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NELSON LEE STOPS A REVOLUTION IN DALMANIA! A remarkable scene from "The King Comes Back!" A thrill-packed story inside.

New Series No. 148.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

November 19th, 1932.

THE KING



CHAPTER 1.

Sixty Millions at Stake.

NELSON LEE had received a warning note from the Foreign Office that an exalted personage would be calling to consult him on a very secret matter, and would be dressed in a fancy costume, as if he were going to a fancy dress ball, in order to throw any too inquisitive watcher off the scent.

Consequently, when the door-bell rang, Nipper was out of the consulting-room and down the stairs long before the housekeeper at Gray's Inn Road could make up her mind whether she had heard the ring or not.

He opened the door and the light from the hall fell on a tall man, almost entirely covered by the long overcoat he wore. But his clean-shaven face was obviously "made

up" with paint and powder, and his head was adorned with a perfectly fitting silver-grey wig.

Below the overcoat Nipper caught a glimpse of palest blue stockings, and the visitor's shoes were more suitable for a woman than a man.

"Mr. Lee at home?" the visitor asked in a very pleasant, almost amused voice. "Mr. Jones—I think he expects me."

"Yes, sir." Nipper ushered the visitor inside and led him upstairs to Lee's room with the air of an old family retainer.

But when he had shown his visitor inside, Nipper also remained. He gathered from the slight sign Lee gave him that the detective desired him to stay.

As the visitor removed his loosely fitting coat Nipper had the feeling that a courtier

—Starring Nelson Lee, Detective, And His Assistant, Nipper!

COMES BACK!



Mystery surrounds the disappearance of the King of Dalmania, who holds the secret of the whereabouts of a fabulous treasure. That he has been seized by ruthless fortune-hunters is discovered by Nelson Lee, the famous detective, who, in a courageous effort to avert disaster to the kingdom of Dalmania, faces countless perils!

from the French courts of the eighteenth century had come into the room.

He was dressed just as one sees the courtier in pictures of that period. Palest blue silk, knee breeches, and a wonderful coat, combined with his perfect make-up to make a very pleasing and even an impressive picture.

"How do you do, Mr. Lee?" Mr. Jones laughed quietly. "I expect you know who I am?"

He turned as he caught sight of Nipper still in the room, then looked at Lee again.

"I want, of course, to see you alone," he said meaningly.

"That will be quite all right, Mr. Jones," Lee answered. "This is my assistant, Nipper. He is a duplicate of myself, as it were. Anything you say to me is equally safe in his keeping. It is better so. I'm sure you will appreciate the point, sir."

"Quite!" The make-believe eighteenth-

century Bourbon prince smiled and turned to Nipper. "Pleased to meet you, Nipper."

Nipper's memory was a pretty good one, and just for a moment or two he felt irritated that he could not place their visitor. Then it flashed into his mind why he knew him so well.

"Lord Keston, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs!" Nipper repeated it to himself with a feeling of pride that he had discovered the man's identity.

Lord Keston, or "Mr. Jones," as he preferred to be known for the time, had taken the chair Lee had brought forward for him. The queer little smile of amusement still flickered about his lips as he began to speak.

"You've probably recognised me, Mr. Lee, despite the charming complexion they have put upon me, and these equally wondrous clothes I wear?"

"I have, Mr. Jones," Lee said with a smile.

"Quite." Mr. Jones was still amused. "I don't think I should ever make a detective. I mean—I'm really disguised twice over at the moment, if you follow me? My very excellent secretary was going to appear at a certain function in this particular costume as a Bourbon prince. There are at least twenty other people going to the same brilliant function in the same brilliant disguise, while I am supposed to be confined to the house with a chill. So I really am quite hopeful that my visit here won't be in all the newspapers to-morrow."

"You have reason to believe that others would find it of interest?" Lee suggested.

"I am inclined to that opinion," Mr. Jones answered. "I want you, if possible, to undertake a case which has already engaged the urgent attention of our own secret service. But you will take it up entirely on your own account. I understand that Scotland Yard will always afford you any facilities you desire without any special instruction?"

"That is so," Lee assured him.

"Good!" Mr. Jones nodded. "Any other facilities you require, Mr. Lee, will also be given. Verney Dean, of the Foreign Office, will attend to that. You have doubtless seen these?"

He took from an unnoticed pocket in his silken coat two newspaper cuttings and passed them to the detective.

One was headed:

"REVOLUTION IN DALMANIA!
Rumoured Anti-Royalist Attack on the
Palace.

King Denis Flees from Castalan."

In the centre of the column was a photograph of King Denis of Dalmania, a strikingly handsome young man of twenty-eight or thirty years of age.

The news, however, was not very definite. Telegrams received by roundabout methods gave different stories. There had been a revolution, one message said. Another stated that there had simply been a demonstration and the king had promptly abdicated and fled for safety.

The second cutting was headed:

"Dalmania's Strange Silence.

"Alarming and contradictory rumours continue to be received from Castalan, the capital of Dalmania," the newspaper stated. "At the moment, however, all communication with the country appears to be cut off.

"No messages have been received for two days. The Dalmania's Legation in London are confident that nothing in the nature of a revolution has taken place, and laugh at the suggestion that the king has abdicated.

"There is no more popular figure in the country than the soldier king of the Dalmanians. The romantic story of his life with his army during the great retreat of the Dalmanians is well known, and forms one of the most thrilling histories of personal courage the great war afforded.

"Yet, on other reliable information, it appears that King Denis fled from his capital

at the first rumour of trouble. The present leader of the Government has apparently joined the revolutionaries, and is acting as temporary ruler of the country."

Both these cuttings were nearly a fortnight old. Lee remembered reading them well, but since then there had been little or nothing in the papers regarding Dalmania. Whether there had been a revolution or not, or whether King Denis still ruled, was still a subject of doubt.

"I have seen those, of course," Lee said as he handed back the cuttings. "What is the truth of the situation now?"

Mr. Jones looked fixedly at Lee for some few moments before replying.

"You will regard it as almost incredible, Mr. Lee," he said slowly. "But so far as actual facts go, I can tell you very little more than is contained in these fortnight-old newspapers."

He paused for a moment, carefully replacing the newspaper cuttings in his pocket and taking out a small envelope, which he played with as he began to speak again.

"There is no doubt that King Denis has disappeared," he went on. "We can accept that as a fact. In my own mind there is no shadow of doubt that he is not the sort of man to run into danger—or away from danger, for that matter.

"Secondly, there has really been nothing in the way of a revolution in the country. But they have apparently deposed the king, and some sort of temporary government is carrying on quite normally. Their attitude to this country, however, is unmistakably hostile, so far as I can gather. That opinion, let me say, is largely guess-work.

"Next, it is particularly important to us that King Denis should remain the ruler of Dalmania. A marriage alliance between him and a certain well-known British lady was shortly to be arranged.

"There is another and more important matter, however. As you know, Britain financed Dalmania throughout the whole of the war. The king himself assured us that once they returned to their own country the question of repayment would be a simple one.

"In common with one or two other countries, Dalmania had for many years accumulated a secret reserve, a hidden 'war chest,' if you like, for just such an emergency as the last war.

"The actual location of that war chest was known always to two men only—the ruling king and his chief adviser, who, as you doubtless know, is a permanent official and not elected. When he retires his successor becomes the bearer of the secret."

"I have heard something of that," Lee said, as the Minister paused. "You know that this reserve actually existed? In what form?"

"It was purely a gold reserve," Mr. Jones answered. "The amount is estimated at somewhere between sixty and seventy mil-

sions of money, made of Dalmanian, Russian and British gold specie and gold ingots. The greater portion of that rightfully belongs to Britain now!"

"It was arranged," Lord Keston continued. "Quite recently, for the shipment of a certain proportion of this gold to Britain. Obviously, it was a task which required a great amount of secrecy, and elaborate precautions were to be taken so that the actual secret of Dalmania's hidden treasure-house should not pass from the two men who held it—King Denis, and his adviser in chief, who is his uncle, Prince Peter!"

"And Prince Peter of Dalmania died three weeks ago—or less than that!" Lee remembered the fact swiftly.

MR. JONES nodded.

"There is a good deal of mystery surrounding his death. It came so unexpectedly that there was no mention of a successor being appointed. Almost immediately afterwards the king himself disappeared.

"The country still goes on, but apparently there is the strictest censorship of all news to and from the capital. At the end of a fortnight even we, with all our resources, know practically nothing. There is one tiny clue—but whether any reliance can be placed upon it, I am very doubtful."

He unfolded the envelope which he had been holding, and took out a scrap of soiled paper. This he handed over to Lee with the greatest care.

"Held prisoner—believe England—have no knowledge. Peter dead. Keeping secret.—DENIS DALMAIN."

On the other side of the paper was written in the same hand and with the same blunt lead.—LORD KESTON, London, Eng.

"How did this reach you?" Lee asked, but did not hand the paper back.

Lord Keston shrugged his shoulders.

"More by luck than anything else," he answered. "A car had a temporary breakdown in a certain Surrey lane just outside a farm worker's cottage. The man himself strolled down his garden, but there was apparently no serious trouble.

"There were three people in the car, and they got out for a time. After they had got away again, the man noticed a slip of paper in the road and picked it up. This was it."

Nelson Lee asked two or three questions about this incident, and to all of them Lord Keston could give no definite replies. The fullest possible inquiry had already been made.

The man was doubtful about the paper and was tempted to destroy it. On second thoughts he decided that no harm could come to him if he slipped it into an envelope with a slip of paper on which was written: "Found by F. Lamb outside his house on Monday evening last. F. Lamb, Honey-suckle Cottage, Missledon Lane, Ternswood, Surrey."

"We sent down to Ternswood at once, of course," Lord Keston said. "The man thought that the note must have been put through the window of the car on the left-hand side while the other three were inquiring into the cause of the breakdown.

"There is one other little point Lamb noticed, and that was the number of the car. It happens to be very easily remembered—number AZ 100."

"You have traced the car?" Lee asked quickly.

Lord Keston smiled in his sadly humorous way.

"It happens to be the number of my own official car," he said quietly. "They must have had a false number-plate, for my car, AZ 100 was in the garage the whole of Monday."

His eyes opened a little wider, as he looked questioningly at Lee. But the detective made no comment. He simply put another question regarding Lamb.

For some time they discussed it, while Nipper, sitting some distance away, noted every word.

"That is every detail, I think, Mr. Lee," Lord Keston said, at last. "I have held nothing back from you, and frankly confess that I have no theories, even. I don't know whether I believe that King Denis is in England or not. But for a good many reasons it is highly important to me—and to this country—I would even say to Europe—that this mystery should be solved within a very short time."

He rose and took up his coat. Lee also jumped to his feet, and helped him to put on his coat.

"Good-bye, Mr. Lee," Lord Keston held out his hand. "I am afraid it is a very vague and doubtful kind of problem which I have put before you. But Verney Deane assures me that you are our best hope. We have a vague feeling that everything is watched. That is why I have endeavoured not to handicap you in the beginning."

Nelson Lee accompanied him to the hall door, but said very little beyond the fact that he would make such inquiries as he could.

"My car should be at the door now," Lord Keston said. "I did not keep it waiting. And, needless to say, it is not AZ 100!"

He laughed as Lee opened the door and looked out. A car had just drawn up, and he told Lord Keston.

A moment later the visitor had crossed the pavement and stepped inside the car. It move off almost immediately, and Nelson Lee returned slowly to his room.

"By Jove, guv'nor!" Nipper greeted him with a certain amount of excitement. "This is the sort of case that's worth taking up. How much money is there in it? Sixty millions? There's a big man behind it. Who do you reckon it is?"

Nelson Lee was already trying to deduce certain theories from what his late visitor had said, but he had scarcely reached the

stage where he was prepared to suggest the name of the person behind it.

In certain types of crime it is often possible to identify a particular job as being the handiwork of a certain expert. The trouble in such a case is to collect the proofs and to find the man.

But the mystery which had led an important Minister to visit Nelson Lee in his own rooms to-night would scarcely come under the heading of "a job"!

"I don't think any of our old friends are organising revolutions, Nipper!" Lee laughed. "The control of a country and its secret treasury is rather outside the sphere of our criminal acquaintances."

"What about Mark Lehman?" Nipper said, and there was a hint of disappointment in his voice, as though he expected the gov'nor to have decided on that already. "That was the sort of thing he managed pretty well in South America. Then he tried to pinch Innisgrail Island, up off the Scottish Coast. We beat him there, and he got clean away with his partner, old Dr. Melzer—or Melzer's body, because that bird fell off the top of the cliff. Anyway, they got away, and we've never heard a hint of them since. I thought this job sounded like Mark Lehman and his crowd right away. Kidnapping a king, fixing up an imitation revolution, and a big prize at the end of it—it would appeal to him!"

Just for a change Nipper had the pleasure of feeling that he had surprised the gov'nor. Lee looked at the youngster with a rare touch of amazement in his eyes.

"Perhaps you're right, Nipper," he said. "It's just the huge type of scheme that Lehman, and Lehman alone, would dare to tackle. We'll start on the business the first thing in the morning, young 'un. We'll have to go down and see this chap, Lamb, who found the note. That's the beginning of our trail."

He looked at the address again.

"Honeysuckle Cottage, Missledon Lane, Missledon. Wasn't it at Little Missledon we first picked up Dr. Melzer's trail, Nipper?"

"Missledon Hall, Little Missledon, gov'nor," Nipper said.

Nelson Lee nodded and stared again at the paper.

"It is highly probable that it is nothing more than pure coincidence," he said slowly. "We mustn't rush ahead too rapidly, or jump to hasty conclusions, Nipper. Still, if we're anywhere in that neighbourhood to-morrow we'll make a few discreet inquiries about Missledon Hall."

CHAPTER 2.

Into the Trap!

SOMEWHERE towards noon on the following morning a couple of pedestrians, evidently on a country holiday, strolled down Missledon Lane at Ternswood.

Nelson Lee and Nipper had motored from town, but had left their car some way back. It would scarcely be correct to say they were disguised, but in his present country attire, and wearing a pair of sun-glasses, even Lee's friends would probably have passed him without recognition.

As they approached Honeysuckle Cottage a man in his shirtsleeves could be seen busy with the hoe.

"Wonder if this is our man?" Lee said quietly to Nipper. "Better handle him carefully at first."

They need not have worried, however. The man admitted on the first inquiry that his name was F. Lamb, and guessed almost immediately that the two wanted to talk about the note he had posted to Lord Keston.

There was really no need at all for skilful handling. The man seemed to be a very sensible country worker, who, if a bit slower than the average townsman in speech, was not a whit behind him in intelligence.

He threw away his cigarette as he came to the end of the garden in answer to Lee's call.

In ten minutes, however, the man had told the detective exactly what had occurred over the note. It was, in every detail, the same story as Lord Keston had told Nelson Lee last night.

"And you didn't notice any of the three men at all, I understand?" Lee asked. "You wouldn't be able to recognise any of them if you saw them again?"

"Well, sir—" The man hesitated and began to play nervously with his hoe. "I mean—I don't want to get myself into no trouble. I told the other gentleman as came down to see me that I didn't really see any of the men. In a manner of speaking, that was true, sir, but—well, something's happened since, and—and—"

Lamb was evidently nervous and upset, and it was then that Nelson Lee began the real gentle handling business.

It came out gradually, and it was quite understandable. The man had seen something of the men, but was afraid of his own powers to describe them, especially as at the time he had not paid any particular heed to them.

Yesterday, however, he had actually seen one of the men again. He had even found out that he was living in the neighbourhood, and was a doctor. But he was a newcomer to these parts.

"Ah, I see!" Lee nodded. "And what kind of a man is he, this doctor? I mean, is he short or tall, young or elderly?"

"Short sort of chap," Lamb answered. "I had a good look at him yesterday when I saw him. I'm quite sure it was the same man, only when the other gentlemen came to see me—I mean, I'd have told them, sir, only they sort of made me feel nervous, and I didn't like to get mixed up in no rows."

"Oh, I quite understand!" Lee said, anxious to assure Lamb that, after all, there was really nothing for him to be nervous

about. "A short sort of chap, you say? Any idea of his age?"

"He was stoutish, too," Lamb went on, "and I'd say he'd be over fifty. Got a funny sort of face, he has—looks as if he's just going to sleep, but is trying to keep his eyes open, if you understand my meaning, sir?"

"I think I know what you mean," Lee agreed. "Clean-shaven, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir. Thick sort of lips he's got—hang down a bit like a dog's. I had a good look at him yesterday, because he stopped to ask me a question."

"He talks like this," Nipper interrupted quickly, and made a queer grimace as he began to speak in a heavy, dull monotone, with just a faint touch of Yankee nasal twang.

"That's the chap!" Lamb smiled pleasantly at Nipper's mimicry. "You know him all right, sir!"

Nelson Lee nodded, but did not seem so excited as Nipper was over this discovery.

As a matter of fact, Nipper found it difficult to refrain from shouting out aloud. The description of the man who had been one of the passengers in the car was beyond any shadow of doubt—Mark Lehman!

They were on the trail now in good earnest. It was not often they struck the scent so quickly and easily as in this case.

Indeed, Nipper marvelled at Lee's calm. He was still going on with his patient and apparently casual questions.

They learned that the man's name was Dr. Carton, and that he had taken a cottage which was on the Missledon Hall estate. It had been a keeper's house, and was right in the heart of the wood, but apparently the doctor was paying a very high rent for it because it just suited him.

"He's got a bad case, so they say," Lamb was explaining. "I was over that way last night, and Bill Soames was saying that he's trying to cure a chap who's lost his memory. Been shell-shocked, you know, sir, and his nerves have all gone. A wealthy chap, they say he is. But that's all I know."

"I see. Thanks very much," Nelson Lee replied. "Your information has been very useful indeed, Mr. Lamb."

"You'll find the cottage easily enough, sir," Lamb told him, "if you're wanting to have a look at it. They say this chap he's looking after sleeps outside—sort of open shed there is, near the house. Trying the fresh air cure on him!"

"Ah, yes!" Lee scarcely seemed to notice the information, and Nipper guessed that he was already piecing the whole business together. "I may come along and have another chat with you, Mr. Lamb."

"I shall be here all day, sir," Lamb assured him.

"And probably I'll have a look round that cottage," Lee asserted. "I should think night-time would be the best. I guess I can see in the dark all right."

"Yes, sir," Lamb looked at him admir-

ingly. "You're one of these London detectives, aren't you, sir?"

"That's right!" Lee told him. "It's difficult work, Mr. Lamb, but you've helped me very considerably this morning, and I won't forget it. See you again soon. Good-bye, Mr. Lamb."

They left him to return to his hoking. Not until they had gone some distance from the cottage did Nipper begin to talk.

"What d'you think of it, guv'nor?" he asked. "If the chap who was in that car wasn't Mark Lehman, I'll eat my hat!"

"Did you notice the cigarette Lamb was smoking, Nipper?" Lee asked quickly.

"No. What's that got to do with it?" It was Nipper's turn to take on a little puzzled frown now.

"Only that it was a Turkish or Egyptian cigarette," Lee said. "There's no violent reason why a farm-worker shouldn't smoke Turkish cigarettes, though it was very polite of him to throw nearly half of it away when he came to speak to me, as if he didn't want me to see it! And did you notice his hands?"

"Yes, I did," Nipper answered. "They were covered with soil."

"Which had been deliberately rubbed in," Lee added. "On nice white hands, with long fingers, which have never done very much manual work. And his arms—carefully dirtied with soil, but really as white as a woman's. And why does he recall this doctor fellow so exactly, when the other day he told the people who came down that he really never took any notice of the three men at all?"

"He explained that, guv'nor," Nipper urged. "It seemed quite a reasonable explanation to me. I don't quite see what you're driving at! Aren't you getting a bit too suspicious?"

"I'm horribly suspicious, Nipper," Lee answered. "Things have gone too simply altogether. In ten minutes or so he has given us sufficient information to identify Mark Lehman. Further, he tells us just where he lives and other facts which all point to the theory that, masquerading as a doctor, Lehman has the personage we want to discover in his charge."

"All that we need to do now, Nipper, is to stroll into the telegraph office and send a code message to Verney Deane. If everything works out with the same simplicity as it had done so far, then within twenty-four hours of receiving a vague outline of the mystery we have solved it. King Denis will have been discovered by the authorities, and Mark Lehman will be in the hands of the police!"

"You'll go round to this cottage and make sure that they are there first of all?" Nipper suggested.

"So you have just a faint doubt in your own mind, Nipper?" Lee laughed.

"Well, naturally, we ought to make quite certain," Nipper answered. "They might have got the wind up and moved on. And anyway, you always insist that you don't

accept anybody's testimony unless you can prove it yourself!"

"Excellent, Nipper." Lee appeared to be throwing off his doubts. "I think we'll just slip back and see our friend Lamb for a moment again. I want to see if he'll take me round to the cottage this evening."

They retraced their footsteps, but found that Lamb was not in the garden. As they opened the little gate, however, he appeared at the door and came down the path to meet them.

NELSON LEE very quickly explained what he desired. This afternoon he proposed to rest at the hotel where he was staying, but would like to be taken to some quiet place near the cottage where the doctor lived as soon as possible after dark.

"Yes, sir." Lamb agreed at once to the suggestion that he should personally conduct Lee.

Possibly it was the note which passed quietly between the two that influenced Lamb. He agreed that he would be ready for his visitor at seven o'clock.

It puzzled Nipper a little. On this second visit he had used his eyes carefully, and observed the details which Lee had remarked upon concerning the man's arms and hands.

He had barely a chance to mention his doubts to Lee because the latter opened the conversation as soon as they were out of earshot.

"There's a lot to be done this afternoon, young 'un," he told Nipper, and there was more cheerfulness in his voice now. "We shall have to divide our forces and meet again at the inn later on."

"Right-ho! What line do you want me to go on, guv'nor?"

"Make all the inquiries you can, discreetly, of course, about this man Lamb and his family. I'd like to have pursued this particular line myself, but I'll give you a suggestion of what's in my mind. Just suppose that this isn't the real F. Lamb at all. What has happened to the real Lamb and his family?"

"But— Great Scott!" Nipper looked up at the guv'nor with fresh perplexity.

