

St. Frank's Schoolboys Discover Buried Treasure!

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PIRATE'S TREASURE!

Chests of gold and jewels—worth a vast fortune! Read how Nipper & Co. discover the treasure in this week's thrilling complete yarn featuring the famous Chums of St. Frank's, and their arch-enemy, Professor Zingrave.

New Series No. 108.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 13th, 1932.

Nipper and Co. trapped in a flooded tunnel! Zingrave's desperate—

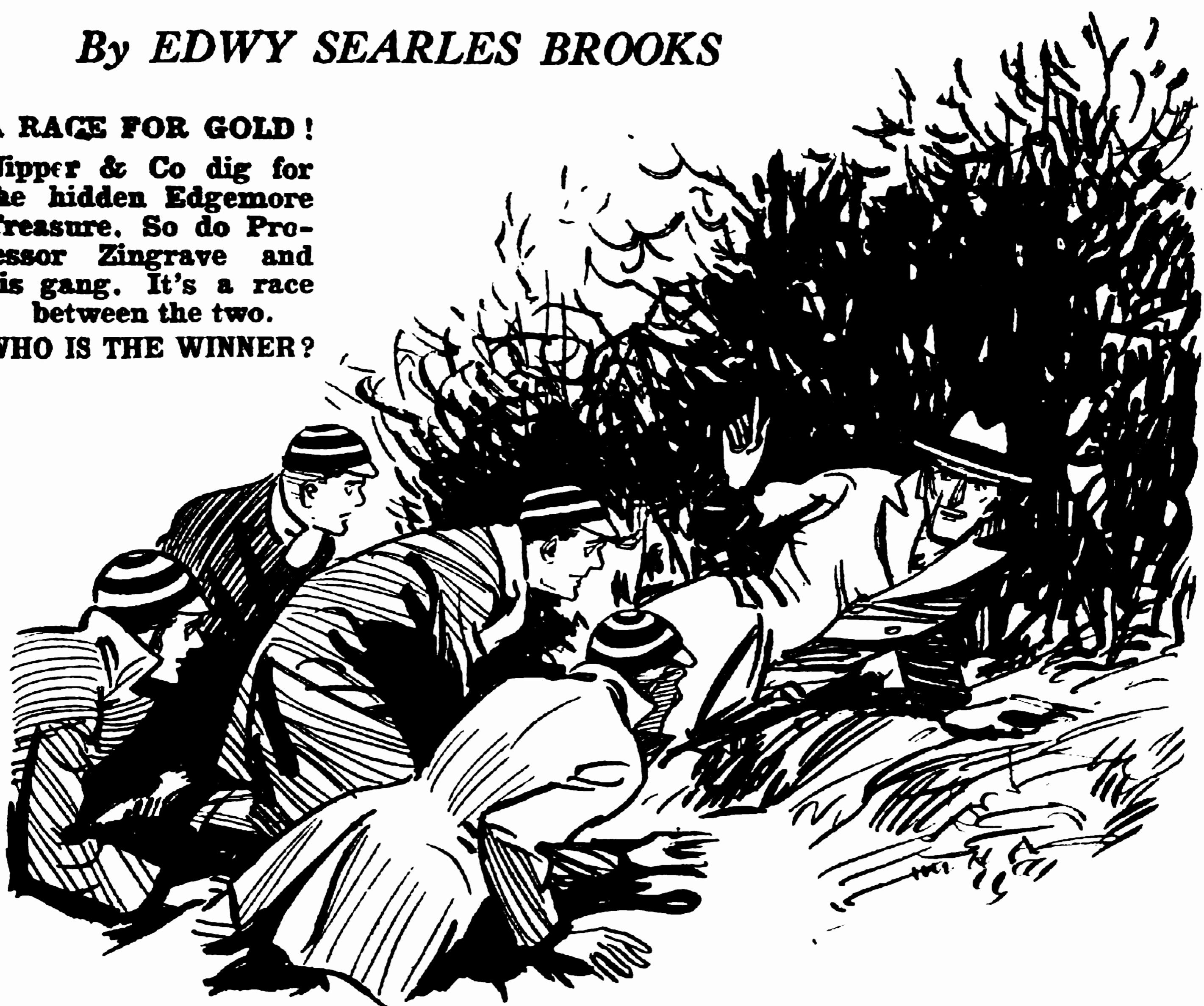
PIRATE'S TREASURE!

By *EDWY SEARLES BROOKS*

A RACE FOR GOLD!

Nipper & Co dig for the hidden Edgemore Treasure. So do Professor Zingrave and his gang. It's a race between the two.

WHO IS THE WINNER?



CHAPTER 1.

Figures in the Fog.

FOOG!

Swirling, eddying, drifting fog; a white, almost impenetrable pall, stealing furtively across the dark countryside from the sea, blotting out hedges, cottages, and trees as it advanced.

Eleven o'clock had just boomed out at St. Frank's, and the great school was silent, the various buildings looming up with vague and ghostly unreality in the fog. The leafless branches of the chestnuts, in the Triangle, spread their skeleton limbs mysteriously into the white pall.

A figure, so indistinct as to be wraith-like, emerged silently from the dense blackness of West Arch; it paused uncertainly for a moment or two and then slid off in the direction of the outer wall.

Another figure materialised in the same strange way—and then another—and another. Like shadows, they passed on into the fog.

The high outer wall of the school property presented no difficulties, and at various points the figures scaled the granite and dropped into Bellton Lane. At the big corner pillar, marking the extremity of the grounds, the figures gathered.

"Everybody here?" murmured a soft voice.

"Think so," said another, in a low, eager tone. "Come on! We're after that treasure!"

"Gold, eh?"

"Doubloons—pieces of eight!"

The words were so softly uttered as to be almost inaudible; the figures, looming through the mist, gathered closely

—effort to beat his schoolboy opponents! Long complete story!



together. Then, in the same mysterious way, they drifted off down the lane.

A strange expedition, this! Whilst St. Frank's slept, whilst fog enveloped the countryside, these valiants were setting out to hunt for Spanish gold! There were eight of them, and suddenly the leading "wraith" came to a halt.

"Hold on!" it whispered. "Where's Skeets? Is he with us?"

"By George!" said one of the others. "We'd forgotten old Skeets!"

The treasure-hunters paused uncertainly. Then, after a few whispered words, they retraced their steps. As they neared the school wall, a dim figure loomed up, and they paused.

"Who's that?" hissed one of the eight. "Aw, shucks!" said the newcomer. "It's only me. We didn't count on this mist, fellers. It hung me up quite a bit. What's the idea of the melodramatic hiss, Handy?"

"He can't help it," said another voice. "Handy's built that way. He wouldn't enjoy himself on an adventure of this sort unless he hissed."

"You silly ass—"

"Cheese it—no squabbling!" said one of the others. "Glad you're with us, Skeets. Come on—let's be going!"

Skeets—otherwise Viscount Bellton—had just cycled from Edgemore Castle. This meeting, at eleven o'clock, had been pre-arranged with the other Removites. Skeets, who was as unlike a viscount as any boy could be—he had been brought up on a Canadian ranch, and was a fine, burly, open-air youngster—was a day boy, and therefore it had not been necessary for him to break bounds, like the others.

"It's good of you guys to take this chance," he whispered, as they went down the lane. "I'm safe, anyway—my time's my own. But if you fellers run into a master or a prefect—"

"Not a chance in a thousand," interrupted Nipper briskly. "We're after that Spanish gold, Skeets, old man. And nobody is going to keep us out of this treasure hunt."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're with you, Nipper, old man."

The other boys were Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, Nipper's own chums; Handforth and Church and McClure, of Study D; and

Vivian Travers and Sir Jimmy Potts, who were Skeets' particular chums of Study H.

"This mist ought to help us," said Nipper. "It's an ideal night for a prowl like this. All the same, we shall have to go easy. We don't know what the enemy is up to, and we shall have to be careful. In fact, in a minute or two we mustn't speak at all—in case our voices carry."

"Hadn't we better pause, dear old fellow, and hold a little confab?" suggested Travers. "We're getting near to Moat Hollow."

So they paused, and, in a tightly-packed group, they consulted.

"We've come prepared," whispered Nipper. "Each chap has a strong rope with a grappling-hook at the end. So there'll be no trouble in scaling the high walls. I think we'd better go in threes—that is to say, three of us will scale the wall at one point, three at another, and so on. And if any of us are attacked, the others must instantly come to the rescue."

"Isn't it a bit risky?" asked Church, who was dubious about the whole programme. "I'm game to go through with it—so you needn't get excited, Handy. But Mr. Lee distinctly warned us to keep away from Moat Hollow, you know. We don't want to go and mess things up, do we?"

"You make me tired," said Handforth impatiently. "We're not taking any notice of Mr. Lee—or Skeets' pater, or anybody else! They're trying to dish us out of searching for the treasure—and we're not going to be dished!"

"Handy's right," said Nipper crisply. "And, as we can't possibly decide any definite plans at the moment, it's a sheer waste of time to stand here jawing! We'll get over those walls, and then we'll join up. As for the rest, we shall have to trust to luck."

And, thrilled by the prospect of the coming raid, they moved on into the dense mist.

— —

CHAPTER 2.

The Monster!

MOAT HOLLOW, the gloomy old house near the river, stood dark and silent. Surrounded by its high walls, the place was shunned by the villagers, who were ready enough to believe that it was haunted.

Moat Hollow had an unsavoury history; from time to time, during recent years, the old house had been used as a private lunatic asylum, as a secret gambling house—and once, not many years ago, it had been used as a private school, a school

of dread, where the boys had been half-starved and tortured, and ugly things had happened. Nobody in the district could think of Moat Hollow without thinking of gloom. The reputation of the place was wholly bad. Centuries ago, the old Traitor's Lodge, belonging to Lord Edge-more's estate, had stood upon this site; but not many people in the district knew of this.

Now, once again, Moat Hollow was occupied—and Bellton had plenty to talk about. For Dr. Franz Ragozin, the new tenant, was as mysterious as any of his predecessors. There were no womenfolk in the household—and this fact alone stamped Dr. Ragozin, in the eyes of the villagers, as an eccentric. Certainly, he had a butler—a man named Ridley—who, from time to time, came into the village to make purchases. And nobody in Bellton could say a word against Ridley, who seemed to be a very well-spoken and highly respectable man. But there was another—a burly, shaggy brute of a fellow, named Ivan Hess. He wasn't seen so much; he was the keeper of Dr. Ragozin's private zoo, and it was rumoured that Ivan Hess had once been a lion-tamer in a circus.

There was quite a stir in the village; some of the local busybodies were thinking of getting up a petition against the newcomer. They objected to Dr. Ragozin's private zoo; they were fearful lest some of the wild animals should escape. Children were warned by nervous mothers to avoid Moat Hollow as they would avoid a fever spot. Farm labourers made wide detours on their way home, in order to avoid passing near the grim old place after dark.

And all this was very much to the liking of Dr. Franz Ragozin—who had many reasons for desiring absolute privacy.

It was perfectly true that nobody had ever seen any wild animals; but it was just as true that some strange-looking enclosed vans had been taken into those walled grounds. Strange sounds, too, had been heard from Moat Hollow, time after time. Willy Handforth, of the Third, had on one memorable occasion rescued a bear cub, and he had coolly added it to his own little private menagerie; and it was significant that Dr. Ragozin had made no attempts to recover the creature.

The village tradesmen pooh-poohed the idea that the new tenant was a menace. Through the medium of Ridley, he did all his shopping locally, and he paid for everything in cash. The butcher, the baker, and the grocer welcomed him as an ideal customer. But these tradesmen, after all, were in a minority.

The very fact that Dr. Ragozin was a "furriner" stamped him, in the eyes of the villagers, as an undesirable. He was vaguely believed to be a Hungarian, and there wasn't much doubt that Ivan Hess was a Pole. Queer people, indeed, to settle in a sleepy Sussex village.

Yet Dr. Ragozin made no secret of his purpose. He had leased Moat Hollow because it was a big, rambling old place, and it was a ready-made home for his private zoo. He had told the vicar that he was preparing to make some wonderful experiments—which, if successful, would be of inestimable value to science.

The nine St. Frank's juniors, intent upon raiding those mysterious grounds, were strangely thrilled as they approached in the mist. They had suspicions of their own; they knew for certain, in fact, that Dr. Ragozin was no more interested in a private zoo than they were interested in Latin grammar. He was after the famous old Edgemore Treasure!

For centuries, stories of this treasure had been regarded as a legend; and it was only recently that the earl himself had been convinced that the treasure really existed. And now its discovery would be a real boon, for the earl was involved in a great City crash, and he was virtually a bankrupt. The discovery of the treasure would restore his fortunes.

Skeets was wildly excited about it all—particularly as there was a very grave fear that he would be compelled to leave St. Frank's at the end of the term. His chums, rallying round him, were determined that the treasure should be found—not by Dr. Ragozin, but by them.

This expedition, to-night, was mainly in the nature of a scouting trip. They wanted to find out whether the Moat Hollow people were active—whether they had started digging for the gold.

The raiding party divided itself up naturally; Handforth & Co. scaled one part of the wall, Nipper & Co. another, and Travers, Potts, and Skeets a third. They were all to advance into the centre of the rear garden, which was a fairly extensive area—a weed-grown wilderness, with long-neglected fruit trees, and dense masses of rambler roses and blackberry brambles ran wild. There was an old, moss-grown sundial here, too, half-hidden by the brambles. This was the agreed-upon meeting-place.

Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson, having scaled the wall without trouble, found themselves creeping amongst the weeds and bushes. It was not easy going, and in the fog they soon lost their bearings.

The house itself was completely invisible; the boys could not tell whether any lights were showing in the windows. They could see nothing. The white pall surrounded them closely, pressing down upon them like an enveloping blanket.

"We'll never find the other chaps!" murmured Watson, after a while.

"Begad! I doubt if we shall find the sundial," said Sir Montie. "This is a most frightful place to explore. And I don't think they're diggin', Nipper, old boy. Everythin' seems quiet for the night."

"It's not late yet," murmured Nipper. "I don't suppose they'd start operations before midnight, anyway. Come on—there's a kind of path here."

And then, through the mist, loomed a queer sort of shape. Nipper stood stock-still, his heart thudding. An impulse seized him, and he whipped out an electric torch.

Click!

He pressed the switch, and the beam of light, slashing through the drifting mist, revealed the horrible hairy shape of a long-armed gorilla-like monster!

CHAPTER 3.

The Capture!

IT was an awful shock for Nipper & Co. The Thing of terror seemed to be neither human nor animal, but a mixture of the two. For one instant the boys saw a pair of eyes gleaming in the torchlight; then the monster swung rapidly round and made as though to bolt. And this, in itself, was surprising, for the boys had expected a violent attack.

Perhaps the creature was unwilling to attack three enemies at once. All the young raiders knew of the "gorilla-man"; they had been keeping a sharp look-out ever since they had scaled the walls. This was a danger they had been prepared to face, and it said much for their courage and determination. However, they had relied upon the old adage—"safety in numbers." Against nine of them, even the gorilla-man could do no serious damage, and there was always the chance that they might capture him. For they believed, in their hearts, that he was a human being—a trickster, cunningly disguised.

Nipper, at this tense moment, decided to make sure. It was a glorious opportunity.

"Come on—jump!" he hissed. "Don't let the brute get away!"

As he spoke, he leapt. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were not so enthusiastic, but they sprang loyally to their

leader's side. And, luckily enough, at the same moment Handforth & Co. loomed up from the mist beyond. Thus the monster was attacked front and rear, and it was impossible for it to dodge sideways as they were all upon a tangled path, with impenetrable bramble bushes on either side.

Nipper tackled with all the vim and enthusiasm of a Rugger International; he threw himself violently at the creature's legs. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie, in the same second, flung their weight at the creature's body.

Completely thrown off its balance, it thudded heavily upon the hard path.

"By George!" came a gasp from Handforth. "Hold its legs, some of you! I don't believe it's a real gorilla—"

"For goodness sake, Handy, keep your voice down!" panted Nipper. "Do you want those crooks on us?"

Nipper's chief fear was that the creature would set up a violent outcry, and he was surprised when no sound came from it. Already Nipper could tell, by his sense of touch, that the furry skin was dead. It was cold and felt like a fur coat. And Nipper knew, as he clutched, that if this monster were a real forest creature, that skin would have been warm.

"Thought so!" exclaimed Nipper triumphantly. "Hold him, you chaps! It's a man—disguised! We'll have that headpiece off, and take a look at his real face."

He was quivering with excitement when he felt the furry headpiece was loose. With one determined wrench, Nipper tore it completely away. But it was very difficult to see in that misty gloom.

"Got you!" breathed Nipper exultantly. "Now—we'll have a good look at you, my friend!"

He switched on his electric torch, and held it close. And then a gurgle of stupefied bewilderment sounded in his throat. He stared at that revealed face stupidly, like one bereft of his senses; the colour drained from his face.

"Guv'nor!" he muttered incredulously.

Nelson Lee was looking calm, but a trifle annoyed.

"When you young idiots have finished, perhaps you'll let me get up?" he asked, with dangerous coldness. "The only satisfactory part of this affair is that you had sense enough to work quietly."

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" gurgled Handforth feebly.

"And put that light out," went on Nelson Lee, as all the boys sprang away from him as though he had become red-hot.

Nipper switched off the light, and he tried—in vain—to compose his disordered mind.

"Guv'nor!" he repeated incredulously. "But—but it's impossible! We—we thought—"

Words failed him. He had expected to see the face of Ivan Hess—or, quite possible, the face of Dr. Franz Ragozin. But Nelson Lee! It was a stunning, overwhelming shock.

The explanation, however, was simple.

"This is what comes of disobedience," said Nelson Lee sternly, his voice also charged with exasperation. "Didn't I give you strict orders not to come near this place?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"I can tell you that nothing is happening here—everything is perfectly quiet," continued Lee. "So you have merely wasted your time—and mine. Our friends of Moat Hollow have made no attempt to unearth the treasure, and your presence here is not merely a menace to yourselves, but to the success of my own campaign."

"But—but we never dreamed, sir—" began Nipper.

"Then you should be dreaming—in bed," snapped Nelson Lee. "You needn't make a mystery out of this 'get-up' of mine. I found it in a shed here, and donned it as a safeguard. Yes, yes, I've known all along that the 'gorilla' was a man in disguise. I merely took his place—that's all."

By this time Skeets and Travers and Potts had come up, attracted by the whispers, and they were equally astounded to learn the truth.

"You reckless young scamps!" said Lee, as he surveyed them. "How many more boys are there knocking about here?"

"No more, sir—only nine of us, and we're all here," said Nipper meekly.

"Then you'll all go back to the school—at once," commanded Nelson Lee. "It's too risky for you to remain; and you'll each write me five hundred lines for breaking bounds."

"But, guv'nor, perhaps we can help—"

"That's enough," cut in Nelson Lee curtly. "Go! All of you!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Treasure Seekers!

EVEN Nipper dared not argue. The others considered themselves lucky to get off so lightly. Nelson Lee was engaged upon detective work at the moment; but none of the boys over-



Under cover of the misty night, Nipper & Co. scaled the wall of Moat Hollow and entered the grounds of that sinister house.

looked the all-important fact that he was the headmaster of St. Frank's, and he—the Head—had caught them red-handed in the serious misdemeanour of breaking bounds after lights-out.

"On second thoughts," said Lee abruptly, "I'll go back to the school with you. You're too full of tricks! I'll see you right into your beds!"

"Have a heart, sir!" protested Handforth. "We didn't mean any harm."

"I know you didn't," said Nelson Lee, a little more kindly. "That's why I am letting you off so lightly. But I want you to realise that I mean what I say, and you must not enter upon any more of these midnight excursions."

"It's not midnight, sir," protested Handforth. "It's only half-past eleven. I just heard the church clock—"

"Don't quibble, old man," interrupted Nipper. "If the guv'nor says we must go, we must go, and there's an end of it."

Whilst speaking, Nelson Lee had deftly

stripped himself of the grotesque costume, and, telling the boys to wait, he vanished. He replaced that costume where he had found it, and then rejoined the juniors.

"Come along!" he said gruffly. "We shall be lucky to get out of this place without raising an alarm. These people aren't in bed yet—and it is only the fog which gives us a chance of getting away."

"I don't see why we should let these crooks pinch the treasure, sir," said Handforth rebelliously. "It belongs to Skeets and his pater. These rotters have pinched that old manuscript, giving all the directions to the treasure, and they're trying to get the loot for themselves."

