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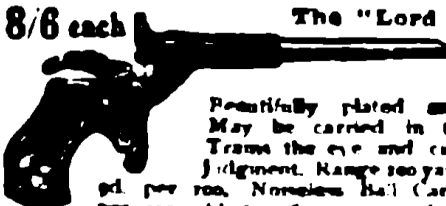
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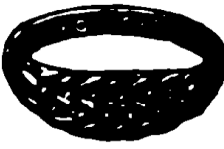
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CHAPTER I.

Nelson Lee's Visitor—Senor Carlos Alvarez's Off.r.

NELSON LEE entered his consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road his mackintosh glistening with moisture, and his boots spattered with mud. The great detective smiled as he saw Nipper, his young assistant, sprawling in a chair before the fire, evidently taking things extremely easy.

"Hallo, gov'nor!" greeted Nipper cheerily. "Is it raining?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, young' un, I assure you I haven't been standing under a shower-bath," remarked the detective. "It isn't a hobby of mine to drench myself for the fun of the thing. It is raining furiously, and I'm glad to get indoors."

He stepped back into the passage, and removed his mackintosh and hat. Then he re-entered the consulting-room and proceeded to unlace his boots. Once in his slippers, he selected a cigar from a box on the mantelpiece, and sank into a chair opposite Nipper.

"Yes, the evening has turned out rough," he said. "We will stay indoors to-night, Nipper, and let us hope we are not bothered by any callers— Well, I'm hanged!"

For even as Nelson Lee spoke the front-door bell quivered below. The detective made a wry face.

"Let us hope the visitor is nobody of any importance," he exclaimed. "Perhaps it is merely our Scotland Yard friend, Inspector Lennard, called round for a chat."

A few moments later the door opened, and Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, appeared.

"There's a gent wishes to see you urgent, sir," she announced. "A furrin gent, by the looks of him, and with a queer-sounding name."

"A foreign gentleman—eh?"

"Yes, sir. Here's his card."

Nelson Lee took it, and glanced at the name. In bold copper-plate writing was the name, "Carlos Manuel Alvarez."

"You may as well show the gentleman up," said the detective, tossing the slip of pasteboard to Nipper. "A Spaniard, evidently, my boy," he went on, as Mrs. Jones left the consulting-room.

"A blessed dago," said Nipper bluntly. "Don't trust him, guv'nor! They're all tarred with the same brush—they're all treacherous!"

"Come, come, that's rather a sweeping statement," laughed Nelson Lee. "I have met many Spaniards who have been honourable gentlemen to their finger-tips. It is a bad policy to size up a man before you know him. Carlos Alvarez," he went on musingly. "I know that name somehow. I've heard it— By James!"

"What is it, sir?"

"Nothing, Nipper," answered the detective evenly. "At least, I have not sufficient time in which to explain. H'm! This promises to be interesting!"

A moment later the door opened and Senor Carlos Manuel Alvarez was bowing on the threshold.

"I have the honour of addressing Mr. Nelson Lee?" he inquired politely.

"My name is Lee," said the detective. "This lad is my assistant. Pray take a seat, senor, and make yourself at home. You will find cigars at your elbow on the corner of the mantelpiece."

The visitor seated himself. He was a tall man, well set up, and with pitch-black hair and heavy eyebrows. His chin was clean-shaven except for a tiny beard just on the point of it. A carefully-pointed moustache adorned his upper lip. His clothes were immaculate to a degree, and he had evidently taxied to Gray's Inn Road, for his boots were glittering and spotless.

For several moments he looked about him rather restlessly, fixing his eyes upon Nipper now and again. Then he lit a cigar, according to Nelson Lee's invitation, and faced the detective.

"I have called on a matter of the utmost delicacy," he said softly, in perfect English. "It is necessary that I should speak with you in private."

"Pardon me, senor," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You may speak with perfect freedom. Nipper, here, is as trustworthy as myself, and I never keep secrets from him. But, before you commence, I should like to say that I am fairly busy at present," he added pointedly. "Unless your case is an exceptional one——"

"I will guarantee it is the strangest one that has ever come before your notice," said Carlos Alvarez. "Moreover, it will prove to be an extremely profitable one if you decide to give me your aid. But before discussing terms it would be as well for me to explain the object of my visit. You will hear me out, Mr. Lee?"

The famous crime investigator shrugged his shoulders.

"As you are here you may as well let me know what you require of me," he replied quietly. "It must indeed be of a remarkable nature if your statement is true."

"You have, of course, heard of the Republic of Brazaguay," commenced the visitor. "It is a rather small state in South America, but one of considerable importance in its own peculiar way. Mr. Lee, eight months ago I was the President of Brazaguay!"

"By Jupiter!" muttered Nipper.

But his master merely nodded without speaking.

"I was the President of Brazaguay," proceeded Alvarez fiercely. "I held the reins of government in my own hands, and I ruled the country for the general benefit of the whole community. The majority of my people wished for no better president than I. Brazaguay prospered exceedingly under my rule."

"Quite so," murmured Nelson Lee. "And then, I presume, trouble came? An enterprising gentleman engineered one of those revolutions which are practically a part of South American politics?"

The visitor nodded.

"Precisely," he agreed. "A band of conspirators, headed by a scoundrel named Don Guzman de Castello, plotted against me. I admit that I was unwary and that I did not take the steps to quell the plot that I should have done. In fact, I even confess that I was a little too sanguine regarding the strength of my own party.

"Well, one day Don Guzman showed his hand. I will not go into details, for they would only weary you; but, owing to Castello's scheming, I was forced to flee in order to save my life. At a moment's notice I had to depart from Brazaguay, and it was only by a slim chance that I succeeded in escaping. Had my rival captured me I should have been shot like a dog.

"Don Guzman de Castello appointed himself president after my defeat—a defeat that makes my blood boil within me," proceeded Alvarez passionately. "Were Castello an honourable man I would not grumble so much. But I have the welfare of my country at heart, and it is a terrible thing that Castello should be reigning over Brazaguay."

"Is he not a man fit to be president?" asked Nelson Lee evenly.

Senor Alvarez threw his cigar into the fire impatiently.

"Don Guzman de Castello is a murderous scoundrel!" he exclaimed, in a quivering voice. "The country is being brought to ruin under his despotic rule. He thinks not of his people, but of himself. You will understand that I, having been president myself, take this change in the affairs of my country very much to heart."

Nelson Lee inclined his head.

"That is only natural," he replied. "But even now, Senor Alvarez, I really fail to see what I can do for you. If your party in Brazaguay is the weaker, then you are more or less helpless——"

"Helpless!" interjected Alvarez quickly. "I am going to prove whether I am helpless! No, Mr. Lee, my supporters in Brazaguay outnumber Castello's by thousands, and hundreds of thousands. But he has committed so many outrages during his short period of power that he has terrorised the whole republic. It is my wish to return to Brazaguay, to oust this intruder, and to do my best to bring renewed prosperity to the country."

"A noble ambition," commented the detective quietly.

"I am sure I shall succeed," said the ex-president. "But I am a peaceful man, and it is my wish to avoid another revolution. All too many lives were lost in the last upheaval. Brazaguay cannot stand another revolution without causing irreparable loss to the country's manhood. I could, of course, return to Brazaguay, and it would be a simple matter for me to declare open warfare, and to gather a staunch and huge army about me. Castello would be defeated in the end, but I believe I should have a stubborn fight. But I want to gain my object without going to war."

"I fail to see——"

"If you will permit me, I will explain," broke in Alvarez. "I want you, Mr. Lee, to assist me in this enterprise. What I require of you is very simple. There may be a certain amount of risk attached to it, but my offer, I believe, will compensate for that. If you consent to undertake the work, I will hand you a cheque for ten thousand pounds this very hour, and another ten thousand will be yours later on."

Nelson Lee carelessly flicked the ash from his cigar.

"You have not stated your requirements, Senor Alvarez," he murmured softly.

The visitor frowned slightly. He had expected his princely offer to cause some surprise, but Nelson Lee seemed to be quite unmoved.

"First and foremost, I wish you to clearly understand that I am anxious to become President of Brazaguay again solely because of my grave fears for the country—my country," proceeded Alvarez. "Wonderful plans I had made are ruined; everything went to the wall at the time of Castello's revolution. But there is a chance that I may still get the reins of power into my hands again. If Castello could only be lured away from Fanillo—the capital of Brazaguay—all would be well. I should simply proclaim myself president again, and the citizens would rejoice."

"Really, senor—"

"Please hear me out, Mr. Lee—I have nearly finished," went on Alvarez quickly. "Here, in a nutshell, is my scheme. We will travel to Rio de Janeiro together, and there I will hire a yacht. You will board this and assume a title—such as the Earl of Cardiff, for example—and travel to Elvasco, a coast town in Brazaguay which is the country's chief seaport. You will pose as a British nobleman, and will finally arrive in Fanillo, the capital.

"Naturally, being an important man of wealth and title, you will do everything in style. You will visit the president, and in due course get on friendly terms with Castello. Finally, by means of a ruse which I shall explain, you will get him aboard the yacht and make him a prisoner. The yacht will then sail for a deserted spot on the Brazilian coast, and Castello will be made prisoner. Meanwhile, I shall arrive in Fanillo, and will become president. Simple, is it not?"

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"I am afraid the carrying out of the scheme would not prove so simple as it now sounds, Senor Alvarez," he said smoothly. "In any case, I do not for a moment entertain your proposition. What you ask me to do is impossible. However much a scoundrel Don Guzman de Castello may happen to be, I do not relish the idea of approaching him in the character of a wolf in sheep's clothing. After gaining his confidence I am to kidnap him in an exceedingly treacherous manner. No, no, senor, that is not my way."

"But, Mr. Lee, let me fully explain—"

"I wish for no further explanations," interjected Nelson Lee smoothly. "I have had some little previous experience of South American politics, too, and—to be frank—I doubt if Castello would ever see Brazaguay again—or any other country, either!"

Carlos Alvarez jumped up excitedly.

"Not a hair of his head shall be harmed!" he cried. "Madre de Dios! I am not a murderer! It is he who is the scoundrel; I only wish to serve my country. And your reward will be twenty thousand pounds, Mr. Lee—a fortune! Do not forget that!"

"Tut-tut! If you offered me fifty thousand my answer would be the same!" exclaimed the detective impatiently. "Candidly, senor, I dislike your scheme, and do not hesitate to say so. Your intentions are probably honourable and good, but this is hardly a business in which my talents would be of use."

Alvarez lost his refined expression for a moment, and scowled darkly.

"You are nervous—eh?" he suggested. "You are afraid of—"

"There is no question of fear," interrupted Nelson Lee curtly. "Indeed, even if I approved of your plan—which I do not—I doubt if I should help you. At the present moment I am engaged upon work which keeps me in London."

"Can I call to-morrow?" pleaded Alvarez. "Will you think the matter over?"

"I have already thought sufficiently. And it would be useless your calling to-morrow, for my answer would be the same. I am sorry, senor, that you have been put to the trouble of coming to me on a fruitless errand."

Carlos Alvarez gripped his lower lip between his teeth for a moment. His dark eyes flashed with an inward fury. But when he spoke again his voice was calm, and he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"When you give an answer, Mr. Lee, I know there is no changing it," he said regretfully. "I am sorry—deeply sorry. I relied upon you as the one man capable of undertaking the delicate task. I need not ask you to keep this matter private?"

"Neither my assistant nor myself will breathe a word," said the detective. "Nipper, show Senor Alvarez to the street. I wish you good-night, senor!"

The visitor politely returned Nelson Lee's bow, and then followed Nipper out of the consulting-room. When the lad returned he found his master lolling before the fire, a fresh cigar between his teeth. Nipper was all excitement.

"Twenty thousand quid, guv'nor!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "And you refused it! Besides, a trip across the South Atlantic would just suit us to a tee——"

"My dear Nipper, the thing was impossible!"

"Why, sir?"

Nelson Lee closed his eyes absently.

"Of all the liars I ever met, Nipper, I think Senor Carlos Alvarez is the most accomplished!" he remarked, after a few moments. "The man simply disgusted me, and I had a mind to fling him out of my rooms. I am glad I refrained, however. It is never wise to fall out with these fiery 'dagoes,' as you expressively term them."

Nipper stared.

"A liar, sir!" he ejaculated. "Was he fibbing, then?"

"The greater part of his statements were bare-faced untruths!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Nipper. "I thought he was a splendid chap, and I couldn't understand why you were so jolly curt with him. And kidnapping a president would be a ripping pastime, especially when that president is such an out-and-out rotter!"

"That's just where you make a mistake, young' un," said the detective evenly. "Don Guzman de Castello, President of Brazaguay, is the finest ruler the republic has ever possessed. He is a gentleman and a man of honour!"

"But—but Alvarez said——"

"Never mind what Alvarez said. He was romancing."

"Well, this is a giddy stunner!" said Nipper flatly. "Fancy you bowling him out so jolly quickly, guv'nor! I suppose that was all bunkum about his being President of Brazaguay eight months ago?"

"No; that was true enough."

"Oh, Alvarez was the president, then?"

"Yes—and he was a harsh despot of the most despicable character," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "I don't suppose there are a dozen people in the whole of Great Britain who know any real facts concerning the affairs of Brazaguay. It is only a small republic, and the majority of people have never even heard of it."

The detective examined his cigar thoughtfully.

"It was extremely unfortunate for Alvarez that I was so well-informed regarding the politics of Brazaguay," he went on. "Had I been in ignorance of the true state of affairs, I might have considered his offer. And once I had taken ten thousand pounds, and was fairly embarked upon the venture, I should have been compelled to carry it through. Alvarez probably

figured that out for himself. My discovering the actual lie of the land afterwards wouldn't have mattered at all."

"But how did you know, guv'nor?"

"By a pure stroke of chance—a providential stroke, as it proves," replied Nelson Lee. "I was in conversation with a man—a great traveller named Horton—a month ago, in one of the clubs—the Travellers' Club, to be exact. He had just returned from South America, and we were in conversation for quite a while. He gave me some very interesting information; but I never thought, at the time, that it would be of use."

"What did he tell you, sir?"

"I will only repeat the essential facts which relate to Alvarez's visit," answered the great criminologist. "Brazaguay, it seems, has been until recently a very hot-bed of intrigue and revolution. Two years ago, Carlos Alvarez appointed himself president, after a series of assassinations had been carried out. Horton declared that Alvarez had been primarily responsible for the murder of his predecessor and the latter's two chief ministers. Alvarez had then become president—and more than president. He made himself a dictator, and ruled the country with cruelty and a travesty of justice. But his power was not destined to last for long.

"The people of Brazaguay were afraid of Alvarez, and were ripe for a fresh revolution. But he held them in a tight grip. He knew that Don Guzman de Castello, one of the republic's former ministers, was popular, and he did his utmost to encompass Castello's death. But the don proved himself the better of his rival, and gained the peoples' sympathy and support.

"Less than a year ago Don Guzman, at the head of a motley army of determined men, led the way into Fanillo, the capital. The attack was planned superbly, and Alvarez was totally unprepared. Like the coward he is, he fled in terror, and the people hailed Castello their president with wild enthusiasm.

"And in eight short months Castello has done much to remedy the harm done by Alvarez," went on Nelson Lee. "Every department of the Government has been scoured out, so to speak, and capable men placed at their heads. Castello is loved by his people, and the republic is enjoying a prosperity it never hoped for. The president is proving himself to be a man worthy of a much better country to rule; but Brazaguay is grateful, and appreciates the stupendous efforts made by Castello for the country's good. Even the party which supported Alvarez is weakening daily."

Nipper nodded.

"So the rotter was trying to stuff you up, sir?" he asked.

"His statements were grossly untrue," said the detective. "He is naturally bitter against his successful rival, and would give much to see Castello humiliated. Indeed, once the president was in Alvarez's power, I am convinced his life would not be worth a farthing. Get two facts clear in your head, Nipper."

"What are they, sir?"

"Carlos Alvarez is a murderous villain—and Don Guzman de Castello is an honourable gentleman of a calibre very seldom met with in South American politics of to-day. He is no plotting dictator, but a kindly ruler, loved by his people. Long may he hold sway over that turbulent little state tucked away in a corner of South America!"

Nipper scratched his head.

