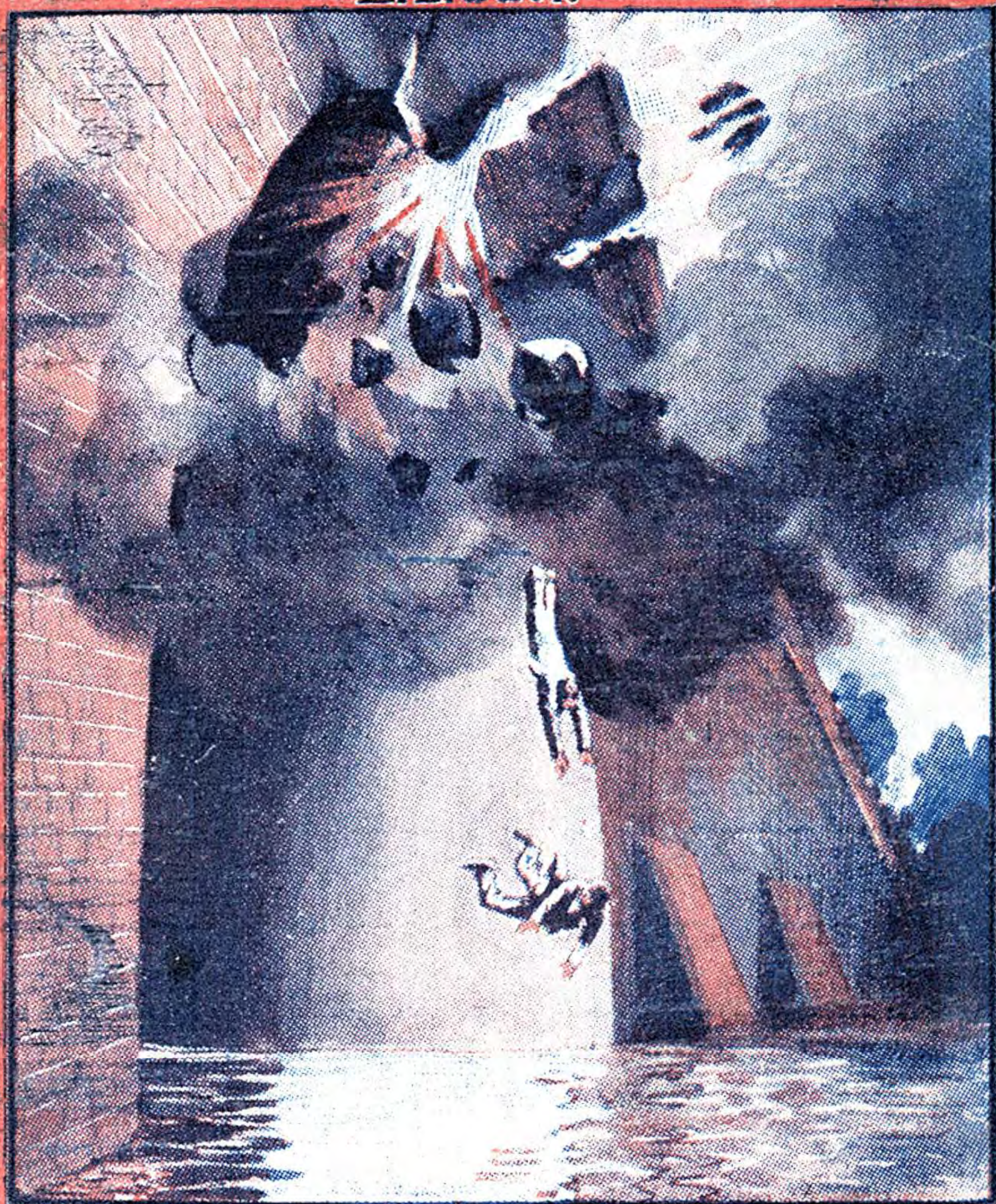


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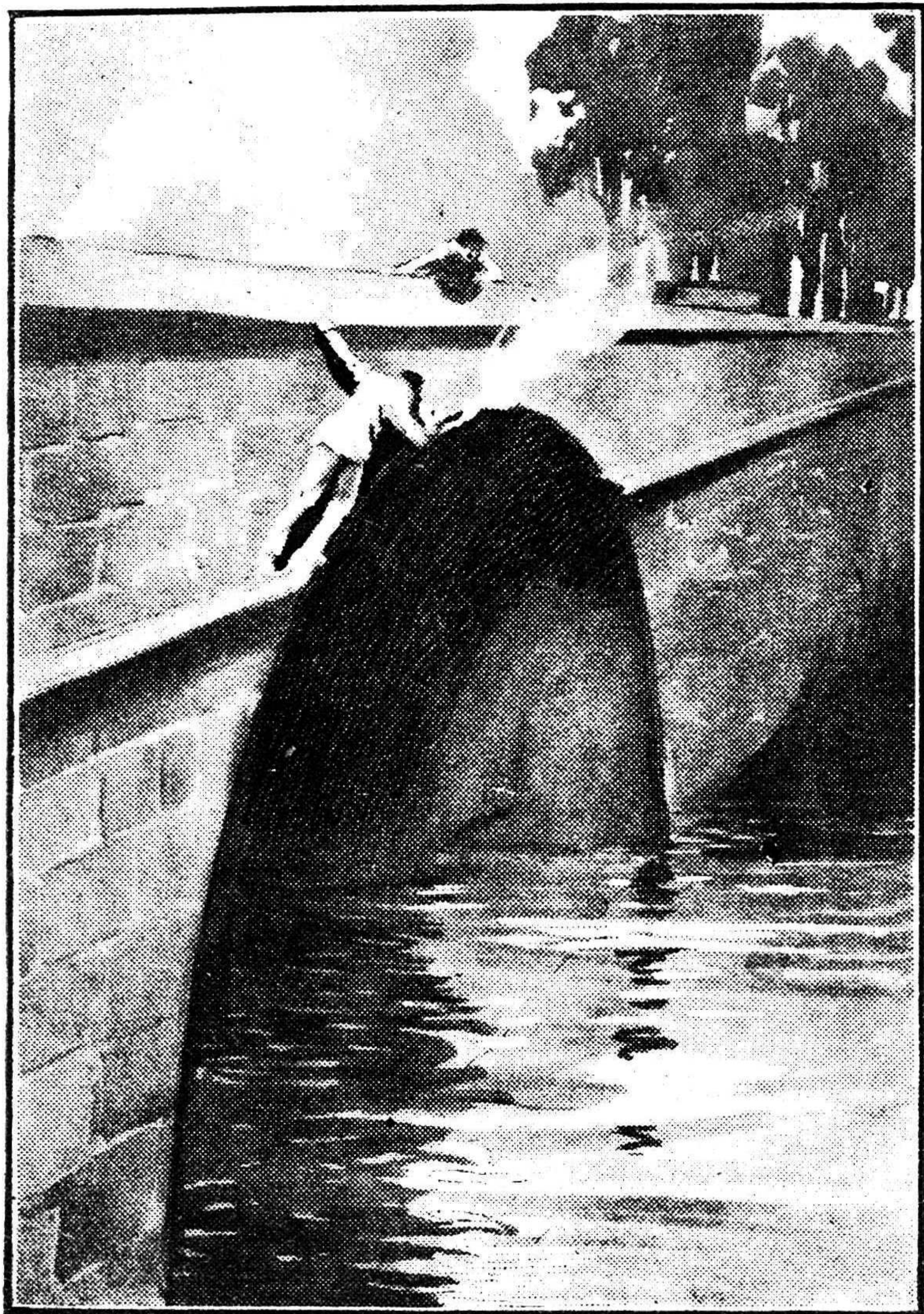
THE INVASION OF NEW ANGLIA

A COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE IN THE FAR SOUTH.

No. 378

EVERY WEDNESDAY

SEPT. 9, 1922



I crept under the arch of the bridge with the bomb in my hand. It was a precarious position, and I half expected to tumble into the river at any moment.

THE INVASION OF NEW ANGLIA

A splendid, long complete story of schoolboy adventure in a newly discovered world in Antarctica, introducing **NELSON LEE, NIPPER, LORD DORRIMORE**, the Boys of St. Frank's, and many other well-known characters. By the author of "The Kingdom of Wonder," "The Lost People," "The Rival Kings," and other fine stories.

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

CHAPTER I.

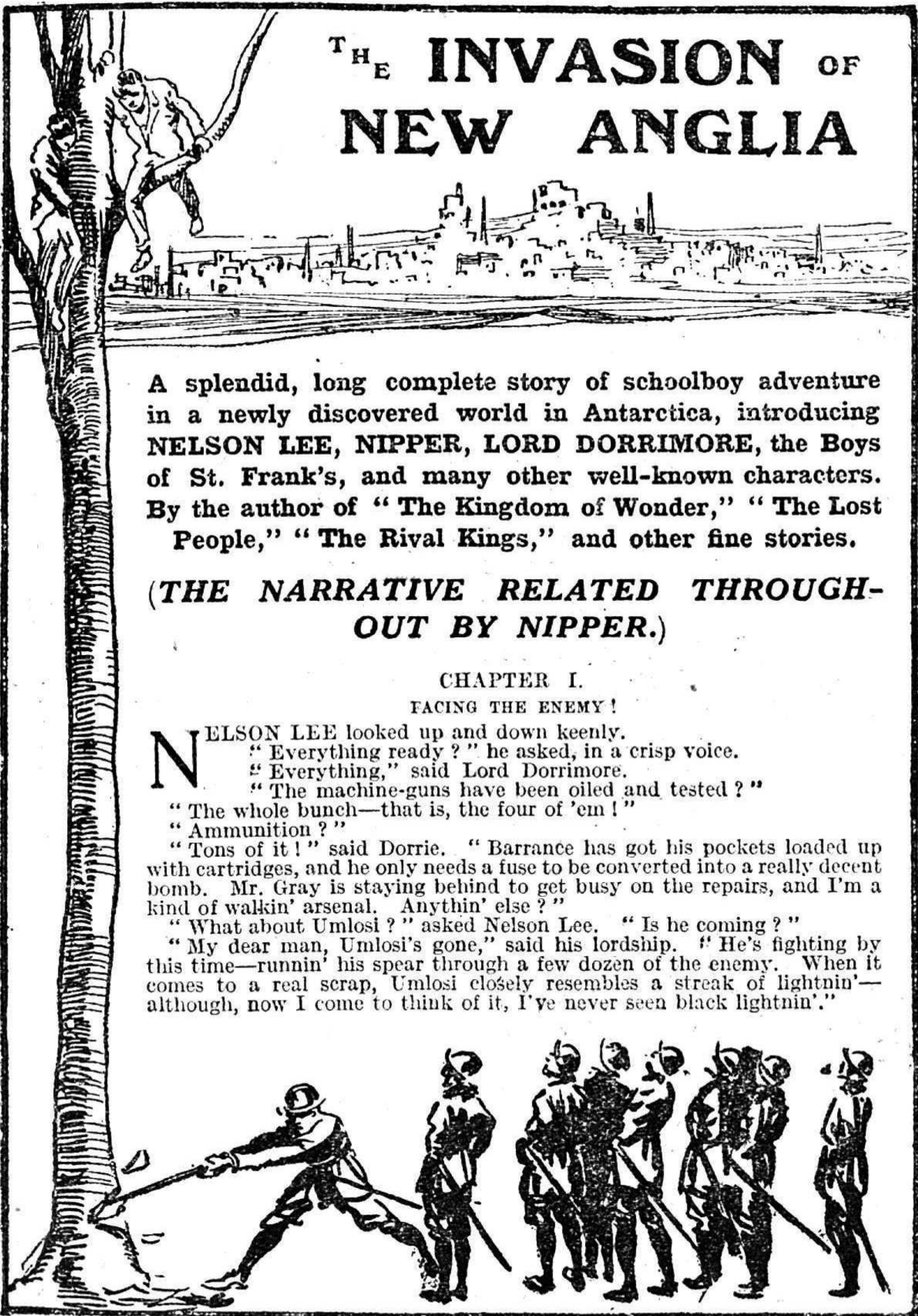
FACING THE ENEMY!

NELSON LEE looked up and down keenly.
"Everything ready?" he asked, in a crisp voice.
"Everything," said Lord Dorrimore.
"The machine-guns have been oiled and tested?"
"The whole bunch—that is, the four of 'em!"
"Ammunition?"

"Tons of it!" said Dorrie. "Barrance has got his pockets loaded up with cartridges, and he only needs a fuse to be converted into a really decent bomb. Mr. Gray is staying behind to get busy on the repairs, and I'm a kind of walkin' arsenal. Anythin' else?"

"What about Umlosi?" asked Nelson Lee. "Is he coming?"

"My dear man, Umlosi's gone," said his lordship. "He's fighting by this time—runnin' his spear through a few dozen of the enemy. When it comes to a real scrap, Umlosi closely resembles a streak of lightnin'—although, now I come to think of it, I've never seen black lightnin'."



"This is no time for jokin', Dorrie," said Lee grimly.

"Hang it all, who's jokin'?" demanded Dorrie. "We're goin' out to face the enemy. That is to say, a bally handful of us are going to knock a few knobs off King Jasper's thousands! Of course, they may knock a few knobs off us, but that's all in the day's work."

Lord Dorrimore was supremely cheerful. If there was one thing he hated, it was inactivity. And if there was one thing he loved, it was a good, juicy scrap. He was likely to get one.

For the rascally army of King Jasper of St. Edmund was invading the peaceful country of New Anglia.

And, indeed, the invaders were already getting within reach of the capital itself. Unless very prompt measures were taken, New London would fall a victim to the enemy's onslaught.

It seemed rather a forlorn hope to make any attempt to stem the tide. But Nelson Lee was the commander-in-chief of the New Anglian forces, and he knew what he was doing. He considered that there was a fair chance of success—or partial success, at all events.

This, of course, sounds very much as though I had been drinking something that is decidedly not good for a clear head. But it's all right. I know exactly what I'm doing. So you needn't worry.

It sounds tall, but it isn't.

To put it in a nutshell—although it will probably be a fearfully large nutshell—we were in the lost country of New Anglia. But that's hardly right—because New Anglia was never found, so it couldn't be lost.

We'd found it all right, and, certainly, we hadn't lost it. We were almost beginning to wish that we had never discovered the place. For as soon as we arrived we ran full tilt into about four large packets of trouble.

We had discovered this extraordinary country in Mr. Raymond Gray's wonderful aeroplane, the Golden Rover. Including myself, there were twenty St. Frank's juniors in the party, and Dorrie and Umlosi, and a few more. According to all the laws of chance, there ought to have been about ten of us left.

But, somehow or other, we seemed to have charmed lives, and so we had come through without any particular harm.

And in this strange land, which was situated amid the everlasting ice of the Antarctic, we had found plenty to interest us and occupy our attention. The New Anglians and the St. Edmund people were descendants of a large party of pilgrims who had set out across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century.

They never reached their destination, but had been driven by storms into the icy zone below the Antarctic circle, and they

had been trapped in a curious volcanic hot stream, which had eventually led them into this enclosed valley.

The atmosphere here was quite temperate and comfortable. Vegetation grew in profusion, and the place looked surprisingly like England. This was partly because the people themselves were of English stock, with English names and customs.

The great valley where the two kingdoms were situated was a vast oblong basin, hemmed in by insurmountable mountain peaks. We, of course, had come by airship—although, curiously enough, we had entered this country under the water.

For the Golden Rover was capable of submerging in the sea, and we had found the country by means of an underground river.

And things were pretty lively.

For King Jasper of St. Edmund—a pretty complete sort of rogue—was leading his trained soldiers against the peaceful people of New Anglia. The latter had never prepared itself for war, and had practically no army whatever. Thus the country was at the mercy of the brutal invader.

Being on the spot, we couldn't do much else but help. In a way, we were obliged to do this, even for our own sakes.

In New London—the capital of the country—the spies of King Jasper had been busy. And it was only by sheer good luck that the Golden Rover had not been blown to smithereens.

For these spies had hurled a bomb at the airship, and it had failed to take full effect. One wing of the great machine was damaged, so that it was impossible for her to fly until repairs were effected.

And so, instead of flying over the invading hordes, and defeating them with ease, we could do nothing but meet the enemy face to face.

I say "we," but it seemed highly probable that the juniors would not be allowed to take any part in the fray.

I was absolutely insistent, and then Nelson Lee had finally agreed that I should go with them. But the other fellows had to remain in the security of the capital.

The latest news that had come through was that the St. Edmund soldiers had taken three villages only six miles from the capital. And the full army was making a forced march to reach the capital at once. It was King Jasper's settled plan to make one big raid, and proclaim himself ruler of New Anglia at the commencement of the fight.

And with King Arthur dethroned, and the capital lost, the New Anglians would have no fight left. They would knuckle under to the rule of the conqueror. This, I repeat, was the enemy monarch's little scheme.

Of course, it wasn't going to work—we should see about that.

In desperation, King Arthur had begged Nelson Lee to take command, and to do

everything in his power to bring King Jasper's forces to a halt. And the gov'nor had promised to see the thing through.

That was why he was now starting off for the front. This was a rather vague term, for nobody knew exactly where the front was. But we did know that King Jasper was leading his men towards the city along two main roads. And if we went along one of these roads far enough, we should be bound to meet some trouble.

But the gov'nor was not doing anything by chance. He had already sent out every available soldier there was. King Arthur certainly had a few hundred, but of what use were such small numbers in comparison to the invading thousands? They were, however, better than nothing.

They had been sent scouting in every direction, with orders to send reports to Nelson Lee without delay. And as the gov'nor started off he was expecting that some of these reports would come in.

With something definite to go upon, he would know better how to act.

And he did not look in vain. For we had hardly reached the outskirts of the city when two of the scouts hurried in, and they brought news of the most vital importance.

The first man was breathless, and he had obviously been running hard. He came upon the crowd of us as we walked along—our party including the gov'nor, Dorrie, Major Barrance, and Phipps—to say nothing of a few New Anglian stalwarts who had joined our ranks.

"I bring thee news, master!" exclaimed the scout eagerly.

"Good!" said Lee. "Which way have you come?"

"I came along the main road, sire, and 'tis quite free as yet," replied the man. "But the enemy approacheth in vast numbers along this road. The King of St. Edmund himself leadeth the invaders!"

"Can you gauge, roughly, the number?"

"'Tis difficult, sire," said the man. "But 'twould not surprise me to learn that the enemy numbereth two thousand, or e'en more."

"Two thousand!" said Lee, compressing his lips. "H'm! It seems to me that we have a somewhat formidable task, Dorrie. And how far is this force from here?" he added, turning to the scout again.

"'Tis no further than two miles, sire!" exclaimed the scout. "Methought I should not be able to return. A number of these scurvy knaves attempted to surround me, but I won free."

"Well, thou canst join our motley throng, if thou wishest!" said Dorrie cheerfully.

"'Tis well, O, chief! We advance!"

"One moment!" interrupted Lee. "I think I can see another scout coming across the field."

"By gad, so it is!" said Dorrie. "What news bringeth he?"

We soon learned.

His information, it turned out, was even more startling than the other man's. The second main road—the east road—was only a short distance away, for they forked out from the capital.

"The enemy's second army, commanded by General Horton, cometh in vast numbers!" said the scout. "They are within but two miles of the great west bridge. But they have halted for food, sire. And mayhap—"

"One moment!" interrupted Lee. "They've halted for food—and they are only two miles from the west bridge! Dorrie, there's work here!"

"Good!" said Dorrie. "I'm your man!"

"The west bridge must be blown up!"

"That sounds frightfully exciting!" said his lordship. "I think Barrance had better attempt that job—he's only got to set fire to himself, an' the bridge will conclude its earthly career."

Major Barrance was carrying a large amount of high explosive. But several bombs were transferred into Dorrie's care. Nelson Lee was not wasting any time in giving his instructions.

"You and Nipper will proceed at once to the west bridge, and if you can blow it up before the enemy appears, it will be splendid!" said the gov'nor. "With that bridge down, they will have enormous difficulty in reaching the capital, for the river is swift and deep at that point, and cannot be forded. It is a great chance, Dorrie."

"Right!" said his lordship. "We shall be buzzin'!"

"But—but what's the gov'nor going to do?" I asked.

"I shall proceed along the east road, and Barrance and I will operate the machine-guns, and do our best to keep the invaders at bay," replied Lee. "We may fail, but—"

"Fail!" I echoed. "You're bound to fail, sir!"

"The cheerful prophet!" said Dorrie calmly.

"Oh, don't rot, Dorrie!" I exclaimed. "It's madness. We can blow up that bridge all right, but how on earth does the gov'nor expect to stand in the middle of a big road, with about six men, and keep back a couple of thousand?"

"It certainly seems a tall order!" said his lordship. "I don't want to be pessimistic, but I shouldn't like to have any bettin' on the matter."

"You need not worry, Nipper!" said Lee. "I shall not be so foolish as to act in the way you suggest. Barrance and I will take up positions on either side of the road, concealed, if possible, by trees or bushes. In that way we shall be able to command the road, without being in any particular

danger ourselves. And I rather fancy that these enemy soldiers will receive a big shock when they have to face machine-gun fire."

"They're wearing armour—"

"They're wearin' what?" repeated Dorrie. "My dear chap, a couple of old sardine tins would be as effective! That armour was never made to withstand bullets from a machine-gun."

There was no time to argue, and although I was greatly worried about the gov'nor, I hurried off at once with Lord Dorrimore. We were going on a grim expedition ourselves.

In fact, the real fighting was at hand.

CHAPTER II.

RATHER BEYOND THE LIMIT.



"ROTTER!" said Handforth dismally.

"Oh, for goodness sake, don't keep growling!" said Church.

