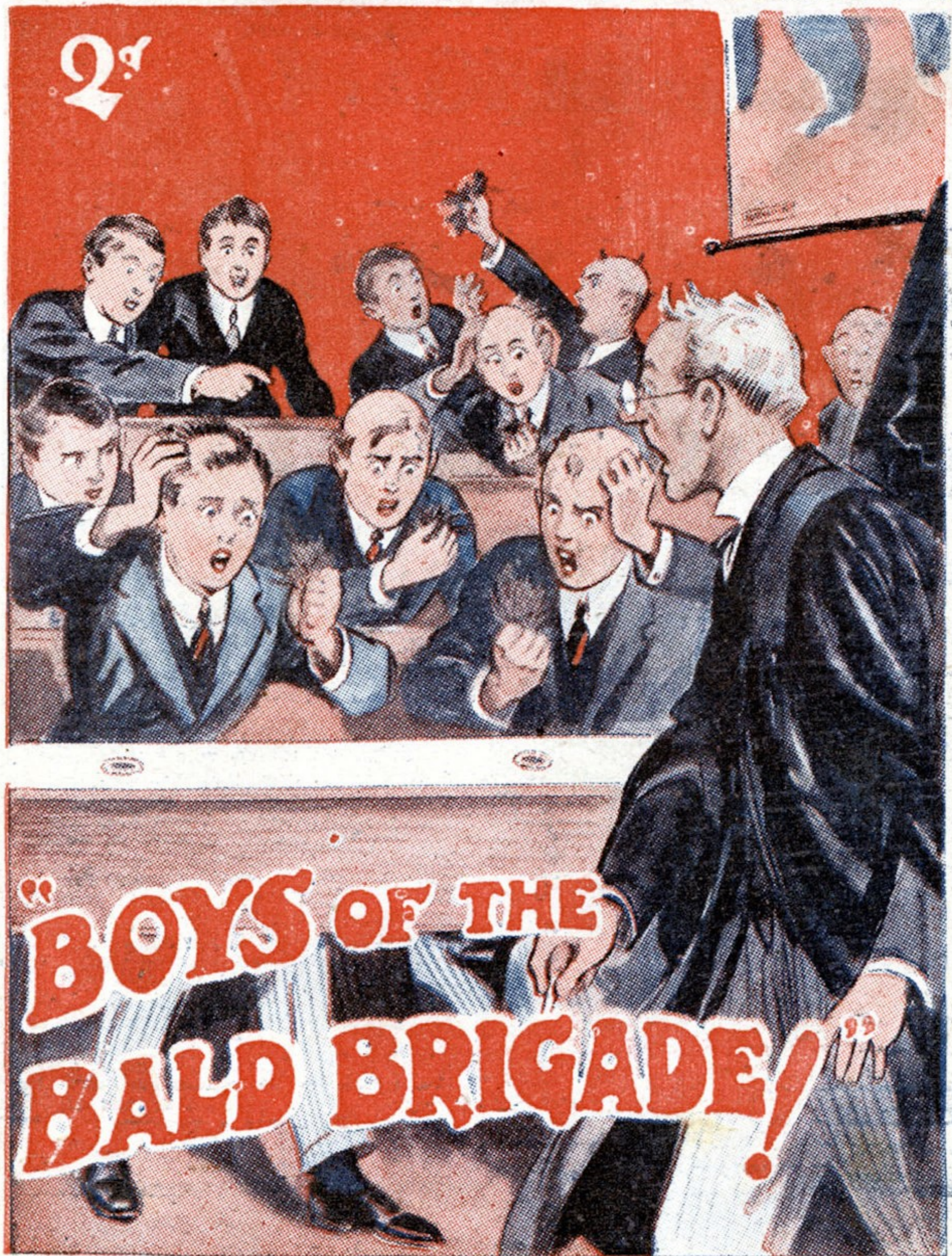


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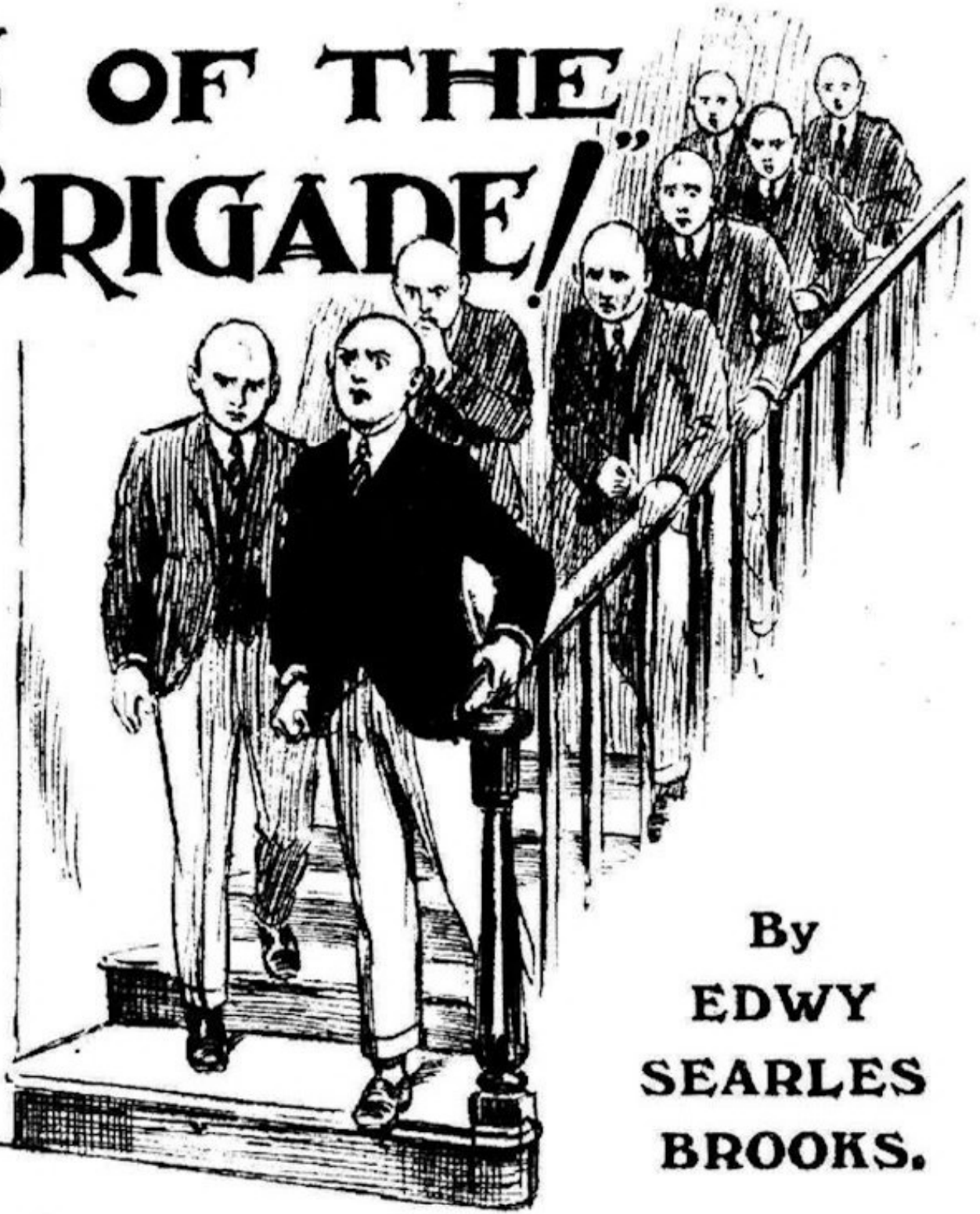
**"BOYS OF THE
BALD BRIGADE!"**

An amusing incident from the rollicking school yarn complete in this issue.
New Series No. 20. OUT ON WEDNESDAY, June 7th, 1930.

**"GLOSSO" FOR
GLOSSY HAIR!**

The Carlton Gang use it. Their hair goes glossy, true; then it goes completely, leaving them——

"BOYS OF THE BALD BRIGADE!"



By
**EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS.**

CHAPTER 1.

The Mysterious Bottle!

"**B**OOZE!" said Handforth, pretending to be shocked.

He was standing in Study C, in the Ancient House, and Church and McClare, his faithful chums, were with him. The great Edward Oswald was shaking a well-wrapped parcel, which he had just found on the table.

"Don't be so nosy, Handy," said Church. "That parcel's addressed to Parkington, isn't it?"

"I can read, can't I?" retorted Handforth tartly. "But what's Parkington doing with suspicious bottles like this, which come through the post?"

Kirby Keeble Parkington was the leader of the twelve juniors who had only recently come from Carlton College, and who were known as the Carlton Gang. Study C was their stronghold, being occupied by K.K. himself, Harvey Deeks, and Clement Goffin, the red-hot trio.

Ever since the arrival of this lively bunch the other Removites had had their work cut out to keep their own end up. Japes were the order of the day. The rivalry was intense—all the more intense because the warring factors belonged to the same House.

"Booze!" repeated Handforth sternly. "And because it's booze, it's our duty to bag it!"

He didn't really think that bottle contained the liquid he so crudely referred to as "booze." K.K. wasn't that sort of fellow. In fact, K.K. was a sportsman. All the same, this parcel was herewith boned.

"We'll soon see what's in it," said Handforth as he ruthlessly removed the upper part of the wrapper. "And if it's something good, we'll take it along and give those Carlton chaps a treat. Nothing like being generous."

He didn't trouble to unwrap the parcel completely, and soon the top part of a good-sized bottle was revealed. There was a patent clip cap, and Handforth soon had it off. Church and McClure watched with interest. After all, this thing might be good.

"Smells all right," said Handforth, taking a sniff.

"Lime-juice?" asked Church.

"Blessed if I can tell what it is!" went on Handforth, frowning. "Smells a bit like a mixture of port wine, furniture cream, ammonia, lavender, and onions."

"It must smell good!" commented McClure, grinning. "But why mess about with the stuff? Why not taste it?"

Handforth took a swig, and at that moment K. K. Parkington & Co. arrived in the doorway. They were just in time to see Handforth screw up his face in agony. He let out a violent bellow, and sent a vast spray across the room.

"Yow!" he howled. "I'm poisoned!"

"Visitors, what?" said K.K. genially as he came in. "Make yourself at home, Handy. I mean, don't mind us. Just sampling my new chixir, I see. Well, there's nothing like— Whoa! Mind what you're doing! Don't spill it!"

He rescued the bottle in the nick of time, and Handforth, gasping and spluttering, dabbed his handkerchief to his mouth. His lips were looking strangely oily.

"You—you dangerous fathead!" he said thickly. "What do you mean by having poison like this in your study?"

"Nobody asked you to drink it," retorted Parkington. "You've probably got yourself into a nasty mess now. Before you know where you are, you'll have hair growing all down your throat!"

"Hair!" yelled Handforth.

K.K. removed the rest of the wrapper and displayed the label. Handforth goggled at it. There was a picture of a very smart young man on the label, with his hair gleaming like an electric fire, and with a kind of halo all round his head. But it was the words which attracted Handforth's attention most:

"DR. THATCH'S GLOSSO FOR THE HAIR!"

"What?" babbled Handforth. "Have I drunk some of *that*?"

"Considering that it's my parcel, and that this is my study, don't you think all this fuss is a bit offside?" asked K.K. politely. "You're perfectly welcome to some of this Glosso if you like—but don't use it internally!"

"Filthy stuff!" snorted Handforth. "Give me that bottle! I'll chuck it in the dust-bin! What the dickens do you want with hair-restorer?"

"You don't understand, sweetheart," said K.K. gently. "Dr. Thatch is an uncle of mine, and this is his latest achievement. Glosso is the most marvellous hair tonic on the market, and if you only use it regularly you'll never have scurf or dandruff or bald spots."

"Better give some to Pieface, then!" said Handforth sourly. "His whole head is a bald spot except for a fringe round the edge."

It was unfortunate that Mr. Horace Pycraft, the Remove master, should be passing along the corridor at that moment. Handforth was notoriously careless. The study door stood wide open, and Handforth's voice was hardly a gentle zephyr. It wafted out into the corridor like a full gale, and hit Mr. Pycraft in the ear.

"Handforth!" thundered the Form-master, spinning round like a top and darting into Study C. "How dare you? How dare you say that my whole head is a bald spot?"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Did—did I say that, sir?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Pardon me, sir, but surely you are in error?" said K.K. soothingly. "If my recollection serves me correctly, Handforth merely referred to somebody named 'Pieface.' And that isn't your name, sir."

Mr. Pycraft seemed to find some difficulty in breathing. His lower jaw worked, and his Adam's apple popped in and out convulsively. It was true that Handforth had used the term "Pieface," but Mr. Pycraft was perfectly aware that that disrespectful term was his own nickname. Yet K.K.'s manner was so utterly disarming that it was difficult to accuse him of ragging.

"That's right, sir," said Handforth, giving Parkington an approving glance. "I was talking about some chap named Pieface. This hair-restorer stuff, sir—guaranteed to put hair on your bald spot in no time! As I was saying to these chaps, if you take some of it—"

"What?" spluttered Mr. Pycraft. "Then you were referring to me?"

"I—I— Oh, my hat!" said Handy, with a gulp. "I mean— That is— To tell you the truth, sir—"

"Handforth, you will write me one hundred lines for gross impertinence!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "As for this stuff," he added, glaring at the bottle of Glosso, "you had better throw it away, Parkington. All such concoctions are useless."

And Mr. Pycraft stamped out of the room, leaving K.K. sadly shaking his head.

"What's the use?" he asked, appealing to the others. "I save this human vacuum flask with my masterly diplomacy, and all he can do is to give himself away!"

CHAPTER 2.

Handy's Brilliant Wheeze!

TEA in Study D was a melancholy meal. Edward Oswald Handforth began by refusing to eat anything, nursing his wounded pride in sullen silence. Then, when Church and McClure got a bit careless, thinking that he was in earnest, he scoffed all the toast. But it didn't improve his temper much.

"First I'm nearly poisoned, then I'm giving

a hundred lines!" he said grumpily. "And all through those silly Carlton asses!"

His chums remained silent. It was safest in the circumstances.

"If only we could think of some wheeze!" went on Handy thoughtfully. "Why should we let these Carlton idiots have the laugh over us? Just before tea I heard that the whole Gang is going to sample that Glosso stuff in the morning. They're going to startle us by coming downstairs looking like that chap on the label!"

"Then they'll look pretty funny," said Church, with a grin. "I believe there's something wrong with that label. That chap's hair is a bit green."

Handforth leapt up with such force that the table rocked.

"That's it!" roared Handforth. "A wheeze!"

"What—what——" gasped Church.

"Green hair!" exclaimed Handforth. "All we've got to do is to make some green dye, then we mix it with that Glosso, and when those Carlton chaps come down to-morrow their hair'll be as green as grass! They'll look like ferns!"

"Easy!" said Church. "The trouble is, they're not blind."

"What do you mean—blind?"

"Well, if you make that stuff green, don't you think they'll see it?"

"Yes, that's true," admitted Handforth, with a frown. "That's awkward. Still, can't we make some special stuff? Something transparent that'll turn green later? By George! That's it! I'm off to the lab!"

"Hi! What about your lines?" yelled Church as Handforth dashed out.

"Blow the lines!" retorted Handforth.

Thoroughly imbued with his latest idea, he shut himself up in the laboratory. Fortunately for himself—and everybody else—there was not much chance of his being disturbed just now.

It was rather a wonder that Handforth emerged in one whole piece.

He got fooling about with all sorts of chemicals and liquids, mixing them to test the effects, and incidentally creating a succession of extraordinary niffs. These smelly experiments he regarded as failures. For this particular job they would be useless, but he bore some of them in mind. A really good, old-fashioned stink often came in handy, and it was as well to know the formula.

However, he was now concentrated upon a dye. It had to be something special. When Handforth started experiments in the laboratory there was no telling exactly what would happen. Fellows looked in occasionally, saw Handforth at the bench, and bolted. It was safer to be at least five hundred feet away.

At last he achieved his triumph. Cricket practice was left to go by the board, and when he finally returned to Study D, Church and McClure were doing their prep. He swept in, carrying with him a vague, unpleasant odour, not unlike cabbage water—and ancient cabbage water at that.

"Open the window, Churchy," said Mac, with a sigh.

"My dear ass, it's wide open already," replied Church. "Look here, Handy, hadn't you better go and disinfect yourself? What have you been spilling on your clothes? Whenever you mess about with chemicals——"

"My sons, look at this!" interrupted Handforth, planting a two-ounce bottle on the table. "Look at it, I say!"

"If we've only got to look, it's not so bad," commented Church. "Well, what about it? What is it? Water?"

"Ha! That's just where you're fooled!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It looks like water—and it smells like water."

"We'll take your word for the smell!" said McClure hastily as Handforth uncorked the bottle.

"It's not water—but dye!" said Handforth. "Green dye!"

Church sat back in his chair and stared.

"Think we're colour-blind?" he asked tartly. "That stuff's no more green than you are!"

"Then it must be green, after all," murmured McClure.

Fortunately, Handforth had failed to notice these comments.

"That's the brilliance of my invention," he said proudly. "I've experimented with this stuff, and I've achieved a sensation. Just watch! If you don't believe me, this'll convince you."

He tipped the bottle up, and allowed one drop of the liquid to fall on McClure's neat exercise-book. Handforth wasn't particular.

"Now watch that closely," he said. "Hi! Don't rub it off, Mac, you ass! Wait to see the effect!"

"You howling idiot!" roared McClure. "This is my grammar!"

"Blow your grammar!" said Handforth. "Watch that spot! Looks like water, doesn't it? But wait!"

They waited impatiently. Then they became interested. The transparent spot was changing. It became delicately greenish, changed more rapidly, and turned into a vivid, staring green.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church. "What do you think of that, Mac? Handy is pretty brainy, after all. This certainly is a triumph!"

McClure was too full of emotion to answer. He could not forget that his grammar lesson was entirely ruined.