"I admit it is merely a suspicion at the moment, Nipper. Still, I want you to work on it. Meantime, I'm going off after a very light lunch to investigate this wonderful keeper's cottage where Dr. Carton is trying to cure a wealthy patient suffering from a complete nervous breakdown."

At the nearest inn they stayed for half an hour or so for lunch. Over this meal the two made out their programme for the next few hours, and Nipper began to understand more fully what was in Lee's mind.

They arranged to meet again at the country hotel, about a mile or so from the inn, where they had garaged the car that morning.

"About half-past five, I think, Nipper," Lee suggested. "If I'm not back by that

time there'll be no need to worry for an hour or so."

"What about your arrangements to meet this chap, Lamb?" Nipper asked.

"I'm not troubling about that," Lee answered. "I think it's highly improbable either you or I will keep it. If I'm not back here by seven—"

"Yes?" Nipper queried, as Lee paused.

"I think your best plan will be to run back in the car to London as quickly as possible," Lee said. "Take every possible care and get hold of Harker at the Yard. You needn't tell him what the job is we're on, beyond the fact that I'm after Mark Lehman. Tell him what has happened to-day, of course. But you'll have to use your own discretion after that!"

Nelson Lee laughed a little at his own elaborate precautions. Yet, with the memory of his past encounters with Lehman's men still in his mind, it was just as well to leave nothing to chance.

The two parted very shortly afterwards. Nipper remained in the inn while Lee went off on his expedition.

The detective knew the country round here fairly well, for once before he and Nipper had explored all about Missledon Hall. That particular expedition had resulted in the flight of the tenants of the Hall. England was no longer safe for them, and the great house had come into the market again.

Nelson Lee knew very little about the present tenant, beyond the fact that he was a wealthy Englishman. In any case it would be rather absurd to suppose that Lehman had returned to the scene of his gang's first complete defeat in England.

The detective did not keep to the high road for any length of time, but chose his way carefully across fields and ditches until he came to the woods which formed part of the Missledon estate.

Here he proceeded even more cautiously, until he came within sight of the keeper's cottage which Lamb had described accurately to him.

From the first position he took up the detective could see the newly-erected shelter where the doctor's patient slept at night. In that detail, at all events, Lamb's story was confirmed.

For fully an hour afterwards, Lee moved about slowly and cautiously, trying to gather every detail he could. During the whole of that time there was no sign of a living soul about the place.

The cottage indeed seemed to be deserted. Beyond the shelter there did not appear to be any sign whatever that anyone had been near the place for many long weeks. Nelson Lee summed up the position quickly in his mind.

On the one hand was the possible risk of encountering Lehman's men, or Lehman himself, which might serve as a warning to them to get away; on the other hand was the complete uncertainty as to whether it was

Lehman, and even whether there was any truth at all in Lamb's story.

The detective decided that it was time to take some small risk. He worked round to the pathway again, and from here approached the house just as any ordinary caller would have done.

His knock on the door brought no response. He hammered strenuously until it became quite plain that the house was deserted.

the narrow passage which led to the front sitting-room of the cottage.

The door of this room was locked, but the key was still in the door. It was very stiff, however, and even Nelson Lee found that he had to exert all his strength.

"I'll break the key if I'm not careful!" he told himself, as he applied another mighty twist to it. "The man who turned this lock——"



In a flash the crooks were upon Nelson Lee. A sudden blow on the back of the head sent the detective reeling. "Got him! Walked right into the trap!" came the snarling voice of the leader of the gang.

After that he went round the place, still keeping an eye open for any possible emergency.

At the back he found one of the windows very slightly open. Peering into the room, he could see the open fireplace with a mass of burnt paper and rubbish as though someone had made a hasty clearance before quitting the place.

A moment after this discovery Lee had raised the window and clambered through into the kitchen.

His first brief inspection tended to confirm the impression slowly stealing into his mind. The place had been temporarily occupied within the past few weeks, but those who had been there had left hurriedly for some reason or other.

Going from the kitchen, he went along

He had been standing quite close to the door. A sudden bang right on the back of his head knocked his forehead against the panel.

But it was the terrific weight behind the blow which stunned Lee. He grasped the fact that he had been attacked even in that fraction of a second before he collapsed.

His brain made a frantic effort to preserve consciousness, but everything was slipping from him. Loud voices sounded in his ears, though his eyes had ceased to see.

"Got him! Walked right into the trap!" The words echoed and re-echoed in Lee's mind. They were his last knowledge of consciousness, but even before then his body had no sense of feeling. He was just drifting slowly down into blackness, while the voices continued to roar.

Above the roar he could hear those three words repeated and reiterated: "Into the trap! Into the trap!"

Three men were standing over the limp form which lay in the narrow passage. Two of them held cloth-covered cylinders of some kind which seemed to be heavily weighted.

All of them were dressed in pleasantly-fitting, country gentlemen's attire. There was nothing of the professional criminal or the hardened gaolbird in their appearance, at all events.

"My bird, I think," one of them said, and grinned. "A neat piece of work, I think, Bastow?"

"Very, Lennan! Guess the chief'll make you the sandbag specialist. And that's the great English detective, Nelson Lee, isn't it?"

He spoke with a nasal twang, and a sneer played about his lips as he stared down at the form below him.

There was very little conversation after that. The three men set to work, trussing up the detective and setting his limp form on a stretcher. And just as the darkness came on they quietly left the house. On the covered stretcher which they carried Nelson Lee still lay—out of the game for keeps—so Bastow said.

This man Bastow had once been a medical man in the United States, but the police wanted him over there. His knowledge was at the disposal of any crook who cared to pay his price. If he said that Nelson Lee's number was up, he spoke with the authority of one who can prove his words. If any man knew, it was Bastow!

CHAPTER 3.

At the Cottage.

FOR some time after Nelson Lee had left him Nipper remained in the same chair at the table where they had had their frugal lunch. Acting on Lee's instructions, he had artfully plied the landlord with questions about F. Lamb, and the whole bag of tricks had come out with a rush.

The real F. Lamb and his family had gone away for a holiday, financed by a man who had given them money provided they went away. The landlord himself had driven the party to the distant station. He said that Lamb had picked up some sort of paper in the lane and sent it to some big pot in London, and the police didn't want some criminal to get their own back on Lamb, so they had sent him and his family away for a quiet holiday, and cautioned him not to breathe a word to a soul. It was only by sheer chance that the landlord knew.

Nipper saw the hand of Mark Lehman in this cute move, and he realised that Nelson Lee had been right all along to be suspicious of the slick way things were going.

He lay down in a corner of the settle which stood on one side of the room. But the

moment the landlord had left the room Nipper was sitting up, and there was no sign of sleepiness or weariness about him now.

The guv'nor was right, as usual. The man they had talked with that morning was not the F. Lamb who had found the scrap of paper which had been sent to Lord Keston.

Who was he? What was the idea of telling Nelson Lee that wonderful yarn about the man he had seen get down from the car?

For fully an hour Nipper wrestled with the problem. He wished Lee had known all this for a certainty before he had gone to the cottage. Still, when he returned he would doubtless have complete proof of all Lehman's schemes.

Nipper strolled to the window and stood looking out on the highway which ran past the house. On the opposite side of the road a labourer had stopped to answer a question which a well-dressed pedestrian had put to him.

Unconsciously Nipper's eyes watched them even though his thoughts were wholly concentrated on the problem in his mind.

The well-dressed man walked on again for a few yards, then, changing his mind, he crossed the road and came towards the inn.

It was then that Nipper noticed a small closed car was standing by the door of the inn. The man passed close to it as he pushed at the door.

From the other side of the road the labourer now made a move. Slowly and casually he strolled over to the car and began to talk to the driver.

Nipper lost interest in them then because the door of the room he was in was opened, and the well-dressed man he had observed outside had put his head inside and was looking quickly round.

As he caught sight of Nipper he came inside and nodded to him cheerfully.

"Good-afternoon, sir! Pleasant day!"

The stranger smiled, and one judged by his tones that he was an affable, sociable kind of man.

"I'm too late to get any real refreshment, I suppose," he said. "Wonder if our friend, the landlord, would serve me with tea or coffee? Where is the old boy?"

He wandered about and ran the landlord to earth. Just what happened Nipper did not know, but the stranger came back smiling.

"A little huffy about it, of course," he said quietly to Nipper. "Still, I persuaded him. Tea! That will suit me admirably. I hope you are fond of tea, sir?"

"Yes," Nipper admitted, and one might have thought him a dull fellow in comparison with the smart stranger. "I like tea well enough."

"Excellent! D'you know, I've been walking for hours to-day and have not spoken to a single soul. I'm not a lonely sort of man myself, and it gets on my nerves. Are you also wandering about on your own?"

"No," Nipper said. "I'm waiting for a friend."

"Let's hope he's back to join us in time for tea, then," the stranger said. "I expect we shall have to wait quite a long time."

"I expect so." Nipper was speaking almost mechanically.

He knew perfectly well that the man was lying when he said that he had walked for miles. It was, to Nipper, such an obvious lie that he wondered the man had troubled to tell it.

There was scarcely a touch of dust on his perfectly polished boots. Now that the man had raised the doubt, Nipper wondered whether he had even walked fifty yards. Then he remembered the car at the door.

The man was still talking in his affable way, but Nipper scarcely listened to him, though he kept his eyes fixed on him all the time.

At the end of about five minutes the man jumped up.

"I expect we shall have to wait another hour for that tea!" he laughed. "I'll just run along and try to liven them up."

Evidently the stranger assumed that Nipper was going to join him at tea.

The man returned in a short time, and was still smiling cheerfully.

"That's all right," he said. "It's coming almost immediately."

When the landlord came in presently and laid the tray on the table there were two cups and saucers.

"You'll join me, of course?" the stranger said, and proceeded to pour out the tea. "I always hate having tea alone, don't you? And, anyway, I'm just making holiday to-day. It's quite wonderful weather, isn't it? Just look at the sky now."

He was in the act of putting the sugar in the tea, but paused for a moment and waved his hand towards the window.

"Fine, isn't it?" he asked, and Nipper also turned.

But out of the corner of his eye, Nipper saw exactly what happened. Something, a very tiny tablet, he imagined, fell from the man's hand into the cup.

It had been done very expertly and easily. The next second the sugar was dropped in, and the man was handing the cup to Nipper.

"Thanks very much!" the youngster said, and began to stir his tea. But his mind was racing ahead. He considered every possibility. If this man were one of Lehman's crowd, as he believed, and was working in conjunction with the two men outside, there would be very little chance for Nipper if he showed signs of fight.

He decided his course even while he was still stirring his tea.

"Excuse me—just for a moment!" Nipper jumped to his feet and made for the door quickly.

The man caught some muttered words about having forgotten something. It was all done so naturally that the kind-hearted

stranger had not the least suspicion for some minutes that Nipper had bolted.

There were other ways out of the house, and Nipper found one of them easily enough. He came out at the back, then went straight down the garden and over the fence which divided it from the fields beyond.

Nipper was not the kind of fellow who made a habit of running away from danger. If he had a weakness, it was rather the other way round. But the present was a case where strategy was of much more importance than direct violence.

At the little inn the affable stranger still waited, but gradually the smile on his face faded, and a look of annoyance took its place.

He jumped up at last, leaving both his own tea and his guest's untasted. A quick search in the inn revealed no sign of the young man for whom he was waiting.

Nor had the waiting chauffeur and the workman who was still chatting with him seen anything of their quarry.

"He's bolted!" the well-dressed man jumped to the truth at last, and began to curse. "Come on! Quick! I know where he'll make for. The Feathers Hotel! Drive there as quickly as possible. We'll get him there all right."

He jumped into the car, and the labourer followed him. A moment later the car was speeding down the road again.

Nipper at this moment was still pounding away over the fields. By now a rough plan of action had come into his mind, but it depended to some extent upon what time Nelson Lee returned to the hotel.

He had judged the direction in which the Feather's Hotel lay pretty accurately, and long before he actually reach the high road he could see the place almost directly ahead of him.

Just as he was within a few yards of the fence which separated the field from the road he caught a glimpse of a small, light-coloured closed car just drawing up outside the hotel. There was something familiar about the car, and in any case Nipper was now in the mood when he would have suspected anything.

He approached the fence cautiously and found a fairly safe observation post behind the hedge which separated the fields. In the next few minutes he thanked his good fortune that he had not covered the ground more quickly.

The three men who had been anxious to capture Nipper had rather overdone their haste. They reached the hotel just a minute or two before Nipper could have accomplished the journey.

On the way they had seen nothing of him, of course. A brief inquiry at the hotel itself satisfied them that he had not reached it yet, and they came out and wandered over to the fence.

They stood some distance from where Nipper lay in hiding, but he recognised them quite easily.

Their search yielded them nothing, and they decided to move on again, having come to the conclusion that he had not made for the hotel, after all, but had probably rushed to the nearest railway station.

The three went back to the car at last, and Nipper saw it move off again with a sense of complete satisfaction.

NOT until they were well out of sight did Nipper himself venture to climb over the fence and cross the road to the hotel. Nor did he advertise his presence too conspicuously even then, but went straight round to the garage at the back of the hotel.

The man in charge showed some faint signs of surprise on seeing him. He spoke to Nipper before the latter had a chance to say anything to him.

"You're not Mr. Nipper, are you?" the man asked, and on being assured that he had guessed correctly, the man began to smile.

"That's funny, sir," he said. "They've just sent out from the hotel to ask if you'd come here, and I said no—because you hadn't then. Some gentlemen called to pick you up, seeing that the car you came down in was sent for this afternoon."

"Our car sent for?" Nipper exclaimed. "When? Who came for it?"

"Tallish chap, he was," the man answered. "Said he'd been sent for it by the gentleman as owned it—Mr. Lee he called him, sir. He'd got a note from him, too, giving the number and all particulars, so it's quite all right. He mentioned about you, too, sir. Said that someone would turn up for you later, so you was to wait for 'em."

"I see," Nipper nodded, feeling for a few seconds incapable of asking any further questions.

He did presently, however, and inquired minutely into every detail. The messenger who came was an expert driver and knew the car well. He said that his employer Mr. Lee, was not able to return himself, and was wanting the car as quickly as possible.

And all this had happened barely half an hour ago. Since then other people had apparently been along inquiring for Nipper.

Just for a brief moment he stood listening to the man's talk, a sense of hopelessness filling his mind. Everything had begun so well that morning, but in the past two or three hours coincidence and contradiction seemed to have piled themselves on each other.

He tried to connect everything up, to arrange the details in their proper order, and to understand just what had happened so far.

"I'll just let them know in the hotel that you've turned up, sir—unless you're going in yourself?" the garage man was saying, and it wakened Nipper from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"No, I'm not going inside," Nipper said quickly. "I— You might let them know

sometime that I'll try and call again before seven o'clock!"

"Right, sir!" The man nodded and he walked alongside Nipper for a little way.

In his present state Nipper did not want to enter the hotel, nor did he want to hear this man talk. He wanted to be alone and to think out this hopeless tangle which seemed to surround to-day's quest.

For which reason Nipper once again went into hiding, and chose a place from which he could command a clear view of the main entrance to the hotel.

It was now about five o'clock. In the next two hours Nipper did not leave his observation post, and during that time only one incident of note occurred.

But this incident was quite important enough. The small closed car returned, and from where he stood Nipper could see the man who had asked him to take tea with him that afternoon, jump out and enter the hotel again.

Altogether, the car stayed there nearly twenty minutes, and in that time Nipper judged that a fairly careful search had been made for him.

The car went away again at last, but it proceeded very slowly down the road, as though its occupants were anxious not to pass anyone on the road.

Seven o'clock came. Even before then Nipper had given up hope of Lee's return. He recalled what the gov'nor had told him just before they parted, and in present circumstances it seemed as though Nelson Lee had anticipated trouble for himself.

But to get back to London and seek Inspector Harker's help was beyond Nipper's power now. Apart from the difficulties of getting to the station, it was questionable whether he would get a train that night. And to approach a telephone booth was asking for trouble, as Lehman's crowd would be bound to watch things like that.

Nevertheless, he decided to leave some sort of trail behind him if possible. He knew something of Lehman's methods, and it might be that Nipper himself would find himself in an awkward corner before the night was out.

He took out his notebook, and, in the fading light, wrote a brief note. The question of envelope was solved by using one which had already passed through the post, and was addressed to himself. A stamp at the back acted as a seal, and Nipper scribbled through his own name and address and carefully wrote in the name of Inspector Harker at Scotland Yard.

Having accomplished this, he carefully left his hiding-place, and with all due caution, went down the road. In due course he found a wall letter-box, and the somewhat shabby-looking missive, marked in pencil "Important," was duly posted.

In everything that he did this night Nipper acted as though half a dozen pos-

sible assailants were lying in wait for him near at hand.

After he had posted his letter he avoided the open road. He knew, of course, in which direction the keeper's cottage lay, but it was a more difficult task to find it now that the light had gone than it would have been in broad daylight.

He succeeded in the end, but by now it was half-past eight and fairly dark. A rising moon helped, however, to show up the dim outline of the unlighted cottage.

For some time Nipper did nothing more than watch. The faintest flicker of light from one of the windows, or the least sound of someone moving would have told him the answer to his first question as to whether the house was inhabited or not.

The silence was uncanny. With every man, however brave, there comes a time when action is preferable to useless waiting. Nipper moved nearer the house at last, and began to make a closer inspection.

He found eventually, just as Lee had found that afternoon, the open window at the back of the house. It was not more than two or three inches open at present, and Nipper began to raise it gently.

But there was still no sign or sound of anyone in the place, and he ventured inside.

"This is a queer business!" Nipper told himself, when at last he ventured to flash his pocket torch about the place. "Somebody's been having a general clearance here, by the look of things."

There was not much to be gathered from the kitchen, however, and Nipper moved on.

"I don't believe there's a soul in the place!" he decided, after he had stood in the hall, listening intently, for some minutes. "We'll risk a light again."

He switched on the flash lamp, but instantly turned it off again and stood with his back to the wall.

The flash might have been a signal to someone outside, for the instant it came on there was a sound.

Nipper's first impression was that a dog was at the door. He could hear the curious panting and gasping an animal will make in its attempts to gain an entrance.

"Got to find out about this!" Nipper decided, and slipped back quietly to the kitchen.

He was not out to take any risks yet, and climbed noiselessly through the window again. Outside he crept along the wall to the front of the house.

He lay flat on the ground before venturing to peer round the end of the house, but at first he could see nothing whatever.

Then the moon, emerging slowly from the clouds which had been obscuring it, cast its pale light on a curious object which lay right by the door.

It was moving a little when Nipper first saw it. Now it rose upwards, and he recognised the outline of a man.

The figure seemed to be struggling to reach forward. Just for a moment or two

it was on its knees, with the body very erect, so that Nipper could see the outline of a face. Then one hand stretched out and seemed to strike the door.

Nipper could hear the faint sound as the man's hand struck the woodwork. Then, as though the effort had taken every ounce of strength from him, the man lurched forward and slightly sideways, and lay helpless on the ground again.

A man's natural instincts at times overcome all other feelings. Just for a brief time the job he was on took a secondary place in Nipper's mind. The man he had been watching so cautiously was very plainly in need of help and succour.

Nipper was on his feet and running forward within the next few seconds. As he bent over the man a little gasping sound came from his lips, followed by the curious panting noise which Nipper had first heard from inside the house.

"He's pretty bad, whoever he is," Nipper decided in a few moments. "What am I going to do with him?"

As though to aid him in his decision the man made another effort to rise, and must have opened his eyes and seen Nipper by his side.

It acted as an electric shock might have done. He was on his knees almost without any effort, it seemed, and his arms were stretched out in the manner of a wrestler's. Just for an instant Nipper fancied that he was going to attack him.

"Who are you?" The man gasped the question in a croaking kind of whisper.

"Friend!" said Nipper promptly, and put out a hand.

He had not the faintest idea who the man was, but at least he was his friend while he was in this state.

"Ah!" The man was swaying again, and Nipper's arms came forward and held him.

"Here, take this!" Nipper remembered that he had come out that morning fully prepared for various emergencies, as usual.

He kept himself quite close to the man while he unfastened the flask and pressed it to his lips. The effect was speedily shown and Nipper withdrew his support.

"Think you can manage to get up?" he asked. "Collar my arm."

With an effort the man struggled to his feet. Nipper, coming back to realities again, decided that they would be safer round by the side of the house.

Very gently he helped his companion along until they were in the darker shadows. Here he paused for a time and allowed this new "friend" to lean against the wall.

"Where are you wanting to get to?" Nipper asked the question slowly and quietly. "There's no one in that house."

"No," the man was still speaking with an effort, and appeared to be utterly beaten. "I am going—London. Lord Keston—Keston!"

"Great Scott!" It was Nipper's turn to indulge in a mild gasp now. "Lord Keston? Queer!"

Then it struck him that after all this might not be among the coincidences of this day. It might be that the case was making rapid progress.

"You're not the ki—I mean, Mr. Denis Dalmain, are you?" he asked.

"That is my name," the man answered. "Why do you ask? Who—who are you?"

There was a note of doubt in his voice, and he still kept his arms pressed back against the wall.

"I'm a friend," Nipper said, and spoke very clearly. "Name, Nipper. Assistant to Nelson Lee, the detective. We're hunting for you!"

"I—it is very good——" Nipper's new friend began, but broke off abruptly with a little start.

From somewhere in the woods came a clear whistle. It was answered almost immediately by another.

On the man who had been king—who was still a king in name—the clear call seemed to have a temporary stupefying effect. He still kept himself pressed tightly back against the wall of the house, his arms stretched out a little from his side, but his head had turned, and he was endeavouring to keep his eyes fixed on the corner of the house.

To Nipper the whistle sounded as a challenge. It was plainly a signal from one man to another, so that they might keep in touch with each other. And Nipper jumped to the conclusion at once that the men were out hunting for his new friend.

"We've got to move," he whispered swiftly. "How d'you feel? You can't run?"

Denis Dalmain, to give him the incognito under which he had been known in England, struggled to answer. But it was scarcely necessary for him to do so. Only too obviously the man was not capable of any real effort.

"You go," he managed to gasp. "Leave me. Tell Lord Keston—here. Go to Lady Mar——"

"Give me your arm," Nipper said. "Got an idea. We can talk later."

He was helping Denis Dalmain along before the latter quite understood. It was not a very rapid journey, but they reached the window at last.