"We all know it's rotten, but jawing don't make it any better! You're just like a giddy old woman! Always chewing the rag!"

Handforth glared.

"I've stood a few things, but I'm blowed if I'm going to stand that!" he said.

"You—you insulting dummy! A giddy old woman! Why, I'll—I'll—"

"I—I didn't mean it exactly—"

"Do you apologise?" roared Handforth.

"Look here—"

"Do you apologise, you rotter?"

"No, I jolly well don't!" snorted Church defiantly. "In fact, I'll repeat it! You're just like a giddy old woman—nothing but jaw, jaw, jaw! And you could nag the hind leg off a donkey!"

Having delivered himself thus Church gave one swift dive out of the saloon, and slammed the door to behind him. This was most unfortunate for Handforth, who had not been expecting the move.

He came charging behind, and the way he crashed into the door was enough to smash it down. And it did not improve his nose in the least. The force was so great that Handy rebounded, and sprawled over.

One of his hands flopped on to something soft, and the next moment a startled yell sounded.

"Gadzooks! What, as it were, is all this?"

Archie Glenthorne sat up dazedly. He had been dozing and it was his face Handforth's fist had thudded into. Handy was on his feet now, and he glared at Archie as though the latter had done him a fearful injury.

"You fathead!" snapped Handforth. "Clear out."

"Well, I mean to say, hardly the stuff, what?" protested Archie. "That is, dash it! In fact, dash it with large knobs on!

I don't want to be most frightfully personal, but—"

"Shut up!" roared Handforth. "I'm hurt!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That is, I hope so—I should say, not at all! But it's like this, dear old scream! A chappie is having forty excellent lumps of dreamless, and something which feels like a bally leg of mutton hits him in the offside optical region. That, as it were, is frightfully bad form. A large apology is not neces—"

"If you think I'm going to apologise, you've made a bloomer!" replied Handforth tartly. "How the dickens could I help it? It's your own fault—you shouldn't always be flopping all over the place asleep! It's disgusting—absolutely fearful!"

"Absolutely, as you say!" agreed Archie. "But, dear old laddie, what else can a chappie do? I mean to say, if he walks about the jolly old saloon, he collides with you! It's a dashed queer thing, old son, but the whole saloon doesn't seem to be quite large enough for you. Possibly it's the feet, or it may be the hands—"

"I'm getting more fed up with every minute!" said Handforth wildly. "I've been punching noses all the evening, and I'm sick of it. What's the good of punching yours?"

"Not at all!" said Archie. "I mean to say, the operation is totally undesired, old bird! A chappie's nose is not intended—"

"If you keep on jawing, I shall go dotty!" bellowed Handforth.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That is, I don't think the journey would be fearfully long—although, perhaps, I'd better not enlarge upon the point. How is it, Handforth, that you fill the old atmosphere so much?"

"I'll tell you," replied Handforth. "I'm fed up! I'm more than fed up! Mr. Lee and all the others have gone off to fight the enemy. And we're left here—stuck in the saloon of the Golden Rover. Is that right? Do you call it playing the game?"

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, I call it somewhat topping!" said Archie. "But for you, old carrot, peace would be with us. Peace would be floating about in welcome chunks. But, I mean to say, how can a chappie have any peace while you roam loose? Couldn't you trickle away to the fighting-line, or something beastly interesting like that?"

"That's what I'd like to do!" said Handforth. "By George! I'll go!"

"Cheers, and what not!" murmured Archie.

"Eh?"

"That is to say, must you?" exclaimed Archie. "It'll seem most dashed gloomy and silent without you. At the same time, now I come to think of it, it's a rather priceless scheme. Why, what about it?"

"What about what?"

"Well, there you are—the pair of us, what?"

"The pair of us?"

"I mean to say, dear old top, you and I!" exclaimed Archie. "That is, to be more precise, the pair of us! How goes it?"

"You—you dotty ass!" said Handforth. "Choke it up!"

"A chappie scarcely cares to choke!" said Archie. "In fact, dear boy, it's somewhat foul to contemplate. But, if you gather the old trend, what about dashing forth into the fray? Deucedly ripping, what? I mean to say, the fighting blood of the Glenthornes rises up, don't you know! Battles, and this and that! Shall we indulge?"

Handforth received a glimmering.

"Are you trying to suggest that you should come with me?" he snapped.

"Absolutely!"

"You—you —"

"But, really, trying to suggest it is

absolutely hate a chatter-box! You ought to be silent—like me!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie faintly. "Words, as it were, fail me!"

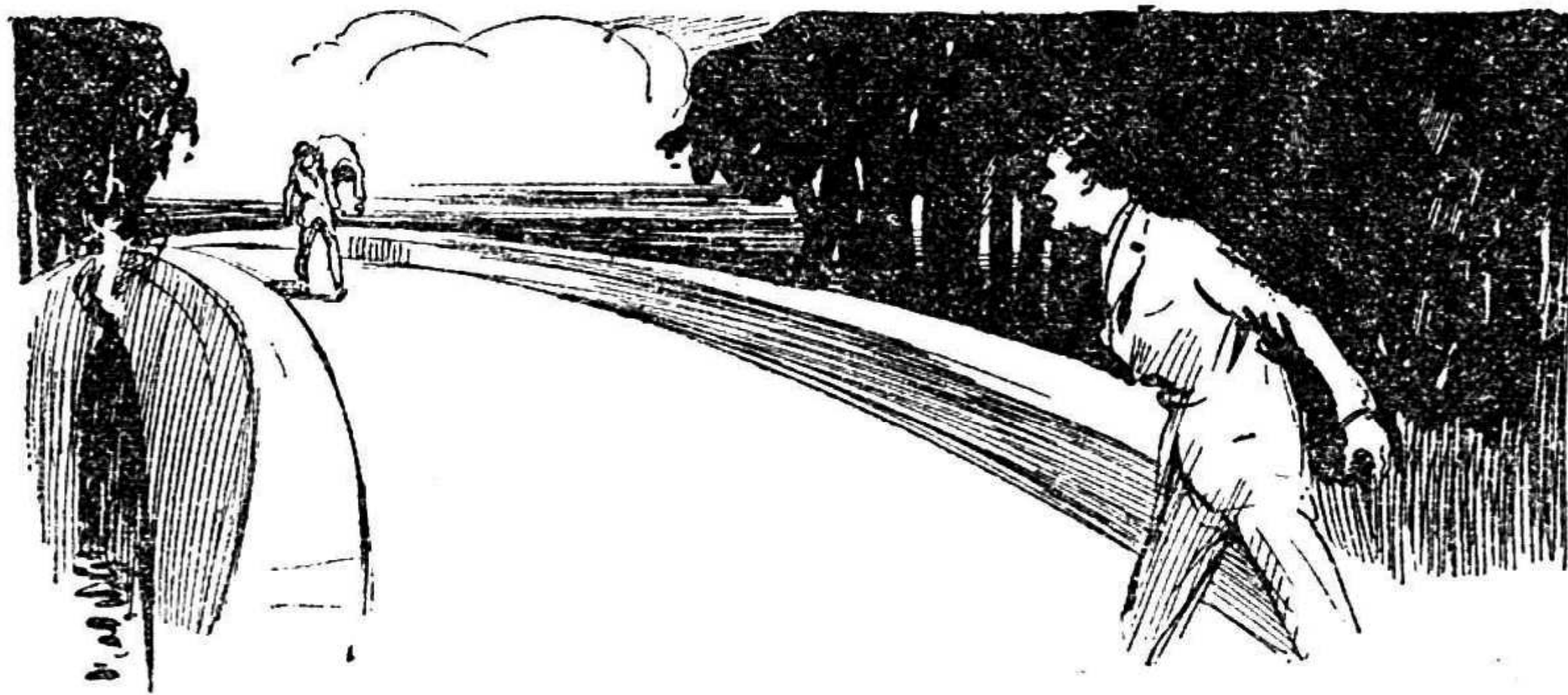
"You ought to take me as your pattern!" said Handforth, in a condescending way. "Between you and me and the dustbin, I'm just about fed up with Church and McClure. Not merely tired, but I detest the sight of them! I was going to take the asses to the battle area—but I'll take you instead!"

"How frightfully jolly!" said Archie.

"And do we commence scrapping, and all that sort of thing? I mean, what about swords? A chappie can't very well dash into battle without a few yards of steel!"

"We've got fists!" said Handforth.

"These St. Edmund soldiers are as soft as putty! Anyway, you come with me, and



Dorrie was just starting forward to lend a hand, when Archie performed an action that saved the lives of the three of us.

somewhat steep!" said Archie. "My dear chappie, I've been putting it to you for the last three-quarters of an hour! To be absolutely straightforward, and to use just two words—what about it? How do we go for the old battle stunt?"

"We don't go!"

"Well, that's awk!" said Archie. "I was just beginning to get the right feeling. A wave of frightful recklessness was sweeping throughout the entire tissues. In fact, old lad, it's got to be done! You've fired me with about two hundred gallons of first quality enthusiasm!"

Handforth looked at Archie queerly.

"Well, I don't know," he said. "You're not such a fathead really!"

"That's dashed kind and generous!" said Archie. "Pray allow me to acknowledge the compliment——"

"You'd be a lot better if you didn't jaw so much," said Handforth. "A chap who's always jawing is nothing but a nuisance! I

things will be all right! Come on—it won't take long to get out!"

At first Archie had no intention of shifting. But it suddenly dawned upon him that a little exercise would do him good. And the idea of seeing something of the battle was rather attractive.

But it was one thing to talk about going, and another to go out. However, there was nobody in charge of the Golden Rover, but Mr. Raymond Gray. And he was so occupied in repairs that it would be quite possible for the juniors to steal away without being spotted.

Nobody else had thought of it. And, as luck would have it, Archie and Handforth succeeded in slipping off without any trouble at all. Once outside the central square, they hastened through the city streets.

These, of course, were thronged with excited, half panic-stricken citizens. And there were refugees from many outlying

villages, all fleeing from the terror of the invader.

The two juniors had reached the outskirts of the town when it had suddenly struck them that they didn't exactly know where the fighting was going on. So they stopped to make inquiries. It was rather like Handforth to put questions to an old man of about ninety—who had probably walked about two miles in six hours. The result was nil, for the old chap turned out to be deaf. And in the meantime, Archie was conversing with another native.

"What-ho!" he said, pausing in front of a young man who was staggering along with a heavy load. "What-ho! How about it, old scream?"

"Thou wouldst speak with me, young master?"

"Well, dash it all, I'm doing it!" said Archie. "I mean to say, absolutely! What about the old battle?"

"'Tis afar as yet," said the man. "But methinks the accursed armies of King Jasper will be at our heels ere long."

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "That must be dashed uncomfortable! I mean to say, to have an army bothering about one's heels would be most uncomf. But what about the fighting, and all that? How many miles?"

"The advanced troops are but three miles hence!" said the man. "And 'tis impossible for me to dally."

"Oh, absolutely not!" said Archie. "Don't allow me to stop you, old onion! Pray trickle along, and take my blessing! 'Tis well, friend—I—I mean to say—"

The native went on, and Handforth joined Archie.

"Well?" asked Handforth.

"It's all frightfully confusing, old son, but it seems that the invaders are coming along somewhat smartly," replied Archie. "As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to wonder if there are any bally invaders! We only hear about them, don't you know. There never seems to be anything doing."

"There will be soon!" said Handforth. "It won't be long before we're right in the thick of it. Come on; we'll take this road!"

They hurried along, being anxious to get to the fighting-line. Perhaps they would not be so anxious after they had reached it—one taste of real warfare would be an eye-opener.

"Of course, we ought to have come before," said Handforth. "Then we could have followed Mr. Lee and the others. As it is, we don't know which way they've gone, or anything about it."

"It's all frightfully awk!" said Archie. "I've been thinking, don't you know. The old bean, in fact, has been buzzing most energetically. And it's dashed wonderful that we managed to whizz through the ropes, so to speak."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we are supposed to be prisoners

within the old Rover," said Archie. "I can't quite understand how we eluded the warders! But that, as it were, is neither here nor there—nor, as a matter of fact, anywhere else. We must confine ourselves to sundry matters. For example, dear one, what price the old wood?"

"What about the wood?" asked Handforth, as Archie waved his hand.

"Well, there you are—just the precise thing!" said Archie.

"The thing? What for?"

"When it comes to fighting, and doing this, and doing that, chappies have to conceal themselves in woods, and all that sort of rot!" exclaimed Archie. "I-mean discretion, don't you know!"

"You're dotty!" growled Handforth.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "But you can't exactly reckon that we're a bally army! Two of us, you know! Supposing, for example, we meet about six hundred and forty-five of the enemy?"

"Well, supposing we do?"

Archie shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, there you are!" he said. "Two promising young threads snapped off somewhat rapidly. You grasp the trend? I mean to say, two of us against a bally mob—what? It seems to me, old son, that the situation calls for a large quantity of discresh. In other words, Archie, for the woods!"

"All right—you can go!" said Handforth. "I'm keeping on the main road."

"But, dash it all, that'll be most unwise!" protested Archie. "I mean, a really decent general doesn't muck his forces about like that! Unity, don't you know, is a considerable amount of strengthiness, and what not! Or, to be more exact, united we stagger along, and, divided, we positively fade out!"

"That's what I'm going to do—fade out of your sight!" said Handforth. "If you like to come with me, all well and good, but if you don't, you can go into that wood and lose yourself! I suppose it would be the best thing!"

And Handforth marched off. It had suddenly occurred to him that there might be some opportunity to do something really great—something that would stand out like a beacon light in history. And if Archie was with him, Archie would probably get some of the credit. So it was all the better that they should go their own ways.

"My only sainted aunt!" murmured Archie, gazing at Handforth's rear. "That, so to speak, is most considerably rotten! The dear laddie has left me standing, and all that sort of stuff! But never mind! Absolutely not! Something tells me that the wood is the real material. So we shall proceed to rot in without further arg!"

And Archie entered the thick wood which lay on one side of the road. He couldn't quite understand why he had decided upon this course. But he certainly had a vague

idea that by lying in concealment he might see something which would prove to be of value. He certainly couldn't do much on a main road.

Archie wandered through the wood, and after a considerable time he found himself emerging from the other side. He had passed nobody on the way, and he had begun to think that he was quite lost.

But then he came out—and he found himself overlooking the wide channel of the river. And, just near by, there was a large, strongly built, stone bridge.

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie. "Something startling, as it were!"

For, as he looked at the bridge, he saw something which interested him greatly.

CHAPTER III.

ARCHIE, V.C.!



LORD DORRIMORE surveyed the scene critically.

"Yes; it's the best thing we can do," he said. "Of course, I hate to destroy a jolly fine bridge like this—

but bridges come before human lives. So up she goes! It's the only thing!"

"Well, of course," I agreed. "We can't possibly allow this bridge to stand, Dorrie. And we mustn't stay here talking, either. General Horton and his troops will be appearing soon, and we want to have the bridge in lumps before they arrive on the scene."

"That's the idea," said Dorrie. "It's all quiet now, so we couldn't have things better for us."

The scene was very peaceful. This bridge was quite deserted, although it was on one of the main roads. The absence of straggling refugees indicated that the invaders were very close. Indeed, according to our information, General Horton and his troops were quite close.

It was even doubtful if we should be able to get our task accomplished in time.

So there was not a moment to be lost.

The bridge was a solid stone one, with a wide central span. And, after taking a good look at it, we decided upon our course of action. It was necessary for the bomb to be placed right underneath the bridge. For the force of the explosion would be upwards, and if we could only get it right beneath that span, there would be no doubt about the result.

We ran lightly on to the bridge.

When we got near the centre I leaned over the parapet and looked down. The river lay beneath, dark and smooth. The heat from the water was coming upwards in little waves.

But we were not interested in this.

We were examining the stonework and the little ledges. There was one ledge at the

extremity of the big span which could be safely negotiated. And I turned to Dorrie with a look of satisfaction.

"It's all right!" I said. "I can do it."

"Oh, can you?" said Dorrie. "An' where do I come in?"

"You can hand the goods to me, and make yourself useful," I replied briskly.

"Look here, Dorrie, this is my job. The ledge isn't large enough for a chap your size. But I shall manage it with ease."

"Yes; but it might be dangerous——"

"Don't argue, for goodness sake!" I put in. "By merely wasting a minute we might ruin all our chances. It's got to be done now—it's no good hesitating over the job."

"Oh, right you are—go ahead!" said Dorrie. "As soon as you get on that ledge you'd better see if you can find a nice little crevice for the bomb. If you can, I'll chuck it down to you."

I nipped over the bridge, and, clinging to the stonework, I gently lowered myself down. And when I reached the ledge I found that I was able to cling there in a fair position of security.

If I fell I should only fall into the river. But I didn't want to fall, because I knew that this river contained some very queer monsters—and, in addition, I should not be able to carry the project through.

I looked under the great span, and nodded. There, as though ready for the very work, was a kind of deep hole in the stonework. Whether this was there by design or not I couldn't say. But the hole was plenty large enough to take over a dozen bombs. And I could just reach it by stretching out to my furthest extent.

I looked up.

"Fine!" I said. "There's a special place here, Dorrie. Lower the bomb down, and I'll put it in position at once. By the way, what about the fuse? Will there be enough?"

"I think so—although it'll be a fairly tight squeeze," said Dorrie. "The fuse is about two yards long, an' we shall have just about enough time to get clear of the bridge before she chucks up the sponge."

"Well, that's better than getting chucked up as well!" I said. "Quick, Dorrie! Let's have the bomb!"

He reached over, and handed me a small, heavy object. It was dull in colour, and looked no more like a bomb than an electric fan. And it seemed altogether too ridiculously small to contain enough explosive to blow up a small bridge.

Yet, as a matter of fact, this harmless-looking little thing was of enormous strength. It would be able to smash the whole bridge to smithereens. The explosive was the most deadly known to science, and it had the additional virtue of being absolutely safe. Even if it was dropped with considerable force, it would not explode. Only the firing of the fuse would set the thing going. And then it would go with a vengeance.

I crept under the arch of the bridge with the bomb in my hand. It was a most precarious position, and I half expected to tumble into the river at any moment. But I placed the bomb in position, and then trailed the fuse along the little ledge until the end of it was sticking out clear. After that I nipped up. Dorrie helped me over.

"O.K.?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good!" he said. "We've got to hustle! Look down there, my son!"

I gazed down the bridge, and along the road on the other side. It was a straight road, and in the far distance I could see large masses of men moving forward steadily.

General Horton and his troops were close at hand.

"My hat!" I gasped. "It'll be pretty close!"

"It will!" agreed Dorrie. "Now we'll light the fuse, and bunk! The best thing we can do, I think, is to make a bee-line, as hard as we can go, for that wood on the left-hand side. If we reach it in time, the trees will save us from any bits of flying debris—an' we sha'n't feel the shock half so much, either. So bear that in mind."

"Right!" I said. "We'll make for the wood!"

Before Dorrie could do anything further, I leaned far over the bridge, and took a box of matches out of my pocket. Then, striking one, I applied the light to the end of the fuse. It commenced sizzling at once.

In a flash I was back.

"Run!" I yelled. "She's going!"

We both started pelting down the bridge together, Dorrie having a slight lead. And then, at that very second, an unlooked-for disaster occurred. My left foot caught on a loose stone, and somehow, before I could realise what had happened, my ankle twisted completely under me.

The next second I crashed down, and my head hit the hard road with a fearful crash. Hundreds of dazzling lights flashed before my eyes, and I can distinctly remember that I thought the explosion had taken place.

And after that things became black.

Dorrie, utterly ignorant of my mishap, was still tearing on, under the firm belief that I was a pace or two behind him. He made straight for the wood, and plunged headlong into it, and, after penetrating a few yards, he flung himself face downwards in the thick undergrowth. In this simple way—so naturally—Dorrie was by himself without knowing it.

He had not the slightest reason to suspect that I was not with him. For he thought that I, too, had flung myself down. And he waited for the explosion. His heart would have been sick within him if he had known that I was still on the bridge—practically over that central span—helpless.

And, below, the fuse was burning!

But, although the position was appalling, I was still alive. And just on the bank of

the river, only a few yards from the bridge, a figure was peering through the bushes.

"Absolutely!" it muttered. "Gadzooks and what not! The dear lad appears to be in a somewhat poisonous predicament!"

Archie's face was the colour of chalk. For some few minutes he had been surveying the scene. He had watched me put the bomb in position under the central arch, and then he had seen the match applied to the fuse. He told himself then that it would be a somewhat healthy proceeding to stagger into some other locality.

For he knew that the bridge was about to go up.

He reckoned that he would wait until we started running, and then he would buzz off himself.

He saw us start—he saw Dorrie tearing across the bridge—and, what was more, he saw me crash down. He was frozen for a second, and he stood there rigid and stiff.

He expected to see Dorrie turn, but Dorrie raced on.

He expected to see me stagger to my feet, but I remained still.

Most of all, Archie was startled and dismayed by the fact that Dorrie knew nothing. Archie was quite sufficiently acquainted with his lordship to know that he would have returned, at deadly risk, to rescue me if he had known of my horrible position. The fact that Dorrie ran on clearly proved that he was quite ignorant of the state of affairs.

Archie saw Dorrie plunge into the wood. And then he gazed back at me. I still lay there—motionless.

"This, as it were, is where Archie is required to do something!" he murmured. "I mean to say, it's a bally good thing I flowed in this direction! Absolutely! Tally-ho, and yoicks! We're off, as it were!"

Archie said a lot of this after he had actually started.

And he knew perfectly well that the words would probably be his last. For he had seen that burning fuse disappear under the arch. And he expected to hear a devastating crash, and see the bridge hurl itself skywards. But he didn't hesitate. For him to run away, leaving me there, was as impossible as anything could be.

