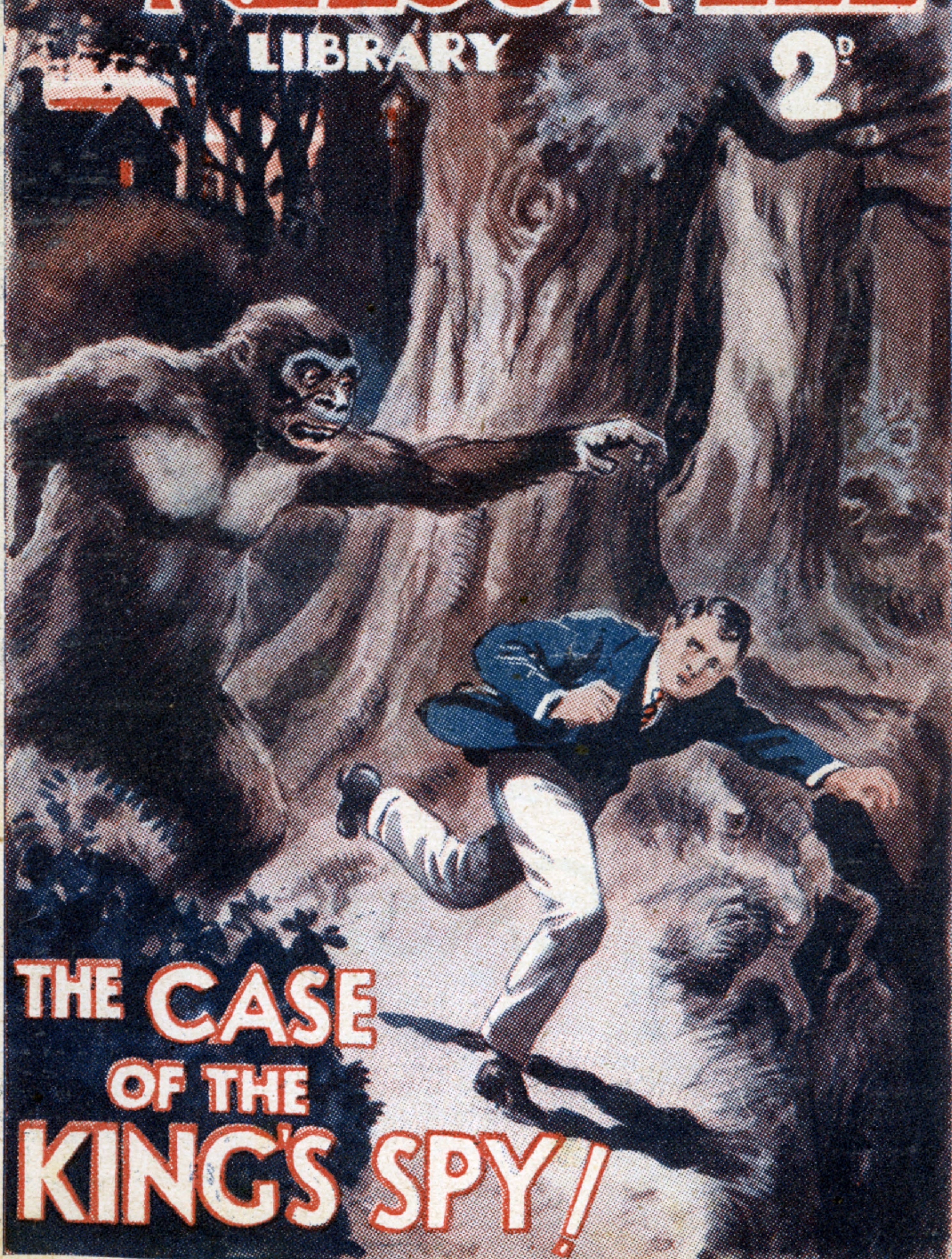


THRILLING YARN OF MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE ADVENTURE
INSIDE !

THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

2^d



THE CASE
OF THE
KING'S SPY!

New Series No. 135.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 20th, 1932.



THE CASE *of the*

CHAPTER 1.

Kidnapped!

JAMES STONE, a Secret Service man and King's Courier, strode thoughtfully along the glistening pavements of Whitehall. It was one o'clock in the morning, and the great boom of Big Ben had just chimed out over the sleeping city.

The famous thoroughfare, ordinarily so full of life and bustle and scurrying throngs of people, was deserted. It had been raining

hard and the pavement glistened beneath the long line of street lamps.

James Stone had been summoned to a private meeting in Whitehall Court. Momentous issues had been discussed and on his shoulders now rested grave responsibilities of world wide importance to the British Empire. They had been entrusted to his able hands, for he was the only man capable of seeing them through.

By his resourcefulness and enterprise many a skilful diplomatic venture had been brought

—And Detective Adventure, Featuring Nelson Lee!



KING'S SPY!

The kidnapping of Jimmy Stone, King's Spy, causes no little consternation in political circles, for foreign powers seek to throw Europe into conflict. And it falls to Nelson Lee, with few clues to help him, to prevent this appalling catastrophe.

to a successful end. Now he was again to be tried. The Government had reposed infinite trust in his ability to see this thing through. And not without reason, for he was far-famed and well-named, 'Stone.' He was hard, with an iron will and strong courage,

and he was a tower of strength to those for whom he worked.

He had dismissed his chauffeur some time before, for he had not known how long he would be in conference, and had no wish to keep his man waiting indefinitely.

As he strode thoughtfully along the pavement a thousand and one questions crowded into his active mind. He was to go abroad again on some secret mission. There was no time to lose; the matter was urgent.

He thought of the charming Miss Laura Valentine, the famous actress, whom he was shortly to make his wife. The wedding had already been arranged. The photographs had appeared in the papers that very day.

However, duty must come first. His country had need of his services, and his wedding must be put off.

With a start, Stone suddenly pulled himself together. His mind had been wandering. That was not usually a failing of his, for his work was too full of unknown dangers to allow him to indulge in dreams. He reached the top of Whitehall and crossed into Parliament Street.

"Good-night, sir!"

James Stone looked up quickly. It was the policeman on point duty. He stood in the shade of a lamp-post, and Stone had not noticed him as he was passing by.

"Good-night, constable!" he said pleasantly, and continued his way across the road.

The constable watched him until he vanished in the darkness.

The next moment a big limousine, with shaded headlights, glided swiftly past the constable and went on in the direction taken by James Stone. It slowed down in the shadow of the Abbey gardens. Then a door was flung open, and two men sprang out and crept silently and swiftly after the retreating figure of Jimmy Stone. The car hid them from the view of the watching policeman.

Suddenly the King's Spy heard the patter of footsteps immediately behind him. Instantly, he was on the alert. He swung round to face his unknown assailants, clenching his fists and bracing his muscles with the knowledge of some impending danger.

But it was too late! The headlights of the car shone full in his face and blinded him for the moment. The next instant a blow from a sandbag hit him full on the forehead. He staggered back a few steps, with his hand raised above his head, then crumpled up into the arms of his adversary.

Quickly one man dragged the unconscious victim into the waiting car, while the other was on guard against danger. The next moment the car was speeding towards Victoria Street.

The policeman had hurried to the spot, but all was silent. He stood in the middle of the road, staring after the tail-light of the car until it vanished round the bend into Victoria Street.

"Well, that's a rum go!" he muttered. "Sure I heard a sort of rumpus. Wonder what the game was?"

So saying the policeman scratched his head and began retracing his steps. He turned the matter over in his mind for the next half hour, and having arrived at no solution of the problem, he straightway dismissed it from his mind.

Meanwhile, the big limousine swung up Victoria Street at a great speed, and, turning

to the left just before reaching the station, sped on over Vauxhall Bridge. After threading its way for some distance in and out of a number of narrow turnings, it eventually entered a mews and pulled up at the rear of a gaunt-looking house in Kennington.

A door of the car was flung open, and two men leapt out, carrying the motionless form of Jimmy Stone between them.

Without a word they entered the yard door of the building and closed it behind them. The big limousine moved silently off into the night.

The two men stumbled heavily across the yard, cursing below their breaths at the weight of their unconscious burden. Reaching the back door of the house they laid their victim on the ground and one of them gave a peculiar rap at the door.

The house appeared to be in darkness and untenanted; not a glimmer of light showed at any of its numerous windows. But their visit had evidently been expected for the door opened, and, without a word, they picked up their burden and passed inside.

"This way," said a voice, obviously of a foreigner.

The three men stole silently down the length of the passage, and the foreigner gently opened the door of the room facing them. A flood of light immediately shone out into the passage. The room was luxuriously furnished. A thick Axminster rug covered the floor, the walls were lined with hunting pictures and trophies of the chase, and innumerable articles of bric-a-brac stood about the room on quaintly carved tables.

The two men deposited their unconscious burden on the floor, while the foreigner locked the door. Then, the latter, turning to one of the two men, a burly-looking ruffian with thick shaggy eyebrows and big prominent teeth, said a trifle nervously:

"Well, Mister Dykes, I congratulate you. So far everything has worked splendidly. Now, there is one more thing for you to do."

"Look here, gov'nor," retorted the other man. "How about the dough?"

It was Dykes' companion who had spoken. Up to now he had been content to play second fiddle to Dykes, but now it was fairly evident that he didn't quite relish the job in hand, and wanted to make sure of his share of the generous pay and clear out.

"Quite right, Crick," said Dykes eagerly. "What about it, gov'nor? We ain't seen much brass yet?"

The foreigner's face suddenly underwent a change. He turned swiftly on the two men like a wild cat.

"Confound you both!" he hissed fiercely. "We agreed on the terms. You know what they are—five hundred between you when you've finished your job. And until it's finished you don't get a penny. Understand?"

The two men cowered back before the other's fierce onslaught. Like all bullies of their type, they were very brave when it came to creeping behind a man in the dark

and knocking him senseless. But it was quite a different matter when it came to facing a man who was as unscrupulous as themselves, and who knew how to use his power.

"All right, guv'nor," said Dykes humbly. "Keep your hair on; we'll see the job through."

"Very good, my friend," said the foreigner pleasantly. "Now, just help me to undress Mr. Stone, and then we can get the job finished with."

For the next few minutes the three men were busily engaged in removing every article of clothing from the unconscious man on the floor. Soon they had him stripped and the foreigner flung a blanket over him.

"Now Mister Crick," he said, "you remain here and see that he doesn't come to his senses. If he does, tie him up with that rope over there. Come on, Mister Dykes; there's another James Stone anxiously waiting to put on these clothes in the next room."

He gave vent to a sinister chuckle, and led the way to a door on the other side of the room, with Dykes following at his heels.

The room which they entered was just as luxuriously furnished as the other. Another thick Axminster rug covered the floor; the dressing-table and wardrobe were made of solid oak. Everything betokened refinement and wealth.

Over in the further corner was a bed, and sitting beside it in a comfortable armchair was a man dressed in evening clothes, reading a book.

He rose to his feet as the two men entered the room and came silently towards them.

"How goes it, Dulac?" he asked pleasantly.

The foreigner answered the stranger in a respectful manner.

"Everything is all right, so far, Baron," he said. "The plan has worked without a hitch."

"Good!" exclaimed the man in evening-dress.

He turned towards the bed.

"Our friend is sleeping peacefully," he said. "We must wake him up."

The form of a man lay across the bed. He was breathing heavily and irregularly. His left arm was sprawled across his head so that his face was hidden. The stranger shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Now, Mister James Stone the Second," he said jeeringly, "it's time to get up!"

The sleeping man shook himself wearily, and, raising himself, sat up.

"Phew! Well, that's the limit!"

The exclamation came from Dykes. He was staring in fascination at the man's face; he rubbed his eyes as if he were dreaming.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he said. "But it's the same chap! Are there two of 'em?"

The Baron gave a low, amused chuckle.

"That'll put your confounded Secret Service agents off the scent," he muttered, and rubbed his hands gleefully.

Dykes was right. The man on the bed bore a wonderful resemblance to James Stone, the King's Spy. The man had the same short

beard, cut naval fashion, the same dark moustache.

His thick head of hair was tinged with grey at the sides, and brushed straight back over his forehead, as was Stone's. In all respects he was the double of the famous Secret Service man—in height, age, and general build.

But his face was not keen and alert and healthy, as was Stone's. Instead, the marks of long dissipation were clearly discernible. His eyes were dull and lifeless, as if he were suffering from the effects of drugs, and a strange pallor hung over his features.

The Baron bowed mockingly in front of his strange guest.

"And how are you feeling to-night, Mr. James Stone?" he asked sarcastically.

The man gazed stupidly at the suave-mannered Baron, as if he did not understand the question. Then he muttered in a toneless voice.

"Why do you call me James Stone? I keep on telling you my name is Jones."

"Pardon me," said the Baron in suave tones. "You are forgetting. You are now Mister James Stone, known throughout Europe as Jimmy Stone, of the Secret Service. And for that you are to have one thousand guineas. Just think, my friend—one thousand guineas all to yourself!"

The Baron suddenly bent closer to the other man.

"Listen!" he whispered earnestly. "There is no time to lose. You must get into these clothes. Everything will be all right; the car will take you to Chelsea. You need do nothing. You will simply be found by the police, wandering in the street and suffering from loss of memory. You need say nothing, or, at least, very little. You must not remember anything. Your resemblance, and the fact that you wear these clothes, will be enough. For one brief fortnight you will be James Stone, and for that you will receive one thousand guineas. Do you understand?"

A flush of excitement passed over the man's pale face. He roused himself with an effort.

"Yes, I understand," he said.

"Good!" said the Baron. "Then get into these things immediately."

The three men helped him into the clothes of James Stone, and in a few minutes the change had been effected. The resemblance was now amazing.

Strong as the likeness to James Stone had been before, it was now so extraordinary that it would have been difficult for Jimmy Stone's most intimate friend to have discovered the impersonation.

At length the Baron stood back with an exclamation of undisguised triumph.

"Ah!" he said. "That is indeed excellent. And now, Mr. Dykes, just see if the car is outside."

As Dykes left the room the Baron drew a wad of notes from his pocket.

"There, Mr. Stone," he said. "There are five hundred pounds for you. And you shall

have the remainder at the end of the fortnight."

The other man took the notes eagerly and thrust them into his pocket just as the door reopened and Dykes entered.

"The car's outside, sir," said Dykes.

"Very good," said the Baron. "Well, you know what to do. Take him to Chelsea and drop him outside Stone's house. I needn't impress upon you the need for speed and secrecy. If you bungle the job, it will be the worse for you. Remember that!"

CHAPTER 2.

Lee Investigates!

IN an apartment on the second floor of a great block of buildings just off Whitehall, Sir Vrymer Fane, attached to the Foreign Office, was striding in agitation to and fro in front of the fireplace, when a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in!" called Sir Vrymer expectantly.

In response to his request the door opened, and Nelson Lee, the famous detective, was ushered in.

"Ah, good-evening, Mr. Lee!" said Sir Vrymer Fane, as he hastened to meet his visitor with outstretched hand. "I have been anxiously awaiting you. Won't you sit down?"

Nelson Lee took the proffered chair and waited for the other to speak again, watching him narrowly through half-closed eyes.

Sir Vrymer cleared his voice and went on speaking with evident embarrassment.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "no doubt you are wondering why I have sent for you. I admit that it is rather an unusual course for a man in my position to adopt, but there are strong reasons for it."

He gazed keenly at the detective, and carefully chose his words.

"You understand," he said, "that what takes place between us is strictly confidential?"

"The warning is unnecessary, Sir Vrymer," said Lee quietly. "I always offer my services on that assumption."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee!" the Minister said quickly. "I should have taken that for granted. Listen carefully. I will be very brief. Last night, in this very room, I had a private interview with Mr. James Stone. I need not tell you what Mr. Stone's official capacity is, as doubtless you are already well aware of that. Certain matters of a highly confidential and secret nature took place between us, and a certain course of action was decided upon. Mr. Stone left this building at five minutes to one this morning. Everything had been arranged. He was to catch a train at eight o'clock—the Continental express. By this time he should have been travelling overland on the Continent."

The Minister paused a moment, and looked at Lee intently.

"Early this morning," he continued, "some two hours after he left me here, Mr. Stone

was discovered wandering near his house at Chelsea. His manner was strange; he could give no account of himself. He was taken to his rooms, and a doctor was sent for. We have since been informed that Mr. Stone has been suddenly stricken with total loss of memory."

Again the Minister paused and glanced at the detective inquiringly. His manner was self-possessed now, but a tremor of his fingers denoted the high nervous tension under which he was labouring.

"Mr. Lee," he said gravely, "the task which Mr. Stone had undertaken must be accomplished not later than within fourteen days from to-day. There is only one man who can possibly see it through with any chance of success, and that man is Mr. James Stone."

The Minister rose from his chair and began pacing up and down, with his hands behind him, and his head bent in thought. Suddenly he stopped in front of the detective, and, speaking in a low voice, said:

"Do you understand now, Mr. Lee, why I took the somewhat extraordinary course of sending for you?"

The detective met the other's gaze unflinchingly. Very coolly, he took the cigarette from his lips, flicked the ash from it, and then leant back in his chair again.

"I will answer your question," he said quietly, "by asking you another. Do you understand, Sir Vrymer, that you have really told me nothing?"

The Minister's thin lips contracted in a flicker of amusement.

"Precisely, Mr. Lee!" he said. "As you say, I have told you nothing. You understand? I must not tell you anything. The authorities have the matter in hand. If it were known that I had approached you in my official capacity it would be absolutely fatal. You see, I am trusting you implicitly."

"Mr. James Stone, to all intents and purposes, is suffering from loss of memory. It is not an unusual occurrence, yet I cannot help thinking that there is something mysterious behind it. That is why I have broached the subject to you. I am more intimately aware of your wonderful powers of unravelling things than you may possibly think, Mr. Lee. I have told you nothing, as you say; and yet I am hoping that out of nothing you may possibly discover something. Of course, my fears may be perfectly groundless. That remains to be seen."

The two men regarded each other narrowly for a minute or two, each trying to read the thoughts that were surging through the mind of the other. Then the Minister held out his hand.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Lee!" he said. "You understand that to the outside world this meeting has never taken place. Whatever you do—that is, if you do anything in the matter at all—will be done on your own initiative."

The detective wrung the Minister's hand.

"I understand, Sir Vrymer," he said. "Good-bye."

As he reached the door the Minister called him back.

"Just one thing more, Mr. Lee," he said. "You understand that the Secret Service funds do not have to be accounted for. Should you require any money——"

The detective nodded his head.

"Quite so, Sir Vrymer," he said.

The next moment Nelson Lee had gone.

IT was about two hours later that the famous detective sat in his study at Grays Inn Road, with Nipper lying full length on the couch, idly studying the pictures in the daily paper.

"Well, I wish 'em luck," said Nipper carelessly. "She's a fine actress, and he looks a tough nut!"

"What's interested you?" asked Lee casually.

"Miss Laura Valentine is to marry a chap named James Stone. The fellow's name sounds familiar to me, guv'nor, and—— Here, what's the game?"

That exclamation was caused by the way Nelson Lee snatched the paper from him. He exclaimed further when the detective reached for the telephone directory, discovered a number and put a call through.

"Gerrard 004, please," he said, and waited.

"Hallo! Is that Gerrard 004? Is Miss Laura Valentine there? Right, thanks!"

He waited a moment or two, and then began again. Nipper stood by, with his mouth wide open and a bewildered expression on his face.

"Hallo! Yes. Is that Miss Laura Valentine? My name is Nelson Lee—— Ah, yes—it is very nice of you to say so. I should like to see you, if I may. Can you spare me a few moments if I come along now? Thanks, awfully. I'll come straight away. Good-bye!"

Nelson Lee replaced the receiver and got up from his chair. Nipper watched him in amazement.

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" he gasped.

"Shan't be long, old son," said Nelson Lee, as he put on his hat and strode from the room. Outside he hailed a passing taxi, and was driven off to Miss Valentine's flat, where he was shown straight up to her room.

"Good-evening, Mr. Lee!" said Miss Valentine, hastening to meet the famous detective. "I am so pleased to meet you."

"The pleasure is mine," said Lee, bowing gallantly to the beautiful and accomplished actress.

"Please sit down, Mr. Lee, and make yourself at home. Perhaps you will smoke—there are some cigars in that box over there."

Nelson Lee helped himself to a cigar and lit it. Then, leaning back in his chair, he looked keenly at the charming lady of whom he had heard so much.

"I ought really to apologise, Miss Valentine," he said, "for troubling you at this late hour."

"Not at all, Mr. Lee," the actress replied smilingly.

Then, leaning eagerly towards the detective, she asked in a low voice:

"Tell me, Mr. Lee, it is about my fiancé, Mr. Stone, that you have called—isn't it?"

"You are quite right, Miss Valentine," said the detective.

"Ah, I'm glad of that, Mr. Lee! I have been very anxious and worried, and I have absolutely no one on whom I can rely."

"But surely Scotland Yard is in close touch with the matter?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, yes! But you do not quite understand. You see, the police think it is simply a case of loss of memory, and so there is not much for them to do. They are quite content to leave the matter in the doctor's hands."

"Would you mind, Miss Valentine, telling me all you know about the matter?"

"Not at all, Mr. Lee. But there is so little. I saw Jimmy—Mr. Stone—yesterday afternoon. We had tea together. You have heard, no doubt, that we are to be married shortly. He came to the theatre with me and stayed through the first act. Later he left to keep an appointment of a rather important nature."

"He was to have called for me at the end of the performance, to take me home, but a message arrived just before the last act to say that he could not possibly see me again that night and would call in the morning. That is all I knew until midday to-day, when an inspector called here to say that Mr. Stone had been found wandering about the street early in the morning and could give no account of himself."

"Thank you, Miss Valentine," said Lee quietly. "Have you been along to see Mr. Stone since?"

"I went over immediately, Mr. Lee, of course. But——"

The girl hesitated a moment, and seemed about to burst into tears. Lee saw that the actress was somewhat distraught, and felt very sorry for her.

"Tell me, Miss Valentine," said Lee gently, "just one thing more. Did Mr. Stone betray the slightest sign of recognition when he saw you to-day?"

"No, Mr. Lee; not the slightest. He pretended he did, to a certain extent, out of mere politeness; but I am certain that he regarded me as a perfect stranger."

The actress thought for a moment, then went on excitedly.

"Do you know, Mr. Lee, it is extraordinary. I cannot believe it is the same man. Of course, it is stupid of me to say that; but there is some remarkable change that I can't quite make out. I was absolutely dumbfounded."

Nelson Lee was silent for some moments. Suddenly he looked up.

"You are aware, I suppose," he said, "that Mr. Stone was to have caught the Continental express this morning?"

"It is the first I have heard of it," replied Miss Valentine. "But I am not a bit surprised. He is always going away at the shortest notice. He was very hopeful of being able to stay in London for several weeks; but I thought it seemed too good to be true."

Nelson Lee did not answer for some time. He was thinking deeply, trying to piece some slender chain of reasoning together that would throw some light on the strange affair.

