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Or, The Great Troop-Train Mystery.

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CHAPTER I.

A Fight and its Consequences.

"IT'S a lie, and you know it!" cried Jack Brendon, his face all aglow with indignation.

"It's the truth!" returned Edward Miller, an evil glitter in his close-set eyes, which, in spite of his brazen doggedness, he averted so as to avoid the other's gaze.

"It's a lie, I say!" rejoined Jack. "My father was a true-born Englishman, and my mother was a true-born Scotswoman. That makes me British all through I should think; and it's a foul and cowardly thing to do to try and poison Millie Winston's mind against me by telling her that I'm a foreigner in disguise, and an enemy to this country!"

"You don't like Millie knowing it—eh?" sneered the other. "Want to be first favourite with her, don't you? But you've no chance, I can assure you, against me."

"That's for her to say," said Jack, the crimson on his face deepening as he thought of the pretty village girl to whom both he and Edward Miller had been lately paying attention. "If she tells me that she prefers somebody else to me—why, I'll give up my claim at once. But till she does, everything's got to be fair and above-board. I won't have lies told about me by you or anybody else; and you've got to apologise straight away, or risk the consequences!"

"Hullo! What do you mean by that?"

"Give you a good hiding—or try to!"

"I say, two can play at that game, you know!" said Miller.

"Then we'll start the game unless you apologise!"

"Pooh! Apologise to a foreigner like you—a dirty German! Not much!"

The red faded from Jack's cheeks, leaving it white with anger at the repeated insult.

"Put up your fists!"

"Right you are. You're looking for trouble, so don't blame me if you find it! There's a sample to go on with!" And before Jack had even assumed a fighting attitude, the other fetched him a treacherous half-arm hit, narrowly missing his jaw, and raising a dark flush on his cheek.

"Now we'll fight in earnest," said Jack, wincing a little under the unexpected blow. "I wasn't ready for that; but no matter. I'll make you pay for it!"

He stepped back to remove his khaki tunic, as did his adversary. For

both of them were in uniform, being members of the same Territorial regiment—the 14th Royal Downshire's, now in training at Yalwood Camp, which was a mile away across the weald.

Facing each other in fighting attitude, they presented a contrast which at first sight certainly seemed to favour Edward Miller.

He was heavily built—nearer thirteen stone than twelve, with broad shoulders and deep chest, thick forearms and big, bunched-up biceps—an ugly customer in a close tussle.

Jack Brendon, on the other hand, had turned the scale at eleven stone exactly only a day or two before. But while he lacked the other's solidity, there was a cleanness of limb and a silkiness of skin as the muscles played beneath it, that suggested the perfection of condition and training, and a lithe lissomeness and pliable agility wholly lacking in the other.

It was a case of thoroughbred versus carthorse, or a lion against elephant, if you will, and in a contest where speed was likely to count as much or more than sheer brute strength, Jack Brendon's chances of victory were likely to be by no means small.

Not that Miller seemed to entertain the smallest doubt about the result of it. As a lifter of weights and such like feats of strength, he had proved himself to be the most powerful man in the battalion, and he felt quite confident now that he could rely on that strength to vanquish quickly the man now facing him.

With his heavy jaw thrust out and a fiery look of intense hate in his eyes, he came straight at Jack as though to end the contest by one instant coup.

But Brendon was ready for that. Fully alive to the advantage in strength which Miller possessed, he knew that in-fighting was not the game he must play. He must adopt wearing down tactics right from the start, biding his time to get in or other of the effective blows of which he was a master.

For Jack was no novice in the art of self-defence, as many a member of the Cestus and other London boxing clubs could have testified. But neither, then, was Miller, who had been very prone to play the bully, and to brag of his fighting prowess among the weaker and younger members of his company.

Wherefore, Jack Brendon determined not to make the mistake of underrating his adversary, went to work warily.

Skipping clear of Miller's first attack, he quickly fore-stepped to land a fairly heavy left clean on the other's broad nose. A crimson trickle instantly descended, for often your very powerful men bleed easily.

"First blood!" smiled Jack, who had quite recovered the good temper and equanimity which are among the first things to be desired in a successful boxer.

The smile and the warm trickle down his upper lip, angered Miller. With a savage lunge, he got home with his right on Jack's ribs.

It would have winded an ill-trained man; but Jack was as fit as a fiddle. He just bucked for breathing, waltzed round his slower opponent for ten seconds, and then, feinting with his left as though he would repeat his previous blow, swung with his right, with all his weight behind it, clean on to Miller's ear.

It made the ear sing, and the owner of it dance.

"Curse you!" he bellowed. And with an action for which Jack certainly was not prepared, and did not the least expect, swung up his right foot, and brought his stout marching boot thudding against Jack's side.

Only the latter's litheness and elasticity of fibre prevented disaster then.

Although quite unprepared for it, Jack instinctively shrank sideways, so that the kick, instead of landing plump against a rigid body, was broken in force as is a cricket ball by the fielder's back-drawn hands. Instead, therefore, of collapsing, Jack escaped with nothing more than a badly-bruised rib.

"So that's your game, you coward, is it?" he said, ere his lips closed tightly. "Very well, then!"

It was no blush of shame that lived on Miller's cheeks, only a purple flush of hate and fury at the failure of his illegal tactics.

Instantly he sought to repeat them, but Jack wasn't to be caught napping twice.

As the heavy boot swung up a second time, he side-stepped, while as it descended to earth again and brought Miller lumbering forward, he moved in with swinging right.

Smash! it came on the fellow's tilted jaw, with such force as to lift him clean off his feet, and then fall heavily to the earth, breathing stertorously for a moment, and then lying quite still!

"Knocked out!" muttered Jack, bending over him. "I was sorry to do it, but he deserved it!"

A referee timing him, might have counted Miller out at least twice, ere he opened his eyes.

"Feel all right now? Shall I get you some water?" asked Jack, with all traces of animosity gone now that he had vanquished.

"Curse you, no!" spluttered the other savagely. "I want nothing from you. That was a foul blow. I'll pay you for it!" And he rose to his feet.

"The blow was fair enough. Your kick was foul—horribly foul if you like. But do you mean that you want——"

But before Jack could finish his sentence, or again raise his hands, Miller had swung a ponderous fist upward, to catch Jack full on the eye and to send him to earth four paces away.

There for several seconds he lay groaning, not so much with pain as with chagrin at allowing himself to be taken unawares a second time, and conscious that his left eye was rapidly closing as the cheek beneath swelled up to a prodigious size.

Mopping the damaged optic, he rose to his feet and looked about him.

But Edward Miller was nowhere visible. At the moment he had seen his adversary fall, that worthy had made off, and was at this moment doubling back to Yalwood Camp.

Thither at a slower pace, for that last cowardly blow had dazed him, Jack presently made his way also. His closed eye pained him, but the manner in which the causing blow had been given, hurt him more.

"Hang the fellow!" he muttered. "A foul kick and then a foul blow. It isn't British; it's a traitor's trick!"

Ah, if Jack had but known then how literally true his words were! But he had merely used them as a figure of speech, and nothing was in his mind save the resolve to have another go at Miller, and get quits with him on a future occasion.

Arrived at the corner of a lane running between Yalwood Camp and the village, his look of resentment vanished, and all his thoughts changed their current.

Coming along the lane with a basket of wild flowers in her hand, was a trim and dainty figure in a white summer frock and a flopping hat—a little

out of fashion, perhaps, but not the less alluring for that—trimmed with red poppies.

"Millie!" exclaimed Jack, and all his blood ran warm within him.

"Mr. Brendon!" came her answer. "Who would have thought of meeting you?"

"It's the unexpected that always happens," laughed Jack, and then pointed to his eye. "This was unexpected."

She had been blushing most charmingly a moment before. Now at sight of his closed eye, all bruised and blackened, she turned pale.

"Oh, Mr. Brendon!" she exclaimed, in alarm.

"Why 'mister,' Millie? We're not 'mistered' in the Army unless we're lieutenants, and I'm just a full-blown private of four months' service. Why not Jack?"

She ignored the direct question, though her personal concern for him increased.

"Your poor eye!" she said, a tear trembling in her own. "How did it happen?"

"Present for a good boy!" he answered gaily. "Edward Miller gave it me!"

She shuddered at the name, and went pale again.

"That man! You've been fighting Edward Miller after his telling me all those horrid falsehoods about your being a German?"

"I fought him on that account. There are some slanders a chap can put up with, but one must draw the line at a thing like that."

"But to fight him, Jack!" she said, in gentle, feminine reproof, and using his Christian name involuntarily. "How could you lower yourself so?"

"I lowered him; or floored him, anyway," grinned the young fellow. "Knocked him clean out with a right on the jaw—a real beauty—after he'd kicked me. Then after he got up, and I'd asked if I should get him some water, he walked into me and did this when I wasn't looking."

"You shouldn't have fought with him," said Millie vehemently. "He's a bad fellow; I'm sure of it. But you can't see out of your eye. Oh, you must come back home with me and let mother bathe it for you, and——"

"I'd like to, Millie, but I can't. I'm for duty presently. As to my eye, I'll get round the cook's mate for a bit of raw beef. That'll put it right in no time."

When after a little more talk they parted, it was on the understanding, arrived at on Jack's urging and Millie's coy consenting, that they were to meet on the following evening, at a certain point along the road where a railway bridge spanned it.

Arrived back in camp, Jack was destined to meet with a surprise. Passing along the lines of huts and entering the one where he was quartered, he at once detected a queer silence among his comrades as he made his appearance. This was the more curious, as up to that time he had always been popular with his fellows.

"Hallo! What's up, you chaps?" he asked, looking across at a group who seemed to have deliberately turned their backs on him.

"What's up with you?" asked Private Bollerton, turning round and glaring. He was a big, hulking fellow, given to fits of sullenness and never over genial towards Jack.

As no one needs to be told, the British Army, both Regular and Territorial (and indeed there seems but little need of distinguishing them to-day), contains many of the finest and noblest fellows in the world, the very flower of British manhood. But as in every flock there is said to be at least

one black sheep, so here and there may be found a black sheep in the military ranks.

Beyond all question, Mark Bollerton was one of these. He had, moreover, shown himself to be a close crony with Edward Miller, and unknown to Jack, had already received a highly-varnished account of the fight that had taken place.

"Perhaps my eye's worrying you?" laughed Jack, quite good-temperedly.

"It ain't a very pretty picture," retorted Bollerton cuttingly; "but it certainly ain't likely to worry me as much as it will you. Hope you enjoyed the good hidin' that Ted Miller gave you."

"I think he got as good as he gave," said Jack, still gaily, but inwardly surprised at the general look of hostility with which the others were regarding him.

"Looks like it from your eye!" Bollerton said, more savagely than ever.

"Serves you right though, you beastly German traitor!"

"Eh—what's that?" Jack exclaimed, with reddening face. "Has Miller been telling you that lying tale?"

"There's no lie about it, is there, you chaps?"

"No," came in a harsh and bitter chorus from the others, the sound filling Jack with dismay. "It's true enough!"

"I tell you it's a lie, a vile and cowardly lie!" thundered Jack. "I am British to the backbone—British as any of you!"

"Likely tale," said Bollerton, with a scowl. "As if a Britisher could write such a letter as you wrote to Miller."

"Letter? What's this mean? I've never written him a letter!"

"Don't try and bluff us! We've seen the letter with our own eyes, haven't we boys?"

"Yes, we have," came in chorus again.

"This is some plot!" said Jack hoarsely. "Something I know nothing about! What did this letter you refer to say?"

"You know well enough, so it's no use pretending you don't! You'll get your deserts before long, no doubt. Meanwhile, none of us want to have anything to do with a beastly Bavarian!"

Roused to fierce indignation, Jack demanded to know more, but not another word could he elicit from any of them. All turned their backs on him, so that in a few minutes he was forced to recognise the fact that the evil machinations of Edward Miller had had the effect of sending him to Coventry.

Quite ready he was to maintain his honour by fighting any man who should spread the gross slander regarding him, but very soon he found that he was to be cut by all in the camp, and to fight the whole battalion was, of course, quite out of the question.

Had he but known the whole truth then, he would certainly have taken some energetic steps to clear himself of the stigma Miller had laid upon him.

For the letter which Miller had shown to some of his closer intimates, and so poisoned their minds against him, was vile indeed.

It purported to be written by Jack, and to be addressed to Miller. It concerned their dual attentions to Millie Winston, and it contained the following diabolical threat:

"If you do not cease your attentions to Miss Winston, I will make you suffer for it, even if it means shooting you down on sight!"

That letter, written in a close disguise of his own handwriting, was the cause of his comrades' change of demeanour towards him, coupled with a

circumstantial statement to the effect that Jack had been born of German parents in the Bavarian town of Ingelstadt.

But poor Jack was not to be made aware of these lying details till later. Meantime, he resolved to suffer in silence, and trust to time to live down the undoubted enmity they had aroused in the breasts of those around him.

CHAPTER II.

The Wrecking of the Troop-train.

NELSON LEE, the famous detective, and his young assistant, Nipper, hurried on to the lighted platform at Waterpool Street Station, the great London terminus.

"Long train, sir," said Nipper.

"And a heavy one, too, my boy! Full of troops and ammunition—all to be transhipped to France from Sandhampton to-night. We're going down to see that there's no tampering with the stuff while it's being put aboard. Slowish job, but necessary with so many spies about."

"Don't seem to be much room for us, sir," Nipper said, with a glance along the train, every window of which seemed full of khaki caps, bright, cheery, healthy faces, and craning sunburnt necks, as the troops called and waved their adieux to their friends.

"You needn't worry, there's room for us," Lee said, and unlocking the door of a compartment marked "Reserved," they entered. "You see the advantage of being an Inspector of Factories and Government Works."

The train might have been waiting for them, so promptly was it off as they settled themselves in their seats. It was a good train, too, and was clear of London and steaming through the open country in next to no time.

"We sha'n't be long getting to Sandhampton at this rate," said Lee, after they had been travelling some time. "How far are we now, I wonder?"

"Here's a station, sir," said Nipper, looking out of the window, and adding as he caught sight of a name on a lighted lamp that flashed by: "Yalwood Junction!"

"Yalwood—why that's nearly half-way! There's a camp a mile or so out yonder. If it were daylight we should have got a glimpse of the huts presently, but we sha'n't see anything in darkness. We're going along at—Great heavens! What has—"

There was not time for Lee to finish his sentence, let alone for Nipper to make a reply.

For the sudden lurch which the train had given, and the weird shriek of the engine resembling almost the agonised wail of a human being, which had called forth Nelson Lee's exclamation, was followed at once by something a thousand times more terrifying.

A loud explosion as of a huge siege gun, followed by a fierce fusillade of bullets, as if the troops within the train had simultaneously started firing and emptying their magazines at the dark fields on both sides! At the same moment there came such a mighty lurch and heave of the rearmost part of the train where Lee and Nipper were, as to pitch them violently across the compartment.

"Out of the train—we're off the metals!" yelled Nelson Lee.

It was necessary to yell at the top of his voice in order to make himself heard, for, following on the explosion and the fusillade of bullets, had come a great crash and a terrific throbbing and hissing from the engine.

which, as they scrambled out through the door, they saw lying on its side, with several of the foremost coaches, some distance ahead of them.

"It's an awful smash!" groaned Lee. "Heaven have mercy on the poor fellows in the front of the train!"

"What a wreck! What a wreck!" sobbed Nipper.

"Terrible! But come, lad, we must pull ourselves together, and lend a hand in rescue work!"

They hurried forward, the while some scores of khaki figures, who had escaped with slight injuries, scrambled from amid the wreckage, and at the word of command from their officers, ranged up as if on parade, to receive hurried instructions how best to assist their less fortunate comrades.

"How did it happen, major?" asked Lee of one of the senior officers, whom he knew.

Major Knightly didn't know. He could only hazard a guess that the stores of ammunition which were in the train had blown up. This theory was supported by the engine driver and the guard, both of whom had luckily escaped with but slight injuries.

"But that doesn't account for the first great explosion," said Lee to Nipper. "Come, boy, there are plenty of men—soldiers and others—to do the rescue work. I rather fancy we may be of more use in our own legitimate sphere. We've got to find out how this explosion was caused."