Archie ran on madly. If any of the juniors had said that Archie couldn't sprint, they didn't know him. He reached me in about ten seconds, and grabbed me by the shoulders, and hoisted me up.

As it happened, I was just beginning to recover myself, but I was quite helpless, and so dazed that I didn't know what was actually taking place. Certainly, I would never have suspected Archie of having such strength. He even didn't suspect it himself.

But, with that one heave, he got me on his shoulder.

And it was at this moment that Dorrie became aware of my absence.

His lordship had made some remark, and he was rather surprised to hear no reply.

"Where the deuce are you, old son?" he asked, turning his head. "There must be somethin' wrong with that fuse, the rotten thing's— Good gad! Nipper, I say, Nipper!"

Silence.

Dorrie leapt to his feet, his face blanching.

Then, dashing through the trees, he came within view of the bridge—and he fairly gulped with horror and amazement, as he saw Archie Glenthorne staggering down the slope towards the wood. And Archie was running like mad. But he had a terrible distance to go. Instinctively, he knew that he would never do it.

And if the bridge went up now, within a second, we should both be killed by the fearful force of the flying debris, if not by the explosion itself—the concussion. He knew he couldn't reach safety.

Dorrie, his heart in his mouth, was utterly bewildered. He couldn't realise what had happened—he couldn't understand. And he was just starting forward to lend a hand, when Archie performed an action which saved the lives of the three of us.

For if he had continued that run, Dorrie would have joined us—and then we should all three have gone skywards—in more senses than one.

Archie, in fact, had a brain-wave.

These mental storms were very rare with him, but when they did come they were generally of first-rate quality.

Without hesitating a second, and without pausing in his stride, he swerved abruptly to the parapet of the bridge. And, in one swift movement, he heaved me over, and followed himself. We both struck the water together. At the same second Dorrie hurled himself back into the wood.

And at the other end of the bridge the troops of General Horton were coming along in full fighting array—big, powerful soldiers, with armour and with glittering helmets. They were an imposing crowd, and they were flushed with the excitement of victory.

As I plunged down into the water my wits seemed to come back. Archie came down with me—right down, into the very depths of that deep, warm river.

And then, indeed, the world seemed to end.

Even at the bottom of our plunge the roar of that fearful explosion was like something hammering upon our heads. But we were there—far under the water—free from any concussion, and safe from any flying debris.

Archie clutched at me, and held me down.

He fought under the water with all his strength, although he need not have troubled. For I had recovered my wits sufficiently by now to know what to do. Our

best chance was to remain below as long as possible. But, at length, we could stand it no longer.

And up we came.

We burst upon the surface, gasping and spluttering. From every side came loud plops and splashes, as chunks of stonework dropped into the river. And the air all round us was filled with choking dust and acrid fumes. In the distance we could hear shouts and wild cries of agony and terror.

The bridge had gone.

The centre portion of it was now non-existent. Instead, there was a great gap, so wide that nothing could pass.

"That, as it were, is absolutely that!" spluttered Archie. "I mean to say kindly cheer, old lad! We do not proceed into the next world quite yet. Absolutely not!"

"Archie!" I gasped. "How—how did you get here?"

"Well, to be precise, I just staggered into the scene from the bally old prompt side, as it were," explained Archie. "That is to say, I was gazing at the old melodrama stuff—blowing up bridge, act one—when I happened to observe that large chunks of unrehearsed effect had taken place. So it was up to me to get rather dashed busy."

By this time we were nearly at the bank—Archie had been talking all the time—and we hauled ourselves up out of the water. And then, just at that moment, Lord Dorri-more appeared. He caught sight of us from the approach of the bridge. And he came tearing down the bank, with a tremendous whoop.

"By gad!" he shouted. "You're safe! Why, I thought you were both smashed into about a thousand bits!"

"Not absolutely!" said Archie. "You see, sir, the jolly old river—"

"I see a hero!" exclaimed Lord Dorri-more warmly. "By the Lord Harry! If ever a V.C. was earned, you've earned one now! It's the bravest thing I've ever seen! Archie, you're true blue!"

"Precisely not!" said Archie. "That is, of course, absolutely ridic.! Kindly cease to talk the most utter rot—I mean to say, no offence, old dear, but there you are! I did nothing! Absolutely not!"

"I'm the biggest fool that ever lived!" exclaimed Dorrie wrathfully. "I want the pair of you to throw me on the ground, an' then stamp on my face! That would just about punish me as I deserve!"

"Why, what do you mean, Dorrie?" I asked. "I tripped on something just as we were running off the bridge. I think I came a frightful cropper, because I don't seem to remember any more—until I found myself struggling with Archie in the water."

"I'll tell you what happened, my son!" exclaimed Dorrie. "When we ran you tripped, as you say, but I tore on towards the wood. I didn't know that you were left behind. Like a confounded idiot. I

took it for granted that you were followin' a yard or two in my rear."

"That was only natural," I said.

"Up to a point, perhaps," agreed Dorrie. "But then I dived into that wood, and threw myself on the ground among the bushes without even turnin'. I still thought you were with me."

"What a queer thing!" I said. "It seems providential that Archie was on the spot."

"By gad, it does!" agreed his lordship. "He was there right enough, and he knew the danger, too. He ran out to the middle of the bridge, an' picked you up, although he knew that he might go up at any second. It was an act of cool, calculated heroism in the face of death. Archie, my boy, let's have your hand. I want to grip it—hard!"

Archie held out his hand reluctantly.

"By gad!" said Dorrie, with a choke in his throat. "Grit!"

"I—I mean to say," mumbled Archie. "That—that is —"

"It's up to me to thank Archie!" I said fervently. "You saved my life, old son. I shall never forget it. It's one thing to save a chap's life by diving into the river, or anything like that—but here you came on to that bridge feeling practically certain that you would be killed before you could reach me."

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "This—this is frightful and shockin'! I—I mean, pray be reasonable, old dears! I've done nothing—absolutely nothing! And I shall esteem it a great favour if you will refrain from gassing when we return——"

"Not likely!" exclaimed Dorrie. "Everybody's goin' to know about this—it's too good to keep!"

Archie groaned, but Dorrie was quite firm. And then Archie explained how he had sneaked out of the city with Handforth—and how he felt a curious impulse to come in this direction.

"It couldn't have been chance!" I muttered. "Isn't it marvellous, Dorrie? What strange power told Archie to come to this bridge?"

"I don't know—things like that are beyond me," said Dorrie quietly. "Well, anyway, we made a good job of it! The bridge is no more—and General Horton appears to be slightly angry."

The dust had cleared away by now, and we could see on the far side of the bridge. A kind of panic was ensuing among the St. Edmund soldiers. Many of them lay still upon the ground—others were groaning. For quite a few of them had been hit by the flying stonework. The advance, however, was checked. General Horton's army could not proceed beyond the river.

Our mission had been doubly successful—for we had brought the enemy advance to a standstill, and we had seen a side of Archie Glenthorne's character which none

of us had ever suspected. Archie was certainly a knut—he was a bit of an ass—but he was absolutely white!

CHAPTER IV.

THE AMBUSH.



KING JASPER chuckled deeply.

"'Tis well, my noble captains—'tis well!" he exclaimed. "Our advance progresses excellently. And ere another

four hours have elapsed we shall be within the capital of the accursed Anglians."

"Mayhap thou art optimistic, sire," said one of the officers who were marching with the King. "Twill be well if we take the capital so soon. But methinks some obstacles may bar our progress."

"Thou art talking foolish!" laughed King Jasper. "These poor fools can place no obstacles in our way. They have no soldiers—they have no weapons. 'Tis for my conquering armies to seize the capital."

"Thou art surely in good spirits, sire," said one of the others. "I would that I could share thy opinion —"

"Tush—tush!" interrupted His Majesty. "'Tis all straightforward—there can be no more doubt! Even now we are within three miles of New London. And we shall soon be marching through the goodly streets. Udd's death! 'Twill be a great moment when I march into the king's palace!"

"Thou wilt spare King Arthur, sire?"

"Spare him!" echoed Jasper. "Nay, not on thy life! King Arthur and his queen will die—ay, and they will die by inches! 'Tis my desire that they should realise the power of the king who will reign o'er New Anglia!"

And in this way the conquering monarch bragged of his doings, and of the plans he had in mind. He and his army had come through without resistance. No man had dared to stay their progress.

The King did not know what had happened to General Horton and the other branch of the army. But he was assured that General Horton was meeting the same success. And now New London lay only a short distance ahead.

"'Twas good to learn of the fate of those accursed strangers from beyond the ice!" continued the king. "Ah, mayhap they will respect me now! For I have revealed to them my power!"

"Thou hast, indeed, sire!"

"Their wondrous craft is now but a wreck," exulted the King, who had apparently been misinformed. "'Tis a mere mass of twisted metal. But 'tis unfortunate that the knaves themselves did not die. But nay, I am wrong! 'Tis well! I would have them live!"

And the King chuckled afresh.

"Dost thou not understand?" he went on. "For now I will be able to seize them—and their heads will be removed one by one. Bah! I will show these reptiles what a man I am!"

The King and his officers—three of them—were marching just in the rear of the foremost troops. About a dozen men led the way, and then there was a short break. The King followed, and after him streamed hundreds and hundreds of soldiers—so many that the eye could not hope to detect the end of the column. And all the men were marching in their armour. It was small wonder that the inhabitants fled at the sight of such an imposing force.

Just here the road ran through a deep valley. It was a very peaceful spot—a beautiful spot.

The bank sloped up sharply from the wide road, and here and there were clumps of bushes and little spinneys. There did not appear to be a soul in sight. The place was deserted.

And then, quite suddenly, a tiny crack sounded—something like the lash of a whip. The King heard it, but he took no particular notice. Then one of the foremost soldiers uttered a sharp cry, and clutched at his arm.

Blood was streaming over his wrist.

"What ails the man?" snapped the King. Crack!

Another whiplash sounded, and then another soldier gripped his arm. And blood was streaming over his wrist, too.

All the men in the front of the column came to a halt, in confusion. The officers yelled out orders, and the whole force of men came to a standstill. The King strode forward and looked at the unfortunate fellows who were bleeding so mysteriously.

"What is this?" demanded his Majesty.

"'Tis a mystery, sire," stammered one of the men. "Even as I walked, a sharp pain came into my arm. And now, as thou seest, blood flows."

"'Tis but a scratch caused by thy armour," said the King curtly. "Make not a fuss over a trifle."

"See, your Majesty!" shouted one of the officers suddenly.

The King looked up, and scowled with fury.

For a man was appearing in the road ahead. The man was not a native, for he was attired in a grey flannel suit and a panama hat. He came forward easily, with his hands in his coat pockets.

"'Tis that accursed wretch of the air machine!" snarled the King. "He they call Master Lee. 'Tis well. The fool is alone, and even now will I cause his head to be severed from his body!"

Nelson Lee came up in just the same easy way. But, before halting, he raised one hand aloft as a sign of peace. The King laughed harshly.

"So!" he shouted. "What wouldst

thou? Thou art surely mad to act in this way, my friend!"

"Not at all!" said Nelson Lee. "I merely wish to have a few words with you—so that we may understand one another. I presume that you are intending to advance to the city of New London?"

"Thou hast a remarkable perception!" sneered the King.

"It may interest you to learn that General Horton and his men have met with a set-back," continued Lee. "They have been unable to advance over the west bridge, for my lieutenants have blown it up—"

"What bluster is this?" shouted the King. "Thy lieutenants! Who are thou to assume command—"

"I am in sole charge of the New Anglian forces," said Lee quietly.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the King jeeringly. "And pray, what forces are they, thou fool? 'Tis but a handful—"

"But not quite so helpless as you seem to imagine," interrupted Lee.

"Enough!" rapped out King Jasper. "I will not continue this idle talk! Seize the man at once, and hold him—"

"Wait!" shouted Nelson Lee quickly. "I have something to say to you first, King Jasper. I am giving you full warning beforehand, so you must not blame me for what may occur."

"What nonsense is this?"

"You saw two of your soldiers struck by some mysterious agency?" asked Lee. "It was I who caused their arms to bleed—"

"Thou art a sorry knave if thou thinkest I should swallow such a story!" interrupted the King. "I will waste no further time upon thee!"

"That is rather a pity," said Nelson Lee. "If you will take my advice, King Jasper, you will order your men to retreat at once. Many lives will be saved if you do this. I do not wish to bring death needlessly to your soldiers. I do not hope that you will agree—but I have at least warned you."

"And thinkest thou such a warning impresseth me?" demanded King Jasper furiously. "Thou art blustering, and thou wilt surely pay dearly for thy foolishness! Seize him at once!"

Three men advanced towards Nelson Lee.

"Stand back, or I will make you all fall writhing to the ground!" shouted Lee.

"Heed my words, for I speak the truth."

The three men did not even hesitate.

Crack—crack—crack.

Three revolver shots, in rapid succession, snapped through the air. And the three men, all in one movement, it seemed, fell to the ground, shrieking and groaning. And there they lay upon the ground—badly hit in the legs.

The King started back, aghast.

"But what miracle is this?" he panted.

"No miracle, King Jasper, but quite a plain fact," said Nelson Lee coldly. "I

told you of our wonderful weapons when I was a guest in your own country. Apparently you did not believe me."

"This is mere trickery!" exclaimed the King. "You cannot frighten me by such methods. Nay! I will make thee suffer! Seize him, my soldiers! Seize him, and do not trouble to hold him with care."

This time four men advanced upon Lee. But they did so rather warily. And Nelson Lee was glad of this. He had a revolver in either coat pocket, and he pulled each trigger twice.

The reports rang out sharply.

The four men fell—also hit in the legs. The other soldiers shouted with terror, and fell back. Even the King was frightened.

"Thou art a good trickster!" he snarled.

Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"And you will not return to your own country?" he asked.

"Nay, never!"

"And you will not stem this advance upon the capital?"

"Nay!"

Nelson Lee bowed.

"Then you must suffer the consequences," he said smoothly.

He turned and walked away. But he took good care to keep his head slightly turned, so that he could see if any dodges were attempted. But he was allowed to pass down the road, and he disappeared into a clump of bushes. The King stood there, his fists clenching with fury.

"The wretch!" he exclaimed. "If I had men, instead of babies, he would have been captured. Throw these fools into the ditch, and we will proceed. I will stand no nonsense!"

The wounded men were bundled into the ditch without ceremony. They were hurt, and they screamed with agony as they were roughly handled. But it made no difference. And then the column proceeded to advance—but not before the King had taken care to get well in the background. He placed fully fifty men in front of him.

He feared that something strange might take place, but he did not wish to suffer as his men had suffered.

And while the column was preparing to advance again, various things were being prepared for the benefit of King Jasper's troops. It really seemed as though this little valley was quite deserted.

But appearances are sometimes deceptive.

They were in this case. For in the two big clumps of trees overlooking the road there were machine guns. Major Barrance manned one on the left side, and Phipps was at the breach of the other. Umlosi waited in a bush, his spear ready—waiting for an opportunity to dash out among the enemy.

And Nelson Lee had a third machine gun.

Further back were a number of men belonging to King Arthur's bodyguard. They were of not much use in this fight—but it

was just possible that they might be able to help in some way.

Upon the face of it, such a force was preposterously absurd to stand against the enormous horde of King Jasper's army.

All told, there were but four shots—for Umlosi had a rifle, too, and was an excellent marksman. His favourite method of fighting, however, was with the spear. He disliked rifles.

The column commenced advancing.

And then—zrrrrh!

A rattling roar sounded. Major Barrance's machine gun was at work, and it created a deafening, shattering noise. The bullets sang through the air with a whining sound.

The first line of the column went down, screaming.

Zrrrrh!

Another burst, and the third and fourth lines collapsed. It was like mowing down hay. And this was why Nelson's Lee's forces stood an excellent chance of winning. For these men of St. Edmund were exposing themselves to the full fire of the machine guns, and offered a mark that could not be missed.

But Lee's party were merciful.

They directed the bullets only towards the feet of the enemy. This was equally as effective as killing them—and perhaps more so. It was far more humane, for there is something rather horrible in mowing down men who have no means in retaliation in the same way.

By merely disabling them, all was well. These soldiers were injured so that they could not walk—but that was all. And they lay there, on the road, screaming with pain and absolute terror.

For it seemed to them that the mysterious hurts had come from nowhere. Just the sound, and then no more. Both in New Anglia and St. Edmund they knew what guns where. But they had made very little progress in firearms, and had nothing to compare with the modern weapons of the outside world.

And the machine guns were deadly.

The King was pale with wrath and fear.

"On, men—on!" he stormed.

Again the army marched forward.

Zrrrrh!

It was a repetition of the former occasions. The men fell like ninepins. And now a kind of panic seemed to seize the entire great column. Men turned, shouting with fright and wonder. In vain the King attempted to rally them.

"Hold still, thou fools!" he roared. "Art thou afraid of a mere handful of men who—"

But they took no notice of their King, and in another moment or two the whole great army had commenced a hasty, disorderly retreat. The men were flying along the road at the run, tripping over one another, shouting, cursing, and with panic in their souls.

And King Jasper shook his fists with helpless rage.

Within a mile or so of the capital—and his men had failed! It was almost more than he could bear, for he had been looking forward to this victory with gloating triumph.

For the moment, the situation was eased.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS!



HANDFORTH looked rather disappointed. "Well, I'm blessed if I can see any giddy fighting," he muttered. "The thing's a sell! I haven't seen a single soldier, and I don't believe there are any! It's all a scare!"

Handforth had been going along the main road for some little time, and he had seen nobody but a few exhausted refugees. The roads, in fact, were full of these unfortunate people—many of them struggling along under heavy burdens. But of an enemy soldier, Handforth had seen no sign.

At last, hoping for better luck, he had turned off into a small side road—for New Anglia was well provided with roads in every direction. In this matter the people had progressed far further than England herself.

This was only a small lane that Handforth had chosen, with hedges on either side, and with wild flowers growing in profusion amid the grass. Not that Handforth even saw them.

He had no eyes for flowers—and he was now keeping a sharp look-out for something exciting. It was not altogether surprising that he found it. Without a doubt, he was asking for trouble!

For, as he was going along this lane, a group of six figures emerged from a kind of footpath. They were big figures, and Handforth gave a jump. Then he stared hard.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Soldiers at last! Now we'll see!"

Apparently he thought there was no danger—he always seemed to have an idea that he was immune. And now he marched straight up to the group, and nodded cheerfully. The six soldiers were looking at him with curious glances.

"Oh, so here you are!" said Handforth. "I suppose you're members of King Jasper's army? Well, you look a pretty strong lot!"

He stood there eyeing them critically. They were in their full war kit, with armour, and with metal helmets. In a gaudy kind of way, they were smart. But Handy did not think so.

"I've seen a few rotten uniforms, but this is about the limit!" he said candidly. "No offence, of course. Where is King



Another whip-lash sounded, and then blood started oozing from another soldier's wrist.

Jasper? He's a rotter, you know, and ought to be jolly well hanged!"

"Thou art talking strangely, O youth!" said one of the soldiers.

"You're the one who's talking strangely," replied Handforth. "What's all this about fighting? I thought there was a battle going on, or something. The whole thing's a fraud."

"Thou wilt meet trouble unless thy tongue is held!" said one of the soldiers grimly. "Ay, comrades, 'tis one of the boys from the strange ship. 'Twill be well for us if we seize him, methinks."

"Oh, will it?" said Handforth.

"His Majesty will reward us richly," went on the fellow. "For has not his majesty given forth orders that these strangers are to be brought before him if captured?"

"Ay, thy words are truly spoken!"

"We will seize him."

The men surrounded Handforth, and he looked round desperately. Now that it was too late, he began to realise that he had acted somewhat rashly. He clenched his fists, and pulled himself up.

"You—you rotters!" he yelled. "Stand back!"

One man tried to grasp him, but Handforth's fist swung round, aimed at the soldier's face, but the man ducked—and Handy's knuckles came into sharp contact with his metal helmet.

Crash!

"Yow—yaroooooh!" bellowed Handforth.
 "Yow—ow!"

"Thou art in pain, eh?" snapped one of the soldiers. "Come, we will take the lad, and the reward will be ours. 'Tis well! See that he does not dare to strike, for his fists are of great size!"

Handforth nearly choked, but it was impossible for him to fight against all these men. He did attempt to dodge free, but it was useless. And a moment later he was held firm.

"You—you silly idiots!" he shouted. "What's the idea of this? Lemme go! I'm not going to be cellared by a lot of rotten St. Edmund bounders! If you don't keep your hands off I'll jolly well——"

"Stay thy tongue, noisy youth!" broke in one of the soldiers. "'Tis well for thee that thou art not lying with blood oozing from thy body. For 'twas only by chance that thou wert spared!"

"Ay, my sword was all ready for the deed!" said one of the others.

Handforth was cooled down somewhat.

"You—you don't mean to say that you'd jab that rotten sword into me?" he gasped. "You're spoofing! It's all bunkum! You're off your rockers!"

"Thy words are even as a foreign language!" exclaimed the first soldier. "'Twas his majesty's orders that you should be spared—and so thou wilt be marched along with us. Do not attempt to break free, however, or 'twill go ill with thee."

Handforth breathed hard. His hands and arms had been bound to his sides by ropes, and he could do nothing. His feet were free, but it was quite impossible to make a dash for liberty, for he was surrounded.

And so, in the midst of the soldiers, he was compelled to march. And he was just beginning to realise that he had been very foolhardy in approaching the soldiers. It was just like Handforth to do a thing and then regret it. He never thought in advance—he was a fellow of the moment.

And the little party of St. Edmund soldiers—obviously a scouting section—went on its way across fields and meadows in an apparently aimless manner. But there was method in this progress, for after passing through a little wood, where all manner of strange trees grew—a slope led downwards. And there was the main road—alive with soldiery.