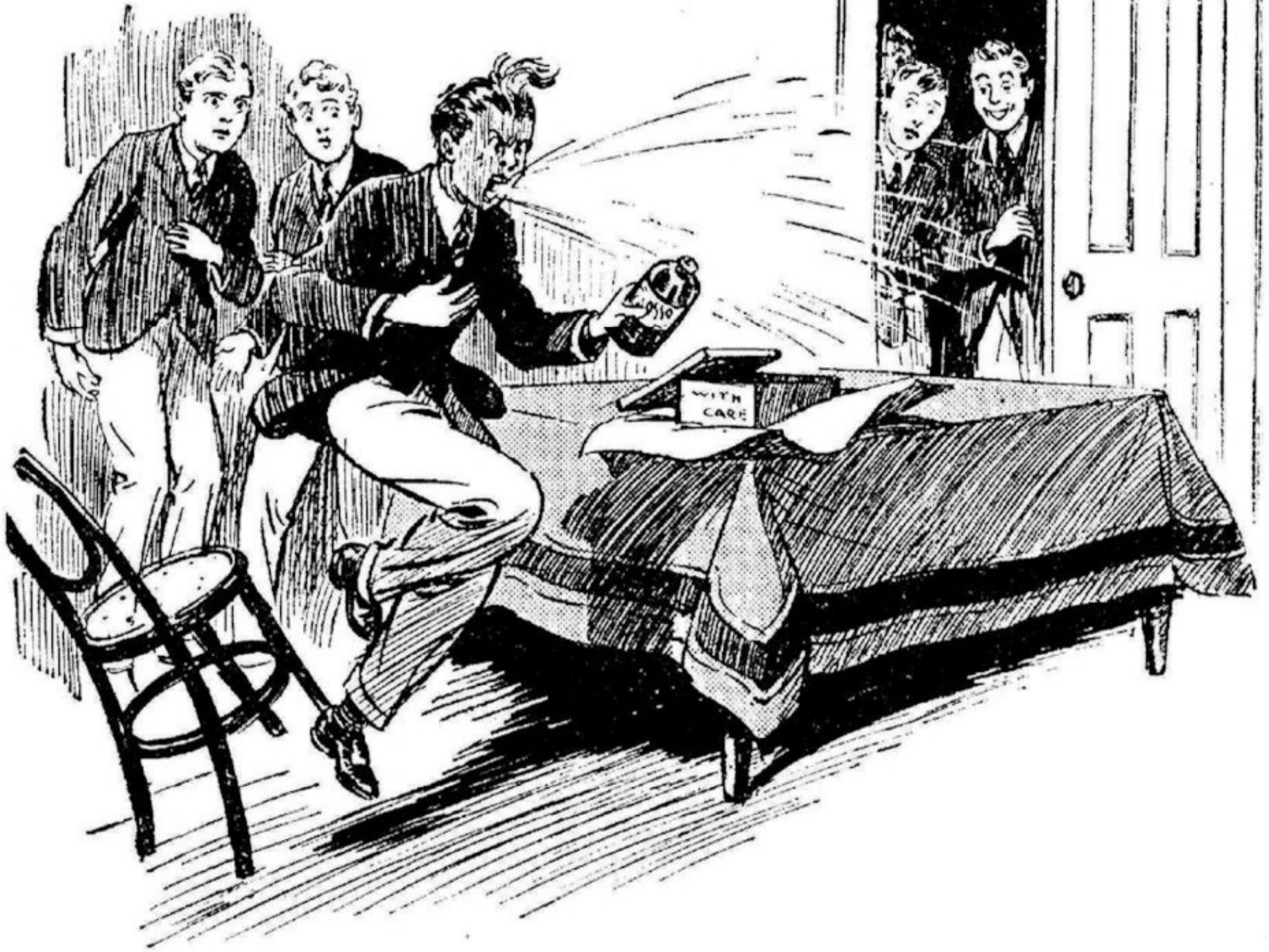
CHAPTER 3.

Waiting for Results!

HANDFORTH was delighted with his achievement, and if it hadn't been for his chums, he would certainly have given the whole game away, thus warning the Carlton Gang of what lay in store for them.

He actually wanted to dash off to the Common-room and demonstrate his "inven-

Handforth took a swig at the bottle—and then let out a terrific bellow. “Yow!” he howled. “I’m poisoned!”



tion” to the other juniors. Had he done so, he would have “let the cat out of the bag” in the first minute.

“No, Handy, you mustn’t do that,” said Church. “Let’s keep this thing to ourselves. Wait until to-morrow. When those chaps’ hair turns green, it’ll be time enough to let the rest into the secret. The joke’ll be all the better then.”

“I suppose you’re right,” admitted Handforth reluctantly. “All I’ve got to do is to add this stuff to K.K.’s patent Blotto.”

“Not Blotto—Glosso,” grinned Church.

“What’s the difference?” retorted Handforth. “And what’s up with you, Mac? Haven’t you got a word to say? Don’t you think this stuff is wonderful?”

“There wasn’t any need to swill it over my exercise-book,” retorted McClure. “Why couldn’t you have used an old piece of scrap-paper?”

But Handforth made light of such trifles, and for the rest of the evening he plotted. He wanted to get up to all sorts of elaborate dodges in order to introduce his dye into the Glosso bottle. In the end it was very easily done.

K.K., suspecting no jape, had left the

Glosso in Study C, and while he and his chums were in the Common-room, just before bed-time, Handforth and Church nipped in, and the thing was accomplished.

“Good thing somebody’s been using some of it,” remarked Handforth. “K.K. won’t notice that the bottle’s a bit fuller. By George, it hasn’t altered the scent or anything!”

They crept out and got back into their own study.

“I suppose there’s enough of that dye?” asked Church. “You used it neat, you know, and on white paper. It may not have much effect on their hair.”

“Don’t you believe it,” replied Handforth. “That dye is concentrated. I’ve added enough to work the whole thing like a dream. Ten minutes after those chumps have smothered their hair in that giddy stuff they’ll go green.”

Handforth & Co. went to bed happy. This promised to be a remarkably good jape on the Carlton Gang, and Handforth was always as keen as mustard on scoring off these boys, whom he regarded as interlopers. He had nothing against them really, but the very fact that they were always trying to usurp

his position as junior skipper was sufficient to make him their bitter foe.

He was up early next morning, and so, for that matter, were the Carlton Gang. They all went out to cricket practice, and it wasn't until after this was over that the dandifying business began. K.K. & Co. changed, washed, and came downstairs looking remarkably spruce.

"My only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Handforth, who was waiting in the lobby. "What's all this? Who's got some smoked glasses? What have you fatheads been doing to your heads?"

"K.K.'s special Glosso for the Hair," grinned Deeks. "Pretty good, eh? They say that it keeps your hair in position all day long."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne, in horror. "Really, old tomato-can, you don't mean to say that you'd go a whole day without brushing your hair?"

"Why brush it if it keeps tidy?" retorted Deeks.

"Odds ruffians and tramps!" said Archie. "Any self-respecting chappie should brush his hair at least six times during the course of the day."

And Archie staggered away, still wilting under the shock.

"My sons, now for the fun!" gloated Handforth, drawing Church and McClure aside in the Triangle. "Look at 'em! So blessed swanky that they're not even wearing their caps! Wait until they turn green!"

"We've been waiting, but nothing's happened yet," said Church.

"That stuff takes a bit of time to work, but it won't be long now," promised Handforth. "K.K.'s red hair will be a scream by the time it's turned! I wonder exactly what kind of tint it will change to?"

Oddly enough, there was no change at all. Handforth & Co. shadowed the Carlton Gang wherever they went, and before long Handforth was getting anxious. In vain he waited for the first sign.

"You chaps want anything?" asked Parkington at length. "What's the idea of haunting us like this?"

"Eh? Oh, nothing!" said Handforth hastily. "I—I was wondering if that hair-cream of yours had set yet."

"Set?" repeated K.K. "What do you think it is—jelly?"

Handforth wandered away, more worried than ever.

"Talking about that giddy Glosso, I'm not quite sure that I like it," said Goffin. "I've got a rummy sort of tingling sensation all over my scalp. I didn't notice it at first, but now it seems to be getting worse."

K.K. looked startled, and Deeks nodded.

"Yes, I've noticed it, too," said Parkington thoughtfully. "I keep on wanting to scratch my giddy head, but a fellow can't do that and maintain his self-respect at the same time."

"My head's burning," said Deeks. "It must be that blessed Glosso. No more hair preparations for me, K.K.! And the next

time you write to your uncle, tell him that his Glosso is rotten."

But the Carlton Gang were only at the beginning of their trials!

CHAPTER 4.

The Wheeze Goes Wonky!

IF Edward Oswald Handforth was worried when lessons started, Kirby Keeble Parkington and his friend were doubly so.

Handforth was thoroughly upset because his marvellous invention had evidently failed. For some unaccountable reason those Glosso-ed heads refused to turn green. The Carlton Gang worried because their heads felt too awful for words. Just before lessons they had combed and brushed their hair again, and had obtained some measure of relief. But now the irritation was getting to work again in real earnest. Their entire scalps felt on fire. It was only with the greatest restraint that they refrained from digging their fingers into their hair.

Mr. Pycraft's temper, to add to their troubles, was much shorter than usual this morning—and it was short enough at the best of times.

"Stop fidgeting!" he commanded irritably when somebody moved a foot. "Baines, take your hand away from your head! Langley, what do you mean by scratching behind your ear? Do you think you are a monkey?"

Langley, who was feeling so itchy on top that he wanted to yell, merely growled something under his breath and put his hand down. Most of the Removites were aware that K.K. & Co. were suffering, but they could not fathom the cause. Handforth was beginning to feel strangely uneasy—particularly as Church and McClure kept giving him queer looks. That stuff of his wasn't working in the right way!

Geography was the first lesson this morning, and after the Remove had listened wearily to Mr. Pycraft's discourse on the subject of the Argentine coast, they started map-drawing.

K.K. tried his hardest, but he admitted himself beaten. With one hand he made a pretence of drawing his map, and with the other he fairly clawed at his head. Within ten seconds his hair was like a mop.

Mr. Pycraft, his own hand straying, strangely enough, to his own scanty locks, glanced up. His eyes goggled. Twelve boys were frantically rubbing their heads, and their hair was in utter disorder.

"Attention!" roared Mr. Pycraft. "Parkington! Goffin! Bonner! Mayhew! What are you doing? And you other boys! How dare you scratch your heads in this disgusting manner?"

"It's some patent hair tonic we've tried, sir," said K.K. desperately. "You remember—you saw the bottle yesterday. I think somebody must have been monkeying with it."

"Monkeying with it?" repeated Mr. Pycraft, aghast.



Mr. Pycraft, turning from the blackboard, beheld the extraordinary sight of the Carlton Gang all frantically rubbing their heads.

"Well, sir, my scalp——" K.K. broke off, and stared at his hand like a fellow in a dream. "Here, what the—— Great Scott! My hair's coming out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Old-Timers, entirely unsympathetic, found humour in the situation. Parkington had a liberal tuft of his own hair in his hand. K.K. stared at it in dismay. As far as he could remember, he had hardly touched his hair, and yet this tuft had fallen out.

"What are you doing, Parkington?" demanded Mr. Pycraft faintly.

"I don't know what's happened, sir," gasped K.K. "Something seems to be wrong—— My only Aunt Matilda!"

This time he had grabbed a handful of his ample hair, and, to his dumbfounded consternation, it came right off in his hand. It wasn't a tuft, but a handful! A loud yell went up from the rest of the Form.

"Look!" shouted Teddy Long. "He's going bald!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Decks is the same!" gasped Singleton. "They're all going bald!"

Parkington's head was a sight. Where he had grabbed his hair, there was a bald patch as large as a teacup. The other members of the Carlton Gang were suffering in a similar way. Mr. Pycraft, strangely enough, was pale with apprehension; he felt for his boys deeply.

"Go!" he said hoarsely. "Go to your House at once, and see what you can do."

"Thank you, sir," chorused the Carlton Gang.

They fled precipitately, and Church and McClure gave Handforth long, straight looks. Handforth sat like a fellow in a daze. He was staring at Mr. Pycraft. Was it his imagination, or had Mr. Pycraft just pulled a large tuft of hair off his head?

In the meantime, K.K. Parkington and his frantic companions made a bee-line for the bath-rooms. K.K. was the first to plunge his head into a basinful of cold water. The relief was enormous. He swilled the water over his head luxuriously.

"My hat! This is better," he gurgled. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to know what happened to that Glosso!"

"I'm going to sue your uncle for damages!" groaned Decks from the next basin.

"Idiot! The stuff's all right," retorted Parkington. "Some funny ass has been doctoring it. Here, I say—— I've got it! Remember how Handy followed us about this morning? I'll bet he knows something about this business!"

"We'll slaughter him!" vowed Langley.

K.K., feeling soothed about the head, gave himself a final vigorous rub, and had a curious sensation of bareness. His heart nearly stood still. Not daring to put his fears into words, he groped for the towel.

That feeling of bareness became even more intense. With a fearful, sinking horror, he withdrew the towel and stared at his reflec-

tion in the mirror. A hollow croaking groan escaped him.

He was as bald as an ostrich's egg!

CHAPTER 5.

Lucky for Handy!

"HELP!" gurgled K. K. Parkington dizzily.

He beheld an atrocious-looking object. For the first tense second he could hardly credit that it was his own likeness. Bald! Completely bald! His head stood out pinkly, and he goggled at his reflection as though it were some vile apparition.

A yelp of consternation from close by made him turn his head. Deeks had just emerged from a towel, and he was staring at K.K. in dread.

"You're bald!" he gasped faintly. "K.K.! Look at yourself!"

"I've looked," groaned Parkington. "But you needn't talk! Take a look at your own head before you start criticising mine!"

Harvey Deeks gave a horrid gurgle, spun round, and removed the towel. He was an even worse sight than K.K., for he had been careless in his rubbing, and at various spots on his cranium tiny knobbly tufts of hair remained, like clumps of gorse on a golf course.

"We'll spifflicate Handy for this!" panted Goffin, who was as hairless as the rest. "He did it! Of all the filthy, caddish tricks! A jape's a jape, but this is beyond the limit!"

Not one of them escaped. That wash did the trick. By the time they had all rubbed their heads, they were bald. The entire Carlton Gang presented a sight too startling for worlds. Mercifully, however, the tingling sensation had gone. The worst was over.

"Come on!" said K.K. grimly. "We're going to have this out!"

They marched downstairs in a body. Biggleswade, of the Sixth, who happened to be in the lobby, gave the twelve juniors one look and jumped a foot into the air. He thought he was seeing things.

The Carlton Gang walked on into the Remove Form-room. The Remove gave one look, and then one yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was enough to raise the roof. Mr. Pycraft, who had been sitting in a kind of stupor for the past five minutes, came to life with a jump.

"Silence!" he commanded. "How dare you— What—what is this? Good heavens!"

Mr. Pycraft saw the Carlton Gang, and nearly had a fit. Agitatedly he clutched at the tufty ridge of hair which nestled all round the back of his head. And then he had a second shock. His own hair had come away in his hand! The Remove, watching in amazement, howled with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This—this is intolerable!" moaned the Form-master. "My hair—my hair! Help!"

Confused and dismayed, he fled. The Carlton Gang felt glad. They closed round Handforth & Co. with a grim purpose. But Handy felt that it was up to him to make a clean breast of it. Now that the laugh was over, he realised the seriousness of the situation. K.K. & Co. were in an awful plight—and would be for weeks.

"My wheeze was to turn your hair green," said Handforth feebly. "I made a special kind of dye, and mixed it with that Glosso. Honest injun, I'd no idea it would cut your hair off like a lawn-mower."

"You didn't reckon on the chemical effect," said K.K. "It's always dangerous to monkey with chemicals. I expect there was some spirit or something in that Glosso which had a reaction on the dye. The beastly stuff has withered all our hair!"

"I'm frightfully sorry!" said Handforth, with genuine regret. "Honestly, K.K., I wouldn't have done this for worlds if I had known! I'm an ass! Don't, for goodness' sake, think that I meant anything so rotten as this!"

After such a frank statement, K.K. melted.

"All right, Handy, old man," he said gruffly. "We'll let you off this time."

"You're a sport, K.K.," said the relieved Handforth. "But I can't understand about old Pieface! His hair's coming out, too!"

Kirby Keeble Parkington grinned.

"That's the one bright spot which relieves the tragedy," he said. "Old Pieface must have been getting at my bottle of Glosso on the quiet—and this beastly business has given him away! No wonder he bolted!"

When Mr. Pycraft returned, some minutes later, his head was as hairless as a billiard-ball. His lips were set, his face was pale, but there was a determined light in his eyes.

"Boys, this is most unfortunate," he said in a hollow voice. "I have just seen Dr. Brett, and he assures me that the hair will grow again. I can only assume that we have—er—unwittingly used a dangerous chemical when washing our heads. Quite—ahem!—accidentally, of course."

"Oh, of course, sir," said K.K. gravely.

"Some of us have mercifully escaped," went on the Form-master. "I—er—think, on the whole, that any inquiry would be useless. And you can rely upon me to have a private word with the headmaster to explain this unhappy event."

Evidently he had his private word, for the powers that were made no comments on the extraordinary condition of the Carlton Gang. But the Old-Timers did!

THE END.

(More lively japes between E. O. Handforth and K. K. Parkington in next week's rollicking complete school yarn entitled, "Dished, Diddled and Done!")

The COWBOY KID & CO.



Adventure No. 3: KING LOOPY TO THE RESCUE!

The Killer Snake!

LOOPY LANE, the Cowboy Kid, who had been crowned King of the Island of Bangaloola, went to the smouldering ruins of the wreck of the *Lacoma*, and gathered together a few articles he thought he might require, and then started off through the palm grove with Sheba, the she-cat, on a lead, and Kiki, the black boy, walking by his side.

The great tiger strained at the lead like an impatient dog, almost dragging Loopy Lane along. Loopy wore his hairy chaps, his spurred boots, and had his Stetson hat set sideways on his head. He wore his holstered belt with a revolver in each hip-pocket, and carried many rounds of ammunition. His gold crown, with many jewels and two great ivory horns of tusks, dangled on a cord from his shoulders. He also carried a stock-whip.

"Kiki," said Loopy as they left the scene of yesterday's battle, "I've pleased millions in the music-halls in this kit, and now the only things I've got to look at me are you and the birds. A come-down, isn't it?"

Kiki, the black boy, grinned happily. "Neber mind. You'm Keeng," he stated. "Oh, yes, I'm a king all right," answered Loopy. "But where are all my people? We haven't seen one of them since they bolted in yesterday's battle; and we haven't seen any of the enemy either."

"Me do bit of scouting," said the black boy. "Me find enemy. Keeng Loopy killum queeck with tiger cat."

"All very well, Kiki," answered Loopy, "but we might not have won the battle yesterday if the jolly old ship hadn't blown up and scared

the cannibals. Next time you and I and Sheba will have to fight 'em all alone."

As he spoke, Sheba, the she-cat, stopped her pulling and stood with bristling back, snarling at a gigantic snake which, with head raised and tongue flickering, completely blocked the narrow path. It was neither python nor boa, nor yet a rattler, but it measured over twenty feet from head to tip of tail. Its enormous head was reared as if to strike.

With a yelp of terror Kiki leapt behind Loopy Lane.

"OVER THE TOP!"

The Cowboy Kid and Sheba are on the warpath—and not even a barrier of spears can stop 'em!

"De killer snake!" he shouted.

Sheba was quivering with fear, snarling viciously, crouching as if she would spring. But Loopy did not intend to risk a fight between Sheba and the serpent. Shortening his hold on the lead, he drew the well-trained tiger to heel, then crept cautiously nearer to the deadly snake, his stock whip ready. Twice he flicked it to judge his distance, and then, as the serpent drew its head back before attacking, he flicked the great whip with his wrist so that the lash whistled as it cut through the air. He had used the whip ever since he was strong enough to hold it, and his aim was so true that he could flick a cigarette from a man's mouth without fear of hurting him.

He made no mistake now, the darting lash moving so swiftly that Kiki could not see it. But what the shivering black boy did see, as he craned his neck round the Cowboy Kid's back, was the head of the snake lying on the ground beside its coiled and still upreared body. Loopy had whipped it off as cleanly as a galloping trooper slices a lemon. The killer snake was no more. Slowly its reared neck dropped and fell, and dodging past the writhing body, Loopy led Sheba and the black boy onward.