"It's a good thing I didn't know all this when Alvarez was here," he said. "I'm not such a cool customer as you, guv'nor, and I should have pitched into him hot and strong! So we don't take a trip to Brazaguay?"

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I'm afraid not, my lad. "If I did go it would not be as an enemy o'

President Castello, but as his friend. But we must stay in London—we have work to do here. The League of the Green Triangle claims our attention."

The pair were silent for a while. Nelson Lee's great campaign against the infamous League of the Green Triangle was by no means at an end. The powerful criminal organisation, with Professor Cyrus Zingrave at its head, was still a menace to the country, and the detective would not rest until he had stamped out the scourge for good and all.

But the end was far from being in sight. Many powerful members of the league's Governing Circle had fallen, but as many—and more—were wielding their evil powers with unabated zeal.

This was no time for Nelson Lee to leave England—unless, of course, it was on work connected with his fight against the Green Triangle.

But, as it turned out, events were to shape themselves so peculiarly that before many days had passed both Nelson Lee and Nipper would find themselves hard at work on an exciting case which was very closely connected with that fruitless visit to Gray's Inn Road of Senor Carlos Manuel Alvarez, ex-president of the Republic of Brazaguay.

CHAPTER II.

Alvarez's Astonishing Mistake—The Spaniard—A Cunning Plot.

SEÑOR CARLOS ALVAREZ walked along with his lips set in a straight line. He was furious with himself and with Nelson Lee. He had, in a way, relied upon the great detective consenting to undertake the task which had been suggested. But Alvarez knew very well that Nelson Lee would not alter his decision.

The ex-president had thought that the prize he offered—twenty thousand pounds—would have secured Nelson Lee's services instantly. Yet the detective had not been impressed in the least.

Disheartened, and filled with an inward rage, Alvarez walked along, his mind crowded with bitter thoughts. The rain had stopped now, but the roads and pavements were wet and muddy. Alvarez walked mechanically, and scarcely knew where he went.

He was trying to think of another man who would do for his purpose. Probably there were many adventurous young fellows who would be only too glad to try their luck; but they wanted finding. The project was of such a delicate nature that it could only be revealed to an absolutely trustworthy man.

And Alvarez had entered Nelson Lee's rooms with the utmost confidence. Now he was downcast, and realised that he would be put to tremendous trouble in order to gain his end. He did not suspect that Nelson Lee knew of the exact position in Brazaguay, but that he had refused the offer for private reasons.

"The coward!" murmured Carlos Alvarez fiercely. "He is afraid of any work that entails a little risk. And yet perhaps that is wrong, for Lee is famous for being a man of courage. I think I can guess his real reason for refusing. Things are too easy for him in England—he is very prosperous, and my offer, though large, was not a sufficient inducement. I must find a man of a different type for my work."

Alvarez walked along fairly slowly. Almost mechanically he had kept to the quiet streets, in order to think without being interrupted. And now he found himself in a deserted West End street that was quieter than all the rest.

The recent rain, and the threat of more to come, kept people indoors. Alvarez saw that the only other person in sight was a tall, slim man, approaching him on the same pavement. He saw this mechanically, for he was still deep in thought.

The stranger approached, and as he passed under an electric standard Alvarez saw his face fully and distinctly. It was a strong face, and adorned by a full iron-grey beard and a heavy moustache. Then the stranger came abreast, and turned his head slightly, for Alvarez was standing perfectly still, as though rooted to the spot.

His face was flushed, and his eyes expressed amazement.

"Name of a saint! What is this?" he muttered, in Spanish. "It is he! He is in London!"

Alvarez twisted round and stared after the man who had just passed him.

The thing was astounding!

For the man had been none other than Don Guzman de Castello, President of Brazaguay! The discovery was so extraordinary that for a second Alvarez was too thunderstruck to move. Then, all in a moment, his activity returned. And a startling change came over Alvarez's face. The calm repose left it, and his lips parted in a snarl of cruel fury, his perfect teeth showing white and deadly.

"Castello!" he hissed. "Madre de Dios! My chance has come!"

With the fiery haste of his race, Alvarez became consumed with a mad, jealous hatred. He did not stop to think, to consider, he swung round, ran after the other man with fleet footsteps, and flung himself forward!

Next second the two men were fighting with a passionate fury; Alvarez attacking, and the stranger defending himself to the best of his ability. But he was taken at a disadvantage, and fell to the muddy pavement.

"Castello, you dog!" panted Alvarez wildly. "You are at my mercy

"You fool—you fool!" gasped the other, in Spanish. "What would you do? My name is not Castello!"

"Do not lie!" snarled Alvarez. "You are—— Ah, by all the stars in heaven!"

He released the stranger as though he were a red-hot cinder, and staggered back. He and Alvarez was absolutely at a loss for words or action.

With his face within a foot of the other's, he had seen that he was certainly not President Castello. The likeness was striking, but in full daylight the mistake would never have occurred.

But the mischief was done—Alvarez had assaulted a perfect stranger in the street. In an instant he was calm, and pale. He knew a good deal of British law, and began to be somewhat nervous as to the consequence of his hasty action.

"Ten thousand pardons, senor!" he exclaimed, in Spanish. "I—I am at a loss to express my regret for having attacked you."

The other was strangely calm.

"A mistake, I presume?" he inquired suavely.

"Yes, yes! I mistook you for an enemy of mine. If you will accept my apologies my mind will be eased—— But you are muddy, and your wrist is grazed. I will call a taxi, if you will allow me, and we will drive to my flat—it is only a short distance from here. I am anxious to make amends, senor!"

The stranger stared hard at Alvarez.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said smoothly. "My name is Don Rodriguez Calleja. I am a native of Madrid, but my permanent home is London. I accept your apology, senor, but I think I have a right to expect an explanation."

"I am only too willing to give one," said Alvarez eagerly. "I will— Ah, a taxi is in sight! Will you honour me by visiting my flat?"

Don Calleja nodded, and in a few minutes the two men—who had been three minutes before struggling with one another on the muddy pavement—were being whirled along to Alvarez's flat, which was close handy.

Having arrived, Alvarez opened the door, and the pair were soon in a cosy sitting-room. The incident which had led up to this present state of affairs was not mentioned until all traces of mud was brushed from the various articles of clothing. The overcoats of both were handed to a manservant to clean.

"And so, Senor Alvarez," said Don Calleja calmly, "you mistook me for a gentleman named Castello?"

Alvarez nodded.

"Exactly. Castello is an enemy of mine—a rogue who once attempted my life in Saragossa——"

"Indeed! He was, by no chance, Don Guzman de Castello, President of Brazaguay?" interjected Calleja.

"Carajo! You have guessed, then!" ejaculated Alvarez, startled.

"Why not be frank with me, senor?" went on the other. "You mistook me for the President of Brazaguay—and I am not astonished. For I know that I bear some resemblance to Castello. And your attack was not surprising, either, for you naturally feel a great hatred for Castello—having been defeated in Fanillo less than a year ago!"

"You are very well acquainted with the politics of Brazaguay!"

"Why not? I am a Spaniard, and naturally take an interest in a Spanish-American republic. I have a relative, too, in business in Fanillo; he writes regularly, and acquaints me with the news."

Alvarez looked at his companion interestedly. After all, there was no reason why he should try to hide the facts. And, as the ex-president continued to gaze at Calleja, a plan began to formulate in his mind. His eyes gleamed.

"Yes, I did mistake you for the President of Brazaguay," he admitted slowly. "It was foolish of me; for, had I thought a moment, I should have known that Castello would not—could not—be in London."

"It was fortunate you discovered your mistake so promptly. I was nearly throttled!"

"I am sorry—deeply sorry," went on Alvarez. "Would it be impertinent if I asked you for your views with regard to Brazaguay?"

Don Calleja smiled.

"I was about to volunteer my opinion," he remarked. "Unhesitatingly I believe that your rule in the Republic was better than Castello's is proving to be."

Alvarez shot a suspicious glance at the other.

"You mean that?" he asked keenly.

"I am not in the habit of saying things I do not mean," replied Don Calleja. "I am well aware that Castello has made many reforms since he proclaimed himself president. But I am convinced that you laid everything in train for those reforms while you were in power. Castello is simply carrying out your ideas, and is therefore reaping the benefit of what you actually did. You, yourself, had no real opportunity—you were forced to take to flight almost before you had settled down to real work."

"You have stated the exact facts," exclaimed Alvarez eagerly. "You are one of my supporters, then, senor? You wish me to become president again?"

"Most decidedly!"

Alvarez's eyes gleamed. Everything was playing into his hands with

superb smoothness. He did not guess that Don Calleja had made his statement merely for the sake of drawing his companion out. As a matter of fact Calleja knew very well that Castello was worth a thousand of Alvarez; but it would hardly have been a wise policy to tell the ex-president so to his face.

"You wish me to return to power!" exclaimed Carlos Alvarez tensely.

"When I encountered you, senor, I had just concluded an interview with Mr. Nelson Lee. The proposition I laid before him was futile—he refused to help me."

Don Calleja started a trifle.

"Nelson Lee!" he exclaimed quickly. "What did you want with that man?"

"I wanted his assistance in a certain enterprise," answered the other. "I offered him twenty thousand pounds, but he refused it as though it were a mere handful of coppers."

"Nelson Lee is not connected with you in any way?"

"Not in the least," replied Alvarez. "And I am glad, now, that he refused. If you will help me that prize of twenty thousand pounds is yours! And you can help me far easier, and far more efficiently than it would be possible for Nelson Lee to do."

Rodriguez Calleja smiled.

"Your offer is magnificent," he said quietly. "I am in no need of money, but twenty thousand makes me think. If it is within my power I will certainly render you any assistance you require. But you must let me know what is wanted of me."

"I will tell you exactly."

And Carlos Alvarez related the scheme he had propounded to Nelson Lee. His companion listened in silence to the end, and then nodded thoughtfully.

"It is possible to carry out the plan," he remarked thoughtfully. "But, in my opinion, it is rather a roundabout way of doing things—and much time would be lost. Why not be straightforward with me, my friend? You say that you intend to keep Castello a prisoner until you make yourself president?"

"Exactly."

"Why not tell the truth and say that you mean to put Don Guzman de Castello out of the way for good and all—in short, that you mean to kill him?" asked Calleja coolly. "I think your way precisely, and should advise you strongly to deal with Castello in a summary fashion. It is the safest way in the end."

The ex-president clenched his fists.

"Since you speak so plainly, I will not try to deny your suggestion," he exclaimed. "Yes, once Castello is in my power, I do intend to make it impossible for him to cross my path again. We understand one another perfectly, Don Calleja. I only mooted the kidnapping scheme as I dared not risk suggesting anything more drastic. In my heart, however, I should like to get the thing over with all speed. And I have another scheme—a far easier and a far more effective one. If you help me your reward will be the same."

"Let me hear what you have in mind?"

"We will journey to Rio, according to the original plans, and there board my little yacht and steam to Brazaguay—to the coast town of Elvasgo. We

shall arrive there at night, and some of my supporters, warned beforehand, will have a motor-car in readiness to convey us in the darkness to Fanillo. There is a private entrance to the president's palace, and I know every inch of the building; I have in my possession, in fact, the keys to the private entrance."

"Excellent, so far. What shall we do then?"

"Deal with Castello first of all," said Alvarez grimly. "The whole thing can be done secretly and without a single member of the palace household suspecting that anything is wrong. Castello will be removed by two of my lieutenants, and the ground will be clear for us. You, Don Calleja, resemble the president strangely."

The other started.

"Dios!" he ejaculated. "You are not thinking of substituting——"

"Wait. You resemble Castello sufficiently for my purpose. A few deft touches and you will be the president to the life. But you will affect illness. When morning comes you will declare you were taken ill during the night. Your voice will be harsh and hoarse, and you will speak very little. Who will suspect? Any difference in your appearance will be put down to your sudden attack. You will say that it is impossible for you to remain in Brazaguay any longer, and will order a special train to convey you to the coast. The whole thing is simplicity itself. You will resign the presidency, and will make it publicly known that you wish your successor to be myself. I shall be at hand, and will step into power right away. There will be no revolution, no riots of any sort. And the death of Don Guzman will never be suspected. Nobody, in fact, will know of the fate that has befallen him. You, in his character, will depart from Brazaguay in Castello's private yacht, and will be landed in the United States. Your task will then be over, and you will be twenty thousand pounds the richer. Do you not think we can accomplish the scheme with perfect ease?"

Don Calleja stroked his grey beard slowly.

"You have outlined the idea only roughly, of course," he said after a few moments. "Polished up, and planned in all the minute details, I believe it would be successful. I believe I could act the part of Castello, provided I affected illness, and you would step into Castello's shoes without any trouble. Yes, Senor Alvarez, I must confess I like the plot. It smacks of adventure, and the reward you offer is certainly enticing."

Alvarez leaned forward, quivering.

"You will help me?" he asked, with eagerness. "You will——"

"I will think it over!" said Don Calleja carelessly.

"But there must be no delay!" protested the other. "Cannot you come to a decision at once?"

"I will come to a decision before midnight. The hour is not late, and I need to think this over very carefully. Between eleven and twelve, senor, I will return, and then you shall know what my intentions are."

"I can rely on you to be discreet?" asked Alvarez anxiously.

"I am no fool—I know how to keep my mouth closed!"

And Don Calleja, five minutes later, had departed—and Carlos Alvarez settled himself down to wait with impatience and anxiety until his new-found friend should return. But, in spite of a few uneasy doubts, he was singing a song of triumph in his heart. He fully believed that when Don Calleja returned it would be to express his willingness to embark upon the great enterprise.

CHAPTER III.

Professor Zingrave's Amazing Power—The Real Truth—The Compact.

"A PRETTY plot—a very pretty plot!"

Don Calleja murmured the words to himself as he walked briskly away from Alvarez's flat. There was a curious smile upon the Spaniard's lips. In plain truth, he had had no intention of assisting Carlos Alvarez, but he was anxious to find out the reason for the ex-president's attack, and what lay at the bottom of it.

Well, he had found out, and he was impressed.

Twenty thousand was a big sum, and would compensate for the risks which would have to be run in the carrying out of the scheme. Personally, Calleja cared not a jot who held the reins of government in Brazaguay. The republic did not interest him in the least, and if he could help to pitchfork Alvarez into power, and receive twenty thousand pounds for it, he was seriously inclined to consider the matter.

Before giving his decision, however, he decided to interview Professor Cyrus Zingrave, for Don Calleja was a scoundrel to his finger-tips. He was a Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle. In point of fact, he had belonged to the infamous society almost since its inception. He was one of its eldest and most powerful members.

And anything that seemed likely to prove profitable always gained his attention. While he had been discussing the plan with Alvarez, he had had one thought in his mind the whole time. If the game was worth the candle the league would certainly not push it aside.

But Zingrave must know. Zingrave's advice was everything.

Calleja soon obtained a taxi and drove to Grosvenor Square, but a manservant who opened the door informed Calleja that the professor was at his club. Calleja was rather glad of this, for the matter was very private, and at the club he would be able to speak to Zingrave without fear of interruption.

The palatial Orpheum Club was close handy, and the Spaniard walked the distance in a few minutes. A very pile of respectability to all outward appearance, the Orpheum Club was, nevertheless, the headquarters of the League of the Green Triangle. Every member of the select circle who belonged to the club was a Governing Member of the league.

Several of the most influential men had been struck off the club's list within recent months with grim regularity. It was the result of Nelson Lee's campaign against the league. But there were many scoundrels still left to be dealt with. The organisation was still a deadly menace to the country.

Professor Zingrave was in one of the luxurious smoking-rooms. To the world he was a clever scientist, a man who had won renown by his undoubted cleverness. But he was the leader of the Green Triangle, the master-brain of the whole concern.

Five minutes after Don Calleja had arrived, he was closeted with the Spaniard in his own private office. Below this office, reached by a secret staircase, was the Governing Chamber of the league. But Zingrave did not think it necessary to take Calleja there. That apartment was only used for meetings of the Circle.

"Well, don, what's the trouble?" asked the professor pleasantly.

His voice was musical and delightful to listen to. A stranger, seeing Zingrave for the first time, would have said that he was a perfectly harmless, genial man of science. His slight frame, his long, silky hair, and his spectacles gave him a mild appearance which was the exact opposite to his

real nature. A few minutes' conversation with Zingrave was enough to convince most men that he was possessed of extraordinary will-power, and that he was certainly not a man to be trifled with.