"Yes, and we're trespassing," said Lee.

"But Dr. Ragozin has only leased the place, sir," said Watson eagerly. "It still belongs to Lord Edgemore, and so does the treasure—if they find it."

"I'm well aware of that," said Lee. "But nothing can alter the fact that Dr. Ragozin is the legal tenant of Moat

Hollow, and we have no right on this property. The treasure is not found yet, anyhow, and is not likely to be found for some little time. Treasure that has been buried for centuries is not so easily located. As I told you once before, you can leave this matter to me. Now, come along."

There was every reason for Nelson Lee's urgency—although even he himself did not quite realise it at the moment. Within the house four men had just finished certain preparations.

They were in the gloomy kitchen, and they were all warmly clothed and heavily booted. On the table stood two powerful petrol-vapour lanterns, and against the wall were a number of digging implements—pickaxes, spades, and forks.

Two of the men were bending over the table, examining a large chart of stiff paper. It was executed in ink, and, although somewhat crude, the general layout of the Moat Hollow grounds could easily be recognised.

"It's all here—clear enough," said Dr. Franz Ragozin, his eyes glowing. "Here's the plan—and, below, the exact directions. It ought not to be so difficult."

"Do not be so sure," said the other man at the table, his voice soft and silky. "You must remember, my dear Tod, that our calculations have been only roughly made. It would have been better if we could have employed expert surveyors—men who could have measured the ground accurately with their delicate instruments. In following the crude directions of Captain Humphrey Rossiter, we are taking many chances, and the treasure, even if it exists, may be buried very deeply. We must not be impatient."

"We'll make a good start to-night, anyhow," said the other.

He was more than impatient, however; his eyes glowed with the lust of gold. An impressive man, with his little black moustache, his tiny pointed beard, and his sombre clothes, he looked in every inch of him what he purported to be.

The local police would have been astonished had they known—as Nelson Lee knew—that this man was none other than Tod Millar, swindler, card-sharper, confidence man, and smash-and-grab expert. It was only owing to a lucky fluke, when fleeing from justice, that Millar had discovered the old parchment, telling of the Edgemore treasure.

By accident he had smashed through one of the older walls of Moat Hollow—and the centuries-forgotten manuscript had been thrust out of its secret hiding-place. It was here, in the old Traitor's Lodge,

that Captain Humphrey Rossiter, pirate and adventurer, had concealed that precious document. Captain Humphrey had sailed the Spanish Main under Drake, and he had returned home laden with loot. But none of the Edgemores had ever known what he had done with it. Now, after centuries, it seemed that the wealth of more than one Spanish argosy was to come to light.

But Tod Millar was not the guiding brain of this enterprise—this audacious plot to rob the Earl of Edgemore of that which was his by right of inheritance. There was a master brain at work here—the brain of no less a person than Professor Cyrus Zingrave himself!

Fate had worked strangely. Zingrave, one-time Chief of the notorious League of the Green Triangle, and now a skulking fugitive from justice, had sought refuge in Moat Hollow—then deserted and empty. Wanted as an ex-convict, he had not dared to move out, even after nightfall. And here he and Tod Millar had come into contact, and they were old acquaintances, since Tod, in former days, had been in the Green Triangle confederation.

Very quickly, Zingrave had seen the possibilities; it was he who had sent Tod Millar to London, there to meet some of Zingrave's influential criminal colleagues. Tod had returned to the district in the guise of "Dr. Franz Ragozin," and he had easily leased Moat Hollow. Hess and Ridley were fellow crooks. Zingrave never figured in "Ragozin's" household; he revealed himself to none.

Since then there had been some adventures with the St. Frank's boys, but the crooks had secured the valuable manuscript, and now, after deciphering the all-important message, they were ready to dig for the treasure.

CHAPTER 5.

The Interruption!

"WAIT!" whispered Nelson Lee sharply.

As he and the boys were about to steal through the fog towards the outer wall, Lee had heard a soft click. It came from the direction of the house, and, spinning round, Lee saw a faint, vague glow of light.

In that dense mist the visibility was so limited that Lee could hardly see the boys around him. The house itself was invisible. But he knew that men had just emerged, carrying lanterns. He could even hear their low voices.

"Great Scott!" breathed Nipper. "They must have spotted us, or something—and they've come out to search."

"No, I don't think so," whispered Nelson Lee. "They are far too slow in their movements—and far too calm. They have come out for another reason."

"My hat! The treasure!" nodded Nipper.

Nelson Lee was looking round, trying to penetrate the foggy pall.

"We must wait, boys," he said softly, to the infinite satisfaction of the juniors. "Quick—into these bramble bushes. They will effectually conceal us. Later, perhaps, we can make a dash for it."

There was certainly no time to lose, for the light, glowing so fantastically through the fog, was becoming stronger. The enemy was drawing nearer!

It was fortunate that the bramble bushes were so near at hand. They formed a dense, overgrown mass, at first sight impenetrable. By crouching down, Nelson Lee and the boys wormed their way beneath the prickly mass, and soon they found themselves in a kind of bramble grotto. Dead leaves lay beneath them, and, overhead, the thick canopy of bramble, entangled and entwined with masses of dead creeper. It was a good hiding-place, and the boys soon realised the wisdom of Nelson Lee's order. They could peep through the little gaps, although they themselves were invisible. Dim figures were appearing in the mist. They could see two men carrying powerful lanterns, and two other men. There came a clatter of spades and other tools.

And then the boys understood. The digging operations were to take place here—within six or seven yards of them, in a fairly open space. To escape now was out of the question. They must wait—and watch.

Lee was glad that the men had no dogs; for such creatures would certainly have given the alarm.

Ragozin and Hess and Ridley could be easily recognised, in spite of the mist. The fourth man was muffled up, and he was wearing glasses. Lee knew him to be Professor Zingrave, but the boys certainly did not recognise him. A big empty packing-case had been brought, and on this a large sheet of stiff paper was laid, with one of the lanterns on top of it. Ragozin and the muffled man were making an examination.

"Yes, this ought to be the place," Tod Millar was saying, in a soft voice. "Look here, Hess. There's the tree; you've got to start digging just this side of it. We

can't be exact, of course—we shall have to leave something to chance."

Lee smiled to himself. If these men were relying upon chance they were booked for some disappointments! Too many of Lord Edgemore's ancestors had conducted digging operations on chance.

Lee bent closer to Nipper, who was by his side.

"Whisper it to the others that they must be very careful—no talking and no moving," he breathed. "If these men get the slightest wind of our presence, we are at a hopeless disadvantage."

Nipper passed the message along, in the softest of whispers, and even Handforth, who was usually so noisy, gave an excellent imitation of a watchful fox.

The juniors, in fact, were filled with excited satisfaction. They had not looked for any such luck as this; they had expected to be packed off back to school. And they were pleased with themselves, too, because their judgment had been right. The crooks were even now digging for the treasure!

Nelson Lee was not so pleased. He was wondering how he and his young companions could get away. It might mean a very long wait; and in this foggy atmosphere, sprawling on such damp ground, the boys were in danger of catching a chill.

They, of course, never gave any thought to the fog, or the damp ground. They were far too fascinated by the scene they were secretly watching. Those powerful vapour-lamps enabled them to see the dim figures of the men as they worked. Hess and Ridley did most of the digging; the sound of their picks and shovels came monotonously. As a start, they were digging a wide trench right across a part of the garden which had been previously staked out.

Even Handforth began to realise the stupendous nature of this task. Digging for treasure, he saw, was not all honey! This one trench alone would mean an enormous amount of labour before it was of any real depth. And perhaps, after days of effort, the searchers would discover that they were in the wrong place. Even if they were only a few yards out, it would mean the same strenuous labour all over again. And they might be wrong at the second attempt—and even at the third.

However, the men had made a start, and they were strengthened by their enthusiasm. Long perusal of Captain Humphrey's manuscript had fired their imaginations, and the gold lust had gripped them so fiercely that their desire

"THE BLACK SQUADRON." A whirlwind story of thrills—

to unearth the treasure was akin to madness.

And so—an hour passed.

Midnight had boomed, and the half-hour had struck. Still the men dug—deeper and deeper. Ragozin and Zingrave took turns—

Bang-bang-bang!

The interruption was sudden, unexpected, and dramatic.

CHAPTER 6.

Nelson Lee Takes a Chance!

BANG-BANG-BANG!

The sounds, in the fog, were muffled, but it was clear enough that they were being caused by somebody hammering hard upon the board-covered outer gates of Moat Hollow.

"What's that light?" came a gruff, authoritative voice. "Hey! What's going on in here?"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Nipper. "Old Sparrow!"

"Hush!" warned Lee.

He was not altogether surprised. Police-constable Sparrow was something of a busybody, and, with the best intentions in the world—fondly believing that he was doing his duty—he would sometimes force his attentions upon perfectly harmless people and cause considerable inconvenience.

But P.-c. Sparrow's thunderous knocks—with his truncheon—upon the boarded gates of Moat Hollow were more or less legitimate. Through the white mist he had seen the glow from the lanterns, and he felt that it was his duty to know the whys and wherefores.

"It's that infernal village constable!" Lee heard Tod Millar mutter. "Confound the fool! We daren't ignore him."

"We let him in—yes?" asked Ivan Hess dubiously.

"Of course we'll let him in—but we won't show him this place," breathed Tod. "Leave it to me—I'll get rid of him."

"Be careful," warned Zingrave. "Even a dullard such as Sparrow can be dangerous in his blundering way."

The professor slipped off, vanishing into the house. He was the one man in this strange household who could not be seen by outsiders.

"Those tools—hide them up," muttered Tod, as he hastily seized an old sack and flung it over the chart—which was fixed to the box by a couple of drawing-pins. "You get indoors, Ridley. Look alive!"

Holding one of the lanterns, Tod Millar went off towards the main gates.

"All right—all right!" he shouted impatiently. "Who is it that interrupts? What do you want at this hour of the night?"

He had suddenly acquired a foreign accent, but his annoyance was real enough. It had not occurred to him that the village policeman, on his beat, would grow suspicious. It would be well to deal with this man now, once and for all.

Nelson Lee, half-emerging from the brambles, glimpsed Millar and Hess as they went towards the gates, carrying their lanterns. Zingrave had long since gone, and now Ridley had followed. The coast was clear.

"Out of it, boys—and not a sound!" whispered Lee urgently. "Make for the wall at the far corner of the grounds. Better not stray from me, though. I'll lead the way."

"Think we can get out all right, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"If we don't take this chance, we shall not get another," replied the detective.

They scrambled out, and Nelson Lee, in advance, had already reached that box, over which the sacking had been flung. It was only the work of a moment for him to whisk the sack back, to unfasten the sheet of stout paper, and to fold it hurriedly. He replaced the sack.

"Now—come along!" murmured Lee. "We'll give the beggars something to puzzle over, at all events!"

At the gates, with much clattering of bolts and chains, "Dr. Ragozin" unfastened the little wicket. Then he stood back as P.-c. Sparrow, burly and red of face, stooped down and entered.

"What is this?" demanded Tod sharply. "Why do you knock and make so much noise? You think something is wrong, yes?"

"Well, sir, ain't there something wrong?" demanded Sparrow. "These 'ere lights don't seem right to me, not at this hour, as you might say."

"What do you mean—not right?" demanded Tod. "Am I not permitted to do as I please in my own property? Must I ask the permission of the police—"

"No 'arm, sir," interrupted the constable hastily. "I thought there was somethin' amiss, that's all. Burglars, p'r'aps."

"Burglars? Pah!" snapped Tod. "Would burglars be in my garden, carrying these powerful lanterns? You are a fool, Sparrow. That is your name, yes? You will not interrupt again. At any hour of the night my trainer may be compelled to be out of doors with lanterns."

"Your trainer, sir?" asked Sparrow, looking at Ivan Hess in doubt.

"You are the blockhead," said Tod contemptuously. "You know, do you not, that I have a zoo here? It is not yet complete—other animals are to come. At any hour of the night it may be necessary for us to be out. So no more interruptions, constable, please."

He handed the gratified Sparrow a pound note.

"I ain't supposed to take this, not really, sir," said the constable. "I mean, you've no call to—"

"That's all right, my man," interrupted Tod gruffly. "Merely a small present. Take it. Put it in your pocket. Do not be foolish. Come in, by all means, if you wish; you may help us to search."

"To search, sir?" asked Sparrow, as he put away the pound note.

"Yes, but it may be dangerous," continued Tod. "Unfortunately, Hess has lost a valuable snake. I only hope that it does not attack us whilst we stand here."

night, sir, and thank ye kindly. I'll remember in future; I won't disturb ye no more."

And Sparrow fairly leapt through the wicket, and he wasn't really comfortable until he had got into the very centre of the village.



Ignoring Nipper's warning, Handforth rushed forward. Next moment his feet shot from under him, and he went tumbling down the slimy steps.

"A sus-snake, sir?" faltered P.-c. Sparrow, with a jump.

"A highly venomous snake, I can assure you," said Tod. "One bite from it means death, Sparrow. It may take us hours to find—but there is not the slightest danger of the reptile escaping from these grounds. We shall find it—"

"That's all right, sir. I—I'll be going," interrupted the constable hastily. "Good-

CHAPTER 7.

Zingrave Blunders!

"WELL, we soon got rid of that wretched fellow," said Tod Millar, with a grin.

"You give him the fright—the what you call wind up;" said Ivan Hess with a chuckle. "You talk of the

snake, and he bolts like the rabbit. It was the good idea."

"He won't disturb us again, either," said Tod, after he has fastened the gate. "Come along—we can get back to the job, Hess."

"You think it will now be safe?"

"That fool won't come within half a mile of this house until to-morrow at the earliest," replied Tod. "You had better go indoors and tell the others. We can only work by night—and this fog is particularly useful."

Zingrave and Ridley were soon out, and the lanterns were placed in their original position, and Tod removed the sacking from the upturned box.

"Hallo!" he said sharply, as he turned the sack about. "Where's that paper?"

"I thought you left it on the box," said Zingrave. "It was rash—"

"We were in a hurry, weren't we?" snapped Tod, looking about him. "Besides, nobody has been here. I can't understand—I didn't put the paper in my pocket. Hess! Ridley! Do you know anything of that paper with the plan and the directions?"

But Hess and Ridley knew nothing; a hurried search, followed by a thorough search, led nowhere.

It was very mysterious, and the men blamed one another. Zingrave thought that Tod had mislaid it; Tod thought that Hess or Ridley had taken it. They were all irritable and exasperated. But not one of them guessed the real truth—for they little suspected that they had not been alone in that wilderness garden.

Meanwhile, Nelson Lee and the boys had successfully scaled the wall—whilst the crooks had been busy with P.-c. Sparrow. Lee was very grateful to the constable for his timely intervention.

Back at St. Frank's, Lee admitted the culprits into the Ancient House, and, with the lobby lights turned full on, he surveyed them severely.

"We're lucky," he said. "We might have been compelled to wait until dawn—and then there would have been danger of those men seeing us. You mustn't let this happen again, young 'uns."

"Have a heart, sir!" protested Handforth. "We're awfully keen on getting that treasure, and if those crooks—"

"I can appreciate your feelings, Handforth, but there is not the slightest danger of our Moat Hollow friends getting away with the Edgemore treasure," said Lee. "And kindly remember that I am now speaking to you as your headmaster. I shall require five hundred lines from each of you. And now you can get to bed."

"What did you do near that box, guv'nor, just before we came away?" asked Nipper keenly.

Nelson Lee laughed, and produced the folded paper. There were many murmurs of excitement.

"By George! So you bagged the book of rules, sir!" exclaimed Handforth. "May we see? I say, you were jolly smart over that, sir."

"Not at all," replied Lee. "The crooks were careless to leave the paper behind. H'm! I thought so. Excellent!" He had been reading the "directions," and he was smiling. "You remember, boys, when the manuscript and the key book were stolen by mysterious raiders from Edgemore Castle?" he went on.

"Not so mysterious, guv'nor," put in Nipper. "We guessed the Moat Hollow people were responsible."

"We guessed so—yes," agreed Lee. "But guesswork is of no particular value, Nipper. Now we know. For here is the complete message as written by Captain Humphrey Rossiter—fully deciphered. I think I told you, at the time, that the crooks would save us quite a lot of work. They probably spent a couple of days on that job, and we have it in our hands."

"And they've made a plan of the Moat Hollow gardens, too," said Skeets eagerly. "Gee! This may be of some use to us, sir."

"By James!" said Lee suddenly.

He was looking intently at the plan, and there was a dancing light in his eyes.

"What have you spotted, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"I'm rather sorry I took this," replied Nelson Lee slowly. "In fact, I think I will make a very rough copy, and then slip back to Moat Hollow and half-conceal this paper amongst some of the bushes. Our friends will find it in the morning, and they will conclude that one of them must have been careless, or that a sudden gust of wind blew away the paper."

"But why do you want them to have it back, sir?" asked Travers curiously.

"Because they have made a colossal blunder in their calculations."

"What!"

"My only hat!"

"Yes," said Lee, examining the plan more keenly than ever. "Captain Humphrey has referred to 'a great oak which stands at a spot fifteen yards from the outer wall,' and all the calculations as to the position of the treasure are based upon that oak tree."

"Well, that's right, sir," said Handforth quickly. "You know the oak, don't you? It stands—"

"I know the one—the only oak tree in the grounds," replied Nelson Lee, nodding. "But I happen to know something about British trees, Handforth, and I am quite certain that that particular tree is not more than two hundred years old."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "I hadn't thought of that! I didn't realise that trees lasted so long."

"The one at Moat Hollow must have been planted somewhere about 1720, but not earlier," went on Lee. "The tree which Captain Humphrey refers to was evidently a handsome giant in 1580, so it must have been a good age, even then."

"Phew!" whistled Skeets. "Then it couldn't possibly be alive to-day; it would have to be more than three hundred and fifty years old!"

"Which is quite youthful—for a British oak," replied Lee dryly. "There is one famous tree—the Cowthorpe Oak, near Wetherby, in Yorkshire—which is said to be something like one thousand eight hundred years old. So Captain Humphrey's oak, if it had survived, would now hardly be of respectable middle age."

"You mean it died, sir?" asked Nipper.

"No; I mean that it was destroyed," replied Lee quietly. "I daresay you boys recall a man named William K. Smith?"

"Yes, rather, sir," said many of the juniors—although Skeets looked puzzled.

"It was before your time, Skeets, old man," said Nipper. "William K. Smith was a German-American, of Chicago, and he had possession of Moat Hollow for some time."

"And while he had possession, he cut down that wonderful old oak," said Lee, nodding. "So you will see Captain Humphrey Rossiter based his calculations on that tree, of which our crooks know nothing. They are digging on the wrong side of the Moat Hollow grounds—fully a hundred yards from the true position."

The juniors went to bed happy; they felt that the night had not been wasted.

— —

CHAPTER 8.

Handy Comes a Cropper!

WHEN the rising-bell sounded there were a few juniors who were unwilling to turn out of their beds, but, in order to avoid comments amongst the other fellows, they braced themselves and were amongst the first down. Nipper managed to get in touch with Nelson Lee before breakfast, and he learned, to his satisfaction, that Lee had successfully entered the Moat Hollow

grounds again and had "planted" that sheet of paper, after taking a copy.

"I shall go into the matter fully to-day, Nipper," said Lee keenly. "I am sure I am right about the oak tree. You remember the one I mean, don't you? A magnificent giant, standing at the far corner of the rear garden, near the ancient flint wall."

"Yes, rather, guv'nor, I remember it," replied Nipper, nodding. "And I remember Smith cutting it down, too; there was quite a stir in the village about it, wasn't there? But Smith was a ruthless man, and he didn't care what damage he did."

"The treasure, as far as I can understand, is buried not a great distance from the site of that old tree," said Lee thoughtfully. "So we are progressing, Nipper. But, remember—you boys must not enter the Moat Hollow grounds again. None of your trying to dig for the treasure in the real spot. You must promise me ——"

"Don't worry, sir. After last night we're not likely to break into the Moat Hollow grounds again," interrupted Nipper emphatically.

Nelson Lee showed him a rough chart he had made, and Nipper noted, with a little thrill, the spot where the treasure was supposed to exist.

