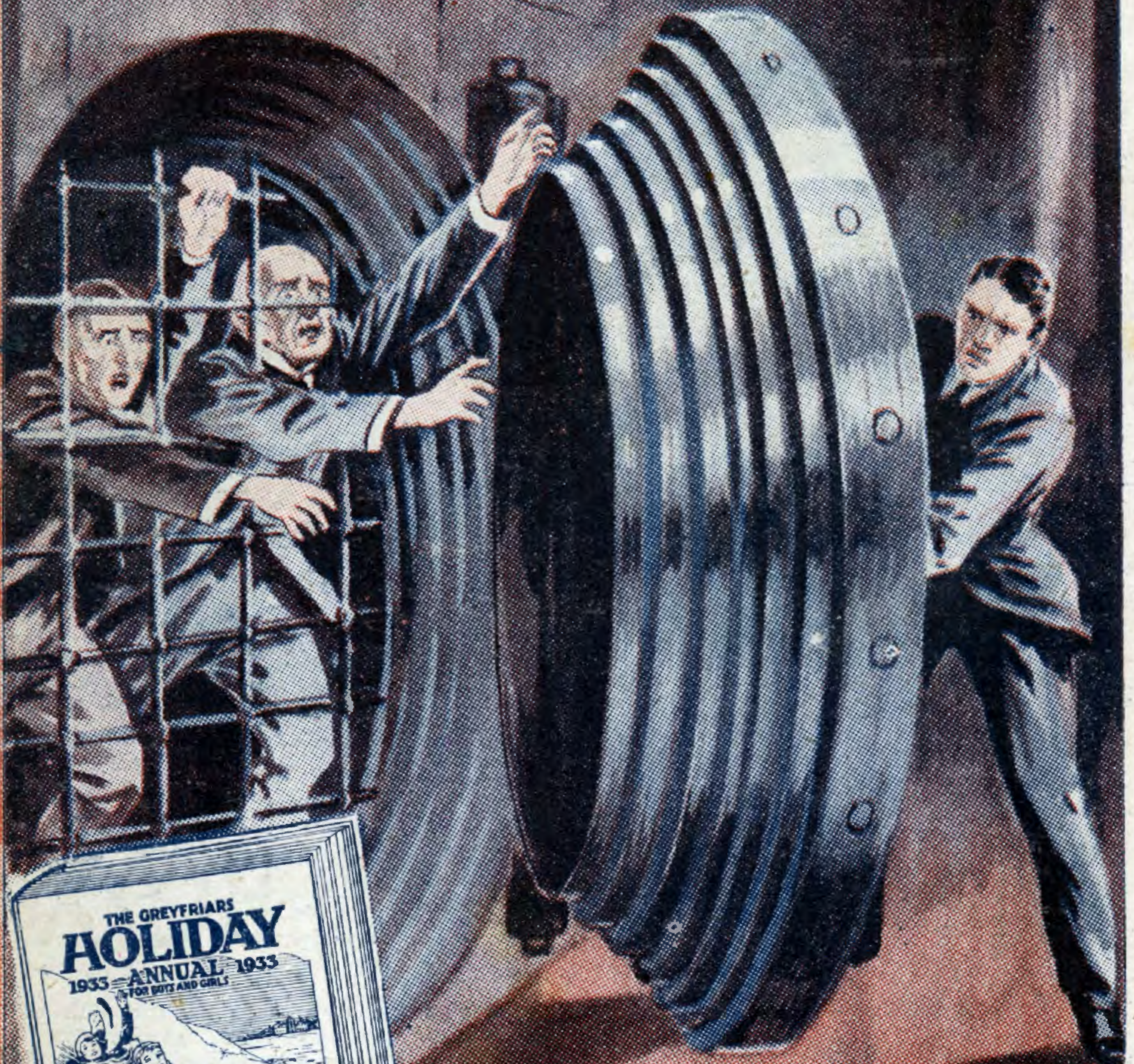


**THE MYSTERY BOX! & WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!**  
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# THE NELSON LEE

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New Series No. 139.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 17th, 1932.



# The MYSTERY BOX!

## CHAPTER 1.

### Out of the River!

**A** MAN in a blue woollen jersey and peaked cap stood opposite the Randlegh Club, just off Regent Street, and glanced across at the imposing entrance to its vestibule with an impatient look on his dark, tanned face. Then he began walking slowly to and fro again.

He had been there for over an hour, pacing slowly up and down, and keeping his

eyes continuously turned to the club doors opposite. It was quite evident by his manner that he was watching for someone to appear, although, from his dress and general appearance, one would not suspect him of having acquaintances in such a select and exclusive society as that of the Randlegh Club.

At last, just as a clock in the vicinity was chiming the half-hour, two gentlemen came down the steps of the club, stood chatting together for a few moments, then, nodding

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affably, strode away in opposite directions.

One of them was a well-knit man of medium height and dressed with a quiet air of breeding. His face was clean-shaven, his features cut clearly and alive with vigour and energy; his keen grey eyes were alert and full of vitality; they were set rather

deeply in his head, as if from constant study and thought.

The man in the blue jersey watched him walk swiftly in the direction of Oxford Circus, then, crossing the road, hastened after him. He caught him up before he reached the Circus.

"Can you spare me a moment, sir?" he asked, touching his cap.

Nelson Lee—criminologist, private detective and expert investigator—glanced at his strange accoster with that quick, incisive look with which he seemed to explore the dark recesses of men's minds, and which some people found so embarrassing.

"What is your business?" he said curtly.

The man cast a furtive look around, as if something prompted him to be on the alert. The action was not lost on Nelson Lee; it was enough to suggest the possibility that someone might be watching.

"What do you want?" he asked again. "Don't be afraid of putting it bluntly. I shan't mind."

"Well, it's a bit of a mystery, sir," began the man.

The detective did not wait for him to finish his statement; it told him enough to know that this man was not trying to palm off the "oid soldier stunt"—he was not asking for money.

"Then you know who I am?" he said quietly.

The man looked rather surprised at this remark.

"Perhaps I've made a mistake," he said. "I thought you were Mr. Nelson Lee."

"You're quite right—I am Nelson Lee. How did you know?"

"I knows your face, sir," answered the other, with a superior smile. "I called at the Gray's Inn Road: they said you had gone to the Law Courts. When I got there I found that you had gone on to the Randlegh Club. I waited outside and saw you come out just now."

"You were certainly persistent," muttered Nelson Lee, with a smile. He suddenly put up his hand and stopped a passing taxi. "Follow me!" he muttered, and clambered inside.

"And now," he said, when at last they were seated in the consulting-room at Gray's Inn Road, "let's hear what you have to say."

"Well, sir," began the man again, "as I said before, it's a bit of a mystery, like. That's why I thought as how you might be able to explain it. Perhaps you'd like to know who I am. My name's Pike—Jim Pike—and I'm a lighterman on the Thames."

"Very well, Pike," nodded the detective. "And what's the mystery?"

"It's like this, sir. A few weeks ago—about a month, I should think—I happened to be working about midway between Blackfriars and Waterloo Bridge. It was low tide at the time, and I was digging out an anchor that had broken her cable, and had been lying there for some years by the state it was in. Presently my spade seemed to come up against something a bit hard. I thought it was a stone at first, but I saw it glitter just where the spade had caught it. I stooped down and picked it up—"

He felt beneath his jersey and drew out a metal flask.

"I picked up this," he said, handing it to the detective.

Nelson Lee gave a quick glance at the flask, but did not stop to examine it. He laid it on his desk and turned again to his visitor.

"Go on!" he said.

"Well, sir," continued Pike, "I didn't pay much heed to it at the time. I just dropped it into my pocket and I went on with my work. Later on, when I got home, I decided to have a good look at it and find out if it had any value. It's fitted with a screw stopper, and I had rather a job to unfasten it, for it had become corroded by the water. However, I soused it in oil and managed to get it undone at last. Then I found that there were some papers inside."

Jim Pike paused a moment and regarded the detective with a fixed stare. Nelson Lee still sat calmly attentive. He was now quite interested in the strange narrative.

"What did these papers contain?" he asked. "Have you got them with you?"

THE man shook his head.

"Not both of them, sir," he said.

"I was just coming to that, because that's the cause of all the trouble. The paper was very old and almost tumbling to pieces; although the flask was watertight, the damp seemed to have got in somehow. One of these papers seemed to be a sort of receipt; I've got it in my pocket; I'll show you in a moment. The other was a letter of some sort."

"And you haven't got that with you?"

"No, sir; that's just where the mystery comes in. It was almost too indistinct to read; and, in any case, I couldn't have made head or tail of it, for it was written in some foreign jargon. A few days later I was working down the docks, and I had a few drinks with a fellow off one of the boats. We got talking about this flask I had found, and I showed him the letter, thinking, as how he might be able to understand it, being a foreigner, like."

"And was he able to read it?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes; but he said as how it was written in German. He couldn't quite make out one or two of the words, and asked me to let him keep it for a few days. 'Not blooming likely,' I says. 'How do I know but what you won't do a guy with it?' And then I'm blowed if I didn't go off and clean forget all about it. And that's the last I saw of that letter."

"And is that the end of your story?"

"Not by any means, Mr. Lee," said Jim Pike, with emphasis. "I ain't got properly going on the mystery yet. Nothing else happened until about three days ago; then, one evening, a cove called at my cottage and began to ask me all about the flask I found at the bottom of the river."

"Who was this cove—as you call him?"

"That I can't say, sir. He cut quite a dash in his way, sir—a dandy little man with

fair hair and a ginger moustache. He was quite friendly at first—a bit too polite for my liking. But I sort o' felt that he knew all about that letter that was pinched from me, and that rather riled me, so I wasn't out to give him any change. Presently he saw that I'd got him taped, and wasn't standing for any old buck. Then he asks me point-blank for that other paper what was in the flask, and ends up by offering me a hundred quid for it."

"And you took it?"

"No, I did not, sir. It struck me that if he was willing to pay out a hundred quid as calmly as that, the papers was worth a lot more, so I haggled about it. Then he asked me to name my own price, but by that time I reckoned there was something fishy. That letter was in German, and here was a foreigner mighty keen on getting hold of the other scrap of paper. Guess I wanted to know before I sold it, and I told him so, straight, and refused to sell."

Nelson Lee gave vent to an appreciative chuckle.

"No doubt you acted rightly," he said; "but not many men would have refused a hundred pounds for a dirty piece of paper. However, what did he say to that?"

"He said quite a lot of things, Mr. Lee, but most of 'em don't bear repeating. In fact, he swore in several different languages, so that I wasn't able to get the full benefit of his remarks. But I gathered he was threatening me, so I slammed the door in his face and let him cool down on the step."

"That was three days ago now?" asked Lee.

The lighterman nodded his head.

"Three days ago, Mr. Lee," he said. "And the same night I had rather a surprise. We 'ad a burglar. But the chap escaped when I went for him."

"Was anything stolen?"

"No, there was nothing much to steal, Mr. Lee. Besides, I've figured it out, and it strikes me that that wasn't no ordinary sort of burglar. He came to pinch that flask and the document that was inside—I'll take my oath on that!"

"And where was that flask, Pike?" asked the detective in a non-committal manner.

"Under my pillow all the time," rejoined the lighterman. "I sort of had the feeling that that fair-headed cove wouldn't be content to let matters stand where they were; that's why I shoved the bottle under my pillow: it was the safest place I could think of."

"It was certainly a wise precaution," admitted Lee. "Has anything else happened since the night of your mysterious nocturnal visitor?"

"Nothing much, sir; but for the last day or so I've had a sort of feeling that I'm being watched. It's made me feel rather creepy. I don't mind saying that I've got the wind up a bit. That's why I suddenly decided to come and see you about it, thinking you might be interested!"

JIM PIKE heaved a sigh of relief and sank back in his chair, glad to have got the matter off his chest. Nelson Lee sat silently turning the matter over in his mind for some moments, then he picked up the flask.

His companion was watching him earnestly.

"It ain't no ordinary flask, sir," he said presently. "It's a bit weighty, too. The casing seems like solid silver to me."

"You're no doubt right there," muttered Nelson Lee. "You say it was securely stoppered when you found it, and that the water hadn't got inside to any extent. I wonder it didn't float."

"There's more than one way of accounting for that, sir. In the first place, I think it's rather too heavy to float. Besides, it may have got left on the bank at low tide and pressed into the mud beneath a barge. Then it could easily have got buried deeper and deeper by the silt carried down by the river."

"Yes, that certainly seems a reasonable explanation," agreed the detective. "I notice that the stopper is lined with rubber, but it's all perished and broken. I suppose that happened when you unscrewed it?"

"That's right, sir. It was stuck so tight that I had to use a pair of grips to shift it."

Nelson Lee nodded and continued his examination. Jim Pike had cleaned up the flask, but the surface was badly tarnished by the water. The detective was able to make out an escutcheon bearing a coat of arms and supported by an eagle with wings expanded. On the lower canton of the shield was a faint tracery of lines which might possibly be the owner's initials. Nelson Lee picked up his reading glass, and, after a careful examination, he was able to read the letters "R. v. Z." The flask was a costly affair, and had, no doubt, been specially designed for the person whose initials it bore; or he may have received it as a present.

"How about the other piece of paper," Lee asked presently. "You said you hadn't parted with that."

"That's right, sir," said Jim Pike.

He put his hand beneath his blue jersey again and fished out a somewhat greasy pocket-book, then drew out a discoloured piece of paper.

Nelson Lee took the slip of paper, fingering it very gently, for the damp had rotted it and it was almost falling to shreds. He laid it in front of him and stared at it with knitted brows.

He saw immediately what it was. It was a printed form of receipt. The print was now a rusty colour, but still readable. It also contained some handwriting and two signatures, but the writing was so faded and discoloured as to be almost illegible. Lee picked up the glass and studied it in silence for some minutes, then took a piece of paper and made a copy of the document.

A gleam of understanding came into the detective's eyes. The meaning of the receipt was quite clear. On the 13th of Octo-

ber, 1890, a deed-box had been deposited with Goyle's Bank—a bank long since amalgamated with a larger firm—for safe custody. That deed-box was to be given up on production of the receipt, and that the box had not been claimed was evident from the finding of this receipt in the flask.

Then where was this box? Was it still in Goyle's Bank? And, if so, what were its contents? According to the receipt, it contained books and documents. Documents concerning what? That was the question. What information had that letter contained that had been stolen from Jim Pike? Had it referred to this receipt and the mysterious contents of the deed-box?

These were the questions that were occupying Lee's mind. He was suddenly deeply engrossed by the problem that confronted him. Here was a mystery a little more than forty years old, and he tried to visualise what was happening in the world when that box was taken to Goyle's Bank.

Then suddenly he heard Jim Pike speaking, and his mind came rushing back to the present.

"I don't think I can stay any longer, Mr. Lee," he was saying.

"Very well, Pike," rejoined Lee. "And what do you propose to do with regard to this document?"

"I guess it'll be safer to leave it with you," said the lighterman. "I don't quite fancy carrying it about with me after what has happened."

"You're content to let me follow the matter up and do as I think best?"

"You've got me, sir. That's the reason why I came along. If there is any dirty work going on behind the scenes, I guess you're the gent to rumble it."

"Well, I'll do my best, Pike," replied Lee, with a dry smile. "If you meet with any fresh trouble you'd better let me know immediately."

"You just bet I will, sir," said Pike emphatically.

He rose from his chair, but did not attempt to go. He stood there hesitating, as if he wanted to say something else and didn't know exactly how to put it. Lee noticed his hesitation and glanced up at him inquiringly.

"Get it off your chest," he said encouragingly.

"IT'S like this, sir," began Pike, with some embarrassment. "That fair-headed cove—he said his name was Stormberg—the German, I mean—called and offered me a hundred quid for that paper. Well, I ain't exactly putting it up to the highest bidder, but fair's fair, and if there's any money attached to it, then I reckon as how I've got a sort of claim to some of it. That's putting it frank and blunt."

Nelson Lee sat back and surveyed his candid client with a flicker of amusement.

"That's how I like to hear a man talk," he said. "I'm taking up this matter be-

cause it interests me, not because I think there's anything to be made out of it. From your point of view it's different, and if there's any financial gain accruing from it, you may trust me to see your claims pushed in the right direction."

Jim Pike held out his hand impulsively.

"That's the idea, sir!" he exclaimed. "I figured it all out to myself before I came here. I reckoned as how you'd deal straight. Your word's good enough for me. I ain't asking for anything in black and white."

"Then if you're satisfied, Pike, we'll say good-night."

The lighterman took his departure, and Nelson Lee leaned back idly in his chair. But no sooner had the outer door closed behind Jim Pike than the detective leaped into activity. He had quickly and deftly disguised himself with a moustache, a change of jacket, a shabby hat and threadbare mackintosh. Then he followed close on the heels of the lighterman.

It wasn't that he disbelieved the man, but he wanted to get a glimpse of the unknown foe. Jim Pike's cottage had already been burgled, and the man half guessed he was being watched. But, as far as Lee could make out, there was no foreigner shadowing Jim Pike from the Gray's Inn Road. But when the lighterman vanished into his riverside cottage, Lee saw the figure of the fair-haired German crouched behind, skulking in the shadows, watching intently.

The detective went close and had a good look at the man. From the description Pike had given there was no doubt that this watcher was Stormberg, the German. Nelson Lee would know him again, anyway.

He hung about there in case the German attempted to break into the cottage again, but nothing happened. Stormberg moved off after a time, and, leaping aboard a moving bus, vanished towards the West End. Consequently Nelson Lee prepared to return to Gray's Inn Road.

**N**IPPER was out of town that day. There had been some minor investigations to be carried out at Brighton—nothing of much importance—and Nelson Lee had sent Nipper down with Wolf, the Alsatian, to do the little jobs and take a day's holiday at the same time. Nipper obeyed willingly enough.

But when he got back fairly late that night he found the detective's housekeeper already in bed. He had his key, and let himself in, and then halted on the threshold, warned by a deep growl from Wolf. He held the dog in leash and listened. Someone was moving stealthily about the place—an unwanted visitor, too, to judge from the big dog's growls.

Nipper went up to the consulting-room quietly. He thrust open the door. Wolf leaped in, dragging the youngster after him. There were two men there, and before he had time to defend himself a large table-

cloth was flung over his head, and he received a blow that felled him to the floor.

Wolf's leash was entwined round Nipper's wrists, so that the big dog could do nothing to help his young master. He tugged and barked furiously, but two shadowy figures sprang across the room, out through the window.

Nipper lay there half dazed, but as soon as his senses fully returned he struggled his way from the folds of the table-cloth and came to his feet. Then, down below, a key rattled in the lock of the front door. Wolf did not growl. He knew who it was. And a moment later Nelson Lee strode into the room. He switched on the light, took one glance round and understood.

"Burglars, gov'nor," said Nipper. "Unfortunately, I never got a glimpse of them, either."

"Were they German?" asked the detective.

Nipper stared at the detective.

"Well, gov'nor," he replied, "now you come to mention it, I fancy I did hear one of them curse in a foreign language when he barked his shin against a chair."

Nelson Lee was looking grim.

"Then they were shadowing Jim Pike," he said.

"Who the dickens is Jim Pike?" asked Nipper.

The detective told him all there was to know about the lighterman and the strange flask, and the receipt.

"They were after that receipt. No doubt about that," said Nelson Lee. "But they haven't got it."

"Where is it, then, gov'nor?"

The detective strode across the room and peered behind one of the pictures.

"It's still there," he said, with a grim smile.

"But I don't quite get the hang of things, gov'nor. You seem to have plunged bang into a hotbed of mystery. What's it all about?"

"I don't know yet, Nipper. I'm just getting warmed up to the subject now. Everything centres round this deposit receipt and the mysterious deed-box. Goyle's Bank is now the Kingsway branch of the National Industrial Bank. We must go there first thing in the morning—they open at ten to the public—and find out if the box is still there. Can't do a thing now till the morning; but it will not matter much, for our slippery friend, Stormberg, doesn't even know the name of the bank, so far as I can make out. That's why he's so eager to get hold of the receipt."

"But what's in the box, gov'nor?"

"That remains to be seen, Nipper. I'm a little curious on that point myself. By the way, did you find the flask lying on my desk?"

"The flask, gov'nor? No, haven't seen anything of it."

"Well, I left it there before I followed after Jim Pike. No doubt our German visitors took it away with them. Perhaps

they hope to find the receipt still inside it. They'll find out their mistake when they come to look."

"D'you think they'll make another attempt to get hold of it?"

"I don't think they'll have the nerve to try. They'll find a rough house next time if they do. Now, I've several things to attend to. Don't forget we're due at Kingsway at ten o'clock in the morning, and not a minute later."

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Bank Mystery!

THE Kingsway Branch of the National Industrial Bank, Ltd., abuts on the west side of that broad and handsome thoroughfare. It stands upon the precise site once occupied by the old premises of Goyle's Bank, and when the latter was demolished, slightly more than thirty years ago, during the construction of Kingsway, the present pretentious building was erected in its place.

It was exactly a minute past ten the next morning when Nelson Lee, with his young assistant, pushed his way through the glass storm doors of the bank and crossed the marble vestibule to the pay-desk.

The somewhat elderly cashier was standing staring anxiously at the clock with an impatient frown on his face.

"I want to see the manager, please," said Mr. Lee.

"I'm sorry to say he hasn't arrived yet," replied the cashier, as he rubbed his bald head with a faint air of perplexity. "By an unfortunate coincidence the chief accountant is also late. Perhaps you will kindly wait—they can't be long now."

"Very well," said Nelson Lee, and began to walk slowly to and fro in front of the counter.

Some ten minutes elapsed. The cashier seemed now to be in a perfect stew of anxiety, and kept darting about the office and talking on the telephone. A number of black-coated clerks were lounging about at their desks and talking together in earnest whispers. It seemed that they could not get on with their work until the manager arrived. Several clients of the bank were also waiting by the pay-desk, impatient to cash their cheques and get on with their business.

Presently Nelson Lee managed to attract the cashier's attention again.

"Anything wrong?" he asked quietly.