"'Tis the King's army!" said one of Handforth's captors. "Ay, comrades, and his Majesty himself is within sight! 'Tis well! We will deliver our prisoner into his Majesty's hands."

"My hat!" muttered Handforth. "That'll be nice!"

King Jasper was indeed within sight. He stood upon a little mound overlooking the main road. And he was in a fine state of fury. His army was not in quite such disorder as it had been. Officers were running up and down, shouting commands. And the whole column, numbering hundreds

of men, had come to a standstill. And the soldiers themselves had got clear of their panic.

"Thou art, indeed, a scurvy set of weak-knees!" snarled the King, gazing up and down the road. "'Tis ill that a King should have followers of such a cursed breed! Thou art no better than a pack of dogs!"

"'Twas difficult for the men to face the fire from the strange machinery that sent bullets in such rapidity!" said one of the officers. "There are many men injured—many men lost, your majesty. 'Twould indeed have been foolish to continue the advance."

"What is this?" snapped the King. "See! Who approacheth?"

They gazed across the meadow, and saw the small party of soldiers, with Handforth in their midst. As the soldiers came up, they halted and saluted. And the King's evil expression became even more evil as he recognised Handforth.

"So!" he snapped. "Thou art in the hands of my soldiery! 'Tis well! But, mark ye, 'tis ill for thee!"

"Look here, King Jasper, I'm not standing any rot!" said Handforth boldly. "If you don't let me go free Mr. Lee and the others will come along and blow you to mince-meat! I demand——"

"Indeed!" shouted the King. "Thou art of a stubborn breed! Thou art not in a position to demand, my young knave! 'Twill cause thee to wilt, mayhap, when thou learnest that thy head is to be severed from thy body!"

"What!" gasped Handforth. "You—you don't mean——"

"I will teach thy friends to hinder the onward march of a victorious army!" snarled King Jasper fiercely. "Methinks they will be impressed if thou art beheaded! 'Twill be an indication of what their own fate is to be!"

Handforth went red with anger.

"Why, you rotter!" he roared. "If you chop my head off, I'll jolly well punch your nose—— I—I mean, I'll punch it before you chop——"

"'Tis idle for thee to protest!" interrupted the King. "I am in a vast fury, as thou wilt see. Thy accursed friends have used strange machines which spurt death at my soldiers."

"Good!" said Handforth gloatingly. "They'll spurt some more death yet! You can't beat our machine guns! This mouldy old country is dead—it's hundreds of years behind the times! And when your rotten soldiers find themselves face to face with machine-guns and rifles, they'll crumple up."

Slap!

The King brought his heavy glove right across Handforth's face, and the junior reeled.

"You—you cad!" he panted fiercely.

"'Twill teach thee not to let thy tongue run loose!" shouted King Jasper. "And may be thou wilt be ill at ease when I tell thee that my secret men have already been

dispatched with orders to destroy these wondrous guns—these devil machines which spurt fire with the rapidity of hail."

"Well, it's just as well to know!" said Handforth. "I shall be able to warn the others—"

"Thinkest thou so?" sneered the King. "If thou art capable of speaking with thy head apart from thy body, 'tis well! But thou wilt never see thy friends again. Make sure of that."

Even then Handforth thought that the threat was only bluff. But then the King gave sharp orders to two of his officers. And, while the main army moved onwards, Handforth was seized by an execution party. He was marched along across a meadow until a little knoll was reached. Here some grim preparations were put into motion.

Handforth looked on, rather dazed. There were two officers and about twenty men. Near by there was a thick clump of bushes, with one or two tall trees growing quite by themselves. A little further away the river flowed swiftly. For at this point the stream narrowed down, causing the current to flow with great power and strength.

Handforth watched the preparations in a fascinated kind of way.

A huge block of wood was brought forward—a great, roughly-shaped piece, with a flat surface. Then two men with great axes set to work, and they fashioned the top of the block with deadly accuracy.

Handforth could see that a slot was being made, so that his neck would fit in comfortably. Then notches were cut, so that the ropes would not slip at the fatal moment.

There was no bluff about this.

"Methinks thou art feeling nervous, my young friend!" said one of the soldiers, with a sneer. "But 'tis needless. Thou wilt feel no pain. 'Twill be over in a trice."

"Over in—in a trice!" said Handforth dazedly. "Oh, but look here! It's—it's all rot, you know! You can't behead me! Things like that aren't done now-a-days!"

"All wrong-doers suffer the same fate in this land!"

"All right—I'm not growling!" said Handforth grimly. "But I just want to tell you that somebody will jolly well suffer. If my napper is lopped off, your King will be shot to bits!"

"Thy threats are a waste of breath!" said the soldier. "Ah! 'Tis ready! Thou wilt now come!"

Handforth resisted for a moment.

He felt like going dotty. There was no question about it—he was to be bound to the block, and beheaded! And it filled him with momentary panic. Being shot was one thing, but to undergo this ordeal was too ghastly for words. He felt maddened.

But then, in a moment, he became cool.

What was the good of jibbing? He couldn't get free—and he was certainly not going to allow these men to gloat over him.

He would show them that he had plenty of the right kind of pluck.

So he laughed harshly.

"All right—go ahead with it!" he said defiantly. "Do you think I care? Rats to you! You can all go and eat coke!"

And, with his head erect, he marched forward to the execution block. Edward Oswald Handforth was a blundering ass, but he was no coward.

The soldiers were rather surprised at his attitude, and they quickly forced him down upon his knees, and then bound the ropes round their victim and the block. Handforth's head was placed in position so that his neck came exactly over the little hollow.

And here he was, secured so tightly that he could not even move an inch. He had gone very pale, and he was sure that his last moment had nearly arrived. But he was calm and grim.

"You—you murderers!" he muttered. "I'll show you! I'm not going to howl for mercy! I'll show you how a chap can take his medicine!"

The officer in charge of the operations bent down, and his coarse, evil face was alight with gloating cruelty.

"Now, my young friend, thou wilt understand that 'tis ill to fall into the hands of the men of St. Edmund! Thy moments are numbered, for death will come right quickly. Prepare thyself."

"I'm ready!" said Handforth curtly.

"Go ahead with the slaughter!"

"Thou art brave!" admitted the officer.

"I admire thee for that, my young friend. Thou art of wondrous courage—"

"Thanks!" snapped Handforth. "You can go and boil your face!"

The officer laughed.

"Thy defiance is good to see!" he exclaimed. "But 'twill avail thee nothing. Thou art doomed!"

He stood back, and gave a sharp order. And one of the soldiers—a big, heavy man, stepped forward towards the block, and he was gripping a huge, powerful axe. It glittered in the light, and looked deadly.

With one swing, the axe was raised aloft—and there it hovered—ready to sweep down in one hissing thrust.

CHAPTER VI.

SAFE FOR THE MOMENT!



"DASH it all!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, old darling! Dash it all! Have a heart, and all that sort of thing! It's simply frightful for a chappie to listen to this sort of stuff!"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"The fact is, Archie, you're infernally modest!" he said. "Nipper an' I have just been makin' sundry remarks concernin' your

amazin' courage. Why, by gad, I've never seen anythin' so plucky—"

"Kindly cease the old flow, sir!" interrupted Archie pleadingly. "Please remember that I did absolutely nothing. That is to say, absolutely! I mean, as it were, a chappie simply must stagger forth and do something when another chappie is in sore straits and what not!"

"All right, Archie, we won't talk about it any more!" I put in. "If you're sensitive on the subject, we'll let it rest."

"That's really priceless, old tulip!"

"For the time being, at all events," I went on. "Of course, we shall tell Mr. Lee and all the others—but that will do later. At the moment, we have got to decide how we shall proceed."

Archie and Dorrie and I had come to a halt just on the other side of the wood, after destroying the bridge which had held up General Horton's army. We felt intensely satisfied with our work.

And now we had to make other plans.

Archie and I were wet through, but this did not worry us. The air was quite warm, and there would be no fear of ill effects so long as we kept on the move. Indeed, we were drying already.

"I don't see why we should go back into the city," I said. "I know the gov'nor's out here somewhere—with a crowd of others, and machine-guns. I think we'd better go in search, Dorrie."

"Right you are," agreed his lordship. "Anything for a quiet life, my lad. But it might be as well for us to separate—although, if one of us happens to get colared, it'll go hard with him."

"I don't think there's much chance of that," I said. "We've got our revolvers, and we can easily deal with a few isolated soldiers, if we happen to meet them. I think the best thing we can do is to go different ways. Two of us in one direction, and—"

"That's a good idea," interrupted Dorrie. "I'll take Archie towards the city, an' you can buzz off on your own. By what I know about you, Nipper, you'll be well able to look after yourself."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But, I mean to say, Nipper is somewhat frightfully injured, and so forth! The poor chappie came a most poisonous cropper on the old bridge—"

"That's all right—I'm as right as rain now, except for a bit of a headache," I put in. "You needn't worry, Archie. And we mustn't waste much time, either. Shall we settle it that way?"

It was settled, and in a few minutes we had parted company, and Lord Dorrimore and Archie went off in the direction of the capital. But I proceeded the other way—for I wanted to come up with the gov'nor.

I didn't exactly know where Nelson Lee was—but I was quite certain that he had taken up a strong position on the main

road, within a mile or two of the spot. And so I looked for a high piece of ground. From there I should be able to gaze round in all directions, and examine the general view.

There really was no danger in us separating, for we were not in the enemy country. All this section of land was still free from King Jasper's troops. General Horton's army was stopped from crossing the river, and I had no doubt that the gov'nor had dealt drastically with the other section of the St. Edmund troops.

So I went upon my way eagerly and light-heartedly.

I came upon some clumps of trees, and passed from one clump to another—for I thought it just as well to keep in cover as much as possible. And then I fancied that I heard voices from comparatively near by. And there were shouts of laughter and derision.

I halted, listening.

And then a strange look came into my eyes.

"Why, that's Handforth!" I muttered amazedly. "But it can't be! It must be just a coincidence! Handforth's in the city—right in the central square, with the Rover! He couldn't be here!"

Again I listened intently.

"But I don't know!" I told myself. "Handy's a queer chap—he's capable of anything! Anyway, I'm going to investigate."

I was fairly certain that my ears had deceived me.

But a thing like this couldn't be left to chance. I ran lightly forward, passed through one of the clumps of trees, and then saw a short stretch of grassland in front of me.

Just on the other side of this there was a thick hedge—or, rather, numerous clumps of bushes. And now and again I caught a glimpse of gleaming armour.

King Jasper's soldiers!

There could not be many, so I thought it quite safe to go forward and see what the position actually was. I couldn't help fearing that somehow Handforth had got himself into trouble.

And so, with light steps, I ran across the grass, and crouched down among the leaves, and stared through.

And then my heart seemed to leap into my throat.

I gulped, and a choking cry arose.

"Good heavens!" I gasped madly.

For there, only ten yards from me, was a great wooden block set upon the ground. A figure was tied to it—a figure in flannels! And I knew at once that Edward Oswald Handforth was in the most terrible predicament.

For the executioner was near by—his great axe was raised—and it was about to sweep down in one murderous rush.

I had one second to act.

In a flash I yanked my revolver round.

and hardly took aim. My brain worked rapidly, and I realised that even the report of the revolver would probably stay the executioner's hand.

But I wanted to do something better than that.

Crack!

The revolver spurted out a shaft of fire—the executioner gave a wild howl of agony—and the great axe clattered to the ground. I had hit the man in the arm, shattering his wrist.

Numbers of yells rang out, but I didn't care. I dashed out of cover, and took in the scene in one swift glance. There were about twenty men, and all of them were on the other side of the execution block. In one way, I had the advantage. But I realised that unless I acted with extraordinary swiftness, I should be captured, and then my head would come off.

As I ran forward, I felt in my pocket, and pulled out a clasp-knife. I opened it in one movement. And by now I was right against the block.

"All right, Handy—cheer-up!" I panted. "I'll soon have you free!"

"Good man!" gulped Handforth. "Oh, my hat! I thought it was all up! It was just like being Queen Elizabeth, or Charles The First, or some of those other poor bounders who had their nappers lopped off!"

"You've got mixed in history!" I said. "Never mind them now!"

"Why, you ass, it was King Charles——"

"Shut up!" I shouted.

It was absolutely amazing that Handforth, even in this dire extremity, should attempt to argue. The position was, indeed, acute. For by now the soldiers had recovered from their surprise, and they were advancing to the attack. They saw that they had only one boy to deal with, and it seemed a simple matter. But during their few moments of hesitation, I had been busy. Already several of Handforth's ropes were slashed through. But he was not free.

"Seize that young dog!" shouted one of the officers. "Are we to be defied by another of these young knaves? Seize him, and he will suffer even as his companion!"

"Will he?" I shouted. "Stand back, you curs!"

The soldiers took no notice, but advanced.

Crack—crack!

My revolver spoke twice. Three chambers emptied! Only three cartridges left! But the effect was instantaneous.

The soldiers held back, for two of them had fallen to the ground, writhing. My bullets had hit them in the legs. The others came to a halt, and stared at me doubtfully.

The officers urged them on, but they still hesitated.

And during this brief respite I succeeded

in cutting through the last of Handforth's ropes—to say nothing of cutting into his clothing as well. But this was no time for delicacy.

He staggered to his feet, flushed and excited.

"Now we'll wipe the rotters up!" he roared.

"No, we won't, you idiot!" I snapped. "We've got to escape—it's the only way! If we fall into their hands, Handy, we shall both be killed!"

"Great pip! You're right!" agreed Handy.

And we turned and raced away. For at that second the soldiers had determined to seize us. They came forward in a great clump. Firing would have been useless, for only one or two would have suffered. Our only chance was to run for it. So we ran.

And then, just as we were hoping to get away, we received a shock.

Through the bushes, immediately ahead of us, came twenty or thirty men. We should run right into them! And there was no escape to right or to left. We were trapped! We could not get away!

"Quick!" I shouted hoarsely. "This might delay things, anyway!"

Within a few feet of us there was a great tree—a tree with a straight trunk which reared upwards to a tremendous height. There were practically no branches—just that one trunk, planted there like a telegraph pole, with a few branches of green foliage at the very top.

I swarmed up rapidly—and I doubt if I could have done this under ordinary circumstances. But in the extremity of the moment, I was given added confidence and strength.

And it was the same with Handforth.

He, too, came up after me. Clutching with hands and knees and feet, we mounted higher and higher. The soldiers below were shouting and cursing. Objects were being thrown at us—stones and other things. But, fortunately, the men had no firearms.

And so, by this swift action, we had saved the situation for the moment. True, there did not seem much hope for us. We were like the man in the tree who escaped from a bear. It would be impossible for us to get down without falling into the enemy's hands. And there were many tactics they could adopt in order to drive us out of our temporary haven of refuge.

But, as I said, for the moment we were safe.

But we did not pause. We mounted higher and higher, until at length we were in the very topmost forks of the tree. Here we were able to sit with comparative ease, our legs crooked over the branches. And the great trunk swayed slightly to and fro under our weight, for it tapered considerably towards the top. We clung there, breathing hard.

"It was the only thing, Handy!" I said at length. "We couldn't hope to fight clear of all that crowd."

"We should have done some damage, but you're about right," agreed Handforth. "I say, old man—thanks awfully, you know. You're a brick! Absolutely a brick! You saved my life!"

"Well, I couldn't do much else," I said. "I saw that chopper in the air, and I knew that you were just about finished. Even as I fired, I didn't think that you would be saved."

Handforth's face was a picture of indignation.

"The murderous rotters!" he exclaimed. "Fancy trying to chop my head off! When I get a chance, I'll——"

"Yes, but will you get a chance?" I asked grimly. "I don't want to be pessimistic, but it seems to me that our hopes of freedom are rather flimsy. We've got to realise, my son, that we're in about the tightest corner anybody could imagine. Things are bad."

"Oh, I don't know," said Handforth. "We're safe, and as soon as these soldiers get tired of watching, we'll slip down and get away!"

"Oh, yes!" I said. "We can do that—I don't think! The soldiers won't go away, and they'll either starve us, or attempt something more drastic. You can be sure they won't let us stay here."

I looked down at the enemy troops. They were collected in a big clump beneath the tree, and were gazing up at us. There were thirty or forty of them there. And my heart sank. How could we possibly hope to escape from such a determined throng?"

Further away I could see soldiers moving along the roads. And there, only a comparatively short distance away lay the buildings of the capital. I could even see the King's palace in the clear air, and the buildings of the big square where the Golden Rover lay.

But my attention was drawn to the immediate peril.

A man below was shouting up to us.

"Thou young fools!" he was saying.

"'Twill serve thee naught to remain up in the tree. Come down, and thou wilt go free. We will not harm thee in any way. Cease this foolery!"

"No, thanks!" I shouted. "We're staying here."

"You can go and tell your King that he's a rotter!" yelled Handforth.

The officer scowled.

"Thou wilt not come down?" he called.

"No!"

"Then 'twill go hard with thee!" snarled the man. "'Tis easy to get thee to the ground. Odds death! We will not be defied by two paltry boys!"

We watched with interest—and not without a certain amount of apprehension. These soldiers had no reliable firearms, but the main

army of King Jasper carried explosives—a kind of gunpowder. A big charge of this stuff would soon bring the tree down, and us with it. And if this high tree was sent crashing to the ground, there would not be much chance for us.

But the soldiers acted differently.

Sharp orders were given, and two of the men, armed with great axes, commenced hacking at the tree-trunk. The splinters of wood flew out in all directions. I looked at Handforth rather desperately.

They were cutting the tree down!

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE!



CRASH—crash!

The axes thudded against the tree-trunk heavily, and the splinters continued to fly. It would not be long before the tree tottered. And then we should

go hurtling to the earth.

"This doesn't look healthy!" I said grimly.

"What the dickens will happen?" asked Handforth.

"Well, we shall come a cropper, anyway," I replied. "In fact, you might just as well settle yourself to the fact, Handy, that we're as good as finished. When this tree falls, there won't be much chance for us."

"Can't we jump?"

"We shall have to; but we're up fifty or sixty feet, and a jump like that isn't going to be particularly safe," I said grimly. "No, the position's about as bad as it can be. If we surrender, off come our heads; if we don't surrender, we come to the ground like a couple of stones."

Handforth was growing red with fury.

"The murderous rotters!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Can't we do something? Can't we beat 'em, Nipper? You're a bit of a marvel when it comes to ideas. Why not let yourself go thoroughly, and think of something really good?"

It was rather surprising to hear Handforth talk in this way.

Under ordinary circumstances, he always claimed to be the greatest idea merchant. But he had sense enough to realise that he was beaten now. And in a dire extremity Handforth was strong enough to admit himself beaten. He was a queer fellow in many ways.

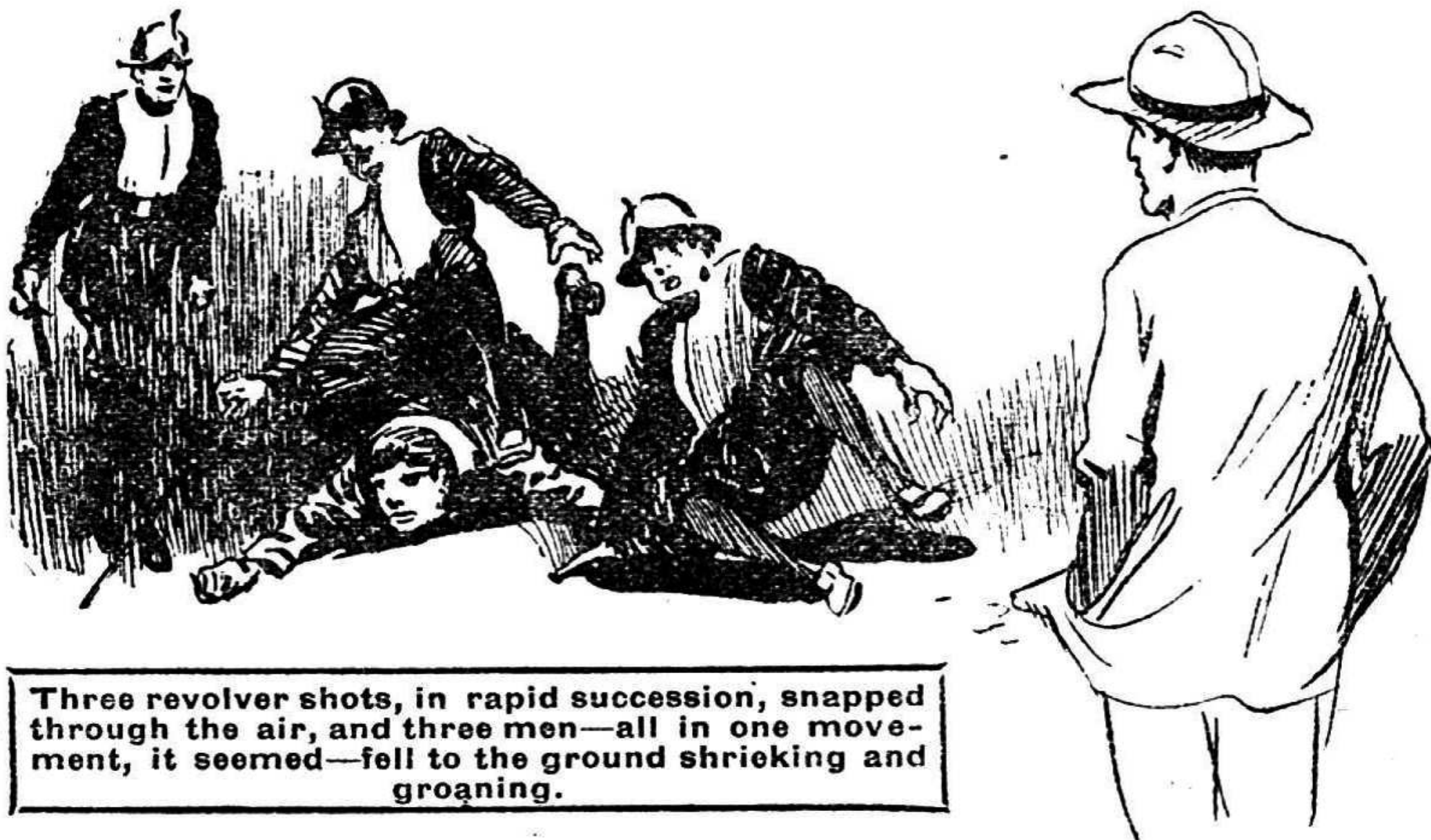
"Something really good!" I repeated.