"Now! Make an effort!" urged Nipper, and bent down in order to help his friend upward. "Get inside!"

It was by no means easy, for Denis Dalmain seemed as weak as a baby. Nipper perspired freely, and his friend did all he could to help himself. Somehow he got up on to the window-sill then fell rather than clambered into the room.

A moment later Nipper himself had jumped up and levered himself through the window, hoping against hope that the men hunting in the wood would not deem it necessary to come near that house.

CHAPTER 4.

The Man who Came Back.

NELSON LEE did not come back to consciousness slowly and gradually. It all seemed to happen quite suddenly.

One minute he had no knowledge of anything that was taking place. The next he opened his eyes just as he might have done after a short, pleasant sleep.

Nor was his brain fogged and dull. Even as he opened his eyes he recalled his last waking moment clearly. He felt again the sudden jerk forward, and the numbing pain about his eyes, the roar of voices, and above all, the repetition of that hateful refrain: "Into the trap! Into the trap!"

So that his attitude on waking immediately became a fighting one. He tried to spring up and to use his arms—to feel his muscles ready for action.

That was not possible. He quickly discovered that he was very securely fastened to what appeared to be a strong wooden arm-chair. His arms were lying along the rests, and from the elbow to the wrist were carefully bound.

In similar fashion his legs were secured to the lower part of the chair. His body was also bound to the back of the chair.

He looked up to find a well-built, pleasantly attired man, whom he had never seen in his life before, looking down upon him with a faint smile of amusement.

"Waal, you've wakened up at last, Mr. Nelson Lee. Pleased to meet you. I've heard a lot of talk about you, but never had the pleasure of running across you before to-day. My name's Bastow. Never heard of Bastow before—not me, anyway?"

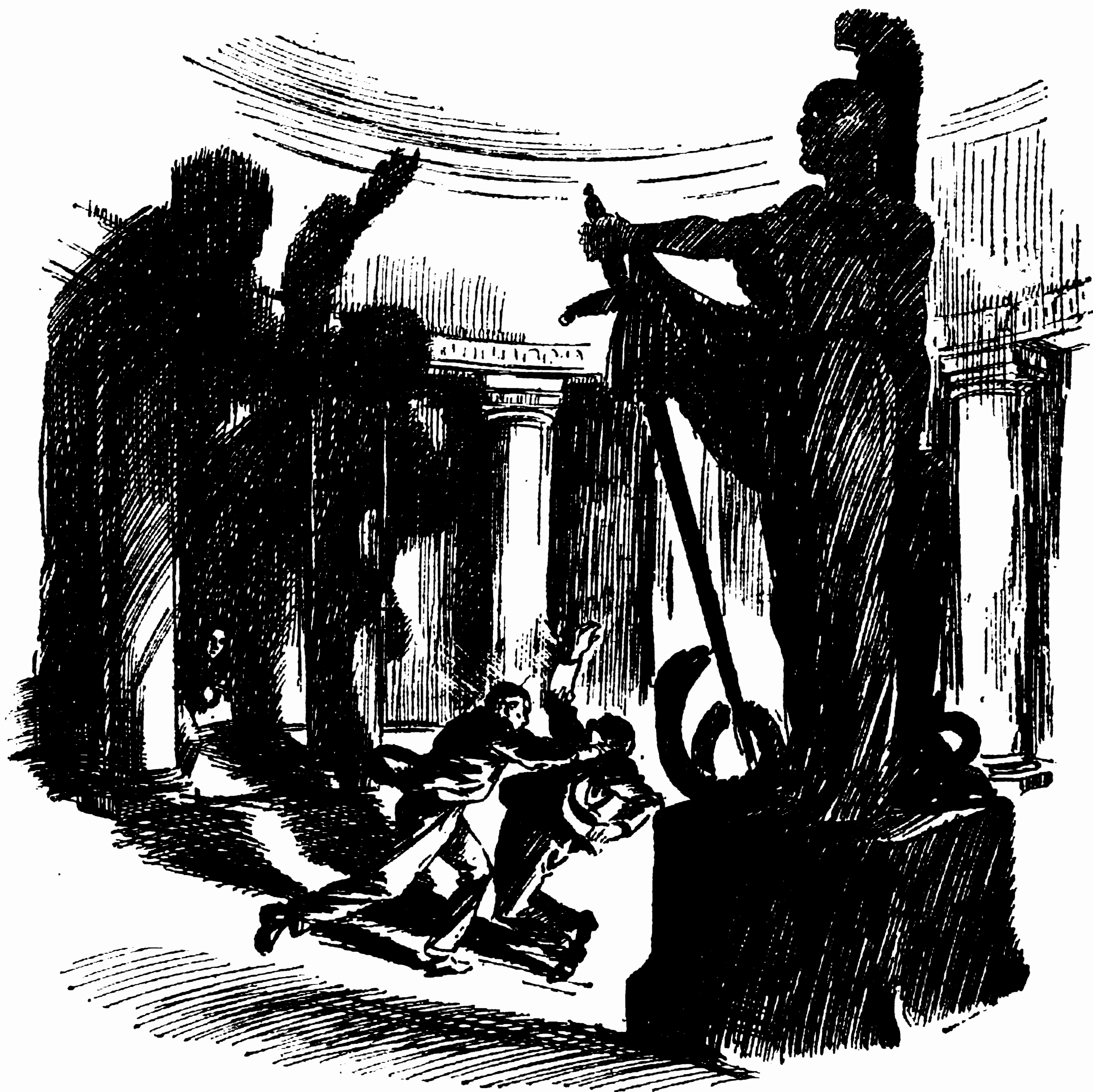
The man spoke with just a faint drawl, and with that quite slight nasal twang of the travelled American citizen. It was not so much his speech, however, as the man's cool superiority and affectation of humour which annoyed Lee.

"I've not met you before," the detective said, "nor heard of you. But I'd like to know what this means? Do you propose to keep me in this position very long?"

"Now, you've rather got me," Bastow smiled again in that lazy, irritating manner of his. "I'm only your medical attendant for the time being, though I had a little part in seeing you safely to sleep. Wonderful what a little drugs will do. They've been taking a lot of trouble over you, Mr. Lee. You were some swell, weren't you, in the detective line? Not so swell just now, though. Let's see, I've trussed you up neatly, haven't I? Want to make you look nice and pretty before your friends come in."

He walked slowly round the chair in which Lee was fastened, examining the cords with an affectation of carelessness.

"I'll just trim this up a bit," he remarked, and from a small table near at hand picked up a strong knife.



The crook shrieked with uncontrollable fear as a wild shape came swooping down at him from the shadows of the pillars. The next moment he was at death grips with the newcomer!

With this he proceeded to cut off an inch or so of surplus cord at the point where it was tied round Lee's wrist.

"It's a neat job," he said, after he had completed it, and stood back a little way to admire his handiwork. "Scientifically done, Mr. Lee. Your hands are free, you see, so's you won't get the cramp, but you can't play about with them much. Eh?"

"It's very good of you," Lee said calmly. "But will you tell me how long it is proposed to keep me in this position?"

Again Bastow smiled in that superior and irritating fashion which he affected.

Before he could answer, however, there was a sound from the door. The American turned and faced the newcomer who stood in the doorway.

"In three minutes," Bastow called to him. "I'm just fixing him now."

The door closed again, and Bastow turned to Nelson Lee.

"They're very anxious to see you, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I wanted to have this little chat with you. Been a real pleasure to me, having heard so much about you. They've told me what a smart detective you are, but Bastow has beaten you. But here come the bosses. I'll retire, for the time being."

He went to the door, which was just being opened from the outside, and stood back while the new visitor entered.

The newcomer nodded to Bastow, and asked some brief question, which Bastow, a talkative man, as Lee had already discovered, answered with equal brevity.

Bastow went out, and in another moment or so Lee was face to face with the man who had sworn to have vengeance upon him—Mark Lehman.

He was not altered in any way. Heavily built, inclined to shortness, with a dull, almost stupid face, Mark Lehman would not

at first sight have impressed anyone as being a man of extraordinary energy and endowed with a tremendous capacity for organisation.

Yet this was the man who for years had been the unknown controller of various schemes of appropriation and robbery so skillfully that the very men he had robbed of their rights were often made to appear as criminals.

Nelson Lee had already discovered something of his power and capacity when he had come into conflict with him or his helpers over certain cases.

To-day, the name of Martin Lehman was on the list of men urgently wanted by the authorities at Scotland Yard. But since the day when Nelson Lee and Inspector Harker had foiled him in his attempt to commandeer the islet he coveted on the Scottish coast, nothing had been seen or heard of Lehman and his gang.

"Urgh!" Lehman stood looking down on Lee, his big, fish-like eyes staring at the detective without any expression of surprise or wonder, or even gladness. "I said you would meet me again, Lee!"

"Ah, yes"—Lee allowed a faint smile to flicker about his lips—"I remember now! Mark Lehman, isn't it? You have the advantage of me—for the moment."

"You will never interfere with my plans again," Mark Lehman answered, without any touch of anger in his voice.

He spoke, indeed, as though he were repeating a sentence he had learned, but did not understand its meaning. Then, without waiting for Lee to reply, he turned towards the door and raised his hand as though signalling to someone just outside.

The door had been left open, and as Lee turned towards it now a long invalid carriage was being wheeled through the doorway. On the bed of the carriage sat a man, carefully propped up, so that his back was at an angle of about forty-five degrees, while his head was comfortably pushed forward a little.

Just at first Nelson Lee did not recognise the man. He was bearded, but his cheeks showed the pallor of long illness and his eyes were sunk deep in their sockets.

They were fixed on Lee the moment the man was brought into the room. There was something almost hideously fascinating about them, and Lee began to wonder why they reminded him of someone—

"Ah!" the man on the invalid carriage gasped, as they brought him so that the foot of his bed almost touched Lee's chair.

"Lee! Nelson Lee! We have met again, after all!"

His voice was not much more than a whisper. Already Lee felt a certain sense of pity for the man, for even as he spoke a wild idea flashed through his mind.

Surely it was not possible? Dr. Melzer had fallen over the cliffs on that rocky Scottish island. Lee himself had peered down and seen his body lying there. He knew, of course, that Lehman had got the body away, but everyone concerned had taken it for

granted that Dr. Melzer had met his death in that terrible fall.

No man could have lived through such a fall as that!

"You are wondering," the man on the bed-carriage croaked. "You thought I had been killed. But there is still something left—something that can still think and desire!"

"Melzer!" Lee gasped the name in wonder. It needed a great deal to startle his mind into amazement, but the sight of this wrecked man before him did, for a moment, startle him.

"You realise who I am? You don't recognise me as the old Melzer?" the man asked. "This is your work, Lee! You can look on me and be proud of your work. Get all the satisfaction you can—it will be short-lived."

"You fell over the cliff in escaping from justice," retorted Lee. "You have no one to blame but yourself. You are lucky to be alive at all."

"It wasn't luck," put in Lehman. "We struggled very hard to save him, and you can see the result. His mind is still the mind of Dr. Melzer, but his body is broken. He has lived for this moment, and he has planned every detail of your capture and ultimate end."

There was something impressive in the very monotony with which Lehman spoke. Lee guessed that it was intended to impress him, and for that reason, helpless though he was, he determined to make light of this talk.

"He must have been quite busy," he said lightly. "Did you expect me to come down to your neighbourhood to-day?"

"We have watched you for more than three months," Lehman said. "We know how, by an unfortunate accident, Lord Keston received a note. I say 'unfortunate,' but as it sent him to you last night, it was, perhaps, fortunate. We knew when you left the Gray's Inn Road this morning, but the trap had been prepared for you before then. Everything was ready for you, because we knew that sooner or later you would blunder into some of our schemes again."

"May I inquire just where I am at present?" Lee asked the question in a casual, almost indifferent manner.

"At Missledon Hall," Lehman said. "You thought you had cleared us out months ago! Scotland Yard ordered it to be sold—and we bought it again within a very few months!"

"Very interesting," Lee commented.

"Listen to me, Nelson Lee," Lehman went on. "I want you to know the force against which you have dared to pit your puny strength. Our organisation is perfect now. We have gathered about us men who of themselves could outwit all your Scotland Yard. As for you—you will simply disappear!"

"Yes, of course." Lee nodded as though it were quite the most ordinary thing in the world. "You don't anticipate any trouble

at all? I mean—if Scotland Yard did begin to inquire about me, for instance.”

“Look at that!” Lehman held before his eyes a letter, and Lee recognised the writing at once. It was his own, apparently.

He read it through. The letter was written on the headed notepaper of the club of which Lee was a member, and it began: “My dear Harker,” after which came a terse, packed note in which the C.I.D. man was informed that the writer was going away immediately, with Nipper, on an important mission which would keep him out of the country for some months.

A hint or two about the mission, and a cheerful note at the end closed the letter. It was signed “Nelson Lee.”

“We have taken everything into account,” Melzer was saying as Lee looked up. “You would be ready to swear that that was your own handwriting. But we have gone further than that. There is no detail we have overlooked. Now, let me tell you something of what awaits you.”

“I should like that,” said Lee cheerfully. “By the way, you mention Nipper in that letter. You are not really troubling to exert your mighty organisation over him, are you?”

“He is already in our hands,” Melzer answered.

This was not the strict truth. It would have been more correct to say that they confidently expected to have Nipper in their hands before the night was out. But as yet the word that he was quite safe had not reached them.

“You interest me very much,” Lee drawled. “Tell me more about your plans regarding myself.”

Almost he appeared to be laughing, and even enjoying the present situation. Actually he was only half listening to what was being said, though he noted the salient points.

His mind was occupied chiefly with his own position, and the possibilities of getting out of it. Melzer’s next words might have been in answer to his outspoken query.

“You will be watched, every movement, night and day,” he said slowly. “Neither your strength nor your cunning will have the least opportunity of showing their power. You will not die yet. There is a punishment far more terrible—”

He was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door. Bastow had returned and came into the room hurriedly.

LEE, looking at Lehman, saw the faint look of anger flush into his heavy eyes. The loose jaws closed as he turned to stare at the intruder. But Bastow was apparently quite unimpressed.

“Say!” He ejaculated the word almost plaintively, and looked at Lehman anxiously. “Just a minute, chief. It’s important.”

“What is it?” Lehman did not move as he made the demand.

Bastow hesitated for a moment and looked from Lee to Lehman, and then to Melzer, doubtful whether he ought to speak.

“That fellow I’m treating—” he began doubtfully.

“What about him?” Melzer asked the question, and again his voice seemed to break before he really got to the end of his sentence.

“Gone! Made a getaway! Just bolted—that’s all!” Bastow spoke resentfully, as though annoyed at their attitude.

Lehman became galvanised with new force. His face took a wholly different aspect. The loose lips were tight-pressed, and the lifeless eyes developed some hint of animation.

He went quickly behind the head of Melzer’s couch-carriage, and put out one hand to grab at Bastow’s shoulder. What he said Lee could not catch, but the reply of Bastow was clear.

“I don’t know!” he snapped back. “Hadn’t the strength of an infant. I’ve seen to that! But he’s gone, I tell you! There all right an hour ago, and as helpless as a log. Just getting him to the right stage—and he’s gone!”

“The fools!” Lehman turned to Melzer for a moment. “I’ll set them to work. He can’t go far. Go on explaining to him.”

He waved a contemptuous hand to Lee, still held stiffly and securely in his chair. In another moment both Lehman and Bastow had passed out of the room.

Dr. Melzer, crippled and powerless to move, was left facing Nelson Lee, his bitterest enemy, equally helpless and impotent.

There was something dramatic in the situation as the two let their eyes meet each other’s again. The wonderful scientist, who had turned his genius to the evil purposes which Mark Lehman planned, was alone with the detective who had hitherto spoiled his plans, and to-night the investigator was the prisoner of the helpless criminal.

“So your plans get a trifle upset at times?” Lee asked smilingly.

Inwardly he felt a little thrill passing through him. All the time he had been in this room his eyes had been at work, and now a faint, almost vague hope was touching his mind.

“Pah! Do you know the man? Do you know the state he is in?” Melzer sneered. “He has not the strength of a child. He is as incapable of harm as you are!”

“You will recapture him quite easily, then?” Lee asked, but both he and his chair were moving.

His legs were bound quite securely to the legs of the chair, but his feet were equally firm on the floor. By using his toes as a lever, and exercising the whole of his body, he managed to work the chair in a jiggling sort of way.

“We shall get him within—don’t do that!” Melzer spoke commandingly as Lee got more way on his chair.

“My dear Melzer,” Lee protested, “you don’t expect me to sit still all this time without some attempt to relieve the painful tension. Have you ever suffered from cramp?”

By now the chair was rocking and was working along in the direction of the small table at the side of the room.

"If you don't stop I'll get someone in to make you!" Melzer warned him.

"Will you?" Lee kept on still rocking. "I wish you would! Can you get someone in to rub my hands? Oh!"

He gave a little exclamation of pain, and his chair rocked even more dangerously.

"This is horrible!" Lee cried out. "Can't you ring a bell, Melzer? Get someone in to do something for me. I want to listen to all your explanations. I can stand most things, but cramp—oh!"

His chair almost left the ground, and Lee was panting with the exertion of the violent exercise and his efforts to keep talking.

Then, just as it was quite near the table, the chair and its helpless captive toppled sideways.

For Nelson Lee that was the critical moment. He would have given anything for a few extra pounds of pressure to be applied as the back of the chair, to which he was himself tied, struck the edge of the table.

It struck in such a manner that the light and fairly low table also lurched forward. With a desperate effort, Lee managed to give an extra lever with his right foot, so that the chair found support for a moment on the top-side edge.

Another moment and the table had slid forward so that both chair and table were supporting each other. Then they both lost their balance and fell.

Lee was lying on his side, still a prisoner and possibly more helpless than when he was upright.

"I say, Melzer!" he called. "Get someone along! This is absolutely impossible!"

EVERY nerve and sense in his body was alert and working at its fullest pressure. The whole incident, from the time when he started to jerk the chair along as a cure for his cramp to the time when he lay on the floor near the overturned table, had taken only a few seconds.

Yet into his mind a dozen different points had flashed during that period, all bearing on the big gamble he was now making.

Melzer was not near a bell, and he could not move the carriage on which he lay. Could he call loudly enough to attract attention? Would he discover what was in Lee's mind? But he was bound to do that eventually. And how long would Lehman or even Bastow be before they came back to this room.

Already, Lee had seen the object for which he had performed this feat. On the table had lain the knife with which Bastow had carried out his little trimming, and it lay now about a foot away from Lee's head, but on the floor.

"You can stay there!"

Melzer, from his position, could only just see the bent form of the detective still trussed to the chair.

"It's absurd!" Lee gasped. "I tell you, Melzer. I'll go mad if you don't do something!"

Again, even as he spoke, he made another effort. It forced him towards the knife, but a little backwards. Another effort was necessary, and then again he had to force himself just a little further forward.

His arms were bound from elbow to wrist to the chair, but part of his hands at all events protruded just beyond the ends of the arms of the chair. Bastow, with his superior knowledge, had arranged that.

Lee's fingers on his right hand gripped the knife at last. He clung to it grimly, but quickly made an effort to twist himself, lest Melzer should discover what he was doing.

In this, however, he failed. Melzer had been watching with more than ordinary interest his latest evolutions. At first the plea of cramp was so obviously true, and it was also equally plain that Lee could do nothing, that Melzer had merely felt a touch of pleasure that his enemy was already beginning to feel some minor torments.

Now, however, he caught the slight flash as Lee twisted the knife in his fingers.

Instantly, Melzer called out:

"Help! Quick—help! Ah-h-rr-h!"

His cry broke off in a horrible, long-drawn gasp.

Nor could Lee do anything with the knife in his fingers. He leaned forward and gripped it with his teeth. In this position he pressed the blade firmly on to the cord just above his wrist.

There had been one dramatic moment when the two were left alone in the room together, but it paled in comparison with the tense agony of doubt which filled their minds at this critical stage.

Melzer was gasping, and a noise came from his throat; but it was voiceless. It would not carry beyond the confines of that room.

Lee was gripping fiercely on the knife, and exerting all the pressure his head would give as he forced the blade across the tight cord. It stabbed his hand, but in his fierce anxiety to accomplish his task the pain merely acted as a spur.

At last! He felt the cord loosen, and heard the faint snap as the last strand yielded to the blade. A wrench and a certain amount of pulling released his right arm. By now he was scarcely conscious of that ghastly sound which came from Melzer's throat.

His hand had secured the knife again, and the keen blade was ripping at the bonds about his chest. His left hand was free in a moment or two, and then came the cord about his legs. Lee struggled to his feet, still clutching the knife—free!

As he stood upright he caught sight of Melzer, impotent, and almost mad in his inability to stop his enemy. When he saw Lee rise it acted as a check on his fury. He ceased to try to call out, and lay back for a moment as though to rest.

"Help!"

He did not cry out very loudly, but it was quite clear and distinct in comparison with his recent efforts.

Lee stepped to his side instantly.

"Stop it, Melzer!" he said quietly. "I'd hate to use my strength on you now, but you must not do that! Keep quiet!"

For a time, at all events, his threat had the desired effect. Melzer closed his eyes and rested his head on the pillow behind him. Either he was afraid to risk calling again, or his last efforts had used up all his reserve of energy.

As for Nelson Lee, he felt a certain amount of satisfaction in his present position, but he was not riotously content. He was not out of danger yet, but he had his limbs free.

He stepped quickly to the door and opened it. Pausing for a moment, he listened intently, but the house seemed strangely quiet.

He decided to leave this room, at any rate, and closed the door behind him. Even as he did so, he could hear Melzer's voice again, but it was doubtful if it would carry very far.

What course should he take now?

Should he make the attempt to get out and away from the place as quickly as possible? Or should he seek hiding in the house itself, in the hope, not only of learning more, but also of finding out where Nipper was?

Half a dozen factors flashed into his mind, even while he stood for a moment or two just outside the door. Then the question was decided for him. He heard the sound of footsteps, and decided on instant action, since there was no possible chance of finding a hiding-place near at hand. And from inside the room Melzer's voice was still croaking out its call for help.

He stepped quickly forward into the full light of the corridor. As he had guessed from the sound, there was only one man, and he was within a couple of yards of the detective as he stepped out.