"No, except that neither the manager nor the chief accountant has arrived yet. It seems a little strange."

Nelson Lee took his card from his pocket and handed it across the desk.

"Perhaps I can be of some help," he suggested.

The cashier read the name and glanced up quickly.

"Would you just go into the manager's room, Mr. Lee?" he said deferentially. "I'll explain the position to you."

"Just follow me, Nipper," muttered Lee, and made his way to the room indicated.

"It's like this, Mr. Lee," began the clerk, when they were inside, "we can't open the strong-room until the manager and the accountant arrive—they hold the two sets of keys. You see, it's quite a mess-up—can't do anything."

"And so the only thing to do is to await their arrival?" inquired Lee.

"Well, I've just got on the 'phone to head office. They're sending someone along with duplicate keys. Should be here in about ten minutes."

"Where do the two missing gentlemen live—I mean, are you sending along to find out what has happened to them?"

"Head office will. There'll be no end of hot air over this."

At that moment the telephone bell rang in the adjoining office, and the cashier darted outside to answer it.

"Funny they should both be absent, guv'nor," remarked Nipper.

Nelson Lee nodded, but made no reply. His brows were furrowed in thought. It seemed that he was striving to recall some fact that had all but slipped his memory. Suddenly he grasped Nipper by the arm.

"That night you came back from Brighton—last night—did you see anything lying on my desk?" he asked sharply.

"Why, yes, several things, guv'nor," said Nipper, somewhat startled by the detective's manner. "You know, I told you—your keys, and—"

"Yes, Nipper; but there was something else. The flask—and a slip of paper lying under the paperweight?"

"Not to my knowledge, guv'nor. Why?"

"I made a copy of that deposit receipt, Nipper, and left it on my desk. I'm certain of it now—I've only just remembered it."

"But it was only a copy, guv'nor. That's no use to anyone."

"But it gives that fellow Stormberg just the very information he required. This trouble here seems too significant to be a mere coincidence. How stupid of me to have left it lying there! I was in such a hurry to follow Pike—"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of the cashier.

"Mr. Broadhurst hasn't been home all night!" he exclaimed in a trembling voice.

"And who's Mr. Broadhurst?" asked Nelson Lee.

"The manager. His wife has just 'phoned up to know what has become of him. In no end of a stew about him."

"That's more than suspicious," remarked Lee. "Do you recollect if the manager left the office before you yesterday evening?"

"Yes, he did. But now I come to think of it, he certainly mentioned something about coming back later on. So did Mr. Minter—that's the accountant."

"And whose hats are those hanging behind the door?" asked Lee.

"Why, I hadn't noticed those before," muttered the cashier. "That's the manager's silk hat, I believe. And the other one belongs to Mr. Minter."

"Likewise, the umbrella and walking-stick, I presume?" said Lee.

"Yes, that's right. Strange that they should have left them here."

NELSON LEE made no comment, but Nipper's sharp eyes noticed a flicker of understanding pass across the detective's face. The detective had turned to the desk and was looking at an open box-file in which were a number of letters.

"Is this the manager's correspondence for yesterday?" he asked.

"That's so, Mr. Lee. Mostly letters from customers of the bank. He generally sorts it away the following morning."

"Would you regard it as a breach of confidence if I glanced through them?"

The cashier hesitated before replying.

"We are especially careful as a rule to protect our clients' private communications, Mr. Lee," he answered, "but I think the present circumstances justify waiving the rule. Look through them by all means if you think it might prove usefuk."

Nelson Lee nodded and began to glance casually through the contents of the file. They were mostly business letters from customers relating to stocks and shares, and asking for information on various matters connected with banking. Presently he drew out the following typewritten communication and began to read it through with knitted brows.

"Dear Mr. Broadhurst,—I am just about to catch the train to Dover, where I am meeting my Continental agent, who is bringing across a consignment of diamonds. I shall return to town immediately. I have transacted the business, and shall catch the train that arrives at Victoria at 8 p.m. I particularly do not wish to have these diamonds on my premises to-night, and for that reason trust that you will do me the favour of allowing me to deposit them in your safe on my return. I shall, therefore, bring them straight on to the bank from Victoria. Hoping you will be so kind as to grant me this favour, and apologising for the inconvenience I am causing you.—I am, Yours very truly,  
"P. G. TOWNLEY."

The letter was printed with a Hatton Garden address, and was dated for the previous day. Nelson Lee held it up to the light, and carefully scrutinised it for some moments with a slight frown on his face. Then he turned to the cashier, who was regarding him with silent attention.

"Do you know this signature?" he asked. The cashier took a brief glance and nodded his head.

"Yes," he said. "That is Mr. P. G. Townley, one of our best customers. Diamond merchant, of Hatton Garden."

"I see," said Lee, and replaced the letter in the file. He was about to make some further remark when the door opened and a police-officer walked in. Nelson Lee recognised him immediately as Inspector Bramley, of Scotland Yard. The inspector did not notice the detective at first, but addressed himself to the cashier.

"I'm Inspector Bramley, from the Yard," he said. "Your head office has just 'phoned

"To Mr. Williams, Bramley, when you appeared."

"Don't let me interrupt you. Fire away!"

"Just one more question, Mr. Williams, then," said Nelson Lee. "Can you tell me if the strong-room is ventilated?"

The inspector and the cashier both started at the question.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lee!" the latter replied. "There is an iron grating through which the air passes."



**Crouched in the shadows, Nelson Lee watched the lighterman vanish into the open doorway. Then, in the distance, the detective became aware that another figure watched the cottage—the figure of the mysterious foreigner!**

us to say your manager and assistant are both missing. What's all the trouble about?"

"The trouble is simply that they're missing, Bramley," put in Lee from his corner.

The inspector glanced sharply in his direction.

"You here, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed in surprise. "What's brought you along?"

"Business, Bramley."

"Oh, well, you seem to have dropped in at an opportune moment. What do you make of it?"

"Just putting a few questions to—er—"

"Williams," interjected the cashier.

"Come, come, Mr. Lee!" interrupted the inspector patronisingly. "When you've quite finished discussing the sanitary arrangements of the bank I should like to get to business."

"By all means, Bramley," said Lee mildly.

Inspector Bramley was about to put the usual questions to the cashier, when the door was suddenly opened, and two officials from the head office hurried in.

"This is a dickens of a mess, Williams," cried the foremost. "I wonder what the deuce has happened to Broadhurst and Minter? Ah, I see the Yard has arrived. And who—"

"Mr. Nelson Lee, waiting to see the manager on business," explained the cashier.

"How d'you do, Mr. Lee? I'm Brown, from head office; this is Mr. Fisher. What d'you think about it, Mr. Lee?"

Inspector Bramley immediately thought it time to assert his position.

"I'm Inspector Bramley, from the Yard," he said. "As I've got the matter in hand, perhaps you'd better discuss it with me."

"And so we will directly, inspector," said Mr. Brown. "But I should like to hear Mr. Lee's answer to my question."

Nelson Lee's rejoinder made the inspector snort with disdain.

"As the strong-room is none too well ventilated, Mr. Brown," he said quietly, "I should advise you to open it at the earliest moment and admit some fresh air."

"So we will," said Brown with a chuckle. "We've brought along the duplicate keys. Come on, Fisher! There's a queue lined up outside to cash their cheques."

They passed through the back office under the curious eyes of the clerks, and, going down a flight of stone stairs to the basement, turned to the left and saw facing them the solid massive iron door of the strong-room.

The door was a Chubb's patent, and was fitted with two locks. To open it two sets of keys had to be used, and neither set would open it without the other. Behind the solid outer door was another door, or grille, constructed of iron bars. This grille was fitted with only one lock, but it required the two sets of keys to open it.

Nelson Lee looked on with no small interest as the two head office officials inserted their keys in their respective locks and turned back the wards. Since reading the letter in the manager's file a sudden idea had come into his head, and he waited curiously to see if his surmise were correct or not.

After removing their keys, Brown pulled back the lock lever, and the dozen thick steel bolts shot out of their slots with a sharp clash. Then Fisher pulled the handle, and slowly and easily the great slab of iron swung back on its well-oiled hinges.

Hardly had the door swung open when a gasp of surprise burst from the onlookers, while they stared with complete astonishment into the interior of the strong-room. Only Nelson Lee seemed unimpressed by what he saw. He glanced at Nipper and shrugged his shoulders, as if the discovery was nothing more or less than what he had expected.

For, locked in the strong-room, and staring out from the bars of the grille, like two caged and frightened monkeys, were the missing manager and his chief accountant!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Bramley Gets a Shock!

**T**HE two men presented rather a ludicrous spectacle. Both were wild-eyed and dishevelled, and it was evident that their enforced confinement in the

atmosphere of the strong-room had driven them almost frantic, and they were too hysterical to explain matters at first. Nelson Lee took control of the situation and managed to get the two released men to the manager's office in order to calm them down.

All the time Inspector Bramley had been too astonished to take any action. He now suddenly remembered his official position, and, dragging himself together with a jerk, he hurried after the retreating manager, flourishing his notebook in his hand.

Mr. Broadhurst had flung himself into his swivel chair and buried his head in his hands—there was no doubt that he was thoroughly shaken by what he had undergone—while Mr. Minter, his companion in distress, seemed in almost as bad a plight. Lee offered them his brandy flask, which he always carried in case of emergency, and both gulped at the contents with great eagerness.

"Now, sir," began Inspector Bramley, "perhaps you will be good enough to acquaint me with what has happened."

The manager smoothed his thin hair with a gesture of distraction, and seemed too dejected to proceed.

"Perhaps, Mr. Broadhurst," suggested Lee, "you will allow me to give the inspector an account of what happened, and will kindly correct me if I make a mistake."

The manager was only too glad to be relieved of an irksome task to wonder what Nelson Lee should know about his experience; but Bramley was plainly disconcerted and annoyed.

"How do you know what happened, Lee?" he asked. "I don't understand what you mean."

"You will when I tell you, Bramley," rejoined the detective, and then addressed himself to the manager. "I understand, Mr. Broadhurst, that you received a letter yesterday from Mr. P. G. Townley, a customer of the bank, asking you to allow him to deposit some diamonds in the safe after the bank premises were closed for the day. Is that so?"

"Quite so," murmured the manager.

"And for that purpose you and Mr. Minter returned here about eight o'clock last night?"

Mr. Broadhurst nodded an affirmative, and Lee continued.

"I imagine," he said, "that Mr. Townley did not appear at eight, but that a man purporting to come from him arrived at that time with a parcel, containing the supposed diamonds, wishing to place the same in your safe custody."

"You are quite right, Mr. Lee," said the manager, "excepting that you have omitted to mention that this man was accompanied by a sergeant and a policeman. That completely took me off my guard. He said Mr. Townley had been detained on important business."

"I see, Mr. Broadhurst. Well, then, this stranger and the police-officers accompanied

you to the strong-room, together with Mr. Minter, here. Directly you were inside you found yourselves overpowered, your keys were taken from you, and, after a certain thing had happened, your assailants departed, leaving you imprisoned in the strong-room. Am I right?"

"You surprise me, Mr. Lee. That is certainly exactly what did take place. The two men whom I took to be policemen threatened us with revolvers. We could do nothing—although I carried a revolver myself, I could not get at it in time. We were made to face the wall, while the third man took charge of the keys. They remained in the strong-room for nearly an hour before they left."

"But how the deuce did you know this, Lee?" asked Bramley, in the deepest astonishment.

"By putting two and two together, Bramley," rejoined Lee.

"Then I take it," said Bramley, "that a robbery has been committed—a large quantity of money has been stolen from the safe?"

"We shall see," said Lee quietly. "I do not think that is the case. Do you know what the third man was doing, Mr. Broadhurst, while the two bogus policemen were compelling you and Mr. Minter to face the wall?"

"That is the most extraordinary part about it, Mr. Lee. We had unlocked the safe before they took our keys away, yet when Mr. Minter went through the contents afterwards we could find none of the bullion missing. As far as I can make out, there is nothing missing, but that will be proved when we go through the contents of the strong-room carefully. While we were both facing the wall we could hear the third man dragging the boxes away from the recess on the other side of the room, but if he took anything away we have not been able to discover what it was, and he left the strong-room without our seeing him."

"I should say this fellow Townley's got something to do with the matter," blustered Bramley. "I should like to know why he wrote that letter."

"He didn't write it, Bramley," retorted Lee. "It was a forgery!"

"A forgery!" exclaimed Mr. Broadhurst, and, sorting feverishly among his papers, presently drew out the letter in question.

"If you will hold that letter so that the light just glances on the surface, Mr. Broadhurst," suggested the detective, "you will observe that there are a number of faint markings on it. I think the signature is Mr. Townley's, but the original letter has been removed by a solvent of some kind, and the present one typed over it. It is certainly a very skilful piece of work."

The manager scrutinised the letter for some moments, then looked up.

"I believe you're right, Mr. Lee," he said. "I must get on to Mr. Townley and make sure."

"How about checking the money and seeing if everything's O.K. in the strong-room, Mr. Broadhurst," suggested Mr. Brown, of the head office.

"That's the ticket!" chimed in the inspector. "When we know what's been stolen we shall have something to go on."

"Very well," said Mr. Broadhurst; and he led the way to the strong-room again.

NELSON LEE, Nipper, and Inspector Bramley waited outside the grille and watched the manager and accountant go through the bags of bullion and carefully check over each item with the cash-book. Then they went through all the deeds and securities deposited in the strong-room for safe custody. This took a considerable time, and nearly an hour elapsed before they came out again.

"I don't believe there's a thing missing," said the manager, with an air of great relief. "It's most extraordinary—nothing seems to have been touched."

Bramley scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Must have got the wind up," he declared. "That's the only feasible explanation."

"I'm afraid you're wrong," said Nelson Lee. "The thieves went away with what they sought." He turned to the manager. "Can you tell me if you have a deed-box lying in the strong-room which was deposited with the bank by a Mr. Vincent Zimmern on the 13th of October, in the year 1890?"

Inspector Bramley stared curiously at Lee, wondering what he was driving at, while the two head-office men seemed rather impressed.

"Eighteen-ninety!" exclaimed Mr. Broadhurst. "More than forty years ago! Old Goyle's Bank stood here, then. Just fetch the Unclaimed Securities Book, Mr. Minter, please."

A moment later the accountant brought the musty leather volume along and placed it in his chief's hands. The manager turned back the faded leaves with puckered brows, and then paused at an entry.

"You are perfectly right, Mr. Lee," he said in surprise. "On the 13th of October, 1890, a deed-box containing books and documents were deposited with Goyle's Bank for safe custody by a Mr. Vincent Zimmern. As far as I can see, we have no record of it ever being claimed."

"Then it should be here now, Mr. Broadhurst?"

"Yes; it must be one of those boxes stowed away in the recess. That was once the strong-room of Goyle's Bank; the present strong-room was built round it when the new premises were erected."

"Then, Mr. Broadhurst, I should like to inspect that deed-box, if you will be good enough to get it out."

"Certainly, Mr. Lee. Come in and have a look."

The strong-room was unlocked again and they all crowded in. On the farther side was the recess which once formed part of

the strong-room of old Goyle's Bank. It was really a small compartment on its own, and was crowded with discarded ledgers and cash-books, and bulky brown paper parcels. Mr. Minter stooped down, and, pulling some of the litter aside, disclosed a large black deed-box, bearing in faded white paint the letters, "V. Z."

Nelson Lee's quick eye noticed immediately that someone had tampered with it quite recently, for the thick dust with which it was coated had been brushed off the lid in some places. He watched the accountant drag it out of the recess, and noted that he moved it with the utmost ease.

"This is evidently the box, Mr. Lee," said the manager; "although I must confess that I have never trouble to look at it before. In fact, I was unaware of its existence."

Nelson Lee knelt down and examined the lock.

"According to your records, Mr. Broadhurst," he said, "this box contains books and documents."

"That is the description, Mr. Lee."

"Then, since the lock has been forced open, Mr. Broadhurst," he said, "I am going to take the liberty of verifying that statement."

Nelson Lee thereupon lifted the lid and pointed inside. The box was empty!

"Whatever this box contained, Mr. Broadhurst," said Lee, "it is empty now, as you see. There is no doubt in my mind that its contents were removed last night while the two bogus policemen were covering you with their revolvers."

The manager stared at the box with evident perplexity.

"But what was their object?" he asked. "Why should they go to all that trouble to get hold of a few ancient books and documents? The box has been lying here for forty years; its contents could not have been as valuable as all that."

"Evidently your mysterious friends of last night placed some value on them," said the detective.

"Well, if that's all that's missing, Mr. Lee, I feel greatly relieved."

They left the strong-room.

"**B**EFORE I go, Mr. Broadhurst," said the detective, "I should like to glance through Mr. Townley's cheques for the last few days."

"You mean the cheques he has drawn on his account, Mr. Lee?"

"That is right, Mr. Broadhurst."

"Well, I don't think there's any harm in your doing that. I'll ask the ledger-keeper to send along Mr. Townley's pass-book."

When the pass-book was brought to him, Nelson Lee casually glanced through the cheques for the last few days, as if he were looking for something, then he handed them back again.

"Would you let me glance through Mr. Townley's cheques for the next few days?" he asked.

"Certainly, Mr. Lee. I'm sure that Mr. Townley wouldn't mind."

"Thank you. To make certain, I will see Mr. Townley myself. Then I will call in each day before the bank closes. And now I know you would like to see the back of me, Mr. Broadhurst, and get a little rest after last night's experience, so I will wish you good-day."

"Good-day, Mr. Lee. If I can help you any further I shall be only too pleased to do so."

Nelson Lee and Nipper passed through the outer office and stepped into Kingsway. They turned in the direction of Holborn and strode on for some distance without speaking. Nipper was not a little puzzled over certain aspects of the problem that confronted them, and soon began to put his thoughts into words.

"What d'you make of this business, guv'nor?"

"I've been caught napping, Nipper. No doubt that fellow Stormberg discovered the copy of that deposit receipt lying on my desk, and decided to get at the box without giving me the chance of butting in."

"Smart piece of work, guv'nor! I'd like to know what that deed box contained."

"So would I, Nipper."

"Do you think the matter's worth following up, guv'nor?"

"I do, Nipper. I think there's more in this than meets the eye. Besides, I don't like the idea of that fellow Stormberg getting the better of me like that."

"What's your next move, guv'nor?"

"There are several next moves, Nipper. One of them is to get on the track of those fellows who entered the bank last night. I am hoping that one of Mr. Townley's cheques will give me a clue there."

"How do you mean, guv'nor? I heard you mention the subject to Mr. Broadhurst just now, but I'm hanged if I could understand what you were driving at."

"I'll tell you, Nipper. There was something on that forged letter supposed to have come from Mr. Townley, the diamond merchant, which I noticed immediately, but did not say anything about at the time. There were two pin holes on the top left-hand corner."

"Two pin holes, guv'nor? And what d'you make of that?"

"Simply this, Nipper. My idea is that Mr. Townley sent a cheque to a certain person and enclosed a covering letter with it. The typewriting on the letter was obliterated by a solvent, or acid, the signature being left intact, and above it was typed the letter to Mr. Broadhurst. And I believe the cheque was pinned to the left-hand top corner of the letter. Do you follow my meaning?"

"So far, guv'nor, yes; but what about the cheque?"

"I'm looking for a cheque, Nipper, with two pinholes in it that coincide with those on the left-hand corner of the letter. That cheque will contain the name of the payee,

and it must have been the payee, or someone connected with him, who forged that letter. Once I know his name, Mr. Townley will be able to give me his address. No doubt that cheque will pass through the bank during the next day or two."

"I've got you, gov'nor; that's certainly a cute move on your part."

"Merely observation, Nipper," replied the detective. "And now I think we'll call on Mr. Townley and hear what he has to say."

## CHAPTER 4.

### Lee Obtains a Clue!

AT lunch time on the Thursday Nelson Lee turned up at the Gray's Inn Road and one glance at his face told Nipper that at last some progress had been made in the long search for a clue.

"You've hit on something, gov'nor, exclaimed Nipper.

"Yes, young 'un, I have! I've discovered a cheque with two pinholes on the top left-hand corner corresponding to the holes on forged letter."

"You have, gov'nor? And to whom was it made payable?"

"To a firm of commission agents in Burton's Court. Weese and Buzzon is the name of the firm."

"Doesn't sound exactly Anglo-Saxon, gov'nor."

"You're right, young 'un. They are exporters and importers as well, and have an office at Stockholm. Townley does shipping business with them, but not a lot of it. But let's have some grub and think it over."

Nelson Lee ate his lunch in thoughtful silence. It was not until he had finished and had charged his trusty pipe that he again referred to the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"The next move, Nipper," he said, "is to probe into the private affairs of Messrs. Weese and Buzzon. That letter must have been forged by someone connected with the firm, and I'm going to discover who it is."

"Better be on your guard, gov'nor. It's evident that they've got you spotted. If you go making inquiries there you'll give the show away!"

"I've thought of that, Nipper. I'll go there disguised. Pretend I'm touting for business for a firm of advertising agents. I'll tell the tale all right. Trust me for that!"

An hour later a somewhat shabby-looking man, with a straw-coloured moustache, side whiskers, and a growth of straggly hair on his chin, stood in the outer office of Messrs. Weese and Buzzon, while a clerk to whom he had just given his name disappeared into the manager's room.

The shabby man waited there with a look of stolid indifference on his face, yet all the while his keen eyes roved swiftly about the office, taking in all the details of the place, and observing the faces of the clerks who were sitting behind the desk.

Presently, the manager came out of his room and beckoned to him.

"What is it?" he asked irritably. "You can't see Mr. Weese—he's out."

"And when will he be back?" asked the shabby man.

"Don't know—some time to-night. But it's not a bit of good you seeing him. He has nothing to do with the business."

"Is Mr. Buzzon in?"

"No; he's at Stockholm—been there for some weeks. What d'you want?"

The shabby man ignored the question.

"What time did you say Mr. Weese would be back?" he asked.

"I tell you I don't know," blustered the other. "He sleeps here. Call at one o'clock in the morning. You might possibly find him in bed."

"And is Mr. Stormberg in?"