It wasn't an easy matter, for the whole line was blocked for two or three hundred yards, while the scene was one of the most excited it was possible to imagine.

While the uninjured troops set to work to rescue their dead and wounded comrades, Lee and Nipper, each carrying a lantern, began to search for possible clues that might help to show how the explosion had been caused.

At the place where it had occurred, the permanent way ran along the top of a high embankment, fringed on either side by a low, thick hedge. Beyond the hedge on the down side, the ground shelved away to a wide expanse of allotment gardens.

Flashing his lantern among the grass and bushes of this shelving ground, Nipper suddenly gave a cry.

"What is it?" asked Lee, running forward.

"A dead man—a soldier. Poor fellow! He must have been blown right out of the train, and then shot through the breast by one of the bullets when the ammunition van exploded."

"No, my lad, you're wrong," Lee said gravely, as he examined the body. "This poor fellow was dead before the train arrived here."

"Good heavens, sir! How do you make that out?"

"Rigor mortis has already set in, and a dead man certainly doesn't begin to stiffen till he's been dead at least half an hour. From this poor fellow's temperature, I should think he's been dead nearly a couple of hours."

"How can that be, sir? Surely he must have been in the train?"

"I'm certain he wasn't. Look at his shoulder-badge. Different regiment. Ah, corporal, perhaps you can help us!" The last words were spoken to a tall young N.C.O., who had suddenly approached. "Do you know this man?"

"I do, sir. He's one of ours. I wasn't in the train. I belong to the Royal Downshire's. We're stationed here. I'm corporal of the guard to-night."

"And this poor chap?"

"Was doing sentry-go on the railway-line close to this spot," said the corporal with emotion.

"Sentry-go, eh? And his name? Do you know it?"

"Very well indeed, sir. He's Private Edward Miller, of B Company."

"Nipper," said Lee, when the corporal had gone, "this is important. Edward Miller has been dead two hours. He must have been shot while on sentry duty, long before the train blew up. How did he come by his death?"

"What's this, sir?" said Nipper suddenly, trying to open the dead man's right hand, which was tightly clenched over something.

"A lock of hair," exclaimed Lee, releasing it from the palm with some difficulty. "A lock of human hair torn out by the roots."

"From his own head, sir?"

"No. That's certain. It's the wrong colour—lighter than his own. It's a clue, anyway, and ought to be a valuable one. And, by Jove, here's another! A patch of tar on his fingers!"

"And more of it on his tunic, sir. Fresh tar, too!"

"You're right, my boy. It's quite damp still. Don't touch it! If there's been murder done, as seems likely, these things may help us to solve it."

"Eh? What's that? Who's talking of murder?" came in a jerky, authoritative voice, and the next moment a bull's-eye flashed right into Nelson Lee's eyes.

"You're a police-officer, sir," Lee said, catching sight of a peaked cap and a braided coat.

"I am Inspector Lorrigan, of the Downshire County Police."

"Good! And I'm Mr. Nelson Lee." The inspector gave a slight start at the news. "Here's a job we may tackle together, inspector. It looks to me like a case of murder."

And he told the local officer all he could about the dead Edward Miller.

"On sentry duty, was he?" mused the inspector. "Then it's possible he committed suicide. Might have shot himself?"

"Hardly likely!" said Lee. "His rifle's missing. We shall have to search for that. And how comes he to be near the bottom of the embankment? His job was to guard the railway-line, and this is right away from it. How came he here?"

"Here's his rifle, sir!" exclaimed Nipper, suddenly looking up from a clump of purple heather, amid which he had been foraging.

"Twelve yards away, at least," said Lee, measuring the distance, with keen eyes.

"Might have staggered that distance after shooting himself," said Lorrigan. "I'm still of belief that it may be a case of suicide."

"I think you're wrong, inspector. Here's evidence of a struggle. I took this from the dead man's hand only a minute or two ago."

"Human hair!" said Lorrigan, pointing on the clue. "You'll let me have that, Mr. Lee? That's going to help us a lot."

"We'll divide it. Here's half of it for you; the other half I'll keep."

"All right. I must get a couple of men to remove the body. I shall see you again, Mr. Lee?"

"Yes. I was due at Sandhampton; but I shall send a wire there to say I'm not coming, as soon as the post-office opens. There's a good inn in the village, if I remember rightly."

"The Chequers—yes. Half a mile from here."

"Good! I shall make it my headquarters for the present. I want to help you solve this mystery."

"Right you are, Mr. Lee. I will call on you in the morning."

The detective did not go on to the Chequers at once. Until daylight came, he realised that it was useless to pursue his special investigations further, and for the next two or three hours he and Nipper assisted in the work of rescue and search among the debris of the wrecked train.

It was grim and sorrowful work enough. Not that the result of the wreck was as terrible as at first it was feared it might be. But when the first grey streaks of dawn appeared, and the roll came to be called, it was found that fourteen poor fellows had lost their lives, while between fifty and sixty had received more or less terrible injuries.

Not until that result was known, and Lee knew that they could be of no further use, did he and Nipper seek out the Chequers Inn, and retire to bed.

CHAPTER III.

A Man's Arrest, and a Girl's Sorrow.

NELSON LEE was not a man to slumber long when work awaited doing. Three hours after seeking his bed found him up again, and splashing himself in a refreshing cold bath.

All aglow with vigorous health he dressed himself and went out. Barely had he gone fifty yards towards the scene of the wrecked train than a sight made him suddenly stop.

Round the turning of a lane appeared a little procession. Inspector Lorrigan and a policeman headed it. Immediately behind them came two soldiers with fixed bayonets, and between them walked another young soldier with handcuffs on his wrists, and a look of deep trouble upon his pale face.

Catching sight of Nelson Lee the inspector hurried forward, with a grim look on his face.

"Morning, Mr. Lee!" he said. "You were right last night. It was a case of murder."

"Ah, you've found that out? And who's your prisoner there?"

"The murderer—the man who killed Edward Miller!"

"Good heavens! You don't say so! He doesn't look a bit like a man who would kill another!"

"Oh, he did it right enough! I've plenty of evidence to hang him, as I'll tell you presently. Or, I suppose, he'll be shot, for, of course, he'll be tried by court-martial. I'm only going as far as the railway-station. The military escort will take him on from there to Greymminster Barracks."

"I'll come with you," said Lee, and walked by his side.

As they traversed the village High Street, the knot of villagers following the arrested man, grew and grew. The news of his arrest at Yalwood Camp was quickly spreading.

"What's the prisoner's name?" asked Lee, as they went along.

"Jack Brendon—a private in the same regiment as the man he killed."

"What was his motive for killing him, if he did so?"

"A love quarrel in the first place. Both men had been paying attention to the same girl—Millie Winston."

"And what's your evidence that he did kill him?"

"The two men quarrelled, and fought a day or two ago. Brendon, according to reports, seems to have got the worst of the fight. That seems to have riled him, and to have made him lose his temper entirely. He wrote Edward Miller a letter which is now in my possession, threatening that he would kill him."

"Whew! That's bad for Jack Brendon!" said Lee, pursing his lips in a low whistle.

"That's not all. He knew that Miller was on sentry on the railway line, and there are witnesses to prove that he was seen lurking about near the spot late last night."

"That's bad for Jack Brendon, too."

"But there's something still more," said Lorrigan, warming to his subject like a man well satisfied by the result of his discoveries. "I've learnt that there was another motive for his desperate act."

"Ah, what was that?"

"That he was a German, masquerading as an Englishman, and that Edward Miller was the first to discover that fact."

"Whew!" whistled Lee again. "If that's true, it's the worst of all."

"You're right, Mr. Lee," said the inspector, reserving his most important revelation till last, "because, believing that he is a German, and bearing in mind his last night's movements, many of the men in his regiment are inclined to believe that it was he who caused the wreck of the troop-train."

"Good heavens! What proof have you of that?"

"None at present. But it's early times. You may depend upon it we shall get the proof before long."

They had reached the station by now, and the prisoner was being conducted through the yard.

Suddenly, close behind them, came a cry. The next moment and a very pretty girl with fair hair, all flying loose from its fastenings, and her beautiful eyes full of untold grief, burst through the crowd, and, before even the escort could interfere, had thrown her arms round the prisoner's neck.

"Oh, Jack—dear Jack!" she cried, in anguish. "What is this terrible thing they say about you? Tell me—oh, tell me that it isn't true!"

"No, Millie, it is not true," answered Jack, with a brave smile. "On my most sacred word I am innocent of this terrible charge!"

The military escort, astounded like everybody else at this unexpected scene, might have let it go on, but instantly Inspector Lorrigan strode forward.

"Here, what's this?" he said, laying a firm but not rough hand on the weeping girl. "We can't allow this, you know."

"Oh, let me speak to him for just one moment!"

"Sorry, but it can't be allowed. Please let go of the prisoner."

"Yes, Millie, you must let go," said Jack, smiling still, though the tears hovered in his eyes at his sweetheart's devotion. "We shall meet again before long. I swear to you I am innocent, and it will not be long before I am free again!"

"Heaven bless you, dear Jack!" she murmured, as he was hurried away into a waiting train, and then, as he disappeared from her sight, she fell to weeping bitterly.

"Who is that poor girl?" asked Lee, as the train steamed out of the station.

"Millie Winston, the girl I spoke about. The girl about whom the prisoner and the dead man quarrelled," replied the inspector.

"Not much doubt which of them she preferred," said Lee thoughtfully. "She seems very fond of Jack Brendon, and it's plain she believes in his innocence."

"Well, that's like a girl, isn't it? Anyway, it doesn't count for much."

"I'm not sure—I'm not sure," murmured Lee, half to himself. "I should like to speak to the girl, anyway."

"Don't go buoying her up with false hopes, Mr. Lee. There's little doubt about the prisoner's guilt."

"As to that, it's early days to make up our minds too definitely, as you remarked yourself just now," said Lee, a little coldly, for he did not quite like the other's cocksure manner. "And while there's any shadow of doubt at all, the prisoner's entitled to the benefit of it."

"Oh, by all means!" said the other airily. "I'll bid you good-day for the present, Mr. Lee!"

Lee waited a minute or two, and then approached Millie Winston, who, by a brave effort, had partly controlled her emotion by this time.

"My dear young lady," he said gently, "you must not give way to grief. You must hope. I understand that you and Jack Brendon are sweethearts?"

With a faint blush she admitted it, adding, in a low, tremulous voice, that it was only on the previous evening that they had become formally engaged.

"At what time?" Lee asked, with a start, for he saw in this a most important point.

"I met Jack at seven o'clock near the railway-arch," she answered. "We then went for a walk. It was on that walk that he told me how much he loved me, and asked me if I loved him in return. I told him 'Yes,' and he then gave me this ring."

"And what time did you part from him? You mustn't mind my asking all these questions, because I am a detective, and want to get at the truth."

"We parted at a quarter to eight, sir," she replied.

"You seem very sure of the time?"

"I am, because I had promised mother I would be back home at eight. The clock was striking when I went indoors. But, oh, sir, you don't believe that Jack did it? I'm sure he didn't—quite sure! He couldn't do such a dreadful thing. He's the kindest, gentlest fellow in the world. It would be impossible for him to do a thing like that."

"I'm inclined to think so too," answered Nelson Lee. "And that's what I mean when I say you must hope. Leave the matter to me, and rely on my doing my very utmost to clear your sweetheart of this awful charge."

He bade her good-bye, and went away very thoughtfully. He meant what he said. He did believe in Jack Brendon's innocence, in spite of what Lorrigan had told him. No man in all England had looked upon the faces of so many murderers as Nelson Lee, and Jack Brendon did not look like any one of them. He was not the type at all—very far from being so. The eyes—those wondrous mirrors of the soul—were much too open and honest to permit Lee to believe him capable of killing a man in cold blood.

But in hot blood. As the result of a quarrel about Millie Winston? What of that?

To say truth, a doubt as to that had lingered in Lee's mind when he looked at the prisoner. It had occurred to him as a possibility that Jack Brendon might have been stirred to wrath, as many a man had been before him, at the idea of losing the girl he loved, and that such wrath might have taken a tragic turn towards the man who had supplanted him in her affection.

But that doubt had vanished instantly as he talked with Millie. From her own lips he had heard that, between seven o'clock and a quarter to eight, vows of love had been exchanged between them. That, and the understanding they had arrived at, disposed of the question of rivalry for good.

Edward Miller, as far as Lee could compute, had met with his death somewhere between nine and ten o'clock, and in this the doctor who had examined the body confirmed him.

More than an hour before that Jack Brendon had assured himself of Millie's love. What possible motive then could he have for revenge against Miller? None.

And was it the least bit likely that, after having won such happiness,

he should deliberately jeopardise his life and liberty by committing such a reasonless crime?

"He would have to be mad to do so, and he doesn't look in the least bit mad," was Lee's comment to himself. "Well, I'll get along to the railway, and see if I can find anything new. The clue of the tar-stains is the one I must follow first."

CHAPTER IV.

The Clue of the Lock of Hair.

BUT Nipper had started work first, after all. Lee had left him sleeping, but the boy had awakened almost as soon as the detective had left the inn.

Now here he was, a little away from the breakdown gang who were hard at work clearing away the train wreckage, closely searching the embankment where the dead body of Edward Miller had been found.

"Any luck, my lad?" Lee asked as he came up.

"None at present, sir. I've been examining all the posts and palings I can find to see if any of 'em have been freshly tarred, but I've found nothing."

"We must continue the search. It's most important that we should find out how those stains came upon the dead man's hand and tunic. You've heard about the arrest, I suppose?"

"Of Private Brendon of the Downshire's? Yes, sir! I heard about it as I came through the village. Do you think he's the man, sir?"

"It's early to say yet, but at present I don't. I've seen the prisoner, and he doesn't look a bit like a man who'd kill another. I've seen his sweetheart, too, and she firmly believes in his innocence."

"What's the prisoner like, sir—dark or fair?"

"Is that important at the moment, my lad?"

"I should think so, sir," said Nipper, with a lift of his eyebrows. "You haven't forgotten that lock of hair, I suppose?"

Lee clenched his fist and smote the empty air.

"Clean forgotten it, Nipper!" exclaimed Lee. "Fancy me overlooking so important a thing as that. Jack Brendon is decidedly fair, and——"

He took the lock of hair from his wallet and examined it critically. As he did so, his brow clouded and his mouth tightened.

"I'm afraid it's just about the colour of Brendon's hair," he said, in a curious voice. "What a fool I was not to compare it! But I must do so at once. The prisoner has been taken over to Greyminster Barracks. That's about twenty miles away. I must leave you to work here alone for the present, and must go over to Greyminster at once."

He went straight back to the station. Near the entrance to the booking-office he met Inspector Lorrigan.

"Going off by train, Mr. Lee?" he said.

"Yes, to see the prisoner. Do you know, I forgot a most important thing. I forgot to compare that lock of hair with Brendon's head. I'm going over to do so now."

"You may as well save yourself the trouble," said Lorrigan, with a superior smile. "If you forgot it, I didn't."

"You compared the hair?"

"I did."

"And what did you find?"

"That it matches exactly."

Lee looked worried at the laconic answer, and Lorrigan smiled.

"It's only one of the many things that point to Brendon's guilt," the latter said.

"Did you examine his head closely?" asked Lee, recovering himself.

"Did you actually find that hair had been torn from his head by the roots?"

"Well, I can't say I did, but I don't attach too much importance to that. Brendon's got an uncommonly thick thatch, and I doubt if a little bit grabbed out of it would be missed."

"The bald spot would show, surely?"

"I don't know that it would."

"Oh, come, I must satisfy myself on that point."

"Please yourself. I'm quite satisfied. Still, if you think it worth while, here's the Greyminster train coming in, and you can be over there in three-quarters of an hour."

In about that time Nelson Lee alighted at Greyminster, and walked through the narrow streets of the ancient cathedral city. He was worried. Lorrigan's confident manner, and his words to the effect that the colour of the hair matched exactly, made him uneasy on Millie Winston's account. It really began to seem as if the web of guilt was being woven round Jack Brendon.

