and again they passed grimy, perspiring men. And these men were soldiers—although they did not look it. They halted and saluted as the king appeared.

"Thou art now standing right beneath the great wall itself, sire," said General Horton. "'Tis over our heads—and I like not thy standing here. Some mischance, mayhap, and the cavern will collapse—"

"Thou art very concerned for my safety, general," interrupted the king. "'Tis nought to worry over. If this place is safe for you, it is safe for me. So! I am pleased! I did not imagine that the work had progressed so wondrously. By my sword, 'tis a fine job thou hast made of it!"

"The cavern extends for a great distance in all directions, Your Majesty," said General Horton proudly. "Thou art viewing the work of a thousand men, spread over the period of not less than five months. It has been a great task—a long, heart-breaking accomplishment. Thirty-three men have met their death in this work, but they have died in a good cause."

"'Tis well!" said the king. "Many other men will die soon—but before the next moon rises the Kingdom of New Anglia will be mine! Think of it, General Horton! Thou wilt be the commander-in-chief of the combined kingdoms. 'Tis a thought to make thee glad."

"I'm anxious, sire," said General Horton. "We had planned to excavate forty yards deeper. The plan, as thou knowest, is all complete. At the given word, at the given time, the cavern will be filled with inflammable material. A draught runs through, and the fire will rage unceasingly till all is burnt. And during this great fire, the wooden props which support the cavern will be reduced to cinders."

"Ay, 'tis well thought out!" said the king, between his teeth.

"And with the falling of the roof, so will the great wall above crash to atoms!" went on the general exultantly. "A gap will be made large enough to admit the armies of St. Edmund! And this gap, sire, will be situate between watch towers numbers fifteen and sixteen. Orders concerning these two watch towers have already been given."

"The garrisons of those two towers will be dealt with?"

"Ay, sire!" put in Lieutenant Crayshaw eagerly. "Every man this night will be poisoned. Thus those two watch towers—the only ones we fear—will be rendered harmless. And at the same time the fires will be started, and the time for action will have arrived."

"How hast thou accomplished these things?"

"We have trusted men in New Anglia," replied the lieutenant. "Our spies are active—they have been working well. And they have arranged with the worthy man who supplies these towers with food. The food this night will be poisoned—and after eating, the garrisons will die. 'Tis impossible for any mishap to take place."

"Even now my soldiers are massing in full strength," said the general. "Within three hours they will be ready—with full equipment. They will be waiting to pass through into New Anglia when the wall crashes."

The king clenched his fists.

"'Tis splendid!" he exclaimed, in a low voice. "If failure comes, General Horton, thou wilt know my wrath! For I have trusted these plans to thee, and thou wilt surely lose thy head if thou failest!"

The general turned rather pale.

"'Tis hardly fair, your Majesty!" he protested. "Thou art insisting upon action before the time is ripe—"

"Well, well! We will not waste time now!" interrupted the king. "Mayhap I shall be merciful—but failure must not come. We have the Kingdom of New Anglia at our mercy, and we must seize our opportunity!"

There was not the slightest doubt that King Jasper's men had been very busy. His spies had been at work—and, by all appearances, the spy system of the St. Edmund army was a very extensive one.

The New Anglians knew that King Jasper had many of his paid spies in the country. These men were given much money, and they were loyal to St. Edmund. They were always ready to do their work, even at the risk of their lives.

And when these men were caught by the New Anglians—as they were occasionally—they were hung from the nearest tree without a moment's hesitation. It wasn't altogether honey being a spy for King Jasper.

But for those who were hanged dozens lived—dozens continued to plot and plan.



And it now seemed certain that the garrisons of the two vital watch towers were to be put out of action.

This meant, strictly speaking, that a space of three miles of the wall would be left absolutely unguarded. And the breach was to be made in the very centre of this space.

The king went all round the deep excavations. They were very extensive, and it was practically certain that when they collapsed, a deep gap would appear in the wall. For the very foundations of that massive structure would be destroyed. For a distance of nearly half a mile the ground would vanish from beneath the wall. It could not possibly hope to remain intact. But it had been originally planned to make these excavations much deeper, so that the wall would sink into the very ground itself.

As it was, this could not take place. But there was every chance of success, nevertheless.

And then, when King Jasper had returned through these workings to the surface, he knew that great masses of inflammable material had been taken down into the caverns. Everything was being prepared for the great hour which would now come very soon.

Once again in the open, the king saw many signs of the massing troops.

He could see numbers of soldiers passing to and fro. And behind, cunningly concealed in the woods, were hundreds and hundreds of others—regiment after regiment. It was absolutely certain that King Jasper was now making one bold, desperate bid for victory.

And in New Anglia they knew nothing!

They blindly believed in the strength of that vast, impregnable wall. They relied upon it to guard them always—they looked upon disaster as impossible.

And yet the cunning enemy had been planning and scheming for years. And now, at last, the one plan that promised success was on the point of being put into execution.

The wall had been undermined at its most vulnerable spot—undermined so completely that it must surely collapse. And when that happened the troops of King Jasper would be able to sweep through. Nothing else was necessary! Once through, resistance would be impossible. The enemy would roll on to the capital—an invading army with none to hold it back.

It was little wonder that King Jasper was jumpy—that he paced up and down on tenterhooks of impatience. One little hitch now, and all would be lost. The work of months—years—would be for nothing.

He had heard nothing certain yet—only talk of what had been planned. But at last this was changed.

A breathless man came dashing up to General Horton's table—for the commander-in-chief was seated there, in a little open

spot, making plans for his coming campaign. And this breathless messenger announced the fact that the entire garrisons of watch towers numbers fifteen and sixteen were poisoned—dead! There were now no watching eyes from the great wall.

And only a few moments later another piece of information arrived. The fires had been lit down in the excavations!

In fact, zero hour had arrived!

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE INVASION OF NEW ANGLIA!



**F**LAMES poured out in fierce, vast quantities from great openings in the ground. The fires underneath the earth were raging with appalling fury. And tremendous clouds of smoke arose upon the still air.

These were visible to the watching soldiers upon the wall further along. But what did such clouds of smoke mean? Possibly that the woods were on fire. How could they be connected with any plot to destroy the wall?

And so the sentries on duty thought nothing.

But those fires meant the very downfall of New Anglia's barrier. For as the flames increased in fury, so the great wooden supports under the ground collapsed—one after another.

And as every support collapsed, so the foundations of this section of the wall grew weaker and weaker. Surely it would be impossible for the appalling weight to stand such a strain without giving way?

Scarcely anything could be seen of the raging conflagration on the surface. Just those bursts of flame from the various holes in the ground. These holes acted like flues. The man who had planned out this scheme was an engineer, and he had performed his work cleverly. For the fires increased in fury every moment. The draught which passed completely through the workings, caused the flames to become white hot in their dreadful intensity. The whole ground, far below the surface, was like a volcano for a distance of nearly half a mile.

And away back, among the trees—in every open space—in every glade—the soldiers of King Jasper waited.

Every man was carrying his full equipment—food for one day, water, and full war kit. The men had swords and other weapons to use. And they were armoured. They looked a formidable crowd.

In one glade, for example, two hundred men had collected. And there they waited under the watchful eyes of their officers. They waited for the word to advance—waited for the news that the wall had caved in.

And these men were alive with intense



desire to destroy the country of the New Anglians. King Jasper was a villain, but he was a wise man. He had served much wine to his troops on this day. Although not drunk, they were reckless, and in the highest of spirits. Their blood was fired for the battle.

King Jasper himself was waiting on a little knoll. And with him stood several members of his suite—Sir Humphrey Everard, his equerry, the Marquis of Thornton, the Minister for Interior Affairs, and the Duke of Braye, the Lord Chamberlain. General Horton was with his men—waiting for the signal which would announce that an advance was to be made.

This signal had been arranged for.

The very collapse of the wall—the thunderous rumble of the falling stonework—would be a warning. But it would not be known if the passage was clear. And a signal had been arranged—the explosion of a huge bomb. When this sound rent the air with its sharp report—so would the army of King Jasper march forward. It mattered nothing that the report would be heard over a great district in New Anglia. They were helpless to protect themselves.

And the king stood on this little knoll, watching the wall. His anxiety was greater than he could bear. From different points the smoke and flames could be seen rising from the woods. But the wall still remained there—huge, towering, impregnable. The barrier which cut off the Kingdom of New Anglia was as firm and secure as ever.

"Curse these bunglers!" snarled the king furiously. "The plan has failed—'tis useless to watch! See? The wall remains intact!"

"Mayhap 'twill fall ere long, your Majesty," said the marquis. "'Tis yet early to think of failure—"

"Early—early!" shouted the king. "Thou art mad, Thornton—thou art bereft of thy wits! Hast thou no eyes? See? The wall is there—and the fires have been burning for an hour! Still it rages—but still the wall remains. Odds death! I am well-nigh insane with this waiting!"

"'Tis a trying time, your Majesty—"

"But, by my sword, they shall suffer!" raved the king. "The head of General Horton shall drop from his bungling shoulders ere the dawn comes! I will show these curs my wrath!"

The nobles gazed at one another nervously. They were beginning to realise that their heads were not very safe. With the king in his present mood, he would not be particular. Their anxiety as they watched the wall was even greater than King Jasper's. His head was safe, in any case.

"See?" shouted Sir Humphrey Everard suddenly. "See, sire? The wall!"

"Ay, I can see!" snapped the king. "'Tis as strong as ever!"

"But thou art mistaken, your Majesty! There is a crack—a great crack which is spreading even as I speak—"

"By lightning!" shouted the king exultantly. "Thou art right! Thou hast sharp eyes, Sir Humphrey—"

He came to a halt, the words choking in his throat. For the sight which suddenly burst upon them was indeed a sight to make the eyes bulge. They caught their breath in, and they stared. They were voiceless.

The great wall lay nearly half a mile distant—a long line of white cliff—a vast thing which rose to the very sky. It was solid, immovable. Small wonder that the New Anglians regarded it as an ever present guardian.

But there, in this towering mass of stonework, two cracks had appeared—not one, as Sir Humphrey had said. These cracks were nearly a hundred yards apart. But only for a flash did they remain. Then, in a manner which was utterly staggering, the whole section of wall between those cracks fell forward, as though it had been made of soft clay.

At first no sound came. The gap in the wall was formed in a twinkling. The stonework swept down in every direction—cracking up into minute particles. And then the ground shook where King Jasper stood. The ground quivered and quaked, and a roar came out of the air like the discharge of a hundred guns. And where that wall had existed a few seconds before, there was now a choking, blinding mass of white dust.

The thing was over.

The collapse had occurred—and only a minute before the wall had been intact! In brief spaces like this are great things accomplished.

"'Tis done—'tis done!" shouted the king, his voice thick with triumph. "See, thou fools? Use thine eyes! See?"

"'Tis too wondrous to be true!" gasped the Marquis of Thornton. "By my sword! Much as I had hoped for this, your Majesty, I dared not believe that 'twould happen! The moment has come—'twill be but an hour before our soldiers are on their way to New London!"

"Wait!" said the king. "We have yet to hear the signal!"

They stared across the intervening land. But that great cloud of smoke hung there, concealing all. It was somewhat gloomy this evening, but by no means dark. And the trees further helped to conceal the movements of any men who were near the wall.

But after only a brief space there came a thunderous report—one sharp explosion.

"'Tis the signal!" said the king grimly. "Success has come!"

And then the armies of St. Edmund awoke into activity. They were brought forward, company after company—regiment after regiment. Everything had been planned, and not a single hitch occurred.

At the break in the wall the gap was so huge that the soldiers had no difficulty in getting through. It was rough going—the men were compelled to climb over boulders



and jagged stones. For the whole gap was strewn with debris. But there were none there to impede the progress of the invaders. It was impossible to hold them back.

And now that the action had started, there was no wild hurry. The soldiers passed through, and massed on the other side—in the country of New Anglia. Other soldiers climbed up the steps of the wall, and went to the attack. At least two hundred of them were dispatched on this task.

And it was their job to drive along the

Old Jim was talking with his son—a rather good-looking youth of about eighteen. And, naturally, the topic of their conversation was the party of visitors from the great world outside. The whole nation had been talking about nothing else ever since our arrival. And those who had seen us considered themselves favoured.

"Ay, 'tis a wondrous thing, lad!" old Stockley was saying. 'Tis more than the mind can picture, indeed. These goodly folk coming from England itself! England is a land we read of in the history books of our



**"Thou art standing right beneath the great wall itself, Sire," said General Horton. "'Tis over our heads, and I like not thy standing here."**

wall in big numbers—to engage the enemy garrisons, and to kill them, or put them to flight.

The terrible war was just beginning.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DASH TO THE CAPITAL.



**O**LD Tom Stockley, the landlord of the Blue Dragon, was enjoying a quiet mug of his own beer in the porch of the peaceful little inn. It was the quiet time of the evening, and as yet his customers had not straggled up. This village was a secluded one, and the inn was mainly patronised by those men who worked on the land—farm labourers, and such like.

country—'tis the land our forefathers lived in, Harry."

"I know it well, father," said the youngster. "But methinks England is a vastly different land to ours. Ay, 'twas good to see these strangers. I would give much for thy permission to visit the capital——"

"Thou canst go if thou wish," interrupted the innkeeper. "'Tis but natural. Thou art anxious to see this great ship that flies, methinks."

"Ay, thou art right, father," said Harry, his eyes sparkling. "We have no wonders such as that in our land——"

Boo-o-om!

From across the trees came a thunderous rumble, and the very ground itself shook. Old Tom Stockley and his son jumped up. The tankard of beer was upset, and went crashing to the stones.



"S'death!" gasped old Tom. "Didst hear, boy?"

"'Twas a terrible thing!" shouted Harry. "Methinks some great explosive has been fired!"

They stared across a rising hill in horror and consternation. Only just a little distance away—on the other side of the hill—lay the great barrier wall. And the rumbling boom had undoubtedly come from that direction.

People were now hurrying out of the cottages—women and children were crying out. For sounds of that kind were unknown here. Nobody could possibly understand what it meant.

And then, while all the villagers were talking in excitement, there came another sound—a great, sharp explosion, which could not be mistaken. This, without a doubt, was the report of some kind of bomb. The people of New Anglia were not unfamiliar with such a sound.

Their forefathers—the founders of the country—had known what gunpowder was. And sulphur and other ingredients for the manufacture of gunpowder were easily obtainable in this land. And of recent years the New Anglian scientists had made other discoveries concerning explosives.

But what could be the meaning of these strange disturbances? The simple village folk were utterly scared—and then, when the real news came, they were so frightened that a panic ensued.

For two men came dashing up the little road—hot, breathless, and with horror written upon their faces. They were both land-workers, and they had come from the direction of the great wall.

"Fly—fly for thy lives!" shouted one of these men. "The soldiers of St. Edmund are coming!"

"Thou art mad!" shouted old Tom. "The soldiers of St. Edmund can never get over the big wall!"

"Never!" echoed his son.

The breathless men waved their arms desperately.