"Well, good-night, Miss Valentine," he said. "There is just one thing that I should like to ask you. Will you allow me to accompany you to see Mr. Stone to-morrow?"

"Certainly, Mr. Lee. If you will call here at about eleven to-morrow morning my car will be waiting ready for you."

"Thank you very much," said the detective. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Mr. Lee!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Watchers!

NELSON LEE went back to Grays Inn Road, and for some time after Nipper had gone off to bed he sat silent, thinking things over. It seemed as if he had a case on his hands that might not be a case. James Stone might really be suffering from loss of memory, and then there would be no case at all. But Sir Vrymer Fane suspected something wrong, and it was Nelson Lee's job to prove or disprove that.

Eventually he went out again. It was a fine starlight night, and the air was invigorating. Nelson Lee plunged into some side-streets, and after a time arrived in the vicinity of Whitehall. He made his way to the building in which he had had the interview with Sir Vrymer Fane earlier on in the evening, and soon reached the flight of marble steps.

He took out his watch. It was just five minutes to one—the exact time that James Stone had left the building on the night before.

Everything was wrapped in silence, nobody appeared to be about. Replacing his watch, Nelson Lee began to walk in the direction of Whitehall.

As he turned the corner the great boom of Big Ben floated out over the silent city. Lee continued his way slowly up Whitehall, glancing alertly about him all the while.

Although he did not expect anything to happen of a dramatic nature he thought that by putting himself in the position of James Stone he might stumble across some small factor that would not be so easily seen in the ordinary course of events.

As he stepped into the road to cross Parliament Square he noticed the policeman standing there on point duty. A sudden idea flashed across Lee's resolute mind. He strode quickly up to the policeman.

"Good-evening, constable—or rather, good-morning," he said.

The policeman came a shade closer.

"Why, it's Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed. "Good-morning, sir. I didn't recognise you at first, sir. It's rather dark and I couldn't see your face."

"Did you happen to be on duty here last night?" asked the detective.

"Yes, Mr. Lee. As a matter of fact, I'm on this beat all this week."

"Good!" muttered Lee. "Now think carefully before you answer my question. Do you recollect seeing a man pass by here in the direction of Victoria Street about this time last night?"

The policeman thought for a moment or two.

"Why, yes!" he said suddenly. "I do. As a matter of fact, it was Mr. Stone, from the Foreign Office. I remember him well because he said good-night as he passed. You know, sir, only men who have a good eye for faces and know all the M.P.'s and Government officials are put on this beat."

"I am well aware of that," said Lee. "That's what made me ask you about it. Did Mr. Stone appear to be quite normal?"

"Quite normal, sir. A bit thoughtful perhaps."

"And did you notice which way he went?"

"Yes; he crossed the road there and went past the Abbey Gardens towards Victoria Street."

"And that's all?" said Lee.

"That's about all, Mr. Lee," said the policeman.

"You're quite sure about that?"

The policeman puckered his brows and scratched his head.

Suddenly he gave a start.

"Oh, wait a bit, though!" he said. "I was forgetting one thing. Just after Mr. Stone had crossed the road a big car came gliding towards me from Whitehall, and crossed over in that direction. Just over by the grass there it suddenly pulled up. I thought it was rather funny at the time. Then I heard a sort of fuss, so I ran towards it. But it suddenly started up again and was off down Victoria Street before I could get more than a dozen yards."

Nelson Lee was not the sort of man to give vent to his feelings, but he could hardly restrain a start at hearing this piece of news.

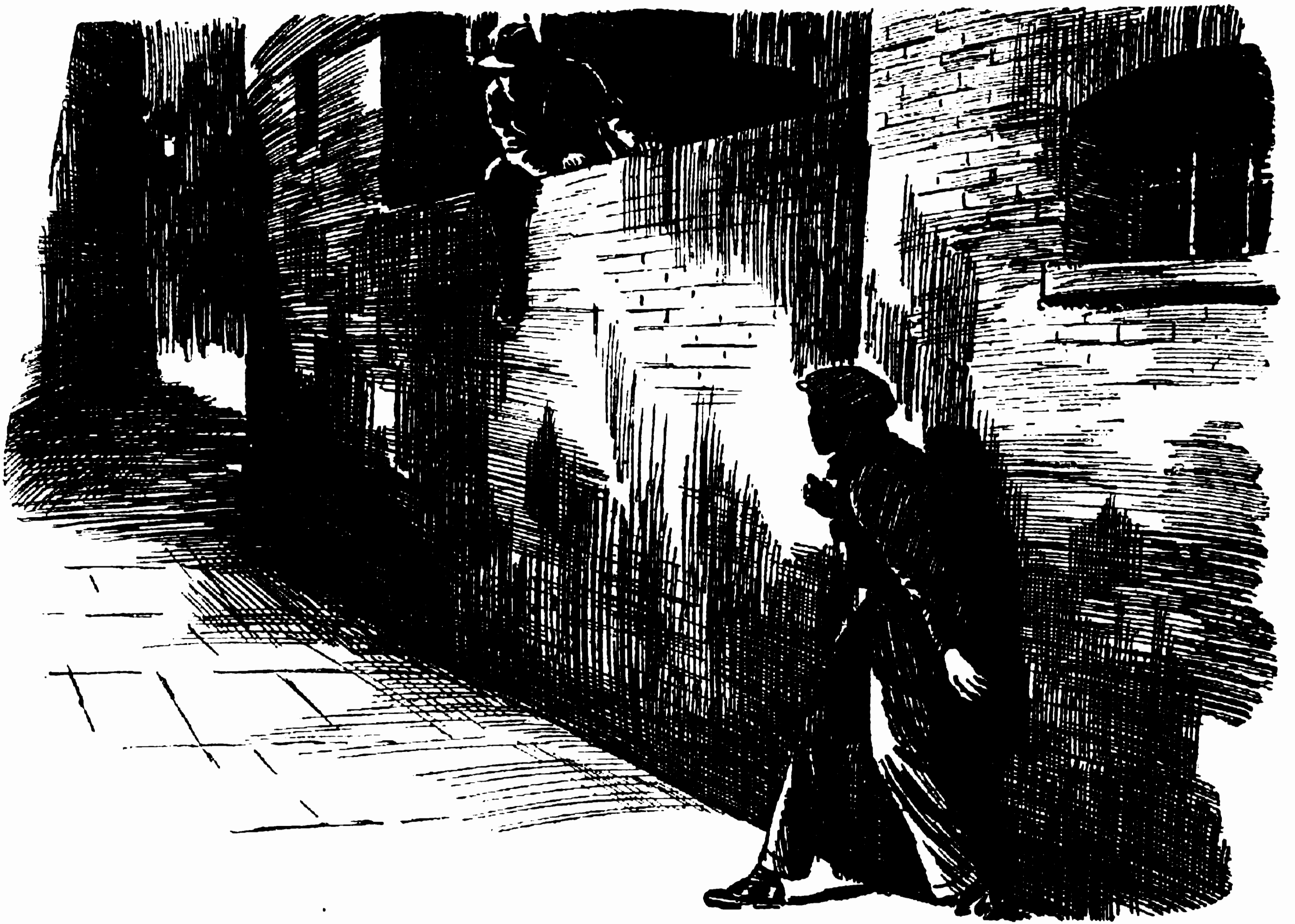
"Think carefully," he said. "Now, do you recollect seeing Mr. Stone after the car had gone off again?"

"No, sir. I expect he had gone some distance. It was too dark to see very far."

"Just one more question, constable," said Lee. "When you saw that car pull up, how far do you think Mr. Stone had got?"

"Well, he had only just passed by, sir. The car must have pulled up quite close to him."

"And there is nothing else that you can remember?"



Nipper retreated up the mews a little way—and only just in time ! For a figure suddenly appeared over the wall and dropped lightly to the ground.

"No, sir. That's about all."

"Thanks very much, constable," said Lee.

"Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Nelson Lee walked slowly over in the direction of the Abbey Gardens. He could not over-estimate the importance of what the policeman had told him.

Although as yet he had no clear idea of what he was up against, he knew now that Jimmy Stone's sudden loss of memory was no natural occurrence, but that behind the whole business there was some deep and cunningly laid plot.

By a stroke of luck, which was really the result of his own quick intellect, he had stumbled right up against an important clue to the mystery at the outset. He guessed, knowing what an important man Jimmy Stone was in the Secret Service, that he was up against a tough proposition, but he meant to see the thing through at all costs.

Suddenly Nelson Lee became aware of a dark shadow moving away from the darkness of the building in front of him. It was a man who seemed to have appeared from nowhere in particular and he was going away at right-angles to Lee.

Something in the man's attitude made the detective suspicious. He began to stride rapidly in his direction. The man glanced over his shoulder and began to quicken his steps.

Nelson Lee suddenly came to a standstill. The other man immediately slowed down. Then Lee broke into a quick run, and the man gave one glance over his shoulder and was off like greased lightning.

Lee slowed up and leant against the railings, breathing heavily.

"Strange!" he muttered to himself. "That fellow seems to have been dogging me. Wonder what his game was? Maybe just an ordinary pickpocket."

He began retracing his steps the way he had come. Big Ben had just struck the half-hour and Lee was contemplating returning home.

But there was one other surprise in store for the detective that night. As he was crossing the road to Whitehall he saw a man slouch away from the entrance to the underground subway.

Nelson Lee wondered what the man was doing there, for he knew that the subways had long since been closed for the night.

He stopped by the entrance to make sure that the gates were locked. To Lee's surprise the man on the other side of the road also stopped.

Determined to get to the bottom of this strange business, Lee suddenly sprang across the road and rushed straight at the stranger. With an exclamation of dismay the man turned to bolt.

But it was too late; Lee was already upon him. With an angry snarl the stranger turned upon the detective and aimed a savage blow at his head.

But Lee was not to be caught like that. He ducked swiftly, and at the same time his left shot out and crashed with a jarring blow full on the chin of his unknown assailant.

Gasping with rage and pain the man staggered back with the detective pressing him closely. Then suddenly a stunning blow descended on Lee's head from behind, and the detective went down in a heap.

"STEADY on, guv'nor! There you are. Just put your arm round my neck."

It was Nipper who spoke.

Nelson Lee put his hand to his head and gazed round him in a dazed fashion.

"What's happened?" he asked vaguely.

"You've had a nasty crack on the head, guv'nor," said Nipper. "You had got your man set, but another chap came at you from behind. Maybe you didn't know there were two of 'em here. But don't worry; just hang on to me. That's right. Now we'll get a move on."

Hanging heavily on his young assistant, Lee began to stagger slowly back along Whitehall.

"How did you get here, Nipper?" he asked presently.

"I followed you, guv'nor. Heard you go out and reckoned it was pretty late, and you might need help when and where you couldn't send for it. Hope you're not ratty with me, but it's a good thing I came. Only I arrived a second too late."

The detective gave a dry, painful sort of chuckle.

"Better too late than never, Nipper," he said quietly. "But I've discovered the Foreign Office is being watched. I don't know why or by whom. We've got a case on, Nipper, and it's a tough one. Find a taxi and we'll get home."

There was much that Lee wanted to know, but he reckoned he had proved one thing to his own satisfaction. There was something profoundly wrong with Jimmy Stone's alleged loss of memory.

In the meantime Crick and Dykes, the two watchers Lee had surprised, had raced back to Kennington to tell the Baron that Nelson Lee was on the case and they had only narrowly escaped him. They were afraid for their own skins, but the Baron was just as nervous. The slightest interference now and all his well-laid plans would go for nought. And before sunrise he had removed his prisoner from Kennington to a village in Kent, where he owned a secluded house that was locally rumoured to be haunted.

CHAPTER 4.

Lee's Suspicions!

AT eleven o'clock promptly next morning Nelson Lee stepped from a taxi outside Miss Valentine's flat. His head ached badly from the blow he had received the night before, but his active mind would not let him rest while there was work to be done. The car was already waiting outside the house, and as the detective entered the gate the front door opened and the actress came down the steps.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lee," she said, holding out her hand. "You are very punctual, but I am quite ready, you see."

He helped her inside and followed after, closing the door behind him. After a run of about ten minutes through the busy London streets they pulled up in front of a house in Chelsea and both got out.

"This is Number Twelve, where Mr. Stone lives," said the actress. "If you will wait downstairs, Mr. Lee, I will call you in two or three minutes."

"Certainly, Miss Valentine," said the detective. "There is no hurry whatever. I am entirely at your service."

"I shall not be long, Mr. Lee," she said.

Nelson Lee sat down in the hall and rested his chin on his hands. He had a slight swimming feeling in the head, but he tried to think clearly and get all the aspects of the case plainly before him.

He was eventually roused from his thoughts by the entrance of Miss Valentine. He could see from her face that the meeting with her fiancé had greatly distressed her, and her voice trembled a little as she spoke to him.

"Will you come up now, Mr. Lee?" she said. "But I am afraid you must not stay long."

"Thank you, Miss Valentine," said Lee. "I shall not require more than a few minutes. And please talk as much as you can and ignore me altogether. It will help me in my observations."

He followed her up the stairs and waited while she entered a room on the right of the passage.

"Come in, Mr. Lee," she said.

The detective strode into the room. The doctor was standing by the window. He turned and nodded pleasantly to the detective as he entered. The actress was standing by a man who was huddled up in a chair by the fireplace.

"This is Mr. Lee, Jimmy," she said.

The man half rose from his seat and eyed Lee furtively.

"How do you do?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Nelson Lee shook hands with him, but he was quick to notice how clammy the other's hand was and how limp the grasp.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stone," he said, sitting down in the vacant chair beside him. "Miss Valentine is a friend of mine, and she

has been good enough to bring me along to see you."

"Oh, yes," muttered the other man. "I am very pleased to see you."

He subsided into silence and for a moment the detective felt slightly embarrassed. He glanced swiftly at the actress; she took the hint and began to talk idly about passing events. Lee did not add much to the conversation. Every now and then he chipped in with some remark, but he was watching the man narrowly, nothing escaping his keen observation.

He could see that the man was very ill at ease and was anxious for him to go. He noticed that there were heavy rings round his eyes, and that his face was puffy and inflamed. His hands also were trembling, and he constantly twisted his fingers together.

Suddenly Nelson Lee turned quickly towards him.

"Do you remember, Mr. Stone," he said quietly, "reading in the papers about a fortnight or so ago that extraordinary case of a soldier's sudden loss of memory?"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the man. "It was in—"

Suddenly he stopped short and cast a suspicious look at the detective.

Nelson Lee stared back at him coolly, not taking his eyes from the other's face.

He could not meet the detective's steel grey eyes; beads of perspiration started out on his forehead.

"I was going to say," he continued, recovering himself with an effort, "that I was reading it in the paper only to-day; it was an old paper I found on the table."

The detective made no reply; but behind that impassive face of his a number of quick thoughts flashed across his brain.

Was the man right? Had he read it only that day in an old newspaper or was he lying? The detective eyed his companion narrowly, without appearing to do so.

The pseudo Jimmy Stone was clearly struggling hard to hide his feelings, but Lee could see that he was in a state of tension. The man fumbled in his pocket, and drawing forth a pair of small nail-scissors began nervously cutting at his nails.

Lee took no notice for a while. Presently he idly bent down to the carpet and then slipped something into his pocket that he picked up.

"I think I must go now," he said, suddenly rising from the chair.

A look of relief swept over the other man's features. He put out a limp hand and wished the detective good-day.

Outside in the passage Lee met the doctor.

"Just one moment, doctor," he said. "Has Mr. Stone been reading the newspaper this morning?"

The doctor shook his head decidedly.

"No, he hasn't," he said. "I have recommended a complete rest. He must not undergo any mental effort whatever; it is

best in these cases not to tax the brain in the slightest, and he is not permitted to look at a newspaper."

"Thank you, doctor," said Nelson Lee grimly.

As the detective went downstairs he could hardly repress a smile at the doctor's professional manner.

It was evident that to him his patient was suffering from a simple loss of memory, which could be cured by the usual prescriptions and the usual procedure.

Nelson Lee thought otherwise, and time would show whether his suspicions were right or wrong.

LATER that day the detective sat at his desk pondering over all the details, until Nipper interrupted his thoughts.

"I say, guv'nor," he said. "You've been staring at that blotting-pad for the last half-hour. I know you've got something big on, but you haven't told me a thing yet."

Lee looked up.

"As a matter of fact, Nipper, you're wrong," he said. "I'm not staring at the blotter at all. I'm studying these nail clippings which Mr. Jimmy Stone was good enough to give me this morning."

Lee glanced slyly at his young assistant's face. Nipper's expression of incredulity was so comic that Lee burst out into a hearty laugh.

"But fancy a chap making you a present of his finger-nail clippings!" exclaimed Nipper. "Why, he must be off his rocker or something. What will you do? Put 'em on your watch-chain?"

Nelson Lee became serious.

"I was only kidding you, Nipper," he said. "He didn't give them to me. I picked them up off the carpet when he wasn't looking."

"But what for, guv'nor? Don't see what use they can be."

Nelson Lee did not reply for some minutes. Nipper waited expectantly.

"Look here, Nipper," said the detective at length, "do you realise that I could find out quite a lot from a tiny piece of your finger-nail? I could find out what your habits are, where you've been, and what you've been up to during the last few days."

"I don't quite get you, guv'nor," said Nipper in bewilderment.

"Well, you just listen, Nipper. Stored under your finger-nails is a certain amount of matter. It makes no difference how much you wash them, you never wash it all away. An expert puts your piece of finger-nail under a high-powered microscope and is able to analyse exactly what this matter consists of, and it tells him all about you."

Nipper took a deep breath.

"You're a marvel, guv'nor," he said admiringly. "That's a cute notion on the quiet. But what about those finger-nails? Going to send those to an expert?"

"Not these," said Lee. "I had more from

the same fingers, and they are already being examined by Professor Bailey at the School of Modern Science. As a matter of fact, I am expecting to get his preliminary report at any moment."

As he spoke there was a ring at the door-bell, and Nipper went to see who it was. He soon returned with an envelope in his hands.

"Messenger just brought this, guv'nor," he said. "Any answer?"

"No," said Lee. "I don't want him."

Lee hurriedly cut the envelope with his paper-knife and drew out a thin sheet of paper. With a look of intense interest on his face he read the contents.

"Ah!" he said suddenly. "I thought so."

"Thought what, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, who had returned from the front door.

Nelson Lee swung round in his chair. It was clear that he had come to some startling conclusion. Nipper, seeing that something important had happened, waited impatiently for enlightenment.

"Nipper," said Lee quietly, "that chap is an impostor!"

"What chap?" Nipper asked in surprise.

"Why, the man who is supposed to be Jimmy Stone, and whom they say is suffering from loss of memory," said the detective.

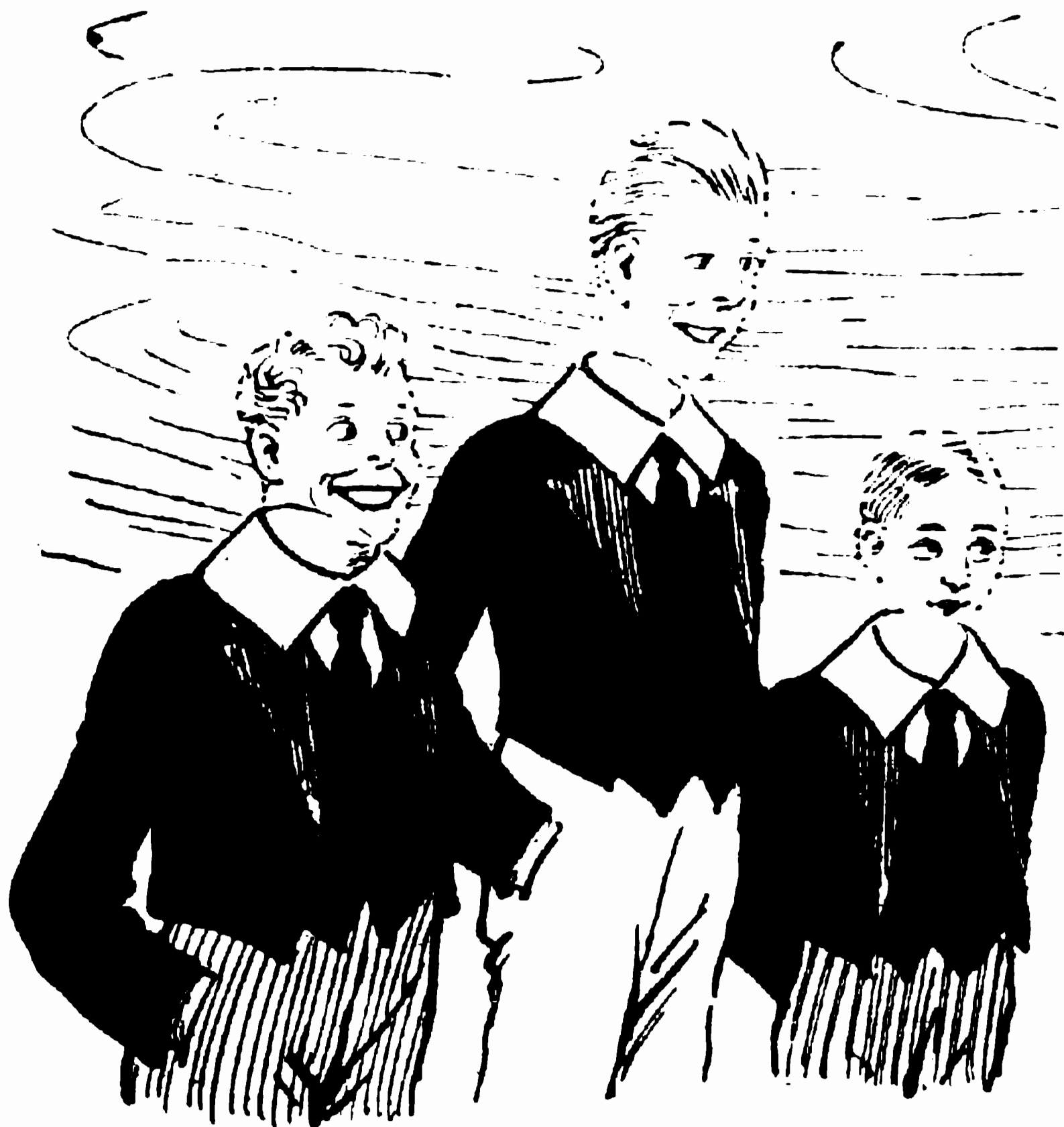
Nipper looked astonished.

"How do you know that, guv'nor?" he asked.

"Just listen," said Lee. He took up the sheet of paper and read out the remarks of the professor. "I have made a minute microscopic examination of the finger-nails, and have come to the following conclusions: The nails evidently belong to a man who has been working for some time aboard a ship. The deposits seem to indicate that he was a steward and was in the habit of wearing a white linen hat and cotton overalls.

"For the last few days, however, he seems to have been living in some house—there are various reasons for assuming this, which I will state more clearly when I have finished my tests. I have discovered fibres

A Book-length School Yarn for 4d.