Kiki Captured!

THROUGH palm groves and dense forests they went, Kiki telling Loopy that the way led to the big city of Bangalloola, where they would be sure to meet the tribesmen. Even when they could not see the sky for the hanging creepers and strangle-weed which choked the forest, Kiki knew the way. And when at last the forest thinned, the monotonous beat of tom-toms and the blowing of horns echoed dimly from a distance.

Loopy Lane stopped, the magnificent tiger dropping full length at his side.

"Friends or enemies, Kiki?" he asked.

Kiki wagged his head, looking very serious.

"No can tell," he said. "Keeng Loopy stay here. Kiki go and see."

He loped off noiselessly and vanished amid the tangled undergrowth; Loopy sat down by the she-cat's side, stroking her silky ears, for he calculated that he might have to wait an hour before his little black pal returned. The beating of those drums came from a mile or two away.

More than an hour passed, and Kiki was still away. Loopy began to feel anxious, and when another half an hour had gone he leaped to his feet and started along the narrow trail the black boy had chosen.

"Track him, Sheba," he cried, and at the words the tiger strained hard upon the lead, her muzzle to the trail, scenting Kiki as surely as if she had been a bloodhound. Never for a moment did she seem at a loss, and when at last they emerged upon a rocky ledge which overlooked a fertile plain, Loopy found his little black pal, Kiki.

Forty feet or so below the ridge a band of savages had made a camp. There were, perhaps, a hundred of them. Their bodies were fantastically daubed with war-paint of red and white, their faces painted into hideous masks.

Most of them were stretched or seated on the ground, and in the middle of the camp a huge fire was burning over which a great metal cauldron was hung from two great stakes. The spears and shields of the warriors were stacked in orderly heaps; near the fire were piled tom-toms and horns.

But it was at Kiki Loopy looked. The poor little black chap was roped, body, hands, and feet, to a huge stake which had been driven deep in the earth. His huge mouth was stretched in a grin of pain, and even at that distance Loopy could see that the cords cut deep in the flesh. He had been tied up in such a way that his feet were off the ground, and Loopy shivered at the thought of Kiki's agony.

"Puss," murmured the Cowboy Kid, as he made up his mind what he was going to do, "they must have caught Kiki unawares while he was spying them out. And if we don't hurry up they'll kill him."

Loopy could tell by their war-paint that these men belonged to the cannibal army from the Island of Potakeeta, thirty miles away, which he and the she-cat had routed yesterday.

Before Loopy left the rocky ledge, some of the savages piled more wood upon the raging fire, and two more with bared knives in their hands crossed to the stake and sat cross-legged on the grass each side of Kiki.

There was just himself and the trained tiger against one hundred armed warriors, but the Cowboy Kid not hesitate. Holding the she-cat well in hand, he followed an animal track from the ledge down a tangled slope, and made his final preparations behind the screen of a flowering shrub of gorgeous beauty. First he made sure that his revolvers were loaded, then he doubly tied the lead to Sheba's nail-studded leather collar. Loopy's ammunition was the same as he used for his stage performances in which he never missed a flying glass ball; it was loaded with small shot instead of bullets, but the shot would spread, and it would sting.

The Cowboy Kid looked out of his hiding-place. A chief who wore a plumed head-dress was shouting at the warriors. The bandsmen were beginning to beat the drums. Kiki's armed guards were on their feet with the glittering steel blades held over the black boy's heart.

Loopy whipped out a revolver and fired in the air. Then, as the startled warriors raced for their spears, he leapt on Sheba's back, and, holding the improvised reins he had made in one hand, he urged the tiger onward with a shout.

"At 'em, Sheba!" he yelled.

The tiger cleared the bush with a mighty bound, and, leaping onward at an incredible speed, bore down on the frightened savages.

In their eyes the striped beast was a devil, and what they thought of the Cowboy Kid who rode upon the she-cat's back must be left to the imagination. Loopy rode with the brim of his Stetson blown back flat, the jewelled crown streaming out at the end of the cord that looped from the Kid's shoulders, and his chap-covered legs and spurred heels clung to the tiger's middle as the magnificent beast bore down on the can-



The mail-clad savage charged to the attack with a mighty leap. The Cowboy Kid ducked and brought his whip into play.

nibals. Loopy fired point-blank at a little group who barred the way with spears pointed. Stung by the leaden pellets, they tumbled headlong. Then a wall of warriors, who stood shoulder to shoulder with shields raised and spear points forming a line of deadly spikes, stood between Loopy and Kiki. The Cowboy Kid fired at them as Sheba flashed onwards; and then he set his teeth, believing that Sheba must impale herself and him upon the sharpened points which were only four yards away, and which were held unwaveringly by the savages.

But the next moment Sheba was in the air, and he up with her. With one mighty spring she had cleared the heads of the savages by fully five feet. Then she was down on all four paws, and Loopy, who had dropped over her neck, straightened up to let out a mighty whoop and bang off the cartridges that remained in his revolver right at the backs of the scared cannibals. As the pellets sank home they gave frantic leaps in the air, and then, with their hands clapped behind them, bounded limpingly for the shelter of the forest.

The Cowboy Kid tumbled breathlessly off the she-cat's back and ran forward. Whipping out a jack-knife from his pocket, he cut the cords which bound Kiki. Loopy caught the sinking figure of his black pal in his arms

as he fell. Moistening his dry lips, Kiki forced a painful smile.

"Dat twice you savey Kiki's life, Massa Keeng," he murmured. "One leettle meenit moah an' Kiki cut upy and eatum."

"Don't mention it, old son," grinned Loopy as he stared after the panic-stricken savages who were scuttling into the forest like rabbits into a burrow. "My hat! Sheba and I did the trick that time. They've left all their weapons and their drums, and somehow I don't think they'll come back. Sit down and take it easy for a spell, Kiki, and then tell me how you got yourself into that mess."

The Battle!

KIKI'S story was thrilling, and just what Loopy Lane had imagined. The black boy had tracked the drum beats to their source, never suspecting for a moment that he was trapped; but after he had taken a peep at the camp and was about to return to Loopy, a dozen spearmen leapt out of the undergrowth and seized him. They bore him at once to the camp, drove the big stake into the ground, and tied him to it, their chief informing him that they were going to eat him.

But that was not all Kiki had to tell.

"Keeng," he said, his voice shaking with excitement as he pointed across the plain, "Potakeeta army faceum Bangaloola army ober dere. Not believum Keeng Loopy come on island with beeg stripey she-cat. Not believum beeg she-cat tiger speerit. Potakeeta army mean to lickum Bangaloola army, den eatum up old King Wangaloola!"

"Do you mean that the chaps who've just done a guy and the other ones we licked yesterday when the old wreck blew up are only bits of the Potakeeta army, and that we've still got another lot to lick?" asked the Cowboy Kid.

Kiki wagged his head and grinned.

"They sayey so," he replied. "And Bangaloola army muchee fraidy of oder one."

"All right then," said Loopy. "As soon as you are ready, Kiki, we'll get along and have a look. After all, they crowned me King of this Island, and I'm not going to let them carve up old Wangaloola and his men if I can help it. We've won two battles, and now we'll win a third."

Kiki possessed the speedy recuperative powers peculiar to the coloured race, and in a very little while he was leading the Cowboy Kid and Sheba to the great plain where the rival armies were encamped. Long before they came near it they could hear the beating of the tom-toms and the droning of native horns.

Suddenly a number of warriors, their faces hideously daubed with red paint, sprang from behind some thick undergrowth and stopped them. But as they recognised Loopy and the tiger, and saw the royal crown swinging from the leather cord about Loopy's shoulders, they brandished their spears and waved their shields, screaming a guttural welcome.

"Dey de keeng's guard—youm guard," Kiki explained excitedly to the Cowboy Kid. "Me safey now."

The warriors dropped down on their knees before Loopy and his tiger, bowing their heads in the dust. Then, at a word from Kiki, Loopy signed to them to rise. They formed up in front of and behind him, marching with swinging strides, and in this way King Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid, made his royal entry to the Bangaloola camp.

Fifteen hundred warriors, at least, were gathered on the plain. Facing them were as many of the invading enemy from Potakeeta, a wide open space separating the rival forces.

In front of a gaudy tent stood the fat ex-King Wangaloola, and when the shouting warriors led King Loopy among the frantically cheering troops, the Cowboy Kid found some attendants busy fitting quaint pieces of armour over the chief's ungainly body.

At sight of Loopy, Wangaloola gave a mighty shout, and, waving his arms above his head, ordered the attendants back. Then an aged man with white hair made a long, droning harangue, to which Kiki listened

with rolling eyes. For twenty minutes the aged man went on, pointing at times to the enemy, and at every pause the warriors joined in with a mighty shout.

"What's it all about, Kiki?" asked Loopy when all was over.

"The big armies no fightee," the black boy explained. "One life good, all lives bad. The battle chief of Potakeeta, him fight Wangaloola; but now Keenk Loopy come, Keeng Loopy fight Potakeeta Chief."

Following the direction of Kiki's pointing hand, the Cowboy Kid saw that a giant savage had stalked into the open space between the rival armies. He was sheathed in mail from chin to toe, and had a great feathered cap upon his head. He held a huge curving sword in his right hand, and a round metal shield in his left. It was the Potakeeta champion—ready for battle!

The Bangaloola dignataries thrust a curved sword into Loopy's hand, and some attendants brought him armour and a shield.

"Why should I fight him, Kiki?" asked the Cowboy Kid.

"Keeng Loopy big man—great fighting man," Kiki explained. "Keeng Loopy beat Potakeeta champion, and Potakeeta army row away in war canoes. Whoh!"

"Whoh!" bawled all the Bangaloola warriors in a mighty shout.

"Is Loopy afraid?" whispered Kiki hoarsely.

That settled the matter.

"I'll fight!" said Loopy. "But tell them to take all this tin junk away, and say I don't want the sword."

The Cowboy Kid had made up his mind what to do. He put down his lasso, and also his belt with the revolvers in it. He marched Sheba out in front of the armies, and tied her up to a stake there where all could see her. He told Kiki to sit beside her, and to release her should the Potakeeta champion happen to kill him. Then, outwardly as bold as brass, but inwardly shaking—for the champion he had to meet in battle towered about three feet above him and must have weighed twenty stone—he felt the weight of his stock whip with his hand, and, raising his left hand as a signal, advanced into the arena, stopping ten paces away from the mail-clad Potakeeta warrior.

The soldiers of both armies shook their spears and shouted. Drums beat and horns blew. Then came a shrill shout and a single word from a devilish-looking Potakeeta witch doctor who seemed to have appointed himself referee, and the battle began.

Loopy dug the toes of his spurred boots deep in the soft earth and waited for the giant's rush. The painted mail-clad savage came at him with a mighty leap, and Loopy had only just time to duck as the sword flashed by. Then he ran in near to avoid a second stroke, and dodged sideways as the savage spun round. Quickly the Cowboy Kid sprang away. Measuring his distance, he lashed out with his whip as the puzzled savage moved. The thong wound itself round

(Continued on page 44.)



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

SCOTCH!

A man had a pure-bred Scotch terrier. Every morning he put a penny into its mouth, and the intelligent animal would take it to the baker's shop and buy itself a penny bun. One morning the dog took the penny and hid it in his kennel; he did the same the next day, and so on for six days—when he took the six pennies to the shop and got seven buns for sixpence!

(*E. Phillips, 25, Henry Street, Totterdown, Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

THE CLUE!

Manager: "Can you identify the waiter who served you, sir?"

Diner: "No, but I've got his finger-prints on my plate."

(*T. Griffiths, 2, Paradise Street, Eccles, Manchester, has been awarded a penknife.*)

VERY IMPORTANT!

Small boy (to man who has just been hit on the head with a cricket ball): "Please, sir, did the ball bounce before it hit you or did it hit you straight away? Because you are the boundary, and we want to know whether it was a six or a four."

(*A. White, 51, High Street, Crediton, Devon, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

ONLY ONE!

Nervous Violin Player: "I hope the audience will like my playing."

Manager (bitterly): "If he doesn't we'll throw him out!"

(*J. Reid, 18, Dale Street, North Blyth, Blyth, Northumberland, has been awarded a penknife.*)

TAKING NO RISKS!

"You are a chemist and druggist?"

"Yes, sir."

"Been in the business a number of years?"

"I have, sir."

"You understand your trade thoroughly?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Registered?"

THIS WEEK'S BEST JOKE!



NO MORE MISTAKES!

Patient: "Bother! That's the second good tooth you've taken out by mistake."

Dentist: "Never mind, sir. I can't make a mistake this time. There's only one left!"

(*J. Barber, 81, Umfreville Rd., Haringay, London, N.4, has been awarded a handsome watch.*)

"Yes, sir."

"That is your certificate hanging over there?"

"It is, sir."

"Well, then, you can give me twopenny-worth of tooth powder!"

(*R. Bracher, 30, Nightingale Place, Woolwich, S.E.18, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

NASTY!

Soprano: "Did you notice how my voice filled the hall last night?"

Contralto: "Yes, dear. In fact, I noticed several people leaving to make room for it."

(*J. Coldwell, Fir Vale Hospital, Block 14, Sheffield, has been awarded a penknife.*)

ABSENCE ACCOUNTED FOR!

Teacher: "Well, Johnny, and where is your brother, Tommy, this morning?"

Johnny: "Please, miss, Tommy and I were playing who could lean farthest out of the bedroom window, and Tommy won."

(*L. B. Saunders, 13, Caulfield Road, Gorse Hill, Swindon, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

SOB, SOB!

Bill: "Poor old Joe's dead. A two ton block of stone fell on his chest,"

Tom: "He always did have a weak chest."

(*D. Garvin, 49, Granville Road, Walthamstow, E.17, has been awarded a penknife.*)

A TRUE STORY!

Old Salt: "So you want me to spin you a yarn, boys?"

Boys: "Yes, a true one."

Old Salt: "Right! I'll tell you about the time when I was eaten up by cannibals."

(*P. James, 45, Plashet Grove, East Ham, E.6, has been awarded a penknife.*)

NOT QUITE RIGHT!

"'Riches,'" read the teacher, "'take unto themselves wings and fly away.' Now, what kind of riches does the writer mean?" He stared round at the class, but nothing but blank looks met his gaze. "Surely someone can answer a question like that? You, Smith," said the teacher, "what kind of riches did the writer mean?"

Smith hesitated a moment, then:

"Ostriches, sir," he replied.

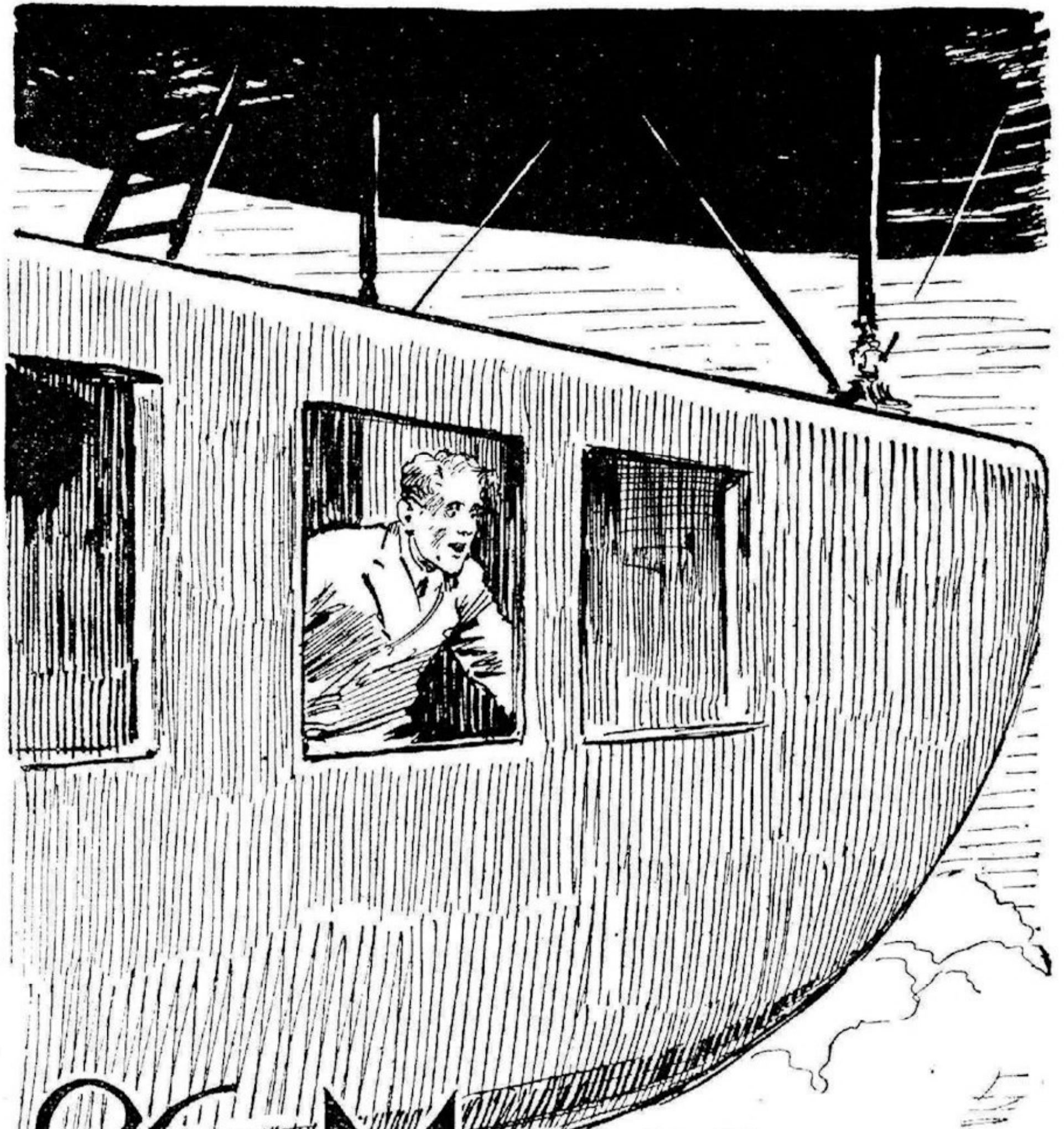
(*D. Smith, "Altona," London Road, Crawley, Sussex, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE!

Barber: "Have I shaved you before, sir?"

Customer: "No, I got those scars in France."

(*H. Barton, West Ham Open-Air School, Tyfield, Ongar, Essex, has been awarded a penknife.*)



The Man From "Mars"!

CHAPTER 1.

The Man With the Scratched Face!

NELSON LEE instinctively eased the foot-throttle as the wild-looking figure broke through the hedge five hundred yards ahead and ran unsteadily towards the middle of the road.

The famous detective's Rolls-Royce Special was doing a comfortable forty along the straight, quiet country road. Nipper was half-dozing by Lee's side, and in the capacious dickey-seat at the back were two other cubs of the Detective Academy—Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West.

once to the aerodrome. I am the commander of that airship, and I am being detained and held——"

He broke off with another wild cry, and he was staring madly down the road. A number of uniformed figures had just broken through the hedge, and were running towards the stationary car, shouting.