"I am telling you this, because I want you to pass it on to the other boys," said Lee dryly. "Perhaps they won't be so impatient. Let our friends, the enemy, continue their useless digging. Meanwhile, we can make our own plans. You see, Nipper, there is no particular hurry."

It was during morning lessons that Nipper, thinking of Moat Hollow instead of his work, had a sudden brainwave.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, jumping.

Mr. Crowell gazed across at him over the tops of his glasses.

"What did you say, Hamilton?" he asked.

"Nun-nothing, sir," said Nipper hastily. "I—I jumped a bit, that's all."

"You had better jump into your work," retorted the Form-master. "Too many of you are slack this morning. What's the matter with you? And why are so many boys yawning? Handforth, don't sprawl! Travers, are you asleep?"

Nipper got on with his work, but his thoughts were far away. He had remembered an old underground tunnel, and the very thought of it set his heart thudding and his pulse throbbing.

There was, of course, a well-known tunnel leading from the monastery ruins to the Ancient House—and another one from

the ruins to the quarry workings. But the tunnel in Nipper's mind was neither of these. Thinking of William K. Smith and Moat Hollow, he had suddenly recalled another tunnel which ran from Moat Hollow to that queer little castle-like building on Willard's Island!

The boys had used it during William K. Smith's regime. Nipper was thinking of "Willard's Folly," and he knew that it would be easy enough to get into the tunnel from that end. But what had really made him jump was the recollection that the tunnel must pass underground quite close to the site of that noble old oak—Captain Humphrey's oak!

According to Nelson Lee's calculations, the treasure was buried somewhere near there—somewhere, in fact, within easy reach of that underground tunnel!

As soon as lessons were over, Nipper

called his fellow conspirators together, and there was a hurried meeting in Study C. The others listened excitedly as Nipper told them of his brainwave.

"But I don't see what we can do," said Handforth, staring.

"Dear old fellow, it's obvious," put in Travers, his eyes sparkling. "We can get into that tunnel at any old time—even this afternoon, in full daylight. Who'll know?"

"But what's the good of getting into the tunnel?"

"My dear ass, haven't you any imagination?" said Nipper. "What's the matter with our digging—from the tunnel? Why shouldn't we excavate in the direction of the treasure? I can have a look at Mr. Lee's chart again and get the exact spot, and then we can make our calculations—"



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"By George!" gasped Handforth. "You—you mean that we'll have a shot at the treasure ourselves?"

"Great Scott!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Why not?"

"Exactly—why not?" said Nipper coolly. "While the crooks are working on the wrong track, why shouldn't we search for the treasure? If we're lucky, we might be able to locate it; and, anyhow, we can be doing some digging. I vote we explore that tunnel this afternoon, and later on we can make plans. By Jove! What a surprise for the guv'nor, and for your pater, Skeets, if we strike lucky!"

THE treasure-hunters were glad that the heavy mist persisted during the day.

Afternoon found the countryside almost blotted out by the white pall, and football was out of the question. Most of the fellows in the Remove and the Fourth were bitterly disappointed, for this was to have been an important "test" game between the Remove and Fourth, in order to help Nipper to select the Junior XI for the forthcoming cup-tie.

Skeets and his fellow-conspirators were glad. Even Handforth, who generally regarded football as the most important thing on earth, chortled with glee. The afternoon was theirs, and they could slip away to Willard's Island and explore that tunnel. They could make full arrangements for the treasure hunt.

"Blow football!" said Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "What's football compared with finding a giddy fortune?"

"You're pretty optimistic, old man," said Church, shaking his head. "I shouldn't count your chickens before they're hatched—"

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald. "That treasure is as good as found. It's a stone-wall cert!"

The same nine stalwarts gathered in the Triangle directly after dinner. Each one carried a powerful electric torch, but Handforth's suggestion that they should go armed with picks and shovels was vetoed.

"Mustn't do anything in a hurry, old man," said Nipper. "The guv'nor has told us that the crooks are on a false trail, so we can take things easily."

"I don't believe in taking things easily," growled Handforth. "That's how people steal a march on you!"

"Well, we'll wait until dark, anyhow," said Nipper. "If we're seen carrying picks and shovels, the rest of the chaps will ask what we're up to. We don't want

the whole school to be talking about the Edgemore treasure, do we?"

"H'm! I'd forgotten that," admitted Handforth grudgingly.

"It'll take us all the afternoon to explore that tunnel, and to work out the exact position," continued Nipper, as they walked through the mist. "I'm going to have another look at the guv'nor's plan, if possible, and then we shall have to calculate the position and dig accordingly."

Not many of the juniors had reckoned upon the difficulties, but Nipper knew that there would be many. He was not even sure that the tunnel extended as far as the Moat Hollow grounds, for he seemed to have an impression that a part of the tunnel had collapsed.

It was easy enough to reach Willard's Island.

They went across in two boats, and none observed them, for the river, at this time of the year, was deserted, and to-day, owing to the mist, which was particularly thick over the water, the explorers had the river to themselves.

Willards Island was a narrow strip, broadening towards the centre, in the middle of the river, where the Stowe was particularly wide. Most of the island was heavily wooded, and the juniors had had many an adventure there. Some of the fellows could vividly remember the great barring-out, when the Remove had taken up its quarters on the island.

Many years earlier a man named Willard had erected a replica of an ancient castle on the island—a castle in miniature. It was complete with battlements and turreted towers, and even dungeons. For years the building had been deserted, and ivy and other creepers had grown wild. The place was locally known as "Willard's Folly."

Mooring the boats securely to some willows near the bank, the juniors continued their way through the mist, and then entered the semi-ruin.

"The beauty of getting in this way is that nobody will suspect our purpose, even if we're spotted," said Nipper. "Anybody who sees us will think we're doing a little exploring and nothing more. The Moat Hollow crowd wouldn't even dream that we were searching for the treasure from here."

"Let's get down to the dungeons," said Handforth practically. "I want to have a look at that tunnel."

They proceeded over the slippery, moss-covered stone floors, and they reached a flight of steps which led steeply down-

wards into utter blackness. These were the cellars—or dungeons. Nipper led the way, and presently they were all standing in a low, arched apartment where the atmosphere was dank and earthy. Complete silence reigned, and the boys were already beginning to feel thrilled. There was plenty of light, for half a dozen torches were switched on. Skeets was looking round in wonder—for he was unfamiliar with this place.

“Gee!” he said. “You fellers are wrong, aren’t you? There’s no way out of here—except by the stairs we just used.”

“Wait a minute,” said Nipper keenly.

He went to one of the corners, and, bending down, he pushed hard against one of the lower stones of the solid-looking wall. Nothing happened for a moment, and he pressed harder. Then a portion of the solid wall moved inwards, revealing a low, dark opening.

“Gee!” ejaculated Skeets, staring.

“Easy enough when you know how,” grinned Nipper.

“Don’t waste time jawing,” said Handforth impatiently. “Get on with it!”

They all passed through into a surprisingly well-built tunnel, and then they came to a flight of stone steps which led down into the very bowels of the earth. The steps were slippery and treacherous, and Nipper uttered a warning.

“You make me tired!” said Handforth, pushing past. “There’s no need to be so jolly careful. Any ass can descend these steps without slipping—Hi! What the—Whoa! Help!”

Edward Oswald deserved all he got. His feet shot from under him, and he lost his balance. Over he went, and he sat down violently.

Then, before he could stop himself, he went tumbling down, clawing and clutching in vain. He vanished into the blackness of that underground stairway. The others heard thuds and gasps—and then silence.

CHAPTER 9.

The Gold Diggers!

“**G**REAT Scott!”

“He must be half killed!”

“The silly ass!” exclaimed Nipper. “I warned him that these steps were slippery, didn’t I?”

“He never takes any notice of warnings,” said Church anxiously. “Come on, let’s go down and find him!”

They went down carefully, for the stone steps were slimy and dangerous; they had not been used for years. Everything was damp, and the very air possessed the chill of the grave. It was by no means a pleasant experience; but these boys were fired by the thoughts of discovering the long-lost treasure, and they took little heed of personal discomforts.

“There he is!” muttered Church, with a gulp.

They reached the bottom of the steep stairs, and there sprawled Edward Oswald Handforth. He was lying on his back, and at first the others thought that he was unconscious.

“Handy!” gasped McClure. “Are you badly hurt, old man?”

“I’m dead!” groaned Handforth. “At least, I’m dying!”

With torches flashing, they gathered round him, and Church and McClure gently eased him up into a sitting position.

“Oh, don’t do that!” moaned Handforth. “My back’s broken, I think—and my right leg is fractured in two places! I’m finished, you chaps.”

“One of you had better dash back and get the doctor,” said Nipper urgently. “And hurry! Bring one of the stretchers, too!”

Handforth struggled to his feet, and glared.

“I don’t want any doctor, you fat-heads!” he growled. “I shall be all right in a minute.”

Nipper nodded.

“I thought that would work the trick,” he said coolly.

“Eh?”

“For a fellow who has a broken back and a fractured leg, you’re doing remarkably well, Handy,” said Nipper cheerfully. “One of the most staggering cures I have ever seen.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The others laughed with relief; but Handforth did not appreciate the humour of the situation.

“That’s right—cackle!” he said bitterly. “If I had really killed myself, I suppose you would have roared with laughter!”

It was found that he had only suffered a few bruises, a grazed elbow and a cut knee. He was very subdued, for he knew quite well that he had been entirely to blame.

“Come on!” he grunted. “I’m all right now. Let’s do that exploring.”

They pressed on, and now they were in a fairly wide tunnel which suddenly



Working with amazing energy, the St. Frank's treasure-hunters commenced to burrow their way through the solid earth.

descended steeply. And here the juniors found themselves splashing through inches of murky, evil-smelling water. The walls of the tunnel were dripping with moisture, and ugly fungus was growing in fantastic formations.

"Say, this is a queer sort of place," commented Skeets. "I guess we're passing right under the river, aren't we?"

"You've got it," said Nipper, nodding. "We're just about under the river now—that's why the tunnel dipped so steeply a minute ago. I think it's safe enough; it has stood the test of centuries, anyway. Goodness only knows who built this tunnel originally. It might have been made by the Friars of the monastery."

They lost no time in passing along that stretch of the underground passage, and presently it inclined upwards; and now the walls were not so wet. Soon Nipper came to a halt, and flashed his torch above him. Here there was a steep, jagged shaft, leading up into intense blackness.

"What's this?" asked Skeets, in wonder.

He could see that this was no man-made affair, but a natural split in the rocky

ground. The shaft sloped upwards acutely, and the top of it was lost in the blackness.

"We used this when that robber, Smith, was in possession of Moat Hollow," said Nipper. "You may not believe it, Skeets, but we're practically under the playing fields of St. Frank's now. If we climbed up this steep shaft, we should find ourselves behind the pavilion."

"By George, yes," said Handforth, his eyes sparkling. "I remember that we made a kind of trap-door there—in a bank of earth. We even covered it with turf, so that the door wouldn't be seen."

"But we don't want to go that way now," said Nipper. "We'll keep to the tunnel. As far as I recollect, it leads to a place known as Curdle's Paddock. It's really a part of the Moat Hollow property—at least, it is now—and that's where old man Smith built his beastly power station."

"I remember," said Tommy Watson, nodding. "We grabbed that power station, didn't we, and barred everybody else out? By jingo! Those were the days!"

"We're getting more excitement now, if you ask me," said Nipper crisply. "Come

on! There's a crude sort of tunnel from here. We made it ourselves, and it may have collapsed in one or two places. We shall have to go easy, too. We don't want to be trapped."

They found, to their satisfaction, that the tunnel was still intact. In one or two places there had been a slight collapse of earth and rock, but there was no sign of dangerous weakness.

The size of the tunnel varied. In some places it was three feet wide, in others four feet, and now and again, where the ground was very rocky, it narrowed down to a mere foot or so, and the boys were compelled to squeeze their way through with a queer sensation of being trapped. Yet they reached the extremity of the tunnel without mishap, and later they retraced their steps, and once again found themselves in the open air.

"It's all serene," said Nipper, his eyes gleaming. "This evening, as soon as it's dark, we'll come back with lanterns and picks and shovels."

"Won't it be taking an awful chance?" asked Skeets. "I mean, down in that tunnel there's no means of knowing exactly where we are. We might be half a mile away from the treasure."

"That's just where you're wrong, Skeets," replied Nipper calmly. "We happen to know the exact spot where that tunnel ends—the spot on the ground level, I mean. We worked all that out on that other occasion. So, by merely taking another look at the guv'nor's plan, I shall know just how far from the treasure we are. A few simple calculations, and we can make a new tunnel, and we can be certain that we're on the right track."

"Gee!" said Skeets, his eyes gleaming. "That's fine and dandy! I'm all on the jump to get at it."

CHAPTER 19.

The Pit of Doom!

NELSON LEE, of course, knew nothing of the boys' secret plans. They had considered the question fully, and had decided that it would be better, on the whole, to say nothing to Lee.

They would not be disobeying any orders, but Nelson Lee might take another view. He had forbidden them to go to the Moat Hollow grounds, but if he knew that they were tunnelling underground, he would probably put a veto on the whole

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plan—for, strictly speaking, they would be penetrating the Moat Hollow grounds.

Lee himself went off on a little mission as soon as darkness set in that evening. There was still some mist, but it was not as thick as it had been the previous night.

The detective's plan was to get into the Moat Hollow grounds at the far corner—where that noble oak had once stood. He wanted to make a brief survey. The oak was not there now, although some of the roots could still be detected; and even the remains of the great trunk, now smothered with creeper and brambles, and more or less disguised, could be quickly located. As a second objective, Lee wanted to make sure that the crooks had found that sheet of paper.

He entered the grounds without difficulty, and his movements now were excessively cautious. At this early hour it was quite probable that Professor Zingrave, wearing that "gorilla" costume, would be on the prowl. Some of the people in the village were inquisitive—and many of the St. Frank's fellows were inquisitive, too. If they climbed the wall, to peep over, it would be all to the advantage of the crooks if the intruders saw the "monster." In the deep gloom it would be impossible to see much more than a mere shape—but that shape would be enough to create a scare.

However, Nelson Lee found himself completely alone. There was no wind this evening, and the dark grounds were mysteriously silent. He was at the back of the house, where the garden stretched out extensively. And presently the detective halted, listening intently. There was a curious sound coming from just beyond a tangled mass of overgrown rose bushes. It was a sound which Lee could not quite place. He advanced with more caution than ever.

Skirting the rose bushes, he found a stretch of open ground ahead of him. It was easy enough to advance silently, for the ground was littered with a thick bed of dead and rotten leaves. He paused again.

Shuffle—shuffle—shuffle!

It was a peculiar sound, and it was near by. Then he heard a queer little whine, as of some animal in distress. It was immediately followed by a quick chattering. Then the shuffling again, and the faint tinkle of a chain.

Peering forward into the gloom and mist, Nelson Lee thought he saw a vague thing reaching upwards from the ground. It was all very indistinct. The detective was fairly "on his toes," sharply alert.

Now that he was at closer quarters, he heard that chattering again, and this time he identified the sound. A monkey! But why should a monkey be out here, in this isolated part of the property? No sounds came from the house, or the grounds nearer to the house. Lee thought that he could safely risk a quick flash of his electric torch. The beam would slant off in the direction of the outer wall, and there was little or no chance of its being seen.

He took a step closer, and suddenly switched on his light. Then, in an instant, the mystery was explained.

Sticking up from the ground was a rough pole, about five feet in height. On the top of the pole was a crude little wooden platform, and squatting on this platform was an exceedingly forlorn-looking monkey. There was a chain affixed to its collar, and the other end of the chain was fastened to a hook on the platform.

"Poor little beggar," muttered Lee, filled with sudden anger.

The monkey was looking at him with beady eyes, but very obviously the creature was numbed and indifferent. It was not accustomed to the bitter coldness of the English climate at this time of the year; and to chain it up like this out of doors was base cruelty. Lee surmised that this was part and parcel of "Dr. Ragozin's" plan to make people believe that he was really and truly converting Moat Hollow into a private zoo.

"All right, little chap," murmured Lee softly, "I'll soon have you free from that chain—and I'll tuck you into my jacket, where you'll be warm."

He took a step forward, and then, in that second, he knew the cunning of his enemies.

For the ground was not solid, as he had believed. It collapsed under his weight, and he went crashing through a thin, fragile layer of flimsy matchboarding. To the accompaniment of frightened shrieks from the monkey, he plunged down—down into the deeply-dug pit.

EVEN as Nelson Lee fell, he half-admired the brilliance of this trap.

The pit had been dug, and the top entirely covered by thin matchboarding, with dead leaves liberally strewn over them, so that it was impossible to detect the trap. That post was not dug into the ground, as it appeared, but merely fixed to a cross-piece of wood which bridged the pit.

Consequently, as the detective fell headlong, the unfortunate monkey was sent sprawling, the cross-piece being so

arranged that when the match-boarding was disturbed, it fell sideways, taking the monkey with it.

Obviously the monkey had been placed there with a purpose. Any intruder, attracted by the sounds of the unhappy creature, would advance towards it—and thus be lured into the trap!

The monkey's screeching served another purpose, for, near the house, Ivan Hess was on duty, his ears alert. He heard that significant sound, and, like a flash, he rushed indoors and reported.

Nelson Lee, confused by the unexpectedness of his fall, torn by the splintering woodwork, thudded heavily into the bottom of the pit—which was all of ten feet deep.

Indeed, the pit was not unlike a grave—being seven or eight feet long, by three feet wide. Escape from it would be difficult, for the earth sides were soft, and it was impossible to obtain a handgrip or foothold.

And there was something else.

Lee was not stunned by the force of his fall; he was bruised and a bit dazed, and smothered with mud from head to foot, but his senses were as alert as ever.

Half-rising, he took in a deep breath, furious with himself for having been tricked. And then he half choked. The air down at the bottom of the pit was foul. Something caught him in the throat, lights blazed before his eyes, and his head reeled.

Then he knew the truth.

Not content with digging this pit, the crooks had poured some gas into it—a stupefying gas which was heavier than air, and which lay in a two-foot invisible blanket at the bottom! Even the air higher up was polluted with it.

"The cunning devil!" panted Lee, rising dizzily to his feet.

He knew that Professor Cyrus Zingrave was responsible for this. Tod Millar would never have thought of such a thing. But Zingrave was a scientist; he knew the secrets of gases. Lee identified the gas at once. It was not fatal—it was not even poisonous. But it would certainly render him unconscious within a few minutes, unless he succeeded in making his escape. Everything would depend upon speed.

His arms felt as heavy as lead, his legs scarcely supported his weight. Yet, somehow, he managed to get his electric torch out, and he flashed it on. He saw the damp, earthy sides of the pit, and his heart sank. There was no means of escape here. He clutched feebly at the earth, attempting to obtain a hand-hold. The earth crumpled away; and all the time that gas

was doing its deadly work. Lee swayed, and his knees sagged so that he almost fell. In vain, he tried to pull himself together.

Making a last effort, he leapt, but it was like the enfeebled leap of an old man. He fell back again, stumbled, and sprawled full length. And this time, when he attempted to rise, he had neither the strength nor the inclination.

The stupor was gripping him completely, and the drowsiness which came over him was too much for him to battle against. He sank back, motionless and silent.

AT such a time as this it would have been lucky if the St. Frank's juniors had disobeyed orders and penetrated the Moat Hollow grounds. But they were otherwise engaged. Armed with picks and shovels and lanterns, they were in that old tunnel, which led from "Willard's Folly," and they were working hard. Their enthusiasm was tremendous. Little did they guess of the disaster which had overtaken Lee!

Nipper had had an idea of bringing other fellows into the game—such stalwarts as Harry Gresham and Reggie Pitt and Bob Christine and Archie Glenthorne and others who could be trusted. Later, perhaps, it would be a good idea, but for this evening, at any rate, the original nine worked alone.

Directly after dark they had smuggled the tools across to the island, and it had been easy enough to obtain efficient lanterns. Now, in the tunnel, they were getting to work in earnest.

"We've got to cut the tunnel diagonally from this point," said Nipper, as they all stood at the far end, looking grotesque in the light from the lanterns, which stood on the floor. "I've worked it out as near as I can, and I think if we tunnel for twenty or thirty yards in this direction, we shall come as near as possible to the exact spot."

"How many yards?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Twenty or thirty."

"By George! That's good," said Edward Oswald. "We ought to do it in about an hour."

