

NO. 52.—DETECTIVE TALES FOR ALL.—1^D.

*Week ending
June 3, 1916.*

NELSON LEE

1^D

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CHAPTER I.

A Cornish Mystery.

IT was an urgent and somewhat incomprehensible telegram which took Nelson Lee down to Cornwall early in May. The telegram had come from Colonel Hendry-Hendry, of S. Enodoc Hall, and in the wording Lee read not only the urgent request to come, but he read much more. In it there was a frantic anxiety over something—evidence that the message had been sent hot-foot on the discovery of something of a very serious nature. And, since matters in town placed no bar on his immediate departure, he lost no time in sending a reply that he would leave London the same day on the eleven o'clock train from Paddington.

He already knew of Colonel Hendry-Hendry, of S. Enodoc Hall, but before leaving town he refreshed his memory by a reference to "Who's Who."

There he read that Colonel Gordon Manners Hendry-Hendry was born in the year 1856; that he had been educated at Haileybury and Sandhurst; that he had entered the Indian Army on leaving Sandhurst, and had served for a period of eighteen years on the north-eastern frontier and in Nepal.

In 1886, when thirty years of age, Colonel Hendry-Hendry had married Margaret Janet, daughter of Sir James Chisholme, of Holme Manor, in Sussex, and there had been two children—one a girl who was born in 1888, and a son born in 1890.

In 1893 the colonel's wife had died in India of enteric fever, and, following that, Colonel Hendry-Hendry had resigned his commission and returned to England. During his service in the Indian Army he had devoted all his spare time to scientific investigations, and, while they had necessarily been limited in their scope, he had achieved more than a few important discoveries which had been invaluable to the British War Office.

On his return to England he had retired to S. Enodoc Hall, the family seat in Cornwall, and ever since—for something like twenty years—he had devoted himself to scientific research.

It appeared that the daughter, now in her twenty-sixth year, lived with him, while the son was in the Army. From what Lee gathered from the pages of the reference book, and what he himself knew of Colonel Hendry-Hendry, it was plain that his scientific attainments were of no mean order.

If he had specialised in science instead of entering the Army, it is more than probable that he would have been a most valuable member of the modern British scientific body.

If he had made any valuable discoveries since leaving the Army, Lee had not heard; but, on the other hand, if he had done so it was more than likely that they had been quietly acquired by the War Office, since the colonel's efforts had always been directed towards the improvement of modern fighting methods.

Travelling via Exeter and Plymouth, with a single change at Bodmin Road, Nelson Lee and Nipper arrived at Wadebridge a few minutes past six the same evening. On alighting from the train they found that a black touring car had come to meet them, and a few seconds later a frank-faced girl wearing a long motoring duster approached Lee.

"You are Mr. Nelson Lee, are you not?" she asked.

Lee bowed, and confessed that such was his name.

"I am Margaret Hendry," said the girl, holding out her hand. "Father sent me to meet you."

They shook hands, and thanked her for her kindness; then, when he had introduced Nipper, they followed the porter who was bearing their bags in the direction of the car. Lee sat in front with his hostess while Nipper was ensconced in the tonneau with the bags.

The little town of Wadebridge, which sits at the head of the broad estuary of the Camel River, which drains that portion of the delectable duchy, is neither very large nor interesting, but owing to certain historical associations the place always interested Lee.

He had motored through more than once on his way down from Bude and Tintagel to Redruth and St. Ives, but he had never been down on the northern side of the estuary, and consequently the drive out to S. Enodoc was a keen delight to him.

As they swung across the ancient bridge which spans the Camel at Wadebridge—that bridge which, when it was built in the Middle Ages, was scarcely wide enough for the mules to pass over, but which has been widened since—he noticed that the tide was up and that both above and below the bridge there was a stretch of lovely green which caressed the vision after the heat and dust of London.

Climbing a steep hill past the timbered grounds of a large private estate, Miss Hendry turned to the left along the S. Minver road.

From the high crest of the ridge along which they now sped Lee could see almost the whole stretch of the estuary—six miles along a green, smiling valley to the little land-locked port of Padstow, just across from S. Enodoc, which was their destination.

A wild country that was as they drew away from the more rural softness of the inland stretches. Nearer and nearer they came to the wild tors and tumbled sand-dunes which, in hundreds of years, have buried villages, churches, and even towns in their terrific onslaught from the sea.

Passing the little village of S. Minver the land grew suddenly and swiftly barren. Now the distant summit of Bray Hill stood out gaunt and bare against the evening sky.

Farther on, the blunt nose of Stepper Point reared in patches of green and grey. Across from it, and giving the entrance to the estuary the appearance of a miniature Pillars of Hercules, was Pentyre Head, that treacherous cliff point where many a vessel has gone to her destruction, and

made still more sinister as being the haunt of Cruel Coppinger, the mysterious and rapacious smuggler chief who harried the shores of Cornwall a hundred and more years ago.

Lying between the two, and stretching almost up to Padstow, Lee could just make out the yellow back of the Doom Bar lying full in the centre of the estuary, like some sleeping creature of the deep, its yellow back dead and cold beneath the warm rays of the sinking sun. A cruel coast—a bare, gaunt, rugged coast, and withal a fitting setting for the strange mystery which Nelson Lee was to find awaiting him.

Between the turning for Rock and the road to the fishing-village of Polseath, Margaret Hendry turned off to the left, and, by a narrow, precipitous way, drove slowly along between bare, drear sandhills until finally, when it seemed that they had passed from the ken of man and had only the sea and the wheeling gulls for company, a white gate appeared.

As though springing from the ground itself two men suddenly showed inside the entrance, and Lee noticed that they both carried guns. While one of them stood aside, his mate sprang to open the gate, allowing them to pass through. As it clanged after them the car took its way onward until, a quarter of a mile or so on, another white gate showed.

Here the same procedure followed. Two men armed with shot-guns appeared and opened the gate for them to pass through. A third and again a fourth time did they halt in this manner, and then, when the fourth gate had been passed, and the car had travelled another quarter of a mile, between towering sand-hills, a long, squat, grey stone building could be seen.

“That is the house,” remarked Miss Hendry, who had offered no explanation of the armed men who had stood at each gate. “We shall be there in a few moments now.”

The road leading from the last gate to the house was a little better, and the girl let the car out somewhat. They traversed the remaining stretch in the time she had mentioned, and then, passing between two grey stone pillars, on one of which hung another opened gate, with the two armed guards standing, as before, just within, they drew up before a deeply-set porch which was more loggia than anything else. Scarcely had they done so when a wide black door opened and a manservant ran out, followed by an upright, grey-haired man, whom Lee knew instinctively must be Colonel Hendry-Hendry.

“Take the car round to the garage, Margaret,” he said. “I will look after Mr. Lee. Then come in and we will have some tea. I am sure you all want something. How are you, Mr. Lee?” he said, turning to him for the first time. “I must thank you for your very prompt reply in person to the telegram I sent you. I am afraid you must have found some difficulty in gathering its meaning. I was very much upset when I sent it.

“And this is your assistant? How are you, my lad? Come inside now. My daughter will be back in a moment.”

Still chattering away, and scarcely giving Lee an opportunity for replying, the colonel led the way inside. Lee, a shrewd judge of human emotions, knew that the almost garrulous patter of the colonel's was for a definite purpose, and he set it down as an attempt to prevent the asking of any questions while the manservant was about.

That individual, a grey-haired, limping person, had disappeared with the bags, and just before the door closed Lee had a fleeting glimpse of another large stone building which seemed without window—at least, on the side on which he stood—and to be backed up against the rising slope of the rugged sand-hill which was the only barrier between the house and the pounding sea below

Colonel Hendry-Hendry led the way along a wide, spacious hall, and, opening a door on the left, ushered them into a cosy room, where a fire burned against the night chill. It was obviously a lounging-room, for not only did it contain a small cottage piano, but the walls were lined with books, and the easy-chairs about all showed signs of frequent usage.

Near a deep window embrasure stood a tea-table plentifully piled with sandwiches and cakes, and they had scarcely sat down when Margaret Hendry entered the room, followed by a white-capped and aproned maid.

With her motoring duster and hat removed she looked much younger than her twenty-six years, though in her calm performance of the duties of hostess she revealed the finish of long experience. It was then Lee remembered that the colonel's wife had died many years before.

From where he sat he could see more plainly the high, grey stone building which had attracted his attention on entering the house, but from the angle by which he now regarded it he could distinguish that it did not, as he had thought, back up against the rising side of the hill. There was a fairly wide gulf between the wall and the slope. He was curious as to what such a building could be used for.

It was a weird type of architecture even in that drear country, where no definite lines seem to govern the erection of the houses.

He could now see one end as well as the side nearest the house, but not yet had he seen so much as a single window.

If it were lighted at all, then, it must be from the other side or end, or from a skylight in the roof. He had just come to this conclusion when the door closed after the departing maid, and, dropping all attempt at indifferent conversation, Colonel Hendry turned a haggard face on Lee.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "you are gazing out at the building in which is centred all the mystery which is the reason for my sending for you. In that building is the cause as well as the mystery itself. You will want facts, and those to the point. I am a believer in military brevity myself, and will endeavour to make the story as short as possible.

"My daughter, who has shared my hopes and fears ever since childhood, is in my complete confidence, and I presume, since you brought your assistant, I may speak frankly before him?"

Lee inclined his head.

"You may trust him utterly," he replied.

"Very well, then, I shall begin; but first I shall turn the key in the door."

He rose, and, crossing the room, locked the door, after which he resumed his seat.

"I do not know if you are aware, Mr. Lee," he began, "but even while I was serving in India I devoted every moment of my spare time to scientific research."

"I am conversant with some of your work in that direction," said Lee. "I know of your inventions, which have been of such service to the British Army, and also that since leaving the Army you have devoted your whole time to science."

"Then you will be able to follow me more intelligently than if I had to explain that," rejoined the colonel. "It is now about twenty years since I resigned my commission in the Army and came down here. At that time the stone building which you can see from the window was not erected, nor was this house the same as it is now. I first had the house rebuilt, then I had that stone building put up according to my own ideas.

"It is my laboratory, and just here I may say that it is practically impossible for any unauthorised person to enter—or, at least, I thought it was until this morning. There is only one door which, in fact, is a double door, the outer part being of heavy oak and the inner of steel, covered with green

baize. The lock is of a complicated nature, and there are only two keys, one of which my daughter has and the other I myself carry. No servants have ever been allowed inside it. Whenever it has been necessary that any cleaning up should be done, my daughter has always attended to it herself.

“That places you in possession of some preliminary facts regarding the building itself. It only remains for me to add that it is built of a solid granite foundation, that the walls are nearly three feet thick, that it is forty feet high, and that, besides a small iron-barred skylight in the roof, there are only two windows to admit light. Those two windows are on the sea side, thirty-five feet from the ground, are circular in form, and heavily barred with iron.”

“One question, please,” put in Lee. “How far apart are the iron bars?”

“Nine inches, both on the windows and the skylight—too close together for a man to pass.”

“Thank you. Proceed, please.”

“Now for the strange thing that has happened, Mr. Lee—the thing which, unless we can lay our hands on those responsible, will set at naught the work of twenty years—will, in fact, prove a terrible calamity for this country.

“It was while in India that I grew interested in a certain chemical experiment of a very illustrious Thibetan whom I met in Nepal. He was then endeavouring to find by chemical means ‘absolute gravity,’ or if that hardly sounds clear enough to you, I might explain it by saying that the theory of this Thibetan was that the core of the earth—the real and utter centre of gravity—was composed of a refined metal which was the ‘absolute zero’ of weight, so to speak.

“It was his hypothesis that the enormous heat and pressure which the core of the earth would be subjected to—too great for mere numbers to indicate—would cause a chemical process in Nature which would evolve the real basic substance of all metals—which would create a metal the weight of which would be absolute gravity.

“He claimed that if one could but duplicate in some chemical way the work which Nature herself had performed, one would find this basic substance, and that when found it would be proved that beside it, iron, gold, platinum, lead, and the heaviest metal we know, would be in comparison of weight as feathers are to lead—in fact, that it would create an entirely new standard of gravity.

“I grew extremely interested in his theories, and had the pleasure of assisting him at some of his experiments, which, however, were but in the early stages, and he eventually accomplished little, for I have heard since that he was carried off by an epidemic shortly after my departure from India.

“The more I thought of the matter the more did it grip me, until at last it took complete hold of my nature. It dominated my waking and sleeping thoughts. It caused me to resign my commission and to dedicate my life to the search for such a basic substance. If it did exist—if it could be discovered, it would revolutionise all our previous conceptions regarding gravity. Why shouldn’t the core of our globe be of some such material? I asked myself.

“We talk glibly enough of the force of gravity. We know that if we drop a thing it at once falls to the ground, and we know that it is the pull of the mysterious force known as gravity which causes it to fall, instead of remaining stationary in the air or flying upwards into the æther. We know, too, that all our system of weights is based on the universal pull of gravity. We know that a piece of wood a foot long, an inch wide, and half an inch

thick, will weigh less than a piece of lead of the same dimensions, because the atomic density of lead is much greater than the atomic density of wood.

"Every schoolboy has seen it demonstrated that a pound of lead occupies a much smaller space than a pound of wool or feathers, because of this same reason. We thought for some time that gold was the heaviest metal. The discovery of platinum has proved that to be wrong; and yet both gold and lead, and silver and platinum, were formed by Nature close to the top crust of the earth. It took tremendous heat and terrific pressure to form metals of such density and weight, and yet they were created where they can be scratched up by man, so to speak.