"The situation demands it, my son—but what can be done? If we decide to slither down and make a fight for it, well, we shall have a good old scrap, but there's not one chance in a million of us getting away. But perhaps that will be better than tamely waiting for the finish. I wish I could think—By Jove!"

I broke off abruptly, and grabbed at my middle.

"Yes!" I said tensely. "Yes!"
 "Burst a button?" asked Handforth, who was always practical.
 "No—no!"
 "Then what's the matter?"
 "Nothing's the matter!" I replied impatiently. "Yes, I'll do it; it's strong enough too! There's that branch in just the right position! Handy, old man, there's a chance!"
 I looked at him with glittering eyes, and he looked at me as though I were talking double Dutch!
 "What's the matter with you?" he asked.
 "What do you mean? How can there be a chance if——"
 "Wait!" I broke in. "They're shouting."
 We looked down. The ground seemed a

"There's not much time now!" I said swiftly.
 "But what's the wheeze?" demanded Handforth. "Before that rotter spoke to us you were saying——"
 "Yes!" I interrupted. "Look here—look at this!"
 I pulled my coat up, and then Handforth stared.
 "A rope!" he exclaimed wonderingly.
 Handforth was right. Round and round my body there was a thin cord-like rope. There was a considerable length of it, and I had wound it round myself as an after-thought, just before starting out.
 In the old days, when the guv'nor and I had set off upon a detective adventure, we



Three revolver shots, in rapid succession, snapped through the air, and three men—all in one movement, it seemed—fell to the ground shrieking and groaning.

very long way distant. And we could see the enemy soldiers looking up at us. Work on cutting the tree down had ceased for the moment. The two axe-men were resting.

"What's the matter down there?" roared Handforth.

"Wilt thou surrender, or nay?" came an officer's voice.

"Nay!" yelled Handforth.

"Thou insane scallywags!" came the voice. "'Tis your last chance. Come down from thy lofty perch, and thou wilt be allowed freedom. But if you continue to remain stubborn, 'twill go ill with thee. One minute more, and the tree will crash down. Death will be swift."

"Go ahead!" I shouted. "We're staying here!"

"Odds life!" roared the officer. "Thou art indeed mad!"

He turned to his men, and gave harsh orders. And the tree quivered as the axes got to work, raining blow after blow on the wood.

had generally carried a rope of this sort, and on many occasions it had proved to be of great service. It now seemed that a rope was to be the means of our lives being saved.

"But—but what's the good of it?" asked Handforth. "A rope's not going to help us, fathead!"

"Isn't it?" I said. "Look over there. See that tree?"

"Yes."

"See that great dead branch?"

"Yes."

"That's going to save us!" I said. "At least we're going to make a jolly good try for it."

There was only one large tree in our immediate neighbourhood. The river flowed swiftly along its course some little distance on the other side of this tree. But that was of little interest to us.

The tree itself was a tall, straight one, very much like our own. Projecting from one side was a great stiff branch. There was no

foliage upon it, and the stump stood out about six feet from the main trunk. It was either dead, or had been broken off owing to some accident. It did not interest me how the stump came to be there.

"I'm blessed if I can see what you're going to do," said Handforth. "Why, as soon as you've unwound that rope we shall be down. We've only got about a couple of minutes left—"

"Exactly!" I interrupted, as I got the rope free and commenced to make a noose. "Thank goodness the gov'nor taught me a good deal about the art of lassoing. If I can, I'm going to hook the end of that branch. Are you beginning to see? We shall swing down, and—"

"But we shall crash into the other tree, you ass!"

"No, we shan't," I said. "There's plenty of room. We shall swing straight down, and miss the tree by two or three feet. And as the tree isn't a great distance away, we shall easily clear the ground. I reckon we'll swing down, and then— Oh, my hat! Did you feel that?"

The tree had suddenly given a giddy lurch. Shouts came from those below. Already a number of ominous cracks were sounding. But, somehow, the disaster did not occur. The tree still remained upright.

"We'll be too late!" I gasped. "Hold still!"

Handforth saw what was required, and he steadied me as I half stood upright. Then, gathering the coils of rope together, I suddenly let fly. The end of the noose coiled beautifully through the air, settled over the end of the broken branch, and in a flash I had drawn it tight.

"First time!" I panted.

"Oh, good man!" said Handy. "I had no idea that you could do it like that! Rip-ping!"

"We might be saved now!" I said. "Look here, we're not going to wait until the tree goes—it might fall in the wrong direction. Grab this rope, and hold on like the very dickens."

"Trust me!" gasped Handy.

"We'll swing down, and then jump," I said. "We shall probably get hurt, and it's almost a certainty that we shall get captured. But there's just one chance in a thousand that luck may be with us. We'll try."

"Right-o! I'm ready!"

I gave one glance below, as I drew the rope tight. Handforth and I were now clinging to the rope, and were on the point of swinging ourselves out. It must be quite obvious to everyone that we should swoop down—without actually falling sheer—like a great pendulum.

And then I saw that numbers of the soldiers were rushing along towards the second tree. The men had spotted our game, and my heart sank. Before we could land they would swoop on us.

But there was nothing else for it—we had to go.

And then then there came a splintering, crashing sound. There was no need for us to leap from the tree. For it was absolutely yanked away from us as it fell. It went over in the opposite direction to the second tree—which was very fortunate.

"Hold on!" I gasped wildly.

We swooped down, gathering speed as we went. It was a most thrilling sensation, and we had queer feelings in the pit of our stomachs. And down we went—down!

I stared in front of me, wondering if the rope would hold—wondering if we should clear the heads of those men who were waiting to catch us upon our alighting. There seemed to be absolutely no hope of getting away.

A terrific crash sounded.

The tree had fallen—but we were now at the bottom of our swing. I caught a flashing glimpse of evil faces as we swept right over the heads of those who were waiting. And then we swooped out upon the other swing of the pendulum. And when we came back there would be no hope.

But we didn't come back!

For in that flash a brain wave came to me.

We were just on the point of beginning the return swing. I saw something which ought to have been obvious to me from the start; but in the excitement I had not had time to notice it.

"Let go!" I yelled. "Drop—drop!"

Handforth obeyed on the second, and I followed suit. The tremendous swing of the rope had carried us right out, as can be imagined, and it was at this crucial moment that we released our hold. We were a great distance from the ground, of course, and a fall from that height was a grave matter.

And then—splash!

Down we went—like stones.

Instead of hitting the ground, we plunged into the river! We had been hurtled out in that direction by sheer force of gravity. And I had left it to chance whether we were lucky or not.

A slight miscalculation, and we should have hit the ground. But, as it was, we found ourselves spluttering and gasping in the warm current.

And we were carried swiftly away.

The soldiers of St. Edmund came rushing towards the river, shouting madly. But by the time they reached the bank we were some distance away, being carried further and further off every moment. Shouts of anger filled the air, but we didn't care. We had beaten the whole lot of them.

About half-a-mile down the stream we struggled out upon the bank—for I did not feel very comfortable in the river, where lurked all manner of queer fish and death-dealing monsters.

And this point where we landed was free from all enemy forces. We were practically

unharméd, and as we shook the water from ourselves we grinned at one another—we grinned with relief.

"Good!" said Handforth. "My only hat! That was a narrow squeak, if you like! It's a good thing we thought of that stunt!"

"Rather!" I agreed. "We've done well, old son!"

"Hold on!" said Handforth, gripping my hand. "I've just remembered—it was your wheeze. I was about as useful as a wax dummy. Of course, I might have thought of that idea in time, but I'm not going to rob you of the honour. I can't understand it, either. I'm usually so quick at getting ideas."

We clasped hands, and then commenced hurrying towards the capital. We had had about enough of roaming about by ourselves.

And on the way Handforth told me how it was that he had been captured. And I told him of Archie's amazing bravery.

And we hastened on—towards further excitement and thrills!

CHAPTER VIII.

TREACHERY!



WITHIN the city all was activity.

Under Nelson Lee's vigorous leadership the New Anglians had awakened into warlike enthusiasm. At first they had been numbed by the approach of King Jasper's army.

Having no army of their own—relying upon the great wall which protected their kingdom—they felt that they were doomed. But Nelson Lee's greatness in holding back the invading forces, assisted by a mere handful of men, had fired the New Anglians to a tremendous pitch of activity.

Men had come in from all corners of the kingdom. New London was swarming with men who were anxious to fight in order to save their country. They were untrained, but they were willing to do everything possible—to lay down their lives, if necessary—in order to bring defeat upon King Jasper and his forces.

And Nelson Lee was largely responsible.

By his fine example, he had shown these men that it was foolish to despair.

And now the capital was absolutely teeming with active men. It was like a vast ant-hill. Every street was crowded with men, and all were arming themselves in readiness for the coming fray.

The women and children were kept closely guarded, behind stone walls. Most of them had been sent down into every available cellar, and all were crowded towards the central section of the city.

King Arthur had flung open his palace

and all the public buildings were also at the disposal of the population. This left the entire outer circle of the city empty and deserted—that is, except for the fighting-men. These, of course, swarmed in hundreds.

For it had been decided that it would be impossible to hold the invaders back for long. The only safe course was to defend the city itself—to keep the invaders out of the capital.

But there was no question that New London would be stormed—grimly and determinedly. But they would now have a very different task.

With the inhabitants fired up into angry enthusiasm, King Jasper's men would find that it would not be such a very easy task to break down the defence.

One point was greatly in favour of the citizens. The entire city was surrounded by a great high wall—a wall which rose to about forty feet in height. In comparison to the Great Wall which divided New Anglia from St. Edmund, it was a mere trifle.

But, at the same time, the city wall was sufficiently high to give the invaders a great deal of trouble. The top of the wall was nearly six feet wide, and here the defenders were swarming in hundreds, with all manner of ammunition ready to hurl down upon the enemy.

Great boulders of stone—hastily constructed bombs, consisting of gunpowder—and all sorts of other articles were being packed in readiness for use. And the four main gates of the city were thoroughly blocked.

The gates themselves were closed, and immense piles of stone were being forced into the gateways. In this fashion there would be no chance of King Jasper's troops gaining an easy entry.

They would be hampered the whole time by the missiles from the defenders. All these schemes—the whole plan of defence, in fact—had been suggested by Nelson Lee.

For the gov'nor had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the New Anglian forces. And he was using his power to the fullest advantage. It was not because Nelson Lee was so tremendously in love with this country—it was not because he wanted to do big things.

He was actuated partly by the fact that these people were so helpless that he could not stand idly by—but mainly because he was responsible for all the juniors. And if they were to be saved, the capital had to be saved.

For there was no question about what would happen if we were captured.

Without the slightest doubt, King Jasper would celebrate his great triumph by executing every one of us.

After what had happened to Handforth and I, there was little doubt about this matter. And so, in order to save ourselves,

we had to fight for the deliverance of the whole nation.

Lord Dorrimore had already returned with Archie. And they had made straight for the Golden Rover. Archie was most anxious to have a complete change for, as he said, he felt somewhat foul after his immersion in the river.

He found everything in a state of great activity.

Dorrie had left him to go in search of Nelson Lee. And Archie arrived among all the other fellows, and found that most of them were marching up and down the big central square. They were allowed this liberty, but were not permitted to go forth into other parts of the city.

And Mr. Raymond Gray and the engineer and the mechanic were working as they had never worked before on the repairs.

If the Golden Rover had been in a fit state to fly, there is no question that Nelson Lee would have allowed the New Anglians to fight out their own battle. He would have not interfered in any way.

But the Rover was helpless.

Having been smashed up by that explosion—caused by a bomb flung by an enemy spy—there was nothing else to do but repair her. And this was not an easy task.

One great wing tip had been completely shattered, and Mr. Gray almost despaired, at first, of being able to make things right. But he had obtained the assistance of forges and native blacksmiths. And then all the twisted and battered metal of the wing had been collected together. And now it was being reshaped and remade.

Until the Rover was able to fly, we had to fight.

For there was another danger, too. If the enemy succeeded in penetrating into the city, they would capture the airship. And that, indeed, would be a terrible fatality.

For even if King Jasper spared our lives, we should be doomed to remain in this strange Antarctic basin for the remainder of our days. For it was certain that King Jasper would wreck the Rover. At all costs, his soldiers had to be kept out of the central square.

And there was no chance of any further bombs being dropped. Every building round the square was guarded by New Anglian troops. They mostly consisted of men belonging to the household brigade. These men could be trusted, and it was absolutely certain that there were no traitors in their midst. Thus, with these men constantly on guard, watching every roof, there was no fear of another party of spies dropping an explosive.

All the streets leading to the square were completely guarded by other New Anglians. And this one spot, where the Rover lay, was like a backwater. It was a haven of peace, while all the rest of the city was teeming with excitement and bustle.

Archie was immediately surrounded—as soon as he had got through the cordon of

troops. He could see Mr. Gray and the engineers working hard on the Rover—but before he could reach the vicinity a number of fellows were round him.

"You—you bounder!" shouted Bob Christine. "Where the dickens have you been?"

"Come on, Archie—out with it!"

"What have you been doing?"

"Let's have the yarn!"

"Why, he's all damp—he's like a drowned rat!"

"Well, old beans, the fact is—I mean to say!" said Archie. "To be quite exact things have been happening. Absolutely. might even say that the most frightful things have taken place!"

"Ass!" said De Valerie. "What do you mean?"

"Absolutely!"

"That's no answer."

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie. "But, you see, dear old birds, you positively fluster me. Dash it all, I'm all in a dither. Absolutely! Kindly refrain from being——"

"Look here, you're not going to get out of it!" said Reginald Pitt. "You sneak off with Handforth somewhere——"

"Yes, where's Handy?" asked Church anxiously.

"What?" said Archie. "Gadzooks!"

"Can't you remember?" said McClure.

"What's become of the ass?"

"I mean to say Handforth was somewhat obstinate," explained Archie. "The dear chappie was absolutely opposed to the idea of going in the same direction as myself. And so we staggered forth in opposite directions, as it were."

"You fathead!" said Church.

"Really! I mean, somewhat terse!" said Archie. "I don't mean to be rude, old darling, but kindly withdraw the ——"

"I don't withdraw anything!" interrupted Church. "You were a fathead to let Handforth go off by himself. You know what a hopeless ass he is. And you know that he only needs half a chance to get himself into a terrific trouble. Goodness knows what's happened to him now."

"He'll turn up all right!" said Pitt. "He always does. Handy's a most extraordinary chap for asking for trouble, and then dodging it. But how the dickens are things going, Archie? Seen any signs of the enemy?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A few thousands, don't you know. Battalions and regiments and all that kind of thing! Millions of them, old tulip! The whole dashed countryside is positively reeking with the blighters!"

"That looks a bit lively for us!" said Armstrong.

The juniors went on talking, and although Archie mentioned something about a bridge being blown up, he entirely omitted to relate his own part in the adventure. He explained his wetness by saying that he had fallen into the river.

And it was not until I turned up, some little time later, that the juniors actually knew the truth.

I did not hesitate to give the actual facts. I told everybody how Archie had saved my life at the terrible risk of his own. And Archie, for some time, was the hero of the hour.

He didn't like it at all.

Finally, he escaped by getting into the Rover, and locking himself in one of the state rooms. And there he went off to sleep—supremely content to leave all the fighting and excitement in other hands.

He didn't want to see how things were going—he had had all he required. And now he knew that Nelson Lee and his lieutenants could be trusted to pull the thing off.

Lord Dorrimore had turned up on a section of the city wall where Nelson Lee was making special preparations. Dorrie told the gov'nor everything, and it was only a little while later that I appeared on the scene.

"It seems to me, young 'un, that you have been getting most of the excitement," he exclaimed. "And what is this rumour about Handforth? Somebody has told me that he and you had a narrow escape."

"Yes, sir—we got in about twenty minutes ago," I replied. "Things were a bit warm for a time, but we managed to beat the bounders."

And I explained to Nelson Lee exactly how we escaped from the St. Edmund soldiers by using the lasso. Nelson Lee listened with great interest, and when I had finished, both he and Dorrie clapped me on the back.

"Well done!" was all that Nelson Lee said.

"Great!" put in Dorrie. "If nothin' else, this bully war is bringin' out large quantities of pluck among the juniors. Who would suspect Archie of such a noble, courageous act?"

"I have always regarded Archie as being a boy of exceptional courage," said Nelson Lee. "His usual attitude is more or less a pose—a habit. He is not such a fool as he looks."

"No, Archie's all right!" I said. "He's all there!"

"But we cannot waste time gossiping," put in the gov'nor. "A good many things have yet to be done. Phipps will be along soon, with about fifty men—I have made him one of my chief lieutenants."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Phipps is a fine leader, sir."

"He is, indeed," agreed Nelson Lee. "I have discovered that Phipps is a great deal more than a valet. He opened our eyes while we were on Lagoon Island, but now he is showing what he can do in warfare."

Major Barrance was in charge of another party of New Anglians, and Dorrie took command of still more. Every quarter of the city walls were placed in command of reliable men.

There was very little doubt that when the battle actually started, the citizens would be able to look after themselves.

But whether they would be able to keep the invaders out would be another matter.

For the enemy forces were a great deal heavier than our own. There were three to one against us.

In a few days, the New Anglians would be able to muster up a great many fighting men—a force quite large enough to put King Jasper and his men to flight. But they were required now—not in a week's time.

This was exactly what King Jasper had relied upon.

He knew that the New Anglians had no trained troops to speak of. One big swoop, and the country would be entered, and the capital seized. Once in the hands of the enemy, all would be lost. For Jasper would force his will upon the people. And it would be too late to institute any offensive.

For this reason, King Jasper would make a desperate, determined attack. Once he succeeded in breaking down the resistance, his victory would be won. So Nelson Lee was determined that the city walls should be held at all costs. The gov'nor was confident that he would be successful.

The most deadly weapon in our hands—the weapon which would mean the defeat of the St. Edmund forces—was the machine gun. We had four of these, and unlimited ammunition. When I say unlimited, I mean we had an ample supply to keep the enemy at bay.

And these four machine guns were placed in the most dangerous position. There were at least three points round the city where a determined rush might succeed. And so the machine guns were placed on the top of the wall here. They could send out a raking fire over a wide area, and keep back the enemy forces with practically no trouble. The St. Edmund troops would never be able to advance in the face of such a terrible fire.

And in this way the defence was being prepared.

Every available sword had been distributed among the men. But the others were armed with clubs. These were great wooden objects which were capable of smashing a man's head. Still more defenders carried heavy chunks of metal.

It didn't really matter what they had, as long as they were armed in some way. And they swarmed upon the city walls—waiting for the enemy to come in sight—waiting for the great moment.

There was no question that King Jasper would begin his attack as soon as possible.

He would not wait—he would not attempt any strategy. He would make one bold bid for complete victory. And his only course was to hurl his troops against the city walls in one fierce onslaught.

So the scene round the outskirts of New London was an animated one.

I was standing comparatively near to Nelson Lee on the summit of the wall. We were looking down one of the roads which led into the open country. So far there was not the slightest sign of the enemy. But there were plenty of scouts out, and word was constantly coming in as to the exact position of Jasper and his army.

Nelson Lee's original scheme had met with great success. By blowing up the bridge, and by sending Jasper's own army back, great delay had been caused. And during this delay, the New Anglians had been protecting the city.

It would be foolish to remain outside the city walls much longer—and that was why Nelson Lee had retreated. There was only one hope of saving the whole situation—and that was to remain on the spot.

As I stood there, a couple of scouts arrived with the news that two separate bodies of troops were marching rapidly towards the capital. They were only a couple of miles distant.

And then something else happened.

It was a disaster.

From somewhere in the centre of the city came a loud shattering report. Afterwards, it was discovered that a kind of bomb had been exploded on a flat roof. Nobody knew exactly why, for practically no damage was caused.

The real reason for that explosion was obvious to us, on the walls.

It was a signal.

There were several New Anglians standing near us, and they were all armed. As that report sounded, one of these men turned like a flash of lightning, and the heavy metal club in his hands was raised.

Crash!

He brought it down with fearful force upon the machine gun—which Dorrie was even then preparing for work. It was an act of treachery which we had hardly expected. Here was a New Anglian volunteer deliberately smashing up one of our most deadly methods of defence.

"Good gad!" shouted Lord Dorrimore hoarsely.

The machine gun had collapsed under the tremendous shock. The thing was shattered—absolutely smashed beyond repair.

"Success to King Jasper and his mighty troops!" yelled the man who had committed the deed. "I defy thee —"

Crack!

Dorrie fired at point blank range. He was wild with fury—and in addition, the traitor had raised his weapon again, this time with the intention of killing Dorrie.

He fell from the wall with a crash—to lay outside, a huddled heap, shot through the heart.

"The infernal cur!" shouted his lordship. "Look, Lee! It's ruined—smashed to atoms! An' we needed that machine gun more than any other!"

Nelson Lee's face was grim.

"We shall be lucky if this is the only one to go!" he said quietly. "Dorrie, I believe that that report just now was a signal. And we will presently hear that our other machine guns have suffered a similar fate."