"Optimist!" said Nipper. "We shall be lucky if we do all that tunnelling in a week! My dear chap, if we scoop out a dozen feet this evening we shall do wonders."

"All right—you see," said Handforth. "This earth is soft, and we shall make

(Continued on page 24.)

"I.O.U. six," said Crowell to Handy—and paid out with the cane!

HANDFORTH'S Weekly

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THE EDITOR'S CHIN-WAG

THIS is an unjust world. I haven't just found that out. That statement is the result of a long and careful train of thought. Yes, rather!

Crowell has just given me "six."

There was not the slightest reason in the world for Crowell to give me "six," but he did it. Perhaps I may have chucked prep. yesterday evening in order to get my WEEKLY ready for the press, but that's no excuse for dropping on me in this savage way.

By George! Crowell wants to get a sense of proportion. Obviously my WEEKLY is far more important than mere prep. He doesn't see it. This magazine is nothing to him—nothing at all. I don't believe he ever reads it.

So he gave me "six," and the injustice of it makes my hair stand on end—practically. I wish I were a real Editor; not merely a schoolboy. I wish I were even the Editor's office boy. I'm sure the Editor of the NELSON LEE doesn't give his office boy "six." I've never heard anything like this happening, for instance:

Editor: "Smithers, you have spilt the red ink on my desk."

Office Boy: "Yessir! Please, sir, it was an accident."

Editor (sternly): "You are always having accidents, Smithers. This kind of thing must stop. Tell the cashier to give me a cane."

Office Boy (wildly): "Yaroooooh! Lemme off this time, sir!"

Editor (wielding cane): "Smithers! Bend over! Assume a semi-recumbent posture across that desk."

What I can't understand is why schoolboys should be expected to stand the cane, and office boys escape scot free.

But, as I said before, it's an unjust world.

E. O. HANDFORTH.

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Editor

E. O. Handforth

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E. O. Handforth

Literary Editor

E. O. Handforth

Art Editor

E. O. Handforth

Rest of Staff E. O. Handforth

February 13th, 1932.

DREADFUL DIARIES

By W. N. Browne
This Week:
Professor Tucker

Monday.—This morning I was just going to have my breakfast when I suddenly remembered to forget it. It's a great strain being absent-minded. Must be absent-minded though. All professors are absent-minded.

Tuesday.—When school-bell tolled I nearly walked into school to take my class, but just at the last moment I recollect to take a short stroll as far as Dorsetshire and back. Left my overcoat and hat at a charming country restaurant where I had tea. Absent-mindedly went back and took somebody else's—it was a much better coat than mine. What am I to do? Think I shall absent-mindedly keep it.

Wednesday.—Thought of a new dodge this morning. I put my boots on the bread-board and tried to polish the bread. The maid much astounded, and told the story to the school staff. Great laughter by all. That trick went well. I must think of something else like that.

Thursday.—A junior tried to make fun of me this morning. So I immediately asked him if he had written the thousand lines I absent-mindedly forgot to give him. As he hadn't, I took the opportunity of teaching him a lesson with the walking-stick which I had absent-mindedly forgot to leave in my study. I don't think he'll try that game on again.

Friday.—Received my cheque for quarter's salary to-day. Took it in an absent-minded fashion.

Saturday.—Remembered in nick of time to forget breakfast again. Later on in the morning maid told me I hadn't had my breakfast and she thought I must be hungry. Said, "Tut tut! I haven't time to be hungry." Didn't mention that I have my own private stock of provisions to use when I absent-mindedly forget my meals. I can cook them much better than the school cook, anyway. I was supposed to give a lecture this evening; but I didn't feel up to talking a lot of dry rot, so I absent-mindedly went to the cinema instead.

FURIOUS FICTION

By Reggie Pitt

No. 3: A MAN OF LETTERS

YOU may have read a book which consists entirely of letters written by the hero or heroine to a friend. This dodge was often used in olden days, and is sometimes used to-day. The whole story is unfolded by means of a series of letters, all written by the same person and usually all to the same friend.

I have never met the hero of one of these letter-novels. I should like to.

His craze for writing letters is positively amazing. He is always writing letters. He writes letters in all circumstances and in all places. Letters are the beginning and ending of life for this merchant.

Suppose, for instance, his team is playing in the final for the cup. He comes out of the dressing-room, complete with scribbling-pad and pencil, and as he lines up on the left-wing, he begins his letter.

"Dear Joe,—I simply must write and tell you about this historic match. We have just come out of the dressing-room and are lined up on the field. The ref. is now looking at his watch. Ah! He's blown it. The ball is in play. I am just running along the touch-line. Excuse my writing, won't you, old chap? It's a little difficult to write when running full speed down the wing."

Then the ball will be passed to him. Does he stop writing his beastly letters? No fear!

"—the ball is now at my toe. A back is coming towards me. He has charged me. I am now sailing through the air. Excuse the sudden jolt old chap. That was where I hit the ground with great violence. I am getting to my feet now. The spectators are talking to me. They don't seem friendly—"

Then he will get a nice forward pass and cut in towards the goal—writing all the time as hard as he can go.

"—I am now getting near the goal. I think I had better centre the ball. Excuse me if I stop for one moment while I drop in my centre. Ah! The centre-forward has muffed it. I knew he would. Now the ball is travelling across the goal-mouth. I am running up to it. Excuse me! No; missed an open goal because I stopped to cross a 't.' Never mind—"

But not only does this chap write letters on the footer field. He's always writing 'em. Never goes out without his scribbling-pad. Imagine this, for instance:

"Dear Joe,—A most extraordinary thing has happened, which I feel I really must tell you. I have just been stopped in a dark lane

by two foot-pads, who are going to knock me on the head with a life-preserved. I am writing this by the light of my luminous wrist-watch while the bigger one of the two pulls out his life-preserved. Ah! Excuse my scribble! I am in great hurry —he is just raising weap—"

The book never tells you what "Joe" says when the postman is loaded up every morning with letters from the silly ass. I expect he holds his head and groans:

"Oh, corks! More bilge! Chuck 'em in the fire!"

I wonder if our hero was so keen on writing home when he was at school. I expect he was.

"Dear Mater,—I write in a hurry to tell you I am just going to have a public flogging. Excuse my writing being disorderly—that was where the school porter hoisted me on his back. Now the cane is about to descend. I write these words by resting the writing-pad on the porter's back. Ah! Pardon me one moment while I yell—"

And, no doubt, at the end of his life his last action will be to start a letter.

"Dear Joe,—I am writing this while rushing through space. I have had the misfortune to fall out of an aeroplane—"

Next Week: GRAMMALOGUES.

I EAR

Don't take any notice of this, you fellows. It's only that printer being cheeky again. This is his way of giving me a black eye and a thick ear. E. O. H.

ODDS AND ENDS. Amazing Arithmetic.

If Brandy-balls are 1s. 4d. per lb., how much is that per oz.? Answer; According to Mrs. Hake—1½d.

WANTED.

A fag who knows how to treat eggs seriously. My last fag dropped a poached egg and ruined it.

Edgar Fenton, Sixth Form.

ADVICE TO

By E. O.
(Editor of this)

THE very first thing you learn, if you are an editor, is that there is no notice of always plenty of free advice. Chaps who come with a halfpenny note from being boiled alive to give yards of advice for nix. Ignore 'em!

This applies also to Sub-editors. They have the idea that they can do better than the Editor 'em!

If your paper has a notice of free advice, you may as well put it in, but it is well to advise you publishers you publish a magazine ago a gentleman named John Smith called to see me about a series of advertisements in your magazine on what he terms." He was, to himself when he said this, short of der monney.

"Now you know what you are short of der monney. Dumkopf, waving his hand, is his point. monneys—chess! a leetle note of I.O.U., wasn't it?—all der monneys—

"How much per month for der monneys?"

"Vat you vill? reasonable. Chess or forty per month, vat?"

With the help of a pen, I persuaded Mr. Dunlop to write a note in his magazine wasn't a suitable advertisement for the advertisers' advertisements. I wiped the red ink away with a handkerchief.

As I was saying, the best thing to do is to ignore them. Since the customers, who are pleased, ignore them. The

Always welcome complimentary or complimentary. I personally am never received on my post every day, but the latter.

Make a point on your artist. Do what they like, unless you tell them. You are a cheeky artist draughtsman sometimes? The But I've spoken next time I shall speak.

So take my advice and absolutely ignore them.

O EDITORS

Handforth
(paper-magazine)

lesson you must want to become to take absolutely advice. There are nows willing to give would not part up to save themselves perfectly willing twice free, gratis and am !

to your sub-editors. ways born with the full run the paper in-chief. Squash

as to support itself, be polite to adver- to be careful what M. Not a fortnight ago Israel Dumkopf tried to arrange a ments in this maga- called "favourable of course, referring e said that.

ng shentlemens run eys," remarked Mr. his hands to force "I geef you der You make me out hand—vat you call—and I vill geef you oh, chess ! "

cent are you asking ?" I inquired.

My terms are most , they are ! Thirty it at der outside—

f Church and Mac, I inkopf that my maga- ple place for money- ments. When he had off his face, he went a bitter vengeance. , the chief thing to everybody but your readers are your buy your goods if it is as well not to ey-night ignore you. letters from readers, insulting. As far as concerned, I have e of the former, but y simply bulges with

ping a firm hand these artists simply with your stories in what you think seen the way that ME in this mag. re you are, then ! n to him—and the 't merely speak. vice, you chaps, and advice.

OUR WISE WRITERS

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir,—As you were kind enough to print my letter on the subject of pancakes last week, it occurs to me that your readers may be interested to hear of the experiments I have made in discovering where the flame of a candle goes when it is blown out.

You know, Sir, that the flame vanishes with such speed that the human eye cannot follow its movements, and I thereupon decided to photograph the thing with a slow-motion cinema-camera. I placed the candle in position, lit it, cranked up the camera and then blew out the candle ; but when I examined the film I found it was a photograph of Teddy Long falling in the school fountain, and I concluded I had focused the thing wrongly. I thereupon tried it again, and this time I obtained a clear picture of the flame vanishing in a direction north-north-east and by east, at what I estimated to be a speed of roughly 5,471,326,184 miles per hour. (I may be a mile or so wrong, however, as this is merely a rough estimate).

As I was standing sough-south west of the candle, this seems to indicate that the flame vanished—or, may I say, hopped it—in the opposite direction. At first I decided to follow the thing on a bicycle and try to overtake it, but a moment's reflection convinced me that I could not get up a speed of five thousand million miles per hour, so I abandoned the idea. After thinking deeply about the matter I came to this conclusion :

That, travelling at the speed estimated, the flame of the candle would go right round the world 218,888 point 8 recurring times in one hour, which means that in one sixty-eighth of a second after I had blown it out, it would have returned and hit me in the small of the back, having been all round the world. Now I know for a fact that the flame did not touch my back, so I can only conclude that it missed me. Going at that speed, of course, this is quite likely.

I shall be glad to place my experiments at the disposal of any learned scientist, if he is interested. Yours faithfully,

"BUSTER."

OUR AWFUL ALPHABET

A is for ANDFORTH, escaped from the Zoo ;

B is for BANGS, the bold Kangaroo ;

C is for CORKY—a Modern is he,

D's for de VALERIE (see also V),

E is for EATH, who lives in the Third,

F is for FENTON (he's captain I've heard),

G is for GLENTHORNE, who sleeps all the day,

H is for HADAMS, from far U.S.A.,

I is for IRENE, whose MANNERS are good J is JAMES LITTLE, who lives for his food,

K is for KROWELL, with "masterly" way,

L is for LONG and for LITTLE (see J),

M is for MONTY, who great things has done,

N is for NIPPER—a son of a gun,

O is for ONIONS (not OLLAND this time),

P is for POTTS who is perfectly prime,

Q is for QUIRKE, who is cunning and sly,

R stands for RUSSELL, who shares Study I,

S is for SOMERTON—and that is enough,

T is for TRAVERS, who's writing this stuff,

U's USSI KHAN, an Indian cove,

V is de VALERIE (see D above),

W is WATSON and WALDO and WETT, (Though the latter is not in the College as yet),

X is for GRESHAM, though why it should be

I must admit candidly I cannot see,

Y is YAKAMA and also YUNG CHING,

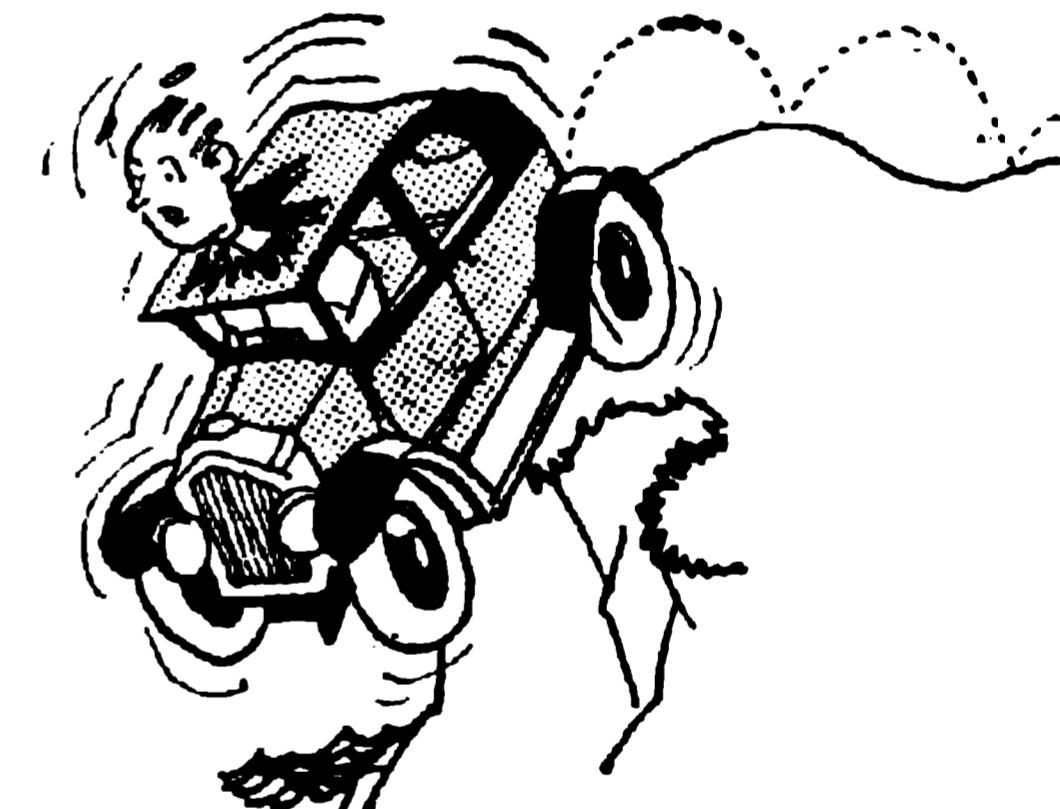
Z is for ZNIPE, or any old thing ;

And now this is finished, you ought to be glad ;

I am, at any rate—so long, old lad !

(Vivian Travers.)

OUR MOTOR ROADS



Handy in his Morris Minor
Set out one day to drive to China,
And when at length he got to Dover,
He said, "I'm glad the worst is over ! "
(C. de V.).

"TEE" HEE !

Last night, as hungry as could be,
I naturally thought of tea,
And turned my steps to drink the brew
In Study U.

When I arrived, to my dismay,
I found that tea was cleared away ;
They said : "We've something else to do
Than Study You."

(Clarence Fellowe).

A TELEGRAM.

" Dear Dick,—Can you lend me a bob ?
My last shilling has gone on this wire.—
JACK."

PIRATE'S TREASURE!

(Continued from page 20.)

good progress. Look out, you chaps! I'm going to get busy with this pick."

He hurled himself into action, displaying amazing energy; and before long digging operations were proceeding briskly. The boys were obliged to take it in turns, and there was a great amount of carrying to be done—and for this purpose they had smuggled one of the gardeners' barrows into the tunnel.

The earth, as it was excavated, was loaded into the barrow, and carried away to the wider tunnel, where it dipped steeply. In this way it would be possible to get rid of all the excavated earth.

And so they carried on; and even Nipper was surprised and gratified at the rapidity of their progress.

— —

CHAPTER 11.

Zingrave's Decree!

THREE figures, crouching low, leaned over the pit in the Moat Hollow garden. The beams from their electric torches were flashing down upon the prostrate figure of Nelson Lee.

"Like the animal, we catch him, yes?" muttered Ivan Hess, in a gloating voice. "I make the pit so good!"

The other two figures, crouching on the opposite edge, were those of Professor Zingrave and Tod Millar. Tod looked sharply across at the ex-lion tamer.

"You made the pit, but somebody else had to think of it!" he said shortly.

Zingrave was quietly amused.

"From the first, I had my suspicions," he said silkily. "You remember the paper that was missing last night, Millar? We found it this morning. I believed that Lee had been at work—and this proves that I was right. He came again this evening, and our little—er—booby trap has been very, very successful."

"Yet Lee is no booby," muttered Tod Millar.

"It was the pitiful little monkey, chained so helplessly to his post, which lured our friend on to his fate," said Zingrave with satisfaction. "Was that not a master-stroke, my dear Tod?" His manner suddenly changed. "Come!" he added. "We are wasting time. Where are the spades? This—er—pit must be filled in without delay."

Tod Millar caught in his breath. He looked at Zingrave in horror.

"No, no!" he muttered. "We can't do that."

"What would you do, then?" asked Zingrave evenly. "Lee knows everything. He is a menace to our plans—our safety. Why take such risks? Remember, dead men tell no tales!"

"I know! But I didn't bargain for anything of this sort when I decided to join you in the hunt for the Edgemore treasure," said Tod shakily. "Look here, Zingrave, it's—murder! I don't like it—I won't have it!"

"You are a fool," said Zingrave, his voice cutting like a knife. "We have burned our boats now. We cannot let him go."

"I'm not saying that," panted Tod. "But we've got a car. Why not put him in the car and take him away to London? Don't you know somebody who would take care of him until we can get clear—"

"It is too late for that!"

"What! You—you don't mean—"

"I did not want to distress you too greatly," murmured Zingrave. "The gas has done its work, my dear Tod."

"Oh!" panted Tod Millar, white to the lips.

He was a daring crook, but in all his career he had never killed a man. This thing hit him like a blow between the eyes.

"Always remember that we are together in this," came Zingrave's voice. "All of us, you understand? No one of us is more responsible than the others."

"But—but I didn't know—"

"That makes no difference in the eyes of the law," continued Zingrave. "Were Lee an ordinary man, I should hesitate to bury him here. But he is a man who has many enemies; a man who comes and goes at odd intervals. He will be missed, yes, but nobody will suspect. For days we shall be safe—perhaps for weeks. It will be a long, long time before the sleepy police get on the track—before they make a search of this garden—and by that time we shall have finished our work here and made good our escape."

"All right—perhaps it will be for the best," said Tod Millar hoarsely. "It's too late now. It would be more risky to remove him than to leave him here. We can cover up the place with dead leaves. Nobody will ever know."

He gulped as he spoke. He had been worked up to a high pitch of emotion, and he was feeling, too, the influence of Professor Zingrave. There was something almost hypnotic about the master-criminal's personality. Already he had over-ridden Tod's objections.

And he had lied, too. Zingrave did not believe that Nelson Lee was dead. The

detective was merely gassed. But Zingrave's hatred of Lee was so overwhelming that the ruthless professor, who knew no scruples, would stop at nothing to dispose of his arch-enemy.

Mercifully, Nelson Lee, still unconscious, would know nothing of his terrible fate.

CHAPTER 12.

The Discovery!

WHILE Zingrave and his fellow crooks toiled at their diabolical work, Nipper, knowing nothing of his beloved guv'nor's appalling predicament, was superintending the tunnelling operations—and doing more than his own share of the hard labour, too.

Progress had continued to be rapid. The earth was soft and sandy—and, because of its sandiness, it was not particularly dirty. The boys managed to keep themselves surprisingly clean. They were more or less smothered—but not with sticky mud.

"By George! We're getting on, you chaps," said Handforth breathlessly, as he took a short rest.

"At this rate we ought to be somewhere near the treasure chests by the end of the week," said Nipper, with satisfaction.

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "Not until then?"

"That's if we're very lucky," nodded Nipper. "Of course, it's more than likely that we shan't get to the treasure until the end of next week."

"Crumbs!"