Arrived at the barracks, he sought out the commanding officer, and readily obtained access to the cell in which the prisoner had been confined.

Jack Brendon looked up as he entered, and listened eagerly as Nelson Lee introduced himself, and told him of his interview with Millie.

The young soldier's eyes glistened at the mention of her name.

"She's a good, sweet girl, sir," he said. "The sweetest little girl in the world. You don't know what a relief it is to find that she, at all events, believes in my innocence."

"I don't mind telling you, Brendon, that I'm ready to do my best to establish your innocence. In order that I may do so, you must help me all you can. You are ready to answer my questions?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very well, then. You went to see Miss Winston last night. Where did you meet her, and at what time?"

"At seven o'clock, sir, near the railway bridge, a quarter of a mile the other side of Yalwood Station."

"What did you do then?"

"We went for a walk, sir, and during the walk we—we came to a definite understanding. I—I told Millie that I loved her, and—and she told me that she loved me. Then I gave her an engagement-ring. I had it ready, for I knew pretty well beforehand what her answer would be."

"And what time did you leave her?"

"Very soon after, sir—at a few minutes before eight. She had promised to be home by eight o'clock."

Lee breathed with relief at finding that Brendon's story, so far, tallied exactly with his sweetheart's. But his next question was also important.

"Did you go straight back to the camp then?"

"Not immediately. You see, I felt very happy knowing that Millie loved me, so I rambled about a bit thinking over my happiness."

"In your rambling did you go near the railway line?"

"Why, yes, sir, I did. I walked along the railway line for a little distance, because it was a short cut back to camp. One of the sentries challenged me, and I answered him."

"Who was the sentry? Was it Edward Miller?"

"No, sir. It was Private Norris, of D Company."

"Did you see Edward Miller at all?"

"No, sir. I left the line before I came to where he was on sentry."

Lee paused to reflect. Part of the evidence against Brendon was that he had been seen on the railway line. This the prisoner had now admitted, and explained plausibly enough. But one thing more Lee wished to know, and that was an important one. He put his next question slowly.

"At what time did you quit the railway line?"

"About half-past eight, sir. I had to be back at camp by nine, because I was for picket duty. I was back a few minutes before that time."

Lee breathed easily again. He was confident in his own mind that Miller had not been killed till after nine o'clock—that it might even have been nearer ten when he had lost his life. His belief in Brendon's innocence was so far confirmed; yet as he glanced at his thick, fair hair, and thought of that lock of hair in his wallet, he still felt uneasy.

"Brendon," he said suddenly, "please sit down on this stool. I want to examine your head!"

"My head, sir? What for? That's what Inspector Lorrigan did. What's the meaning of it?"

"You mustn't ask questions yet; only answer them, and do what I say. This is a matter of the greatest importance to you."

"Very well, sir," said the young soldier huskily, and promptly sat down on the stool.

Nelson Lee bent over him, and gave a start as he placed the torn lock of hair close beside that on his head. No wonder that he started; no wonder that Inspector Lorrigan had smiled so confidently.

For the hair, not only in colour but in texture also, matched exactly!

Nelson Lee drew a quick breath. His discovery was disquieting, but by no means conclusive.

Out came a powerful lens from his pocket, and through this he examined the prisoner's head, inch by inch, as he carefully pulled the hair back.

"That'll do!" he exclaimed when he had finished.

"Mr. Lee, what does this mean?" asked Jack. "Do, please, tell me."

"I'll tell you one thing, my friend," said the detective. "You've much to be thankful for that nature has given you an unusually thick crop of hair. I shouldn't wonder if it has saved your life!"

"Saved my life! I don't understand."

"Perhaps you will later. One thing I'll tell you now, and it's this—if you'd had a single bald spot on your head, an inch or even half an inch in diameter, it might have cost you your life!"

"Mr. Lee, you bewilder me."

"Do I? Look at this!"

Jack Brendon gazed at the lock of hair in amazement.

"Why, it's like mine!" he exclaimed.

"Very like yours, but it isn't yours. None of yours is missing."

"How did you get this, sir?"

"I found it tight-clutched in the dead man's hands!"

"Who's hair is it, then?"

"I don't know. If I did I could tell you who killed Edward Miller; or, at any rate, I could tell you the man with whom he struggled just before he met his death!"

"Then you don't believe I did it, sir?"

"I don't. Your head has saved your neck, so to speak."

"Thank Heaven for your words, sir!" said Jack with emotion. "Shall I be set free now?"

"I'm afraid not. They seem to have worked the case up against you pretty strongly. What I have just said disposes of one point, but there are others. There's one in which a letter is concerned. Did you write a

letter threatening to kill Edward Miller if he did not cease his attentions towards Millie Winston?"

"Good heavens, no, sir! I have never written to Miller in my life!"

"Good! Then that's all I want to ask you at present. Good-bye, and keep up your courage!"

CHAPTER V.

The Clue of the Tar Stains.

WHILE Lee had been investigating one clue, Nipper had been busy on another.

No sooner had the detective departed for Greymminster than the young fellow continued his search for the source of those tar-stains.

Not a post or paling or bit of boarding within several hundred yards of where the body of Miller had been found went unsuspected.

But for a time all his search was in vain. Baffled and nonplussed, Nipper presently sat down on the embankment to try and think things out.

Up to then the day had been fairly fine, but now came signs of a change. Clouds that had been scattered and fleecy before now began to mobilise into dark, piled-up banks as the wind drove them together.

"Hallo, the wind's changed," quoth Nipper, as he observed the stir of it among the bushes and heather amid which he was sitting. "Blowing up for rain!"

It was blowing up something else, too—something that made Nipper sniff and his nostrils quiver.

"Tar!" he exclaimed, as the pungent smell reached him in a strong waft, and he leapt to his feet.

Where did it come from, this odour of the very thing for which he had been looking for the past hour—fresh tar? Plainly from somewhere on the plain below—the level stretch given over, as has already been mentioned, to allotment gardens. It was dotted all over with small sheds in which the various small-holders kept their spades and forks and other garden implements, and would have attracted Nipper's attention before as the possible source of the tar-stains, but that he had thought it unlikely for a sentry to wander so far from his post.

Now, however, with the pungent smell to guide him, he at once descended the embankment and started anew on his search. But though he made a close inspection of at least a score of the tool-houses, all of which had been tarred in their time, he could find no trace of any sufficiently fresh to give off so strong an odour.

He was returning somewhat disconsolately towards the embankment, when he suddenly caught sight of another shed which had hitherto escaped his notice.

It was somewhat larger and more substantially built than the majority, and was tucked away so close to the embankment as to back right against it.

Nipper approached it, with no great hope that it would yield any more satisfactory result than the others. He looked all round it, but no signs of fresh tar appeared.

Stay, what was this? A black streak, congealed into jellike beads, showed distinctly at the joining of two boards. The inside, then, had been recently tarred, and some of the black liquid had oozed through.

Quick as lightning Nipper was round at the door. It was fast, made secure by a big padlock. And what was this upon the very padlock itself. Tar-stains upon its rusty surface, and, more important still, other marks upon the tar-stains.

"Finger-prints!" ejaculated Nipper. "Well, if this isn't a stroke of luck! I won't touch it until the gov'nor comes. I wouldn't spoil these marks for anything."

It wasn't easy to repress his inclination to pick the lock, and so get a look of the inside of the shed, but he did it. Who knew how valuable those finger-prints might prove? On no account must they be interfered with until Nelson Lee should be there to examine them.

He waited, a tedious process, killing the time by walking to and fro along the embankment, with his eyes almost constantly fixed upon the shed below, lest anyone might approach and tamper with those marks, and with only an occasional glance in the direction from which Lee would approach.

At the end of two hours he came.

"Back again, you see, Nipper," smiled Lee. "I've examined Jack Brendon's hair, and the torn lock doesn't belong to him."

"Glad to hear that, sir. I've found out something too. I've found out where the tar-stains come from, I think."

"The dickens you have! Good lad! Show me."

"This way, sir," Nipper said; and led the way to the back of the shed, where the tar had oozed through.

"Yes, you're right; the inside has been fresh done, my boy. Been inside?"

"Not yet, sir. I didn't want to tamper with the padlock."

"Why not?"

"See for yourself, sir!" And he led the way round.

"Finger-prints!" exclaimed the detective, as he bent down close to the padlock. "Whose are they, I wonder?"

"Perhaps the dead man's, sir."

"No. Edward Miller had tar-stains on his palm and on his tunic, but none on his fingers. These marks were made by somebody else while the tar was still wet. It's barely dry even now. They may have been made by the owner of the shed, and in that case they may be of no value to us. On the other hand, they may possibly have been made by somebody else, in which case——"

Lee broke off, musing. Then, with a sudden thought, he said:

"There's a man working in one of the allotments over yonder, Nipper. Go over and ask him who tills this plot."

Nipper was off eagerly enough, and in four minutes was back with the information that the shed and plot was rented by "old Amos Larcombe."

"And where does old Amos Larcombe live?" queried Lee.

"In the second cottage this end of Station Lane, the man told me. He's a man of nearly eighty, it appears."

"Then go and see the old gentleman, and bring him here as fast as his ancient legs can carry him. You can tell him I've got some of the finest cut-plug that ever grew in old Virginia."

Whether it was the mention of the peculiar kind of tobacco, which Lee knew was generally a prime favourite with ancient sons of the soil, and which he sometimes smoked himself we cannot say, but certain it is that Amos appeared in remarkably quick time for an "old 'un."

Having shaken hands, and then handed him over about two ounces of cut-plug, Lee at once got to business with questions.

Yes, Amos had tarred the inside of his shed only the day before, and was going to do the outside later on. No, he could swear them wasn't his fingers on the lock.

"Why so sure, grand-dad?" asked Lee.

"'Cos, sur, whenever I've got a bit o' pitchin' to do, I allus wears gloves."

"And you wore gloves yesterday?"

"To be sure, sur. I mek no doubt I mid have smeared the padlock wi' me gloves, but I make no marks wi' me fingers, that I'll swear!"

"Then these prints make it clear that somebody must have tampered with the lock after you had left the place yesterday."

"Ay!" said the old man angrily. "Arter some o' my seeds, that was what they were arter, I'll warrant! Let me ketch the danged scamp as done it, that's all, and I'll lay my stick acrost his thievin' head, old as I be!"

"Is it an easy lock to pick?"

"No, sur; that's what it just baint. That there lock was bought, and the key made, by young Dick Dove, as used to have the plot afoor me."

"Dick Dove, who is he? Where does he live?"

"He used to work at Job Multon's, the blacksmith's, in the village yon. Didn't belong to Yalwood, he didn't, sur. Sort o' foreigner, he wur, sur. Worked here about two year, he did, and then went away a bit sudden last 27th July."

A foreigner with an English name, who went away on the 27th July last! Nelson Lee suddenly seemed to become engrossed in thought.

Little wonder, for the date mentioned he knew to be a very ominous one. July 27th, 1914, was just a week before the war had broken out. On that day, as Lee well knew, the secret word had gone through the length and breadth of England, for all Germans and Austrians to return to their Fatherland and rejoin the colours!

Supposing this Dick Dove was a German or an Austrian! Here indeed was food for later reflection.

"Grand-dad," he said, with seeming carelessness, "you don't mind my having a look inside the shed?"

"To be sure not, sur! Here be the key! Your eye be younger ner mine and yer hand steadier for tetchy work like to that. Unlock it, sur!"

Lee did so carefully, taking care not to spoil the finger-prints that were now gradually drying.

"You'll let me keep this padlock, grand-dad," he said, with a quiet smile, "if I buy you another, and give you half-a-sovereign into the bargain?"

"Half-a-suvrin!" gasped the old man. "You don't mean that, sur, surelie!"

"Why not? Here's the money!"

With the little deal completed, they passed into the shed.

"Why, you're quite snug here!" said Lee, glancing round. "Got a carpet here, and everything." And he pointed to the square of felt that covered the floor.

"Ay, sur—that were Dick Dove's doin', that were! He put the felt down. He used to sit here a tidy bit o' summer nights, and he said it kep the draught from comin' up atween the boards."

"No doubt it does—no doubt," said Lee lightly, but Nipper could see that he had some other thought at the back of his mind.

The detective spent the next few minutes in examining the newly-tarred walls. One or two smears and smudges were to be seen, and one of these particularly attracted Lee's attention. He actually brought his lens to bear upon it, and looked carefully through it for several seconds.

"That's where Miller's tunic rubbed against the wall," he said, in a whisper to Nipper.

"How do you know that, sir?"

"Look through my lens. You will see that two or three minute pieces of kbaki fibre are still adhering to the tar."

"So they are! Little tiny pieces of fluff, as though the nap of the cloth had rubbed off."

"But why should Miller have come to this shed, sir?" Nipper asked presently, when old Amos had departed to buy a new padlock, and the two were once more alone.

"Can't say at present. It's certain he did, though, and it's equally certain somebody else did also, as witness the finger-prints which are not Edward Miller's, and are not those of old Amos."

"Whose can they be, sir?"

"Why not the previous tenant of the place—Dick Dove?"

"He must have had a duplicate key?"

"What man more likely to have such a thing? He's a blacksmith, and very likely a locksmith as well."

"But he went away last July."

"Yes, on the 27th, my lad. The very day that all Germans and Austrians in England were called to rejoin the colours."

"You think he's a German or an Austrian?"

"We know that he's a foreigner, according to old Amos. And if he wasn't an enemy of England, why should he depart suddenly on that particular date? It may be merely a coincidence, but it may easily be something more. It's ominous, at all events, and I sha'n't feel satisfied till I've seen Mr. Dick Dove."

"If he's at war against England, it's like his impudence to adopt a peaceful name like that!" said Nipper.

"Done deliberately, no doubt. It's a sample of the Teuton's peculiar humour. Most of 'em, of course, adopt Scottish names."

Old Amos returned presently with the new padlock. This Lee carefully locked, and having instructed the old man that nobody was to be admitted to the shed during the next few days, he and Nipper went off.

"Are you going to begin your search for Dick Dove, sir?" Nipper asked.

"Not till the day after to-morrow. The Board of Trade enquiry into the cause of the wrecked train begins this afternoon, and will probably finish to-morrow. I shall wait for that, and then try and get on the track of Mr. Richard Dove."

The enquiry referred to duly took place. Several witnesses were called, including the engine-driver. He was most emphatic in declaring that the railway line had been clear of obstacles. Had this not been so, the engine must have struck anything lying there, whereas it struck nothing, but was thrown off the line by force of the explosion.

How this latter had occurred remained a mystery. The official verdict declared that it must have been caused by the accidental fusing of some of the shells aboard the train, and with this vague finding, people had to remain content for the time being.

But Nelson Lee was by no means satisfied. Evidence had been given as to the strictness and carefulness of the loading and packing, and short of spontaneous combustion—an almost impossible theory—the detective could not understand how the explosion could have been caused from inside the train.

Yet if it had been caused by an agent outside, how had it come about? That was the mystery which Lee was now setting himself to solve.

Inspector Lorrigan had already solved it to his own satisfaction. Meeting Lee after the enquiry, he at once said that he differed from the Board of Trade inspector's finding.

"The explosion was caused by somebody not in the train. The wrecking was a deliberate crime," Lorrigan said.

"Just what I think," agreed Lee. "But who could have done it? The centries say that nobody was seen trespassing on the line."

"Except one man—Jack Brendon."

"He admits that himself," said Lee; "but that was a full hour or more before the train came along."

"My belief is that he returned later. Anyway, I've almost absolute proof that he did it."

"Proof's a strong word," said Lee, a little testily. "And, anyway, you were wrong about that lock of hair. I've absolute proof that that didn't come from his head."

"I don't care for that," Lorrigan said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm not relying on the hair clue."

"What are you relying on then?" asked Lee, irritated by the other's grin of confidence. "Have you any fresh evidence?"

"I have."

"What is it?"

"Documentary evidence found in Brendon's kit. Letters from Koenigergratzstrasse 70!"

"In Berlin?" exclaimed Lee, with a start. "The headquarters of the German Secret Service?"