I clutched at the gov'nor's arm.

"Oh!" I gasped. "But—but it can't be, sir!"

CHAPTER IX

THE STORMING OF THE CAPITAL.



CONFIRMATION of Nelson Lee's grim surmise came rapidly.

Phipps, who had charge of the next machine gun position, sent word by special runner that immediately after the report from the town had sounded, a newly-enrolled volunteer had smashed the machine gun with a great bar of iron. The gun was damaged beyond repair.

"The curs!" said Dorrie fiercely. "By the Lord Harry! This makes our position absolutely different, old man!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It does," he agreed. "But it is useless to grumble, Dorrie. We could not be prepared for anything of this nature. Nobody is to blame, so it is idle to accuse ourselves of carelessness. When there are traitors in our midst we can only expect such acts as these."

Dorrie cocked his revolver.

"They'll be comin' for us next!" he said curtly. "That'll be their infernal game! We must be on our guard, Lee, or some of these skunks will try to break our heads in."

"Yes, you are right," said Nelson Lee. "I think somebody else is coming along with a message. We shall soon see."

He was right. A man came hurrying up with news from Major Barrance. His machine gun had also been wrecked by the traitors. There were only four all told, so things were looking bad, indeed.

But there was just a faint glimpse of hope.

For shortly afterwards a huge black figure came pushing through the crowds. It was Umlosi, and upon his burly shoulder he carried the fourth machine gun. It appeared to be nearly intact.

"Well, old friend, I think I know what your complaint is!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, after Umlosi had mounted to the top of

the wall. But the gun does not appear to be greatly damaged —"

"The machine which spurts fire and drives lead is unharmed, my master!" exclaimed Umlosi. "Not that those dogs did not attempt to wreck the wondrous weapon. Wau! Even as the accursed wretch raised his bar of iron I ran him through with my spear. He lies dead!"

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "An' the gun's all right?"

"I know not, N'Kose," replied Umlosi. "It is for thee to see."

Nelson Lee was already examining it, and he looked up.

"Was the gun hit at all?" he asked.

"The merest of touches, O my father," replied Umlosi.

"Well, I rather fancy the mechanism is slightly affected," said Nelson Lee. "However, we shall soon have a chance to know—for the enemy is appearing within sight, and the battle will soon be raging."

"Wau! I am happy, O Umtagati," said the Kutana chief.

He was off like the wind—back to his own position. He didn't care anything about the machine-guns being broken. In fact, it is quite possible that he was glad. For it would mean that the St. Edmund soldiers would sweep into the city—and this would give Umlosi an opportunity of using his great spear.

But the enemy's base act had made all the difference.

Much to my disgust, I was not allowed to remain on the city wall with Nelson Lee. I was told to go back to the central square, and remain with the others. I could do nothing else but follow these instructions.

All the juniors were thoroughly excited and eager to do something on their own account. But the time had not yet come. Later, perhaps, if the enemy penetrated into the city, there might be a chance.

The news quickly spread that enemy spies had destroyed the machine-guns. And this caused no little consternation among the fellows. They were furious, too. Handforth suggested that every spy should be hanged on the spot.

It was a good idea, but there was one drawback. We didn't know who were spies, and who were not.

The work on the Rover was going ahead as quickly as possible.

Mr. Grey and Jock McGregor and the mechanic were working like niggers. With feverish haste they laboured away. But the job was a long one, and there was no prospect of completing the work for at least another two or three days.

"We've got to stick here!" said Handforth, disgustedly. "Why should we?"

"Because we've had orders!" said Pitt.

"Yes, but we could easily slip off," declared Edward Oswald. "It wouldn't take us long to get to the city wall, and then perhaps we could join in the fighting. I'm going, anyway."



Crash! The soldier brought down his club with fearful force upon the machine-gun which Dorrie was working. It was an act of treachery we hardly expected.

"After what happened?" asked Church.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you weren't very successful the last time," said Church. "If it hadn't been for Nipper, your head would have been off by now. The next time you won't be so lucky."

Handforth sniffed.

"I can take care of myself!" he declared.

"I think you chaps ought to come with me, because——"

"Absolutely not!" put in Archie firmly.

"Eh?"

"I mean to say, dear old lad, the atmosphere in this quarter is a frightful lot healthier than it is elsewhere," said Archie. "Dash it all, fighting and all that sort of thing is absolutely priceless, but—Well, there you are! You know what I mean, what?"

"I'm blessed if I do," said Handforth.

"Something after the style of the old saying, don't you know," said Archie. "Enough, as it were, is as good as a bally old feed, or words to that effect. You catch the trend, old scream? We, as it were, have had considerable chunks of adventure to-day——"

"Archie's right!" I interrupted. "You don't want to go out looking for more

trouble, Handy. Besides that, the gov'nor and the others will have their hands full up without being bothered by us. We might be helpful—but, on the other hand, the gov'nor would be so worried about our safety, that he wouldn't be able to give his full attention to the battle."

"Yes, it's better all round that we should stay here," said Pitt. "Listen! Did you hear that?"

Crack—crack! Crack—crack!

Faintly, and far away, came the sounds of sharp reports. They came from different parts of the city walls.

"They're firing!" I said grimly. "That means that the enemy has started the show! If we want to see anything of the fighting, the best thing we can do is to get to the top of one of these high buildings."

"That, as it were, is a somewhat brainy scheme!" said Archie. "At the same time, old dear, it entails huge cartloads of energy. I mean to say, stair-climbing, and this and that!"

But the bulk of the juniors decided to adopt my suggestion.

If they couldn't actually be on the spot, there was no reason why they shouldn't witness the battle from afar. And from any of the high buildings it would be easy to see the city walls—in every direction.

There was no prohibition about climbing to the roof of one of these buildings. For

they were all in the safe area. And there was an immediate rush for the great clock-tower of the cathedral, for a balcony ran entirely round this tower, at the very summit, and from here the whole progress of the battle could be viewed.

There was a rush at once.

Practically all the juniors decided to go. Only Archie and Fatty Little elected to remain with the Rover—Archie because the journey was too tugging, and Fatty because he could smell certain luscious odours from Snowball's kitchen. The attraction of that odour was irresistible. Wild horses wouldn't drag him away from the vicinity.

Even Handforth decided that it would be better to go. He had some dark idea of sneaking off on his own, disguised as a native. But this was soon knocked out of his head, and he came with the rest of us.

And when we reached the balcony, we found a magnificent view spread before us. We could see the whole city—which, after all, was not particularly large. It was well arranged, with neat streets. And it was slightly oblong shaped, with a wall entirely surrounding it.

There were four gates. And these, as we could see, had been closed and completely blocked up. Just outside the walls there were other houses—branches which had sprung up within recent years.

(Continued on next page.)

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But all these dwellings had been deserted, and the inhabitants were now safely within the city proper. If only the New Anglians could keep King Jasper's men out, all would be well.

For, in a comparatively short time, the Rover would be ready for service. And then the soldiers of St. Edmund would be put to rout. Once the Golden Rover was able to take the air, all difficulties would vanish.

And so this, really, was the crucial time. If the defences failed, and the enemy swept into the capital, there would be no hope at all, for the Rover would fall a victim to Jasper's men, and we should lose her for ever.

Not that it would interest us much—for we should soon be put to death.

And so it was with a great personal interest that we watched the battle.

"Great Scott!" shouted Tommy Watson. "Look out there! Swarms of them! The whole countryside is packed with the enemy troops."

"My only hat!"

"He's right!"

At all events, Watson was not far wrong. Over towards the west gate, the enemy appeared to be concentrating for a big attack. We could see right out over the walls and into the country roads. They were filled with soldiers—and these soldiers were pushing forward to the attack.

It was just at this point, too, that Nelson Lee was holding a section of the wall. The machine-gun which Umlosi had brought was tested—it was put into action. After firing about ten shots, however, the mechanism jammed.

"I thought as much!" said Lee grimly. "The whole thing wants readjusting. It is not badly damaged, but the mechanism is affected. It's useless—we can't rely upon it."

He attempted to put it right, but found that the only hope was to take it to pieces and thoroughly adjust the mechanism afresh. And so, without delay, Nelson Lee gave the gun into the hands of four trusted men.

And these were despatched, post-haste, to the central square. The gun was to be

delivered into the hands of Mr. Raymond Gray—with urgent instructions to put it in working order as quickly as possible. All other work was to be stopped until this job was accomplished.

In the meantime, the great onslaught had commenced.

King Jasper had done wonderfully well up till now. It was useless denying the fact. Not only had he disabled the Rover by means of his spies, but he had also put all the machine-guns out of action.

And, now, his troops had only to sweep up to the city wall, and break down the defence, and the capital of New Anglia would be his. For, once these enemy troops surged into the city, a great panic would ensue, and surrender would be the only result.

Nelson Lee knew that the lives of his whole party depended upon this battle. He was not merely giving his services for the benefit of King Arthur and his subjects. The safety of the whole St. Frank's party depended upon Lee.

And the gov'nor was determined to fight to the last—and to force his men to fight with him.

The enemy soldiers came charging up. The air was filled with cries—shouts of rage and excitement.

The storming of the capital was now a reality.

The battle was a big one—with many thrills and many dangers. Exactly how we fared cannot be related here—for the simple reason that I haven't got the space. But you can be quite sure that we didn't lose, or this record wouldn't have been written at all.

I can just hint that the events immediately following the battle were the most exciting of all our experiences. And then, after that, we were booked for a quick return to England, home and—St. Frank's!

But, before that homeward trip commenced, we were destined to pass through some extraordinary adventures—all packed into one breathlessly short space of time.

THE END.

My dear Readers,

With the enemy massed outside the city walls and spies within the capital, and no weapons to meet either, the outlook for the beleaguered inhabitants, including the Holiday Party, is about as black as it could be. King Jasper is about to strike the final blow, and unless Nelson Lee in this hour of peril can achieve almost the impossible, New London will be doomed, and all will be lost. After what has happened, King Jasper will not spare a single member of the Holiday Party, and no one realises this more than Nelson Lee himself. The

story of this titanic onslaught on the city, and the ultimate fate of the defenders, will form the last and grandest of the present adventure series. It will appear next week, under the title of "THE STORMING OF THE CAPITAL."

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Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 42.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

Sept. 9, 1922.

MY DEAR CHUMS,—At time of writing our fate hangs in the balance. If we get through the ordeal successfully, we shall take the first opportunity of getting back to Good Old England and St. Frank's. Everyone is agreed that we have had quite enough adventure in strange parts of the globe for this year. But we have still the stiffest battle to fight before we can regain our freedom. And if any man could get us out of our difficulties, it will be the Guv'nor.—Your devoted pal,

NIPPER (the Editor).

Wild Life in Antarctica.

WHALES AND SEALS.

NO LAND MAMMALS.

PROPERLY speaking, there are no land mammals, such as Polar bears, in the Antarctic, and the only large mammals found in these extreme southern latitudes are whales and seals. Neither have remains of extinct land mammals been found to suppose that they ever existed in Antarctica, although there is a theory that at one time the climate was warm enough to support vegetation. It is early yet, however, to be positive, as there is still a large area of the Antarctic continent unexplored. There are a few kinds of moss and lichen which might be classed as a low form of vegetation, and a single species of small, wingless insect, constituting the only form of terrestrial life so far discovered, with the exception of penguins, sea-gulls, and the amphibious seal.

THE KILLER AND THE RORQUAL WHALES.

Of whales there are many varieties, the killer or the orca being the monarch of the Antarctic seas. This monster, measuring 15 feet, preys upon seals and penguins, which it hunts in schools of a dozen or more. There is no mistaking the killer in appearance. It is of the high-finned species, and has an ochre-coloured saddle with a buff patch on the head, which is inclined to be pointed; and it is very active in its movements. The rorqual, sometimes known as the blue whale, is very common in the Antarctic seas. It is distinguished by its broad, blue, slate-coloured back, its small dorsal fin, and its high spout of condensed vapour which rises vertically from 12 to 15 feet in the air. In addition, there are at least five other distinct species of whales, of which two are quite new.

ANTARCTIC SEALS.

We next come to the seals, the only other form of mammal in the Antarctic. There are three species found below the Circle, and they

are the crab-eating or white seal, the Ross seal, and the Weddell seal. The sea-elephant and sea-leopard are occasionally met with, but they properly belong to regions north of the Antarctic latitudes.

THE CRAB-EATER.

The crab-eater or white seal is found in groups on the pack-ice, and is more often a chocolate-brown or chestnut colour, dappled with silver-white, than wholly white. It is not so big as the Weddell seal, but it is one of the most active of seals. Its length is about eight feet. For food it lives on shell-fish, which it finds in large quantities at the bottom of shallow seas.

THE ROSS SEAL.

The smallest of the Antarctic seals is the Ross seal, which is seldom more than seven or eight feet in length. In colour it is either black or brownish-grey on the shoulders and back, and lighter underneath. One of the peculiarities of this seal is its power of concealing its head within its blubber-laden neck. It is also noted for its ability to produce extraordinary vocal sounds. Its food consists chiefly of jelly-fish and squids.

THE WEDDELL SEAL.

Of all the Antarctic seals, the Weddell seal is the most important to man, for its flesh provides him with fresh meat. This seal is found in herds only on the coastline, and is very abundant. Because of its sluggish nature and absence of fear, the Weddell seal is an easy prey to the hunter. Measuring from nine to ten feet in length, with a girth of from six to seven feet, this huge animal is by far the most striking of the seal family in the Antarctic. Its coat is richly marked with black on top, blending with grey and silvery-white underneath. As a songster, the Weddell seal is even more astonishing than the Ross seal. When induced to sing, he will begin with a long, high-pitched moan, gradually going down the scale, and breaking off with grunts and gurgles, a succession of high, piping notes, then a long, shrill whistle, concluding with a snort.

PREFER TO DIE IN SECLUSION.

In common with most wild animals, seals, when they become old, retire in seclusion to die. Explorers tell us that they have found dead seals, including Weddells and crab-eaters, many miles from the coastline, and often high up on the glaciers. Much more could be told of the curious habits of these quaint Polar creatures which cannot be described in a short article, but readers who are interested should, if possible, pay a visit to the Zoological Gardens, where they can observe for themselves the peculiar characteristics of the Antarctic seals.

Your Football Club.

The Ideal Captain.

Another Interesting Chat to Junior Footballers.

About Your Skipper.

IN the earlier articles of this series I have given you a few hints on organising your club; of how to raise money to assist in its progress. This week I am going to commence talking to you about your play—to give you a few hints on developing your game and endeavour to put your feet on the path of football success so that you may help your club—for which you have already worked so manfully—rise to a superior position in its own league table—or, if it does not yet belong to a league (about which I hope to chat to you in another article) above the other clubs with whom it competes. And my first talk to you is going to be on the all important subject of your captain.

What the Captain Stands For.

No team can aspire to success in its games without, first, of all, it has an efficient and inspiring skipper as its leader. The captain of a side counts for a great deal more than would appear at first glance, especially in junior football. To the lads under him he is looked upon as the guiding genius whose football generalship spells the difference between victory and defeat, whose help and good advice inspires them to do things. A capable skipper is half the battle won at the outset.

The Senior Player.

In the big league clubs the captain of the side is generally the senior man on the club's books. Why? Simply because that man, by being longer with the club than his fellow players, has gained a greater experience of the particular style of football that club has been playing and is, consequently, more fitted to uphold its traditions than anybody else. He has been a long time with the club, he is anxious, for the sake of his association with it, to lift it into a high position in the world, and therefore he puts more effort into his work than if he had been a newcomer who had had the honour thrust upon him. So it should be with your captain. Make the senior man of the club your leader and trust to him to pull you through.

Praise and Blame.

But seniority is not the only merit that goes to make up the ideal captain. It is indeed, only one of many. Your captain, as I said in the first article, should put the interests of his club first and foremost, he should be well versed in

the laws of the game and he should be tactful and kindly—not too ready to condemn, not to ready, on the other hand, to overwhelm with praise when one of his men has done something particularly brilliant. Condemnation makes for a discontented spirit in the club, too high praise breeds conceit and jealousy—three serious bugbears that have been the ruin of many clubs in the past. The most tactful and helpful way of telling a man whom you may have noticed doing something on the field that he ought not to have done is to draw him aside from the other players after the match and just explain to him quietly where you think he was lacking, and tell him how to remedy his fault. Do not let him think that you are dissatisfied with him. Tell him, on the whole, that you are very satisfied with his play, but that you think he might have done better when such and such a thing happened.

Tactfulness.

And you will find that man, if he is a sportsman, will respect you for your thought and will look up to you afterwards. And the same remarks apply, in a lesser degree, when handing out bouquets. Supposing one of your men has saved the game by scoring a particularly brilliant goal. You naturally feel that you want to congratulate him upon it and you may do so, but do not let your praise be for him and he alone. Remember that, whoever scores the goals, the other members of the team also have some share in the performance and are entitled to praise as well. "Chaps," you will say to the team after the match, "I'm very pleased with the way you all showed up this afternoon, and I must congratulate so and so on his goal. It was a beauty." There you will have given the scorer of the goal some pleasure, and you will also have shown that you are not forgetting the part the other members of the team played in it. And so everybody will be satisfied. That's tact!

The Captain's Ideal Position.

The ideal position for a captain is centre-half. The centre-half is the very pivot of the team and sees practically everything that goes on around him during the progress of a game. Set your men an example by doing your best in every match, and you will find that they, too, will catch your spirit and do their best. Play up indifferently, and it has the effect of making your men play up indifferently. Remember you are the guiding light of the side; that the others look up to you for leadership and inspiration. Above all, don't hesitate, like a great many junior captains I know of, to raise your voice in directing the attack. There is no law in football to prevent a captain giving voice to orders on the football field. Watch the weak points in your defence and attack and do your best by judicious effort to strengthen them.

Foster the feeling of sportsmanship in the club, see that your men are not either under or over trained, for one is as bad as the other. Do your utmost for the club and the lads under you, and they will do their utmost for you.

Next week I shall talk to you about your goalkeeper.

"ROVER."

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE THURLINGHAM HALL ROBBERY



A Thrilling
Detective Story
OF

NELSON LEE & NIPPER
introducing the Master Criminal
ZENITH
THE ALBINO

J. T. VALDAN

YOU will excuse me, Mr. Lee—you are Detective Lee, are you not? Yes; I was sure I could not be mistaken. I am so interested to hear what you think of this albino fellow. You know the man I mean. Zenith, they call him; Monsieur Zenith."

Here the old man who had insisted upon entering into conversation with Nelson Lee opened out a grimy newspaper which he drew from his breast-pocket, and stabbed his thumb upon a series of startling headlines.

"See what the 'Evening Chronicle' says," he insisted, peering at short focus through his dark glasses. "Three years of ceaseless vigilance by the police of two continents have left the master criminal at large; and now, as an act of mere bravado, he dines at Newcastle Central Hotel, undisguised. We shall do well to look after our civic treasures. If the county police cannot protect us from such flagrant braggadocio as this, the nefarious talent of Zenith the cracksmán could hardly fail to outwit them." And so on.

The old man who had thus accosted Nelson Lee and Nipper within an underground restaurant in the neighbourhood of Central Station, Newcastle-on-Tyne, looked up from his newspaper with an air of triumph.

"What do you make of it?" he persisted. "Do you think, Mr. Lee, that this albino fellow would dare to remain in the city here, after his exploit of last evening?"

Here the old man turned to the paper again.

"By Jove," he went on, without waiting for a reply, "he's a daring fellow, is this Zenith!"

And, forthwith, he launched into a long account of the doings of Zenith the Albino.

Lee did not appear to be listening. The whole of his attention was engrossed by another matter. It was between eight and

nine o'clock at night, and one would have expected that particular restaurant to be empty. Yet, following in twos or threes upon the heels of the old man who had accosted Nelson Lee, had come a large number of visitors—all men—who had seated themselves at neighbouring tables.

They were all men of commonplace appearance, and their behaviour was perfectly natural. A casual observer would have deduced nothing untoward in their sudden arrival.

But long acquaintance with danger and the subtleties of international criminals had made of Nelson Lee a man who missed nothing. Carrying his life in his hands, as he undoubtedly did, he dared not disregard the unusual.

So that, instead of listening to the singularly detailed narrative of Zenith's exploits, which his table companion was narrating, the detective was scrutinising these newcomers, seeking to discover whether their purpose there was only the ostensible one of getting food, or something obscure, ominous, inimical to himself.

The minutes passed, the old man talked, and Lee turned his keen glance from face to face.

Then, quite suddenly, Nipper became aware that his employer had ceased to be interested in anybody other than the old man who had seated himself beside them. His manner had changed from one of polite indifference to one of intense concentration.

There is little doubt that their table companion noticed this, for his conversation, which had been rambling and discursive, improved to the point of brilliance. He continued to talk about Monsieur Zenith; but now he illustrated the tales of Zenith's exploits by experiences of his own career. He had known many strange people, and moved in strange places. Despite a growing con-

sciousness of danger, that half hour of talk in the underground restaurant was one of the most absorbing that Nipper had ever known.

But Lee observed a fact to which Nipper, fortunately for his peace of mind, was inattentive. He observed that, in the intoxication of brilliant talk, the old man had dropped his slovenly accent, straightened his bent back, and allowed his once rasping voice to become deep, vibrant, clear as a bell.

He had, in fact, betrayed that he was acting a part.

"Your colleague of Baker Street, Mr. Sexton Blake," he was saying, "has had many a battle of wits with Monsieur Zenith, if what they tell me is true. There is no doubt, Mr. Lee, that Sexton Blake is a man of very unusual powers; yet, I venture to suggest that even Sexton Blake has met his match in Zenith.

