

NO. 44.—FOR READERS OF ALL AGES.—1^D.

Week ending
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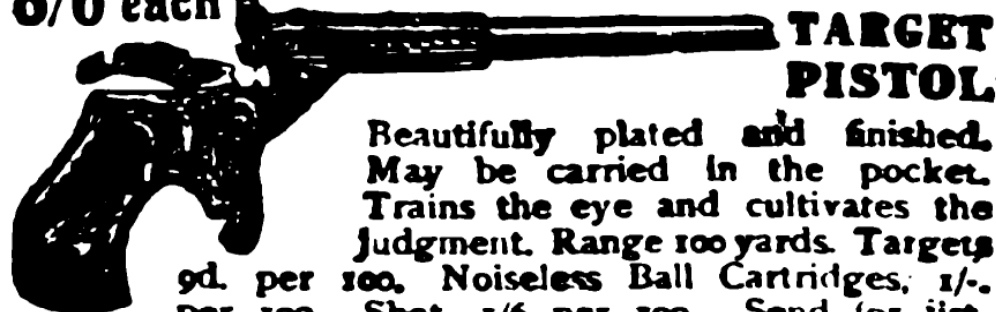
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CHAPTER I.

Sir Roger Hogarth’s Revelation—A Fruitless Visit.

THAT is the situation, gentlemen. Reluctant as I am to admit it, the League of the Green Triangle is on the downward grade. I put it thus bluntly in the common interest of us all—for it is necessary that you should know the exact truth. It is never a wise policy to conceal bad news.”

Professor Cyrus Zingrave ceased speaking.

He had been delivering a speech, and as he looked at the faces round him he saw that they were grave and troubled. Some, indeed, were expressive of alarm. For Zingrave’s speech had been the reverse of cheering.

The scene was a curious one. A fairly spacious room, with a rather low ceiling, from which numerous incandescent electric-lamps hung, delicately shaded, and casting their soft light upon a large table. Round the latter were many luxurious easy-chairs, and a number of these—not all—were occupied by gentlemen in evening-dress. Some were smoking and lolling back among the cushions; others were drawn up to the table. But all eyes were fixed upon the figure of Professor Zingrave at the table’s head.

The apartment was, in fact, the Governing Chamber of the League of the Green Triangle; and the men in evening-dress were all that remained of the Governing Circle. There were very many present, it is true, but the ones who had gone had been, for the most part, the league’s greatest and cleverest men.

Zingrave himself was undoubtedly the brains of the vast criminal organisation, but these Governing Members who had left this chamber, never to return, had been among his ablest lieutenants.

Where were they?

Even Zingrave, notwithstanding his undoubted genius, had informed the circle wrongly. He had declared that the absent men were victims of circumstances and ill-luck. But the real truth was very different.

This thinning-out of the Governing Circle was the direct result of a great

campaign against the Green Triangle; a campaign undertaken and executed by Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective. Many months had passed since Nelson Lee had commenced his grim labours—but the result was very apparent.

And Professor Zingrave did not suspect that Nelson Lee was the chief cause of the league's decline. He knew that the detective had been concerned in several league affairs; but Zingrave laboured under the delusion that Nelson Lee was as ignorant as Scotland Yard regarding the league. The official detective force were utterly in the dark—they knew nothing. Nelson Lee, on the other hand, had been supplied with information which placed him in possession of the Green Triangle's most cherished secrets. And, because of this secret knowledge, the detective had waged his war successfully and with terrible effect.

Zingrave was standing at the head of the table, resting the tips of his fingers upon the polished surface. His clever, clean-shaven face wore an expression of gravity and determination; and his strange eyes gleamed from behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. It was not often that the professor's dome-like forehead was wrinkled; but at present deep furrows lined the white skin.

"Yes, gentlemen, I have been perfectly frank with you," he went on, in his soft, silky tones. "The league is suffering—suffering severely from a series of great misfortunes. Our resources are getting low, and it is incumbent upon us all to look the facts in the face, and prepare ourselves—"

"Prepare ourselves?" interjected Edmund Gresswell, K.C., sharply. "Prepare ourselves for what? You are not anticipating a crash, Zingrave?"

The professor shook his head.

"A crash? Oh, no—not a crash!" he replied softly. "That would be the end of all things. A crash would mean the break-up of the league, and the exposure of us all. We must prepare ourselves for hard work—grim work—in order to place the league in a firm, secure position again.

"Recently several of our biggest and most ambitious money-making schemes have fallen to the ground. The result is that the position is— Well, the position is difficult. There is no danger, no fear of a collapse; but strenuous efforts must be taken to bring resources to our coffers.

"To mention only a few of our recent failures," went on Zingrave, "you will all remember Sir Gordon Hyde, and the money-making workshops which were situated on his island in Scotland? That island was blown to atoms deliberately, in a moment of extreme danger. The loss was irreparable, but the league stood it without flinching. Soon after that Mr. Austin Sheldon—one of our cleverest men—lost his life at Port Said. Then came the untimely death of Dr. Simeon Whitten, during the unfortunate land-slide on the south coast. Owing to that land-slide, and the consequent ruining of an extensive scheme, the league lost no less a sum than half-a-million sterling. That was a stunning blow, for many great plans of mine had to fall to the ground."

Sir Roger Hogarth grunted.

"A regular series of disasters," he exclaimed. "Luck has been cruel to us."

"But two other valuable Governing Members have perished since that fatal land-slide," went on Zingrave gravely. "I refer to Don Calleja and Mr. Dudley Foxcroft. Calleja went to South America on a big mission, and died out there—the league losing another good man, and benefitting not one penny. Foxcroft fell the victim to a sad accident near Swansea, quite recently, while attempting to secure some valuable plans. Had he

been successful we should have made a fortune. But, owing to an unkindly fate, he failed, and in Foxcroft I lost my right-hand man. The situation now is this: we must all work strenuously in an effort to stop the decline, and to bring fresh blood into the league. I have many splendid plans, but they all need capital—and capital, just now, is lacking. Sir Roger has news for us, I believe, and that is one reason why this meeting was called."

Sir Roger Hogarth nodded.

"I have important news," he said, rising. "May I speak now, Zingrave?"

The professor seated himself, and nodded.

The circle regarded Sir Roger interestedly. It was such an unusual thing for Professor Zingrave to make a pessimistic speech that the Governing Members were grave and sorely troubled. Hitherto they had been so secure—so hidden beneath their cloak of respectability—that they regarded exposure as impossible. Yet Zingrave had certainly hinted at a general break-up; and a break-up would be, as he had said, the end of all things for the league.

What was the project which Sir Roger Hogarth was about to lay before the circle?

The anxious men were soon to learn.

"What I am about to say will, I venture to think, be a very adequate answer to the professor's speech," commenced the rascally baronet. "I do not agree that the league is on the decline; and a plan I am about to suggest will provide a solution to the present financial difficulties. As you all know, I have lately returned from a visit to Ireland. It was while there that I made an important discovery."

"A discovery?" remarked Lord Sylvester.

"One that will be extremely profitable, if we go to work the right way," continued Hogarth. "As a preliminary I will just state the bare facts, and the splendid possibilities—leaving details until afterwards. While in Ireland I stayed quite close to the estate of Sir Terence Brent, a young Irish baronet, who has lately inherited the title. As I have said, I won't go into long explanations at present, and will tell you at once that on Brent's estate is a huge fortune. Unknown to him—and, indeed, unknown to a soul except myself and a league agent—his property contains an incalculably rich deposit of hematite."

There was a murmur.

"Hematite?" asked Lord Sylvester bluntly. "What is hematite?"

"A valuable mineral, commonly known as red oxide of iron," replied Sir Roger. "From secret investigations, which I caused to be made, I learned that the hematite contained in Brent's property is singularly pure, and very abundant. Brent is totally unconscious of the fact that his estates are not only valuable, but that a vast fortune is in his hands, waiting to be discovered."

Professor Zingrave nodded approvingly.

"Very excellent, so far," he commented. "But where does the league come in, Sir Roger? How do you propose we should possess ourselves of this property? We cannot go to Ireland and bring it away with us as though it were a priceless diamond."

"When you know all the facts you will realise how simple the whole thing is," said Hogarth, leaning forward. "We shall get this fortune in a perfectly legal manner; there will be no robbery, no risks. It will be perfectly straightforward and simple. You will say that it is one of the 'softest' jobs we have ever undertaken. Yet there is a big fortune in it."

"Perhaps it is too 'soft' to be really good?" suggested one of the men.

"Not at all," replied Sir Roger quickly. "Let me explain. This young baronet, Brent, is in a decidedly bad way—financially, I mean. He is quite poor, and consequently the estates are almost allowed to go to rack and ruin. Brent himself lives in London, in a fairly modest flat. He has not the slightest suspicion that his seemingly dilapidated and poor property is actually worth tens of thousands."

"Ah! You think he will sell?" asked Zingrave.

"I am sure of it. I intend to pay him a visit, and make him a substantial offer for the freehold of his estates. And once the land is in my possession—bought outright—it will not matter a jot if the truth concerning the hematite comes out. It will be too late for Brent to repent of his bargain."

Zingrave again nodded.

"Excellent!" he said smoothly. "Really, Sir Roger, if this is true——?"

"It is true! Indeed, I have not emphasised the value of the property enough."

"Then there is nothing in the way of success. Since Sir Terence is a poor man he will almost certainly jump at a good offer, and the plan has the splendid quality of being perfectly legitimate."

"That is why I am so optimistic about it," said Hogarth. "We are not penniless, gentlemen, and it will be a simple matter to finance the scheme. Before long the league will be reaping a rich harvest. Since Brent is too slow to discover the value of his own property, he will have no cause to grumble if a smarter man gets in first, and takes the fortune out of his hands. There will be nothing illegal in it—no roguery, no robbery. The whole scheme is straightforward."

"But suppose—suppose Brent refuses to sell?" asked Gresswell pointedly.

Sir Roger shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not anticipate that," he replied. "If, however, Brent refuses my offer, the league will have no difficulty in forcing his hand. He has got to sell—you understand, gentlemen? There is a fortune here, and we must gain possession of it. Let me repeat emphatically, that these mineral deposits are worth tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands! Brent has got to sell."

And then Sir Roger went into details; how he had discovered the hematite, and how extremely valuable Sir Terence Brent's estates were. At the conclusion of the speech, the Governing Circle were in much better spirits, and a resolution was firmly carried.

If Sir Terence Brent refused Hogarth's offer, there was only one course to pursue. The young Irishman would be forced to sell.

The meeting of the circle had taken place quite early in the evening, at the Orpheum Club—the league's headquarters. And, a little less than an hour later, Sir Roger Hogarth presented himself at Brent's flat, in the neighbourhood of Knightsbridge.

The young Irishman was at home. He lived quite alone, for he was an orphan, and the last of his family. Sir Terence was engaged to be married, but at present his financial position was not exactly favourable to his getting married.

Sir Roger's ring was answered by a stately old manservant—one who had been in the family since boyhood, and one who had accompanied his young master to London from Ireland. In a few moments Sir Roger was shown into a quietly furnished reception room. Here, seated in an easy-chair, was a tall, lithe, young man of about twenty-eight. He was clean-shaven, dark, with singularly expressive eyes of a deep brown.

He jumped to his feet and shook hands with his visitor cordially. He

had heard of Sir Roger Hogarth as a famous shipowner, but could think of no reason for this visit. The two baronets faced one another.

"I dare say you are wondering what has brought me here, eh?" said Sir Roger genially. "Well, I won't beat about the bush, Sir Terence. Just recently I have been in Ireland, and while there I had the pleasure of seeing your estates in County Tyrone."

Brent laughed.

"Not much pleasure, I should imagine," he replied. "The old house and grounds have been sadly neglected of late, and, to speak frankly, I am ashamed of them."

"Well, in a nutshell, the object of my visit is this: I am here to propose a sale," said Sir Roger. "Your property took my fancy, Sir Terence, and I want you to sell Brent Castle and the surrounding estates to me—for cash."

"By Jove! You want me to sell?"

"Exactly!"