"Get thee hence—and save the women and children!" shouted one of them. "The great wall is down—it has fallen!"

"What!" panted old Tom wildly. "'Tis impossible——"

"With mine own eyes did I see!" shouted the man. "A great piece of the wall has fallen down—a piece as long as from here to the brook! And the soldiers of St. Edmund are pouring through. The invasion of our country has come!"

And after that the panic started.

The entire population of the village fled in terror, taking none of their belongings. They were horrified at the thought of King Jasper's men killing them. For, without doubt, these soldiers would create death and destruction as they advanced.

Old Tom Stockley attempted to obtain a hearing. He wanted to calm the people—to

give advice. But it was useless. And he turned to his son with gleaming eyes.

"Go!" he exclaimed tensely. "Go thou, my son, and speed with fleet foot to the capital! Give warning of this tragedy. 'Tis well that the king should know. Mayhap his Majesty's soldiers can repel the enemy."

"I will go like the wind, father!" panted the boy.

For the first time in his life a task of responsibility had been thrust upon him. He revelled in the thought, although, at the same time, he was filled with a kind of awful horror at the thought of New Anglia being at the mercy of those hounds from St. Edmund.

Ever since a child, he had been told of the wickedness of the St. Edmund soldiers. King Jasper's men had always had a bad name. All the children of New Anglia looked half-scared if even a St. Edmund soldier was mentioned. These men were demons in the popular imagination. They were bad enough in themselves, being a riotous lot—but they were painted in more lurid colours than they owned.

And so the peaceful inhabitants of these villages fled in dire panic when the news swept through the land that the invasion had commenced. The great wall had broken! The one barrier was down!

Bad news generally flies fast, but Harry Stockley flew faster. There were no telegraphs or telephones in this land. The people did not know anything about electricity. They had newspapers and books, and excellent methods of transport, by means of swiftly-running coaches. The whole country was well provided for in this way.

And all the main roads were as smooth as a billiard-table. If England had such roads, motoring would be a real delight. The New Anglians had discovered a road substance which was well-nigh perfect.

And Harry Stockley was the owner of a little car of his own. In just the same way as an English youngster will potter about with a motor-bicycle, so the inn-keeper's son spent all his spare money and his time upon a kind of mechanical car. It was a small thing, just large enough for himself. It had enormous wheels, and the power was given to it by some wonderful kind of spring arrangement. It appeared to be clockwork mechanism—but immensely more powerful. And old Tom had instructed his son to hurry to the capital, because he knew that Harry could be there in advance of any other vehicle.

And while the youngster was setting off, the whole country was seething with excitement and panic. The news was spreading from village to village—but in the City of New London nothing was known. Only those in the immediate path of the invaders were aware of the peril.

And already the destruction and pillage was beginning.

The armies of King Jasper had come through the wall, and they were marching



in one great column towards the capital. They would probably break up later, and take different directions, so as to encircle the city.

And as they passed through the villages, they found them deserted. It was pitiful, the way in which every little cottage and house had been left empty—many of them with meals set out upon the tables. It was as though the people had fled from a plague.

King Jasper was fiercely exulting over his victory. He had not dared to hope that the success would be so great. His advisers were even more surprised—because they had feared that the collapse of the wall would not be complete.

And now King Jasper was gloating.

"'Tis an ill day for King Arthur!" he exclaimed. "Ere long his throne will be my throne! Without resistance, we shall march through to the capital. And the capital will pass into my hands without destruction or looting! New London must be captured intact, or 'twill go ill with my captains."

"The capture will be easy, sire," said the Duke of Brays.

"But methinks these accursed strangers will make trouble!" put in the Marquis of Thornton darkly. "We have seen what knaves they are, your Majesty. And 'tis idle to ignore the truth. Their wondrous craft of the air can do to us what we hoped to do to the Anglians! For that craft can fly over our soldiers, and destroy —"

"Tush—tush!" snapped the king sneeringly. "Thinkest thou I am a fool, sir? I have already sent instructions—and those instructions shall be carried out! This Golden Rover—as they callst the vessel, will do no harm to my soldiers. For 'twill be a wreck ere long, if 'tis not one already."

"Thou hast prepared for this, sire!"

"Ay!" laughed the king. "Men have received orders to proceed to the capital—trusted spies who are not suspected among these people. 'Tis their task to blow the air vessel to scrap metal. And 'twill be done, noble marquis—never fear! 'Twill be done!"

It was quite evident that King Jasper was leaving nothing to chance. For he knew only too well that the Golden Rover could upset all his well-laid schemes. It could wreck his plans, and make the conquest of New Anglia impossible. For the Golden Rover could fly over the invading troops, and drop bombs upon them without any fear of harm. For nothing could touch this flying monster. They had no anti-aircraft guns in New Anglia, or in St. Edmund.

And thus, while the king's men were sweeping on in victory, young Harry Stockley was riding the ride of his life.

He had frequently caused his queer little machine to go at great speed, but now it beat all its own records. With a curious

clicking noise, and with its wheels humming along the road, it shot towards the capital.

The distance was not far, strictly speaking—merely a matter of ten or twelve miles. In New London the noise of the two booms had probably been heard—but it would mean nothing to them, so far away.

And it was the innkeeper's son who brought the dreadful tidings.

Tearing through the city streets, he caused no little consternation. For it was not usual for these cars to dash along at such a speed. However, the lad did not care.

And, at last, he arrived in the great central square. It seemed that some kind of ceremony was about to take place. For numbers of gaily attired young men and girls were forming up in the square—probably to give a dance for the benefit of the distinguished visitors.

As a matter of fact, this was actually the case. And the St. Frank's juniors were looking on with great interest. I was on the deck of the Golden Rover—for she stood in the very centre of this great square, with ropes round her, and with men of the king's own household troops acting as guards. The crowds were not allowed to come near.

So we felt somewhat important as we strolled about within that enclosed space, or moved on the Rover's deck. Other juniors were on the deck, too, including Handforth and Co.

Handforth was now quite himself again. He limped a bit, and he made loud remarks if anybody happened to slap him on the back—and one or two patches of plaster were silent witnesses of his injuries. But the unpleasant smell had gone—for he had entirely changed his clothing.

And now he was passing comments upon the crowd—frankly, as usual, with a cheerful unconcern as to whether he was overheard or not.

"Not such a bad looking lot," he remarked. "A fat lot better than those St. Edmund rotters, anyhow. And the girls look decent, too."

"They're lovely!" said Church. "Look at those two over there—as pretty as any girls you see in England."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie, adjusting his monocle, and taking a closer look. "I mean to say, visions, what? Positively the goods, old dears! Rippling curls, and ruby lips, and all that sort of rot! I must admit, laddies, that the young ladies are somewhat priceless!"

"They don't interest me!" said Handforth, with a sniff.

"No; but, dash it all, a chappie must be polite, don't you know!" said Archie. "How about it, old dears?"

"How about what?"

"I mean to say, trickling forth, and all that!"

"Trickling forth?" I grinned.

"Well, to be exact, I mean— Well,



there you are!" said Archie. "Hobnobbing with the populace, as it were! How about it? I thought it would be a dashed good scheme, you know, to get better acquainted with the young ladies!"

"You boulder!" said Pitt. "I don't suppose the young ladies would understand your delightful style of speech."

"What!" said Archie. "I mean, what? That's most dashed terse, old lad! I mean to say, I'm generally in the habit of hurling forth a good old chunk of priceless English."

"Well, I suppose it is—priceless!" I agreed. "But I don't think—Hullo! Who's the speed merchant?"

I indicated a small road car which was shooting down one of the main streets in the direction of the square. There was no question about its hurry. It was careering along, nearly upsetting numbers of people who were in the thoroughfare. And then, at last, it turned sharply into the square, and came to a halt.

A young fellow leapt out.

"Why, it's that innkeeper's son!" I exclaimed. "Don't you remember? He helped you to wash that mud off, Handy—"

"I don't want to be reminded of that!" growled Handforth. "It was all Church's fault, anyhow—"

I left him making unkind remarks about Church, and hurried down through the body of the Golden Rover to the ground level. And as I passed out I saw that Harry Stockley was being hurried up towards the king's palace by two of the king's troops. Obviously, his news was of some importance.

It was over twenty minutes before I knew the truth.

And then Lord Dorrimore came hurrying down from the palace, with a grave expression upon his usually cheerful countenance. I knew at once that something was wrong. Dorrie hardly ever wore that expression.

"What's up, Dorrie?" I asked, hurrying to his side.

"How the deuce did you know—"

"Your face," I interrupted. "It's as long as a fiddle!"

"Look here, my son, there's trouble coming!" said his lordship grimly. "You needn't get excited, or tell the population—they'll know soon enough! But that long-nosed brute of a King Jasper is comin'!"

"Coming?" I repeated, staring.

"His rotten soldiers have busted a chunk of the wall down," said Dorrie. "How they did it, Heaven only knows—it's about as solid as a fortress. But it's down, an' the country's invaded!"

"Phew!" I whistled. "Invaded!"

"They're swarming towards the capital in hordes!"

"But it can't be true!" I exclaimed. "Why, that wall is altogether too strong to be smashed! And nobody could possibly scale it! It must be a bloomer, Dorrie—"

"That's what I thought—but I was wrong!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "It's

come at last, Nipper. An' it's just our luck for it to happen when we're on a holiday in the country. We generally manage to arrive at various places when trouble's brewin'. The St. Edmund crowd have been preparing for this for years."

"I expect our arrival has caused King Jasper to act at once," I said. "He wants to take the New Anglians by surprise, before we can use the Rover. That's about the size of it."

"Well, anyway, things seem to be in a pretty pickle," said Dorrie. "They've got practically no soldiers in this place, an' we shall be at the mercy of the invaders—at least, the people will. We can easily take care of ourselves in the Rover."

There was hardly any need for me to inform the other fellows. For in a very short time other men came into the capital from all quarters—and it was only a matter of an hour before the whole population knew the truth.

But here there was no panic—only consternation and dismay. The people of the capital believed themselves to be safe. It seemed impossible that the invaders would ever be able to reach New London.

But the danger was great.

King Arthur had no soldiers to repel these invaders. He had relied upon that great wall to keep the enemy out. And the wall had failed.

It seemed that things would soon become very exciting.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MEETING THE TROUBLE.



"KING ARTHUR will find this a bit too much for him, I reckon!" said Reginald Pitt, shaking his head. "And I shouldn't be surprised if these rotten St. Edmund men get clean through."

"Never!" said Handforth. "They couldn't do it, my son. You can't tell me that these people are going to stand tamely by and allow the invaders to sweep through until they capture the capital!"

"But they've only got a handful of soldiers—"

"Soldiers!" snorted Handforth. "Who said anything about soldiers?"

"You did!"

"I didn't," said Handforth. "I was talking about the population. What are they mad about? Can't they gather themselves together and form a volunteer force, and meet the enemy, and drive them back?"

"It sounds all right, old man, but it's a little bit more difficult than you seem to think," I put in. "It would be worse than useless for a mob of untrained men to go out with the idea of giving battle to the enemy. It wouldn't do—it would mean a



gory fight and the soldiers would win. You can never expect untrained men to gain the victory over disciplined troops."

"But they can do a lot——"

"No, they can do a little," I interrupted. "There'll be plenty of volunteers, I dare say, but before they can be of any use they'll have to be trained. And long before then the capital will be taken. As far as I can see, the king and his court and all the citizens will have to flee. Later on, perhaps, they'll be able to fight the invaders, and drive them out."

"Well, it doesn't make much difference to us," said Fatty Little comfortably. "We are all right in the Rover. If any trouble comes along, we can simply buzz up into the air, and shift out of the fighting zone."

"This boulder doesn't care what happens to him as long as he gets plenty of grub!" shouted Bob Christine, with a grunt. "At the same time, it's pretty good to know that we can move just when we like."

It was, indeed, a comforting thought.

But for the inhabitants of New London there was no such escape. If the invaders came right up to the city gates, there could be only one result. The city would have to surrender. For the whole population to flee was impossible.

And King Arthur's anxiety can easily be imagined.

The men of St. Edmund were marching on to the attack. They hadn't done any fighting yet—for the simple reason that they had met with no resistance. There was no defence, and the invaders were looting and burning as they advanced.

Already news had come in that several villages were on fire. The soldiers were leaving death and destruction in their wake. They meant to create terror throughout the whole of the land, and they were doing it.

King Jasper's ambition was to join New Anglia to his own kingdom, and to be the one supreme ruler of the whole great valley. As things looked at present, his ambition would be realised.

But it mustn't be forgotten that the Rover was ready for action.

One of the first things that King Arthur did was to send for Nelson Lee. The governor had been expecting it, and he went at once. He found the king in a well-appointed reception-room in the palace. He was alone, except for Duke Somerley, one of his court nobles and advisers.

The change in the king was remarkable.

His fine upright bearing had gone, and his shoulders were even inclined to droop. This blow was so great that he had hardly been able to bear it. And as Nelson Lee appeared, ushered in by two flunkies, he squared his shoulders.

"Thou art sorely needed, Master Lee!" exclaimed the king. "'Tis wondrously strange that thy fears should come true. When I spoke with thee on the subject of

invasion I was confident. But thou wert right. The wall, although seemingly so vast and strong, is but a fictitious barrier, after all."

"I did not imagine that the St. Edmund troops would act as speedily as this, sire," said Nelson Lee quietly. "My warning was only issued in the hope that you might pay heed to it, and prepare for invasion in the future."

"Thy wisdom is greater than mine, Master Lee," said the king. "But 'tis idle to speak of such matters. The invasion has come. The most terrible calamity has fallen upon my subjects. And I am sad—I am filled with anger against myself for letting this disaster take place."

"You acted unwisely, perhaps, your Majesty, and I do not fear to tell you so," said Nelson Lee. "It would have been better had you listened to the advice of those who favoured the forming of a strong army. The very knowledge that such an army existed would have convinced King Jasper that his vision of supreme power was hopeless."

"Thy words are wise, good friend!"

"But, as matters were, King Jasper knew that he had only to smash through this wall, and your country would be at his mercy," went on Lee. "With soldiers here—a strong army—the St. Edmund men would never have dared to pit themselves against the New Anglians. But now King Jasper means to force his tyrannical power upon your kingdom. Of course, he will not do so. He and his men will be driven out."

"What meanest thou, Master Lee?"

"My words are quite plain," smiled Nelson Lee. "King Jasper will not meet with success, as he imagines. And this invasion, sire, will probably be a lesson for you. In future it will be for New Anglia to maintain a strong army. It is sad that such things should be necessary. But that is the way of the world. It has always been the way."

"Thou art right," said the king sadly.

"In savage times, one tribe battled against another tribe," continued Lee. "When civilisation came, one country became jealous of another—and so great wars were caused. And now, when mankind is civilised to the highest extent, it is precisely the same. Every great country is compelled to maintain an army at great cost—not because fighting is desired, but in order to avoid fighting. It seems quite wrong—but things are so."

"Thy words cheer me," said the king.