"Never heard of him. You've come to the wrong house, my man. Can't waste any more time on you."

And with that the manager entered his room again and banged the door.

The shabby man stepped out into Burton's Court with a thoughtful look on his face. As he turned into Cheapside a youth attached himself to his person, and strode on at his side.

"Any luck, gov'nor?" he asked.

"Nothing to speak of, young 'un," said Nelson Lee. "But Mr. Weese seems a rather mysterious person. He's a partner in the firm, yet he has nothing to do with the business, and sleeps on the premises. We must inquire further into the respectability and repute of our friend, Mr. Weese."

That same evening when dusk was falling the shabby man was again haunting the dingy precincts of Burton's Court. But this time he seemed to meet with more success, for presently he observed two men coming towards him from Cheapside. He passed them on the pavement and glanced casually into their faces. One of the men was undoubtedly Stormberg. Nelson Lee had no difficulty in identifying him. The other was a florid-faced man with iron-grey hair and a bushy moustache.

They were talking together in heated tones as if both were losing their tempers, and the shabby man watched them with a look of interest as they paused by the bookseller's shop and, opening the side door that led up to the premises of Weese and Buzzon's above disappeared inside.

The shabby man waited for a few moments and presently a light appeared in a room on the second floor, then he, too, made his way to the door on the right of the bookseller's shop, and with the aid of a skeleton key opened it.

He stood there listening intently. In front of him was a flight of stairs leading up above, but the place was in darkness, and no sound could be heard of the two men who had just entered. Burton's Court was also deserted, save for one solitary figure—the postman making his last delivery for the night.

Presently, the postman reached the open door at which the shabby man was standing.

"Any letters for Weese and Buzzon, postman?" asked the latter.

"Yes," said the postman, and thrusting a bundle into the other's hand, passed on with a muttered "good-night."

The shabby man seemed to arrive at a sudden decision. He stuffed the letters into his pocket, closed the door softly behind him and strode quickly away up Burton's Court.

Meanwhile, up in that room in Burton's Court the two men faced each other with fierce angry eyes. One was Stormberg, the German. The other was Mr. Weese, who had once been Count Dorflisch of the German Secret Service, although that was before the Great War.

"Let me warn you, Stormberg," Weese was saying thickly, "that I'm not the man to be trifled with. For your part in this business you've been paid, and paid pretty generously. Now, get out! I want no further dealings with you!"

"Easier said than done, count," sneered Stormberg. "You can't ride a high horse with me. Without my help you'd never have got hold of those memoirs. Now, I'm going halves—I'm not to be bought off with a paltry five hundred."

"Himmel!" blustered the count. "Once I would have had you flung out of my room. But beware, my friend! I have still some authority in certain quarters. Take yourself off while you're safe!"

"And supposing I go to the English police—what then?"

"What then, indeed! You'd get yourself into trouble, not me. You won't do anything of the kind, you'll clear out while you're safe like a wise man. Better not let this fellow Nelson Lee get on your track, or else he might make it rather warm for you."

Stormberg gave a little start of anxiety and changed colour. He was about to make some angry rejoinder, then, thinking better of it, turned abruptly on his heel and strode angrily from the room.

**A**T the Gray's Inn Road that night, Nelson Lee sat thoughtfully staring at a letter which he held in his hand.

It was addressed to Mr. William Smith, care of Joseph Weese, Esq., and read as follows:

"Sir,—I am interested to know more of Bismarck Memoirs, which you say your friend is about to publish, and shall be pleased to grant you the appointment you ask. If you can make it convenient to call here at nine p.m. on Thursday, I will arrange to convey you back to town in my car.

"Yours truly, VAVASOUR."

The notepaper bore a crest in the top right-hand corner, and below it was the address of the historic seat of the Vavasours—Mylton Towers, Kent.

For some time Nelson Lee sat there with the letter open before him. It was the only communication there that possessed any significance. All the others had been business letters.

It seemed extraordinary that such an aristocratic personage as Lord Vavasour should have any dealings with this Mr. Joseph Weese. The letter had been written by Lord Vavasour himself, for the writing was in the same hand as the signature. Yet one would have thought that his lordship's secretary would have dealt with such a small matter as this. Evidently, Lord Vavasour attached more importance to the matter than it seemed to warrant.

He wondered what was the nature of these Bismarck Memoirs. Why was Lord Vavasour so interested in them? Had they been stolen from the deed-box that had lain for forty years or more in the strong room of the National Industrial Bank? And, if so, what was the secret they contained that so affected Lord Vavasour's interests and made him so ready to grant an interview to this Mr. William Smith? Who was this Mr. William Smith? Were Mr. Joseph Weese and Mr. William Smith one and the same person? He felt fairly certain that they were.

Nelson Lee remembered then the flask with its coat of arms and the initials, R. v. Z. The facts were too consistent to be unrelated. Jim Pike's strange discovery had opened up a mystery that had lain dormant for forty years, and for some unknown reason Lord Vavasour was involved.

Nelson Lee presently replaced the letter in its envelope and stuck it down.

"Nipper," he said, "you might take these letters to Burton's Court, and drop them in the letter-box of Weese and Buzzon. Be on your guard and don't let anyone see what you're doing."

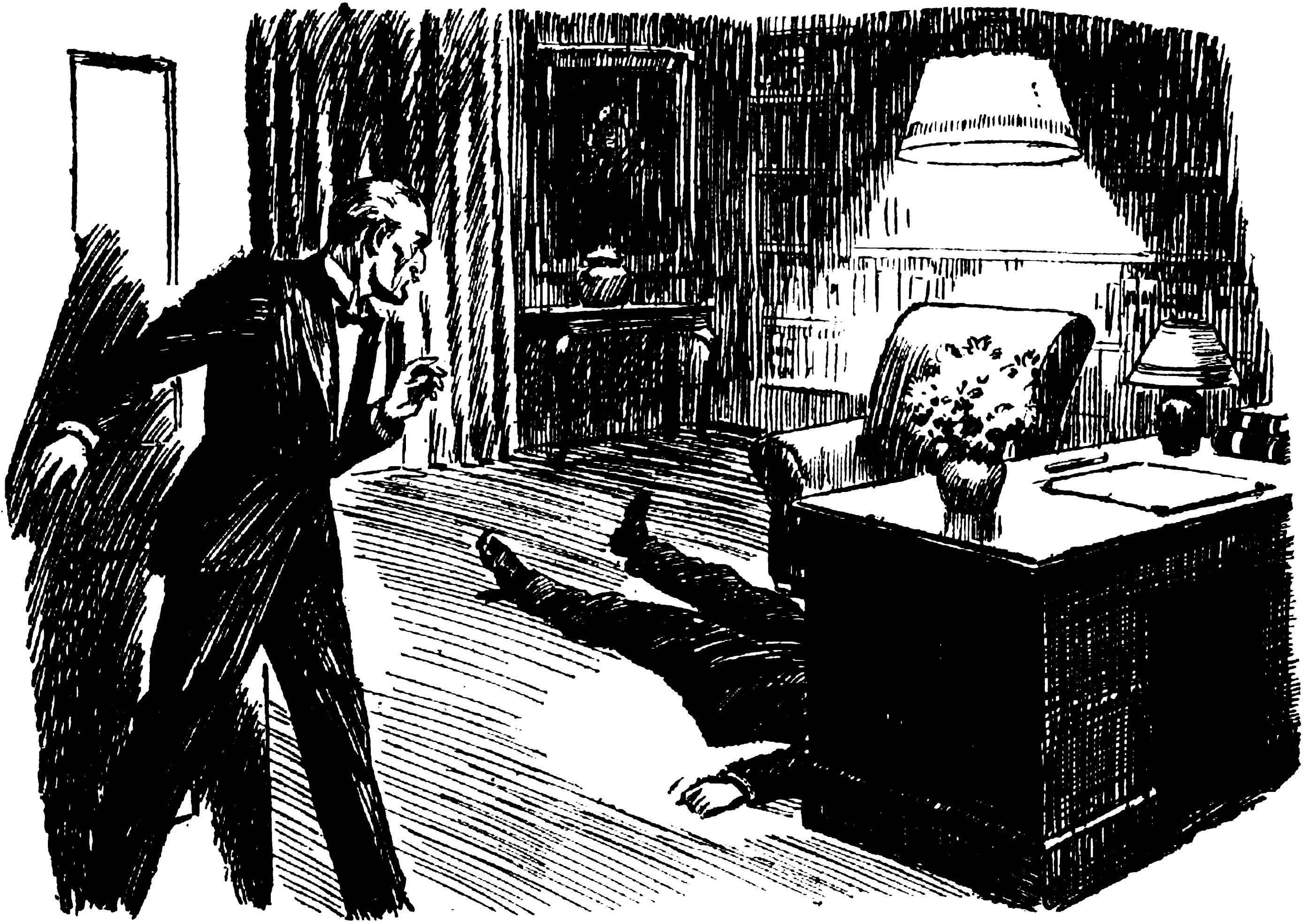
## CHAPTER 5.

### The Crime at Mylton Towers.

**I**N the rambling, oak-panelled library of Mylton Towers sat Lord Henry Vavasour, great financier and diplomat, and peer of England. In the inner councils of the world Lord Vavasour's ancient and historic name was something to be conjured with.

During the last few days Lord Vavasour had been entertaining some distinguished guests beneath his hospitable roof. Notable amongst these were a high official from Persia, a well-known French diplomat, and Sir Charles Hawke, representing the British Foreign Office.

With these gentlemen, Lord Vavasour had been closeted for the greater part of that day. What had transpired behind those closed doors no one could say with any degree of certainty. The utmost secrecy had been maintained, and the Press had been excluded, but the papers coupled Lord Vavasour's name with certain important financial operations,



Lord Vavasour drew back with a horrified cry. There, sprawled on the carpet, lay the stiff form of his strange visitor!

and hinted at the possible flotation by France and Britain of a new Persian loan.

The Persian agreement now lay in a drawer of his writing desk. But his lordship was thinking more of the Bismarck Memoirs than of that other document. His father had been ambassador at Vienna many years ago, and had delved in matters not altogether to his credit. If things which this Mr. William Smith alleged appeared in the Bismarck Memoirs, about to be published, apparently, then the good name of the Vavasours would be sullied for all time. Somehow, Lord Vavasour must have those memoirs destroyed. But how?

He sat there toying with the thin stiletto blade of the paper-knife that always lay on his desk, when the butler suddenly opened the door and stood on the threshold.

"Mr. William Smith, my lord!" he announced, and silently withdrew.

William Smith, otherwise Joseph Weese, otherwise Count Dorflisch, stood by the door and bowed gravely, as Lord Vavasour came quickly towards him.

"At your service, my lord," he said politely.

He now looked ten years younger than he had done the evening before. The heavy moustache had gone from his upper lip, his face was clean-shaven and his iron-grey hair was dyed black and parted in the middle with a somewhat youthful air. His hat and coat he had left outside in the hail, but he still held his walking-stick under his arm.

Lord Vavasour drew a chair up to the writing desk.

"Pray, be seated, Mr. Smith," he said, and sat down himself.

"Now, Mr. Smith," he said, in a cold, clear voice, as his visitor seated himself, "I will give you my undivided attention. You did not give any details in your letter of these secret memoirs. In the first place, who is your friend the publisher, and how did they come into his hands?"

"You will pardon me, my lord," replied Count Dorflisch, "if I say I am not disposed at the present moment to supply you with that information."

Lord Vavasour eyed his visitor in silence for a moment or two.

"Very well," he said serenely. "I will ask you another question. What makes you think that the memoirs of Prince Bismarck would interest me so profoundly?"

"Because, my lord," said Dorflisch slowly, "the memoirs contain certain interesting letters written by your father when he was in Vienna in 1880."

Lord Vavasour started quickly, then recovered his composure. What he feared had come about, then. The honour of the Vavasours was at stake.

"And the nature of these letters?" he asked quietly.

"State secrets divulged under the influence of drink," replied Dorflisch. "And many things you would not care to be discussed, my

lord, and out of which your father emerges with his good name sadly tarnished."

Lord Vavasour smoothed back his hair with a gesture of despair.

"The past is past," he said hoarsely. "My father is dead. I am innocent of these evil things, yet I should be the one to suffer. Why publish these things at all?"

"It is in your power to prevent publication—at a price, my lord," replied Dorflisch, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

Vavasour suddenly leant forward. His face was tense, his hands gripped the arms of his chair so that the knuckles showed white.

"Supposing your friend were made an offer," he said. "What then? Would he be disposed to sell?"

"If it is your intention to make a definite offer, my lord, I could at least put the matter before him."

Lord Vavasour rose unsteadily to his feet. His face was white and strained, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

The room seemed suddenly to have grown hot and stifling, and swaying slightly, he went across to the French windows and flung them open. For a few moments he stood there breathing quickly, with the cool night air fanning his face. Then he came slowly back to the writing desk again.

When he spoke his voice was tremulous with emotion.

"I will make this offer," he said. "Bring your friend along so that we can discuss the matter. In the meantime, I will give you my cheque for the sum you named in your letter to me in earnest of what agreement we may arrive at."

"We will make it a thousand pounds, my lord?"

"It shall be a thousand pounds, then. And your friend, the publisher? When will he come?"

"I will advise you of that, my lord."

"And in the meantime, you promise that these memoirs are kept a secret?"

"I promise that, my lord."

"One moment," said Lord Vavasour. "I will give you my cheque now."

He went quickly across the library, and opening a door at the further end passed into his study. Exactly three minutes later he came out again, holding in his hand the cheque which he had just made out.

He came noiselessly across the carpet and reached the writing-desk, then, with an exclamation of surprise, turned and glanced swiftly round the library. He had left Mr. William Smith sitting in the chair, yet he was not there now. He did not even appear to be in the library. He seemed suddenly to have vanished.

Utterly perplexed and bewildered, Lord Vavasour switched on the electric light and gave another searching glance around. Then he drew back, dismayed and horrified. For sprawled on the carpet beneath the swinging electric chandelier lay the still form of a man with the jewelled haft of the paper knife protruding from his breast.

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Strange Golfer!

A MAN in plus fours, sports jacket, cap and vivid pullover, stood at the lodge gates of Mylton Towers and pulled viciously at the handle of the clamorous entrance bell. Then he turned to the youthful figure who was standing a few paces away with the bag of golf clubs swung over his shoulder.

"That ought to wake 'em," he said.

The prophecy proved correct, for a few moment's later the lodge-keeper came limping to the gate.

"Good morning," said the golfer affably.

"Morning, sir!" replied the man, eyeing his importunate visitor inquisitively.

"Is his lordship in?" inquired the golfer.

"He's in, sir," replied the lodge-keeper, "but he ain't seeing nobody—not after what happened last night."

"But I think he'll see me! Will you, please, tell his lordship that Mr. Vincent Sterne wishes to see him on important business."

The lodge-keeper seemed to waver. A doubtful look had come into his face. He was about to make some reply when the clatter of horse's hoofs approaching up the drive caused him to glance over his shoulder.

"Here comes his lordship with his groom," he whispered. "Better not stand in his way."

The lodge-keeper drew back the heavy bolts and flung wide the iron gates. He performed the feat with such rapidity that the entrance was clear while the approaching horsemen were still some fifty yards away.

Lord Vavasour was mounted on a black thoroughbred, which he rode with the easy grace of the expert. His face was still pale and careworn. Behind him, on a grey filly, rode his groom.

The peer's gaze was fixed in front of him as he rode through the gate. He would have paid no heed to the man in the plus fours had not the latter stepped forward and, with a quick movement, grasped Lord Vavasour's stirrup iron and stared up into his face.

"My lord," he said, in a low voice that no one else overheard, "I am interested in the memoirs of Prince Bismarck."

A sudden rush of colour mounted to the peer's face, and as quickly faded away. He reined in his hunter and flung himself from the saddle.

"Shall we walk back, my lord?" suggested the golfer politely, motioning to the drive that led up to the house in the distance.

Without a word, Lord Vavasour turned and passed back through the gates. The lodge-keeper had been a silent witness of this puzzling scene; he stood now by the gate with his perplexed eyes fixed on the golfer. The latter smiled into his face as he passed closed to him.

"Better be careful about that foot," he muttered confidentially. "Mind you don't get it poisoned."

The lodge-keeper started again, and changed colour. Behind the thick rimmed spectacles

of the strange golfer two penetrating eyes looked out, and seemed to probe into the man's uneasy mind. Then the golfer had passed on with Lord Vavasour, leaving the lodge-keeper standing there, anxious and perturbed. The caddie took advantage of the man's temporary abstraction to pass through the gates, too, and began calmly to follow his employer down the drive.

When they had progressed thus for about a hundred yards, the golfer turned to his companion and remarked in casual, indifferent tones:

"How far are the links from here, my lord? Hope to get in a little golf while I'm down here."

Lord Vavasour turned swiftly on his questioner. There was now a hunted look in his dark, sombre eyes.

"Who are you?" he asked fiercely.

The golfer smiled blandly. He seemed not the slightest bit perturbed by his companion's passionate outburst.

"For the present my name is Vincent Sterne, my lord," he replied. "Vincent Sterne, a friend of Lord Henry Vavasour, down here for a few days' golf and staying beneath your lordship's hospitable roof. Can you repeat that correctly, my lord? It is very necessary for my purpose that you should make no mistake."

A look of great astonishment crept into the peer's eyes. For the moment the very audacity of the suggestion drove all other thoughts from his mind.

"For your purposes?" he asked. "And what are your purposes?"

"Curiosity, my lord—the crime that occurred last night in your lordship's library interests me. No doubt, your lordship will wish me to unravel it without your active assistance. I understand perfectly. But it is necessary to handle the matter delicately. The police must not discover too much. You agree with me there, my lord?"

"And why should I agree with you, Mr. Sterne?" asked Lord Vavasour, striving hard to conceal his perplexity and confusion. "What do you mean? I have not asked for your assistance. What business is it of yours?"

**M**R. VINCENT STERNE suddenly dropped his air of flippancy; he spoke now in earnest confidential tones.

"I will be frank, my lord," he said. "The Memoirs of Prince Bismarck must not become known. We must arrive at the ends of justice without dragging the story into the light of day. Tell me if I have judged your lordship's desires correctly?"

As he heard these words Lord Vavasour seemed to rouse himself from the mood of stoical indifference. His attitude of utter dejection changed to one of vague hopefulness, as if for the first time he dared to see some loophole from the fate that menaced him.

"It is impossible," he muttered. "I don't know who you are, why you are here and

what your motives are, but I tell you again, it is impossible. How you discovered your information I do not know, but it is of no use to you now. You are only wasting your time."

"Then we will waste no more time, my lord," said the golfer calmly. "Come, my lord, this is the way to the house, I think. You surely will not refuse to extend me your hospitality for a few days."

Lord Vavasour hesitated for a moment, then, shrugging his shoulders with a gesture of indifference, he strode on again up the drive.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Who is Vincent Sterne?

**M**YLTON TOWERS faced south-east and was only partly visible from the drive, until one passed the steep bend in the broad avenue of elms. Then the imposing frontage came into view, with its wide colonnaded terrace and its glittering facade of windows.

As the two men crossed the porch and entered the main hall, Superintendent McKoy of the local constabulary and the sergeant, who were standing together outside a door over on the right, glanced up and stared curiously at the newcomer.

"Send James to me," said the peer to a footman who was standing nearby.

The butler came quickly in answer to the summons, and met his master with an inquiring look.

"Mr. Vincent Sterne is staying here for a few days, James," said Lord Vavasour. "See that he has every attention."

"Very good, my lord," replied the butler, and, addressing himself to the golfer, added: "If you will follow me, sir, I will show you to your room."

"In five minutes, James," said the strange Mr. Sterne, in that pleasant confidential way of his. Then he laid his hand on Lord Vavasour's arm, just as the latter was about to depart unceremoniously. "One moment, my lord," he said coolly. "I am going to ask you to be good enough to show me the scene of last night's occurrence."

For an instant it seemed that the peer was about to make an angry rejoinder. Then, with a gesture of submission, he turned and walked towards the library door.

The superintendent was standing in front as if on guard. He made no effort to move aside at the approach of the two men, but regarded them with determination.

"Orders not to allow anyone to go into the library, my lord," he said.

Lord Vavasour would have turned away at that, but his friend, the golfer, was not so easily discouraged.

"Ah, good-morning, inspector——" he began, smiling blandly.

"Superintendent McKoy, sir," corrected the officer stiffly.

"Ah, yes; Superintendent McKoy—my mistake. His lordship is just going to show me over the library. Come in by all means, superintendent. We shall be greatly interested to hear your views on the strange happening that took place last night."

And, not in the least perturbed, the strange golfer had the audacity to take the key from the bewildered officer's hand, and calmly open the door, and ushered Lord Vavasour inside. When the superintendent had partly recovered from his bewilderment, Mr. Vincent Sterne was already standing by the writing desk, chatting intimately with Lord Vavasour.

"Come in, superintendent; and you, too, sergeant!" he drawled, smiling over his shoulder disarmingly. "Like to hear your views, you know—no hiding anything from you clever chaps of the force. What?"

And the superintendent, who a minute before, was inwardly fuming with outraged dignity, came forward as meek as any lamb, with the sergeant following sheepishly in his wake.

"Now, sergeant," continued Vincent Sterne, "I bet you've got something up your sleeve! No humbugging a chap of your intelligence. Just show us how the dead man was lying when you found him."

The sergeant suddenly swelled up with importance. Mr. Vincent Sterne was evidently not such a fool as he looked; at any rate, he knew a clever chap when he saw one—even when the clever chap happened to be wearing a helmet and a blue coat. The sergeant spread himself out on the carpet with alacrity, and, although even a clever chap doesn't look his best when reclining on the floor, he certainly endeavoured to look intelligent and live up to his sudden reputation.

"Nicely done, sergeant," drawled the golfer, and, in a loud aside to Lord Vavasour, he added: "By Jove, these fellows want some beating—what?" Then he continued reflectively: "And that's where you found him when you came out of that little room over there, my lord? Um-m! And now, superintendent, if you will be good enough to take this chair by the writing desk. Thank you!"