"Rather a sudden proposition to lay before a man, isn't it?" asked Sir Terence. "I am afraid that your visit will prove fruitless——"

"My dear sir, pray do not be hasty. I require the freehold of your property, and I am willing to pay your own price," Hogarth hastened to say. "Name it—whatever it is—and you will not find me unreasonable."

Sir Terence smilingly shook his head.

"Sell Brent Castle?" he asked. "Heavens, what a thought! No, Sir Roger, it is impossible! I am sorry if you have been entertaining hopes that I would——"

"But this is a matter of business. I am prepared to make terms with you," interjected Sir Roger. "If it would not be impolite to say so, your property is in a sad state of neglect, and if I acquired it I would make drastic alterations without delay."

The young Irishman lit a cigarette.

"Brent Castle, I know, is in a lamentable condition," he exclaimed. "The castle itself is not so bad, but the estates have, for many years, been suffering from a lack of attention—and lack of funds. But Brent Castle is my home—the ancestral home of my forefathers. No, Sir Roger, I cannot entertain your proposal."

"That is final?"

"Quite."

Hogarth bit his lip beneath his moustache, but gave vent to a good-natured laugh.

"I am disappointed," he said. "I was optimistic enough to assume that you would be only too willing to sell the property for the high price I was willing to pay. But is your reason solely owing to sentiment?"

"Quite so. The estates are certainly of no value," replied Brent. "A considerable sum of money will have to be spent before the property becomes anything like decent again. But I intend to build up the old traditions of my family, and to make the Brent estate a profitable agricultural concern."

Sir Roger Hogarth nodded. Already his companion had said quite sufficient to prove that he knew nothing whatever of the valuable mineral which was hidden beneath the ground of the Brent estate. Very good. Since Sir Terence would not willingly consent to sell, other steps would have to be taken.

"I have no wish to be impertinent," remarked Hogarth, "but would it be out of place if I asked you how you intend to restore Brent Castle? It is a well-known fact—although it is hardly a nice thing to say—that your financial position is—well, precarious."

Brent laughed softly.

"You have hit it exactly," he replied. "At the present moment I am almost a beggar. Therefore it seems curious to you that I should refuse your offer?"

"Very curious indeed. I thought we should come to an arrangement immediately. And since you are almost a beggar, where do you propose to get the necessary means from to carry out your programme? I should have thought the easiest way out of your difficulties would have been to sell the property."

"I will explain, Sir Roger," answered Brent. "You may have heard that one of my really valuable possessions is a racehorse—none other than the famous Blue Diamond. My father was a great racing man—and, incidentally, he left this world practically penniless, and with the family property neglected and worthless. But Blue Diamond is mine; and all my hopes are centred upon the horse."

"I've heard of the racer, of course," said Sir Roger. "But even the high price the animal will fetch will not make your way clear."

"You mistake me. I am not proposing to sell Blue Diamond," said Sir Terence quickly. "The horse is a marvellous racer, and is first favourite for the Shire Cup—the race for which will be run at Oldmarket at an early date."

"Ah, I begin to understand."

"I am absolutely confident that Blue Diamond will romp home a winner, and I am staking every farthing I possess on the horse. With the winnings, which will be considerable, I intend to marry and settle down at Brent Castle. Quite simple, isn't it?"

"Exceedingly so. But has not one point escaped you?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Suppose—just suppose—that Blue Diamond should lose?" said Sir Roger pointedly.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I have never allowed myself to suppose anything so improbable," he replied. "I am as confident as it is possible for a man to be that Blue Diamond will turn the tide in my fortunes. But if, as you suggest, the horse fails me, I shall be utterly and completely ruined. What little money I do possess will be gone. My marriage will be out of the question, and Brent Castle will know me no more."

Sir Roger's eyes narrowed.

"I trust nothing so unfortunate will come to pass," he exclaimed. "But this is a world of uncertainties, Sir Terence—and horse-racing is a decidedly uncertain pastime. I should not advise you to be too confident."

"No doubt your advice is sound, but I am, nevertheless, exceedingly confident," replied the young Irishman. "Of course, if Fate does decide against me I shall be forced to abandon all my plans. And Brent Castle, and the estates, of course, will have to be sacrificed."

Sir Terence rose to his feet.

"So keep your eye on events," he laughingly concluded. "If Blue Diamond does not win the race for the Shire Cup you are perfectly at liberty to approach me again. I shall then be quite ready to discuss your proposal, and my ancestral home will pass into your hands."

"I sincerely trust that your hopes will be fulfilled."

"If it were possible to stake my life upon Blue Diamond I would do so without a second's hesitation," said Brent. "That will give you some idea of my overwhelming faith in the horse. I do not anticipate defeat, Sir Roger, because I know it is practically impossible for defeat to come. Your chances of ever possessing my estates are about a thousand to one!"

A few moments later the two men shook hands. Sir Roger Hogarth was good-humoured and cordial, and took his failure with the best of spirits. He gave Brent the impression that it was really of no importance whether the deal was transacted or not.

But as Sir Roger was bowling towards the Orpheum Club in a taxi, his expression was very grim, and he softly slapped his knee.

"There is only one way," he muttered grimly. "If Blue Diamond wins the race all chance of gaining possession of the Brent estates will be gone. Therefore, the matter is quite simple. Blue Diamond must lose!"

CHAPTER II.

The Telephone Call—Nipper Receives Instructions—He Gets Busy.

"HALLO! Well, what is it? Yes, I am Nelson Lee."

"Oh, I'm glad you're in, Mr. Lee. I'm M. C."

"Oh, it's you, Caine?"

"Yes, sir. And I've got a little piece of information which you might care to follow up."

Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed for a moment. The famous detective was standing in a small cupboard, in almost total darkness, with the receiver of a telephone to his ear. It may be thought that a dark cupboard was rather a curious place for a telephone instrument to be fixed.

As a matter of fact it was a curious place—but this was a curious telephone. It was a private instrument, and the wire merely led from Nelson Lee's rooms in Gray's Inn Road to an attic several doors away. It was very seldom used, and then only by one man.

That man was Martin Caine, a controlling agent of the League of the Green Triangle. He was one of Nelson Lee's most faithful assistants, and had, on occasion, provided the detective with information which had led to the downfall of more than one Governing Member. In spite of his apparent loyalty to the league, he was actually working against the terrible organisation.

It was necessary, when imparting news to Nelson Lee, to exercise the most stringent precautions. Accordingly, Caine seldom visited the detective, but usually rung him up by means of this private wire—having previously disguised himself before venturing near the vicinity of Gray's Inn Road. The spies of the league were so numerous that Caine could not possibly be too careful. The precautions he did take, however, effectually rendered his movements fairly safe.

Being a controlling agent—that is, a man who received orders from the Governing Circle to pass down to the ordinary working members—he was in a position to impart information of the most vital nature. On this occasion, however, his news was somewhat scanty.

Nelson Lee never under-estimated the value of Caine's assistance.

"Well, what is your news to-day?" he asked softly.

"Nothing very much, sir," came the whispered reply across the wires.

"But there might be more to follow, so I thought I'd prepare you. There's some big scheme about to be launched against Sir Terence Brent."

"Ah! The young Irish baronet—owner of the racehorse Blue Diamond?"

"Yes, sir. The plot concerns the horse."

"Dear me! Roguery connected with the Turf," murmured Nelson Lee, into the receiver.

"That's it, Mr. Lee—and pretty deep roguery, too, I believe," replied

Caine. "I can't say, at present, what game is afoot, but this much I do know. Blue Diamond is in training at the stables of Mr. Rupert Mitchell, at Oldmarket, and the league means mischief. The horse is favourite for the Shire Cup, sir, and there's going to be some foul play; pretty dirty work, I believe."

"Can you give me no details?"

"None, sir."

"You have told me all?"

"All I know at the present," replied Martin Caine. "I think it is very probable that I may know more to-morrow, when I receive the circle's orders. But I thought it would be better to give you a word of warning."

"Very sensible of you, Caine," said the detective. "You will let me know, then, what the game is as soon as you receive fuller information?"

"I think you can rely on me, sir, to do my best."

"Of course. You are a splendid fellow, Caine. One day you will be amply rewarded for all the risks you are taking in assisting me in my campaign against the dreaded league."

A few moments later Nelson Lee, having rung off, walked slowly out of his bedroom—in which the secret telephone was situated—and entered his consulting-room, absentmindedly sucking away at his empty pipe. His brow was wrinkled, and his steely eyes were very thoughtful.

"Hallo, gov'nor, what's the trouble?"

Nelson Lee took no heed of the query. It had been voiced by Nipper, the famous detective's astute young assistant, who was lolling luxuriously in one of the easy-chairs.

"Struck dumb, sir?" went on Nipper genially. "My hat! You look as though—"

"Oldmarket!"

"Eh?"

"Get ready, young 'un!" rapped out Nelson Lee crisply. "You've got to start for Oldmarket immediately. Do you hear, you young rascal? Don't stand there gaping! Move yourself!"

"I've got to go to Oldmarket, gov'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"My dear lad, do you want me to repeat it? But perhaps I'd better tell you what Caine has just rung up for—you'll have to know, anyhow. Merely as a precautionary measure I have decided to send you to Oldmarket to keep an eye on Blue Diamond until I know fuller details of the game."

Nipper looked somewhat excited.

"A jewel robbery—eh?" he said quickly. "So the league's on that lay again—"

"Jewel robbery!" roared the detective. "Who said anything about jewels?"

"You did, sir. I've got to watch some blue diamonds—"

"You young idiot!" snapped Nelson Lee. "Blue Diamond is a race-horse!"

"Oh, crikey!" grinned Nipper. "How was I to know that?"

"Well, you know now, don't you?"

And the great crime investigator lost no time in giving Nipper his instructions. The lad listened eagerly to the news which Caine had imparted.

"It is quite possible that this is merely the opening which will lead to another important case," said Nelson Lee. "In any case, I intend to act at once—there is nothing like being prepared. Let us hope our efforts will result in the downfall of another powerful Governing Member."

"But where do I come in, sir?"

"As I have already said, you will at once proceed to Oldmarket," replied

the detective. "It is still early in the day, and you have heaps of time to get there long before evening. Do your best to obtain employment in the training establishment of Mr. Rupert Mitchell——"

"Suppose I can't, gov'nor?"

"Then wire me the position. But if you do manage the trick, simply keep your eyes well open, and let them be directed particularly towards Sir Terence Brent's horse, Blue Diamond. See that no harm comes to the animal; for I suspect pretty grim mischief, from what Caine told me. You are going to Oldmarket to act as a kind of watchdog over the horse until I give you further instructions."

"Thanks for calling me a dog, sir!" grinned Nipper. "Right-ho! I'll go and get togged up for the giddy part. I pride myself that I can handle gee-gees quite as well as most jockeys—and a dashed lot better than some!"

"Oh, yes; you'll be able to take care of yourself all right!"

"Rather, gov'nor!" Nipper replied. "And if we ever have a split—a merry bust-up, I mean—I shall easily be able to earn my living by riding gee—— Whoa! Oh, crumbs!"

Nipper fled as Nelson Lee suggestively lifted his slippered foot. Twenty minutes later the lad reappeared, but there was a vast change in him now. He was attired in riding-breeches and a check coat and vest; his cap was one with a large peak, and a horseshoe tie-pin reposed in his scarf. Altogether, Nipper had a decidedly "horsey" appearance.

"Well, gov'nor, what's the verdict?" he asked. "Everything O.K.?"

"Splendid, young 'un!" replied Nelson Lee approvingly. "I'll warrant Mr. Mitchell will take you on at once. You look an exceedingly smart stable-boy, and almost unrecognisable as your own self. Certainly, the disguise is quite sufficient."

"Good enough, sir."

And, very shortly afterwards, Nipper took his departure. He arrived at Oldmarket without incident, and found the famous racing town somewhat quiet in comparison to London. It was not a race day—otherwise he might have found Oldmarket a little livelier than the metropolis!

He made his way through the town to the heath. His attention was at once attracted by a group of racehorses being taken out for exercise. They were in charge of a short, stoutish individual, and several stable-boys.

In the distance Nipper could see the training establishment of Mr. Rupert Mitchell. The house was a good-sized one, with a great length of stabling to the rear, a number of paddocks, and the staff's quarters.