"But surely thou art wrong, good stranger, when thou sayest that this disaster can be averted? King Jasper's troops can never be beaten back——"

"It will be comparatively simple," interrupted Nelson Lee. "For Mr. Gray, my friend, will see to it that the Golden Rover is used on your behalf. The Rover can settle this conflict with rapidity. King Jasper overlooked that when he made this



attack. At least, he chanced it, probably thinking that there would be no time for us to act."

"But what can be done?" asked the king eagerly.

"Even now Mr. Gray and Major Barrance are preparing things as rapidly as possible," exclaimed Lee. "We have explosives on board the Rover which are unknown to you; explosives of such power that King Jasper's men will be wiped out if they fail to retreat. We also have machine-guns—weapons that deal death with fierce rapidity. No invading force in this land could withstand such a fighting machine as the Golden Rover. You need not fear, your Majesty."

The king clasped his hands with joy and relief.

"Indeed, thou art a true friend!" he said fervently. "And thou canst really do these things? Verily, 'tis like a gift from Heaven itself."

"And now, sire, I will hasten away," said Nelson Lee. "I and my friends will fight this battle for you, and you need not fear the result."

And a few minutes later Nelson Lee left the palace.

He had put new hope into King Arthur's heart. Even his Majesty had not guessed that the Golden Rover could be such a wonderful aid. And yet, as a matter of fact, the thing was quite simple.

And Lee was anxious to get to work at once.

The smallest delay would mean that other villages and towns were being sacked and burned. Once the Rover got into the air and away, the invasion would be a thing of the past. King Jasper's troops could never stand against the onslaughts of Mr. Raymond Gray's aeroplane.

The vessel was equipped with machine-guns—which could fire from any angle—and there were large quantities of bombs on board. These bombs were small, but absolutely deadly.

They had been brought for the purpose of fighting against animals, and not against men. When Mr. Gray had started out he had not known what perils had to be faced, and he deemed it wise to bring plenty of weapons and ammunition.

And now, it seemed, the Golden Rover was to be the saviour of New Anglia.

Nelson Lee had not exaggerated. Dropping bombs, and firing machine-guns, the airship would be able to pull the advance up in next to no time. For its death-dealing methods would put terror into the hearts of the enemy soldiers. Lee was convinced that they would soon become panic-stricken and flee back to their own land.

And Nelson Lee knew, also, that not a moment was to be lost. He feared that spies of King Jasper would make some attempt to harm the Golden Rover—although there did not seem much fear of this, since the Rover was in the very heart of the capital, and surrounded by King Arthur's own troops.

But the cunning of King Jasper was great!

## CHAPTER VII.

### WHAT HANDFORTH AND CO. SAW.



"I MEAN to say, somewhat fearful, to be exact," observed Archie Glenthorne.

"The fact is, dear old lads of the village, we've been bally-well booted out!

In other words, we've had to leg it pretty smartly!"

"Well, I suppose Mr. Gray knows best," said Pitt.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But if you gather the old trend, it's a bit hard on a chappie when he's partaking of a few spasms of the best and sweetest! That is to say, the old dreamless, don't you know!"

"Were you taking a nap, old man?" grinned Pitt.

"Well, dash it all, I was in the bally middle of the twenty-ninth wink!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, I had about eleven more to come! Forty, don't you know, is the amount a chappie needs."

"Considering you had about a thousand to-day, you don't need any more!" put in Bob Christine. "But I wonder what the game is? I wonder why Mr. Gray politely requested us to vamoose?"

"The thing, as it were, is a most priceless mystery," said Archie. "What, so to speak, does it matter if a chappie is disporting himself somewhat largely upon the plush lounges, and the what nots? Not that I'm complaining. Absolutely not! The bally old ship ain't mine. But there you are—we've had to stagger forth, and here we are, gazing upon the populace."

Archie adjusted his monocle, and took great interest in the excited crowds of people in the palace square. About ten minutes earlier Mr. Gray had requested us all to leave the ship.

"I knew why, of course. He and Dorrie and Major Barrance and Nelson Lee were going up shortly—as soon as ever the gov'nor returned from the palace. And the whole saloon was being littered with bombs, in readiness to be thrown out of the windows upon the enemy."

The Rover, in fact, was being converted into a bomber, and the juniors were not required on board.

Handforth was inclined to be somewhat touchy about it.

But he soon forgot this when another idea occurred to him. Handforth generally got his ideas quickly—they came in a flash. As Church and McClure said, this was no doubt the reason why they were so rotten. He never gave his brain a chance to evolve a really good one.

"I've got it!" said Handforth suddenly. "We'll go out and see the fighting!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Church and McClure stared at their leader.

"We'll go out and see the fighting."



repeated Handforth. "Come on! It won't take us long to buzz into one of those road cars, and then we can scoot off and dash to the front!"

"We shall be safer at the back!" said Church.

"Fathead!" said Handforth. "That's supposed to be a joke, isn't it? It's got whiskers on it—grey ones, too! There's fighting going on, and I don't see why I should be out of it."

"Nobody's asked you to be out of it," said McClure. "You can go, if you like."

"Oh, oh!" said Handforth grimly. "And what about you?"

"I'll come, too," said McClure.

"Same here!" said Church promptly.

that's why you agreed to go with me—because you jolly well knew we couldn't go! You—you rotters! You funny fatheads! You blithering idiots! You—you——"

"The air appears to be somewhat blue!" remarked Archie, gazing at Handforth wonderingly. "I mean to say, lurid, and all that sort of thing! The chap's a dashed marvel!"

"Talking about me?" snapped Handforth.

"Absolutely!" replied Archie. "A most priceless gift, old scream! Language, you know! The way you reel forth the jolly old terms makes a chappie feel somewhat staggered: The fact is, you——"

"Clear off—you make me tired!" interrupted Handforth.



Then, in a manner which was utterly staggering, the whole section of the wall between those cracks fell forward as though it had been made of soft clay.

Handforth stood there with his mouth open. He had been preparing all sorts of scathing remarks—fully expecting his chums to object. Their startling willingness to agree took Handy off his feet.

"You—you'll come?" he repeated blankly.

"Of course!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth.

"Good chaps! I didn't expect it of you——"

"Of course, we may have a bit of difficulty," said Church carelessly. "For example, Lord Dorrimore told us five minutes ago that nobody is allowed out of this square. We're forbidden to move out, under any circumstances. Dorrie says that he doesn't know what might happen, and so we've got to stick near the Rover."

"Strict orders!" added McClure.

Handforth slowly pushed up his sleeves.

"So that's it!" he said sourly. "So

"What-ho!" said Archie. "To be absolutely exact, what-ho twice! It seems, as it were, that Archie has been somewhat ticked off! A most frightful affair! I long for Phipps! The blighter has oozed away, and the young master is somewhat forlorn!"

"The young master will be somewhat slaughtered in a minute," growled Handforth. "You can buzz off, Archie, because your face worries me! I can stand most faces, but yours makes my giddy fist itch."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "But, don't you know, that's bally curious! Pray be lucid, old dear! How, I mean to say, can my somewhat handsome features cause the old digit department to itch?"

Handforth shoved his fist under Archie's nose.

"See that?" he said ominously.

"Well, dash it!" protested Archie. "The old horizon, as it were, is somewhat obliterated."



ated! It's like the bally wall of a house, butting itself into a cove's face!"

"That's what it'll feel like!" said Handforth. "You—you putty-faced dummy! So my fist's as big as a house, is it?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That is, of course, absolutely not!" he added hastily. "Quite a slip, old lad. Pray accept a few dozen choice apologies. I should have said that the old knuckles somewhat resemble —"

"Hallo, what's the argument?" inquired Lord Dorrimore briskly. "My dear Handforth, I've no desire to see your fist, so please push it somewhere else. I might add, in passing, that you seem to have a bally rotten acquaintance with soap!"

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie. "I thought, possibly, that the old optics were somewhat deluded. But such, evidently, is not the case. I mean to say, a chappie with dirty paws is, as it were, a somewhat foul proposition!"

It was very fortunate for Archie that Lord Dorrimore was present. For Handforth would certainly have had something to say about being called a "foul proposition." It is even possible that Archie seized an excellent opportunity to get a good one in. Archie was by no means a duffer.

"All right—I'll deal with you later!" hissed Handforth.

"Eh?" said Dorrie.

"Nun—nothing, sir!"

"Strange!" said his lordship. "I thought you spoke, young 'un. Well, what do you think of things? No enemy troops yet, but they are coming along. Not that they'll ever reach the capital."

"We thought about going for a stroll into the country, sir," said Handforth carelessly.

"Good!" said Dorrie.

"Thank you, sir——"

"But, all the same, it wouldn't be a bad idea to think again!" went on Dorrie. "Sorry, Handforth, but strolls in the country are barred. There's nothing doing in that line."

"But I want to see the fighting, sir," said Handforth rebelliously.

"Bloodthirsty young rascal!" said Dorrie, frowning. "If you got loose, my son, you'd probably get yourself into about five different piles of trouble. If you want to see the fighting, you can't do better than get up into the clock tower of the cathedral."

"My hat!" said Church. "That's a good idea!"

He turned round, and gazed up at the

clock tower. The cathedral stood back from one of the sides of the big square. It was a magnificent erection, and the great tower reminded us of Big Ben. It was by no means as handsome or perfect as Big Ben, but a fine piece of work, nevertheless.

Handforth sniffed.

"What's the good of that?" he asked.

"We can't see the fighting, sir!"

"Yes, you can—you only need to take a pair of decent binoculars," replied Dorrie. "From the top of that clock tower you can see ten miles in any direction with ease. It's the best I can do, anyhow. Don't bother me now, because I'm waiting for Mr. Lee to come along. We want to start."

Handforth was rather inclined to growl, but as there was nothing else for it, he decided to climb to the top of the clock tower. It was easy enough to obtain a good pair of binoculars.

And, armed with these, the trio started off. Church and McClure were not very keen about it, but they went along—mainly to keep Handforth from falling into the courtyard. He was a terribly reckless fellow on high buildings. He had had one marvellous escape recently, and he couldn't expect two. As Church had sometimes remarked, Handforth was like a cat, and had nine lives. About eight of these were used up, so he had to go easy now.

It was rather tedious business, climbing to the top of the clock tower. There was a fine, wide staircase, and it seemed to go up for ever. By the time the juniors were at the top, they were pretty well fagged out.

But they passed out upon a balcony which ran completely round the summit of the tower.

And it was undoubtedly a fine point of vantage. From here a superb view could be obtained. In the clear light of mid-day, it was possible to see for twenty or thirty miles. But now it was rather gloomy in the evening, and the view was not so good.

But even in this light one could see for seven or eight miles with the naked eye. And from two or three points great masses of smoke and lurid glares could be seen.

"My hat!" said Handforth. "I'm glad we came up! Look! There's the gap—clear as anything! About three hundred yards of the wall have disappeared! The rotters! How did they manage it?"

"Goodness knows!" said Church. "But you can see the route they're taking. Look at those fires! The destructive demons! They're burning up the property as they advance."

"That's what it looks like!" agreed Handforth. "And, by George, I can see hordes of people coming along the roads. Why, the roads are full! Soldiers, I expect."

"No, refugees!" said McClure. "The poor inhabitants are fleeing before the enemy."

"And so are the rich, you ass!" said Handforth.

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"I know that!" replied McClure.

"But you said——"

"When I said 'poor,' I meant all of them."

"Ass!" growled Handforth. "They're not all poor——"

"Can't you understand?" yelled McClure. "They're poor in the sense that they're all in a rotten fix! Just the same as you say a fellow in a street accident is a poor chap. And yet he may be a millionaire."

But Handforth refused to see. He was too literal to observe any difference. To him, a poor chap meant a poor chap, and not a rich one. The matter nearly developed into a scrap.

Church saved the situation by suddenly giving a terrific yell, and pointing. There was nothing to point at, except one of the fires. But Handforth, thinking something fresh had cropped up, levelled his binoculars. And he forgot all about the argument.

His chums had to be very diplomatic at times, or disasters would have occurred. They were so used to him and his little ways, that they knew instinctively when to do things.

"I can't quite make out about these chaps down here," remarked Church, after a moment or two. "Let me have the glasses a minute, Handy."

"Of course, if you want to be selfish, you can have 'em!" snapped Handforth. "I haven't had a good squint yet—and all you can do is to bother me all the blessed time."

"Why, you rotter, you've had those glasses ever since we came up!" said Church indignantly. "If anybody's selfish——"

"They seem to be carrying something," put in McClure tactfully. "My hat! I believe they've got some game on!"

Handforth stared down where Church and McClure were staring.

Next to the cathedral itself was a tall, imposing building, which was one of the landmarks of the capital. It was, in fact, a big government office of some kind, and it presented an imposing frontage of pillars and columns. A great parapet ran entirely round the roof, and this was nearly flat.

And upon this roof were three men.

There was nothing particularly surprising in the fact that three men should be on the roof, although it might be somewhat unusual. But as the juniors watched they could not help being struck by the fact that the men were taking great pains to keep themselves hidden from the people in the street.

And, as McClure had said, they were carrying some object. The three men crouched low against one of the parapets. Now and again one would take a cautious peep over the parapet.

Handforth and Co. lost their interest in the open country, and they centred their attention upon this near scene.

Who were these men? And above all, what were they doing?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A NARROW ESCAPE!



"It looks fishy!" said Church softly.

"Rather!" agreed McClure. "Fearfully fishy! I believe those three men are up to something pretty rotten!"

Handforth smiled indulgently.

"Of course, you're sure to imagine all sorts of silly things!" he said. "Just because three men happen to be on a roof——"

"There you are!" interrupted Church. "There's one of them pointing to the Rover now! Can't you see him?"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth. "But still, that's not startling! There's no reason why the fellow shouldn't point to the Rover——"

"But why are these men keeping back, as though they're afraid to be seen?" remarked Church. "That doesn't seem to be square, does it? If they were ordinary inhabitants, going about their legitimate business, they wouldn't try to hide themselves. I tell you, it looks fishy!"

"Mr. Lee's just come!" said McClure. "There he is—walking towards the Rover now. And, I say! Look at those men! They're pointing to Mr. Lee, and they seem excited!"

This was quite true.

The three men on the roof of the building had become very agitated, apparently, by the appearance of Nelson Lee. And they once more gave their full attention to the object which they had been carrying.

Church suddenly caught his breath in sharply.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

"What the——"

"What's up, you ass?"

"I—I've just thought of something!" said Church, breathing hard. "It—it came into my mind, you know——"

"Well, there's no need to go pale about it!" said Handforth. "Why, you ass, you've gone all goosey! What the dickens is the matter? Don't look at me in that glassy way!"

Church clutched at Handforth's sleeve.

"They're spies!" he said intently.

"What!"

"Those men are spies!"

"Spies!" repeated Handforth, with a start. "Great pip!"

"And they're going to do something to the Rover!" gasped Church. "Can't you see? That—that thing they're carrying! I'll bet it's a bomb, or something! That's why they're keeping back! They mean to chuck that thing down, and blow the Rover to smithereens!"