The Vanishing THREE!

Great snakes! Gee whiz! What's happening? It's enough to scare anybody out of his skin when three Eton suits start walking about without any heads, but that's nothing to what Bill Berkley and his chums can do when they really get going! They're the Vanishing Three of Martindale, the lads who can melt into thin air, and when the three biggest japers in the whole school get the chance of a lifetime like this, they won't let the grass grow under their feet. If you've never laughed before, you'll roar when you read this amazing yarn of fun and excitement at school.

Ask for No. 346 of

BOYS' FRIEND Library

Now on Sale at all Newsagents

4d.

of a grey flannel material, and also fibres of red plush, commonly used for upholstering purposes. There were also traces of a peculiar aromatic soap. I am still engaged on my tests." "

Lee finished reading and looked keenly at his assistant.

"You see, Nipper," he said. "A man in Jimmy Stone's position would never have such a report after an examination of his finger-nails. I happen to know just how and where Jimmy Stone spent the fortnight before his alleged loss of memory, and this report ought to be different, and can only be explained by assuming that the man who is now appearing as Jimmy Stone is an impostor, as I have suspected all along."

Nipper was too dumbfounded to reply immediately. That Lee should find out all this merely from two pieces of finger-nail which had been under the microscope was quite beyond his understanding.

But the detective was plainly very pleased with his discoveries.

"We're getting a move on, Nipper," he said. "We know to some extent what we're up against. We've got our work cut out, but we'll come out on top, you see if we don't!"

"You bet we will," said Nipper confidently. "But why don't you go and have that chap arrested straight away, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee gave a superior sort of smile.

"No," replied Lee. "We've got to find the real Jimmy Stone first. If we went and kicked up a shindy about this we should give the show away. I've hinted that the alleged patient should be taken out of London, preferably to Brighton, for a rest cure, and the Foreign Office have Secret Service agents watching him all the time. Even Scotland Yard doesn't know that. Moving him out of town cuts him adrift, more or less, from the gang for whom he must be working. But we daren't show our hand to that gang by having him arrested. I want our unknown enemies to think that we suspect nothing definite, as yet."

"And what's our next move, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"We must get on the track of the real Jimmy Stone, and I hardly know where to start. It's a stiff proposition, Nipper."

"Well, I'm with you, guv'nor," said Nipper excitedly. "I reckon one of those crooks, whoever they are, will slip up somehow and leave a clue for us to follow."

He was right, but it was not the clue that even Nelson Lee could have anticipated in his wildest moment.

Crick and Dykes, the two ruffians employed by the Baron to kidnap Jimmy Stone, had been paid their money and dismissed. But the Baron made a big mistake. He paid the money in one lump to Dykes, relying upon him to settle up with Crick. Dykes tried to cheat his confederate, and there was a quarrel and a fight, with the result that in the early hours of one rainy morning the dead body of Crick was found in a back alley off Soho!

CHAPTER 5.

The Plot Deepens!

"**E**ARLY edishun! 'Orrible tragedy in Soho! Body found in Soho alley!"

The warm rays of the midday sun were slanting through the trees as Nelson Lee strode thoughtfully along the Embankment. He had been spending the morning in making one or two inquiries concerning the events of the preceding day, and was hurrying in the direction of the Strand to have a hasty lunch, when the cries of the newsboys attracted his attention.

He stopped one of the lads as he came rushing by, and, buying a paper, thrust it into his pocket. Then, turning to the right up Savoy Street, he entered a famous restaurant.

For some time Nelson Lee sat idly watching the number of well-dressed people passing in and out of the luncheon-room. Presently two men entered, and after looking around for a vacant table, came and sat down near the detective.

So accustomed was Nelson Lee to sizing up people that it had become almost a second nature with him. Consequently, he found himself criticising and examining the two strangers, and idly wondering who they were.

One of them was a tall, well-bred looking man, dressed very fashionably, but with an air of quiet distinction about him. The other man had his back towards the detective, but he appeared to be somewhat shorter in build, with a closely cropped black beard and bristling moustache.

Both men were slightly foreign in appearance. For a time neither spoke. Then the waiter came up, and the tall man ordered lunch.

Directly the waiter had departed on his errand, the shorter of the two men leaned across the table and began talking excitedly to the other in low tones. The other nodded his head several times, then felt in his pocket, and, taking out a newspaper, spread it open on the table.

For a few moments he remained silently reading some item of news, then, looking up at his companion, he shook his head vigorously, and handed him the paper across the table. The two men seemed so interested in this particular piece of news that Lee's curiosity was aroused.

He craned his neck to see if he could get a glimpse of the paragraph which had caused all the excitement, but the table was too far away. Then he remembered that he had bought a paper just a little while before on the Embankment, and, feeling in his pocket, dragged it out.

He glanced over at the other table. The two men were studying the front page. Lee ran his eyes over the headlines, and the account of the Soho murder caught his eye.

"Early this morning," said the paper, "the body of a man was found in an alley in Soho. The head was terribly mutilated and battered, and it is clear that he had been the victim

of a murderous attack. Death appeared to be due to strangulation. The only clue, so far, to the identity of the stranger is a piece of paper found in one of his pockets, bearing the name of 'J. Crick.' The motive of the crime is not clear."

A description of the man followed, and it went on to say that the police were making inquiries, and that anyone able to give information concerning the dead man should communicate at once with Scotland Yard or any police-station.

Nelson Lee glanced up again at the two men sitting opposite. They were still talking together in excited whispers. Presently the tall man, who was facing Lee, turned his head slightly and cast a swift glance at the detective.

Lee immediately began to turn over his paper with an unconcerned look, yet he felt sure that as the stranger's eye had rested on him he had given way to a half-concealed start of recognition.

Without appearing to do so, the detective carefully scrutinised the man out of the corner of his eye. He saw him lean across the table to his companion and mutter something in a low voice. The other man appeared to listen with intense interest; then he very deliberately dropped his serviette on the floor, and as he stooped down to pick it up, he casually glanced round and stared full at Nelson Lee.

Then he muttered something to his companion and nodded his head several times!

As Nelson Lee was wondering what possible interest these two strangers could have in himself, the tall man called a passing waiter and, after chatting for a moment or two, paid his bill. A few minutes later both men rose from the table and left the dining-room without further incident.

By this time Nelson Lee had also finished his lunch. He beckoned to the waiter and asked for his bill.

"By the way, waiter," he said, slipping half-a-crown into the man's hand, "do you know who those two gentlemen were who were sitting at the table over there?"

"The two gentlemen who have just left, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir, I don't," said the waiter. "But it's rather funny you should ask me that, because the tall one asked me if you were Mr. Nelson Lee."

"He did, did he?" echoed Lee, somewhat taken aback. "And what did you say?"

"Well, of course, sir, I couldn't deny it. I said you were Mr. Nelson Lee, right enough."

"And you've never seen them before?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

Lee finished his cigarette and a few moments later left the restaurant. As he made his way in the direction of the Grays Inn Road the detective could not help puzzling over the incident that had just taken place in the dining-room of the famous hotel.

He found Nipper in the study waiting for

his return. He greeted the detective hurriedly as he entered the room.

"I say, guv'nor. Professor Bailey has been ringing you up. Something important to tell you. Says he'll send a message along."

"How long ago was that?" asked Lee.

"Oh, about two hours," said Nipper. "The messenger should be here by this time."

"Well, perhaps he won't be long now," said the detective, and was soon busy in attending to a mass of correspondence.

In about half an hour a double knock sounded at the street door, and Nipper hurried from the room. He returned almost immediately and handed the detective a small blue envelope. Lee took it quickly and tore it open. It was from Professor Bailey, and was scribbled on a half-sheet of paper in the professor's well-known handwriting.

"Dear Mr. Lee," it read. "Just to tell you I was called in at the post-mortem on the body of the man found at Soho this morning. Finger-nail analysis revealed red-plush fibres and traces of that peculiar aromatic soap. Thought it would interest you in view of the analysis I undertook for you yesterday. May be a pure coincidence, of course, so don't attach too much importance to it. However, I thought I would just let you know.—Yours sincerely,

"BAILEY."

"Phew!" Lee whistled his amazement and carefully read the message through again.

What amazing fact had he stumbled on? What was the meaning of this new turn of events? What connection could this tragedy at Soho have with the mystery of Jimmy Stone? Or was it simply a case of coincidence, as Professor Bailey suggested it might be?

These questions, and many more besides, passed swiftly through the detective's active mind. The incident in the restaurant, which had been half forgotten, came back to him now with renewed significance.

Suddenly Lee's face cleared a little, and he looked up quickly.

"I say, Nipper," he said, "I want you to do a job for me."

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" said Nipper. "I'm on."

"It's not very exciting, I'm afraid," said Lee, "but it's rather important. I want you to go straight over to Professor Bailey's place at Hampstead and ask him to give you a piece of cloth from the clothes of the man whose body was found at Soho this morning. Do you understand?"

"I've got you, guv'nor," said Nipper.

"Right! Off you go. I'll get on the 'phone to the professor at once and tell him you're on your way."

Nipper seized his hat and departed on his errand without further discussion. About half an hour after he had gone the telephone bell on Lee's desk suddenly started ringing.

The detective took off the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Hallo!" he said.

A girl's voice sounded from the other end.

"Hallo, Mr. Lee! Miss Valentine speaking. I want you to have dinner with me to-night at Dalgretty's. Will you come?"

"Delighted," said Lee, half guessing that there was something more than mere hospitality in the invitation.

"That is awfully good of you, Mr. Lee. A friend of mine is coming—a gentleman who is very anxious to meet you. He is very interested in criminology, and as he was very kind to me some time ago, I thought I'd give him a little pleasure; that is, if you don't mind. I shall expect you there at seven o'clock sharp. I've got to be at the theatre at eight-thirty."

The actress was there, and she rose with a smile as he came up and greeted him with outstretched hand. Lee bowed courteously and held her chair for her while she seated herself again; then took the chair on her right. She rested her dainty fingers lightly on his arm.

"I hope you don't mind my asking you here to-night, Mr. Lee," she said. "I am expecting a friend of mine to dinner—a Baron Rodanoff. I met him some time ago, when I was touring the Continent not long after the war. Strangely enough, I came across him to-day. He used to be in the diplomatic service. But he is very eager to make your acquaintance; that is why I asked him to come along."

"I shall be very charmed to meet any friend of yours," said Lee.

"That's very nice of you, Mr. Lee," said

For Next Wednesday—

"SOUTH SEA LOOT!"

A Stirring Story of Thrilling Adventures in the South Seas,

Starring Nelson Lee and Nipper!

"You can rely on me to be there punctual," said Lee.

"Thank you so much. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said the detective.

Lee was puzzled and slightly worried. There might be nothing wrong in the famous actress being friendly with a man interested in crime and criminology, and, of course, an actress with the fame and charm of Miss Laura Valentine is bound to have a host of friends wherever she goes. But Nelson Lee could not forget that she was the fiancée of Jimmy Stone, and it occurred to him that the men who were behind that mystery would be bound to keep a close watch on the actress. Accordingly he set out for the hotel with more than a passing interest in the invitation than he might have had otherwise.

CHAPTER 6.

The Baron!

THE gorgeous dining-room at Dalgretty's was ablaze with light. Ladies dressed in beautiful clothes and bedecked with glittering jewels; and men in evening dress, with their wide expanse of shirt front, sat about at the snow-white tables and laughed and chatted gaily over their glasses of sparkling wine.

As Nelson Lee strode down the thick-carpeted aisle between the tables, the strains of the band came floating to his ears to the soft, dreamy tune of a waltz.

the actress, smiling. "And now, just to talk shop for a moment; I promise not to do so any more this evening. Mr. Stone—you know who I mean—they have taken him to a nursing home at Brighton."

The detective nodded his head.

"It was my suggestion," he said. "I am keeping in touch with events. You may rely on me."

The actress was about to reply, but checked herself, and glanced expectantly over Lee's shoulder.

"Here is the baron," she said.

The man was approaching them from behind, so that the detective did not have a chance of seeing his face before he reached the table.

"Ah, baron, you have arrived!" said the actress gaily, as she rose to meet him. "May I introduce Mr. Nelson Lee—Baron Rodanoff."

The detective rose to his feet and turned towards the stranger. For one instant a thrill of incredible astonishment shot through him; the next moment the two men were gravely bowing to each other.

They ceremoniously took their seats. Lee's face was imperturbable and cold; not the vestige of an expression crossed it to indicate his tumultuous feelings.

Yet in the first moment of meeting he had recognised in this Baron Rodanoff the man he had seen at the hotel earlier on in the day—the same man who had stared at him with such curiosity and had asked the waiter

if he were really Mr. Nelson Lee, the detective.

Why had he expressed the wish to meet him? Who was he? What was he doing here? Was he involved in the mystery that surrounded the fate of Jimmy Stone? Did he know anything of the murder that had taken place the night before in that dark passage in Soho? And how much did Miss Valentine know of his history?

All these thoughts crowded swiftly through the detective's mind in the space of a few seconds. At that moment the waiter came up, and he found himself glancing down at the menu.

"Will you take hors-d'œuvre, Miss Valentine?" he asked.

The actress nodded her head, and continued chatting intimately with the baron for some time. Eventually the baron turned suddenly to Nelson Lee.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "I am greatly honoured to dine with you. I have heard much of your extraordinary career in the detection of crime. Your reputation is world-wide. It is indeed a pleasure to meet you."

Nelson Lee's keen grey eyes were fixed searchingly on the baron's smiling face. Lee was wondering what were his motives. It occurred to the detective that if this Baron Rodanoff was the man behind the mystery of Jimmy Stone, he might choose just this way of getting to know something of the man he was up against. In short, Baron Rodanoff might be using his old friendship with Miss Valentine in order to become acquainted with his opponent.

Nelson Lee determined to sound him at the first opportunity that presented itself. For the next half-hour nothing of importance occurred. The detective was thoroughly enjoying his dinner, and the good wine and the splendid music had the effect of making him feel friendly disposed towards his companion. After all, the man was jolly good company.

Suddenly the detective leaned towards the baron and looked him full in the face.

"Baron Rodanoff," he said, "I have just remembered we have met before. In the Grand to-day, at lunch-time, you sat at a table near mine, and seemed very interested in the Soho crime."

It was a cute shot, and the suddenness and unexpectedness of the challenge quite took the baron off his guard. He started violently and recovered himself with an effort.

For the space of a minute or two, the two men glared across the table at each other. Neither spoke. It was a conflict of wills, and both men were strong-willed and resolute. But Baron Rodanoff's eyes wavered. Lee could see that he was fighting hard to conceal his embarrassment. At last he spoke.

"Really, Mr. Lee," he said, "you surprise me. Fancy my being so near to you without knowing it!"

For the moment there was an awkward silence. The baron looked uneasy; those steel

grey eyes of Lee seemed to be boring holes in him. What was the meaning of that slight smile of mockery that played over the detective's thin lips?

Baron Rodanoff felt strangely uncomfortable, but he tried to pass the incident off with a forced laugh and turned to the actress. But Nelson Lee knew that he had deliberately lied; for had he not asked the waiter if he were Mr. Lee? More than that, Nelson Lee felt sure that Baron Rodanoff also knew that the detective suspected him.

When the baron turned to him again there was a sinister glint in his eyes, as if he recognised that between them was proceeding a struggle of wills.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "now that you have referred to this mysterious murder in Soho, I should like to know what your opinion is as to the motive of the crime."

The detective's lip curled slightly, but he answered without a moment's hesitation.

"I think," he said, very deliberately, "that the motive was robbery. But behind it there is something bigger at stake. If I am not greatly mistaken, the crime is connected in some strange way with diplomatic intrigue. It remains to be seen whether I am right or wrong."

This time the baron was plainly disconcerted. He could not forbear a start of surprise, and his fingers plucked nervously at the table-cloth. It was merely a chance shot on Lee's part. He had no evidence on which to base his startling theory, excepting the deductions to which his own cleverness had led him. But he noted the baron's embarrassment with secret satisfaction.

Presently Baron Rodanoff spoke again.

"I think, Mr. Lee," he said, "you are rather melodramatic. The crime is just a simple case of robbery, and nothing else. At any rate, if there is a deeper motive behind it, as you suggest, then I am sure it will not be discovered until the information is too late to be of any use. I am willing to stake a hundred pounds on that."

The detective leaned suddenly forward.

"Done!" he said quietly. "I accept your challenge, Baron Rodanoff."

Baron Rodanoff pushed back his chair with a jerk. He had never expected Lee's prompt reply. He immediately regretted his rash statement. But it was too late now to withdraw it; the only thing left to do was to put as bold a face on it as possible. He gave a queer little laugh, but his eyes were blazing fiercely.

"Good, Mr. Lee!" he said, and he put out his hand. "It is a bet!"

The detective gravely shook hands with the baron, as if the difference between them was just a simple matter of opinion. He glanced at the glowing face of the actress. She had been following the conversation with intense interest.

Presently the baron got up, and, apologising, bade them good-night and strode from the room. Soon after, Miss Valentine rose to go. Nelson Lee saw her to her car, and,

as he was bidding her good-night, asked her how much she knew of the baron.

"Not very much, I am afraid, Mr. Lee," she said. "He is fairly well known on the Continent, and I think he is very wealthy."

"Do you know where he is staying?" asked Lee.

"Yes, Mr. Lee. At the Imperial Club. He is a member."

"Thank you," said Lee, raising his hat. "Good-night."

The detective was perfectly calm outwardly, but he had made up his mind to find out more about the baron. On the other hand, the baron was far from calm. At the Imperial Club he found his confederate, Dulac, to whom he made it quite clear that Nelson Lee's interest in the Soho murder and his theory with regard to its connection with diplomatic intrigue represented a real danger to them.

"There is no doubt that Dykes did it," said the baron. "And the arrest of Dykes may mean the ruin of our plans. We must find Dykes and get him away safely for our own sakes. He may go to the house at Kennington for help, so we must leave a message for him there."

When the baron and Dulac motored to Kennington, Nelson Lee was following them in a taxi. He could not guess why they went there, but he felt certain it was another link in the chain, to be put in its proper place later on.

Unfortunately the baron found no sign that Dykes had been near Kennington. He decided that it would be dangerous to leave messages about, and returned to the West End, hoping to find Dykes in some other way. Nelson Lee's taximan lost the quarry in a traffic block, and the detective had to return to Grays Inn Road, not sure whether he had made progress or only deepened the mystery.

But Dykes had been to the house at Kennington before the baron revisited his old haunt. He was a hunted man and wanted help. But the house was empty, the birds had flown, and Dykes went hunting for them elsewhere.

CHAPTER 7.

Wolf on the Scent!

NIPPER had long returned from Hampstead when Nelson Lee got back that night. He was wondering rather at the detective's absence, for he knew nothing of the dinner at Dalgretty's. He was, therefore, somewhat relieved when he heard the familiar footsteps of his master on the stairs.

"Well, Nipper," said Lee, "have you done the needful?"

"I should say so, guv'nor," said Nipper, producing from his pocket a handkerchief and unfolding it. "Here's the piece of cloth. Professor Bailey cut it from the dead man's clothes himself."

"Good!" said Lee, gingerly taking the dirty piece of rag from his assistant's fingers.

"It isn't over-clean, is it, Nipper?"

"I say, guv'nor, I've got something else," said Nipper mysteriously.

"What's that?" asked Lee quickly.

"A photograph of the finger-prints on the dead man's throat. I saw it on the professor's desk, and asked him for a copy. He happened to have one and obliged yours truly."

"Capital!" said Nelson Lee. "That's one up to you, Nipper!"

Nipper carefully unwrapped the freshly taken print and laid it on Lee's desk. The detective rested his chin on his hand and began poring over it.

To the average man the small photograph with the strange markings on it would have conveyed nothing. But to the great detective it conveyed quite a number of things. He read it as easily as if it were an open book.

For a long time Lee sat engrossed in studying the photograph, turning it this way and that, and scrutinising it through a powerful magnifying glass. At last he glanced at his assistant with a look of unconcealed satisfaction.

"Nipper," he said quietly, "the man who murdered this fellow Crick has a finger missing—the little finger on the left hand."

Nipper stared at him with an air of doubt.

"How do you know that, guv'nor?"

"Just look at this photograph," said Lee. "Do you see those five marks there? Well, they correspond to the fingers and thumb of the right hand."

Nipper stared down at the photograph.

"I suppose you're right, as usual, guv'nor," he said, only half convinced. "But I'm hanged if I would have known it."

"Now, just look at these marks here. You'll see them better through the glass. There—do you see? How many can you count?"

"Why, guv'nor," said Nipper, after a moment or two, "there certainly seems to be only four, comparing them with the other side. But I shouldn't have noticed it if you hadn't pointed it out."

Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"It's as clear as a pikestaff to me, Nipper," he said. "I've studied too many of these photographs in my time to be mistaken over a thing like that. The man who killed Crick, Nipper, had three fingers only on his left hand; the fourth finger was missing."

Suddenly he turned to his assistant.

"Get Wolf, Nipper," he demanded shortly. "We're going on the warpath."

Nipper's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"That's the stuff, guv'nor," he cried delightedly. "You haven't put me up to all this business, but I'm with you."

He turned to leave the room, but Lee with a gesture of his hand stopped him.

"Just a minute, Nipper," he said. "You are quite right, you ought to know every-

thing. Just sit down a moment and I'll tell you the story."

Nipper sat down by Lee's desk and listened intently while the detective told him of the events that had taken place that evening and the things which he thought pointed to the connection between the Soho murder and the mystery of Jimmy Stone.

"You see, I have a lot of facts," said Lee. "Without any definite connecting link between them. I want to find out a little more in order to straighten out things."

Five minutes later Nelson Lee, Nipper and Wolf, the detective's big Alsatian, left the house. The dog was in a state of great excitement and tugged frantically at the lead, pulling Nipper along at the double.

"Steady, boy!" said Lee. "Save your wind. You may need it before the night's out."

The great hound looked up at the sound of his master's voice and gave a little yelp of delight. The intelligent animal seemed to understand Lee's meaning, for he went more soberly after that.

They strode on in silence for some time, their thoughts being occupied with the mystery that confronted them. About half an hour's sharp walk brought them to Vauxhall Bridge, and after crossing it, Lee quickly left the main road and plunged into some side turning. Presently he caught hold of Nipper's arm.

"This is the street, Nipper," he whispered. "The house is down there on the right. Stay here with Wolf, and if I'm not back in ten minutes come and look for me."

"Right, guv'nor," said Nipper, as he watched his master stride swiftly down the street.

It seemed to Nipper as if he had been waiting there quite half an hour, although his watch told him it was only five minutes, when he saw Nelson Lee's familiar form appear out of the darkness.

"The house is in absolute darkness," said Lee. "I don't believe anybody is there. But I discovered a mews at the back, and climbed over the wall and undid the gate. Come on. We'll see what Wolf makes of it."