For a moment Nipper thought of proceeding direct to the training stables; but decided, finally, to watch proceedings on the heath.

Accordingly he strolled nearer, and stood looking on with keen interest. He wondered who the man was, and thought it decidedly probable that he was Mitchell, the trainer, himself.

As it chanced, he knew for certain a moment later, for one of the young jockeys cantered near to him. The lad was mounted on a restive two-year-old, and he seemed to find a difficulty in holding the horse in hand. The stoutish man called something to him, and he turned.

"All right, Mr. Mitchell, I've got the beggar under control!" the stable-boy shouted. "He seems to be gettin' a bit wicked lately—— Whoa! steady, you brute!"

The two-year-old, high-mettled and fidgety, suddenly started off at a canter, and then swung round, cannoning into a cantankerous racer, who seemed to be giving his rider a considerable amount of trouble. The latter horse reared up viciously, with a decided display of bad temper.

The lad in the pigskin was unprepared for the sudden move, and the

next second he was sent flying, and only just scrambled to his feet in time to grab the reins and prevent the horse careering off.

"Under control, eh?" roared Mr. Mitchell. "You're a young fool, Packham! See what you've done to the Darkey! Hold him, Miles! You young duffer—— Bah! What's the good of a crowd of nincompoops like you! There's not a sound horseman among the lot of you!"

Miles, the youngster who was now at the head of the Darkey, muttered something under his breath, and glared at Packham, on the two-year-old. The latter moved off, however, and Miles prepared to jump into the saddle again. Nipper saw at a glance that the Darkey was rather more than a handful for the unfortunate Miles, who seemed to be a somewhat nervous lad. And nerves, where racehorses are concerned, are of no use whatever.

Nipper strolled nearer.

"You want to be a bit firmer with him, old son," he said genially. "It's no good being funky. Show him you're the master, and he'll knuckle under like a good 'un. Just let me hop across him——"

"You mind your own affairs!" growled the jockey ferociously. "I don't want your rotten advice, you outsider! Sheer off before you get hurt!"

Nipper grinned

"Sorry!" he said. "I only thought——"

"Shut it! We don't want your sort here!" cried Miles. "Clear off, j'hear?"

Mr. Mitchell trotted up, mounted on a staid old mare.

"What's this?" he exclaimed sharply. "Is this young fellow interfering with you, Miles?"

"Yes, sir He——"

"Steady!" interjected Nipper. "I didn't interfere. I only gave you a bit of jolly sound advice."

"Who the dooce are you, anyway?" demanded the trainer.

"Oh, nobody in particular, sir!" replied Nipper coolly. "Name's Mike Tracey—Mike for short. I thought you might want a good stable-lad. I'm not one for boasting, but I'll soon show you what I'm worth if you let me get into the saddle of the Darkey. He needs mastering, he does!"

"Oh! So you fondly imagine that you can master him—eh?" asked Mitchell sarcastically.

"I don't ask you to take my word, sir. Let me have a shot, and see for yourself!"

"Dashed lot of swank!" growled Miles. "The chap couldn't ride a donkey!"

The trainer regarded Nipper uncertainly for a few seconds. The lad certainly looked a cool card as he stood there, smiling amusedly, and carelessly chewing a straw. Mitchell saw at once that Nipper was sturdy and strong, and obviously possessed of heaps of self-confidence.

"You want a trial, boy?" asked the trainer abruptly.

"That's all, sir."

"Well, I won't send you off until you've shown what you can do. Hold the Darkey firm, Miles, and let this youngster get into the saddle. If he isn't any good he'll be flat on his back in two seconds."

Mitchell was smiling slightly, and it was obvious that he expected his words to come true. He had had much experience of boasters, and thought that Nipper was a member of that vast fraternity. But Nelson Lee's shrewd assistant was well aware of his own capabilities, and one glance at the Darkey was enough for him. He had tamed worse horses than this cantankerous chestnut.

"Thank you, sir!" he said briskly. "It'll take more than two seconds to have me on my back, I can tell you."

Miles scowled, but there was a certain cruel look of anticipation in his eyes. He, too, was of the same opinion as his master. He held the Darkey's head while Nipper leapt lightly and easily into the saddle—Nipper having previously possessed himself of the jockey's whip.

"Now then, let go!" ordered the trainer.

Miles did so, and backed away hastily. The Darkey was well aware that a stranger was on his back—he knew it instinctively, if not by sight. And he apparently set himself out to be as vicious and obstinate as he knew how.

For instantly he reared up until he was almost perpendicular. Miles grinned delightedly, expecting Nipper to slide off ignominiously. But the lad was quite at home, in spite of the difficulties of his position.

"So that's your game, you brute!" muttered Nipper. "My hat! We'll soon see!"

He set his teeth firmly. Curiously enough, at that moment he was thinking of the lad Miles, and he vowed to himself that he wouldn't give Miles any opportunity of having the laugh over him.

These thoughts flashed through his brain in a second, as the Darkey was rearing on his hind legs; and Nipper acted promptly. He slipped his feet from the stirrups and gripped the pigskin tightly with his knees. Then he brought the butt of his whip down fairly forcibly between the horse's ears.

The Darkey reassumed his normal position quickly, but almost immediately commenced the same tactics over again. But as he was in the act of rearing Nipper clubbed him once more. The Darkey lashed out furiously, arched his back, and did his very utmost to unseat his rider.

Nipper, however, was not at all in danger. Mr. Mitchell watched approvingly, nodding to himself with satisfaction. Experienced as he was, he saw at once that this strange lad was perfectly at home. Miles was scowling now, for it would have given him intense pleasure to see Nipper discomfited.

Nipper was sitting well back, holding the reins tightly. And every time the Darkey kicked Nipper gave him a touch of the spurs. It was a struggle between the vicious horse and the cool lad, and Nipper was quite enjoying himself. The racer used every means in his power to unseat his cool rider. He kicked, he reared, he pranced about with helpless fury. Nipper, indeed, found the horse more of a handful than he had anticipated. He could understand why the nervous Miles had been unable to hold the animal in check.

At last, giving it up as a hopeless task the Darkey gripped the bit between his teeth and bolted.

Across the heath he careered, and Nipper grinned cheerfully. He knew now that it was only a matter of time before the horse would be subdued. When his fury had exhausted itself he would be as meek as a lamb.

Nipper enjoyed that wild ride immensely. He swayed to and fro with graceful ease as the Darkey galloped madly along. He gave the horse his head, and for several minutes the pace did not slacken. When, however, the Darkey did show signs of tiring Nipper spurred him on relentlessly. It was an unpleasant shock for the racer to find that he was unable to do just as he pleased.

Nipper came round in a wide circle, still maintaining the killing pace. Probably the Darkey would have been quite willing to submit now; but

Nipper had no intention of obliging him. The animal needed a lesson; and he was certainly receiving it!

With his chest flecked with foam, his ribs heaving, the Darkey was compelled to gallop homewards. All the fury had left him now, and he was quite tamed. Nipper had seen at once that nothing was required but firm handling. Finally a touch of the reins was quite sufficient. The Darkey was only too pleased to come to a stand still, quivering and steaming, after his strenuous exertions.

Mitchell was close by, and there was a queer look in the trainer's eyes as Nipper lightly dismounted and stood beside the subdued animal, with no sign of triumph or "swank" in his manner. The lad gazed into the animal's eyes, rubbed his nose, and patted him affectionately.

"I reckon you know who's master now, Darkey, my son!" he said cheerfully. "You only wanted the nonsense knocked out of you!"

He gave the reins a slight touch, and the Darkey meekly followed him to Mitchell's side. Miles had now changed his expression; in spite of himself the young jockey could not keep the admiration out of his eyes.

"Well, you ain't such a duffer, after all!" he grunted.

"Duffer!" ejaculated Mitchell. "This lad's no duffer! He's shown you a few points it won't do you any harm to learn, Miles, my boy. The Darkey's been needing a lesson for some time, and now he's had it."

"Well, boss, is there any chance for me?" asked Nipper quietly.

"Consider yourself engaged," replied the trainer promptly. "You're just the sort of lad I wanted. Trot the Darkey back home, and we'll discuss the terms later."

And thus, merely by an exhibition of good horsemanship, Nipper obtained the post he required. He was installed as a stable-boy in the training establishment of Mr. Rupert Mitchell—according to Nelson Lee's instructions.

But, so far as Nipper could see, there was no evidence of any kind that the League of the Green Triangle was at work. Before dark Nipper located the loose-box of Blue Diamond, and he managed to catch a glimpse of Sir Terence Brent's famous racehorse.

Exactly how Nipper was to guard the animal he hardly knew. But he had received his orders, and he was resolved to carry them out. He was at Oldmarket to watch over Blue Diamond, and to see that the racer came to no harm.

But, in a famous training stable like this, from whence could harm come? Nipper didn't know. Probably the game hadn't started yet—but when it did, he would be quite ready and prepared to play his part.

By nightfall he was feeling quite at home. He got on well with his fellow stableboys, in spite of the fact that he was—at first—regarded as an outsider. But his cheery nature and genial tongue soon won him many friends. It was quite a change for Nipper, and he was enjoying himself immensely.

But there was one anxious thought constantly in his mind.

What was the league up to, and when would the real work commence?

CHAPTER III.

A Conference—A Dastardly Scheme—Mitchell Enters the Plot.

LORD SYLVESTER nodded.

"I understand, Hogarth," he said. "What you said at the meeting of the Circle supplied me with all the facts, and your explanation now is perfectly clear. Since Brent refuses to sell his estates

there is only one course open for the league to adopt. Blue Diamond must lose the race!"

"Precisely," said Sir Roger Hogarth.

"Rather a ticklish job, isn't it?" went on the scoundrelly racing peer, thoughtfully examining the end of his cigar. "Everything will have to be done in secret, and no suspicions will have to be aroused. Blue Diamond is training at Mitchell's place, and it's no easy matter to get at the horse

"We mustn't get ahead too fast," interjected Sir Roger. "This matter has got to be discussed slowly and deliberately. If there are difficulties in the way, well, we must overcome them."

The two men were seated in a cosy "den" in Lord Sylvester's country mansion, on the outskirts of Oldmarket. Sylvester was a famous racing man, and one of the most popular figures of the Turf. Genial, bluff, and good-tempered, he appeared to be one of the most harmless men on earth. Those who knew him liked him, and he was welcomed everywhere. Certainly the real truth was never suspected.

And the truth was just this: Lord Sylvester was a clever, cunning man, in spite of his apparent innocence and good-heartedness. He was one of the league's most influential Governing Members, and his numerous coups added much grist to the league's mill. What these coups were need not be explained; but all were connected with the Turf, and all were of vast proportions. Large sums of money are synonymous with horse-racing, and Sylvester was constantly arranging fresh "deals." His very popularity and high position rendered him utterly immune from suspicion.

There was only one man—outside the Green Triangle—who knew Lord Sylvester for what he was worth; who knew that the peer was often engaged in decidedly "shady" transactions. And that man was Rupert Mitchell, the trainer.

But his knowledge was of no use to him; on the contrary, he was entirely in Sylvester's power. The latter found Mitchell very useful on occasion, and he had no fear of the trainer betraying him. For Sylvester was quite aware of certain villainous schemes which Mitchell had indulged in, and a single word from the peer would have ruined the trainer utterly and completely. The two men understood one another, and had no fear of betrayal.

"Blue Diamond has got to lose," murmured Sylvester musingly. "The horse is a wonder, Hogarth. I've received inside information—and I know. There'll be nothing in the field to touch him."

"Your own horse, Speedwell——"

"Speedwell is a splendid racer," interrupted Sylvester, "but he simply can't hold a candle to Blue Diamond. Brent's horse will win hands down—if it's allowed to. That's why the man's so confident. Speedwell is second favourite, and I honestly believe my horse will romp ahead of all the rest, barring Blue Diamond."

"You're backing Speedwell, of course?"

"Heavily. Jove, if he won I should rake in a pretty pile!"

"If Blue Diamond loses, Sylvester will certainly win."

"I'm sure of it," replied Sylvester. "All the rest will be nowhere. But how can we work the business? You say that Blue Diamond must lose—I wonder——"

"You wonder what?"