"Perhaps not at all, dear old fellow," murmured Travers. "Treasure hunting, at the best, is a doubtful business."

The new tunnel, crude but effective, was taking shape. Under the steady assaults of the picks and shovels, the soft, sandy earth was coming away. The rest of the fellows were busily engaged with the barrow, carting off the excavated earth.

Nipper was a little anxious at times about the roof of this new tunnel. If there was a collapse the consequences might be serious. He went forward now, flashing his electric torch searchingly. Just ahead of him Jimmy Potts and Skeets were busy with their shovels.

"H'm! I think we'd better call it off for this evening," said Nipper at length. "I don't quite like the look of this, you chaps."

"Don't quite like the look of what?" asked Handforth.

"Well, there's no desperate hurry, and we don't want to take any chances,"

replied Nipper. "I think we shall have to smuggle some poles and cross-pieces into the tunnel to-morrow. This roof needs support. As we tunnel deeper and deeper, we ought to strengthen the sides of the roof. If we don't there might be a collapse."

"It looks all right to me," said Handforth.

It was at that moment that Travers, shovelling hard, suddenly plunged forward. His shovel had gone clean through a soft mass of earth, and there was a miniature fall.

"That's funny," said Travers, picking himself up. "There must be—Look! There's a cavity here!"

Skeets looked, and Nipper flashed his torch upon the spot. The earth, where Travers' spade had struck, had fallen away. There was a hole, not unlike a rabbit burrow.

"Better go easy," advised Nipper, crouching low, and flashing his light through. "The one thing we've got to be careful of is a sudden collapse. Don't forget that we're taking a pretty big chance down here."

"How do you make that out?" asked Skeets.

"Because we're not very far below the surface," replied Nipper. "I've been reckoning things out, and, of course, the nearer we are to the surface, the more chance there is of collapse. I can't quite understand— Hallo! What the—"

Peering into that cavity, he had seen something which startled him—which made him catch in his breath. And when he looked round the others saw that his face was deathly pale.

"What's—what's the matter?" asked Travers, half scared.

"There's a human hand there!" muttered Nipper tensely.

"What!" went up an incredulous shout.

Frantically Nipper began tearing away the earth, making the hole larger. He touched the hand, and he was bewildered—dumbfounded—to find that it was warm!

"Either we're all mad, or dreaming, or something," he said, his voice almost a croak. "Quick! Hold this torch, one of you! Bring the lantern nearer! Let's have that shovel of yours, Skeets!"

He used the shovel carefully, and the earth fell away. And at the same time Nipper thought he heard a curious sort of thudding from within that cavity. He had enlarged it now so that he could put his head and shoulders through, and if he had received a shock at first, he was now almost stupefied. He had flashed the torch, and he saw a human face.

"Guv'nor!" he gasped incredulously.

And then, in the next second, he became frenzied.

"Quick, you chaps!" he said urgently. "Here, pull! Take this arm—I've got his shoulders! Now, all together—pull!"

They never knew how they did it. Lugging with all their strength, they heaved and pulled at those arms and shoulders. At last they dragged the body free, and in another moment the boys were staring down upon the muddy figure of Nelson Lee. By this time Church, McClure, Tommy Watson, and the others had come crowding up.

"It's the guv'nor!" panted Nipper, his voice charged with anguish. "Oh! How could he be there, buried like that?"

"What's the matter with the air?" asked Travers, swaying. "I'm going all dizzy—there's a strange smell, too!"

"Gas!" said Nipper, with a flash of inspiration. "That's what it is—gas! But there's no need to worry, you chaps—there's a good current of air in here. It won't harm us."

He hardly knew what he was saying; for, at that moment, he had his hand over Nelson Lee's heart, and he could feel the steady, regular beating.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" he said fervently. "He's alive, you chaps! We must have saved him in the nick of time!"

They were all stunned by the shock of their discovery. They were bewildered, baffled. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare. Not one of them could even begin to understand what it all meant.

Nipper took prompt measures. Fumbling round to Nelson Lee's hip-pocket, he was gratified to find the detective's brandy-flask. In a moment the stopper was unscrewed, and Nipper poured some of the fiery spirit into the detective's mouth.

The effect was rapid—coupled with the pure air which Lee was now breathing. He opened his eyes, and for a moment he looked stupidly about him.

"Hallo, boys," he murmured sleepily. "What's—what's happening?"

And then he sank back, and his eyes closed again.

IT was fully ten minutes before Nelson Lee recovered sufficiently to know where he was, or what had happened.

He was still dizzy, and a feeling of dreadful nausea had come over him. But he concealed this from the boys. He listened with growing wonder to the story they had to tell.

"I can only tell you, young 'uns, that this thing is the nearest approach to a miracle that has ever happened in my experience," he said quietly. "You know, of course, that you have saved my life?"

"We don't understand, guv'nor," said Nipper, who was overjoyed to see that Lee was gaining strength so rapidly. "It's—it's so puzzling. Where were you? What happened?"

Lee pointed upwards.

"You may not know it, but we are only ten or twelve feet beneath the ground level of the Moat Hollow garden," he said.

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"You boys have been tunnelling to good advantage," went on Lee. "And your calculations, by what I can see, have been astonishingly accurate. Thank Heaven for that!"

"But—but, guv'nor—"

Nelson Lee told them how he had seen the chained monkey in the Moat Hollow garden, how he had approached, and how he had fallen headlong into that cunningly-contrived pit.

"I struggled for some time, but the gas overpowered me," he concluded. "The last I remember is sinking down with a feeling of utter drowsiness. We can only guess what happened after that—but I don't think there will be much difficulty in guessing. You tell me, Nipper, that you heard thuds?"

"I thought I did, sir."

"Let me have one of those torches."

Lee half-crawled into the cavity from which he had been dragged. Beyond, he could see nothing but solid masses of damp earth. There was no pit now—and no sounds came, either.

"In the first place, our friends of Moat Hollow dug that pit—all unconsciously—very near to the real treasure," said Lee quietly. "The pit is filled now, I imagine."

"Filled?" repeated Handforth, staring. "But—but you were at the bottom of it, sir."

"Yes."

"Do you mean that those fiends buried you alive, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, horrified.

"Perhaps we can give them the benefit of the doubt," replied Nelson Lee. "Let us assume that they believed me to be dead from the effects of the gas. However, there is no doubt that those men were filling the pit at the very moment you boys broke through."

"Oh!"

"Had you been ten minutes later—even five minutes later—I should certainly have been suffocated," continued Nelson Lee. "As it was, you broke through at the critical moment. The men had hardly commenced their task of shovelling the earth into the pit. So, you see, it was comparatively easy for you to drag me out. And the men above, working in the darkness, could guess nothing. Even if there had been movements of the



Running down the tunnel, Nipper was horrified to see a foaming mass of water surging towards him. With a roar, it swept him off his feet, and he was carried along on its crest helplessly.

earth at the bottom of the pit—and that is almost certain—they would not have seen, and any sounds you boys made would have been drowned by the noise of their shovelling."

"It was a miracle, guv'nor," said Nipper huskily. "A miracle that we should be working down here—in secret—at the time. By Jove! When I think of the narrowness of your escape, I get a chokey feeling in my throat."

By this time Nelson Lee was on his feet, and he was feeling better. Except for a dull, throbbing headache, he was not much the worse for his startling adventure. He was, of course, smothered with mud from head to foot.

"So you boys decided upon this little plan of your own, eh?" he went on, after a while. "You thought of this old tunnel, and you decided to have a shot for the treasure? I suppose you realise, strictly speaking, that you have disobeyed my firm orders?"

"Well, you see, guv'nor—" began Nipper.

"My dear lad," interrupted Lee, placing a hand on Nipper's shoulder, "you don't think for a moment, do you, that I am going to scold you? You are all in this, and you have all had a share in saving me from a terrible death. After this, I shan't try to stop you again!"

"It was only luck, sir—" began Handforth.

"Luck or not, you can go ahead with your good work," said Lee heartily. "As for those impositions I gave you yesterday—forget them."

"Rather, sir," grinned Handforth.

"Thanks awfully, sir," chorused the others.

"All I advise you to do is to take more care in this tunnelling," continued Lee. "The place doesn't look any too safe to me. I think you ought to have props and roof supports."

"We were thinking about that ourselves, guv'nor," replied Nipper. "But we can carry on for this evening. I don't think there'll be any danger. To-morrow we'll get the props."

"The situation is not without its humour," said Lee dryly. "Whilst the crooks are digging in the wrong place, you boys are getting very near to the real treasure. Good luck to you! I fancy you can go ahead without much fear of the enemy knowing of your enterprise."

"I say, sir, can we carry on until supper time?" asked Nipper eagerly. "If you'll just have a word with Mr. Wilkes about calling-over—"

"Don't worry," smiled Lee. "I'll tell Mr. Wilkes—and you can carry on. All I have to say is—be careful."

Nelson Lee took his departure, and the treasure hunters carried on the good work with renewed enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 13:

The "Ghost" of Nelson Lee!

LESS than an hour later, Nelson Lee, bathed and changed, was himself again. He had managed to get into the school without being seen, and he was glad of this—for, indeed, he had been an extraordinary sight.

He glanced at his watch as he came down, and he found that he would have to hurry. He had a dinner appointment with the vicar that evening—one which he could hardly cancel, since the Bishop himself was also to be a guest, and this gentleman was very anxious to meet the headmaster of St. Frank's.

Nelson Lee had now dressed in his evening clothes, and he hurried away. He would only be a few minutes late. Originally, of course, he had intended to make his survey of the Moat Hollow grounds, and be back at the school in excellent time to take things easily. It was so misty now that he decided to walk; it would be just as quick as going by car.

Certainly, Lee had no deliberate intention of giving Mr. Tod Millar the fright of his life. But that is what happened.

It was rather a coincidence, the pair meeting, as they did, just outside the gates of the vicarage. "Dr. Franz Ragozin," looking as impressive as ever, was going into the village to visit the post office. And just as he was passing the vicarage, he beheld a figure. It was plainly visible in the light of the lantern which hung midway over the entrance.

Tod, disturbed by what had so recently happened, was still shaky—although he showed no outward sign of it. He halted now, for there was something about that other figure which seemed familiar.

At that very moment the vicar himself, the Rev. Goodchild, came bustling down the short drive.

"Ah, Mr. Lee! Splendid!" he said, in his effusive way. "I was wondering—"

"I am afraid I am a little late, Mr. Goodchild," said Lee apologetically.

"Oh, not at all—not at all," said the vicar.

Tod uttered a hoarse cry and staggered. In vain, he had attempted to control himself, but it was impossible. For in that second he believed that he had seen a ghost. He was not a superstitious man, but this happening was beyond his understanding.

Nelson Lee turned at the sound, and he nodded in a friendly way.

"Good evening—Dr. Ragozin," he said cheerfully. "Rather misty again?"

Tod made a supreme effort and controlled himself.

"Yes!" he said, and he new only too well that his voice sounded like a croak. "It is—the—wretched weather, yes?"

"Very bad for the throat," nodded Lee dryly. "How's the private zoo, doctor? Still doing fine?"

He passed on towards the house with the vicar.

"Really, Mr. Lee, I do not quite approve of that man—"

Tod dimly heard the words. He knew not whether he was on his head or his heels. His brain was throbbing like a hammer. He reeled as he walked. Then, finding himself clear of the vicarage, he broke into a run. Panic had seized him. This thing was unbelievable—it was fantastic.

Nelson Lee alive! And he, Tod, had helped to bury him in the Moat Hollow garden!

Tod was almost crazy when he burst into Moat Hollow. Gulping for breath, he came into the presence of Zingrave and Hess, who were in the closely-shuttered sitting-room.

"What on earth has happened?" demanded Zingrave sharply.

"Lee! Alive!" croaked Tod.

"You're mad!" snapped Zingrave. "Pull yourself together, Millar! Great Heavens! Do you want to have everybody in the village talking about you? You didn't come along the street like this, did you?"

"I tell you, Lee—alive!" jerked out Tod, his face as pale as death. "I saw him—vicarage—evening dress! I talked to him."

Zingrave took hold of the man, and shook him.

"Listen to me, Millar!" he said, his voice vibrant. "Pull yourself together, do you hear? Lee is dead! We buried him!"

"He's alive!" screamed Tod Millar, breaking free. "I saw him—I spoke to him!"

At last the others were compelled to believe him. Tod calmed down, and, in a gulping voice, he described exactly what had happened outside the vicarage.

"This is indeed a staggerer," said Zingrave, his voice soft again. "What can have happened? I will swear that it was Lee we buried. Yet how could he have escaped? We piled ten feet of earth upon him! That man is like a magician!"

"Haven't I always said that he's unkillable?" asked Tod hoarsely. "We were mad to try it! Now he's got the drop on us!"

"Wait!" said Zingrave. "Bring lanterns. You, Hess. Fetch the lanterns."

They went outside into the thickening mist, and when they arrived at the fateful spot, it was exactly the same! The pit was filled in, and over it was the layer of dead leaves. The man who had been buried could not possibly have escaped.

"But, I tell you, I saw him!" panted Tod desperately. "What does it mean?"

But even Professor Zingrave was at a loss to account for this remarkable development which seemed utterly impossible.

Ivan Hess was crouching down, and now suddenly he flung himself full length on the damp ground.

"What are you doing?" asked Tod hysterically. "Don't be a fool, Hess!"

"Silence, please!" muttered Ivan Hess. "Listen! I think I hear— Yes, yes! Listen!"

He placed his ear to the ground, and a strange light came into his eyes. For he had made a great discovery.

CHAPTER 14.

Action at Moat Hollow!

NELSON Lee, after his meeting with Tod Millar, had been somewhat amused. Not for an instant had he suspected that the crooks of Moat Hollow would profit by their discovery that Lee was still alive. Yet the detective became vaguely uneasy after that dinner at the vicarage had begun. Without doubt, there was excellent reason for his uneasiness.

For Ivan Hess, with his ear to the ground, could hear dull, mysterious thuds coming upwards. And no sooner had he reported to Zingrave than the professor slapped his clenched fist into his other palm.

"Yes, yes, it was Lee himself," he muttered. "He did escape, then."

"But—but how?" faltered Tod. "You told me that Lee was dead."

"He was not dead—he was only unconscious."

"And you meant to bury him alive?" asked Millar, with sudden fury. "You liar! You told me—"

"This is no time for us to quarrel," interrupted Zingrave. "Lee is alive, I tell you, and, knowing what he does, he is a hundred times more dangerous than before. He is playing with us, my friends—he is laughing up his sleeve."

"But even now I can't understand how he could have escaped," said Tod, bewildered. "How was it possible?"

"The thuds that Hess just heard are a sufficient explanation," said Zingrave. "Those thuds can mean only one thing—somebody is tunnelling under these grounds."

"What!" gasped Tod; and Ivan Hess cursed in his own language.

"Perhaps there was a tunnel already in existence—and they are merely extending it," continued Zingrave shrewdly. "But this is what must have happened: the people in the tunnel broke through into this pit, and they must have done so just as we were filling it. Thus they rescued Lee. This is a highly important discovery, Millar. We must take advantage of it. There is need for immediate action."

"But I don't see what we can do."

"Let me think," muttered Zingrave. "Is it possible that we are making a mistake? Why should these people be tunnelling? I mean here, in this part of the garden. Is the treasure here, instead of the spot we marked?"

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Tod, the reference to the treasure strengthening him strangely. "Do you think they're going to beat us, then?"

"We cannot tell—and we must make inquiries," said Zingrave. "In any case, nothing can be done out here. Let us go indoors."

They went in.

The sensational escape of Nelson Lee, and the discovery that somebody—presumably the schoolboys—was tunnelling underground, had put the crooks of Moat Hollow into a

state of mind akin to panic. Professor Cyrus Zingrave was the only one who really kept his head.

Until this minute they had fooled themselves into believing that they had weeks of time at their disposal. Now, all in a second, they were obliged to readjust their views.

Nelson Lee's attitude was puzzling, too; and it made them gravely uneasy.

Obviously, Lee had not communicated with the police; he had taken no action whatever. After his escape, he must have gone back to the school and changed his clothes, and then he had calmly kept his dinner appointment at the vicarage. No doubt he was enjoying the situation. He was content to let things be as they were—to wait. Unquestionably, he had accepted the gauntlet which the crooks had flung down.

No sooner had Zingrave and Tod Millar and Hess reached the sitting-room than a double rap sounded at the front door, accompanied by a heavy peal of the bell.

"Who's that?" panted Tod, who was as jumpy as an hysterical woman.

"Who else but the postman?" said Zingrave evenly. "You know that you left the gates open this evening—in order to give people confidence that we are harmless householders. We knew, too, that the postman was coming with an important parcel."

"Oh, yes—I'd forgotten," muttered Tod. And then an idea came to him.

"Wait—wait!" he added, going to the door. "This man may be able to tell us something."

He found Ridley the "butler" just on the point of closing the door, but Tod, pulling himself together, hurried to the door and called back the postman. Mudford, who was rather anxious to get away, returned reluctantly.

"I would like a word with you, my friend," said "Dr. Ragozin" with his best accent. "You are a native of Bellton, yes?"

"Born here, sir—been here all my life," replied Mudford, not without pride.

"Then you know Bellton and the district very well, yes?" asked Tod. "Tell me, my friend, do you know if there is an underground tunnel which comes near to this property of mine?"

"Tunnel?" repeated Mudford, staring.

"There has been some flooding in the cellar, and it had occurred to me that an old tunnel, long since disused, may be the cause of the seepage," said Tod glibly. "I have heard that there are some underground tunnels in this district. If there is one here, I must have it filled in, for the flooding is a nuisance."

Mudford scratched his head.

"Come to think of it, sir, I believe there is one precious near to this property," he said. "Why yes, of course. I don't know if it quite reaches your garden, but I've heard tell that it's not far off. Some o' them boys from the school made it, some time ago."

"Oh! The boys!" said Tod, hiding his eagerness.

"THE FIGHTING MIDDY." A stirring yarn of the Navy.

"Why, yes, them young rips are up to all sorts of games," went on the postman. "Many's the time they've played tricks with me, the cheeky young beggars! But about that tunnel. Yes, I seem to remember that it leads to the Island."

"Surely not?" said Tod. "There is the river, my friend. It would not pass beneath the river."

"But it does," insisted the postman. "I've 'eard as you can get to it by going down into the cellars of that queer buildin' on the Island—what they call Willard's Folly. But I don't suppose you'll know much about that, sir, you bein' what you might call a stranger."

"Thank you, postman, I am obliged," said Tod, giving the gratified man half-a-crown. "I must communicate with the Council authorities, yes? No doubt they will pay the necessary attention."

He closed the door—and in his eyes there was a glitter of burning fury.

TOD Millar was clenching and unclenching his hands when he joined the others, in the sitting-room.

"Those boys again!" he snarled. "Always the boys!"

"Keep your temper, Millar," said Zingrave quietly. "The position is—difficult. We need to remain cool. The man who loses his temper, loses his balance."

"Yes, you're right," muttered Tod, controlling himself. "Hess was right about

those thuds he heard. There is a tunnel. It leads from the island, out in the river. The postman told me about it. Oh, don't worry. He suspects nothing. I told some yarn about the cellars being flooded."

"What are we going to do, boss?" asked Hess eagerly. "Lee—he lives. He knows! And the boys—they're in the tunnel."

Ridley was looking nervous.

"Looks to me as if we'd better make a jump for it," he muttered, staring from one to to another.

"Unless you can speak with sense, do not speak at all," said Zingrave dangerously. "We have nothing to fear from Lee. He lives, yes, but he has no evidence—by which I mean corroborative evidence. His word, alone, is not sufficient. It pleases him to play his own game. So we shall play ours."

"We're not giving up that treasure yet," muttered Tod Millar, his eyes burning. "Come, Hess! You and I had better go to that island. The entrance to the tunnel, I understand, is in the cellar of that building there. Bring a torch with you. We must find out what is happening."

"Yes, go," said Zingrave gently. "I will think. Perhaps I may have a solution when you return."

It was, of course, still comparatively early in the evening. A great deal had happened in a short time. But Tod Millar and Ivan Hess had no reason to be particularly cautious as they made their way to Willard's Island. The mist had come down more



Jokes from readers—wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets and penknives are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

HIS AMBITION.

Gent: "What is the height of your ambition, my boy?"

Boy: "The top of a telegraph pole at a football match."