Handforth and McClure stared at him in tense silence for a moment. As a matter of fact, this theory of Church's was a singularly shrewd piece of work. Certainly,



the men were acting in a very suspicious way. But it was smart of Church to jump to such a conclusion.

Those three men on the roof did not know that they were being observed. They were taking pains to make their movements secret, but they had no idea that three pairs of keen eyes were upon them from high above. They did not even think of looking up to the clock tower.

Church grabbed at the binoculars, and adjusted them.

The men on the roof jumped into clear prominence. Church could see their expressions. He could see that they were looking grim and tense. They were ugly fellows—coarse and vicious. And the object which lay at their feet seemed to be made of metal, and there were one or two cogs attached to it. There was also a kind of tap.

"Great Scott!" muttered Church. "It's—it's an infernal machine!"

Handforth yanked the glasses out of his chum's hands, and stared through them. By this time he had caught the fever, and he was quivering with excitement. One look was enough for him. He removed the glasses, and his face was flushed with excitement.

"Yes—I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I was right! Those rotters are spies!"

"You—you were right?" stuttered Church.

"Of course," said Handforth. "I guessed

it from the first! This just shows you what it means to have the real detective instinct. I've only got to look at these rotters, and I can see what they are at a glance! They're spies, and they mean to smash up the Rover."

"That's what I said!" snorted Church.

"Fathead!" said Handforth. "If you think you're going to take the credit for what I do, you've made a bloomer! I'll admit you agreed with me at first," he added kindly, "but we can't waste any time now. There's one thing to be done—and one thing only!"

"Yell down a warning!" said Church.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be much good," put in McClure anxiously. "We're a tremendous way up, you know, and our voices wouldn't carry."

"But Handy's got a voice like a fog-horn—"

"Oh, have I?" roared Handforth. "You—you insulting bounder—"

"Don't start now, for goodness' sake!" gasped Church. "I—I mean you've got a splendid voice, Handy—a voice that anybody can be proud of! It's a voice that can carry miles—"

"Never mind my voice!" interrupted Handforth. "It wouldn't be any good for this job. There's a big row going on in the square, and we can't positively waste time

(Continued on next page.)

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in shouting. Besides, they wouldn't understand, anyhow. I tell you, there's only one thing to be done."

"Well, what is it?" asked Church. "Out with it—out with it!"

"There's a window halfway down this tower," said Handforth. "We can get through it right on to the cathedral roof. Then, as you can see, the roof at one end is only about ten feet from the roof of that building. And the other building is slightly lower. We could nip across without any trouble."

"Yes, that's it!" said Church. "But we may not be in time. Come on—they may smash up the Rover before we can get down."

There was certainly no time to be lost. And Handforth's suggestion seemed to be fairly decent. Church and McClure were both surprised, but they had no time to express themselves. For Handforth to make a really good suggestion was a bit of a novelty.

They rushed down the staircase of the tower as hard as they could pelt. And at length they came to the window that Handforth had referred to. It was, indeed, in such a position that the cathedral roof could be reached without any particular trouble.

The window opened easily.

And the three juniors quickly climbed out. It was a somewhat precarious task to walk along this roof, for it was by no means flat. One slip, and it would mean slithering down towards the gutter, and then a fearful drop to the ground—and on to the stones.

But Handforth and Co. did not think of any peril now.

With Handy leading the way, they passed along the roof. As they did so they could see that the men were now actively preparing to throw the object over the parapet. They had got it in their arms, and one man was making a few adjustments to the levers.

Handforth, who saw this, had his heart in his mouth.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "We'll be too late!"

He let himself go.

He didn't care what happened—he only knew that he had to reach that roof before the thing was flung over into the square. Handforth let himself go, and raced along with supreme daring.

And he reached the end of the cathedral roof, and found that the jump to the adjoining roof was rather more than he had bargained for. But there was no time for him to halt—he couldn't have stopped himself, even if he had wanted to.

And he went over into space like a catapult.

Crash!

He landed on the roof with a thud. Then he hurled himself forward with a wild, furious yell. For he had seen at the

very moment of his landing that the thing was going over the parapet.

Handforth made one desperate effort to avert the trouble. At the same second he dimly heard Church and McClure yelling with alarm. Then Handforth charged into the men like a mad bull.

And it was at this moment that the thing went over.

There was a brief, breathless silence, and then—

Boom—boom!

A sharp, devastating explosion rent the air like a crash of thunder.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FIGHT ON THE ROOF.



NELSON LEE looked round quickly.

"Yes, I think everything is ready, Dorrie," he said. "We might as well be off at once. For the sooner we get to the scene of battle the better. But, if possible, we want to put a stop to this advance before the next big town is reached. A few bombs will soon make these invaders change their plans."

"Rather!" agreed Dorrie. "I suggest that we fly pretty low, and drop the bombs in quick succession—to start with, anyhow. That'll give the beggars a bit of a twisting as an openin' event."

"Everything's ready, gentlemen!" said Major Barrance, looking into the saloon. "The engines are just being started, and I think we shall be able to take off quite easily from the square. It's a good open space, and quite clear."

"Yes, I saw to that," replied Lee. "I had the square cleared by the soldiers, and there can be no accident—"

The next second Lee wondered if an earthquake had happened.

There was a deafening, terrific explosion, and the saloon of the Golden Rover reared up like a thing alive. There was a crashing and splintering of metal. Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Major Barrance were flung from one side of the saloon to the other.

And then came a deadly silence.

But it was only for a moment. The silence was immediately followed by shrieks and shouts from every quarter. The sound could be heard plainly within the Rover's saloon.

Then there was a shout of fury, as Mr. Raymond Gray appeared. He practically fell down from the navigation-room.

"The demons—the infernal demons!" he thundered. "They've wrecked us, Mr. Lee!"

Nelson Lee was staggering to his feet, slightly dazed—for he had caught his head a crash against the wall of the saloon. Dorrie was up, too. They saw, to their intense relief, that the Rover was standing



on an even keel. She did not seem to be harmed at all.

"This is just what I feared—and the very reason I wanted to get away!" exclaimed Lee grimly. "But how did these wreckers get near enough to hurl a bomb? Thank Heaven we are not harmed—"

"Not harmed!" screamed Mr. Gray. "The vessel's wrecked!"

Nelson Lee had never seen the inventor excited before. But now he was fairly livid with fury and concern. His beloved Rover had been wrecked—according to what he said. It didn't seem to be.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Gray!" shouted Lee. "There doesn't seem to be much damage—"

"I tell you, we cannot fly!" panted Mr. Gray. "See!"

With a quivering finger, he pointed out of one of the windows. Nelson Lee and Dorrie took only one glance. Then, with Major Barrance close behind, they hurried to the door in a body, and leapt to the ground.

It was a big jump, but they didn't wait to lower the steps. And their faces were grave and full of consternation, as they looked at the Golden Rover's left wing.

Upon the ground there lay a twisted mass of broken metal—and there was a deep, jagged hole. The explosion had caused a portion of the Rover to be torn up.

The air was heavy with acrid fumes.

But they hardly looked at the ground, and they certainly did not notice the fumes. Their whole attention was centred upon the Rover's left wing. The outer end of it—the tip of the wing for about five feet was utterly shattered to fragments.

Ribbons of torn and twisted metal hung fantastically in all directions. And the wing for a considerable distance towards the left engine-house was buckled and battered.

That first glance was sufficient to tell Nelson Lee that flight was out of the question. To even attempt to get the Rover into the air would be fatal. With her left wing in that condition she would dash herself to a complete wreck. She would never be able to get into the air.

"The dastardly scoundrels!" shouted Major Barrance fiercely.

"The damage is serious, but we must be thankful, gentlemen, that it is not absolutely fatal," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Indeed, we must be thankful that our lives have been spared. Obviously, a bomb was thrown. It fell short, and so the wing tip received the full brunt of the explosion instead of the body. If the bomb had struck us amidships we should have been killed in a flash, and the Rover would have been an utter wreck."

Mr. Raymond Gray calmed himself.

"By Heaven, you're right!" he said. "Yes, Mr. Lee, you are right! We must indeed thank Providence that we have escaped so lightly. Forgive me for losing control of

myself for a moment. But to see this wreckage sent a stab to my very heart!"

"It's spoilt our plans, anyhow!" said Dorrie, "and this affair makes all the difference between success and failure for the invading troops. By gad! The scum will win the day now!"

"Upon my soul!" shouted Nelson Lee. "What is all this?"

He had turned abruptly, and was staring up at the roof of one of the high buildings. Just visible beyond the parapet were some struggling figures. A familiar voice came down. And that voice could easily be recognised as belonging to Edward Oswald Handforth.

"The bomb must have been flung from that roof!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Yes, and those boys probably saw it—"

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Dorrie. "Of course they saw it! I told them to go up into the clock tower! And from that high place they must have seen the bomb-throwers preparing to do their filthy work! It's infernally smart of the youngsters to attack the fellows!"

A light dawned upon Nelson Lee.

"We have to thank Handforth and his friends for our lives," he said quietly. "The men who planned this coup would never have made such an atrocious blunder. The Rover was an easy mark, and it puzzled me why the bomb had fallen short. But now I know! Those boys sprang at the curs at the crucial moment—and the bomb fell short!"

"Good lads!" exclaimed Dorrie. "I wasn't hankerin' after such a swift finish as all that! But hadn't we better lend a hand?"

Nelson Lee was already racing across the square. That gap in the road told its own story. The bomb had fallen very short indeed. The wing tip of the Golden Rover had received only a mere fraction of the explosion's force. Most of it had been wasted upon the empty air, and upon the ground.

Indeed, if the bomb had struck only six yards nearer, the aeroplane would have been shattered to fragments, and all those on board would have perished miserably and without a chance of fighting for life.

In the meantime, Handforth and Co. were extremely busy.

Church and McClure had paused at the gap between the two roofs. For they had seen the bomb falling. Horrified, and frozen to the spot, they stood there. They saw the blinding flash as the bomb exploded. They saw the Rover heel over, and then come back to a level keel.

And their relief was so enormous that they felt all limp and shaky afterwards. They had expected to see the airship disappear into a thousand bits.

"Hurrah!" yelled Church, in a cracked voice. "She's hardly touched!"

"But—but that wing is busted up!" gasped McClure.



"Only the end of it!" said Church. "And what's that? It can be repaired—and Mr. Lee and all the others are saved! Oh, good old Handy! He did this! Didn't you see the way he dashed at those horrible brutes?"

McClure nodded.

"Yes, and, by thunder, Handy's in the thick of it now!" he said quickly.

Handforth, indeed, was fighting like mad. He needed to. There were three men against him. Church and McClure would never have attempted the leap under ordinary circumstances. But their leader was in urgent need of them, and they completely forgot to be nervous.

McClure went first, and only just managed to land in safety. As near as a fraction, he slipped over backwards. But, as he said afterwards, a miss was as good as a mile—although Church pointed out that a miss would have been as good as death.

Church himself did the leap well, and landed squarely.

And then the pair rushed to the assistance of their leader. They entered into the fight with terrific vim.

"Good!" bellowed Handforth. "Come on, you chaps! We're going to lay these rotters out! Take that, you murderous skunk!"

Biff!

Handforth's fist crashed with devastating force upon the nose of one man. The fellow went over with a fearful crash, and lay still. It wasn't Handforth's blow which had knocked him out—but the thumping of his head upon the hard roof.

Church and McClure were fighting with the other men. Handforth lent a hand. And the fight was not a very long one now.

Church and McClure were no mean warriors when it came to a scrap. And they entered into this with heart and soul. For they were fiercely angry against these dastardly spies—these curs who had attempted to blow the Golden Rover to atoms.

Crash—biff—thud!

Blows were exchanged rapidly. But these men had no knowledge of real boxing. They only hit out at random. As a result, they received practically all the knocks, and gave nothing in return.

One of them received a crashing blow on the jaw, and a punch in the eye at exactly the same moment. It was rather too much for him, and he collapsed. The other fellow was attempting to dash away, but Handforth raced after him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"No, you don't!" he roared. "I've been reserving this for you!"

Crash!

It must have hurt Handforth's fist—a swinging right-hander under the jaw. The man gave just one grunt, and he was knocked out. And then, as Handforth and Co. stood round, surveying their victims, Nelson Lee and Dorrie appeared on the roof.



"Fly—fly for thy lives!" shouted one of these men. "The soldiers of St. Edmund are coming!"

## CHAPTER X.

### IN DESPERATE STRAITS!



"THANK goodness, you're alive, sir!" said Church fervently.

"I think we can thank you, my boys!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Well, dear me! You seem to have been somewhat active!"

"The fiery young beggars!" said Dorrie, gazing round. "They haven't left us one! These fellows appear to be in a bad way. Well, it doesn't matter much—they'll be hanged in less than an hour, no doubt!"

"Is the Rover all right, sir?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"The Rover is damaged—but not fatally."

"Oh, the curs!" said Handforth. "I tried to stop them, sir! I tried to pull that bomb out of their hands! But I was too late—it went over the parapet before I could stop them."

"But you ruined their aim, my boy—"

"Well, rather!" said Handforth. "I don't want to boast, sir, but if I hadn't chipped in, that bomb would have gone slap in the middle of the Rover's deck! I saved her!"

"You did, Handforth, and it is by no means a boast to speak of it," said Nelson Lee. "By your prompt action, you saved our lives—and you saved the Golden Rover from absolute destruction."

"It was Church who spotted the rotters, sir!" said McClure. "We were up on the



clock tower, and Church pointed out these three men on the roof. Then he guessed that they were spies."

"Of course, I don't want to butt in!" said Handforth. "But I had an idea that I spotted the rotters! Still, it doesn't matter—we've jolly well spoilt their rotten game!"

Nelson Lee looked at Dorrie gravely.

"Yes; but they have spoilt ours!" he exclaimed. "We must be thankful that the Rover is whole—or nearly whole—but it will be quite impossible for us to bomb the invaders, as we first intended. The position, indeed, is extremely bad."

"It is!" agreed Dorrie. "So jolly bad that it seems pretty certain that we shall catch a large quantity of trouble in the neck! But my motto is to take things as they come, old man. They can always be a lot worse than they are."

A few minutes later, Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the juniors descended to the ground. By this time something like order had been restored in the big square. The crowds were being kept back by the soldiers, but all the St. Frank's fellows were, of course, allowed to be free.

These soldiers who were in the square were of not much use to fight against the enemy. They were excellent men, no doubt, but a mere handful like this were better serving their king by remaining in the capital.

The juniors gazed at the Golden Rover in consternation and anger. I was frowning darkly with fury myself.

"This means that the whole thing's off!" I exclaimed. "The gov'nor can't go out on that expedition now—it'll be impossible to bomb the enemy from the air. And that means that the invasion can't be stopped!"

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "What frightful rotters, you know! But I can't help admittin' that they're smart—they are, really! Although it was against us, it was a clever dodge to disable the Rover!"