"Wait!" said Sylvester. "Let me think, man!"

He lay back in his chair with puckered brows, Sir Roger watching him curiously. When at last Lord Sylvester spoke again his face was somewhat flushed, and his voice a trifle low. He drew his chair closer to Hogarth's.

"I've thought of a plan," he exclaimed softly. "It is quite simple—"

and success will be certain. And it has this advantage; nobody will know that anything is wrong, and the price will not be altered. I shall back Speedwell for all I am worth, and the odds will be such that I shall rake in a fortune. Not a soul will suspect that Blue Diamond will lose until the race actually takes place—and then it will be too late. If you want to make a pile, Sir Roger, back Speedwell!”

“I am not concerning myself with Speedwell,” said Hogarth. “Whatever fortunes can be made out of racing, the real prize is Sir Terence Brent’s estate. Blue Diamond must lose in order to make Brent sell his property.”

Sylvester nodded.

“My scheme cuts two ways,” he replied. “We shall be making money in two directions. If Blue Diamond loses, Speedwell will win—for those two horses are the only decent animals entered. The fact of Brent’s horse losing will compel him to accept your terms, and will assure Speedwell’s triumph.”

“Quite so. But you have not explained how——”

“Give me time—give me time!” interjected the other. “Now, listen!” And in a low voice, he outlined his plan. Sir Roger listened interestedly, nodding from time to time. Finally, the two men shook hands, and Hogarth slapped his knee with satisfaction.

“Splendid!” he exclaimed. “Failure is almost impossible. But——”

“But what?”

“It is necessary, for the success of our plan, to bring Mitchell into our confidence. Do you think the trainer is to be trusted?”

Sylvester laughed.

“Mitchell has no choice,” he said shortly. “He is in my power, and he dare not refuse. Have no fear on that score, Hogarth. Mitchell will cause no trouble.”

The peer rose to his feet and crossed to a telephone. Having given the number required, he looked at his companion.

“May as well settle the thing right away,” he remarked. “Time is getting short, and we must not delay—— Hallo! Ah, is that you, Mitchell?”

“Yes,” came across the wires. “Who’s that?”

“Sylvester.”

“Oh! Anything I can do, your lordship?”

“Yes; you can come over to the Manor at once,” said Lord Sylvester. “I have urgent business to discuss, Mitchell. Can you come now?”

“At once, my lord.”

And, in less than half-an-hour, the trainer’s somewhat portly form was ushered into the apartment. He found Sylvester alone, for Sir Roger Hogarth had no wish to be mixed up in the transaction—there was really no reason why he should be. Sylvester was quite capable of dealing with the situation.

Having seen that the door was securely closed, Lord Sylvester seated himself close to his visitor, and touched the latter’s knee. Mitchell was looking somewhat uneasy; probably he had an inkling of what was coming, for Sylvester’s manner was suggestive.

“Now, Mitchell, I want to talk quietly to you,” began the peer. “I don’t intend to beat about the bush, but will get straight to the point. Sir Terence Brent’s horse, Blue Diamond, is being trained at your stables, I understand?”

“Yes, that’s right, my lord.”

“Between ourselves, Mitchell, Blue Diamond is practically a cert for the Shire Cup? My own horse, Speedwell, doesn’t stand an earthly chance, eh?”

“Well, Blue Diamond’s the better horse, my lord. He’s bound to win.”

"Blue Diamond has got to lose!" said Sylvester bluntly.

"Eh? But—but——"

"The favourite has got to lose!" repeated the peer. "You know what I mean, Mitchell? We understand one another, and we've done business together. I'm backing Speedwell very heavily, and I can't leave anything to chance."

Sylvester intended the trainer to think that the plan was to be adopted merely for the sake of ensuring Speedwell's success in the race. Mitchell knew nothing whatever of the League of the Green Triangle, and the plot against Sir Terence. And this was by no means the first "job" Sylvester and Mitchell had been partners in.

But the trainer turned suddenly pale.

"You mean that Blue Diamond has got to be doctored?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes, doctored—that is the exact word."

Mitchell shook his head.

"No, my lord, I can't do it!" he said anxiously. "Good heavens, I should be ruined if I consented——"

"You will be ruined if you don't consent!" cut in Sylvester grimly. "And I will see that your ruin comes about! Look here, my dear fellow, you and I don't want to quarrel. This business can be arranged quite easily."

"I've been going absolutely straight for eight months now," said Mitchell huskily. "I thought all this sort of thing was finished with. I was a fool once, years ago, and you got to know of it. Oh, I'm well aware that you can drive me from Oldmarket if you wish to—your word is stronger than mine! But I'm going square now; I'm training the horses in my care to the very best of my ability——"

"No doubt—no doubt!" Sylvester broke in. "But you've got to help me this once, Mitchell. Don't look so frightened, man! My plan is perfectly safe, and I will pay you with astonishing liberality—although payment will be perfectly gratuitous. For, if I chose, I could force you to do the thing without giving you a farthing compensation. Be sensible, and listen to me."

The trainer shifted uneasily.

"But Blue Diamond!" he protested. "The finest horse in my stables——"

"Tell me, where is Blue Diamond's box situated?"

"At the extreme right of the building," replied Mitchell. "The loose-box is separate from all the rest, divided by a long blank wall, and quite close to a private gate which leads straight out on to the heath."

Sylvester chuckled.

"Excellent—excellent!" he exclaimed. "Begad, couldn't be better; there'll be no need to shift the horse from his present quarters. Near to a private gate leading on to the heath, eh? Splendid!"

"Why, what is your scheme, my lord?" asked the trainer.

"All in good time. Now, suppose the horse were taken out on the heath at dead of night?" asked the peer. "Would anybody hear? I mean, would the other stables know anything about the move?"

"No—nothing would be heard. Blue Diamond's box is quite separate."

"The horse isn't left alone all night?"

Mitchell stared.

"Left alone all night!" he echoed. "Good gracious, what a question, my lord! I should think not! One of my stable-lads keeps guard constantly—night and day. Blue Diamond isn't left by himself for a second. For the matter of that, no other horse is, either. But the favourite's box is so far distant from the rest that I take pains to guard him with special care."

"At night a stable-boy is on the watch?"

"Yes. He is relieved at five o'clock by another lad——"

"That's of no consequence," said Sylvester. "H'm! We needn't worry ourselves over a stable-boy. A little something in his tea at supper-time will settle him until the small hours. And he'll think he's merely been sleeping on duty. The horse will be there, apparently as healthy as ever, so the boy will suspect nothing."

"Why, what is your plan?"

"I think you can guess," replied the racing peer. "Two years ago, Mitchell, you performed a little operation on a horse called Corncob. You are an expert at the job, so——"

"Corncob!" echoed the trainer. "But——"

"No, now! Don't get excited. The situation, on this occasion, is much more favourable for the work. You succeeded with superb ease with Corncob, and you will have no difficulty with Blue Diamond. There's no need for me to go into details, for you now know the plan I propose; but I'll just state the scheme in a few words."

Mitchell looked at his companion nervously;

"I don't like it, my lord!" he muttered.

"Neither do I, as a matter of fact; but it's got to be done!" replied Sylvester firmly. "To-morrow night something will be placed in the stable-lad's tea—the stable-lad who is guarding Blue Diamond, I mean. You had better take the boy's supper to him yourself, Mitchell. But we needn't go into these little matters now. At about two o'clock in the morning, when the boy is senseless, and when everything is quiet, you will enter the box and bring Blue Diamond out on to the heath. As you know yourself, it will be impossible to perform the operation in the stables, for the horse may create a commotion. But on the heath you will be perfectly safe and free from observation. Not another soul in the world will know what is happening."

"But I cannot do the job myself!" Mitchell growled.

"I am not suggesting that you should. Let me finish before you raise any objections. Once on the heath I will meet you. Then, together, we will perform the simple little task. I presume you understand perfectly what I mean?"

"It's a shame!" the trainer muttered. "A fine horse like that——"

"Tut, tut! We cannot afford to stop at those considerations!" snapped Sylvester curtly. "It will be Brent's misfortune—not yours. My dear man, it is quite simple. You have only to make a slight nick upon the tendons of Blue Diamond's ham. I will provide the necessary instruments, and the operation will be performed subcutaneously. That is to say, absolutely no trace will be left."

"Oh, there'll be no trace!" the trainer exclaimed. "It's a ticklish operation, but I can easily do it. Blue Diamond will develop a slight lameness which will be put down to a strain in exercise. Foul play will never be suspected, but the lameness will probably be noticed——"

"The race will be run so shortly afterwards that there will be no risks from that quarter," said Sylvester. "But it is certain that Blue Diamond will lose—and that is the main point. If, on race day, he is known to be slightly lame, it will not matter a jot."

"But suppose I am discovered? Suppose——"

"You seem to be raising all the objections you can!" snapped the other harshly. "Don't be a fool, Mitchell! What on earth is the good of supposing utter nonsense? There will be no risk whatever. You are the master of your own stables, and the very fact of your doing this job yourself renders detection impossible."

The trainer frowned uneasily.

"I suppose I've got to do the thing whether I like it or not—and I'm hanged if I like it!" he said bluntly. "Well, my lord, we must plan everything to the last detail. I am glad that you're going to help me yourself!"

"It will be the safest in the end," said Sylvester. "I can't trust a thing like this to a third party."

And the pair, having partaken of whisky and soda, went into all the details of the precious plot then and there. And, when Mitchell left, the league's plans for ruining Sir Terence Brent were thoroughly matured and cut and dried.

CHAPTER IV.

The First Step—Nipper Suspects Things—The Operation.

NIPPER was somewhat surprised.

It was the evening following the conversation between Mitchell and Lord Sylvester at the latter's home. And Nipper, who had now been in the training stables for several days was feeling quite at home.

He was, nevertheless, surprised this evening to receive orders from Mitchell that he would be required to mount guard over Blue Diamond that night. The reason for this was simple; the trainer argued that Nipper, being a new-comer, was best suited for the task, and when it was revealed that he had apparently slept at his post, Mitchell would easily be able to dismiss him at a moment's notice. He had proved himself to be a smart lad, but it was better that he should be dismissed than any other member of the staff.

But Nipper, of course, knew nothing of what had been planned. He was, to tell the truth, beginning to get a little impatient. He had received no sign whatever that the League of the Green Triangle was at work. Everything seemed to be quite ordinary; the daily routine of the stables never altered.

The lad, moreover, had heard nothing from his master. He had written to Nelson Lee, explaining what he had done, and how the position stood; but Nelson Lee had not replied. Nipper was not at all worried, for he knew that his master would act just as soon as it was advisable.

Nipper went on duty in Blue Diamond's box at nine-thirty, and would have to remain at his post until relieved by another stable-lad in the early hours of the morning. The prospect did not displease him at all, for he was provided with a good lamp, and had an excellent novel to be reading to while away the hours. At ten-thirty, he knew, his supper would be brought to him.

He sat back in his chair and looked at Blue Diamond critically. Nipper knew a good deal about horse flesh, and Blue Diamond met with his whole-hearted approval. The racer was a real thoroughbred, and in the very pink of condition.

"I wonder if there was anything in Caine's information, after all?" thought Nipper. "He told the gov'nor that some mischief was afoot concerning Blue Diamond. Well, I'm blessed if I can sniff anything out of a shady character!"

Nipper was rather pleased at the turn of events, for he was now obeying Nelson Lee's instructions to the letter. He was not only keeping his eye upon Brent's horse, but actually mounting guard over it. He hoped that

the duty would fall to his lot until he received fresh instructions from his master.

"Quarter-past ten," muttered Nipper. "Not long before supper now. Well, I'm feeling quite ready for it. Let's hope it'll be something appetising."

And when, fifteen minutes later, Mitchell himself appeared, Nipper was quite satisfied with the nature of his repast.

"Everything all right, my lad?" asked the trainer briskly. "Thought I'd come and have a last look at you myself, as this is the first time you've been on night duty."

"I'm all right, sir," said Nipper. "This grub looks all right, too, and after I've got outside of it I'll be as fit as a fiddle."