"Then, I ask again, why was it not reasonable to suppose that far, far down, four thousand miles beneath untold millions of tons of stone and earth, and under a terrific pressure which the mind of man cannot even picture, there should be formed a substance—call it a metal if you will—the atomic density of which would be zero—a substance, in fact, where the atoms composing the body should be so compacted by the awful pressure that they should be at the absolute zero of relation in so far as anything in this third dimension of ours may be?"

"I follow you perfectly, Colonel Hendry," said Lee, "and you interest me exceedingly!"

"I am glad," responded the colonel, who had paused for a moment. "I am, however, permitting myself to wander away from the main point. For twenty years, Mr. Lee, I have toiled and sought unceasingly to discover some such base. And, believe it or not, as you will, six months ago I did succeed in discovering a substance which, while I do not claim that it is the absolute zero of atomic weight—that it is the same material which is at the core of this earth—is so much heavier than any of the basic metals we have known, that it almost passes the possibilities of belief.

"You will grasp better what I mean when I say that gold, one of the best known metals and also one of the heaviest, will serve as a basis of comparison. You know, and I know, that if a single grain of gold be taken and pounded out into thin gold leaf, according to the methods of the gold-beater, this single grain of gold can be made to cover fifty-six square feet of surface. In other words, a grain of gold could be pounded so thin that it would entirely cover the top of a table eight feet long by seven feet wide.

"Yet this substance which I have discovered is even more ductile than gold; it is far, far heavier, and yet, above all, it will take a much harder edge than steel. It will temper as steel never could temper. It is almost ten times as heavy as gold; and when I tell you that a solid ball of Hendrite, as I have christened the new substance, of a diameter of only eight inches, weighs over six hundred pounds, you will realise exactly how dense and heavy it is—how far it transcends in atomic density anything ever known before.

"I remarked that a single grain of gold could be beaten out so the leaf would cover fifty-six square feet of surface. A single grain of Hendrite can be beaten out so that it will cover four hundred square feet! It can be beaten so thin that it becomes as transparent as crystal, yet it is so tough that even then it can be handled in any way, and it will not break.

"A single grain of gold can be drawn out into fine gold wire five hundred feet in length. A grain of Hendrite can be drawn out to a length of over two thousand feet, or nearly half a mile, to the fineness of the thread composing the spider's web, and even at that fineness it will at any portion of it support a weight of one hundred pounds! Think of it!

"That is referring to the crude metal. In appearance it is creamy white and dull of surface. When tempered by the Bessemer steel process it turns black, and when hardened like vanadium steel, it will take a cutting edge

as fine as a razor, and yet that same cutting edge will not dull perceptibly after weeks of cutting solid iron with it!

“It cuts glass as a steel knife cuts butter. In the form of a chisel it will cleave the hardest granite, and needs no sharpening. It is so unbelievably hard that the hardest stone we know is as paper to it.

“I have tested it with the most powerful rifle known, and a sheet only one thousandth of an inch thick will stop the bullet of an elephant-gun. Think what it means to the world of commerce as well as to the war department of any nation! At the present time our dreadnoughts are protected by thick belts of armour round them. It adds to the weight, and even then they are not immune. I could cover a whole dreadnought with one hundred pounds of Hendrite, and while it would be thin and light compared to the ponderous armour plate, it would withstand the shock of the most powerful shell or torpedo. It would turn aside the shell of a 15-inch gun as one would brush off a fly!

“For surgical instruments, for steel-cutting tools, for diamond-cutting instruments, for ball bearings, for all the uses to which steel or iron can be put, it would be useful; and it ranks above all known metals as a conductor of electricity. If drawn into fine wire for electric light it forms such terrific resistance to the current that a much more powerful amount can be sent through, and the resultant light is one rivalling sunlight. These things I have told you so that you may know exactly what the substance is.

“I told you that about six months ago I discovered Hendrite. It was as the Thibetan scientist had thought—it was discovered through chemical accident; and I do not mind acknowledging that my ultimate success was more by accident than anything else.

“It took me the better part of twenty years, however, and the notes of all those experiments were in a small leather book which never left me. When I finally discovered Hendrite it was natural that I should take care of the secret formula.

“For the past four or five years I have felt that I was being watched. On more than one occasion I have had proof that attempts have been made to enter the laboratory, but until recently it resisted all efforts. This served to put me on my guard, and six months ago, when success crowned my efforts, I at once took pains that the secret should not be stolen.

“About a month ago there was a definite attempt made to steal the secret. One night an assault was made upon the laboratory, and the marauders made little effort to conceal their object. We were woke up in the night by the sound of hammering on the door of the laboratory, and, on lifting the window—it was a bright moonlight night—I saw fully half a dozen men trying to break down the door.

“I called out to them, but the only reply was a hail of bullets from an automatic. I was not to be scared off by that, and getting my rifle, I opened fire on them. They replied, and for half an hour or more the fusillade lasted; but I was uninjured, and suddenly they turned and fled precipitately.

“Soon after, a party of men arrived from Rock. They had heard the firing and had come to see what was the trouble. Ever since then I have had the place surrounded by armed guards. You probably saw them as you came in?

“I had communicated the result of my discovery to the War Office, and next week I was to give complete demonstrations to an expert from there. After the last attack on the place I sought for some scheme which would protect my secret formula, and finally I hit on a plan. I made a solid lump of Hendrite and ran it into the form of a ball—a white ball, eight inches in diameter. But before doing so, I placed the red notebook, containing the

secret formula, in a small, oil-leather packet, and moulded it into the very centre of the ball of Hendrite.

"Now, remember, that ball of Hendrite weighed over six hundred pounds—more than a quarter of a ton. The ball has stood on a large, slate-topped experimenting table, and I flattered myself that no one would ever suspect it concealed the book containing the secret formula. Even if anyone were able to break into the place it would take at least three men to carry off the ball. The book was, I imagined, safer than in any safe. Yet last night it disappeared from my laboratory, and there is not the faintest clue as to how it went.

"That, Mr. Lee, is why I at once wired you to come down. I have told you the story here, for I wanted you to know the facts before you inspected the interior of the laboratory. I dwelt at some length on the qualities and properties of Hendrite because I wished you to appreciate fully just how important it is.

"In value it is priceless, for, beyond what is left in the laboratory, that ball is all there is in existence. Yet, by my secret formula, it can be produced on a large commercial scale at a price which compares favourably with iron. That, I think, is a fairly comprehensive outline of the case. Can you help me?"

Nelson Lee had listened with absorbed interest to the strange tale which the colonel had to tell. He was sufficiently versed in science himself to appreciate fully just how stupendous was this discovery which the other had made.

He knew that steel, being practically the hardest and toughest substance which was known, would not stand the terrific stress which must be exerted in the direct force of gravity. He knew that it had been proven long ago that it would take a substance three thousand times stronger than steel to stand such a stress, and, that being so, he was quite prepared to believe that somewhere there must be a substance which would not yield to even that terrific pull.

Then why not at the core of the earth?

In that case, then, the discovery which the colonel had made would do all that was claimed for it when it could be produced in commercial quantities and at a competitive price with iron.

How the white ball had been taken from the laboratory he could not imagine. The colonel said there was not the vestige of a clue. That remained to be seen. Perhaps Lee's eyes—or Lee's methods—could see a broad trail where the colonel saw nothing.

It was with this idea in his mind that Lee said quietly:

"I have, I think, retained the main points of what you have said, Colonel Hendry. It is, of course, impossible for me to offer any theory until I have seen the interior of the laboratory. I observe that the sun is just setting. Will it be too dark in the laboratory for me to make an examination now? In a case like this I fancy promptitude in starting our examinations will be a very essential point."

The colonel was on his feet in a moment.

"The windows on the other side face to the west," he said. "Besides that, the laboratory is lighted by Hendrite bulbs, and the light is, as I have already said, almost as white as pure sunlight. We shall go across at once."

Lee excused himself to Miss Hendry and followed the colonel through a side door and across a stretch of level lawn to the building, which stood about a hundred paces from the house.

The door was in the northern end of the building, and, gazing upwards as

he reached it, Lee saw that, like the eastern side and the southern side, it was bare of any windows.

Before entering, he walked round the corner to the west side of the building, and stood there for a few minutes getting a detailed idea of the surroundings.

The laboratory building was, as he had been told, forty feet in height. He could see the two circular windows thirty-five feet up, and the detail of their thick iron bars. Then he turned and gazed up the slope of the hill which reared itself between the laboratory and the cliff. It was a high sandhill, lying like a sleeping turtle on the very edge of the cliff—in fact, its western side was part of the cliff itself.

The laboratory had been built about forty feet from the base, and since the hill appeared to be about five times the height of the building, Lee reckoned it to be two hundred feet or so, which, as a matter of fact, was about right.

When he had a perfect mental photograph of the surroundings he walked back to where the colonel and Nipper were waiting for him, and said:

“All right now, Colonel Hendry. I am ready to examine the interior of the place.”

CHAPTER II.

Nelson Lee Propounds a Basic Theory.

THE moment he was inside the double door which gave entry to the laboratory, Nelson Lee was using his eyes to take in the details of the place.

It did not take him long to see that what the colonel had said was true enough—the walls were of solid Cornish granite, two feet thick, and practically impregnable to any sort of attack short of bombardment with heavy artillery. There was no passage or vestibule, but once inside the door one was in the laboratory itself.

The whole building was a single vast room, the dimensions of which were forty feet by twenty-eight feet—so Lee learned from the colonel. As they entered, the dying sun shone through the two circular windows in the western side, making on the opposite wall a clear-cut pattern of the windows and the iron bars which protected them.

The walls had been stained white, and, with the aid of the reflected sun, Lee could see the whole interior distinctly. In the very centre, immediately beneath the round skylight, was a huge slate-topped experimenting table, on which was a litter of retorts, glass jars of chemicals, tubes, and all the paraphernalia which goes to make up the heterogeneous collection which the research scientist gathers round him. Against the eastern wall was another smaller table similarly littered, and at the southern end, as well as on the western side, were other tables.

In the south-western corner was a huge metal affair which, on inquiry, Lee learned was a special furnace invented by the colonel. In the opposite corner was a large oven, and near it an electric oven, smaller than the other. Along the walls were affixed many shelves, which held chemicals, liquids, glass objects of all sorts and sizes, books, and what not. It was a perfectly equipped laboratory, and must have cost a pretty penny to fit up.

They walked across to the large table in the centre of the room, and there Lee paused.

“Is this the table on which the ball of Hendrite stood?” he asked.

The colonel laid his finger almost on the central point of the table-top.

"It was just there," he said. "And here is the only other bit of Hendrite in all the world."

As he spoke he pointed to a small pile of what Lee had at first taken for a particular long sort of cigarette. They seemed, at a distance, nothing more nor less than little white tubes. He reached out in order to pick one up, but to his surprise found that he lifted it with difficulty. He had forgotten for the moment how very heavy Hendrite was.

"One of those little tubes weighs exactly twenty pounds," remarked the colonel. "In that little pile there are twenty-five, with an aggregate weight of five hundred pounds."

Lee caught hold of one of the sticks, and, lifting it up, examined it. Now that he actually held a stick of Hendrite in his hand, he could not doubt what the colonel had said about its enormous weight. Yet it seemed difficult to realise that such a tiny stick, scarcely longer than a cigarette and certainly no more in diameter, should have a weight of twenty pounds. It was so, nevertheless, and it was with no little curiosity that Lee examined the material.

It was a dull white, as the colonel had said, seeming more like a piece of white lead than anything else, except for its extraordinary weight.

Nipper, who had also been examining a stick of the substance, suddenly laid it down and turned to Lee.

"I say, gov'nor," he said, "Colonel Hendry has made a mistake in the number of sticks here. I have only been able to count twenty-three."

"Did you forget the two sticks we were examining?" asked Lee quickly.

"No, sir; I took them into account."

Colonel Hendry, who had not heard distinctly, turned an inquiring countenance towards Lee.

"Nipper says he can only make twenty-three sticks, colonel," said Lee. "Is that right?"

"Certainly not!" responded the colonel sharply. "He must be mistaken. There are twenty-five sticks on the pile."

Slowly and carefully Lee counted the number.

"I can only make the same amount the lad makes," he said, after a few moments. "Count them yourself, Colonel Hendry."

With a frowning countenance, the colonel bent over the table and counted them over twice.

"Twenty-one," he muttered, "and the two sticks you have makes twenty-three. Now, what the deuce does that mean?"

"When did you count them last?" asked Lee. "Can you swear there were twenty-five sticks there?"

The other knit his brows, then replied:

"It was the day before yesterday that I was using some of the sticks, and when I had finished, I piled them on this table. They had been lying on that side-table. I know there were twenty-five sticks then, for I counted them as a matter of course."

"So since the day before yesterday two sticks have disappeared," remarked Lee. "Evidently they were taken along with the white ball."