"Yes, I suppose it was!" I agreed. "They meant to smash it up, but the bomb went wrong. If it had hit the Rover amidships the whole square would have collapsed."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Watson. "That bomb wasn't powerful enough to smash the square, or it would have done it!"

"Yes, but what about the explosives in the Rover?" I asked grimly.

"Begad!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Watson.

"Those bombs in there are tremendously powerful, and if they all went off at once it would have been good-bye to the whole crowd of us," I went on. "But the explosion only affected the wing tip, and so we are saved. Handforth is the hero of the hour."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A deucedly bright lad, as it were! I mean to say, the chappie positively did things!"

"But that doesn't alter the position," I exclaimed. "Handforth certainly did things, but how are we going to drive the enemy

back now? And what's going to happen if King Jasper and his men take the city? They'll seize the Rover—and probably smash her up!"

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "That, as it were, is a somewhat foul idea! I mean to say, there'd be absolutely nothing doing when it came to skidding forth towards the old homestead. In other words, cheery youths, we should be somewhat bottled up!"

"Archie's right!" said Pitt. "If the Rover gets smashed up we shall be booked to remain in this country for the rest of our lives. It's a pretty strenuous place, and there's no end of adventure—but I rather think I prefer old England."

"Well, it's no good discussing the matter," I said. "King Jasper won't get hold of the Rover. Things will be pretty bad now, but there's nothing to get alarmed about. It all depends how quickly Mr. Gray can repair the damage."

Nelson Lee and the others came towards us, and Handforth and Co., were immediately surrounded, and they were compelled to tell the whole story. Handforth liked it immensely.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was standing with Major Barrance and Mr. Gray. The latter had made a thorough examination of the damage, and he was looking grave and troubled.

"The Rover is not vitally injured," he said. "Several important stays and struts have been weakened, but the engines are unharmed. All the bearings and shafts are perfectly true, and we have nothing to fear in that direction. The sole damage lies in the wing tip. That will have to be entirely rebuilt before the Rover can fly again."

"Can we do it?" asked Lee.

"I believe so; but we shall need the assistance of some blacksmiths and some engineers," replied Mr. Gray. "These wings, as you know, are made with exquisite care, and even before we can start on the work, all this twisted and battered metal must be removed. Our great difficulty will be in reforming the metal so that it can be used again. The New Anglians have no metal that will serve as a substitute."

"And how long do you think the work will take?"

"Not less than ten days," replied Mr. Gray quietly. "That, of course, is appalling—but it is far better for us to face the truth. Heaven only knows what will have happened within ten days. For the Rover to fly now is out of the question."

And within ten days this country will either be in the hands of King Jasper's men, or the invaders will have been driven out," said Nelson Lee. "I do not think the war will be a long one. To be successful, it must be short and swift. But it is atrocious luck that we are unable to drive the invaders out at the commencement."

"What can we do?" asked Dorrie. "Now



that the Rover is disabled, that bomb-dropping stunt is off the menu. An', as far as I can see, these St. Edmund customers will simply walk in—without anybody barring their way."

Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed.

"No, they will not!" he said grimly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that King Arthur must protect the capital at all costs," replied Nelson Lee. "Refugees are flocking to the city in hundreds—and they expect to find safety here. It would be an absolute disaster if the St. Edmund men ever entered the capital as conquerors."

"But what can we do to stop them?" asked Dorrie.

"We can do much!" said Lee. "It is my intention to interview his Majesty at once, and to acquaint him with the latest development. I shall demand every man he can muster, and we shall also call for citizen volunteers."

"But what good will they be?" asked Major Barrance. "And do you think it will be wise, Mr. Lee, to butt in upon this war, which is really none of our business? I shall be only too pleased to help in every possible way, but it seems to me that our help cannot be of much avail. We are only a mere handful, after all—"

"Yes, but our handful is almost as good as a whole regiment," interrupted Lee. "For we have machine-guns, and we can operate them with deadly effect. Such weapons are unknown to these people."

"You mean that we shall actively enter the fighting?"

"Yes—and we shall not be fighting other people's battles," said Lee grimly. "We shall be fighting our own. If these invaders come, our position will be extremely perilous. So it is in our interests that the invasion of the capital should be averted."

"Have you any special plan?" asked Dorrie.

"I have," replied Lee. "Only three or four miles outside the city there is a valley along which the invaders must pass. There is no road elsewhere, and an army cannot progress across country with much success. Roads are essential to a satisfactory advance. It is my scheme to set up an impassable barrier in this valley."

"You mean, we'll engage the enemy there?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Lee. "And, with our machine-guns and other weapons, I have no doubt we shall bring the advance to a standstill, even if we fail to put the enemy to flight."

Very soon afterwards Nelson Lee hurried off to the palace. The king was worried beyond measure to hear the news. For this disaster was another result of his mistaken policy.

Insufficient vigilance had been kept, and the whole country was overrun with King Jasper's spies. There was no question of it. The invaders were now approaching the city itself—and the Golden Rover was unable to move an inch to stem the advance.

Men were constantly rushing into the city with reports. And the news from all quarters was ominous. Already the invading army had set fire to ten villages, and they had wrought terrible destruction. It was King Jasper's policy, evidently, to institute a reign of terror throughout the territory he seized.

And refugees were streaming into the city in constant crowds. At all costs the capital must be saved.

And Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the other members of our party put their heads together, and made grim, effective plans. King Arthur agreed to all Nelson Lee's proposals without question.

Indeed, he had requested the gov'nor to accept the post of commander-in-chief of the New Anglian forces. This was not much of a job, considering that the forces were so small.

But Nelson Lee accepted at once—for it placed him in a position of supreme control. He could do exactly as he wished without consulting the king or his advisers. His word was law.

And so, with this remarkable change in our fortunes, we waited eagerly for the next developments.

A clash with the enemy was certain.

But whether King Jasper and his invading army would be the victors remained to be seen. For now that Nelson Lee was at the head of things in New Anglia, there would be some lively times. For the gov'nor had many big ideas, many schemes of strategy.

King Jasper would soon find that the invasion of New Anglia was not quite such a simple matter as it had originally seemed!

THE END.

MY DEAR READERS—In Next Week's Story, "THE INVASION OF NEW ANGLIA!" you will read how the Holiday Party valiantly try to thwart the invaders. It will be an exceptionally exciting tale which none of you should miss. I am also publishing the first part of a baffling detective mystery, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER, and ZENITH the ALBINO. The second and concluding part will appear the week following. I want to see how many

budding detectives among my readers can solve this detective problem from the clues given in the first part. Therefore, drop me a line giving me your solution as soon as you have read the story.

Every reader of the St. Frank's stories should make a point of getting "THE IDOL OF ST. FRANK'S!" which will appear on sale in THE BOYS' FRIEND 4d. LIBRARY on Friday NEXT!—Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



# Nipper's Magazine

No. 41.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

Sept. 2, 1922.

New London,  
New Anglia.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—The grave news that a huge gap has been made in the great wall, through which King Jasper's armed hosts are pouring, has created consternation throughout the peaceful and prosperous kingdom of New Anglia. Their main bulwark of defence now useless, it is only a matter of time ere the despot of St. Edmunds will have the whole of New Anglia at his mercy, unless the gov'nor has something up his sleeve to frustrate the enemy's designs—which I think is more than probable.

Next week's article will be all about wild life in the South Polar regions, and there will be included also a "Footer" chat, by "Rover," entitled, "The Ideal Captain."

Your Old Friend,

NIPPER (The Editor).

## Famous Antarctic Explorers.

### CAPTAIN ROALD AMUNDSEN.

#### A DESCENDANT OF THE ANCIENT VIKINGS.

THE discoverer of the geographical South Pole, Captain Roald Amundsen was born at Borje, in Norway, on July 16, 1872. He is the son of a Norwegian shipowner, and belongs to a seafaring family whose ancestors might be traced back to the ancient Vikings. As a lad the future explorer went to Christiania University to study medicine. At that time the early achievements of Nansen in the Arctic seas filled the adventurous youth of Norway with unbounded admiration, among them, Roald Amundsen. Determined to become an explorer like his famous countryman, Nansen, he forsook the career his father had chosen for him, and signed on as a deck-hand on a sailing-ship.

#### A SCIENTIFIC EXPLORER.

The experience Amundsen gained of Arctic navigation while hunting seals and whales in the Polar seas was to prove of great value to him in later years. Apart from the fascination of exploring these little known regions of the Poles, the feeling of triumph in surmounting the dangers of ice floes, of encountering raging blizzards and intense cold, Amundsen was deeply interested in the scientific side of Polar exploration. For a long time he studied magnetism under Dr. von Neumayer, one of the greatest living authorities on this subject.

#### HIS FIRST VOYAGE TO THE ANTARCTIC.

His course of study completed, Amundsen then started out as first officer of the "Belgica" on his first voyage to the Antarctic in 1898.

The object of the expedition was chiefly scientific. Unfortunately, the "Belgica" was imprisoned for a year by ice floes. After suffering badly from shortage of food during the long darkness of the Antarctic night, the expedition returned to Norway.

#### FINDING THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE.

Amundsen now turned his attention again to the icy seas of the North, and in the course of the next few years he became the greatest living authority on navigation in the Far North. In 1903 he began his great project of discovering the famous North-West Passage, where Franklin and other brave English explorers perished. His boat, the "Gjoa," was only a small sealing craft of 46 tons, carrying a crew of six men. It was fitted, however, with a 39 horse-power motor and carried a set of the most up-to-date magnetic instruments. To this and his splendid knowledge of magnetism, Amundsen owed the success of his voyage through the North-west Passage. From a scientific point of view, his work on this expedition was his finest achievement. For nineteen months he made daily and nightly observations with his magnetic instruments at a point just below the Magnetic Pole.

#### HIS DISCOVERY OF THE SOUTH POLE.

After negotiating the difficult North-West Passage, Amundsen decided to find the Geographical North Pole, but he was forestalled by Commander Peary, and so he turned his ship, the "Fram,"—Nansen's old ship—towards the south to race against Captain Scott, who was then on his last, ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. Reaching the Bay of Whales, Amundsen commenced laying depots, and everything was in readiness for the dash to the Pole by April, 1911. The start was made on October 20, and by November 17, Amundsen began to climb the great ice-barrier of the Polar tableland. The summit, 10,750 feet, was reached on December 6, and then it was downhill all the way to the Pole. The party encamped on the South Pole on December 16, 1911. Here observations were taken every hour for twenty-four hours.

#### TO CONQUER THE NORTH POLE BY AIR.

From beginning to end the expedition was a complete success. The weather was favourable and the health of the men was excellent throughout. There was never any shortage of food, and thanks to the experience and foresight of their leader, the expedition went as smoothly as if it were a holiday picnic. Although in middle life, Amundsen's splendid work in the Polar regions is not yet done. We have still to hear of his latest exploits to the North Pole, which he hopes to cross by air.



## YOUR FOOTBALL CLUB HOW TO RAISE FUNDS.

*Another Interesting Chat to Junior Footballers*

**T**HERE arrives a time in the period of every small junior club such as yours, my reader, when money becomes a stern necessity. You wake up to the fact suddenly that you want new goalposts, new nets, a new football, or, perhaps, if you have not already got one—a ground. And to develop, and rise to embrace the ambitious possibilities which I outlined in my article last week, you will want all these things—and more.

### The Burning Question.

In fact, when you begin to look round, you will discover that there is no end to the necessities that you require, and the question naturally arises, "Where is the money coming from?" You have exhausted all your usual sources—your clubmates, good hard-working sports that they are, have made every sacrifice upon their own pockets; your president—well, he has been giving you such a lot lately that you feel ashamed to ask for more. It is up to you, then, to get the money yourself, and get it quickly. But how?

### Factors of Success.

I am assuming, of course, that you are a body of zealous lads, all anxious for the betterment of the club to which you belong, all willing to do your very utmost for it. That your president, an adult, has your interests at heart just as keenly as you have them yourself and is willing to help in any sensible project put forward. Without these fundamental factors to success you will, as I have already explained, never get very far out of the ruck in which you find yourselves at present.

### Profit by Example.

You want money. Those other big clubs, I told you about last week—they, like you, when they were in practically the same position as you are now, found this need crying at their doorstep and they rose above it, to become what they are to-day. Those lads, like you, were keen and eager to get on; and they put the club first, and worked together in its cause. And, as a result they have "made" their clubs, and put them in the first rank of professional football to-day.

### The Road to Fortune.

Let me cite one case. Before the Clapton Orient got into the Second Division of the League, they were one of the most desperately hard-up clubs in the South of England, but they were determined to succeed and succeed they did. Their players, realising that unless something was speedily done the club would collapse, set about collecting old tins and bottles, rags, paper, bones, and other refuse usually to be found on the dust-heaps of the district, and selling it at a marketable price. And such a good revenue did this bring in, that it helped considerably to establish the Orient's financial fortunes and started the club on a run of success that later emboldened it to apply for admission into the Football League itself.

### How to Raise Cash.

There's one idea for you—an idea that is as sound to-day as it was then. And here's another, which my own particular club—for I play football like the rest of you, and belong to a junior organisation of whom I have great hopes in the future—have always found a remunerative source when funds to replenish the club's coffers were required. Whist Drives! Get your president to arrange a drive for you, and rent a hall for one night in which to hold it, and you will find, if the scheme is successful—and really there's no earthly reason why it should not be—that it will yield quite a goodly sum. Once you've got the hall, just purchase a few prizes and get some tickets printed and—well, all you've got to do is then to sit tight and take the money as it rolls in.

### Where the President Comes In.

Speak to your president about it, and see what he can do in the matter. Or, if you don't care about whist drives, organise a concert. There's a lot of fun as well as cash to be got out of concerts, and they're not at all hard to promote if you've got a little ingenuity and some enthusiasm. Your pals have some relatives who will be willing to perform or sing, and you yourselves can make up some little stunt of your own to work into the programme. Here again, the organising work will fall on the shoulders of your adult president, and you must do everything you can to help him.

### Workable Wheezes.

You might try both these ideas, and if you find them successful then go in for others. A jumble sale is another workable wheeze that should yield money, and is quite a simple matter to arrange. Every member of the club contributes one or more serviceable articles for which he has no further use and you canvass round your neighbourhood among the folks you think will help you for other articles to augment them. This also, is where your handy men, who have carpentry or fretwork for a hobby can help you. Get them to make articles to sell at the sale. I once knew a sale of this kind, held by the vicar's permission in the hall of the parish church, which raised a net sum of about twenty pounds, and set a small junior club on the road to fame and fortune, when it might easily have fallen into the ashes of ruin and obscurity.

### The Helping Hand.

These are only a few wheezes for raising the wind. I have others, more complicated, but just as profitable, which I may tell you of at another time. Meantime, if any of you young footballers want any further information or advice on this subject, and you will drop a line to me, c/o the Editor of the paper, I will do my best to oblige. For football, with me, comes above any other sport, and I am especially eager to lend a hand in helping junior football and the lads who play it.

Next week I will chat to you on the subject of the ideal captain, and show you what a great influence he bears on the club's success in the field.

"ROVER."