"That's right, Tracey," said Mitchell. "And no dozing off, you know. If I hear that you've closed an eye for even half a minute you'll be thrown out neck and crop from my establishment. I'm testing you to-night."

Nipper grinned.

"You won't find me one of those duds, sir," he said cheerfully.

"I hope not."

And, after a few more words, the trainer left the loose-box in sole charge of "Mike Tracey," the new hand. With such a famous racehorse as Blue Diamond it was quite necessary to mount a special watch over him during the hours of darkness.

Nipper took the basket containing his supper over to a little side-table upon which stood a lantern.

"This is O.K.," murmured Nipper, drawing his chair up to the table and setting to. "Before long I shall get quite used to this sort of life. I must say it's a bit too monotonous, though. I shall be jolly glad when something happens."

Nipper poured out a mug of steaming tea from the enamel can, and as he bent over his supper the steam wafted full into his face, and he suddenly paused.

He looked fixedly at the tea, and then picked up the cup.

"Queer!" he murmured. "There seems to be a funny whiff about this tea!"

Always on the alert, Nipper was instantly suspicious. Tea was tea, but this beverage had a certain curious odour which was quite foreign to the nature of tea. Nine lads out of ten would have noticed nothing wrong, but Nipper's sense of smell was exceedingly acute. For years Nelson Lee had trained the lad to use all his faculties to the full extent of their power—and Nipper had been a good pupil.

He detected something wrong with the tea at once. Moreover, knowing the nature of his position, there was nothing surprising in his being particularly on the alert. He was at Oldmarket for the special purpose of keeping his eye on Blue Diamond—because some sort of foul play was anticipated.

Well, he was on guard now, and was, indeed, the only hindrance to any stranger appearing from the heath and entering the loose-box. For, as Nipper knew, this particular box was quite separate from the rest of the stables.

He sniffed at the tea keenly, and then tasted a little.

"H'm! Tastes all right," he muttered. "There's nothing in the flavour to verify the curious whiff. Perhaps it's only my fancy."

He took another sip, but the result was the same. But the lad was frowning and somewhat uneasy. Before drinking the beverage he intended to make a little investigation. Accordingly, he crossed the stable and picked up an empty tin which lay in one corner. Then, very carefully, he

emptied the tea from the enamel can into the tin until only a few drops remained.

"Now we'll have a squint at the dregs!" he muttered.

In the full light of the lantern he saw that there were no tea-leaves, but his attention was instantly attracted to some slight gritty substance which clung to the smooth enamel at the bottom of the can.

He touched his finger upon this, and then put his finger to the mouth. For a second Nipper remained expressionless, and then his eyes gleamed with excitement. At the same second he made a wry grimace and spat out with some force.

"Great Scott!" he murmured tensely. "I was right! The giddy tea's drugged!"

Drugged!

There was not a doubt about it. The sediment he had tasted had a decidedly bitter flavour, and Nipper knew, from experience, that it was an extremely pungent drug which would have rendered him senseless in less than half an hour.

He guessed that this particular drug had been used because the natural bitterness of the tea would conceal the other bitterness. And, doubtless, this effect was gained. But the slight odour had given the game away.

Lord Sylvester and Mitchell were not to know that "Mike Tracey" was utterly unlike any other stable-boy. Most boys would have been unable to detect anything wrong with the tea if the drug had been double the strength, for most boys had no experience of such things. But Nipper was different; not only was he on the alert, but he was well acquainted with tricks of this nature. And so, by a sheer train of natural circumstances, Nipper was forewarned of the excitement to come.

"And Mitchell brought it to me himself!" he muttered, staring fixedly before him. "By jingo! Can it be possible that the trainer himself is connected with the Green Triangle? Of course, it's quite on the cards. Most Green Triangle men are chaps one would never suspect. The guv'nor and I have good reason to know that!"

Thoroughly aroused now, and quite ready for anything that might turn up, the young detective slipped across to the door and softly opened it a few inches. He was soon satisfied that the yard was quite deserted. Mitchell had obviously returned indoors, and would not reappear until the time for the drug to take full effect had passed.

"So that's the game!" Nipper murmured grimly. "Well, Mr. Mitchell, if you're mixed up in any roguery, I'll set myself to find out what it is. It looks to me as though Blue Diamond's going to be tampered with to-night. Well, although the wheeze will appear to have worked, I sha'n't be quite so unconscious as I seem to be!"

For Nipper had at once decided upon his course of action.

He would dispose of the tea by means of other channels than that of his throat; and, having apparently swallowed the beverage, he would behave as though he had actually done so. Thus he would be more on the alert than ever, but seemingly totally oblivious of what was going on.

Without loss of time he very carefully poured the tea down one of the drains, and then washed all trace of it away—cleansing, too, the old tin he had used. Nipper was nothing if not thorough.

And, although he was decidedly hungry, he determined to sacrifice his supper. He could detect nothing wrong with the food, but he did not mean to risk eating it. The task of disposing of this was somewhat more difficult. He carefully wrapped the food in a sheet of paper, tied it up with string, and then placed it in one of his overcoat pockets—for the garment was hanging in an obscure corner.

Upon the table stood the empty mug, the empty can, and the remaining crumbs of his meal on the plates. To all intents and purposes Nipper had enjoyed his supper thoroughly, for everything had disappeared.

"Now we're all serene," he murmured. "I'd better——"

He suddenly stood stock-still, and then darted to his chair, picked up his book, and lolled back. The next moment the door opened, and Mitchell appeared, warning of whose approach Nipper had heard. He had only just finished his preparations in time.

"A last look round, young 'un!" exclaimed Mitchell genially. "Al you've finished your supper, I see."

"Every bite and every drop, sir!"

"Then you ought to feel fit for the night's vigil," said the trainer, allowing a gleam to enter his eyes for a moment. "Did you enjoy the food?"

"First-rate, sir; and the tea was prime!" answered Nipper heartily.

He leaned back, half closed his eyes, and then commenced to yawn. As though remembering himself, he pulled up short and shook himself.

"Now then—now then!" exclaimed Mitchell sharply. "Yawning! That won't do! You've got the night before you, and——"

"Sorry, sir! I'm as fit as a fiddle."

But Nipper uttered the words in a dull and listless voice, and actually yawned again as the trainer turned his back. Mitchell did not fail to notice it. And as he went out he smiled quietly to himself with satisfaction. He did not care for this business, but it was Hobson's choice; and now that the scheme was fairly afoot he was pleased to find that no hitch was occurring.

Half an hour later it was quite evident to Nipper that he was alone for the night, or until the grim business—whatever it was—should commence. He had no intention of remaining in the hard chair, and so he took his book with him to a pile of hay in a far corner, the light from the lantern shining full into it. Here he flopped himself down in luxurious comfort, and was instantly prepared to affect insensibility when the right moment should arrive.

There was no danger of his falling off to sleep, in spite of the ease of his position. His mind was too full of thoughts for sleep to come to his eyes. Dozens of wild notions surged through his brain. What was the game? When would the next move take place? How did the league propose to get to work? And what was to be done to the racehorse?

All these questions were unanswerable, and Nipper was compelled to consume his impatience, and wait further events.

As it turned out, he was destined to wait until close upon two o'clock. And then, just as he was reading an interesting chapter of his novel—having given up conjecturing as a bad job—he heard a faint footfall outside in the yard. It was so faint that at first he thought he was mistaken.

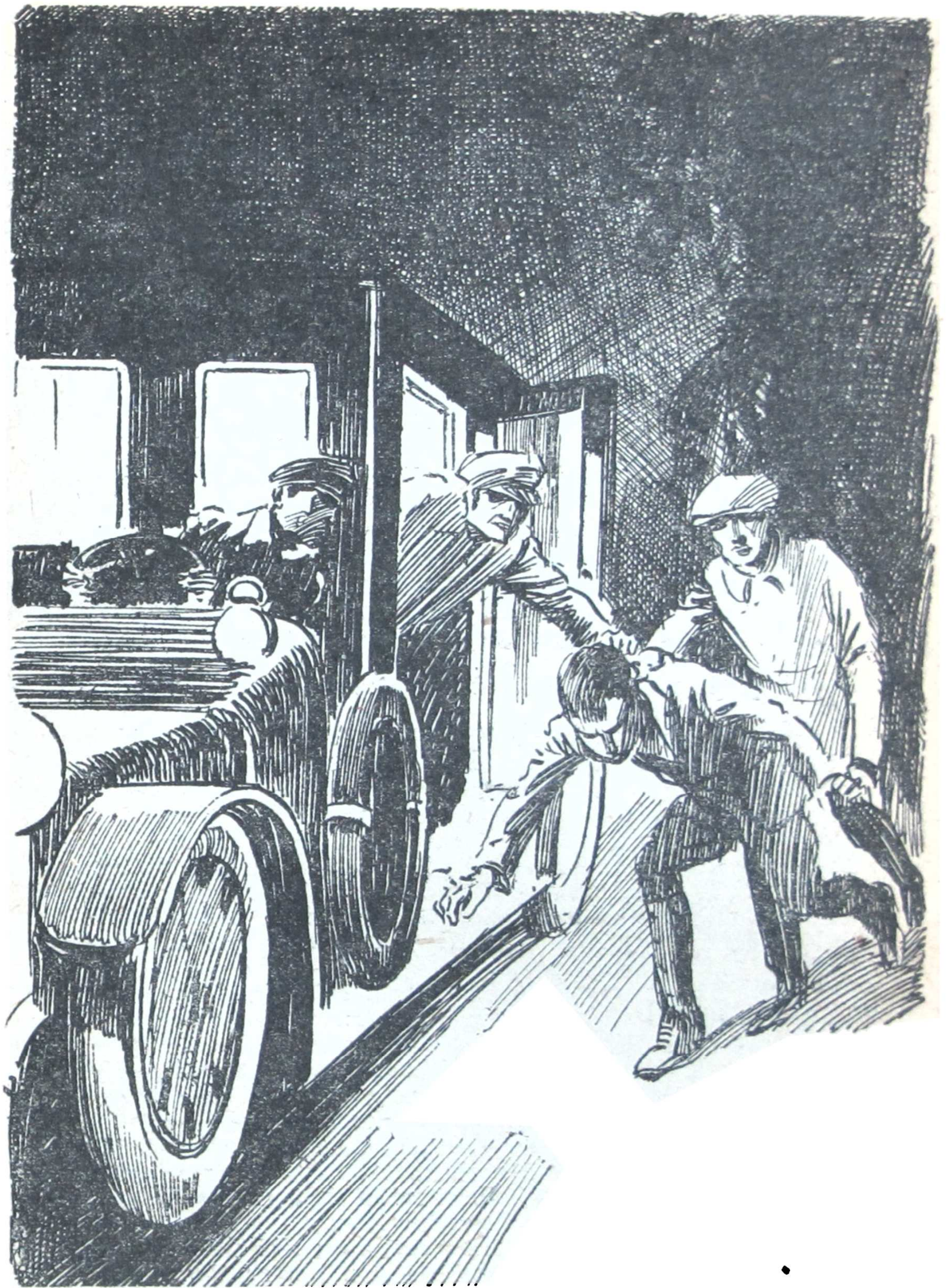
But Nipper instantly allowed the book to slide down the hay, and his head to flop on one side. But he was in such a position that he could see everything that went on within the stable. Nipper hadn't forgotten that detail!

A moment later the door silently opened, and Mr. Rupert Mitchell entered. The trainer was pale, and he cast an anxious glance round him. His eyes fixed themselves upon Nipper, and he at once crossed to the lad, bent over him, and shook his shoulder.

Nipper didn't flicker an eyelid.

"Dead off!" he heard the trainer mutter. "Poor youngster! I shall be infernally glad when this devilish business is over!"

From the tone Mitchell used Nipper gathered that he wasn't exactly happy in his nefarious work. That which happened next was quickly accom-



"In with him, Jerry!" snapped one of the men quickly. "Sharp, man!"
Nipper had no chance to make a bolt for it. The attack was so sudden, and so simply planned that success was assured. In a flash, Nipper knew that he was in the hands of Green Triangle men. (See page 31.)

plished. The trainer soon had rugs across Blue Diamond's back, and the racer was ready for his ordeal.