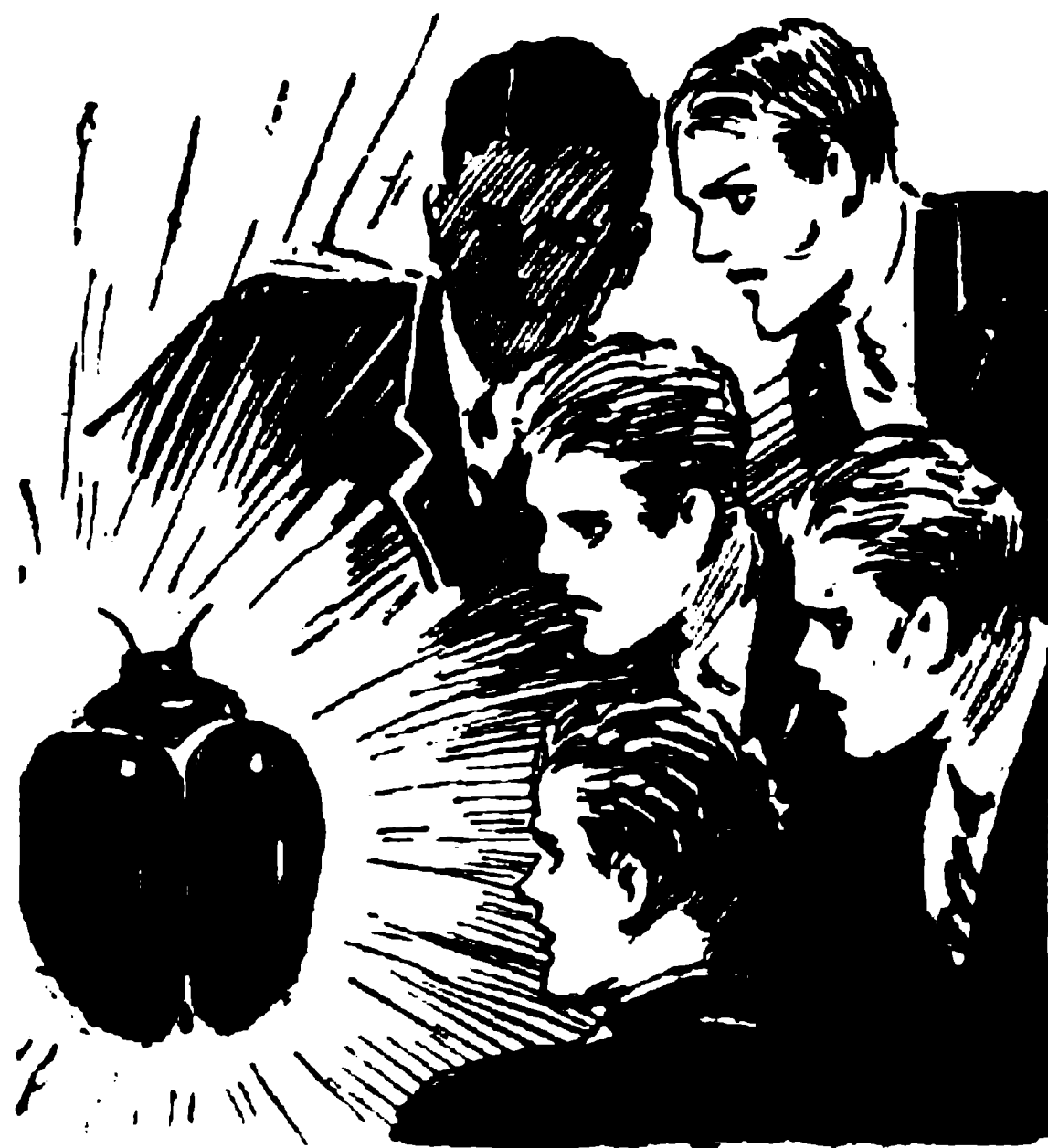
Very cautiously, Nipper, with Wolf pulling hard on the lead, followed the detective along the street until they came to the entrance of the mews. At the third gate on the left Lee paused and gently turned the handle. The door swung back easily, and motioning to Nipper to follow him, the detective stole across the yard.

In the shadow of the house Lee took a small aluminium box from his pocket, and removing the lid, took out the piece of cloth which Nipper had brought back from his visit to Professor Bailey.

"Here, Wolf!" he muttered, holding the piece of cloth out for the dog to scent. "Good dog, Wolf! Have it, boy!"

Schoolboys in Quest of a Fortune!

Thousands of miles has Kalizelos, a villainous Greek, travelled in search of a Golden Scarab which holds the secret to a hidden treasure worth a quarter of a million pounds. And this little golden beetle is in the hands of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, who are now bound for Egypt in quest of the hidden fortune. If you want a thrill-packed holiday story get this week's issue of The MAGNET



The Famous School Story Paper

The Magnet

Buy Your Copy Now - **2d.**

The Alsatian buried his nose in the rag, growling low and quivering with excitement. Then Lee took the cloth away.

"Now, boy!" he said. "Seek! After him!"

Wolf cast a swift glance of inquiry at his master, wagged his tail as if he were pleased, then lifted his great nose, sniffing suspiciously at the air. Then his head went down, and he pattered noiselessly to and fro for a few moments with his nose to the ground.

Presently he stopped dead, sniffing the ground and growling to himself; then he gave a little yelp of satisfaction and ran across the yard, sniffing the ground all the while.

Nelson Lee drew in his breath.

"Jove, Nipper!" he said. "He's picked up the scent. I was right, then. Baron Rodanoff is in some way connected with the Soho murder. That poor fellow Crick must have been here within the last day or two. Very likely he left here on the very same night that he met his death."

Nelson Lee stopped suddenly as Wolf came slowly towards them. The dog was well on the scent now and was engrossed in his work. He came close to the wall and followed the trail along by the house. Then he stopped suddenly in the shadow, growling savagely and pawing at the back door.

"Ah!" said Lee, hurrying to the spot. "So Crick must have entered the house by this door. We must get inside somehow, Nipper, even if it happens to be occupied."

The detective tried the door, but it was locked on the inside. He took a pace back to look up at the windows and his feet crunched loudly on something lying on the ground. He stooped down and felt in the darkness.

"Broken glass," he said shortly, then took another look at the wall to the right.

"See!" he said. "There is a small window there. Somebody has forced an entry in there to-night. Just give me a hoist up, Nipper."

The next moment Nelson Lee had scrambled through the window.

"I'll open the door in a moment," he whispered, and dropped inside.

In a few moments the bolts were shot back and the door gently opened.

"This way, Nipper," said the detective. "Hold on to Wolf and see where he goes."

The dog sniffed at the floor and moved forward in the darkness. Lee took out an electric torch and shot a thin beam of light ahead. A few yards to the right was a broad staircase towards which Wolf was making, with Lee and Nipper following hard behind.

They climbed the stairs and Wolf led them along the passage to a door on the first floor where he stopped and sniffed. Lee tried the handle; it turned easily, and the door swung back.

The room was in darkness. Feeling for the electric switch Lee flooded the place with

light. The room was not occupied; the furniture appeared new, as if it had not been there long. In the centre stood a full-size billiard-table. The detective began casting swift glances around.

Wolf had been slowly nosing about the room. Presently he came to the door on the other side, and after one or two sniffs he pushed it open and disappeared inside. Nelson Lee and Nipper quickly followed him. This room was also in darkness, but Lee switched on the light and gazed curiously around.

Over in the corner stood a bed; it was flattened and disordered, as if someone had recently been lying upon it.

"Nipper," said Lee suddenly, "do you notice those chairs? They are upholstered in red plush."

Nipper looked puzzled for a moment.

"I've got you, guv'nor," he muttered suddenly. "What Professor Bailey found in the finger-nails."

"Just so," said Lee. "It may be merely a coincidence, of course, but it seems strange."

Then an idea suddenly occurred to him. He strode over to the washstand, and lifting the lid of the soap-box, took out a piece of soap. Lee took one smell at it and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Nipper," he cried excitedly, "just smell this!"

Nipper took the piece of soap and did as he was told.

"What a funny smell it's got, guv'nor," he said. "But it's jolly nice, all the same."

The detective did not speak for some moments. He seemed to be deep in thought.

"Do you know, Nipper," he said at length, "that it is the very aromatic soap which Professor Bailey found, not only on the nails of that poor chap Crick, but also on the nails of the man who is posing as Jimmy Stone?"

Nipper could only look astonished and wait for Lee to continue.

"Yes," said the detective, "there are the red plush chairs and here is the soap. Taken separately, neither is very strong evidence; but together they prove one thing, and that is that the man now occupying Jimmy Stone's position and this fellow Joe Crick must have both at some time been in this room."

The detective began an exhaustive search of the two rooms, but after a long and minute examination he was unable to discover anything else of importance. Wolf had now given up the scent and had stretched himself on the carpet.

Nelson Lee and Nipper then made a search of the whole house, but nothing came to light of any value in the solution of the mystery. With the exception of the two rooms on the first floor the remainder of the house was quite unfurnished. Lee at length decided to give up the hunt for that night.

"We must keep a close watch on this

place," he said, as they were going down the stairs. "So far, I am rather at a loss for an explanation of the whole strange business. No doubt these men will return here in a day or two, so I think I'd better lock the back door and climb through the window again. We don't want them to know we've been here in their absence."

Nipper and Wolf passed out into the yard, and having bolted the door Lee proceeded to hoist himself through the window. Just as he was balancing himself in the frame, however, he was struck by a sudden thought. He took out his pocket torch and carefully scrutinised the woodwork. A moment later he gave a quick cry of amazement.

"Nipper!" he whispered hoarsely. "What d'you think? There are two sets of fingerprints plainly discernible on the sill here, and the little finger of the left hand is missing. The Soho murderer must have broken this window and climbed through here. And it must have happened within the last hour or two."

FOR three solid hours in the early morning Nipper kept watch on the house in Kennington, but nothing had occurred to arouse his suspicions. Nipper was feeling a trifle fed up and was just deciding to hook it when he chanced to glance down the road again.

A man was approaching from the other end, and something in his appearance and gait seemed to attract Nipper's attention.

"Might as well see where he goes," muttered Nipper. "Looks as if he's got the wind up over something."

Nipper crept back to his corner from where he could obtain a good view of the house without being seen himself. As the man approached Nipper noticed that his cap was pulled down over his eyes and the collar of his coat was turned up so that little of his face could be seen.

Nipper watched the stranger curiously as he slowly passed the house and stared up at the windows. Then Nipper saw him stop, and after giving a rapid glance up and down the road, turn and slowly pass the house again.

Nipper's interest was now thoroughly aroused. Craning his neck he watched the man repeat his performance several times, each time casting that swift glance up at the windows.

"Now what's his game, I wonder?" muttered Nipper. "Does he expect something to happen? Hallo, he's coming this way!"

Nipper drew himself back behind the corner, preparing to look as unconcerned as possible should the man come along and notice him. Not hearing the approaching footsteps after waiting a few minutes Nipper took another peep round the corner. The stranger was nowhere in sight.

"He must have gone down the mews," muttered Nipper, and ran swiftly across the road to the entrance.

He was right. The stranger had paused outside the third gate, and after giving a swift glance around he made a spring on to the wall and the next moment had dropped down on the other side.

Now greatly excited and eager to see what the stranger would do Nipper ran quickly to the gate and peered through the keyhole. He was just in time to see the man's legs disappear through the broken window.

For a moment Nipper was undecided whether he should scale the wall and chance his luck in meeting the stranger or stay where he was. He determined, however, to stay where he was for a time and see if anything happened.

For five minutes or more Nipper remained with his eye glued to the keyhole. Then he saw the stranger's head poke through the window again as he scrambled out of the small opening.

Without stopping he strode straight across the yard towards the door through which Nipper was peeping. Nipper beat a hurried retreat up the mews. He was just in time, for hardly had he concealed himself when the man dropped lightly over the wall and strode swiftly away, muttering to himself angrily.

Nipper quickly made up his mind. At all costs he must keep him in sight and see where he was going. There was something very fishy about this man's movements. Nipper felt he was well on the way to making an important discovery, and it was too good an opportunity to miss.

For ten minutes or more Nipper dogged the footsteps of the stranger, keeping well behind him and never losing sight of his quarry. Presently they came to the Vauxhall Bridge, and Nipper began to close up until he was barely a dozen yards or so behind. Then something startling happened.

They were just about half-way across the bridge when a taxi which was speeding towards them from the direction of Victoria suddenly pulled up abruptly. Nipper saw a man poke his head out of the window and gesticulate wildly to the driver. The cab immediately skidded round in the road and came to a stop alongside the man Nipper had been following.

The stranger gave a start of surprise and made as if to run, but the occupant of the cab flung open the door and grabbed him by the shoulder. For a few seconds the two seemed to be having a fierce argument over something, then the other man half pulled, half persuaded the stranger into the taxi, gave some order to the driver and slammed the door.

The taxi swung round again and sped off in the direction of south-east London. The whole incident had happened so quickly that it was over before Nipper had had time to grasp properly what was going on. As the taxi went by, however, he caught a brief glimpse of a bearded face peering out of the window.

Nipper gave a swift glance at the back of the taxi and made a mental note of the number. For a moment he was minded to follow, but there was no spare taxi in sight. After watching the taxi disappear in the distance Nipper turned and hurried in the direction of the Grays Inn Road, where he told his story to Nelson Lee.

"The bearded man," said the detective, "was undoubtedly the man who lunched with Baron Rodanoff at the Grand. The stranger was the Soho murderer, I fancy. But we can do nothing at the moment. We must give the taxi time to get back to its garage and then we must interview the driver."

But that was delayed longer than the detective had expected. He found it easy enough to trace the taxi as Nipper had a note of the number, but it was plain that the vehicle had been some distance, and it was six hours later before Nelson Lee found the driver.

"Just a moment," he said. "In the small hours of this morning you were passing over Vauxhall Bridge with a fare when you suddenly stopped and picked up another man and then went off again."

"Yes sir, I did," agreed the driver. "Just come back from that trip. Had a fifty mile run or more."

"I should like to know where you took them," said Lee, slipping a coin into the man's hand. "I happen to know the gentleman."

The driver regarded Lee thoughtfully for a moment.

"Right, boss," he said at last. "No reason that I know of why I should keep it dark. I picked the gentleman up here this morning and he asked me to drive him to Kennington. Then he stopped me on Vauxhall Bridge and picked up the other chap. I reckon he was out looking for that chap all the time and reckoned to find him at Kennington, only met him before we got there. Anyway, he changed his mind and promised me twenty quid if I'd take them down to Denesford in Kent—about a fifty-mile run."

"Thanks," said Nelson Lee. "And did you stop at a house there?"

"No, I didn't," said the man. "They asked me to drop them just outside the village, which I did. Wasn't no concern of mine. They paid me; that was quite good enough for me."

"Quite so," said Nelson Lee. "That's all right. Thanks very much. Good-day."

The detective went straight back to the Grays Inn Road. He found Nipper waiting for his return and told him what he had learnt.

"Nipper," he said, "we must hustle. Just find out exactly where Denesford is while I get the car ready and pack a few things. We've got to get there as soon as possible."

CHAPTER 8.

The Sinister House!

NELSON LEE'S powerful car came to a halt outside the Chequers Inn at Denesford. The detective was at the wheel, while Nipper and Wolf sat beside him, and their scanty baggage was bundled in the dickey seat.

"You wait here," said Lee, alighting, "while I explore a bit. We don't want to create a sensation by all trooping in at once. They'll think there's a raid on or something."

The detective opened the door and strode into the bar. About half a dozen yokels were sitting round the old-fashioned grate, drinking and smoking. A chorus of "Good-evening, sur's!" greeted Lee's entry.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said Lee pleasantly, as he made his way towards the innkeeper, who was behind the bar.

"Good-evening, sur," said the innkeeper respectfully, eyeing his visitor with some surprise.

"Have you a spare room?" asked Nelson Lee, lowering his voice so as not to be overheard by the other customers. "My friend and I want to put up here for a day or two."

The innkeeper scratched his head dubiously. "Don't know 'bout that, sur—" he began. But Nelson Lee would not take a refusal.

"Look here," he said, "we've got to stay here to-night." He thrust a note into the man's hand. "You'll be well paid for it."

The innkeeper crushed the note in his hand and put it in his pocket.

"That's all right, sur," he said. "Come this way."

Ten minutes later Nelson Lee and Nipper were sitting down to a meal in the cosy little bar-parlour, while Wolf and the car were safely stowed away in the stables at the back, Wolf doing justice to a mutton bone.

"After that ride, this grub goes down just right, guv'nor," said Nipper, with enthusiasm.

"Well, make the most of it, Nipper," said Lee. "I don't think our stay here will be in the nature of a rest cure. If you've finished just go for a stroll round and get acquainted with the lie of the land."

Nipper rose with a sigh of satisfaction and left the room. As he passed the door that led into the bar he happened to glance above the frosted-glass window. Immediately he gave a gasp of surprise and ducked his head.

"What's the matter, Nipper?" asked Lee sharply, as Nipper returned to the bar-parlour again.

"There's a chap standing by the bar having a drink, guv'nor," whispered Nipper. "It's the same chap who climbed into that house at Kennington, and who got into the taxi on Vauxhall Bridge!"

The detective tiptoed to the door and peeped above it. Presently he came back to where Nipper was standing.

"Nipper," he said impressively, "that man has only three fingers on his left hand."

The fourth finger is missing. It is the man who murdered Joe Crick in Soho, unless I am greatly mistaken."

Nipper gave a low whistle.

"Well, what are you going to do, guv'nor?"

"Follow him, Nipper," said the detective. "Very likely we shall get some clue as to the whereabouts of the real Jimmy Stone."

At that moment they heard the bar door shut to, and Nelson Lee took a hasty glance into the bar.

"Come on, Nipper," he said. "Out of the back door! We must find out where he's off to."

Without making any noise, Lee unfastened the yard door and, followed closely by his young assistant, crept out into the yard.

A low hedge separated them from a lane leading down on the right of the inn. As they got outside the figure of a man vanished swiftly round the corner. It did not take Nelson Lee and Nipper long to vault that hedge. The next moment they were dogging the footsteps of the stranger as he strode quickly down the winding, narrow lane.

For about ten minutes they crept on in silence. The lane was soft and muddy and their feet made no sound. It was now getting dark, and it was very difficult to keep sight of the man in front. Eventually they lost him altogether.

Nelson Lee and Nipper crept stealthily forward, hiding in the shadow of the hedge as much as possible. Then they came upon a gate on the right of the lane which led to a path across the fields.

"This must have been the way he went," whispered Lee. "Come on, Nipper. Mind how you go."

They climbed the gate and hurried across the field. Soon, the dark form of the stranger appeared again in front, and they went more slowly. They must have been walking thus for nearly twenty minutes, when presently there loomed up against the skyline a great, gaunt-looking house.

The place seemed silent and deserted, no lights shone in any of the windows, and an air of profound gloom hung over the whole place. From just beyond came the low murmur of the sea breaking on the shore.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were now standing among some tall fir trees, while the man they had been following had strode straight towards the house, and disappeared in the shadow of the walls.

"So that's where he's hiding!" muttered Nelson Lee. "Well, we're hot on the scent, Nipper, my boy! I wonder who owns this show. It stands in its own grounds and they're pretty extensive, too. Look, they reach for miles and cover all this wood to the right. There's the sea over there, too. You can hear it."

"Look, guv'nor!" said Nipper suddenly. "There's a light in that room. It wasn't there a moment ago."

"You're right, Nipper," said Lee. "Someone's pulling the blind down, too."

They watched in silence for some time.

Nelson Lee was thinking out his plans. Presently, he turned to Nipper.

"Nipper," he said, "I'm going back to the inn. I want to find out to whom this place belongs, and also to fetch Wolf along. You had better wait here for an hour or so until I come back. I'll give the signal when I do. If I don't return in an hour you might come on to the inn."

"Right you are, guv'nor," said Nipper.

The detective made his way as quickly as



Suddenly Nipper saw the shadows of two figures followed the lash, lash of a whip fall

possible back to the inn, only to find the landlord anxiously awaiting him.

"Just looking for you, sir," he said. "Here's a telegram. Found it at the post office, and the postmaster gave it to me to give to you. Came directly after you left."

"Thanks," said the detective, taking the envelope and tearing it open.

He stood staring at the message, with a puzzled look on his face. The telegram had been sent to Grays Inn Road, and the detective's housekeeper had had it sent on to him at Denesford. It was from Sir Vrymer Fane.

"Must see you at once. Important news. 'FANE.'"

Greatly perplexed Lee read the message through several times before he quite realised its import. For a moment he could not decide what to do for the best; then he realised that he would have to obey that

summons. Obviously, it seemed that something extraordinary had occurred for Sir Vrymer Fane to summon him to the Foreign Office so unexpectedly. After all, he could speed up to London in the car and be back just after midnight, and Nipper would return to the inn, in any case, in an hour's time.

Accordingly, the detective hastily scribbled a note for Nipper, explaining what had happened, then motored back to London as hard as he could go.



appear at the frosted and barred window. Then
ing, and fearful, savage snarls rang out.

MEANWHILE, Nipper remained standing silently in the grounds of the grim-looking house at Denesford. A strange stillness seemed to have stolen over the place. There was not the sound of the slightest movement or the rustle of the trees. The sky had clouded over, and the night was pitch dark.

In front, loomed the vague, dark outline of the house, rising gaunt and ghostly out of the darkness that spread around. The light still shone through the red blind of the room on the second floor. Otherwise the whole place was shrouded in blackness.

Nipper glanced again at the lighted window. It seemed rather to fascinate him. He wondered what was going on behind it. Who was in the room? Was it the strange man whom they had followed from the inn? To whom did the place belong, anyhow?

While these thoughts were surging through his mind, Nipper had been unconsciously creeping nearer and nearer to the house. He

pulled up suddenly to find that he was almost within thirty yards of the building. He was now out in the open without any cover of any sort. At all events he must not stand there. At any moment someone might come out of the house and discover his presence.

He was about to turn back and make for the cover of the trees again, when he noticed a privet hedge a little to his right, and about ten yards ahead. Nipper glanced at the window again. Yes, he must get closer.

Without further thought he bent his body to the double and ran swiftly forward. His feet made no noise on the springy turf. He reached the hedge and hid behind it. From his position Nipper could get a near view of the house without running any danger of being seen. He stuck his head above the hedge and peered over.

Another light had now appeared. It shone through a window in the basement. The window seemed to be made of heavy, opaque glass, and a number of thick iron bars crossed it on the outside. From the sill projected a row of spikes. What was happening in there, Nipper wondered. If he could only get a peep inside! But Nelson Lee might be back at any moment.

Suddenly Nipper gave a start and almost stopped breathing. For a time he remained listening intently. Had his ears deceived him? What was that strange cry he had heard, or had it only been his fancy? He listened again, feeling his heart throbbing painfully at the base of his throat.

"Pah!" he muttered at length. "You're getting windy, Nipper, old son! Pull yourself together!"

But the place was getting on his nerves. He glanced anxiously over his shoulder. If only Nelson Lee would hurry up!