"But that's what I want to find out!" cried the colonel, in an exasperated tone. "Look about the interior of this place yourself! Look at the door, then the windows and the walls. Walls two feet thick; floor, twelve inches of cement on two feet of solid granite; double doors, one oak and one steel—doors show no signs of having been tampered with; only two windows and skylight—skylight over forty feet from floor, and protected by iron bars an inch thick and nine inches apart, and windows thirty-five feet from ground outside, and protected like skylight. Skylight shows no signs of having been

disturbed—windows same! Impossible force entrance through walls and ceilings! Great mystery! Don't understand! Six hundred pounds metal disappeared like smoke! H-r-r-r! Don't understand!"

Nelson Lee listened patiently while the colonel got his complaint off his chest. Then he regarded him gravely.

"That is just what I am down here to try and decide, colonel," he said quietly. "Undue haste is not going to help any, and if we are to handle the case in an intelligent manner we must keep our wits about us. We have discovered one thing since we have entered the place—that where you thought there were twenty-five sticks of Hendrite on this table there are only twenty-three. You adopt the wrong outlook regarding the matter.

"The events of a month ago had a very human origin and a very human ending. The bullets which pattered about your window were very material bullets, as no doubt you were able to prove the next day. Therefore, we must bear in mind one point above all others—namely, that the secret of Hendrite was undoubtedly the magnet which drew not only a very clever mind to Cornwall but also a very daring one.

"You say there are only four ways of communication between the interior of the laboratory and the outside air—the skylight, the two windows, and the door. You have already stated that the skylight and the two windows are so protected that a man could not enter by either, and when you say they show no signs of having been tampered with I assume you have examined them since the Hendrite disappeared."

The colonel nodded.

"I made a careful examination of them to-day. The bars are quite undisturbed, and, besides, they couldn't be loosened from the outside. They are all fixed in the solid cement inside, and the slightest movement of them would disturb the cement."

"That seems, on the face of it, pretty conclusive proof," remarked Lee. "Yet if that were so it would leave only the door to consider, and you say it, too, shows no signs of having been tampered with.

"On the other hand, I shall begin my investigations by a thorough examination of all four spots.

"We have the very solid fact, to start with, that six hundred pounds of Hendrite had disappeared, and with it your notebook of the secret formula by which it can be made.

"That Hendrite went out of this laboratory either by the door, the skylight, or by one of the windows. It is up to us to discover which one. But before beginning we shall make a thorough search for the two missing sticks of Hendrite. It is just possible that you have mislaid them."

The colonel shook his head.

"I know I have not touched them since I laid them on this centre table, and my daughter hasn't been inside the laboratory for a week or more. However, we will look."

All three started at the door, and while Lee and the colonel each took one side Nipper passed up to the far end. They went along slowly and carefully, missing nothing on the way; but, search as they might, there were no signs of the two sticks.

When even Lee was satisfied that they could not be in the laboratory, he went back to the big table in the middle of the apartment, and, turning to the colonel, asked:

"How did you manage to get up to the skylight to examine it?"

For answer the other pointed to a peculiar-looking affair which lay against one wall.

"That is a telescopic ladder with an adjustable end which holds it from falling over," he said. "It is quite safe. Shall you go up?"

"I should like to scrutinise the skylight and windows while there is sufficient light," replied Lee.

Between the three of them they got the telescopic ladder out, and, working it up section by section, soon had it placed against the flange just under the cowl of the skylight. While Nipper and Colonel Hendry steadied the ladder at its base, Nelson Lee went up lightly, rung by rung, until he could lift his hands and place them against the flange which rimmed the circular opening in the roof.

Now that he was close to the skylight he could see that it had a diameter of at least five feet, and was built not unlike the lanterns of some of the smaller lighthouses; in fact, it reminded him strongly of just such a thing.

He stood poised on the topmost rung of the ladder and gazed to the four points of the compass.

To the east he could see the narrowing sweep of the estuary as it lay shimmering beneath the lambent rays of the sinking sun; in the north was the landmark of S. Minver's spire, with the green fields beyond lying like so many squares of a draughtboard.

Now, turning his gaze westward, he found the whole lower stretch of the estuary unrolled before him like the curving lines of an aviator's map. Immediately in front of him the rise of the hill cut off the port of Padstow from his view, but below it he could follow the curving configuration of the shore until it rose swellingly to Stepper Point.

It was low tide now, and treacherous Doom Bar was revealed in all its menace. Pentyre Point was caressed by the dying orb of day, and just beyond Lee could see the two jagged rocks which lie off each point.

Nearer to him, and extending in two directions, were the rolling, tumbled, bleak sand-dunes, the work of aeons of mighty storms. Far out at sea he could distinguish the red sails of half a dozen fishing-smacks; but in the estuary itself not a boat showed.

It was with a sense of the impotence of man in such harsh work of Nature that Lee turned his attention to the examination of the heavy iron bars which protected the skylight—or, rather, which were supposed to protect it.

There were twenty-three in all, and by careful measurements with a pocket-rule Lee ascertained that, with a single exception, they were exactly nine inches apart. The one instance where the measurement was different was where it had been found impossible from the circumference of the circle to equalise the distance on the basis of nine inches apart, and in this case two of the bars were exactly ten and one-fifth of an inch distant from each other.

Lee made a note of this, and also marked that the space of ten and one-fifth inches faced the slope of the hill on the cliffside.

His next step was to give a close scrutiny to the upper and lower ends of each bar. The flange of the skylight as well as the cowl itself were of solid cement, and while the material had been still in a soft state the end of the bars had been embedded in it. Under such conditions of construction it would be impossible to disturb one of the bars without the result at once showing in the cement bed.

Therefore, this part of the work was not difficult. Carefully, and with the aid of a pocket-glass, Lee went to work. Each end where it was embedded in the cement was subjected to the closest scrutiny, yet in no single instance did he find anything which appeared to show a disturbance of the bars.

In one or two instances—at the bases of the two bars which were wider apart than the rest, as well as some of the bars on the opposite side—he did discern a few specks of crumbled cement, but not more than might have been caused by a perfectly natural crumbling of the edges where the bars

entered the material. It was so little, indeed, that few persons but Lee would have given a second thought to it.

The glass of the skylight was, curiously enough, outside the bars, and in the circle there were seventeen sections of window, each section being about a foot in width, while in height it was the same as the skylight—extending some three feet above the level of the roof.

No care had been taken to place locks on these window sections, the colonel, no doubt, having considered the strong iron bars sufficient protection.

By thrusting a hand between the bars one could easily move any section of the window on a slide groove, thus ventilating the building from any quarter of the compass.

Lee extended his examination to the windows, and then to the heavy slate tiles of the roof itself. Yet though he worked with even more than his usual care he came upon nothing which might be put down to the result of unauthorised disturbance of the condition of the place.

When he was quite satisfied that he could see nothing more there he descended the ladder, and, with the assistance of the colonel and Nipper, placed it at the left-hand window.

This window, it will be recalled, was some thirty-five feet from the ground outside, and about thirty-two feet from the cement and granite floor of the laboratory.

On measuring it—like the skylight, it was circular—Lee discovered that the diameter was a little less than four feet, and that it was protected by the same sort of iron bars, an inch thick and nine inches apart, across the face of the window, except at the extreme edges, where, owing to the circle, the bars were shorter and only a few inches from the edge.

The greatest distance between, however, was nine inches, and at both ends the bars had been embedded in solid cement.

Outside was a plate of heavy glass which was provided with no means of opening. The windows had been placed purely for light and not for ventilation, the laboratory depending entirely on the skylight for fresh air.

A comprehensive examination of the window and the bars revealed nothing to Lee's searching gaze, and, descending the ladder once more, he had it moved across to the window on the right. His scrutiny here met with the same result as at the other window. The conditions of construction were identically the same, and not even with the aid of the pocket-glass was he able to discover anything.

As he reached the floor once more Colonel Hendry turned anxiously towards him.

"Well?" he asked.

Lee shook his head.

"I have discovered nothing of any moment as yet," he answered curtly. "I shall now try the door. But it will be necessary to have more light on the scene. It is too dark there to see distinctly."

Without a word the colonel walked to the end of the apartment and turned a switch. For a moment Lee and Nipper were almost blinded by the brilliant white light which filled the apartment.

It was as though the sun had suddenly flared through the very roof of the place, and, gazing about him, Lee saw that the shadows thrown were as black and clear cut as they would have been by sunlight. Yet the light came only from each corner of the room—from four small bulbs which before had been almost invisible.

In the pride of his discovery the colonel forgot momentarily the reason for Lee being there. He was filled with the pride of the fanatic.

"What do you think of it?" he called. "Isn't it magnificent? There is

nothing in the world but Hendrite that will give a light like that. And it isn't harmful to the eyes. Once you are used to it you will appreciate what I say."

Lee nodded his head vigorously.

"It is a perfect light," he answered. "I am beginning to share your enthusiasm for Hendrite, colonel. It will be as easy to examine the doors by this light as it would be by daylight."

A shadow crossed the other's face as the remembrance of his trouble returned, but he silently led the way to the door and stood by while Lee went to work.

From threshold to lintel, from side to side, and over every portion of the baize-covered steel inner door, went Lee, with his powerful pocket-glass, searching, seeking for one tiny thing which would reveal the passage of the most cunning and the most careful.

Yet, painstaking though he was not to miss a single point of detail, he could discover not a single thing to afford even the vestige of a clue.

It was with reluctance that he finally turned his attention to the outer door of massive oak.

Here, too, he failed to perceive anything, and at last, feeling beaten by the inexplicable mystery of it all, he walked back into the laboratory, and, leaning against the heavy, slate-topped table, sank into thought. Mechanically he lit a cigarette, and as mechanically he puffed at it.

Colonel Hendry was sitting on the edge of another table waiting for Lee to speak, and Nipper was again prosecuting a search for the two missing sticks of Hendrite.

From time to time Lee gazed at each window, then lifted his eyes to the skylight overhead. Indeed, it seemed that he had run hard against a brick wall, so to speak.

Lying almost in the centre of the heavy table against which he was leaning there had been a white ball of Hendrite weighing something like six hundred pounds. It was not like a packet of banknotes or a small jewel-case, which could be carried away in the pocket; but it was a heavy ball of substance which would take at the very least three men, and probably four, to move.

By the two windows no entrance had been gained. They could now be definitely ruled out, for the heavy plate-glass was immovable without breaking, and the bars, too, had been quite undisturbed.

When Lee had first gained the facts the circle of examination had comprised four sections or points. These four had been made up of the door, the two windows, and the skylight. Already Lee was able to eliminate the two windows, which therefore left the skylight and the door.

Yet a detailed examination of both had failed to reveal anything of a nature which might point to the passage of a ball of substance weighing six hundred pounds.

To take first the substance itself. He had been told by the colonel that its diameter was about eight inches. The bars of the skylight averaged nine inches with one exception, and there the distance was, as he had ascertained, ten and one-fifth inches.

Now it was, of course, quite possible for the ball of Hendrite to pass between any of the bars of the skylight, always supposing that it could be lifted from the table and conveyed upwards nearly two-score feet.

In order to hoist six hundred pounds of concentrated weight that distance a block and tackle capable of standing considerable stress would be necessary. Yet the erection of such tackle would not only take some time, but it could not be erected on the slate roof of the laboratory without leaving distinct marks.

Then, again, even admitting that such might have been done, how would the ball be picked up by the tackle? It would require first a strong net to hold it from slipping, and such a net could not be arranged about it without human hands to do it. That would at once presuppose that someone had entered the place, and no man could get through those bars.

But even that tentative theory broke down when one took into account the undisturbed condition of the roof. No block and tackle had been erected there—of that Lee felt certain. Also, the roof was forty feet from the ground, and with guards about the place the work of getting the material to the roof must have been noticed as well as heard.

Could he next eliminate the skylight? If he could, then only the door would be left, and no matter how cleverly it might have been opened by intruders some signs must have shown; yet he had discovered nothing.

True, the three or four men necessary to handle the ball could only enter by the door. But how could they have done so when the door revealed no signs of their passage?

Lee's scrutiny of the two locks had satisfied him that they were not of the type which could be forced without wrecking them. They were of the most modern and intricate nature, and of such delicate mechanical construction that the slightest touch of any other instrument than the proper key would put them out of order at once. Then did that mean he could eliminate the door?

If so—if he ruled out both the door and the skylight—then what was left? Nothing!

Yet the fact remained that a ball of substance weighing six hundred pounds, as well as two sticks of the same material weighing twenty pounds each, had been removed from the building during the previous night, and that without sufficient noise to arouse a soul.

Fact is fact; and six hundred pounds is a very material fact as well. There is nothing of the ghostly in such a lump of material, nor could it pass through the walls of the place. It had gone out of that laboratory either by the skylight or the door.

But how had it been managed?

It was when he had arrived at this point that Lee suddenly looked up and addressed the colonel.

"What sort of a night was it down here last night?" he asked.

"It wasn't stormy, if that is what you mean," replied the other. "But it was clouded over, and very dark."

"Were you at work here in the laboratory during the evening?"

"Yes. I locked up about eleven o'clock."

"You saw nothing then to arouse your suspicions?"

"Not a thing. Just outside the door I met one of my guards, and he lighted me across to the house with his lantern. He reported everything quiet."

"Have you questioned all your men to-day?"

"Every one of them. I naturally did that the first thing this morning."

"What time did you discover that the ball of Hendrite had disappeared?"

"A little after six o'clock this morning. It is my habit to do some work before breakfast. I came out about six, and as soon as I had entered the laboratory I saw that the ball of Hendrite was gone."

"You, of course, made an examination at once?"