"Exactly." Lorrigan was rubbing his muscular hands in triumph.

"What do the letters say?"

"They prove that Brendon is a German spy of the most dangerous kind."

"Do you mean that? What has he done?"

"Do you remember the burning down of the munitions factory at Beedle-bridge, fifteen miles from here, a month ago?"

"Why, yes; I investigated the affair."

"Ha! And what conclusion did you come to?"

"That it might have been the work of an incendiary, but who, I couldn't discover."

"Then I can tell you, Mr. Lee. The man who did that was Jack Brendon!"

"You say that deliberately?"

"I've proof of it. One of the letters found among his kit commends him highly for this special act!"

"Does the letter mention him by name?"

"Why, no. All the letters are in German, and begin 'Dear Sir' in each case."

"But the envelopes—how are they addressed?"

"I have found no envelopes. They have probably been destroyed."

"Envelopes destroyed and the letters themselves preserved!" cried Lee with emphasis. "I'll never believe they were sent to Brendon at all!"

"Not when I've found them among his kit?"

"I don't believe for a moment that he's capable of such an act of villainy."

"He'll have a toughish to persuade a court-martial to that belief. And a man who can burn down a factory is just as capable of wrecking a train!"

"I don't believe for a moment that he did either," Lee said calmly.

"Then I can't help saying you're the most obstinate man in the world, Mr. Lee."

And Inspector Lorrigan, full of the feeling that he was beating the famous London detective at his own game of mystery-solving, strutted off as proud as any peacock.

CHAPTER VI.

Louis Radetsky, alias "Richard Dove."

TO say that Nelson Lee was not disturbed would not be true. What Inspector Lorrigan had told him, had come upon him like a small bombshell.

Not that he believed now in Jack Brendon's guilt any more than he had done before. But the fact that those incriminating letters had been found among his kit, was a circumstance to make him feel very uneasy.

The absence of Brendon's name, which Lorrigan admitted, were a sort of negative confirmation of Lee's belief that the letters had been sent to somebody else, and that that somebody had endeavoured to cast suspicion on Brendon by placing the letters where they had been found.

Who was that somebody? Circumstances pointed to Edward Miller. Was it not he who had tried to poison Millie Winston against her lover by telling her he was a German in disguise? Was it not he who had turned all Jack's comrades against him by telling them the same story?

That being so, what more likely than that he should support his tale by smuggling those incriminating letters among Jack's things?

But now Edward Miller was dead, and the task of tracing such a perfidious act to him was rendered a hundredfold more difficult, if not quite impossible.

It might prove beyond Lee's powers to do it. The court-martial might come to believe what Lorrigan and other people believed; might regard the case against him as amounting to proof—and even Lee had to admit the strength of the circumstantial evidence in some respects.

If they did, Jack Brendon would be found guilty of treason, and death at the hands of a firing party would be his punishment!

"It must not be," exclaimed Lee to himself. "I believe him to be innocent. For his own and his sweetheart's sake, he must be saved, and the only way to save him is by proving that another man is guilty! How is that to be done? Had the missing Dick Dove anything to do with this business? I fancy he may have had. In any case, it's the only theory I have, and I must follow it up to the bitter end!"

He hastened back to the Chequers.

"Bring me a time-table at once," he said to Nipper. "I catch the next train to London."

"What's up now, sir?" Nipper asked as he brought the book.

"I'm going to try and find Dick Dove. I must find him within the next few days. It's the only way I can see of saving poor Jack Brendon's life!"

"Is it as bad as that, sir?"

"Yes. Inspector Lorrigan's got some absolutely damning evidence against him. Unless we can disprove it, poor Brendon will be shot for certain."

Nelson Lee arrived in London that same afternoon. During his journey up he had planned out his course of procedure. To have attempted to find Dick Dove in a mighty city like London without a clue to his whereabouts, was, on the face of it, like looking for a needle in a haystack.

But Lee had a plan, and forthwith proceeded to carry it out. Entering a taxi at the station, he drove straight to a certain office in Westminster. On sending in his card by a clerk, he was immediately shown into the room of a high official to whom he stated his business.

"So you wish to examine the registers of all aliens who have become naturalised during the past ten years, Mr. Lee?" the official said. "That's a longish job, but the registers are at your service."

Lee retired to a smaller room which was placed at his disposal, and here for the next two hours he proceeded with his self-imposed task.

Long were the lists of names that he examined without coming upon the one for which he sought. Still he searched on patiently and carefully, and at last his patience was rewarded.

His poised finger dropped upon a name, the very one for which he had been looking—Richard Dove!

There was a reference number and letter beside the name, which sent Lee to other documents for their meaning. This he discovered in a few minutes, and it amounted to this:

That the man Richard Dove had assumed that name by deed-poll; that by birth he was a Hungarian, having been born at Kolomea, in Galicia, and that his inherited name was Louis Radetsky!

The date of naturalisation went back some seven years, and Radetsky's occupation was given as that of an electrical engineer!

"Electrical engineer," mused Lee. "Not quite the same thing as a blacksmith; still, the name's the same, and it's more than possible it's the same man. Now, if he's in London, as is more than likely, the thing is where to find him. Perhaps they can help me at Scotland Yard."

They could, as Nelson Lee very quickly learned. In conformity with regulations passed since the outbreak of war, Richard Dove, as a born foreigner, had reported himself to the police, and been duly registered.

"As a qualified engineer, he's offered his services to the Ministry of Munitions," the police official informed him; "but I believe his offer is still under consideration. It's a ticklish business employing foreigners on Government work, naturalised or not."

"Quite so," agreed Lee. "And where does Richard Dove live?"

"Here's his address, 28a, Tregona Street, W."

"H'm, that's in Soho," said Lee. "Still favours the foreign quarter. Evidently his sympathies are still with his compatriots."

"Got anything against him, Mr. Lee?"

"Nothing definite—only surmise at present. If anything develops, I'll let you know." And the detective took his leave.

He wanted to get a look at Richard Dove, but knew that he must exercise caution in this to prevent arousing his suspicions. That he would be able to recognise him if he saw him, he felt tolerably certain. For before leaving Yalwood, he had obtained from the local blacksmith a cabinet photograph of his former assistant.

Now the question was how to come face to face with its original. Lee seemed to settle that question in his own mind by going straight to his chambers at Gray's Inn.

There he remained for a full hour, busying himself the while in selecting suitable garments from his very extensive and varied wardrobe, and in effecting a very complete disguise of himself.

When, at the end of that time he gazed at himself in a long pier-glass, he smiled at his completely altered appearance.

"When I bought this suit three years ago at that shop in Buda-Pesth, I thought it might come in handy some time or other," he said. "They're certainly the very things for this job. My command of the patois isn't over-grant, but I think I know it well enough to back up my appearance. Louis Radetsky, alias Dick Dove."

Passing out of the door into the dusk of the street, he suddenly felt his arm tightly gripped.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a stern voice. "What were you doing in that building yonder? You don't live there, you know."

"I haf been galling on mein vriendt," replied Lee, in broken English.

"That's hardly good enough," replied the plain-clothes' officer, for the

man who was gripping him was no other. "You're a foreigner. Are you registered?"

"I vos registered von, doo, dree months ago!"

"All right then, you will show me your certificate."

"Sorry, Sergeant Wace," laughed Lee, speaking in clear English now, "but you've beaten me."

"Why, blow me if it isn't Mr. Nelson Lee himself!" exclaimed the sergeant, recognising the voice which was well-known to him. "And all the time I thought it was somebody paying a visit to your chambers in your absence."

"Lucky for me I wasn't," laughed Lee again. "You fairly beat me in your demand for my certificate."

"It's you who beat me with that disguise, sir. Your make-up's wonderful."

"Thanks, sergeant. Your tribute inspires me with confidence. I've need of a good make-up to-night. Within the next few hours I hope to move among some very exclusive Hungarian circles."

"The best of luck, then, sir," Sergeant Wace said, smiling at the meaning wink which Lee gave him. "There are a good many of 'em still knocking about, but we've got most of 'em spotted. Where are you going, sir?"

"Tregona Street, Soho."

"Nasty place to go single-handed. Best be careful, sir, though in that rig you ought to pass well enough."

"Oh, I think I shall manage," and Lee moved off.

Arrived in Soho, he slouched along with his sombrero shading his swarthy face, until he reached Tregona Street. Taking up a position in a dark doorway, he looked across at number 28a, which was opposite.

The downstairs part was a fourth-rate restaurant, while certain of the upper rooms seemed to be let off in lodgings. Save for the lights behind the closely-drawn blinds of the restaurant, and one lighted window on the very top floor, close under the roof, all was in darkness.

Looking across at this upper light, Lee was presently able to make out certain shadows moving across the blind.

"Two men at least," murmured Lee. "Perhaps three. Wonder if one of them's Radetsky? It's quite likely, I imagine. Ah, they've turned the light off! That's good. It's probable they're coming out."

He remained where he was, staring straight across at the entrance. The outer door was open, giving on to a small square lobby. Out of this, another door on the right-hand side led into the restaurant, while at the back, a third door led to the passage and stairs beyond.

Even while he looked, this latter door opened and three men passed through it. Halting in the lobby, they seemed to debate which way they should go, and in a minute settled the question by not coming into the street at all, but by turning into the restaurant.

In that minute the lobby light, shaded from above, had fallen upon their faces; on one round and swarthy face in particular.

"Dick Dove for a million!" exclaimed Leo to himself. "Luck's running my way. Now to beard the lion in his den at feeding time. I'm merely going to look and listen, but I hope my luck will last."

CHAPTER VII.

Nelson Lee's Perilous Escape.

HE crossed the street, and sauntered into the restaurant as carelessly as if he were quite familiar with the place. His attire and appearance secured him against undue scrutiny, while for his part, he was able to observe Dove and his two companions just seating themselves at a table near.

The place was not over brilliantly lighted, and such illumination as there was, was deliberately lessened by the guests themselves, by means of screens placed between the tables. Evidently most of the people who came there were more or less anxious to avoid being stared at.

Dove and his party were no exceptions to this, for one of them at once drew a screen between their table and a small one standing in a corner.

This latter was vacant, and Nelson Lee noiselessly sidled to it, having first obtained some liquid refreshment from a bar at the end of the room.

It was a trifling thing to do, but it was a wise one, since it would now be unnecessary for a waiter to approach, and hidden by the screen as he was, Dick Dove and his companions would not suspect his presence there.

They were thus likely to talk with less restraint, and this, supposing they had anything important to talk about, was a matter for congratulation on Nelson Lee's part.

And that they had important matters to discuss became immediately perceptible, though at first their themes of talk had no direct bearing on the particular business on which Nelson Lee had come.

But he quickly learnt from their talk that both Dove's companions were Hungarians like himself. Their names appeared to be Carlo Kallay and Graf Krieg. Both were tall men, dark and cunning of eye. Dove himself, as Lee cautiously observed him through a mirror, was of middle height, but with a depth of chest and thickness of limb that suggested great strength.

"A tough lot to tackle if it ever comes to tackling them," was Lee's thought as he strained his ears to catch their talk.

This for a time concerned some mission which Carlo Kallay seemed to have been on in Rumania. It was connected with an endeavour to persuade the neutral government there to allow free passage through their territory of ammunition intended for the Turks.

Nothing of direct interest to Lee in that, yet it was not without importance. It told him what he wanted to know, namely that Dick Dove, in spite of his having become a naturalised Englishman, still sympathised with the country of his birth, and its allies.

But presently the conversation was to become positively startling.

The man named Graf Krieg quite suddenly drew the talk round, as he turned to address Dick Dove.

"And what's your next move, Radetsky?"

Radetsky—alias Dick Dove—leant across the table and whispered something which Nelson Lee could not catch, strain his ears how he might.

"That's a big job," said Krieg, "and terribly risky!"

"Ay, so it may be," returned Dove, his eyes aflame with evil. "But think of the reward if it comes off successfully. It was my own idea, and the count has approved it. I received a letter from Berlin to-day. It's taken ten days to smuggle it across, but it's here at last."

"You have it in your pocket?"

"No, it is in my room upstairs. You shall see it when we go up presently. All the details of the scheme are set out. It will take some little time to

organise, but when it is done, thousands will die at one swoop, and all this cursed England will be staggered!"

"Here's to the success of it, then," said Krieg, raising his glass and drinking.

"And here's another toast," said Dove. "Success to the arms of our Fatherland, and death to England!"

"Ay, perfidious England!" added Krieg, draining his glass.

Listening behind that screen, Nelson Lee felt his blood beginning to boil. That such men as these should be able to move freely about and talk such gross treason against the country which gave them hospitality and shelter, filled him with hot indignation.

Had he had no particular mission to carry out, he would have stepped forward at that moment and denounced these men on the spot. But while that would have meant their instant arrest, it would have probably prevented further discoveries in the case he was investigating, and would help him but little towards saving the life of Jack Brendon, which was his chief object at the moment.

But, even though for the time being he must let these men go free, there was something he could do; something he must do at once.

The letter from Berlin, of which Louis Radetsky had spoken! It was in his room upstairs.

"I must get possession of it before they go upstairs again!" Lee said to himself. "I must act at once!"

He remained where he was a minute or so more. Then, as a greasy-looking waiter brought the three men more drink, Lee slid silently from behind the screen, and made for the door unheeded.

Reaching the lobby, he instantly tried the inner door through which the men had emerged.

It was unlocked, and opened at a turn of the handle. Lee passed through, closing it softly behind him. He found himself now in a dark, narrow passage, with a staircase facing him.

He listened intently. Not a sound came from overhead. The upper rooms seemed to be quite empty.

"Now or never!" muttered Lee, and placed his foot upon the stairs.

The woodwork was old and crazy, but he prevented its creaking by keeping to the side. Reaching the first landing, he paused again to listen.

Still not a sound. He ascended to the second floor, and listened again before he climbed to the top floor.

Here everything was as quiet as the grave, only the distant sounds of traffic in the street far below reaching his ears.

On the landing where he now found himself, were three doors, two leading to back rooms, and one to the front. He turned the handle of the latter, and entered a big, square room. The dim glow from a street lamp shone upon the window, and showed a blind partly torn away from its roller.

"So I'm in the right room," Lee murmured. "I remember seeing that torn blind from outside. Now for my search!"

He drew an electric torch from his pocket, and flashed it carefully round the room. It revealed several chairs, a table with empty glasses smelling of spirits upon it, and in a corner against a wall, a knee-hole writing-table with drawers down each side.

"That's the place where he most likely keeps his papers. Let me have a look."

He tried one drawer after another to find that all were locked. Out came a big bunch of keys from his pocket. In two minutes he had opened one of the top drawers with a skeleton key,

"Nothing much here," he said swiftly, turning over some miscellaneous papers. "I'll try the next."

"Ha, this looks like business! A letter addressed from Berlin; written in German, and signed by Count von Revlo. Von Revlo, I know him, the scoundrel. He's one of the chiefs of the German Secret Service. And, good heavens; this must be the very letter that Radetsky spoke of. It is—it is," he added, as his eye roved swiftly over the contents. "What a scheme, what a frightful scheme!"

He paused to wipe his brow, upon which the moisture had appeared. This was not surprising, for the plan whose details were written in the letter he now held in his hand, was one of the most diabolical ever invented, even by a German!

"If only I can frustrate that, and I must, I shall have been well repaid for my trouble. What are these other papers?"

He took from the drawer a wad of documents, tied together with a piece of tape, and began hurriedly to examine them.

But before he could get more than a vague idea of their purport, an ominous sound made his heart almost stand still.

Footsteps on the stairs—footsteps, and gruff, drink-thickened voices. Radetsky and his companions were coming up to the room!

Without a second's hesitation, Nelson Lee thrust the papers into his pocket, and hastening to the door, opened it.

But it was too late to escape that way! Even as he opened the door a few inches to peep out, he was seen!

With an oath one of the men sprang forward, a revolver glistening in his hand.

Bang went the door, and in an instant Lee had turned the key. He was not a second too soon, for the fraction of a moment afterwards came a heavy pounding at the panels as the foremost man set his shoulders to it.