It was Bastow, evidently coming up to see if all went well with Melzer and his prisoner. He stopped dead as the apparition of Nelson Lee burst on his vision.

"Gee-whiz!" Even in his astonishment Bastow felt it necessary to give voice to it. "Nelson——"

Then Lee had jumped forward, and his arm shot out. The blow caught Bastow fair and square, and he simply toppled over. This was the sort of thing for which he had not been prepared.

The next moment Lee had dropped forward on his man, his knee robbing him of any breath that might still be in his body. When he rose, after barely a couple of seconds' search, the detective had added another weapon to the solitary knife he still possessed.

It was a very useful automatic which he had taken from Bastow, and quite conceivably it might aid him considerably before the night was out.

He dashed down two flights of stairs and found himself in the hall. Months ago he

had been in this same place, but it was changed in some way since that time.

The great wide doors were open, and he ran towards them, trying to catch the sound of alarm which Bastow was certain to raise. As he reached the door two other figures suddenly loomed up in front of him, and he brought his weapon up instantly.

One of them he did not know, but the shorter of the two was Mark Lehman himself. He saw Lee just as the latter jumped forward, and gave a sudden yell.

"Vellam—quick!" Lehman himself jumped back before the avalanche which was rushing upon him. "Shoot!"

Nelson Lee steadied himself for an instant and decided to settle with the man who had been called Vellam first of all!

CHAPTER 5.

The Secret.

THE two men Nipper had seen approaching the house where he crouched with Denis Dalmain halted close to the open window, and the youngster caught snatches of their conversation. He gathered that they were out hunting for someone who had escaped, and that Nelson Lee had been ambushed and captured in that same house.

Fortunately they did not think fit to enter the house then, but decided that the man they sought would be somewhere in the wood. Consequently they sheered off and disappeared in the dense shadows beneath the trees.

"It's hard luck," Nipper muttered, more to himself than his companion. "We'll have to find some way out of this mess."

"What is hard luck?" Denis Dalmain had caught the words and was beginning to take a real interest in the game once more.

Nipper told him what he feared had happened to the gov'nor, judging by the conversation he had overheard.

"Looks as though they'd come back to Missledon Hall again," the youngster added. "Think of the cheek of it! Lehman coming back to the same place we cleared Melzer out of! I'll bet Melzer wouldn't have dared to come near the place."

Denis Dalmain did not follow most of the references, but he was able to confirm the fact that it was at Missledon Hall where he had been kept prisoner.

"You've had a pretty rough time?" Nipper asked. "What happened exactly, Dal—I mean, your Majesty, of course. Only—well, it's hard to feel polite and proper and remember the right things, isn't it, when you're in a tight corner like this?"

"I am Denis Dalmain," the young man in the corner of the room answered, and there was a tiny note of humour in his voice which cheered Nipper.

"But you were—a king," Nipper persisted.

"I hope I still am—in Dalmania," came the answer. "Why do you say that? Tell me. What is the news of my country?"

"There isn't any, really," Nipper answered. "That's why I wondered just what had happened to you. There's a sort of rumour that the king has abdicated, and there's a new Government, you know; but they are carrying on. They don't seem to know what has happened to the king. Of course, if old Lehman has been stage-managing the business, they wouldn't know."

"How long did all this occur?" Dalmain asked.

"About a fortnight or so ago, I think," Nipper answered. "You were in your own country then, I suppose."

"I suppose so," the other mused. "It all seems like an evil dream to me. I want to try and piece it together again. My uncle died suddenly, and I had sent for Wolfram to take his place. It was late evening when he came, I remember."

"There was something peculiar about Wolfram that night. He has been one of my very good friends since I was a boy. But he was stiff and stilted, and never called me by the name he always used when we were alone together."

Denis Dalmain paused, as though struggling to recollect something.

"I forget," he said bitterly. "I felt hurt, I know, and decided not to entrust the—certain important secrets to him that night. Perhaps he had been drinking, though I had never known him to do so before."

"More likely it was one of Lehman's men made up to look like your friend," interjected Nipper.

"But I don't know Lehman," Dalmain answered. "Who is he? How could he know that I intended sending for Wolfram?"

"I can't explain that," Nipper answered. "But I expect he did know, and that's what happened. He sent somebody in Wolfram's place, expecting you'd give him the secret. You didn't. Perhaps you told this chap Wolfram that you weren't going to tell him everything that night?"

"Yes, yes! I remember now." Dalmain spoke with a note of excitement. "I was doubtful about Wolfram, and told him we would leave the matter over for a day or two. He rose to go, and I think he pointed to something on the table. I bent down to look at it—and something happened."

"He probably struck you," Nipper said. "That's a pleasant way Lehman's gang have when they can't get things quite their own way. Probably they were in league with somebody over there, or they'd fixed everything up so that they could manage the job without any interference. Where did you find yourself when you awakened?"

"On board a boat," Dalmain said. "They told me I was dying, and that Wolfram was there waiting to hear any message I had to give him. They sent him into the cabin I was in—but it was not Wolfram. I was sure—quite sure of it then."

"And they've gone on ever since, trying all sorts of fancy stunts, I suppose?" Nipper asked. "I've met them before, but they used to have a chap in the gang who was a regular wonder with drugs and things of that sort. They say he's the chap who really invented poison gas. He's gone now, so they probably won't be quite so clever."

"I don't know," Denis Dalmain said in a puzzled voice. "I think, perhaps, that is what they were trying to do with me—to poison me in some way. I got weaker on the boat, and they kept bringing medicine to me, but I always hated medicine. I used to get rid of it at times, but sometimes I had to take it when they were there."

"And they'd worry you all the time, of course?"

"They came to me nearly every day and said that I was very ill and wanted me to tell them anything I thought ought to be attended to. All the time I knew that it was part of some plot, but I never quite understood it. Then we reached England."

"You scribbled a note to Lord Keston?" asked Nipper.

"Yes. I heard someone talking and saying they were glad to be back in England. I was taken to a car, and at one place they got out for a time. It was then that I managed to write that note, though they imagined I was still asleep."

"I know something about that note," Nipper told him. "As a matter of fact, that's how I come to be here. And that's why the gov'nor—Hullo! 'Sh!"

He had been sitting alongside his companion, but rose quickly and quietly as a sudden sound reached them.

The next moment he heard the window of the kitchen pushed up. It was not done gently or cautiously. Whoever the intruder was, he expected to find the place empty, and was not hunting for anyone.

So much flashed into Nipper's mind as he stepped nearer the window. The man was through in record time, and even while Nipper raised his weapon and prepared to flash his lamp the window had been closed again.

It was then that Nipper acted, waiting until the man had slid forward along the table.

"Don't move!" he snapped. "I'll fire—"

Now Nipper was no child in the matter of holding a man up, but he was quite unprepared for the swift action of this new opponent. His arm had flashed out in the darkness, striking Nipper's hand which gripped the revolver so that even had he fired it would have gone harmlessly into the ceiling.

The next instant the hand seized his wrist in a grip that was paralysing in its intensity. The revolver clattered to the ground.

So did Nipper. But not before he had yelled out quickly.

"Now, Dalmain! Get your gun! Lend a hand!"

His opponent had just pushed his knee into Nipper's chest and was twisting his arms round in a perfect fury of strength. Then, as Nipper yelled out, a wild idea in his mind that he would either frighten the man or even gain help, he felt his fall swiftly checked.

"Hold up, young 'un! Trying to scare the life out of me! Where's your light?"

It had gone to the floor in that first sudden rush, but Nipper found it quickly and turned it on. As he flashed the rays into the face of his late opponent he still felt half dazed from his recent conflict.

"Guv'nor!" He gasped the word out, then felt he wanted to laugh.

Nelson Lee himself stood before him, a little smile playing about his lips as though this was quite an amusing incident.

"You gave me a shock, young 'un," Lee said, as he took the light from Nipper and turned it on to him. "Knocking the wind out of me, and throwing yourself at me in that fashion. You want to be more gentle in your methods. But how did you manage to get here?"

"Came to find you!" Nipper was laughing now.

They might still be in a tight corner, but with the guv'nor here there couldn't be any possible doubt about the end of this game.

"And I've found you instead," Lee retorted. "And your friend?"

"Mr. Denis Dalmain," said Nipper, with just a touch of pride in his voice. "He's the king of Dalmania, really, guv'nor; but that's the name he prefers at present."

"Ah! Good!" Lee had already walked over to the corner and allowed his light to illumine the man who was now sitting upright.

"This seems to be a bad night for them at Missledon Hall," Lee said. "They are not hunting for you at present, Mr. Dalmain. I've seen something of the men as I came through the woods. I left the Hall myself somewhat hurriedly. What about you, Nipper? Have you been there this evening?"

"Not nearer than this cottage, guv'nor," Nipper answered.

"Tell me what happened. I think that's the best thing to do before we start to talk about plans. We'll have a better idea of where we stand. It won't be quite a safe walk to the hotel where we left the car just yet. Too many people about."

"And you wouldn't find your car if you went, guv'nor," Nipper added. "They've got that to their credit at present."

He went on to explain all that had happened to him, and how he found himself in his present plight, and in return Lee told how he had been captured and how he had made his escape.

"So they are still hunting for you?" asked Nipper.

"I imagine they are still hunting for the three of us," Lee retorted. "This isn't a very healthy place for us to stay in, Nipper."

"What do you propose to do now, then?" his assistant asked. "I don't think the king—Mr. Dalmain—is in a fit state to do anything violent."

"No." Lee spoke almost to himself. "Stay here for a time, Nipper, will you? I'm going to explore this place, if possible. Give me the usual call if you hear anything."

The detective went off down the narrow passage, which led to the front of the house, but exploration under present circumstances was somewhat difficult. Now and again he used the lamp, but only when he felt it was quite safe. In the rooms the light of the moon was sufficient to give him all the information he wanted.

As he stood on the landing upstairs, just outside one of the bed-rooms, he noticed the panel let in the ceiling above his head. It gave the touch of inspiration to the idea which had been in his mind, and in a few moments he had found a small table on which he climbed.

The trapdoor or panel which allowed entrance to the space under the roof was easily moved, and Lee pulled himself up in order to have a good look round.

There was quite a good-sized space between the rafters and the ceiling, and a quick inspection satisfied the detective that it would at least afford a temporary hiding-place. He returned to the kitchen as speedily as possible and explained his idea to Nipper.

Lee himself proposed to get away from the cottage as quickly as possible after he had made fairly certain of the safety of Denis Dalmain and Nipper. It was better that his assistant should stay on, both from the point of view of safety and of being at hand in case anything went wrong with Dalmain.

"You'll be able to have water to drink, and that's about all," Lee said. "There won't be anything in the food line, I'm afraid, though I wish there were. Dalmain wants something pretty badly, I fancy."

"And you'll get to London?" asked Nipper.

"All being well, I shall get there somehow before morning," the detective said. "What you've got to do is to hang on here until I return. Then I think all our troubles will be over. If we can't stamp out Lehman and his gang after that—well, he's even better organised than I've given him credit for, and I'm not underrating his power just at present."

They discussed details. So far there had not been any sound or sign of the men who were still presumably hunting them, and Lee flattered himself that they had taken a leaf out of Lehman's book in remaining in the very place where he himself had suffered temporary defeat.

"But we'll get upstairs now," Lee said at last. "We'll have to get Dalmain up into the roof as best we can, but it's the safest plan."

For the next twenty minutes or so both Nipper and Lee were fairly busy arranging the space under the roof so that its tem-

porary occupants would have a certain amount of comfort.

Once or twice during this time they heard the signals of Lehman's men, who were evidently still searching the woods, but the house was free from any visits.

The task of getting Denis Dalmain up through the manhole in the ceiling was not an easy one. His efforts on his own behalf were ludicrously weak and spasmodic, and Lee was impressed afresh with the necessity for getting him under proper medical care as soon as possible.

They managed the task at last. One or two odd cushions and pillows had been discreetly removed from the rooms below, a supply of water was brought up, and every possible detail which would make the sojourn here fairly comfortable was attended to before the detective decided to leave them.

"I shall be back as soon as I can," he told Nipper. "But it may take some time tomorrow morning to fix up everything, so don't worry. Just stick it and keep Dalmain as cheerful as you can."

"You are not afraid old Lehman will have any new-fangled stunt out for you, gov'nor?" Nipper asked, with a faint touch of concern in his voice. "I mean—he's a demon!"

"I shan't run any risks," said Lee quietly. "I want to get this job settled. We'll start on Lehman and his gang later."

He turned to go, but Denis Dalmain, who was lying down some little distance further along, called to him.

"Before you go, Mr. Lee," he begged, "I'd like to give you a message—in case anything happens to me in the near future."

"I don't think it will," Lee answered him with a note of cheerfulness. "Don't you worry about that, Mr. Dalmain. But what is the message?"

"I'm not dropping out of the fight yet! Only—I ought to safeguard the interests of others, and to do that I am going to break even the laws of my own country."

He stopped for a moment, and then made a slight motion with his hand to indicate that he wished the detective to bend nearer. Lee knelt by his side and bent forward a little.

"Listen, Lee," Dalmain had taken hold of his hand. "Dalmania has a secret treasure house. It is the reserve which my ancestors built up and accumulated in case of war. From time to time, even before my coming, it has been drawn upon, only to be added to later."

"Only two people in the kingdom ever know the full secret—the king and his chancellor. Others know something of it, but it is a very wonderful treasure."

He pulled Lee a little further forward and began to recite in a clear whisper and speaking very slowly. And all the time his eyes were fixed on the detective.

At first Lee was tempted to stop him. He

had no desire to possess a secret of this nature, but Dalmain went on with so much earnestness, and with such evident effort to make each point clear and impressive, that the detective concentrated his memory on the task.

It was more than five minutes before Dalmain ceased whispering.



Nelson Lee helped the wounded king to the side of mass of people—a mass ripe for rev

"You will remember it?" he asked, when he had finished the recitation.

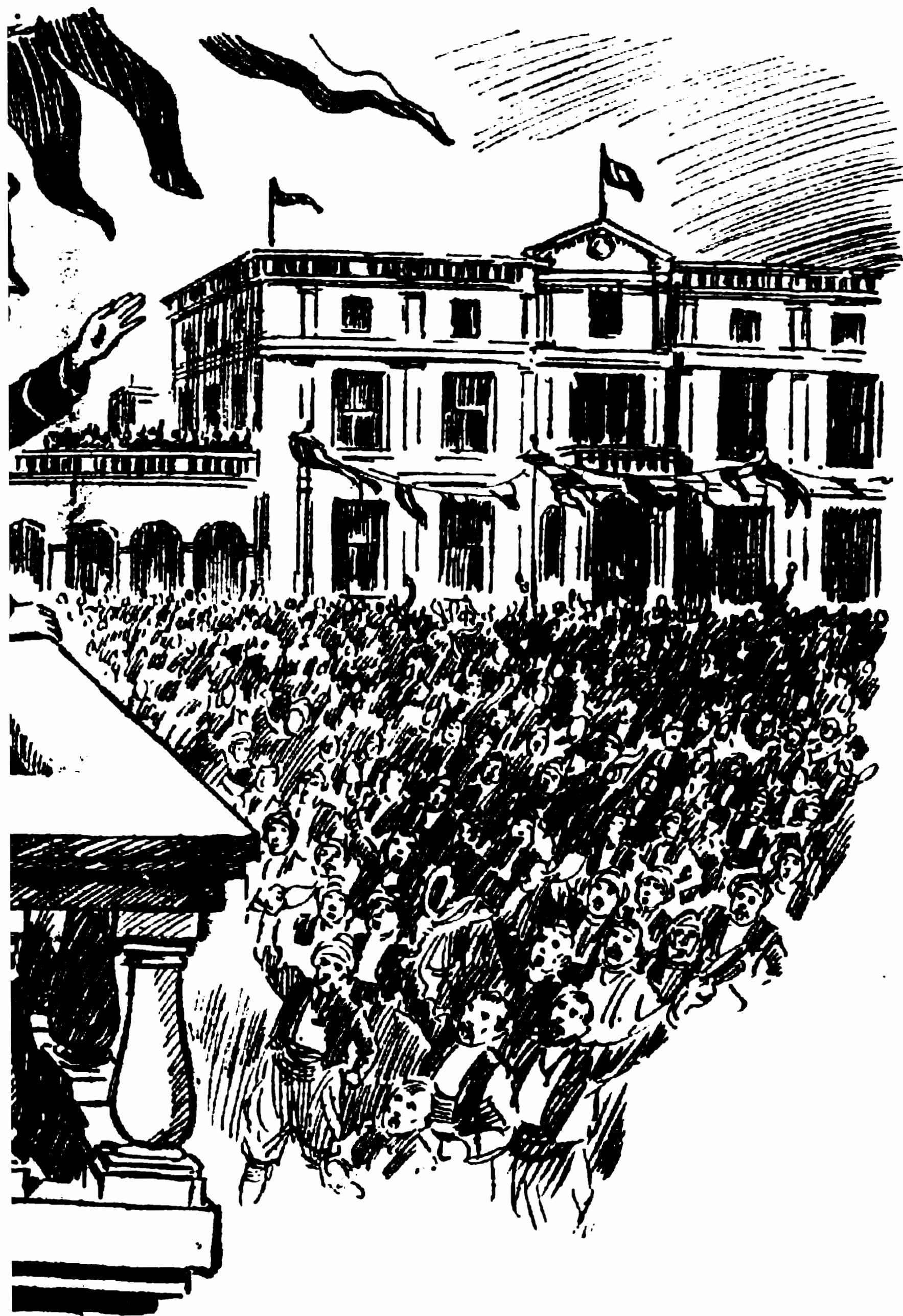
"Until you are safely back in your own country and have chosen your chief counsellor, I shall remember it," Lee answered. "Then I shall forget it."

He rose from his kneeling position, and smiled across at Nipper, who was struggling to fit up a shaded light which dimly illumined the place they were in.

"Good-bye, Nipper!" Lee called quietly. "I'll be along here again soon."

He let himself down through the manhole, and Nipper, standing above him, carefully replaced the boarding.

Lee himself took the table on which they had climbed up to the ceiling back to its original position again. Then he descended the stairs and prepared for the work before him.



the balcony, and they both looked down on the surging
 ult. "Speak to them!" whispered Lee.

CHAPTER 6.

The Fight on the Stairs.

FOR some considerable time after Nelson Lee had left them, Nipper and Denis Dalmain kept very quiet. Every moment Nipper expected to hear the sound of people entering the house, but hours seemed to pass by before the silence was disturbed.

At last, he fancied he could hear the sound of someone moving—and they were struggling

to lift up the wooden panelling which covered the manhole.

Nipper crept forward cautiously, but with all the speed he dare muster. He reached it just as the panelling was pushed back.

Quickly the youngster summed up his chances. He had no idea who the intruder might be, but it was fairly safe to assume that it was one of Lehman's men. In which case it was a hundred to one that there were others with him.

"Desperate measures to-night!" Nipper decided, and waited for the man to show his face.

It came up suddenly. The man had taken a little leap to aid him in the levering part of the game, and he gave a jerk so that almost in the same motion he was sitting on the edge of the manhole.

And in that instant Nipper pressed his revolver almost into the man's face and flashed the torch on to him.

Then, for the second time that night, Nipper had a pleasant shock. The light revealed an old, familiar face. Inspector Harker, of the C.I.D., was blinking under the rays.

"Mr. Harker!" Nipper felt he wanted to laugh. "Who expected you? How did you get here? It's Nipper. Have a look!"

He turned the light on to himself and the revolver was lowered.

"Well, I—I'm blessed!" Harker was even more surprised.

He was also very pleased. Nearly three hours ago he had set out in a state of great interest and hopefulness. It had been difficult to follow all that Lee had said on the 'phone, but certain facts were quite clear, and they were quite enough to set the blood tingling in Harker's veins.

Some time during the previous day the Chief had sent for Harker and told him that Nelson Lee was likely to be engaged on a very important job. This was merely a preliminary warning that in case of need the famous private investigator had full authority to command any assistance he required.

Then, that night, had come the 'phone message from Lee. He wanted Harker. The C.I.D. man would be pleased to know that he had an old enemy of theirs, Mark Lehman, right at his mercy.

At Scotland Yard Lee's car appeared very shortly after Harker got there. It was not the first time Harker had set out to meet adventure in that same car.

Lee himself sat at the wheel, muffled up to the eyes, and speaking with a voice as hoarse as a crow. But he said quite enough to make Harker realise that he was in dead earnest to-night.

On the journey down to Missledon, which they did in record time, Lee said very little. But again, what he did say was all bearing on the task before them.

He recalled to Harker's memory their experience together at the island off the Scot-

tish coast, and a previous hunt they had had after Dr. Melzer.

Eventually they reached the keeper's cottage, after a certain amount of preliminary skirmishing. Once inside, Lee's instructions were of the briefest.

"Go upstairs," he whispered. "Somewhere in the place are important papers—hidden. I've searched everywhere—not succeeded yet. I'm staying below—Lehman himself will be here presently."

Harker had obeyed and come upstairs. In some way he felt a vague sense of disappointment as he did so. Why, it would have been difficult to explain, except that he would have preferred to remain with Nelson Lee until Lehman came.

And why was he so confident that Lehman would come? Usually Nelson Lee gave very sound reasons for every step he took. At any rate, Harker proceeded cautiously to investigate the upstairs rooms.

He found nothing of any importance in the first swift search. Then his eye caught a small table in one of the rooms, on which was the print of fairly heavy boots.

Now Inspector Harker had learned a good deal on the value of small details from Nelson Lee. Here was a case in point. It was only a tiny clue which would have been passed by everyone but the last man in a million.

It led Harker, however, to carry it outside eventually, and to climb up on it until he was sitting on the edge of the manhole.

"Just come down with your guv'nor," Harker told Nipper quietly, when at last he had recovered from his surprise. "He's never mentioned a word about you. He's downstairs now, waiting for Lehman—"

There was the sound of a door being opened and closed gently.

"Keep where you are, laddie," Harker whispered. "I'm getting down."

He swung carefully and quietly down to the table again, and so to the floor. Just as he reached it there was a sudden fierce cry:

"Harker! Quick! Help—ah!!"

The cry ended in a sharp gasp, the call of a man who has received a mortal blow.