"You are looking quite excited!" he went on. "Anything good, Calleja?"

"I do not know. I will leave you to judge for yourself" replied the don slowly. "Anyhow, there is a certain chance of twenty thousand pounds."

"H'm! Twenty thousand!" murmured Zingrave. "Quite a respectable sum! But what is the work? What are the risks?"

Calleja related what had occurred, and his companion listened with interested attention. The Spaniard finished up by informing Zingrave of the exact state of affairs in Brazaguay—that Castello was supported by practically the entire populace, while Alvarez had only a small following in comparison.

"But that is immaterial to us," concluded Calleja. "Once Alvarez is in power, my work will be done, and I shall have the money. If he is defeated soon after—well, that is his own trouble."

Zingrave nodded, and stroked his thick hair.

"It may be worth the trouble," he said thoughtfully. "Planned carefully, the scheme could be worked with perfect ease. Alvarez has doubtless got secret agents in Brazaguay, and your part of the business would be simplicity itself."

"Then why is he willing to pay me so much?"

"Because you are indispensable to the plan. Without you, nothing could be done. You will become President Castello for a short while, to pave the way for Alvarez. But it is queer—very queer!" said Zingrave slowly.

"What is queer?"

"Consider all the facts!" exclaimed the professor. "Why is Alvarez so inordinately anxious to become president again? He must know that his supporters are in the minority, and that to return to Brazaguay would be to court disaster. In a country like that, his enemies would think nothing of assassinating him. I doubt if he would remain in the presidential shoes for a month."

"That is my opinion, also. But Alvarez is optimistic."

"Tut-tut! Optimism has nothing to do with it!" interrupted Zingrave keenly. "No, Calleja, there is something behind this, something we cannot fathom. Alvarez has a very particular reason for wishing to become president of Brazaguay again, some reason apart from his misplaced ambition."

The professor paced up and down for a few moments.

"I am curious," he went on. "I am very curious, Calleja! We will see Alvarez to-night—at once!"

"We?" said Don Calleja, in surprise.

"Exactly! You promised to give him your decision before midnight. Well, I will accompany you to his flat. I think a little conversation with the excellent ex-president would be enlightening. I wish to make a little experiment."

In less than ten minutes the pair were seated in a taxi, en route for the temporary abode of Senor Carlos Alvarez. Zingrave was talking quietly, and Calleja was listening with great interest.

Alvarez was pleased to see the Spaniard again, but he frowned slightly as he beheld Professor Zingrave. He was instantly suspicious. But the don soon set his fears at rest.

"This gentleman is a great friend of mine," explained Calleja, when the trio were seated alone in the sitting-room. "He is interested in this

matter, and will give us some excellent advice. You may speak with confidence on all matters before him. He is with us heart and soul."

"I am glad to hear that," said Alvarez, regarding Zingrave keenly. "Well, gentlemen, what do you think? Is the plan practicable?"

"It is not only practicable, but easy to accomplish," said the professor.

"I have advised Senor Calleja to accept your offer."

Alvarez's eyes gleamed.

"And you will accept?" he asked of Calleja. "You will help me?"

"You will hear my answer very shortly," said the don quietly. "At the present moment my friend wishes to claim your attention."

Alvarez turned to Zingrave again. The latter had removed his glasses, and he was sitting in such a position that the electric light fell upon his striking face and his extraordinary eyes. His eyes were black and glittering, and as Alvarez gazed into them he shivered slightly, and felt compelled to watch.

After a few seconds, he tried to shift his gaze, but somehow he found it impossible to do so. A curious fascination was creeping over him, and he found himself wondering at a singular illusion. Zingrave's strange eyes appeared to be growing larger—larger, until they filled the whole room. Alvarez could see nothing but those eyes.

He tried to laugh, but his features remained fixed. He was held—held as though in a vice—by the professor's steady stare. Gradually the desire to shift his gaze left him, and he felt a dreamy, dazed sensation.

Don Calleja watched keenly. He saw at once that Alvarez was strangely affected. The professor remained perfectly still, his eyes fixed like those of a waxwork model. But they burned with a black fire, and formed a strange contrast to those of Alvarez.

For the ex-president's eyes were now dull and listless. He continued to gaze before him, but he did so mechanically.

"By the saints, what power!" Calleja murmured to himself. "What terrible power!"

He himself had sometimes felt the influence of Zingrave's eyes. He had seen the professor silence a man with one look. He had seen the professor compel a man to speak against his will and against his inclinations.

But this was the first time he had witnessed such a scene as this.

It was astounding, almost uncanny.

Yet there was nothing really astonishing in the occurrence. Alvarez was naturally weak-willed and cowardly. He was blustering, arrogant, and filled with a great idea of his own importance, but his will was powerless to resist that of Zingrave. For Professor Zingrave was possessed of an amazingly strong will. His power was terrible and deadly, and few men could have resisted that gaze.

What was happening was a kind of hypnotism. Unconsciously Alvarez found himself entirely under the control of Zingrave's brain. He had passed into a species of hypnotic trance, and could no more obey his own will than he could sink through the very floor.

It was an iron will opposed against a feeble one. Naturally enough, the weaker succumbed at once to the stronger.

"Senor Alvarez, I wish you to tell me a few facts," exclaimed Zingrave deliberately. "You hear me? You understand me?"

"Yes. I understand you."

Alvarez's voice was dull and toneless. He was still looking into Zingrave's eyes, but his own were listless and without expression.

"Why do you wish to return to Brazaguay?" asked the professor. "Tell me your exact reasons for wanting to return."

"I wish to become President of the Republic again."

"But why? What is your object?"

"It is simple enough. I was forced to flee without laying my hands upon Sagana's treasure. I must return to complete my work."

Don Calleja started, and bent forward eagerly.

"Tell me of this treasure," said Zingrave softly. "What is Sagana's treasure? How did you learn of it, and what does it consist of?"

"I do not know the precise facts myself," replied Alvarez mechanically.

"Twenty years ago a man ruled over Brazaguay named Jose Sagana. He was president for five years. During his period of power he robbed the country and the people, and gathered together a vast store of wealth in gold and precious stones, its total value estimated at several hundreds of thousands. Well, soon after I became president, I discovered the secret which has puzzled my countrymen for many years. I found out where the stored wealth of Sagana was hidden."

"And you secured it?" asked Zingrave calmly.

"No. I was frustrated in my object. I laid my plans carefully, for I decided that not another soul should know of my discovery. I intended securing the hidden wealth and leaving the country for good. But on the very night I had set aside for the purpose to carrying out my plans, I received stunning news."

"That was disconcerting."

"I went mad for a time—mad with rage and helplessness," went on Alvarez, a note of passion creeping into his dull voice. "I learned that Don Guzman de Castello was just outside the capital with a huge army. At a moment's notice I was forced to flee. My own life was more valuable to me than Sagana's treasure, and so I took to flight. It was the only course to pursue. I left Fanillo within the hour, rather than be made a prisoner by Castello."

"And the treasure?"

"The treasure is still concealed beneath the cellars of the palace," replied Alvarez. "No other man knows of the secret, for I dared not share it. They are treacherous hounds in Brazaguay. But that vast store of wealth is now beyond my reach. It is beyond the reach of any man who is not in residence at the president's palace."

"And so you are desirous of returning to Fanillo?" suggested Zingrave.

"Could you not smuggle yourself into the palace as a servant, and so gain your end?"

"I considered such a course, but it is impracticable," replied Alvarez listlessly. "I am too well known in Fanillo. Whatever disguise I adopted I should be recognised. Besides, no man—no servant—would have a chance of reaching the secret cellar where the hoard is stowed away. For it is only accessible from a passage in a part of the palace which is the president's private quarter. My only hope of gaining my desire is to become President of Brazaguay again."

"You do not wish to remain president?"

"Only as long as it suits me. When I have got the treasure into my own hands I shall leave the country secretly, and it can go to perdition for all I care!" said Alvarez dully. "My one wish is to defeat Castello, and to step into his shoes. I am willing to give all I possess to gain my object, for I shall be amply repaid."

Zingrave nodded, and lowered his eyes for a second. He had learned all that he wished to know.

The ex-president sank back into his chair, and allowed his eyelids to drop. His breath came in regular, almost soundless, hisses through his nose.

"He will wake presently," murmured Zingrave, turning to Calleja. "And when he does awaken, he will know nothing of what has passed. Be prepared to continue the conversation at the point we were at when he first became affected."

"I am amazed, Zingrave!" panted Calleja. "Now I understand his eagerness to become president again. He has a set object—a personal object. He cares nothing for the republic itself."

"I suspected as much. Well, my friend, it is up to you!"

"To me?"

"Assuredly!" replied the professor smoothly. "You will agree to help Alvarez, and will accompany him to Fanillo. But when you arrive, having settled with Castello, you will also settle with Alvarez himself! There is a chance of the league scooping in a little fortune here, and we must not lose the opportunity. To-morrow, Don Calleja, we will discuss the matter thoroughly."

Almost as he ceased speaking Alvarez opened his eyes abruptly.

"Yes, I should advise you to plan the business in every detail before leaving England," said the professor, as though nothing had happened. "In a case such as this it is as well to have everything cut and dried."

The other blinked a little.

"Of course—of course!" he said, somewhat confusedly.

He hurriedly shook himself, and looked at Calleja and Zingrave. Both were in precisely the same position. The ex-president had no suspicion that many minutes had passed since he had consciously spoken. He averted his gaze from the professor's eyes, and inwardly concluded that he had been momentarily confused by them.

"I am disposed to accept your offer, senor," said Don Calleja slowly.

"Ah! You have decided?"

"Yes."

Carlos Alvarez forgot his curious spell of dizziness, and turned quickly to the Spaniard.

"You will not regret it," he said enthusiastically. "Carefully planned, the task will be quite simple; and once I am president again, I will do much for you. And Brazaguay will, I hope, be ruled over by my will for many a long day to come!"

Having heard the true story from his own lips a few short minutes before, this speech sounded somewhat hollow. But Calleja and Zingrave nodded gravely. They all shook hands on the compact, and Alvarez produced a bottle of delightful wine.

"To the success of our enterprise!" he cried.

The toast was drunk, and then Don Calleja promised to meet Alvarez on the following morning, in order to discuss the scheme in all its bearings and to make final plans and preparations.

Alvarez was rather glad of this, for, although he trusted Zingrave, he would rather make his arrangements with Calleja alone. The ex-dictator of Brazaguay was in high spirits as he accompanied his two companions downstairs to the street.

He stood at the great doorway of the flats until Professor Zingrave and Don Calleja disappeared round a corner in search of a taxi. Then he turned into the wide hall again, his eyes gleaming, his breath somewhat forced.

"At last," he muttered triumphantly, "I have found the man for my task! Twenty thousand pounds is a large sum, but is the game not worth it? I stand to gain fifty times the amount, and the odds are all on my side!"

But were they?

Carlos Manuel Alvarez was seriously at fault there!

CHAPTER IV.

Nipper's News—The Detective's Guess—Proof—Off For

"GUV'NOR—guv'nor!"

Nipper burst into Nelson Lee's consulting-room like a whirlwind. The time was nearly midnight, and the famous crime investigator was comfortably attired in his dressing-gown and slippers, enjoying a last cigar before turning in.

He turned his head as Nipper flung himself into the room, and saw that the lad's face was flushed and excited.

"My dear Nipper, what on earth is the matter?" he asked calmly. "I was really wondering what had become of you. Cool down, young 'un! Don't behave as though you were a miniature cyclone!"

Nipper crossed over to his master, breathing quickly.

"I've just seen something, guv'nor," he exclaimed—"something that means a tremendous lot! You know that dago who was here an hour or two ago?"

"Well, what about him?"

"I saw him ten minutes ago, standing at the door of a block of flats in a quiet turning off Russell Square," replied Nipper deliberately. "I happened to pass through the street on my way home, and there was Alvarez on the doorstep of the flat!"

Nelson Lee elevated his eyebrows.

"The man may be a scoundrel, my lad," he said, "but surely there is nothing very criminal in his taking a breath of fresh air before turning in?"

"Can't you let me finish, guv'nor?" roared Nipper.

"Oh, you have some more to tell, then?"

Nipper glared.

"Look here, sir, if you're going to be funny, I'm not going to say anything at all!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "I've come here with some jolly important news, and all you can do is to loll in that giddy chair, puff at your cigar, and make facetious remarks!"

Nelson Lee frowned.

"Have you no respect for your master?" he asked sternly.

"Oh, rats!"

"Come, Nipper, perhaps I have been teasing you a little too much!" went on the detective, laughing. "I know you well enough by this time, my lad. If you have some important news, let me hear it."

Nipper was somewhat mollified.

"I think you'll agree with me that it's a whole heap fishy," he declared, bending forward eagerly. "Alvarez was standing on the doorstep of the flats, and he had just said good-night to two men. He was quite effusive, and was obviously on the very best of terms with the men who had just left. Alvarez, in fact, was looking triumphant, and as he turned into the hall I saw him rub his hands together with satisfaction."

"Well?"

"Well, guv'nor, who do you think those two men were?"

"My good Nipper, I haven't the faintest notion!"

"Professor Zingraye and Don Calleja!" rapped out Nipper triumphant!

"Now, sir, isn't that worth getting excited about?"

Nelson Lee rose, and his face was serious in a second. He turned to his young assistant and looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are sure of this?" he asked abruptly.

"Positive, sir!"

"Then there is only one thing to conclude. Alvarez, having failed to

obtain my services, has managed to approach Zingrave and Don Calleja. It looks very much as though the Green Triangle has taken up the case for Alvarez. But, of course, the game may be deeper."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, Alvarez may have known Calleja and Zingrave for long past," replied the detective shrewdly. "His visit to me may have been part of a plot, the object of which is to take my life."

"You're wrong there, sir," remarked Nipper. "This isn't any plot against us. Alvarez has merely made arrangements with Calleja and the professor to do the work you refused to do. The way he rubbed his hands together proved that he was in high spirits. And I'm pretty certain that he hasn't met Calleja before to-night."

"Why are you so certain?"

"Because I use my ears," replied Nipper keenly. "When Alvarez said good-night he hesitated over Calleja's name, and finally pronounced it quite wrong. And he called the professor 'Mr. Singrave.' I tell you, gov'nor, Alvarez hasn't known these two rotters for many hours. In all probability, he only became acquainted with them after he left us. Anyhow, I'm jolly certain there's mischief afoot with the Green Triangle. The league is going to do the dirty work for Alvarez."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"You have done well, Nipper," he said approvingly. "From what you say it is fairly obvious that no plot is contemplated against myself. And it is also obvious that Don Calleja is busying himself with the scheme which Alvarez proposed to me. And you may be sure, young 'un, that if the league takes a hand in the game, it will almost certainly succeed, unless something is done to frustrate it."

Nipper's eyes sparkled.

"What are you thinking of, gov'nor?" he asked eagerly.

"You may be sure of one thing," said the detective. "Since the league is now mixed up with the plot, I naturally take a very keen interest in it. And if these scoundrels mean to journey to Brazaguay with the object of murdering Don Guzman de Castello—for I am sure murder is the object—I shall certainly take steps to render the whole scheme futile."

"But it may be necessary to go right to South America!" gasped Nipper.

"If it is necessary I shall not hesitate to take such a course. We are fighting the Green Triangle, don't forget, and Don Calleja is a man I have long had my eye upon. If I could bring about his ruin and be of service to President Castello at the same time, I shall have done excellent work."

Nipper's news was undoubtedly startling. The more Nelson Lee thought, the more the full significance of that chance discovery of Nipper's was impressed upon his mind.

The last member of the Governing Circle to go had been Dr. Simeon Whitten, who had met an untimely fate in the great landslide on the south coast. That had been a week or two previously, and Nelson Lee was still waiting for an opening to strike another blow at his enemies.

That opening now seemed to be near at hand.

And while striking at Don Calleja, Nelson Lee would be rendering valuable service to a small but prospering republic. President Castello was a good man, and it would be a sin to leave him to the fate which was being planned for him. The great detective could not have done so with an easy conscience. South American politics were tricky things to play about with, but it did not matter. The main object of Nelson Lee's attentions would be Don Calleja.