"Yes. I had a close look at the door; then I called one of my men and placed the ladder under the skylight. After that I examined both windows, but I found nothing."

"Have you gone over the ground outside?"

"Yes; but it is not disturbed more than usual."

"You can trust all your men?"

"Implicitly. Every man is a picked man. They are all from the district here, and nearly all descended from families who have been yeomen under the Hendrys' for centuries. Not one of them would betray me."

"And yet none of them reported hearing or seeing anything out of the ordinary?"

"Not one."

"When I first arrived, you spoke of a serious attempt being made to get possession of the secret of Hendrite about a month ago. Have you any idea as to the identity of the men who made that attempt?"

"Not the remotest. For some time now I have had the feeling that I was being watched. I got this impression not from anything definite, but from little things which happened from time to time, though I never saw anyone."

"I put it down to a natural nervousness owing to the anxiety I naturally felt; but then, when I discovered some tentative efforts to break into the laboratory, I knew I was not mistaken. But until the attack of a month ago nothing serious occurred except——"

"Except what?" asked Leo sharply, as the colonel paused.

"Well, I will tell you," he said finally. "It was in London. I had gone up to have an interview with a certain official at the War Office, and was staying at the Venetia. Although I could not be dead certain, I have always suspected that my luggage was gone through while I was absent from the hotel."

"How long ago was that?"

"About six weeks ago."

"That was before the night attack?"

"Yes; about a fortnight before."

"It seems that for a long time there has been a deliberate plot to get hold of the secret of Hendrite, colonel," remarked Lee. "Connecting the actual happenings and the suspicions for some time past, one can pretty well follow the lines of the plot. But there is one thing which is difficult to explain."

"What is that, Mr. Lee?"

"It is this. How did the thieves know that you had the secret of Hendrite concealed in the ball which lay on this table? Did they take that ball because they did know that, or did they steal it only in order to make a chemical analysis of it? If we only knew that it would help some."

"I cannot answer that, for I do not know," responded the colonel. "How they could for a moment guess that the secret formula was in the centre of the ball of Hendrite, I cannot imagine. It could not have been known to them."

"In that case, and if they only wanted some of the material for examination purposes, then why didn't they content themselves with some of the sticks which were so much more portable than the ball? No, colonel, I think you are wrong. In my opinion the ball was taken because they knew it contained the secret of Hendrite."

"But how could that be?" cried the colonel. "Not even my daughter knew that I had placed the formula there."

"Then you must have been seen to place it there," rejoined Lee.

The colonel shook his head hopelessly.

"I cannot even entertain such a thought, Mr. Lee," he said.

Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, the very evident fact remains that the ball of Hendrite is gone," he said slowly, "and from the finished manner in which it was done I am inclined to think, colonel, that the thieves knew a good deal more about you and your doings than you give them credit for knowing."

"But, at any rate, we can do no more in here this evening. I am quite willing to confess that it is a tough problem, and needs considerable thought. I do not say we shall succeed in tracking down the thieves, neither do I say that we shall fail. We will apply ourselves to the solution of what seems the impossible, and then we can judge better.

"What men can do, then men, by scientific means, should be able to solve. We shall place all our science against the mystery and see if we cannot discover how it was worked. At least, we have very material facts to go upon."

The colonel seemed disappointed that Lee was not able to make his examination, and then, in some mysterious way, supposed to be known only to himself, immediately state the identity of the thieves, their number, how they had managed the affair, and, lastly, exactly where the missing ball of Hendrite could be found.

Unfortunately, the colonel had imbibed his ideas of the modern criminologist from a species of romance in which the detective had but to look at a withered spear of grass on the side of the road to tell one that a piebald horse, bearing a man with a wooden leg and a patch over the right eye, had passed that way a few hours before.

Such nonsense is but a travesty on the real scientific methods of the man who has brought modern science to his aid in unravelling the crimes of an equally scientific class of criminal.

Nelson Lee had the detective instinct developed to an abnormal degree. He was a man who had placed the old methods of sneak shadowing in the limbo of the past or with the divorce agents.

In developing the science of detection of crime, he had brought to bear not only all the discoveries in chemistry, which are a great aid in such work, but he had also applied a comprehensive knowledge of logic and psychology—a combination which must lead to a true system of analyses and deduction on evidence in hand with a corresponding value in the result gained.

It was just such a conglomerate science which was at work at the present time. The machinery of analysis had been started, and Lee's brain was turning the wheels as rapidly as possible.

It was an invariable plan of his when beginning to work to assemble all the facts or truisms which were in evidence. About these he would draw an imaginary circle, enclosing not only the facts within its circumference, but any clues which might have been found as well as every human being who by any stretch of the imagination might be suspected.

Into this heterogeneous mass of material his keen mind delved, searching here and there for each particle, and ruthlessly dissecting it beneath the microscopic mental analysis which he applied, until he either laid it by for further use or rejected it as worthless.

Item by item he would go over the material until the circle ever narrowed—it never widened—and contained but those items which he had retained. Then, be the items many or few, he would subject them to a renewed onslaught, based on any possible connection they might have with the other items, until by slow and careful deduction he could come upon the first tiny thread which, when followed, would lead to a corollary, and that, in turn, would put him in possession of a still stronger thread, until at last the real clue, the definite clue, was reached, pointing like an arrow to the place or person of guilt.

Given time and opportunity to thoroughly prosecute such a method, Nelson Lee could, nine times out of ten, eventually place his finger on the guilty person.

Nor could such a complicated system be carried to a success until first of

all he had arrived at an understanding of the motive. Once he had that the imaginary circle would be drawn, and drawn closer until—

And in the present instance the motive was plain. The possession of the secret formula of Hendrite filled that point, and from there the enclosing circle must be drawn, taking in not only the four points of the laboratory which had been under examination, but, as a human element, all the persons about the place, even the colonel himself.

Then as Lee might reject item after item, he would finally arrive at the one evident weak point in the chain, the point from which the tiny thread of suggestion would start.

That was why he wished for an opportunity to apply his methods, and why he was perhaps moody at dinner that night, leaving the burden of the conversation to the colonel, Miss Hendry, and Nipper. And it was after dinner that Lee excused himself to his host and hostess, and, calling Nipper to him, informed the lad that he was going for a walk and wished him to come along.

CHAPTER III.

On the Brink of Death. .

ONCE outside the house, Lee stood for a little time in the shadow until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. At sunset it had been a perfect evening. The whole arch of the heavens had been without a cloud, stretching from a curving scimitar of crimson in the west, across a deepening violet lake, into the indigo of night in the east. But now some scudding clouds had come across from the seaward side, and a chill breeze was blowing in from the Atlantic.

Here and there a star could be seen gleaming brightly for a moment, then to disappear suddenly behind the moving cloud curtain. From where they stood they could see the light on the tiny lightship in the estuary, and over the very brow of the hill was a glare, which Lee knew to be the reflection from the fishing port of Padstow, across the estuary.

Now and then a fugitive sword of light stabbed across the heavens, sent forth from Trevose Head Lighthouse, which was out of sight behind Stepper Point. Inland, a gleam showed at intervals, and over towards S. Enodoc, past the little church which had lain for so long buried to the steeple in the sand, a lamp shone in more than one cottage. But over all the night was dark—dark and drear and chill.

When they could see more distinctly, Lee set off towards the shadowy bulk of the laboratory, which loomed dimly even against the heavy slope of the hill. They had gone scarcely half-way when suddenly they were brought up short by a challenge, and the next moment a light flashed in their faces.

"Oh, it is you, sir!" said a voice. "I'm sorry; but we have to be careful!"

Lee recognised the man as one of the guards, and replied:

"Quite right, too! We are going for a short walk."

"Then better watch out for the cliffs, sir," replied the man, shutting off the light. "They'm be main bad along the night."

"We will be careful," Lee assured him.

With another word or two they went on, turning round the end of the laboratory and continuing their way up the slope of the hill until, by the silhouette of the building against the sky, they knew they were higher than the roof. Here Lee paused again, and, in a low tone, said:

"To-night is not unlike last night, my lad. From what Colonel Hendry

told me, I should judge that perhaps it was a trifle more cloudy last night, but not much. My object in coming out this evening was to endeavour as far as possible to reconstruct the conditions which must have been existing when the ball of Hendrite was stolen. The hour is earlier, certainly, but on the outside a quiet study of the conditions, supplemented by deduction, may always provide some suggestion of value.

"We must always remember that the thieves were on the outside of the laboratory—that probably night after night they lay concealed, studying the building from the outside. It was from this patient study that they finally evolved a scheme which, when put into execution, proved successful. For our part we must endeavour to place ourselves in their position—to try to imagine for the time being that in that building there is something of great value which we are determined to possess. How should we go about it?"

"We know, as they knew, that the building was not only well guarded by the peculiarity of its construction, but that the human guard surrounding the place was vigilant. There were two supreme difficulties to combat, yet they managed it, and that without being suspected. What men have done, men can do. It is up to us to solve the problem!"

"Now I propose to walk slowly along the slope of the hill to the right. I would suggest that you go to the left. You have a nimble mind. Keep the problem before you all the time, and concentrate your thoughts upon it. Think always that, instead of trying to find those who stole the Hendrite, we ourselves must steal it. Walk carefully, for the slope will eventually bring you round near the edge of the cliff. Then make your way back here and wait for me. Do you fully comprehend what my object is?"

"Perfectly, gov'nor," replied Nipper, in a low tone. "I shall do my best. Scott, gov'nor, we have in our time got into buildings better guarded than that one! We ought to be able to solve this riddle."

"Time will show," responded his master, as he started off through the gloom.

Nipper did not follow Lee's example at once. He stood where he was for some minutes, gazing across the gulf which lay between him and the shadowy bulk of the laboratory. At that moment there suddenly flared up a brilliant light inside, throwing into strong relief the cowl of the skylight and the barred circles of the two windows. Colonel Hendry, he fancied, had grown restless, and had sought the laboratory.

With the light inside, he could more easily imagine the part Lee had impressed upon him that he must play. The conditions now that the laboratory was lit up were more nearly those which must have existed when the thieves were laying their plans, for on those occasions the colonel was nearly always at work.

Nipper could see now how closely the cowl of the skylight screened the opening in the roof, for only the lower part of the bars protecting it could be seen from the outside, so far down did the cowl extend. He stood a little longer taking in the details of the building, then, with the thought strong in his mind that he must think out some way for gaining access to it, he turned to the right and began to make his way round the slope of the hill.

He found that his course was a precarious one in the dark. While the slope of the hill gave the impression from a little distance of being fairly regular, Nipper found, to his cost, that the rolling ridges of sand dropped away with a startling abruptness which more than once precipitated him headlong down a tiny slope. The ground, however, was soft, and the slopes of such small dimensions that there was danger of injury.

The thing he must watch out for, he knew, was the edge of the cliff. But that would be some distance on yet, and he kept on turning round from time

to time, until suddenly the glow which he had noticed before suddenly gave way to a clear glare. He had come in sight of Padstow.

Across the estuary he could see the line of illumination on the quay-front, and farther up the hill there shone a motley collection of lights throughout the town. The hill now loomed sheer on his right, and off to his left he knew the sand dunes rolled for another two miles or more. The cliff could not be far ahead of him now, and the drum, drum, drum of the waves beneath told him to be wary. He advanced more cautiously, until he reckoned he had come far enough in the dark.

He was standing close to a line of small scrub, which no doubt had been planted to stop further encroachment of the sand, and, turning, was endeavouring to pick out the lines of the laboratory, when sharply and suddenly, a short distance from him, there was the harsh bark of an automatic.

Dumbfounded with the suddenness of it, Nipper for a moment stood stock-still, even though he knew in his heart the bullet had been aimed at him. It had zipped over his head uncomfortably close, and, thinking that one of the guards had mistaken him for a prowler, he called out. He did not pause to remember that, in the first place, the guards carried out shotguns, and in the second, that they invariably challenged first. The only reply to his hail was another shot, which tore through the cloth of his cap and whipped away into the night.

Now Nipper had recovered his sang froid, and dropped like a plummet. He crept away rapidly to the right, up the slope of the hill, and the next moment he saw the wisdom of this move, for three shots rang out in rapid succession, and he could hear the heavy thud of the bullets in the ground at the very spot where he had first dropped.

He could not imagine what the sudden attack meant. That it was of a most reckless nature was evident. Not only the guards, but Lee, too, must hear the bark of the automatic, and would be on the scene in a very few minutes. In fact, at that very moment there rang out a distant "Hallo!" but Nipper dared not answer it. To do so would but reveal the place he was lying, and another hail of bullets would find him.

Therefore he lay still, waiting for an opportunity to warn Lee or the guards should they come along. The shots had stopped as suddenly as they had begun. Nothing now broke the silence of the night but the boom of the water on the beach below and the soft rustle of the sand vetches as the night breeze picked them out.

Perhaps two or three minutes passed thus, and then Nipper became conscious of a new sound impinged on the night. It was a peculiar low coughing, slobbering sound, which he could find no explanation for. It seemed to be just beyond the bushes, and as he strained his ears to endeavour to explain it to his reason, it seemed to become more distinct.

As moment after moment passed, he knew that it was drawing nearer to him, and as the strangeness of the sound became more odd still, he shivered unaccountably. It was not like the breathing of a human being who might be crawling along in the darkness. It was more like the panting of some animal which was struggling through an unfamiliar element.