Even Nipper, sitting up above the manhole, felt a little thrill of fear pass through him, a thrill which only served to bring him to a quicker decision.

The inspector was already rushing down the stairs. He had taken out his revolver, and was ready for instant action, but for the moment he kept his light out. It was no use giving his opponent or opponents a chance to mark his progress.

He could hear a slight shuffling sound as he descended, and the sharp gasps of men breathing quickly. As he reached the bottom of the stairs Harker struggled to catch the faintest glimpse of what was happening in the darkness.

But now the gasping and the shuffling had ceased; nor could the inspector detect the faintest outline of the fighting shadows he expected to find,

"Lee!" He called the name softly and took a step forward along the narrow passage, while his right hand, holding the revolver, almost touched his own face.

"Lee!" he called again, and then a blaze of light was suddenly flashed upon him, startling him for the instant.

The next, Harker was lurching forward, a dull feeling in his mind that his head had been jerked from his shoulders, while ten thousand lights were dancing before his eyes, and he himself was sinking through them to the blackness beyond.

"Got him! Switch on! What's that?"

The man who had settled Inspector Harker's account for the time interrupted himself quickly. From somewhere quite near at hand came another sound.

In the brief space of time which elapsed between Inspector Harker's statement that he had come down with Nelson Lee and the moment when Nipper realised that Harker was rushing to someone's assistance, the youngster's mind experienced a dozen different emotions.

It also grasped and became perplexed over several problems.

The guv'nor was already back, and had brought Inspector Harker with him. Yet Harker knew nothing about Nipper and his companion, and Lee had not even troubled to come upstairs first of all to find out if they were still safe.

And Lee was expecting Lehman to come here alone. Why? Nipper already knew quite enough about Mark Lehman to realise that he was not the man to take personal risks.

The fierce call for help changed the current of his perplexities again. Harker was going down to help. The fighting was below, and Nipper's aid might make all the difference.

Nipper swung himself down to the table more quickly than Harker had done, and he was at the top of the stairs by the time the inspector was half-way down. Just ahead of him the youngster could see the dim outline of the inspector's burly figure, and he slackened down a little.

He was half-way down the stairs when Harker was hesitating for a moment at the foot of the stairs. Nipper saw the flash of light, glimpsed for an instant the capped head of the C.I.D. man, and then, as something circled above Harker's head, he jumped down another step or two.

The whole affair was only a question of moments. There was no time for careful and deliberate thinking before Nipper was crouching again on the stairs. Harker had gone down! Of that much Nipper was sure, and he grasped the meaning of the triumphant "Got him!" which came from the figure just by the handrail of the stairs.

Then the light was suddenly flashed on Nipper himself. He jumped up and steadied himself by the handrail, ready to use his weapon on the first definite sign.

The light still blazed in his face, and for a few moments quite a babel of sound came

from the little passage, and he guessed that there were two or three men below him.

He backed up the stairs. It would be safer at the top. Even as he did so someone fired at him, but the shot went wide.

Someone below was calling instructions, and Nipper tried to get a real view of the man who held the lamp. For the time his eyes had been blinded by the strong rays, but he was growing accustomed to it by now.

Just as he realised that the man was holding the light well away from him there came a sudden rush up the stairs. Nipper was simply swept backwards. There was no chance to use his weapon because the two men had flung themselves so violently at him that he crashed back to the stairs.

BUT Nipper fought! It was not an ideal place for a struggle, and they became inextricably mixed up for a brief space, rolling and tumbling, and each trying to gain a fair footing on the stairs. As they all bumped together at the foot of the stairs the light disappeared again.

"Hold him! Hold him!" someone was crying out, and Nipper struggled again to get free and shake off his opponents.

It was an unequal fight, and to add to the disadvantages under which Nipper was struggling the light which the third man held was switched on and off during the next twenty or thirty seconds, and it seemed to be directed into Nipper's face with unerring accuracy.

He was on his back at last, and one arm was securely pinioned to the floor. Then the third man jumped in. He made no mistake, and Nipper lost his hold on everything for a time.

"Dope 'em both, quick!" It was the third man who gave the order, and his voice showed that he was afraid.

Not until he was satisfied that both Harker and Nipper were incapable of any harm for a time did he begin to question about the cause of their trouble.

"Where's he come from?" he asked.

"This is the fellow they've been hunting for all the afternoon and night. I know all about him!"

"What are we going to do with him?" another demanded.

"I guess we'd better attend to this chap first," Lennan pointed to the inspector whom he regarded as his special capture. "We're got to truss him up, take him out into the wood and leave him to be found later on by whoever comes to look for him."

The three struggled with the limp form of Inspector Harker, no light task as they discovered, and trussed him up ready to be carried out into the wood.

"Better get down and keep an eye on that other young fellow," Lennan said. "What puzzles me—Hullo!"

He had caught sight of the table below the open manhole in the ceiling.

"Now, that's smart!" he said admiringly.

"The chap's been up there all the time! I wonder——"

He had jumped up on the table and was pulling himself up before he finished his queries.

One of the men had already run down the stairs to see that Nipper did not create any further disturbance. The other stood watching Lennan as he balanced himself on the edge of the manhole, and calmly took out his torch.

For two seconds he played about with the light. Then, quite suddenly, he was sliding down to the table again.

"The other fellow!" he gasped excitedly. "Dalmain—or whatever they call him! He's there!"

It was difficult to know whether to be delighted or perplexed over this discovery. Lennan's instructions were to get back to the Hall as quickly as possible. He had done his job, and done it in accordance with Lehman's wishes. But here he was saddled with new responsibilities.

"Get a move on, Rolf!" he told his companion. "Go up to the Hall. See Lehman. Tell him I've fixed the Lee business all right, and got Harker here. We've also got Lee's pup, and Dalmain's on the roof. He can't fight. What are we to do? If he wants 'em both we'll want more men—and pretty quickly, too!"

The man obeyed without any questioning. He understood the situation just as well as Lennan did.

It was a full half-hour before he came back, and now he was reinforced with five other men. Lehman could easily spare them, for his own arrangements were already completed.

By this time Nipper had been made secure, but he knew nothing of it, and even the journey through the woods, as they carried him on a stretcher, was something of which Nipper never had any knowledge.

Dalmain's case was comparatively simple, though he made some feeble efforts to struggle against the two men who stole upon him very quietly in the darkness. In the end he, too, made the journey through the woods to Missledon Hall, in the same manner as Nipper and Inspector Harker, but he was the only one who actually was carried into the building. The other two were left in a quiet glade to be found later on if their luck held good!

Already, outside the hall three big cars were waiting. In the entrance hall Mark Lehman, Bastow and Vellam stood together, ready for a journey, and close by Dr. Melzer lay in readiness on his couch.

There was no hurry apparently. Lehman stood talking to Lennan for fully ten minutes after the "sandbag expert," as Bastow had called him, had arrived.

"There should be no difficulty whatever," Lehman was saying. "We have Dalmain back in our hands again. Nelson Lee nearly succeeded, but not quite. He muddled things. We have not escaped entirely, but we have gained time. Nelson Lee will have

to get together a large body of police. They will comb the countryside for some sign of Harker and the youngster. They will find them, eventually. But by that time we shall not be in this country. Time is everything to us now. I had thought England was the best place to force Dalmain to do what we want him to do. It would have been the safest place in the world for us, if that meddler, Nelson Lee, had not got on our trail. Now, the safest thing is to get away from here while we've got the chance."

A few moments later Dr. Melzer was being carried down to one of the waiting cars. The stretcher on which Dalmain lay was already being taken through the wide doors.

Very carefully they lifted him off and propped him inside the first car. In this Bastow and Vellam also travelled. In the second car was Mark Lehman, Melzer and two more men. The rest piled into the third car, and the whole gang drove off.

In spite of all he could do, the dawn was far advanced before Nelson Lee arrived with

a strong force of police, and then it was too late. The birds had flown, and taken Dalmain with them. Inspector Harker and Nipper were discovered unconscious in the quiet glen, and rushed to hospital, where they were found to be under the influence of some rare drug.

It looked as if Mark Lehman had won the conflict without question, but Nelson Lee thought otherwise!

CHAPTER 7.

Following After!

IT was easy enough, afterwards, to discover what Mark Lehman had done. Knowing that Nipper had somehow escaped from the clutches of the men who had been sent after him, and guessing that Nipper would realise what Nelson Lee's absence meant and possibly report the matter to Scotland Yard, he had prepared his plans accordingly.

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His men had promptly got hold of Lee's car by means of a ruse, and then Lennan had disguised himself as Nelson Lee, and lured Harker to the keeper's cottage. This was done to prevent the inspector interfering at an awkward moment. Should Nipper get to Scotland Yard, or communicate with them, he would be told that Nelson Lee had been there himself and was already on his way to Missledon accompanied by Harker. Nipper would be satisfied, and simply wait for what was to happen next. Thus Lehman hoped to gain time.

But he had not bargained for Nelson Lee escaping as well. It was perfectly true that when he did get to Scotland Yard the famous detective had no little trouble in convincing the Chief that Harker was the victim of Mark Lehman's cunning. Valuable time was thus wasted, and Lehman took full advantage of it to get away while he was safe.

Thus, if Mark Lehman had got the better of things at the moment he could not feel safe with Nelson Lee so close on his track. The truth of the matter was that Nelson Lee had not been such a hopeless failure as appeared on the surface. He had been butting into mystery blindfolded, as it were. Yet, despite all the handicaps, he had succeeded in upsetting all Mark Lehman's plans and making things too hot for him, causing him to bolt out of the country again.

Nipper and Harker would have to remain in hospital for some time to get rid of the effects of the drug which Bastow, the renegade doctor, had injected into their systems. But Nelson Lee could not wait for them. He placed the whole matter before Lord Keston at the Foreign Office.

"And now you've lost them, and don't know where they've gone," said his lordship.

"On the contrary," retorted Lee. "There is only one place where they dare go—Dalmania. And this is where I shall need help."

He had no need to ask twice. At three o'clock that afternoon he was on board the boat train and crossed the Channel that same evening. He travelled with speed, but without attracting any undue attention from anyone, as far as Venice, where he was soon aboard the destroyer which had been placed at his disposal by the Admiralty.

"Those are my instructions, Mr. Lee," the commander laughed, when at last they were in his cabin. "Rather a pleasant variation from the usual sealed orders idea. I hope you've got some exciting scheme all planned out?"

"I'm afraid not," Lee joined in the laugh. "For the moment the only plan I have is to get to Castalan as quickly as possible. After that, anything might happen, but I'm hoping for a quiet trip."

"We'll have you at Castalan by to-morrow morning," Commander Denby assured him. "There's trouble knocking round that neighbourhood, isn't there? We picked up some news about a revolution and street fighting, and all that sort of thing."

"I haven't heard of any fighting," Lee answered, but the report puzzled him. If the revolution had developed it might have a serious effect on his plans.

The destroyer's commander was as good as his word. About seven o'clock the following morning a message came to the detective to say that they were anchored just outside the harbour of Castalan. Would Mr. Lee let Commander Denby know as soon as he could see him?

There seemed to be some little excitement on board as Lee went along presently to the commander's cabin.

"We've got here in pretty good time, I think, Lee". Denby was as cheerful as ever in his greetings as the detective entered the cabin. "Did you have a good night?"

"Splendid, thanks," Lee assured him. "And everything is in order, I take it?"

"Not quite," Denby told him. "There seems to be some little trouble on among the authorities. That's why we're hanging outside the harbour. They signalled to us, politely asking what our business was, and signifying that the harbour is more or less closed to the general public for the present on account of the revolution. It complicates matters just a little from our point of view."

He looked at Lee inquiringly, and though he did not put it into words, the detective understood the query that was in his mind.

For a British destroyer to go into the harbour of a capital in the throes of a revolution might lead to awkward complications.

They discussed the matter for some time, and a way out was soon arranged. For the time being, the detective was a Government messenger, anxious to deliver certain papers to the British representative in Castalan.

He would go ashore in the motor pinnace, while the destroyer would cruise about until further orders.

There seemed to be no objection to this plan, nor was there any difficulty when it was actually put to the test. The next few hours were, in fact, the duller Lee had ever spent so far in this case. Even the journey to Venice had held more interest for him than he found in the ancient town of Castalan.

For the capital of a country that was in the grip of a revolution Castalan was singularly quiet and peaceful. It was, however, the calm before the storm, so the British envoy assured him.

"There have been incidents already," Sir Charles Grettrex said. "But as yet the people have not quite grasped the realities. They expect the king to come back."

"Why?" asked Lee.

"Because the whole thing is so amazing," Sir Charles answered. "I don't profess to understand it. The king was not the sort of man to shrink from personal danger, nor was he the kind to allow himself to be intimidated by anybody. He must have known that in the main the people are enthusiastically on his side. The army worships him. Yet he runs away!"

"I think not," Lee said quietly. "Say that he had been 'spirited away,' and you would be more correct."

Sir Charles looked at him curiously for fully ten seconds.

"Lee?" He repeated the name to himself. "Nelson Lee—why, of course!"

The letter which Nelson Lee had handed him from Lord Keston had merely referred to the detective as "my friend," and had said nothing whatever regarding his exact business in Castalan.

"You are *the* Nelson Lee?" Sir Charles had dropped his air of irritation and become deeply interested. "The big investigator? You're not out here investigating the mystery of the king's disappearance? I tell you, it's the most perplexing affair I've ever known. If you really are trying to discover why the king disappeared—well!"

He put out his hands with a little helpless gesture, as though to suggest that this was a mystery which no one on earth could hope to solve.

"I think I know why he disappeared," Lee told him calmly. "I may want your help, so perhaps I had better tell you how much I do know. I saw the king himself about five days ago."

The envoy sat bolt upright at that, but he said nothing until the detective had given him a rough outline of the king's adventures as he knew them.

"The first man I want to meet is someone called Wolfram," Lee concluded. "He was, I believe, to take the position of chancellor to the king."

"Yes. Prince Wolfram—the king's cousin," Sir Charles answered. "He has only just returned to Castalan, and is more amazed than I am with what has happened."

"He is loyal to the king?" Lee asked. "There is no danger that he is working on the side of the revolutionary party?"

"None whatever," answered Sir Charles emphatically. "But we will go to him. You can judge for yourself. We shall have to go warily, but I don't think there will be any danger. The revolutionary party are particularly anxious not to upset any of the foreign representatives in Castalan."

So it came about that Nelson Lee journeyed with the British Minister in his car out of the town towards the hills at the back. On one of these hills was the great palace, and clustering around this were other imposing residences, one of which was the home of Prince Wolfram, cousin of King Denis.

On the way Sir Charles told Nelson Lee the exact details of the revolution as he had noted it. But it did not help the detective very much, although he felt that it might be necessary for him to gather every detail he could.

At the entrance gates to Prince Wolfram's home several soldiers were on guard, and for a moment it appeared as though they would prevent the car from going any farther. As

soon as they realised who it was, however, they permitted it to proceed.

Lee found Prince Wolfram a very pleasant young man of about thirty to thirty-two years of age. Like his cousin, the king, the prince had been educated in England, and was even more fully acquainted with the reputation of the detective than the British envoy was.

WITHIN the first ten minutes Lee had discovered that his first assumption had been correct. Wolfram had never seen his cousin on the night when he had so mysteriously disappeared.

He had, in fact, been away from Castalan at the time. The story of why he had left the city was in itself only another proof of the care with which the plot had been engineered.

At this juncture Lee found himself for a time in an awkward position. He was anxious to be alone with Prince Wolfram, now that he was entirely satisfied on the question of his loyalty.

There was one big query in Lee's mind to which he desired an answer as early as possible. Had Lehman forced the secret from the king; and, if so, had he reached Castalan yet?

The possibility of answering this question came at last.

Sir Charles Grettex was anxious to return, and Lee suggested that he should stay on with Prince Wolfram for a time, as there were one or two matters which he wished to discuss with him. As soon as Sir Charles had gone, Lee felt at liberty to broach the topic which was uppermost in his mind.

"You have one or two interesting places in your country which I am anxious to see, prince," he said to his host, very much in the tone of an ordinary tourist. "There is the Hall of Fleeting Shadows—that is how we should translate it into English, though it does not quite get the right idea, does it? Do you think it would be possible for me to have a look at it?"

Had Lee suddenly fired a pistol the effect would not have been greater on the prince than this apparently harmless question.

He sat upright, his hands gripping the arms of the chair in which he sat. His lips, for a moment, became a perfectly straight line, and his eyes were fixed on Lee with a strange intensity.

"Why do you wish to see the Hall of Fleeting Shadows?" he asked in a calm, level voice which yet betrayed the nervousness behind it.

"Because that is at the root of all this trouble," Lee answered quietly.

The prince relaxed then, and a faint smile came to his lips.

"You know a great deal, Mr. Lee," he said quietly. "That is the full extent of my knowledge, and I imagine that it is the extent of yours, too. It is a well-guarded secret. But if you think you can learn anything from a visit to the hall, I think we could manage it."

The matter was quickly settled. It was not possible, of course, to make the visit as they might have done in normal times. As a matter of fact, the prince himself was under orders from the new Government to remain in his own grounds, and had been expressly forbidden to enter the grounds of the king's palace.

The Hall of Fleeting Shadows was quite a small memorial hall to the memory of the past kings of Dalmania. It had been erected in the grounds of the king's palace a hundred years or more ago, and contained statues of all the kings with various flags and souvenirs of national interest.

Prince Wolfram had dressed himself quickly in different clothes from those he wore when Lee was first introduced to him. He was attired now in a golfing jacket and cap, and would have passed anywhere for a casual pedestrian.

Not that either of them intended to show themselves to any of the guards who were still stationed about the castle and the prince's own house.

They went out quietly, and chose their way discreetly. The prince knew every inch of the ground in this neighbourhood, and to arrive at the hall, which was their objective, was not a difficult task.

Moreover, he assured Lee that, if he could climb, there would be no difficulty in entering the place, despite the fact that the doors were securely locked.

"Denis and I have climbed in many times when we were youngsters together," he explained, with a touch of regret in his voice. "There was some weird attraction about the place for us even then."

Their progress to the place was without incident. The fact that most of the way was through fairly thick wooded country made the risk of observation of no great account.

The hall itself was quite a small, white stone building, standing among the trees some considerable distance from the palace, which was on higher ground.

"I think I will go in alone," Lee said, when Wolfram had shown him the way in which he could gain an entry. "I wonder if you would mind acting as a kind of guard while I am inside?"

It was arranged in this way after some brief discussion. Wolfram was to remain outside, keeping watch in case of any intruders, which the detective entered the hall itself.

He climbed through the little window to which the prince had brought him and found himself in a narrow passage. This led ultimately to the main hall.

The place was built almost entirely of marble of different hues. Down the sides were the famous statues of the kings; and at the end, where Lee himself entered the place, was the largest statue of all.

It was a huge figure in pure white marble, and was a symbol of Dalmania's greatness. For a few moments the detective stood before it, impressed by the figure itself, and by

the weird silence which added to the whole effect.

The floor of the hall was done in mosaic, and when he had grown accustomed to the strange atmosphere, Lee walked slowly away from the statue down the centre of the hall, examining the floor with more than casual interest.

To himself he was carefully repeating the phrases which he had learned that night when he listened to Denis Dalmain in the keeper's cottage at Missledon.

HE stopped at last and went down on his hands and knees. His attitude for a time was that of a man who was seeking for some minute article on the floor.

Whatever it was, he eventually discovered it. Taking out his pocket-knife, he began to loosen the cement about one of the small pieces of mosaic in the floor. In another minute he was pulling with his fingers, and slowly but surely the piece of stone was rising from its place in the floor.

He pulled it out altogether at last. As he did so there came a faint sound, and Lee stopped just as he was in the act of removing a second section of the stone.

The secret of the kings of Dalmania was a complicated one, and this was but the first step in its unravelling. But that slight sound upset Lee's plans. At all costs he did not wish anyone else to learn the secret, whether they were friend or foe.

His sole object in coming here was to establish quite definitely whether Lehman had been or not. If he had not yet been, if he were still struggling to learn the secret, then Lee had his plans all cut and dried, ready for his utter defeat.

The instant he heard the sound, however, the detective quickly pushed home again the piece of stone which he had just removed. Even without the small quantity of cement which he had removed, it fitted quite evenly.

When he jumped to his feet there was no sign that only a few moments before he had been tampering with that particular part of the floor.

As he stood upright the wisdom of his swift decision was borne upon him more strongly. The first faint sound had developed into the quiet echo of footsteps from one of the passages at the other end of the hall. Whoever was coming into this place had no fear of intruders. They were coming quite boldly, and the sound of their voices reached him presently.

But by that time Lee had tiptoed swiftly across the hall until he was behind the great statue at the far end. Barely had he reached here than there came another interruption. This time it was from behind him, and, turning, he found the prince softly stepping towards him, one hand slightly raised in warning.

He crept to Lee's side before he ventured to whisper his reason for coming into the place.

"I don't know, but I think someone else is coming into this place," he said quietly. "I saw three men come through the woods from the road, and I thought— Ah!"

There was no need for him to explain further. From the darkness of the shadows in which they stood both of them could see quite clearly the three men who had entered the Hall of the Fleeting Shadows at the opposite end.

They came slowly down towards the statue, and Lee and his companion drew back a little way, so that they were completely hidden by the huge base of the big white figure, though they themselves could still see over the top.

The vari-coloured lights which shone through the tinted windows made it difficult at first to distinguish the three men clearly. Only as they drew within eight or ten yards of where Lee stood did he recognise them. Then he realised that his visit to the Hall of Fleeting Shadows had not been a minute too soon!

Mark Lehman himself was the centre of the little group. With him on one side was the American, Bastow, and on the other was a taller man whom Lee only vaguely recognised. Almost immediately, however, Lehman addressed this man by name, and the detective remembered he had had a fleeting glimpse of his features.

"It's up to you now, Vellam," Lehman said. "I wasn't there when he began to repeat. We begin with the statue, don't we, Bastow?"

"Yes," Bastow nodded, but stood stock still for a time, evidently impressed with the Hall of Fleeting Shadows just as Lee himself had been. And for some seconds the three stood there staring up at the great white statue, all unconscious of the fact that in the blackness of the shadows beyond two eyes were carefully watching every slight movement they made.