"Betrayed!" came in the voice of Carlo Kallay. "Who is the traitor. Break down the door and see!"

"No use, he's barricading it!" cried Krieg. And in truth Lee was dragging table and chairs against the door to bar their entry.

This gave him a brief respite, and he breathed more freely. But none realised better than Nelson Lee how desperate his plight still was. Alone in that house, and with three desperate men thirsting for his life, he knew that his peril was extreme.

Soon, in spite of his barricading, they would batter down the door. Why were they not doing it? What was the meaning of their inaction, and their whispered conference out there on the landing?

"Downstairs!" he heard Radetsky say in his foreign patois. "We can get at him from the room below."

"What did that mean?" Leo asked himself, as he heard the sound of their footsteps descending the stairs.

He was very soon to know. From under the floor of the corner of the room in which he was, came the sudden pulling back of a rusty bolt.

Lee turned his electric torch on the spot, just in time to see a small woollen mat slide sideways, as a trapdoor was lifted from under it.

With a leap the detective pounced on to the trapdoor with both feet, closing it with a bang, and sending Radetsky and a short ladder up which he had climbed from below, clattering to the floor beneath.

Lee remained where he was, pressing with all his weight upon the trap. It was the only means of securing it, for there was no bolt or fastening on his side. By standing where he was, he could at any rate keep them out for a time. But, good heavens! what was happening?

Something was moving right under his very feet. He shifted them a few inches, then he saw.

Saw that the trapdoor was perforated, and that through one of the holes a long, thin rifle barrel of peculiar pattern, was being thrust!

He stepped aside as if it had been an adder, and indeed this darkly gleaming thing was every wit as deadly, or even more so.

He was not an instant too soon!

Ping! came a sound, with only the very softest of reports, and a bullet buried itself harmlessly in the ceiling above his head.

Nelson Lee took in the situation in a moment. The villains were using a silent rifle, such as he had once seen being made at Essen, when he was on a secret visit to Krupp's. They could shoot him with impunity then without a sound being heard in the street below.

Ping! came again, and Lee sprang away from the trapdoor just in time to avoid a second bullet.

This left the way open for the scoundrels to climb into the room, but there was no help for that. To remain on that trap meant death for certain by means of that deadly silent rifle thrust there through one of the specially-bored holes.

But did his altered situation mean anything less? What chance would he have against these three armed men? What mercy was he likely to get from them? None.

What could he do, then? Was there no means of escape? He gazed quickly round the room, the while the sounds of the men readjusting the ladder below came to his ears.

They were ascending. One man was nearly at the top. The trapdoor was opening again. A hand appeared—a rough, strong hand, holding a revolver.

Another moment, and the man's head and shoulders would appear, and he would fire.

In that moment Nelson Lee took his last desperate chance. With a rush, he bounded to the window, tore the blind aside, threw up the sash, and leapt on to the sill.

One glance he gave at the street, some seventy feet beneath him. With time for the people below to have prepared a sheet or something for him to have jumped into, he would have jumped without hesitation.

But there was none. Nobody in the street could see him in the darkness, while Radetsky and his two scoundrelly accomplices were already in the room.

One way of escape remained, and one only. Standing there on the window-sill, Lee reached upward and grasped the parapet a few feet above his head. One false move, one tiniest slip or loosening of grip, and he must be hurled to death!

But he made no slip. Like a gymnast at the horizontal bar, he pulled himself breast-high to the parapet. Then, still pressing, he hoisted himself until, with a final inward movement, he threw himself on to his knees on to the leaden gutter. A forward crawl, and he was right upon the flat part of the roof.

He paused to breathe, but only for a brief space. Then a sudden sound made him start. The villains were following him on to the roof! Radetsky was already there!

Lee had barely time to shelter himself behind a chimney-stack ere the figure of Louis Radetsky was revealed, clearly silhouetted against the skyline. He did not advance, but stood where he was.

"He is waiting for the others," thought Lee. "When they have gained the roof, they'll all come for me at a rush. What can I do? Ha, I see a

bare chance! The next chimney-stack there! The telegraph cables run from there across the street. It's the only way."

At a run, he hastened along the gutter, climbed over the shallow roof of the next house, and gained the chimney-stack. But by this time the three men had gained the first roof, and had caught sight of his fleeing figure. Towards him they came at a rush. Another few seconds, and they would be right upon him.

One chance alone remained to Nelson Lee, and he took it. With an upward leap, he clutched the bunch of telephone cables, and with a loud cry swung himself into mid-air.

That cry saved him. It attracted the attention of those in the street below, and gave Radetsky and the others instant pause. They might have fired at that swaying figure, but to do so would have been ruin to them. The firing would be heard, the house would be entered by the police, and they would be taken.

"Curse him, who ever he is!" hissed Radetsky. "He's slipped us, and we must let him go. Over the roof quick, and into the house by the back windows. We must make our escape before the police come."

CHAPTER VIII.

What the Documents Revealed.

HIGH over the houses swung Nelson Lee in mid-air. Unaware that his foes were no longer in pursuit of him, but were intent on making good their own escape, he hastened, hand after hand, to reach the roofs on the other side of the street.

His method of escape was indeed perilous, and one at which even a sailor might well have hesitated. Suspended there in mid-air, high above the street, with nothing between him and death save his hand-grip on the insulated cables, the consciousness of such terrible danger might well have dizzied a weak-nerved man, and caused him to relax his hold.

But Leo had nerves and fibres like interwoven steel and whipcord. In face of danger, he did not weaken but grew stronger, firmer and surer of hand, clearer of eye and brain. Beneath his weight the cables sagged and swung, but they supported him well, and it was not he, the man in peril, who quaked at the thought that they might yield to the strain, but the terror-stricken people below.

How they watched, with open mouths, horrified eyes, and fluttering hearts, the uncouth figure—for it must not be forgotten that he was disguised—as it swayed aloft and moved ever onward, a foot at the time, towards the opposite roofs!

And when at length it was seen that he had reached them in safety, what sighs of relief went up. There might have been cheers, too, had the people below known the full truth. But they didn't. While full of admiration of Lee's courage and nerve in venturing across those slender wires, they did not know what had led to such a risky performance. It seemed to most of them as if the adventurer must have been engaged in some nefarious task, and, being detected in it, been forced to escape in this way. Consequently, their admiration was tempered with considerable suspicion.

Most suspicious of all were the many police who had by this time gathered in the street below. They looked upon the man aloft as nothing more nor less than a burglar, and had taken prompt steps to bring about his capture. Inspector Fewings, who had arrived and taken command, had sent round

to a fire-station hard by, and just as Lee set foot safely on the roofs after crossing, a fire-escape came quickly trundling up.

The telescopic ladders were at once run up. Inspector Fewings looked up, apparently surprised that the man above made no attempt to run away. He started to ascend, and then received another surprise as Nelson Lee shouted down:

"All right, inspector! I'm coming down."

"Good heavens! The man's an Englishman! I could have sworn, from his rig, he was a foreigner."

Closely he watched Lee as he rapidly descended.

"And he is a foreigner," he exclaimed, as he caught sight of the dark hair and swarthy complexion, "in spite of his speech. Come, my man, what's this little game you've been playing?"

"It's all right, inspector. I'm English all right. I'm Nelson Lee," whispered the latter.

"Good gracious me!" said the startled Fewings. "What ever's the matter, then?"

"Tell you everything presently. Meantime there are three men in that house—three desperate villains. If it's possible to take them, they must be taken. Come with me!"

He led the way into the house, followed by Fewings and nearly a dozen police-officers, while as many more remained outside in the street.

But they were too late. Search the house how they might, from top to bottom as they did, they could find no trace of Radetsky or his companions.

"The birds have flown," Lee exclaimed disappointedly. "I was afraid they had."

"Who are they?" asked Fewings.

"Three enemies of Britain, three as vile villains as ever breathed! They're in the pay of the German Secret Service."

And quickly he related what he knew about them to the amazed inspector.

"But there's more to learn yet," he concluded. "I've got some of their papers here in my pocket, but there are others in that desk. We must take possession of the lot."

"I'll leave you to do that, Mr. Lee. I must set about scouring the neighbourhood for these men. See you later!"

He moved away to give the necessary instructions to his men, while Lee once more made his way to the top of the house, where three constables had been left in charge.

Going through drawer after drawer of the desk, he possessed himself of their contents, and, placing them all in a bag, presently returned in a cab to Gray's Inn.

"Now to go through the papers!" he said, and locked his door to guard against interruption.

For the next hour he remained engrossed in his task. There was much to occupy his mind, much to arouse his angry astonishment at the depths of perfidy to which Germany, a nation boasting of its advanced civilisation, had descended, and still showed her willingness to descend, for the correspondence between Radetsky and the heads of the Secret Service in Berlin and Vienna accounted for several terrible catastrophes which had already taken place in this country. One letter, for example, praised Radetsky highly for the cunning way in which he had set fire to a munition factory at Beedlebridge.

"Beedlebridge!" exclaimed Lee. "The very crime Inspector Lorrigan accuses Jack Brendon of having committed! Well, this letter clears the poor chap of that, any way! If only I can clear him in regard to the troop train!"

But, search how he might, he could find no document relating to that.

Nevertheless, there was one letter that seemed to have an indirect bearing on it. This was the letter from Count von Revlo, a man whom Lee had met years before, and knew to be a villain among villains.

This letter embodied in detail what was evidently an elaboration of a suggestion Radetsky had himself made. As set out by Von Revlo, it amounted to a scheme of the most diabolical sort.

The details of this, as written in the letter, need not be recorded here. It is sufficient to say that the scheme amounted to this—that, at a given time, twelve trains, leaving London at about the same hour, were to be blown up by certain ingenious means, fully explained in the letter, and that Louis Radetsky was to organise this vast scheme of wholesale murder.

"Terrible!" said Lee. "And it's evidently Radetsky's own idea. And what more likely than that he should have been responsible for the blowing-up of the troop train at Yalwood? How I wish I could prove that he did, and so save poor Jack Brendon! But whether Radetsky did that or not, he must be caught. So long as a scoundrel like that remains at liberty, anything may happen at any time!"

Having finished his examination of the papers and removed his disguise, he left his chambers, and drove at once to the police-station to which Inspector Fewings was attached.

"Any trace of the men?" he asked of that officer, whom he was lucky enough to find in.

"None at present, I'm sorry to say. My chaps are still searching."

"Put every man you can spare on the job! It's of the utmost importance that they should be caught! I'd wait to help you, but I want to get back to Yalwood. My inspection of Radetsky's papers has given me an idea in connection with the train wreck there, and I'm eager to put it to the test. I shall be down there for the next few days most likely, but wire me at the Chequers Inn if anything happens and I can be of any use. I'm going down to-night."

It was late when he arrived at Waterpool Street Station.

"Any train to Yalwood to-night?" he asked of a ticket collector.

"No, sir. Last train went near an hour ago."

"But I must get down! I'll see the station-master."

A few word of explanation to the latter, and the difficulty was solved.

"You can go by the Sandhampton mail. I'll arrange for the train to drop you at Yalwood, Mr. Lee."

Bag in hand—the bag contained those precious papers—Lee secured a first-class compartment to himself, and was locked in by the guard.

He did not notice, keenly observant man though he was, that, as he seated himself in one compartment, three other men entered another not very far away.

Presently the train started off. It was a fast one, and was very soon clear of London and running through the open country.

Full of the important business he had in hand, Lee opened his bag and started on a re-perusal of the documents he had found in the house in Soho. So engrossed did he become during the next three-quarters of an hour that he did not think of anything that might be happening aboard that train.

And something very important was happening! A man was at that moment walking along the upside footplate!

He walked carefully, as befitted so hazardous a journey. At each door as he passed it, he clutched the brass handle, and stooped so as to avoid being seen through the window by anyone who might chance to glance that way.

But arrived abreast of Nelson Lee's compartment, he acted quite

differently, and with a courage worthy of a better cause. Without hesitation, he thrust a hand through the window, which was open on this warm night, and sent the spring blind flying into its socket with a rattle.

Round came Nelson Lee's head with a jerk. A cry of surprise broke from this throat as he recognised Carl Kallay!

"You!" he exclaimed, leaping to his feet and rushing towards the window.

"Stop!" hissed the man, as he passed in through the door, which he had unlocked. "Stop, or I shoot!"

But before he could level the revolver, which he had quickly drawn from his pocket, Nelson Lee was upon him and gripping him by the wrist.

To his amazement, Kallay, instead of showing alarm at being thus tackled, merely gave vent to a hoarse, guttural laugh.

The reason for this became at once apparent. For at that very moment the door on the other side swung open, and into the compartment came two men—Louis Radetsky leading, and Graf Krieg at his heels!

"So we've tricked you—eh, Nelson Lee!" rasped out Radetsky, and the detective realised immediately that they had.

For by springing upon Kallay as he had, he had allowed the latter to grip him so that he could not free himself from his hold. The villains had had no intention of shooting, the revolver being produced simply with the intention of bringing about the very situation that now existed.

With a wrench Lee tried to free himself, but before he could do so the powerful, sinewy hands of Radetsky were fixed upon his throat from behind. A second after, and Krieg, swinging a life-preserver aloft, brought it down with stunning force on the detective's head.

His eyes closed and his limbs went limp. Then as Radetsky and Kallay released their hold of him at the same moment, he sank to the floor of the carriage in an inanimate heap!

"Is he dead?" asked Kallay of Radetsky, who had dropped to one knee.

"Not quite; but as near as makes no matter. But we must get rid of him. Kallay, you gather up the papers; we must keep those close. You, Krieg, open the door and help me lift him up."

There followed some dreadful seconds during which this was done.

"We're at Black Bridge, crossing the river!" whispered Krieg.

"All the better!" was Radetsky's answer. "Stand aside; I can manage him better alone!"

He had lifted the unconscious Nelson Lee in his powerful arms, and advanced near to the open door. The next moment, and he had hurled him out and over the low parapet of the railway bridge, over which the train was at that moment running, into the pitch-black night and down—down towards the darkly gleaming river.

CHAPTER IX.

Nipper's Discovery and Alarm.

DOWN at Yalwood, Nipper had not been idle. He had become as keenly interested as Lee himself in Jack Brendon and Millie Winston, and just as determined to save the young soldier from the consequences of the grave crime with which he was charged, but of which he firmly believed him innocent.

On Lee's departure to London then, he forthwith resolved to do what he could to further the end they had in view.

By this time the breakdown gang had cleared the line of debris, and

the local police were already at work searching the place where the explosion had taken place, on the chance of finding further clues.

In this very necessary work, Nipper had promptly offered his assistance. But this Inspector Lorrigan had somewhat derisively declined. Annoyance at what he looked upon as Nelson Lee's obstinacy, still rankled in the officer's mind, and where he felt he could not work harmoniously with the master, he was not likely to feel more kindly disposed towards the assistant.

"What do you think you can do, young fellow-me-lad?" he asked of Nipper with a superior air.

"I thought perhaps I might help you search for clues," said Nipper modestly. "I've helped Mr. Nelson Lee in heaps of cases, and I'm used to work of this sort."

"And so are other people," rejoined the inspector loftily. "Look here, my lad, if you think you can teach your grandmother to suck eggs, you're making a mistake. Why didn't Mr. Lee take you away with him? I've got this job in hand, and I tell you straight you're not likely to be of any use here."

"Ain't I?" was Nipper's inward thought. "Perhaps we shall see."

With his presence clearly resented by Lorrigan, he took care to steer clear of that gentleman as far as possible. Nevertheless, he did not relinquish his idea of assisting in the search. But he could not start on it properly until the police had finished, and that was after Lee had been away from the place a couple of days.

He did not wonder then at his employer's absence. He had no means of knowing that Lee had been so soon successful in getting upon the track of Dick Dove, and he was quite prepared to find the hunt for him occupying several days at least. Doubtless Lee would drop him a line reporting progress, and giving him further instructions within the next day or so. Meanwhile, Nipper would start on his belated work.

He betook himself to the railway line. A quick survey showed that several new sleepers had been laid down to replace those which had been shattered by the force of the explosion.