Then suddenly he heard it again, this time distinctly. It came from the room in the basement, a strange, snarling cry—angry, menacing, full of horror! For a moment Nipper remained, petrified with fear. He had his full share of grit, and could stand up in a fair fight with a man twice his own weight and take his gruelling without a murmur.

But this was different. That ghastly, inhuman cry seemed fairly to freeze the very marrow in his bones. He remained where he was, incapable of moving, and gazing with wild eyes at the room from which the sound came.

Suddenly that fearful snarl rang out again, and with it came the sounds of commotion. Something crashed to the floor, as if the table had been overturned. Then, across the frosted and barred window came two shadows. For one instant only did Nipper see them—the shadow of a man with his arm upraised striking at the other shadow. Then followed the lash, lash of a heavy whip falling on some body.

Again a shadow crossed the window, a monstrous, ungainly shape, and swiftly disappeared, and those same savage snarls rang out. Then, with a crash, the light went out and all was darkness.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Nipper stood

as if turned to stone, unable to stir a limb through sheer cold fright. The sweat stood out on his forehead in icy beads, and a cold hand seemed to clutch at his spine. Suddenly there was a smashing of glass, and the weird, ghastly cries grew louder, mingled with the hoarse shouts of men.

Immediately afterwards came a strange panting noise, and the crumbling of brick-work, then the sound of a body falling to the ground, as if the iron-barred grating in front of the window had been wrenched from the frame.

Quite unable to move, Nipper stood behind the privet hedge, trying to pierce the darkness in front. Something was bounding towards him—some great, uncouth shape. The next moment the thing had fled past and went bounding towards the trees. But its terrible snarls still rang in Nipper's ears.

Then several other figures came racing from the house, shouting to each other in short, excited tones. They rushed past Nipper also, and made for the trees. Almost directly a shot rang out, then another, and after an interval came four or five in quick succession.

Gradually the noise subsided in the distance, and all was deathly silence once more. For nearly ten minutes Nipper stood there listening. He wanted to run from this night of horror, but his limbs seemed to have turned to stone. He did not seem capable of moving them.

But he heard no more. The house remained dark and silent. No noise came from it now, and the men who rushed so madly after the strange thing that had escaped from the room had not returned. Perhaps they were still hunting it! At any rate, he could hear no more cries or sounds of firing. By this time they might be miles away.

With an effort Nipper crept from his hiding-place. He must return to the inn and find Nelson Lee. Perhaps he would meet him on the way. He should have arrived back at the grim house by now, if he intended coming back at all.

Nipper took stock of the situation as best he could in the darkness. That was the direction, over there through the trees. The path across the fields was just on the other side of the coppice. Once there he could easily find his way back again. He stole across the open cautiously, anxious to reach the cover of the trees as quickly as possible.

When he reached the wood it was so dark that he had to grope his way with his hands. Where was the path? It must be close at hand now. He paused a moment and peered around, then pushed on again.

Suddenly he tripped over something lying on the grass, and put out his hands to save himself. Then he gave a gasp and drew back dismayed. It was the body of a man! He could just make out the vague white smudge of the upturned face!

That dreadful fear came over Nipper again. He stood rooted to the spot, gazing in horror at the dark, indistinct form. The thought came to him that this might be Nelson Lee.

One of the shots might have ended that brilliant career—and Nipper was alone.

Then the sharp snap of a branch sounded a dozen yards away. Nipper stood straining his ears and trying to pierce the gloom in the direction of the sound. What was that? Something was moving, some big, monstrous shape creeping stealthily towards him.

Nipper tried to open his mouth to shout, but his tongue clove to the roof. For a moment he seemed as if he would drop helpless with fright. Then, turning on his heel, he rushed like a madman through the wood.

The thing was pursuing him. He could hear its soft padding feet close behind. It was gaining on him. He tried to shake it off, dodging behind trees, falling in holes, tearing his clothes on prickly plants and sharp wire, and bruising his hands in his mad flight.

But the thing was getting nearer and nearer. It was almost on him now. A second more, and its great hairy arms would be reaching out to grasp him.

Then Nipper suddenly felt the ground give way beneath his feet. He flung up his arms, gave one piercing shriek, and shot down!

Down he went, down into a black, bottomless pit. He flung out his arms and clutched frantically at the sides, gripping at pieces of tree roots and projecting stones to save himself from the dizzy fall into the inky blackness below. His hands were torn and bleeding, and his body was bruised and battered as it was flung from side to side. Yet he still went down and down.

Then his feet struck a projecting side of the pit. He swung violently round, clutched wildly in the darkness, and held on for a moment to the root of a tree. It broke beneath his weight, and he dropped again. But only a few feet this time, for immediately after he pulled up with a shattering jerk.

And he remembered no more. Nipper lay at the bottom of the pit, unconscious and bleeding, with a deathly pallor on his thin, drawn face.

CHAPTER 9.

Missing!

NELSON LEE remained in London all that night. Sir Vrymer Fane's news was important, but not so important as to have dragged the detective away from Denesford at that juncture. It was simply that the Jimmy Stone who was at the nursing home at Brighton had suddenly started to rave for drugs, proving that he was addicted to drugs, whereas the real Jimmy Stone was not the sort of man to have such a weakness. The news had come as a shock to Sir Vrymer, for it proved what he had suspected, that there was foul play behind the whole business.

But Nelson Lee was not amazed. He had already proved to his own satisfaction that the Jimmy Stone in the nursing home at Brighton was an impostor. Accordingly, he

made Sir Vrymer aware of all that had taken place, and he promised to find the real Jimmy Stone within a week.

After that he snatched a little rest and a meal, then motored back to Denesford in the early hours of the morning. He arrived at the Chequer's Inn about eight o'clock, to find Nipper was missing.

"I haven't seen the young gent since yesterday evening," said the landlord solemnly. "He never came back here. Your letter is lying on the table now, waiting for him!"

For the moment Lee was stunned by this piece of news. So unexpected had it been, and so unaccountable was Nipper's absence, that even now he could scarcely believe the landlord was speaking the truth. He strode into the bar-parlour and glanced round the room, half expecting to see Nipper there. But there was the letter on the table, unopened, just as he had left it. What on earth had happened to Nipper?

Then a familiar sound smote on Lee's ears. It was the muffled baying of a great dog. He turned on the innkeeper, who had been standing by silently watching him.

"What about my dog?" he asked sternly. "Have you fed him?"

"N-no, sur! Not a man here dare go near him, sur, and that's a fact."

Cold anger glittered in Lee's eyes, but he knew that rage would not help him. He strode to the stables to pacify the great dog, and feed him. Not until then did he attend to his own wants.

"And now," said Nelson Lee to the innkeeper, "I want to talk to you. There is a big stone house standing all alone in its own grounds about two miles from here, near the shore. Do you know anything about it?"

"You mean the haunted house, sur," said the innkeeper, sinking his voice.

"The haunted house!" echoed Lee. "What on earth do you mean?"

"The place is supposed to be haunted, sur. Nobody ever goes near it. Many years ago a murder was committed in the woods. For some time after it was empty; then it was bought by a foreign gentleman. But strange noises have been heard there at night-time."

"Ah!" said Nelson Lee, deeply interested. "And who is this foreign gentleman who owns it now?"

"Can't say, sur! He is very seldom seen. Comes down in a car. As a matter of fact, nobody is particularly anxious to have anything to do with him. Those things are best left alone."

"Rubbish!" said Lee scornfully. "There are no such things as ghosts. What exactly do you mean?"

"Why, sur, I've told you. Strange noises have been heard, not only in the house, but in the woods. Inhuman noises—make your blood run cold, they do!"

As if even the recollection had the same effect, the innkeeper's teeth chattered and he gave a quick shiver.

"And that is all you know?" asked the detective.

"That's about all, sur."

The detective dismissed the man, and took from his hip pocket a shiny automatic revolver and fingered it lovingly. Then he replaced it.

"Come on, Wolf!" he said. "We're going to find Nipper!"

Wolf gave a yelp of delight. He seemed to understand every word his master said. Together they passed out of the inn door and went swiftly down the lane that skirted the right of the inn. It did not take them long to reach the gate in the hedge, and they were soon trudging across the fields by the same path Lee and Nipper had taken the previous night.

The detective kept a sharp look-out on the newly ploughed ground on each side for footprints that might indicate which way Nipper had gone; but nothing attracted his attention. After nearly half an hour's walk the gaunt outline of the house hove in view. Lee went more cautiously now. He did not know who might be on the look-out for trespassers, or whom he might meet in the vicinity of the house, and he did not wish his presence to be discovered.

Presently Lee found himself among the fir-trees where he and Nipper stood the night before. The trees were crowded so closely together that very little light penetrated them. Through the rising trunks the broad, sweeping lawn ran down to the house, and Nelson Lee had an uninterrupted view without any danger of being observed.

He began to take rapid stock of his surroundings. Where exactly had he left Nipper the night before? It must have been about here, Lee thought, after carefully measuring his steps. This is where they must have stood, on the verge of the wood, and between these two great trees.

Would Wolf be able to pick up the scent from here? Nearly twelve hours had passed by—it seemed more like a week to Nelson Lee. It was rather a severe test for Wolf. Would he succeed? Lee looked hastily around for the big dog. He could not see him immediately. He called him softly by name. Through the trees there echoed in Lee's ears the sound of a low, savage growl.

The detective stood listening for a moment.

"Wolf!" he called again, and began threading his way through the trees in the direction of the sound. Suddenly he came upon the dog a dozen yards or so away.

Nelson Lee stood still, silently watching him. Something was the matter with Wolf. Along the ridge of his back the hair was bristling in a straight line. His ears were held back and his tail drooped peculiarly between his hind legs. He was sniffing at the ground around a big fir-tree, and all the time the great dog kept up that deep, angry growl.

Half fascinated, Lee did not attempt to interrupt him. Nothing was there as far as he could see, only the great gnarled roots

of the tree projecting about the carpet of dead leaves. Presently the dog began to steal stealthily away from the spot with his nose to the ground as if he were on the scent. Lee watched him pause for a moment, undecided; then he went on again and drew nearer and nearer to the edge of the wood.

The animal was now on the fringe of the trees at the spot where Lee judged he had left Nipper standing last night. The dog thrust out his nose towards the wide, sweeping lawn which led down to the house and sniffed the air suspiciously. Again the detective called to him.

"Wolf! Wolf!" he said softly.

But the faithful animal failed to answer. Lee began to creep quietly towards the spot, but at the moment the dog sank his head again and stole stealthily out into the open. Greatly puzzled, Lee watched him as he went across the level stretch of grass. The dog moved in little spurts, running forward a few paces half crouching close to the ground, then pausing and nosing the air with his ears held back. Nearer and nearer he approached to the house. Was he making for it? Was this Nipper's scent he had picked up, and was Nipper in that grim stone building?

Nelson Lee's hand went to his hip pocket reassuringly. He would let the dog get a little nearer. He must make sure that it was the house that Wolf was heading for, then Lee would follow him up. But it was Wolf's strange manner that was puzzling Nelson Lee. He had never seen the dog like this before. It was obvious that he was uneasy.

Wolf was now within thirty yards of the house, and still he crept furtively nearer. Then suddenly he turned sharply to the right and ran towards the privet hedge that skirted the right wing of the building. For some moments Wolf nosed close up to the hedge, then he turned about, and, with his head held low, came creeping back across the lawn towards where the detective was standing.

Nelson Lee was, by now, utterly mystified. That the animal was on Nipper's scent he had no doubt. His quick mind immediately grasped the fact that after he had left him Nipper had stolen across the lawn to the privet hedge in order to get a closer view of the house. That was all straightforward. And he could also understand the dog re-tracing his steps, for it was evident that after satisfying his curiosity Nipper would return to his former position among the trees.

But what puzzled Nelson Lee was Wolf's strange behaviour. What other factor was present to account for that? There was something uncanny here.

Lee glanced around again for Wolf. The dog was back again at the roots of the big tree, sniffing at the ground. What was it that was attracting the animal's attention? The detective made his way towards him, and, kneeling down at the base of the tree, carefully scrutinised the spot.

Something had lain here—some body had

pressed down the leaves. An ordinary person might not have noticed anything amiss, but to Lee's expert eyes it was plain. Some pressure had caused that slight flattening of the leaves, and by the shape of it Lee judged that it was caused by the body of a man.

Yes, there was no doubt about it, for just where the damp earth protruded round the roots there was a slight depression, as if, in falling, the man's arm and elbow had hit the soft earth first. The detective wondered who had lain there. Had it been Nipper? And, if so, who had removed his body? Nelson Lee was just rising to his feet when a piece of metal just showing above the leaves caught his eye. He hastily dragged it forth and held it up, gazing at it with a frown on his face. It was a cigarette case made of solid silver. But that was not the point that was troubling Lee. He was wondering where he had seen it before for it seemed familiar.

Then suddenly he knew. This cigarette case belonged to Baron Rodanoff. He remembered now. He had offered Lee a cigarette that night the three of them had dined together at Dalgretty's. There was no mistaking it. He would have recognised that peculiar design and workmanship anywhere.

Nelson Lee tried to think clearly. So Baron Rodanoff had been here, and Nipper also. What had happened? Whose body was it that had lain there on the ground? Was it Nipper, or was it the baron? Had they fought together; and if so—

Again the thought of foul play came to Lee's mind. He could not conceal his anxiety. He must get on the track of Nipper's body immediately. The great dog was still nosing among the leaves. Lee caught hold of him by the scruff of the neck.

"Wolf!" he whispered hoarsely. "Nipper! Where's Nipper? Good boy! Find him!"

The dog lifted up his head to his master, his eyes were blazing madly, and froth dripped from his red jaws. But that one look had been almost human. Lee knew that he understood. Something was worrying the animal that Lee could not fathom. But he would find Nipper; Lee felt sure of that.

He slipped the cigarette case in his pocket and rose to his feet. The Alsatian had picked up the trail this time. He was moving off into the heart of the wood. Keeping close behind, the detective followed him as he threaded his way in and out amongst the trees. The trail wound about in a perfect maze, and as he went along Lee's quick eyes noted the broken twigs and trampled ferns that strewed the path.

For ten minutes more Lee forced his way through the wood. He could still see Wolf some yards ahead, nosing the ground intently. Presently, in front, there appeared a small clearing, thickly overgrown with ferns and mosses, and suddenly he saw the dog leap back a couple of paces and stand growling fiercely, with his nose stuck upwards.

Then, very cautiously, Wolf crept forward

and came to a standstill, with his body quivering. A second or so later Lee pulled himself up with a start. At his very feet yawned a black, unfathomable pit. He had not halted a second too soon. He was on the very brink of it. Already the soft earth was crumbling beneath his feet.

So this was the explanation of Nipper's disappearance! He had been hurled down this frightful chasm. Nelson Lee had not the slightest doubt about that. Wolf's unerring sense of smell had led him right.

Nelson Lee knew all about these pits. This was one of the famous Dene Holes that abound in that part of the country. They were dug many centuries ago by the Druids. They led into subterranean caverns, where they used to perform religious rites.

The detective stood trying to pierce the black opening beneath his feet. At the bottom of this pit, perhaps a hundred or more feet below, Nipper was lying crushed and bleeding. At the thought of it the cold sweat stood out on Nelson Lee's forehead. He forgot that other strange presence that had been with them ever since they had entered the wood, and which had caused that smouldering anger of Wolf's.

He looked around wildly for some means of descent. If he only had a rope! But there was nothing handy—nothing he could use. Yet he must get a rope from somewhere. The only thing he could do was to hasten back to the inn. He knew he could get one there.

Nelson Lee turned to Wolf.

"Good dog!" he said. "Good dog, Wolf! Guard Nipper!"

The Alsatian growled deeply and sank down with his great paws hanging over the brink of the chasm. Nelson Lee turned and sped through the wood back to the inn.

CHAPTER 10.

Lost Underground!

IT was many hours after Nipper had fallen down the Dene Hole that consciousness began slowly to return to his bruised and numb body. That last frantic clutch at the tree-root had saved him; it had checked his fall. All through that night he lay at the bottom of the pit, senseless and bleeding, but with no bones broken.

For a time he lay perfectly still, blinking up at the chasm overhead, staring at the patch of sky far above. He could not quite make out what had happened to him or where he was.

It was now broad daylight. Suddenly memories began to rush back to Nipper's mind. The recollection of that last awful drop down into the unfathomable black pit came back to him with renewed force. He could feel himself falling again until he almost cried out at the sensation.

Then he remembered with a shiver that frantic race through the woods with that

strange, fearful thing padding behind him. What was it? What could it have been? Had it toppled over the brink of the chasm?

At the thought of that a thrill of fear went through Nipper's body. Perhaps it was lying beside him now, all crushed and mangled! A feeling of sickness came over him. He tried to raise himself to glance around, but sank back with a groan. His limbs were stiff and cold, and it was agony to move.

After a time, however, his limbs moved more freely. He began gently rubbing himself down until there was some sort of real feeling in his numbed limbs. Sitting up and supporting himself on his arms, he looked fearfully around. It was pitch dark. Nothing could be seen but that tiny blue patch far above.

Then Nipper remembered the electric torch he always carried in his pocket. He felt for it and dragged it forth. He pressed the button and a thin beam of light shone out. He flashed it around. The light seemed so feeble in that terrible darkness that it was little he could see. But there was no sign of that mangled shape that he so much dreaded. That was a great relief.

The walls of the pit seemed to rise up sheer on all sides, and seemed to be formed of some dirty-white, chalky substance. But what was that darker smudge over there? Was it the entrance to a tunnel?

Slowly and painfully Nipper rose to his feet. He felt as weak as a rat, and could scarcely drag his legs along. Yes, it was a tunnel. It seemed to branch away right into the bowels of the earth. He flashed the torch over the walls. It was roughly circular, and was composed of that same chalky substance.

A glance upwards at the smooth sides of the pit down which he had fallen showed him that he could not hope to scale that height. If there was any way of escape for him at all, then it lay along that tunnel. It must lead somewhere, although, of course, it might be a blind alley. However, there was no harm in investigating it.

Nipper made his way again to the dark mouth of the tunnel and began to proceed very cautiously along it, flashing his torch over the uneven floor on which he was treading. The air was intensely cold, and smelt rank and musty. He wondered how long ago it must be since a human being had walked along this labyrinth. Perhaps, centuries had passed since then.

The tunnel wound in and out like a maze. He passed a number of smaller openings on each side, but contrived to keep to the main tunnel. There seemed to be no ending to this labyrinth. He kept on and on for over half an hour. The sameness of the place was oppressive. This was no good, he thought, suddenly coming to a standstill. There did not seem to be any way out in this direction. He had better turn and retrace his steps. He could at least remain at the bottom of the

pit and shout in the hope of someone hearing his cries.

Accordingly he turned back and plodded on and on, his strength gradually failing him. That feeling of sickness assailed him again. Would he never get to the end of this tunnel? Surely he should be getting near the pit by this time? Yet no patch of light showed far above his head to mark the exit.

Ah, here was a sudden bend! No doubt he would find the pit just round here. He went on with renewed hope, only to find, on rounding the bend, that same all-pervading darkness before him and above him. Still he kept on, every bend bringing renewed hope, only to mock him with the darkness and the soft echoes of his despairing footsteps.

Suddenly, Nipper came to a dead stop. At that awful moment the actual truth flashed in upon him that he had somehow taken the wrong turning and wandered off into one of the branch tunnels. Once realising this he did not stop to question if it were correct or not. He simply turned and sped off in the opposite direction, his weakness giving way to panic.

For another ten minutes Nipper stumbled frantically on. Sometimes the roof of the tunnel came so low that his head crashed against the hard surface, and he had to crouch down. At another time he floundered down two or three steps, rudely cut in the chalk, which he had scarcely noticed in his rush. He tried to keep the truth from himself, but eventually it became stronger and stronger. The fact was he had lost himself in this awful labyrinth, far underground!

Then, to add to his horror, the feeble light of the torch slowly faded away into the impalpable blackness of night. The battery had given out! It was hard, in his weakened state, not to give way to that panic of fear which he felt in his heart. The youngster was full of grit and pluck, and fought hard to keep his end up, but he was almost at the end of his tether.

He yelled for help despairingly. It seemed as if that one dreadful cry of his had awakened a thousand devils. The echoes mocked him, rumbling and wailing in the myriad tunnels. He remained, listening fearfully, while the echoes gradually ceased. The stillness now seemed all the more oppressive. Had they really been merely the echoes of his own voice?

He strained his ears to listen, and he heard a strange noise distinctly—soft, stealthy, padding steps coming towards him. Then he heard a half-human snarl. Cold, clammy beads of sweat dripped into Nipper's eyes. He knew it was the horror that had pursued him through the wood the night before. The ghastly thing was coming towards him, softly padding down that silent corridor.

Nipper did not try to move. He was transfixed. He opened his mouth and tried to shout, but his voice only sounded in a hoarse, gurgling whisper. Then he felt that

he was raving mad. He laughed a hysterical, croaking gurgle, and sank to the ground.

For a brief moment his fevered brain mocked him with the sound of Nelson Lee's voice echoing some distance along the tunnels.

Then he remembered no more!

IT did not take Nelson Lee long to find his way back to the inn after leaving Wolf on guard at the mouth of the Dene Hole. He had never run so fast in his life before. The thought of his young assistant lying there at the bottom of the pit, crushed and bleeding, added wings to his feet. He covered the ground in record time.

The innkeeper saw him coming down the lane, and immediately beat a hasty retreat into the bar-parlour.

"Hi!" shouted the detective, breathlessly, as he got to the door of the inn. "Get me a rope! Don't stand there gaping! I want a rope!"

The innkeeper was in a flurry at once. He did not understand why this masterful man wanted a rope, but it was best to humour him as he seemed a dangerous character. He backed nervously towards the yard door.

"There's a rope in the stable, sir," he said.

Nelson Lee vaulted over the bar and rushed after him.

"Here," he said, grasping the innkeeper by the arm, "I'll get it. You go and get some food—cheese, bread, biscuits—anything. Do it up in a small parcel—and quick!"

He gave the man a push that sent him flying into the kitchen, then strode to the stable and flung open the door.

A coil of stout rope was hanging from a nail on the wall. Lee caught hold of it and turned it over; altogether there was about fifty yards.

"That ought to be enough, I should think," muttered Lee.

Then, pulling the end of the rope free, he began to tie knots along it at distances of about a yard. In about five minutes he had completed his task, and, picking up the coil of rope, flung it over his shoulder and returned to the kitchen. The innkeeper was just tying the string on the parcel of food.

"Good!" said Lee. "That will do."

He snatched up the parcel, and without a word rushed out of the house. The innkeeper gazed after him in astonishment; then he shook his head and tapped his forehead significantly.

It took Nelson Lee even less time to get back to the Dene Hole than it had taken him to get to the inn. The way was getting familiar now, and he knew the most direct path. He found Wolf where he had left him a short time before, on guard at the brink of the chasm. The animal wagged his tail by way of recognition.