With scarcely a sound the horse was led out of the loose-box, and Nipper could tell that he was being taken through the little gateway on to the heath.

Nipper sat up abruptly, all his senses on the alert.

"Pinched!" he muttered excitedly. "Blue Diamond half-inched! My stars! I never expected anything like this!"

Without hesitation he leapt lightly to his feet, and ran across to the closed door. Passing out, he found the night dim and still. A soft pounding of hoofs told him that Mitchell had taken the racehorse on to the heath.

"What can it mean?" Nipper asked himself. "Blue Diamond carted off by his own trainer! What can Mitchell be up to? Blessed if I can see the object of pinching the gee-gee!"

Knowing nothing of the plot, Nipper was naturally nonplussed; but he did not waste a moment. Quietly running to the gateway, he emerged on the heath, and could just see the dim outline of Mitchell and the racehorse in the distance.

Nipper started off in pursuit. But before he had taken ten paces a startling thing happened. The lad was totally unprepared, for he was of the opinion that he was quite alone.

Yet, without warning, two hazy figures loomed up out of the darkness and flung themselves upon the lad. Before Nipper could turn, before he even knew of the danger, something hard descended upon his head with stunning force, and he pitched forward on to the grass and lay perfectly still.

"That was quick work!" muttered one of the figures. "He's settled, though!"

Nipper was certainly knocked completely out. But how could he have guessed these scoundrels would be lurking in wait for him? To tell the truth, the pair were two emissaries of the League of the Green Triangle. Their presence on the spot was even unknown to Mitchell himself.

By Lord Sylvester's secret orders, the men had been stationed there, with orders to closely watch and see that the programme regarding Blue Diamond was carried out. They were not to move from the stables, but were to stop any person who might perchance follow the trainer on to the heath. They had both been rather surprised to see Nipper, for they had imagined everything would pass off without a hitch.

Without delay Nipper was carried to an old ruined stable, some distance from the spot, and left there on a pile of straw—the league men having first assured themselves that there was no prospect of their victim regaining his senses until all was over, and Blue Diamond in his stall once more.

By an unkind fate Nipper had failed, but not by any carelessness on his part. And, meanwhile, what was happening to Blue Diamond?

At about the same time as Nipper was being dumped in the ruined stable—which was not actually connected with Mitchell's training establishment—Mitchell came to a halt in a little hollow, out of sight of any building or any road. Here, waiting for him, was Lord Sylvester.

The dastardly operation was to take place, after all!

Scarcely exchanging any words, the two men lost no time in getting to work. While Sylvester held the horse, Mitchell made ready. He placed an electric lamp on the ground in such a position that the light was cast directly upon the animal. Then he gripped the delicate surgical knife with which the operation was to be performed.

Such an operation was by no means unheard of; but it was a drastic measure, and would certainly ruin Blue Diamond's chances in the race.

Sylvester himself was taking a personal part in the scoundrelly business because he dare not trust anyone else. And Mitchell, much as he disliked the work, was compelled to do it.

As Sylvester had said, the operation, skilfully performed, would leave no trace whatever, and Blue Diamond would, without any apparent reason, develop a slight lameness which would certainly be attributed to a strain in exercise or a touch of rheumatism.

And there, in the little hollow, beneath the clouded sky, the dreadful thing went on. The patient was rather restive, but Sylvester held him firmly, and was somewhat surprised that he was not even more troublesome.

The peer did not fail to notice a sudden quiver pass through the horse. Blue Diamond's nostrils dilated, his ears went back, and he whinnied a little. At the same moment he lashed out uneasily with his hoofs, and it was some moments before he could be quietened. Sylvester easily guessed the reason for the moment of restlessness on the racer's part.

A minute later Mitchell faced Lord Sylvester, and carefully replaced the surgical knife in its case.

"Well?" demanded Sylvester, with hoarse sharpness.

"Blue Diamond will lose the race!" the trainer replied significantly.

"Gee! You have done the trick?"

"With every success. And it's the most infernal thing a man could do to a horse," added Mitchell fiercely. "I should hope you are satisfied, Lord Sylvester! I'm in your power, and I've been forced to do your dirty work. Well, it's done!"

And Lord Sylvester was perfectly satisfied.

CHAPTER V.

Nipper's Fury—Nelson Lee Appears—A Double Surprise.

THE early morning sun was gleaming down on the heath when Nipper, dazed and bewildered, staggered out from the old ruined stable into the open. The lad had come to his senses several minutes before, and now he passed a hand over his eyes and tenderly rubbed his head upon the spot where he had received the blow which had stunned him.

A glance told him that the training stables were astir, and that the race-horses would soon be brought out for their early morning exercise.

"Blue Diamond!" Nipper murmured. "I remember now. The horse was stolen—stolen by Mitchell himself. I was following him when somebody sprang out on me and— Oh, I've failed! I shall have to tell the gov'nor that I've made a mess of things! What a fool I was to let myself be whacked on the napper!"

But Nipper was not being fair to himself, as he fully realised when he was able to think more clearly. No blame whatever could be attached to him for what had happened. He had displayed very great shrewdness in detecting the drug in his supper, and in remaining on the alert. But for him to have been prepared for that unexpected attack in the dark was impossible.

The league men who had attacked Nipper had been perfectly content to leave him in the old stable to recover his wits in due course. Had they known his real identity they would probably have finished him off once and for all. But they thought he was merely a stable-boy who had rushed out to investigate. Even if he had seen Mitchell himself taking the racehorse away it would matter nothing. For when he came to his senses the horse would be back in its loose-box, apparently as healthy as ever, and every-

thing would be in order. Even if Nipper told his story, who would believe it? Who would take the word of a mere stable-lad against that of the trainer himself? The very nature of Nipper's story would cause it to be ridiculed, and it would be supposed that he had made up the tale as an excuse for his own neglect of duty. The league men were quite comfortable on the point. They had prevented Nipper giving the alarm, and that was sufficient.

"What can have happened?" Nipper asked himself again and again, as the fresh morning air made his brain clear and acute. "I was supposed to be drugged, and I saw Mitchell take Blue Diamond away. Has the horse been stolen? Oh, of all the rotten luck! What will the gov'nor say? How the dickens can I explain?"

Nipper was nearly distracted. He had been sent to Oldmarket especially to keep watch over Blue Diamond. He had detected the trick to drug him, and yet had fallen a victim to the Green Triangle. Everything seemed to have gone wrong.

While he was still worrying himself, and wondering how he should act, he saw a couple of young jockeys in the distance—Miles, and a lad named Poulter. The latter was a rather arrogant youngster, but a smart jockey who had won several important races.

Seeing Nipper, the pair bore down on him at once.

"Where in thunder have you been, Tracey?" demanded Poulter, as he approached. "By gum, you're in for a fine old hiding from Mitchell! The very first night you're put on duty, you desert your post and leave the most valuable horse in the whole place to look after itself! Gosh, you're going to get it hot!"

"The gov'nor's been fairly ravin'," put in Miles, not without a certain vindictive pleasure. "Says he's going to kick you out!"

"Oh, stow it!" snapped Nipper testily. "You kids don't know what's been happening. I guessed there'd be the dickens of a rumpus. What's happened to Blue Diamond? He's gone, I suppose?"

Poulter stared.

"Gone!" he echoed. "Strike me you're going dotty! Of course he ain't gone. Did you think he'd fly away just because you deserted your post?"

"Then—then the horse is still there?"

"Oh, the chap's loony!" said Miles. "He'll soon have some sense knocked into him once old Mitchell gets busy!"

And the two jockeys marched off, leaving Nipper decidedly relieved but strangely uneasy nevertheless. He was relieved to learn that Sir Terence Brent's horse was once more in his box, but the mystery of the affair worried him greatly. What had actually happened he could not even guess. But, as he continued to rack his brain, a shrewd suspicion of the truth entered his mind.

"I thought Blue Diamond had been pinched!" he murmured. "But that can't be the case, because he's back in his box again, and everybody thinks he's never been out. But I know jolly well he wasn't taken on to the heath in the middle of the night just for the sake of exercise. Mitchell's not a lunatic—and he's certainly a rogue!"

A grim expression came into Nipper's eyes.

"There's been some rotten shady work going on while I was lying helpless," he told himself angrily. "I know a bit about the Turf, and the Green Triangle is up to some mischief with that horse. If Blue Diamond wasn't taken on the heath for the mere fun of the thing, he was taken there for some rotten trick. By Jupiter, they've been monkeying with

him—they've been doctoring him! Oh, what will the gov'nor say when he knows? I've failed—I've failed!"

Nipper paced up and down, hardly conscious of the fact that his head was throbbing agonisingly. His mind was too full of frantic thoughts for him to heed bodily pain. He was simply furious at the turn events had taken. In spite of all the precautions the league had been successful in their efforts. Out of all his chaotic thoughts one stood out clearly in Nipper's mind.

He must tell Nelson Lee at once. He must communicate with his master without the loss of a minute. With this idea growing in his mind he commenced walking along the road to Oldmarket. At this early hour Nelson Lee would surely be in his rooms at Gray's Inn Road, and Nipper had decided to telephone him straight away.

But before he reached the town, and while he was passing down a little hill bordered by thick hedges, he became aware of a stranger approaching. Half-unconsciously the lad saw that the stranger was an elderly man with a slightly bent back, grey beard, and spectacles.

Nipper was in the act of passing the man when he felt a hand on his arm. The lad turned quickly, the frown leaving his face and giving place to an expression of mild surprise. He saw that the stranger was smiling down upon him curiously.

"What's up?" demanded Nipper. "I'm in a hurry——"

"To communicate with me, probably?" interrupted the other smoothly. "Well, young 'un, what have you got to report? I declare, you seem to have the worries of the whole world upon your shoulders. Buck up, my lad—buck up!"

Nipper gave a joyous cry.

"The gov'nor!" he shouted. "Well, I'm blowed!"

The stranger was, indeed, Nelson Lee. Nipper recognised his master's voice instantly, but he had certainly not recognised his features. The disguise was a very clever one.

"I was just going to ring you up, sir!" exclaimed Nipper quickly, when he had got over his astonishment. "Something terrible has happened! I've made a proper mess of things! I've——"

"Hold on; not so fast!" Nelson Lee interjected sternly. "You are looking quite groggy, my boy. Let us sit down on this bank and have a quiet chat."

A moment later they were both seated on the grass leaning back against the thick hedge, and the famous detective lit a cigar.

"Now tell me exactly what has happened," he said calmly.

Nipper did so in as few words as possible.

"They've done something to Blue Diamond, sir!" he finished up fiercely. "I did the best I could, but how was I to be prepared for those blighters who sprang out on me? I diddled Mitchell properly over the drug, and then I got dotted on the napper before I could see what the game was. I'm sorry, sir, but I know I've made a proper hash of things——"

"Nonsense, young 'un—nonsense!" broke in Nelson Lee. "Don't worry yourself over what has occurred. You acted admirably, and I have nothing but praise for you. I sincerely hope your head is not badly knocked about."

"It's a bit sore, sir, but I shall get over it. I suppose you've just arrived?"

"On the contrary, I have been in this neighbourhood for two or three days," replied the detective calmly. "Ah, you seem surprised! To tell the truth, my lad, I have been keeping my eye on things. I received the fuller information regarding this plot which our friend in London promised;

and I accordingly disguised myself and came down here, realising that a big capture will probably result."

"Well, you are a chap for surprises, sir!" Nipper ejaculated.

"I think I am going to give you another surprise in a few moments," rejoined the great crime investigator. "I will tell you why Blue Diamond was taken out upon the heath in the middle of the night. It was Mitchell's intention, assisted by that rogue Lord Sylvester, to perform an operation upon the horse and render it impossible for the animal to win the race for the Shire Cup!"

"Oh, the devils!" gasped Nipper. "But, of course, you were on the spot and spoilt the little game?"

"Not at all. I was nowhere near."

"Then—then——"

"The dastardly plan was carried out," went on Nelson Lee evenly. "Had you been able to follow, my boy, you would have frustrated the whole plot. But Fate ordained it otherwise, and—apparently—the plot has succeeded."

Nipper was quick to notice a note of amusement in his master's voice.

"Apparently, gov'nor?" he asked shrewdly.