"We've come to grips again!" Leo told himself, and felt a little sense of joy that the period of inaction had passed.

CHAPTER 8.

Revolt!

MARK LEHMAN was the type of man who did not understand the meaning of the word failure. On those rare occasions when his schemes had not been a complete success, he attributed it to the mistakes of his subordinates, combined, as he admitted, with the extraordinary pertinacity of the man whose name was Nelson Lee.

Lehman decided quite definitely to remove Lee from his path. His lieutenant, Dr. Melzer, was anxious to carry the matter a stage further and to have a full and complete revenge. But in this they failed. Their brief success was speedily shattered by Lee himself, and they had been forced to bolt from

England, that being the only way to succeed in the one big plot they were hatching. They had gone aboard Lehman's yacht and disappeared, apparently.

But they still held King Denis of Dalmania a prisoner. They had nearly lost him, and it was more by luck than judgment that they had recaptured him. Scared of utter defeat, Lehman had urged both Melzer and Bastow to speed things up, and with their fiendish drugs they had brought the king to a very low state, and in his delirium he had unwittingly revealed the secret they wanted to learn—the secret of the huge gold reserve in the Hall of the Fleeting Shadows.

After that, Lehman had set sail for Castalan. By wireless he received a message from his "friends" in the city. They begged him to come quickly, as the situation was developing unpleasantly. When they were within a few miles of the port a message of warning, in the code which had been arranged, reached Lehman. A British destroyer was outside the harbour, and though its mission was ostensibly a peaceful one, the head of the revolutionary party was uneasy about it.

Lehman decided that he would put into a much smaller port some eight miles from Castalan. It might be a little more awkward for his schemes, but he would surmount the difficulty without any doubt. So his yacht came to anchor in the little port of Barendor. Even yet it was doubtful whether they had gathered all the secret which Denis Dalmain possessed, but Vellam felt confident that once he reached the place he would understand its meaning quite clearly.

"We will go as soon as possible!" Lehman decided, and made his arrangements swiftly.

A message to the man he was backing in the revolution brought a car to Barendor, and on the very same afternoon that Lee went to visit Prince Wolfram, Lehman and his two helpers were motoring over the coast road to Castalan. He had guessed from the first that this part of his enterprise would be difficult, and he had left the helpless Melzer and many of his gang in Spain. This was a case where numbers were dangerous.

There was no difficulty about Lehman's entrance into the city. He was in a car which bore the President's own colours, and he went first of all to the Assembly Hall, where Mastrick, President of the Republic, had his headquarters. He found Mastrick in a nervous state. A storm was brewing, and he feared that it would sweep him away. Lehman assured him that all would go well, and that he was simply to trust in him.

Meantime, certain orders were to be issued. Lehman would not explain just what his moves were, but he required certain transport to be at a particular place at a stated hour that evening.

Mastrick, of course, believed that this was part of some clever scheme to consolidate his own position. Actually, Lehman did not care a brass button how the revolution went once his own plans had been successfully concluded.

With the aid of the transport which Mastrick had promised he hoped to get away that night with the gold for which he had worked and schemed.

His own men from the yacht would be the workers. There would be no Dalmanians present to see what actually occurred.

Having arranged everything to his satisfaction with Mastrick, and with a final assurance that everything would go well, Lehman left in the car again for the Hall of Fleeting Shadows.

Here was the testing moment. Even Mark Lehman felt some tremors of nervous fear as Vellam and Bastow began their elaborate performance.

Lehman stood with his back against the base of the great statue and watched his two helpers as they went about their task, calling to them from time to time as they seemed to be in doubt.

And five yards behind Lehman stood Nelson Lee equally interested and anxious over the efforts of the two men. He had whispered quietly to Prince Wolfram, and both of them were now little more than a part of one of the great pillars in the darkness behind the statue.

"Got the first steps!" It was Bastow's voice which called out; and Mark Lehman growled approval.

For the next quarter of an hour the procedure went steadily on. Now and again Vellam or Bastow would repeat a line, and

Lee recognised the words as being part of that same recitation he himself had committed to memory that night in the keeper's cottage.

"We've got everything pretty correct so far, I reckon," Bastow was standing near Lehman as he spoke. "What's the next, Vellam? It's like one of those puzzles. They must have a highly complicated sort of locking arrangement on the job, chief!"

Vellam was again repeating:

"Where the finger of the Great One points
"To the moving head that rears——"

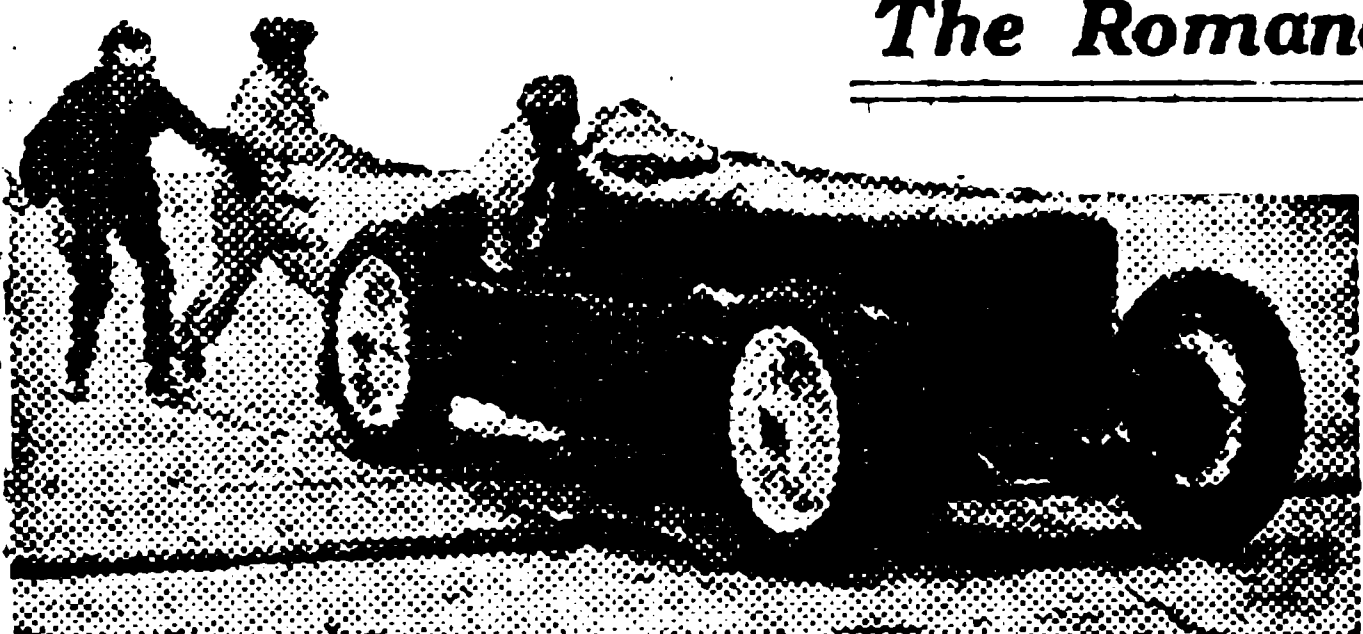
He put the slip of paper back in his pocket again, and leaned over the base of the statue. Lee could see him take hold of the marble head of the snake which was rising from beneath the feet of the huge figure. For ten seconds Vellam seemed to be exerting his strength as though to break off the head. Lehman and Bastow watched him anxiously.

From his shadow Lee had an equally clear view. He saw the head of the marble snake slowly twisting round, but it did not break. In another moment there came a dull thud from some place quite near when Lee was standing. Lehman and Bastow had already begun to hurry round the base of the statue.

It was dark on this side, but Lehman was flashing a light on the back of the base, and in a few moments revealed the fact that a door of marble had swung open.

Lee also saw what had happened, and he knew that the secret of Dalmania's kings

The Romance of Man's Mastery of Speed!

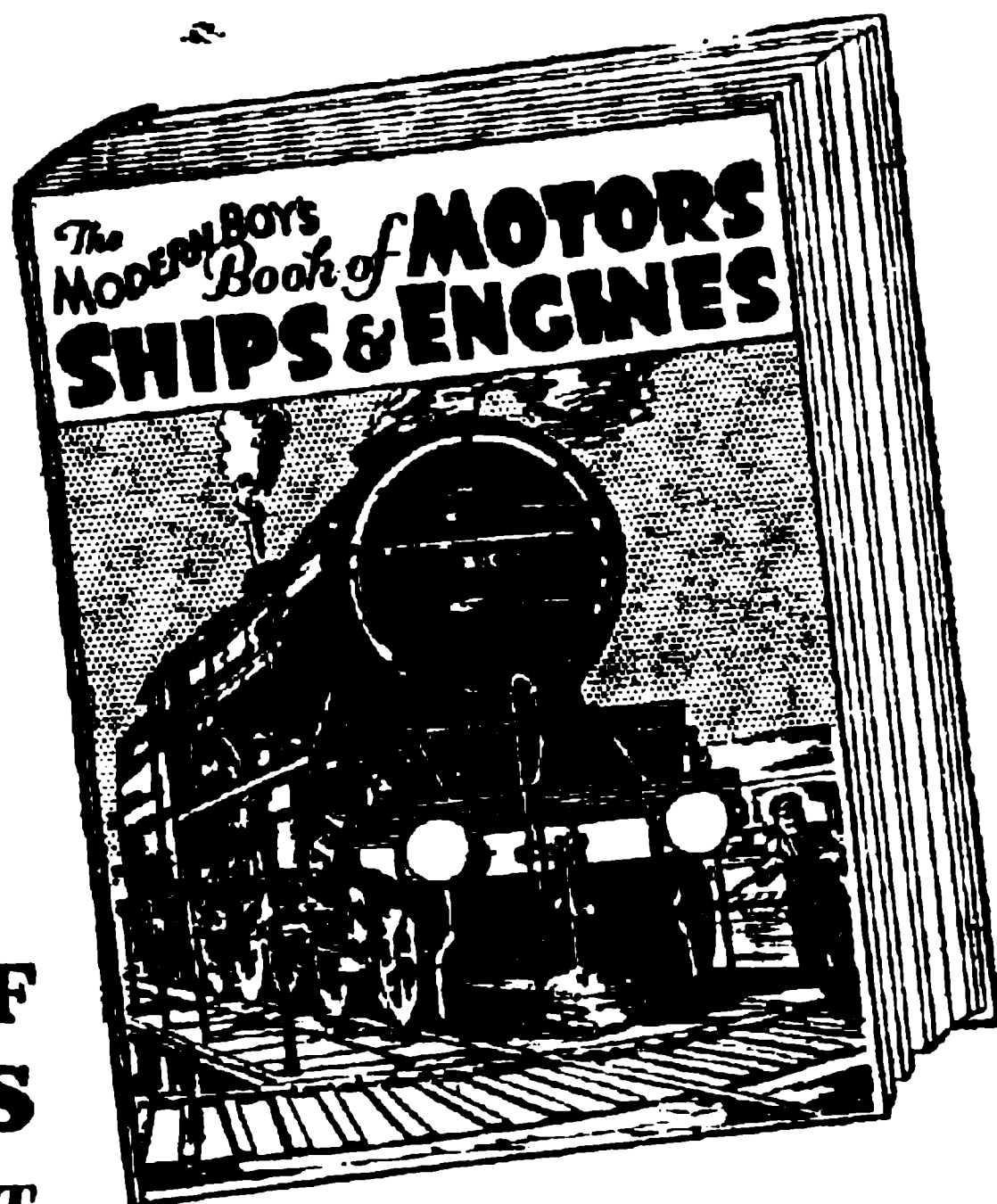


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was discovered. Mark Lehman had succeeded after all. He was even now peering down into the dark cavity and growling out his satisfaction.

"There are steps here," he said. "This is the place, Vellam. You'll come down with me. We'll inspect the place and decide on the best plan for to-night. You remain above, Bastow."

Whether Bastow would have preferred to make the journey with them into the treasure vault or not cannot be said. He had learned the art of obedience so far as Mark Lehman was concerned. He stood by the door as the other two, very slowly and carefully, stepped through and on to the first step.

They disappeared at last, but for a time Bastow still peered down into the cavity.

When he moved presently it was a signal for Lee. He gripped Prince Wolfram by the arm.

"Get that man!" he whispered very quietly and very slowly, so that there should be no mistake about his words.

Probably the faint whisper reached Bastow. As he moved away from the cavity he turned hesitatingly, as though conscious of the presence of some other person.

In that same moment Wolfram leapt forward from behind the pillar. It was almost totally dark behind the statue now, and all that Bastow saw was a wild shape swooping down upon him.

He shrieked out, filled for the moment with uncontrollable fear and dread. The next second Wolfram had flung himself upon him with so much force that he bore him to the floor.

Nelson Lee had run forward in the same instant that Wolfram moved. But his object was a different one. With all the strength he possessed he began to struggle with the heavy door which now lay open. He gritted his teeth and felt it moving, and then with a final concentrated effort he felt it swing slowly and heavily into its place.

From every corner of the hall it seemed that dull faint echoes came back to him. The thud as the door fell into place was followed by curious clicking sounds, intermingled with the echoes, but there was no mistaking all that the sounds meant.

The machinery which worked the door had answered again to the reverse action. The door was locked once more, and only by going through all the process a second time would the door reopen.

Mark Lehman and Vellam were prisoners in the treasure vaults of Dalmania!

And only three people in the world could release them. The King of Dalmania, Nelson Lee and Bastow knew the secret of all these intricate locks and devices which had been the lifetime's work of a dead and gone locksmith.

Wolfram knew the result of the secret, but he did not know how the effect was obtained, while Bastow was for the moment in Wolfram's power.

The moment Lee was satisfied that the door of the vaults was safely locked he turned swiftly to the help of the prince.

Not that Wolfram was in urgent need. His sudden appearance had terrified Bastow temporarily, and the prince had not been slow to take advantage of the fact.

Bastow was now lying on his back, and the prince had him pinned to the floor as Lee joined him.

"You can let him get up now, prince," the detective said quietly. "You have a weapon? Watch him carefully, and don't hesitate to shoot."

Lee himself assisted Bastow to rise, but one hand was kept free, and in this he held his revolver.

As soon as Bastow was on his feet he felt the cold touch of the steel on his cheek. In his previous brief experience with the man Lee had judged his character fairly accurately.

He was courageous enough, and doubtless willing to take risks—up to a point. After that point his courage was likely to collapse, and it was the detective's firm intention to keep the fullest possible control of Bastow, and to make the greatest use of him that he could.

"Go before me!" he ordered. "Keep your hands up for a time. Will you search him, prince? He may be anxious to get at the revolver in his pocket."

THE prince very quickly relieved their prisoner of this unnecessary article. It was the second which Bastow had lost to the detective.

As they came from the shadows in the dim light of the hall itself Lee gave another order, and Bastow turned for a moment. Until now he had been too dazed to understand very clearly what had happened. His captors, so far as he had any knowledge, were Dalmanians, who had been guarding the treasure house, contrary to Lehman's certain information that no guard was ever kept on the Hall of Fleeting Shadows.

But, as his bemused senses returned, something in the voice of one of his captors sounded familiar to Bastow. He turned and realised the truth.

"Nelson Lee!" he gasped the name helplessly, almost stupidly.

"I—you—"

"It is Nelson Lee," the detective returned steadily. "We have met before, Mr. Bastow. On this occasion you will do exactly as I tell you. You quite understand? We were playing a game the last time I met you. To-day it is serious!"

For perhaps three seconds the little group stood there just in front of the great white statue. From somewhere came a low, dull throbbing sound, and all three guessed its cause. Lehman and Vellam were hammering furiously on the door which had closed upon them, and were doubtless calling loudly for help.

But here, not more than a dozen yards from the door behind which they were imprisoned, the sound was so faint that it merely served to intensify the strong silence of this house of shadows.

Prince Wolfram was watching the prisoner he had assisted in capturing with calm interest. As yet he did not fully understand all the plotting and scheming which lay behind it; but he knew quite surely that he and this Englishman, Nelson Lee, were defending and working for his country.

It was Lee who broke the silence at last. Bastow was still staring as a man bewitched, his lips slightly apart, and his eyes fixed on the face of the man who dominated the scene.

"Your friends will stay there for some time, I fear," the detective said eventually, and his voice echoed and re-echoed about the hall. You have a car waiting outside, I imagine. Will you lead the way to it, Bastow?"

"Yes." Bastow jerked the word out as though all idea of protest had gone from his mind.

The little procession moved slowly across the tessellated floor. Bastow was in front, and he was in that wondering, perplexed state of mind which makes a man tread slowly and very carefully.

Outside they paused for a moment while Lee closed the door of the main entrance. He noted that there were no signs that the lock had been tampered with, and judged that Lehman had come provided with a proper key.

"Lead us to the car, Bastow," Lee told their captive, and they moved on again.

The shadows of a summer evening were stealing across their path as they walked slowly towards the broad pathway which led through the woods.

A walk of five minutes brought them to a narrow gateway in the great high wall which surrounded the king's estate. Outside, on the road, a well-equipped, modern car was waiting, and its driver stared in amazement as he saw the new passengers. But Lee's revolver persuaded him that it was better to obey than argue. He was forced from his seat. Lee got in beside Bastow. Prince Wolfram took the wheel of the car and drove to the harbour, the President's colours on the bonnet of the car assuring their rapid and uninterrupted progress.

It was easy to signal to the destroyer and to board the pinnacle that was sent to bring them off. Bastow was immediately put under an armed guard, while Lee instructed the commander to up-anchor and steam for Barendor—Bastow having already promised to turn king's evidence to save his own hide, and had told them where Lehman's yacht lay.

Nelson Lee did not believe in unnecessary mystery. It was better that both Prince Wolfram and Commander Denby should understand the job they were now on. For which reason he explained certain parts to

the prince, and then waited until the commander returned from the chart-room before discussing the immediate plans.

"The king is on board this yacht?" the commander asked. "And you want to get him transferred here, return to Castalan, hang round until we know he is quite safe, and so on?"

"That is what ought to happen." Lee laughed. "The trouble is that there may be one or two awkward moments before we get to that stage. The king may be in such a condition that to move him will be dangerous. That's why I want to have Bastow handy, and to keep on reasonable terms with him until we are sure all is well."

"He's a medical man, is he?" Denby asked.

"I believe so," the detective said. "Anyhow, it is fairly safe to assume that they have been using their fiendish drugs on him. They are past-masters at that business. I have seen quite a lot of their work."

FOR the next half-hour or so they remained in the cabin, talking and discussing minor points in the game before them, and at times recalling other experiences which each of them had had.

The time came at last when they went on deck. It was now pitch dark, and the destroyer's searchlight was sweeping the sea.

"That's Barendor," Denby said, as the light threw up a little collection of houses nestling at the foot of the hills which swept down to the sea.

"And there's the boat we're after," he added a moment later as the broad beam rested on a large yacht riding at anchor in the bay.

When the searchlight passed on for a space they observed that there were practically no lights on board the yacht. The Magic, as Commander Denby's vessel was named, now turned shorewards, and at reduced speed ploughed its way towards the yacht.

Once again the searchlight played on the vessel, which was now lying ahead of them. So far as Lee could see there was no sign of life on board.

"I'll go down and see Bastow for a few moments," he said presently. "We are nearing the stage when his help may be useful."

By this time Bastow's spirits had fallen to zero. The knowledge that Lehman was in an even more hopeless position than he was did not cheer him in the least. No wonder Mark Lehman had been anxious to get Nelson Lee out of his way. The man seemed to know everything and to anticipate every move they made.

It was, therefore, a very subdued Bastow whom Lee saw when he passed the two guards and entered the cabin in which the prisoner was temporarily resting.

Lee talked to him quietly. There was no suggestion of threat in his manner, but

underlying everything he said was a little suggestion of power. It was the iron hand in the glove of velvet, and Bastow realised that it had him very firmly in its grip.

When Lee returned to the deck at last he found a certain amount of excitement. They had run alongside the yacht, but no one had answered their calls. The crew of the *Magic* were therefore making their own arrangements. One or two of them were already aboard the yacht, and Commander Denby informed Lee that it would be possible for him to go on board in a very few minutes.

"But we'd better send a few of our men first," he added. "The whole boat seems deserted. Queer state of affairs altogether."

"I'll go and bring my friend Bastow up," Lee answered genially. "I'll go aboard with him."

A few minutes later the detective was clambering on to the yacht, and just ahead of him was Bastow. Prince Wolfram and Commander Denby followed them. Actually the yacht was not entirely deserted, but the three men who were its sole crew for the time being were not anxious to meet anyone. They were dragged out at last, but that was a minor incident.

The prospects of any fighting, however, were completely gone. For all practical purposes the yacht was at their mercy. Bastow volunteered the explanation. The majority of the crew had gone to assist Mark Lehman.

At one of the cabins on the main deck Bastow paused, and, after some little manœuvring, opened the door.

"Here's the man you want," he said, with the air of one who had done everything expected of him.

"Thank you!"

Lee stepped inside and switched on the light. But one arm was still linked through Bastow's. Behind him Prince Wolfram and Commander Denby still followed. If Bastow had any idea of achieving some sudden coup his prospects were distinctly poor.

"Close the door!" Lee called, as he stepped towards the single berth.

The man who lay there had his face turned to the bulkhead. Very gently Lee moved him so that the light illumined his features. From behind him came a sudden sharp cry, and the prince stepped swiftly to his side.

"My cousin!" he gasped. "He's changed—but it is the king, Lee!"

He turned round at last and faced Denby, as though anxious to impart his news to everyone.

"It's the king!" he repeated again. "King Denis of Dalmania! He has come back—at last!"

CHAPTER 9.

Facing the Multitude.

THE scene in the little cabin was one which Denby remembered long afterwards. Perhaps it was that ghastly white face on the pillow, or it may have been the strange note of excitement,

not untinged with fear, which was in Prince Wolfram's voice; but whatever the reason, the atmosphere of the cabin seemed charged with mystery and wonder.

To the left of Lee, Bastow seemed to be trying to shrink into less space, but his eyes were fixed on Wolfram, who had, for the moment, become the central dramatic figure.

"He has come back!" Wolfram repeated.

"That's good, sir." Commander Denby felt that everyone expected him to speak, and his abrupt, matter-of-fact tones acted as a tonic.