Lee picked up a piece of clinker lying near by, and tied it securely to the end of the rope. Then he dropped it over the side and began paying out the rope. What a great depth the pit must be! He began to

wonder if the rope would be long enough. Then, presently, the rope began to sag and he knew that the clinker had touched the bottom.

Lee glanced round. About half a dozen yards away was a stout fir tree. He backed towards it, letting the rope run through his hands as he moved away from the pit. He had just sufficient for his purpose. Flinging the end of the rope round the trunk of the tree, he tied it securely, then leant his weight against it to make sure that it would hold

little way down the opening. He paused a moment and shouted, "Nipper! Nipper!" and waited until the echoes died down. But no Nipper answered.

What ought he to do? Had Nipper lost himself down here in this loathsome place? It was too dangerous to penetrate any farther into the labyrinth.

Suddenly, Nelson Lee thought of Wolf, and hurried back to the pit-mouth. He began to scale the rope. It was harder work going up than coming down, but the knots



Advancing along the subterranean passage, Nelson Lee came across an inert form stretched out on the ground. Flashing his torch upon it, the detective found himself staring at the white, upturned face of Nipper!

him. Then, satisfied, he tied the parcel of food round his neck, took one more glance round, then lowered himself over the chasm.

"Good dog, Wolf! You stay here," said Lee, and began his descent into the pit.

He found his task quite easy; the knots in the rope gave him a good grip and prevented his hands from slipping. Down he went, lower and lower. The mouth of the pit gradually became smaller and smaller, until presently it was merely a faint, luminous patch overhead.

He was just wondering if he would ever reach the bottom, when suddenly he felt his feet touch the solid earth. He glanced about apprehensively. He flashed his torch around. Where was Nipper? There was no sign of him. And yet, when he came to examine the soft ground he found footprints, made recently, about Nipper's size.

He stared about him again. Ah, what was this? A tunnel running into the earth. Had Nipper gone along there? With the aid of his torch the detective crept cautiously a

gave him "a good hold. Presently, he emerged again at the surface, puffing somewhat from his efforts, and with the skin chafed from his knuckles, but otherwise unhurt. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs with fresh air.

"You're going down there, Wolf," said Lee, pointing to the gaping pit.

The dog wagged his tail excitedly, as much as to say:

"I knew you'd want me. I'm ready."

Nelson Lee began hauling up the rope until the clinker appeared again. Then he undid it, and, taking a scarf-pin from his pocket, made a sling for Wolf. Fixing it securely round the dog's body he lowered him down the pit. Presently, the rope sagged, then followed a series of jerks. The detective smiled to himself. Wolf was already trying to free himself to follow up the scent.

Nelson Lee let himself down again, and a few moments later touched bottom. Wolf was struggling furiously to get loose. He

undid the fastening, but he did not let the dog go. He tied his handkerchief to his collar and held him back.

"Now, Wolf," he said. "Where's Nipper? After him, boy!"

The dog growled excitedly and began pulling Lee towards the entrance to the tunnel, then on they went into the depths. It seemed to the detective as if he were in a maze. He passed quite a number of small tunnels that branched off on the left and right. Several times it seemed that he was going over the same ground again.

Twice Wolf had deliberately turned about, and, with his nose to the ground, had gone back again. They still continued on, traversing the dark, silent corridors. They had been underground for nearly an hour now. Lee was feeling very anxious, yet Wolf still led on as if he were quite certain of himself.

Then suddenly the detective's head came in contact with the roof. He gave a sharp exclamation and went more carefully, bending his body until the roof rose again.

Suddenly Wolf stopped still. Lee flashed the light on him. The dog was standing tense and quivering, with his nose thrust forward, and the hair along his back bristling in the same strange way it had done an hour or so ago in the wood. Then he gave vent to that low, ominous growl, and began to move stealthily forward.

Wondering what had so disturbed the animal, Lee crept after him, holding tightly to the handkerchief that was tied to his collar. Suddenly, through those gloomy corridors a ghastly cry rang out!

CHAPTER 11.

Trapped in the Tunnel!

NELSON LEE stood stock-still, petrified, his ears straining painfully as that dreadful cry echoed up and down the tunnel. The next moment the handkerchief slipped from his grasp. Wolf had sprung away into the darkness with a fierce, savage snarl.

"Nipper! Nipper!" shouted Lee, madly blundering forward, with his torch flashing on the ground in front. "Nipper, where are you?"

At that instant the cavern was filled with a frightful din. A fierce struggle was going on in the darkness somewhere in front. There were ghastly snarling screams and a rushing to and fro, as if Wolf were being dragged over the hard surface of the ground.

But above the awful din rose always the deep, throaty baying of the big dog as he fought that grim, unseen death struggle in the black abysmal caverns of the labyrinth. Wolf had at last come to grips with that strange, invisible foe that he had been relentlessly following through the wood.

But Nelson Lee had no ears for this gruesome struggle. At that moment he had stumbled across a body lying close to the cavern wall, and, flashing his torch upon it,

stood staring down at the white, upturned face of his young assistant.

He knelt down beside the still form, and, placing his hand over Nipper's heart, remained thus, scarcely daring to breathe. Presently a great look of joy came into his face. Lee's sensitive hands had felt the tell-tale flutter of the heart which told him that life was not yet extinct.

Propping Nipper's head on his knee, Lee took a brandy flask from his pocket and forced some of the fiery liquid between the lad's clenched teeth.

From away down the tunnel the echoing noise of that grim, savage struggle still came to his ears; while above those demoniacal screams sounded the ferocious baying of the great dog.

A moment later Nipper's eyelids quivered and opened, and he gazed wonderingly at the detective. Then he spluttered feebly and tried to sit up.

From the end of the tunnel came the low sobbing of the great dog, but those other ghastly screams had ceased.

Presently Nipper spoke. His voice came in a hoarse whisper.

"Is that you, guv'nor?" he asked.

Nelson Lee put his hand reassuringly on his young assistant's arm.

"Yes, Nipper," he said. "It's me right enough. How are you feeling? Can you stand up yet? Let me help you."

He put his hands under Nipper's arms and pulled him to his feet. Nipper leant, gasping, against the wall of the cavern.

"How did you get here, guv'nor?" he asked slowly. "I can't think straight yet."

Lee chuckled dryly.

"Don't try to think yet, Nipper," he said.

"You'll be all right in a few minutes."

The sobbing moan of the Alsatian still sounded in the distance. Nipper heard it, too, and a shiver of fear shot through his body. Suddenly he remembered that grim shape that had haunted the passage. Lee's quick eyes noted Nipper's sudden fear.

"That's all right now, Nipper," he said reassuringly. "Don't worry. That's Wolf you can hear. I'm afraid he needs help, too. Just wait here a moment while I go along to him."

"I'm coming with you," declared Nipper boldly.

He tried to move, but he would have fallen if Lee's hand had not been there.

"Hold on to me, Nipper," he said. "That's the style. Now we're moving!"

Half supporting his young assistant, Nelson Lee moved forward in the direction from whence the sound proceeded. Presently he heard Wolf a few yards ahead in the darkness.

"Lean against the wall, Nipper," he said. "That's right. Now for Wolf."

He stepped cautiously forward, flashing his torch around. In the feeble circle of light a strange scene met Lee's eyes. Lying on the cold floor of the cavern was the monstrous hairy form of a great baboon, and sprawled across it was the body of Wolf!

Lee took a step nearer and gazed repugantly at the uncouth creature. It was dead now, yet as he looked at its gigantic limbs and its huge size, the detective suddenly understood what fearful odds the brave dog had been up against.

But what was the matter with Wolf? The dog was still sobbing softly, but he did not attempt to move. Lee knelt down and looked more closely. The Alsatian's teeth were buried deeply in the creature's throat.

So that was how Wolf had won his great fight. He had taken that awful stranglehold on the creature's throat from the commencement. And once he took that grip Wolf never let go. Nelson Lee began to have some idea now of the fury of that struggle. Driven to a frenzy by the dog's remorseless grip, the creature had tried every possible means to fling him off, rushing madly to and fro in the dark tunnel, and beating the dog's body against the hard walls and the ground.

Yet Wolf's grip had never slackened. He had won against fearful odds by sheer tenacity.

"Wolf!" whispered Lee. "Good dog, Wolf! Leave go, boy!"

But the dog took no notice of his master. Lee caught hold of his collar and gently pulled him away. The Alsatian rolled over on his side, with his tongue hanging out, absolutely exhausted. As Lee looked at the faithful animal he could not restrain the tears of gratitude that came into his eyes.

He stooped over the bruised animal and felt his body. Fortunately no limbs had been broken, but poor Wolf had been through the mill, and his coat was ripped and torn and covered with blood. Very gently Lee lifted the big dog in his arms and stumbled back to where he had left Nipper.

"Nipper," he whispered. "Wolf has had a rough house. I shall have to carry him for a time. Let's get out of this. Can you manage to hold on to me?"

"I can manage all right now, guv'nor," said Nipper, "but I'm mighty hungry and thirsty."

"I've got some grub, Nipper," said Lee, "and we can find water along here. But let's get away from this place first."

They made their way slowly down the tunnel until they came to a wider one, and there Lee stopped where some water trickled down the walls, and put Wolf down.

"Get busy on this grub, Nipper," said Lee, handing him the parcel, "and you'll find this water quite clean. There's a pool on the ground here, and it's well filtered through the chalk."

The detective soaked his handkerchief in the water and began to bathe Wolf's bruised body. The animal was slowly recovering from his exhaustion, and licked his master's hands in gratitude. At last the dog took a long drink of the refreshing water and started to lick his wounds.

"You'll do!" said Nelson Lee. "Gallant old veteran!"

He turned to Nipper, who was munching stolidly in the darkness, as if he had never eaten before.

"Don't eat them all, Nipper," he laughed. "Save a little for Wolf. I expect he's hungry."

"Right you are, guv'nor," said Nipper. And Lee noted with a feeling of satisfaction that the words sounded more like Nipper's old self. "I won't eat the lot, but, gosh, I am hungry! How did you manage to get down the hole, guv'nor?"

"By a rope, of course. That's why I'm in a hurry to get back. It'll be good to breathe the fresh air once more. Ready?"

"Yes," said Nipper.

"Right. We'll talk when we're clear of this. Wolf, good dog! Which way, Wolf?"

Poor Wolf was still in rather a shaky condition, but he was still game, and knew what was required of him. Lee did not have to hold him back this time, however. Wolf was too tired to do more than patter on silently just in front of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

So they wended their way back through the maze of those dark, tortuous passages until at last they saw that faint patch of light ahead. A few minutes later the three of them came into the circle of light cast by the yawning mouth of the pit.

Nelson Lee gazed up at that great circular shaft, then he rubbed his eyes and looked again. Yes, he was right. The rope had gone. Somebody had hauled it up from the top. They were imprisoned in that appalling subterranean chasm.

CHAPTER 12.

Free!

"**T**HOUGH you said there was a rope here, guv'nor?" queried Nipper.

"It's gone!" Nelson Lee gasped.

"That means that they know we're here."

"Rats in a trap," observed Nipper huskily. "And it's my fault. I reckon I lost my head last night when that baboon chased me through the wood."

"Let's hear all about it," said Nelson Lee.

They compared notes, and even when they had finished, their knowledge was not greatly increased.

"We have at least laid the ghost that has apparently terrified the Denesford folk," said Nelson Lee. "But why should Baron Rodanoff keep a brute like that running wild?"

"He wasn't running wild at first, guv'nor," said Nipper. "From what I could see through that window the brute was unmanageable, and escaped. They were slashing at it with a whip."

"Granted. That sounds feasible," said the detective. "But it doesn't explain why the baron kept the brute at all."

"It would make a fine watch dog, guv'nor."

"I was thinking the same thing. If the real Jimmy Stone is in that house he would not escape very easily. Neither could anyone get in to rescue him. But the baboon is dead now. I wonder if they know that. Someone has evidently found the rope, and they must guess we are down here, Nipper. We've got to get out of here. I don't want to starve down here and I don't want Baron Rodanoff to capture us."

"Well, guv'nor," said Nipper thoughtfully, "I don't hanker after going in those passages again; but that baboon got in somehow, and I'm ready to swear he never came down by way of this pit."

Nelson Lee sat down to think it out. He and Nipper had got as near the truth as was humanly possible to do, but they were not strictly accurate. The baboon did belong to Baron Rodanoff. He had captured the animal when it was quite young on a big game expedition in Africa, and had brought it to England and taken it to Denesford when he bought the big house. His servant, a man named Mason, looked after the house and the animal.

But the baboon had grown bigger and bigger until it became a danger. The baron had often considered the advisability of having it done away with until he had occasion to find a more secure prison for Jimmy Stone. Then the baboon came in handy as a sentinel. Only Mason was cruel, and when he had had too much to drink he was inclined to use the whip too much. The baboon had rebelled under the lash and had broken out of the house.

Dismayed, the baron, Dulac and Mason had given chase through the wood. Nipper had seen them in the dim light without fully understanding what was taking place. Baron Rodanoff, however, had tripped over a root and had stunned himself. His revolver had exploded as he fell, and thinking that he was trying to shoot the baboon rather than let it escape, the other men had promptly fired at every shadow.

In the end they had missed the baron, hunted around till they found him, and had carried him back to the house, not daring to remain out in the woods any longer with that brute waiting to pounce out on them from behind every tree. After all, no one in the neighbourhood knew there was such an animal in the county. They would have to trust to luck.

After breakfast the next morning, however, the baron instituted a search for the missing animal and gave the men orders to shoot the brute on sight. He even forced Dykes, the Soho murderer, to help. And it was Dykes who came to the Dene Hole and found the rope dangling there, noticed the tracks of a man and a big dog leading from the village. Dykes immediately had visions of himself on the gallows, sent there by Nelson Lee. Therefore he had pulled up the rope to make sure the detective could

not get away. The baron knew nothing of it until later in the day.

In the meantime, Dykes was panic-stricken. He cared nothing about the baboon or Jimmy Stone. He was a murderer, and the man who could and would force him to pay the penalty of his crime was down the Dene Hole. Dykes raced back to the house for explosives. He meant to make short work of the meddling Nelson Lee and his infernal dog. And he would do it before Baron Rodanoff could interfere.

NELSON LEE was already retracing his steps along the tortuous passages far underground with Wolf and Nipper.

They had not gone more than a hundred yards, however, when the sudden noise of an explosion shook the cavern, then followed the sound of falling earth and debris.

Nelson Lee and Nipper stood still with blanched faces until the sounds ceased.

"The fiends!" muttered Lee savagely. "They've blown in the mouth of the pit. We were only just in time, Nipper. Come on!"

The detective blamed Rodanoff for that fiendish piece of work, but Rodanoff knew nothing of it until the roar of the explosion brought him to the spot to find Dykes chuckling with triumph. Then the news came out. The baron merely shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"I couldn't have done it so coolly," he remarked. "Still, that is the end of Nelson Lee. I only wish the baboon could be got rid of as easily. I am not anxious to have too many inquiries round here."

But Nelson Lee was still alive and following Wolf through the maze of tunnels through which they had passed before. They were compelled to go very slowly for Lee's torch was giving out. But there was hope. They must find how the baboon had got into the labyrinth, and that would mean freedom for them.

Eventually they approached the spot where Wolf had put up such a splendid fight. The dog was still suspicious of his old foe and moved very stealthily, with his hair bristling, as he made his way towards the body of the brute lying in the cold and silent corridor. Nipper could not repress a shiver of fear and repugnance.

"Now," said Lee. "I wonder if Wolf will pick up the scent?"

He stooped down and patted the animal.

"Good old fellow," he said. "Which way now, Wolf?"

Wolf cast an appealing look at his master, then sniffed listlessly at the floor. He pattered on a little way, and then began smelling again. This time he did not lift his head, but continued his way silently up the tunnel with his nose to the ground.

"I believe he's picked it up," whispered Lee. "Poor old chap! It's a shame to overwork him. But it must be done."

They held on in silence for a time. Wolf was evidently following the scent, although he did not betray his usual excitement. It was clear that he was not leading them in and out of those tunnels on a wild goose chase. Suddenly Nelson Lee stopped still, listening intently.

"Did you hear that noise?" he asked Nipper.

Both stood straining their ears. In the distance came the low muffled beat of the waves on the long line of the shore.

"The seal!" cried Lee. "Come on, Nipper. We're almost free!"

They went on again. Sometimes the noise of the breakers sounded loud and sometimes far away. At times they lost it altogether. Lee knew that they must be pursuing an erratic path owing to the wandering of the baboon in the labyrinth. But it was best to trust to Wolf. Sooner or later the scent must lead them to the exit.

Suddenly on rounding a bend in the tunnel the boom of the waves rose to a crescendo. The seashore was close at hand. Hurrying forward, Lee and Nipper rounded another bend and gave a gasp of great relief and joy. In front of them was a great gap of luminous blue light, and a glorious current of pure sea air swept inward.

They drew in their breath and filled their lungs with a sigh of satisfaction. It was like wine after the fetid atmosphere in which they had been imprisoned for so many hours. They climbed up the steep slopes towards the opening, and a few moments later were standing at the entrance to the cave. Before them stretched the sea, with its long line of foam-flecked billows breaking on the shore, and above reached the vault of the sky ablaze with light.

They were free once more!

BY noon that day Nelson Lee and Nipper with Wolf arrived in London. But before starting on that motor ride the detective had scouted round the grim house where the baron was hiding, and had actually succeeded in getting a glimpse of the real Jimmy Stone through the blind of one of the rooms. For this reason he hastened back to town.

This case was by no means straightforward. Sir Vrymer Fane would not thank Nelson Lee if he barged into that house, arrested all the inmates, rescued Jimmy Stone, and thus caused a floodlight of publicity. Unfortunately whereas the affair of Jimmy Stone was purely a diplomatic matter which the Foreign Office wanted kept secret, the Soho murder was in a different category. Therefore, Nelson Lee went back to London to seek instructions from Sir Vrymer Fane. There must be a way of rescuing Jimmy Stone, deporting the baron and his confederates, and bringing the Soho murderer to justice without the public ever learning of the diplomatic dangers that lay behind it all.

They drove straight to the Gray's Inn Road where there were several things that required attention. Lee's first care was for Wolf. The dog had been badly mauled in his great fight in the tunnel, and there were two or three very nasty wounds. When the dog had been made comfortable and Lee and Nipper had enjoyed their lunch they busied themselves making their plans and visiting Sir Vrymer Fane and the officials at Scotland Yard.

The telephones wires were kept busy, and even Miss Laura Valentine was dragged in to help, which she did eagerly, when she knew that at the end of it all Jimmy Stone would be restored to her.

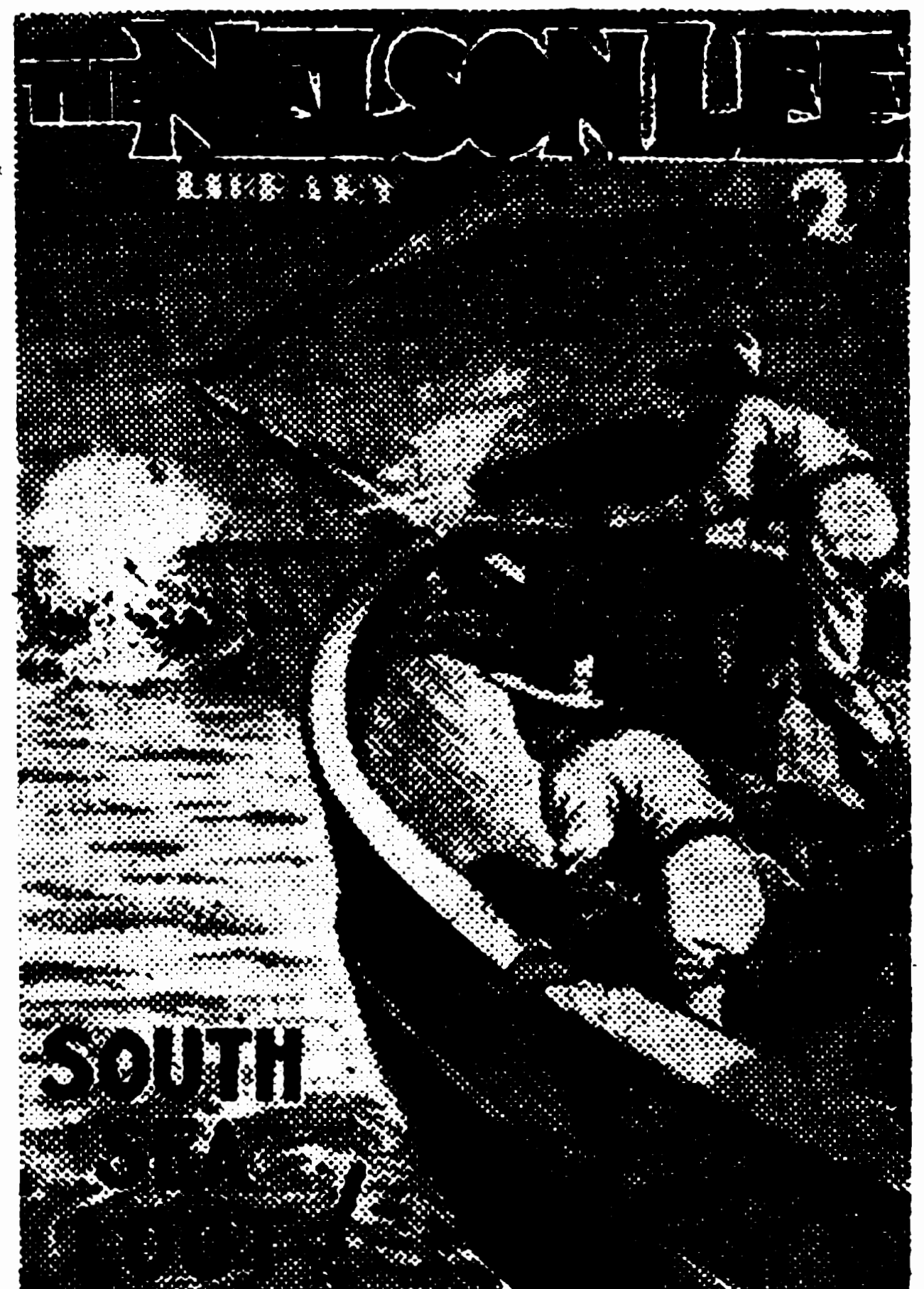
She got into touch with the baron by means of a message sent to the Imperial Club and invited him to dinner. Curious as to the reason for this, the baron accepted the invitation. He felt secure enough. Jimmy Stone was safe in the house at Denesford, and Nelson Lee was dead at the bottom of the Dene Hole. He reckoned he had nothing to fear.

CHAPTER 13.

Rodanoff Gets a Shock!

AS Nelson Lee strode again up the aisle of Dalgretty's sumptuous dining-room he could not help contrasting his present position with that of a few days previously, when he had last dined with the actress at the self-same restaurant.