Superintendent McKoy was determined not to be beaten in intelligence by a mere sergeant. And the way in which he sat down on that chair proved conclusively that his intellectual faculties were undoubtedly of a very high order. In fact, so impressed did Mr. Vincent Sterne appear that he stood watching him for some moments in silent admiration. Then he began to drawl in a reflective voice:

"One chap was sitting in the chair like that when you entered that room, my lord, and when you came out, three minutes later—it was three minutes, wasn't it?—you found this other chap lying just where the sergeant is now."

Lord Vavasour gave a little start; the superintendent glance up quickly.

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, sir," he said. "If you'll pardon me for

saying so. There was only one gent in the room—at least, so—"

Vincent Sterne broke in with a slow, deliberate voice.

"My mistake, superintendent—of course. The gentleman was sitting in that chair like that, and when his lordship came out of the little room he found him lying on the floor like that. Only one gentleman, of course—Mr. William Smith, I think you said, my lord? Found him lying there with a paper-knife stuck in his chest, didn't you, sergeant?"

The sergeant suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Yes, sir. I found him lying just like this—on his back. And the knife was stuck just here like this. And when—"

"Just like that, sergeant—I see! By Jove! You fellows do notice things! How was it stuck, now? Straight out, like that?"

"Straight out, sir. It was—"

"It wasn't askew, sergeant? Didn't point upwards, for instance—or downwards?"

"No, sir; it just stuck straight out. Couldn't have—"

"Anyone would think, sergeant, that it had been thrust into him when he was lying on the floor. What?"

"That's right, sir; leastways—I don't know—"

"I see, sergeant. I've got you—exactly! It was your paper-knife, my lord—left it lying on your desk. What?"

Lord Vavasour nodded indifferently. The golfer suddenly turned his speculative eyes on the French windows.

"Doors over there open last night, my lord?" he queried casually.

"Yes—no," said Lord Vavasour hurriedly.

Vincent Sterne did not appear to notice the peer's hurried contradiction.

"Other chaps slips in here," he went on musingly, "steps on to the carpet—"

"There wasn't another—" began the superintendent, when the sergeant broke in from his lowly position on the floor.

"Then those doors were locked," he averred. "I thought of that directly I entered the room."

"By Jove!" muttered Vincent Sterne enthusiastically. "Can't get round you two chaps, anyway!" He turned to Lord Vavasour, and, pointing to the writing desk, asked with startling suddenness: "Keep all sorts of valuable things in that, my lord. Always locked, I suppose?"

Lord Vavasour went white to the lips. He gave vent to an inarticulate exclamation, and, turning on his heel, strode quickly from the room.

THE golfer chuckled softly.

"Upset," he said sympathetically.

"Enough to try a man's nerves—what? Thanks, sergeant—don't sit there any longer. We'll have a look round the place. By the way, where's the body?"

"In the conservatory, sir," replied the

superintendent. "The inquest is at three o'clock."

"Three o'clock," murmured Vincent Sterne, looking at his watch. "Um-m! Got two and a half hours. Well, let's trot along and have a look at him. By Jove, I must hear what you fellows have to say at the inquest this afternoon!"

Feeling strangely elated and important, the superintendent led the way out of the library and locked the door after him. The three of them crossed the hall and entered a long corridor. Before a glass door at the farther end stood a constable. He saw the three approaching and immediately unlocked the door.

"Here we are, sir," said the superintendent, pointing to the still form on the trestled table, which stood under the great glass dome of the conservatory. "Afraid there's not much to be learnt from him."

The golfer nodded, and, gently uncovering the body, stared curiously at the blanched face.

He gazed at the pallid features, the penetrating eyes behind the thick-rimmed spectacles narrowed thoughtfully, while his brows contracted in a significant manner.

"Funny little mark in the corner of the right eye, superintendent!" he drawled, looking up. "Bit bloodshot, too—notice it before?"

"Can't say that I have, sir," muttered the superintendent, bending over the dead man's face. "Expect he knocked against something when he fell."

"Nothing to knock against, superintendent," retorted the golfer, and turned his attention to the dead man's chest. "Um-m!" he murmured after a careful scrutiny. "Bit raw for the lungs. Just grazed them, I should think—pierced the diaphragm. Shouldn't have been fatal—not immediately."

"Stabbed in the lungs," insisted the super, not quite following the other's remarks. "Died from hæmorrhage. Can't get away from what the doctor says."

The golfer took no notice of the officer's interjection, but turned his attention again to the man's face. He took a magnifying-glass from his pocket and stared through it long and intently at the little abrasion in the corner of the eye.

Suddenly he looked up.

"Is that his hat and coat over there?" he asked.

"That's right, sir," replied the sergeant. "Butler says the gentleman left them behind him in the hall when he entered the library."

Mr. Sterne picked up the hat, glanced inside, then placed it on the dead man's head.

"Bit big for him," he drawled, and tossed it to one side.

Then he picked up the overcoat and measured the sleeve against the dead man's arm.

"Bit big for him," he muttered again, and also tossed that aside. "Let's get back into the library," he added, and neither of his

companions noticed the suppressed eagerness in his voice.

Back in the library once more, Mr. Vincent Sterne pursued his investigations with renewed zest.

"Now, sergeant, you just stand by the French windows, as if you had just entered. That's the style! And the superintendent is sitting in this chair by the desk. I guess this is child's play to you, super. What?"

The two men obeyed his injunctions as if his authority were undisputed. The strange golfer went on, drawing reflectively:

"Sergeant steps forward into the room. Superintendent ups with his little pop-gun—bang!—sergeant drops wallop on the floor. That's it, sergeant—that's where you found him—lying just there, wasn't he? By gum, you fellows ought to act for the pictures!"

Utterly mystified and confused, the two policemen watched Mr. Sterne without having the vaguest notion what he was driving at. He seemed to be drawing a mental bee-line from where the superintendent sat to where the sergeant stood, then continued it until it reached the left jamb of the French windows. A moment later he had crossed the room and was intently scrutinising the woodwork. Close up against the jamb of the window stood a large bookcase. Presently Mr. Sterne turned his attention to the closely packed volumes and drew out one from the shelf just above his head.

"Nasty splotch on that binding, super," he drawled, thrusting the book into McKoy's hand. Then he drew out another one. "Cover damaged," he muttered; "cloth grazed. Ought to take more care of them."

He drew out several volumes from that particular shelf, and, dropping them on the floor, thrust his hand in the space thus formed. Presently he withdrew it and held it out flat.

"Funny little piece of lead, super," he murmured. "Hollow one side—t'other side rounded, and with a little dent in it—what?"

McKoy was scratching his head with a bothered expression on his face.

"Don't quite get you, sir," he muttered. "That's not been fired from a gun or pistol. Doesn't signify anything. Looks as if it were a piece of pencil-holder. Besides, the poor chap was stabbed."

The sergeant's slow mind had also got to work by this time.

"You don't mean to say there was a shot fired, sir?" he asked. "It's impossible. Nobody heard a sound. Can't go shooting about the place without making some noise. I've made careful inquiries on that point."

"By Jove, can't catch you fellows tripping!" drawled the golfer, and he dropped the little piece of lead in his pocket and glanced at his watch.

"Must go now," he said hurriedly. "Lots to do! See you fellows again later on. So-long!"

And in a moment he had vanished.

## CHAPTER 8....

## Sterne's Ally!

**O**UTSIDE in the hall Vincent Sterne raised his voice.

"James!" he called.

The butler approached him with a look of offended dignity.

"Your rooms are ready, sir," he said, with cold politeness.

Vincent Sterne beamed on him affably.

"By Jove," he drawled, "you fellows are slick! Everything here seems to go by clockwork. Guess you know a bit about organising—what?"

The butler visibly melted, but he still endeavoured to preserve his dignity.

"If you will be good enough to follow me, sir," he said, and led the way up the broad staircase.

The golfer suddenly stopped on the first floor and stood gazing out of the window. He was now overlooking the rear of the house, and beyond him stretched beautifully kept lawns and extensively laid out flower beds. A little to the right was a wide enclosure of green turf as flat as a billiards table, and, rising from a clump of trees on one side of it, was the red roof of a building.

"What building is that?" he asked, turning his speculative eyes to the butler.

"That's the pavilion, sir."

"Anyone occupying it?" asked the golfer casually.

"Oh, no, sir! Not used very often."

"Well, I guess that'll suit me, James. We'll get along there straight away."

He turned to descend the stairs. The butler raised a remonstrative voice.

"But, sir——" he began.

Vincent Sterne broke in quickly.

"Must look after his lordship's interests, you know, James—what?" he whispered in an ingenious, confiding manner.

The butler's face was a study in conflicting emotions. His gaze fixed itself on the spectacled eyes of his extraordinary companion in silent perplexity; then he broke out excitedly:

"He couldn't have done it, sir! It a lie—an infernal lie!"

"Knew I could trust you, James," drawled Mr. Sterne. "Sure of it directly I saw your face. Bet you'll stick to his lordship through thick and thin! Rely on you, you know—what? Let's get along to the pavilion."

And, although a moment before the butler had fully determined that his strange visitor should occupy the rooms on the second floor that had been allotted to him, and none other, yet he now could not do enough to gratify Mr. Sterne's desires.

"It's quite snug in the pavilion, sir," he said. "I'll have the fires lighted immediately. Anything you want, sir—just let me know. This way, sir."

As they emerged from a door at the back of the house the golfer laid a detaining hand on his companion's arm.

"Don't trouble to come any further," he said. "I'll toddle off there alone. Come and see you again later on. Where's my caddie? Just send him along, will you?"

"Very good, sir! I'll go and find him myself."

Five minutes later the youth with the golf clubs slung over his shoulder pushed open the door of the pavilion and stalked in.

"Gosh, guv'nor," he exclaimed, "but this is quite a snug little dug-out!" and flung his clubs on the ground.

The golfer had removed his thick spectacles; his eyes were now keen, alert and penetrative.

"Phew, Nipper!" he exclaimed, in the familiar crisp voice of Nelson Lee. "This fungus on my chin gives me the itch. However, it's rather necessary to keep up the deception until I discover who's who."

"Any luck, guv'nor?"

"Not so bad," replied the detective. "There is a first-class mystery here, Nipper; and the affair really started, although we are the only ones who know it, with the fishing of that flask out of the mud of the River Thames by James Pike. From that our friend Stormberg obtained for his unknown employer the deed-box out of the bank, which, I surmise, must have contained the long-lost Bismarck Memoirs. In those memoirs are references to Lord Vavasour's father which would not make pleasant reading, so the unknown employer of Stormberg—possibly Mr. Joseph Weese—suggests to his lordship that they might arrange the matter for a certain sum of money."

"Blackmail," said Nipper thoughtfully.

"Undoubtedly, and if this job had succeeded, I dare say the possessor of the memoirs would have found others to blackmail. But this fellow called to see Lord Vavasour, and that same evening an unknown man is found dead in the library, stabbed with his lordship's paper-knife. Obviously, Lord Vavasour does not want the police to know about these Bismarck Memoirs. They would accuse him at once of murdering the man in a fit of helpless rage."

Nipper glanced up quickly.

"And didn't Lord Vavasour kill him?"

"That is only one of the questions we have to answer," said the detective. "I am sure in my mind that the victim was not killed by Lord Vavasour, neither did he die from the effects of the knife wound. And, further, Nipper, I doubt if he is the man who called on his lordship that evening. I am also inclined to think that his lordship is worrying about other matters besides murder and the Bismarck Memoirs. In the meantime, I want you to rush up to town and fetch Wolf. If you go up now you can get back by this evening."

"Right-ho, guv'nor! I'll shoot off now."

## CHAPTER 9.

## The Trail!

INSPECTOR BRAMLEY turned up at Mylton Towers for the inquest on the murdered man. Nelson Lee, alias Vincent Sterne, was rather surprised to see him, for he had scarcely thought it possible for the Scotland Yard man to connect the murdered man with the strange affair at the Kingsway Bank. On the other hand, Nelson Lee had no knowledge of what had been found in the pockets of the victim, and the police refused to divulge anything for the present.

At the inquest it appeared that the police case was directed against Lord Vavasour, and Lady Vavasour was obviously greatly distressed. The proceedings themselves were all cut and dried at first, although there was a certain amount of surprise when his lordship declared that Mr. William Smith was relatively unknown to him. It was plain that before long his lordship would be forced to explain why Mr. William Smith called upon him, or else be indicted for murder. The paper-knife was evidence that told against Lord Vavasour.

The doctor gave his evidence to prove death by stabbing, and the atmosphere of the temporary court became electrical. But Mr. Vincent Sterne rose from his chair and stood smiling blandly through his big spectacles.

"In the interests of Lord Vavasour, sir," he drawled, addressing the coroner. "I should like to put a few questions to Dr. Brown."

There was a craning of heads and a restless movement as all eyes turned to the strange bearded face with its heavy rimmed spectacles.

"What is your name, please?" asked the coroner.

"My name is Vincent Sterne."

"Go on, then, Mr. Sterne," he said in a doubtful tone of voice.

Vincent Sterne cleared his throat and turned his speculative gaze on Dr. Brown.

"In what position was the deceased, doctor?" he drawled, "when he was stabbed?"

"Naturally, on his feet, I should think," replied the doctor, somewhat perplexed.

"Right, doctor! And if he were standing on his feet would the thrust of the knife be upward or downward?"

"Downward, of course," said the doctor promptly.

The golfer turned to Sergeant Jenkins.

"Just a little question that I put to you to-day, sergeant," he drawled. "In what direction was the knife pointing when you found the body last night?"

"It was pointing straight out, sir," said the sergeant.

"It was not pointing upwards, sergeant, or downwards?"

"No, sir. It was just pointing straight out."

"That'll do, sergeant. Looks as if he had been stabbed when he was lying on the floor, doctor, doesn't it?"

"Possibly," muttered Dr. Brown, feeling a little perplexed.

"Right again, doctor," drawled Vincent Sterne. "Now, when a fellow has a nasty little knife stuck in his lungs would you expect to find hæmorrhage?"

"Certainly," said the doctor.

"Expect bleeding from the mouth, doctor?"

"Certainly."

"And did you find bleeding from the mouth, doctor?"

Dr. Brown seemed suddenly bothered and bewildered.

"No," he said slowly. "Can't say that I did."

Vincent Sterne beamed around affably.

"I guess we're making some headway, doctor," he drawled. "I guess we'll do a bit of speculating. Supposing the little knife went a weeny bit lower or stuck in his little diaphragm, would he die immediately?"

"Not necessarily," said Dr. Brown.

"Might linger on for an hour or so, doctor? What?"

"Certainly—if the knife missed the lungs and entered the diaphragm."

"Exactly, doctor!" drawled Vincent Sterne. "And if the knife entered the diaphragm, how would you account for the dying so suddenly?"

"The question is purely a supposition," said the doctor.

"Well, then, I guess we'll do some supposing, doctor. Supposing this man didn't die from hæmorrhage of the lungs, you'd have to search about for some other fatal cause, wouldn't you?"

"Yes; that is quite obvious."

"And did you find any other cause to account for his death?"

"No; the necessity did not arise."

"Didn't notice a funny little mark in the corner of the right eye, doctor?"

"No; I certainly did not."

"Didn't notice that the eye was bloodshot, doctor?"

The doctor shook his head desperately and wriggled uncomfortably in his seat.

"I did not," he mumbled.

Then, with dramatic suddenness he dropped his drawl and spoke in crisp, incisive tones:

"This man," he said, "was not killed by a stab from Lord Vavasour's paper-knife. The knife was thrust into him when he was lying on the floor already dead. He could not have died from hæmorrhage of the lungs for the knife did not puncture the lungs, it entered the diaphragm."

He paused and, resuming an air of complacency, beamed affably across at Dr. Brown. The doctor had half risen from his chair; his professional assurance had not entirely deserted him. He was shaken, perturbed and full of bewildered doubt.

"Then, how in the name of reason did he die?" he muttered.

"I guess that's a question that ought by right to be put to you, doctor," drawled Vincent Sterne, stroking his hairy chin reflectively. In my opinion, however, the deceased man was killed by a little shot that entered the inner commissure of the right eye and lodged in his brain. And I guess that's the reason why death was instantaneous—What?"

**T**HERE was a sensation in court. The superintendent made it clear that no shot was heard, but the facts were there, and the coroner even went to the trouble of taking another look at the body and seeing for himself the peculiar mark in the right eye. On the face of it, there was nothing else to be done but to adjourn the inquest to await further medical evidence. This gain of time was just what Nelson Lee wanted, and he was satisfied, while Lord Vavasour breathed again as a man who had been reprieved.

But Inspector Bramley was annoyed because the coroner had adjourned the inquiry without asking him for his evidence.

"Ah, well," he growled. "I can afford to wait. I don't care what they find out. I've got evidence that'll knock holes in all their theories."

"Guess you chaps from the Yard don't worry once you freeze on to a thing," drawled the golfer.

Bramley swung round impulsively, forgetting his usual reticence in his desire to show off his knowledge.

"I tell you, Mr. Sterne," he exclaimed, "that you're all on the wrong track. If the coroner had only called me I'd have dropped him a bombshell. There was something found in the murdered man's pockets—the key of a certain London bank. But you don't know what I'm driving at. It's a mighty significant discovery, I can assure you."

The speculative eyes behind the thick-rimmed glasses flickered once or twice in a startled manner, then began to twinkle with suppressed merriment.

"That's an interesting bit of news, inspector," drawled Mr. Sterne. "Wonder what that fellow was doing with the key of the Kingsway Branch of the National Industrial Bank in his pocket?"

Inspector Bramley fairly jumped off his feet with surprise.

"What's that?" he blurted.

"Guess you fellows from the Yard want some beating!" broke in Mr. Sterne, in his strange deliberate manner. And he calmly walked out of the room before Bramley could gather his scattered wits.

The inspector stood gazing speechlessly at the door for some moments after the golfer had vanished. Then he turned to McKoy.

"Now, who the dickens is that fellow?" he asked, in a voice of mingled exasperation and amazement.

As Mr. Vincent Sterne was descending the stairs he came face to face with the butler, who seemed to be lying in wait for him.

There were tears of gratitude in the man's eyes.

Sterne put his hand kindly on the old fellow's shoulder.

"Must look after his lordship's interests, you know, James!" he muttered confidently.

The butler appeared almost too affected to speak.

"If you'd only make use of me, sir," he choked. "Let me help."

"And so we will, James," drawled Mr. Sterne. "Just wanted to ask you a few little



**Suddenly Wolf sprang forward, as a dark figure, can suppressed an exclamation. There was evid**

things. D'you remember showing Mr. William Smith into the library last night?"

"Yes, sir. Quite distinctly."

"Do you remember him handing you his hat?"

"Yes, sir; it's in the conservatory now."

"And his overcoat?"

"Yes, that's there as well, sir!"

"And his—well, how about his umbrella, James?"

"Walking stick, sir. Didn't have an umbrella!"

"Well, his walking-stick, then. He handed you that, did he?"

"Yes, sir; that's with his hat and——"  
The butler paused suddenly and thoughtfully rubbed his nose. "Now I come to think of it, sir," he added slowly, "I didn't take his stick. He wouldn't let me have that for some reason—took it into the library with him."

"Was it a thickish sort of stick, James? Made of ebony—what?"

"Can't say that it was made of ebony, sir. Seemed more like bamboo!"

"Rather stout, straight cane, James?"



ying an electric torch, came into view. Nelson Lee only another night searcher on the scene!

"That's more like it, sir—yes."

"By Jove," drawled Vincent Sterne, "you do remember things, James! Just another little question. When you opened the door to Mr. William Smith you thought he looked rather a little man, didn't you?"

"No, sir; he was rather a heavily built man."

"Wearing a light grey suit, eh?"

"It was a dark-coloured suit, sir, as far as I remember. Didn't take much notice of it at the time, but I remember it was made of blue serge."

"Trousers and coat the same, James?"

"Yes, sir; that's right."

"Sort of quick-change artist," murmured Sterne to himself. "Chap lying in the conservatory is rather a little fellow, wearing a black coat and striped trousers. Um-m!"

They had now reached the bottom of the stairs. Vincent Sterne glanced speculatively at the butler again.

"Funny that walking-stick seems to have disappeared," he said. "Haven't come across it, I suppose?"

THE butler looked somewhat startled.

"I never thought of that, sir," he exclaimed. "No, I certainly haven't seen it."

"Don't suppose you will, James. But if you do happen to come across it, you know—understand?"

"You can trust me, sir. I won't blab."

"Just so, James, just so!" drawled Mr. Sterne. "Guess you and I will look after his lordship's interests, and see him through—what?"

He nodded affably and walked across to the doors. He did not make his way immediately towards the pavilion. He passed round to the back of the building and stood thoughtfully gazing up at the windows of the little room adjoining the library, which Lord Vavasour used as a study. Dusk was now falling, and the rambling old mansion was becoming shrouded in shadows. Presently he heard the sound of footsteps approaching, and the next moment Lady Vavasour and the lodge-keeper appeared round the wing of the building.

Lady Vavasour had flung a cloak over her thin silk gown; she seemed to be somewhat agitated. The lodge-keeper was muttering something in a sullen tone and was walking with a limp.

"You must not breathe a word about it, Bennett," Lady Vavasour exclaimed excitedly. "On no account——"

Then she suddenly caught sight of the two speculative eyes looking out of the thick-rimmed glasses, and, uttering a little frightened cry, drew back, breathing quickly.

Mr. Vincent Sterne raised his hat politely, muttered a few conventional words of apology and stalked off towards the pavilion. By the door Vincent Sterne drew out his pipe and began to fill it with an air of contemplation.

"Um-m!" he muttered. "Pretty little woman. 'You must not breathe a word about it!' Sounds fishy! Lodgekeeper limps, too! Woman—young—intrigue—bloodstains—lodgekeeper limping! What a jig-saw puzzle! Lots to discover yet, though!"

There was more in it than he had yet found out. Lord Vavasour had lost a State document, and the Foreign Office were agitated about it, and had sent their Secret Service man, James Stone, to Mylton Towers.