"And you, Mr. Lee, what is your private opinion in the matter? Do you imagine yourself the intellectual equal of this pink-eyed monstrosity they call Zenith? Do you imagine that, if this master-crook set himself to commit a certain crime—say, of robbery—that you, with all the powers of the county police behind you, would be able to prevent him?"

Nelson Lee cut and lighted a cigar.

"If that happened," he replied, looking his questioner straight in the face, "I would have a jolly good try, not only to thwart the plans of Monsieur Zenith, but also to put him where he belongs—in a prison cell."

"Bravely spoken," sneered the old man, "but let me tell you this, Zenith will never lie in a prison cell. You may achieve his death, but you will never achieve his capture."

He himself lighted a tiny brown cigarette which he took from a case which he held, as if by accident, below the level of the table.

"But we are talking without the book," he expostulated. "Zenith the Albino is a criminal genius, a superman of criminal device. We will talk about something else, Mr. Lee. You have never met Monsieur Zenith!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Never," he admitted, "until to-night!"

The old man smiled also.

"Ah," he breathed, "you are a smarter man than I took you for. This recognition is very much to my liking, Mr. Lee. For one thing"—and he suited the action to the word—"it allows me to remove those confounded spectacles, which, as I can assure you, are very trying to wear."

Nipper looked, with fascinated interest, at the face of their table companion. Now that the spectacles were removed it was a thing of strange contrasts. The face was still that of an old and rather simple man; but the eyes, crimsoned-irised and fringed with lashes as white as snow—the eyes were dominant, intimidating, and filled with the light of a sad and sardonic recklessness. They looked

through the skillfully applied grease-paint as through a mask. Only those terrible eyes, the regular, strong, white teeth, and the deep voice charged with sadness, seemed to belong to the man. The rest was make-up—make-up perfect and complete.

"And what are you going to do now?" drawled Zenith, for, as the reader has doubtless conjectured, it was he, and no other, who sat at their table. "Do you, by any chance, purpose to—arrest me?"

Nelson Lee whipped out his automatic, and before the crook could move a finger he found himself looking directly into the small blued ring which was the business end of the muzzle.

"Put them up!" said Lee very quietly.

"By all means."

Zenith complied instantly, and Nipper saw that the stained and stumpy fingers of the old man were merely those of indiarubber gloves, which the master-crook wore as part of his disguise.

"This," continued the albino, "is a most interesting situation. But, if I may suggest it, my dear detective, it is a waste of valuable time. Look round you."

After a moment of hesitation, Lee obeyed.

Then, ruefully, he returned his automatic to his pocket and folded his arms. It was he, and not Zenith, who was at a disadvantage.

As had been said, the customers who had followed upon the heels of Zenith had seated themselves at tables near that of Nelson Lee. Now each of them—every man in the room, as it seemed—had drawn a pistol, and was silently covering Nelson Lee.

In whatever direction he turned he was threatened by a pistol-muzzle, and he divined that, at the word of command from Zenith, every man would shoot, and shoot to kill.

"Well," he said calmly, "and what now?"

Zenith waved his hand and the pistols disappeared.

A waitress who had screamed on seeing the weapons drawn was instantly pacified by the master-crook, who assured her that it was "only a game," and solaced her wounded nerves by means of a handsome tip.

"Now," said Zenith, "we will talk."

He lit a fresh cigarette, and leaned back comfortably in his chair. It was such a situation as Zenith enjoyed.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Lee, and to find that you are a man of discrimination. I was particularly anxious to make your acquaintance, because I thought it very likely that we should have—ah—business relations in the near future."

"You mean—"

"I mean, in connection with the burglary at Thurlingham Hall."

Nelson Lee was frankly mystified.

Why had this almost theatrical display of force been staged? Why, now that, by a stroke of luck, Zenith had cut off and surrounded himself and his assistant, did the

crook not make an end of them? He had heard enough of the ruthless albino to know that no considerations of humanity prevented him. He had yet to appreciate that absurd and childish vanity which was the strongest attribute of the albino's character.

Wondering, he continued:

"There has been a burglary at Thurlingham Hall, then?"

"No," replied the albino, enjoying his astonishment, "there has not been a burglary at Thurlingham Hall; but—there will be."

He allowed a thin trickle of opium-laden smoke to escape from his lips, and continued:

"Listen to me. In five days' time, Viscount Greys, the eldest son of Earl Thurlingham, reaches his twenty-first year. The coming of age of the eldest son is attended, in this family, by a display of the Thurlingham heirlooms. These, as you probably know, are of almost incalculable value. Nevertheless, it is a tradition of the family that, for forty-eight hours, the treasures of the earldom lie in state, and a very large, but select, house-party is commonly summoned to witness the ceremony, and admire the jewels which comprise its patrimony. I hope you are following me, Mr. Lee."

"Well, now, seeing that your friend, Inspector Anderson—oh, yes, I make it my business to know all about these things—seeing, I say, that your friend, Inspector Anderson, is more than likely to fly to you for advice when the best of the Thurlingham jewels are removed from under the noses of the house-party, I thought it only fair to give you due notice of my intention."

Here the boastful crook permitted himself to smile; but there was no responsive guffaw from his men. Such was his overweening egotism, that he would not even have allowed his men to laugh with him. He looked upon them as cattle, and they knew it; yet, such was the magnetism—the abiding charm of the man—that the situation was accepted by them one and all, and he was served more loyally than a king.

"You see," he explained, in continuing his harangue, "I haven't had a flutter with Sexton Blake for some time. I trust Sexton Blake is well. He is? Thank you. And I am so very tired of playing hide-and-seek with these dull county police. In truth, Mr. Lee, I need excitement; I really must have excitement. And now that I have told you of my intentions with regard to the Thurlingham gew-gaws, I am hopeful that you will provide it for me. Good-night, Mr. Lee!"

He rose from his seat, ignoring the fact that the private detective did likewise, and bowed with exaggerated courtesy.

"Permit me," he murmured, "to assure you that I have enjoyed this little talk with yourself and your assistant. It has redeemed an evening which, otherwise, would have been intolerable. Good-night!"

And, reassuming his smoked glasses, the master-crook began to ascend the stairs.

Risking a fusillade of pistol-bullets, Nelson Lee sprang up with the intention of following; but this move had been expected, and his path was barred by a big man, who arose from a table near the staircase.

The bunched knuckles of Lee's right hand arrived well and truly upon the point of this big fellow's jaw, and the recipient of that famous sleeping-draught went down like a poleaxed ox; but before the detective could move forward the staircase was literally crowded with Zenith's men, who had timed the completion of their own meals to agree with that of their master.

"Come on, guv'nor!" Nipper was fully prepared to attempt the task of punching a way out. But his employer stopped him with a shake of the head.

By now, Zenith the Albino had undoubtedly made good his get-away, and Lee had no liking for a purposeless scuffle.

Nor did Nelson Lee make the mistake of arresting any of Zenith's men. He knew enough of the albino's methods to realise that such a course would be futile. Any one of them would be in a position to furnish complete proofs of his entire respectability, and to convince a country court magistrate that he had not even heard of Monsieur Zenith. The albino's plans were laid with a very nice regard for detail.

When the gang had departed, bearing between them the individual who had stopped Nelson Lee's right, the detective himself went straight to Inspector Anderson of the County Police. He firmly believed that Zenith intended to put his boast into execution, and that the Thurlingham heirlooms were in danger.

But, for once, the inspector thought he could afford to laugh at his unofficial colleague.

"You haven't seen Thurlingham Hall," he explained. "I have. It's as strong—as strong as a safe deposit. This chap Zenith is talking through his hat. He don't stand an earthly of getting the goods; and, if he is wise, he won't try. Don't you worry, Mr. Lee, I shall be there with several of my men. If pink-eye tries any hanky-panky, he'll find himself in the stone jug, sharp!"

To tell the truth, the inspector thought that the private detective had been imposed upon, that Zenith, if he had had any burglarious intentions, certainly would not have given himself away.

If he had been able to follow the master-crook from the underground restaurant he might have changed his mind.

Zenith, in his disguise of an old man, made his way past St. Nicholas Church, through Manors, and along to an obscure passage known as Haward's Entry.

There, in a human rookery of tumbledown and ancient tenements, he emerged into a luxuriously furnished room where one of his Japanese servants was bending over a drawing-board, whereon lay a plan labelled: "Pro-

posed Annexe to Banqueting Chamber, Thurlingham Hall, Northumberland."

The Japanese hastened to relieve Zenith of coat, hat, and spectacles.

"I have got the drawings, Excellency."

"Good!"

Zenith bent over the drawing-board.

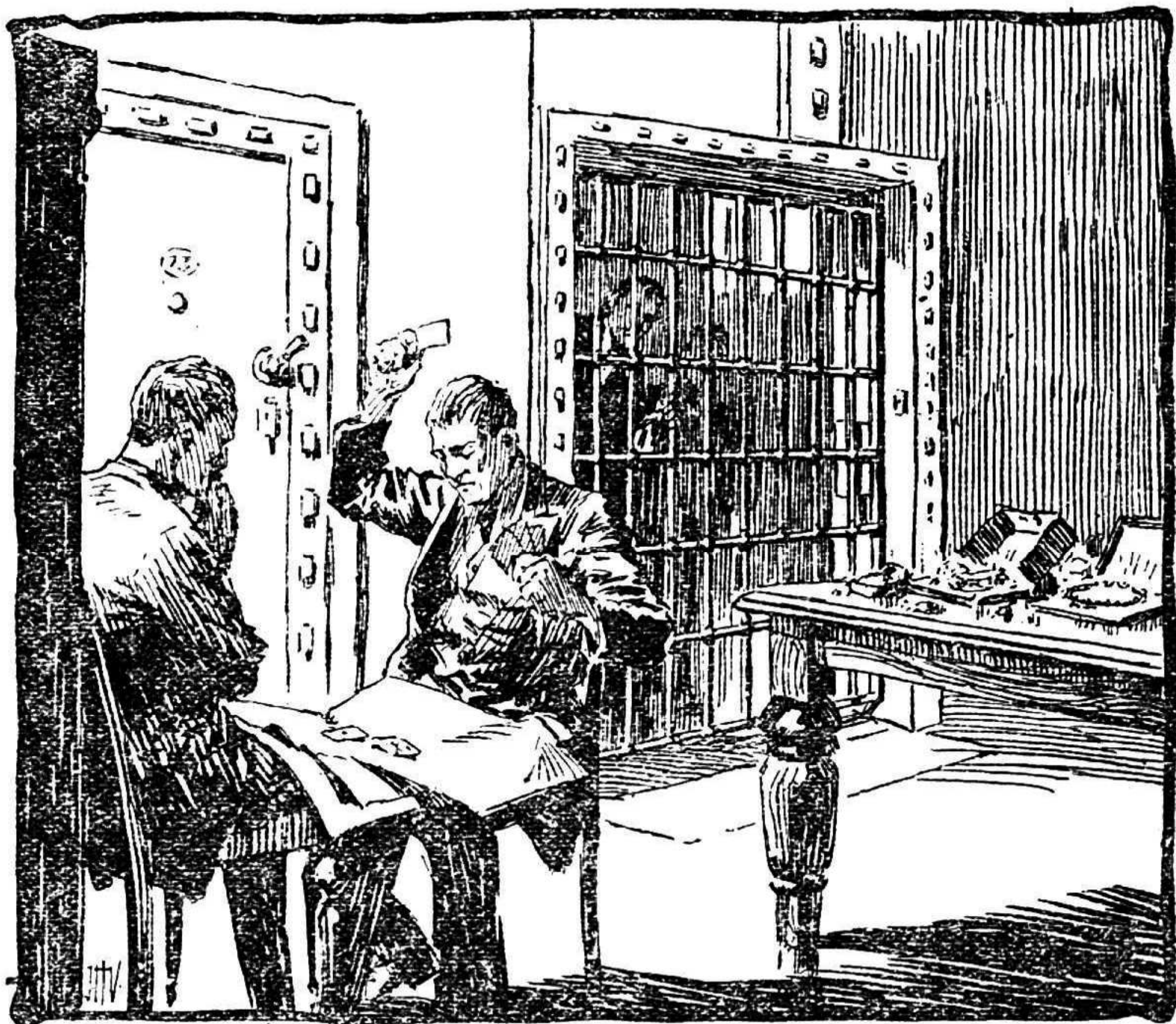
"And that," he questioned, "is the apartment wherein the heirlooms are displayed?"

the window. The door, I see, is a collapsible steel gate, concealed in the thickness of the stone wall. That also is impossible, I fear."

He turned again to the section.

"What do these dotted lines indicate, here, above the window?"

"That, Excellency, is an air inlet, a perforation right through the thickness of the wall; but, as you see, it is only six inches



They could see the two detectives amusing themselves playing cards upon a newspaper drawn across their knees.

"Yes, Excellency."

"H'm. Got a section? Good again!"

He turned over the architectural drawings with the air of one who completely understands.

"Floor, walls, and ceiling are of stone, I see. No fireplace. One window. What is the window like?"

"The window, Excellency, is double, and protected by a steel grille."

"H'm. And the wall is three feet thick? No; I don't think we can do anything with

square, and impossibly high up, even if there were dry ground outside."

"And, as a matter of fact, a tributary of the river flows past the outside wall, does it not?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"H'm. That makes the burglar's kit look pretty useless. What chance do I stand of obtaining an invitation to the house-party?"

"None, Excellency. The house-party is confined to well-known relatives of the Earl.

I do not think that any sort of impersonation would be likely to succeed."

"H'm. You almost tempt me to try it, but I shan't. Fix me up a pipe of opium, Frank, and leave me for—let me see—three hours. I think I see a way. There are just the details to be worked out."

Inspector Anderson's certitude that any theft was impossible was more than upheld by Earl Thurlingham.

The Earl turned out to be a martinet of the old school, and nearly suffered an apoplectic seizure when Lee suggested further protection.

"Blow it!" he said. "I've got Inspector Anderson here, and two of his men, in addition to yourself and your assistant. We ought to be safe enough. No doubt this fellow Zenith, or whatever you call him, is clever at his dastardly trade, but he cannot perform miracles.

"And," he added, "to take any of the Thurlingham heirlooms would be a miracle. I tell you, Mr. Lee, it can't be done, and that's all there is to it!"

Certainly the place where the patrimony of the earldom was displayed had the appearance of being burglar-proof enough.

Walls, floor, and ceiling were constructed of solid stone. The door was a steel gate, the fixed window was protected by a grille of the same material. There was no fire place, nor, with the exception of the air-inlet, three feet long and six inches at its greatest width, was there any break through which even a straw could be thrust.

When, at the beginning of the thirty-six hours during which the treasure of the earldom was to be displayed, Nelson Lee and Nipper inspected the annexe to the banquetting chamber, where they were set out, the private detective was compelled to agree that their safety seemed assured.

On either side of the long table stood one of Anderson's men, his pocket bulging with a heavy revolver, loaded in every chamber; and their expression was commendably alert.

During the one night when, according to tradition, the jewels were to remain undisturbed, they would keep guard behind the steel gate, drawn, and double locked on the outside. Surely theft was impossible. Surely, for once, the boastful Zenith had overreached himself.

"If you ask me," said Anderson, "this boast of his was a blind. He's doing a big job somewhere else, and wanted you out of the way, Mr. Lee."

And, with this theory, the private detective found himself disposed to agree.

Nevertheless, having committed himself to the protection of the Thurlingham treasures, Nelson Lee neglected no precaution.

He obtained a long list of the valuables on view, and marked off those which were most likely to be coveted by such as Zenith.

There were three necklaces, two of pearls and one of diamonds; a pair of magnificent emerald bracelets; the well-known Thurlingham tiara, worth more than Thurlingham Hall and all its purlieus put together; that fabulous unmounted jewel known as "the Rajah's diamond"; two Brazilian diamonds, also unmounted, and of equal value; and a collection of wonderful pins, brooches, and rings. These were the things which Zenith would undoubtedly risk most to secure, and, consequently, the things which Lee would most closely watch.

His last advice to Inspector Anderson when the collapsible gate was drawn for the night—the only night when the valuables would be there—was that he should instruct his men to keep awake.

"Give 'em a chance," grumbled Anderson. "They've been on their feet all day, and they've got another long day to-morrow. They're bound to doze—in their chairs. But the light will be on, and everything's in full view from outside, although the gate is locked. I shall be around now and then, and take a look at them. Good-night, my lads! Keep your guns handy. There's no knowing when Mister Zenith will be along."

And he turned away, laughing at his own joke, a laugh in which his men dutifully joined.

Nelson Lee and his assistant were about early upon the next morning, and went for a training spin in the dew-wet fields.

They did not make any detailed inspection of the treasure-chamber. After all, it was not their business to interfere with Anderson's men; but, glancing through the locked steel gate, they could see the two plain-clothes men playing cards upon a newspaper drawn across their knees.

"Everything looks all right," commented Nipper.

"Yes, and I'm very glad of it, my lad. I don't mind admitting that Monsieur Zenith impressed me as one who meant what he said."

They returned in time to witness the ceremony of opening the steel gate.

Earl Thurlingham, in a dressing-gown and slippers, carrying a bunch of keys, and accompanied by his valet and Inspector Anderson, formed a sort of procession down the main staircase.

They approached the gate of the strong-room, and while the Earl fumbled for the correct key the two guardians of the treasure stood at attention immediately inside.

The nobleman drew back the steel gate with his own hands, and entered the small stone room.

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"Well, men, everything all right?"

"Yes——" began one of the two; and then checked himself because of the expression which had distorted the Earl's face. Suddenly, ridiculously, the nobleman burst into tears.

"The tiara!" he sobbed. "The Thurlingham tiara; where is it? Where are the emerald bracelets? Heaven have mercy, they've robbed me!"

He was right.

The snap-cases of this careful age had never appealed to the Earl. He had loved to see his treasures in barbaric profusion. They had lain, like so much silver-plate, upon a green-baize cover. Now, instead of the tiara, the necklaces, the bracelets, there were empty spaces upon the green cloth.

Worthwhile. Inspector Anderson forgot the presence of the bereaved Earl, and fell to cursing his men for their carelessness. They protested, and for a full minute the small room was the scene of a debacle.

"There's no advantage," said Nelson Lee quietly, "to be gained by losing our heads."

He did not raise his voice; yet such was the magnetism of the man, that they turned to him with one accord for advice, for guidance.

"The jewels are missing," he said, "but they cannot be far away, if we act quickly——"

"But how act?" interrupted Inspector Anderson, trying too late, to assert his authority. "The thing's incredible!"

He turned again to his men.

"You fellows must have pocketed the things," he said; "must have done it in your sleep, or something. Here you"—to the valet—"lock that door. Now I'll trouble you men to submit to a search. Then we will search the room. If we don't find those things then, well, I'm a Dutchman!"

The inspector's abnegation of his British birth appeared to be a fact, for after an hour of minute search they were compelled to believe that a miracle had happened. Everything within the room was exactly as it had been left overnight, except that certain pieces of jewellery had disappeared.

"Mr. Lee," said the Earl, who did not appear to be in the habit of picking his words, "you seem to be the only man here with any brains; have you any theory as to how this astonishing theft occurred?"

"I have," replied the private detective, "but I should like to verify my suspicions before going any further."

"Do so, by all means. We will give you a free hand. If you can find the Thurlingham tiara for me I will give you any fee that you like to name. In the meantime, Inspector Anderson, we will go on as before."

With that the nobleman turned away.

"What I am to tell the house-party," he muttered, "I am sure I don't know."

Nipper was the first to break the uncom-

fortable silence which followed the Earl's departure.

"Do you mean, gov'nor," he asked, rather indiscreetly, "that you have a clue already?"

"I do," replied his employer. "For that matter, we all have a clue."

"For goodness' sake, Lee," put in the inspector testily, "don't talk in enigmas. For my part, I don't see the shadow of a clue of any sort."

The private detective smiled.

"A clue to the means of the theft," he submitted, "is supplied by the description of the articles taken."

"I will ask you one question: If you had been Monsieur Zenith, and you had been able to take some, but not all, of the Thurlingham treasures, which would you have taken first?"

"Why," answered the inspector, "the most valuable, of course."

"And that is?"

"The rajah's diamond, I suppose; and, after that, these unmounted Brazilian stones."

"Yet all these have been left, while the necklaces, the bracelets, and the tiara have been taken. Doesn't that tell you anything?"

"I can't say that it does," growled the Inspector. "It's a very singular fact, that's all."

"It is," Lee repeated, "a very singular fact. I invite you to think it over."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime, my assistant and I are going for a stroll. When we return we shall, I hope, have further news which may prove interesting."

When the private detective and his assistant had disappeared, Inspector Anderson turned to his men.

"Either Mr. Lee is wrong in the think-box," he remarked, "or he began detective work where we left off."

(To be concluded in our next issue.)

Which of the alternatives suggested by Inspector Anderson is correct? Does Nelson Lee really know the means by which this mysterious crime was committed. If so, what is it? Our readers have the advantage of knowing what passed between Zenith and his Japanese servant, which Nelson Lee did not. In addition, the facts of the case have been presented exactly as perceived by Nelson Lee. I am of opinion that the crime could only have been carried out as related by the author of this story in our next issue, and I invite our readers to do a little detective work for themselves, and let me have a solution in advance. They will be interested to discover how far their powers of observation and deduction would have carried them if they had been in the shoes of Nelson Lee.

YOUR EDITOR.

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

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XXXII.

Bouncer's Lost Sheep.

NO cat suddenly bereft of her family of kittens could have been more astounded and staggered than Mr. Bouncer was at the disappearance of his four pupils.

One boy running off he could have understood, but for four to vanish was a source of unqualified trouble and amazement.

Finding they did not turn up at morning lessons he went off in search of them, and traced the lost ones to the railway station.

There he received assurance that they had not taken tickets for Bangley, but had gone away after the departure of the train.