Lee nodded, and bent quickly over Denis Dalmain again; then, after a very brief examination, turned to Bastow. Even as he did so the figure on the bed moved uneasily and began to moan a little.

"This is some of your fiendish work, is it?" Lee demanded; and again Bastow tried to shrink back. "You've got an antidote for the poison you've been putting into him? Will you get it?"

Bastow made no attempt to answer him, but turned quickly to the cupboard near the head of the bed. From one of the shelves he took down a small bottle and looked at it with an air of anxiety for a few moments.

"You are quite sure it is right?" Lee asked.

"I'm making no mistake, Mr. Lee," Bastow answered. "I—you've got me beat. I'll do my best, but it'll take time."

He prepared a syringe for the necessary injection.

"How long will it take for him to recover?" asked Lee.

"Some hours," returned Bastow. "But he will recover. I can promise that, although I ought to stay by him. Mind you, Mr. Lee, you promised to do what you could for me."

"You keep your side of the bargain and I'll keep mine," said Lee.

He arranged with Denby for the return of the destroyer and the yacht to Castalan. A crew was placed aboard the yacht, which was called the *Mystery*, and while Bastow fought to save the king's life the vessels steamed on their courses and dropped anchor outside Castalan harbour.

Both Lee and Prince Wolfram found the business of waiting a very trying one. Both of them were anxious to get ashore as quickly as possible, and to take the king with them. There were any number of difficulties still to be faced apart from the fact that the detective wanted to release Lehman and his companion. A good many hours passed, however, before the condition of the king warranted the idea of moving him.

It was somewhat shortly after noon when Denis Dalmain sat up of his own accord after a long and peaceful sleep. Even now he still seemed dazed and bewildered.

"Don't trouble to ask any questions," Lee told him quietly. "You remember me—Nelson Lee! Your cousin, Prince Wolfram, is here, too. Everything is working out splendidly!"

"But where am I?" Denis Dalmain lost the dull look which had been about his eyes and began to show signs of excitement. "Tell me! What has happened?"

It was the prince who came forward to calm him.

"You shall hear everything presently, Denis," he whispered to him. "But we are near Castalan, and when you are strong enough we are going on shore."

"Strong enough?" The king began to make an effort to get up, and Lee quietly restrained him. "I feel quite strong enough. Let us go at once!"

It was a full hour, however, before they decided to make the effort. The king was made presentable. Lee had arranged for Prince Wolfram and Bastow to accompany him and the king, and also had a naval officer and four men to join them on shore, partly to look after Bastow, and partly to be at hand when he released Lehman and Vellam from the Hall of Fleeting Shadows. The plan was to go first to Sir Charles Grettrex.

Eventually, the whole party went ashore. Fortunately, the car in which they had come to the port the previous night was still in the shed where it had been left. The king, heavily muffled and carefully wrapped up, was put in the car, and with him went Wolfram, Bastow, and one of the naval officers. Lee himself took the wheel.

Arrangements were made so that the remaining members of the party could keep in touch and be at hand if wanted. They would follow on foot to the British Legation. Castalan was three towns in one. There was the port, the old city, and the residential part among the hills were all the great ones of Dalmania had castles and wonderful parks.

It was, however, to the old city that Lee now drove. Here, in one of the main squares were the houses which were occupied by the chief foreign representatives to the court of King Denis. To-day the port was even more deserted than it had been yesterday. Yet, as Lee approached the main town it became plain that something unusual was astir, and it was not long before an angry mob surrounded the car with savage cries and menacing gesture.

From what was yelled it was plain that Nelson Lee had been recognised as an Englishman, and the Dalmanians were not friendly towards Englishmen just then. Wolfram was amazed at this strange turn of events, for which there appeared to be no rhyme or reason. He shouted to Lee to turn back, but the detective was not one to be lightly turned from his purpose. He set his foot hard on the accelerator, and the speeding car charged through the scattering mob.

But although they gained the outside of the British Legation, the mob swarmed round, more dangerous than ever. Stones were hurled and sticks brandished.

"We'll have to make a dash for it," said Lee. "They are bound to let us in, and anyway there should be enough shelter about the house. Are you ready?"

He flung his arms about Denis Dalmain, and hoisted him over his shoulder. Prince Wolfram stepped in front of him. Actually, Lee saw very little of what took place in the next three minutes or so. Fortunately, some of the mob recognised Prince Wolfram, and his presence had a good effect. They stood aside as he strode forward to the porch which gave entrance to the house on this side.

"You keep in front of me now, Lee," he whispered. "We'll get admittance somehow."

He called to the other two, the naval officer and Bastow, who had followed them. Between them they succeeded eventually in attracting the attention of someone in the house, and very cautiously the great bolts on this particular door were withdrawn.

Lee, still bearing his burden across his shoulder, staggered inside the moment the door opened. Standing just inside was Sir Charles Grettrex, a big service revolver in his hand.

"I saw you myself," he said quickly, as Lee put down Denis Dalmain. "You would never have got in otherwise. As it is——"

He broke off abruptly to jump to the door. Lee for the moment was too interested in learning if Dalmain were all right to follow just what happened, but in a moment or two he heard the clanging of the bolts again and heard Sir Charles laugh.

Prince Wolfram was already explaining something of what had happened. Between them, he and Lee managed to get the king to a more comfortable apartment.

Inevitably there was a certain amount of confusion in those first few minutes. Not until they were in this second room did Grettrex realise who it was that Lee had brought with him to the house.

"The king!" Grettrex gasped. "But this—— What's behind it all, Lee? I'm hopelessly puzzled over everything. Listen to this mad crowd outside. They'll break in here presently."

"Why?" Lee asked. "What is all this commotion about now? Why are they concentrating on your house?"

Grettrex sat down. Outside the roaring and the shouting still went on. Now and then there was a curious wailing as though a name was being called out simultaneously.

"They're calling for me," the Envoy smiled, but there was a touch of bitterness about it. "I shall go to them again presently. But what can I do? Can I—dare I tell them yet that the king is safe?"

"What's happened?" Lee asked sharply. "There seems to be a whole mass of misunderstanding over this."

G RETTREX nodded, and very quickly explained. For days past it was obvious that the new government was in difficulties. Their position would very speedily have become untenable had anyone arisen to lead the people. Unfortunately, those who would have supported the

king were helpless because they were utterly without knowledge of their ruler.

In the end it had not been any one man who had led the soldiers and the citizens so much as a gradual growth. Rumours began to grow, and even during the night there had been a certain amount of fighting between the guard which the new government had managed to retain and the townspeople. It had ended by a demand for Mastrick, the president of the republic. For a brief space he faced the crowd this morning.

"There wasn't any real fighting," Grettrex explained. "It's ridiculous, really. The whole government collapsed. Mastrick asserts there is some plot, and that he has really been trying to protect the people all through. Anyhow, some of the army people have collared him, and there will be a chance for him to explain later on."

The republic's collapse had merely brought on a still more dangerous phase. Mastrick's talk of a plot had started even wilder rumours, and in the present situation anything might happen.

"That is the only man who can save the situation," Grettrex said very quietly. "Mastrick spread the story that some Englishmen had captured the king and taken him to England. General Bainim came here an hour or two ago. I've cabled England, and the general told the crowd I knew nothing, but was doing my best."

He put out his hands with a little suggestion of helplessness.

"And the king is here!" he added. "General Bainim told me they had captured about twenty men this morning near the king's palace. A mixed crowd they were—all sorts and nationalities, apparently. Who they are or what they are I cannot say, but Bainim asserts that they are mixed up in this revolution. Mastrick, of course, is trying to get out of all responsibility now by blaming this mysterious Englishman and his helpers!"

"That accounts for their hostility to me," Lee laughed. "Still, I know the man they mean. I don't think he's British actually, but that's a minor point. I hope to be able to hand him over to this General Bainim afterwards, unless he'll let me take him away. We've got one or two charges against him in England."

The noise outside had grown in volume again, and, judging by certain sounds, they were hammering on the doors of the house. Grettrex jumped to his feet.

"I must go out on the veranda," he said abruptly. "What can I tell them?"

Lee turned to the corner of the room, where, on the couch, the king was now lying. Prince Wolfram was talking to him, and still explaining something of what had happened since he had last seen his cousin.

"One minute!" the detective nodded to Grettrex, and went quietly over to the two. Very briefly he explained something of the exact situation of the moment.

"How are you feeling now, your Majesty?" he asked the king. "Do you think you

could show yourself—just for a few moments? That would, so I gather, solve all these problems."

"I will do it," the king said quickly. "You and Wolfram could support me?"

"We could give you something to give you temporary strength," Lee added, then turned to Grettrex. "Where are the other two fellows who came with us? A naval officer and an American doctor. It's the medical man I want."

"I'll look for them," Grettrex said. "You're sure they came in with you? I don't remember seeing anyone but you three."

Within a very short time it was quite definitely established that the young naval officer and Bastow had not entered the house. Nor was there time just at present to spend in hunting for them. Another violent banging on the main entrance door of the house told them that various people were anxious to force admission.

Apparently one of Sir Charles Grettrex's staff decided to take risks and opened the door. A few moments later a dapper man in a light blue uniform came dashing up the stairs and almost ran into Lee and Grettrex, standing just outside the room in which the king was waiting.

"I say, Grettrex," the little military man began in curious mincing English, "you must speak again! Can't you promise? They are getting beyond our control. Can you throw no light—"

He broke off as he realised the presence of the third man.

"General Bainim; Mr. Nelson Lee, representing the British Government," Sir Charles Grettrex said, without troubling to be too exact.

The little man bowed.

"The present situation is most serious, Mr. Lee," he said. "We have had a revolution in this country; the king disappeared. Yesterday—to-day—we have a counter-revolution. It is all so very childish, yet it may have grave results. A summer madness, I think you would call it. If only the king would appear! If the king appeared in person—"

Grettrex opened the door.

"Will you enter, general?" he suggested, and he and Lee followed the military man into the room.

As they entered, Prince Wolfram turned from the window, where he had been engaged in forcing back the shutters. Quite near him stood Denis Dalmain—as Lee still preferred to call him.

FOR a moment the little general stood stock still on the threshold, petrified with astonishment, it seemed.

"Well, Bainim! Have I returned in time?"

It was a weak, almost pitiful voice, and very far from kingly yet, but its effect on the general was magical. He darted across the room and had bent down on one knee

before the king. Lee saw him raise the king's hand and touch it with his lips.

He was on his feet again presently, and then began a swift discussion in which possibly the general became the dominating person for a space. This was, perhaps, because Lee was busy mixing certain medicine which Grettrex had managed to find. Their hunt for the naval man and Bastow had been in vain, and it was necessary to keep on dosing Denis Dalmain.

As the detective crossed the room with the tumbler of liquid, the king called to him.

"Bainim agrees! I must go out!" he said. "I cannot say much, but Bainim understands everything. Will you help me?"

It seemed that he was determined to have Nelson Lee by his side during what would doubtless be a trying five minutes.

The shutters which had darkened the room had now been flung back, and the wide French windows opened. Even while the king was raising the glass which Lee had brought, General Bainim and Sir Charles Grettrex had stepped out on to the balcony.

The shouting and the noise had risen to a tumult as the two men went forward. General Bainim turned for an instant to beckon to Lee and Prince Wolfram. A moment later he was standing on the balcony, and as Lee came along on the right side of King Denis, the little general had unsheathed his sword and was holding it aloft.

Its effect was immediate. The noise quietened to a gentle roll, then sank to nothing more than a faint murmur. Still the general waved his sword. Standing just at the back of the veranda, Lee could see the gently swaying mass of men with upturned faces, all concentrated on that little figure in blue who held the sword above his head.

Not until absolute quiet had fallen did General Bainim speak. He did not say a great deal, and he spoke, of course, in his native tongue. Whether very many in the crowd heard all that he said was doubtful, but good news at times flies even more swiftly than rumour.

The revolution had come—and gone! It had been a trick. But it had not deceived the people of Castalan. They had waited their time, and behold—to-day!

Like them, the king had been deceived. He had also suffered. But he had won through, and his friends were here with him to-day.

He turned, and Lee and Prince Wolfram stepped forward, still supporting the king. As he drew to the rails of the veranda, however, he stood alone, resting his hands on the ironwork.

For perhaps two seconds, though it seemed longer to both Nelson Lee and Prince Wolfram, a strange silence fell on the crowd. It was as if every one of them was held in his place, and not able to do anything but stare up at the figure now right in the forefront of the others on the balcony.

The general was the first to move. He took a step forward and whispered something to the king.

Even as he did so the same idea had evidently entered the mind of King Denis. He opened his lips, and with a tremendous effort called aloud.

"My people——" he began.

It acted as a signal. General Bainim had said that in their present mood the crowd needed some outlet, and, whatever happened, there would be some climax to all the feeling and the excitement which swayed them.

They found it now. It seemed as though the cheering would go on for ever. Time and time again the king raised his hand to acknowledge this amazing show of enthusiasm.

For a time, indeed, he almost forgot that he was still a sick man. Then presently he turned, and in his eyes was a look which Lee had not seen before. The dull glaze had left them, and they were shining again.

As he turned he smiled on General Bainim and tried to speak. Then, like a man in a dream, he nodded joyfully to Sir Charles Grettrex and to his cousin, Prince Wolfram.

Suddenly his hand went out, and he had gripped Lee's right hand firmly.

"My little hour of triumph!" He managed to make his words audible above the din. "But it is really your triumph, Lee. If you had not kept——"

"I think, sire, that you should go indoors and rest now," Lee said very gravely. And Prince Wolfram nodded his agreement.

They left General Bainim to add the finishing touches to the triumphant moment. With a last salute the king turned, and, still leaning on the arms of Nelson Lee and Prince Wolfram, he re-entered the room.

"And that," said Sir Charles Grettrex, as he joined them a little later, "is the end of a revolution!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Way of Escape!

IT was, as Sir Charles had said, the end of the revolution in Dalmania. But it was not quite the end of the case so far as Nelson Lee was concerned.

He hoped and believed, however, that it was the beginning of the end. There was still a fair amount of work to be accomplished, and one or two awkward details to be overcome.

In a short time he managed to draw Sir Charles Grettrex on one side.

"They haven't found that fellow Bastow yet?" he asked. "You might put someone on to the job of hunting for him, and for that naval officer who had charge of him."

"I'll do that at once," Grettrex agreed.

"The next question concerns the secret which has been the cause of all this bother," Lee went on. "There are still two men imprisoned in the treasure vaults. Apparently,

our friend, General Bainim, has gathered in most of the men who went to help Lehman."

"He certainly captured a number of men near the grounds of the king's palace," Grettrex said. "They will be treated as revolutionaries, and are Bainim's prisoners."

"I'm not anxious to rob him of them," Lee retorted. "Though I should rather like to take the other fellows back with me, if you can get over the formalities. Meantime, do you think Bainim will provide a guard? I'll explain the purpose when it has been fixed up."

They discussed the question with the general himself presently. Prince Wolfram was also drawn into the discussion, and by now the king himself knew that the secret of the treasure house was no longer inviolate.

"But the treasure is," Lee assured him. "We have robbed Mark Lehman of his spoils. Later on you will be able to make fresh arrangements for the protection of the treasure. Meantime, I want to get up there as quickly as possible."

In a very short time Lee had made all the arrangements he desired. Within half an hour he was in a car supplied by Sir Charles Grettrex, and Prince Wolfram was again by his side. They had searched first of all for the car in which they had made the journey from the port that morning, but it had mysteriously vanished.

General Bainim had also agreed to send up a properly constituted guard to take charge of the Hall of Fleeting Shadows. They would also give Lee any assistance he needed, as it had not been possible for him to get into touch again with the men who had come ashore from the destroyer.

They reached the Hall quickly, and Lee and Wolfram descended from the car. The prince had chosen two officers to accompany him, and the four of them made their way once again to the main entrance. The door required no unlocking, and they went straight inside, and across the mosaic floor to the great white statue.

"It is rather a lengthy proceeding to open the door of the vault," Lee explained, as he led the way. "We'd better look at the door itself first."

They went to the back of the statue, but even as the detective flashed his light into the dark shadows he realised that he had come too late.

The door of the vault lay open!

The probable explanation of this flashed into his mind at once. Bastow!

"You had better come down with me," Lee said quietly, turning to Prince Wolfram. "We should soon be able to tell if anything has been disturbed."

Together the two descended the steps into the musty vault. Below they found that the vault consisted of one fairly long corridor, and this was lined for a certain length with heavy iron boxes. The boxes themselves were each secured by a big, old-fashioned and apparently very complicated lock,

It did not take a very expert examination to make certain that these boxes had not been touched in any way. Each one of them would probably have needed four men to lift them from their places. Had Lehman's plans gone exactly as he desired he would doubtless have been able to have each box removed to the transport which Mastrick had arranged to send for him.

What actually happened is known to some extent, and the rest can be imagined. As a matter of fact, Nelson Lee made very careful inquiries before he left Castalan, and established beyond any doubt the full truth of the matter.

It is only fair to say that Bastow carried out his promise to give the king proper treatment. More, he intended to go on with that treatment, having recognised the fact that he had more to gain by playing straight with Nelson Lee than in any other way.

Then came the moment when Lee's whole energies were concentrated on the task of getting King Denis into the house of Sir Charles Grettrex against the anger of the mob.

It was Bastow's chance. He took it and made a quick bolt for liberty. The naval officer who had been temporarily interested in this game of running the gauntlet was momentarily taken by surprise when he realised that the man in his charge had gone.

He gave chase, however, and very soon became hopelessly involved in the crowd into which Bastow had promptly plunged.

After that the naval man had a rough time. His luck, as he said afterwards, was badly out. By the time he managed to shake off various members of the crowd he caught a last glimpse of the car, in which he himself had travelled, being driven away.

He still stuck to his job, however, but his adventures after that scarcely concern this story. A man has not much chance in a competition against a good car, and it is sufficient to say that Bastow got clear away.

Apparently he drove straight to the Hall where Lehman and Vellam were imprisoned. At the time when Lee was arranging to support the king in his journey to the veranda, Bastow must have been working the mechanism which released the great door.

The fact that this door was open was sufficient in itself to show that the two prisoners and the man who released them were in no mood to worry about treasure.

Doubtless Bastow would tell them of what was happening in the town and of the need for speed. They did not stop to take away even the most trivial memento of their twenty-four hours' captivity in the treasure vaults of Dalmania.

One can only imagine that they got to the car again as quickly as possible. Where they went, what hardships they may have had to endure, or what precautions they took to avoid being traced, can only be guessed.

NELSON LEE did not stay very long at the Hall of Fleeting Shadows, once he had satisfied himself that no harm had befallen the treasure. The door was closed again, and Prince Wolfram went outside and made arrangements for the guard to keep watch until fuller and more adequate arrangements had been made. After that, Nelson Lee and the prince returned to the city and went to the house of Sir Charles Grettrex.

By now the crowd had dispersed, though both the square and the streets were still well populated. But the early rumours had been displaced, and something of the real truth was known.

Above everything remained the one great fact—the king had come back! Nor was it true that he had run away. There had been some vile treachery, and even yet the king was weak and ill—but he had beaten his enemies.

The king was still resting at Sir Charles' house. He was looking fairly well despite the fact that Bastow's treatment had been suspended. He was now in the hands of his own physician. Sir Charles Grettrex told Lee this before the detective went in to see the king.

"He's very anxious to see you alone for a time, Lee," Grettrex said. "But I suggest the prince goes to him first. You see, I'm wanting your help, too."

"What about?" Lee asked.

"I'll have to advise the Government of everything that has happened, of course," Grettrex explained. "There's a cable I'm sending just to say that the king has returned and all is well."

He handed over the decoded copy of his message.

"You can cut out the reference to me," Lee laughed. "I'll explain my little part when I get back."

"Oh, but I'm bound to explain," Grettrex expostulated.

And after that Lee had to assist him with certain details for his written dispatch.

Presently Prince Wolfram came out from the king and suggested that Nelson Lee should go in and see him. Just what passed at that interview can only be guessed as Lee himself preserves a discreet silence, beyond the fact that they felt justified in congratulating each other.

As an outcome, however, the detective did not return to England quite so soon as he had intended. Nor did the destroyer leave the port of Castalan immediately. Instead, on the following evening, there was a banquet at the palace on the hill overlooking the old city, Commander Denby, of the Magic, and two of his officers were present. Sir Charles Grettrex and Prince Wolfram were also there, and so was General Bainim. But the chief guest of the feast was Nelson Lee.

"I shall see you again, I hope, in London, very soon!" the king told Lee quietly. "When everything here has settled down again I hope to make a more pleasant trip to your country, and next time someone—the Queen of Dalmania—will return with me!"

THE END.

(Nelson Lee and Nipper in Tibet
"The Treasure of Hunger Desert!" is the title of next week's stirring detective-thriller, which deals with the amazing adventures of the famous detective and his assistant in the Far East. You simply must read it!

READERS' PRIZE JOKES!

Binks: "He called me a barefaced robber."

Jinks: "Well, perhaps he didn't notice your moustache."

(A. Greatorex, 92, Main Road, Glascote, Nr. Tamworth. A penknife.)

Magistrate: "Did you steal this rug?"

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

(R. Taylor, 1, Lister Cottages, Sagger Lane, Elstree, Herts. A pocket wallet.)

Mr. Smith: "Excuse me, but have you seen my dog this morning, Mr. Brown?"

Mr. Brown (grocer): "Seen 'im? I should think I have. Come in 'ere, stole a 'am, bit me in the leg, and then upset a customer into some eggs."

Mr. Smith: "Really? Well, I wonder if you'd mind putting this 'lost' notice in your window?"

(L. Taylor, 14, Tanzo Road, Hampsted, N.W.3. A penknife.)

McDonald: "Are you fond of moving pictures, son?"

Son (hopefully): "Yes, father."