The following day Nelson Lee instructed Nipper to keep watch on

Alvarez's flat. At tea-time the lad returned and made his report. It was very significant. Alvarez had left his flat during the morning, had met Don Calleja, and the pair had spent many hours together. They had visited a shipping office in the afternoon.

"My report corroborates your own, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I have learned that Alvarez and Calleja sail to-morrow morning from Tilbury by the mail steamer Undine, for Rio de Janeiro."

"They're not losing much time, sir!"

"Why should they? It happens that the Undine sails to-morrow, and there is no other boat for two or three weeks. Naturally, Alvarez wishes to push his plot ahead with all expedition. I have an idea there is something deeper in the game than appears upon the surface; but that we shall discover later on."

"We're going ahead with the case then, sir?"

"Right ahead, my lad," replied the detective firmly. "It may interest you to know that I have booked passages for Rio, and that we both leave England by the Undine to-morrow. We travel by the same boat as our enemies!"

"By Jupiter!" gasped Nipper. "We shall be spotted, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee smiled

"We may be spotted—in fact we certainly shall be, since we cannot render ourselves invisible—but we shall not be recognised," he replied. "I have already decided upon what disguises we shall adopt."

"I can see a lot of excitement ahead," exclaimed Nipper, with sparkling eyes. "I suppose we shall go alone, sir? You don't mean to take Mr. Clifford?"

"No; I have seen Douglas Clifford this afternoon, and have informed him of my plans," said Nelson Lee. "In this particular case I think Clifford would be superfluous. He is a wonderfully smart man—but don't forget the old adage: 'Too many cooks spoil the broth.' I am not exactly sure whether it is a wise policy to take you along with me, young 'un!"

Nipper bristled.

"Of all the nerve!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Not going to take me, eh? I should like to know what the dickens would happen to you if I didn't come along to look after you?"

The detective laughed heartily.

"I'll give you your due," he said, patting Nipper upon the back. "I should have been dead on many occasions but for your timely assistance. You have an excellent knack, Nipper, of turning up at the right moment."

Douglas Clifford, to whom Nelson Lee had been referring, was a young man who had done much in the campaign against the Green Triangle. It was Clifford who had given Nelson Lee all his facts, and who had rendered splendid service on many occasions. It would certainly have been unwise to take him to South America—although he was eager to go.

The rest of that evening was a very busy time for Nelson Lee and Nipper. There was very little time at their disposal, and much had to be done.

But it was certain, now, that Alvarez had found a man for his work. And, under the circumstances, Nelson Lee could pursue no other course than that which he was taking. Not only was the ex-president's plot to be brought to nought, but a Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle was to be dealt with.

There was a double purpose in Nelson Lee's new enterprise—indeed, a treble purpose. To frustrate Alvarez, to settle with Don Calleja, and to work in the interests of Don Guzman de Castello.

CHAPTER V.

Aboard The Undine—Nelson Lee's Ruse—The Floating Body!

NELSON LEE and Nipper slowly mounted the gangway on to the saloon deck of the liner Undine. At the moment, both Carlos Alvarez and Don Calleja were leaning against the rail, gazing almost directly at the gangway and at the passengers who were embarking. Yet the two scoundrels had no suspicion whatever of the identity of the pair who were actually on their track.

For Nelson Lee and Nipper were cleverly disguised.

Even the detective's greatest friend would not recognise him, however close the scrutiny. And Nipper's identity was equally as well hidden.

Under the circumstances, Nelson Lee had realised the necessity of giving his enemies no chance whatever of discovering the truth. Alvarez and his newly-found hireling must not suspect that Nelson Lee was travelling by the same boat. Calleja had been satisfied that the detective was taking no interest in the case. If it were discovered that Nelson Lee was on board the Undine, Alvarez would certainly change his plans—and that would have been unfortunate for all concerned.

And so stringent precautions had been taken.

Nelson Lee was completely hidden under the guise of a white-haired old man. Bent, but nevertheless active, the aged passenger was apparently a very respectable old gentleman indeed. His hair was white, and his beard reached almost to the middle of his waistcoat. The skin of his face was tanned and wrinkled, to all appearances, and he wore heavy gold-rimmed spectacles.

The detective had spent three full hours upon his disguise, and he had excellent reason to feel pleased. Even if Alvarez had actually been watching for Nelson Lee he would not have suspected the elderly Mr. John Pendleton. Nipper was posing as the old fellow's grandson, and there was nothing in his appearance to cause comment. He was dressed in a Norfolk suit, and seemed to be a very quiet, studious boy. Apparently, he was shortsighted, for he, too, wore glasses. His hair was almost flaxen, and his eyebrows of a similar colour.

This change in itself was almost enough to convert Nipper into another lad. But his cheeks had been made rosy, and a slight hump placed upon his back. Altogether, both Nelson Lee and Nipper was so unrecognisable that even Douglas Clifford would never have suspected their identity, even if he had faced the pair for days.

And Alvarez and Calleja, who were not closely acquainted with the detective, were easy and contented in mind.

The voyage started, and in due course the passengers settled down. Mr. John Pendleton and his grandson kept very much to themselves. They came on deck occasionally, but spent most of their time in their own state-room.

"This disguise business is rather tiresome, Nipper, but it is necessary," remarked Nelson Lee, as they sat in their cabin on the third day out. "Our movements are hampered, but we are, at least, safe from suspicion. Our enemies are complacent and calm. They do not dream that things are by no means so rosy as they appear to be."

Nipper grunted.

"I'm fed-up with this 'good little boy' rot already, gov'nor," he said candidly. "Still, I'm not the chap to grumble. It's necessary, so I'll stick it!"

Exactly what he meant to do upon reaching Rio, the detective was not

quite decided. But future events would have to shape themselves according to the happenings of the moment. While on board ship there was nothing to be done. Action must be deferred until South American shores were reached.

As it happened, however, action—and brisk action—did take place aboard the *Undine*.

For the most part, the voyage was uneventful. The boat was a fairly small one, and consequently slow. Life was more or less dull, and the days dragged by monotonously. At last, when Madeira had long since been left behind, and when the Cape Verde Islands had been passed, Carlos Alvarez began to show signs of becoming restless.

Perhaps it was the sunny weather of the South Atlantic which caused the change. He felt himself in the climate of his own country. And now that the time for action was coming to hand, he was impatient and anxious to arrive at Rio. His little steam yacht was there, and would start at once for Brazaguay. Already his agents were acquainted with his plans.

Before leaving London, Alvarez had dispatched several lengthy cablegrams in a secret code known only to himself and his supporters in Brazaguay. And he knew that when he set foot on the soil of the turbulent republic, everything would be prepared.

Although his plans had been discussed in London with Don Calleja, he had not mentioned them while on the *Undine*. Until South America was reached the two scoundrels were taking a little holiday.

They were both comfortable and contented of mind. Perhaps Alvarez would not have been so easy had he known that Calleja was only accompanying him for his own purposes—and for the purposes of the League of the Green Triangle.

But the ex-president knew nothing of the league; he had never heard of the society. He thought that Calleja was helping him solely for the magnificent reward he had offered. In reality, however, Calleja—on behalf of the Green Triangle—was after the secret treasure of the former Brazaguayan President, Jose Sagana. And it suited Calleja's plans to affect friendship for Alvarez until the time for action arrived.

When the *Undine* was within three days' steam of Rio de Janeiro, the weather changed a little, the sunny skies vanished, and dark clouds appeared. By evening of that day the sea became a little restless, and the liner rolled sullenly as she ploughed her way through the green water.

Rain was in the air, although only a few drops had fallen so far. Nelson Lee was standing against the port rail, gazing over the dark sea in the gathering gloom of night. And while he stood there Alvarez and Calleja passed him. A few words they uttered fell upon his ears, and he was instantly impressed. The words themselves were of no account—but they caused Nelson Lee to think.

"Yes, it is certainly going to rain," Calleja said. "We will do as you say."

"A splendid opportunity for a chat," answered Alvarez. "Come to my cabin at seven o'clock. We have much to talk over, my friend."

The words in themselves meant nothing, to all appearances. But Nelson Lee read between the lines, as it were. At seven o'clock, Calleja was going to Alvarez's cabin—to chat. There was "much to talk over." A casual listener would have taken no notice of the seemingly idle words.

But the famous detective was in a different position.

He guessed at once that the chat was to be in connection with the plot against President Castello. The two schemers were going to discuss their final plan. Nelson Lee suspected much, but he did not know anything definite regarding his enemies' course of campaign. According to the plan

which Alvarez had outlined in the detective's own consulting room it would be Calleja's business to board Alvarez's yacht, to travel to Fanillo, and to pose as a rich man of leisure. He would then contrive to get Don Guzman de Castello aboard the yacht, and finally kidnap him.

That was the scheme which Alvarez had outlined.

But Nelson Lee had strong suspicions that a very different plan was now to be adopted. With Don Calleja conspiring with the ex-president, more drastic measures would probably be taken. It was quite likely that Castello would be brutally murdered. And, if at all possible, Nelson Lee wished to discover what was precisely afoot.

Even as he was making his way to his state-room, the promised rain began to fall, and the detective arrived below with his coat glistening with large spots of moisture. Nipper was in the cabin when his master entered.

"Hallo, raining?" remarked the lad. "I thought we were going to have some, sir. I don't suppose it'll be much."

"The rain, I believe, will prove very welcome," interjected Nelson Lee grimly. "There's work to be done to-night, my lad, and I have already thought of a plan."

"Work?" repeated Nipper wonderingly. "What kind of work, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee told his young assistant of what had occurred.

"I firmly believe that Alvarez and Calleja are going to discuss this conspiracy against the President of Brazaguay," he exclaimed with conviction. "Whether this is so or not, I mean to adopt a little ruse which may possibly put me in possession of facts which I do not now possess."

Nipper drew a deep breath.

"Am I in the wheeze, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"You are, young 'un!"

"Good biz! Thank goodness there's something to do at last!"

For the next hour the pair were exceedingly busy. The time was then six-thirty, and presently both Nelson Lee and Nipper sallied out on two different errands. Nipper stationed himself in such a position that he could keep an eye on Alvarez's cabin without himself being noticeable.

Meanwhile the detective was on deck. He had attired himself in a thick waterproof coat, and a sou'-wester was jammed over his head. For this occasion he had removed his long white false beard and wig, and had adopted quite a different disguise. He had no fear of being bowled out, for there were so many passengers on board that nobody would question him even if they came face to face with him.

But he took care to keep to himself.

The rain was now descending in torrents, and the deck on which he was standing was absolutely deserted. It was a covered deck—a lower deck—and right below the spot where Nelson Lee was standing, was the porthole of Carlos Alvarez's cabin.

By leaning over the rail, Nelson Lee could see a light gleaming out. The glass of the little window was bespattered with rain, and it was closed to.

The detective had little difficulty in obtaining a long length of stout rope. One end of this he secured to one of the iron uprights which supported the rails. The rope, hanging straight down, was no little distance to the left of Alvarez's porthole; but the detective had a design in arranging things thus. He leaned over the rail and gazed along the hull of the ship, nodding to himself with satisfaction.

"I think everything will be ready in case of an emergency," he murmured. "This rain is greatly in my favour. Not a soul is on deck, and this particular place is in absolute darkness, and no officer can observe my movements. Yes, I have high hopes of being successful."

A footfall sounded behind him, and the next moment Nipper tapped him on the shoulder.

"It's O.K., gov'nor," whispered the lad.

"The pair are together?"

"Yes. Calleja entered Alvarez's cabin a few minutes ago," replied Nipper softly. "But I say, sir, don't you think it'll be a bit risky——"

"Tut, tut! This is no time for thinking of risks!" interrupted the detective. "Besides, with the precautions we are taking there is no question of risk."

"Well, I'll be ready to do my bit if it's necessary, gov'nor!"

"Good lad!"

Nelson Lee wasted no further time. He and Nipper had been inactive so long on board the *Undine*, that this little adventure was a positive relief to them. A quiet rest was all very well in its way, but it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

The rain was driving on to the deck in stinging showers, but neither Nelson Lee nor Nipper troubled themselves about the elements. Rain was not going to do them any harm, and it was really in their favour. The passengers were all below, and this particular portion of the ship was exceedingly quiet and free from observation.

Nelson Lee swung himself over the rail, gripped the stout rope, and gently lowered himself overside. When his face came level with the porthole of the cabin—but several feet to the left of it—he placed one of his feet in a noose which he had prepared in readiness. It was now possible for him to swing on the rope with comparatively little fatigue.

To his left was the porthole of Alvarez's cabin, and, to the right, a similar distance away, was a kind of cradle arrangement, made of spars and wood, lashed to the ship's hull. Painting operations were in progress on the liner, and the workmen had left their paraphernalia slung over side in readiness to continue their labours when daylight came again. There was nothing uncommon in this; it was quite usual for painting to be done while vessels were en route.

Nelson Lee swung himself silently to and fro. Now and again the spray was flung up as a wave slapped the side of the ship, and it smothered him. But he was well protected; and the water, in any case, was far from being cold. In these latitudes the Atlantic was always fairly warm.

As the detective swung to and fro the *Undine* gave a sudden lurch, and he was flung against the cradle arrangement with considerable force. For a moment he hung there, and then let himself swing back like a pendulum.

The motion carried him right back until his face passed the cabin porthole. Nelson Lee took one of his hands from the rope, and gripped the edge of the porthole. This was fairly deep, and he easily retained his grip. With his foot in the noose below, it was now possible for him to cling on with both hands, and the position was by no means a strained one. It was necessary for him to exert his muscles somewhat, but, if necessary, he could remain in the same position for half-an-hour.

Nipper, above, saw that his master was all right, and then the lad hurried away. But he returned within a few minutes, and leaned over the rails. By this time, Nelson Lee was fairly settled in his extraordinary position.

He had found the port window unfastened. Very gradually, almost imperceptibly, he had opened the iron frame. But even now it was only opened an inch, and the detective's ear was pressed close against the slit.

He dared not take a peep into the state-room, for that would have been too risky. Moreover, there would have been no object to be gained by

doing so. It was his ears he wanted to use—not his eyes. And he was using one of his ears, now, at least!

And, as he had more than half expected, he was being rewarded for his trouble.

The voices of the two men within the cabin reached his listening ear distinctly. As a rule, Nelson Lee did not believe in eavesdropping. But on this occasion he was acting the part of an eavesdropper with a very worthy purpose:

Both Alvarez and Calleja were speaking in Spanish; but the detective was thoroughly conversant with the language. He could not speak with the fluency of a native, but he understood every word that was spoken.

"Exactly, my friend. We shall arrive at Elvasgo after darkness has fallen," came Alvarez's voice. "I have already instructed my secret agents in the coast town, and everything will be in readiness for us."

"But suppose Castello had discovered——"

"Carambo!" exclaimed Alvarez impatiently. "Castello will know nothing! My spies are faithful to me, and there will be no hitch. I am going over all this now, so that we shall be able to carry the work through perfectly. When we arrive at Elvasgo, a signal will be shown on the yacht, and my supporters ashore will have everything in readiness for our departure as soon as we land."

"We travel to Fanillo by motor-car—eh?" asked Calleja.

"Exactly. We shall arrive long before dawn, and the capital will be asleep," replied Alvarez grimly. "By the saints, the more I think of our scheme the easier it seems to accomplish. At the side entrance of the president's palace, to which I shall lead you, two guards will be placed. Those fellows will be agents of mine, and will instantly admit us into the building. I know the whole place from roof to cellar, and we shall be within Don Guzman's sleeping apartment in a very few minutes."

"And then?"

"The rest is simple, but will largely depend upon circumstances," replied Alvarez. "The president will probably be asleep, and one swift blow will settle him. But if he happens to be awake the ultimate end will be the same. Before he can cry for assistance, the air pistol with which your friend Zingrave supplied us will make short work of Castello. This pistol, I understand, does not release bullets, but deadly poisoned steel darts—or something of that nature."

"No matter what portion of the president's body is touched, he will die," said Calleja, with a satisfied note in his voice. "Have no fear, Alvarez. Once we reach the president's bedchamber, he will be dead within a minute. Your supporters will attend to the removal of the body?"

"Not a soul in Fanillo will know a word about it with the exception of my trusted followers," replied Alvarez grimly.