These old ones had been stacked in a pile on the embankment pending removal, and Nipper started to take a look at them. There were nearly twenty in all, and all were more or less damaged. Not greatly damaged, but mainly corrugated and torn by the engine and coaches falling over on them.

Except one of them! That one sleeper showed signs of having sustained a special kind of shock which all the others had escaped. It was splintered clean in two along its whole length, the two halves lying a few feet from one another, away from the pile of the lesser damaged ones.

"Now, what's the cause of that?" Nipper asked himself. "Why should this one have copped it more than all the others put together?"

Accustomed to Nelson Lee's own deductive methods, and ever mindful of the importance of getting at the bottom of things like this, he went on his knees and inspected one half of the sleeper closely.

It had been splintered as clean as a piece of match-boarding smitten by an axe; severed straight with the grain, hard though the wood was, the whole of its length.

"That's queer!" muttered Nipper. "That couldn't have been caused by the engine or a coach falling on it. How could it——"

He stopped abruptly, his breath catching as his eye fell on something. A little, semi-circular cut in the splintered edge of the wood, about a foot from the end. Letting his eye travel along, he at once beheld a similar, clean, crescent-like cut, an equal distance from the other end.

Both semi-circles were smooth and blackened as with smoke. He bent lower and applied his nose to them.

"Dynamite, or some other explosive!" he exclaimed, and then wiped his brow, startled at his discovery.

"What does it mean? It must mean——"

He jumped to his feet, hauled at the other half of the severed sleeper, and dragged it close beside the other.

The two splintered halves fitted exactly, while two similar crescent cuts in the second half tallied with those in the first, and combined with them to form two complete round holes, about an inch and a half in diameter.

"Whew!" Nipper mopped his brow again. "The holes run right through the whole depth of the sleeper. Looks to me as if they'd been especially bored through, and a couple of high explosive cartridges inserted. But even if that had been done, they'd have needed a fuse to fire 'em, and I don't see how that could have been done. The guv'nor may gather more about 'em, but they puzzle me altogether. Still, it'll be something to tell him when he comes back. Wonder when he will come back? Wonder if he's got on to the track of Dove yet? I ought to hear from him to-day or to-morrow. Perhaps there's a letter for me already."

But on arriving back at the Chequers, there was no letter.

"It'll come to-morrow morning," Nipper said to himself.

But it didn't. The postman certainly arrived, but he brought no word from Nelson Lee. Nipper began to worry, as he often did when separated from his employer for long.

"Hope the guv'nor ain't met with any trouble," he murmured. "It ain't usual for him to let three days go by like this without writing. Still, I won't brood. A letter is almost sure to come to-night. I'll go out for a stroll."

His walk drew him to the railway again, and to the heap of sleepers, as if they had been a magnet. He took another look at those blackened circles, and longed more ardently than ever for Lee's return, so that he might acquaint him with his discovery.

Moving along the embankment, he presently caught sight of old Amos Larcombe's tool-shed, the key of which Lee had left in his charge.

"I'll go and have another look at it; it'll kill time, anyway."

He descended the embankment, and fitting the key into the padlock, entered the shed. All was as they had left it, and it was clear nobody had visited the place since.

Nipper looked about him. The tar was quite dry by now, and the strong morning sunshine, coming in through the door, made it glisten like black enamel. That same sunshine revealed something else. Another dab of tar made a print, not of fingers, but of a human palm showing quite clearly upon it!

It was on the floor, in what at the time of their previous visit had been a dark corner. It was on account of the darkness that the stain had escaped Nelson Lee's notice.

"Wonder if this was caused by Edward Miller?" muttered Nipper, as he dropped to the floor. "Why, blow me if it doesn't look as if somebody had been pulling the floorecloth up! Why should he do that? Is there anything underneath? I'll have a peep!"

He unhooked a trowel from a nail on the wall, and with its flat blade began prising up the square of felt which was secured to the floor by means of tacks.

"Funny for anybody to have taken so much trouble to carpet a tool-shed like this. Looks as though there was something to hide. Ha!"

He had rolled back the felt, to disclose a number of loose planks laid over the ground. Lifting one of these he looked down into a hollow space below.

A little gasp of astonishment escaped him, which grew into sheer amazement as he raised a second plank. For now a square space, some six or seven feet deep, was revealed—a space partly filled up by a jumbled-up heap of mechanism.

Exactly what this was, Nipper could not determine. There was two or three coils of wire, and parts of what might have been a dismantled electric battery. But in addition there were a number of thin steel rods made to fit into each other like the joints of a fishing-rod, the use of which Nipper could not at the moment determine.

But his mind was greatly exercised by his discovery, and at once was working on the possible connection between it and the explosion which had wrecked the train.

His first thought suggested a tunnel. The shed backed close against the railway embankment. Given plenty of time, it would not have been difficult for anybody working beneath the shed to cut a passage through the embankment to right under the permanent way.

It was an obvious theory, yet one which Nipper was forced to abandon in a very little time. For search as he might, he could find no trace at all of any attempt at tunnelling. This was the more strange since, owing to the formation of the embankment being mainly chalk, no passage through it could have been cut and afterwards filled in again without leaving unmistakable signs behind.

Yet here there were none. Save for a chip or two, the chalk face of the underground wall showed no trace of having been disturbed.

"Nothing in the tunnel notion, that's clear," muttered Nipper. "Wonder what all this machinery means, though? It's a puzzle which the gov'nor may be able to solve, but I'm sure I can't. Hope he turns up again soon."

But the last post came that evening without bringing any news of Nelson Lee. When the next morning came a like blank result, Nipper's anxiety grew and grew.

What could his prolonged absence mean? Had any ill befallen him?

An answer to these questions grew pressingly urgent on another account. Meeting Inspector Lorrigan that evening, Nipper received a startling piece of news.

"The court-martial on Private Brendon finished to-day," the inspector said.

There was a note of grim satisfaction in his tone which made Nipper's heart quake.

"What's the result?" he asked.

"What I knew it would be. Brendon has been found guilty of treason!"

"Not of murder, then?"

"We didn't try to prove the murder charge. There was no need to. He's been found guilty of wrecking the train, and of treason against England, and the result will be just the same."

"What will the result be?" Nipper asked, with his heart in his mouth.

"Brendon will be shot!"

"Good heavens! When?"

"That I can't say for certain. Nobody knows yet. We sha'n't know till we hear of a firing-party being ordered for duty. It might be to-morrow, or it might not be for two or three days."

CHAPTER X.

The Secret of the Tool-shed.

THE terrible news was true. With a quickness quite different from the procedure of a civil court, the court-martial had arrived at its decision, and had found Jack Brendon guilty of treason.

Despite its startling celerity, nothing of thoroughness had been lacking at the trial. Jack had been properly defended, but the defence had broken down under the accumulated mass of circumstantial evidence.

The case against him was, from that point of view, extremely strong. Apart from the evidence of his quarrel with, and threats against, Edward Miller, there was the testimony from the other sentries that he had been seen on the railway line at a time when he had no sort of business there. Above all, there were the incriminating documents found among his kit by Inspector Lorrigan, which were interpreted as proof that he had been in the pay of the German Secret Service.

Useless for the defence to urge that these documents had never been intended for the prisoner, useless to urge that they had been put in the place where they had been found by some enemy or other.

The Court refused to believe such a tale. They believed, as on the evidence they could not help doing, that Brendon was an enemy to Britain, and, that being so, they had decided that he must die.

To Nipper the news came as a very heavy blow. He believed in Jack's innocence, and Nelson Lee believed in it, too. Before this, the latter might possibly have obtained evidence to rebut the charge made against the young soldier; yet, unless the detective should return soon, Jack Brendon might go to his death in spite of all.

With such a tremendous issue hanging in the balance, Nipper did all he could. He wired to Lee's chambers at Gray's Inn, only to receive a reply from the housekeeper there saying that she had not heard of her employer for three days, and that she knew nothing of his present whereabouts.

"Where can he be?" groaned Nipper, as he sat alone in his room at the Chequers that evening. "Heaven grant that he may return in time."

In great bitterness of spirit he sat up till late. Suddenly, just before midnight, the sound of a motor-car driving right up to the door of the inn roused him.

He jumped to his feet, rushed to the window, and looked out. His heart beat for joy as he recognised Nelson Lee engaged in paying and discharging the driver of the hired car in which he had come.

Down the stairs, two steps at a time, he hurried to open the door.

"Thank goodness you've come back, sir!" he cried, grasping the detective's hand. Then, as he caught sight of a white bandage bound round Lee's head, he added in alarm: "But you've been hurt, sir!"

"I've been in the wars, my boy," Lee answered, in rather a weak voice. "As a matter of fact, I've been unconscious for the better part of three days, and only came to a few hours ago."

"Good heavens, sir, what has happened?"

"It's a longish story, Nipper, and I won't tell it you all now. But I will tell you that I traced Mr. Dick Dove all right. His real name is Louis Radetsky. He's a Hungarian, and an avowed enemy of Britain. I've proof of his complicity in crimes sufficient to hang him."

"You have, sir? Is he in custody?"

"Unfortunately, no; although the police are after him. I've told them where to look, and I may hear from them at any time. But they found out I was on their track. That's how I came by this broken head. I've much to be thankful for, though, that it isn't much worse."

And Lee recounted to his amazed companion what had happened in the train.

"They stunned me, my boy, and then they pitched me right out of the train. They chose a spot midway between here and London, at a place where the railway line crosses the river. Their intention was, of course, to drown me, and drowned I should have been in ordinary circumstances. But Providence was on my side. A barge happened to be passing at that very moment. It was loaded with hay, and covered by a great sheet of tarpaulin stretched taut over it. The tarpaulin broke my fall, and I landed on the hay with nothing worse than a bruised back. But of that I knew nothing at the time, for I was senseless. And senseless I remained until a few hours ago, when I came to to find myself lying in bed at a riverside cottage where the bargeman had landed me.

"The kindly cottager had sent for a doctor at once, but in spite of all his efforts I didn't get back my consciousness till to-day. When I did, I at once sent for the local police, and instructed them to communicate with Inspector Fewings in London. I gave them full details of what had happened, and instructions where to look for Radetsky and his crew. Then I hired a car, and came on here. It was dead against the doctor's orders, but I had to disobey them because I didn't know how things might be going on down here in regard to poor Jack Brendon."

"You're not very fit to travel, sir," said Nipper, "but I'm glad you've come, all the same. Jack Brendon's position is critical. The court-martial has found him guilty of treason, and he's to be shot!"

"Shot!" cried Lee, starting up. "When?"

"Nobody knows yet, but it may be to-morrow!"

"Good heavens! And I still lack proof of his innocence. I'm convinced of it myself, but how to convince others? Nipper—Nipper, what's to be done?"

"I've discovered something in your absence, sir. I don't know exactly what bearing it has on this business, but it seems to me mighty suspicious."

"What is it—what is it?"

Quickly Nipper explained what he had found beneath the tool-shed.

"And you could find no trace of a tunnel?" said Lee who had listened intently.

"No trace at all, and I searched thoroughly. Yet those steel rods and the other things must mean something."

"They must. It is useless going to the place to-night, but be ready at daybreak. We must find out all there is to find out. If we are to save Jack Brendon we have no time to lose."

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In the first grey streaks of dawn they might have been seen hurrying towards the tool-shed the next morning. Nelson Lee was much refreshed and strengthened by his few hours of sleep, but he still had his head bandaged.

Nipper unlocked the shed, and in a minute they had dropped into the hole under the floor. There, with the aid of the daylight, supplemented by their electric-torches, Lee made a minute inspection of the various pieces of mechanism he found there.

For many minutes he remained thus occupied, examining the coils of wire, the hollow steel rods, and the various other things with the closest attention.

"What do you make of it, sir?" asked Nipper at last. "There's no sign of a tunnel, as you see."

"You're right as to that, Nipper. There's no tunnel, but there's some-

thing else." He was lying flat on his stomach, torch in hand. "Look here!"

"A small hole!" exclaimed Nipper, with his eyes close to the junction of floor and wall. "What can that mean? There can't be much in that, surely? It's so small and——"

"Big enough to take these rods—see?" And Lee thrust one of the hollow steel sections into the hole till the whole six feet of it was buried in the chalky wall.

"Good gracious!" gasped Nipper.

"Pass the bundle of rods!"

Nipper did so.

Lee screwed a second on to the first, and, pushing it slightly, made that disappear, too. A third rod, screwed on to the end of the second, was similarly swallowed up by the chalky wall.

"My word, sir, however far does that hole go?"

"We are going to find out, my lad," was Lee's answer. And quietly but carefully he fitted one rod after another until, like the jointed sections of a chimney-sweep's brush, they had all vanished from view.

"The end at last!" he said, when the rods would penetrate no further. "Fourteen rods, each of six feet, makes eighty-four feet. Threes into eighty-four gives us twenty-eight. Twenty-eight yards at the angle through the embankment which you saw the rods took would bring us somewhere near the permanent way. Our next job is to examine that."

As they quitted the shed and climbed up the embankment, Nipper was full of eager questions. But Lee, as yet, would not answer them.

"You must wait a little, my lad," he said. "Ah, here's a man who'll be able to help us."

The last words referred to a ganger who, with a sledge-hammer over his shoulder, was approaching. Nelson Lee, standing near to the heap of damaged sleepers, beckoned him.

"I wonder if you can tell me where this one came from?" he said, pointing to the sleeper which had been so neatly split.

"To be sure, sir. I helped to take all these up, and to lay the new ones. And every sleeper is always numbered. Here we are, sir—26611 D," he added, pointing to a branded number on the end. "Now I can tell you exactly the spot it came from."

He led the way along the permanent-way for a little distance, then stopped and stooped to consult the numbers on other sleepers.

"Here's the spot, sir," he said, and pointed to where a new sleeper had been lately placed.

"Good," said Lee; then, catching Nipper's eye, pointed. "You see."

Nipper followed the direction in which he pointed, and saw that they were immediately opposite the tool-shed.

"Exactly opposite, sir," he said. "And as near to twenty-eight yards away as makes no odds. Just what you said."

"Probably a yard or two more over the surface," said Lee, when the ganger had moved on to his work of testing bolts and screws. "We'll take the exact measurements later. Also, we'll have this new sleeper taken up later, and see what's underneath the stone bed."

"What do you think is underneath, sir?"

"Oh, not much to see! Nothing more than a little space, I expect, sufficient to take two upright, insulated wires."

"Wires—for what?"

"Fuses to fire the two dynamite cartridges that had been embedded in the old sleeper."

"Then you think the explosion was caused——"

"By means of those two cartridges fired by an electric fuse, and controlled from the tool-shed yonder."

"But how did they get the wires through the chalky embankment?"

"Encased in the steel rods which were afterwards withdrawn. The passage through the chalk was probably made by means of cylindrical drill, such as is used for boring mines. All it would be necessary to do then would be to take up the sleeper and join up the wires beneath the cartridges. Not a very difficult job for an engineer—and Louis Radetsky, alias Dick Dove, is an engineer, you know."

"You think he did it?"

"It's highly probable."

"But surely he would have been spotted taking up the sleepers? Think how closely the line is guarded."

"Only since the war broke out. Before that, there would have been opportunities in plenty. Remember, Dick Dove lived down here for two years."

"Would he have made preparations like these before war broke out?"

"Nipper, by boy, the records of the German Secret Service show us that they have been preparing for war against us for the past ten years and more."

"But even now we haven't got proof that Dove blew the train up!"

"No, not proof, but strong presumptive evidence. Still, we shall want more in order to save poor Jack Brendon's life, and I only hope we may get it. Come, we'll get back to the Chequers to breakfast."

CHAPTER XI.

Positive Proof.

BREAKFAST was hardly over than a telegram arrived for Nelson Lee.

"From Inspector Fewings," he said, tearing it open. "It's in police code, and says that the local police at Frendon have got on the track of Radetsky and Company. Fewings is already on his way there, and wants me to meet him. Let's see, Frendon is some forty miles from here. I go as far as Ecclesham Junction, and then change. I must start at once."

"You'll come back as soon as you can, sir?"

"Depend upon that, for Jack Brendon's sake. I hope to be back to-night."