"I spoke the word deliberately," replied Nelson Lee. "I said apparently, young 'un, because Blue Diamond has not suffered in the slightest degree. Lord Sylvester fondly imagines that the operation took place, and it seemingly did so; but I stepped into the game in time to prevent the dastardly deed."

"You—you mean——"

"I mean that by adopting these tactics Lord Sylvester is lulled into believing that everything has gone smoothly. It is simply a waiting game now. When the race is actually run Blue Diamond will not have developed an unfortunate lameness, but will romp past the post a winner!"

Nipper let out a soft whoop.

"Oh, you're a wonder, gov'nor!" he gasped. "How did you manage it?"

"I will tell you," replied the detective. "This plot is directed primarily against a young Irish baronet, Sir Terence Brent. For some reason Lord Sylvester requires Brent to be ruined, and by queering Blue Diamond that object will be achieved."

"But why——"

"Don't interrupt. I have interviewed Sir Terence, and have learned that Sir Roger Hogarth proposed to purchase Brent's property in Ireland. Brent refused, but told Hogarth that he would be quite willing to see if Blue Diamond lost. There is some deep game afoot here, but I don't quite know what. Time will show. In any case, I advised my Irish friend to let you ride his horse in the race, and it is up to you to spur Blue Diamond on to victory!"

Nipper's eyes sparkled.

"I am going to ride the favourite, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"Exactly. For once you are to become a jockey," smiled Nelson Lee. "My reason for suggesting such a course was simple. We are dealing with scoundrels, and there is a bare chance that they will make assurance doubly sure by bribing the jockey to 'pull' the horse in the race. If you are approached, my boy, you must pretend to agree, and thus our enemies will be utterly discomfited at the finish."

"But how did you find out about the operation on Blue Diamond, sir?"

"Merely by adopting bold methods," replied the detective quietly. "As I said, I have been in Oldmarket for several days, and I have been keeping my eyes open. Well, knowing that Lord Sylvester is engineering this plot,

I suspected things when I saw Mitchell, the trainer, paying a visit to Sylvester. Of course, it was quite a commonplace incident for the trainer to visit Sylvester, but I was struck by one fact. After having interviewed the peer, Mitchell's whole manner had changed. He was nervous, ill at ease, and obviously perturbed in mind.

"Yesterday morning I was still on the watch, still uncertain how to act. I suspected Mitchell of being implicated in the plot, but I had no proof. In the forenoon I followed Sylvester on to the heath, and there saw him meet a stranger. He apparently gave the man some instructions, and I thought it my best policy to transfer my attentions to the stranger.

"He journeyed to Cambridge, and I followed hot on his track, although he was completely unaware of my gentle attentions. The fellow simply went to a large chemist's shop, made a purchase, and then returned to the station and waited for a train back to Oldmarket. Having seen him enter the train, I made my way back to the chemist's, and ascertained what the man had purchased. Merely a non-poisonous drug, the chief use of which is to induce unconsciousness. Needless to say, my boy, my keenest suspicions were at once aroused."

"I should think they were, gov'nor," said Nipper interestedly.

"Well, I returned to Oldmarket by the next train, and before the morning was out, I had the satisfaction of seeing Lord Sylvester meet Mitchell," went on the detective. "Sylvester handed the trainer something, and I had little doubt that it was the drug the league agent purchased in Cambridge."

"What did you do, sir?"

"I adopted, as I intimated, bold methods," replied Nelson Lee grimly. "Since Mitchell was in possession of the drug, it stood to reason that the trainer intended some mischief. And when I learned that you were to guard Blue Diamond during the night I was naturally somewhat anxious. It is all perfectly simple, young 'un. It is rather unusual for a trainer to take in a stable-boy's supper, and I was at once struck by the fact. Accordingly, after Mitchell had visited you at about ten o'clock, I followed him to the house, and, as he was entering, confronted him."

"By Jimmy!" gasped Nipper. "You—you got the truth from him?"

"Precisely. I need not go into details, but will merely state that after Mitchell had taken me into a private room I made it clear to him that I was quite cognisant with the chief details of the plot, and that for him to deny his share in the scoundrelly business would be futile.

"I soon found out that Mitchell was unhappy in his task. Perhaps he has been a scoundrel in his time, but he has been going straight recently, and a horse, to his mind, is of more importance than a human being. It went absolutely against the grain for him to tamper with Blue Diamond; but his position was a grave one. He had been forced to agree to Sylvester's scheme, and to perform the operation.

"I had a long talk with him, and finally we came to an agreement. Finding that I knew everything, Mitchell could do scarcely anything but accept my proposals. Had he refused I should have exposed his villainy to the Jockey Club without delay, and he knew it. And if that exposure had been made the trainer would have been warned off the Turf and his training licence would have been withdrawn. That would have meant utter ruin and disgrace, and so Mitchell had no choice. Moreover, he was only too glad to fall in with my suggestion——"

"What suggestion, gov'nor?"

"To go through with the dastardly scheme—but to trick Sylvester," replied Nelson Lee smoothly. "You see the idea, lad? Mitchell took the

racehorse on to the heath, he met Sylvester, and apparently cut the tendon as planned. In reality, however, the trainer did not harm Blue Diamond in the least; he merely pricked the animal's leg in order to make him start so that Sylvester would think the operation had taken place.

"I learned that you had been drugged, but that fact did not worry me, for the drug was quite harmless. It was too late to prevent you partaking of the tea, and so I decided to let things go on. I did not guess that you would be astute enough to detect the drug. All things considered, it was perhaps as well that those two spies prevented you following Mitchell."

Nipper grunted.

"My brain-box is pretty sore, sir!" he said ruefully.

"You have had worse knocks!" laughed the detective. "Your healthy aspect now, my dear fellow, is ample evidence that you are not badly injured. There is, after all, some advantage in being wooden-headed!"

Nipper glared at his master.

"Wooden-headed!" he snorted wrathfully. "Why——"

"Don't get excited!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "You may have a wooden head, but the contents of it are of sterling quality. There! Has that appeased you? But, jokes apart, young 'un, this business is turning out quite satisfactorily. Sir Terence Brent is in Oldmarket, staying at the same hotel as myself, and he will call upon Mitchell to-day, and express the wish that you should ride Blue Diamond in the race. It is a great honour for you, and you must ride to win."

"Trust me, gov'nor!" said Nipper, with sparkling eyes. "And if any rotters approach me, and try to bribe me to deliberately lose the race, I'll pretend to fall in with their suggestion, and then give 'em a surprise on race day."

"Excellent! And now you had better return to the stables. Mitchell will affect anger, and will take you into his office in order to call you over the coals for sleeping at your post. Once in private with you, however, he will tell you what has been arranged between him and myself—for he is aware of your identity. It had been agreed—between Sylvester and Mitchell—that you should get the sack, but the trainer will keep you on, and will make some plausible excuse to Sylvester. He will probably explain that Brent has expressed his desire that you should ride Blue Diamond in the race, and that to sack you is impossible. Sylvester will not worry, for he thinks everything is settled."

"Right-ho, sir. I suppose I shall have to go into training?"

"Of course. And there is very little time," replied Nelson Lee. "But you are in splendid condition now, and there will be no necessity for strenuous dieting. You will pass the scales satisfactorily, I am sure, and the jockey's licence can easily be arranged."

A few minutes later Nelson Lee and Nipper parted, the detective promising to see his young assistant again before long.

Both were feeling highly pleased with the turn of events. All the odds were on their side, but the Green Triangle imagined that the plot against Sir Terence was progressing smoothly. The operation had been performed, and there was nothing to do but await race day.

But the depth of the league's grim organisation was again in evidence here.

For as soon as Nelson Lee and Nipper had disappeared—the detective towards Oldmarket and Nipper back to the training-stables—the bushes parted in one of the hedges, and a small man appeared on the road. His face was flushed, and his eyes were glittering with triumphant satisfaction.

The man was, in fact, a spy of the Green Triangle!

And he had overheard the whole of the conversation between Nelson Lee and Nipper! He knew exactly how matters stood—how the league's plot had failed—and he would lose no time in communicating his information to Lord Sylvester! The tables were now turned with a vengeance. It was the great detective who would be at a disadvantage! The whole effect of his counter-plot would be rendered futile.

But what was the reason for the spy's presence at that spot—the very spot where Nelson Lee and Nipper had discussed their plans?

It was no matter of chance, no convenient coincidence which had placed the spy in that position. Such coincidences only occur in fiction, while this was stern reality. The league man had been there deliberately.

In short, he had seen Nipper talk for a few moments with Miles and Poulter, and he had seen the lad commence his walk to Oldmarket. Knowing what had occurred, the spy was anxious to learn the reason for Nipper's journey to the town. He had followed the lad, taking care to remain invisible all the time. When Nipper had met Nelson Lee the spy had been behind the hedge in the adjoining meadow. And he had cautiously crept up behind the cover of the hedge until he was immediately behind the pair. From this coign of vantage he had listened to everything, making notes with ease.

And in less than an hour his valuable news was delivered to Lord Sylvester. Sir Roger Hogarth was with the peer at the time—having come, in fact, to learn of the night's doings.

The scoundrelly pair were contentedly discussing the success of the plot when a sealed packet was brought in, having just been delivered. It proved to be a long account of the true state of affairs, compiled by the spy, and written in the league's secret code.

As he perused the report, Lord Sylvester turned pale, the cigar dropped from his lips, and he started to his feet.

"We have been betrayed, Hogarth!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Mitchell has tricked us! Blue Diamond is as sound as ever!"

"By Heaven! What are you saying?" gasped Sir Roger. "There must be some mistake! You yourself were present when Mitchell performed——"

"He tricked me, I tell you! See—see for yourself!"

They both read the report carefully, Hogarth being decidedly the more perturbed of the two. Both men stared at one another with startled expressions. In one second they knew that the whole villainous scheme was futile. Blue Diamond was unharmed, and would certainly be watched with extra care right up to the day of the race meeting.

"The hound!" snarled Lord Sylvester furiously. "By James, Mitchell shall pay for this treachery! I will expose him! I will have him hounded from the Turf——"

Sir Roger swore.

"What's the good of uttering threats against Mitchell?" he said sharply. "Nothing can alter the fact now. Mitchell can wait until afterwards—until the business is settled. There is something more important to occupy our attention at present. Blue Diamond is safe, and Mitchell is working with these two strangers!"

The spy had been unable to say who Nipper and the disguised man had been, and so the Governing Members did not guess that Nelson Lee himself was opposed against them. But the startling nature of the revelation was enough to drive such minor matters out of their heads.

"And this lad—this stable-boy, Tracey—is to ride Blue Diamond in the race," went on Sylvester. "He is out of our reach, for in the event of our offering a bribe he will pretend to take it! Heavens, what's to be done, Hogarth?"

Sir Roger frowned thoughtfully.

"Don't get into a panic," he said. "Let me think—let me think, Sylvester. The position is this—we can't touch the horse again, and we can't touch the jockey—at least, not in the way of bribery. It seems as though we shall lose——"

"But think of the issues at stake——"

"Let me finish!" protested Hogarth testily. "I say it seems as though we shall lose. But there are ways and means. Who was to have ridden Blue Diamond? Do you know?"

"Yes. Mitchell said that young Poulter would be the jockey."

"Poulter! A clever lad," said Sir Roger. "He has already won several important races. If this fresh lad, Tracey, is nowhere to be found on race day Poulter will certainly ride in his place."

"Good gracious! What do you mean?"

Sir Roger looked grim.

"I mean that Poulter will be far easier to buy over than Tracey," he replied pointedly. "Tracey is working against us—he is in the know. But Poulter—— Yes, Sylvester, there is only one course for us to pursue."

And the pair, their plans utterly wrecked, set about the task of thinking out a new *modus operandi*, and this time their thoughts were turned in the direction of Poulter, the young jockey, and in the direction of Mike Tracey—otherwise Nipper.

The League of the Green Triangle had not exhausted all its resources by any means. The most exciting incidents in the case were yet to take place.



CHAPTER VI.

A Startling Adventure—Poulter is Bought.

"YOU get off to bed early, my lad. You've got to pull off that race to-morrow, or Sir Terence will be a ruined man!"