Now Nipper felt cautiously for his own automatic. He had drawn it out as he crept along beside the bushes, and now, lifting it up, he aimed in the direction of the sound. He had made up his mind that if the noise drew any nearer he would risk the bullets and call out. He would cry a warning first, then fire.

With this idea in his mind he shifted his position until he was on his knees, and could just bring his chin to the level of the stunted bushes. The



Nipper's heart gave a leap, for not three feet away from them was a black abyss that marked the edge of the cliff.

His antagonist was not slow in seeing it, and now he exerted every effort to work Nipper along to the edge. (See page 22.)

sound had stopped now, but he thought there was more of a rustle in the bushes than the breeze alone caused. He was just opening his lips to cry the warning when suddenly, through the darkness, a shadowy form sprang, and, coming on with unerring sense of direction, struck the lad full as he crouched.

With one frantic movement, Nipper pulled the trigger of his automatic, but the bullet plunged harmlessly into the ground, and the next moment he was struggling violently in the clutch of his mysterious assailant.

At first he could not discern whether it was man or beast. With a terrible heave he managed to gain his feet, and then it struck him queerly that he must be fighting with a child, but for the uncanny strength of the creature. Then his hands clutched bits of cloth, and he knew that whatever it might be it was still human and not animal.

Encouraged by this, and now quite master of himself again, he put forth all his strength, and in a sudden heave drove his antagonist backwards. Straight through the bushes they crashed, and as they went sprawling forward Nipper heard Lee's voice calling to him. He called back, but the next moment his small assailant had renewed the struggle with more ferocity than ever, and Nipper had all he could do to keep the tiny, but strangely sinewy fingers from his throat.

It was uncanny and unnerving, that fight in the darkness. Now that they were standing up, Nipper's assailant came scarcely higher than the lad's waist. Ordinarily it might have been a boy but for the terrible strength of muscle and purpose exhibited.

Nipper knew full well that it was no child, yet he was puzzled to explain it. All the time the creature kept up that sobbing, slobbering, panting noise which had sounded so uncanny, and his short, sinewy legs enwrapped Nipper like steel springs. Back and forth they struggled near the bushes until, in a vicious drive, Nipper sent his antagonist reeling, and the next moment they had both gone over the edge of a sand-dune.

In the fall they became parted, but arriving at the bottom Nipper had not time to recover his feet before his vicious enemy was upon him. Like lightning he sprang astride the lad's chest, and his hands shot downward into the flesh of Nipper's throat.

Nipper tore at the tiny clinging hands with all his strength. It seemed ridiculous that he should be unable to pry that infantile grip loose, yet, struggle as he would, he could not do so, and it was with a feeling of self-disgust at his own impotency that he felt the grip tightening and tightening round his windpipe. He must throw this incubus off him.

Collecting his strength, he allowed his whole body to relax for a moment, then, tensing every muscle, he heaved suddenly, and so vicious was his move that he carried himself upwards with his antagonist still clinging to him. But the attempt had been sufficient to break the grip on his throat, and now, throwing his arms about the other, Nipper struggled to get on top.

Over and over they rolled until they brought up against the edge of a small sand-dune, and there, as he fought for the mastery, Nipper's heart gave a leap, for not three feet away from them was a black abyss that marked the edge of the cliff.

His antagonist was not slow in seeing it, and now he exerted every effort to work Nipper along to the edge. Nipper as violently struggled to get away from it, and so the fight went on until the voices of the searchers came still nearer. Dragging his head free, Nipper gave vent to another cry, and then he felt his tiny but powerful opponent give a quick wrench which allowed him to slip free. Nipper made a wild effort to hold him; then, as they crashed together on the very summit of the sand-dune, his strange little

antagonist plunged forward, and down the slope they rolled to the very edge of the cliff.

Nipper made a desperate attempt to save himself, but now the little fiend who had clung to him like an old man of the sea broke free once more, and tried desperately to push Nipper over the brink. So critical was the lad's position that he dared not release his hold on the turf in order to strike back. His feet were already over the edge, his nether limbs were hanging over, too, and only the greater weight of the upper body prevented him from slipping down, down into that abyss beneath.

Yet he realised that unless assistance came very soon he should have to let go his hold. His tormentor was still kicking and urging his body desperately, but with his head down Nipper clung on, and from time to time managed to call out.

Then as suddenly as the fierce attack had begun it ended. His assailant turned and fled through the night as swiftly as he had come.

Relieved of his attentions, Nipper tried to draw himself back over the edge, and then his heart came into his mouth as the turf to which he was clinging broke away. A sharp cry broke from his lips as he caught frantically again at the turf. There was the sound of shouts near at hand now, and the next moment, even as he began to slip ever so gently over the edge, a light flashed in his face, and his wrists were caught in a powerful grasp. A single strong heave, and Lee had dragged him back from the very brink of death.

Two of the guards were standing by as Nipper sat up, panting, and they, as well as Lee, were obviously waiting for an explanation of what had happened. Nipper pointed up the slope of the tor.

"Came round the hill," he panted. "Was fired at, then attacked. Went—off—that—way. Better—make—chase."

"You mean your assailant has gone up the slope?" asked Lee quickly.

Nipper nodded.

"Better go up, men, and see if you can locate him," said Lee sharply.

"What was he like, Nipper?"

"Very small," replied the lad, and something in his eyes warned Lee that he did not wish to say more before the two guards.

Lee managed to get them away; then, assisting the lad to his feet, he thrust his arm beneath Nipper's.

"Now, then, Nipper," he said, in a low tone, as they began to make their way slowly back to the house, "what does it all mean? Who attacked you?"

Briefly Nipper related what had happened to him from the time he had left Lee until he had been dragged back over the edge of the cliff.

"I can't understand it even now, guv'nor," he said, as they reached the shadow of the laboratory once more. "It is simply beyond me. I tell you when we were standing up he wasn't hardly higher than my waist, but strong—well, he was stronger than the average man, and he fought like a maniac. If it hadn't been for his clothing I should have thought it an animal of sorts. I am no Bombardier Wells, but, on the other hand, I am pretty tough and can hold my own. It's the first time I was ever downed by anyone smaller than myself."

"I shouldn't feel upset about that part of it," said Lee quietly. "When we understand more about it you will probably discover that you have nothing to be ashamed of. You say he was scarcely higher than your waist?"

"That is so, guv'nor."

"And wonderfully strong?"

"Stronger than I am."

"You remarked, I think, that the sounds he emitted were scarcely human?"

"They sounded more like the sounds an animal would make. They were sobbing, slobbering sounds. That isn't very clear, but it is the best way I can describe them, sir."

"I think I grasp what you mean," said Lee. "It was undoubtedly this mysterious individual who fired at you without warning."

"It came on me like a clap of thunder, sir. One second I was moving along by the bushes, and the next an automatic had barked, it seemed, not ten feet away from me. The first bullet went high, but the second went through my cap, as I can prove to you when we get in the house."

"You said the attack was made upon you beside the bushes?"

"Yes, sir. There appeared to be a line of stunted scrub just there."

"I think I noticed it this afternoon," remarked Lee. "I heard the shots and couldn't imagine what was up. From what followed the shots it is beyond doubt that whoever your assailant was he intended to kill you. The sending of the hail of bullets into the ground where he thought you were lying, was the proof of that intention, and, had there been any doubt, what happened on the edge of the cliff settled it. Ah, here comes one of the guards, I think."

They paused and watched the course of a wavering light which seemed to be coming down the slope towards them. In a few moments it drew close, and, calling out, Lee was answered by one of the guards who had gone in pursuit of Nipper's mysterious assailant.

"Can't find him, sir," he said, as he came up. "Did the young gentleman say, sir, that he was very small?"

"Yes," said Nipper; "very small."

The guard was silent for a little, then he said:

"Well, they'm do say, sir, that the 'little people,' they'm come out here at times."

For a moment Lee was puzzled as to the man's meaning, then he remembered that the guard was a native of the district, that the Cornish peasants are saturated with superstitious beliefs, and that they are firmly convinced the 'little people'—in other words, the dwarf race, who at one period inhabited the country—still appear from time to time.

From what Nipper had said, it was plain that he put it down to the attack of one of the 'little people,' and, that being so, Lee knew neither he nor his mate would search very closely. Nor did Lee remark that one of the 'little people,' even if he did elect to appear, would hardly use a modern automatic pistol.

This fact seemed to have escaped the attention of the guard, and Lee said nothing to recall it to his mind. And just then the door of the laboratory opened and Colonel Hendry-Hendry appeared, asking what had happened.

CHAPTER IV.

At Padstow—A Startling Discovery.

IF Nipper was glad to get to bed that evening, after his unenviable experience with the mysterious creature which had brought him so close to the brink of death, Nelson Lee was differently affected by the affair.

It had been a comparatively easy matter to evade the inquiries of the colonel, and when they had finally arrived at the house they found that Miss Hendry had already retired. On Lee's advice Nipper lost no time in follow-

ing her example, and in the colonel's large study, where a cheerful fire blazed, Lee was left alone to drink his nightcap and smoke a last cigarette.

Coming on top of the examination he had made of the laboratory, and the system of analysis he had already applied to the case, the mysterious attack on Nipper formed in Lee's mind an important corollary to the disappearance of the ball of Hendrite.

Not for a moment did he consider the superstitious suggestion of the guard that it must have been one of the 'little people.' During former peregrinations through Cornwall, Lee had had an opportunity to study to some extent the characters of the peasants, and he had long ago made up his mind that of the real ancient history of Cornwall one would never be able to sift fact from fancy, for so interlaced with legend and folk-tales were the happenings of the past, and so much a part had they become in the repeated tellings by the wandering minstrels, that it was now a hopeless matter to weed out the stories which had been woven by a naturally superstitious people.

That it was a decidedly concrete and material being that had attacked Nipper was evident. The lad was naturally cool and possessed of more than the ordinary amount of common-sense. He would never, even in moments freighted with urgent necessity as that evening had been, permit his mind to weave any silly fantasy.

He had stated definitely and clearly that he had been attacked by someone who, when standing up, scarcely reached higher than his own waist, and yet that this individual had been possessed of extraordinary strength. Lee's first thought was that it might have been a humphack, but in such a hand-to-hand struggle Nipper must have noticed this fact, and on Lee asking him about the point before he went to bed Nipper had stated positively that he had felt no hump nor suspicion of a hump.

That rather clouded the question, yet there must be some reasonable explanation for it. The chief point was—from where had this person sprung? Then how had he disappeared so swiftly and so mysteriously?

Also, why was he lurking about the place armed with a modern automatic and prepared to shoot without discrimination? It was a puzzle, and as he gave his mind to it Lee decided it was but part and parcel of the case which had brought him to S. Enodoc.

One thing in particular puzzled him. The ball of Hendrite had been safely removed from the laboratory. Then why, if the object had been accomplished, did the enemy still hang about the place? Did they know that Colonel Hendry had sent to London for Nelson Lee? And, if so, did they have some very strong reason for stopping the detective's investigations before he was able to discover anything? Certainly the shots aimed with deadly intent seemed to point to the fact that they were willing to go to any length to attain their purpose.

With the matter still in this state of pure conjecture, Nelson Lee threw the end of his cigarette into the fire and prepared to retire. He was up very early the next morning, but a feeling of restlessness seemed to pervade the whole household, for although it was only a little after six when he came down, he found Colonel Hendry and Miss Hendry already down, and a few minutes later Nipper appeared.

Under these circumstances it was decided that breakfast should be served as soon as it could be got ready, and during the meal Lee surprised the colonel by asking:

“Have you a row-boat on the beach, colonel?”

The colonel shook his head.

"No, we have no boat at all," he replied. "It is really not worth while to keep one. Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering how one could get across to Padstow," remarked Lee.

"Oh, that is easy enough!" rejoined the other. "It is only a little over a mile to walk from here to Rock. There is a small motor-boat there which acts as a ferry."

"Ah! In that case then I think we shall walk to Rock immediately after breakfast. I wish to cross over to Padstow."

A frown of perplexity crossed the colonel's face. Frankly, he was considerably disappointed in Lee. When he had sent the wire to London it had been with the idea that once the great detective was on the ground, he would soon read the riddle. But since he had arrived he seemed to have done little.

He had scrutinised the interior of the laboratory, it is true; but then the colonel himself had done that. The evening before he had gone for a walk, and now, when to the colonel's way of thinking he should be prosecuting the search, he calmly talked of going across to Padstow—a journey which could scarcely have any bearing on the case.

He opened his mouth as though to say something, but evidently thought better of it, for he contented himself with a curt nod, and immediately the meal was over excused himself.

They saw him leave the house and cross to the laboratory. Then the great door slammed after him. Just before Lee and Nipper got away, Margaret Hendry came to them in the big hall. Laying her hand on Lee's arm, she said:

"Toll me, please, Mr. Lee, do you think there is any hope of discovering the thieves? If there is not, I think it would be a kindness to tell my father. It is worrying him sick, and I fancy he hoped too much from your visit."

Lee smiled down at her kindly, and replied:

"So like the colonel, you think that I have practically abandoned the case, Miss Hendry. Let me assure you that I have not done so, nor do I intend to do so. I am merely working in my own way. At present I am willing to confess that I have had little success, but do not give up hope yet. I will make a contract with you. As soon as I honestly feel that there is no chance of discovering the thieves, I will tell you, and also the colonel."