# THE MISSING VALET



A CLEVER DETECTIVE STORY  
of NELSON LEE and NIPPER

## CHAPTER I.

"HALLO!" Nelson Lee called, as he lifted the receiver from its hook. — "Hallo!" a voice responded from the other end of the wire. "Is that Mr. Nelson Lee?"

"Yes, it is. Who is speaking?"

"I am Major Bagot, sir, of Assam Lodge, Putney Hill. I want you to come at once—without delay!"

"What is the trouble, Major Bagot? A burglary?"

"Burglary be hanged! No, nothing of the sort! Either my house is haunted, or some confounded fools have played a joke on me!"

"What can I do for you? What has happened?"

"All sorts of queer things, Mr. Lee! Enough to make one's hair stand on end! Demon faces in the night, and ghoulish voices, and phantom hands! Lifted bodily into the air! I thought it was all a dream, but it wasn't! That rascal Meeker! The valet missing, my car gone, and a cask of ale stolen! A topsy turvy affair, sir! What the devil to make of it I don't know! I wouldn't spend another night in this house, not if you were to offer me—"

"Calm yourself," Nelson Lee interrupted, "and try to give me a clear explanation."

"Explanation?" cried Major Bagot. "Haven't I just told you what has occurred, you numbskull?"

"It sounds like nonsense, major, to be candid. I am afraid you are under a delusion."

"A delusion! Me under a delusion! I am as sane as you are, Mr. Lee! Insult me, will you? You needn't come! I don't want you! I'll send for Sexton Blake, who has more brains in his little finger than you have in your head! I'll bet he will solve the problem in half the time it would take you to—"

"Then by all means send for him."

"No, I won't! I prefer to have you, Mr. Lee! Are you coming, or not?"

"I will consider the matter, major. Good-bye!"

Nelson Lee rang off, and the next instant his young assistant, Nipper, entered the room, fresh from his cold tub, his cheeks glowing.

"Who were you talking to?" he asked.

"A madman, I should imagine," Nelson Lee replied.

"You don't mean that, guv'nor. Who was the party?"

"A certain Major Bagot, with a very peppery temper."

"And what did he want?"

"I don't know, my lad. That is the question."

As Nelson spoke he stepped to a bookshelf, and, taking from it a copy of "Who's Who," he turned over the pages.

"Ah, here we are!" he murmured. "Here's the peppery gentleman. Major Peter Bagot, on the retired list. Seen service in India, Burma, and Egypt. London residence Assam Lodge, Putney Hill. Club, the Army and Navy. Favourite recreations are golfing, walking, and—"

Nelson Lee tossed the bulky volume back on the shelf.

"The Snob's Bible, I call it," he said. "Crammed with nonentities. Still, it comes in handy sometimes."

He hesitated for a moment.

"Ring the bell, my lad," he bade. "We will have breakfast at once, and then we will run out to Assam Lodge. I feel rather curious about Major Bagot. It is possible that he will have something interesting to tell us."

It was between ten and eleven o'clock that morning when Nelson Lee and Nipper got out of a cab at Assam Lodge, which was a semi-detached dwelling of moderate



size, with a small garden at the front of it, and a garage to one side.

As Lee and the lad were walking up the tiled path, the door of the house was opened, and there appeared a plump little gentleman of about sixty, in a suit of baggy tweeds, with a rubicund complexion, grey hair, and a bristling moustache that was nearly white. He was not in a peppery mood now.

"This is indeed good of you, Mr. Lee," he said, in a contrite tone, as he stepped forward to shake hands with the detective. "I hardly expected that you would forgive my rudeness. I apologise with all my heart. I am rather hot-tempered, and what with that, and the state of excitement I was in when I rang you up, I was unable to tell you coherently what had occurred."

"Am I to understand that it is something out of the common?" Nelson Lee asked.

"Extremely so, Mr. Lee. It is something grotesque, uncanny, incapable of any satisfactory explanation."

"Indeed? You rouse my interest, major."

"I knew I would. By the way, I presume this is your young assistant, of whom I have read."

While talking, the three had entered the dwelling, and gone into the library, a pleasant room with numerous shelves of books. Nelson Lee and the lad sat down, and Major Bagot paced the floor while he related his story, speaking at intervals in quick and jerky sentences.

"I am a man of independent means," he began. "An aunt left me a small fortune just before I retired from active service. I came home from India, bought this house, and called it Assam Lodge. For the past three years I have lived here quite alone with the exception of my valet, William Meeker, who has also performed the duties of a general servant. He is a paragon, immaculately respectable, capable of doing anything, honest and sober, with no bad habits. At least, I believed him to be all that, Mr. Lee. Now I don't."

"To continue, six weeks ago I went down to Monte Carlo, leaving the valet in charge here. I returned early last evening, not having announced my arrival by letter or wire, and I at once observed a change in Meeker. He was pale and nervous, not like himself."

"I questioned him, and he said that he had been ill with influenza. He prepared supper for me, and at nine o'clock, after telling him I would not require anything more that night, I went upstairs to my study."

"For an hour I sat there reading and smoking, until I wanted a drink. I stepped to a cabinet, and discovered that a whisky decanter which I kept there was empty. I rang for Meeker, and he did not appear. I opened the door and called to

him. There was no answer. I went downstairs, and found that he had gone out, which was an unusual thing for him to do at such an hour."

"I returned to the study, and had another pipe. I was tired after a long day's journey, and instead of going to bed I stretched myself on the couch, meaning to rest there for a few minutes. But I dropped off to sleep, and knew nothing more until I was roused by—"

The major paused.

"I was awake, and yet not awake," he resumed. "It was as if I was in a trance, for I could neither move nor speak. The lamp had been extinguished, and by the light of the moon, shining in at the window, I saw dim, evil faces around me, and heard low whispers. Hands moved before my eyes, but they did not touch me. I felt a curious sensation, as if I was rising in the air, floating like a feather. Then something wet was pressed against my face, and all grew dark."

"The sun was shining when I awoke with a dull headache. I recalled what had happened in the night, and was at first convinced that it had been a mad dream, for nothing had been stolen. My watch, and a considerable sum of money in notes, were in my pocket. My desk had not been forced open, and some little Chinese idols of gold which I kept on my writing table were still there."

"Wishing for a cup of tea, I rang for the valet, and rang in vain. I hastened downstairs, and sought for him. He had disappeared. He had not slept in his bed, and he was nowhere on the premises. I even searched for him in the cellar, where I observed, to my surprise, that a cask of ale which had been delivered the day before I went abroad was missing. It was so heavy that I knew it must have been carried off in some vehicle. I thought of my car, and hurried round to the garage, to discover that it was gone."

"And now, Mr. Lee, what do you think of it all? I may add that nothing whatever has been stolen except the cask of ale. Look at these valuable curios lying about in the library, and that old-fashioned desk yonder. The curios are all here, and no attempt has been made to force open the desk. There were certainly several men in the house last night, and Meeker was one of them. They entered my study, and for some reason they presumably drugged me. But what was the motive? Why did they not at least steal my money? I had a couple of hundred pounds in my pocket. Under the circumstances, sir, you can't wonder that I sent for you."

Major Bagot had finished his story, and was gazing at the detective as if he expected him to offer a prompt solution of the mystery.

"The men didn't force an entrance to the dwelling?" Lee inquired.



"No. I have made sure of that," the major answered. "They must have been admitted by the valet."

Nelson Lee shook his head, and lit a cigarette.

"It is a very curious affair," he said. "And now, major, I think we will have a look at your study. Perhaps I shall pick up a clue there."

## CHAPTER II.

THE study was on the first floor, and at the rear of the house. It was a small and comfortable apartment, with furniture that was upholstered in red leather. A writing-table, on which were magazines, and pipes and a tobacco-jar, stood between a roll-top desk on the right, and a French cabinet on the left. And beyond the cabinet, towards the window, was a big couch with cushions. On the walls hung a number of rare military prints, and clusters of native weapons from India and Burma.

"This is the scene of the mystery, sir," Major Bagot remarked, as they entered.

Nelson Lee nodded. His keen gaze had already swept the room, grasping every detail of it; and then, with Nipper's attention bent on him, he strolled leisurely about, from one side to the other, now standing erect, and now stooping to peer through a powerful lens which he had taken from his pocket.

At length he stopped, looking first to his right, and then to his left.

"By Jove!" he murmured, his eyes sparkling.

"What have you found to interest you?" Major Bagot asked.

"This couch," Lee replied.

"The couch? What about it?"

"It was shifted from its position in the night, major. It was picked up, carried to the opposite wall, and put down there, and afterwards carried back to where it is now."

"How on earth can you tell that, Mr. Lee?"

"The deductions are obvious, major. Look to the right. Observe on the velvety surface of the carpet the four deep impressions made by the four castors of the couch. And now look to this side. Here you can plainly see on the carpet similar but deeper impressions close to the legs of the couch, which was not replaced exactly as it had been."

"You are right, sir! Quite right! The couch has always rested where it is. It was there when I came into the study last night, and it was there when I awoke this morning."

"Exactly, major. But meanwhile it had indulged in a little journey. Not across the floor, though. It was carried, not trundled."

Nipper whistled under his breath, and

glanced at Nelson Lee, whose grave and thoughtful features showed how deeply his professional interest had been roused by this amazing discovery. Major Bagot stared blankly at the two of them.

"I must have been on the couch, sir," he declared, "when those men lifted it, carried it to the other side of the room, and brought it back to its former position."

"I don't doubt that you were," Lee assented. "That would account for your curious sensation of rising into the air."

"But why the deuce did the men do such a stupid thing? What could have been their object?"

"That is what I propose to find out. It is going to be a fascinating problem."

"You haven't got a clue as yet, Mr. Lee?"

"A clue already! How could you expect it? By the way, how many of those dim, ghostly faces did you perceive by the moonlight last night?"

"There were at least three. There may have been more."

"Do you think the men were masked, major?"

"No; they were real faces I saw, but they were very indistinct."

It was like an extravaganza, this bewildering and apparently motiveless affair. Why had the men entered the study at dead of night, drugged Major Bagot, shifted the couch on which he was lying, and put it back?

Who were the mysterious intruders? Why, when they could have had money and valuable curios, had they departed without stealing anything except the car and a cask of ale? What could be more farcical and baffling?

Nelson Lee turned the couch on its side, and closely examined the bottom of it; and before lifting it up he scrutinised the carpet which it covered through his lens. He strolled to the window, and stood gazing absently into the garden below.

"He looks very strange," Major Bagot said in a low tone to the lad. "Do you suppose he has a clue?"

"I don't know, sir," Nipper replied. "If he should have he won't tell either of us. It isn't his habit."

Nelson Lee swung sharply round, much as the prosecuting counsel in a case might turn at an interruption from counsel for the opposite side. His expression was alert now.

"I presume, major," he said, "that the door of this room was not locked when you fell asleep on the couch last night?"

"No, it was not," Major Bagot answered.

"Your valet has a latchkey to the dwelling, I dare say."

"Oh, yes, he has always had one."

"What is he like? Give me as accurate a description of him as you can."



"He is a man of a little more than thirty, Mr. Lee, and tall and slim. He has sandy hair, smug, clean-shaven features, and watery blue eyes. He reminds me of Uriah Heep, for he has a habit of wriggling his body, and twisting his fingers together. He is a very meek and mild sort of a person, and I had the fullest confidence in him. It is hard for me to believe that he is mixed up in this nonsensical affair; yet it must be."

"Do you know of any friends of his?" Lee continued. "Or any relatives?"

"He spoke to me once or twice of having an unmarried sister," the major replied. "Her name was Jane, if I remember rightly. She was employed in a shop at West Kensington, and she lived over the premises. I can't tell you the address."

"And now about this cask of ale. Are you certain that it was in the cellar last evening?"

"It certainly was, Mr. Lee. I had Meeker broach it for me—it had not been opened during my absence abroad—and I had two or three glasses with my supper. It was in prime condition."

Nelson Lee nodded vaguely, and considered for a moment.

"There are some clear deductions to be drawn in this case," he said, "but they are lacking in the main point. Your unexpected return home startled your valet. That is why he was pale and nervous. After you had gone to your study, telling him you would not require anything further, he slipped out of the house, and subsequently returned with two or more friends of his. That was presumably several hours after his departure."

"The party went up to the study, found you sleeping soundly, and drugged you. And for some obscure reason they lifted the couch with you on it, carried it from one side of the room to the other, and carried it back again. They administered the drug twice. They had not given you enough the first time, which explains why you awoke in a state of semi-unconsciousness, and felt as if you were in a trance."

"Meeker and his companions departed, taking with them your car and the cask of ale. As for the cask, I should imagine that it was stolen merely as a blind, to cloak the real and mysterious motive for—"

"Who can that be?" interrupted the major, as a bell pealed below.

"I think I heard a car stop in your garden a moment ago, sir," said Nipper.

The three descended the stairs, and Major Bagot opened the front door. A constable who was a stranger to the detective was standing in the porch, and on the drive, close by, was a large, dark-blue motor-car.

"By Jove, that's mine!" the major eagerly exclaimed.

"I thought it was, sir," the constable replied.

"Where was it found? And when?"

"At an early hour this morning, sir. It had been deserted at Barnes, close by the church, and pinned to one of the seats was a sheet of paper on which somebody had written that the car was the property of Major Bagot, of Assam Lodge, Putney Hill. I found it myself, and took it to the police-station. As it happened our inspector—his name is Clark—knew who you were. He had been in your regiment out in India many years ago, and he told me to drive the car over to your place, and get what information I could."

At this point Lee made a furtive sign to the major, who promptly understood the significance of it, and said to the constable:

"The car was stolen from my garage last night. That is all I can tell you. I am greatly obliged to you, my good fellow, and I wish you to present my compliments to Inspector Clark."

Followed by the lad, Nelson Lee stepped over to the car, and examined it closely. He saw that it was spattered with mud, and observed that it had Freynault tyres, which had been recently put on the market by a French firm, and bore a marked difference to all others. He noted the pattern carefully, impressing it on his memory.

"We'll be off now, major," he called to him. "I will investigate the matter, and you will probably hear from me shortly. Come along, my lad," he added. "There is work for both of us to-day."

With that, leaving Major Bagot in conversation with the constable, the two passed out of the gate, and stopped when they had gone several yards to the left.

"Are we working together?" Nipper asked.

"No; singly," Nelson replied. "I want you to go to West Kensington, and make every effort to trace William Meeker's sister Jane. As for myself, I am hopeful of being able to trace the car, as there was a heavy rainfall about ten o'clock last night."

"You think it went towards the heath, guv'nor?"

"I do, my lad. It is not likely to have gone in any other direction."

As Lee spoke he moved on, and Nipper bent his steps down the hill, feeling that he had a difficult task to deal with.

### CHAPTER III

NELSON LEE'S shrewd brain had already evolved a theory which would account for the mysterious affair at Assam Lodge. It was the only plausible one, and he had strong faith in it. He was in a confident mood, knowing that the rainfall on the previous night, and the fact that there had not been much traffic since, would be to his advantage.