The station-master was quite sure of it.

He believed they went away in a milk-cart, but would not be positive.

Perplexed beyond measure, Bouncer returned to his abode.

He hoped to find them there, but not a single stray bird had returned.

"It beats cock-fighting," he said, "but I'll tan 'em when they return. The cheek of 'em going off in any sort of cart in that free and independent way. I'll skin 'em."

The morning passed slowly away, and wrath gave place to fear.

He conceived all sorts of things about the missing ones, and finally he set forth to make inquiries of the villagers.

There are some people who never like to say they "don't know," and of these Mr. Bouncer

found two or three who "fancied they had seen 'em."

One old man, so short-sighted that he could only see half-way across the road was pretty sure he had met them going towards the lock.

This was indeed alarming.

Had those precious boys—precious because their bills were unpaid—gone to that dangerous place and fallen in?

Bouncer turned hot and cold by turns at the thought.

As he wended his way with tremulous footsteps to the spot he encountered Squirrel, the blacksmith, and Baynes, the carpenter.

They were returning from a job in which their united services had been required.

Bouncer was ready to seek help from any source, and, stopping the two men, he told them his story.

"They're in the lock for a pound!" declared Squirrel.

Men living in quiet country places are never averse to that which will give them a little cheap excitement, and they at once took Bouncer and his troubles in hand.

"Don't you bother," said Baynes, "we'll get 'em out of the lock and bring home the corpses."

This was a handsome offer, but Bouncer did not fully appreciate it.

"I don't want 'em dead," he groaned. "Bring 'em back to me alive."

For some hours Squirrel and Baynes were dragging the lock, and all who could get out and spare the time wended their way thither.

It was a deep lock, and it took some time to get through it.

But that, having been done, and nothing but old kettles and other discarded domestic ironware being found, the river next occupied their attention.

Two flat-bottomed boats were got out, and a party with drags took possession of each.

As long as daylight lasted the work of dragging the river proceeded, but nothing to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the four boys was discovered.

Not till close on midnight did Mr. Bouncer go to bed. Despite his anxiety, he quickly fell asleep, and awoke no more until about three in the morning, when he was aroused by the loud ringing of the door-bell.

At first he contented himself with lying awake, and trying to call back recent events.

The bell rang again.

Then, and not till then, he recalled the events of the preceding day.

Springing out of bed, he threw up the window.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Me, sir," replied a husky voice.

"And who's me?"

"Snacks, sir. We've got back, and are nearly dead."

"Are you all there?"

"Yes, sir; but Jebbs is very bad."

"All right," said Bouncer, "I'll come down and let you in."

He was glad to get them back anyhow, and having hurried on his clothes and lighted the candle, he hastened down to the front door.

On opening it four forlorn figures came in—the wreck of his pupils.

Mortar-boards broken, clothes soiled and torn, bleary-eyed, grimy with dirt, they came in, as wretched a quartette of boys as ever were seen.

"Goodness help us!" cried Bouncer.

"Wherever have you been?"

"Everywhere, sir," gasped Snacks, "but we can't tell you until we've had something to eat and drink."

Bouncer motioned to them to go to the kitchen, and, in a weary file, they crawled thither.

It was a disorderly, dirty place, as one might have expected in such a house, but there was a table and chairs in it, and the larder was handy.

It had very little in it, but there was some butter, bread and cheese, which Bouncer brought out, and his pupils fell upon it like ravening wolves.

Water was the drink, and it had to do. The boys said nothing, but ate and drank, ate and drank, until only a few crumbs were left.

Bouncer had never seen boys, or anybody else, eat like it before.

"Seems to me you've not had much to eat to-day," he said.

"We've had nothing at all, sir!" whined Snacks.

"Where have you been?" asked Bouncer.

"We don't know," said Snacks. "We were seized by some men who put us in sacks, clucked us into a cart, and took us miles and miles away to a big common, where they threw us out and left us—didn't they, Winks?"

"I should think so," replied Winks. "If we hadn't been thrown out we shouldn't be here."

"What sort of men were they?" asked the amazed Bouncer.

"Tall men," replied Snacks, "with their faces blackened and masks over them."

"Leather masks, with holes in 'em," supplemented Winks.

"And you don't know what common it was?" enquired Bouncer.

"They told us we were not to ask," said Snacks, "nor speak to anybody, but just

make our way home as soon as we could, or they'd kill us; and we've done it—haven't we, Winks?"

"Mr. Bouncer can see we've done it," returned Winks irritably. "but I don't feel as if I can talk any more. Please let me go to bed."

"We'd better all go," said Bouncer, "and to-morrow we'll go into particulars about this job. I've seen some suspicious-looking men about here during the past few days, and I think I know who set 'em on the job."

"It won't be easy to find out, sir," said Snacks, shaking his head.

"I can try," said Bouncer. "A man like me can't sit down under this outrage and say nothing. I'll get to the bottom of it I assure you! And now be off to bed!"

Bouncer was as good as his word.

As soon as he was awake in the morning, he was out and about making inquiries.

The result was that he set the place all agog with the lying yarn which Snacks had told.

It came to a premature end by the constable of the parish receiving notice from the chief constable to call upon Bouncer and demand the fines inflicted by Squire Battenham—with costs—which amounted in all to close upon three pounds.

This led to ructions in the Bouncer establishment.

Summoned one by one into the presence of Bouncer, the culprits were called upon to confess the truth.

They did in part, each trying to screen himself, and Bouncer got at the main facts.

"Three pounds," he said. "It's a little fortune to me now, and I contract with your parents to pay for everything, including washing and broken winders."

One by one he chastised them, laying on many stripes, insomuch that sitting down could only be indulged in with extreme discomfort for the next three days.

The fine he could not pay, so he wrote to the squire asking for time, as a "recent bereavement" had robbed him of all his "immediate cash."

His letter was a very humble one, with lots of soft-soap, and he gained what he wanted.

The squire took no further trouble about the matter.

But the story got wind, as such stories are sure to do, and the Bouncer boys could not show their noses outside without being asked "How they liked Bangley Fair?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

An Invitation from Sir Claude.

WOODEN JERRY and Perks had come back together by a late train on the previous night.

Mr. Wrasper said nothing to them, and there the affair ended, so far as Wooden Jerry was concerned.

But Perks became more strange than ever. The colour in his cheeks—he never had much—totally disappeared, and he looked

like a lad who had gone through a long and trying illness.

He was horribly nervous, too, and started at almost every little sound.

Everybody noticed it, but he insisted that he "was quite well."

In response to a few queries put to him by Tom he replied:

"It will soon be all over."

Not another word would he say.

Wooden Jerry was also going wrong. His old failing was getting the better of him.

Still he concealed the fact from his master by indulging mostly at night, and then he would have a quiet carouse in his bedroom, soaking himself to such an extent that he would fall into a dead sleep.

Chopps made no secret of having bought the pistols at the fair.

He showed them to Mr. Wrasper as curiosities, and was told to be careful not to leave them in the way of the boys.

In addition, he let the villagers know that he possessed such things, and in the skittle-ground of the inn he showed how true they were by hanging up a card and shooting at it.

He put a bullet into each corner and one in the middle, so that at a distance it looked like the five of spades.

One of the villagers happened to say so, and Chopps cheerily replied:

"Spades prepare graves and bullets get the men ready for them."

This remark got about, and reached Ralston's ears. He thought a good deal of it, and himself took to pistol practice.

He possessed some very good modern weapons, and knew how to use them.

Tom, when visiting him three days after the fair, was entertained by him in the back garden, where he aimed at a penny piece stood up edgewise, at fifteen paces, and hit it four times out of six.

"I should not like to kill a man," he said, "but I would do it in self-defence. At first I should only try to disable him."

Uncle Josiah's illness came to an end, and once more he walked abroad. But he avoided the boys as much as possible, and sought no society whatever.

There was one person in the house who strongly objected to his continued presence, and that was Mrs. Wrasper.

She had spoken about his being there many times to her husband, and his answer of late had been:

"It doesn't matter much—it won't be for long."

"But why put up with him?" she urged.

"For a certain purpose, as you will know in due time."

And that was all he would tell her.

It was about a week after Bangley fair that Sir Claude Freshly sent another invitation to the boys to come to the Hall. Young Cecil had been travelling abroad for some time with his private tutor, but had now returned, and was desirous of giving a party.

The invitation was extended to Mr. and Mrs. Wrasper and Mr. Chopps; and Cecil Freshly wrote a special note to Tom Tartar asking him to come over early, as he wanted his advice in getting certain things ready. "Come in the morning if you can, old chap," he wrote, "and have lunch with us."

Tom showed this missive to Mr. Wrasper, who readily gave his consent. So, at about ten o'clock on the morning of the day appointed for the party, Tom started off for the Hall alone.

He took the old road, intending to cross the lock and follow the footpath through the park.

Just before reaching the lock, he encountered Walt Powner looting about. He had not seen the fellow for some days, and thought he had left the neighbourhood.

"Mornin', young mister!" said Powner, in a tone half-fawning, half-impudent.

"Good morning," replied Tom, and would have passed on but for the man standing in his way.

"If you've a few coppers on you I'd be glad of 'em," said Powner.

"I've no money to spare," replied Tom.

"Ah, they all says that—cuss 'em!"

"And if I had," went on Tom, "I wouldn't give it to you."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" said the ruffian.

"No!" replied Tom. "Why should I? Go to work!"

"I can't get work about here. Nobody wants the cousin of the man as you drove to death."

"He was responsible for his own end," said Tom. "He was an utter scoundrel."

"Anyway, it's a great disappointment to me not to find him here," growled the other. "He'd have give me a helpin' hand. Come, you'll give me something now, won't you?"

"Not a penny," said Tom, "and if you are a nuisance to me I'll have you locked up."

"Oh! you will," said the fellow; "that's what they all tell me. I'm warned off here, chucked off there, and treated in a ginerall way like a dog. That 'ere park, which is free to all here, isn't free to me. 'Out you go,' says the keeper to me, and out I have to go."

"That's nothing to me," said Tom.

He pushed on, and the fellow reluctantly made way for him.

Tom walked lightly across the lock and disappeared.

The loafer stood hesitating for a few moments, and then crossed the lock also.

"I'll risk it," he said, "whatever comes of it. Hang 'em, they sha'n't all have their own way."

Tom walked quickly on, and arrived at the hall without meeting anyone, except Mark Brierly, the keeper, who gave him a good-day.

It was in Tom's mind to speak to him about the ruffian he had just parted with, but he decided it was hardly worth while, and went on without mentioning him.

Tom was watched for by young Cecil, who came to the door and gave him a warm greeting.

"Pater's gone to look at some of his prize Alderneys," he said, "and mater is writing letters, so we shall have an hour or two to ourselves. Come into the armoury."

The armoury of the Freshly family was one of the noted things in the country—succeeding generations had added to it by collecting fine specimens of any sort of weapon and armour they could buy.

"I thought of having a dance here," said Cecil, as they entered the long, gallery-like apartment—"the band at the end in the gallery, with seats between the suits of armour."

"Good idea!" said Tom. "How is it I haven't seen this splendid collection before?"

"It has been closed for a time," replied Cecil, "while the armour has been cleaned and renovated. You have no idea what a job it has been, and how carefully it had to be done, especially with the inlaid armour. We have had a man from London living in the hall for months."

"You see this suit of chain-mail," he said, stopping before as fine a specimen of that class of armour as could be found anywhere. "Think of the size of the man who wore it."

"He must have been nearly seven feet," said Tom.

"He was six feet eight," said Cecil. "The tallest of our ancestors. We've come down a bit since those days."

They spent two hours in the armoury—a most delightful time to Tom.

"I've found out something here," said Cecil, stopping at the upper end of the gallery, "which nobody knows but myself. You've heard about secret passages in old houses like these?"

"Yes," said Tom, "and wondered if they were true."

"All might not be," returned Cecil; "but some are. There is a secret gallery or passage here."

He pointed to a portrait of a knight painted on a panel—a splendid piece of work by some old master.

"It's there," he said; "see if you can find it out."

Tom had a good look up and down and round the panel, but could find nothing to give him a clue to a secret passage.

"I confess I'm licked," said Tom.

"Have another try."

"No; show me how it works."

Cecil laid hold of the lower part of the panel, pressing it downwards with all his might. It slipped down about half an inch.

"That sets the portrait free," he said; "it revolves on a pivot—see!"

He gave one side of the picture a push, and, turning on a pivot in the centre, it revealed a dark passage beyond.

A tiny draught of cool air came up

through it, so it was not merely a cupboard.

"And where does this lead to?" asked Tom.

"Ah! that's what I don't know," answered Cecil. "I only found it out yesterday, and I rather funk'd going in alone."

"Shall we explore it now?" asked Tom.

"I don't think we have time," said Cecil, looking at his watch; "luncheon will be ready in half an hour. By the way, there are small holes in the eyes of the portrait to look through. I can't see through them—I am not tall enough, but you are. Get up and see."

Tom jumped up, and, having swung the picture round, saw that there were peep-holes, as Cecil had said.

It was altogether a very ingenious contrivance for hiding and espionage too.

"After lunch," said Tom, "I should like to see what is inside there. It looks very dark; we shall want some sort of lantern."

"I'll have one got ready," said Cecil; "an oil lamp that will burn for hours."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Chained Skeleton.

LUNCHEON was served at the appointed time, and Sir Claude and Lady Freshly were there to give Tom a cordial welcome.

The meal was barely over when the butler entered and said something in a low tone to his master, whose brow instantly darkened.

"What is the matter?" asked Lady Freshly anxiously, when the butler had retired.

"Rather a serious thing has happened," replied the baronet. "It appears that a member of that ruffianly family, the Powners, has been loafing about for several days past. He was warned to keep out of the park two or three times, but he persisted in coming, and now he has taken to violence."

"Good gracious! What has he done?"

"He has shot Brierly. Not seriously—just a few shots in the leg. The ruffian has got away, but there ought to be no difficulty in capturing him."

"But are you sure Brierly is not seriously hurt?"

"Quite. He is able to walk, and has himself limped up here with the news. I am just going to see him."

And Sir Claude hurried off to the butler's pantry to interview the wounded keeper.

Brierly made but little fuss about the business, but thought that "summat ought to be done to keep Powner from doin' mischief."

Walt Powner, it seemed, had been ordered out of the park, but had refused to go. Brierly had threatened to remove him by force; whereupon Powner had snatched at the keeper's gun, and "either accidental

or on purpose," as Brierly described it, discharged the weapon.

"Then he threw down the gun, and scuttered off," concluded Brierly.

"You had better speak to the police," said Sir Claude. "We must have the rascal punished."

The principal body of guests were not expected until four o'clock; so Tom and Cecil had about two hours before them to explore the secret passage.

Cecil got a good lantern, with a well-trimmed oil lamp in it, and, having got away quietly to the armoury, they opened the panel and climbed in.

"How does it work from the inside?" asked Tom. "Let us see to that before we close the panel."

"It seems to me that you first pull the panel open," said Cecil.

They tried it, and that certainly appeared to be the way of working the affair. Then they closed it.

"Which way?" asked Cecil. "There are passages right and left."

"To the left first," said Tom, "and walk lightly, or we shall be choked with dust."

The injunction was necessary, for there was fully two inches of fine, pungent-smelling dust upon the floor of the passage.

For a short distance—to the extreme end of the armoury, as they guessed—the way was straight, and then they came to a stone staircase.

Up the steps, about a score in number, they went, to find themselves in another passage bearing right and left.

Owing to the bad air, the lantern was not burning very brilliantly, and they could not see very far either way.

"We shall have to carefully note which way we go," remarked Tom, "or we shall have a job to find our way back."

"Turn to the right again," said Cecil. "Stick to the right going, and to the left coming back, and we can't go wrong."

"But didn't we start to the left?"

"Yes, of course we did—but we shall remember that."

Dust—dust everywhere! It compelled them to go very slowly, and to be careful how they moved their feet.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Cecil, after a paroxysm of sneezing. "It's as bad as snuff!"

"Hadn't we better turn back now?" suggested Tom. "Here's another staircase, as like the last as two peas. We shall lose our hearings hopelessly!"

"We'll just go to the end of it," replied Cecil, "and if we don't find anything we will return."

And on they went again.

As they ascended this last staircase, they found they could breathe more freely, and this fact prepared them to find some place communicating with the open air.

In this surmise they were not wrong; for there at the top of the steps was a small stone chamber, and in the wall of the outer side were a number of small holes, through which came faint rays of daylight.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

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(Continued from page 40.)

Ivy, or some other creeper, covered the greater part of these orifices, which were about five inches square; but in many of them birds had built their nests, and in flying to and fro had kept the way open.

So intent were the two boys on examining these openings, that they had been there fully ten minutes before Cecil made a grim discovery.

The staircase was in a corner of the chamber, and on the left side of it was a large block of stone.

Chained to this block, and reclining on the ground, was a human skeleton!

The position was that of one who had fallen asleep, and so died.

Of clothing there was no indication, save for a little heap of additional dust; but that the skeleton had probably at one time been richly clad, was attested in a remarkable way.

Hanging on the crooked finger-joints were several gold rings set with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds.

It was a weird, awe-inspiring scene, and the light from the lantern gave a still more uncanny appearance to the grim relics of some awful story of the past.

Chained to the wall and died there!

Who was the poor hapless one, and what had led to his or her incarceration?

"They say there is a skeleton in every house," said Tom. "You have one in yours, Cecil."

"There is a story of our house which I have always looked upon as a legend," said Cecil, "but I fear now it is true."

"I should think it is a woman's skeleton," returned Tom, stooping down and examining but not touching it. "See, the head is small, and the teeth are like a woman's."

"There is something in the corner," exclaimed Cecil. "It looks like hair."

And so it was, but not much of it—long, and still golden in hue.

"I'll clear the nests out of these holes and get a better light," said Tom.

In the act of doing so he made another discovery.

The greater part of the nests were partially lined with hair—the golden hair of the dead.

The boys looked at each other in amazement, and Cecil's face turned pale.

"I don't think I can stop here, Tom," he said. "And it will just as well not to mention what we have discovered to-day," said Tom. "I don't like the idea of a skeleton at a feast."

"You are right," replied Cecil; "we will keep our secret to-day. Leave it there, just as it is, rings and all."

He was anxious to get away, and Tom had no desire to remain in that grim chamber.

Holding the lantern up, he desired Cecil to go first.

"And go easy," he said. "It seems to me as if the air is not so clear as it was. Put your handkerchief to your face."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Cecil; "it's horrible—this dust—and to think that it may be the dust of the dead Lady Augusta Freshly!"

"One of your house, Cecil?"

"Yes—Sir Rowland Freshly went to the wars and left her here in charge of his brother and sister. She was an angel, and they were the reverse, I've heard. Certain it is that they hoped Sir Rowland would not return. The heir to the estate—quite a child—would have been murdered but for a faithful servant, who ran away with him."

"A strange story."

"It's a true one, Tom, I'm sure. Sir Rowland came back, and could find nothing of his wife. The brother and sister had fled, and were never heard of again; but the child was restored to the father, and so far lightened his sorrow, although the mystery of the disappearance of Lady Augusta has remained a mystery until now."

"There is a description of the rings she wore," added Cecil, "in the family history. We can make certain about the identity of the skeleton by-and-bye. Ugh! this dust! How it chokes a fellow!"

"Are you at the bottom of the staircase?"

"Yes, Tom—which way—right or left?"

"Give me a moment to think," said Tom; "I've been a bit bewildered by that discovery above, and I'm not quite clear about the way."

(To be continued.)

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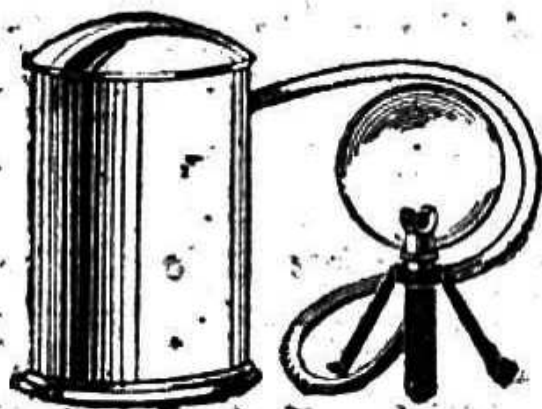
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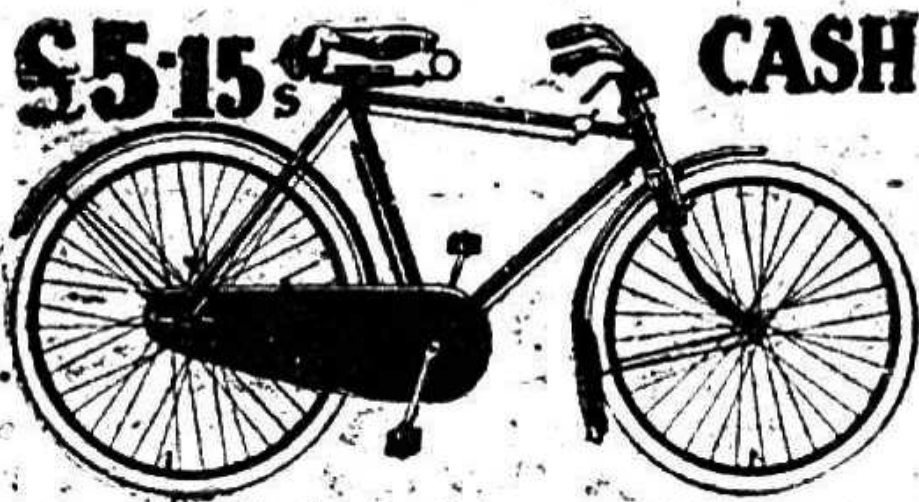
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