## CHAPTER 10.

## The King's Spy Again!

**N**IPPER had arrived back with Wolf, the big Alsatian, and was in the pavilion with Nelson Lee discussing the case. "It seems all of a tangle, gov'nor," he said.

"There's one thing that bothers me," put in the detective. "What's the matter with Lord Vavasour? The man's absolutely gone to pieces. Has he got something else on his mind? Remember, the Persian conference was held here yesterday—papers full of it. Has that anything to do with his strange demeanour? Made a cute shot to-day: asked him if he kept valuables in his writing-desk and if he kept it locked. The man nearly jumped out of his skin. I wonder what it means?"

Nelson Lee, clean-shaven, keen eyes, alert—gazed out of the pavilion windows across the wide, green billiards-table of grass. Wolf lolled at his feet—lazy, inert; in a camp-chair by his side Nipper was sitting. The moon had now risen—a full October moon—and in its silver light the broad acres of Mylton Park lay shimmering in silent tranquility.

The detective's eyes had narrowed; they were staring intently into the shrouded darkness.

"Who's that big fellow walking across there in the moonlight?" he asked suddenly.

Nipper craned his neck and tried to follow the direction of the detective's gaze.

"Gone!" muttered Lee. "A big fellow—something familiar about him. Wonder why he's nosing around here? Have to find out."

"What's going to happen next, gov'nor?"

"It's going to happen now, Nipper," said Lee, getting up. "Where's my face fungus and horned spectacles? Here they are. Come on, Wolf, old fellow."

"How about me, gov'nor. Can't I come, too?"

Nelson Lee turned the hairy bespectacled face of Vincent Sterne towards his assistant.

"Guess it's a shame to leave you here," he drawled. "Pity your face gives you away. Better stick a little bit of fluff on your top lip and get into corduroys and leggins. I'll get the butler to engage you as Binks, the new stable-boy. Join me outside his lordship's study window in ten minutes time. Got it?"

"Right-ho, gov— I mean, Mr. Sterne!" chuckled Nipper.

"Come on, Wolf!" said Mr. Sterne; and he opened the door of the pavilion and stepped outside.

Three hundred yards away rose the dark turrets of Mylton Towers.

With the Alsatian at his heels the golfer approached the south-west wing, entered the shadow of the great building and strolled on silently beneath its frowning walls. Presently he came round to the front, where the main entrance doors flung out a huge shaft of light on to the broad avenue of elms. As

he passed the open doors he glanced inside, casually, but did not alter his pace. A few moments later he rounded the corner to the left and stood outside the north-east wing.

The French windows of the library were almost in the centre of this wing; the study was now at the end, with its long window just round the corner. As Vincent Sterne moved stealthily along, he suddenly noticed a beam of white light playing about among the shrubbery that faced the library window. He came to a halt immediately and stood staring curiously into the darkness. At the same moment the Alsatian darted forward and disappeared in the shrubbery.

Vincent Sterne made a sudden exclamation as if to call the dog back, then, checking himself, abruptly moved slowly forward again. The next moment the beam of white light circled about him, and then shone full in his face. At the farther end of the thin shaft of light stood the big, vague form of a man.

"Guess you're hunting for moths," drawled the imperturbable Mr. Sterne. "Any sport going?"

The big man lowered his torch with a grunt.

"Bet you've strayed from the links," he said in a deep bass voice. And he stooped down and patted Wolf, who was showing all the signs of meeting an old acquaintance.

At the sound of that sonorous voice Vincent Sterne's hand went furtively to his chin. He seemed somewhat reassured at discovering his beard there, and dropped his hand to his side again.

The two men were now face to face. They seemed to be eyeing each other narrowly. The big man was still fondling Wolf's great head.

"Some dog—eh?" he growled.

"Good mouser," drawled Sterne.

The big man grunted again.

"What d'you call him?" he asked suddenly.

"W-Wilfred!" stammered Sterne. "Y'see, he likes rabbits."

The big man gave another grunt—rather a funny grunt this time.

"Had him long?" he queried.

"About a yard," drawled Vincent Sterne. And, quite indifferent to the big man's sullen growl, he strolled casually on his way.

When he had gone about half a dozen yards he glanced over his shoulder.

"Come here, W-Wilfred!" he drawled.

The Alsatian immediately left the big man and ran obediently to his master's feet.

Sterne passed round to the study window at the rear of the house. He was cautiously stroking his hairy chin and communing with himself.

"Now, what the dickens is he doing here?" he muttered. "Grubbing about outside the library windows, too. Um-m, more wheels within wheels! It seems as if the Foreign Office is interested in this crime; and that, in

its turn, must mean that the copy of the Persian agreement must have been stolen from his lordship's writing-desk. For what else should a Secret Service man be poking around here?"

He turned quickly as a step sounded behind him. It was Nipper.

"Say, boob," drawled Sterne, "guess you look some stable-boy—what?" Nipper—or, rather, Binks—choked back a gurgle. Sterne suddenly whispered in an energetic voice: "Nipper, James Stone, the King's Spy, is grubbing about round the corner. I just came across him. Wolf nearly gave the show away. I said his name was Wilfred. You get round there and keep an eye on Stone. I don't want him butting in and ruining my plans for to-night."

"I'll watch it!" replied Nipper, silently moving off.

Sterne took out a torch and stooped to the ground. He quickly found what he was looking for—the little brown bloodstain on the narrow strip of asphalt path immediately outside the study window. Wolf was now on the lead; he grasped him by the collar.

"What's this, boy?" he whispered. "Good boy! Have it!"

The Alsatian bristled excitedly and sniffed suspiciously at the brown stain. Then he circled round and round for a few moments and then came back to the spot again. This time he took three hard sniffs and then began to move away at right angles to the house with his nose to the ground.

"Won't do, boy," muttered Sterne, and he dragged the unwilling animal along to the right of the steps.

The Alsatian was suddenly all eagerness. He only paused a moment to sniff suspiciously at the spot, then passed through the door and began slowly to ascend the narrow stairs step by step.

"That's more like it," murmured Sterne, his eyes lighting up behind his thick glasses. "Good dog! Find him!"

Presently they reached the linen cupboard. This time the big dog did not require his master to point out the significant brown stain—he found it himself. The dog sniffed once or twice at the spot, then deliberately ignored the linen cupboard and began to ascend the stairs once more.

Vincent Sterne passed on down a narrow passage. A moment later he stepped out into the broad, sumptuous corridor of the third floor. The Alsatian paused, and was rubbing his sensitive nose on the thick Axminster carpet. Sterne stooped down and intently scrutinised the spot—it was a bloodstain again.

They went on once more—the dog eager and excited, his master attentive and curious. There were doors on the right and on the left of the corridor, and there was also a door at the end. In front of this door the Alsatian stopped again, and again his nose sniffed at the carpet. Sterne stooped down

again, and there again was another of those almost invisible brown spots.

He straightened himself and stood looking at the door in front of him, just as James the butler came along. Whoever had made those bloodstains had passed through that door. Sterne was about to take hold of the door-knob when the butler stopped him deferentially.

"That is Lady Vavasour's room, sir," he explained.

"Jove! Who'd ha' thought it!" drawled Sterne. "Well, James, we won't bother now. Listen, you'll find a new stable-boy downstairs—name of Binks. You engaged him yourself. No awkward questions asked."

"You can trust me, sir," replied James. "But I ought to tell you that several strangers have come to stay here, and no questions are to be asked."

"Thank you, James. That makes it all right about Binks."

FOR the next hour Sterne was busy. But in that time he made several interesting discoveries. One: that the blood-spots ran from the passage on the third floor, through the grounds to the centre of a small bridge over an ornamental lake. The rail of the bridge had been broken in the middle; also, the blood-spots had stopped there.

Also, that another pair of footprints came from the French windows of the library and ended at the bridge in what appeared to be a scuffle.

Several other things he discovered, and at last, tired and hungry, he returned to the pavilion.

He found Nipper already there when he arrived.

"Been looking all over the place for you, gov'nor," he said. "Stone isn't worrying about you—only messing about the shrubberies and flower-beds following a line of footprints. Have you made any discoveries?"

"A few, Nipper. Tell you about them by and by. Want to have a quiet think first. Don't interrupt me until I've finished."

Nipper nodded and watched the detective sink down into an easy-chair. He was familiar with Nelson Lee's moods. He knew it would be useless trying to question him until he chose to tell him everything of his own accord. He therefore restrained his curiosity and waited for the detective to break the silence.

It was now nearing midnight. Soon the chime of a distant church clock sounded on the still night air. The park was still bathed in the soft, silvery light of the moon. Everything was quiet and wonderfully peaceful; the broad bosom of the earth was hushed in silent slumber.

Suddenly the detective turned to Nipper.

"I've got it!" he said quietly. Then he paused and rose to his feet. "Wolf is still out there. Forgot all about him," he added.

He crossed over to the door, and, opening it, gave a peculiar low whistle to which the dog never failed to respond. Some distance off the Alsatian's sharp bark bit into the silence of the night; a moment later it sounded again, nearer, this time, and ended in a series of short, joyful yelps, as if the dog were pleased about something.

"Hallo!" muttered Sterne. "What's the matter?"

He strained his eyes and peered into the distance. Across the turf came the leaping form of the big dog, and close by was the graceful form of a woman. Vincent Sterne went out to meet them, and found himself face to face with a pretty French woman. He recognised her at once as Mademoiselle Marie Lepierre, one of the cleverest agents of the French Secret Service. She stared up at the golfer with amazement in her eyes.

"I—I thought I knew zis dog, m'sieur," she faltered. "But—it iss a mistake. I am sorry."

"That's all right," drawled Vincent Sterne, intent on concealing his identity. "Wilfred was always fond of the ladies."

Mademoiselle Marie turned and made her way back towards the house without arguing further, while Vincent Sterne and the dog rejoined Nipper in the pavilion.

"That supplies the missing link, Nipper," said Nelson Lee quietly. "James Stone and Mademoiselle Marie down here! It can only mean one thing: something of great importance has been stolen from Lord Vavasour—very likely the memorandum concerning the secret conference that was held here yesterday. I thought there must be something else to account for his strange demeanour. His manner this morning when I asked him if he kept his writing-desk locked aroused my suspicions. The man is in a nasty predicament—he dare not move one way or the other, for fear of disclosing the Bismarck Memoirs. We shall certainly have to look after his lordship's interests."



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## CHAPTER 11.

## Sterne Hustles Some!

**A**S Vincent Sterne was sauntering in the vicinity of the house next morning he passed James Stone, who seemed to be making for the ornamental lake. The two men exchanged brief nods, but did not stop to speak. Sterne went round the front of the building and up the marble steps to the vestibule.

Mademoiselle Marie Lepierre, clad in soft, flimsy draperies, and looking the picture of health and beauty, was just coming out. Sterne stepped aside and bowed gravely: the girl gave him a supercilious stare and passed on. Not appearing in the least rebuffed, the golfer crossed the vestibule and entered the lofty, imposing hall.

Superintendent McKoy was nosing about the library door, apparently still feverishly searching for fresh evidence of Lord Vavasour's guilt. When he saw Vincent Sterne approaching he seemed strangely embarrassed, and, with a mumbled statement about having some appointment, he hurriedly withdrew.

Sterne passed the broad staircase to the farther end of the hall, and a few moments later he stepped out to the back of the house by the door leading to the servants' quarters. Bennett, the lodgekeeper, was waiting on the asphalt path outside. He started violently at seeing the golfer's hairy face and immediately beat a hasty retreat.

Vincent Sterne came back into the hall again and met the butler coming from a room on the left.

"Morning, James!" he drawled. "Guess you're the only fellow here that thinks I'm not a great big stiff! Just a little word about a little matter."

He drew his companion into the alcove below the staircase and began again.

"D'you remember what sort of boots that guy in the conservatory is wearing, James?" he asked.

"The dead man, sir?"

"Sure, James. I reckon that's his name. Did he have sort of rubber things on his boots?"

"Rubber heels, sir? Yes, he did."

"D'you remember, James, if there's a li'l chunk out of one of 'em—just as if somebody had taken a bite of rubber with his teeth?"

"I believe there is, sir. But if you'll wait a moment I'll slip along to the conservatory and make certain."

"Sure! I'll stay right here, James, till you come back."

The butler hastened off on his errand. The hall was now empty save for the presence of the golfer. As he stood there in the alcove meditatively stroking his chin, he fancied he heard a light step over his head. A moment later Lady Vavasour came swiftly down the stairs.

She stood a moment at the bottom of the staircase, breathing quickly—her blue eyes dark-rimmed through lack of sleep, her

delicate face pale and wan and pallid—then she turned and stepped towards the passage that led to the back door. And at that moment she caught sight of Vincent Sterne's speculative eyes regarding her from the shadow of the alcove.

She uttered a little frightened cry and clung to the banisters for support, and a pink envelope fluttered from her hand to the floor. Sterne stepped forward, bowed politely, and, stooping down, picked up the letter.

"Guess I can save your ladyship the trouble," he drawled. "Got a li'l appointment with Bennett; reckon I'll take it along to him right now."

Lady Vavasour's wide blue eyes were fixed on him in silent fascination. She struggled to speak, but no sound came from her lips. Then, with a weak gesture of dissent, she turned and went slowly up the broad staircase again.

The butler returned a moment later.

"You are quite right, sir," he said; "there is a little piece chipped out of the left rubber heel."

"Thanks, James! Just wanted to know. Reckon that's about all for the present."

He nodded affably and left the house by the back entrance. Bennett was nowhere in sight. Sterne glanced at the pink missive which he held in his hand. It was marked private, and addressed simply to Charles Descovet, Esq., in Lady Vavasour's handwriting; but no other address was given.

"Chance shot!" muttered Sterne to himself. "Wonder if I'm wrong, after all?"

**H**E went quietly to the end of the house and turned the corner. The lodgekeeper was standing against the wall, as if he expected someone. Sterne was on him before he had time to fly. The golfer pointed dramatically to his left boot.

"Get off your foot!" he exclaimed. "You're standing on it."

So startled was the lodgekeeper that he actually endeavoured to get off his foot, with disastrous consequences to himself.

"Guess you're having to look after that foot," said Sterne, lapsing into his drawl once more. "Here's a li'l document for you—reckon you know where Mr. Charles Descovet resides—what?"

Bennett took the pink envelope as if he thought it might contain an infernal machine, glanced at the name and dropped it into his pocket, then stood glowering suspiciously at the golfer.

"Well, I guess you'd better be getting a move on with that pink envelope," drawled Sterne. "Reckon her ladyship'll be expecting an answer right now."

Without a word the lodgekeeper swung round and started off in the opposite direction.

"Stop!" cried Sterne suddenly. "Reckon I know a shorter route than that to the lodge gates. Just come over here and watch my step!"

He stepped off the asphalt on to the little narrow gravel path that led through the shrubbery. Bennett stood watching him with a startled look on his face, but made no attempt to follow him.

"Well?" queried Sterne, looking back. "Is there anything you don't cotton? Guess you don't know the bridge over the ornamental lake—what?"

A hunted look came into Bennett's eyes. He made a frenzied movement with his hand.

"Hang you!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I tell you I won't come that way. It was an accident. He shot me in the foot. I hit him in self-defence, then——" He paused in his wild rush of words. He was shaking all over, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead. "Who are you, curse you?" he demanded. "What concern is it of yours?"

Vincent Sterne came slowly back and placed his hand on the man's arm in a friendly manner.

"Just a li'l question," he drawled. "That li'l pink letter—guess you've often seen 'em before—what?"

"And what if I have?"

"Sure, nothing whatever! But I reckon Mr. Charles Descovet does business with her ladyship, and you're the postman. Awful row if his lordship found out."

"What about it? Why should you come nosing around?"

"Guess you were playing postman the night before last. Lady Vavasour very fond of bridge, gets into debt; Lord Vavasour gets nasty about paying up. Her ladyship borrows, and is in a mess before she can look round. Charles Descovet, Esq.—nasty money-lending gent, making big profit by playing on Lady Vavasour's fears, is threatening to split if she doesn't pay up. Secrecy wanted here. You act the postman; but you met a fellow on the bridge that night—what?"

"I tell you——" began Bennett angrily, then he suddenly seemed to lose his nerve. "I'll make a clean breast of it, sir," he said appealingly. "I'll tell you exactly how——"

"No, you don't," interrupted the golfer. "Guess this child's not asking for family secrets. I can fill in the blanks for myself. Reckon you'd best keep a stiff upper lip, my son, and don't go shouting the odds. Plenty of trouble here, without making more. I'll call you when I want your evidence, and then I'll only ask you to say yes or no to my questions—and nothing more than that."

And leaving the bewildered lodgekeeper standing there with his mouth open, Sterne hurried off down the narrow gravel path.

When he came in sight of the ornamental lake he noticed a little boat rowing about on its surface. In it two people were seated. He recognised them immediately, although he was still some distance off. The man at the oars was James Stone, his companion was Mademoiselle Marie.

Sterne made his way on to the bridge, and, hanging over the side, began to scru-

tinise the water below. The lake was evidently fed by a small stream which entered at one end and flowed out at the other. Beneath the bridge a wire netting had been fixed to catch the surface scum of the water as it flowed sluggishly beneath. It was among the debris here collected that Sterne hoped to find the thing he sought.

Presently he saw it—a stout cane walking-stick that bobbed up and down on the water and tried ceaselessly to force a passage through the narrow holes in the wire netting. He could not reach it from where he stood, and waited until the rowing-boat was near.

"Say, bo'!" he called. "Guess I'll ask you to do me a li'l favour. Dropped my l'il walking-stick overboard. Can I trouble you to hand it right here now?"

The King's Spy twisted the boat round and sent her alongside with a vigorous thrust from his powerful arms. Then he leant over the side and flung the stick up to the golfer on the bridge.

"Thanks," drawled Sterne. "Reckon you've save me getting my feet wet."

He tucked the stick under his arm and began to walk back along the bridge as the boat pulled for the shore. Neither occupant took any further notice of him. James Stone sent the boat forward with vigorous jerks. He seemed strangely elated over something. On the seat in front of Marie was a wad of foolscap paper, saturated with water, on which the ink ran in illegible scrawls and twists. Marie had one hand resting on it as if she were afraid of letting it out of her grasp.

A curious look came into Sterne's eyes as his gaze rested on this wad of paper.

"Guess you've hooked some queer fish there," he said. "What name d'you call it?"

James Stone glanced up momentarily.

"Oddfish," he grunted. "A species of papyrus. Catch 'em with quill pens baited with blue black. Bet you can't beat that in America."

"Sure we can't, sir," drawled Sterne. "Maybe we don't want to. Queer ink marks, though. Reminds me of a Persian cat!"

He had reached the end of the bridge by this time. The stick was still tucked under his arm. He pulled it out and stared at it critically, then unscrewed the ferrule. Suddenly he tucked it under his arm again and stroked his whiskers reflectively.

"By Jove," he murmured, "I'll try it! It's bound to be right—there's no other possible explanation."

He stepped off the bridge and began to walk swiftly along the gravel path. Presently he broke into a run, and he did not stop again until he had reached the pavilion.

"NIPPER," he said, bursting into the room, "I'm going off to pay a visit to Weese and Buzzon, in Burton's Court. Going up to town straight away. Be back early this afternoon. Sit tight and answer no questions until I return."

The next moment he had vanished, leaving his young assistant bewildered and mystified.

Ten minutes later Vincent Sterne arrived at the one and only street of the little village of Mylton, took his big car out of the shed adjoining the one and only public-house of the village, started up the engine, jumped in and sped away on the main road to London. Exactly an hour later the car was purring its way up Cheapside. At the wheel sat—not Vincent Sterne, but Nelson Lee, still clad in the plus fours, sports jacket, vivid pullover and cap.

At the same time a message was received by the Foreign Office to the effect that the transcript of the Persian agreement had been recovered. A similar message reached the French Government, and the news flashed throughout Europe, and the diplomats heaved sighs of relief.

But Nelson Lee was more concerned with the Bismarck Memoirs than the Persian agreement!

## CHAPTER 12.

### The Bismarck Memoirs!

AT three o'clock that afternoon the detective's big car drew up in front of the iron gates of Mylton Towers, and, in response to its clamorous hooter, Bennett came hurrying out of the lodge. When he saw Vincent Sterne sitting at the wheel he could not open the gates quickly enough.

Sterne put in the clutch and slowly entered the drive.

"Want you up at the house in half an hour's time, Bennett," he said, "just to give a li'l evidence."

He did not wait for the man to reply, but shot forward up the drive. He stopped again at the bend just before the house came in view and drew up in the shade of the elms. Dragging a heavy leather bag from underneath the seat, he climbed out and went quickly across the grass to the rear of the house. He entered by the back door and went in search of the butler.

He found that trusty old servant on the second-floor corridor and beckoned him in a confidential manner.

"James," he drawled. "Just another li'l matter. Can you tell me anything about Mr. Charles Descovet?"

The butler gave him a quick glance of understanding.

"Not much known about him, sir," he said. "Lives at the big house about a mile down the road. Entertains a lot, though no one knows where he gets his money from."

"Just so, James. He plays bridge a lot with people, and always wins, then gets other people to write out IOU's and runs them for the money and charges interest. A nasty money-grabber, James. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid you are right."

"Some people reckon he cheats."

"Yes, sir. I've heard it said quite a lot."

"And her ladyship is fond of bridge, James? Got into Descovet's clutches that way, and is being bled white. Lord Vavasour hates bridge debts, and won't pay any more. Lady Vavasour afraid to make a clean breast of it. Am I right, James?"

The butler gazed meaningfully into the speculative eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses, then lowered his own in evident embarrassment.

"Just so, James, just so," said Sterne quickly. "Family matters. No concern of yours. No concern of mine. Won't breathe a word to a soul, will we? And now, I guess I'll have a li'l word with his lordship if you'll just lead the way."

Lord Vavasour was seated in the little room at the end of the first-floor corridor in which he was wont to bury himself when faced by some perplexing financial problem. He lifted a taciturn, morose face when the butler entered and announced Mr. Vincent Sterne.