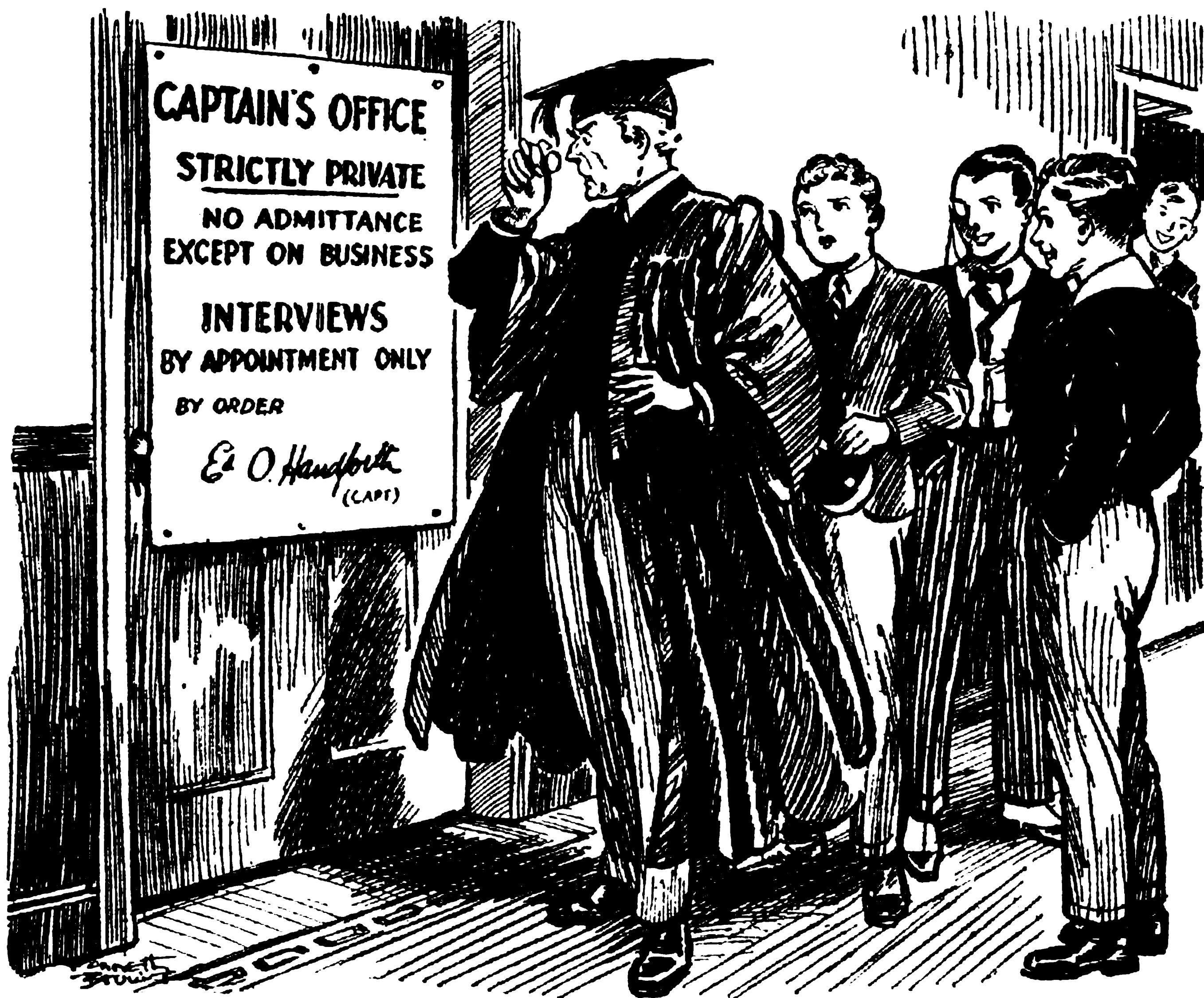
McDonald: "Then come and help me move half a dozen from the attic."

(A. Robinson, 31, Manor Farm Road, Bitterne Park, Southampton, Hants. A pocket wallet.)

A lorry had to wait while some workmen were laying an electric-light cable. They were such a long time that the lorry-driver leaned out of his cab and said: "When you've finished playing with that there blink-ing yo-yo I'll make a move."

("Nelson Lee Reader," 77, Cricketfield Road, Lower Clapton, E.5. A penknife.)

COCK O'THE WALK!



Hal Brewster, of the River House School, shows St. Frank's how simple it is to "put it across" Handforth, the new Remove Skipper, . . . The jape of the Term!

Startling the Remove.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH paused in the Remove passago, and his eyes were gleaming with an intense expression of glee. He was feeling enormously proud of the fact that the new Housemaster had taken him so fully into his confidence.

And what an idea, too!

A feed of celebration! A feast in honour of Mr. Fakenham's arrival! And all done in such a way that the fellows would be mystified. But he—Handforth—would have the calm, comforting assurance that he was doing everything with Mr. Fakenham's sanction.

This was the trump-card which he would hold up his sleeve. A feed was always a

happy inspiration, but this evening it seemed a sheer gift from the gods—for Handforth hadn't had any tea, and he was ravenous. What did it matter about Hal Brewster's hot sausages now? There was something infinitely bigger on the programme. And it was the duty of the Form captain to get his men on the job without delay. Mr. Fakenham appeared to have plenty of confidence that Handforth would be capable of working this oracle.

Edward Oswald quickly made up his mind. "Common-room—at once!" he said curtly, as he put his head into one of the studies. "Something important—Form captain's orders!"

The study happened to be occupied by De Valerie and Somerton.

"Rats!" said Val. "We can't be bothered

"Urgent!" snapped Handforth. "I've got a great scheme!"

He went out, and hurried from study to study, giving the same instructions. Then he went along to the Common-room. Fellows were coming in all the time—for the majority of them had detected a peculiarly excited note in his voice, and had scented something out of the usual.

"Everybody here?" said Handforth, at length. "Where's Pitt? Where's Burton? Where's Onions—"

"You ass, they're West House fellows," said Fullwood. "If you meant this to be a Remove meeting, you ought to have said so."

"Oh, West House fellows!" frowned Handforth. "I'd forgotten. Well, it doesn't matter—they don't count in this affair. This is purely an Ancient House celebration. I want a dozen volunteers."

"Is this one of your big stunts?" asked Watson politely. "Is this the beginning of your great campaign?"

"Twelve ought to be enough," said Handforth, ignoring the query. "Twelve for the kitchens, and another twelve to prepare the table. A feed, my lads—that's the order of the hour."

"A feed!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We always knew you were the right man!"

The juniors waxed warmly enthusiastic.

"The most ripping feed you could wish for!" said Handforth, nodding. "I want twelve volunteers to help me raid the kitchens."

"To do what?" asked Church, staring.

"Raid the kitchens!"

"Oh, rather!" said Fullwood. "Don't all fall over yourselves, you chaps! I suppose this is where we laugh?"

"You're crazy, Handy!" said McClure, frowning.

"Of course, I knew you'd say that," went on Handforth complacently. "But I'm not crazy, and it's not a joke, and there's no need to laugh. Shall I say it again? I want twelve fellows to come with me to raid the kitchens and store-rooms."

"We heard you the first time," said Church. "Either you've gone off your rocker, or you're trying to be funny. Wouldn't you like another twelve volunteers to raid the local bank? One's just as likely as the other!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm Form captain, and I know what I'm talking about," said Handforth, glaring. "I don't want to hear any more of this cackling! I'm talking seriously, and I want you to take me seriously. Twelve of us are going to raid the kitchens for grub, and another twelve are going to set the table for the feed in the dining-hall. I've made up my mind to hold a celebration."

"Yes, but you haven't made up our minds," said De Valerie.

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie Glen-thorne stoutly. "I mean to say, I'm ready to dash into the good old fray if it's a question of a House raid, or something frightfully thrilling like that. But, good gad, what would the pater say if Archie rolled home with the good old sack?"

"The sack!" said Handforth.

"We should all be sacked if we raided the kitchen openly, you priceless fathead!" said Church. "What's come over you, Handy? Even if we didn't get sacked, we should be swished pretty stiffly!"

Handforth was still serene. He knew something that the others didn't. He had Mr. Fakenham's full permission to go ahead!

"You won't get sacked, and you won't get swished," he said calmly. "If I don't get volunteers, I'll use other methods! Why, you—you ungrateful rotters! Here am I, suggesting a ripping feed, and you won't back me up! I'll take full responsibility."

"That's a fat lot of consolation!" grunted McClure.

"Full responsibility!" repeated Handforth. "I'm Form captain, and you can all enter this thing freely and openly. If there are inquiries, refer to me. If there's any question of punishment, I'll take it all. I shan't let anybody suffer. As skipper of the Remove, I'm giving these orders."

"Half a minute!" said Fullwood curiously. "If we go ahead with this raid, you'll take the full blame?"

"There isn't any question of blame," said Handforth. "I've got permission—"

"What?"

"I mean, you've got my permission to get busy," said Handforth hastily. "Now, I don't want any rot! I can't speak plainer, can I? Back me up, and I'll guarantee that you won't come to any harm."

"Honour bright?" asked several juniors dubiously.

"Honour bright!"

Handforth spoke so vehemently that the fellows wavered.

"Oh, but this is rot!" growled Fullwood. "What guarantee can you give, Handy? A fine set of asses we shall look if we raid the kitchens and then get it in the neck! Mr. Stokes won't punish you alone—"

"Mr. Stokes won't have anything to do with it," interrupted Handforth coldly. "I know what I'm doing. You needn't have any qualms. This is a Form captain's job, and I'm giving my orders. I don't want any more silly objections."

"Yes, but—"

"If Mr. Stokes or anybody else tries to interfere, I'll satisfy 'em!" said Edward Oswald firmly. "I won't let anybody suffer. It's your duty to back me up—and as junior skipper, I insist."

Fullwood and De Valerie and Church and McClure retired into a corner with Russell and Watson and a few others—all the principal fellows.

"Of course, he's off his rocker," said Full-

wood. "But it might be a good idea to back him up."

"My dear chap, are you dotty, too?" asked McClure, aghast.

"No—but it'll teach the chump a jolly good lesson," said Fullwood. "He means what he says about taking all responsibility, and we can rely upon him to face the music."

"But, hang it, we can't let him go into this like a lamb to the slaughter!" objected Church uneasily. "It's a bit too thick——"

"No, it isn't," said McClure grimly. "You're right, Fully. Now I come to think of it, it'll be the best way to bring him out of that giddy trance! If he comes a cropper on his very first day as Form skipper, he'll be subdued."

"Just my argument," nodded Fullwood. "Besides, this raid won't develop. It'll only be a beginning. We'll pull him up before it goes too far."

Handforth strode over and glared.

"Well, what's all this jawing about?" he asked. "Am I going to be defied, or——"

"All right, Handy—you want volunteers, and you can have 'em," said Church blandly. "The scheme is to raid the kitchens, eh? Have a feed in the dining-hall? Good!"

"Let's go!" said Adams briskly.

Some of the other fellows were rather staggered.

"But—but it's too risky!" gasped Hubbard.

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "Handy's taking all responsibility, so we can leave the explanations to him if there's any trouble. You'll accept all the blame, won't you, Handy, old man?"

"There won't be any blame!" retorted Handforth. "Come on—there's no time to waste."

And, satisfied that their Form captain was intent upon qualifying for the sack, the Removites marched out of the Common-room in a body.

With Full Permission!

MOST of the fellows regarded it merely as a rag, for they had no actual intention of raiding the kitchens, as Handforth supposed. And as long as they didn't commit any violence, and as long as Handforth took the blame, no very serious consequences would result.

Church and McClure were rather worried. It was obvious to them that their leader had some sort of bee in his bonnet, but they couldn't understand what it was. He was hungry, of course—since he had had no tea—but that fact didn't provide a reason for this extraordinary decision to raid the domestic quarters.

"This captaincy business has got into the poor old chap's head," said Church sadly. "He seems to think he's a giddy emperor, or something. He's only got to give his orders, and we can do any old thing he likes!"

"Let's wait and see what happens, anyhow," said McClure.

Handforth, at the head of the crowd, was the first to open the baize-covered door which separated the domestic quarters from the rest of the House, and he entered the kitchen as though he were a general taking command of a conquered fortress.

"Three of you ransack these cupboards, and get everything you can lay hands on!" he said briskly. "Three more of you can have a shot at these other cupboards——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" said Mrs. Poulter, suddenly appearing in the kitchen and looking at Handforth with considerable warmth. "Out of my kitchen, young gentlemen! Whatever has come over you? You know well enough that you're not allowed——"

"That's all right, Mrs. Poulter," interrupted Handforth. "This is a special occasion. 'We've come here for grub!'"

"For what?" said the amazed matron.

"Grub—food!" explained Edward Oswald. "And it's no good making a fuss, either. Take my advice, Mrs. Poulter, and stand aside. I've given my orders, and they've got to be carried out!"

"Oh, indeed, have they?" said Mrs. Poulter hotly. "Well, I declare, I never heard of such a thing! How dare you! Out of my kitchen this instant, Master Handforth! I won't have you here! I'm surprised at you! You know that it's against all the rules——"

Handforth made a sweeping gesture to his men.

"On with the raid!" he said grimly. "Get all the food you can lay hands on, and choose only the best! This feed has got to be a special one!"

"Master Handforth!" exclaimed Mrs. Poulter.

"Sorry, Mrs. Poulter, but this is my affair!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "You'll know all about it later on, but just at the moment I can't be bothered with any interruptions!"

The good lady was fairly startled—and with excellent reason. She had never experienced anything like this before, and her amazement turned to genuine anger.

"Don't you dare to touch any of my cupboards!" she said frantically. "Master Handforth! I'll go straight to your Form-master and tell him what you're doing! I won't have this outrageous interference——"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Handforth. "All this fuss! It's only a feed, Mrs. Poulter! And there's nothing to worry about——"

"You'll see whether there's nothing to worry about, young man!" panted the matron breathlessly. "You'll see whether I'm going to allow this to go on! Well, I declare! I never saw the like!"

She bustled out, fairly bristling with anger.

"Better chuck it up, Handy," said Church uneasily.

But Handforth, to the astonishment of the other fellows, was just as serenely cool as ever. He had Mr. Fakenham's full authority to go ahead with this raid, and wasn't Mr.

Fakenham the new Housemaster? By George! These fatheads would have a shock when they learned that he was in the right all the time!

"Chuck it up?" he repeated. "My dear ass, we haven't started yet! You needn't worry—I'm on safe ground, and I know exactly what I'm up to. Now, then, these cupboards. Sorry, Mary Jane, but you'll have to shift!"

Mary Jane, one of the maidservants, held her ground.

"Indeed, Master Handforth, I shan't shift!" she said stoutly. "Whatever's come over you? You can't come down here——"

But Handforth turned to another cupboard and pulled the door open. His eyes gleamed. A new ham met his gaze—prime, cooked, and ready for cutting.

"Good egg!" he said heartily. "Here you are, Mac—take hold of this! We've made a jolly good start, anyhow!"

He staggered away from the cupboard with the ham, and Church wisely backed away. McClure had completely vanished.

"Here you are!" said Handforth, barging into Fullwood.

But at that very moment Mr. Crowell appeared, accompanied by the hot, flustered Mrs. Poulter. And Handforth, in a manner of speaking, was caught with the goods on him. He still had the ham clutched in his embrace.

"Handforth!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "What is this I hear?"

"I don't know, sir," said Handforth. "How can I know what you hear, sir?"

"Don't attempt to be funny, you young rascal!" snapped Mr. Crowell. "I am amazed, I am shocked, that you, the captain of my Form, should have the startling audacity to—to raid the food supplies of the House!"

Handforth was at a great disadvantage. That ham was a huge one, weighing something like twenty pounds, and it was resting on a dish which might have come from a giant's household. No self-respecting Form captain could be quite dignified with this encumbrance in his grasp. And there was no table handy where he could deposit it.

"It's all right, sir!" he panted. "Don't blame these other chaps. I take full responsibility, sir——"

"That is neither here nor there, Handforth," broke in Mr. Crowell. "Good gracious, boy! Put that ham down at once! Mrs. Poulter tells me that you came here with the deliberate intention of ransacking her cupboards."

"Yes, that's right, sir"

"What!" barked Mr. Crowell.

"Just a little celebration, sir," explained Handforth, as he reeled under the weight of the ham. "Can't somebody take this fat-headed thing away? Here, Watson! And you, Tregellis-West! Grab hold of this, and rush it off to the dining-hall!"

Mr. Crowell fairly goggled.

"The boy must be mad!" he said breath-

lessly. "Before my very eyes, in my very hearing, he continues this—this outrage! Handforth!" he thundered. "How dare you!"

Edward Oswald literally dumped the ham into the arms of Tregellis-West and Watson, and they were compelled to take it in order to save the dish from destruction. Handforth breathed more freely, and he faced Mr. Crowell with perfect confidence. He couldn't explain, of course, but he always had that trump card up his sleeve—he was doing all this with Mr. Fakenham's full permission!

"I expect it seems a bit rummy, sir," he said cheerfully, "but it's just a little idea, you know. A sort of junior celebration. We're going to have a big spread, and we're collecting the supplies——"

"Stop!" gasped the Form-master. "Are you telling me, Handforth—are you actually informing me—that you have come here to annex all the necessary food for this outrageous orgy?"

"Yes, sir," replied Handforth coolly.

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Crowell, utterly aghast. "This—this audacity is utterly beyond my——"

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Crowell?" said a new voice.

Mr. Beverley Stokes had appeared—also fetched hither by Mrs. Poulter's orders. The good lady had taken very prompt measures, it seemed.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Stokes," said the Form-master thickly. "I am very glad you have come! This—this poor boy has taken leave of his senses! I not only discovered him leading a raid upon the kitchens, but he is actually intent upon continuing it under my very eyes! He will probably brazen it out in front of you!"

Mr. Stokes regarded Handforth curiously.

"Well, young man?" he asked.

"Well, sir, what's the matter?" asked Handforth serenely. "All I want is to take all the grub that I can lay hands on, so that we can have a feed. Of course, I don't expect you to understand, but all these chaps——" "Hallo!" he added, with a start. "They've gone! They've all bunked!"

"I am not at all surprised," said Barry Stokes. "It appears that the other boys have more sense than you have, Handforth—and I hold you to blame for this outrageous piece of conduct."

"That's all right, sir! As Form captain I accept full responsibility," said Handforth. "I'm going to carry on with the raid whether you like it or not. I don't mean to be cheeky, sir, but when I start a thing, I finish it."

"You see?" said Mr. Crowell, in something like a bark.

"Yes; and there is obviously something behind this," said Mr. Stokes quietly. "The boy would never act in this fashion unless he had been misled. I seem to remember that Handforth is peculiarly prone to believe all that is said to him. I fancy he has been duped!"

"Daped, sir!" said Handforth, grinning. "No fear, sir! Mr. Fakenham told me—I—I mean—Oh, corks! The fact is—"

"Mr. Fakenham?" repeated Mr. Stokes gently. "Come, Handforth, let us hear the rest. Who is this Mr. Fakenham?"

Outside the door a number of Removites were listening intently, and they glanced at one another with dawning enlightenment.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Handforth. "But I can't say any more. Anyhow, I'm going on with this raid. I've got full permission—That is—"

"Full permission from Mr. Fakenham, eh?" interrupted Mr. Stokes. "We are pro-

gressing, young 'un! But when we find out who Mr. Fakenham is, we shall probably be at the root of the matter."

Handforth suddenly gave a violent start.

"But—but you know him, sir!" he gasped. "You know Mr. Fakenham!"

"I can assure you I do not," said Mr. Stokes.

"But—but—" Handforth stared, bewildered and aghast. "But you must know him, sir!" he panted. "He spoke to you in the corridor! He's our new Housemaster, and he gave me permission—"

"I think," said Mr. Stokes, "that we are beginning to see daylight!"

NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE!

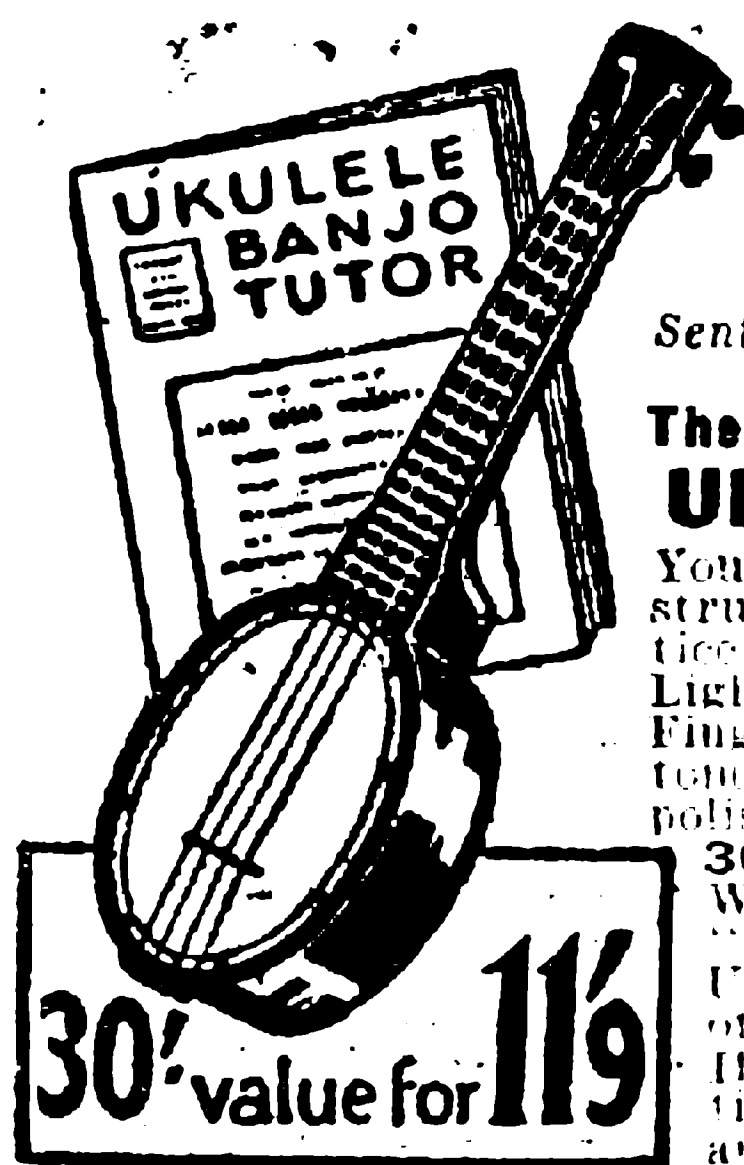
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