Lee was off in a very few minutes, and was fortunate enough to find a train waiting at the station which would take him to Ecclesham. Arrived at the latter place, he had to wait some twenty minutes for another train to take him on to Frendon, the town where he was due to meet Inspector Fewings and the local police.

It was these latter who had discovered the presence of Radetsky and his accomplices in their midst, but it was Fewings who had drawn their attention to the possibility that they might be there.

Not that the credit of this belong altogether to the London inspector. That was indeed due to Nelson Lee. Among the papers which he had discovered in Radetsky's room was one containing details of a plot then being hatched, in connection with certain important railway centres of England. Frendon being one of the most important junctions in the country, Lee had reasoned that it was one of the places likely to be visited by the conspirators. In his communication to Fewings, he had emphasised

this, and Fewings in his turn had telegraphed warnings to the local police, and in this manner had the present situation come about.

Arrived at Frendon, Lee made his way straight to the police station. Fewings was already there, engaged in close talk with Superintendent Druitt, chief of the local force.

"Ah, Mr. Lee!" said Fewings, rising and introducing Druitt to him. "I knew after getting my wire you wouldn't be long before you came here. We've excellent news! Superintendent Druitt here has located Louis Radetsky and Company."

"Yes, Mr. Lee," said the superintendent. "They are staying at the King's Head Hotel in the guise of British officers."

"That's like their cool impudence! You haven't attempted to arrest them yet?"

"Well, I couldn't. I only had meagre details, and didn't know till Inspector Fewings arrived half an hour ago, the precise nature of the charge against them."

"And I thought we'd better wait for you," added Fewings.

"Perhaps it was as well, for I've obtained some fresh evidence this very morning," and Lee related his discoveries at the tool-shed.

"My word, but these fellows are a crafty lot!" said Fewings. "No wonder General French says this is a war of machinery! It's all machinery, even here at home. It's plain that the enemy have been planning this war for years. But, I say, Mr. Lee, we're likely to have some trouble in arresting them! They're a desperate lot, and well-armed. We don't want a repetition of the Sidney Street business."

"We certainly don't," said Lee, and fell into deep thought for a minute. "We must avoid that at all costs. We must bring their arrest about by strategy. If only this was London, there would be no difficulty. I have a plan! I wonder if I can carry it out here? Have you a good theatrical wigmaker in Frendon, superintendent?"

"Branch of Foxon's, the London perruquier, round in Market Street, Mr. Lee."

"Excellent! Then I can get the disguise I want round there. I shall be ready in an hour."

"Wonderful chap, Nelson Lee!" quoth Fewings, as he disappeared. "Ought to have belonged to Scotland Yard. If he had, he'd have been at the head of affairs there. His resource is wonderful!"

Lee was back in less than an hour, so wonderfully disguised that they would never have recognised him had he not revealed himself.

"Who are you supposed to be?" asked Fewings.

"Count von Revlo of the German Secret Service, the man under whose instructions Radetsky is acting. I know the count fairly well, and a precious villain he is. I flatter myself my make-up is a good one, and as to Von Revlo's voice, well, his croak isn't difficult to imitate. I shall beard Radetsky boldly in his den."

"Risky business, isn't it? He might penetrate your disguise."

"I sha'n't give him time. You will be on hand when I want you."

They discussed the plan of campaign for a few minutes, then separately quitted the police-station.

Outside the King's Head Hotel, Lee and Druitt met again.

"My men report that Radetsky and the others are still inside," the local officer said. "Radetsky is staying there in the name of Captain Reswick."

"Good, that's all I wanted to know!" said Lee, and disappeared.

Some twenty minutes or so later, Louis Radetsky, alias Captain Reswick,

was seated in his private sitting-room with two other men also dressed as British officers. The two were no other than Kallay and Krieg, and all three were in deep discussion of the plans which had brought them there.

This included the blowing up of the railway station, and thus interfering considerably with the transport of British troops to the embarkation port.

"Everything will be ready in three days' time," Radetsky was saying, "and we shall then only have to await word from the count."

"Good thing we got that fellow Nelson Lee out of the way," remarked Krieg. "If he'd got clear away with those papers, all our plans would have been spoilt, and we should have been arrested."

"Well, we needn't worry about him," Kallay said. "We've got the papers back, and Nelson Lee is dead and done for."

"Hush!" said Radetsky suddenly. "Somebody outside the door!"

"And pushing a note under!" cried Kallay, springing up and possessing himself of the envelope which had been quickly thrust beneath the door. "Addressed to Captain Reswick. Whose writing is it? Surely I've seen it before?"

"It's from the count himself—Count von Revlo!" said Radetsky, in tones of excitement. "He says that our scheme is so important that he's come to England to supervise it himself. He's here—in this very hotel, and wants to see me at once in room No. 15."

"How did he know we were here?" asked Kallay in amazement.

"Ask him that. Doesn't he get to know everything? He might easily have seen us going in or out. Wait here till I come back."

Radetsky departed. Like all unscrupulous villains, he had a strong streak of vanity in his character, and it flattered him to be sent for in this way by the great Count von Revlo.

"Ah, Radetsky!" came in hoarse guttural German from the man who was standing on the hearthrug twisting a fierce moustache. "I have found you, you see, in spite of your disguise. As I said in my note, this business we have in hand is so important that I have come over to see it through myself. Don't think that I have any complaint to make against you. You have done excellent work for the cause of the allied Fatherlands—excellent work! Let me see, what was your last job? That troop train, wasn't it?"

"Yes, your Excellency," answered Radetsky; "the troop train at Yalwood. I am glad your Excellency is satisfied with the way that was done. It is a pity that more cursed Britishers were not killed, but——"

"Silence, you murderous villain!"

The words came from the supposed Count von Revlo, but in a very different voice—the voice of Nelson Lee!

Radetsky heard it and sprang back, his hand to his hip pocket.

But before he could draw his revolver, Fewings and Druitt had sprung from behind a screen, and had snapped the handcuffs on his wrists in a twinkling.

"Curse you! What's the meaning of this?" demanded the Hungarian.

"The meaning is simple," replied Nelson Lee. "Louis Radetsky, alias Captain Reswick, alias Dick Dove, the game is up! I am Nelson Lee, and I have been after you in connection with the wrecking of the troop train at Yalwood. You have confessed to that dastardly crime in the presence of us all, and you are our prisoner!"

"Curse you—curse you all!" cried the fellow, his face deathly pale.

"Cursing will do you no good, nor will struggling. We have a dozen men within call, if necessary. Ah, what's this?"

He had taken a bunch of keys from Radetsky's pocket. On one of them was a black stain.

"Dry tar!" exclaimed Lee. "This is the final link in the chain. This is the key with which you opened the padlock of the tool-shed."

"Curse you again, Nelson Lee—you seem to know everything!" the fellow hissed, and then he was led away by two other police-officers who had been called in from an adjoining room.

"Splendid, Mr. Lee!" said Superintendent Druitt. "Your plan has succeeded beyond all my expectations. How about the other two? Shall we go and arrest them?"

"No; they shall come to us, one at a time," smiled Lee. "It will save possible bloodshed. Kallay is staying here in the name of Major Gurton. We will send for him first."

But for the very serious issues involved, the events of the next five minutes would have been comical. For first word was sent to Kallay, alias Major Gurton, to join Radetsky and the count in room No. 15. When he came it was only to find himself promptly pounced upon and handcuffed as soon as he entered the room. Then a minute or two later Krieg, alias Lieutenant Riser, was similarly treated.

Thus were three of the most dangerous and desperate ruffians in Europe beguiled into a trap and captured without so much as a shot being fired, and without their being allowed to put up the least show of resistance.

Of their guilt there was now no sort of doubt. Radetsky had convicted himself out of his own mouth in answering Nelson Lee's question regarding the troop train, a question purposely framed so as to flatter the scoundrel's vanity.

But even without the absolute confession to which Radetsky's words amounted, Lee had quite enough on which to act. The key with the tar stains was strong evidence, but stronger was presently to be discovered, for, on visiting the Hungarian in his cell at the police-station and examining his head, it was found that the tuft of hair not only matched his in colour even more closely than it had matched Brandon's, but one bald spot was discovered from which it had plainly been torn.

"This is the man with whom Edward Miller struggled just before he died, then," Lee said, "and there can be little doubt but that this is the man who afterwards killed him."

"You have positive proof of his guilt now," said Fewings. "You will, of course, lose no time in going back to Yalwood and obtaining poor young Brandon's release?"

"I must see about that at once! The prisoners I, of course, leave in your hands," said Lee, and at once hurried away.



CHAPTER XII.

A Blank Wall and a Firing Party.

LEE had telegraphed to Nipper, advising him of his return, and the lad was at Yalwood awaiting him on his arrival. On his face was a look of the most strained anxiety.

"What's the matter, Nipper?" asked Lee in alarm.

"It's awful, sir! I'm afraid you're too late!" replied Nipper huskily. "Something's happened within the last hour——"

He broke down, overcome by emotion. Lee seized his arms and shook him.

"What has happened?" demanded Lee. "Speak, my boy—speak!"

"I've just heard that a firing party went over by the last train to Greyminster!"

"Good heavens! Does that mean that Jack Brendon is to be shot to-night?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm afraid to think."

"We must act at once! Quick! The telegraph office!"

"It's too late to wire, sir! The telegraph office closes at seven."

"A train, then, to Greyminster. What's the next?"

"There's none for two hours. I've just inquired."

"We must get a motor-car, then. There's a garage in the village."

They hurried there at once, only to learn that all three of the cars belonging there were out on hire.

Nelson Lee was as near distraction as he ever was in his life.

"Where can I get a car?" he demanded fiercely.

But the man in charge could only shake his head, and couldn't help in the least.

"I must get to Greyminster before sundown!" cried Lee. "A man's life may depend upon it. What's that?"

"A biplane coming down over in that field, sir," answered Nipper, who was looking skyward from the doorway.

Nelson Lee said not a word. What he did was to tear along the village street at such a pace that all the village turned out to see what was the matter.

He turned down a lane with Nipper at his heels, and across the fields to where the aeroplane was now settled.

Straight up to the pilot—a military lieutenant—he dashed, and in a minute had explained his errand.

"I fear that Brendon is to be shot before sunset over at Greyminster," he said. "And Brendon is innocent! He must be saved if possible."

"He shall be saved, if speed can do it!" replied Lieutenant Rodway. "Jump into that seat, sir!"

They were up and away in next to no time, and whirring towards Greyminster at a rare pace.

"We shall be there in a few minutes!" cried Lieutenant Rodway presently, leaning back and yelling so that his voice should be high above the whir of the propeller.

But terrific as was the speed, and although the square twin towers of Greyminster Cathedral came very quickly into view under the setting sun, it was not fast enough for Lee.

Would he be in time? His experience of such grim events told him that condemned spies were generally shot at dawn, but in one or two cases the execution had taken place at sunset. What had been arranged in the case of Jack Brendon?

"Greyminster Barracks!" yelled the pilot, pointing to a big block of red-brick buildings far below, every window of which was glinting as if with flame in the sunset.

But Nelson Lee's eyes, glued to the prismatic binoculars lent him by the observer whose place he had for the time taken, were fixed, not on the barracks themselves, but on a space in the rear of them.

A courtyard, surrounded by a very high wall, into which, at that very moment, several figures were walking.

Lee saw them through his glasses, and his face blanched.

"The firing party!" he gasped. "They are filing into the courtyard and ranging up. And now—now they are bringing in a man. Merciful heaven, it is—it is poor Brendon! Faster—faster, in mercy's name, or we shall be too late!"

It was even as Lee described. At that very moment a firing party from

the Downshire regiment had entered the courtyard, while poor Jack was being led forth with all the grim ceremony befitting such an occasion.

Soon, in a very few seconds, it seemed as though his doom would be sealed. But just then a sudden sound drew all eyes skyward—sounds of firing from the aeroplane which for some moments past several of the party had been furtively watching as it hovered high above their heads!

"Shots—revolver shots!" exclaimed one officer to another. "What can they possibly mean?"

"Done simply to attract our attention, sir, I think," said a sergeant. "Look! They're signalling to us!"

And sure enough there was Nelson Lee—although no one in the courtyard knew who it was—sending a Morse message down to those below by means of a pair of flags.

"What does he say, sergeant?" asked the officer.

"He's asking us to stop, sir. Says there's something wrong, and that Brendon isn't to be shot on any account."

"Who can it be to make such a demand as that?"

"He's Nelson Lee, he says," replied the sergeant, still following every dot and dash of the waving flags.

"The detective. Something must have happened. We'd better wait till they can plane down. A few minutes delay can't matter much."

They had not long to wait. Full of amazement at the strange interruption, they followed the movements of the aeroplane as the pilot, circling round, deftly landed in an adjoining field.

A minute or two later, and Nelson Lee came running into the courtyard at full-speed.

"Am I in time?" he gasped.

"Yes, Mr. Lee," returned the officer. "We got your signal, and I have had the prisoner removed for a few minutes. What is the meaning of all this?"

"The meaning is that Private Brendon is innocent. I have absolute proof that he had nothing whatever to do either with the murder of Edward Miller or with the blowing up of the troop train. A man named Louis Radetsky, a Hungarian spy, was guilty of both."

"Great heaven! If that's the case, we can't go on with this business! But you must see the general and get his authority."

"Please take me to him at once!"

It was some quarter of an hour later that Nelson Lee entered the cell where Jack Brendon, pale and haggard and closely guarded, was. The meaning of the interruption was to him a complete puzzle, nor could his guards enlighten him on that point.

But at sight of the detective coming into the place, the poor fellow's eyes lit up as they had not done for several days.

"Mr. Lee," he exclaimed hoarsely, "you have come to see me again at last!"

"Ay, my dear young friend, and bring good news."

"Good news!" said Jack, shaking his head wearily. "What news can be good for one in my place?"

"The very best of news! Prepare for it, Jack! You are a free man!"

"Free?"

"Yes, I have given the general proofs that another man is guilty of the crimes for which you have been condemned. Pending a few formalities, you will be set at liberty!"

One look Jack gave him, one look of such heartfelt gratitude as no words

could possibly describe. Then, unable to trust himself to speak, the poor fellow hid his face in his hands, and sobbed as if his heart would burst with his new-found happiness.

Lee's words were verified to the letter. Within an hour Jack was a free man and on his way back to Yalwood to carry the joyous news to Millie Winston, the girl he loved.

CHAPTER XIII.

Conclusion.

IN all England there was no more astonished man than Inspector Lorrigan when he heard the news that Jack Brendon had been set free.

He sought out Nelson Lee at once, only to find that the famous detective had again left Yalwood. He did not return for several days, so that Lorrigan had to wait till then to hear the full story. By the time he did meet him, he had quite got over his chagrin, and was quite prepared to rejoice over Jack's release.

"Since he is undoubtedly innocent, I'm of course glad he is free. But what beats me, Mr. Lee, is how on earth you proved his innocence. The case I had against him was one of the most complete in my experience."

"So it was, inspector. A very complete case indeed! But, luckily for Jack, it was made almost entirely of circumstantial evidence."

"But I had proofs that he was on the line——"

"An hour or more before the explosion. He himself admitted that to me."

"It was easy to suppose that he came back again later."

"The court believed that, and sentenced him in that belief, but it was a mistake. They also believed that those documents you found among his kit were intended for him."

"And they weren't?"

"Not a bit of it! They were intended for Edward Miller. It was Miller who was a German."

"Miller a German?"

"Yes. His real name was Muller. The rumours he spread about Jack Brendon were all false. What he said really applied to himself. He was a German born, and for years he has been a paid German spy."

"Good heavens! How did he come by his death?"

"He was murdered."

"By whom?"

"By Louis Radetsky, the Hungarian, who afterwards blew up the train in the way you already know about."

Apart from the details with which the reader is already acquainted, the substance of the story which Lee recounted to the astonished inspector amounted to this:

Both Radetsky and Muller, alias Miller, had been for years employed by the German Secret Service. To Radetsky had been deputed the task long before the outbreak of war, of contriving a means of wrecking a train at will, in that part of the country where he worked.