Sterne did not wait to be invited, but followed the butler in. When the latter had left he carefully closed the door and stood with his back to it.

"Beggin' your lordship's pardon for the intrusion," he said, "but there's just a li'l matter that I guess you'll find a bit interesting. This li'l bag contains the Bismarck Memoirs. There's only a few fellows who've had the privilege of reading 'em, and I guess they won't split because they're dead. No one'll be wiser if you just sort of censor them before they're likely to become public property."

Lord Vavasour made a noise that sounded like a stifled sob. He was trembling with emotion.

Sterne hastily opened the door.

"Perhaps if your lordship can spare a moment to come down in the library in about half an hour's time, you'll be rather interested to know just what happened the night before last."

And not waiting for Lord Vavasour's reply he stepped out into the corridor and closed the door.

As he walked away he heard the key turn in the lock. Sterne smiled to himself in a satisfied sort of way and went downstairs. Lord Vavasour was already busy destroying the Bismarck Memoirs.

Inspector Bramley, looking very hot and excited, stood in the hall. At that moment McKoy came hurrying to meet him.

"Hi!" exclaimed Bramley excitedly. "Has Nelson Lee arrived yet?"

"Nelson Lee?" echoed McKoy. "What d'you mean?"

James Stone popped his head out of the library.

"What's that about Nelson Lee?" he asked.

"Why," exclaimed Bramley, "he's coming here at four. 'Phoned up the Yard." A sudden suspicion flashed across his mind. "If this is one of his little jokes," he growled, "by Heaven, he'll suffer for it!"

"Bet I've got a share in that little joke, inspector," said the King's spy. "Here's a telegram I received from London an hour ago. 'With Nelson Lee's compliments. Will be at Mylton Towers at four o'clock.' That's why I'm still here, although my job is really finished."

Mademoiselle Marie had now joined the group. She was holding a slip of paper in her hand.

"I also had a message from M'sieur Lee," she said. "It is just the same, m'sieur, the inspector."

"The deuce you have!" muttered Bramley. "Then what the——"

"Guess you're a li'l too previous, inspector," drawled Sterne from the stairs. "It's only about a quarter-past three."

And, beaming affably, he went out by the back door.

Nipper was standing at the pavilion door. He hurried inside when he saw the detective approaching, and waited there breathlessly.

"Why did you rush off to London, guv'nor?" he asked. "What's it all about? I can't get the hang of things."

Sterne dropped down in a camp chair.

"Put my theory to the test, Nipper. It proved absolutely right. Just committed a burglary at Burton's Court. Sneaked the Bismarck Memoirs from the safe of Mr. Joseph Weese. Nearly got arrested; escaped by the skin of my teeth. Lord Vavasour has

the Memoirs. Bet there'll be no incriminating documents left by the time he has finished with them."

"But——" began Nipper.

Sterne stopped him with a gesture.

"See that niblick in the bag over there?" he said. "Just pick it up, walk round the house with it several times, go into the hall at half-past three, walk straight up to Mr. Vincent Sterne, and say: 'Here's the niblick you broke, sir!' Leave the rest to me. Go!"

Nipper picked up the golf-club and went.

At twenty-seven minutes past three Vincent Sterne knocked at the door of the little room at the end of the first-floor corridor. Lord Vavasour himself opened the door. His face was now transformed; he was the proud, self-possessed aristocrat once more. He grasped Sterne by the hand and pulled him inside.

"Mr. Sterne," he said, still grasping his hand. "I will not ask who you are. You came down here unknown and uninvited; you demanded my hospitality and took my friendship for granted. Let me assure you now that I am honoured to have you as a guest, that my humble roof is always at your disposal, and that I crave your friendship as a very great favour."

For the moment it seemed that Vincent Sterne had lost his habitual self-assurance. He seemed strangely embarrassed and ill at ease.



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"My lord," he said, with a note of earnestness, "I appreciate your kind sentiments, and thank you for them. The affair that might have ruined and disgraced your good name has gone for ever like a summer cloud. Might I suggest—dare I suggest—that in your natural joy you should pardon the follies of one dear to you—put matters straight, once and for all. I am in a position to tell you that her ladyship has suffered these past few days as much as you. That warning will prevent any repetition of her past folly."

Lord Vavasour's face was strangely stern, but he nodded his head.

"I understand," he said. "She asked for one last chance. She shall have it gladly. Leave that to me."

"But," continued Mr. Vincent Sterne, "there is one little matter that has yet to be cleared up—the mysterious crime that took place in your library two nights ago. With your lordship's permission and assistance I should like to explain how that occurred to all those interested in the matter."

An anxious look came into Lord Vavasour's face. Sterne was quick to notice it.

"Let me assure you, my lord," he said, "that the explanation need cause you no anxiety. The thing that should not be said will be left unsaid."

"Very well, Mr. Sterne," rejoined the peer quietly. "I am entirely in your hands. Do as you wish."

"Then we will go down into the library at once, my lord."

**B**RAMLEY was standing in the hall talking to McKoy when the two came down the broad staircase. He drew in his breath and blinked rapidly when he saw Lord Vavasour arm in arm with the golfer. They certainly looked an ill-assorted pair—the proud aristocratic peer and his companion in the horn-rimmed spectacles, the plus fours, the sports jacket and vivid pull-over. Bennett, the lodge-keeper, was standing in the vestibule looking the picture of woe and misery.

At the library door Lord Vavasour turned and glanced towards the two police officers.

"If you will be good enough to come into the library," he said quietly, "Mr. Sterne will have something interesting to say."

And he entered the room, politely motioning his companion in first.

James Stone and Mademoiselle Marie were seated at the far end in earnest conversation. They rose immediately when they saw who had entered.

"I beg your pardon," said Lord Vavasour in his grand dignified manner. "I did not know you were here. Allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Vincent Sterne. Perhaps you have already made his acquaintance?"

"Guess your lordship is right," drawled Sterne.

Bramley and McKoy were now standing just inside the door looking on with perplexed faces. Lord Vavasour glanced inquiringly at Sterne and was about to speak

again when there was a sudden commotion outside in the hall.

"I tell you he's engaged," sounded the exasperated voice of the butler.

Then a youthful voice sang out.

"Mr. Sterne, sir; here's the niblick you broke, sir."

The golfer hurried to the door.

"That's all right, James," he said. "Just slip over to the pavilion, Binks, and fetch that stout walking stick I left there. You'll find it standing in the corner. Bring it along right here."

He turned to the butler as Nipper went off on his errand.

"Come right in, James," he drawled, "and bring Bennett with you. He's standing in the vestibule over there."

"Are you ready now, Mr. Sterne?" asked Lord Vavasour.

"Fire away, my lord," drawled Sterne. "Guess the stage's about ready for the curtain to go up."

## CHAPTER 13.

### Vincent Sterne Explains!

**L**ORD VAVASOUR glanced round at the circle of curious faces and cleared his voice.

"You are all aware of the perplexing crime that took place in this room two nights ago," he said in a grave voice. "Mr. Vincent Sterne has been good enough to offer to explain that mystery. I will ask him to proceed at once."

All eyes were now turned on the golfer who stood there beaming pleasantly behind his big spectacles. James Stone's brows were contracted, thoughtfully; Marie was frankly perplexed; Bramley and McKoy looked disdainful and supercilious; the butler's eyes were fixed in front of him, while the lodge-keeper glowered sullenly at the floor.

In the midst of this strained silence the door opened and Nipper—or, rather, Binks—came into the room.

"Ah," drawled Sterne. "Here comes my li'l walking-stick. Just hand it right here, Binks. Thanks!"

Bramley sniffed scornfully and muttered to McKoy in an audible whisper.

"What the deuce does he want his walking-stick for?"

"Guess I'll answer you li'l question later on, inspector," drawled Sterne.

And Bramley looked disconcerted suddenly. The golfer waved his hand airily and continued in the same inconsequential manner.

"Reckon we'll shift the clock back forty-two and a half hours so as to be correct in time. That makes it nine o'clock on Tuesday night. Up goes the curtain on this li'l old drama and we find his lordship sitting here at his writing-desk. Then the hall door opens and the butler announces Mr. William Smith. In walks Mr. William Smith as large as life minus his hat and coat, which he had left outside with James. But he still carries his walking-stick under his arm. Guess that's

why I've got this li'l stick tucked under mine, inspector, just to make everything appear real and lifelike. How's that for the truth, James?"

"Quite right, sir," muttered the butler, nodding his head.

"To proceed, then," drawled Sterne. "His lordship gives Mr. Smith a polite how-d'you-do and motions him into this li'l chair alongside his desk. Then they have a li'l pow-wow about something that's no concern of ours, and his lordship gets so interested that he jabs his finger on the paper-knife which is lying on his desk. Reckon that makes his finger bleed and he fetches out his handkerchief and dabs at it. McKoy, there, has been making a fuss over that blood-stained handkerchief. How's that, your lordship?"

"Just so," said Lord Vavasour.

"Very well, then," continued Sterne. "When his lordship and Mr. Smith have been talking till half-past nine, his lordship suddenly gets up and goes into that li'l room over there to look for something. Guess that's just where the drama works up and the band plays slow music. Directly his lordship closes the door Mr. Smith pulls open this li'l drawer of the writing-desk and takes out something that I reckon Mr. Stone here calls an oddfish. Guess that's so, Mr. Stone—what?"

James Stone was frowning heavily; he was feeling a little impressed by the golfer's easy assurance.

"Let it go at that," he growled. "Call it an oddfish for the time being."

"Guess we'll call it an oddfish, then," drawled Sterne. "As Mr. William Smith grabs the oddfish, which Mr. Stone and the lady there has since recovered, and closes the drawer, the French windows over there are pushed open and in steps another fellow, whom, for certain reasons, we'll call Mr. Rubber Heels."

McKoy interrupted violently.

"The French windows——" he began.

But Sterne broke in abruptly.

"Guess I'll answer your questions after the performance is over," he drawled. "Got a lot to say, yet. Now, when Mr. Smith sees Mr. Rubber Heels, and Mr. Rubber Heels sees Mr. Smith, the band stops playing, and there's a sort of suspended 'hold your breath and say ninety-nine' atmosphere. Then Mr. William Smith, in a sort of friendly mood, ups with his li'l gun and down flops Mr. Rubber Heels on the carpet there with a li'l piece of lead in his brain."

The golfer paused and beamed around on his audience. He seemed the only cool, collected person present; everyone was watching him with expressions of intense interest. Then McKoy broke the strained silence again.

"Gun!" he exclaimed. "But we've proved that was impossible. There was no shot fired!"

"My mistake, superintendent," drawled Sterne. "Guess it wasn't a gun after all. It was a li'l air cane. Here it is, tucked under my arm—this li'l walking-stick. Wicked li'l weapon to play with—spits out nasty li'l lead

slugs. Reckon I showed you one yesterday morning, super—remember? Works by compressed air—no noise—no smoke—nothing! Got me?"

McKoy stared at the walking-stick in silent wonder and awe. He was too amazed, too bewildered, too astounded to say anything. For the moment he was absolutely beaten.

"Nothing to say?" queried Sterne. "Can't raise an argument? Start the music again, then. We've got Mr. Rubber Heels lying on the floor with a li'l piece of lead in his brain. Guess that's just where Mr. William Smith has a sudden brain wave. He snatches up the paper-knife, jabs it into Rubber Heels who is lying on the floor, then slips out of the French windows. At twenty-seven minutes to ten his lordship walks in from the li'l room over there, sees Mr. Rubber Heels dead on the floor with the knife stuck in his chest, naturally thinks it's Mr. William Smith, gets worked up into a lather of agitation, the curtain falls with a crash."

He beamed around on his amazed audience again. Unconsciously everyone had drawn nearer to him; he was now encircled by a ring of strained intent faces. Then Bramley and McKoy both spoke together.

"The windows were locked!" exclaimed McKoy.

"But the bloodstains outside the study window——" began Bramley.

"Reckon I'll have to answer one question at a time," drawled Sterne. "As regards the French windows—guess his lordship must have closed them after the curtain had fallen. Being knocked all of a heap as it were, he didn't quite know what he was doing. Reckon he forgot all about it at the time in the excitement of the absorbing drama. Am I right there, my lord?"

"Quite right, Mr. Sterne," said Lord Vavasour. "I was so bewildered at the time that I clean forgot all about it, as you say. I remember the incident quite well now, though."

"GUESS we'll tackle the bloodstains now," continued Sterne. "Mr. William Smith, being the villain of the piece, is naturally in a sort of simmering ferment. He doesn't stop to pay his respects, but makes a bee-line drawn from the French windows across the park. That brings him straight to the ornamental lake, where he's just in time to say how-d'you-do to Bennett, who is just coming across the bridge on his way to the house. Right, Bennett?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Bennett, with his eyes on the floor.

"Well," drawled Sterne, "I guess that Mr. Smith tried to dodge Bennett, and Bennett tried to dodge Mr. Smith, with the result that they had a li'l collision. Then Mr. Smith, being rather hasty-tempered, ups with his li'l old walking-stick and plugs Bennett in the foot. That sort of gets Bennett's rag out, quite natural like, and he takes a firm grip of Mr. William Smith and starts to

give him a lathering. They had a rare old tussle on the bridge. Bennett gives Mr. Smith a clout over the head with his cudgel, and Mr. Smith takes a quick dive into the lake. Still right, Bennett?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Bennett, still keeping his eyes on the floor.

"Guess I'm always right!" drawled Sterne. "Reckon I'll have to explain your li'l blood-stains now, inspector. After Mr. William Smith departs for his cold moonlight bathe I reckon Bennett here feels a bit lonely and depressed. Besides, he's got a nasty piece of lead in his foot, which isn't exactly comfortable. He makes a bee-line for the house, dropping li'l splotches of blood all the way on the gravel path. He steps on to the asphalt outside the study window, drops another splotch of blood, hurries to the li'l door at the back, drops another splotch of blood, rushes up to the linen cupboard and drops another splotch of blood. Am I wrong, Bennett?"

"No, sir!" muttered Bennett, his eyes still on the floor.

"To finish the story, then," said Sterne. "Reckon Bennett doesn't sleep much that night—feels nervy like. Decides to make a clean breast of it next day. When the next day comes he says nothing. Keeps on making up his mind to speak—keeps on saying nothing. Don't blame him. Nasty li'l predicament to drop into unawares—nasty li'l story to get off one's chest.

"Well, I reckon I've finished with explaining," drawled Sterne. He was the only one who had discovered that Lady Vavasour had taken Bennett to her own room that night in order to bandage the wounded foot, and that he kept to himself. "Any questions?" he asked, glancing with speculative eyes at each face in turn. It was McKoy who broke the intense silence.

"Your explanation is very clever, Mr. Sterne," he said, in a respectful tone of voice, "but except for the air cane you have not shown us any definite proofs that what you say took place actually did take place."

"Proofs!" drawled Sterne. "Guess I'll ask you to go and look for them. You'll find Rubber Heels lying in the conservatory. Go and see if the hat and coat left behind by Mr. William Smith fit him. Reckon you'll find them several sizes too big. Guess Mr. William Smith took Rubber Heel's hat—no doubt you'll find it in the lake. How did Rubber Heels enter this library? Not through the door, but through the French windows—you'll find his footprints outside coming from the bend in the drive. Reckon if you'll take the trouble to look you'll find Mr. Smith has left a few footprints—from the French windows here straight to the lake. Guess he didn't stop for the flower-beds. Reckon Mr. Stone can bear me out there."

"Quite right, Mr. Sterne," said the King's spy. "I came down here to discover who had stolen a certain document from this writing desk. Mr. Sterne has referred to it by the name of 'oddfish.' I saw immediately that

the thief must have escaped by way of the French windows. Then I discovered those footprints, and followed them to the lake. The document in question was floating on the water—I fished it out this morning. And also that walking-stick, Mr. Sterne—although I thought it really belonged to you. I came down here to recover this document, and having recovered it my work was finished. It was up to the police to solve the baffling crime that took place in this room two nights ago—that was no business of mine. You have done it extraordinarily well, Mr. Sterne."

"Thanks!" drawled Sterne. "Reckon the police have still got a li'l problem to spend a few sleepless nights over. Guess Mr. William Smith wasn't born with that name, and Mr. Rubber Heels isn't exactly a common sort of name."

"This man, William Smith——" began McKoy.

"Guess you'll find him at the bottom of the lake," drawled Sterne.

And before anyone could realise what had happened, he had rushed to the door, flung it open and vanished.

For a few moments everyone was too surprised to move. And while they stood there glancing at each other in bewilderment a knock sounded at the door, it was thrust open, and Nelson Lee, clad in the plus fours, the sports jacket and brilliant pull-over, stood there, with a quaint look of boredom on his lean, ascetic face.

Quite indifferent to the astonishment his presence created, he came slowly into the room—looking cool, unconcerned and self-possessed—and bowed gravely to Lord Vavasour. Then he turned to James Stone, and held out his hand.

"Sorry I'm a bit late, Stone," he said, in his familiar crisp tones. "Rather forgot the time. You got my telegram, I suppose?" He seemed suddenly to notice Mademoiselle Marie. "Ah, mam'selle," he said. "How delightful to meet you again!"

Stone suddenly gained possession of his faculties. He grasped Lee's outstretched hand and began shaking it as if it were a pump-handle.

"It was you, Lee, old man, after all!" he said thickly. "First I thought it was, then I thought it wasn't. Jove, Lee, what an actor you are!"

"I had my reasons, Stone," he said, "or I would not have deceived you as I did."

James Stone then began to bustle Lee towards the astonished peer.

"My lord," he said, "you did me the honour a little while ago of introducing your friend, Mr. Vincent Sterne. Permit me to return the compliment by introducing my much-esteemed friend, Mr. Nelson Lee."

Lord Vavasour was now the grave and dignified aristocrat once more. He took Lee's hand with an air of great cordiality.

"Let me assure you, Mr. Lee," he said, "that the sentiments I expressed a short while ago have undergone no change. I can only add to them by saying that to make the acquaintance of such a distinguished crimin-

ologist and detective is an honour to me. You will understand me when I say I feel too moved to say more. If you and your friends will care to join me and Lady Vavasour in the drawing-room in a few moments for tea we should both regard it as an especial favour."

And, looking strangely moved and affected, Lord Vavasour went quickly from the room. He was closely followed by Bramley and McKoy, who had no more to say. The police-officials hastened to look for the proofs of Lee's reconstruction of the crime and found them. They also dragged the lake for the body of Mr. William Smith, and found that, too.

**B**EFORE tea Lee went across to the pavilion for Nipper, who was also included in his lordship's invitation to tea. While changing their clothes they talked over the affair together.

"You will say nothing about bridge debts, Nipper," said the detective. "Bennett acted as postman between her ladyship and this money-grubbing cheat, Descovet. The rogue knew that Lord Vavasour had warned her ladyship he would not pay her debts any more. She had to find the money somehow, and Descovet charged what interest he liked, and she was too scared to protest. I feel sure, however, that this fright she has had will be a lesson to her. She will make a clean breast of the matter to his lordship; he will pay all she owes, and she will never contract such debts again."

"But why did Lord Vavasour lock the the French windows after he discovered the crime, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Because the murderer knew about the Bismarck Memoirs. His lordship was afraid that if the murderer was captured the truth would come out and his proud name would be dragged in the dust. I might mention, Nipper, that Mr. William Smith was our old friend, Joseph Weese, while Rubber Heels was our friend Stormberg. You will remember I saw them together in Burton's Court and they were quarrelling then.

"Let the police think what they like, these two men are not ordinary crooks, Nipper. They are men who have dabbled in State intrigues—possibly have been employed at some time as spies by a foreign power. Anyway, Weese learns about Jim Pike's discovery, and, as we know, employed Stormberg to get the mystery box from the strong-room of the Kingsway bank. Having thus secured the Bismarck Memoirs and found out that it contains damaging information concerning actual people, some living, some dead, he proceeds to blackmail them, holding over their heads the threats of publishing the memoirs.

"That is what took him to see Lord Vavasour. But Stormberg was not satisfied with his rate of pay. He was greedy. Having been snubbed by Weese, he decided to queer the pitch, and blundered into that library, no doubt prepared to grab what he could,

or come to an agreement with Weese, maybe kill him. We shall never know exactly what he meant to do, but it must have meant that he could have come to terms with both Lord Vavasour and Weese, only the latter was too quick for him and killed him. Then, knowing that he would have to lay low for a long time, and that the Bismarck Memoirs must be forgotten for a time, Weese looked in the drawer of the writing-desk. He saw the transcript of the Persian agreement and recognised its value. He stole it, deciding to make up for his losses over the blackmail affair by selling the agreement to a hostile foreign power. Only he met Bennett on the bridge, and that altered all his plans.

"And when I had once become satisfied in my mind that both these rogues were dead I knew what to do. The Bismarck Memoirs were in the offices of Buzzon and Weese at Burton's Court, and a job of burglary got them for me. They exist no longer now, and it is better so for everyone, I think. But hustle, young 'un, or we'll be late for tea."

\* \* \*

**W**HEN the police did actually come to size up the affair they had to admit that Lee was right in every particular.

They made it their business to find out who Mr. William Smith, alias Joseph Weese, was. The public was never told, but a letter from James Stone some time later told them that the man was actually Count Dorflisch, an ex-spy of the German Secret Service, who, after the war, found himself out of work and took to making money in many shady means—mostly by blackmail.

As for the Bismarck Memoirs, they had been brought to England by Rudolph von Zimmern when Prince Bismarck quarrelled with the Kaiser of that day. The enemies of the prince wanted to get hold of them, but Zimmern must have tossed the receipt into the Thames, and his death, shortly afterwards, made his secret secure until the shovel of Jim Pike brought up the ancient flask out of the Thames mud, and he showed the letter to Stormberg himself, another German ex-spy, who was, at that time, working as a seaman aboard a tramp steamer.

Jim Pike had refused a good offer for that flask, but Lord Vavasour, grateful for the happy issue out of his troubles, made it his business to reward the lighterman with a thousand pounds.

Nelson Lee smiled to himself when he read Jim Pike's crude letter of thanks.