THE BEST ON THE BOOKSTALLS



OUT NEXT WEDNESDAY

Then he had seemed nowhere near a solution of the mystery with which he was grappling. All the issues had seemed confused and unrelated. Certainly he had never for one moment doubted his ability to pull through with the task which Sir Vrymer Fane had assigned to him under such strange circumstances. Yet that he should now, after the short lapse of a few days, be on the eve of releasing the famous King's Spy and thereby justifying Sir Vrymer Fane's trust in him seemed almost too good to be true.

The detective entertained not the slightest doubt that in a few short hours at the most he would be bringing the real Jimmy Stone back to London, safe and sound. A big touring car was outside the restaurant, and Bradley, the Scotland Yard inspector, and Nipper and six men were inside waiting. Nelson Lee had delayed attempting the rescue for the simple reason that he wished to involve the baron in a great anti-climax. Baron Rodanoff was no ordinary criminal who could be tracked down and punished by the usual methods. In his way he was just as courageous and resolute as was Jimmy Stone, for the two men played the same big game in the secret and hidden undercurrents of European politics.

Sir Vrymer Fane had expressly stated that he wished no publicity to be given to the drama in which Lee had played such an important part. It must remain for ever but one more of those secret intrigues of those who pull the strings of international affairs.

For these reasons Lee had taken it upon himself to administer a bitter pill to the proud and haughty baron. It was a little personal triumph which he could not bring himself to forego. He had felt a sneaking admiration for the baron until that last apparently treacherous act of his in blowing in the mouth of the tunnel. Lee did not know that the baron was not responsible for that. He could only regard it as a fiendish piece of work.

These were the thoughts that were surging through Lee's mind as he wended his way towards the table at which the actress was already sitting awaiting him.

"Ah, Mr. Lee!" she said. "I am dreadfully anxious to know what you have to tell me. Your 'phone message simply set me furiously thinking. I am all at sixes and sevens. Please satisfy my curiosity."

"I certainly will," said the detective, sitting down beside her. "But first of all, how long have we to talk before Baron Rodanoff arrives?"

"He promised to be here at seven, Mr. Lee."

"Well, we have just twenty minutes, so I will fire away. The most important thing which I have to tell you is that I have discovered the whereabouts of Mr. James Stone."

The actress caught her breath.

"Mr. Lee," she said in a low voice. "Is that really true?"

"Yes, it is really true. In fact, I promise to bring him to London within a few hours, or, at any rate, early to-morrow morning."

"It all seems like a dream," exclaimed Miss Valentine. "My mind is too confused to frame any questions. But then I shall see him soon—very soon now. And he is quite well? But where is he? What is the meaning of it all?"

The detective laughed softly.

"I am going to let Mr. Stone have the opportunity of answering all those questions when you meet him," he said. "I am sure he will be able to answer them much better than I can. But you know that his work is very important, and that he lives behind the screen, as it were, of the ordinary, everyday affairs of life. It was because of this fact and also that he had undertaken a very delicate diplomatic mission, that led to his abduction."

"Then he has been abducted?"

"Yes, and is being forcibly detained. But I am off to secure his release directly I have seen Baron Rodanoff."

"But what has Baron Rodanoff to do with it?" asked the actress in surprise.

Nelson Lee gave a dry laugh.

"Don't you remember our bet, Miss Valentine, on the last occasion we dined together here?"

"Yes; but that was to do with the Soho affair."

"Precisely."

"Then you have won, and Baron Rodanoff owes you one hundred pounds?"

"He will do very soon, unless I have made a great mistake," said Lee.

The actress was about to reply, when happening to glance across the room she saw Baron Rodanoff approaching.

"Here comes the baron," she whispered.

Baron Rodanoff came across the carpeted floor with an air of preoccupation on his handsome face. The detective's back was turned towards him, and he did not trouble to look too closely at this third member of the party.

He was frowning heavily, as if some incident had caused him irritation and annoyance.

As a matter of fact, the cause of this look of annoyance was a telegram which at that moment was crushed in the pocket of his dinner jacket. It was from Dulac and was in code, of course, and to the effect that although the hunt for the missing baboon was still going on at intervals, no news of the brute had been received, and what was more extraordinary, no one in all Kent seemed to have discovered that the savage beast was roaming wild and free.

"It's a mystery to me," the baron told himself. "And it's a worry. If only I can hold James Stone a prisoner for one more week Great Britain will have lost her chance

on the Continent, and there might be war, which my people want. One never knows."

Except for the mystery of the baboon he was playing a safe game now, and a few more days would see it brought to a successful conclusion.

Baron Rodanoff shrugged his shoulders, and dismissing the subject from his mind, bowed to the actress.

"You have met this gentleman before, Baron Rodanoff," said Miss Valentine, as Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

Baron Rodanoff turned affably to the detective with a bland smile of welcome.

The next instant his face went livid and then turned grey. He swayed violently and clutched at the back of the chair for support. Then with a superhuman effort he had recovered his usual sang-froid.

"I beg your pardon," he said, turning politely to the actress. "Just a sudden twinge of my old complaint. I hope I have not alarmed you."

"Shall we help you to a chair?" said Miss Valentine, greatly distressed at what she thought was a sudden attack of illness. "I am so very sorry. Perhaps you will take a little wine?"

"Yes, I will take a little wine, thanks," said the Baron, sitting down rather heavily. "But it is nothing, I assure you. Do not distress yourself. I am quite well now."

He turned to the detective and stared him straight in the eyes. He was quite composed now, although the pallor still hung about his face. Nelson Lee could not but admire that iron self-discipline which had enabled him to carry the thing off so well.

"It is just these little attacks, Mr. Lee," he said, "that remind one that one is getting old. You, doubtless, are immune from such trifling ailments of the flesh."

Nelson Lee's lips curled ironically.

"Well, you certainly did your best this morning to make me immune from all earthly troubles," he said quietly.

Baron Rodanoff regarded Nelson Lee with a puzzled expression for a moment. Then he leant across the table and spoke in a low voice.

"I do not quite understand that last remark of yours, Mr. Lee," he said. "Do you refer to the blowing-in of the pit-mouth?"

"Exactly," said the detective.

"Then, Mr. Lee, believe me when I say that, as far as I am concerned, I had nothing to do with it. I did not order it to be done, and knew nothing of it until I heard the roar of the explosion."

Nelson Lee looked searchingly into the face of his opponent, as if he were probing into his mind. Then that last infamous act was not sanctioned by the Baron? He was not responsible for it?

Either it was a pure accident, or else one of his men had taken the responsibility upon himself to make sure that Nelson Lee and Nipper should never come out of the pit alive.

But it had been no accident, for he had plainly heard the explosion. Then it must

have been the ruffian who had committed the Soho crime. Dykes was the one most likely to benefit by Nelson Lee's death.

Well, at any rate, his hours were numbered. Bradley, the Scotland Yard man in charge of the Soho murder investigations, would soon have him under arrest.

"I take your word for it," he said eventually. "I am glad, Baron, that you have cleared yourself of that outrage. It hardly seemed worthy of you."

The Baron was about to reply when Miss Valentine, who had been following the conversation with the utmost astonishment, interrupted.

"Whatever are you two whispering about?" she asked. "Really, you seem both to have been involved in some mysterious intrigue."

"As a matter of fact, Miss Valentine," remarked Lee, with a laugh, "I was about to remind the Baron of the bet we made on the last occasion when he dined here. I think, Baron, that in a very short time you will be owing me one hundred pounds."

Baron Rodanoff shot a look of keen inquiry at the detective. He had an uncomfortable feeling that Nelson Lee was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse.

He had now recovered from the first shock of surprise that he had felt at meeting him here in Dalgretty's, of all places, when he believed him to be lying dead at the bottom of the Dene Hole. How he had escaped that fate was a mystery he would solve later.

But the important question now was how much did this calm, dispassionate man know of his schemes? What was to be his next move?

Was he really concerned with this Soho crime, or did he know that James Stone, the King's Spy, was a prisoner at the house at Denesford? Baron Rodanoff was not sure of himself at all.

"What exactly do you mean by that, Mr. Lee?" he asked. "How should I owe you a hundred pounds?"

"But you surely have not forgotten our little bet with regard to the Soho murder, Baron?" said the detective sarcastically.

"Not at all, Mr. Lee! I remember it perfectly well. I think your opinion was that the crime was connected in some way with diplomatic affairs."

"Precisely, Baron Rodanoff."

"While I maintained that it was a simple case of robbery."

"Yes!"

The Baron hesitated, and seemed disinclined to continue. But Nelson Lee would not let him escape.

"Go on!" he said quietly.

"I further maintained that if you were right in your theory, and there was a deeper motive behind the crime, it would not be discovered until the information was too late to be of any use. I think I was willing to stake a hundred pounds on that."

"You were not only willing, Baron, but I accepted it as a bet."

"Yes, Mr. Lee. I do not deny it. But I do not see your argument. You have yet to prove your case."

The detective took out his watch. It was just seven-thirty. He got up from his seat.

"You will excuse me, Miss Valentine," he said. Then, turning to the Baron, he added: "I am just off now, Baron Rodanoff, to prove my case, and I shall prove it beyond all question and argument. We may yet meet again. Good-night!" And without another word Nelson Lee left the dining-room.

Baron Radonoff bit his lip, and gazed after the retreating figure of the great detective with a look of mingled anger and bewilderment on his face. What did he mean, he wondered, by that last strange remark? How much did he know? Was he going to Denesford?

He turned to the actress.

"Perhaps you will excuse me, too, Miss Valentine," he said. "I also have an appointment."

He bowed low and hurried after Nelson Lee.

CHAPTER 14.

The Baron Beaten!

OUTSIDE Dalgretty's, Nelson Lee found Sir Vrymer Fane's touring car, with the engine just ticking over, ready to start at a moment's notice. The men in the car were all in plain clothes, and Lee recognised most of them. They were all used to working silently and swiftly in the inner affairs of the Secret Service, and could be relied upon in an emergency.

He had already given the driver instructions where to go, and the car jerked forward directly the door had closed behind him. His dramatic meeting with Baron Rodanoff had given Nelson Lee a sense of keen satisfaction.

He had certainly bested him so far in this exciting struggle against time; and in a few hours now he hoped to be able to wash his hands of the trust that he had voluntarily taken upon his shoulders. The detective leant back against the upholstered seat, and, closing his eyes, began reviewing the events of the evening.

There was nothing that the Baron could do now to circumvent him. The house at Denesford was not equipped with a telephone, and a telegram sent via the village could not reach the house until the following morning. Nelson Lee had worked the thing out to the last letter, and Baron Rodanoff would have another surprise in the morning.

They were now speeding along the hilly roads of Kent. It was a fine night, and the powerful touring car was running smoothly and almost silently, taking the hills without the slightest effort. They sped on and on until at last they passed through Denesford. Some ten minutes later, as they were running along the road that led down to the beach, Lee told the driver to slow up, and they slowly approached the house without showing any lights.

When they were within a few hundred yards Nelson Lee stopped the car altogether, and, leaving the driver in charge, cautiously made his way towards the house, with the others following close behind. Near the great iron gate, which stood at the entrance of the drive, the detective told Inspector Bradley to wait behind with the men while he and Nipper made a closer investigation.

The front of the house was in darkness, save for that one window on the second floor, where a glimmer of light still showed through the slat of the blind.

"I don't think they've had any warning," whispered Lee.

"It doesn't seem like it, guv'nor, does it?" said Nipper. "How about getting in through that window in the basement where the baboon wrenched away the bars? I don't suppose they've boarded it up."

"That's a good idea, Nipper. Let's go round and explore first."

They crept round to the rear of the building, where the level stretch of grass reached to the wood. In one of the windows on the second floor was another light.

"Be careful," whispered Lee. "Someone may be on the watch."

Stealing noiselessly along in the shadow of the wall they came upon the window through which the baboon had made its escape. The iron grating was still lying on the ground in front of the window, and nothing had been done to close up the opening. Nelson Lee and Nipper quickly climbed through into the chamber, and the detective flashed his torch around.

The floor was covered with straw. In one corner was lying the smashed lamp, with the overturned table, just as it had happened when Mason, the baron's servant, had driven the baboon to desperation by the lash of the whip, plied once too often.

"Let's try the door," said Lee. "But I expect it's locked."

He turned the handle, but as he had surmised, it was locked from the outside.

"Won't take me long to pick that," he said. "Go and fetch Bradley and the men, and I'll have it open when you get back. Be very careful not to arouse anybody in the house."

Nipper stole through the window again and departed on his errand. When he returned with Bradley and the others a little later, Nelson Lee had already picked the lock.

"Now," whispered the detective, "follow me and keep your weapons handy."

He gently pushed the door open and looked out into the passage. All was in darkness. Closely followed by the others, Lee tiptoed along the corridor, flashing his torch in front of him. Presently they came to a flight of stone steps, and after climbing them they found themselves in another corridor.

Suddenly the sound of voices smote upon Lee's ears. A little farther along the corridor a streak of light crept out from be-

neath a door. Nelson Lee uttered a low warning, crept forward a dozen paces, grasped the handle and flung the door open.

Two men, who were sitting at the table playing cards, sprang to their feet with exclamations of frightened surprise, to find themselves staring at Nelson Lee's automatic.

"Put your hands up!" he ordered.

One of the men immediately complied, but the other seemed petrified with fear, and stood staring at the detective with a blanched look on his face, as if he had seen a ghost.

It was Bill Dykes! As Nelson Lee looked at his terror-stricken face he knew who it was who had blown in the mouth of the Dene Hole.

"That's your man, Bradley," he said.

Inspector Bradley went up to Dykes and clapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists before he could recover from his fright and surprise.

"I arrest you on a charge of having murdered Joe Crick at Soho, last Monday," he said. "Anything you say will be taken down, and may be used as evidence against you."

But Bill Dykes was incapable of saying anything. He could only gaze at Nelson Lee with his eyes staring out of his head.

"One of you stay with Bradley," said Lee. "The rest follow me."

They went on up another flight of stairs, and were just going along the second-floor corridor, when the door opened at the farther end, and Dulac came out. He stood stock still at seeing Nelson Lee and his companions advancing towards him, quite overcome with amazement.

"Hands up!" shouted Lee, rushing at him.

But before he could get near enough Dulac had turned and sprang back into his room. Lee grasped the handle just as the key was turned in the lock from the inside.

"Doesn't matter about him," he said. "Our man's in the front of the house. This way!"

They hurried to the left and raced down the passage to a door on the right. Nelson Lee tried the handle. It was locked. He tapped gently on the door.

"Who's there?" asked a voice, and footsteps approached from the inside.

Nelson Lee heard the key turn in the lock; then, with a quick twist, he turned the handle and flung his weight against the door. The door shot open, sending the man the baron had stationed there as sentry sprawling to the floor.

"Just see to him!" said Nelson Lee to one of his men, and turned to the man who sat in the farther corner of the room, and who had calmly closed the book he had been reading as if nothing had happened to get excited about.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Stone," said the detective.

"Jove! Mr. Lee!" said the other, rising to his feet with some difficulty. "I should like to shake your hand if you will be good enough to remove these handcuffs."

JAMES STONE, the King's Spy and Courier, was rescued, and Sir Vrymer Fane could not thank Nelson Lee enough. For that matter, neither could Miss Laura Valentine, the famous actress.

But Jimmy Stone had little time in which to marry the actress. He was sent off post haste to the Continent to tackle the business which Baron Rodanoff, on behalf of his secret employers, had wished to prevent.

The baron and his men, being guilty only of a diplomatic offence, were simply kept in custody, but well treated, until Jimmy Stone had done the work the Government required of him. As soon as the news of his success came through the baron and his confederates would be allowed to go out of the country. Sir Vrymer Fane pledged his word on that.

But it was different with Bill Dykes. He had to stand his trial for wilful murder, and the verdict was never in doubt for a moment.

"I think Bradley carried that through quite well, Nipper," said Nelson Lee one morning.

They were having breakfast in their rooms some time later, and the detective had been reading the account of the trial of Bill Dykes for the murder of Joe Crick at Soho.

"You mean that he didn't drag us, and Jimmy Stone, and the baron into publicity," said Nipper. "Well, considering that it was you who really found the murderer and gave Bradley his opportunity, he ought to be jolly well grateful. But I see that Dykes has got away with it, more or less. He says it was a row over money and he hit harder than he knew and didn't intend to kill. He's got twenty years, but he deserves hanging. After all, it's not his fault that we are not lying stark and stiff at the bottom of that beastly hole now. The jury didn't take that into consideration."

"Well, naturally. They didn't know about that, Nipper."

They went on reading in silence for some time.

"By the way, guv'nor," said Nipper presently, "what's happened to that chap who pretended he was Jimmy Stone, suffering from loss of memory? Didn't he get it in the neck?"

"No. He was only a cat's-paw, Nipper. We found out all about him from Professor Bailey's finger-nail analysis; made inquiries at the docks, and found that he had been missing from his vessel for about a week. Remarkable likeness to James Stone, though. The baron happened to come across on that same vessel—that's how he met him. But the fellow is an inveterate drug fiend. He's

(Continued on page 44.)

The FIGHTING HEAD



Handforth on the Trail!

HANDFORTH was in a thoughtful, silent mood at bedtime; and for once, Church and McClure did not "twig" the real reason.

They knew that their leader was suddenly fired with the determination to be the Remove's chosen man to battle for the Kingswood Belt, and they knew that he had been out for a run that evening, in the rain. And they took it for granted that his thoughtful condition was occasioned by a realisation of the hopeless task he had taken on.

Hence his unwonted moodiness at bedtime. He undressed and got into bed without exchanging more than half a dozen words with his chums.

"Tired, old man?" asked Mac, sympathetically.

"No, fathead!" retorted Handforth.

"I thought, after your run in the rain——"

"You shouldn't think—your constitution can't stand the strain," interrupted Handforth. "Why can't you chaps dry up, and let me get to sleep?"

"Well, we hope you'll get on with your training all right, and we wish you luck," said Church handsomely.

"Oh, that!" growled Handforth.

"Wheren't you thinking of the boxing contest?"

"Why should I think about it?" retorted Handforth. "Haven't I already told you that I'm going to lick Lawrence? Why ask silly questions? The result of that fight is a foregone conclusion!"

And Handforth rolled over in bed, and prepared himself for sleep. Church and McClure did the same—but now they were beginning to wonder. Perhaps their earlier suppositions had been wrong.

—Of E. S. Brooks' Popular School Story!

OF ST. FRANK'S!

James Kingswood, who has very original ideas on running a school, has made himself a popular favourite as headmaster of St. Frank's. But E. O. Handforth thinks that he is leading a double life—that he is connected with a gang of crooks. So when Handy discovers the Head is to make a nocturnal visit to a derelict cottage, he determines to trail him.



As a matter of fact, Handforth was thinking of his queer encounter with Mr. Kingswood at the tumble-down cottage. And he remembered, too, that the Head had planned to go back to that cottage to-night—late.

Handforth meant to be there!

He recalled every word of the little note which Mr. Kingswood had left in the cottage: "All right—will come again late to-night—and shall expect to find the stuff here.—J. K." A significant enough message! What was the "stuff" which Mr. Kingswood expected to find?

From the very first Handforth had entertained the deepest suspicions against the stalwart headmaster. He really hated doing so, because he had a great respect for Mr. Kingswood. He could not bring himself to believe that the Head was actively mixed up with crooks. It was Handforth's theory, in fact, that the unfortunate Head was being forced, against his will, to engage in some unlawful enterprise.

"I'll save him!" muttered Handforth, with sudden fire. "By George! He's a decent chap, and it's a rotten shame to see him in this mess! I'll probe this mystery to the bottom, and save Mr. Kingswood from his enemies!"

"What's that?" came a mumbling inquiry from Church.

Handforth started.

"Go to sleep!" he growled. "I thought you and Mac had dropped off long ago."

"My hat! Were you talking to yourself, then?" asked the sleepy Church, in wonder.

"I wasn't talking at all, ass!" snapped Handforth.

Church subsided, and Handforth waited impatiently. It seemed ages to him before his chums were breathing regularly in healthy slumber. With infinite caution, Edward Oswald crept out of bed, slipped into his clothes, and stole out of the little dormitory.

He had already decided upon his plan of action. It would be a wrong policy to watch the Head's House for Mr. Kingswood to leave. He might have left already—he might get out by the back door, or a window. Handforth could not possibly watch the whole House.

But by going to the ramshackle cottage, he would be in a much better position. He could get there first, and conceal himself somewhere within.

The night was fittingly dark for such an adventure. Heavy clouds obscured the sky,

but, fortunately, there was no rain. A fairly strong wind blew inland from the sea, and it sighed and moaned through the trees.

Handforth made up his mind, years ago, that when he grew up he would be a detective. A really great detective. Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee, all rolled into one. And there was nothing like early training. The more detective work Handforth could do at school, the better. And when that detective work involved the saving of the headmaster himself from desperate criminals—well, it was an enterprise worthy of his powers.

In this spirit Handforth took a short cut across the meadows towards the wild backwater of rural country which stretched away behind Bellton Wood. He kept a sharp look-out on the way—in case he should accidentally run up against Mr. Kingswood, or some of the members of the gang.

But for all the sign of human life that Handforth saw he might have been the only human being in this little rustic world.

Thus he came, at length, to the half-ruined cottage. He wasn't sure whether the place had the reputation of being haunted, but he thought it fairly likely. It was just the kind of cottage, he thought, that would be likely to have mysterious happenings.

With cat-like tread—although it is hardly probable that any self-respecting cat would have broken the weeds underfoot as noisily as Handforth did—he approached. Perhaps it was fortunate that he paused, near the overgrown hedge of the cottage garden, to take a careful survey of the scene. For it was while he was standing motionless there, concluding that he had never seen such a mysterious-looking building in all his life, that he heard from a belt of trees near by the unmistakable sound of a whistle.

"My only hat!" breathed Handforth, quivering. "A signal!"

It was certainly an unusual kind of signal, for the whistler was indulging in an old-fashioned ballad melody. And presently he came in sight, from beyond the trees—and Handforth recognised the burly, bulky figure of the Fighting Head.

Mr. Kingswood was not whistling now. He approached the cottage boldly, making straight for the tumble-down doorway.

He entered, and then followed a sudden crashing fall, accompanied by a gasping shout. After that—silence.

Handforth strained his ears, but a stronger gust of wind than usual whistled noisily through the neighbouring trees, and drowned every other sound. And from the cottage there was that same ominous silence. Not a light was showing. The place remained uncannily quiet.

"A trap!" panted Handforth, his imagination getting into high gear. "Somebody was waiting in the cottage—and when the Head walked in——"

So dreadful was the picture which Handforth conjured up in his mind that he was startled by it. Perhaps more than one man had been waiting—perhaps two or three. The Head hadn't had a chance.

The amateur sleuth could stand the strain no longer. Throwing all caution to the winds, he ran to the cottage doorway and peered within. The interior was black and silent.

"Mr. Kingswood!" called Handforth, in a cautious undertone.

No reply.

"Is there anybody here?" demanded Handforth, raising his voice.