For this purpose he had specially hired the allotment he had tilled, on account of the proximity of its tool-shed to the railway embankment. In this tool-shed he had secretly arranged the electric battery, while on a certain night a few days before the war broke out, he had, with assistance, taken up one of the sleepers, and having embedded two powerfully explosive cartridges in it, had joined them up with cunningly contrived wires underneath.

With everything ready he had, on departing for London on the outbreak of war, reported his act to a superior secret service officer in London. The latter, in his turn, transmitted the news to Count von Revlo, but wishing to take the credit to himself, omitted to mention Radetsky's share in the work.

Now, on Von Revlo devolved the task of allotting to the many spies in England their various work after the outbreak of war. It happened that he had lately been in correspondence with Muller. He had been specially pleased to find that he managed to pass as an Englishman, and to enlist as an English soldier.

Looking about for some work that Miller might do, and finding that he was stationed at Yalwood, he had bethought him of the preparations made there some time before for the blowing up of the train, and had written Muller a letter asking him to make a preliminary survey of the place preparatory to carrying out the grim work that had been planned.

On the night he was on guard on the railway, Muller, finding himself in close proximity to the shed, had thought this an excellent opportunity of seeing if everything was in order.

Now, it so happened that Radetsky, quite ignorant of the fact that another had been deputed to carry out the work for which he had made all the plans, was keen on carrying it through himself.

He had learnt that a special train, loaded with ammunition and troops, was to pass over the spot that night, and had resolved to blow it up. With this vile, murderous intent, he had come down to Yalwood, and had hidden himself in the tool-shed until the moment for action should come.

Thus had it come about that while he was waiting there, Muller, quite oblivious of the other's presence, had visited the spot, and had entered the shed, the door of which he was amazed to find open.

Radetsky, crouching there, was equally astonished to see anyone approach at such an hour of night. Astonishment grew to alarm as he saw that the visitor was dressed in the uniform of a British soldier.

As Muller stepped into the shed, Radetsky pounced upon him. There was a struggle, brief but fierce, during which Muller tore that tuft of hair from his adversary's head. Then Radetsky got the upper hand. He managed to wrench the other's rifle from his grasp, and the next moment had shot him dead.

"He carried the body and hid it among the bracken on the embankment," Lee continued. "Then, as coolly and callously as if nothing had happened, he returned to the shed, and waiting till the train was approaching, did his deadly work."

"A terrible and wonderful story," was Lorrigan's comment. "How did you discover all this?"

"From Radetsky's own lips, most of it. The rest from documents deposited by Muller at some rooms he formerly occupied in London."

A few more words will suffice. In due time, and there was no great delay, for the case against them was conclusive, Radetsky and his companions suffered the penalty of their misdeeds.

As for Jack, he, of course, rejoined his regiment. He is at present in Flanders, where up to now he has fortunately escaped uninjured. He and Millie Winston are plighted to one another.

Those who have followed his fortunes, will wish that when the time of national trouble is over, he will come back safe and sound, to claim the heart and hand of the girl he loves.

TICK END.

The Boys of Ravenswood College;

or, *Dick Clare's Schooldays.*

A New Story of School Life. By S. CLARKE HOOK.

Author of the famous Jack, Sam & Pete stories, appearing weekly in "The Marvel Library."

Dick Clare, a rich youngster, joins Ravenswood College, and he soon makes his presence felt.

One day news comes to the school that Dick and his chum, Tom, have been drowned, but ultimately they turn up safe and sound.

Melby, one of the other boys, takes a violent dislike to Dick Clare, and is especially jealous because the Headmaster takes special notice of the new boy.

Dick, whilst taking a short cut across a certain Farmer Garling's land one day, is chased by a bull, and seeks refuge in a tree where the infuriated farmer finds him.

Garling orders him to come down. (Now read on.)

Up a Tree.

"**B**UT look here, Garling," said Dick. "I know jolly well that it will also be the worse for me if I do come down. Don't you see, old boy, I'd rather stop where I am."

"I'll catch you if I wait here all night."

"You will catch rheumatics in both of your legs, old chap, and that will hurt nearly as much as the bull's horns. Take my advice and go home. There are only two other things for you to do. One is to go for your gun, and I strongly advise that. The other is to climb the tree. That isn't a bad idea at all."

It was an impossible one, though. The farmer was very fat, and the tree was a high one. Dick could have climbed it all right, but Garling never could—unless he went for a ladder.

This was also impracticable, because he knew perfectly well that directly his back was turned Dick would drop to the ground and bolt.

But he saw another way of bringing Dick down, and it was one that had not occurred to that worthy. There were some stones round about, and having selected the largest ones, Garling commenced hurling them at Dick, who retaliated with apples. He succeeded in hitting the farmer on the nose with a large one, while a second one on the ear caused Garling to draw out of range.

He was not far from the tool-shed where there was a long-handled hayrake. He bolted towards it.

Dick dropped to the ground, damaged a few more cabbages, then bolted through the opening the bull had made. He was certainly in the wheatfield with the bull, but hoped for the best. He went across the wheat at top speed, and the infuriated farmer went after him with the hayrake. The bull

had not the same terrors for him as it had for Dick. As a matter of fact it did not trouble either of them, finding the nearly ripe wheat a most delicious supper.

Garling only got half across his field, and as Dick was already scrambling through the further hedge, he gave up the chase as hopeless. But he was determined to have vengeance that very night, and knew the surest way to get it was to approach Dr. Stanley.

Dick crossed a few more fields, then struck the lane leading to the college, but as he scrambled through the hedge a shout caused him to turn, and he saw Vance the porter returning to the college.

"Your night out, old chap?" inquired Dick.

"It is so, and I'm jest returning. You've been trespassing."

"Correct!" exclaimed Dick, gazing thoughtfully at him.

"I shall report you."

"Correct again."

"You will get caned."

"Once more correct I say, Vance, would you like this sovereign?"

"I would so, young gent. I'd never report a boy that did his dooty by me."

"Put it in your pocket, and listen to me if you would like another one. You know Varmer Garling. Well, I've ridden his bull, bashed up his kitchen-garden, romped down his wheat, hit him on the nose with an apple, and I fear he is vexed."

"Bust me! He would be too. It takes a lot less than that to rile him."

"Well, look here, just you go to him and see if you can appease him."

"Right you are. I'll tell him it wasn't intentional."

"I don't think he would credit that. Square it, Vance. If you can square it for anything under twenty pounds he shall have the brass to-morrow. Tell him I will call and pay it. You shall have the change. See! If you square it for fifteen pounds you make a fiver. If ten you make a similar amount."

"Suppose I square it for five!"

"You won't. There's more than five pounds damage done. No, you need not go lower than ten pounds—and I'm jolly well certain he won't. Off you go! If you fail altogether you shall have another sovereign."

And that night Vance came in with the news that he had compromised matters for fifteen pounds after some difficulty, so Dick handed him a fiver, and the following morning settled matters with Garling.

Melby's Mishap.

"I WON'T stand this," cried Melby, emerging from the cupboard in No. 7 Study, where he had been trying to listen to the conversation of Dick and Tom; but they, knowing perfectly well that he was there, had kept lowering their voices in a most tantalising manner each time they seemed on the point of revealing their secret.

"I say, Melby," exclaimed Tom, looking serious. "I hope you haven't been listening to our secret. That would be mean, you know."

"Isn't it jolly mean to have a secret from me," snarled Melby. "Don't you always leave me out of all your giddy tricks? It isn't fair! I don't consider it's honest, and it's no good you bragging about your truthfulness if you are not honest, Dick!"

"I'll vow I've never thought of doing such a thing," laughed Dick. "Fancy going about the giddy college singing. 'Please love me. I'm a truthful boy.'"

"Well, I don't care," grumbled Melby. "I'd rather swerve a bit from the truth sometimes and be honest like I am than——"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom. "You jolly well never swerve on to the truth. How do you suppose we are going to let you into our secrets when you go and blab them to Gowl the bully?"

"I should not think of repeating this one."

"I believe you there," said Dick. "I have made up my mind you shall not repeat it. That's why I'm not telling you. But look here, if you like to come with us this afternoon, you can."

Such an offer as this was not to be despised. It was a half-holiday, and going out with Dick certainly meant a lot of fun with a tea attached to it.

"I'll come with pleasure, old chaps," exclaimed Melby. "What's the joke?"

"Oh, we will tell you all about it later on," answered Dick. "There goes the hash hammer! Hurry up!"

"Here, jest you wait a bit while I look if you are gated," cried Vance, when they reached the porter's lodge that afternoon. "Ten to one, you are."

"Well, hurry up, old lean and hungry!" exclaimed Dick. "We have important business in hand and can't wait all the afternoon while you are trying to decipher your illegible scrawl. If I were your schoolmaster I'd cane you till you wrote decently. He must have been a horrid little boy at school, don't you think so, Tom?"

"Rather! Much like Melby—always sneaking! Oh, come on! The idiot will be all night looking for what he cannot find!"

And they darted past, while Vance rushed after them, and two boys who were really gated, dodged out. Needless to say Vance did not catch the chums.

"Are we going to start with a feed, Dick?" inquired Melby, as the chums led the way into the stable yard of the village inn.

"Why, we have just had dinner!" exclaimed Dick.

"It wasn't up to much, you know. What do you say to a few jam tarts—hot ones? They are jolly nice."

"Got any money?" inquired Dick.

"Certainly not! What has that got to do with it? You asked me to come, and I don't suppose you will expect your guest to pay! I know when my father invites——"

"Oh, never mind about your father!" interposed Dick, anticipating a long and uninteresting yarn. "We are not going to have any jam tarts. Now, what do you think of that little lot?"

It was a new motor-cycle, and it looked a good one. As a matter of fact, it was a good one, Dick's mother having bought it for him, and spared no expense, as was always the case when she bought anything Dick fancied.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed Melby. "I have got a couple of them at home."

"Then you can ride them all right?" inquired Dick.

"I should rather think I could," answered Melby, and he spoke the truth. The two bicycles he had referred to were just ordinary safety bicycles, but he could ride those all right, and he rather fancied he could ride a motor-cycle.

"All right!" exclaimed Dick. "You shall have a turn presently; but look here, Melby, if you are romancing about having two at home, and if you can't ride, I'd strongly advise you to take some lessons before you get on that machine."

"What rot! I can ride a lot better than you can."

"I can't see how you can tell that, considering that you have never seen me ride. But that does not matter. You wait here while I have a spin

round. She starts with a kick-starter, and that's better than hopping along till the engine fires."

Dick was quite an experienced rider. He went out of the yard which was a very large one with a duck-pond at the further end. The innkeeper did a little farming, and sold a good deal of his produce to the college.

Dick returned in about ten minutes, then offered to let Melby go.

"Tom can go first if he likes," observed Melby.

"I have got to teach him first," answered Dick.

"Oh, well, give him a lesson now!" said Melby, who thought this an excellent way of learning a little more than he knew.

Dick explained a few matters, but Melby got them fearfully mixed. Dick was a very rapid learner, and expecting others to be the same rattled away in a manner that was most confusing to Melby's brain. In the end he knew that there was one way of starting the machine and three ways of stopping it, but he was not quite certain whether you closed the throttle lever when you wanted to start or whether you cut off the spark when you wanted to stop; but as he did not know which those levers were it did not much matter.

The one thought that flashed through Tom's brain as Melby mounted and told them to get away was that it was deadly dangerous.

Melby knew how the kick-starter worked, because he had watched Dick. He also succeeded in putting in his gear, but that was by an unlucky chance. After that he knew he was going—so did the ducks and fowls in the yard.

The convulsed yard-keeper bolted into the stables, sincerely trusting that the daring Melby would not come that way; but in case he should do so he armed himself with a pitchfork.

By reason of being able to cycle Melby kept on all right.

He went round in rapid circles, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Stop me! Oh, I say, stop me!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Cut off your spark!" yelled Dick.

"Oh, I say! Which is it?"

"Close the throttle lever. Look out! You will kill the ducks. Ram on the brake!"

The ducks sought safety in the pond, which showed they were not so stupid as they looked. Melby came whizzing round, then he shot over a rubbish heap, and flying off the machine at a tangent, dived headfirst into the miry pond.

The man wrenched him out by the leg, and Dick closed the throttle lever.

Tom only waited until he was convinced that Melby was not injured, then he burst into howls of laughter, for Melby was a sight.

He had dived his head into about two feet of black mire. No master could have recognised him in his present state.

"Haw, haw, haw!" howled the man. "Well, you are in a tidy state, too! That's right, young gent! Spit it out, 'cos mud ain't healthy—specially if there were any worms in it! Haw, haw, haw! You might grow murrers on him!"

"Grooh! Oh, I say! I've swallowed a pailful of the beastly stuff! This is all your fault, Dick Clare! It's too jolly shameful! Why didn't you tell me the beastly thing wouldn't stop?"

"You said you could ride, and that you had two of them at home."

"Mine are of a different sort."

"Jolly lucky for your father's ducks," said Dick; "though it's bad for his tailor. If you rode much you would want a new suit every day."

"I suppose you think the scandalous trick is funny?"

"Not a doubt about that."

"You did it on purpose, you cad!"

"I'll bet you I did not."

"At any rate, you haven't got the right to spread the report all over the college that Gowl is a dangerous criminal, and that you could send him to prison, and will do so if he isn't careful."

Melby shouted this out at the top of his voice, for he saw Gowl and Fox entering the yard at that moment. They had come to hire horses.

"Jump up behind, Tom," whispered Dick, mounting the machine. "Cling round my body. Are you ready?"

"Yes!"

"Then we're off!"

And so they were. The bully bolted out of their way, and Dick whizzed through the gates, then along the street, and he was out of the village in no time.

"It's no good letting Gowl catch us," said Dick.

"Not a bit of it; especially after the lies Melby has been telling."

"Well, he's savage. Ha, ha, ha! I say, what an unholy mess he got into."

"I say, Dick, where are we going?"

"To the station first. I've got a side-car there. It was sent down last night, and it will be a lot more comfortable travelling when we have hitched it out. After that we are going to a certain riverside inn called the Mermaid. It's about fifteen miles up the river. I went there once when boating. Well, I wrote to the landlord the day before yesterday telling him we would be there to tea, and I told him to prepare the very best tea he possibly could. We are going to eat it. I would have brought Melby in the side-car if he hadn't made himself so frightfully muddy."

Dick found his side-car all right, and, having connected it, started off on their journey.

A prettier inn than the Mermaid it would be impossible to find, and it is situate at one of the fairest spots in England. The little building is quite close to the river, and it is surrounded by a well-kept garden, the back being occupied with fruit and vegetables, the front with fruit and flowers. John, the landlord, is as jolly a man as can be found in all the land, and many a fisherman spends a happy fortnight at the Mermaid.

Dick left his motor-cycle outside, and, entering the inn, shouted for John, but receiving no reply, he entered the little parlour, whose window overlooks the river and the flower-beds.

"I say, jolly decent of John to be so punctual!" exclaimed Dick, for tea was on the table. "He has given us some trout here. New bread, home-made cake, eggs, jam—well, this is all right! I said five o'clock, and it's just striking. Nothing like punctuality. Pour out the tea, old chap, while I help the fish. All right, isn't it?"

"I'm not so sure," said Tom.

"Don't you care for trout?"

"You bet I do—with new bread and butter."

"Then stop your grumbling and make a start."

The chums were fearfully hungry, the fare was excellent, and it quickly disappeared. Having finished off the fish and the eggs, they started on the plum cake, and were getting on famously with it when a big, stout gentleman, carrying a fishing-rod, entered the parlour.

"Why, you young vagabonds," he howled, "do you dare to tell me you have eaten my tea?"

(Another rollicking, long instalment of this fine school yarn will appear next week.)

TOMMY WILL THANK YOU

if you send him a copy of this issue of the "Nelson Lee Library." All you need do is to fill in this address-form, affix a penny stamp, fold the paper, and tie it with string and then post it. If posting to a sailor, simply cross out the words "Company," "Regiment," and "British Expeditionary Force," and write "H.M.S. Benbow"—or whatever the ship happens to be named. Result: a soldier or sailor made happier—and grateful to you.

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