She smiled her thanks, and a few moments later Lee and Nipper were swinging along over the sand dunes towards the little village of Rock.

"What's the move, gov'nor?" asked Nipper, as they drew round the slope of the hill.

"The first move, my lad, is to find those bushes where you were attacked last evening. I want to examine the ground round about. Then we shall go to Padstow. My reason for going there is in order to get a full view of this part of the estuary from the opposite side."

He said no more until they came to a stunted line of sand-bushes, which Nipper averred was the spot where he had been attacked. After a few minutes' examination of the spot it was not difficult to prove the truth of the lad's words, for here and there the grass was trampled down, showing where the struggle had taken place.

The bushes ran up the slope of the hill until about half-way, then they took a turn seawards, and ran out to the sheer edge, where the hill formed part of the cliffs. Lee stood gazing at them for some time, then, with a far-away look in his eyes, he started on again.

They found the little wharf at Rock without any difficulty, and had a twenty minutes' wait before the little motor-launch started across to Padstow. Paying the moderate fare demanded, they stepped into the launch, and in a

few minutes were threading their way between the fishing smacks which were moored at the Padstow quays.

Lee's movements when he had landed somewhat puzzled Nipper. Instead of climbing the hill and gaining an eminence where he could clearly see the stretch of shore across the estuary, Lee remained on the quays, and, strolling along like an ordinary tourist, paused before this smack and that, nor seemed averse to entering into conversation with any fishermen who happened to be lounging about.

He kept on, until at one end of the quay they came upon a small knot of men who appeared to be highly amused over something. At this spot several small row-boats were moored, the crowd of fishermen having gathered at the top of them. Lee pushed his way along until he could see what the entertainment was, and Nipper, as he gazed over the shoulders of a couple of men, gave a sudden gasp.

His hand went out stealthily and gripped Lee's arm hard, but the latter made an almost imperceptible movement which caused the lad to refrain. In the very centre of the group was one of the most weird human beings possible to find. At first one might have taken him for a child until one saw the seamed and lined face of the creature, then realised that here in an infantile body was the ego of a man in years, if not in size.

He was no higher than the average boy of ten, though his head was preternaturally large, and his little wizened face was brown and wrinkled like that of a man of forty. Two vicious little eyes glared out at the world beneath beetling brows, and the barrel-like girth of the body proclaimed great strength. At that moment the little creature was unfortunately under the influence of too much liquor, and the fishermen who were surrounding him were being highly entertained by a dance peculiarly his own.

On the quay at his feet were a few coppers which had been thrown to him, and while he twirled grotesquely, Lee added several coppers to the pile. At this, the little creature whirled about until he was close to Lee; then, his small, wicked eyes a gleam with mischief, he leaped high and knocked Lee's hat from his head.

A roar of laughter followed this, and Lee, taking the matter in good temper, stooped to pick up his hat. No sooner had he done so than the dwarf, with a marvellous spring, landed astride Lee's shoulders, and clinging to him like the old man of the sea, wrapped his repulsive little arms about Lee's neck, exerting a pressure which, while it could not be seen by the onlookers, was nevertheless full of a fiendish strength.

Lee, despite the strain, kept on bending until he had recovered his hat; then, passing it to Nipper and with the good-natured smile still on his face, he straightened up. Slowly, but with no lack of decision, his arms went back until he gripped each ankle of the dwarf.

Then slowly, and with no seeming effort, he gently began to twist the dwarf's limbs until, though Lee knew the other was struggling hard, his hands slowly released their pressure on his throat. Nor did Lee stop yet. Inch by inch, by the exercise of his terrific strength, he forced the dwarf down, down, down, until, with a strange little cry, the other entirely released his hold and dropped.

Now Lee whirled swiftly, and before the dwarf could slip away he had picked him up and, despite the other's struggles and strange cries, had turned him over and was spanking him as he would have corrected a naughty child. When he had finished he set the dwarf down, and, looking up, saw that not a single smile was now in evidence among the fishermen who were grouped about.

In fact, more than one of them was already edging away. The dwarf

stood facing Lee, his eyes fairly blazing with insane passion. So they stood for a few moments; then, with a torrent of strange sounds issuing from his mouth, the dwarf turned and raced away along the quay.

A sigh of relief went up from the fishermen, and one of them turned to Lee.

"Mister, I wouldn't have done that for a hundred pounds! That was Mad Joey!"

"Indeed!" drawled Lee. "And who, pray, might Mad Joey be?"

"Well, mister, I don't rightly know," replied the fisherman. "He has been round here as long as I can remember, and he's always been the same. When he's in liquor he's harmless enough, but when he isn't you never know what he will do. I've never yet seen a man who wouldn't rather do Mad Joey a good turn than a bad one, and if I was you, mister, I'd get away from here as soon as I could. Mad Joey will never forget what you did to him here just now."

Lee smiled, and lit a cigarette.

"And what does Mad Joey do for a living?" he asked.

"Oh, he picks up a bit here and there!" responded the fisherman. "He owns a little boat, and does a bit of fishing on the river. Then he picks up some coppers the way you saw this morning. He gets along all right. But if I—— Excuse me, mister, there he goes now! I don't want him to see me talking to you."

Lee and Nipper suddenly found themselves alone at that part of the quay, and with a shrug, Lee turned and looked across the estuary.

"I was in hopes of getting a boat here to take us across to the cliff, my lad," he said, "but from the attitude of the fishermen, I imagine it will now be an impossibility."

"But, gov'nor," said Nipper tensely, "that dwarf, I feel sure, was——"

"Hush, my lad!" said Lee curtly. "I know what you are going to say. But keep your remarks. Here comes someone up the steps."

They waited until the fisherman had passed them, then Lee continued:

"As I was remarking, Nipper, I had intended getting a boat here, but now it will be impossible. These fishermen have a superstitious fear of the dwarf. And I also have a feeling that he will watch our every move. Come, let us stroll along to the public-house on the corner and try to outwit him. I wish to make an examination of the cliff below the hill on the other side of the estuary, but while the dwarf is about I shall not, for several reasons, attempt it."

As they made their way back along the quay they caught a fleeting glimpse of the dwarf as he made his way up the hill, running and skipping for a short distance, then pausing to gaze back the way he had come.

"That creature is more knave than fool," muttered Lee, as he and Nipper entered the public-house. "His mind has grown if his body has not, and I have a strong suspicion that Mad Joey, as they call him, is not so mad as he permits people to think."

In the low-ceilinged bar they found half a dozen fishermen gathered, talking as ever of the prices fetched at the last auction of fish and prophesying the prices to be realised at the next sale. There were Cornishmen there, and Devon men, and men from the East Coast—from Lowestoft and Broadstairs—and from "up above," as they termed it, or in other words, buyers from Billingsgate, the great fish mart.

Lee and Nipper sought a quiet corner, and while Lee smoked they listened idly to the conversation. For fully an hour they sat there; then, with a sign to Nipper, Lee rose and started for the door. But scarcely had he laid his

fingers on the latch when there was a weird screech outside, and the door flew open to admit the dwarf.

When Lee and Nipper had first seen him he had been under the influence of liquor, but during the past hour he had undoubtedly been drinking steadily, for now he was in a fearful state, repulsively so, for he looked like nothing more than a child saturated with poison.

If he recognised Lee and Nipper he gave no sign, but, reeling into the bar, demanded in a squeaky voice that he be given drink. Out of fear, the barmaid quickly served him, and as Lee slammed the door after him they could just see the glass being lifted. On the quay, Lee spoke:

"I can't make out whether he is playing a game or is really as bad as he seems, Nipper," he said, in a low tone. "Yet we cannot waste any more time. I think it will be better for you to remain here and watch him, but do not get into any trouble with him. I shall go back in the ferry and walk along the shore. I wanted to inspect the cliff from a boat, but that is out of the question now."

Turning, Lee pointed towards the windows of the big hotel which stands near the station.

"Go up there, and take a room for an hour or so. Keep a sharp look-out, and if the dwarf should get down to the quay, or go to any spot where he can watch the cliff across the estuary, make your way to the room in the hotel—be sure to get a front one—and hang a sheet or something out of the window. By that I shall know that he is spying. If I see nothing I shall go ahead. Wait here about two hours, then come back on the ferry and meet me at the house. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir. I'll keep my eye on him, and will signal you if he comes on the quay."

Lee nodded, and, descending the step at the water's edge, entered the ferry which was ready to go across to Rock. He walked up the little wharf at Rock, and, turning to the left, started off along the hard sand beach which led towards the cliff.

From time to time he paused, and, taking a small pair of glasses from his pocket, gazed across the estuary towards Padstow; but though he searched the quay carefully he could not see either Nipper or the dwarf. Always he completed his survey by focussing the glasses on the front windows of the hotel, but not once did he see the warning sheet hung out.

By the time he had reached the cliff he could only see a portion of Padstow, for the jutting point across the estuary had almost cut it off from his view. He paused once more to search the windows of the hotel, and seeing no warning he began to clamber over the rocks at the base of the cliff.

For perhaps a quarter of a mile Lee worked his way along, and then, as his eyes searched the face of the cliff, he suddenly paused. Before proceeding, however, he turned and looked back again towards Padstow. He could now see hardly any of the port, and with a grunt of satisfaction he devoted his attention to that which had caused him to pause.

Above him in the cliff, ten or twelve feet above his head, was an opening. Lee knew that the coast thereabouts was in places almost honeycombed with caves, worn by the thrashing of the sea against the rock, and he knew, moreover, that in this particular locality there were many caves which had been used by the smugglers and wreckers of old. Yet while several of the caves were undoubtedly deep and roomy, many were but false caves, running in for only a few yards.

Such could only be proven by investigation, and after a laborious climb Lee managed to gain the entrance to the opening above him. Here he paused, and gazed into the cavity which the waves had cut in the solid rock.

The cave was about five feet high, and as much wide, though as it deepened it narrowed rapidly until, gazing towards the rear, where was gathered a medley of stones and driftwood, it appeared that it was, after all, a false cave, seeming to end in a tiny upward slant against the polished face of the rock. Slowly, and with caution, Lee made his way along until he was compelled to drop to his hands and knees.

As the place narrowed it became still more difficult for him to go forward, but he persevered until he could stretch out his arm and touch the back of the place. Then, and then only, he saw directly above his head an opening—a round hole which appeared to go straight upwards for about three feet, then to slant landwards.

Now Lee knew perfectly well that from Lundy, on the north coast of Devon, to Land's End there were many, many instances of what are ordinarily termed blow-holes—giant funnels, as it were, worn upwards by the pressure of water and air until in the course of centuries they drive a way clear through to the surface of the ground.

He had seen the one on Lundy Island, and had stood at the edge when, as the tide filled the cavity below, the air had rushed out of the mouth with a shrieking sound which was weird and uncanny. All along that rocky coast they are to be found, and his first thought was that in the present instance he had found one.

After a careful examination of the hole he decided to attempt to climb it, and, once he had thrust his head and shoulders up it, he found that by using his knees and elbows as a brace he could make a slow but steady progress. Once he was on the slant he went ahead more quickly, until he judged he must have covered twelve or fifteen feet. Then, to his surprise, he suddenly saw a faint light above him.

This was amazing, inasmuch as the surface of the ground must have been at least fifty or sixty feet over his head. But he kept on, and a few minutes later, to his astonishment, emerged into a large cave.

It was high and wide, and, gazing towards the mouth, he saw that it had a length of fully thirty feet. Why he had not been able to discern the entrance from the beach he did not understand until he had made his way along to the mouth and peered outwards. Then he saw.

Just in front of the opening was a wide ledge which jutted outwards and upwards in such a way that anyone standing on the beach below would never guess that there was the opening to a cave there. They would see only the mouth of the lower and smaller hollow, and scarcely one person in a thousand would ever investigate that one sufficiently to discover the blow-hole at the back. Even then it would take a very curious person to attempt to climb up it.

But this cave into which Lee had gained access was more than just a place which the sea had hollowed out. A very cursory examination proved to him that he had accidentally come upon what must at one time have been a very important rendezvous for the smugglers. Along each side were stone slabs which acted as shelves, and which he could picture loaded with bales of silk and tobacco and kegs of contraband rum.

Further investigation showed that the use of the cave had not been confined to the past, for in the rear he came upon a roll of rope almost new, some ordinary tackle, a lantern, and then, a little farther on, he plunged full against the lower end of a spar. Only by a close investigation did Lee discover that this spar, of which he could only see the end, appeared to be placed so almost the whole length disappeared up what seemed to be another blow-hole.

The cave there was dark, so lighting a match he investigated more closely. He found a wide hole at the back which seemed to go upwards

slantingly, and if the length of the spar was in proportion to its diameter at the butt end, then he reckoned the hole to be more than ninety feet high. Here and there were definite signs that the cave had been recently used, but before investigating the hole Lee made his way once more to the mouth. Lying flat on his face, he gazed down at the beach, studying it closely and noting in one place a wide slice where a portion of rock seemed to have been but lately broken off. A little farther out in the sand he discerned a small hollow which showed up distinctly on a surface which the sea had beaten flat and hard.

Then he rose, and, walking back to the rear of the cave, began to climb up the blow-hole, using the spar which had been thrust up it to assist him. Halfway up the hole widened perceptibly, and there Lee rested on a tiny shelf. As he sat in the darkness, listening to the sigh of the wind up the hole and pondering on what he had found, his hands suddenly came into contact with something on the ledge beside him.