"Well, that's the end of the Bismarck Memoirs," he muttered, and added, under his breath, "as far as I'm concerned."

THE END.

(Another Powerful Detective - Thriller next week, entitled "The Treasure of Wu Ling!" Don't miss it.)

## Here We Are Again—Gather Round!

**MY DEAR CHUMS**  
—Last week I mentioned the fact that there was an extra-extra-special treat in store for all readers of our Companion Papers, "Ranger," "Magnet" and "Modern Boy." I can well imagine that that announcement made

you curious and whetted your appetite for more information. Well, here are some more details. The treat in question well earns the title of **A RECORD-BREAKING FREE GIFT SCHEME**, for nothing like it has ever before been devised for readers of boys' papers. These Free Gifts, let me whisper it, are unique. They'll set the world alight, in a manner of speaking. Interested? I bet you are. Then buy any of this week's issues of the above mentioned papers and you will find therein more details. More than that I am not going to say now, save, that if you miss this treat you will feel like kicking yourself—hard.

The following paragraph is in reply to a good many queries that have been included in readers' letters of late. My chums have seen the many new editions of Annuals on all the bookstalls, and now they wish to know the names of those Annuals which I consider are the best. A very wise move, my readers. Yes, I certainly know the names of the Best Annuals obtainable, and here they are:—

- "The HOLIDAY Annual," price 6/-.
- "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories," price 2/6.
- "The MODERN BOY'S Annual," price 6/-.
- "The New ZOO Annual," price 6/-.
- "EVERY BOY'S BOOK OF MOTORS, SHIPS & ENGINES," price 7/6.

There you are. Look where you like—you won't come across better value for money. Incidentally, these Annuals are obtainable through Christmas Book Clubs. If you are interested apply to your newsagents who will be pleased to supply you with full details.

Next week's programme is a snorter. In brief it is composed of the finest detective and school fiction on the market. Our Detective-Thriller, "The Treasure of Wu Ling!" is a story of the most remarkable adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper ever recorded. Drama, peril and sinister mystery all play their part with equal force, and Nelson Lee is shown in the light of a typical Britisher, fighting courageously against overwhelming odds. Our School story, "Waking Up St. Franks," reaches its final chapters next week and the conclusion is certainly startling.



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to **NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.**

Do you remember that great series of stories written by Mr. E. S. Brooks, which dealt with the adventures of the chums of St. Frank's abroad in the "School Ship"? Do you remember the amazing land in which they found themselves adven-

turing?

Well, realising how popular Mr. Brooks' stories of the "unusual" are, I have got him to write another. That's a sensational bit of news you weren't expecting, eh? Got you fairly quivering with excitement, what? Well, have a good quiver, and then listen to this.

The new series of stories which Mr. Brooks has written deals with the amazing adventures of Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi. Each story is a detective-thriller of the most unusual and sensational kind, so unusual, in fact, that your eyes will fairly goggle with excitement as you read each chapter. But full details next week.

Starting shortly, there will also be a grand long story of the Chums of St. Frank's.

### Readers' Prize Jokes.

"Where's your rear light?" demanded the constable to the lorry driver. The latter disentangled himself from his precarious perch and walked back to the end of his van. He peered in all directions for a second or two, and then stood scratching his head.

"Well, what about it?" asked the P.-c., producing his notebook.

"I dunno, I had a—"

"Now, I've heard that tale before. Anybody can see you haven't had a lamp, cos' there's no bracket."

"Yes," said the driver, "but, look here—"

"No good making excuses," said the arm of the law. "You've got no light and that's flat."

"That's not what I'm worrying about," said the driver sadly. "What I'd like to know is, where's my blooming trailer."

(T. G. Walker, 458, Uttoxeter Road, Derby—a pocket wallet.)

Passenger (aboard liner): "Steward! What's that beastly noise outside my port-hole?"

Steward: "We're just passing a whistling buoy, sir."

"Passenger: "Well, tell the young scamp to be quiet."

(N. A. Mittalholzer, 5, Colburg Street, New Amsterdam, Berbice, British Guiana—a grand prize.)

# The KINGSWOOD BELT!

★ Fighting James Kingswood, the new Head of St. Frank's, who has already sprung a surprise on the juniors by offering a Boxing Belt to be fought for by the Lower School, springs another surprise on them. One day he discovers Handforth fighting Bernard Forrest, for bullying a fag. The Head immediately orders them to the gym. to settle the matter properly with the gloves on. ★

## Rough Justice!

**F**ORREST, perhaps, was the only one who soon experienced a wholesome distaste for the novelty. For Handforth, with more than his usual aggressiveness, was lashing out with grim purpose.

The Head's refereeing was a mere pretence—and he meant it to be a mere pretence. This was, really and truly, a fight.

"I'm not going on with this!" panted Forrest suddenly. "Confound you, Handforth, you're not boxing—you're just fighting!"

"I'm finishing what I started out in the Triangle!" retorted Handforth. "What's the matter with you? Scared?"

"No, I'm not scared!" roared Forrest.

"Now, you fellows, don't waste time," said the Head genially. "Come along! You can do better if you try, Forrest."

The spectators watched and listened, and they hugged themselves.

"By jingo! What a man!" murmured Church. "Any other Head would have lugged Forrest indoors and swished him! But Kingswood prefers to let Handy knock him silly!"

"He's a gift!" said McClure dreamily.

They were right on the mark. It would have been easy enough for Mr. Kingswood to have faced Bernard Forrest, and to have given him a six-hander for slashing Ellmore's clothing.

But how much better to pretend to know nothing of the incident—and let Handforth administer the punishment!

And at this sort of thing the one and only Edward Oswald was inimitable.

His blood was up, and he wanted to show the Fourth-Formers that neither he nor any of the other Removites agreed with Forrest's methods.

Forrest himself was no mean opponent. He was a good boxer, and for all his caddish ways, he had plenty of pluck. He battled gamely, after that one and only protest.

But he was a loser from the start.

The juniors witnessed the glorious spectacle of Handforth delivering this licking—with the headmaster calmly allowing the fight to go on until Handforth, with a tremendous right-hand uppercut, delivered a blow which was a most decisive knock-out.

Bernard Forrest crashed to the canvas. He was bruised, battered, and his plans for getting even with the Fourth were abandoned from that moment.

And the Head, smiling cheerfully, and with a breezy nod, went his way. He was quite satisfied that justice had been done.

Fighting Jim Kingswood sprang a surprise a few evenings later.

The gymnasium was in great demand these days; in such demand, in fact, that the various Housemasters had to get together, so that they could fix the times when the gym should be available for the boys of the various Houses who wanted to use it.

The Head happened to come in while the Ancient House boys were in possession—and many fellows, belonging to other Houses, were crowding round, interested spectators. The Fourth-Formers were more than interested—they were amused. Their own man—Lawrence—held an unbeaten record, and Buster Boots & Co. regarded him as a cert for the Kingswood Belt.

Such was their confidence that they did not even feel uneasy as they beheld Archie Glenthorne sparring with his trainer. The rivalry between the Remove and the Fourth was now at fever pitch, and the boys of the respective Houses were apt to belittle the performances of their coming opponents. Archie, as a matter of fact, was sparring brilliantly.

"Bravo, young 'un—bravo!" said Mr. Kingswood heartily.

As he approached the ring there were many murmurs of surprise, for, beneath his light coat, Mr. Kingswood was attired for boxing.

"Thought I'd come along and give a hand," he explained, addressing everybody in general. "I'm pretty useful when it comes to sparring, and the exercise will do me good."

"That's the spirit, sir!" said the Kid, grinning.

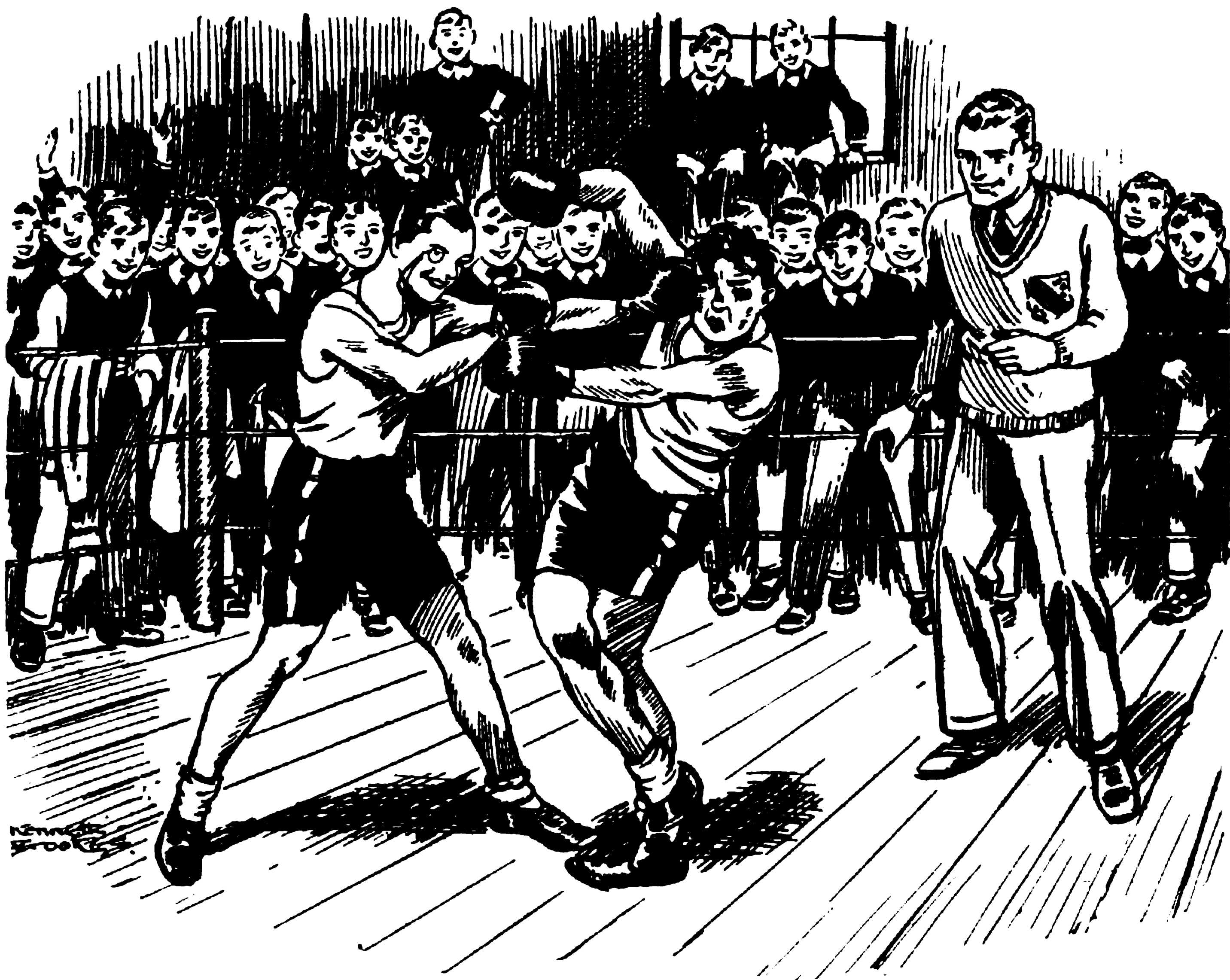
Archie was rather flabbergasted.

"You don't absolutely mean to say, old bean—I mean, sir—that you're going to indulge in the fistic battle with me?"

"Let's go!" said the Head briskly.

And "go" they did. Archie was making rapid progress, but he was a mere child in comparison to the redoubtable Fighting Jim.

—In E. S. Brooks' Great Tale, "Waking Up St. Frank's!"



In a whirlwind of neatly-placed blows, Archie the dude descended on his opponent, and Handy didn't stand a chance from the very beginning.

The spectators watched fascinatedly. They had never seen the Head in the ring before. He was a revelation. Despite his size, his brawn, he was as light as a feather on his feet. It was a sheer joy to see him.

A sort of miracle had happened to Archie Glenthorne. Of course, he had known a good deal about boxing for a long time, but he had even surprised himself. Kid Williams, realising Archie's possibilities at their first meeting, had been almost bewildered at the elegant junior's lightning progress. His muscles were now becoming harder, and, in a way of speaking, "every day, and in every way, he was getting fitter and fitter."

"You'll do, old chap," said the Head confidentially, to Archie. "Keep it up! I've heaps of faith in you."

"That's most frightfully decent of you, sir—"

"Remember your brother," continued the Head. "Remember your noble family. All the Glenthornes are fighters, aren't they? Above all, remember that you're doing this for your Form. You're not going to let the Fourth get hold of that Belt, are you?"

"Good gad! Perish the blighting thought!"

"I'm not a betting man, Archie, but if I

were I'd put my money on you," murmured the Head. "So got to it—and win!"

Not that Archie really needed any encouragement. Having made up his mind to go all out in this competition, he was so bubbling with energy that even the active Mr. Williams found it hard to keep pace with him. But those words, from Fighting Jim, were sweet in Archie's ears.

The Head had no favourites, however.

When Handforth stalked into the ring, bent upon showing his prowess, the Head eyed him dubiously. After Handforth had done some sparring, Mr. Kingswood hopped into the ring himself.

"Let me have a go," he said. "Now, old son. Keep that left arm of yours more easy. Don't be so free with that right punch, either. You are leaving yourself unguarded all the time."

"Cheese it, sir," protested Handforth. "Leaving myself unguarded! You try to get past that guard!"

Crash!

Mr. Kingswood got past it with supreme ease, and Handforth had an idea that the corner of a brick wall had hit him. He sat down with a mighty thud, to the accompaniment of joyous chuckles from the populace.

"That's what I mean," said the Head genially. "You didn't know that was coming, did you? You've got hefty muscles, heaps of confidence, and a fine spirit. But you need more science. You're entering for a boxing competition, remember—not a prize-fight."

Handforth was not feeling quite so pleased with himself after his sparring bout. He couldn't help feeling that Mr. Kingswood had taken him down a peg or two. In fact, he had had a jolt. He wasn't half so good as he thought! And he resolved, then and there, to go in to train as he had trained before. Which was exactly what Mr. Kingswood desired.

Then came the Fourth-Formers, and the Head could not fail to be deeply impressed by the polished performance of Ernest Lawrence. There was something almost magical about this wonder boxer. There was "class" in his every movement. As lithe as a panther, as light on his feet as a ballet dancer, he made rings round his sparring partners. And he had a swift, deadly left punch which Archie, when the time came, would have to watch. For the Head was quite convinced, in his own mind, that Archie would represent the Remove.

The Remove, of course, did not think so. The Remove ridiculed the very idea. Archie was doing pretty well, of course, and it was more than likely that he would lick Handforth in the preliminary match. But then, Handforth wasn't much to beat.

There were others—Vivian Travers, Fullwood, Jimmy Potts, Harry Gresham and the celebrated Reggie Pitt. Ninety per cent. of the Removites were satisfied that Pitt would come out on top.

But Fighting Jim did not alter his own opinion. And as for Kid Williams, he was loyal to his "young boss," and meant to see him through to final victory.

"THAT youngster is going to surprise his Form fellows yet, Kid," said Mr. Kingswood confidently, that night. "You've seen what he can do, and you've seen what the others can do. Now, frankly—just between you and I—what do you think of things?"

"Why, I'm backing Master Archie," replied the Kid promptly. "Those young gentlemen of the Remove don't take him seriously, but that's their funeral. They'll get a shock later on."

"And Lawrence?"

"He's hot, sir," said the Kid, becoming serious. "Hot as—mustard. One of the prettiest little boxers I've ever had the pleasure to see. And, mark you, he's going to give our man a ding-dong fight. Taking the two as they are now, on their present form, Master Lawrence could lick young Glenthorne in a couple of rounds. He could knock him cold with that marvellous left of his. But I'm getting Master Archie into shape, and when it comes to the night, he'll be the goods."

When the Kid went off, Mr. Kingswood became thoughtful. Presently, he did a curious thing. He donned a rough old jacket, and he strapped some strange implements to his heavy boots. At a touch of a spring, strong steel forks sprang out. Having seen they were in perfect order, Mr. Kingswood secured a leather satchel to his shoulders, and ventured forth.

It was a cloudy night, but the moon was riding somewhere above the clouds, and the countryside was bathed in a soft, mellow radiance. And no sooner had Mr. Kingswood passed beyond the school grounds than a furtive figure crept after him.

The Head made his way leisurely across the meadows in the direction of the wild, rough country at the back of Bellton Wood. He was thinking, not of his mission, which seemed to be of a secretive nature, but of the hectic condition he had caused in the Junior School.

He was so amused that he chuckled delightedly as he walked along—so genuinely pleased that he never once troubled to glance behind him. Had he done so, he might have become aware of the clumsy shadower who was so amateurishly on his track.

"Yes, things are going even better than I expected," murmured the Head.

Having aroused the Fourth Form boys to arrive at a proper sense of their position in the school, he had started this fresh excitement by the announcement of the boxing competition. That had been something of a master stroke. For Lawrence belonged to the Fourth—the very Form which had been so dormant.

It was the Remove's turn to be pepped up now. Fighting Jim knew that the Removites would move heaven and earth to win the belt—to prove, beyond doubt, that the Remove was cock-Form of the Junior School. And it was just as certain that the Fourth would go all out to retain the one honour which they had held for so long.

Yes, Mr. Kingswood was very satisfied with his progress at St. Frank's. With these pleasant thoughts in his mind, he trudged on. And behind him came that creeping, shadowy figure.

Mr. Pycraft was very scared.

After his disappointment of the afternoon—when he had been prevented by Handforth & Co. from following Mr. Kingswood—he had resolved to wait about after lights-out. More than once he had heard footsteps between eleven o'clock and midnight—for Mr. Pycraft was a bad sleeper. Sometimes he would lay awake until one a.m. Perhaps his irascible temper was sharpened by this insomnia.

"I'll drive the man out of the school!" Mr. Pycraft vowed. "Since he's been here there's been no peace for any of the masters. And there's something about him that won't bear the light of day. By heaven! I'm going to find out what that is—and expose him."

The project had become an obsession with

him. No man had ever "told him off" as Mr. Kingswood had done, and Mr. Pycraft's nature was mean and petty. He brooded. He desired revenge.

He could not forget what he had witnessed from his window some nights earlier—Mr. Kingswood crossing the Triangle, and supporting an unsteady drag-footed companion. That companion had been Kid Williams. Yes, he would teach this Fighting Head to bring a common bruiser into the school!

Where was Mr. Kingswood going now? Why should any self-respecting headmaster sneak out at night and take to the woods? There was some secret behind it all—and Mr. Pycraft, like Handforth, believed that that secret was dark and sinister.

Suddenly the Form-master came to a halt. His quarry had not turned back, but he had stopped. And by this time Mr. Kingswood had reached the fringe of the wood, where the shadows were deep.

A low, peculiar whistle sounded on the night air; and it was some moments before Mr. Pycraft realised that the Head was responsible. Mr. Pycraft had mistaken the sound for the cry of a night-bird.

"A signal!" he muttered excitedly. "I knew it! I knew that Kingswood had come out to meet some more of his disreputable companions. It isn't enough that he should bring prize-fighters into the school!"

This shadowing business was all very well, but Mr. Pycraft had a horror of being detected. Had he dared, he would have gone nearer. But his fear held him back, and, crouching low in the grass, he waited.

Two figures emerged from the wood; and even in that faint, screened moonlight Mr. Pycraft had no difficulty in recognising the men as shabby, ragged brethren of the highway. Or perhaps they were dressed in rags, with several days' growth of beard on their chins, in order to conceal their true character.

"... just what you want, guv'nor," came a rough, eager voice. "Bill and me took a few risks . . . of course! . . . Didn't we say that we'd put 'em in the box?"

"Yes, I found them," came Mr. Kingswood's voice. "Good—but not good enough. Let's see what you've got here; and remember, be extremely careful—"

"No need to tell us, guv'nor," said the rough voice. "We're old hands at the game. There you are—look!"

A match flared, and Mr. Pycraft saw the group of men peering into a square, opened box.

"Splendid!" came Mr. Kingswood's delighted voice.

And soon the match went out; Mr. Pycraft's eager ears heard the chink of money as it was exchanged from one hand to another.

"Yes . . . very special job to-night," Mr. Kingswood was saying. "I think I shall want you fellows to help . . . better come along."

Before Mr. Pycraft could quite realise it

they had plunged into the wood; and when he plucked up enough courage to follow he only heard faint sounds of their progress deep in the undergrowth. He ventured to follow, but being as skilful in woodcraft as a cod-fish, he was hopelessly lost within two minutes. And it took him practically half an hour to get out of the wood again. He was a very relieved man when he found himself out in the open.

His disappointment at losing his quarry was tempered by his satisfaction at what he had overheard. So Mr. James Kingswood, accompanied by two palpable ruffians, was going on some special job to-night!

"I'll get him!" vowed the mean-spirited Form-master. "I'll not rest until I've discovered this secret of his—and then I'll have him kicked out of the school."

He went to bed in quite a genial mood.

### Surprising the Natives.

"NOW'S your chance, Archie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's see if you can last three rounds."

"Good old slacker!"

There were all sorts of good-natured comments, uttered in loud voices, as Archie Glenthorne leapt into the ring with his seconds. The redoubtable Handforth was already in his own corner, and Church and McClure were attending him like nurses over a baby.

Two or three days had passed—hectic, crowded days. Every morning Archie had been up at six; with the Kid he had been out running. He had put in wearisome hours training in all its aspects—wearisome hours during the first part of the period, but enjoyable hours towards the latter. For as Archie's muscles became more supple, so his woes vanished. He was now sound in wind and limb, and he was looking forward to this contest with supreme confidence.

Handforth had been training, too. He had suddenly jumped to the conclusion that Archie meant business, and it had not needed the urgings of Church and McClure to spur him on. He had even consented—somewhat grudgingly—to accept helpful tips from Kid Williams.

The gym. was packed. Somehow or other everybody belonging to the Remove and Fourth had managed to cram in. The boys surrounded the ring in a solid mass; they overflowed on to the window-ledges; they even spread to the overhead beams, where they perched like monkeys.