(R. Williams, Rosser Cottages, Cwmgwrach, Neath, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

AND FEET LIKE LEAD.

Teacher: "What is a man of mettle?"

Tommy: "A man of mettle is a man with copper hair, steely eyes, an iron jaw, and a bronze complexion."

(R. McKinlay, 1, York Street, Thornhill, Falkirk, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

DIFFICULT.

Mrs. Smith: "Did your son pass the history examination, Mrs. Brown?"

Mrs. Brown: "No—and I'm not surprised. They asked him things that happened before he was born."

(B. Shinder, 38, Fuller Street, Bethnal Green, London, has been awarded a penknife.)

A BARGAIN.

Old Lady: "Are you sure this Century Plant will bloom in a hundred years?"

Florist: "Positive, madam; and if it doesn't, bring it back and your money will be refunded."

(J. Finegan, North Park, Doneraile, Ireland, has been awarded a useful prize.)

ON THE WAY.

Lecturer (dramatically): "Work, work! All my days I have worked! It has sapped my energy and stolen my youth, but where—where is the fruit of my labour?"

Listener (taking aim with an over-ripe tomato): "Coming along now, guv'nor."

(P. Peters, 148, Brixton Road, S.W.9, has been awarded a penknife.)

SEEMED LIKE IT.

Gent: "How do you know that the thief was a cat burglar?"

Constable: "Because he stole the canary and drank the morning milk."

(R. Harris, 40, Marlborough Road, Upper Holloway, London, N.19, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

thickly, and nobody would be out in the meadow at this hour of the evening.

They secured a boat easily enough—from the St. Frank's boat-house, near by. There were several lying drawn up on the bank. And soon the two men caught a glimpse of the ghostly-looking trees on Willard's Island looming up out of the murk. The little craft touched the bank, and the two men leapt ashore.

"No talking!" whispered Tod. "The boys may be here. We must be careful."

It was not so easy finding their way about the island. However, it was only a small strip of land, and by making for the centre they soon came upon the "Folly." Here they paused, listening intently. There was not a sound, except for the occasional gurgling of the water.

Tod thought it safe to switch on his electric torch, and after that the going was much easier. The cellars were soon located, and here the two men met with a piece of luck.

They might easily have drawn a blank, for the entrance to the tunnel was cunningly concealed. But it so happened that the boys had left the secret door standing wide open—and this was not mere carelessness. The air in the tunnel was none too good, and the door had been left open so that a fresh current should pass between this end of the tunnel and the shaft which led up to the playing fields. The schoolboy treasure-seekers had not considered the possibility of the enemy making such a move as this.

Descending the slippery stone steps, Tod and Hess traversed the tunnel, crouching low, pausing every now and again to listen.

"Careful!" warned Tod Millar, presently. "I can hear voices—yes, and shovelling! By Heaven! You were right, Hess!"

They crept on, but not for long. They soon paused, for it would have been dangerous to proceed. In the distance they could see the lanterns glowing, and they could also see shadowy figures. The voices of the boys came to them fairly distinctly, echoing strangely.

"—better be chucking it up for this evening, hadn't we?" were the first words Tod heard.

"It's all right—we can carry on for another half-hour," said another voice. "We've made pretty good progress."

"Gee! If the treasure is really here, we ought to be getting to it after a day or two like this," said one of the others.

Tod Millar quivered. He had recognised the voice of Skeets. The treasure! Their deductions, then, had not been at fault! These boys were actually burrowing for the Edgemore gold!

"It's not a half-holiday to-morrow, worse luck," came the voice of Handforth. "We shan't be able to do anything till after tea. How about getting up early, and putting in a couple of hours before brekker?"

"We might get the guv'nor to come with us," came Nipper's voice. "He's as keen as mustard on the job now, and he reckons.

HE BOLTED.

Guest (breathlessly): "I have just seen your family ghost!"

Host: "I expect he gave you a bit of a start, Claude."

Guest: "Believe me, I didn't want any start!"

(K. Edwards, 54, Snape Hill Lane, Dronfield, Derbyshire, has been awarded a penknife.)

A DUNCE.

Teacher: "Now, Willie, tell me what you know about the Dead Sea."

Willie: "Please, teacher, I never even knew it was ill."

(J. Jarvie, 117, Backbrae Street, Kilsyth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

OBEYING ORDERS.

Magistrate: "Did you steal the rug?"

Prisoner: "No, sir. A lady gave it to me and told me to beat it—and I did."

(J. Hayes, 61, Bishop's Road, Itchen, Southampton, has been awarded a penknife.)

A BIG PROBLEM.

"There, dad!" exclaimed the youthful student to his father, who was visiting the college. "We've discovered a substance that will dissolve anything."

"Aye, son, that's surely a grand discovery," remarked

father. "But what I'd like to know is, what are you going to keep the stuff in?"

(J. McClure, 39, Merkland Street, Glasgow, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

CORRECT.

Teacher: "Tommy, which is nearer, the sun or Australia?"

Tommy: "Please sir, the sun."

Teacher: "How do you make that out?"

Tommy: "You can see the sun, but you can't see Australia."

(T. Burnett, 26, Thistle Street, Glasgow, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NO REPLY.

1st Boy (climbing over wall after retrieving football): "The ball hit Mr. Smith right on the head."

2nd Boy: "What did he say?"
1st Boy: "Nothing—not yet."

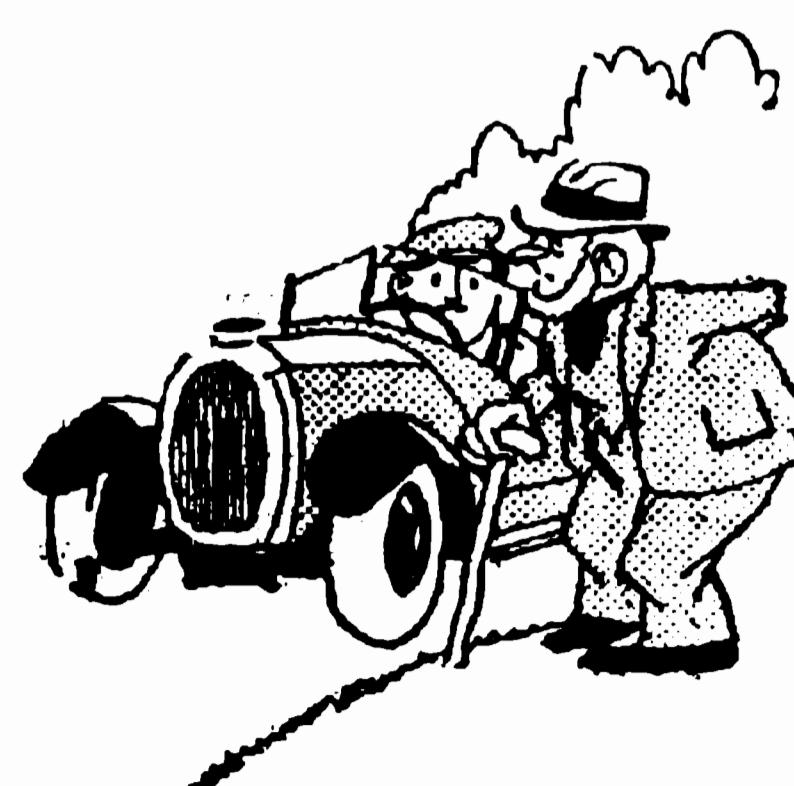
(W. Bonham, 8, Hylton Terrace, North Shields, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

GO SLOW.

Speedy Motorist: "Hi! What's the way to Chilliwack?"

Aged Farmer: "Just follow me. I'm going that way."

(M. Phillips, 7-839, Pender Street Hotel, Vancouver, Canada, has been awarded a useful prize.)



that we're tunnelling in the right direction. What a sell for those Moat Hollow crooks!"

"And what a shock for them when they find that Mr. Lee's alive," chuckled somebody else.

Tod gripped Hess's arm. They had heard every word, and they were startled. These schoolboys knew a great deal more than the crooks had ever dreamed.

Tod did not trust himself to speak as he and his companion made their way out. But when they arrived in the open, Tod was muttering ferociously under his breath.

"What do we do?" whispered Hess.

"I don't know—we've got to tell Z," replied Tod hoarsely. "Did you hear, Hess? The treasure is in a different spot altogether. Lee knows! And these accursed boys are getting near to it! We've got to put in some fast work."

Even Tod Millar did not realise how fast that work was to be.

CHAPTER 15.

Zingrave's Plan!

As the two men were preparing to hurry away from the river-bank, after landing from the island, they saw a dim figure looming up out of the mist. They halted abruptly.

"Do not be alarmed, my friends," said a silky voice. "It is I."

"You gave me a turn," muttered Tod. "What are you doing here? You know it's risky for you to leave the grounds—"

"We must all take risks," interrupted Professor Zingrave. "Well? You have discovered—what?"

Tod Millar told him.

"So I thought," said Zingrave. "I expected you to come back with this report. The boys are down there now? How many?"

"We didn't count them—nine or ten, I imagine."

"They are the boys who are 'in the know,' and they are dangerous. They must be dealt with drastically," declared Zingrave.

"What do you mean?" asked Tod, who was becoming more and more afraid of Zingrave.

"I have come prepared," replied the professor. "You have a boat here, I think. Come, we will use it. No, perhaps it will not be necessary. The distance is not great, and the—er—device can be thrown."

"Device? What do you mean?"

"Now, Millar, you will not raise any objections," said Zingrave, a grim note creeping into his voice. "You will realise that these schoolboys are not only menacing our whole project, but they are menacing our very liberty. I am not well disposed towards boys who pit their puny brains against mine."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Tod, alarmed by the other's tone. "You'll have

to be quick, whatever it is. The boys will be out of that tunnel in twenty minutes—"

"Time enough," said Professor Zingrave. "I need but two minutes." He took something from his pocket, something heavy. "I am glad I had this interesting article brought from London," he said. "It was our original intention to use it as a last resort if we should be trapped at Moat Hollow."

"Not the bomb?" asked Tod, aghast.

"Why not?"

"No, Zingrave. You mustn't do that—"

"I am in command here!" broke in Zingrave curtly. "From the very first, Millar, this plan has been mine. It was I who engineered everything. It was I who rendered you safe from the police. It was I who provided you with ample funds."

"Yes, that's true," muttered Tod.

"This is a time-bomb, and, moreover, it is watertight," continued Zingrave. "I have but to set the mechanism and it will explode one minute after we leave it, or two minutes, or three minutes. I propose to drop this to the bed of the river. Then we shall retire."

"But the explosion will create a sensation."

"The explosion will hardly be heard, since it will be almost completely muffled by the water," said Zingrave. "It is only a small bomb, Millar, but I think it will be sufficient for our needs. For it will weaken the ancient roof of the tunnel and the water will surge down."

Tod gulped.

"And—and the boys?" he panted. "They'll be killed! They'll be caught like rats in a trap!"

"And are they not rats?" snarled Zingrave, with sudden fury. "Some of them may escape—all of them may escape." He shrugged. "What does it matter? Our main object is to flood this tunnel, so that there can be no more burrowing. Do you understand? They dare not undertake their operations at the surface, for in order to do so they would have to trespass on the Moat Hollow property. At any cost, we must render this tunnel useless."

"Then wait until the boys are out!" panted Tod, gripping Zingrave's arm.

"No; I shall act now," said the professor. "I am sick of these boys. Let them take their chance."

And before Tod could prevent him he swung himself away. Tod heard a click, and then the next moment Zingrave flung out his arm. There came a splash from the river, about midway between the bank and the island.

"So! It is done," murmured Zingrave. "Come, my friends. It might not be healthy for us to linger here. Within two minutes we shall see something interesting."

Tod Millar was startled at the cunning of the professor's simple plan. There was no necessity to drop the bomb immediately over the tunnel. A random throw would

serve just as well. For a disturbance anywhere in the vicinity of that tunnel would be sufficient to cause its collapse.

They hurried away into the mist, and it seemed to Tod that four or five minutes had elapsed. They halted at last and stood still.

"I think it has failed," muttered Tod shakily.

"Not yet," said Zingrave. "There are fifteen seconds yet to go."

"You should have waited—"

"Listen," said the professor. "Do not talk."

They stood motionless. And then—

Thud!

It was hardly an explosion; anybody not knowing what had been done would take little or no notice. The air seemed to quiver for a moment, the ground shook slightly, but that was all. Until—

A great splash sounded from the river, a surging of the water, a great deal of rippling, and then gradually things became normal again.

"I think," murmured Professor Zingrave, "that this particular trick is ours."

CHAPTER 16.

The Flood!

BOOM!

It was that same soft thudding sound, but down in the tunnel it seemed louder, and it echoed strangely. Nipper, who had just picked up one of the lanterns, looked down the tunnel with sudden interest.

"What was that?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," said Tommy Watson, wiping his brow. "By jingo! I'm hot and tired. I think we've had enough for this evening."

"Listen, you chaps," said Nipper softly. "Hold still, everybody. I can't understand—"

He broke off as a puff of air came along the tunnel with curious force. And at the same time there was a fresh sound; a strange rushing noise.

"I say, something's happened!" muttered Jimmy Pott, startled. "That sounds like water to me."

"Great Scott! The tunnel's collapsed!"

"The river's pouring in!"

"Quick! Let's bolt for it!"

"Steady, you fellows," said Nipper, keeping cool. "Don't lose your heads. That won't do us any good."

He was nearest to the open end of the tunnel; the others were in the newly-excavated portion which was, of course, a cul de sac. Running forward, Nipper was conscious of the rapid thudding of his heart. He knew that something sensational had happened.

The rushing noise was more pronounced now, and suddenly he halted. He stared as though he could not believe the evidence



Quickly Nelson Lee lowered himself into the underground tunnel. Somewhere below Nipper & Co. were trapped—would Lee be in time to rescue them?

of his eyes. A foaming, surging mass of water was roaring along the tunnel, and coming straight at him.

"Look out!" yelled Nipper.

The next second the flood was on him; it had lifted him off his feet and he was carried along. In the same second the air became curiously compressed, and he had a sensation that his eardrums were about to burst.

He clutched wildly at the sides of the rough tunnel, and in a measure he checked his headlong progress. The water was past him now, and he was struggling frantically in its icy grip. Wild yells came from the others. The water had reached them, and it was pitching them over, sending them this way and that. Their alarm was dire, for in a moment they realised that they were trapped underground, caught by this flood, with their way of escape cut off.

"Gee! This is the end, fellers!" came Skeets' voice. "I guess we're all washed up."

"But what's happened?" came a gasping roar from Handforth. "Has the tunnel given way? How could it? It was sound enough—Great Scott! I'll bet those crooks did it on purpose!"

The same thought had occurred to Nipper, but what was the good of voicing it? Within a minute, it seemed, they would all be drowned.

Those first few seconds were a nightmare. And then to the astonishment and joy of the trapped boys the flood water ceased its wild surging. It quietened down, and although it was up to their armpits it rose no higher.

"We're in a nasty mess, you chaps, but for goodness' sake let's keep our heads," said Nipper who, although it was an arm-aching job, was still holding his lantern, keeping it above the flood. "This is the only light we've got left, and we'd better go easy with it."

"Do—do you think we shall be able to get out?" asked Church huskily.

"We'll have a jolly good try, anyhow," replied Nipper. "The roof of the tunnel must have given way under the river, and that caused the water to pour through. What just happened was the first surge, but now it has quietened down. And don't forget that we're on a higher level here, or we should all have been drowned."

"But—but that means that we can't get out," said McClure. "The tunnel's blocked! There's no possible way—"

"Steady!" broke in Nipper. "What about that shaft? It's steep, but we may be able to get up. Anyhow, it's our only hope."

With difficulty he advanced down the tunnel, and he had a curious feeling of being light-headed. No doubt this was due to the compression of the air. His ears were drumming painfully. The others, following in his wake, scarcely spoke a word. The dreadful

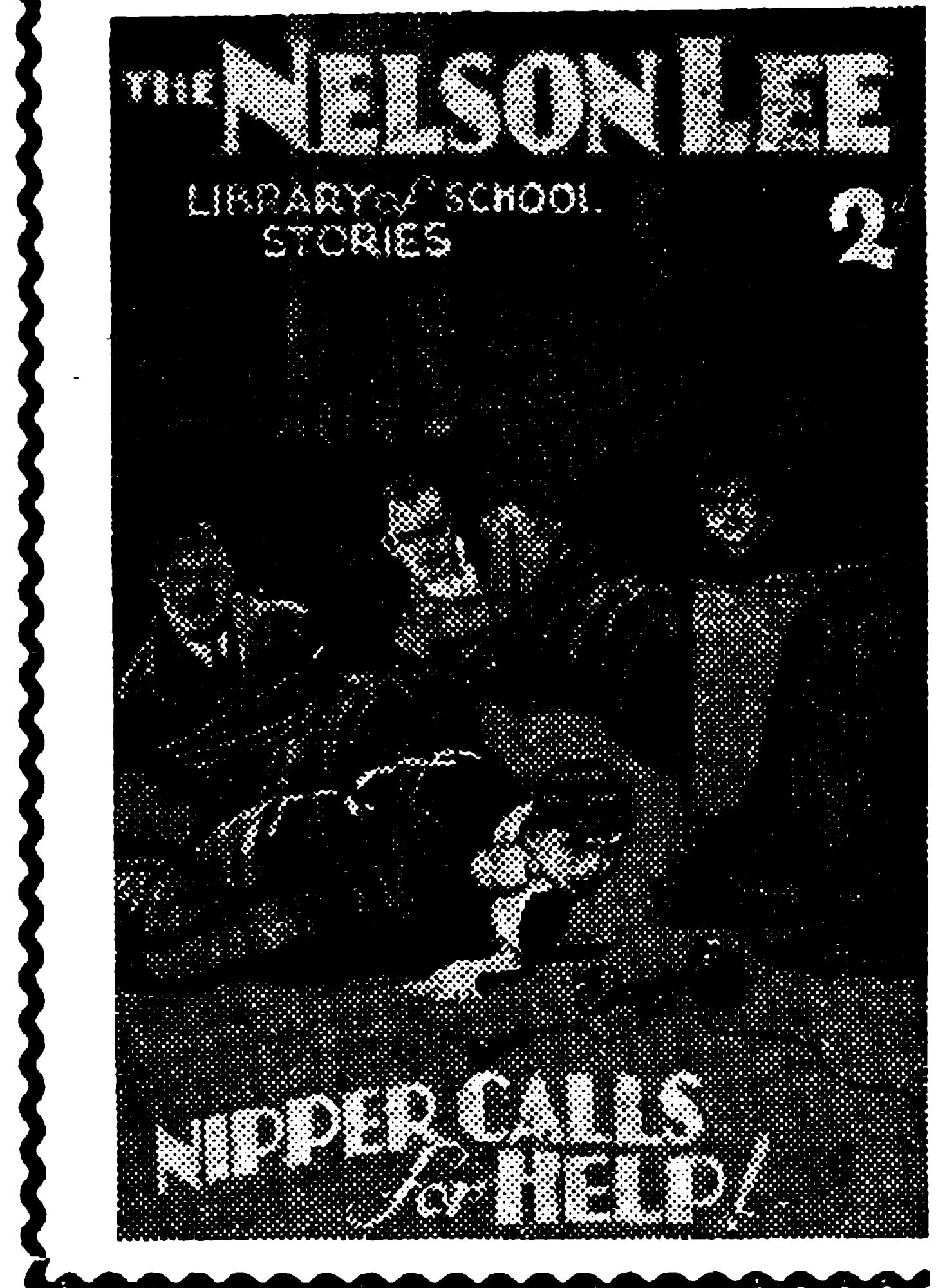
nature of their predicament appalled them, but Nipper's fine example steadied them and prevented a panic.

Nipper's arm was aching badly and he changed the lantern from one hand to the other. His limbs and his body were numbed by the cold, but he pressed on. Then he saw something which caused his hopes to sink to zero. For the water, not far ahead where the tunnel dipped, touched the very roof.

"Look!" came a voice from behind. "We're trapped in here—trapped!"

And Nipper, with an inward groan, knew that this was the truth. He also knew, even

COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



if the others had not yet realised it, that the water was steadily and surely rising!

CHAPTER 17.

Nelson Lee to the Rescue!

MAKING his excuses, Nelson Lee left the vicarage immediately after dinner. Even at the risk of offending the Bishop himself, he decided that it was necessary for him to be elsewhere.