As well as he could he examined it in the darkness, and when he attempted to lift the object up he found, to his surprise, that he could not do so. Lighting a match, he held his hands about it and gazed down at the ledge.

Lying coiled up was a most peculiar mass of material, which appeared like nothing more than a fine wire ladder with little rungs of the same material. But in colour it was white, and in weight it was much, much more than wire would have been. Beside it Lee saw something white--something that reminded him of a cigarette. He picked it up with difficulty and thrust it in his pocket. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he threw the match down and continued his way.

Foot by foot he worked upwards until at last he passed the top end of the spar, and could see a patch of daylight over his head. It was only a short climb now, and, a good deal exhausted by the journey, he crawled over the edge of the blow-hole to find himself lying on the grass near the edge of the cliffs, behind the line of sand-vetches which were clustered there.

For a solid five minutes he lay regaining his breath; then, rising, he skirted the line of bushes, and, passing round the slope of the hill, descended to the laboratory. Knocking on the door, he turned the handle and entered.

Colonel Hendry was busy at the big table in the centre, and, walking along to him, Lee thrust his hand in his pocket. Then, taking it out, he dropped something on the table in front of the colonel. For a second the latter stared at it, then he cried:

"A stick of Hendrite! One of the missing sticks! Where did you get it?"

Lee smiled.

"I shall answer that later, colonel. By the way, what time is the tide low to-night? It is some time early in the evening, I know."

"It will be low tide about seven," replied the other.

"That means high tide at one," remarked Lee. "Half tide at ten. Yes, it would be half tide, I think. Between ten and eleven would about hit it."

"What do you say?" asked the colonel.

"I was talking to myself," said Lee. "Listen, colonel. Can you have half a dozen of your men gather here at the laboratory to-night about half-past nine?"

"Certainly."

"Well, have them come armed and ready for trouble. We shall meet here, and I think before the night is over I shall be able to show you how your ball of Hendrite was stolen. It went the same way that stick went, but there are a few threads yet which I must endeavour to connect up. To-night, then, at half-past nine."

With that Lee turned, and, passing from the laboratory, emerged just in

time to see Nipper coming across the sand-dunes from the direction of Rock. Lee waited for him, and, as the lad came up, asked:

"Well?"

"I kept a watch out, gov'nor," said the lad, as he panted up. "He stayed in the bar for some time, and then I saw a big, bearded man coming down the hill. He went into the bar, and when he came out he was carrying the dwarf in his arms.

"The dwarf had collapsed from the amount of drink he had taken. I asked who the big man was, and was told that he was an American who had taken a house at the top of the town, and that the dwarf had been doing little odd jobs for him since he arrived."

"Ah!" Lee uttered the monosyllable; then, turning, gazed along the wide sweep of the estuary. "Have you ever been out to Pentyre Head, where Cruel Coppinger had his haunts, my lad?" he asked.

Nipper glanced at his master in surprise.

"No, sir; I haven't," he replied wonderingly.

"That is good, for I thought we would take a run out there this afternoon. We shall walk it; go on to Port Quinn, the fishing port, and come back by way of S. Minver."

"But—but how about the case, sir?" asked Nipper haltingly.

"Oh, we shall do nothing about that for the present, my lad. Plenty of time—plenty of time."

And with this very enigmatical reply Lee led the way towards the house.

CHAPTER V.

At Half Tide

NIGHT had come again. Even the last faint glow of day had entirely disappeared in the west, and heavy clouds obscured the stars.

In the shadow of the laboratory a small knot of men stood talking in low tones, and from time to time shifting uneasily. They were the guards employed by the colonel, and had been summoned by him to the rendezvous at half-past nine. They were all there—eight of them—though what for they had not the faintest idea. Nor was the colonel himself any more enlightened.

In suppressing the reason for the assembling of the guards, Nelson Lee had but played a cautious hand. One whisper of his intentions, and the whole work would go for naught. Therefore, he had kept his plans to himself. That afternoon he and Nipper had taken the excursion to Pentyre Head, not arriving home again until nearly dusk.

Even though Lee had brought back in the morning one of the missing sticks of Hendrite, the colonel had almost given up hope that the detective would accomplish anything. Privately he was under the impression that Lee had picked up the stick of Hendrite somewhere in the grounds, and why he should ask the guards to assemble, he could not attempt to guess.

At exactly half-past nine Lee and Nipper emerged from the house, and,

making their way across to the laboratory, joined the waiting group. Calling the men close together, Lee began to speak:

"Men," he said, "I asked Colonel Hendry to summon you here for a definite purpose. If my calculations are correct there will be some trouble to-night, and, if there is, I know you will, one and all, meet it like men. You all know that Colonel Hendry has had a very severe loss. You are aware, moreover, that the thieves operated under your very noses, so to speak. To-night, unless I am very much mistaken, you will have an opportunity to redeem yourselves. If there is any man amongst you who is faint-hearted, let him speak now, for later it will not serve. Now, then, do any of you wish to draw back?"

Not a man replied, so Lee continued:

"I want to divide you up into two parties. I want two of you to remain on the edge of the cliff with Colonel Hendry. Now, then, colonel, will you pick the two men you wish?"

The colonel called two names, and in answer a couple of the guards stepped out and joined him.

"The rest of you will remain here until I return," said Lee. "I am ready, colonel."

Lee led the way, followed by the mystified colonel and the two guards, round the slope of the tor and along the side of the bushes until he had come almost to the edge of the cliff. There he paused, and, dropping to his hands and knees, searched about until he found the edge of the blow-hole up which he had come that morning. He called softly for the colonel to approach, and when he had come up he whispered:

"Feel here, colonel. There! Did you ever know that blow-hole was here?"

"Never!" replied the colonel quickly. "I never even suspected its existence."

"I discovered it this morning," said Lee. "Now, colonel, your work is to guard this hole. If anyone should come up it, grab them at once. If you fail to do so, they will shoot, I am certain. Have your men lie here at the very edge, and do not permit them to talk. I am going to the beach."

"But what does it all mean, Lee?" asked the colonel quickly.

"I cannot explain now," replied Lee. "If it comes off successfully, then I will tell you all. If it fails then—well, then it will fail."

With that he was away through the darkness again, and joining the men by the laboratory bade them fall into single file. He led the way along over the sand-dunes until, half a mile or so on, he came to a spot where he could find a way down to the beach. One by one they crept down the sandy path until they stood on the hard beach below.

Here Lee bade them sit down, and not to smoke or talk. He himself stood close against the bank with Nipper beside him, and from time to time he peered through a pair of night-glasses at the sea.

Ten o'clock came, and still he stood there, until over the other side of the estuary a light showed for a single moment, and to the right, from somewhere on the cliffs, another light showed. Lee knew it came from the cave which he had discovered that morning, and as he realised there was a chance of his plans working out his pulses quickened.

Ten minutes later even the men who sat on the sand could hear the sound of muffled oars, and then came the low murmur of voices somewhere along

the beach. A boat had grounded. Still Lee held his position, the while the men shifted nervously, and not until another quarter of an hour had passed did he make a move. Then, bending down, he whispered:

“Stand up!”

The men obeyed, and clustered about him.

“You all heard that boat?” asked Lee.

A chorus of whispers answered him.

“Well, men,” went on Lee, “in that boat are the men who robbed Colonel Hendry. There may be only one or two, and on the other hand there may be half a dozen. But, whatever the number, we are going to try to capture them. You will all follow me. Have your guns ready, and, if necessary, use them. Do not fire unless you are fired upon; but if I give the word do not hesitate. Nipper, you keep beside me.”

Cautiously Lee moved out on to the sand, and, treading only on his toes, began to make his way along towards the spot where the sounds had come from. The voices had stopped now, but as they rounded a tiny crag of rock they could see the glow of a lantern on the beach and the shadows of several figures about it.

“They’m be digging,” muttered one of the men, but Lee silenced him sharply.

On they went, until they were scarcely twenty yards from the spot where the lantern glowed, and still they had not been seen. Then, giving a whisper to halt, Lee stepped forward and raised his voice.

“Ahoy! I will give you ten seconds to put your hands up and surrender,” he called.

They could see the sudden whirl of the shadows, then there was something of a panic, followed by a curt voice commanding silence. Then the reply came:

“Who are you, and what do you want?”

“I have given you the order,” answered Lee. “Are you going to obey it?”

For answer an automatic barked, and the next moment a perfect hail of bullets spattered on the beach about them.

“Ready!” called Lee. “Steady men—fire!”

As he gave the order a volley rang out from the shot-guns, and there were several howls of pain as the fine duck-shot caught the enemy in the legs.

“Give them the other barrel,” ordered Lee, as another hail of bullets came from the automatics of the enemy.

The volley rang out; then, as the enemy wavered, Lee gave the order to charge. Using their shot-guns like clubs the guards raced along the beach after Lee, and a few minutes later they were in the thick of a melee which drove the enemy back towards the edge of the water.

“Get the boat with a couple of men, Nipper!” called Lee, and the lad, pulling two of the guards with him, made his way round the flank and rushed the boat, just as two of the enemy made for it.

The fight there was short and sharp, but the long clubbed guns of the guards were too effective against the clubbed automatics, and the two men went down under the hail of blows.

Lee, with four of the guards, was having it hot with three other men,

out superior numbers told, and when, with a violent blow from the butt of his own automatic, Lee stretched the leader on the sand, the others surrendered.

Lee lost no time in securing the prisoners, and when the five men had been trussed securely, he took the lantern and allowed the light to fall in a hole in the sand.

Beside the hole lay the shovels which had been used, and ordering three of his men to set to work digging, Lee and Nipper stood by until a hole fully eight feet deep had been excavated in the sand. It was then that one of the shovels hit on something hard, and resounded with a metallic ring. As he heard it, Lee gave a smile of satisfaction.

"That is the objective, men," he said quietly. "Unless I am very much mistaken, you will find it to be the ball of Hendrite which was stolen from Colonel Hendry.

"Phillips, you take a man with you and go at once to S. Minver. Inform the constable there that we have five prisoners waiting at Colonel Hendry's for him. He had better communicate with the inspector at Wadebridge for extra men, unless he cares to use some of you. Four of you stay here, and when you have dug out the ball of Hendrite get it up by the path we came, and take it on to the laboratory. The others will come with men and help to march the prisoners up to the house."

An hour later Colonel Hendry, Nelson Lee, and Nipper stood in the laboratory gazing at the ball of Hendrite which once more rested on the big slate-topped table. The colonel was gazing at Lee with a questioning look. He had just come in, having turned the prisoners over to the constable from S. Minver, and had sent half a dozen of his own men to assist in conveying them to Wadebridge.

Nor had his own wait at the top of the blow-hole been fruitless, for he and the two guards with him had caught something which had rushed out of the hole—something which, when they had dragged it to the laboratory, proved to be nothing more nor less than "Mad Joey," the strange Padstow dwarf.

"I am at a loss to understand it," said the colonel slowly. "How did you know, Lee?"

Lee lit a cigarette.

"I will explain, colonel," he said. "When I came down here, and heard what had happened, it was not difficult to find the motive. Therein the case was simple, for it enabled me to concentrate at once on the method. But after a careful examination of the laboratory I had to confess to myself that it would not be easy. There were only four possible ways by which the ball of Hendrite could have been taken out of the building—by the door, either of the windows, or the skylight. It was easy to eliminate the windows, and that left only the door and the skylight.

"Well, after a most searching examination of the locks of the doors I came to the conclusion that they had not been tampered with, and that narrowed the problem down to the skylight. Impossible as it might seem, the ball of Hendrite had gone that way. I was positive of it.

"But how? How had it been done, with guards all about the place? The widest space between any two of the bars was only ten and one-fifth inches. No man—no ordinary boy even could get through that space.

"Last night Nipper and I went for a walk. In the darkness Nipper was mysteriously and viciously attacked. From what he told me I made up my mind that his assailant was a dwarf of some sort. In pondering on the matter that night, I came to the conclusion that this dwarf was in some way strongly connected with the theft of the ball of Hendrite.

"How he had got on the hill, and how he had managed to escape so mysteriously, I could not then understand; but the more I thought of the whole affair the more convinced did I become that the weak spot was the sea side of the place. The thieves had come that way, and they had gone that way.

"You will remember that I said you must have been seen to place the secret formula of Hendrite in the ball of that substance? Now, I know that was so. This morning Nipper and I went to Padstow, as you know. It was my intention there to secure a row-boat and to row along the estuary, in order to make a thorough inspection of the cliff from the water. But no sooner had we arrived on the quay in Padstow, than a curious thing happened."

Here Lee briefly related their experience with the dwarf.

"Both Nipper and myself felt positive this strange creature was the same who had attacked him last evening. He was exactly the vicious, dwarfed, strong type which fitted into the affair. It then became necessary for Nipper to remain in Padstow and watch him, for I felt more certain than ever that the dwarf had a connection with the case.

"I came back and walked along the beach. It is not necessary now to go into the details of how I found first one cave—you probably know it—then by working my way through a blow-hole discovered a large cave above, which had obviously been used, in days gone by, by the smugglers and wreckers. I could not be surprised if it eventually proved to be the cave Cruel Coppinger used.