"Quick—quick!" almost shrieked the stranger. "Let me get in! Drive away! If they get me——"

"Hold him, sir!" came a shout from one of the uniformed figures.

The man with the scratched face staggered back, his eyes full of fury.

"Fools—fools!" he croaked. "Why didn't you drive away? It's too late now!"

He ran drunkenly towards the opposite hedge and attempted to plunge through, but by this time the uniformed figures had come up, and they pounced upon their victim. There was a brief struggle. Hoarse breathing and muttered imprecations sounded. Then the figures separated. The fugitive was helpless in a strait-jacket, and he was almost foaming with impotence and rage.

"Sorry you were stopped, sir," said one of the keepers, saluting. "Rather lucky this fellow didn't attack you."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I half-guessed what he was by his manner," he said. "I did my best to calm him, although I certainly did not know that you were so near at hand. Poor man! This sort of thing grieves me more than I can say."

"We've had a fine old time, sir," went on the keeper. "Been chasing about for over an hour. Fawcett's his name; been with us for years, and this is the first time he's ever knocked any of our chaps down and escaped."

"He told us he was Commander Stanton," remarked Nipper.

The keeper significantly touched his head.

"That's just his delusion, young gent," he said, in a low voice. "His very latest! All this talk about the R 2000, I suppose—and he's always been a bit touched about the stars and the moon. He didn't do you any harm, sir, I suppose?" added the keeper.

"Not at all," replied Nelson Lee. "You came on the scene before he could attempt any violence. A pitiful affair."

Suddenly the lunatic forced his way forward, dragging the other keepers with him.

"Listen to me!" he panted. "Who are you, sir? They've captured me, and I'm helpless—but at least you can tell me who you are. You needn't be afraid—I can't harm you; this accursed thing keeps me helpless."

Lee thought it better to humour him.

"My name is Nelson Lee," he replied quietly.

"Lee! Nelson Lee!" shouted the madman, his eyes burning with greater intensity than ever. "I have heard that name! Of

course, you're the famous detective. For Heaven's sake, sir, do something to help me!" he added, with strange earnestness. "I am being detained—imprisoned! I am not mad, as they say."

"Better come along, Fawcett," said the head keeper gently.

"I won't! I won't!" shouted Fawcett. "Don't you dare to take me away until I have spoken to this gentleman. My name is not Fawcett," he went on, appealing to Lee. "I am Commander Douglas Stanton, of the R 2000."

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured Lee kindly.

"You mock at me!" shouted the other, with fury. "You try to humour me! I tell you I am Stanton. When does the airship sail? To-morrow? No, don't answer—I know! She sails to-morrow!"

This was perfectly right, but Lee made no comment.

"You are my only hope, Mr. Lee," continued the lunatic. "Bring doctors down to examine me! They will prove that I'm sane—and it must be done before dawn! If the R 2000 sails without me there will be disaster!"

The head keeper motioned to the others, and Fawcett was dragged back.

"Sorry about this, sir," said the keeper apologetically. "I thought it best to let him say his piece, though. It does 'em good sometimes. Poor chap, he's properly cracked. Been scatty for years."

"Where do you come from?" asked Lee.

"The Moresby Convalescent Home, sir."

Lee nodded. He knew that the Moresby Convalescent Home was an institution for the insane.

"**R**ATHER a disturbing incident, young 'un," remarked Nelson Lee some minutes later, after the car had driven on from that spot.

"Makes me feel all uncomfortable, gov'nor," said Nipper, with a shiver. "Poor chap! He looked as mad as a hatter."

"Curiously enough, this particular man impressed me otherwise," said Lee slowly. "His manner denoted excitement more than madness—excitement combined with wild anxiety."

"Surely you don't think there was anything fishy about that incident, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Not at all," replied Lee. "Don't get any such ideas into your head. The Moresby Convalescent Home is an eminently respectable institution—one of the best of its kind in the country. Those keepers were genuine enough, too. That unfortunate lunatic has been in the Home for years, and, on the face of it, it seems impossible that he should know anything about the real Commander Stanton. Yet the incident has somehow left me with a vaguely unpleasant impression."

They drove on in silence for a while.

"This R 2000 flight is going to be something pretty big, isn't it, gov'nor?" asked

Nipper presently. "By Jove! I'd like to go on that trip."

"Yes, it ought to prove interesting," said Nelson Lee. "This airship is the most notable advance in aircraft construction that the world has seen. She is at least twice as large as any other airship, and it is claimed by her designers that she is unique in many respects."

"There's been a lot of 'hush hush' business about her, hasn't there?"

"But the world will know the R 2000's capabilities this week," went on Nelson Lee.

"I understand that she is absolutely silent. They have at last mastered the secret of invisibility, too. At any height above twenty thousand feet this airship, it is claimed, will be absolutely indistinguishable from the sky."

"On a clear day, guv'nor?" asked Nipper sceptically.

"In a perfectly blue sky," replied Lee. "I understand that the secret is connected with some new scientific discoveries allied to the atmosphere. It is the old idea of camouflage in a new form. And you must realise that a silent and invisible airship is an extraordinary advance over the older type."

"By jingo, rather," agreed Nipper. "She can travel at a hundred-and-fifty miles an hour, too, can't she? And carry two or three hundred passengers?"

"Her range, I believe, is something like ten thousand miles," said the great detective.

"Her trial trips have been so remarkably successful that this flight which starts tomorrow will be something of a sensation. Her passenger list alone is one to wonder at."

"There's going to be royalty aboard, isn't there?"

"Yes, the Royal Family will be represented," agreed Lee. "And then, of course, the Prime Minister of England—Mr. Douglas Mortimer—will also be a passenger, to say nothing of Lord Sudbury, the Home Secretary, Sir Pelham Gore, Air Minister, and Field Marshall Lord Forteby. Then there is Sir Bertram Stokes, the Canadian Premier, and Mr. Reginald Brace, the Australian Premier—merely to mention two other distinguished passengers. Practically every Dominion and Colony will be represented. A true Empire flight."

"And Commander Douglas Stanton will be in full charge," said Nipper thoughtfully. "By Jingo! No wonder that poor beggar of a lunatic got this new twist into his disordered mind! The R 2000's big flight is

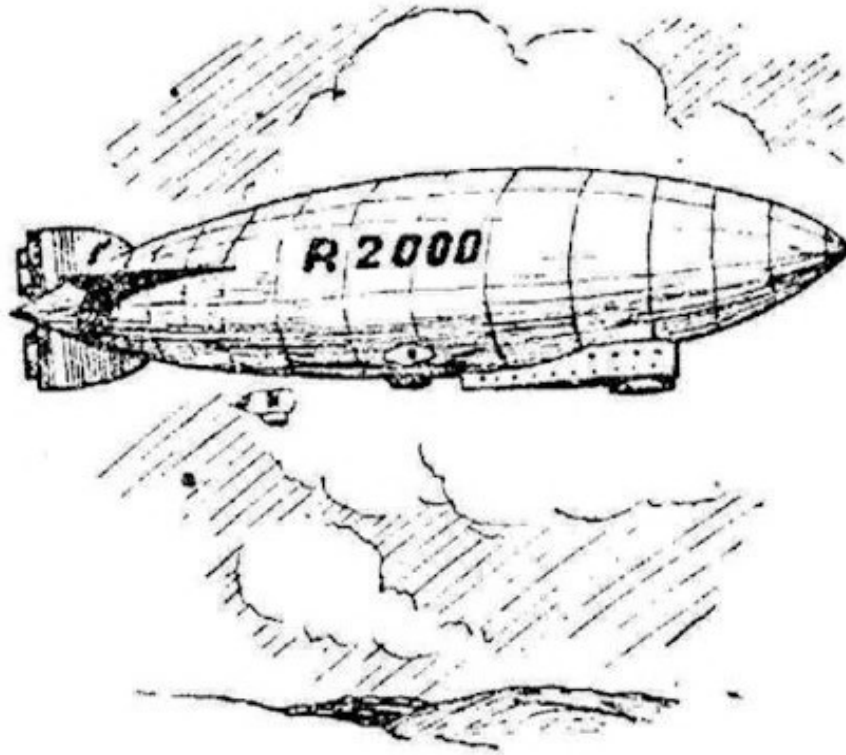
the only topic of conversation in the whole country."

Nelson Lee pursed his lips.

"But is it a topic of conversation in such places as the Moresby Convalescent Home?" he said musingly, as though to himself. "A curious business, Nipper—and I still have that vaguely unpleasant impression."

CHAPTER 2.

The Launch of the R 2000!



NIPPER stood spell bound. He and a number of other cubs from the Detective Academy were among the vast crowd which stood watching the graceful, dignified ascent of Britain's latest and greatest airship.

They were at Crosslands Aerodrome, on the outskirts of London. It was a Government 'drome, especially created for the R 2000. Nipper and the other cubs had obtained special

permission from Nelson Lee to come along and witness the launching of the great aircraft. Watching her rise majestically from the stupendous mooring-mast had been a wonderful sight. Now, with her engines only just audible at a thousand feet, she was gaining height. Her enormous hull shimmered in the June sunlight. Cheer after cheer rang out. Everybody was tremendously excited.

Commander Douglas Stanton was in full charge, and from early morning he had been on duty—a strong, powerful, virile figure. His eagerness and enthusiasm were contagious; every member of the R 2000's crew was "on his toes," and as keen as mustard to make this flight a glorious triumph.

Nipper and the other cubs had only caught one or two glimpses of the Commander, but what they had seen had impressed them deeply. Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, in particular, were forcibly reminded of that unhappy incident of the previous night. What a difference between this splendid figure with the eager eyes, the resolute jaw, and the wretch who had gesticulated so frenziedly in the glare of the Rolls-Royce Special's headlamps!

"Begad! It's the most marvellous sight I've ever seen, dear old boys," said Tregellis-West breathlessly. "Look how she's soaring! And she's practically silent, even now."

"When she's up another two or three thousand feet we shan't be able to hear a sound," declared Nipper. "At ten thousand, they say, her engines can only be heard as a mere whisper, and at twenty thousand,

even when she's going full speed, not a murmur can reach the ground."

"But they do make a noise of some kind," said Tommy Watson.

"Of course they do," agreed Nipper. "But that's just the miracle of it. The designers have arranged things so that the sound is diverted upwards. That's the whole secret of it. The sounds go into the ether, and are lost in outer space. It's all to do with the science of acoustics—and this is the first airship that's ever been built in this way."

"Listen!" urged Watson. "She's silent already."

It was rather uncanny, watching that vast monster of the sky. The whole crowd held its breath. The whirling propellers could be seen, but no sound reached the ground.

The airship was not setting straight off on her flight, but circling the aerodrome and gaining height. Even as the crowds watched, marvelling at the absence of sound, a change seemed to come over the very appearance of this leviathan of the sky. Her outline was not so clear-cut; her colour was gradually and insidiously merging with the blue of the heavens.

"They were right, you chaps," said Nipper wonderingly. "Look! She's vanishing—and she's not more than half her maximum height yet."

It was all the more astounding because the sky was perfectly blue. It was one of those cloudless June mornings, typically English. Yet in spite of the clarity of the air the R 2000 was rendering herself invisible to the naked eye.

Within ten minutes the last hazy outline had gone. Some people asserted that she was still over the aerodrome. Others were just as convinced that she had flown off. It didn't matter, anyhow. The launch of the R 2000 was an unqualified success. In public, Britain's greatest triumph in aircraft had demonstrated her unique qualities.

LONDON had a treat less than half-an-hour later.

Out of a clear sky came the R 2000. The vast crowds of people in the streets had been expecting her, and she did not disappoint them. Roofs of great city buildings were alive with eager office girls; in the streets, the traffic was practically at a standstill.

The airship came down to so low a level that her engines could just be heard. She circled St. Paul's once or twice, turned westwards, and visited the Houses of Parliament. Then she gained height again, and over the very heart of the West End she went up and up into the summer's blue.

The great vessel was scheduled to keep to a fixed route. Already crowds were collecting in Paris, for the R 2000 was due over the French capital in the afternoon. By night she would reveal herself over Berlin, gleaming with special flood-lights which would illuminate her great hull.

The next day she would continue on to Rome—and then Barcelona, Lisbon, and so on. The whole course was mapped out almost to an hour, and extensive preparations had been made in every European country of importance in case the R 2000 should require to make a landing. No such emergency was anticipated, however. The object of this cruise was to prove the new airship's capabilities. The voyage would last several days, during which time thousands of miles would be covered.

Her accommodation was superb—and of a type undreamt of in earlier aircraft. She had luxurious state-rooms, lounges, smoking-rooms, and promenade decks. Her great dining saloon was as elaborate and as commodious as many a dining saloon on an Atlantic liner.

This trip was regarded as a great event—not only by England, but by the Empire and the entire world. Rival countries were watching with keen eyes. If this flight was the success it promised to be, millionaire combines in Europe and America would, no doubt, acquire the rights to build great fleets of similar ships. Regular trans-Atlantic and trans-European services were already being discussed.

The R 2000 was out to prove that such services were possible.

THEN came the first hint of mystery.

Paris waited in vain for the appearance of the R 2000. Huge crowds assembled and were disappointed. The afternoon passed; evening came and still there was no sign of the giant airship.

At Berlin it was the same. Here again crowds waited; here again they saw no sign of the airship. Officials became anxious. Even if the R 2000 had changed her plans for some unknown reason and not descended low over Paris, surely she would have shown herself at Berlin?

Anxious inquiries were sent out. Not a trace of the airship had been seen. Since leaving London, the R 2000 had disappeared.

"It's an infernally mysterious business, I must say," commented Lord Dorrimore, the famous millionaire sportsman-explorer-airman, in the smoking-room of the Wayfarers' Club that evening. "It isn't as though the weather is tricky. According to the latest reports, this fine-weather area stretches from mid-Europe to mid-Atlantic. There's not a storm within a thousand miles of us."

"No doubt we shall hear something very soon," said one of the other clubmen.

Nelson Lee dropped in soon afterwards, and Dorrie immediately buttonholed him.

"Just the fellow!" he said. "What's the latest, Lee?"

"About the airship?"

"What else?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "There's no other subject of conversation worth mentioning, is there? You're generally in the know of things——"

"Not this time, Dorrie," interrupted Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "The extraordinary silence of the R 2000 is not only puzzling the

A mud-covered, dishevelled figure came running up alongside Nelson Lee's car. "Help!" he croaked. "Save me!"



general public, but I can tell you that the Air Ministry and the whole Government are anxious."

"What exactly do you mean by 'silence'?"

"Precisely what I say," replied Lee. "The airship has not only failed to show herself, but not a solitary sound has been heard from her, either. Not a single wireless message has come from her since she left Crosslands."

"Good gad! Is that a fact?"

"It is a fact which is causing the Air Ministry acute tension," replied Lee. "Think of it, Dorrie! Commander Stanton definitely

arranged that communications should be maintained with the Air Ministry throughout the entire voyage. The R 2000's wireless equipment is the finest in the world. Yet there is this utter and absolute silence."

"Doesn't it look—ugly?"

"It looks mysterious, at all events," said Nelson Lee, frowning. "I'm not sure about it being ugly—yet. The Air Ministry has been signalling by wireless all day, but there's never been a ghost of a reply. Not a word has come in from any Continental point regarding the airship's position. The fact is, Dorrie, she hasn't been seen or heard of since she rose into the air over London."

"No wonder the officials are so worried," said Dorrie, pursing his lips.

"Of course, the newspapers haven't been allowed to print a word of the real position," continued Lee. "And I'd like you to remember, Dorrie, that this is strictly between ourselves—not even to be discussed here, in the club."

"Naturally."

"The papers are merely saying that there's been an alteration in the R 2000's plans, and all news is being toned down," went on Nelson Lee. "But the fact remains that the entire Government is on tenterhooks. Really, Dorrie, it's the most extraordinary mystery. What has happened? There's been no disaster, or the reports would have come in."

"It's not possible that something went wrong, and the ship came down in the Atlantic?"

"Possible, but very unlikely," replied Lee. "If something like that had gone amiss, why was no S.O.S. sent out? And, surely, one ship out of the hundreds on the Atlantic would have seen her, and reported? No, Dorrie, the whole thing is inexplicable—and we can only hope that we shall soon get news."

The sporting peer looked Nelson Lee straight in the eye.

"Out with it, old man," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

"You can't fool me," said Dorrie. "All this inscrutable stuff is all very well—but I've been your pal for years. There's something on your mind, professor. Whisper it into daddy's ear."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Yes, Dorrie, you're right," he admitted, becoming instantly grave again. "There is something on my mind. Perhaps I'm worrying without cause—but I cannot get a certain incident out of my mind. Something that happened last night. Sit down, and I'll tell you."

CHAPTER 3.

A Staggering Discovery!

MR. DOUGLAS MORTIMER snorted with ill-concealed anger. The Prime Minister of England was very upset.

"This is intolerable!" he said, fuming. "Why are the officers so absurdly mysterious? Do they take us for a lot of children, Gore?"

"After all, Mortimer, we're only passengers," said Sir Pelham Gore, the Air Minister. "I was speaking to one of the officers only a few minutes ago, and he assured me that there was nothing seriously wrong."

"Doesn't he call it seriously wrong for us to be nearly freezing?" demanded the Premier. "This airship is fitted with the most elaborate heating apparatus ever installed—"

"I know—I know," interrupted Sir Pelham worriedly. "But something seems to be wrong. I daresay matters will be righted soon."

"And what about lights?" demanded Mr. Mortimer. "It'll be dark presently, Gore. Perhaps they'll tell us the lighting plant has gone wrong? And in Heaven's name why can't they drop to a lower altitude, where the atmospheric conditions will be more amiable?"

They were in the Prime Minister's private state-room on board the R 2000. From the wide window they could gaze down at the earth, far below. It was difficult to determine what type of country they were cruising over, owing to the evening haze.

The airship was at a great height; indeed, it was difficult to imagine that she could fly any higher. She was "somewhere on the Continent," but beyond this fact her passengers were left in complete ignorance.

Mr. Douglas Mortimer was a man of striking personality, and he was celebrated for his bluntness of speech. Grey-haired, clean-shaven, tall, he was an impressive figure; particularly as he had a habit of gesticulating vigorously.

The door opened, and Lord Sudbury came in. The other two men turned and regarded the Home Secretary anxiously. Lord Sudbury was looking intensely nervous. He was stoutish, florid, and very mild-mannered.

"Anything fresh?" demanded the Premier, in his blunt way.

"My dear Mortimer, I wish you wouldn't bark at me," protested Lord Sudbury irritably. "No, there's nothing fresh. Heaven alone knows what's happening on this infernal craft. The officers, confound them, are as mum as oysters. And I've never seen a more frightened-looking crowd."

"I'm ashamed of them," grunted Sir Pelham.

This was not the first conference between these distinguished statesmen. All day long—ever since the R 2000 had left London—the passengers had known that something was amiss.

At first there had only been a mere hint. Everything had gone swimmingly immediately after leaving the metropolis. But when the airship had rose steadily into the air, and had continued to rise, the first suspicion spread through the passenger quarters. On this summer's day the temperature was equable and pleasant at a normal height, but beyond twenty thousand feet the conditions changed.