He had not gone very far when luck favoured him. A little beyond the pavement he discovered in the mud the distinct imprints of Freynault tyres, and at frequent intervals he had further glimpses of them as he mounted the broad and steep thoroughfare to the verge of Putney Heath.

Here he bore to the right, passing the Grey Man public-house. Still guided by the tyre-marks, he held on for nearly half a mile, and presently stopped at a lonely part of the heath.

The car with the Freynault tyres had apparently stopped here also, and from the edge of the road, on the left, the footprints of several men were dimly visible.

"It is just as I supposed," Nelson Lee reflected. "I wonder what I shall find?"

For a hundred yards or so he followed the footprints across a stretch of damp ground that was dotted with clumps of gorse and bracken, and then, to his surprise, they turned at a clump of poplar-trees, and led him back to the point from which he had started. He stood there for a few moments with a look of earnest conjecture in his eyes.

"It is strange," he said to himself. "Very strange. I can't understand it at all."

Disappointed and puzzled, he took up the trail of the car again; and, getting an occasional glimpse of the tyre-marks, he left Putney Heath, and went slowly down Roehampton Lane to Barnes Common, over the railway-bridge, and into the little town of Barnes, and on to the old church, where the deserted car had been found early that morning.

There was nothing more he could do at present. Having had his luncheon at the Red Lion, he hired a cab, and drove home to Gray's Inn Road. It was after two o'clock when he entered his consulting-room, and there he found Nipper, who was looking very well pleased with himself.

"What luck, guv'nor?" he asked. "Did you trace the car?"

"Yes, from Putney Heath round to Barnes, where it was deserted," replied Nelson Lee, who was not inclined to speak of his discoveries. "And what about you?" he added, as he dropped wearily into a chair.

"I got on all right," declared the lad. "It was a much easier task than I had expected. After I had inquired at half a dozen shops in West Kensington, I hit on the right place. It was in the Blythe Road, close to Olympia. It was a drapery shop, and one of the clerks told me that Miss Jane Meeker had been employed there, but that she had left some months ago to be married to a man of the name of Thompson."

"You got her address, I hope?"

"Yes; she is living at No. 17, Swan Lane, Chiswick."

"You have done well, Nipper. The in-

formation you obtained may prove to be of importance, for it is possible that William Meeker has called on his sister since last night. Perhaps he is staying with her, and if not she may have knowledge of his present whereabouts."

"I had half a mind to go there, guv'nor."

"It is as well that you didn't. Leave that to me."

"You'll go to see the woman, won't you?" the lad pursued.

"Presently," said Lee. "Presently, Nipper."

"Well, if you ask me, guv'nor, I should say you were stumped."

"Stumped? Don't you believe it, my boy! I have a stiff proposition to tackle, but it won't be long until I have solved it."

Nelson Lee would not say more. Having stuffed the bowl of his biggest pipe with black tobacco and set it alight, he sank into one of his tense, analytical moods. His gaze was bent suddenly on the floor. He might have been on a desert island for all he heard of the roaring and raging of the traffic that was searching along the Gray's Inn Road.

Once he took from the table at his side a volume containing sectional maps of London on a large scale, and for a few moments, with conjecture in his eyes, he glanced at the Putney and Barnes district.

He smoked on and on until the tobacco was burnt out, and then he roused from his abstraction, and tapped the ashes from his pipe. He briefly told the lad what his deductions were in regard to the mystery of the shifted couch, and told him also of the trail of footprints that had led him a couple of hundred yards over Putney Heath from where the car had stopped, and had drawn him back to the road again.

"My deductions only touch the fringe of the mystery," he went on. "I doubt if I can make any further progress until I have found Major Bagot's vale. When I have had my tea, Nipper," he added, "I will run out to Chiswick, and see Mrs. Thompson."

#### CHAPTER IV.

**D**USK was falling that evening when Nelson Lee got out of a cab in the Chiswick High Road, and turned a nearby corner into Swan Lane, which was a narrow street of small, brick villas. The detective wore a cap, and his clothes were somewhat shabby.

A short stretch brought him to Number 17. He rapped on the door, and it was opened by a young woman who had a whimpering baby in her arms. She gazed at the visitor in surprise.

"If you want my husband he isn't at home," she said.

"No, I don't want him," Nelson Lee replied. "It is your brother, William



Meeker, I want to see. He is an old pal of mine—Jones is my name—and I got back to London yesterday after working for a year in Birmingham. I knew your brother had been in service with a gentleman at Putney, but I had forgotten the gentleman's name and his address. I remembered William telling me once that he had a sister, Jane, who was employed in Underwood's

money, and meant to go out to Canada, hoping to do well there."

"Is he here now?" Nelson Lee asked.

"No; he's gone," Mrs. Thompson answered. "He had his breakfast this morning, and slept for a couple of hours. Then he went off, and when he returned this afternoon he told me he had got a passage by a vessel that left Liverpool the



He was about to step into one of the compartments, when a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder, and he turned to see a cold, stern face that was unfamiliar to him.

drapery shop in the Blythe Road at West Kensington, so I called there to inquire, and was told that you were married, and lived at Number 17, Swan Lane, Chiswick."

Mrs. Thompson nodded.

"It was with Major Bagot, of Putney Hill, that my brother was in service," she said. "He isn't there now, though. He quarrelled with his master last night, and left him in anger. He must have wandered about all night, for when he came here early this morning he was tired and hungry, and his clothes and boots were spattered with mud. He told me what had happened, and said he had saved a bit of

day after to-morrow, and he would travel by the boat-train from Euston to-morrow evening."

"And he afterwards left?"

"Yes; no more than an hour ago."

"But you will have another visit from him to-morrow, I suppose?"

"No; he kissed me good-bye, saying he had to buy his kit, and wouldn't have a chance of seeing me again."

"Well, perhaps I'll run across him somewhere. I am sorry to have troubled you, madam. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The door swung shut, and Nelson Lee walked back to the High Road, where he



picked up a cab and drove home. Having told Nipper what he had learned from Mrs. Thompson, and mentioned what steps he proposed to take regarding the information, he seated himself at his desk, and with a pencil drew on a sheet of paper a round chain with a gap between the two ends of it.

"What's the idea?" asked the lad. "What is the gap for?"

"It stands for the missing link in the case," Nelson Lee replied, with a smile.

"I see what you mean, guv'nor. But how would you get this missing link? From William Meeker?"

"Perhaps from somebody else. A theory has occurred to me, Nipper, and I shall put it to the test to-morrow."

The matter was not further discussed that night, save for a short conversation about the missing valet. Nelson Lee had breakfast at nine o'clock the next morning, and soon afterwards set off alone in a cab.

It was his shrewd intention to make inquiries of the various physicians of Barnes living beyond the spot where the deserted car had been found, and, to start with, he had given the chauffeur the address of a doctor with whom he was personally acquainted.

The problem still absorbed his mind to the exclusion of all else. While he was satisfied that the theories he had formed were correct, that he knew what was the motive for the strange things that had happened at Assam Lodge, there were other things which were obscure to him, and defied deduction.

Lost in thought, he sped swiftly on for miles by Piccadilly and Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens and Hammersmith, across Hammersmith Bridge, and up the long road leading to the Red Lion, close to the gates of the Ranelagh Club.

At length, remembering that he had a newspaper in his pocket, he took it out after passing Barnes Church, and scanned the pages. Presently he uttered a low exclamation as his attention was drawn to a small paragraph which ran as follows:

"A curious affair is reported from Barnes. In the early hours of yesterday morning, some time before daylight, Dr. Robert Glenister of Number 98, Station Road, was roused from sleep by the sound of his night-bell. He pulled on some clothes and went downstairs, and on opening the door he found lying in the porch a strange man who was in a state of unconsciousness. There was nobody else in sight. The man was taken in by the kindly physician, and put to bed. He could not be roused from his lethargy, though there were no traces of any injury on him. He had a considerable sum of money in his possession, but no papers whatever. He is a man of about thirty, well-dressed, with bronzed, clean-shaven features. His identity has not yet been

discovered, and he is still in the care of Dr. Glenister. His condition had improved last night, and it is expected that he will soon be able to make a statement."

Nelson Lee read the paragraph twice.

"By Jove, I was right!" he murmured.

Almost as he spoke the cab stopped at the destination which had been given to the chauffeur. Nelson Lee opened the door and got out. Opposite to him was a double-fronted dwelling, with a small garden that stretched to a gateway, and to one of the gateposts was fastened a brass plate, on which was engraved the name of Robert Glenister, M.D.

## CHAPTER V.

**S**HORTLY before eight o'clock that evening a young man of thirty, carrying a kitbag, entered the booking-office at Euston Station, and passed out from it to the platform. He was tall and lean, with keen, shaven features and sandy hair.

He approached the boat-train for Liverpool, which was in readiness to start; and he was about to step into one of the compartments when a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder, and he turned to see a cold, stern face that was unfamiliar to him.

"Your name is Meeker, I believe," a voice said blandly.

"Quite right, sir," the young man assented. "William Meeker. But you have the advantage of me."

"I have," Nelson Lee replied. "You will have to postpone your trip to Canada."

"Indeed? How is that?"

"Because it is necessary that you should account for what happened at Assam Lodge the night before last."

The valet took it calmly.

"I see," he murmured. "So you have tracked me down! You have a warrant for my arrest, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't got a warrant," Lee answered. "I am not a police officer."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am a private detective. Nelson Lee is my name."

"It is familiar to me, of course. It is a pleasure to meet you, sir. You propose to take me to a police-station, I dare say?"

"No; I am going to take you to Major Bagot's residence, where you will make a full confession to him."

"Very well, Mr. Lee. I am quite willing to go with you."

And with that, apparently unconcerned, William Meeker accompanied the detective from the station, and got into a cab with him.

Not much more than half an hour later the valet was sitting in the library at Assam Lodge. Major Bagot sat opposite to him, stroking his white moustache; and



Nelson Lee stood by the fireplace, his hands in his pockets.

"Now then, Meeker, get on with it!" he bade.

William Meeker wriggled like an eel in his chair, and nervously twisted his fingers together. And in a low tone, addressing the major, began his story.

"As you know, sir, I have been deeply attached to you," he said. "It was a grief to me when you went abroad, and I was so lonely during your absence that I sought distraction in the company of two friends of mine—nothing will induce me to divulge their names—who live in Putney. They were quite respectable persons, though they were fond of cards, for which I have no inclination. On several occasions I invited them to your house for a convivial evening, and there was some card playing.

"The last time they came on Wednesday evening, they brought with them an old acquaintance of theirs a young man of the name of Larry Donovan, who had been out in the Colonies for a number of years, and had returned to England on a visit. The four of us sat in your study, playing cards for small stakes, until well into the night.

"And finally, to our bewilderment, Mr. Donovan accused us of cheating, a charge which I can assure you was absolutely untrue. He sprang to his feet in excitement, using most violent and profane language; and of a sudden he turned ghastly white, clutched at his breast, and fell heavily to the floor."

The valet paused, shaking his head sadly.

"You can imagine what our horror was, sir, when we discovered that Mr. Donovan's heart had ceased to beat," he continued. "It was a terrible blow to us. We discussed the matter, and decided what to do. It was then nearly daylight, so we hid the body of the unfortunate young man under the couch, with the intention of carrying it off in your car the next night, and leaving it at some lonely spot.

"But on the evening of the following day, to my consternation, you unexpectedly arrived home. You had your supper, and when you had gone upstairs, after telling me you would not require anything more, I went out to search for my friends, and returned with them several hours later.

"We went quietly up to the study, and, to our dismay, we found you asleep on the couch. We drugged you with chloroform, and while you were in a stupor we lifted the couch and carried it to the other side of the room, and put it back where it had been after we had removed the body of Larry Donovan. We then carried it downstairs and out of the house, and placed it in your car; and when we left we took with us the cask of ale from the cellar, hoping the theft would divert suspicion, and lead you to believe that we had not been in the house for any other motive

"To resume, we drove to a lonely spot on Putney Heath, and carried the body over to a clump of poplar-trees. We meant to hide it there, but as we were about to put it down we discovered, to our intense relief, that the young man was not dead. Some faint colour had crept into his cheeks, and we saw one of his eyelids twitch.

"Our first thought was to have medical attendance for him, so we hurried back to the car, and drove to the residence of Dr. Glenister at Barnes, where we placed Larry Donovan in the porch, and rang the doctor's night-bell. And a quarter of a mile farther on we left the car by the roadside at Barnes church, with a sheet of paper on which were your name and address.

"As for the cask of ale, we had dropped that into somebody's garden as we were going up Putney Hill. That is my story, sir. I was in dread of arrest, and would have been on my way to Liverpool now, to sail for Canada, had not Mr. Nelson Lee caught me at Euston Station."

"You are a rascal, Meeker," the major sternly declared. "A rascal. And now, Mr. Lee," he continued, "tell me how you solved the mystery."

Nelson Lee did so in a few words. Having spoken first of the vague theory, he related how, with the assistance of Nipper, he had step by step, link by link, followed the trail that had ultimately led him to the residence of Dr. Glenister at Barnes.

"There I saw Larry Donovan," he resumed. "He had recovered consciousness, and made a statement to me which corroborated your valet's story. The young man has a peculiar form of heart trouble, the doctor told me, and what with that, and his excitement on the night of the card-party, he went off into a state of suspended animation, and remained in that condition until last night."

William Meeker's melancholy features had become a little brighter while he listened. He was twisting his fingers again, and wriggling uneasily in his chair.

"I have done wrong," he said to the major, "but it was because I was led astray by my evil friends, with whom I will have nothing more to do. I am penitent and thoroughly ashamed of myself, sir, and I hope you will overlook my fault."

"You have had a severe lesson," said the major, "and I am disposed to keep you in my service, as I doubt if I could find any one else quite so capable."

"Oh, sir, that is indeed good of you!" half-sobbed the valet, as he pressed a handkerchief to his eyes.

"All's well that ends well, major," Nelson Lee said. "It would have been a pity if you had lost this precious valet of yours. I will bid you good-night now," he added, as he rose.

THE END.



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(Now read on.)

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### The Woes of Snack & Co.

THERE were rifles and pistols to shoot with lying about. Chopps took up some of the weapons and examined them.

"Are they true?" he asked the man in attendance.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "and they need be if half who shoot here are to hit anything. We are very particular about getting the right thing."

The boys shot in turn, and did not do amiss, but none of them particularly distinguished themselves.

"I think I'll have a shot or two," said Chopps, when the boys had done.

The man cocked a rifle and handed it to him.

"No," he said, "a pistol for me. That's a good old-fashioned pair."

"They are duelling pistols," replied the man, "and were once the property of Captain Coningsby."

"Ah! He was a famous, or infamous, duellist, as we may view a man of that sort," said Chopps.

He took up the weapons, handling them curiously, but with the action of a man who understood such things.

"Only think," he said to Tom; "these weapons have accounted for more than one life. Are they loaded?" he asked the booth proprietor.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Then I'll test them," said Chopps.