For, during that meal, the detective's uneasiness had increased.

He did not really believe that any harm would come to the boys; but the more he pondered over his chance meeting with Tod Millar, the more he worried. Tod had certainly gone back to Moat Hollow and re-

ported that meeting. Then the men had no doubt gone out to the pit and made an inspection.

Naturally, they would be puzzled; but, finding the pit securely filled in, they would begin to think. They would know—quite positively—that Nelson Lee must have escaped by some other channel. And that might soon lead to some discoveries.

At all events, Lee considered it necessary to go to the tunnel and see if the boys were safely out. On his way there, he decided to look over the wall of Moat Hollow.

As he left the vicarage he fancied he heard a peculiar thud, not unlike the single beat of

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a muffled big drum; and at the same second the earth seemed to quiver. But Lee could not be sure; the impression was only vague. To-night he was in a state of considerable tension, and his senses were more than usually alert.

"I wonder what that could have been?" he muttered, doubt in his mind.

He hurried away. Skirting the high wall of the Moat Hollow grounds, he found a spot where he could leap upwards and gain a hold. He pulled himself up, and peering over, he saw nothing. The mist concealed the garden.

There were no lanterns out here now, and not a sound came to his ears.

"Perhaps I'm too jumpy," he told himself. "Yet something seems to tell me that all is not well."

He left the Moat Hollow wall at an angle, deciding to cut across the meadows towards the river. Abruptly he fell flat in the long grass.

For he had heard voices close at hand, and in the next second he heard the soft footfalls of two or three men. It would have been risky to dodge, so Lee took the only course and dropped into the grass.

"You're mad, Zingrave—absolutely mad!" somebody was saying, in a muttering voice. "I never agreed to anything like this. Those poor kids! Nine or ten of them—drowned like rats!"

"You've lost your nerve, you fool!" said another voice. "Will you be quiet?"

"I'm game for anything—as long as it's clean," came Tod Millar's voice. "I'm not squeamish; I've done plenty of big jobs in my time. But there's a limit—"

"You will make him be quiet, Hess," cut in Zingrave.

"Hess can't keep me quiet," snapped Tod Millar. "You're a devil, Zingrave! Dropping that bomb in the river—"

The voices became muffled and indistinct. Nelson Lee, crouching there, was horrified beyond words. He had heard more than enough to tell him the whole dreadful story.

These men—Zingrave, at least—had dropped a bomb into the river; the tunnel had been flooded, and those boys were trapped.

Nelson Lee was almost stunned. He remembered that peculiar thudding noise.

He was on his feet almost as soon as the men had passed, and, like a man possessed, he ran across the meadow. But he did not waste time by going towards Willard's Island. That, he knew, would be useless. If the tunnel was flooded, there could be no escape there.

Similarly, it would have been a waste of time to go after those men and face them with their crime. That would only do more harm than good. Lee was thinking of the boys—and only of the boys. Perhaps there was a way—perhaps there was a slim chance of their escaping.

For Lee had remembered that shaft—that natural split in the rocky ground which led downwards from the cunningly concealed opening behind the sports pavilion. Lee had used that shaft himself once.

He knew that the boys could not escape by that means, even if they had reached the shaft—for it was far too steep. Ropes would be required.

This thought reminded Nelson Lee that he would require a rope for his own purposes. So he altered his course, and, running at full speed, he detoured to the old barn, which stood fairly close at hand.

Within a minute he had secured two long lengths of rope, and now he ran for the pavilion. With the aid of his torch, he soon located the spot in the grassy bank where a kind of trap-door existed. It had been neglected for many months, and the weeds had grown profusely.

Exerting all his strength, Lee heaved back the turf-covered trap—and there, below him, was a yawning cavity.

CHAPTER 18.

The Trapped Schoolboys!

WHO'S that?"

It was a sharp, authoritative voice, and the next moment, before Nelson Lee could begin to descend the natural shaft, two figures strode out of the mist, and a match was struck.

"Mr. Lee!" ejaculated a startled voice.

"Fenton! The very man I need!" said Lee thankfully. "Fenton, help me!"

"Certainly, sir!" gasped Fenton, utterly taken aback. "I was out for a stroll with Morrow. We came to the pavilion to get my sweater, and we heard something—"

"Never mind that," interrupted Lee. "Nine junior boys are down in this tunnel—you know the one I mean. There has been an accident—the tunnel has collapsed, and I believe they are in terrible danger."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Fenton.

"They may be dead already," went on Lee. "Come! Help me with this rope—I am going to descend at once. Morrow, perhaps you'll rush to the school and get a number of warm blankets ready?"

"Why, yes, sir, of course," said the other prefect, bewildered by the unexpectedness of this emergency.

"Tell Mr. Wilkes—he'll attend to everything," went on Lee. "Don't let the whole school know—there'd only be a sensation. Keep it as quiet as possible. But see that the blankets are ready, and have them brought here. Get Mr. Wilkes to ring up the doctor, too. Hurry!"

Morrow was off like a flash, and Fenton, already quivering with excitement, helped Lee to affix the rope. The detective went down first, having discarded his overcoat. Dressed in his evening clothes he looked an incongruous figure as he slithered down that steep, rocky shaft. Fenton came after him. Reaching the bottom of the shaft, Lee plunged into muddy, icy-cold water.

"Careful here, Fenton," he warned. "It's all right, though—the water is not more than five feet deep."

He was in the original tunnel, and the light of his electric torch revealed the swirling, scummy surface of the black water. Fenton plunged down beside him.

"You must be mistaken, sir, surely," muttered the school captain. "Those boys can't be here! Why, the tunnel is absolutely flooded."

"This is a central spot," said Lee keenly. "The old tunnel, as you know, originally extended from the school to Willard's Island. It dips steeply beneath the river, and that is the spot where the fall has occurred. Hence the flooding."

"Then we can't go towards the river, sir—because there's no way of escape there. And if the juniors—"

"No, they were not in that direction," said Lee. "They were in another tunnel, which branches out from this point. Wait."

He took a deep breath, cupped his hands and shouted.

"Boys!" he bellowed.

They waited, and then, to their infinite joy, they heard a muffled reply.

"Here, sir!" came a faint voice, as though from the very bowels of the earth. "Guv'nor—guv'nor! Help!"

"They're alive!" muttered Lee, his haggard face relaxing. "But where? That tunnel I spoke of must be completely submerged. Wait, Fenton." He raised his voice again. "Nipper! Are you all safe?" They both listened tensely.

"Yes—water rising—air bad—can't stick it for long!" came the feeble cry.

Nelson Lee instantly knew the truth.

"That newer tunnel slopes somewhat upwards, and that explains why they have so far escaped," he said. "The level of the water has not yet completely engulfed the tunnel. So they are alive—although trapped."

"But—but what can we do, sir?" asked Fenton. "Do you think it would be possible to plunge through—to swim and drag them out?"

"It might be possible, but there is scarcely one chance in a thousand that we should succeed," replied Lee, his thoughts working rapidly. "By James! I wonder! Fenton, look here! In this direction, the original tunnel leads towards St. Frank's, and it is not fully submerged. You remember that there was a fall of roof some time ago, making it impossible for anybody to reach the school? I think we had better go along this tunnel. If we can remove some of the wreckage, we might release the water."

He did not wait for Fenton to reply, but plunged on. It was quite true that this old tunnel had collapsed—and the point of collapse was only a short distance away, beyond that steep shaft. They soon reached it, and Nelson Lee made a brief examination.

"Look, Fenton," he said. "The water is already rushing through a narrow hole here—and that keeps the level down a bit, thank Heaven! If only we could dislodge—Here, help me!"

He placed his shoulder to a mass of slimy masonry, and Fenton did the same. This was the place where the roof had collapsed, and the debris almost completely filled the tunnel. If only some of it could be dislodged the flood waters would have a fresh outlet.

Straining to their uttermost, the pair heaved, jamming their feet against any projections they could find to obtain leverage. Nothing happened at first. They heaved again—

With a crumbling and grinding, the mass of stones moved. The veins were standing out like whipcords on Nelson Lee's face; he was exerting every fraction of strength he possessed; the perspiration was pouring down his face, in spite of the chilled condition of his body.

Cra-a-a-a-sh!

It came suddenly—an utter collapse of that debris. No doubt it had already been

weakened by the action of the water, or Lee and Fenton could never have succeeded.

"Back!" gasped the detective.

They staggered back only just in time, for some great stones fell heavily from the roof, dislodged by the collapse. And something else was happening, too. The water in the tunnel, finding this new outlet, was roaring through with a terrific, devastating rush.

NIPPER'S head was swimming; he felt that any moment his senses would leave him. Long since he had found it impossible to hold the lantern, and, in any case, it was burning up the precious oxygen. So the imprisoned schoolboys were in absolute darkness—waiting for the end to come.

Many of them were in a kind of stupor, owing to the foul air. They had hoped for some little time—after they had heard Nelson Lee's voice—but then silence had come. Their had been no response to their shouting. And now the water was steadily but insidiously rising. It was up to their chins, and soon it would be over their mouths.

"Listen! What's that?" came a sudden ejaculation from Nipper. "I heard—"

He broke off, for at that moment a draught of cold, pure air struck him in the face like a slap. He gulped the life-giving oxygen. Hoarse cries came from the others.

And, in the same moment, they knew that the water was subsiding rapidly—it dropped from their necks to their chests—and then to their waists. From somewhere down that crude tunnel, its light reflected in the foamy surface of the water, came a beam from an electric torch.

"Hurrah!"

"The water's going down!"

"We're saved—saved!"

"Boys—boys!" came Nelson Lee's voice. "Thank Heaven! Are you all safe? Are you all here?"

Lee came plunging through, and Nipper was the first one he gripped.

"Good old guv'nor," muttered Nipper. "We thought you'd come. Yes, everything's O.K.—we're all safe."

"Those scoundrels shall suffer the full penalty for this," said Lee grimly.

"How did you manage it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper dully.

"We won't talk now—you can hear all that afterwards," said Lee. "Come along—the more exhausted ones first."

But none of them would admit that he was exhausted. The fresh air, coming upon them so unexpectedly, had acted as a wonderful reviver, and the fact that they were now rescued put new strength into them.

The water had practically gone—it had fallen so rapidly that it was almost incredible. Beyond the point where Lee and Fenton had forced down the obstruction, the tunnel descended somewhat, and the water had gone pouring into that slope, thus emptying the newer tunnel, which was on a higher level.

The boys, in spite of their protestations, were really exhausted. Tommy Watson, who was at the far end, tried pluckily to follow the others out, but he stumbled and fell—and there he lay in the muddy water—for at this spot it had not yet drained away.

"Poor boy," murmured Lee.

"All right, sir—we'll get him," said Nipper. "Just hold your torch in this direction, and we shall be able to see."

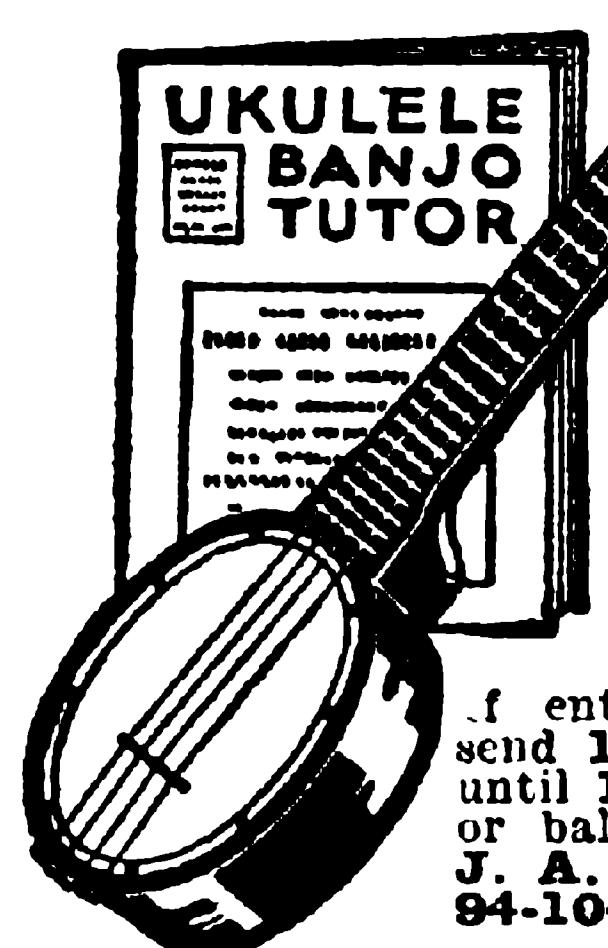
He and Tregellis-West stumbled back. They seized Tommy, and were on the point of lifting him, when Nipper uttered a hoarse cry.

"Guv'nor—the light!" he shouted. "Look here! What's this?"

The action of the sudden flood had washed

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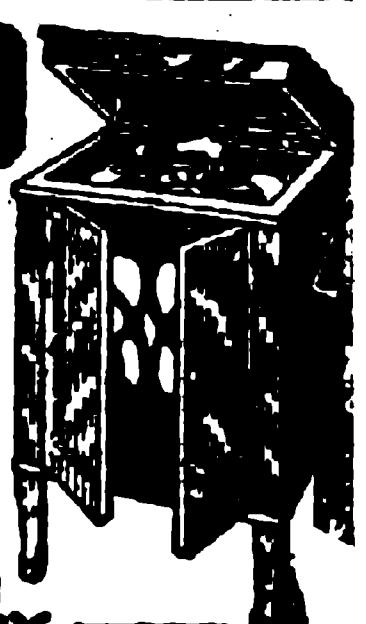
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away a good deal of the soft, sandy earth—and at the end of the tunnel there was a large cavity, which had not been there before. And, in full sight, was the corner of a black, stout-looking sea-chest. It was studded with great knobs, and there were heavy metal bands surrounding it.

"Begad!" croaked Sir Montie. "There's—there's another chest, too!"

"The treasure!" yelled Handforth, who had turned round, and he plunged forward through the water.

And they all knew, in that second, that Edward Oswald Handforth was right. The same flood which had nearly caused the untimely death of these boys, had exposed the centuries-hidden treasure-chests!

CHAPTER 19.

Beaten at the Post!

THE treasure!"

It was a magic word; it helped to revive even Tommy Watson, for Tommy sat up, blinking, and he stared dazedly.

"The treasure?" he gasped. "Where?"

Nelson Lee had come forward with the torch, and, flashing the light on those chests at close quarters, the detective momentarily forgot the plight of the boys. For he, too, was thrilled.

"By James, you're right!" he said. "These are, without question, the treasure chests!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"And we weren't even tunnelling in that direction!"

"The flood water caused a collapse just here, and the earth drained away with the water when it subsided," explained Lee. "So, you see, the chests have been revealed. It seems that our enemies, in their efforts to harm us, have done us an excellent turn. But we mustn't waste time on this now," he added abruptly. "You boys are chilled to the marrow, and you must be taken to the school at once—yes, and put to bed."

"Cheese it, guv'nor," protested Nipper. "Put to bed? Not likely! Not after we've found the treasure!"

They were all wildly excited. One after the other, they were hauled up that steep shaft, and those strong ropes came in handy. And as they reached the top they were bundled into warm-blankets.

There were a good many rescuers waiting up there—Mr. Alington Wilkes, the House-master of the Ancient House, Mr. Barry Stokes, of the West House, and a number of prefects. Before any of the chilled boys could be exposed to the bitterly-cold night air, they were wrapped in the blankets and whirled away.

It had been found next to impossible to keep the sensational news from the school. Somehow it had leaked out, and the whole of St. Frank's was agog. Everybody knew that the juniors had been trapped in the

tunnel, and nearly drowned. And there were whispers going about, too—the word "treasure" was passing from mouth to mouth.

Somebody had rung up Lord Edgemore, urging him to come over—for it had been feared, at that time, that Skeets had perished. The earl arrived soon after the boys had been carried upstairs, to the waiting hot baths. The excited juniors refused to be put to bed. After a good hot bath and a rub down, they felt themselves again; they seemed to have come to no harm whatsoever.

Now they were rapidly dressing themselves—fully determined to waste no time in getting back to the tunnel, and this time they would go well equipped.

"Dad—dad!" shouted Skeets joyously, as his father appeared. "Wonderful news, dad! We've found the treasure."

Lord Edgemore was as excited as any of them. They all immediately returned to the shaft, Nelson Lee not having the heart to order back the boys. Descending into the tunnel, Skeets led the way, flashing a powerful electric torch.

"They're here, dad—two great chests!" he was saying. "Our idea is to get them out to-night—"

He broke off with a hoarse cry.

"Why, what is it, son?" asked his father sharply.

"Look!" yelled Skeets. "Nipper—Handy—Mr. Lee! Oh, look! The chests are gone!"

Nelson Lee ran forward. One glance told him the truth. The chests had indeed gone. The earth in which they were buried had been removed; there were marks along the muddy floor showing where the chests had been dragged. A hard light gleamed in Nelson Lee's eyes.

"Beaten at the post!" he said, clenching his fists.

"You—you mean—" began the earl.

"While we were getting the boys indoors, the people at Moat Hollow came here," replied Lee steadily. "Perhaps they saw the lights flashing, and they were attracted. They seized their opportunity and dragged those chests away. Heaven alone knows how they got them to the surface. Certainly, they had no time to break open the strong fastenings. They took them intact."

"The treasure—gone!" groaned Skeets. "Oh, dad."

And there was a world of dismay in his voice.

"Don't despair, young 'un," said Lee, a dangerous note in his voice. "The treasure is gone—but we are going to fight tooth and nail to get it back! And we shall win, take my word for it!"

THE END.

(*Nelson Lee keeps his word, too, but only after a titanic struggle between him and Zingrave—a struggle in which Nipper & Co. play a big part. Next Wednesday's thrilling story is entitled: "Foiled By St. Frank's!" Order your copy to-day.*)

Have you written to the Editor yet, chums? All letters welcome.



A breezy chat with readers conducted by the EDITOR. All letters should be addressed to The Editor,

NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

STILL your cheery letters roll in, Martin O'Callahan (North Richmond), South Australia), and I now regard them as a weekly tonic. Ralph Leslie Fullwood was featured in the very first St. Frank's story written—No. 112, old series. Fullwood was then a rotter, and he was the captain of the Remove. No need for me to tell you where the Duke of Somerton's home is, as you must have read all about it in the Christmas series. Wellborne, of the River House School, occasionally sports an eyeglass, but only for swank. Lord Pippington's full name is Clarence Augustus Jerome Marchant. Rather a mouthful, eh? Much easier to say "Pippy." There are fourteen Junior studies in the Ancient House.

* * *

Pen-sketches of two more St. Frank's Removites: STUDY E. ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE. A general favourite with everybody is the aristocratic Archie. He is always perfectly dressed; adopts a languid demeanour, and uses a quaint manner of speech. Archie is something of a fraud, for while he poses as a hopeless slacker, with an aversion for exertion of any kind, he is really one of the most active fellows in the Remove when the occasion demands. In the same way, he affects to be dense, whilst actually being quite keen-witted. ALFRED BRENT. The son of Sir John Brent, Bart., the Chairman of the St. Frank's Governors. "Alf," as he is always called, is a fellow of dogged determination and he is obstinate to a degree. Modest and unassuming, he shows little sign of his real character. He is broad-shouldered, clumsy, and sunny in disposition. Archie's best pal.

* * *

Here's an idea which I am sure will interest readers. I'm going to ask three questions about the St. Frank's characters, etc. Next week I'll give the answers. I wonder how many of you old readers will get the right answers before you see them in print? 1. What is the London address of Handforth's people? 2. How is Bannington supplied with its water? 3. What

is the name of the opening in the cliffs, near Shingle Head, where it is possible to run a car right down to the beach? These questions will serve a double purpose, for they will interest old readers and give useful information to new readers.

* * *

Reggie Pitt's girl friend, H. Pryor (Birmingham), is Doris Berkeley. St. Frank's is many hundreds of years old. Yes, at one time the Monastery of St. Francis stood on the school's present site and some of the original walls still exist.

* * *

Sorry to hear, George Buckley (Liverpool), that you miss the human note in our more recent stories. I think the modern demand is more for thrills and excitement. However, Mr. Brooks will soon be busy on a series which will have a strong human interest, in addition to the thrills—and that's the kind of yarn I think you want. Look out for this series shortly.