Before long the passengers had complained of coldness. They had requested that the heating apparatus should be put into operation. Nothing had happened—nothing, that is, except a flustered running to and fro of officers and other members of the crew.

No heat had been turned on, and long before mid-afternoon the cold had been intense. The unfortunate passengers were having the greatest difficulty in keeping themselves warm. Nobody had brought heavy clothing—never imagining that it would be necessary.

However, these conditions couldn't last for long, they told themselves. The defect, whatever it was, would probably be put right

within a few hours, and, if necessary, the airship would come down at Le Bourget Aerodrome, near Paris. Unfortunately, Paris was not even sighted. The R 2000 did not go anywhere near the French capital—and this was totally at variance with the carefully-arranged plan.

Now she was cruising with murmuring engines at the same preposterous height. And nobody could find out exactly over what part of Europe she flew.

A FOOTSTEP sounded outside in the corridor, and the Prime Minister opened the door. Standing on the threshold was the trim, uniformed figure of Major Gunby, the second in command of the R 2000. He entered the cabin, looking haggard and weary.

"Mr. Mortimer," he said slowly, "I think it is time that you and the other passengers should know the truth. They have all assembled in the central saloon, and I should like you gentlemen to join them."

The Prime Minister looked at the major in amazement. He made as if to speak; then, changing his mind, he nodded to his colleagues and walked out of the cabin. The others followed him as he made his way to the big central saloon.

Assembled there were all the passengers—some two hundred of them—famous statesmen, politicians, soldiers, sailors and financiers, with their wives and daughters.

Major Gunby was obviously labouring under a great tension as he faced them.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my duty to inform you that something of a very serious nature has happened on this airship," he said with quiet deliberateness. "We have every reason to fear that Commander Stanton has become demented, but so long as he is humoured the situation may be saved!"

There were many exclamations; incredulous comments from the gentlemen, frightened little cries from the ladies.

"Demented?" repeated Mr. Mortimer sharply. "Do you mean that he has actually gone mad? Let us know the worst, I beg of you, major!"

"Then it is certain that Commander Stanton is a dangerous maniac," said Major Gunby agitatedly. "When I tell you that he has decided to take this airship to Mars, you will appreciate the measure of his insanity."

"Mars!" gasped somebody. "Impossible!"

"Quite impossible," agreed the major. "But Commander Stanton thinks otherwise. He has locked himself into the control-room, alone. He is taking the R 2000 to Mars, and he believes that he is already well on the way."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Sir Pelham Gore, in amazement. "If this man is mad, as you say, cannot he be restrained?"

"I am afraid not, Sir Pelham."

"What of the other officers?" demanded the Air Minister. "Good heavens, man,

there are over a dozen of you! And the men? What about the scores of men—the crew? Are you telling us that you are at the mercy of this one maniac?"

"If you could appreciate the appalling anxiety we have suffered during the past few hours, Sir Pelham, you would speak with less impatience," said Major Gunby, tightening his lips. "Perhaps you wonder why the engine crews are still obeying orders? Perhaps you wonder why we, the officers, have not taken measures to bring the ship to earth?"

"We are all wondering that, sir," said the Prime Minister bluntly.

"Then I will tell you that Commander Stanton has lashed himself to the control-wheel, and that he has also tied a cord from one arm to a lever which operates the rip mechanism," said the major. "Any attempt to rush this madman will result in absolute disaster. He has refused to admit anybody, and he has threatened to send us all to destruction if his orders are not carried out to the letter. The engine-room crews are obliged to obey; the steersman is equally at his mercy."

There was a murmur of consternation and dismay.

"In such an emergency as this—with so many valuable lives at stake—this madman should be shot," declared one of the passengers.

"If he is shot, the rip mechanism will operate," replied Major Gunby. "I may mention that all the ship's parachutes are in the control-cabin, so we cannot even escape in that way. The commander ordered the parachutes to be taken there earlier to-day—before anybody realised that he had gone mad. Furthermore, he has complete control of the wireless. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that we have done everything humanly possible—but the fact remains that we are at the absolute mercy of this one madman."

"It is a ghastly situation," said somebody hoarsely. "What if he does operate the rip mechanism? Wouldn't it be better to let him do it, and so bring the ship down?"

"That would mean disaster for us, sir," said Major Gunby quietly. "The rip mechanism on an aircraft of this size is only for use in acute emergency. When lighter-than-air craft lands there is always the danger of dragging—unless there is an efficient landing crew on the ground. In a forced landing, such a crew is not available. Therefore special mechanism is provided whereby the gas envelopes can be ripped open by the moving of one lever. This has the effect of dumping the airship to earth abruptly.

"Such an operation can only be performed when the airship is within a few feet of the ground—and even then it is a risky proceeding, only to be resorted to in vital emergency," went on the major. "It is, indeed, a safety device which, under normal conditions,

(Continued on page 24.)

THE MAN FROM "MARS!"*(Continued from page 21.)*

would never be required. If we attempt to interfere with Commander Stanton, he will operate that mechanism. As a result, this ship would lose half its gas within the space of twenty seconds, and go hurtling to inevitable destruction."

"Appalling!" said the Prime Minister, cool and calm now that he knew the worst. "Our only hope is that this maniac will tire. He is alone, you say? Surely he must sleep sooner or later?"

"That is our one chance," agreed Major Gunby. "Unfortunately, Commander Stanton is a man of iron strength, and in his madness he is quite capable of remaining awake and alert for days and nights. He is so utterly violent that any attempt to force the door of the control-cabin is fraught with risk."

It was rather good to see the calmness and courage of these distinguished passengers.

There was no panic—no wild alarm. Now that the worst was known, these eminent ladies and gentlemen were more calm than ever.

Major Gunby's position was unenviable. In the light of Commander Stanton's insanity, he—the major—was now in full command. And yet he was helpless! He felt his responsibility acutely. Always, at the back of his mind, he remembered these famous statesmen and noblemen and ladies who were under his care. But for their presence he might have risked much; but his first duty was to protect them from danger.

"Let me talk with this unfortunate man," said the Prime Minister quietly.

He would not be denied, and while the others waited Mr. Mortimer was escorted to the front of the airship, down some metal steps, through another narrow passage, until he faced a tightly-closed metal door.

"Commander Stanton!" called the Premier, as he knocked.

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"Away—away!" came a wild, high-pitched voice which caused the Premier to jump. "Have I not warned you? Leave me in peace, you fool!"

"I am Douglas Mortimer, Prime Minister of England——"

"Splendid!" came the voice from within, accompanied by a laugh of maniacal intensity.

"Before long, my friend, you will be in Mars! We are travelling swiftly and certainly towards the Red Planet. My ambition is being realised—the ambition of a lifetime! On, on! On to Mars!"

"Good heavens!" muttered the Prime Minister, aghast.

CHAPTER 4.

Nelson Lee Moves!

NELSON LEE paced up and down his study with quick, active strides.

"Yes, I'll try it!" he told himself grimly. "It's a chance—a slim one, but nevertheless a chance."

Two days had elapsed—two days of silence from the R 2000. By now the whole world was startled. In every country anxious eyes were turned skywards—watching for the first glimmer of the lost airship. Officers on every ocean-going ship were on the alert, too.

All their watching seemed in vain. Still the R 2000 remained lost. Not a single soul could definitely say that the airship had been sighted. Rumours had come in by the hundred, but in every case they were proved to be groundless.

In desperation, high Government officials had visited Nelson Lee, urging him to help. Scotland Yard was baffled. It was beginning to be felt that some terrible disaster had overtaken the airship. The greatest puzzle of all was that still no wireless messages had come from the airship. And there was not the slightest evidence to suggest that she had crashed.

Nelson Lee was struck by one or two strange news items that morning. They were trifles, and apparently meant nothing—unless looked at from a certain angle. There was the report of a curious rain phenomenon in North Italy. A sharp shower had occurred out of a cloudless sky—a shower, moreover, confined to one insignificant section of a main road. Rain, or suddenly released water ballast from a high-flying airship?

In another part of Europe a supposed thunderbolt had fallen—also out of a cloudless sky, with no storm nearer than a thousand miles. A metallic object had crashed through the roof of a house, and

had buried itself in the debris; a search was being made for it. A thunderbolt, or something dropped from a high-flying airship?

Nelson Lee, at least, was struck by the significance of these apparently-trifling news items. And back into his mind came the recollection of that unfortunate madman who, the other night, had stopped his car.

"Disaster will befall the R 2000!" Thus had the madman foretold the calamity.

"It may seem absurd, but I cannot help feeling that that madman will be able to supply a clue to the mystery," muttered Lee. "It's worth a trip. Yes, I'll go down there at once."



WITHIN five minutes Lee was in his Rolls-Royce Special, speeding out of London. Having once made up his mind, he acted quickly. When he arrived at the Moresby Convalescent Home he sought out the superintendent—a grave, elderly, kindly man named Bryant.

"Fawcett?" said Superintendent Bryant, as Lee sat opposite to him in his sanctum. "Yes, he's the man who escaped the other night. You were good enough to detain him till the keepers came up, I believe. A very sad case."

"How has Fawcett been since that incident?"

"Quiet—too quiet, in fact," replied the other. "He is being very carefully watched, for I am afraid that he might have another brainstorm. A very well connected man, Fawcett. Before his brain gave, he was one of the greatest amateur astronomers in the country. No doubt his study of the heavens affected him."

"Would it be possible for me to see Fawcett to-day?" asked Lee.

"I'm afraid not," replied the superintendent. "He mustn't be excited, Mr. Lee. Such a visit might be dangerous. He has twice tried to escape recently——"

"Twice?" broke in Lee sharply, with a start.

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"I knew that he had escaped once, because I was there."

"Oh, yes, he escaped a week ago—two or three days before the affair in which you were concerned," said the superintendent. "And curiously enough, his violence dates from that first escape. He was quite docile before then—one of our best patients. We trusted him anywhere in the grounds. So you can imagine our surprise when we missed him. We didn't find him until hours later."

"May I know exactly how you found him after that first escape?"

"He was wandering aimlessly, muddy and grimy, with an ugly bruise on his head," replied Bryant. "He was extraordinarily violent, too, and since then we have been having trouble with him. His ravings have been fantastic—his chief delusion being that he is Commander Stanton, of the R 2000. By the way, Mr. Lee, is there any fresh news of the lost airship?"

"I think there is!" replied Lee, with a

curious note in his voice. "But I shall be able to tell you with more certainty, Mr. Bryant, after you have allowed me to see Fawcett."

"I have already told you that it is not convenient——"

"This is a time for plain speaking, superintendent—so be prepared for a shock," broke in Nelson Lee. "In London I formed the theory that this lunatic, Fawcett, could provide a key to the R 2000

The door burst open and Major Gunby led his men to the attack. Crack! The madman's gun spurted flame, and the major dropped to the floor with a groan.



riddle. Your statement just now is much more significant than you realise."

"Which statement?" asked the bewildered Bryant.

"That Fawcett has escaped twice," replied Lee. "I believe that the man you now hold is Commander Stanton himself—

There can be no question of impersonation—and yet—" He paused, his eyes filling with consternation. "And yet there is something different about the man—now! He looks the same, his voice is the same—but he has got greater strength, and there are certain mannerisms— Come with me, Mr. Lee."

Agitated and pale, the superintendent led the way to the private room in which Fawcett was detained. It was not exactly a padded cell, but not far off it. Fawcett looked up wearily as the two men entered. Then he jumped to his feet with an excited, eager cry as he recognised Nelson Lee.

"Steady, Fawcett," murmured the superintendent. "This gentleman—"

"I know him!" broke in the other. "He is Mr. Lee—the man I met on the road the other night! Why are you here? Tell me! What of the airship? Nobody will give me any news! By Heaven! There shall be a reckoning one day—"

"You say that you are Commander Douglas Stanton," interrupted Nelson Lee bluntly.

"I have said it until I am weary," replied the other, "but nobody will listen. What

and that the madman has taken control of the airship!"

"This is fantastic!" exclaimed the superintendent, startled. "It is a—a grotesque theory, Mr. Lee! Fawcett has been here for years. I know him perfectly.

have you come here for—to torture me?"

"If you are Commander Stanton, there is a very simple manner in which we can establish that fact," went on Nelson Lee, placing a sheet of paper and a pencil in front of the patient. "Will you be good



and that the madman has taken control of the airship!"

"This is fantastic!" exclaimed the superintendent, startled. "It is a—a grotesque theory, Mr. Lee! Fawcett has been here for years. I know him perfectly.

have you come here for—to torture me?"

"If you are Commander Stanton, there is a very simple manner in which we can establish that fact," went on Nelson Lee, placing a sheet of paper and a pencil in front of the patient. "Will you be good

enough to draw roughly on this paper a sketch of the R 2000's control-cabin?"

The patient was startled; then, with a cry, he seized the pencil.

"I can only do it crudely," he said, breathing hard. "Here is the door—here the main control-wheel—here the observation windows—here the telephones to the engine-gondolas—here the wireless control—"

With quick, nervous fingers, he jotted down the various details. Superintendent Bryant watched with growing amazement. As Lee had said, it was a simple test—but a certain one. The detective was already satisfied. He was familiar with the details of the R 2000's control-cabin—these details had been supplied to him by the Air Ministry—and this pencil sketch, although rough, was accurate in every particular.

"Superintendent, there has been an appalling blunder," said Lee grimly. "This gentleman is not Fawcett, your patient. He is Commander Douglas Stanton!"

"Good Heavens!" panted Bryant. "I cannot believe—"

"The inner dispositions of the mechanism in the control-room of the R 2000 are known only to those people who actually have been on board the vessel," said Lee. "Such details have never been published. Look at this, superintendent! Every item is accurate! You tell me that Fawcett has been your patient for years. How could he know these facts? Impossible that he could have learned them during his first escape, a week ago."

"I—I am amazed," stammered the superintendent.

"My advice to you, Commander Stanton, is to tell us the absolute truth," said Lee, turning to the "patient." "I take it that the supposed Fawcett is your twin brother?"

"He is," muttered Stanton.

"But why was I not told of this?" demanded Bryant excitedly. "I might have set inquiries afoot—"

"You ask that!" broke in Stanton, his voice bitter. "You ask why you were not told! Good Heavens, man, haven't I been telling it until I became hoarse? Your keepers merely attempted to soothe me—until, indeed, I felt that I *was* mad. No notice was taken of me. The doctor treated me as a child—the nurses, too. Until Mr. Lee came I have never had the slightest chance of a hearing."

"This is an appalling affair," said the superintendent, with visions of a Home Office inquiry, and the loss of his post. "I will have the whole matter threshed out, and those responsible for your detention shall be dealt with. But even now I am utterly at a loss. I cannot imagine how the blunder occurred."

"If the commander will be perfectly frank, I think we shall get at the truth," put in Nelson Lee. "The unfortunate part is that you were never informed of your real patient's relationship to Commander Stanton."

"It was the desire of my parents," said the commander quietly. "When my brother went insane they decided to put him into an institution under another name, mainly to shield the family reputation. Professor Stanton, the astronomer, supposedly died abroad. In that way, the unhappy affair was hushed up."

"I see, I see," murmured Bryant. "A pity I was never told."

"You can imagine my startled surprise when, about a week ago, my brother rang me up," continued Stanton. "He told me that he had escaped, that he was quite recovered, and he urged me to meet him with a car and a change of clothing. He mentioned an old barn just beyond a certain cross-roads. Of course, I realised at once that my poor brother was as mad as ever, and in order to humour him I promised to do as he said. You will understand that in view of my responsible position as chief officer of the R 2000 I did not want any publicity. Confidence in me would naturally have ebbed had it become known that my brother was demented."

"You met him?" asked the superintendent sharply.

"Yes—after failing to get through to you on the telephone."

"The wires were cut," said Bryant. "Good Heavens! We wondered who had been responsible. It was Fawcett's work, of course."

"My object in motoring down was to humour him, and bring him back to the Home," said the commander. "But no sooner had I got out of the car than my brother came up and rushed at me whirling a heavy stick. He raved something about intending to take my place on board the R 2000, and then he caught me a blow on the head and I knew no more until I awoke in the ditch. I was dazed, clad in my brother's clothes, and my moustache had been shaved off. Then the keepers came. I remember explaining to them, but they refused to listen."

"You should have insisted upon seeing me."

"Perhaps it was my own fault," muttered the other. "I was excited, furious—and the more I recovered, the more I shouted. I don't really blame your keepers; they must have thought that my ravings were those of a madman. In desperation, I escaped later—but you know all about that, Mr. Lee."

"I do; and it was that meeting which brought me here to-day," replied Nelson Lee. "I have never been quite satisfied that you were mad. I am, of course, familiar with your appearance, commander—for your photograph has appeared in many papers recently—but I failed to recognise you that night because of the mud on your face, the absence of your moustache, and your general dishevelled appearance."

"What of my brother?" asked the commander anxiously. "Has he carried out his crazy intention of impersonating me? But perhaps my fears have been groundless. With

so many capable officers on the airship, my brother could hardly do much harm. Perhaps he did not even sail——”

“Your fears were very well justified,” broke in Nelson Lee. “Unfortunately, Commander Stanton, your brother did sail in the R 2000.”

The famous airman gripped the arms of his chair.

“There has been—a disaster?” he asked steadily.

“We don’t know,” said Lee. “That’s the whole point. With the cunning of his demented brain, your brother deceived everybody. He took the airship up at the appointed hour—exactly as arranged. And since that hour nothing more has been seen of the R 2000.”

Commander Stanton sprang to his feet.

“And you come here, talking to me quietly like this?” he shouted. “Good heavens! I assumed by your manner that everything was in order! Why didn’t you tell me at first? You say the ship has vanished? Where? What has happened to it?”

“Nobody knows,” said the detective. “No wireless message has been received. From that moment to this the R 2000 has vanished without trace.”

“And my brother, a madman, is in control!” said Commander Stanton huskily. “Why do you come to me now? I can do nothing! The worst has already happened!”

CHAPTER 5.

The Wireless Code!

MAJOR GUNBY faced the passengers in the central lounge of the R 2000, and his pale, haggard face was wearing a set expression.

“I thought it advisable, ladies and gentlemen, to inform you of the exact position,” he said quietly.

“Anything’s better than suspense and uncertainty,” said Mr. Douglas Mortimer bluntly.

Everybody was looking pinched. The excessive cold, from which there was no relief, had weakened them all. They had no energy—no initiative. All their senses were semi-paralysed by the weakening effect of the Arctic temperature.

No change of any importance had occurred during the past twenty-four hours. The airship was still flying at her maximum height, and ever since daybreak she had been thousands of feet above an apparently everlasting bank of clouds. Not a glimpse of the earth had been seen. Her engines were all working smoothly, and she was cruising at a little over half-speed.

“Commander Stanton is as firmly entrenched as ever,” continued Major Gunby. “I have been to the control-cabin once or twice, but any attempt to reason with the commander is futile.”

“Does he show no sign of sleeping?” asked Sir Pelham Gore.

“None whatever,” replied the major. “You must remember that he is not suffering from the same discomforts as we are, for the control-cabin is heated. He has had no food, and apparently has no desire for food.”