Outside Nelson Lee clenched his teeth and set his lips. Already he had heard quite sufficient to justify his worst suspicions. These scoundrels were bent on black murder; there would be no escape for Don Guzman if they were allowed to reach the capital before the president could be warned.

"After Castello has been removed," proceeded Alvarez smoothly, "you will take his place in the bed. You resemble him quite sufficiently for our purpose, and by affecting serious illness no comment will be caused. In the morning Castello will apparently still be alive, and not a soul—Nombre de Dios!"

Alvarez swore out the exclamation as the Undine gave a sudden lurch. A heavy sea had struck her, and she heaved over to port with unexpected violence. Alvarez, indeed, was almost flung out of his chair.



"Castello!" Alvarez cried. "Madre de Dios! My chance has come!"
With the fiery haste of his race, Alvarez became consumed with a mad, jealous hatred. He did not stop to think, to consider, he swung round, ran after the other man with fleet footsteps, and flung himself forward!" (See page 8.)

But that sudden roll of the ship was to have serious consequences. The slightly-open window of the cabin jerked completely open, and the hard steel edge caught Nelson Lee a sharp crack upon the head. Involuntarily, he uttered a short gasp, and he found himself looking straight into the eyes of Don Rodriguez Calleja!

The Spanish member of the Governing Circle acted on the instant.

Even while Nelson Lee was preparing to duck out of sight Calleja whipped a glittering object from his pocket and levelled it at the porthole.

"Name of a fiend! We are being spied upon!" he snarled furiously.

Click!

The air pistol in his hand spat out its message of death, and Nelson Lee's face disappeared from the open porthole. At the same second he uttered a short gasping cry. Both Alvarez and Don Calleja had forgotten the incident which had caused the eavesdropper to be revealed. Calleja dashed across the state-room and thrust his head out into the night.

For a second he could see nothing but the murky swirling waters below. There was not a sign of any stranger: it was obvious he had been hit, and had fallen into the sea. Then, as the Spaniard looked down, his breath hissed between his teeth sharply. Quite distinctly he saw a body floating face upward on the water! It was bumping against the ship's side in the choppy water!

And, as Calleja watched, the body, dim and ghastly-looking, floated away, still hugging the Undine's hull, until it was sucked into the deadly wash of the propellers!

In that one second Don Calleja knew that even if his missile had not done its deadly work, those churning propellers would soon do it themselves. Once under the stern of the liner the hapless spy would be torn to shreds with awful swiftness.

And it was Nelson Lee who had been the spy!

CHAPTER VI.

Rio At Last—On The Border—A Set-Back—The Goods Train

"THAT lurch was exceedingly unfortunate, Nipper!" exclaimed Nelson Lee calmly. "It came just when our excellent friends were about to discuss a most important part of their programme. What I did learn, however, will prove of great service."

"I'm not thinking about what you overheard, gov'nor. I'm thinking of what those rotters will think. They will be suspicious now, and on their guard."

The great detective shook his head.

"Not necessarily," he replied. "They are positive I am dead; and, in any case, they had no suspicion of my identity, for I was wearing a heavy disguise. They will think, probably, that I was—— Well, I really do not know what they will think! Whatever their suspicions, however, they will be easy in mind. I am dead, young 'un! Don Calleja actually saw my body sucked into the propellers!"

Nipper chuckled.

"My hat! It was a smart wheeze, sir!" he said admiringly.

"It shows how necessary it was, my boy, to be prepared for emergencies."

Nelson Lee and Nipper were sitting in their state-room. Half an hour had elapsed since that startling incident had occurred outside the porthole of Alvarez's cabin. To the two plotters it seemed certain that their

victim had gone to his death. Indeed, they had never a thought to the contrary.

Yet Nelson Lee had not even touched the water!

What had actually occurred was simplicity itself. The detective had been wise; he had prepared for the emergency. And, as it had proved, his preparations had been well-advised.

When Don Calleja had fired his deadly pistol the detective had merely ducked. At the same second he released his hold on the rim of the porthole. The rope, being on a slant, immediately swung back and drove Nelson Lee on to the painter's cradle arrangement. The detective had gripped this on the second, and had pulled himself up with one muscular heave.

Thus, when Calleja arrived at the little window, Nelson Lee was nowhere to be seen. He was, in fact, hidden behind the woodwork and ropes of the painting structure. Had the night been moonlight, the Spaniard would have seen the detective; but in the gloom Nelson Lee was invisible.

Moreover, Calleja's attention was attracted by the floating body in the water below. Having seen that, he did not look elsewhere.

But what of that floating body? Whose was it?

It was here that Nipper came in.

The lad had been standing against the rail immediately above his master. Beside him, also leaning against the rail, was another person—apparently. This second person was a very silent individual, for he did not speak a word. He simply stood there, seemingly supported by Nipper, and gazed fixedly out across the dark ocean.

When Nelson Lee had uttered the gasping cry—especially for Calleja's benefit—Nipper had taken his cue. That cry, he knew, meant that the detective had been discovered. And it meant that Nipper was to act without a second's loss of time.

Had any fellow-passenger or officer been observing Nipper at that moment there would certainly have been a tremendous commotion aboard the *Undine* immediately afterwards. For Nipper acted in an extraordinary manner.

He turned to his companion, picked him up with apparently no effort, and deliberately flung him overside!

Fortunately no one saw the little incident, and so there was no uproar.

The unfortunate individual whom Nipper had so coldbloodedly attacked struck the water with a faint splash, and, to Nipper's satisfaction, floated face upwards. Curiously enough, Nipper's victim made no attempt whatever to save himself. Accordingly, when Don Calleja gazed downwards, he saw something which could be mistaken for nothing else but the dead body of a man. The fact that he did not struggle merely proved that Calleja's aim had been true.

The Spaniard had not the slightest suspicion that he had merely gazed upon a stuffed dummy!

For Nipper's companion was only an old suit of Nelson Lee's carefully stuffed with all sorts of old rubbish. His face was a mask of the detective's own making, and in the dimness it looked precisely like a pale human face.

The rest had been simple. The very instant Calleja withdrew his head and closed the port, Nelson Lee had scrambled up the rope, and he and Nipper made themselves scarce. Hardly had they disappeared when both Don Calleja and Alvarez hurried up and walked to the rail. But the deck was deserted—not a soul could be seen.

Alvarez spotted the rope almost at once, but that only confirmed the suspicions of his companion and himself. A man had scrambled down that rope, and had been listening outside the cabin window. He had been sh-

by Calleja, and had dropped to his doom. If he had overheard anything it mattered not, for he had taken his knowledge with him to a watery grave.

At least, this is what the precious pair supposed.

Needless to say, they were perturbed in mind. The incident had upset them considerably. But they soon found that no alarm had been given, and that the affair was obviously unknown to a soul save themselves. After remaining on deck for some little time they both went below finally convinced that if any danger had existed, it was now effectually dealt with. They decided to keep a very strict watch until Rio was reached, and to then pursue their plans without alteration. The unknown man who had been spying was undoubtedly dead.

Unfortunately for the plotters' calculations, the unknown man was even then calmly sitting in a state-room, within twenty feet, enjoying a cigar.

Nelson Lee's first task was to remove his disguise and adopt the white wig and beard again.

"Our friends will certainly not suspect an octogenarian like myself of being implicated in the affair which has just taken place," smiled the great criminologist, carefully knocking the ash from his cigar. "As I said before, however, the ship's lurch was rather unfortunate. Nevertheless, I have learned much."

"Fat lot you've told me!" grumbled Nipper.

"All in good time, my boy. To be brief, Alvarez means to murder Don Guzman de Castello at dead of night. Alvarez and Calleja are to get on board the former's steam yacht at Rio, and the yacht will then sail for Elvasgo on the Brazaguayan coast. They will arrive at night, and will proceed to Fanillo, and their first task will be to murder the president!"

"The dirty cowards!" ejaculated Nipper indignantly.

"I suspected as much all along, but now I know for certain," proceeded Nelson Lee. "It seems, Nipper, that our league friend, Calleja, bears a striking similarity in appearance to Castello himself. From what I could gather it is Alvarez's plan to substitute Calleja in the president's place after the latter has been killed. The precise object of this I do not know—neither do I care."

"Why not, guv'nor?"

"I am not going to trouble myself with needless thoughts," replied the detective quietly. "The substitution is to take place after Don Guzman has been assassinated. As the president will not be assassinated, however, we need not worry ourselves further. Our task is clear and simple."

"What are your plans, sir?"

"As soon as we arrive at Rio we shall have all the advantage on our side. Alvarez imagines he has plenty of time for his dastardly work, and I don't suppose he will hurry himself unduly. We, however, will start for Fanillo by train. By changing from one train to another on the borders of Brazaguay we can do the trip right through to Fanillo without much delay. And once arrived in the capital, I shall acquaint Don Guzman with the precise facts."

"And that'll be the finish of Alvarez and Calleja," remarked Nipper, with satisfaction. "The rotters will be caught red-handed, and I'll bet old Guzzy will deal with them pretty sharply. When they're copped they'll be under Brazaguayan law, and I expect they'll both be propped against the wall facing a firing party. Well, they jolly well deserve to be executed."

Nelson Lee was silent. Much as his enemies deserved the treatment Nipper had outlined, the detective did not somehow relish such a fate overtaking them.

As events turned out, however, Nelson Lee's task was not to prove so simple as it appeared.

The following day the rainy spell of weather broke somewhat, and a clear night followed. The day after that the skies were blue and cloudless, and tropical heat prevailed. Alvarez and Don Calleja gradually became more comfortable in their minds. They had seen not the slightest sign of anything suspicious. Who the man was who Calleja had sent to his doom they did not know, and when Rio de Janeiro finally came within view they had both relegated the incident to the backs of their minds.

The capital of Brazil was reached just before noon, and the passengers disembarked at midday. Nelson Lee and Nipper went ashore, and kept a sharp eye on Alvarez and his companion. The two scoundrels made their way to a different portion of the docks, and at once boarded a fairly small steam yacht which lay at anchor in the harbour. Having seen that Nelson Lee busied himself on another task.

He and Nipper boarded a tramway-car, and proceeded to the very outskirts of the great city. In the early afternoon they walked right out into a deserted piece of country. Finally, they came to a halt in the centre of a little wood. The shade of the trees was welcome, for the heat under the scorching sun was truly terrific.

"Phew! All this rotten walk for practically nothing!" panted Nipper. "Why couldn't we have done the trick in some quiet hotel, gov'nor?"

"Because I have no desire for people to talk," replied Nelson Lee. "Had we done as you suggest, it would have necessitated taking the hotel proprietor into our confidence, and, to be candid, I don't trust anybody in this quarter of the globe. We have adopted the safest course, young 'un."

And the pair proceeded to remove their disguises, and to don light airy attire of a different nature to the clothes they were wearing. Having thus become themselves again—without a soul having seen the transformation—they entered the city once more. They had little fear of encountering Alvarez or Calleja among the hundreds of thousands of Rio's mixed population. In any case, Nelson Lee had disguised himself very slightly by wearing a false moustache, and Nipper still wore his glasses. This was only a precautionary measure, and the pair would become themselves in earnest once the Brazilian capital was left behind.

The first thing was to obtain a square meal, and then to make inquiries about trains. On their way to the centre of the town they were struck by the difference between the suburbs and the city proper. The suburbs—Santa Theresa, Gavea, Capacobana, and others—are exceedingly charming. But the streets of Rio itself are narrow and irregularly built.

Nelson Lee and Nipper passed through one of the city's beautiful parks, and could not help admiring some of the fine buildings. The residence of the president—the Cattete Palace—is a fine structure, while the Government printing office is one of the finest edifices in the whole city.

As the pair were walking along they paused to admire the magnificent view. Nipper was hungry, and was rather impatient to get outside of a good meal; but he took quite an interest in the scene which he now beheld. The beautiful bay of Rio was clearly visible, with the harbour and the docks. Many islands were scattered over the bay, and the largest was the Ilha do Governador, fully six miles long, containing the offices of the harbour authorities. Away in the distance was the conspicuous conical hill, Pao de Azucar—or sugar loaf, as it is called.

"A splendid panorama," Nelson Lee commented. "But really, Nipper, we must not waste our time in seeing the sights of Rio. When our mission is accomplished we will perhaps spend a week here, but at present we must make all haste to reach Fanillo. Alvarez, you see, has not yet set sail."

He nodded towards the harbour. Carlos Alvarez's little yacht was still at anchor, so it was obvious that the ex-president had not started for

Elvasgo. Probably he would not start until the morrow. But it made no difference; Nelson Lee and Nipper would reach the Brazaguayan capital long before Alvarez could do so.

The happenings of the next two hours are really of no interest. Nelson Lee and Nipper dined at a splendid restaurant, and then left Rio by a train which departed almost at once. A fairly long journey was before them. After travelling a great distance by the Brazilian State railway, they would have to take a slow-going train which would finally deposit them on the border of Brazaguay. Here, at a small town called Cordoza, they would find it necessary to get on a train which would take them to Fanillo.

The journey was slow, tedious, and fatiguing. When Nelson Lee and Nipper at last arrived at Cordoza the time of day was almost noon, and the town proved to be an extremely dirty collection of houses, with only one or two large buildings of any note. The Brazaguayan Railway skirted the town—for it was not the terminus of the line. As Nipper remarked, Cordoza seemed to be chiefly noted for its filth, its feverish heat, and its overpowering odour.

After an indifferent meal at an apology for a hotel, the pair proceeded to the station on the other side of the town. For some reason the two railways were not connected, and the stations were about two miles apart.

The station they were bound for proved to be a very poor affair. A white-washed shed did duty for a booking-office, and the single line of track would have been condemned at once on any British railway. But as the trains probably proceeded at a snail's pace, the poor condition of the track did not matter much.

After some difficulty, Nelson Lee discovered the official he was looking for. This gentleman rejoiced in the name of Pablo Gomez, and was attired in a gorgeous uniform which was at once extremely dirty and ludicrously funny—at least, to British eyes.

"The next train for Fanillo, my lord?" he said politely, in reply to the detective's inquiry. "Yes, there is one to-day—an express."

"That's good hearing," said Nelson Lee, speaking in Spanish. "What time is the train due here, senor?"

"It may be in within an hour, excellency, or it may not arrive until nightfall," replied the stationmaster suavely. "It is an excellent train, and is bound to arrive at Cordoza before darkness falls."

"Thank you; we will wait!" said Nelson Lee.

He slipped a milreis (a silver coin) into the station-master's hand, and the latter swaggered off with an air of pomposity which caused Nipper to chuckle loudly.

"Well, my lad, so much for the 'excellent trains' of Brazaguay," remarked the detective. "It may be here within an hour, or it may not arrive until nightfall. For punctuality, I should say this 'express' train the worthy official boasts of wants some beating!"

The afternoon dragged on, but the express showed no sign of appearing. Nelson Lee and Nipper lounged in the shade of some stunted trees, chafing at the delay. In due course the sun sank low in the sky, and dusk began to fall.

Some little sign of activity made itself apparent now, and the pair of Britishers were examined freely and thoroughly by many swarthy, fierce-moustached natives, all of whom looked as though they required a bath more than anything else.

Nelson Lee noticed that Pablo Gomez was going about in a decidedly excited condition. For some time he had been talking to a horseman who had ridden up, dusty and hot, after a long journey.

"All this activity probably means that the train is within a few miles,"

said Nelson Lee. "Well, Nipper, we mustn't grumble. If we start for Fanillo to-night we shall certainly arrive at the capital before noon to-morrow. The distance is only a hundred miles, or just over, and the train can scarcely take more than five or six hours, however snail-like it may be."

They approached Gomez, who had just finished talking with the stranger.

"Well, my friend, your train has not put in an appearance yet," smiled Nelson Lee. "I suppose it will come before long?"

Gomez started a little, and his shifty eyes half closed themselves.

"There will be no train, excellency," he said, after a moment.

"No train!" repeated the detective sharply. "What do you mean?"

"To-day is Tuesday," replied the station-master. "There will be no train, my lord, until Thursday afternoon."

Nelson Lee clicked his teeth.

"Then what did you mean by saying there would be a train before night-fall?" he demanded grimly. "From all the information I received there is a train leaving Cordoza for Fanillo to-night. Will not that train run?"