As he spoke he raised one of the pistols, took quick aim, and fired at one of the toy ducks.

The charge reached its mark, for the duck, as mechanically arranged, fell over on its side.

"Good shot, sir!" said the man.

Chopps fired the second pistol, and another bird fell.

"Yes," he said, "they are good weapons, and curiosities, too. I collect such things. Are you disposed to sell them?"

"I'll take five pounds for the pair," was the reply. "They're a bargain, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Chopps. "I'll buy them. Give me a few cartridges—will you?"

He handed the man a five-pound note, and received the pistols and charges in return.

Chopps at once bit off the end of a cartridge, in the old-fashioned way, and reloaded one of the weapons.

As he was placing the pistol in his pocket, the man said warningly:

"Mind you don't forget about its being loaded, sir."

"I don't forget such things as that!" laughed Mr. Chopps. "Come along, boys!"

When they got outside the booth, he said, in his off-hand way:

"I think I'll leave you to yourselves for a while, boys. I'm quite sure you'd prefer not to be looked after like a lot of babies. You know what time the train returns to Peddleton, and where we are to meet. Good-bye for the present!"

And with a good-humoured nod, he sauntered off.

"I say," moaned Raddles, "don't you think we're out of the track. This doesn't look a bit like the road that ploughman told us we should come to."

"Oh, we're right enough!" snarled Snacks.



"You can't get away from the points of the compass."

"Jigger the points of the compass!" exploded Winks. "What Raddles says, I say, too! We're on the wrong track!"

It was four hours since Snacks, Winks, Raddles, and Jebbs had set out from Portwell station for the weary trudge back to Peddleton. They had asked their way several times, the last man they had questioned being an old labourer, who had given them elaborate directions.

But evidently they had misunderstood him, for now they had reached a wide stretch of common land, and there had been no mention of a common in the old man's directions.

However, Snacks persisted in going forward. Every few minutes he consulted his pocket-compass, maintaining that if they kept walking in a westerly direction they would eventually reach their destination.

So for nearly another hour they trudged on without meeting a soul, and each blaming the other for what had happened.

At length they came upon a wood-cutter. He had a billhook in his hand, and wore thick leather gloves.

He stared open-eyed at the four Bouncerites, whose mortar-board caps seemed to have a fascinating effect on him.

"I say, you fellow," said Snacks haughtily, "we've lost our way. We want to get to Peddleton."

"Dunno the place," replied the wood-cutter.

"Well Bangley, then. We shall have to go through Bangley to reach Peddleton."

"Of, if it's Bangley ye wants, there be a short cut across yonder." The woodcutter jerked his thumb to the left. "It'll save ye a matter o' two mile. It be through Squire Battenham's grounds, and if—"

"Never mind about whose grounds they are!" snapped Snacks impatiently. "Just tell us how to get there—that's all we want to know."

"Bear for yon wood," said the man, "and get 'ee over the white stile. Go along t' path an' bear round till 'ee coom on park. Then strike athirt, bearin' to the house on the left, an' that'll bring 'ee out on the main road to Bangley."

Without a word of thanks, or a "good-day" to their informant, Snacks and his companions hurried away.

The wood-cutter gazed after them with a wry smile.

"What nice, well-spoken young gents to be sure!" he murmured sarcastically. "If ye'd been civil I'd ha' told ye to be sure an' keep to path, an' 'ware the squire's keepers. But seein' as ye're so saucy an' uppish, ye may take yer luck!"

And with a dry chuckle he resumed work with his billhook.

Meanwhile, Snacks and his companions made their way to the white stile, clambered

over it, and traversed a path through a thick wood.

It was evidently a game preserve, for at intervals there were notice-boards warning wayfarers to keep to the path under certain pains and penalties, which would be inflicted in case of trespassing.

The four youths were ravenously hungry, and this fact did not improve their tempers. They never once ceased wrangling and growling at each other.

After journeying through what seemed an interminable wood, they at length came to comparatively open country—the park belonging to Squire Battenham.

The mansion of this local magnate stood on a bit of rising ground, and as Snacks caught sight of it, he said sulkily:

"We've got to go to the left of that place."

"No," said Winks; "the old man told us to leave the house on the left, and that means going to the right of it."

"I know you are wrong," insisted Snacks, "and I'm going to the left. Anyhow, it can't matter much which side we go—we are bound to get to the back of the house whichever side we go round it."

This was a force of reasoning his companions could not combat, and so they yielded.

They went across the park to the left of the house.

As they drew near to it they saw that along the front on that side the turf was remarkably good, and by the side of the house was a thick, quickset hedge, running along for fully a hundred yards.

At the end of it was a sheet of water.

This hedge brought the boys to a stand.

"Ah! now you see, Mister Clever," said Winks, "that it's the other side of the house we ought to have gone."

"It's the old man who was wrong," retorted Snacks, decidedly; "he told me the left side."

"Oh! just listen to him!" exclaimed Winks.

"Don't argue with him," muttered Raddles; "it's a waste of time."

"Well, after all," said Snacks, "I haven't brought you far out of the way. All we've got to do is to walk along this terrace, and then we shall soon be on the other side of the house."

They set off again, Snacks leading, but had not gone very far when a fiery-looking old gentleman came out of the porch of the house.

The moment he saw them he opened his mouth and yelled out:

"Hullo! Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"W-e-e want to go to Bangley," stammered Snacks.

"I'll Bangley you!" yelled the old gentleman. "Don't you know you are trespassing? I'll lock you all up and give you a month



apiece. Hi! there, Cattermole—Groves—Biffins—trespassers! Let loose the dogs!"

The scared boys wheeled about and ran along the terrace. A moment afterwards the baying of a huge mastiff was heard.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Snacks, "the brute will tear us to pieces!"

"Here's a hole in the fence," said Winks.

"Stop 'em!" roared the squire. "Hi! good dog—bring 'em back!"

"Crawl through!" shrieked Snacks.

It was an awful hedge—so full of thorns that it was impossible to get to the other side without being pricked and scratched in a very painful manner.

One after the other, however, they scrambled through the small opening discovered by Winks, and on the other side they skipped about and rubbed themselves to ease their sufferings.

Snacks was last, and the barking dog behind him, who luckily would not face the thorns, scared away what little wits he had left.

On the other side of the hedge was a fine garden, and all round it, save in two places, where there were tall iron gates, ran the hedge.

It was, without a doubt, the squire's private garden.

"We've got 'em, squire," cried a man on the other side; "if 'ee stay here, sir, we'll run round and ketch 'em."

The boys scampered across the garden and tried the gates on the opposite side.

They were locked, and beyond them was the road they sought.

Had they gone in the right direction they might have been on the way to Bangley.

"I think," said Winks, "that Snacks is the biggest aes that ever lived."

Snacks did not deny it.

He was overwhelmed with terror and a sense of having made a fool of himself.

He looked up at the gates to see if they could be climbed over, but the top was guarded with a hideous arrangement of spikes.

They were fairly in a trap.

Half a dozen servants, headed by a man who looked like a keeper, came pouring out of the house into the garden.

They were armed with sticks and brooms, and other offensive weapons, but they did not need them.

The Bouncer boys had not the least thought of resistance, and dropped in a body to the ground to show that they gave in.

In triumph they were collared and dragged along to the house, gasping out appeals for mercy.

"Aye! it's a lot of mercy ye'll get, sure," said the keeper; "a month on it and wittles found!"

This joke made the others roar with laughter until cut short by the appearance of the squire.

"Take them into the library," he said; "I will examine them there."

So into the library the trembling culprits were taken.

It was a big, cold-looking room, with uninviting books all round, and a bust or two stuck about on brackets.

A long table, with horsehair-seated chairs around it, stood in the centre of the room.

The keeper was a sort of court usher. Having taken off the caps of the culprits, he ranged them in a row at the head of the table, and awaited the coming of the squire.

In a few minutes he entered and sat down at the head of the table.

"I have despatched a servant for the constable," he said. "Now, boys, who are you, where do you come from, and what do you mean by trespassing in my grounds?"

Snacks had utterly collapsed, and was unable to offer anything by way of reply. Winks, who felt a little bolder, but not much, did his best to tell their story.

He laid it pretty thick upon Snacks, whom he called "a fool" at least half a dozen times, and finally wound up with an expression of regret.

After all, the squire could do very little with them, and he felt it would be unwise to go too far; but the little he could do he did.

"I am a magistrate," he said, "so I fine you five shillings each for trespassing, or imprisonment for three days."

Five shillings each, and they had not five pence among them!

"If you let us go, sir," said Winks, "Mr. Bouncer will send the money."

"Bouncer had better come here and pay it," was the reply. "You can wire to him."

"We haven't any money."

"Then you must be locked up! Take them away, Cattermole!"

They threw themselves down on their knees and began to howl for mercy.

Such a hullabaloo had never been heard in that house before.

"Stop 'em!" cried the squire.

But stopping them was not easy.

The more they were shaken and smacked the louder they howled. At last the squire seemed to get a little scared.

"Take them out to the road," he cried. "Give them a bit of stick and send 'em packing!"

This order was duly obeyed, the "bit of stick" taking the form of half a dozen cuts each from a pliant ground-ash wielded vigorously by the keepers.

Tingling with pain and weeping bitterly, but nevertheless relieved at having escaped the lock-up, Snacks and his companions in distress were then allowed to continue their weary trudge homewards.

(Continued on page lii of cover.)



(Continued from page 40.)

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### Where is Perks ?

**B**Y three o'clock in the afternoon, Tom Tartar and his chums had managed to get through the whole of their pocket-money in patronising the various attractions on the Bangley fair-ground.

"What shall we do now, old chap," asked Sam Smith, ruefully diving his hands into his empty pockets.

"Let's get to the quieter end of the town," replied Tom. "I rather want to have a look at that public-house where we saw those seamen this morning."

"What for?"

"Oh, just to spy out the land—that's all. We shan't go into the place, of course."

They slipped away from the rest, and leaving the fair-ground, sauntered through the streets.

"I say, Tom," remarked Sam suddenly. "Wonder what Chopps wants those pistols for?"

"Perhaps he means to use 'em!"

"What! Kill somebody?"

"In self-defence, if need be. Chopps is a very queer fish, indeed. Mind you, I don't for a moment believe he's such a bad lot as Foster Moore, but all the same I don't think he'd stop at much with people who stood between him and his projects. As you know, Sam, I can guess what those projects are, but guessing isn't proof, and—hallo, here's the street, and yonder's the pub!"

They strolled slowly towards the establishment, and as they passed the open door noticed that the bar was almost filled with noisy men.

"Don't stop!" whispered Tom eagerly.

"Did you recognise anybody?"

"Rather!"

"Who?"

"Chopps!" said Sam. "He was standing at the bar talking to some of those chaps we saw this morning!"

"That's all right!" said Tom. "I was pretty sure it was Chopps, but not quite. However, if you recognised him too, there can be no mistake about it. This will be an interesting bit of news for Mr. Ralston."

In excited discussion of the incident, Tom and Sam made their way into the High Street. And there they almost collided with Mr. Wrasper, accompanied by a gentleman who had the appearance of a lawyer.

"Why, Tartar, what's this?" exclaimed the schoolmaster. "Are you tired of the fair, or does it mean that you and Smith have exhausted all your wealth?"

"I'm afraid it does, sir," replied Tom, with a smile.

"Ah, boys are so improvident!" laughed Mr. Wrasper. "Well, I suppose I had better advance each of you another half-crown. You will be wanting some tea presently."

It was a welcome boon, and the two boys lost no time in seeking out a confectioner's shop and regaling themselves in style.

Greatly refreshed, they emerged into the street again, and ere they had gone many yards

whom should they encounter but Wooden Jerry!

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom. "I didn't know you came from Peddleton with us this morning."

"No more I did, Master Tartar," replied Jerry. "But Mrs. Wrasper let me come by the next train. Perks came too, Mr. Chopps havin' asked leave for him so to do."

"Oh, he did, did he? And where is Perks?"

"Blowed if I knows, Master Tartar, for no sooner did we get out o' the train on to Bangley platform, than he give me the slip, an' I've seen nothin' of him since."

Jerry's face was somewhat flushed, and there was a strong colour of beer about him. After a few more words, Tom and Sam parted with him, and glancing back over their shoulders saw the serving-man enter the ale-house for which he had evidently been making when they encountered him.

The hours passed, and just before seven o'clock Mr. Wrasper and his pupils assembled at Bangley station for the return journey.

Mr. Chopps did not put in an appearance until the very last moment. Indeed, the train was actually in motion when the usher darted on to the platform and sprang into the guard's van.

But neither Perks nor Wooden Jerry caught the train. Jerry could be easily accounted for. When a man of his temperament breaks a prolonged period of comparative abstinence from alcohol, he is apt to forget such things as trains.

But Perks was a different matter. Why had he been left behind?

That was the question which Tom was asking himself all the way back to Peddleton.

(To be continued.)

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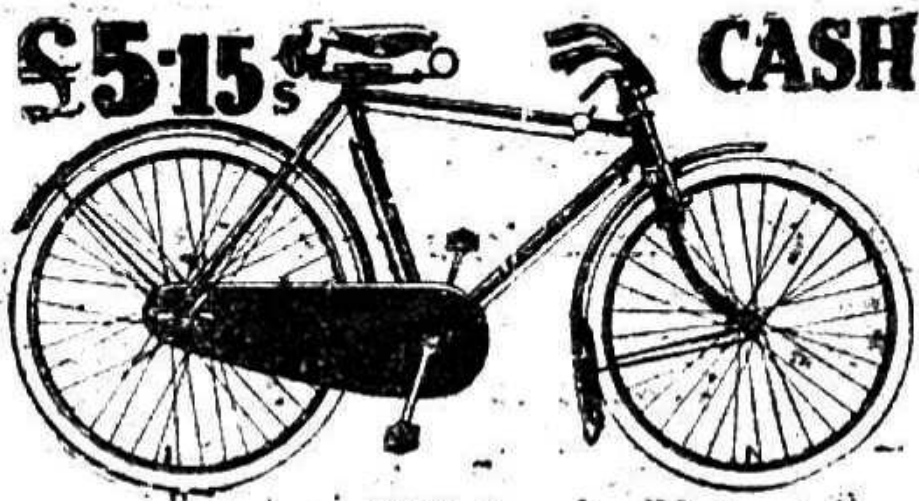
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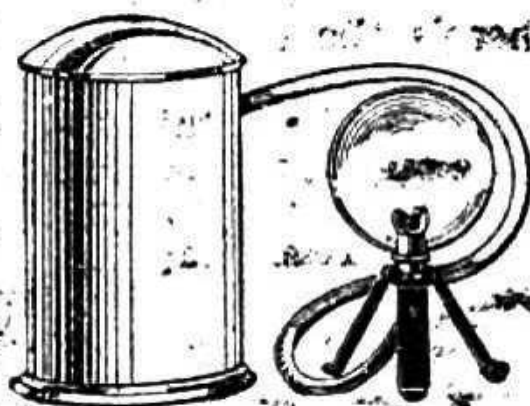
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