“The man must crumple up sooner or later,” said somebody.

“In the meantime, we must face the position,” said the major quietly. “It is my personal belief that this madman will remain on the alert for another two days, at the very least. Our water supplies are almost gone, and there is practically no food left. As you all know, no cooking has been possible—and so a good deal of the food we had on board has become unfit for consumption. Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, there is not one meal left.”

There were no comments. That day there had been no real meal—just a few biscuits and other trifles generally distributed. Acute hunger was added to the woes of the passengers; and this, combined with the cold, was rendering them desperate.

“We can either remain passive, and hope that Commander Stanton will collapse, or we can take action,” said Major Gunby steadily. “That is why, ladies and gentlemen, I have called this gathering. I feel that it is my duty to leave it to you. If you so desire it, we, the officers, will make a bid to seize the airship; but I warn you with all gravity that it will be a very great risk.”

“I, for one, am tired of this infernal inactivity,” said Mr. Mortimer. “By all means take action. If we are to die, let the end come swiftly. Why suffer torture in addition?”

“Hear, hear!”

The voting was almost unanimous. Even the ladies, now calm and resigned, were in favour of action.

“**R**EADY?” muttered Major Gunby tensely.

“Let her go, sir.”

Four of the airship’s officers were crouching outside the locked door of the control-room. Not a sound had come from within for over an hour. And now the great moment had arrived. These officers were glad enough of this opportunity to act. They were sick of being idle.

With a sudden rush they drove a metal ladder—which had been especially disconnected—against the control-room door. This was no moment for blundering. That door had to be smashed in the first rush, or the whole attempt would fail.

Crash!

The door shivered, shook, and flew open. Major Gunby, leading, had his revolver ready. But it was the madman who had all the advantage.

Crack!

A shot rang out—not from Major Gunby’s weapon, but from the maniac’s. With a groan, the major sank to the floor, his face

contorted with agony. The bullet had struck him in the shoulder, fracturing it.

"Fools!" screamed the usurper. "So you thought you could surprise me, eh? One move, and the rip mechanism operates! Back—back! Am I to be frustrated in the very hour of my triumph?"

Crack—crack!

He fired again, and the officers were lucky.

One received a flesh wound in the arm, and the other heard a bullet hiss past his ear. Until this moment they had not even known that the madman was armed.

"Close that door!" came the command. "You are such imbeciles that you do not know when you are in luck! Everybody on this ship is mad! Everybody is mad except me! But I know what I am doing—and already we are half-way to Mars. Mars! My life's ambition! You will not be so ready to laugh at me when we land on Mars."

The officers retired, baffled, carrying Major Gunby with them. More than ever they realised the helplessness of their position.

A CONFERENCE was being held in Nelson Lee's private study. Only Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Commander Stanton were present.

"We have had plenty of indications that the R 2000 is still afloat," said Nelson Lee. "That remarkable shower in Italy—the supposed thunderbolt in Serbia—and now, to-day, we read of a smashed deck-chair being found in a field in Eastern Germany. It was splintered into tiny fragments, and it may, or may not, have fallen from the airship. But I think we can safely assume that the R 2000 is still afloat."

"My brother's pet mania was the planet, Mars," said the commander slowly. "I keep on wondering if he may have some crazy idea of flying into outer space. Even before he went mad his interest in Mars amounted to a mania. It was when he declared that he had received wireless messages from Mars that we suspected his insanity."

"What kind of messages?" asked Lee sharply.

"A sort of code—conjured up, of course, in his own brain," replied Stanton. "He even told it to me—gave me a full key to it. It's hardly a dot-and-dash principle, but something like it."

Nelson Lee leapt up.

"Here is a chance!" he said tensely. "Man alive, why didn't you speak of this before? Do you know this code? Can you remember it?"

"Yes," said the other in surprise. "But it's only a farrago of nonsense. I mean, there's no such code in existence—"

"But your brother invented it in his demented brain—thinking that it came from Mars," broke in Lee. "You are probably the only other man in the world who knows this code. By its use we might even get in touch with the airship!"

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie. "You mean that he'll think the message is coming from Mars?"

"Exactly," replied Lee. "While he has steadfastly refused to answer any ordinary wireless message, he might respond to that code. No harm will be done by putting the thing to the test, at all events. Come!"

He led the way up to his splendidly-equipped laboratory. Here there was a small transmitting wireless set—but powerful enough to get in touch with the R 2000 if she was anywhere within fifteen hundred miles.

"Now, commander—the code," said Lee crisply. "Perhaps you'd better operate the set. The controls are quite simple."

Commander Stanton was soon at home with the set. From a pocket-book he took a slip of paper on which was noted a curious set of dots and dashes.

"It is, of course, a pure adaptation of the Morse code," declared the commander, "but my brother, in his mania, imagined that it was entirely novel. Not that any Morse expert could make head or tail of a message sent in this code. It is similar—yet different."

He tuned in to the R 2000's wavelength, which, of course, was well known to him. Then, with his face eager and tense, he sent out the code. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore stood by, watching and waiting. At regular intervals Commander Stanton paused, waiting for any response.

"Afraid it's no good," he muttered, after a while.

"Keep on trying," urged Lee.

The message was as brief as it could possibly be—merely the one word "Mars"; but it was the word most calculated to attract the madman's notice.

"Of course, there's always the possibility that the wireless has gone wrong through inattention or excessive height," said the commander. "Or perhaps my brother is not troubling to operate—Hullo! What was that?"

They all became tense. The receiver was alive.

"E-a-r-t-h."

It was the same code, and the reception was remarkably strong. All three men looked at one another with flushed, triumphant eyes.

"Lee, old man, you've scored again!" gloated Lord Dorrimore. "By gad! The first breath from the R 2000 since she vanished! And it's your brilliant wheeze which has resulted in—"

"Never mind my 'brilliant wheeze,'" interrupted Lee crisply. "Try again, commander. You've established communication now, and your brother is bound to be on the alert. Send him a definite message."

"What shall I send?" asked the other huskily. "All right—I know!"

He operated the set: "Mars calling. Good luck on trip. Expecting you."

"Splendid!" murmured Lee, when he had been told. "The one message that is likely to draw him."

Back came the answer: "R 2000 calling. On last lap. With you soon."

Commander Stanton breathed hard.



The mad man picked up Nelson Lee and hurled him through the open window into space!

"He's accepted it!" he ejaculated, explaining what the answer consisted of. "I knew it! In his madness, he's actually attempting to fly the airship to Mars—and he even expects to arrive there."

Nelson Lee was a changed man; he was like a hound at the leash.

"This is extraordinarily good," he declared. "Dorrie, are you game for a big adventure—something quite out of the common?"

"Why ask darned silly questions?" retorted his lordship.

"There's just one chance of saving all those helpless people aboard the R 2000," continued

Lee, "and we can do it—just we three. No need for fleets of Air Force machines—no need for spectacular search. The quieter this thing is kept, the better. Send another message, commander."

"What shall I say?"

"Just this—'Mars calling. We are sending pilot to meet you, and to escort your space-defying craft to our planet.' See what he says in reply to that."

The message was sent, and they waited with fast-beating hearts.

Back came the reply: "R 2000 calling. Will watch for your pilot."

"We've got more than a chance," declared Nelson Lee keenly. "It's going to be a tricky job, but we'll hope for the best."

On the R 2000, the madman laughed with frenzied triumph in the seclusion of his isolated control-room. His eyes, deep-sunken and glassy through lack of sleep, and burning with the intensity of his madness, were like living coals.

"At last—at last!" he shouted. "Success! Not only have I taken this airship into outer space, but Mars is sending its pilot! Success—success!"

With another maniacal laugh he fiercely signalled to the engineers to give him more and more speed.

CHAPTER 6.

The Great Adventure!

LONDON knew nothing of the preparations that were set in motion that same day. Great Britain, the Empire, and, indeed, the whole world, little realised that three men were setting out to bring the lost airship back. Nelson Lee had not even informed the Government of his plan. He desired absolute secrecy.

Commander Stanton's rescue from the lunatic asylum was also kept secret—Superintendent Bryant having been warned to breathe no word. The world believed that Commander Stanton was on the R 2000—and it was better that the world should continue to believe so.

But very late on that summer's evening, when the twilight was lingering, an aeroplane stood waiting to take off from a private aerodrome not many miles from London. It was one of the latest productions of the Manners Aircraft Company, Limited—a secret plane which had only just passed through its triumphant trials.

Lord Dorrimore was the pilot, and he stood ready. Commander Stanton was already in the passenger cabin, lovingly fingering the controls of a special wireless transmitter which had been installed.

In that cabin were several other figures. They were youngsters, eager, excited, and impatient. Nipper, Watson, Tregellis-West, Browne, Stevens—Nelson Lee's cubs from the Detective Academy. They were not going on this trip because it was likely to prove a joy ride, but because they were needed.

"Here he comes," muttered Dorrie, with satisfaction.

Nelson Lee's Rolls-Royce Special had just driven up. The great detective carried with him a big suit-case, and he was looking quietly confident.

"Everything ready, Dorrie?" he asked.

"Waiting for you, old man," replied his lordship.

"Wireless set satisfactory?"

"Ask Stanton—he's delighted with it," said Dorrie. "The sooner we're in the air, the better. You're going to join me in the cockpit, aren't you?"

"Later, Dorrie," replied Lee. "Let's be off."

Quietly the 'plane's twin engines started up, and she glided across the aerodrome. Those engines were of the very latest type—enormously powerful, yet nearly silent. The 'plane gained height rapidly, and Dorrie sent her speeding away in the direction of the coast. As yet he did not know which course he would ultimately take. To begin with, he was making for the Continent.

It wasn't until the aeroplane had gained a height of twenty-five thousand feet that Commander Stanton got busy with the wireless set. The temperature at this height was chilly and rarefied; but those within the well-equipped cabin and cockpit suffered no discomforts. This machine was fitted with adequate heating apparatus, and extra supplies of oxygen were available. Within the cabin the atmosphere remained unchanged at whatever height the 'plane flew.

"Better try her now, Stanton," said Nelson Lee, after a while. "The most important thing for us to know is the airship's position. The success of our plan will depend upon your brother's readiness to give it."

"If we can," said the commander anxiously. "Still, we'll try."

Ten minutes later he was looking flushed. The wireless had operated perfectly. Almost at once an answer, in that strange code, had come through. This aeroplane was supposedly the Martian pilot, and was asking for directions. They came; and although it was difficult to figure out the exact position there was every reason to suppose that the R 2000 was cruising somewhere over the Mediterranean.

"She's been wandering about aimlessly all these days," said Stanton. "By Jove! She's proving her airworthiness, if nothing else! How long will it take us, Mr. Lee? When do you think we shall sight her?"

"Not until after dawn, at the very earliest—and probably a good deal later," said Lee. "That leaves me ample time for my preparations."

Nipper and the other cubs had been told nothing of what these preparations were to be, and they were full of curiosity. This curiosity was not satisfied even now, for the boys were told to get in some sleep. Lee, in the meantime, joined Lord Dorrimore in the cockpit. It wasn't until dawn was approaching that Nelson Lee returned to the cabin. And then, watched eagerly by the cubs, he proceeded to don the most remarkable make-up of his entire career.

"Don't be startled, young 'uns," he said with a smile. "I've got to turn myself into a Martian—and the success or failure of this mission will depend upon the madman's readiness to accept me as the genuine article."

He proceeded to encase himself in a tightly-fitting suit of vivid red. The material was a kind of oiled silk, which gleamed and shimmered at every movement. Lee's arms were converted into curious-looking fins. The continuation of the costume beyond his hands was so cunningly devised that all human resemblance was lost.

It was the same with his legs. They became fins in a similar way. And, so that there should be no likeness to a human head, a complete false head was provided, fitting on after the fashion of a diver's helmet. It was much bigger than Lee's own head, of course, and the features were vaguely suggestive of humanity, yet utterly different.

The costume was grotesque, and no sane man would have accepted it. But Lee had never forgotten that he was dealing with a madman—and a madman, moreover, who was excited and ready to accept any weird apparition as a visitor from Mars.

"It's marvellous," declared Browne, with enthusiasm. "But there is one point, Chief. In the event of His Nibs attempting to chat with you, how will you manage it?"

"This false head is made after the fashion of a ventriloquist's dummy," replied Lee. "I can operate every feature by the pressing of bulbs: Then there are special little bellows which create uncouth sounds. Mad as this poor man is, he would never accept an ordinary human voice talking in his own language."

"You are quite right, Mr. Lee," said Commander Stanton. "The more weird and monstrous you make yourself, the greater will be the chance of success."

"But how are you going to do it, gov'nor?" asked Nipper. "We're in this 'plane—and the madman is on the airship. I'm jiggered if I can make head or tail of the game."

"You'll soon understand," replied Nelson Lee quietly.

THE 'plane was making remarkable speed. Ever since leaving England she had been travelling at well over two hundred miles an hour. Now the Mediterranean had been sighted—a bluish patch, tens of thousands of feet below, glimpsed through a rift in the cloud banks.

The actual search for the R 2000 was now in progress; and there was no certainty that this lone 'plane would succeed. The airship was quite invisible except at fairly close quarters. It was necessary to avoid being seen, for if Commander Stanton's mad brother should sight the 'plane, he would immediately become suspicious. For this reason Dorrie had climbed to the extreme "ceiling" the 'plane was capable of. The machine was miles up in the air, a tiny speck purring along in the illimitable blue of the upper atmosphere.

"He must be below us," declared Lee, as they waited. "We're at least twelve thousand feet higher than the airship could possibly fly. There's not one chance in a thousand of our being seen."

"No chance at all," agreed the commander. "The control-cabin is at the nose of the ship, but well underneath. So long as we keep above we remain invisible."

At intervals he operated the wireless, using the madman's code. His messages were brief—assurances that he was getting nearer.

These communications with the airship were of great value. By the strength of the signals it was possible to calculate the position; and now the signals were becoming of great strength.

"She's somewhere in this area, Dorrie," declared Nipper, who had gone into the cockpit. "The commander says that the signals are so strong that——"

"Dry up!" broke in Dorrie. "What's that over there? No, not that way—over to starboard, here. Only a cloud, I think, but—By gad, though, it's not! Look! Do you spot it?"

Nipper stared. The entire front of the cockpit was transparent, so that the pilot could not only see everything ahead and above, but a full panorama of that which lay beneath. Far, far below were the clouds, looking unreal and fairylike at this great height. Only in one or two spots could the blue of the sea be seen—several thousand feet still farther below.

"I can't see anything!" said Nipper. "At least, nothing but clouds and—— Wait a minute! I believe you're right, Dorrie. It is! It's the R 2000! Hurrah! We've found her!"

"Don't make such a din, confound you!" grinned his lordship. "Buzz back and tell the Chief that everything in the garden is lovely!"

Dorrie dipped the nose of the 'plane down, and throttled the engines until they were scarcely ticking over. The machine went into a graceful glide. Dorrie piloted her so that she kept exactly over the airship. Sinking lower and lower, the enormous hull of the R 2000 now stood out clearly against the "footground," so to speak, of the clouds.

Commander Stanton now took Nipper's place.

"She's pretty well moving at full speed, I imagine," he commented. "Do you think you'll be able to manage it, Lord Dorri-more?"

"It's a big chance, but I shall love it," replied Dorrie happily.

The 'plane dropped nearer and nearer. Before long Dorrie opened the throttle a trifle, and aeroplane and airship travelled at exactly the same speed, the 'plane seven or eight hundred feet higher, and dead overhead.

Dorrie inspected the airship's top with keen eyes. For a considerable distance that top was flat. There was a special runway provided—designed for the very purpose which Dorrie now intended to employ.

It was a landing-run for an aeroplane! The only risk here—and it was a big one—was that this 'plane was very large. That runway was provided for tiny, single-seater fighters. There was always the danger of a heavier machine crashing straight through.

"All right—I've seen all I need," said Dorrie, at length. "We'll try her."

Still keeping his engines running at the same power—for to shut them off would mean dropping behind—he descended lower and lower. It was a tense moment. Aeroplane and airship were both travelling at over a hundred miles an hour, and now only a few feet separated them.

"Look out!" snapped Dorrie, between his teeth.

The landing-wheels touched the runway. It was like the flick of a feather. At the same moment Dorrie released two great grappling-hooks. They shot out from the aeroplane's body, one on either side. They tore at the great envelope, tautened, and held fast.

"Well, that's that," said his lordship lightly.

It had been an amazingly skilful piece of work. Dorrie had landed the aeroplane with scarcely a jar. Not a soul aboard the R 2000 could have known. And those grappling-hooks kept the 'plane in position.

There was need to move swiftly now, however. At any moment one of the hooks might slip, and that would mean disaster. For the 'plane would inevitably lift and get tossed away—perhaps wrecking itself on the great hull before getting clear.

"Outside—everybody!" shouted the commander as he dashed into the cabin. "Ready, Mr. Lee? By Heaven! I can't believe that this thing will succeed!"

"It's got to!" replied Nelson Lee grimly. "Help me with this head, Stanton."

CHAPTER 7.

The Visitor From "Mars"!

MOVING about on the top of the great hull of the R 2000 was a number of figures. They were like tiny ants against that vast envelope, fighting hard against the rush of wind caused by the airship's passage. It was a wind of bitter, appalling cold. The temperature was below zero, and the air so rarefied that within a very few minutes Dorrie and Commander Stanton and the cubs were feeling almost light-headed.

"For mercy's sake, be careful, young 'uns!" urged Dorrie, fighting for his breath. "One false step, and you'll be over the edge—and that means a little drop of about twenty-five thousand feet."

He need not have wasted his breath. The cubs were careful. For they were engaged upon a remarkable task. Having advanced along the top of the airship almost to its nose, they were now gently lowering Nelson Lee down the great vessel's side. He was suspended on an almost invisible wire. And now that his headgear was in position, and his "fins" outstretched, he looked the very embodiment of a fantastic imaginary Martian. Lower and lower he dropped.

An appalling moment came when there was a horrible rending sound, a shrieking

of metal, and a dull jarring which shook the airship from stem to stern. Lord Dorrimore, assisting the cubs in their perilous task, glanced round and caught in his breath.

He was just in time to see the aeroplane reeling helplessly from the runway. One of the grappling hooks had dragged! The machine slewed round, pitched dizzily to starboard, and struck the airship's hull. There was a rending of fabric, a shattering of girders, and in a moment the aeroplane toppled over into space.

"Thank Heaven she's cleared!" panted Dorrie. "What's more, she's fallen away behind. No chance of His Nibs having seen her."

The R 2000 was flying as steadily as ever now. The smashed girders were only minor ones, and the airship's stability and rigidity were in no way impaired. But she was losing gas from at least one of the bags, and she was already imperceptibly losing height.

Down below, in the passengers' quarters, everybody was on their feet. Even those on the point of exhaustion had tumbled out, and were staggering into the big central lounge.

"What has happened?" was the general cry.

"Nobody can tell," said Majoy Gunby, pale and weak, his arm in a sling. "It felt like a collision—but that seems impossible."

Another officer came running in, his youthful face flushed.

"Major—major!" he shouted. "It's the commander! He's just come aboard!"

A chorus of exclamations arose as a figure appeared in the great doorway, leading from the central staircase.