"No, excellency," replied Gomez uneasily. "The passenger-train has been delayed for certain reasons——"

"What reasons?"

"I cannot tell; I do not know."

"But—but——"

"It is by order of the president," Gomez interjected, almost roughly. "There will be no train to-night—there will be no train until Thursday!"

Nelson Lee bit his lip to prevent an exclamation. No train until Thursday!

If that was the actual truth, then it seemed highly probable that the detective's plans would fall to the ground. Alvarez and Calleja would almost certainly arrive at Fanillo the following night.

It seemed that the plotting scoundrels would succeed in their evil designs after all.

CHAPTER VII.

The Ammunition Train—Sentenced to be Shot!—The Escape.

NELSON LEE grabbed hold of the swarthy station-master's arm as the latter was about to move off. Somehow the detective was decidedly suspicious. Gomez's behaviour was questionable, and he had obviously been lying.

"You say there is no train until Thursday?" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Is there no train of any description?"

Gomez hesitated.

"Yes, excellency," he said at last. "There will be a luggage-train passing through Cordoza almost within the hour."

"Ah! Where is it bound for?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"Come, come!" Nelson Lee said sharply. "You are the station-master, my friend, and you should know these things! Is the train going to Fanillo?"

"No, it is not," answered Gomez hesitatingly. "You cannot travel by that train, my lord. It is—it is a special train, and will not stop here."

Nelson Lee locked grim.

"There's something queer about this business, Nipper," he said to the lad

in English. Then he turned to Gomez again. "You say this special train will not stop? I understand that all trains were compelled to stop, in order to refill the tanks with water?"

"Carambo! Why all these questions?" growled Gomez. "The train will stop for water; but that is all. No passengers will be allowed to travel by it. You see, my lord," he went on, "there are new tracks under construction miles from here, and the usual traffic is disorganised. This is only a branch line."

"But is there not a train to-morrow?"

"No. There is no train until Thursday," said the other impatiently.

"I must reach Fanillo to-morrow," said Nelson Lee steadily. "Look here, my friend! Is it possible to get to the capital by to-morrow evening?"

Pablo Gomez shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no road," he answered. "There is a track, but the mountains are almost impassable, and to travel by night is impossible! You could not start until to-morrow morning, and then you would have to obtain mules. Carambo! It will be quicker for you to wait until Thursday for the express!"

"I cannot wait—I shall not wait!" declared Nelson Lee grimly. "See here, senor, this special train must be travelling to Fanillo—or in the direction of the capital, at least! My young friend and myself would cause no trouble. If you can manage to get us aboard the train I will make it worth your while."

"No, no! By the saints, I dare not!" gasped Gomez, shifting his eyes fearfully. "It is not possible, excellency! You cannot go!"

"Why, what are you afraid of?"

"Madre de Dios!" snapped the official angrily. "What care I for you, pig of an Englishman! I advise you to go away from the station. When the train comes you will be in danger. Go!"

And Gomez stalked away, evidently in a state of funk and excited anger. Nelson Lee gazed after him, and eyed one another. Nipper could not understand Spanish perfectly; but he knew quite well how the conversation had ended.

"There is something fishy about this, young 'un," said the detective quietly. "The station-master is mortally afraid of something. What has happened? Why has the express been delayed, and what is this 'special' train Gomez speaks of?"

Nipper looked blank.

"There seems to be only one fact I can grab hold of, gov'nor," he said. "We're diddled—we're dished! We sha'n't be able to reach Fanillo in time, and Alvarez and Calloja will murder the president, after all!"

The detective's lips set in a thin straight line.

"Since we cannot obtain official permission to travel by this precious 'special' train, we will take French leave!" he said evenly. "Come, Nipper, we will go!"

They left the station premises in the fast-gathering dusk, followed by many curious glances from the ruffianly-looking men who were lounging about. That something unusual was afoot was certain. When Nelson Lee had walked some little distance he led the way over the rough ground until he and Nipper were behind a clump of bushes which adjoined the railway track, a short distance from the station.

"We came to South America to save Don Guzman de Castello from his rascally rival," the detective said quietly. "We have arrived within a hundred miles of Fanillo, Nipper, and we find ourselves frustrated by some absurd disorganisation of the railway service."

"And we reckoned on being in the capital long before Alvarez!" growled Nipper.

"We shall be! We are going to travel by the train which will pass through this benighted hole this evening," said the detective grimly. "By hook or by crook, my lad, we are going to board that train—if it ever comes!"

"I'm jolly doubtful—Hallo! Listen, sir!"

But Nelson Lee had heard. In the far distance the rumble of an approaching train sounded, and it gradually grew louder and louder. In a few minutes smoke appeared, and very shortly afterwards the train pulled up, with much creaking, in the little station.

It was almost impossible to see distinctly now, for darkness was fast falling. But Nelson Lee could see that the train was not very long, and that its engine was old dirty and of an almost obsolete pattern. The coaches, too, were apparently only fit for scrap-iron and firewood.

"I am more puzzled than ever," murmured the detective. "This train is composed of passenger coaches, Nipper. But the windows are covered, I believe, and it seems as though there is much secrecy. By James, two men have just dismounted from the locomotive, and they are dressed in uniform!"

"My hat! Do the engine-driver and fireman wear uniform on this line?" asked Nipper.

"I do not mean that. The men are soldiers!"

"Soldiers! Great Scott!"

A suspicion entered Nelson Lee's mind, but he said nothing. He watched and waited, and in less than twenty minutes the old engine gave a snort and commenced to move forward with many wheezes. By this time darkness had descended in earnest, and the watchers could scarcely see the train. Shouting could be heard, however, and a white lantern gleamed at the engine's funnel.

"Come, Nipper!" murmured the detective.

They broke through the bushes, and stood waiting in the gloom. When the train reached them it was moving at about ten miles an hour, and they both slipped silently forward. Almost simultaneously they scrambled on to the wide footboard, and crouched there, with their hearts beating fast.

But they had boarded the train! The footboards were extra wide, and very low. It would be possible to get from one end of the train to the other while it was travelling at full speed.

As the train-jolted along over the uneven track it gathered speed quickly, and was presently rocking and jerking in a most uncomfortable fashion. It seemed to the two Britishers that the speed was dangerous but probably the rocking of the train was due to the unevenness of the track.

Nelson Lee crawled along the footboard, followed by Nipper, until he arrived at the wide platform at the rear of the coach. A minute later the pair had pushed open a sliding door and were within the coach.

All was darkness. The detective produced something from his pocket, and a click sounded. A little beam of white light formed a patch on the floor, and upon piles of rough cases which filled the coach, almost to the very doorway.

One searching glance was sufficient for Nelson Lee, and he switched his light off.

"I suspected as much, young 'un!" he muttered tensely.

"What, gov'nor?" breathed Nipper. "I don't catch on!"

"This train is filled with ammunition—ammunition and guns!" said

the detective. "I can understand now why the usual passenger train was delayed. A fresh revolution is brewing, Nipper!"

"My stars!" gasped the lad breathlessly.

"That station-master, Gomez, was in the pay of the revolutionaries. No wonder he would not consent to our travelling by this train! It is carrying ammunition to Fanillo—or to a secret retreat close to the capital, I expect. If we are caught, my lad, things will go hard with us!"

"Why, we're doing no harm!"

"That is not the question," interjected the detective. "We are not supposed to be on this train at all. If we are discovered we shall be taken for spies—and very naturally. We are foreigners in this country, and utter strangers. By James, I never anticipated anything of this nature!"

"There's—there's going to be a revolution?" muttered Nipper.

"Undoubtedly. But if we are lucky we may be able to warn Castello of the plot."

"Who's responsible, sir—Alvarez?"

Nelson Lee was silent for a moment.

"I do not see how Alvarez can be engineering this affair," he said at length. "Alvarez has been away in England, and it looks to me as though some ambitious gentleman—probably a former statesman—is having a shot at driving Castello out of power. Whether this is so or not, however, it makes no difference. Our present position is far from being desirable."

Nelson Lee's guess was a shrewd one.

For the position was very much as he had outlined. Small republics such as Brazaguay cannot exist without revolutions and upheavals every now and again. The inhabitants of the South American "waistcoat-pocket" countries are excitable and fickle. They rather enjoy changes, and plot and intrigue seems to be a part of the daily life.

In this present instance President Castello's rival did not even have a sporting chance; but he could cause a lot of trouble and loss of life, nevertheless. His name was Jose Fernandez, and he had held the post of Minister for War in Carlos Alvarez's Government. When Castello had driven Alvarez out of power, he had also made a clean sweep of the Government.

Consequently, there were many men in Brazaguay who were the president's sworn enemies. And Fernandez laboured under the curious delusion that he was a kind of second Napoleon. In his own farcical way he engineered a revolution, and was confident of success. It was planned carefully and secretly; but, if things were allowed to take their course, Fernandez would find his calculations sadly at fault. His supporters were comparatively few—most of them being Alvarez's followers. Now that Alvarez had fled they turned their attention to his successor, Jose Fernandez.

Fernandez had secured a large consignment of ammunition, and, by bribery, had managed to get it packed on board this train. The ammunition was bound for a desolate spot within five miles of the capital. It would there be unloaded, and the final preparation for the attack on Fanillo would then be made.

But Fate, in the guise of Nelson Lee and Nipper, was to alter things considerably.

As the pair prepared to emerge from the coach, Nelson Lee suddenly gripped his young companion's arm. Quite distinctly they could hear voices above the rattle of the wheels. The voices came closer, and through the glass door Nelson Lee saw two men mount the platform from the foot-board.

One was attired in the usual dress of the country, but the other boasted a gorgeous uniform, the chief characteristic of which seemed to be an absurd

superabundance of gold braid and brass buttons. Apparently he was an officer of the Brazaguayan Army, and it seemed obvious that he was a traitor.

"Yes, they are all right," one of the men said, in Spanish, evidently in answer to a question. "They are both in the horse-box at the end of the train."

"It is well. Those horses are valuable," said the other. "Lieutenant Perlado and myself will need them to-night in order to reach Fanillo. It will be necessary for us to reach the barracks without being observed. For are we not faithful officers of President Castello's army?"

And the highly-uniformed individual laughed coarsely.

"What's the joke, gov'nor?" whispered Nipper.

"Nothing much," replied the detective. "One of these men is an officer of the Brazaguayan Army, and he is a traitor to his country. He has merely been talking about a couple of horses which are in a box at the end of the train."

Presently the two men turned, and quite abruptly the sliding doors of the coach was thrust open. There was not an atom of cover for the two intruders within. Nelson Lee and Nipper were revealed, and, strangely enough, the detective made no show of resistance, but crouched back with abject fear. Nipper took his cue at once, and followed suit.

"Carambo! What is this?" snarled the uniformed individual.

The other man gasped.

"I do not know, Captain Lorenzo!" he stammered. "Ah, by the name of a fiend! Gomez mentioned to me that two British dogs—a man and a boy—wished to travel by this train! They have managed to get in this coach unobserved! Dios! They may be spies of Castello's!"

Captain Lorenzo swore fluently in Spanish.

"Who are you?" he snarled, grasping Nelson Lee's shoulder roughly. "What are you doing on this train?"

The detective shook his head fearfully, and stuttered out a few words. Nipper covered his face with his hands and uttered a dismal wail. Lorenzo gazed at the pair furiously for a moment, and then his expression changed into a sneering smile.

"British, you say?" he asked. "By the heavens, they are proving to be a pair of cowardly hounds, at all events. Spies or not, they will not live to reach Fanillo with any information!"

"Carambo! What do you intend to do?"

"You, Juan, will remain here and guard this door," replied the captain fiercely. "The dogs cannot escape by the other exit, for there is no way clear. When the train stops in the gorge, these brave Britishers will be shot dead out of hand. We do not know who they are, and we cannot afford to let them escape."

"Why not shoot them now?" suggested Juan callously.

"I will leave the matter for Fernandez himself to deal with," replied Lorenzo curtly. "He will show no mercy, you may depend upon that!"

The captain turned to Nelson Lee and deliberately slapped the detective stingingly across the cheek. Nelson Lee was strongly tempted to treat the sneering scoundrel to a taste of British knuckles; but he refrained. The policy he was adopting was much the better one. He cowered back, and sank to his knees, whimpering for mercy. By this time Nipper was crouching on the floor with his face buried in his hands.

"Pah! The cringing worms disgust me!" snapped Lorenzo. "They will have something to be afraid of before long—when Fernandez orders them to

be shot! Your task of guarding them, Juan, will be a simple one. I do not think you will find it necessary to use your revolver!"

For several minutes longer the pair continued to talk, and then Captain Lorenzo made his way forward along the footboard. Juan was left to guard the prisoners. Nelson Lee had overheard every word, and he knew that if they remained on the train until it stopped in the gorge—wherever that happened to be—both he and Nipper would be stark and cold before daylight.

But Nelson Lee was quite easy in mind. By affecting sheer funk he had saved himself and his young companion from being either roped up or shot at once. He had no fears regarding the immediate future. When the time came he and Nipper would be able to overpower Juan with very little effort. His deception had caused Juan to think that he had nothing to fear from the prisoners; the man would discover his mistake before long!

At present Nelson Lee wished to think. The door was still open, and Juan stood against it, revolver in hand, smoking complacently. The train was rattling along at a fairly good speed. The detective dared not speak to Nipper for fear of causing suspicion.

After ten minutes had elapsed Nelson Lee had formed a plan—a daring plan. But he allowed the time to slip by without making a move. He reckoned that half an hour had already passed since the train had started from Cordoza. The train was travelling about thirty miles an hour—a good speed for such a fourth-rate system. Accordingly, fifteen miles had been covered.

Two hours later the situation was unchanged. The train was still rattling along, and Juan was still mounting guard over the abject prisoners. Once Captain Lorenzo had appeared with another uniformed individual, but they had departed again after a short discussion regarding the fate of the prisoners.

Tunnels had been passed through, gorges traversed, and plains crossed. But the situation was just the same—Nelson Lee and Nipper were still within the coach and Juan by this time had become somewhat careless. As a matter of fact, he chafed at having to remain there, and felt nothing but contempt for his charges.

But by now, although the night was still fairly early, the best part of the journey had been accomplished. On the whole, the train had made good progress—much better than Nelson Lee had anticipated. It had rushed through stations without halting, and had not stopped once.

But, according to Nelson Lee's calculations, Fanillo could now be no more than thirty miles away. From a few words he had overheard, he knew that the train would proceed to a spot about a couple of miles from a junction where this branch line ran into the main line. Here the ammunition would be unloaded in a gorge.

Twenty minutes later the detective nudged Nipper, and gave him a swift, meaning look. The lad understood. The time for action had arrived.

And action followed—swiftly.

Indeed, the happenings of the next few minutes were simply breathless.

Nelson Lee had chosen his time with care. The locomotive was hauling its load of coaches up a fairly steep incline, and was accordingly travelling at scarcely more than twenty miles an hour.

Without warning Nelson Lee leapt to his feet and grabbed at Juan's right hand, which carelessly held his revolver. The man was so taken by surprise that he had not even time to yell. The detective's fist crashed into his face, and the fellow staggered back and fell headlong off the train.

"He's settled!" rapped out Nelson Lee crisply. "Now, Nipper, everything depends upon speed!"

"Great Scott! We haven't wasted much time yet!" gasped Nipper.

Nelson Lee had had no compunction in acting as he had done. The train was not travelling fast, and Juan would only be stunned, at most.

Without pausing a moment the detective slipped across the end platform of the coach and descended to the footboard. Nipper followed his master closely. It was a fairly wide stretch from the footboard of one coach to the other, but it was accomplished with comparative ease.

The escaping prisoners made their way cautiously towards the back of the train, listening to the rattle of the wheels and the violent puffing of the engine as it laboured up the incline.

Apparently Captain Lorenzo and the other members of the train crew were forward, near the locomotive, for Nelson Lee and Nipper saw no sign of them. The detective was feeling elated. He and Nipper had never been prisoners at all, as a matter of fact—they had merely waited until this moment to carry out their plans.

At last they arrived at the end of the rear coach. Beyond this was a horse-box, jolting along fairly smoothly.

"You get on the box and crouch down!" ordered Nelson Lee briskly. "Leave the rest to me, Nipper!"