Still no reply.

He was about to plunge in when a thought occurred to him. Mr. Kingswood had met with disaster because of the darkness. But Handforth—like all efficient detectives—had prepared himself with a powerful electric torch. He pulled it out of his pocket, and pressed the switch.

A beam of white light shot into the untidy space which had once been the cottage's front parlour. Grass and weeds grew up between the crevices of the ancient bricks which lined the floor.

But Handforth saw nothing of this. His attention had become riveted upon something else—and he stared with fascination and horror. For there, on the bricks, almost at his feet, was an imprint of a hand—and it was wet and red in the torchlight.

The Red Stains!

"O H, my goodness!" panted Handforth faintly.

He was more shocked than he could express. He had suspected from the first that Mr. Kingswood had met with some misadventure. But this! There could be no mistaking the grim significance of that blood-red handprint.

"Mr. Kingswood!" yelled Handforth hoarsely.

Only the echoes of his own voice came back to him.

"They've got him—they either stunned him, or killed him!" he muttered feverishly. "Then they must have dragged him out at the back, and—and—— Yes, that's it! They're dragging him down to the river!"

There was no back door—only an empty space. Handforth dashed through, but presently when he came to the river, there was not a sign of any living soul. In some mysterious way, Mr. Kingswood had been spirited off. And now Handforth turned his thoughts in another direction. In this moment of crisis he was not so self-reliant as he had been.

"Help! That's it!" he muttered. "I've got to fetch help!"

It was natural that he should dash for the school. Arriving there out of breath, it was rather a wonder that he did not dash up and clang the firebell, or yell at the top of his voice and arouse the whole school.

What he actually did was to get into the Ancient House through the window of Study D, which he had left unlatched. He raced upstairs, burst into the dormitory, and awoke Church and McClure by the very flurry of his entrance.

"Great Scott!" gasped Church, sitting up in bed. "It's—it's Handy—fully dressed! What's the matter?"

"The Head!" gurgled Handforth. "Quick—get dressed—come!"

"But what's the matter?"

"Dead!"

"What!" gasped Church and McClure in one voice.

"The Head—murdered!"

"You're mad!" said Church horrified. "How the dickens can you be sure——"

"I tell you, I heard it—and then I saw the imprint of the hand," said Handforth, gulping! "An imprint—in blood! Oh, my goodness! It's—it's awful!"

"Well, it's a jolly good thing you came straight to us," said McClure, who knew exactly how Handforth's imagination could run away with him. "Buck up, Churchy—we'd better get into some togs and go with him."

"That's it!" said Handforth, who was now slightly calmer. "While you're getting dressed I'll rush down to Old Wilkey and wake him up. Then he can ring up the police, and——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Mac. "We don't want Old Wilkey in this—or the police, either. Churchy and I will go with you, old man!"

"But you don't realise how serious it is," ejaculated Handforth. "The Head—killed! At least, if he wasn't killed, he must have been badly injured!"

"You're altering your yarn already," said Church, with a sniff.

"Those crooks got him——"

"Which crooks?"

"The gang that he had been mixed up with, of course!"

"What gang?"

"Oh, my hat! You make me tired!" said Handforth. "I didn't see the rotters, and I didn't hear them, either. But when the Head went into that cottage he was whacked on the skull with a cudgel or something. I tell you I saw the bloodstains on the floor. I'm going to ring up the police——"

"And let the police claim all the credit?" interrupted McClure cunningly. "That's a fine thing to do!"

"Eh?"

"Far better for us to go with you, Handy, and then we can rescue Mr. Kingswood ourselves," went on the Scottish junior. "Ready, Churchy? Good! Let's go!"

They did not allow Handforth to talk. They whirled him downstairs, and soon they were all out in the open, and proceeding at the double for the ruined cottage. Handforth's chums were by no means satisfied that Mr. Kingswood had met with disaster. Before they informed any-

body else—particularly the police—they meant to have a look at the scene themselves.

And as they went, Handforth found time—and breath—to explain how he had got on the track, and how he had waited for the Head to arrive.

"The very fact that Mr. Kingswood came to the cottage proves that I was on the right scent!" he argued. "Why should the Head come to that cottage? Why should he leave such notes? I tell you there's something squiffy about the whole giddy business!"

Church and McClure, for the first time, began to feel uneasy. Handforth had been talking earnestly, and his story had the unmistakable ring of truth. He had exaggerated, of course, but his yarn, in the main, was a recitation of fact.

"Here we are," muttered Church suddenly. "We shall soon know now!"

They were in sight of the cottage, and approaching, they found nothing to occasion them any alarm.

"Sure you weren't dreaming, Handy?" murmured Church, pausing.

"Don't be an ass! I'll show you!" said Handforth.

Producing his electric torch, Handforth switched it on.

"No sense in messing about here," he said fiercely. "Let's rush the place!"

They ran in and the first thing they saw was that ominous handprint still gleaming red.

"There you are—look!" panted Handforth.

There were some other stains, too—in one place a considerable pool. And suddenly McClure sharply sniffed the air.

The next moment he ran forward, bent down and, to Handforth's horror, touched that dreadful stain with one of his fingers—and then applied the reddened finger to his nose.

"You hopeless fathead!" said Mac witheringly.

"Eh?"

"You imbecile!"

"Look here——"

"You dud detective!" roared McClure.

"What do you think of yourself? Dragging us out of bed, and getting us here on this idiotic wild goose-chase!"

"But—but I don't understand!" gasped Handforth feebly. "All that blood on the floor——"

"Blood!" roared McClure. "This isn't blood, you chump!"

"Not—not blood!" burred Handforth, in a voice which was almost a squeak.

"It's paint—common or garden red paint!"

"Whaaaat!"

"You and your bloodstains!" proceeded McClure witheringly. "Why didn't you look over against that wall?" he added, pointing. "Flash your light there now!"

Handforth, like a fellow in a dream, did so. And he was staggered, and mortified, to see a dirty old paint pot tipped over on its side. Near it and farther away were two pools of the same crimson stickiness.

"Well I'm blowed!" said Handforth blankly. Church was grinning.

"Well, it's lucky we didn't arouse the giddy school!" he said fervently.

Handforth wilted visibly, but he soon re-

covered from the shock, and within a minute or two he was practically himself again.

"Well, thank goodness the Head hasn't been murdered!" he said coolly. "But this doesn't make any difference to my suspicions, my sons."

"He's hopeless, Mac," said Church wearily.

"It's clear enough that the Head came in here, in the dark, and he stumbled over that paint pot," went on Handforth. "That's what I heard and, naturally, I mistook the commotion for something else. I thought the Head had been attacked. While I was waiting against the hedge, he must have gone out by the back way."

"I'm not satisfied that the Head was here at all!" said McClure.

"But he was," insisted Handforth. "And how do you account for it? Why should Mr. Kingswood come here, in the middle of the night, falling over paint pots, and making me believe that he had been murdered? And what about that dispatch-box? It's gone! Don't you see? He came here, and he took that dispatch-box away! There was something in it."

"What could have been in it?"

"The stuff!" said Handforth impressively.

"The which?"

"Don't you remember what I told you about that note?" continued Handforth. "The Head said he would come back later and he expected to find the stuff. Well, he must have found it."

"And you came along—and found a mare's nest!" said Church coldly.

At the same time, both Church and McClure were compelled, with justice, to admit that the circumstances were queer. It was not their business, of course, to spy into the headmaster's affairs; but it did seem strange that he should engage upon these nocturnal jaunts.

And at last Handforth's chums were ready to acknowledge that Mr. James Kingswood, in addition to being a fighting man, was something of a mystery man.

The Head Hits Out!

QUITE unconscious of Handforth's activities—which was just as well for his peace of mind—Mr. Kingswood was walking back towards St. Frank's by way of the main road.

Whatever the name of his recent mission, his thoughts were not dwelling on it. He was rather amused, than otherwise, by his misadventure with the paint pot.

He recalled something he had seen near the river during daylight. One of the villagers had been busy with a rowing boat, which was propped, bottom side up, near the stream. And the villager had been engaged upon the task of giving the boat a new coat of vivid paint. Evidently the man had decided, owing to the rain, to abandon his project—and he had put his paint in the cottage, rather than carry it all the way home.

"He might, at least, have placed it safely out of the way, so that nobody would stumble over it, as I did," mused Mr. Kingswood. "Well, he will have to pay for his carelessness by buying some more paint. I don't think that I am called upon to shoulder any responsibility."

During the course of his night jaunt, the Head had come out on the main Bannington Road. He was now approaching Bellton, which lay dark and sleeping in front of him.

Suddenly a figure, which had been leaning against a gateway, lurched out upon the road. He did so drunkenly, and he came reeling unsteadily towards Mr. Kingswood.

"Oh! Thought you'd get past me, huh!" came a thick, threatening voice. "Where's—money?"

"Steady, my friend," said Mr. Kingswood quietly. "You'd better pull yourself together."

"Gimme money!" shouted the other, with sudden fury.

It was very gloomy, but the Head could see that this man was no ordinary tramp. Certainly, he appeared to be much the worse for drink. He was dishevelled, too, and he must have been out in the night for some time.

"Can't get away from me, you rat!" snarled the fellow. "Where's that money? Better hand it over quiet, or—or——"

"Or what?" asked Mr. Kingswood ominously.

"I'll lay you out—that's what!" muttered the other, his voice thick.

And as he spoke he lunged out with his right. With the skill of experience, Mr. Kingswood side-stepped, allowing the fist to pass harmlessly over his shoulder.

"Dodge, would you?" roared the man. "All right! Come on—we'll fight it out!"

He attacked with a ferocity which took Fighting Kingswood by surprise. And in spite of the man's unsteady condition, it was obvious, from the very first, that he was a past-master in the noble art of self-defence. And there was something about his dim figure—something about his voice—which awoke a chord in the Head's memory.

"If you want to fight, my friend, I'll give you one!" said Mr. Kingswood grimly. "But you'd better understand, right away, that I don't give money to people who threaten me on the highway!"

Crash!

His fist, with terrific force behind it, caught the fellow on the chin, and he reeled back gasping.

But he could take his punishment well. Recovering rapidly, he charged again. It was like the onrush of a maddened bull. And the next moment the pair was going at it hammer and tongs, fighting desperately.

Crash! Thud! Crash!

Mr. Kingswood saw no reason why he should prolong this unpleasant scene. In rapid succession he delivered a right-hander on the man's ear, then a left-hander on the point of his chin, and another right-hander squarely in the centre of his chest. The fellow, bewildered by this attack, staggered back, stumbled and sprawled full length in the road.

He lay there motionless.

"I'm sorry, but you asked for it!" said Mr. Kingswood gruffly. "If you hadn't been drunk you wouldn't have threatened me——"

Then he suddenly caught his breath in.

He had gone down on one knee beside the fallen man, and he had struck a match. He could clearly see the features of the fellow now—

strong, unhandsome features, but in no way vicious or brutal.

"Kid Williams!" said the Head, taking a closer look. "Kid—Kid! What does this mean?"

He was greatly shocked. The discovery startled him—and pained him more. For the man he had knocked out was, indeed, Kid Williams, a very well-known pugilist and, to the best of Kingswood's knowledge, a thoroughly decent man. It was the Kid, in fact, who had helped Fighting Jim in his own training, at Rydehouse, his old school, before the big fight for the Amateur Heavyweight Championship of England—which Mr. Kingswood had won. Kid Williams had been one of his most trusted sparring partners.

"This is most distressing!" muttered the Head, as he hoisted the other from the road, and supported him.

Mr. Kingswood was somewhat perplexed for he knew Kid Williams as a simple, trustworthy fellow without an ounce of harm in his whole make-up. He had always found the man to be as honest as the day and, moreover, a teetotaler.

Mr. Kingswood suddenly bent down and sniffed at the Kid's face. A hard light came into his eyes, for there was no tell-tale odour of liquor. Perhaps the Kid had not been drunk, after all?

"Well, I'm not going to leave you here, Kid," said Mr. Kingswood, coming to a sudden decision. "There's something mysterious about the whole affair, and I want to get to the root of it. Come along! Think you can stand?"

But the man was more or less helpless. And the Head realised that he must have delivered a real knock-out.

With a sudden heave he got the man across his shoulder, an eloquent testimony of his strength. Then he strode off with the burden without any apparent inconvenience.

"I'm taking you up to the school, my friend," said Mr. Kingswood calmly. "I believe there's some satisfactory explanation that you can give me."

The boxer, who was only semi-conscious, merely grunted. But a little further on, recovering somewhat, he was able to carry himself on his own legs.

But he was still very unsteady. Mr. Kingswood was obliged to hold him tightly, and to steer him.

Thus they arrived at St. Frank's. The Head opened the gate with his own key, and soon they were off across the silent Triangle.

One of the windows of the East House had been pushed cautiously open, and a figure crouched there, watching.

It was Mr. Horace Pycraft!

"Oh-ho!" muttered the resentful Form-master. "So the esteemed Mr. Kingswood comes home in the middle of the night with intoxicated companions! By heaven! And that is the man who had the utter audacity to lecture me!"

From that moment onwards there was to be another amateur detective on Fighting Jim Kingswood's trail!

(Don't miss reading next week's chapters of this splendid school story. The Head causes another surprise in his efforts to wake up St. Frank's.)

The Editor's Weekly Pow-Wow! Gather Round, Chums!

MY DEAR READERS,

The other day I received a nasty shock, although, I must say, the outcome of it pleased me rather. I was going to lunch, with pleasant thoughts of a nice steak, when a terrific report rent the air, almost shattering my ear-drums, and, I must confess, making me nearly jump out of my skin. I have heard nothing quite like it since the days of the Great War. I looked round for the cause of the awful noise, and discovered it was a lorry that had back-fired on passing me.

But what I was coming to, and what astonished me at first, was the apparent indifference to the explosion of a young lad walking along in front of me, his head bent reading a periodical. He gave not the slightest start, and never even looked up.

"The story that lad is reading must be very interesting," I thought, so as I passed I glanced at the book he was reading. Then I smiled with satisfaction, for it was a copy of the NELSON LEE in which he was so absorbed.

It was some compensation for the shock I had had, and it was real-life proof of the point I have stressed again and again—that for sheer reader-interest the stories in the NELSON LEE are second to none.

NEXT WEEK'S SPLENDID PROGRAMME.

Next Wednesday's thrill-packed, book-length yarn of Nelson Lee and Nipper will, I am sure, compel your interest just as much as did the story the lad I have mentioned was reading. The title of this magnificent novel is "SOUTH SEA LOOT!"

Nelson Lee undertakes one of the most baffling cases of his adventurous career when he investigates an amazing and brutal robbery which occurs in London. A night watchman is murdered, and the only article stolen is a grisly skull, a relic which had once adorned the hut of the chief of a tribe of South Sea head-hunters. Why should the thief want to steal a skull? For what reason could he want it? These and other problems Nelson Lee has to solve, and you'll enjoy immensely the workman-like way the famous detective goes about the case, and the thrilling adventures in which he and Nipper are involved in the South Sea. Don't miss this yarn.

Then there is another grand instalment of our topping school tale—"WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!" The contest for the Kingswood Belt, which the Head has put up for the best boxer in the lower school at St. Frank's, has aroused keen interest among the juniors—so much so, that even Archie Glenthorne decides to go into training for the competition.

Now we'll have a few hearty laughs from the jokes which have earned for their senders handsome prizes.



Letters to the Editor
should be addressed
to NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Lady (to bus conductor): "Do you stop at the Grand Hotel?"

Conductor: "No, ma'am, not on my salary."

(W. S. Nairn, 8, Timpron Street, Edge Hill, Liverpool. A Penknife.)

Coach: "I can only see one obstacle in the way of your

getting the wicket every time."

Enthusiastic Bowler: "And what's that?"

Coach: "The batsman."

(R. Marsh, "Southfield," Bloomfield Road, Bath, Somerset. A penknife.)

A Frenchman visiting his English friend's house noticed on arriving that his friend had a very savage-looking dog, which barked furiously as he approached.

"The dog won't hurt you," said the Frenchman's friend. "There's a proverb 'Barking dogs don't bite.'"

"Yes," said the Frenchman, "I know ze proverb, you know ze proverb, but ze dog—does he know ze proverb?"

(E. Paget, The Shaubury School, Shustoke, nr. Birmingham. A Penknife.)

A city man, out for a walk in the country, was crossing a meadow in which there was a fierce-looking bull.

"I say," he shouted, turning to a farm-hand in an adjoining field. "Is this bull in here quite safe?"

"Well," returned the farm-hand, "I reckon he's a lot safer than you are just now. Run, sir, run!"

(E. Waddell, Nishi Suma, Naka ike noshita, No. 19, Kobe, Japan. A Grand Prize.)

Our 10,000 Gift Plan Result.

Our recent huge coupon-collecting scheme, in which many thousands of Fine Gift Books were offered, proved a tremendous success, and as a result readers all over the country are now enjoying the topping books they have won.

We congratulate them on the many magnificent totals of points scored—prizes were awarded for totals ranging from 32,700, sent by H. Leggetter, of Luton, down to 3,000—and we only regret that it is not possible to give all their names in the paper. All prizes for Home readers were, however, sent off promptly, and also personal letters from the Editor to all unsuccessful entrants.

The remaining 500 of the Prize Books offered are, of course, being reserved for Overseas readers—for whom there is a later closing date—and these will be awarded and sent as soon as possible after that date.

THE CASE of the KING'S SPY!

(Continued from page 37.)

in a home for mental deficient at the present moment."

"Let's hope he stops there," said Nipper grimly. "But how about Baron Rodanoff? Any news of him?"

"Yes, Nipper, and of Jimmy Stone. Jimmy has succeeded in his task and there will not be war in Europe just yet. The baron and his confederates were escorted out of the country two days ago. He's on the Continent now, and he has sent me this."

Nipper took the slip of paper with a look of wonderment.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's a cheque for one hundred pounds! What does it say here? 'With Baron Rodanoff's compliments.' Now, what the dickens does he mean by that?"

"Well, we had a little bet together, Nipper, and I happened to win. It must have been a shock to him. He was arrested that night as he stepped out of the doorway at Dalgretty's on to the pavement. He knew, then, that he had lost. But, in his way, he's not a bad sort, and was only doing the job his country paid him to do, just as Jimmy Stone does for us. He's honourable enough to pay his debts, at any rate. I hope I meet him again some day."

But Baron Rodanoff did not deem it advisable to visit England again.

Jimmy Stone returned, however, and was given a long holiday, which he began by marrying Miss Laura Valentine, the famous actress. The newspapers made much of the happy occasion, because Miss Valentine was a popular favourite. They did not guess that a far more exciting drama lay behind that item of news.

Nelson Lee and Nipper attended the ceremony, and made their present to the happy pair.

When they returned from their honeymoon, Jimmy Stone, the King's Spy, and his beautiful wife, paid Nelson Lee a special visit to thank him and Nipper for all they had done. Nor did they forget Wolf; but the only present that the gallant Alsatian really appreciated was lump sugar from the fingers of the lovely actress, after which he stretched himself on the rug at her feet and went to sleep. As far as they could tell, Wolf had forgotten the "huge baboon" he fought in the subterranean passage, and they were not anxious to revive the memory of the nightmare.

THE END.

("SOUTH SEA LOOT!" — powerful thrill-packed novel of clever detective work and South Sea adventure—in next Wednesday's issue. Order your copy now.)

GROSE'S, Ludgate Circus, LONDON.

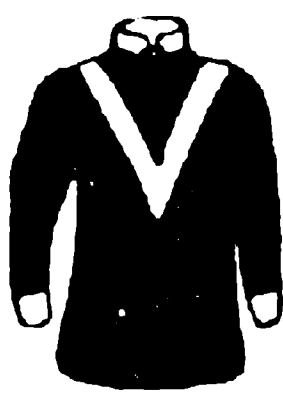


FOOTBALL JERSEYS

All Colours and Designs.

12/9 per doz.

SEND FOR ILLUSTRATED LIST POST FREE.



GEO. GROSE & CO., 8; New Bridge St., London, E.C.4

XMAS CLUBS

SPARE TIME AGENTS WANTED
For oldest, largest and best club.

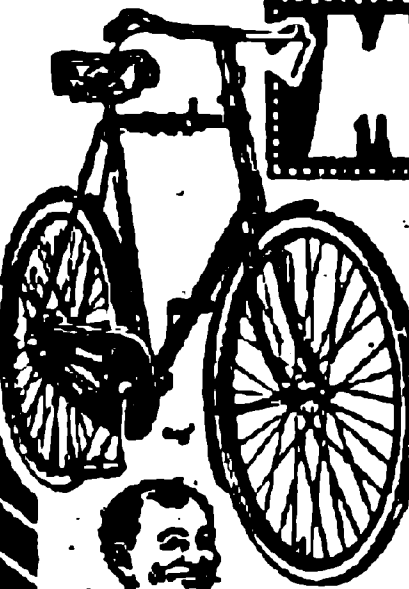
Chocolates, Toys, Fancy Goods, etc. Over 700 articles. No outlay—Excellent commission. Write for Art Catalogue and full particulars.

SAMUEL DRIVER, Ltd., Burton Road, LEEDS.

STAMMERING. Stuttering. New, remarkable. Certain Cure. Booklet free, privately.—**SPECIALIST,** Dept. A.P., 28, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.

MAN-SIZE My Two Illustrated Books show a simple, quick way to be TALLER and STRONGER. Write TO-DAY for FREE copies and BE MAN-SIZE. **CARNE Institute, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, S. W.**

Be sure to mention **The NELSON LEE LIBRARY** when communicating with advertisers.



MY GREAT OFFER

Write for my free Bargain Lists of the best ALL BRITISH cycles. 14 DAYS' APPROVAL. CARRIAGE PAID. Cash price £3 10s. or terms. All accessories FREE. Value 21/-.

O'Brien IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST CYCLE DEALER, 17 COVENTRY

2

WEEKLY

BE TALL. Your Height increased in 14 days, or Money Back. Complete Course, 5/-. Booklet free privately.—**STEBBING SYSTEM,** 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.

AGENTS WANTED to sell **PRIVATE CHRISTMAS CARDS.** Magnificent collection of beautiful Cards. Sample Book free. Highest commission. Valuable prizes. Apply Denton Ltd., Dept. D, 29, Acerrington.

BLUSHING, Shyness, "Nerves," Self-consciousness, Worry Habit, Unreasonable Fears, etc. cured or money back! Complete Course 5/-. Details.—**L. A. Stebbing, 28, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.**

BE TALLER! Increased my own height to 6ft. 3ins. Treatment **£2.2s.**—Details 2d. stamp.—**A. B. M. ROSS,** Height Specialist, SCARBOROUGH, ENGLAND.

Handsome Men Are Slightly Sunburnt.—"**SUN-BRONZE**" remarkably improves appearance. **1/6, 2/9.** 7,000 Testimonials. (Booklet, stamp.)—Sunbronze Laboratories (Dept. A.7), Colwyn Bay, Wales. (Est. 1902.)

All applications for Advertisement spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.