"Hold him!" urged the Prime Minister. "Don't let him interfere with anybody here. Why are you keeping back?"

The officers were staring at the newcomer in a dazed way.

"I beg of you to keep calm," said Commander Stanton urgently. "I have just come aboard with Mr. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore—we landed on the hull from an aeroplane. The 'plane broke away—"

"What is he saying?" demanded Sir Pelham Gore, in amazement.

"The man in the control-room is my brother—my twin brother," panted the commander. "Our safety now depends upon the skill of Mr. Lee. If he fails, we shall all share the same fate. But he will succeed!"

WHILE excitement ran like electricity through the length and breadth of the airship, causing the weakened passengers to discover new strength, Nelson Lee was undertaking the riskiest task of his career.

Dangling at the end of that wire, lowered foot by foot by his faithful cubs, he now came level with the control-cabin. He could see through the windows; and his heart

capt when he observed that the madman was occupying himself with the wireless apparatus. The man had now unlashd himself from the control-wheel, for his excitement was so intense that he could not remain still. The R 2000 was more or less looking after herself.

Nelson Lee was now able to make the final move. He gave the wire a sharp jerk, indicating to those above that he desired to be lowered no farther. He beat his fins against the thick glass of the cabin, and then gave himself a swing outwards. He saw the madman turn. He heard his scream of delight.

"The pilot—the pilot!" shouted Stanton's brother. "The Martian pilot!"

He stood and gazed for several seconds, as though bewildered by this apparition. This was the test. Would he "swallow" this well-nigh incredible deception? Only his madness caused him to do so.

Deliberately Nelson Lee tapped with one of his fins upon the glass—and his tapping was in the secret "Martian" code. He gave the word "open."

"Yes, yes!" shouted the man in the cabin. "You have come to pilot us on the last lap of this great journey. My triumph is at hand."

He rushed to the windows, tore at the fastenings, and unsealed them. He flung one of them open, and with a violent swing Lee sent himself hurtling inside. In a flash, all his plans were changed. He would have no parley with this crazed astronomer.

In that plunge, Lee had knocked the other down—an entirely unrehearsed effect, and he took advantage of it. He fell upon the madman, and, hampered though he was by the ungainly costume, he grappled. His hands forced their way through the red silken fabric.

"Help! Help!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "No, my friend, you don't get back to those controls."

The madman was fighting with utter frenzy.

"Cur! Traitor!" he snarled. "You are no Martian! You would seek to trick me! But you shall not!"

Outside Commander Stanton and some of the other officers were slithering down the ladder which led from the interior of the hull to the control-cabin. They flung themselves against the door, and they burst in.

"Great Heavens!" shouted Stanton hoarsely.

They were just in time to see the madman picking Nelson Lee up in his arms. In spite of all Lee's efforts, he was helpless in the hands of his antagonist. The new arrivals, as they burst in, saw the great detective flung out of the open window.

"Hold him!" panted the commander. They dashed forward. The madman did not even recognise his brother. He uttered one final scream, and leapt after Lee!

THE famous detective had not been hurled to his death. For, of course, he was still attached to the wire. The cubs, far above, made no blunder.

After that one terrific jerk—which had, indeed, nearly caused William Napoleon Browne to topple into space—there came two other jerks. Nelson Lee was hauled up. Eager hands gripped him. He was looking a wreck. His costume was in tatters, his wrists were bleeding where the madman had torn his flesh. His head-gear had been flung away.

"O. K.?" asked Dorrie briefly. "He's gone," replied Lee. "Threw himself to destruction. Dorrie, we've done the trick. The R 2000 is safe."

LESS than one hour later the R 2000 was down to a mere thousand feet, and cruising at half speed—a necessary precaution, this, on account of the damaged hull and torn fabric.

Her injuries were slight, however, and she was still under perfect control. The tranquility and warmth of the air had done much to restore the passengers; but the shock of being saved had restored them most.

Over every corner of the world the news was being flashed—"the R 2000 found." Newspapers were getting out special editions; people in all parts of the Universe were wildly excited. When all hope had seemed lost, the missing airship had reported that all was well. After days of silence came the signals, asking for bearings and requesting an aerodrome staff to make ready. It was like a message from the dead.

When, at length, the R 2000 was approaching a great Italian aerodrome, Mr. Douglas Mortimer took Nelson Lee by the hand.

"There is not much that any of us can say, Mr. Lee," said the Prime Minister quietly. "England owes you a debt that she will find it difficult to repay. Lord Dorri-more is equally entitled to the country's thanks."

"Oh, I say," protested Dorrie. "You don't seem to realise, Mr. Mortimer, that we thoroughly enjoyed the stunt. Best thrill I've had for years!"

He was not allowed to escape the acclamations of the crowd when the airship landed, however—but Dorrie was certainly clever enough to avoid the hero-worship of the British population. For no sooner had he landed than he quietly disappeared, hinting that he was off to bury himself in the wilds for a month or two, until "all this silly nonsense" was over.

And Nelson Lee and his cubs envied him!

THE END.

Another exciting long, complete detective yarn featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper next Wednesday entitled, "The Test Match Mystery!"

THE TROUBLE TRIPLETS!



Farmers' Boys!

"LET'S risk it!" exclaimed Posh Trooble hopefully.

"They'll only set the dog on us!" said Sam.

"Well, Nippy can hypnotise him, or I can imitate a more savage bow-wow and frighten him off!"

"Rats! The farmer will take us for tramps and chase us off with a hayfork——"

"Don't be a croaker!" sighed Posh. "We've got to earn a breakfast somehow! Gosh!

Sleeping under a hedge doesn't suit me—I'm stiff and aching all over—and a bit of exercise such as waiting for hens to lay eggs will just suit me."

"More likely we'll be set to work cleaning out pig-styes!" grinned Nippy. "Still, let's chance it. I'm hungry!"

"Come on, then!" chuckled Posh, and he began to sing in a sort of croaking treble, "Oh, to be a farmer's b-hoy-oy!" that caused a bull, just eyeing them over the hedge, to whisk round, kick out with both heels and tear across the meadow in a fright.

Arm in arm the Trouble Triplets approached the farm along the lane until they reached a gate over which a fat man in gaiters, who was chewing a straw with a far-away look in his rather piggy eyes, leaned.

"The giddy farmer!" murmured Posh. "Now, no larks, mind! I'm going to forget that I'm a ventriloquist, and Sam must forget that he's a rotten juggler and acrobat, and you, Nippy, must forget that you're a hypnotist and conjurer. We're going to be farmer's b-boys—if this fat merchant will give us jobs!"

The farmer's look was none too promising as he eyed the three hungry wanderers.

"Allo!" he remarked. "What are you young tramps arter? Hop it afore I sets the dog on you!"

"We're not tramps, sir!" explained Posh meekly. "Only trampers seeking work—just enough to earn breakfast, if you like! We'll work like anything, sir!"

"Oh, it's work you wants, is it? Ho-ho! And what can you do, I'd like to know?" sneered the farmer.

"We can do anything—milk cows, or make hay, or—or water milk or anything!" said Sam vaguely. "Just give us a chance, sir!"

"I'll jest give you a chance to hop it afore——" The farmer paused, and a crafty look came to his piggy eyes. As it happened he was very short-handed, two of his staff being away with mumps, and he realised that if help was not got soon he himself might

"DOWN ON MISERY FARM"

It's "misery farm" until the Trouble Triplets give it a look in—and then it becomes

"JOLLITY FARM!"

have to work—which was an awful thought. "Hold on! After all, perhaps I can find you jobs!" he ended. "Foller me!"

They followed him into the farm-yard, and the farmer shouted out: "Liza!"

Liza proved to be his wife, a thin, scraggy female with a face like a hatchet.

"What 'ave they bin up to?" she inquired, glowering at the boys. "Stealing happles or heggs?"

"Arter a job!" explained Farmer Bloggs briefly, winking at his spouse. "If you've any jobs you want doin', Liza——"

Mrs. Blogg had; she set Nippy, armed with a basket, to collect eggs and feed the hens. Mr. Bloggs set Sam to help milk the cows, while Posh—to his disgust—was given the job of cleaning out the pig-styes and feeding the pigs.

For an hour the three lads slaved hard, eager to earn breakfast. Nippy found himself at the beck and call of Mrs. Bloggs, who seemed a meaner and worse tyrant than her husband. The trouble started when Mrs. Bloggs, who followed Nippy about suspiciously, suddenly came on him searching for eggs.

"Well, 'ow many have you got?" she demanded.

Nippy showed her the half-dozen new-laid in his basket.

"That all?" sniffed Mrs. Bloggs. "There ought-er be more than that, young feller! You've been eating them!"

"I haven't!" said Nippy indignantly.

"Course you have!" shrilled the female. "You've been stealing——"

"I tell you I haven't, ma'am!" said Nippy, stung to anger by the charge. "But if you want more I'll try to produce 'em!"

And with a gleam in his eyes that ought to have warned Mrs. Bloggs, Nippy rapidly began to take eggs, one after another, from under a sitting, protesting hen, and shove them into the basket. Yet, strange to say, the number of eggs in the basket did not increase. One after another Nippy brought the eggs from under the hen until there should have been at least fifty in the basket—but weren't; the original half a dozen only reposed there.

Not knowing Nippy was a clever conjurer, Mrs. Bloggs stared and stared, her eyes nearly coming out of her head.

"It's magic!" she shrilled at last. "It's magic—unless you're playin' tricks, my lad! What you done with all them eggs—hand 'em over afore I fetches a policeman, you young thief! You taken out fifty at least, and——"

"Hallo! Here's another, ma'am!" And Nippy took another egg—or appeared to—and dropped it into Mrs. Blogg's skinny palm, where it turned into a mouse before her very eyes.

Mrs. Bloggs shrieked, then jumped back, and, tripping over a bucket of chicken-food, sat down with a terrific bump, nearly flattening out a hapless hen amidst an uproar of hen music.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nippy, unable to restrain himself.

"You—you young villain!" shrilled Mrs. Bloggs.

She leaped up, grabbed the upturned bucket and flung it at Nippy's head. Luckily it missed him, and crashed through the scullery window. From the scullery sounded the crash of breaking glass and crockery, and a terrified female shriek.

Nippy bolted, dodging round the buildings. He nearly collided with Sam, who was attempting to milk a stubborn cow in the stackyard.

"How's it going?" asked Nippy glumly. "I've had bad luck——"

"Oh, splendid!" said Sam bitterly. "We're playing 'Here we go round the mulberry bush!' me and this dashed cow. Every time I sit down to milk her she dances round in a circle on her hind hoofs, blow her! I'm getting dizzy with following her up. Whoa, Bess!"

He sat down again on the stool, and the moment he did so the exasperating cow whisked round again as on a pivot. Sam hopped after her, dragging the stool behind him and the bucket before him.

"Why don't you tie her tail so she can't twist round?" suggested Nippy brightly. "Here, I'll do it!"

He grabbed the cow's tail and was just trying to tie it to the handle of a milk-urn when the cow, evidently resenting the liberty, lashed out with her heels, sending Nippy and the milk-urn—which happened to be full of butter-milk—flying. The yard was flooded with butter-milk as the lid shot off. Then she whisked round, lashed out again and sent the bucket, nearly full of milk, sailing into the air.

Unfortunately Jim, the farm-hand, happened to be approaching, and he got most of the milk and all of the bucket. The milk soused over him and he plonked down on the hard cobbles with the bucket jammed on his head like a bonnet.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Nippy. "Look out! Here's that awful female coming! Better hop it!"

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They hopped it, having sighted Mrs. Bloggs bearing down armed with a rolling-pin. They hastened round to the backyard again where Posh was hard at work in the pig-styes, perspiration streaming down his youthful brow.

"Better hook it, Posh!" panted Sam. "That awful woman's after us with a rolling-pin! We've— Gosh! Here's the farmer!"

Farmer Bloggs came rushing up, bawling at the top of his voice. Evidently his wife had complained about the three boys.

"Ere, you!" he bawled, as Sam and Nippy dropped down out of sight behind the pig-stye wall. "Outer that—lively! I've 'ad enough of this—you and your larks!"

"Why, what have I done?" demanded Sam warmly, raising his heated face. "I've worked hard enough—"

"None of your sauce—hop it!" raved the farmer. "And you, too!" he added, glaring at Posh.

"But what about my wages for the work I've done?" asked that lad heatedly. "I've cleaned out these pig-styes—"

"Never mind what you've done—hop it afore I sets the dorg—"

"I'm jolly well not going until I've been paid for what I've done!" snorted Posh indignantly.

"Aren't you?" roared the farmer, and he made a grab at the gate of the pigstye. Even as he did so a voice came from the end of the stye. Actually it came from Posh, who decided that the situation merited his getting into action with a few spots of ventriloquism. To the startled farmer, however, it seemed that the voice came from a big, fat sow.

"Stop that, old Bloggs!" it ordered. "Give the kid what he's earned, you miserable, mean old skinflint!"

Farmer Bloggs went white, and leaned for support over the gate of the stye. Unluckily for him the gate was unfastened, and under his weight it instantly swung inwards. Farmer Bloggs plunged forward with a wild howl and buried his features in the trough which Posh had only a few minutes before filled with some liquid mess that was the pig's food.

Amidst frightened squeals from the startled inmates of the stye, the farmer wallowed and struggled until, just as he raised his dripping features from the trough, he heard the nearest pig remark:

"Blowed if the old skinflint ain't pinching our grub now!"

It was too much for Farmer Bloggs. He jumped up with a wild shriek of fear and bolted—or, at least, tried to bolt. Unfortunately—for him—he tripped over the pig, fell astride it, and then wrapped his arms about the animal in a desperate effort to save himself from falling.

Squealing shrilly the pig, not being trained to carry a jockey, ambled a few paces out of the stye with its weighty rider, and then neatly deposited him on his face in a bed of stinging nettles just outside.

Pressing for Payment!

"HA, ha, ha!" shrieked the Trouble Triplets.

"Serves him right!" grinned Posh. "Better seek a job elsewhere after this, chaps! Come on!"

But they had delayed their departure too long, for the farmer's bellowing had brought several farm-hands and Mrs. Bloggs rushing to the spot.

"Collar them, Joe—Jim—Garge—Tom!" bellowed the farmer, raising a red, dripping face from the nettles. "Don't let 'em get away! I'll tan their hides for this! Stop 'em!"

"Oh, crikey!"

The three lads turned to bolt. Posh got away well, and so did Sam, but Nippy ran right into the arms of a burly farm-hand. Instantly, hearing his yell, Posh and Sam turned back to his rescue. It proved their undoing, for Jim, Garge and Tom pounded up. Instantly Posh was collared, but Sam proved a difficult capture. As Garge's horny hand grasped him, Sam, feeling he had neglected his acrobatic art lately, instantly turned a neat somersault, planted both feet in Garge's manly chest and pushed, dropping lightly on his feet again.

Garge sat down on the cobbles with a heavy bump and a bowl. After that Sam quite enjoyed himself, vaulting, leaping, wheeling and playing all sorts of acrobatic tricks.

Unfortunately, all his efforts were in vain. Determined that one, at least, of his youthful victims should not escape, Farmer Bloggs, having finished mopping his features and hair, had dashed at Nippy, catching him unawares and bringing him down.

Twice Sam barged into Bloggs in an effort to release Nippy, but the farmer was crafty, and he sprawled over the hapless youth, almost squashing him flat in his burly embrace. And just then Mrs. Bloggs arrived and put an abrupt end to Sam's performance.

She rushed at Sam from behind, and before that youth had got over the surprise at being attacked from such an unexpected quarter the female Amazon had grabbed him and was boxing his ears soundly.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yarrooop! Whooop! Yaw-ow-ow-ow! Stoppit!" shrieked Sam.

By this time Nippy was tired of playing the part of a punctured balloon just to please Farmer Bloggs, and suddenly a brainwave came to him. It was not often he used his wonderful powers as a hypnotist, but he felt it was necessary and justified now.

He gazed in a peculiar manner into the bloated visage of Farmer Bloggs just above him, and as the farmer caught his eye a change came over him.

He stared and stared into Nippy's magnetic orbs, and then slowly, as if worked by mechanical action, he arose off Nippy, while his rage faded and a broad, idiotic grin distorted his face. Then he seemed to sight Mrs. Bloggs doing her ear-slapping act.



With the irate farmer clinging frantically to its back, the pig waddled out of the sty. "Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Trouble Triplets.

"Here, hold on, missis! Them kids is pals of mine!" chortled Farmer Bloggs blithely, and he began to dance on the cobbles like a two-year-old, while his wife and the farmhands stared with wide-open mouths. "Come and dance, Liza, old gal! Tra-la-la-la-de-de!"

"G-goo' 'lor!" shrieked Mrs. Bloggs. "Ebenezer, stop that this minute, you big fool! Stop that or I'll—I'll—I'll——"

Mrs. Bloggs' voice trailed off as she suddenly caught Nippy's strange dark eyes fixed upon her. Slowly she released the hapless Sam, and then, with startling suddenness, she also began to dance, humming blithely as she did so.

"By hokey!" gasped Garge. "The maister and missus 'ave gone mad-loike! They be——" He paused, and his jaw sagged as he suddenly met Nippy's eye, and a moment later he also was joining hands with the merry farmer and his wife as they clod-hopped round over the cobbles. Within three minutes Nippy, determined to make a job of it, had Jim and Joe and Tom doing likewise.

"What the thump——" began Posh, and then suddenly he understood. He broke into a howl of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't it rich?" choked Sam, also understanding. "Good man, Nippy! Go it!"

"Make 'em give us some grub!" gasped Posh, in Nippy's ear. "We want payment for work done, old scout!"

"What-ho!" said Nippy solemnly. Then he chuckled as Mrs. Bloggs suddenly sat down on the cobbles, exhausted, but happy. "Very nice indeed, ma'am," he went on. "And

now if you've finished entertaining us, will you please pack us some grub?"

"That I will, laddies!" chirruped Mrs. Bloggs.

And she tripped happily indoors. Her hubby was still leading the merry dance when she emerged, bearing a bulky parcel. Nippy bowed as he took it from her.

"Carry on, Mrs. Bloggs!" he said cheerfully, giving her a bit more 'fluence. "You can all stop in a few minutes! Go it—on with the dance. Come on, chaps!" added Nippy. "Time we pushed off!"

Slipping round the wall of the farm, the Trouble Triplets, almost doubled up with laughter, hooked it with a will. They had crossed three fields when, from the distant farmstead, came a chorus of angry howls and shrill shrieks of rage.

"Gosh! The giddy 'fluence has worked off, Nippy!" giggled Posh. "Old man, you're a genius!"