Nipper did as he was bidden without question. And while he crouched down he could see his master clinging on to one of the buffers of the horse-box. For two or three minutes Nelson Lee was busy with the coupling. It was old-fashioned and of a decidedly inefficient pattern—at least, gauged from a British standpoint.

At last Nelson Lee's object was accomplished.

He had uncoupled the horse-box from the rest of the train!

Being on an incline the effect was immediate. The horse-box slowed down at once, having no power pulling it, and the train itself forged ahead and left the box as though it were standing still.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Nelson Lee triumphantly. "I never hoped for such success as this, Nipper! We have not only escaped from the train, but we have a couple of horses here on which we can proceed to Fanillo without delay!"

But even as Nelson Lee spoke a series of shouts rang out from the train, which was now separated from the horse-box by a distance of a hundred yards. The shouts were followed by several spurts of flame and the resulting reports.

But it was too late!

The horse-box had ceased going forward now, and the sloping incline caused it to reverse. While Captain Lorenzo and his confederates were gazing furiously rearwards, the horse-box, with the two prisoners upon it, commenced moving with ever increasing speed down the long gradient!

CHAPTER VIII.

The Explosion—In the Nick of Time—Don Calleja Shows His Hand.

NIPPER declared that he would never forget that journey on the horse-box. Without a doubt both he and his master had an exceedingly exciting few minutes. With every revolution of the wheel the little coach increased its speed as it descended the long hill. The train itself was lost sight of almost immediately after those revolver shots had snapped through the darkness.

And the horse-box thundered on, roaring and rocking, with Nelson Lee

and Nipper clinging to it for dear life. The wind whistled past them fiercely, and, truth to tell, they both expected to visit Kingdom Come with startling promptitude.

But the horse-box stuck to the rail manfully, and raced downwards at a truly terrific speed. Nelson Lee knew that sooner or later, however, the coach would leave the rails unless something was done. At the bottom of the gradient was a curve. It was not a very sharp curve, but the detective was convinced that the horse-box would not negotiate it in safety. And to leave the rails at that speed would assuredly mean instant death for its human freight, and for the two horses.

So Nelson Lee wasted no time.

Below the footboard, on both sides of the coach, were hand-brakes, made for use only when shunting operations were in progress. But it was possible to apply them by the foot. Bidding Nipper to remain where he was, Nelson Lee managed, at the risk of his life, to reach the other side of the van.

Meanwhile Nipper was applying his brake. At such a speed it was a difficult task. But by clinging with his hands to some ironwork, he managed to lower his right foot until it rested upon the metal arm of the brake. With all his weight upon the lever the effect was instantly apparent. The brake-block shrieked on the wheel, and Nipper fancied he could feel a slight lessening of the appalling speed.

Less than a minute later the horse-box slackened its headlong flight considerably. Nelson Lee had got to work on the other side. The rest was merely a matter of time. Gradually, grunting and groaning as though in agony, the van slowed down, until at last it grated to a standstill.

As Nelson Lee leapt to the ground he cast a swift glance round him. The stars were brilliant, and it was possible to see a good distance in every direction. The country was desolate and bare, being rocky and almost treeless. The line they had just descended was out of view, for a pile of rocks hid it.

"My goodness, gov'nor, that was an exciting ride!" panted Nipper.

"Rather too exciting, young 'un!" replied the detective quickly. "I enjoy a bit of speed myself, but not under these conditions. But we're whole, and the next thing is to get away from the vicinity of the railway-track."

As quickly as possible they unfastened the doors of the horse-box, and managed to get the two animals out of the opening. They were both quite calm, for they had, of course, been unable to know anything of the danger which had threatened to crush them to pieces. It was short work to affix the large Mexican saddles, and, that done, Nelson Lee and Nipper mounted and galloped away. The ground rose slightly, and they came within sight of the long gradient down which they had roared so perilously.

Nipper suddenly gave a yell.

"The train, sir!" he roared. "It's rushing down straight upon the horse-box!"

Nelson Lee pulled his steed up and watched. He knew instantly what was happening. The train was pursuing the railway-van, evidently in the hope of catching it up on the incline which commenced round the bend. If the horse-box had been allowed to run on unchecked—and if it had managed to negotiate the curve—it would certainly have come to a standstill on the neighbouring incline.

Captain Lorenzo, furious at the prisoners escaping, was acting with reckless haste. He was sending the train flying down the hill, probably

thinking that the horse-box would be caught up with before the two Britishers could jump clear.

What happened next was unexpected and terrible. Owing to the curve and the pile of rocks those on the train could not see the horse-box standing stationary, full in their path. The consequence was disastrous. The train, rushing backwards, was unable to pull up in time to avoid a collision. Lorenzo saw the danger too late. He roared his instructions out, but the words were drowned by the rattling wheels.

Seeing that an accident was inevitable, Lorenzo and his companions jumped for their lives. The next moment the rear coach crashed violently into the horse-box, splintering it to atoms, and practically derailing the whole train.

Almost at once a fire broke out amongst the wreckage, and those on the locomotive, knowing the nature of the train's cargo, rushed away for their lives. At the first sight of the flames, too, Nelson Lee yelled out to Nipper, and the pair galloped away with all the speed the horses were capable of.

But hardly had they traversed a couple of hundred yards when a loud boom sounded behind them. It was instantly followed by three other tremendous explosions, and the whole ground shook and quivered.

"By heavens! That has settled things!" shouted Nelson Lee grimly. "The whole train-load of ammunition is blown to atoms, and the train itself is probably in a hundred thousand splinters—locomotive and all!"

"By Jupiter!" gasped Nipper. "What about Lorenzo and the others?"

"They may have escaped, or they may not. In any case, I do not care," replied the detective, as he galloped along. "They are traitors to their country—supporters of the villainous Alvarez—and their deaths will not be bemoaned by many. I have an idea, however, that they managed to escape before the explosions took place."

Nelson Lee glanced at his watch. It was fitted with a luminous-figured dial, and he could see the time instantly. It was only just ten o'clock, so the night was still young.

"It is really remarkable, Nipper!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "By boarding that train we not only save much time, but have been the means of foiling a murderous revolution against President Castello. Well, it now remains for us to ride to Fanillo, which lies, I believe, no more than twenty miles to the southward."

The detective consulted a compass, and the pair set their course accordingly. In that waste-land it was impossible to set their course by anything but the compass, for there were no roads and apparently no houses. The whole landscape was composed of uncultivated waste-land, covered with sun-scorched scrub and pampas grass. Here and there were piles of rock and groups of stunted trees. Cactus plants grew abundantly, but the horses instinctively steered clear of them, having had, probably, experience of their needle-like spikes.

After riding the best part of an hour the pair, to their great satisfaction, came upon a rough roadway. It was scarcely more than a track, but many wheel-marks proved that it was in daily use. And, after a fairly short gallop, a small village was reached.

The inhabitants were all asleep, but Nelson Lee did not hesitate to knock one of these worthy people up. Upon seeing the two well-dressed strangers, and upon receiving a liberal tip, the man was only too glad to direct the travellers to Fanillo. Whether it was the sight of the strangers, or the comfortable feel of the coins in his palm, that brought about the desired effect, was a question. Anyhow, very shortly afterwards Nelson Lee and Nipper were jogging steadily along with the knowledge that the capital was only fifteen miles distant.

The road improved as they progressed, and villages and houses were passed frequently. The aspect of the country changed, for it was here cultivated and well wooded. By the time Fanillo was reached midnight was long passed, but dawn was many hours distant.

Fanillo proved to be a fairly small settlement, but it was well-kept, and provided with brilliant street-lamps. It seemed like coming into civilisation to the two riders.

Nelson Lee had a suspicion that the revolutionary plot would come to a head before dawn. Captain Lorenzo would probably communicate with his chiefs, and the latter might decide to push the matter ahead with all speed. It was possible that the rebels had another stock of guns and ammunition, in addition to the train-load which had been destroyed.

It would be wise, in any case, to proceed straight to the palace and warn Don Guzman de Castello of what had occurred. With this object in view the great detective rode straight for the centre of the town. Here, surrounded by the public gardens, was situated the president's palace.

"We will go to the small rear entrance, Nipper," exclaimed Nelson Lee. "The front entrance will probably be guarded by many sentries, and I should say we shall gain admittance more quickly if we go to the private door. Besides, there will be stables round at the rear."

They rode into a paved courtyard at last. Everything was absolutely quiet, and not a soul could be seen. Indeed, since entering the two, the night arrivals had passed only a few people. And in the private parks surrounding the palace they had seen nobody at all.

Fanillo was asleep.

"Seems a dead-alive-sort-of-hole, sir," remarked Nipper, as he dismounted. "Phew! I'm aching like the very dickens, and I'm as hungry as a giddy hunter! I hope the president will invite us to supper!"

Leaving their horses standing in the courtyard, the pair looked round them for a moment, and then made their way to a low creeper-covered porch above which a dim light burned.

The next minute the two visitors received a terrible shock.

Lying on either side of the porch was a soldier. Both of them were motionless and in a huddled-up position. Almost at once Nelson Lee saw that the unfortunate fellows had been stabbed to the heart.

"Great heavens above! What has happened here?" asked Nelson Lee feverishly. "Are we too late, Nipper? Have Alvarez and Calleja already arrived?"

Nipper was too startled to reply. His master did some quick thinking. According to his calculations the enemy could not possibly have arrived until the following day. But there was a bare chance that they had done so. Alvarez's steam-yacht might be a much faster boat than she looked, and by travelling at full speed could have reached Elvasgo in time for Alvarez and Calleja to undertake their deadly work this very night.

The two murdered sentries were silent evidence of something of a startling nature.

"The poor fellows have not been dead many minutes," Nelson Lee exclaimed, after a short examination. "Come, Nipper, we must investigate this tragedy at once! I hope to Heaven we have not arrived only to find that our efforts have been in vain!"

They entered the porch and found that the door was just ajar. The detective was thinking deeply as he swiftly traversed a passage and mounted some stairs. If Calleja and Alvarez were indeed in the building, they had met with unexpected trouble, for the sentries were to have been two of Alvarez's supporters. Obviously this had not been the case, or they would not have been done to death.

The building seemed to be completely asleep. Corridor after corridor was traversed, until at last the front of the building was reached. Here everything was splendid—the carpets were soft, and the walls were hung with rich paintings and tapestries.

Nelson Lee paused to listen, and almost at once voices made themselves apparent quite close at hand. They were proceeding from a closed door on the other side of a wide landing.

Without hesitation, the detective slipped across to the door and stood listening. Then, without pausing, he flung the door open and strode into the apartment, Nipper at his heels.

A strange scene met their gaze.

In the centre of the room, under a strong light, stood a man who bore a striking similarity to Don Calleja. He was pale but calm. Facing him was Don Calleja himself and Carlos Alvarez. The former held a gleaming pistol in his hand, and it was plain that the two rogues had been taunting their victims before putting him to death.

Now, at this dramatic interruption, they twirled round with startled exclamations, and found themselves staring at Nelson Lee's own revolver.

"Hands up—the pair of you!" snapped the detective sharply.

"Madre de Dios—Nelson Lee!" snarled Alvarez amazedly.

Calleja did not speak. He lifted his hands and flung his pistol full at the president's face. It struck Don Guzman's forehead squarely, and he dropped to the floor with a gasp. Simultaneously Calleja dashed for the door with the speed of a deer. He dashed out, and before Nelson Lee could act Alvarez had followed. The door crashed to, and the key turned in the lock.

The whole incident had only occupied a few seconds. The enemy had acted so promptly that Nelson Lee had had no time to interfere.

With a muttered exclamation of annoyance he gripped the door and turned at it. But it had been built in preparation of revolutions! It was of solid oak, and the lock was almost strong enough for a safe. From the door Nelson Lee hurried over to the window and flung it up. But when he looked down he saw that a sheer drop of a hundred feet was below him. This side of the palace was built on the edge of a rocky precipice, at the bottom of which was one of the public footways through the park. It was impossible to escape by the window. From the spectacular point of view this corner of the palace, jutting out flush with the precipice, was all very well, but it had disadvantages to a man who wished to escape from an upper window.

"Confound it! The scoundrels have foiled us after all, my lad!" exclaimed Nelson Lee angrily. "But we have arrived in time to save Don Guzman, at least. Thank Heaven for that! Alvarez and Calleja will not travel far before they are captured, I am sure!"

As he spoke he turned to the window again and fired his revolver out into the night four times in quick succession. He wished the alarm to be given, and those revolver shots certainly had the effect of rousing the entire immediate neighbourhood.

But Alvarez and Don Calleja were not making their escape. What was actually occurring would have surprised Nelson Lee very much, could he have been a witness to it.

Once outside the president's apartment the precious pair of rogues realised that the game was up. But Don Calleja, the Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle, had come to Brazaguay for one purpose—and one purpose alone.

Finding that the plans had miscarried, he decided to act promptly.

And he acted so promptly that Alvarez was taken utterly by surprise. The ex-president suddenly found himself confronted by the muzzle of a deadly air pistol—the weapon which was to have caused the death of Don Guzman. The revolver which Calleja had flung at the president's head had been one of an ordinary pattern. The weapon now in his hand was, as Alvarez well knew, a hundred times as deadly as a commonplace revolver.

"You will obey my instructions to the letter!" said Don Calleja tensely. "I am desperate, my friend, and I will not hesitate—"

"Carambo! You are mad!" gasped Alvarez. "What is this, Calleja? I am not your enemy! I am not—"

"You are in a position to lead me to a certain chamber where lies the hidden hoard of a former President of Brazaguay!" said Don Calleja deliberately. "Ah, you are startled! Allow me to inform you, Senor Alvarez, that I have known your secret all along. You wished to become president again so that you could obtain the treasure which President Jose Sagana concealed so securely twenty years ago. Well, I am after that treasure, and I hold the trump card!"

Alvarez's face worked convulsively. He looked like a fiend, and his breath came in short quick gasps. His eyes were glittering almost with a live insanity. This shock, coming immediately after the other, was almost too much for him. But he pulled himself together with an effort; that deadly weapon pointing at his breast told him that Calleja was top-dog.

"You traitor! You foul brute!" he snarled pantingly. "Very well, I will do as you say, since I have no option! Curse you! You have beaten me at the last moment—at the moment of triumph!"

Alvarez turned and led the way down corridor after corridor. Finally, after descending a flight of narrow stairs, he was faced by a small door set flush with the wall, and almost invisible. He flung back two bolts and stood aside as the door opened.

"There!" he exclaimed gratingly. "There is the treasure chamber, you treacherous dog!"

Don Calleja started forward, for one second off his guard. The greed for wealth was in his soul, and he did not suspect the grim purpose in Alvarez's heart.

But that one moment was enough. With a curse Alvarez flung himself upon his companion and gave him a mighty push. Don Calleja hurtled through the open doorway, and a wild scream escaped his lips.

He dropped down—down! Alvarez had tricked him, and had turned the tables. The doorway led right out into the open air, and below was the precipice which Nelson Lee had seen from above. For sixty feet the ill-fated Governing Member of the Green Triangle dropped like a stone, and then his body struck the stone flags beneath with a dull, heavy thud.

His base treachery had cost him his life!

CHAPTER IX.

Calleja's Dying Words—Alvarez's Chance—Conclusion.

"I CANNOT express my gratitude, Mr. Lee. You have not only saved my life, but this revolutionary plot will now be quashed without delay. Before you arrived I had given up hope."

"I am indeed thankful that we appeared upon the scene in time to save

your Excellency," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I do not think there is much to fear. The two rogues will certainly be captured before dawn."

"And then I hope they'll jolly well be shot!" Nipper jerked out.

"You may be sure of that, my young friend," said President Castello calmly. "A shooting party will attend to the requirements of Alvarez and Calleja. Such hounds as those need to be dealt with summarily."

The president's injury was not severe. After a few minutes he had come to himself, and Nelson Lee had then bandaged the slight wound caused by the revolver-butt. Explanations had followed, and Don Guzman's gratitude was heartfelt. He was a gentlemanly ruler, with kindly eyes and well-moulded features.

"Ah, I think we are about to be released!"

Nelson Lee uttered the words as footsteps sounded out in the corridor. The next moment the door was opened and two officers in gaudy uniforms stood in the doorway. They were startled to see the president half-dressed, and with his forehead bandaged. And they were still more startled at the sight of Nelson Lee and Nipper, dusty, dirty, and obviously strangers.