"All about were signs that it had been recently utilised, and on investigating further, I found that a blow-hole led upwards from it. Protruding from this blow-hole was the butt-end of a ship's spar, which rested on the bottom of the cave. Using it to aid me, I began to work my way up the blow-hole, and about half-way up came to a wide space with a small ledge, undoubtedly artificially made, on which I rested. It was while sitting there I discovered something else. I lit a match, and what do you suppose I saw?"

The colonel shook his head.

"I found a thin wire ladder rolled up. Judging from the fineness of the wire and the thickness of the roll, it was not difficult to estimate the length, which I placed at more than a hundred feet. What was the purpose of that strange ladder?"

"I could not guess then, but now I know. Beside it I found the stick of Hendrite which I gave you on my return. This afternoon, while Nipper and I were walking, I went over the case step by step and pieced together the different parts into a complete whole. And this is how it was done.

"From the sea side a landing was made, and by the blow-hole the thieves made their way upwards until they came out on the slope near the laboratory. They were, then inside the circle of guards, so ran little risk of discovery. They observed the light under the cowl of the skylight, and probably spied night after night, before they were able to form a plan.

"Then a spar was suggested. It was procured and secretly brought to the cave. It was forced up the blow-hole, and then, with men working in the cave and others on the ground above, it was forced up through the hole

until it could be dragged clear. Then it was brought down the slope to a spot opposite the laboratory, and gently placed across to the roof of the laboratory.

"You will remember that the hill rises just there, and they could do all this from the side, far over the heads of anyone who might be passing. On a dark night, if they worked cautiously, they would never be seen.

"Then across this bridge the dwarf was sent, and, creeping up the roof, he spied on you through the skylight. The cowl coming down so far would enable him to do this without being seen from the ground.

"It was the dwarf who saw you place the packet of oiled paper in the ball of Hendrite, and immediately plans were laid for stealing it. Some nights ago the two sticks of Hendrite were stolen. They were not taken when the white ball was taken. One of those sticks was drawn out into fine wire, and a thin, portable ladder made of it. The stick was, of course, stolen by the dwarf, crawling between two of the bars and being let down into the laboratory by a rope. The night before last their plans were completed.

"The spar was once more placed across from the hill to the roof. A heavy wood roller was placed between two of the bars of the skylight, and the dwarf was let down into the interior once more. By the use of a wire net of sorts, he managed to secure the ball of Hendrite; then he was drawn up, and by a heavy rope the ball was hoisted to the skylight. But the work was not over then. It had to be taken from the roof to the hill, and that was not easy, considering that it weighed six hundred pounds. But they were equal to the task. Therein came the ladder of Hendrite wire. It was fastened to the bars of the skylight and stretched across the gulf to the hill. The ball of Hendrite was placed on it—it was exactly wide enough to allow the ball to roll in it—and then started. It would roll easily down the wire and across to the hill, where others were waiting to receive it. But then there came a hitch in the plans.

"How it occurred I do not know, but if it had not happened we should have had a much more difficult time to locate the ball. In lowering it down the blow-hole to the cave, the ball loosened and fell. It rolled the whole length of the cave and bounced out on to the beach, striking a rock, breaking off a piece, then plunging heavily into the sand, and being of such a terrific weight, it sank deep.

"There was no opportunity for the thieves to dig it up that same night. They were forced to wait, and last evening they made the attempt. They would have succeeded had it not been for Nipper, who strolled round towards the blow-hole, where the dwarf was on guard.

"He attacked Nipper, then gave the warning, and the thieves retired, thinking it wiser to wait until to-night. By good fortune we have been



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enabled to capture them, and I think when they go up for trial at the Bodmin Assizes, you will find that it is a German-American gang. That, colonel, is the story."

Nor was Lee wrong in his prophesy. The bearded individual whom Nipper had seen carry off the dwarf was a German-American in the pay of the German Embassy at Washington. The others were all creatures of the same source, and it was finally proven that they had been living at Padstow for nearly three months, with a single idea in mind—to get possession of the secret of Hendrite.

These events took place just two months before the outbreak of the present war, and for obvious reasons it has been impossible to publish the details of the case sooner.

For still more obvious reasons it is impossible to reveal at present anything further regarding the development of Hendrite, but had it not been for Nelson Lee's promptitude it is perfectly certain that long ere this the secret would have been in the hands of the accursed ones.

It was another great triumph of the peculiar science which has grown out of so many, and which Nelson Lee has applied to the detection of crime.

THE END.

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Hal Claims His Right—Conclusion.

THE tall Boer started, and looked at Hal curiously.

“Don't be a fool, lad,” replied West roughly. “He'd kll you!”

“That's my affair,” said Hal. “Is it my right or isn't it?”

“It is,” admitted West, “'cording to Dogger rules. But I'm not going to let you tackle him. Great flounders, boy, haven't you had enough?”

Never mind,” said Hal, and, snatching the sheath knife from Lloyd's belt, he slit the cord round the Boer's wrists before they knew what he was doing. But West pinned the man's arms from behind.

“Answer 'me now,” said Hal, “as I answered you. Can you wrestle?”

“I know little of it,” returned the Boer quietly, “but I could break you in two halves, you whelp, and you know it, if I gripped you. I will not wrestle with a boy!”

“You will wrestle three rounds with me, nevertheless,” said Hal, “on the condition that, if I beat you, you shall do my bidding”—he pointed to the blackboard—“and if you beat me I will do yours. Otherwise, the captain shall do with you as he decided.”

“I make no covenants,” said the Boer, his eyes alight again, “but if your crew will see fair play I'll teach you your lessons.”

“Don't be an ass!” pleaded Ben, as Hal threw off his coat. “You shall not tackle that fellow. Why, he's twice your weight.”

“Well, captain, my father, ‘Parson Mack,’ was the best scientific wrestler in the Eastern Counties, and he taught me all he knew,” said Hal, quietly. “I could throw the gymnasium master at Bury Grammar ‘chool, and I beat the Norfolk twenty year old champions before even I joined the Bonnie Jean, and I'm going to try this man, and I'll bet he can't hurt me.”

“Sink me, if I believe there's anything our mascot can't do,” West muttered; “an' if he's a fine wrestler—Grant, what d'ye think of it?”

“Let him try—let him try!” said the Scot with a chuckle.

“That settles it,” said West. “You shall take your right, Hal. But, mind you,” he continued fiercely to the big Boer, “if I see ye play foul, ye shall answer to me for it! Stand back, lads, an' give 'em a fair field!”

The two rivals faced each other, both in their stockinged feet. The Boer had disdained to take off his coat. Hal stood alert and keen, beautifully

poised, his body slightly bent and his arms crooked forward from the elbows.

He had stripped his jersey, his sturdy legs were braced, and the perfectly trained muscles rippled over his arms, beneath his light vest. His eyes took in every movement of his enemy.

The big Boer held himself carelessly, even contemptuously. He considered his adversary so far beneath him physically that he loafed forward, and opened his arms to grip the boy.

He soon found out his mistake. With a sudden spring Hal darted in, took the under-grip, and with a deft "back-heel" threw the big body off its balance and brought it toppling over backwards.

The Boer's broad shoulders struck the ground squarely, and a cheer arose from the Jean's crew.

With a grunt of rage the Boer struggled up, stepped back a pace, and then bore down upon Hal, flinging out his arms to envelop the boy's body.

He meant to put forth the full power of his great chest and biceps and crush the boy's ribs in, and Hal knew that, given the chance, he would probably do it.

Hal watched his opportunity keenly, feinting and dodging twice. His only chance was to bring his skill on top before the other's brute strength overpowered him.

Like lightning he snatched the under-grip again, just as the man leaned slightly on one side. He swung round, darted out his right leg, and with a swift, strong effort, gave his adversary the cross buttock fall.

The big Boer was flung clear off his feet, and, with a hoarse cry, he was dashed downwards with a force that shook every wall and window in the room.

A cry of pride and triumph escaped the Jean's crew as they saw their plucky mascot master his big adversary. Hal stood ready, but the Boer raised himself slowly upon his hands, and stayed there. Hal helped him up.

"Take your time," he said. "Are you ready for the third round?"

But the Boer turned his head away. He was too shaken by the fall to try again, and the boy's easy victory had cowed him.

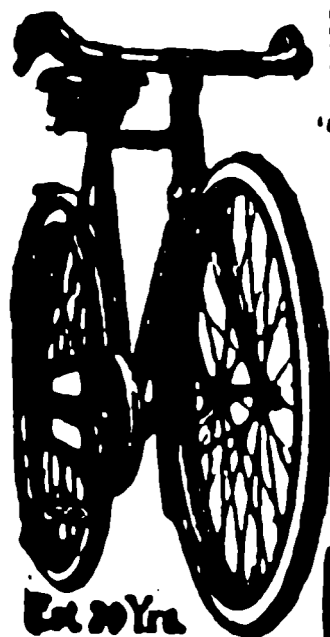
"Very good," said Hal. "Then it's time to fulfil the other condition."

He propped the wrecked easel against the wall, and set the blackboard upon it. Then he went to the model flagstaff and ran down the Dutch colours. He unbent them from the halliards, and flung the flag to the Boer.

"Now," said Hal, "two hours since you tore up the British flag, and swore that before we left you would force us to do the same. The tables are turned. You shall rend those colours to pieces where you stand, or be lashed to your own cross-bar and flogged till you obey. Begin!"

The Boer's face, white under the tan, grew hard as marble, and his

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nostrils widened. He drew himself
himself like a man.

His lip quivered, but he held

"Take your ropes," he said grimly, "and bind me. You will only waste your time. There is no punishment under heaven that can make me follow that order!"

"We will see!" said Hal sternly. He believed what the man said, but he meant to put it to the test. "Lloyd and Grant, will you bind him to the bar?"

The man's jacket was stripped off, and they triced him to the place where he would have flogged the renegade. He made no resistance. The crew of the Jean looked on curiously.

"Give me the sjambok," said Hal.

He took his place, bared his arm, and made the great whip whistle through the air.

For the last time he cried, "Yes or No?"

"No!" said the Boer between his teeth. "Strike—strike and say no more!"

There was a pause of five seconds, and Hal, standing motionless, watched the prisoner's face keenly.

"Cut him loose!" he said, flinging the whip down.

A snick of Grant's knife set the Boer free. The prisoner stood up, flushed, astonished, and ashamed.

"Let the others go, cap'n!" pleaded Hal. "It's my right. Cut their bonds!"

It was done. Seeing what Hal was about, Joe West gave the order. Hal turned to the tall Boer, and held out his hand.

"It is finished," he said. "You are a man! Had you done as I ordered, you should have been flogged for cowardice, for, of all the beasts that crawl the earth, there is none so ugly as a coward. You come of a brave nation that fought a strong fight and lost. The two countries are now one. Join the Empire, as your kindred have done, and give up kidnapping boys in a strange city!"

The tall Boer took Hal's hand in a firm grasp, and hung his head.

"Boys," he faltered, "I thank you. I begin to understand why your people conquered mine."

He walked to the door without another word, and turning the key with a trembling hand, passed out, his companion slipping after him.

"What d'ye say?" said Angus, with a glance at West. "Shall we stop him an' hand him over where he belongs?"

The skipper shook his head.

"No!" he replied, "I'm thirkin' we've had to do with a madman. I'm rather sorry for the man than not. As no great harm has been done, by good luck, let him go. I'm for quitting this house—it's not canny. Come, lads."

He stopped before passing Haggart Neil, whom Hal had cut loose, and he looked the Vulture's captain in the eyes. Neil did not meet his gaze, but slowly flushed a burning red, and looked at the floor.

"What of this man?" said West sternly. "I think you've not told us all, Hal."

"I've told you all there's any need to tell, sir, I believe," said Hal quietly, "Mayn't we let it go at that?"

Haggart glanced quickly at Hal.

(Continued overleaf.)

"Laddie," he said in a hoarse voice, "I've owed ye plenty o' ill-will, an' tried to pay it. But if I'd known ye better I'd never ha' put the curse on ye. Ye've saved my son."

"One thing I'll say. I'll never cross your hawser agen, nor any that ye owe kin-ship to. The Dogger'll know ye no more! Ye'd tak' nae thanks frae the likes o' me, o' course. But if ever ye was in need, I wish I might be by tae do ye a service. I—I——"

He choked slightly, and, beckoning his son after him, left the room. The crew of the Jean looked at each other in wonder. Then, in silence, they, too, left the house.

The Bonnie Jean sailed that night, and glad they were to shake the dust of Amsterdam from their sea-boots, and to feel the clean blue swells lifting them westwards again. Hal and Ben neither saw nor heard anything more of Haggart Neil till, two months later in Gorleston Harbour, a still greater surprise awaited them and their shipmates.

The news came from a Vigo steam-trawler that the Vulture had made her new headquarters at Caminha, far down the Portuguese coast, and the time, at least, was driving an apparently honest fishing trade in those well-stocked waters. But more amazing still was the report that Haggart Neil and his crew had, under considerable difficulty and danger, saved the lives of six Portuguese fishermen whose vessel has been driven on the rocks.

"Man, it's juist inc-redible!" said Angus Grant, when Ben brought the news on board the Bonnie Jean, "Haggart Neil savin' life at sea? It maun be a lie!"

Skipper West looked at Ben and smiled grimly.

"I believe it, for one," said the skipper. "He saw his own son saved I've dealt wi' many men, but I never saw one so black that there wasn't white streak in him somewhere. Maybe ye did more that night than ye knew, Hal, me lad."

THE END.

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