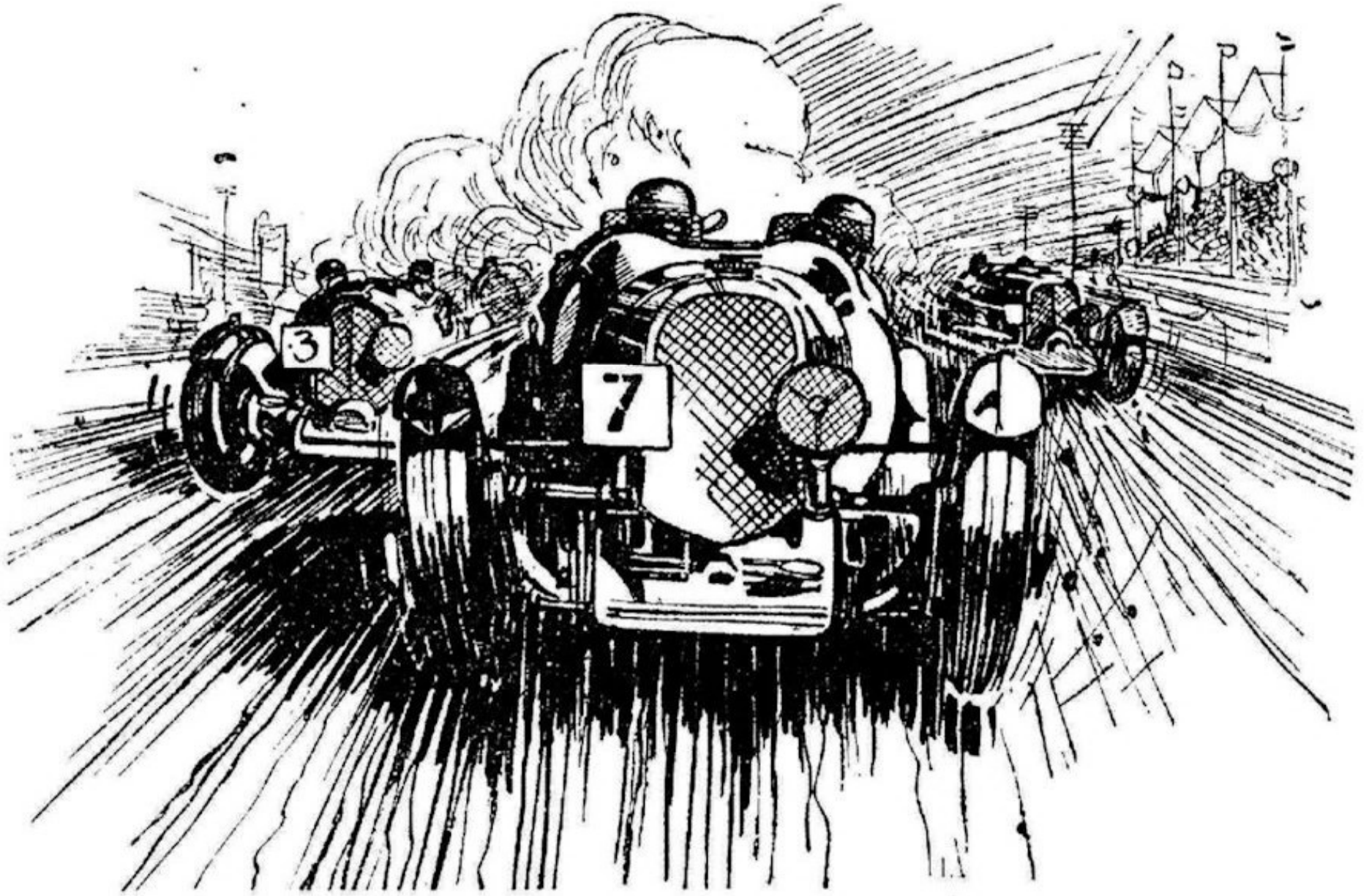
It was not until they had put a couple of miles between themselves and the farm that the Trouble Triplets ventured to stop and open the parcel. Inside was a big rabbit-pie, some lovely pork sandwiches, and an assortment of egg and ham sandwiches that made their eyes glisten with joy and gladness. And the wanderers settled down to their long-delayed breakfast feeling that the recent trials and tribulations had been worth it after all.

THE END.

(More about this cheery trio of laughter-merchants in next week's hilarious complete yarn.)

ALFRED EDGAR'S POPULAR SERIAL CONTINUES IN THRILLING STYLE!

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!



Jim's Threat!

NIGHT cloaked the circuit of the Irish Grand Prix. The crowds had gone and the stands were deserted. In

Dunoon a big dinner was being given to all the drivers. Jim didn't go to it, because he wanted to keep himself quiet.

He spent the evening in a quiet stroll with Joe across the fields, and they talked about the crash.

"You can bet it was deliberate," Joe said.

"But I want to make quite sure," Jim told him. "If we can see Stargie when he comes back from Dunoon, we'll tackle him.

If the blighter shows signs of guilt then—"

He paused a moment, and his voice was hard as he went on: "Then I'll know what to do!"

So they went across to the Ace camp, which had been set in two barns some way out of Dunoon, and when the moon was up and it was drawing near midnight, they saw three cars come in from the town.

"That's him!" whispered Joe.

The watching boys saw Stargie get out of the leading machine. They heard his laugh, and they saw the glittering gold cup which was the victor's trophy in the race. He had it under his arm, and was still holding it when he turned to stride along the road to-

wards the little Irish inn at which he was staying.

He went off alone, his raven-black hair bared to the night wind. The boys watched him come up, and they saw that he was in an invincible sort of mood. There had been speeches at the dinner in praise of his driving skill; he had won one of the fastest of all road races, and he was thoroughly pleased with himself.

He stopped dead when the boys stepped from the shadow of the hedge near the inn, and his smile died for a moment.

"I want a word with you, Stargie," Jim said quietly.

"You deliberately crashed me in the race—you threatened me beforehand, and you pulled it off!"

"What are you talking about?" Stargie bent a little, his dark face lowering and his

eyes half-closed, so that they glittered out from beneath his lids. "I can't help it if you ride so close to me that I—"

"My dad crashed in the same way," Jim said slowly. "You crashed him!"

Stargie straightened up, and his fists bunched. For an instant the old terror that Jim had seen in his eyes showed once more, then the man forced a grin.

"My car hit a bump in the road and

Lon Stargie crashed Jim in the Irish Grand Prix—and now Jim's going to crash Stargie in the French Grand Prix!

touched yours," he snarled. "I can't help it if the same thing happened to your father on the Sarles Circuit!"

"You didn't hit a bump," Jim said. "You did it deliberately!"

"You young liar, I'll——" Stargie's fists bunched and he stepped closer, only to stop as he stared into Jim's set face.

The boy saw the man's lips twitch. His eyes widened. He stared into Jim's features as though, once again, he could not believe what he saw. Then he laughed.

"What's the use of arguing with you? You mad young fool, you can't drive well enough to——"

"Stargie, you killed my father—I know it now, for certain! You tried to kill me and Joe to-day in the same way. The law can't touch you—but I'll be my own law!"

Jim's face was pallid in the moonlight, and his voice came cold and hard and threatening.

"I'm going to ride in the French Grand Prix—and I know you're due to race there. We'll race over the same circuit as where you killed my dad—and one of us won't come out of it!"

Stargie drew back, his breath hissing through his suddenly gritted teeth.

"You—you mean—you——" he gasped.

"You killed my dad there—you meant to do it!" Jim said. "And you know what I mean!"

He turned abruptly, caught Joe's arm and moved off with him.

Stargie remained, gazing after them, his face distorted. He watched until they were turning a bend in the road, then he gasped.

"The young fool! What can he do to me? I don't have to be afraid of him!" He laughed to himself, but his laugh was hollow and thin.

The boys heard that laugh, and Joe glanced back to see Stargie striding on towards the inn.

"You were an ass to talk like that, Jim," Joe said. "You as good as said that you'd crash him next chance you get."

"And so I will!" Jim answered. "I meant it. He killed my dad, and I'm going to avenge him. My dad was—was the finest man that ever lived! And a rotten beast like Stargie finished him—because he was jealous of him!"

"I'm going to send Stargie off the road, piled up in a busted car, just like he piled up my dad—and tried to pile us up. And nobody on earth will stop me doing it!"

The White Stone!

JOE thought that Jim's vengeful mood would pass off, but it did not.

Back at Woodburn Village, Jim grew more and more grimly determined. Before they left Ireland, he made Joe swear to say nothing to anyone about it, and, as time passed, Joe wished he hadn't made that promise.

He didn't like the cold, hard way in which Jim went to work on the reconstruction of the battered car, and he didn't like Jim's eagerness to get over to France and begin practice.

Joe could not altogether understand the way in which Jim's ideas ran. But, in the first place, Jim now realised what a fine man his father had been. There was hardly any racing driver he met who did not praise the memory of Big Ross.

In addition, Jim knew that a racing man's life depended on the drivers behind the wheels of other cars on the road. He had to trust them to do the right thing, to give him his share of the track.

When a crooked driver plays some trick, he takes his victim by surprise. In a crash things happen at incredible speed, and Jim knew that his dad had been given no chance. He had been given no more chance than if Lon Stargie had shot him in the back—and Stargie had escaped scot-free.

Still more, Stargie was being hailed everywhere as a marvellous driver. He had taken the place which should have belonged to Big Ross, and which the Ace crack could never have gained had Jim's dad not died.

Jim knew, too, that but for Stargie's treachery, the Ross-Ryan must have won the big Brooklands race, and would certainly have won the Irish Grand Prix. All the work of Steve and Mr. Ryan, all Jim's own labour, and all Joe's cheerful endeavour had gone for nothing because of the Ace man's craft.

But above all, Jim wanted to avenge his dad.

So in Woodburn Village a new car was built in the Ryan works, and in Steve's

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, daring, is a born racing driver. His brother, STEVE ROSS, has just completed building a special racing car known as the Ross Eight, and they take it down to Brooklands for a big race. They are accompanied by JOE COOPER, Jim's chum, who acts as mechanic. Jim realises that his most dangerous rival is LON STARGIE, the crack speedman of Ace Motors. Stargie is unscrupulous, too—as Jim discovers to his cost during the race. Jim is winning, and then the Ace speedman deliberately makes him crash. After the race Jim vows he will get his own back against Stargie in the Irish Grand Prix. The Ross Eight having been wrecked, Mr. Ryan, owner of the Ryan Engineering Company, builds another car for the brothers. The day of the race comes. Once again Jim is winning—and once again his rival deliberately crashes him. The boy is not seriously injured, and decides that he'll have another cut at Stargie in the French Grand Prix. "He's licked us twice—but the third time he'll be unlucky!" Jim tells Joe grimly.

(Now read on.)

garage the wrecked machine was gradually reconstructed. The new car was not finished when Jim and Joe and Steve started for France with the old car which Jim was to use for practice.

They travelled to the Sarles circuit, and made their camp in a big shed just outside the town. The place had a floor of beaten earth, but it had housed racing cars before, and all around the walls were old oil-tins, worn-out tyres and broken bits of metal.

Jim found that the circuit was triangular. It was eleven miles round, and four miles of this was dead straight, with the grandstands built alongside the middle of this stretch. The course had two dangerous turns, one of which was Gadaret Corner.

This corner was fringed by tall poplar trees, and close against the road was a square pillar of white stone. Engraved on the stonework, in French, were the words: "To the memory of the English racing driver, James Robert Ross, who died on this spot."

That was all the stone carried.

And on the evening that he arrived, the son of the man who had died there stood before the stone, with the light of the setting sun playing about his bared head, and he murmured:

"I'll get Stargie, dad—and I'll crash him on this corner, where he crashed you!"

Next morning, very early, the villages along the course were roused by the shattering blare of Jim's practice car.

He stayed on the roads until the ordinary day's traffic began to appear, then he took the car back to the camp and spent the remainder of the day examining the corners afoot, finding out what the surface was like and the best way of getting around them.

Although the Ross-Ryan practice machine was the first to reach Sarles, other cars were not long in following. The French Grand Prix is the most famous motor-race in the world, and it is always hard fought. But the other speedmen in the race knew that this year the event was to be tougher than ever.

News had gone around that there would be a fresh Ross-Ryan running, with young Jim Ross behind the wheel. There were rumours of special preparations by the Ace firm, and wild stories had been told of the terrible first lap in the Irish Grand Prix, when four cars had crashed after putting up terrific speeds.

So the speedmen came early, to get in as much practice as possible, leaving their teams of mechanics to tune and re-tune the racing cars to get the limit of their speeds.

From Italy and Germany, from America and Spain, the racers came, while France

sent four teams of her own fierce little blue cars. Firms selected the best men they could get for drivers, and every team was on the circuit on the day that official practising started over cleared roads.

By this time Jim's new car had come. It had been run in, and he had tried it out, and he knew that it was still faster than his other machine had been.

In appearance it looked like the old one, save that the body was just a shade wider. Mechanics were to be carried in this event. Joe was to ride with Jim, and Joe's heart was in his mouth during most of that first practice run.

Jim broke the lap record for the circuit, driving as hard as he could nearly all the time.

"You're giving our speed away again, like you did in Ireland!" Joe protested.

"That's all right," Jim said grimly. "I want 'em to know how fast we can go. And the faster Stargie makes his machine travel, the better I'll like it!"

The Ace team was there, and the following morning Stargie bettered Jim's time by two seconds for the lap; only to have his new record shattered by an Italian Alfa-Romeo.

Then two days before the race, Jim went around the circuit as nearly all-out as he could manage, and nobody broke the lap record that he then set up—84 m.p.h.

"And I can go still faster if I take chances," he told Joe.

"If you're goin' faster than that, let me know," Joe growled. "I'll get out and walk. It'll be safer!"

Spectators began to pour into the town. The smaller grandstands were completed around the course. The dangerous corners were protected by curving banks of yellow sand. The teams made their final preparations—and then came the dawn of the race.

The French Grand Prix had never seen such vast crowds. All night they were flooding to the circuit. All night, too, frenzied mechanics were working on some machines, striving to pack more power into the engines, and to send the cars to the line with at least a chance of victory against the fierce Ross-Ryan, the wicked-looking Ace cars, and the other hard-driven machines which had come for the speed-fight from all over the continent.

With the first hint of the rising sun Jim left the camp and walked over to Gadaret Corner. He had with him a laurel wreath which he had bought in the town, and he laid it on top of the stone.

He saw that someone else had placed flowers by it, and the Grand Prix officials had also sent a wreath, which was set at the foot of the memorial.

A GRAND NEW SERIAL

by popular

DAVID GOODWIN

will be starting shortly.

WATCH OUT FOR DETAILS!

To-day was the anniversary of Big Ross' death.

For a few moments Jim stood with bent head before the stone, then he returned to the racing camp, his face set and determined.

The Death Race!

BRILLIANT sunshine flooded the Grand Prix course, so hot that the road-edges danced and shimmered in the haze, and it seemed to Jim that the far end of the straightaway from the start was misted by the heat.

He was on the line for the start of the race, right in the centre of the front rank, with three cars on either side of him, and three more rows of seven behind. There were twenty-eight machines in this Grand Prix, each stripped for the event and as fast as hands could make them.

At Jim's side Joe was huddled, waiting. Away to the right stretched the replenishment pits, their corrugated iron roofs hot to the touch.

Blistering heat came back to Jim from his roaring engine, and he lifted a hand to adjust the face-mask that he wore—a stiff bit of canvas held by elastic over nose and mouth. The heat was going to make the dust rise in this race, and the canvas would help him to breathe easily.

All the other drivers wore the same guard so that, tensed in the cockpits of their trembling machines, goggled and masked they seemed desperately grim and strange.

Jim knew that Stargie was somewhere behind, but that was all he worried about. Plenty of time to go after Stargie once he had tested the speed of the other drivers in the race—and Stargie would not be far behind him, anyhow.

"One minute to go!" Joe reached up and yelled the words as a maroon crashed out behind the great grand-stands.

Jim slipped into gear, and both watched the starter's flag—a French tricolour, upheld by an official thirty yards in front and to the side of the road.

The excited spectators silenced. Only the mad blare of the waiting machines sounded. Then, swiftly, the coloured flag dropped.

Whoom! The Ross-Ryan was away like an unleashed greyhound.

Wha-aaaaaa! Stargie's Ace was after it diving through the gap that Jim had left streaking to his tail.

The French Grand Prix had started—the race which was to be a race to the death for Jim or Stargie!

(What will be the outcome? Will Jim crash his rival as he has vowed, or will it be Jim who is crashed? Don't miss next week's exciting chapters, chums!)

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The COWBOY KID & CO.

(Continued from page 12.)

the Potakeeta warrior's right ankle, and, giving the whip a tug, Loopy brought his opponent down a frightful purler. He clashed like a tin kettle as his armoured body hit the earth. A great roar of triumph went up from the Bangaloola army.

Loopy dodged away, waited till the savage was on his feet, and then, as he moved, drove at him with the whip again and brought him down a second time. As the savage crouched on the ground, bearing his weight upon his sword hilt and his shield, Loopy drew the whip-thong free and cut the feathered head-dress from his head.

The discomfited giant rose, swung his sword, shook his shield, and returned to the attack. This time Loopy's stock whip wound round his neck like a snake, and as the Cowboy Kid sprang backward, he brought his enemy toppling down upon his nose.

The man began to panic. Rising, he glared at Loopy, muttering to himself. Then he raised his sword hand to strike.

Loopy's target this time was the sword handle. The whip wound round it just above the hilt. With a tug, Loopy dragged the weapon out of the giant's mighty hand, and sent it flying in the air.

As it turned over and over in the sunlight, Loopy began to lash the unhappy warrior round the middle. Piece by piece his armour was flayed from him. Then, as the whip cut into his naked flesh, he turned and ran, never stopping until he had passed the rearguard of his army.

Meanwhile, the dropping sword had landed hilt first on top of the Potakeeta witch doctor's head, laying him senseless.

Loopy turned and shouted to Kiki to release Sheba. The tiger came bounding towards him, gambolling like a playful dog. Then, with one accord, the Potakeeta warriors rose and broke camp, fleeing in disorder for the sea and the canoes which had brought them to the island. And since the issue had been settled by the rival champions without bloodshed, the Bangaloola soldiers let them go.

With a rush they came at Loopy, and the Cowboy Kid was raised shoulder high. They loosened the horned crown and set it on his head. And with Sheba, the she-cat, marching at his feet, and with Kiki capering in front of him, Loopy was thus carried away in triumph.

THE END.

(The Cowboy Kid is up to his eyes in excitement again next week. Thrills galore in this corking story. Watch out for it, chums!)

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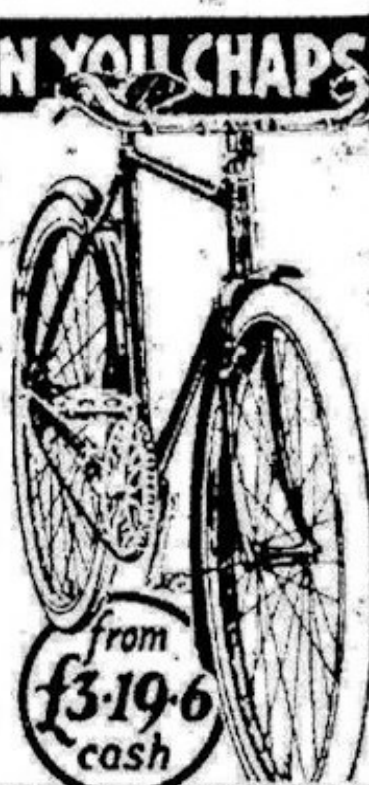
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