Castello uttered a few words of explanation, and then was informed that a strange man was lying on the pathway outside, at the foot of the precipice, in a dying condition.

"The man wonderfully resembles your Excellency," proceeded the officer. "Carajo! For a moment we thought you had been killed!"

"Calleja!" rapped out Nelson Lee. "It is Calleja who is dying. I'll warrant Alvarez turned on his companion at the last moment. Let us hasten below at once!"

In less than five minutes the detective, President Castello, Nipper, and the two officers were down at the foot of the precipice bending over the form of Don Calleja. The latter was almost on the point of death, but his heart was filled with black rage against Alvarez.

"Have you captured that foul dog?" he gasped out. "Have you made a prisoner of Alvarez?"

"No," Nelson Lee answered. "He is at liberty."

"Then capture him and make him reveal his secret," croaked Calleja painfully. "Bah! I was a fool to embark upon this wild enterprise. But I didn't expect you to be in the game, Mr. Nelson Lee."

"I have nothing to say, Don Calleja," exclaimed the detective. "If any man deserves death, you do!"

"Why talk thus? I am dying, and I know it!" gasped the Spaniard. But listen; my sole aim in coming to Fanillo was to obtain possession of a treasure—Alvarez knows of it, and I thought I had him in my power. He tricked me!"

"What treasure?" demanded Nelson Lee sharply.

"A certain Jose Sagana ruled over this republic twenty years ago. He hoarded up a vast amount of wealth, and it is hidden somewhere beneath the palace. Carlos Alvarez knows the secret!" croaked Calleja faintly. "Make him reveal the whereabouts of—of—"

The dying man strove to speak distinctly, but his words jumbled into one another confusedly, and a minute later he fell back unconscious. Nothing on earth could save him, for in a few minutes he would breathe his last.

Even as he fell back a squad of soldiers marched up, and, to Nelson Lee's great satisfaction, he saw that Carlos Alvarez was a prisoner. It appeared that the ex-president had been captured while trying to make his escape at the rear of the palace.

He was marched straight into the building, and Don Guzman and Nelson Lee followed. Alvarez had nothing to say. He stood as though dazed,

overcome by the shock of his exposure. He knew well enough the fate which awaited him.

"Your confederate has met his deserts, and at your own hands," said Castello, with grim coldness. "Have you anything to say? Is there any reason why you should not be shot at dawn?"

Alvarez bit his lip, but remained silent.

"I did not expect you to display such courage," went on the president bitingly. "Carlos Alvarez, when dawn breaks you will be placed against a wall and will meet the fate you richly deserve!"

Nelson Lee stepped forward.

"May I make a suggestion, your Excellency?" he said, in a quiet voice. "There may be something in Don Calleja's story of a treasure. Why not give Alvarez a chance of his life?"

"The man shall die!" cut in Don Guzman firmly.

"Please hear me out. If you shoot him at dawn he will certainly not open his lips regarding the hidden hoard of Jose Sagana. Why not adopt my suggestion, your Excellency? Offer to give Alvarez his life on the condition he reveals his secret."

Don Guzman was certainly impressed, and after a short consultation he agreed. And Alvarez was only too glad to grasp at the straw. He willingly consented to reveal his secret, and did so at once. He knew very well that Nelson Lee would see that Don Guzman kept his word.

But nothing further was done that night. After a hearty meal Nelson Lee and Nipper retired to a very well-earned rest, and when they awoke the next morning they learned that the treasure was of great proportions. The president was highly elated, for Brazaguay was sorely in need of money. Don Guzman had many extensive plans in mind, but the republic was poor.

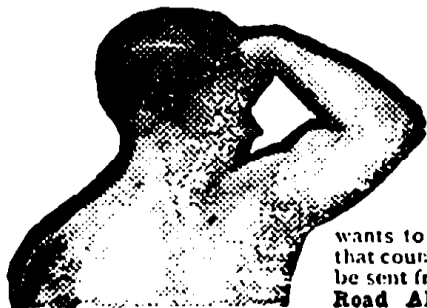
Carlos Alvarez was not to escape, however.

The president kept his word, and placed the prisoner under an escort to be taken to the frontier. But the populace of Fanillo were excitable people and the newspapers that day were filled with the story of Alvarez's plot.

Retribution descended upon the scoundrel's head swiftly.

A surging mob surrounded the vehicle in which he was being carried, tore him from it, and carried him away to a huge tree in the public park. There Alvarez was hanged. Don Guzman had kept his word, but his people had taken the matter into their own hands. And no man could say that Alvarez did not richly deserve his fate.

Several weeks later Nelson Lee and Nipper arrived back in good old London Town. Their visit to South America had not been in vain, for the plot against Don Guzman de Castello had been frustrated, and another Governing Member of the League of the Green Triangle had been dealt with as he deserved.



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In addition, the revolutionary movement, instigated by Fernandez, the former Brazaguayan statesman, was smothered promptly. The loss of the ammunition train had upset Fernandez's plans entirely, and the ambitious rogue fled the country in terror.

Some time after arriving back in London a letter came from South America. It contained a very acceptable cheque for Nelson Lee, and much information.

It was from President Castello, and he again expressed his gratitude for Nelson Lee's part in the affair. He also stated that the revealed treasure had been made use of in many ways for the good of the country. Nelson Lee passed the letter over to Nipper after he had perused it himself.

"Taking all things into consideration, the adventure has not turned out so badly," he remarked, as he lighted a fresh cigar. "We have received a splendid monetary reward for our services, Alvarez has met his fate, and another smashing blow has been dealt at the League of the Green Triangle. I think we may say, Nipper, that we have emerged from the tussle victorious."

To which Nipper replied, with emphasis, "What-ho!"

THE END.

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The Wrecker's Warning.

"ONE more load of ice, Hal, old son, and then up sails and away!" said Ben West, slapping his chum, Hal Forsyth, on the broad of his jerseyed back as the ice-blocks came thundering down into the hold of the Bonnie Jean while she lay alongside the quay. "No more rollicks ashore. Hard tack and salt water!"

"It can't be too soon for me!" said Hal Forsyth, giving himself a shake. "The spray on my face, an' the flappin' of big fat cod—that's what suits me. Shall we sail to-night, captain?"

Joe West, the skipper of the trawler, a big, golden-bearded giant, laughed. "You're as keen to get to sea as most folk is to get off it, youngster," he said. "But make your mind easy, we sail next tide. I've had nigh enough o' Grimsby myself."

Angus Grant, the young Scotsman who was mate of the Bonnie Jean, and Lloyd, the dark-haired, cheery hand who hailed from Cardiff, both chaffed Hal freely over his liking for the sea, and the boy grinned back at them, and set to work at shovelling the ice into the hold.

Hal was the only son of the late Macklin Forsyth, "Parson Mack," the captain of the North Sea mission ship, Helping Hand. In the two years of hard work and good living since he joined the Bonnie Jean Hal had filled out wonderfully. One would hardly have known him for the weedy youngster who first signed on. He was nearly eighteen now, tall and wiry, and quick as a cat aloft or on deck. But he was still a good deal below the weight of the skipper's burly son, Ben West, who was a year older.

"Hope we have a better trip than last time, Ben," said Hal, as the hatches were got on at last and the twilight began to settle down on the fishing harbour. "Cod were scarce enough, an' as for soles or turbot——"

"You'll have to try an' bring us a bit more luck, Hal," replied Ben, with a wink. "I dunno as you're quite the mascot you used to be; but——Hallo, who's this beggar? What's he want?"

A hoarse, raucous voice, quivering with passion, came down to them from the quay, far overhead.

"The black curse of Shieleggh on ye an' your trawler, too! D'ye hear, Joe West? Ye an' your cub of a son—an', abune all, that sneakin' brat, Forsyth! May ye hae foul winds in your teeth, an' the devil's weather!"

The crew of the Jean stared upwards, astonished at this outbreak. They saw a long, evil-faced man in dongarce kit and huge sea-boots, his black

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eyebrows almost meeting across his forehead, shaking a knotted fist at them and snarling like an angry dog.

"Where in Grimsby did that blow in from?" said Lloyd.

"Some drunken fool who's lost himself," murmured Hal, who was very bitter on the subject of drink. He had seen too much of it at sea and ashore.

"Ye'll get what ye desairve this trip!" cried another voice shrilly. It came from a sallow youth of about sixteen, standing beside the man with the black brows. "If the sea dinna gie it ye, we will ourselves, ye coppers' spies!"

"Why, it's Haggart Neil," said West, spitting contemptuously over the side, "an' his son, Simon! Brother to Black Jack Neil, of the Skua, who looted the Eaglet two year ago an' got a 'lifer' for it."

"Black Jack's brother!" exclaimed Hal. He remembered Jack Neil only too well, and many a fisherman rejoiced that the Dogger Bank was rid of him. Black Jack had been the leader of a gang who owned three fast trawlers, and did very little fishing when they could find any dishonest trade that paid better.

Hal had sailed under him once. Black Jack and his men had looted a trading-ketch far out in the North Sea—an act as near piracy as is ever done in these days—and had made a murderous attack on the Bonnie Jean and her men besides, as a private deed of vengeance. He had been brought to trial, and Hal had given evidence against him at the Assizes. The result was that Black Jack received a well-deserved life-sentence, and most of his men went to gaol as well, to the great benefit of all honest men. It was one of the ugliest affairs ever known at Grimsby.

"The curse of Shielegh!" screamed Haggart Neil again, dancing with rage at the contemptuous replies he had from the Jean. "May wind an' sea open your seams an' send ye to the crabs! Ye've put my brother away, an' spoiled the livin' for better men than yerselves! But ye've me tae deal wi' yet, and, I warn ye, remember it!"

"I thought we'd cleared the seas o' such scum as you," said Skipper West quietly. "Go away, an' don't be a fool, Haggart Neil! Curses come home to roost!"

"Ye shame o' Scotland!" said Angus Grant hotly. "We breed the best men ower the Tweed, an' it makes me sick tae think there should be sich as you as well! Tak' up your footsoles out o' this, or I'll maybe lay a rope's-end across ye!"

Neil replied with such a torrent of insults that Angus jumped to the quay ladder and began to run up it, Hal following after.

"Let's teach the foul-mouthed brute a little sense!" said Hal. "Come on!"

But Haggart did not see the point of waiting for the brawny young Scots mate. He and his son took to their heels with a parting curse long before the heads of the two appeared above the quay. The boy

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Simon stopped in his flight, however, and picking up a piece of iron bolt that lay on the ground, ran to the edge of the quay and hurled it with all his might at the pursuers who were scurrying up the ladder. The iron struck Hal on the forehead, and a stifled cry broke from his lips. He all but lost his hold, and swung on the ladder by one arm, the blood running down his face.

"Hold up, laddie!" cried Grant, flinging an arm round him just in time, for the boy was half stunned. Hal was helped down to the deck, and Ben West and Lloyd, hot with anger, rushed up the ladder and went in chase.

"The cowardly swabs!" cried Joe West, sponging down Hal's forehead with a piece of wet cotton-waste. "If the lad's harmed, I'll——"

"It's all right, skipper," said Hal faintly, for the blow had dazed him and his head was badly laid open. "Nothing to make a fuss about. I'll hope to meet that chap some day and settle up with him in a fair fight; only he don't look the sort that cares for that sort of thing."

He pulled himself together, and West, who was as handy as a surgeon, bandaged up his head, simmering with anger the while over the assault and the insults. Ben and Lloyd returned presently, and reported gloomily that the two Neils had made good their escape.

"I thought the little ruffian had brained you when I saw that lump of iron come home," said Ben. "Haggart Neil is startin' early!"

"I never heard of him till now," said Hal.

"He's been away on a whaling voyage. He's savage as a bear about the gang being broken up and his brother in prison. Natural, I reckon," said Lloyd.

"He's more savage still because his poaching and smuggling games are not likely to pay now we've cleared the Dogger of all that crew," put in West. "Looks as if he's sworn a feud agen us, like his brother did."

"If all he can do is to come muttering curses at us, we sha'n't take much harm," said Hal, grinning.

"I wish he hadn't put it on us, all the same," said Angus uneasily.

Hal looked at him in surprise.

"Why, you don't believe that sort of rot, do you?" he said. "It's all bunkum!"

Grant shook his head.

"Dinna ye make a mock o' the curse o' Shielegh, laddie," he grunted. "Ye wasn't born i' the Hebrides, like me. It's an unked thing to put on a man."

Lloyd, the Welshman, nodded his head in agreement, and a discussion broke out, the boys scoffing at the notion that a curse could harm anyone, especially from Haggart Neil. But Joe West cut the talk short.

"High water, lads! Out on deck an' get her under way! Let's get out o' this! You can turn in, Hal; you aren't fit to work with that head on you."

Hal refused to take sick leave, however, and took his share of the work with the rest, making light of his injury, which was not so bad as it looked. They cast off from the quay, and the brown sails of the trawler were hoisted. The Bonnie Jean was gliding out of harbour, when Ben touched his chum on the shoulder, and pointed to a long, low, black trawler lying at a buoy near the wharves.

"The Vulture!" he exclaimed. "She was one of Black Jack's vessels. Hal, look, Angus, there's Haggart Neil on her deck, and that little scrowcher, Simon, too! That's where they bolted to."

"Losh! I wunner where they raised the Vulture?" said Grant, frowning.

"Haggart must be sailin' her on his own now! They're gettin' her ready for sea. Skipper, will ye lay alongside an' let us tak' it oot o' them?"

"No!" said Joe West sharply. "I'll miss my tide for no man. Let them bide; we want no truck with such seum. If they cross our hawse for any mischief, let them look out. Ease off that main-sheet!"

"See the crowd they're got on her," said Ben. "Nine men. Never an honest trawler needed more than five."

He saw Haggart Neil shake a fist at them as they passed out of sight, and Hal elegantly put his fingers to his nose in reply, which was not good manners, but it expressed his feelings.

"We've nothing to fear from a swab like that," he said. "He's not the man his brother, Black Jack, was!"

Ben looked rather serious.

"Don't you believe it," he replied quietly. "Haggart ain't the big, violent blusterin' beggar his precious brother is, but he's dangerous. He's a sight more cunnin', an' I'd rather deal with the other one for choice. Still, I reckon he'll keep out o' our way, if he values his skin."

The wide Humber opened before them, and in a short time the Jean was past Spurn Head and breasting along over the swells of the North Sea. The land was soon out of sight in the darkness, and Lloyd took his trick at the wheel while the rest went below and laid in a piping-hot meal. They lived well on the Bonnie Jean.

Daybreak next morning found them on the Long Bank, eighty miles from land, and the great beam and trawl of the Jean went overboard and started its journey along the ocean floor. The luck had not been good lately, and at the end of two hours the trawl was hauled aboard and inspected eagerly.

The crew gave a cheer. The haul was a splendid one. Big green-backed soles, large codling, John Dories, and a host of other prime fish were soon flapping on the decks. There was hardly any offal among them. The next two hauls were equally good, and all hands were kept busy sorting and stowing the booty. For three days the Jean trawled steadily, following the fish away over towards the Dutch coast, and she took more big turbot than her crew had seen for many a long day.

"We shall make our fortunes at this rate, lads," chuckled Captain West gleefully. "Your old luck's come back, Hal."

"Yes," chuckled Hal. "The curse of Sheba, or whatever it's called, seem to have fizzled out—eh, Angus? We ought to pay Haggart Neil to con an' lay it on us every time we go out to sea."

They spoke a westward-bound trawler that day, whose captain told them that prime fish were making big prices in the Dutch markets. West despised foreigners, and said he would take his catch back to Grimsby unless he met a Billingsgate fish-carrier ship on the way. But that night the weather changed, the sun went down in lurid, sickly beams of light, mares'-tails streaked over the dun-coloured sky, and by midnight the Jean was hoys-to under trysail and storm-jib, facing a howling gale that raised a terrible sea.

"Didnæ I tell ye so?" said Grant, who feared nothing living, but had a strange dread of the Powers of Darkness. "Neil the Wrecker hasn't done wi' us. I wish I'd wrung his black neck before he put the curse on you."

(Don't miss next week's instalment of this grand new sea story.)