* * *

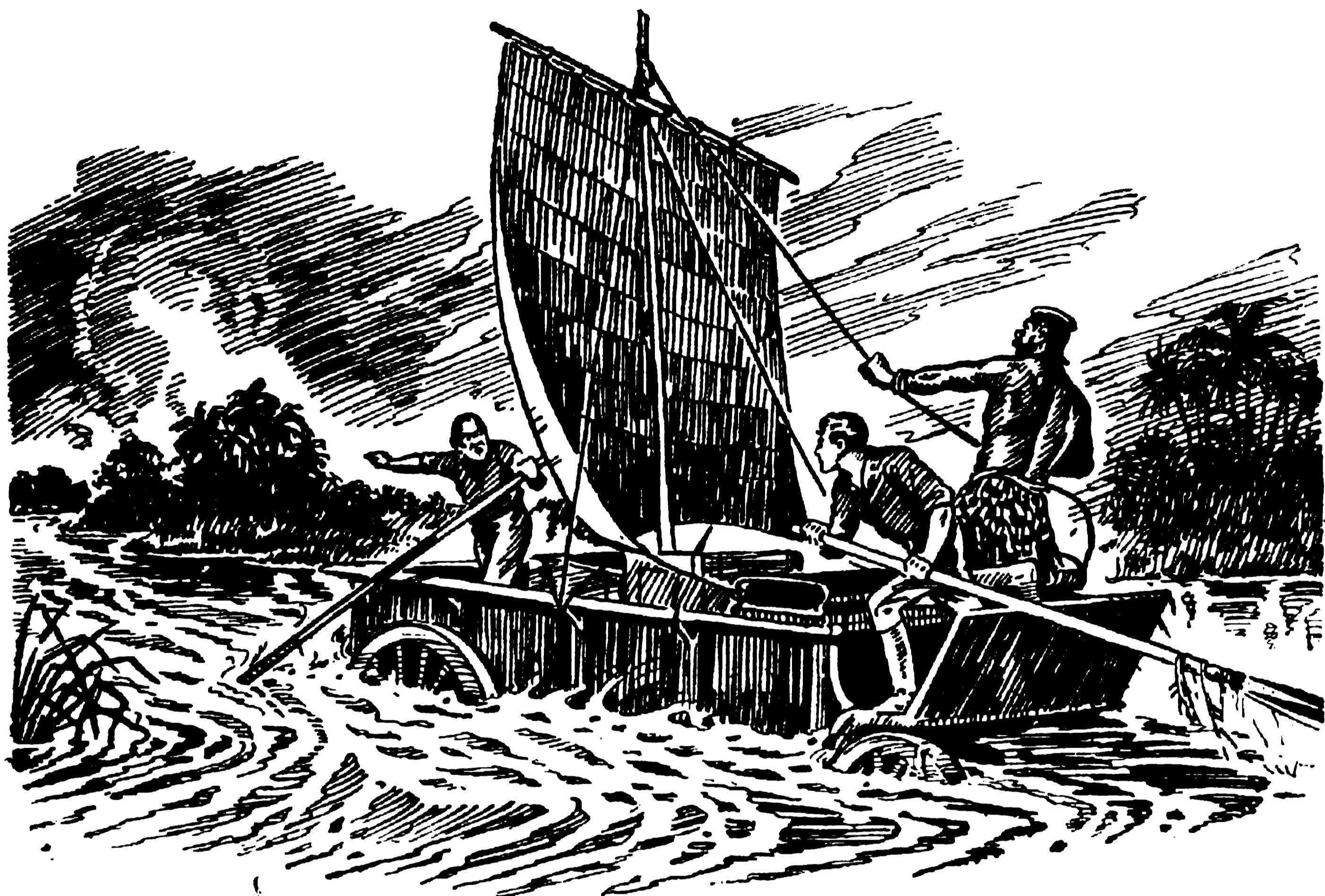
Waldo, of the Remove, has inherited many of his father's abnormal qualities, Albert W. Wilson (Wallasey); there is no need to describe these as they are referred to from time to time in the course of the stories. The character you mention is not related to the Duke of Somerton. Dr. Morrison Nicholls, who was once headmaster of St. Frank's, has been appointed headmaster of a Public School in Essex.

* * *

Thanks for your interesting letter, Molly Poulton (Liverpool). So you would like a story about Nipper getting into disgrace? Somehow, I think other readers would appreciate such a story, too. An astonishing number of people seem anxious for Nipper to get into hot water! I'll bear this idea in mind, Molly. Nipper's birthday is July 31st. Yes, before Nelson Leo took him under his wing, Nipper sold newspapers in the London streets. Mr. Brooks does not use a pen-name for the St. Frank's stories. Believe it or not, Edwy Searles Brooks is his own name.

"Rolling down the river" on Lulu the Zulu's ark?

The CITY of GOLD!



By HERBERT FORD

Into the heart of Saluki land comes Tom Cook on a trading expedition. Trade is good—but the situation is bad when Oboona, chief of the warlike Salukis, spots some rifles and ammunition in Tom's wagon.

Salukis on the Warpath!

THE Saluki chief's eyes bulged at the sight of the rifles. He muttered a few words in his clicking dialect to his men, who returned to the trestles. Hoisting the rolls of calico and other articles they had bartered, they carried them across to where their weapons were piled. By twos and threes the other natives followed, leaving but half a dozen still bargaining with Tom Cook. Chief Oboona stood apart, his bloodshot eyes rolling evilly.

"That's all; trade's over!" Tom announced at last. "Inspan, soon as you like, Lulu! Stir Hendryk up, and we'll have supper and clear out. I want to get away from here before sunset. No more trade, Oboona. I've got all I want to buy, and no more to sell."

The Saluki sidled nearer, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Hark ye, Inkoos; I have down there by the edge of the forest two tusks of best quality, twice as heavy as any you have seen. I will give them both for a few of the weapons that ye have yonder in the wagon!"

"What d'you know about what I've got in the wagon?" demanded Tom. "Been spying, have you? Clear off, I tell you!"

"You will not sell the weapons?" hissed Oboona. "Beware lest we take what we want!"

"Oh, that's your game, is it?" roared Tom, and, jerking his rifle from under the trestles, he presented it at the snarling chief.

Oboona turned on his heels and bolted for his life, whilst Tom yelled for Lulu to hurry up. In a few minutes the Zulu emerged from

the bush, his face very grave. In a moment Tom sensed disaster.

"Baas, there has been bad work here. Hendryk is lying yonder in the bush, fast asleep, and I cannot wake him. The cattle have all strayed in different directions. There is the spoor of naked feet amongst the beasts; they have been driven!"

Tom hurried after him, to find the little Dutch-Kaffir snoring loudly by a small fire. An empty pannikin which had contained coffee lay near his limp hand, and Tom took it up and smelt it.

"Drugged!" he announced shortly. "Lulu, these brutes mean trouble. Hark!"

From back in the forest came once more the thrumming of the war drums.

"Back to the wagon and load every weapon we've got, Lulu—quick as you can!" Tom ordered calmly. "I'm goin' to get those oxen. I've still got my pony, and I can round 'em up in fifteen minutes if you can hold these blighters off and keep 'em busy. Can you do it?"

"Baas, I obey!" was the reply.

"Right! I guess it means we're in a pretty tight hole, and we'll have to fight the whole durned tribe, which means odds of about two hundred to one!"

"Suits me, baas!" the Zulu assented. "We'll show these sons o' hyenas jest where dey git off. I took a strongest dislike to de shape o' dat Oboona person's face, an' I'll have greatest pleasure in alterin' same. Carry on, sergeant!"

A Modern Ark!

TOM COOK rode through the thick bush on the trail of the wandering cattle, and the farther he went the deeper his heart sank. For it was very evident from the spoors that the whole twenty span of fine "salted" oxen, of which he had been so proud, had been driven away rapidly to all points of the compass. It would take more than one man to round them up again, to say nothing of the fact that at any moment a horde of the Salukis might burst out from cover.

"It's no go!" Tom admitted to himself at last. "We'll have to stay and fight it out—Hallo!"

He had emerged from the thick bush, and over the edge of the kloof just ahead of him, he could see a tiny glow, which told of a "muffled" camp fire down on the other side of the declivity.

Tethering his pony, Tom snaked his way forward, using all the bushman hunter's knowledge of which he was possessed, hardly stirring a leaf or a twig as he wormed his way on his stomach towards the little half-concealed spot of light.

Over the edge of the kloof he could see the tiny flicker of flame, and realised with a throb of joy that he could also hear the voices of the men as they squatted on their haunches round the fire. They were Salukis, and all were armed with knobkerries, throwing spears and assegais.

From their conversation, the boy gathered that they were detailed by their chief to guard the only trail down river, and to prevent Tom and his two companions from getting down the Zambesi to his dad's trading station.

"Big white man got plenty fine stores at his kraal," said one of them complacently. "Oboona been planning for long, long time to raid station, and now it should be easy, for there are but a handful of Kaffirs besides the big white man. His son and Lulukumbula will be slain ere daybreak, and the Kaffir is to be sacrificed to Voodoo, along with the two white men captured before."

"Where are they?" asked a younger warrior.

The older man jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"In the Voodoo village yonder, in the forest on other side of river from Big Baas' station. It seems this white man—he of the glistening eyes—is the son of Baas Cook's brother. He must be a brave man, for he and his servant killed twenty of our warriors ere they were captured by a trick!"

"So much the better—they will give more sport at the torture!" snuffled a blood-thirsty looking savage.

This made Tom think furiously. For some weeks he and his father had been expecting a visit from Tom's cousin, Alva Vandek, son of the famous American millionaire inventor. And here they were, apparently having tumbled into the hands of the fanatical Voodoo worshippers just on the very threshold of their goal.

There had been rumours of the existence of a band of Voodoo priests away back in the forest on the opposite side of the river to the trading station, but Phil Cook had always pooh-poohed the idea, though forbidding any of his own Kaffirs to cross the wide Zambesi at this point.

As Tom rode back to camp he turned the matter over in his mind. What hope had he of getting to his father's rescue and lending a hand in the defence of his home?

The only track down river was guarded by the strongly armed Salukis, and probably there were many more savages hidden in the forest on either side. There was no other way—

There came a sound to his ears—the muffled, sullen rush of great waters—and he suddenly realised that the mighty Zambesi was in flood. And, as he realised it, a joking remark which his father had made when they were building the huge trade wagon came to his mind.

They had spent many weeks on the great covered cart, putting in the best workmanship and materials, for it would have to stand many months of the roughest usage and hold up against terrible cross-country journeys. But it had been built truly and strong, and they had surveyed their handy-work with pride.

"Yes, by gosh, it's a good piece of work, tho' I say it!" the trader had declared. "Teak, boxwood and oak, and all seasoned

stuff. I'mbettin' that the weather can't get in through that floorin', Tommy. It's as strong as Noah's Ark, and I guess it would float just the same."

"The trail's guarded, but the river's still open!" Tom ejaculated now, as he spurred his willing little Basuto pony to a faster gallop. "By Jove, it's the one chance and we must take it!"

Back in the forest, the thrumming of the drums seemed to have taken on a more definitely menacing note, and when Tom scurried back to the wagon, he found Lulu coolly getting ready for an immediate attack.

"Glad to see yo', Baas Tom," said the Zulu quietly, and jerked his thumb towards a dark figure which was rolling to and fro in front of a small fire, making the most hideous noises. It was Hendryk, who had been drugged by the Salukis. "I give him some make-sick powders, with some coffee and plenty mustard, baas," went on Lulu. "Him be okay soon. Him lucky not to be dead for keeps!"

Just at the moment the unfortunate Hendryk was rather wishing he were dead, but after another ten minutes he managed to stagger over to the wagon and lend a feeble helping hand.

Tom had told his news, and given them an outline of his plans, at which the Zulu chortled.

"It is a case of die or do, baas!" he said. "But if Noah could do it—sure we can!"

"We'll have to throw out all the trade stuff and the things we've collected on the trip, Lulu," said Tom briskly. "Leave only the rifles and ammunition and enough grub to last us for a day or two."

"You mean t'row away all dem beeyutiful tuskes, an' de gold ornyments an' all?" gasped Lulu, reverting to "broken" English in his dismay.

"Yes; dump the lot!" replied Tom firmly. "And give me out the hatchet and saw, and that sailmaker's palm and needle. I've got a notion!"

Lulu obeyed, and then, whilst he began unloading the wagon, Tom set to work. He cut away the weather-proof tilt of the wagon, and from it fashioned a sort of lug-sail. The long trace pole he fitted with a flat blade, to act as a steering oar.

He had set Hendryk to work digging under the spot where the wagon stood, and there buried the valuables he had been compelled to turn out to lighten the vehicle. After moving the wagon, they built a fire over the spot and obliterated all signs of the digging.

Tom felt fairly sure that the enemy would not think of attacking before dawn, or, at any rate, until during the night. They had a wholesome fear of the white man's "magic" in the shape of his weapons, and also they would feel certain that he could not move without falling into the hands of their patrols.

Tom and his two companions worked with

desperate energy, and at last all was ready for transferring the great trek wagon into a modern "ark." They had chopped down the thicker brush between their camping ground and the river, but, even so, it was heavy work hauling the wagon over the rough, with only Tom's little Basuto pony to aid them.

At last they had backed the "ark" down to the steep bank. Then Tom unharnessed his little pony and, after stroking its soft nose regretfully, sent it galloping off down the trail toward its own home. It was an intelligent little beast, and the boy had hopes that it would find its way back without mishap.

"At any rate, he may attract some of the Salukis and give them a wild-goose chase," said Tom. "He'll take a bit of catching, and, as they haven't got guns, I guess they won't be able to hit him with their throwing spears. Now, Lulu, one more heave and I guess it'll be 'All aboard!'"

Once started down the steep bank, and there was no stopping the heavy wagon. He and Lulu scrambled in at the "stern," which was really the driving seat of the wagon, whilst Hendryk fended the "bow" off with a long pole.

He nearly pitched over the tailboard in doing so when the wagon took the water, for, directly the rushing tide hit her, she "careened" heavily to one side, the water rushing in as she threatened to capsize. But Tom rushed to the steering oar, and with a few lusty strokes got her headed downstream, whilst Lulu threw his great bulk well over to the other side to right her.

"Up with the sail, bo'sun!" Tom yelled cheerfully as the wagon began to drift rapidly down with the tide. "There's a following wind, and it may give us steerageway. I hope to goodness we don't strike Victoria Falls. I won't guarantee the 'ark' against them!"

"Hey! Get off, you!" yelled Lulu, seizing the long pole and jabbing at an inquisitive hippo which had come up from the bed of the river to see what was the nature of this huge shadow passing overhead. "De animiles came in two by two, but not to dis ark. We ain't licensed to take passengers! Hendryk, you black good-for-nothing', take dat pail, and bail for your miserable life. De Zambesi is comin' in much too rapid!"

Besieged!

IT was a wild ride through the black night, and a hundred times the intrepid adventurers were only saved from disaster by Tom's skilful use of the trace-pole steering-oar. The tilt sail was a brilliant success, although one of the "hands" had to be constantly on the alert to drop it at Tom's order as a bend in the river would bring the wind on to another quarter.

They bumped innumerable small islands

and floating logs, and quite possibly a hippo or two and several crocodiles, but the heavily-tyred wide wheels acted as a keel and kept their quaint "craft" steady and right side up until the first pale streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

But as they rounded a bend an even stronger light showed over the distant bush, and Tom groaned as he realised what it meant. He knew the river so well that he could tell exactly where the Cook station stood, in spite of the twisting and winding of the great river.

"Those demons have fired the station!" he groaned. "Lulu, I reckon we're too late!"

"No; we may be yet in time, baas!" Lulu jerked out, jumping up and down in his excitement until the "boat" rocked madly. "Hark to dat!" He held up his finger and Tom heard the distant crackle of rifle fire. "Big baas will hold 'um off 'til we come. Baas Tom, I've got an idea!"

He waded over to one of the stout chests, which were still lashed against the side of the wagon, and threw back the lid. It was full of ammunition and several dynamite cartridges, but at the bottom were some Vérey lights and flares for signalling purposes, together with some rockets and coloured lights.

"Baas Tom, your father fight twice as well when he knows help is coming!" he explained. "Him knows we got dese, for it was him who insisted dat we bring 'um. When he sees 'um he take a second wind!"

Waiting until the wagon swirled around a bend within two or three miles of the station, Lulu lighted the fuses of all the rockets at once and sent them soaring skyward, where they burst in a thousand stars, which must

indeed have been gleams of hope to the small body of defenders at the trading station.

It was evident, from the rapid fire that struck their ears as the wagon dashed downstream, that the defenders had taken new heart and were now fighting desperately. But directly the wagon came within sight of the conflict, Tom realised that they were only just in time, and that they would have all their work cut out to drive off the Salukis in any case.

A huddled mob of dancing figures, brandishing spears, danced about at the water's edge, where a couple of score war canoes were moored at the wharf. The Salukis were being held in check by Phil Cook and a handful of his faithful Kaffirs, who were using every available weapon the station possessed.

They were entrenched behind the high stone wall which acted as a stockade for the station, and in front of it was a pile of still black figures, mute witnesses of the heroic defence against tremendous odds. But the popping of the rifles grew less and with longer intervals between—for the stock of ammunition was running short.

"Hold on, big bass, we're comin'!" yelled Lulu, as if he expected that old Phil Cook could hear him in that din.

The gigantic Zulu picked up the machine-gun as if it were a toy. Then, with half a dozen belts of cartridges dangling around his neck like a weird sort of necklace, he plunged over the side of the wagon and dashed among the yelling savages!

(When Lulu gets into action—the fur begins to fly! Look out for plenty of excitement in next week's rousing chapters of this grand story.)

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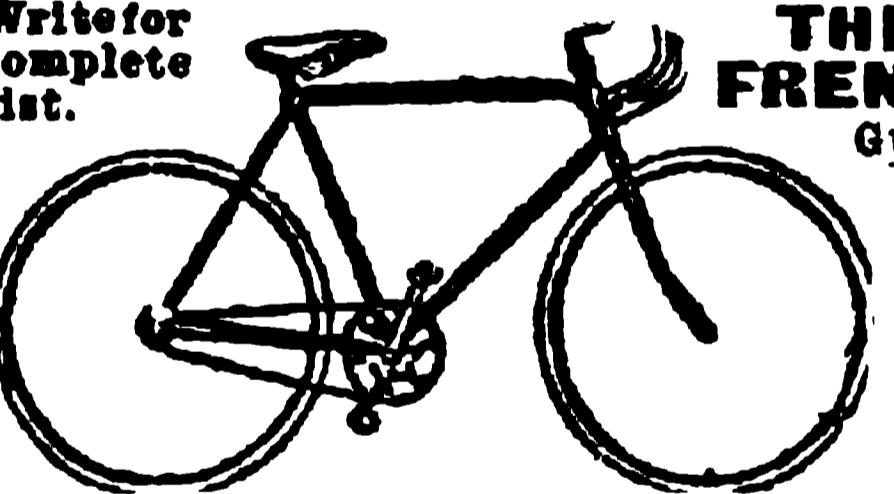
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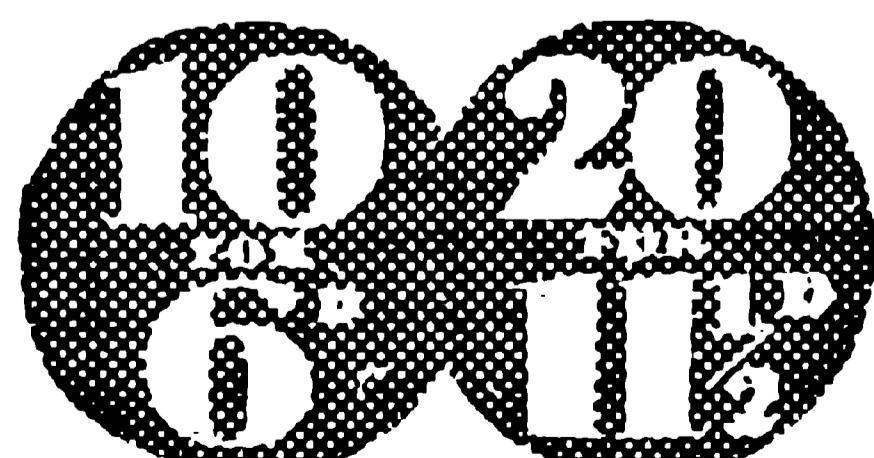
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