Mr. Kingswood himself was acting as referee. This was the first of the eliminating contests. The winner would be matched against the winner of another eliminating contest—and so it would go on until the final pair were left.

"Don't forget, Handy—box!" urged Church earnestly, just before the gong sounded. "Don't try to fight, or you'll get nowhere. Box all the time. Archie is a dark horse."

"Rats!" said Handforth, who still couldn't believe, even for a second, that there was any possibility of him losing. "Haven't you heard the chaps yelling? Archie won't last three rounds."

"Mind you last three rounds!" said McClure significantly.

He proved to be—alas for Handforth!—a true prophet.

With the sound of the gong the young boxers leapt into the match with that enthusiasm and pep for which schoolboy contests are noted. There was no waste of time—no dilly-dallying. Archie and Handy went at it with an earnestness which was a delight to the referee's eyes.

Thud! Biff! Thud! Tap! Thud-thud!

With twinkling feet Archie almost made rings round the clumsy, astonished, bewildered Handforth. His gloves, beating Handforth's guard repeatedly, nipped in and out with amazing skill, and Handforth was tapped on the chin, on the chest, here, there, and everywhere.

And Handforth's own lunges were clumsy and elephantine in comparison. The spectators, who had chiefly come here to laugh, were soon murmuring with admiration. Even Lawrence himself was flushed with wonder.

"This man's a genius!" he muttered, nudging Buster Boots.

"You'll lick any chap the Remove can produce," retorted Boots.

"You bet!" agreed Lawrence. "But Archie is the Remove's man, or I'm a blind horse!"

The Removites were soon cheering lustily; the Fourth-Formers, startled by Archie's display, scarcely knew whether to be pleased or dismayed. But their confidence in Lawrence was unshakable.

"You lost that round hopelessly, Handy!" said Church in despair, after the gong had sounded. "What did we tell you? Use your feet more! He'll win every point there is unless you change your ideas!"

The trouble with Handforth was that he had only one set of ideas. In the second round he commenced fighting in earnest—rather to Archie's surprise. He got in one right-hander which rocked the noble junior on his heels.

"Oh, rather!" said Archie aggressively. "If you're going in for that kind of stuff, old thing, right-ho! I mean to say, now we know—what?"

Biff! Thud! CRASH!

Handforth did not even see those fists. He only knew that something—which felt remarkably like the hind hoof of a mule—struck him on the left ear. Before he had recovered from this shock, and before he could even begin to readjust his guard, another mule kicked him in the chest. And then an elephant struck him with such force on the chin that his interest in the proceedings faded.

"One—two—three—four——"

He heard somebody counting. He didn't know who it was, or what the counting was for. He was somewhere in the clouds, float-

ing, and in some extraordinary way he had lost the lower part of his face. At least, there was no feeling there—

"Out!" said the voice gently.

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Archie!"

Archie Glenthorne was considerably surprised. He had not even known his own strength—for in giving Handforth one or two hefty punches, in response to Handforth's own onslaught, he had delivered a knock-out!

### Archie Becomes Favourite!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, having come out of his trance, received the sad news with bewildered horror.

"I've lost?" he asked hoarsely.

"Archie's won?"

"Afraid so, old man," said Church gently.

"But—but how did it happen?"

"Most frightfully sorry, old man, but I didn't absolutely mean it," apologised Archie Glenthorne, coming over to Handforth's corner. "But you started biffing, and I started biffing, and in some extraordinary way my fist developed an extra supply of horsepower."

"In other words, Handforth, you were beaten very decisively," said Mr. Kingswood, with a smile. "It really makes little difference—because Glenthorne is so very superior to you on points that I should have awarded him the verdict, even if the contest had gone to the full time."

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

With characteristic sportsmanship he grabbed Archie's hand, and slapped him on the back.

"Jolly good, old son!" he said enthusiastically. "Congratters! Any chap who can whack me is a giddy marvel!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The spectators yelled appreciatively

"You're the man for the Remove!" went on Handforth. "Of course, I was a dotty chump to ever think that I could win the belt. This boxing stuff is no good to a hard hitter like me! When I use my fists, I fight. I've no use for fancywork and pretty foot play."

Thus the burly junior consoled himself.

"You Fourth-Formers had better prepare yourselves for a shock!" he went on, addressing Buster Boots, Corcoran, Christine, and that crowd. "Lawrence is pepper, but our man is the whole giddy cruets! I never thought Archie had it in him!"

"Aren't you taking things too much for granted?" asked Jack Grey, of the West House, with a grin. "Archie's good—a lot better than I expected—but a West House fellow is going to represent the Remove in the final."

Roars of laughter from the Ancient House section broke out.

"All right!" yelled Grey. "What about Reggie Pitt? He'll lick Archie hands down—"

and he's the Remove skipper, don't forget! Reggie is our man!"

And most of the Removites were inclined to agree with this opinion—although Archie's performance, brief though it had been, had slightly shaken their confidence. Kid Williams listened to everything with his own inimitable grin. And more than once he took the liberty of radiating a sly wink in Mr. Kingswood's direction.

The Kid was satisfied. More than satisfied. Never had he trained such a promising boxer. From the very first moment of his association with Archie Glenthorne, the latter had sprung surprise after surprise. His energy was unbounded; his enthusiasm was tremendous. It was as though the noble junior, by slacking and loafing for months on end, stored up enormous reserves of concentrated vim. And having had this glorious "binge," as he himself termed it, he would probably rest on his laurels and spend another term or two in glorious idleness until something else cropped up to start him off again. Archie was like that.

**N**EXT morning Handforth startled his chums by ruthlessly pitching them out of bed on to the floor, at five a.m.

It was a dull, grey, unsummery morning; but Handforth would not have cared if rain had been pouring down in torrents.

"Come on, show a leg!" he said crisply.

An unnecessary injunction, since his chums were showing four.

"But—but it isn't time to get up!" ejaculated Church sleepily. "The rising bell hasn't gone——"

"Bother the rising bell," interrupted Handforth. "It's five o'clock."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"We're going to help Archie in his training," explained Handforth blandly. "As I'm out of the running, we might as well make sure that an Ancient House man gets into the final. Those West House chaps are too jolly cocky. We'll knock Pitt off his perch!"

Church and McClure admired their leader's spirit, but they found it difficult to share his enthusiasm.

"Mad, as usual!" said McClure dourly. "That's the worst of you, Handy, you can't do anything moderately. You always go to one extreme or the other. Do you think Kid Williams wants us messing about? He's Archie's trainer—and he doesn't need any help."

"Well, he's going to get it, whether he needs it or not," replied Handforth. "In any case, it's not so much help that we're going to give Archie—but support. Encouragement. We'll rally round him, and cheer him on."

There was no help for it. Church and McClure had to get up. They were quite satisfied that Archie would be far better off without Handforth's encouragement, but it was such a worthy object that the two juniors hadn't the heart to resist their leader. Besides, after what they had seen of Archie, they were inclined to make him favourite.

Thus, at five-fifteen, whilst the rest of the school slept, Handforth & Co. barged out into the Triangle. Handforth had discovered, to his astonishment, that Archie's bed-room was empty. Early as the Study D chums had been, the energetic Archie had forestalled them.

"Come on—in the gym, I expect!" yelled Handforth.

"Not so much noise, fathead!" urged Church. "Do you think everybody else wants to be awakened at this hour?"

"Why not?" retorted Handforth. "By George! There they are. Go it, Archie! Good man!"

Archie Glenthorne, in running togs, accompanied by the Kid, similarly attired, had just come trotting through West Arch. The aristocratic junior eyed Handforth somewhat uncertainly.

"Oh, rather!" he said. "I take it, old fright, that you are rallying round?"

Before Handforth could reply a head appeared at one of the East House windows.

"Go away!" said the head ferociously. "How dare you make all this noise at such an hour? How do you think people can sleep?"

"Sorry, Mr. Pycraft," said the Kid, glancing up. "But Master Archie and me was quiet enough. It's these young gents——"

"I wasn't talking to you!" interrupted Mr. Pycraft rudely. "You had better not give me any of your insolence, my man."

Mr. Williams felt justifiably annoyed. Mr. Pycraft's snappiness was quite unwarranted. The kid did not know—and it wouldn't have made any difference if he had known—that the weedy Form-master had spent such a restless night that he had not dropped off until dawn. And within a couple of hours Handforth's voice had awakened him—and Mr. Pycraft could never get to sleep again in such circumstances.

"Making a big fuss, ain't you?" asked the Kid. "But don't fret yourself—we're going. And I shouldn't advise you to talk rude to me any more, Mr. Pycraft, because there's a limit to my good nature. You're safe up there, but there'll come a time——"

"Are you daring to threaten me?" gasped Mr. Pycraft, horrified.

"Look here, sir, it was my fault!" broke in Handforth. "Sorry if we disturbed you. Don't blame Mr. Williams."

"Don't blame whom?" asked Mr. Pycraft, with exaggerated offence in his voice. "Mister Williams, indeed! If I had my way, you boys wouldn't be allowed to associate with such a man! I'm going to complain to the Headmaster——"

"Go ahead!" said the Kid, flushing. "Go and complain to him now! Mr. Jim don't lie a-bed in the mornings! You'll find him up and about. Go and talk to 'im!"

And Mr. Williams, thoroughly disgusted, went off with Archie. Handforth & Co. received something of a shock—at least, Handforth did. For when the burly Edward Oswald proposed that he should accompany Archie on the run, Mr. Williams grinned.

"In them togs, young gent?" he asked.

"Eh?" said Handforth, staring down at his lounge suit.

"Can't run in them things, sir."

"That's what I thought," put in Church casually. "What a pity, Handy! We shall have to let Archie and the Kid go off alone. Can't expect them to wait about while we change."

"Be reasonable," added McClure.

Handforth regarded his chums with deep suspicion.

"You—you rotters!" he said fiercely. "Why didn't you remind me, when we were getting dressed? You knew jolly well that we ought to have put on our running togs."

"Well, so-long, old tulips!" said Archie. "You don't expect the Kid and me to take root while you finish this dashed argument, do you?"

And off they went, leaving Handforth & Co. more or less stranded.

But that little incident, trivial though it was, led to something big.

#### Mr. Pycraft's Progress—and Archie's

MR. Pycraft decided to take Kid Williams at his word. There was no time like the present—and Mr. Pycraft felt that he had full justification for complaint. That wretched prize-fighter had been insolent to him, had even threatened him.

"It is more than flesh and blood can stand!" muttered Mr. Pycraft, as he dressed.

No doubt his sleepless night had greatly added to his ill-temper. His very sleeplessness, however, had been occasioned by his hatred of Fighting Jim Kingswood. For hours he had tossed about, wondering how he could strike the blow which would humble the headmaster in the dust.

He was afraid of Mr. Kingswood—and that very fear added fire and strength to his hatred.

When he emerged from the East House, well before six o'clock, he was irritated to see quite large numbers of juniors in the Triangle.

"Bah!" said Mr. Pycraft disdainfully. "Is this a school—or a boxer's training camp? All the boys have gone mad!"

"Speaking to us, sir?" asked Buster Boots cheerily. "Good-morning, Mr. Pycraft!"

"Why are you up at this hour?" snapped the Form-master. "Do you think you'll be any good at lessons?"

He turned his gaze from Boots to Christine, and from Christine to Lawrence, and from Lawrence to the other Fourth-Formers, who, in running-kit, were ready to start off on a cross-country trot.

"Your headmaster is responsible for this insanity!" said Mr. Pycraft sourly. "Well, if any of you boys neglect your lessons to-day you will be detained after school. If the Head is content to see your studies going by the board, I am not!"

He stalked away.

"Beast!" murmured the Fourth-Formers.

On the other side of the Triangle Vivian Travers had just emerged from the Ancient House, surrounded by a little gang of his own supporters. From the West House came Reggie Pitt, equally surrounded. Everybody was "bitten." Seldom indeed had the Junior School been so energetic. Mr. Kingswood had positively inspired the boys. Incidentally, their studies were not suffering in the least. Rather the contrary.

"I won't put up with this sort of thing," muttered Mr. Pycraft, as he hurried towards the Head's House. "We Form-masters don't know whether we are on our heads or our heels. The entire school is disorganised. By Heaven! If only I had some definite complaint to lay before the Governors!"

His eyes glittered at the very thought. Reaching the House, he found the Head's front door standing wide open. With his celebrated creep, he entered the hall. The study door was ajar, and Mr. Pycraft approached.

Even the servants had not yet made an appearance at this early hour—for it had not yet struck six. Mr. Pycraft entered the study abruptly, and then came to a sudden halt.

Mr. Kingswood was at the desk, bending over something which lay on the blotting-pad. It was a little ormolu tray, but Mr. Pycraft had no chance of seeing what the tray contained. For, with a smothered exclamation, the Head swept the tray into a drawer and slammed the drawer in, locking it.

"I—er—am sorry, sir, if I startled you——" began Mr. Pycraft.

The headmaster's face was flushed, and he looked confused. His eyes blazed.

"May I ask, Mr. Pycraft, why you creep into people's room?" he demanded angrily.

"Really, sir! I wasn't aware that I was creeping!" protested Mr. Pycraft. "Neither could I anticipate that you would be engaged in some secretive occupation——"

"You had better be careful, Mr. Pycraft," said the Head ominously.

"I don't know what you mean."

"In my own study I can do just as I like—without asking your permission," went on Fighting Jim, now fully recovered from his confusion, and coldly angry. "I was foolish enough to believe, Mr. Pycraft, that I was enjoying the privacy which, as the headmaster of this school, is my right—in my own House."

They stood there, glaring at one another, and Mr. Pycraft was quivering with sudden excitement. He felt that he had gained a point.

"I did not even know that you were in the room, sir," he said sneeringly. "I am sorry if I startled you. Indeed, I apologise for interrupting your—er—privacy."

"You hate me, Mr. Pycraft, don't you?" asked the Head bluntly.

"Well, really, sir——"

"I'm not a fool," continued Mr. Kingswood. "If you had the chance, Mr. Pycraft, you would do me an injury. Well, what do you want? Once before I had to complain

because you charged into my study uninvited, and unannounced. I don't like your creeping ways, Mr. Pycraft. Say what you want to say, and then get out."

Mr. Pycraft swallowed hard.

"I have come to lay a complaint before you," he said, pale with fright and anger.

"Another complaint?" said the Head. "Don't you ever do anything but complain, Mr. Pycraft?"

"That wretched fellow, Williams, has been insolent to me—"

"Oh, Williams?" broke in the Head. "If you have anything to say against Williams, say it in his presence. Come to me later, Mr. Pycraft. Come to me immediately after breakfast, when Williams will be here."

"But, really, sir—"

"That's all, Mr. Pycraft," said the Head. "Good-morning!"

"But I don't see—"

"You will oblige me by closing the door as you go out."

After such a dismissal, there was nothing more to say. Mr. Pycraft closed the door with a slam. He fairly seethed as he strode back across Inner Court. Fighting Jim's directness was more than Mr. Pycraft could cope with. He was baffled.

But what he had seen in the Head's study intrigued him. What was it that Mr. Kingswood had thrust into that drawer so hastily—so guiltily? Why had he been so confused?

Mr. Pycraft remembered the headmaster's secret meeting with questionable, disreputable characters in Bellton Wood. He had bargained with them—he had gone off with them on some nocturnal mission. And now, this morning, believing himself to be private, he had been poring over the contents of that ormolu tray. Mr. Pycraft quivered from head to foot. There wasn't the slightest doubt that Mr. Kingswood was engaged in some underhand traffic which could only be conducted in secret.

"These facts, alone, might be sufficient to place before the Governors," muttered Mr. Pycraft feverishly. "By Heaven! I have a mind to write a letter to Sir John Brent to-day! This man is a menace to the very sanctity of the school!"

But he did not write—yet. He wished to make absolutely sure. He wanted to obtain definite evidence. And an idea had come to him—an idea which was characteristic of the man.

If only he could get one glimpse into that locked drawer he would discover Jim Kingswood's secret—and he would have Jim Kingswood in the hollow of his hand!

That morning, Mr. Pycraft made a systematic collection of all the keys he could lay his hands on.

**T**HREE days elapsed, however, before the Form-master's opportunity presented itself. And during those three days his suspicions had increased; they had fed upon themselves until he had come to regard Mr. Kingswood as a sinister criminal. He  
(Continued on page 44.)

# RESULT

of

## CADBURY'S

### "FUNNY FACES"

## COMPETITION

The prizes for the best drawings of funny faces have been awarded as follows:

### 2 FIRST PRIZES

of

#### £2 Caskets of Finest Chocolates and 24 Stamps

BASIL BROWN, Coppice Avenue, Gt. Shelford, Cambs.

MARGARET O. GENT, 43, Steunhouse Place East, Edinburgh.

### 2 SECOND PRIZES

of

#### £1 1s. Caskets of Finest Chocolates & 24 Stamps

JANET MCGINLEY, 53, Commercial Road, Glasgow, C.5.

JAMES A. WILKINSON, 16, Lees Street, Ducie Street, Manchester.

### 10 THIRD PRIZES

of

#### 1 lb. Boxes of "King George" Chocolates and 24 Stamps

FRANK BURCH, 8, Spring Lane, Woodside, South Norwood, S.E.25. EILEEN M. FULLER, 1, Hill Crest, Heacham, near King's Lynn. ALICE GREENHALGH, 25, Elmwood Grove, Bolton, Lancs. B. HOPKINS, 279, Stone House, Two-Gates Road, Kettlebrook, Tamworth. J. S. MORRIS, 17, Heath Road, Uttoxeter. VIVIAN NEEVE, 7, Bulwark Row, Deal, Kent. VIOLET RADLEY, 44, Fair Street, Stepney, London, E.1. PEGGY RISDON, Oakdene, Davenham Avenue, Northwood, Middlesex. JENNIE ROBERTSON, 1, Benjimen Road, Roschill-on-Tyne. ALEC WILLIAMS, 8, Court Street, Leamington Spa, Warks.

### 7,500 Consolation Prizes

of blocks of Milk Chocolate, each with a packet of 24 "Cadbury" stamps,

### and 2,500 OTHER PRIZES

of packets of stamps, have also been awarded and sent off, too.

### SPECIAL PRIZES FOR FATHERS and MOTHERS

The 1,000 prizes for parents—200 special parcels of Cadbury products, and 800 consolation prizes—have also been awarded for the best answers to "Why I like my child to eat Cadbury's Chocolates." These also have been despatched to winners.

## THE KINGSWOOD BELT!

saw something suspicious, something significant, in every one of Mr. Kingswood's movements.

And when a man is watching another man, as Mr. Pycraft was watching the Head, he cannot help noticing all sorts of strange things. The school, as a whole, regarded Mr. Kingswood as a sportsman and a gentleman. Nobody took any notice when Mr. Kingswood went out for long country rambles. He invariably went off alone, and just as invariably he plunged into wooded, secret places, vanishing in mystery.

Meanwhile, matters were progressing with the 'juniors.' There had been another Eliminating Contest—Reggie Pitt versus Vivian Travers.

A great boxing match—one which would be long remembered by the Ancient House fellows. There had been very little to choose between the West House junior and the Ancient House junior; but Pitt won the match on points. He was a shade the better of the two—much to the gleeful satisfaction of the West House section.

"Well, it's all plain-sailing now," said Jack Grey happily, after the match. "Reggie meets Lawrence in the final."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "What about Archie? Pitt's got to beat Archie yet!"

"My poor ass, that won't be a match at all—it'll be a comic interlude!" said Grey kindly.

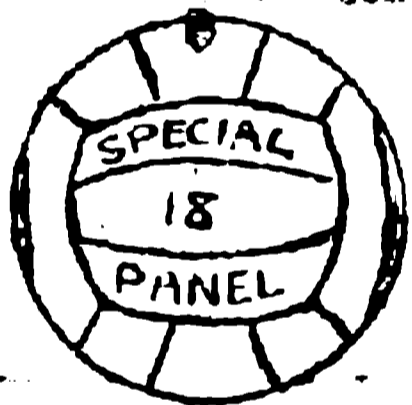
But the Ancient House juniors, much to their own surprise, were now pinning their faith on the once despised Archie Glenthorne. Archie had become their hot favourite. They were relying upon him to lick Reggie Pitt. If he did so, he would inevitably be matched against Ernest Lawrence, the unbeaten champion.

Archie's progress, in fact, was a kind of nine days' wonder in the Remove. Never for a minute had the former slacker's enthusiasm waned. And Kid Williams found it necessary to repress Archie, rather than urge him. And such was the Kid's optimism that he communicated it to the boys themselves. Even the Fourth-Formers, for the first time, were beginning to regard Archie seriously. Not that any one of them had the slightest shadow of doubt. Ernest Lawrence was their man—and he was unconquerable.

*(There is certainly a surprise in store for the School in the next round of the Kingswood Belt. Next week's chapters of this great school tale are full of sensational adventures.)*

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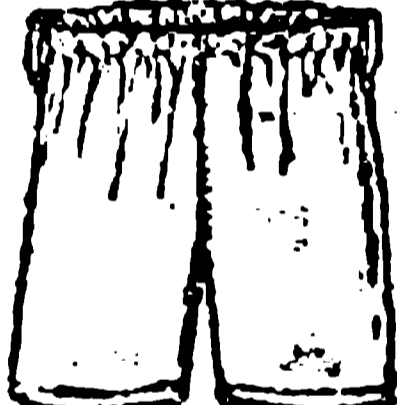
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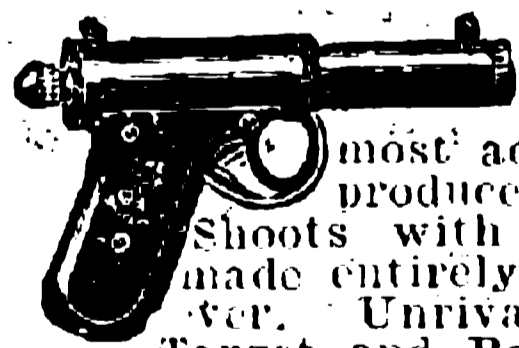
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