Mr. Rupert Mitchell was the speaker, and he addressed his remarks to Nipper. The pair were standing out on the heath near the stables, and Nipper had just finished his day's work.

It was the eve of the great race. To-morrow Oldmarket would be thronged with bookmakers, racing men, and sightseers of all varieties. And the weather promised to be excellent, for the sunset was superb, and the wind in a dry quarter. The Oldmarket trainers had been a little anxious regarding the weather lately, for it had been very dry, and the ground had been hardening. A downpour, long and continuous, the previous day, however, had made the turf springy and soft, and in splendid condition. There was every prospect of a successful meeting.

Nipper and Mitchell understood one another. The trainer, although somewhat nervous when he thought of Lord Sylvester, had been assured by Nelson Lee that no harm would come to him. In the past he had erred, but he was now running his training establishment on businesslike and scrupulously honest lines. The detective was determined that Mitchell should not suffer from the machinations of the Green Triangle.

"Don't you worry your head about me, sir," said Nipper cheerfully. "I'm not a chap to boast, but I reckon I could ride Blue Diamond to victory any day. He's a ripper, and in first-class condition!"

After he had left the trainer, Nipper smiled slightly to himself. Blue Diamond was in splendid condition. And yet Lord Sylvester was under the impression that the horse was maintained—at least, Nipper thought so.

The situation was curious. Nelson Lee and Nipper were taking things easy because they thought that their enemies were deluded into believing everything was in their favour. Yet, in reality, the league was aware of the exact facts, and were planning to play their last trick.

Nipper was feeling bright and merry as he trudged along the road towards Oldmarket. It was comparatively early yet, and he had arranged previously to run down and see his master at the Cambridge Arms Hotel. He was to see Sir Terence, too, and to acquaint the pair with the exact condition of Blue Diamond. As the racer was in really excellent fettle Nipper was quite cheerful.

It was almost dark now, and this road—although it would be thronged on the morrow—was practically deserted this evening. In fact, Nipper strode along to the accompaniment of his own whistle, and saw no other human being. The road was soft owing to a shower which had fallen an hour before; but although the sandy surface was spongy, there was no mud.

Nipper's thoughts were entirely concerned with the events which were to occur to-morrow. He told himself that the Green Triangle, in this instance, would be beaten. And it was rather curious that he should be pondering on the subject when an incident occurred which proved very clearly to him that the league was far from being beaten.

He heard a motor-car coming up from the rear, but took no notice, for motor-cars in Oldmarket were just as common as in any other town. The car passed him slowly, and he could see that it was a closed limousine. It came to a halt a few yards ahead, and two men emerged and stood in the road. Nipper could not see their features, for it was now too dim.

Even then Nipper had not the slightest thought of possible danger. Alert as he was, there was no reason for him to suspect peril because of this seemingly trifling incident.

But as he was passing the car one of the men clutched his arm in a firm grip and spun him round like a top.

"In with him, Jerry!" snapped one of the men quickly. "Sharp, man!"

Nipper had no chance to make a bolt for it. The attack was so sudden, and so simply planned that success was assured. But, in a flash, Nipper knew that he was in the hands of Green Triangle men; and he instinctively guessed that he was to be kidnapped so that he would be unable to ride Blue Diamond the next day.

"You—you rotters!" gasped the lad furiously.

He struggled with all his strength; but even as he did so he knew that his efforts would be futile. He was in the grasp of two strong men, and to resist was a sheer waste of energy. But Nipper resisted, nevertheless—resisted with all the fury of a little demon.

And his reason for so doing was an excellent one. His quick brain instantly grasped the fact that before so very long he would be completely spirited away. There were no witnesses to this dramatic little adventure, and Nelson Lee would be utterly perplexed as to what had become of his young assistant. There would not be a single clue to aid him in his search for the lad. Nipper would be kidnapped, and no trace would be left.

Accordingly, Nipper was providing some clues!

The ground was soft, and he dragged his feet about with as much force as possible in order to give visible impressions of a struggle. And, at the same time, he slipped his hand into his coat-pocket and fished out a big clasp-knife. As he struggled he dropped this on to the ground.

It was quite possible that a stranger would find the knife, but by no means probable. The road was dark, and pedestrians were few. In any case it was the utmost Nipper could do under the circumstances.

For, a few minutes later, he was bundled in the limousine, accompanied by many curses from his two attackers, and by the men themselves. Then the car jerked forward. Although Nipper was tightly held down, with a hand over his mouth, he could feel that the car was turning back on its own tracks.

Having turned, the automobile put on speed, and rushed away through the gathering night. Apparently, the league men did not wish to risk passing through Oldmarket with their prisoner.

Nipper was soon bound hand and foot, and a coarse scarf was tied over his mouth. With a captor on either side of him he had no chance of escaping, even had he thought of such a thing. But he knew quite well that he was helpless.

He was in the hands of the Green Triangle.

That fact was self-evident. But even now Nipper did not guess the true state of affairs; he did not realise that this was a last desperate effort on the league's part to bring success to their scoundrelly plot.

Nipper thought that the league was carrying him away so that another jockey would ride Blue Diamond—a jockey who would have instructions to lose, if the horse showed any sign of winning. That, in fact, was the plan, but Nipper was unaware of the fact that Lord Sylvester knew of Mitchell's trick.

The lad was bitterly disappointed, and inwardly furious. For he knew, now, that the league would probably win. If Nelson Lee failed to get on the track—and it was more than probable that this would be the case—Sir Terence Brent would be ruined. After all the efforts of his master, Nipper realised that it was now practically a lost game. Time was so short that it would be too late to frustrate this last-minute kidnapping plot. A bribed jockey would ride Blue Diamond, and— Well, the horse would lose.

Nipper did not attempt to think of any ways of escape. He knew his own capabilities, and he knew when he was beaten. He was beaten now, so there was no sense whatever in making his position worse by foolishly attempting that which could not be accomplished.

The limousine journeyed steadily through the night, and Nipper knew that he was being taken many miles away from Oldmarket. In which direction he could not tell, and his captors volunteered no information.

The hours went on, and the miles sped by, and with every mile Nipper realised that the prospect of Nelson Lee rescuing him was growing more and more remote. And there was another thought troubling the young detective. He was in the hands of the league; and if they were aware of his real identity he knew that he could expect no mercy.

It was possible that he was now being taken to his grave! Nipper was not possessed of a morbid mind, but he could not help his thoughts straying into gloomy channels now and again. If these league men did intend to kill him, he knew that he had no chance. But, he mused hopefully, if his death was intended he wouldn't have been conveyed all this way from Oldmarket.

And, while Nipper was speeding through the night, another link in the chain of villainy was being welded on Oldmarket Heath. The moon, appearing from behind a bank of clouds, shone down upon two men who were standing behind a thick clump of bushes, not far distant from Mitchell's racing stables.

One figure was that of Poulter, the jockey. He was a small, wiry lad, with an old-looking face and cunning eyes. His left cheek was marred by a deep scar—the result of a wound inflicted by a horse's hoof a couple

of years before. His hair was somewhat thick, and of a decidedly "carrot" hue.

The other figure was bigger. He was, in short, a gentleman known to the world as Mr. Josh Siggers—bookmaker, racing tout, and many other avocations, all of them of a more or less questionable character. He was, moreover, a member of the League of the Green Triangle, and his business, at the present moment, was in connection with the league's plot against Sir Terence Brent, Baronet.

"Don't be a young fool, Poulter!" Siggers was saying in soft, oily tones. "Think of the reward! My dear young feller, you'll be rich——"

Poulter growled impatiently.

"Don't go over that again!" he snapped. "I'm not thinking of the reward, although I admit it's tempting. But suppose I'm bowled out? Fine thing that'll be, won't it? What will you say then? Will your money compensate me for being warned off the Turf? Warned off! Just when I'm getting a bit known——"

"Oh, you make me mad!" interjected the other. "Warned off! Why, you young ass, who's to bowl you out? This sort of thing's done every day! Racing ain't such a clean business as some people seem to think; there's hardly a jockey to be trusted nowadays——"

"That's a lie, anyhow!" said Poulter.

"Oh, well, we don't want to quarrel. But you'd better make up your mind quick, young feller. There are plenty of other jockeys who'll simply leap at a chance like this. Tracey's out of the way—I told you that—and you'll be chosen to ride Blue Diamond in his place. But if you don't agree to this proposition I'll drop a word to Sir Terence Brent, the owner, and he'll mighty quick change his jockey——"

"I'm going to ride Blue Diamond!" said Poulter warmly.

"Not if you act the fool!" said Josh Siggers, with a grim note in his voice. "Look here, can't we finish this business nice and friendly? Here I'm offering you a small fortune just to 'pull' the gee-gee so as to make him romp home second, and you raise all sorts of objections! Never saw such a young idiot!"

"But suppose I'm tripped——"

"Suppose nothing!" rapped back Siggers. "The thing's as safe as houses—it's a dead cert! Well, I'm waitin'? What's your answer?"

Poulter thought for a moment. He was an unscrupulous young rascal, and the only thing which caused him to hesitate was the thought of possible exposure. Principles were unknown to him. His own safety and his own pocket were his chief concern.

"Oh, well, perhaps it'll be safe——"

"Ah! That's the talk!" said Siggers softly. "It's a go, then?"

"Hang you, yes!" Poulter exclaimed, thrusting out his hand. "I'll work the thing sure enough. Blue Diamond won't win to-morrow, although he is favourite! It'll be a ticklish job holding him back without being spotted; but I'll do it!"

"Good! Shake on it!"

And the precious pair warmly shook hands on the scoundrelly compact.

CHAPTER VII.

Nelson Lee is Puzzled—On the Track.

"STRANGE! The lad should have been here hours ago!"

Nelson Lee consulted his watch with a worried frown on his brow. He was in his private room at the Cambridge Arms Hotel, and Sir

Terence Brent was with him. The young Irish baronet was on intimate terms with Nelson Lee, and had commissioned the latter to look after his interests in the strange affair of his racehorse. Both had been in the highest of good humours this evening.

But a disturbing thought was in Nelson Lee's mind that something had happened to Nipper.

"I cannot understand it," said the detective. "Nipper positively arranged to be here at half-past seven. And the time is now twenty minutes to ten. Can the lad have forgotten the arrangement?"

"That is the most likely explanation," said Sir Terence, smiling. "You know what youngsters are, Mr. Lee!"

The great detective nodded.

"And I know that Nipper is about as different from the ordinary youngster as it is possible to be," he replied grimly. "Nipper never forgets my orders; I only made the suggestion unthinkingly. Nipper must have been detained for some reason. But what can the reason be? You and I know, Sir Terence, that we have enemies——"

"Jove! Do you think something has happened to the lad?" asked Brent, startled. "I hadn't thought—— But what do you suggest, Mr. Lee?"

"I can offer no suggestion as to the reason for Nipper's non-arrival," answered Nelson Lee; "but I can suggest action on my part. I am going to take a walk up to Mitchell's establishment, and ascertain what has been keeping the young beggar."

And, without loss of time, the detective donned his hat and hurried out. He still wore his disguise, and was registered at the hotel under an assumed name. When he emerged on the old High Street the moon was shining overhead, shedding a soft light over the picturesque town.

But Nelson Lee gave no thought to the moon or the landscape. His mind was too busy; and, although he had not admitted the fact to Brent, he was decidedly perturbed. The race was to be run to-morrow, and Nipper was to be the jockey. Nelson Lee knew quite enough about the criminal side of the Turf to realise that Nipper might have fallen a victim to enemy designs even at this eleventh hour.

The great crime investigator found Mitchell at home, resting after a hard day's work. The trainer was surprised to see Nelson Lee, but he shook his head when asked if he knew where Nipper was. In fact, Mitchell's face suddenly became alarmed in its expression.

"I thought the lad was in bed!" he exclaimed quickly. "Haven't you seen him at all, Mr. Lee?"

"Not this evening."

"But he left me soon after seven, saying that he was going straight to Oldmarket to visit you," exclaimed the trainer. "Good gracious, what can have happened?"

"That is a point which is worrying me considerably," replied the detective. "We'd better resign ourselves to the fact, Mitchell, that Lord Sylvester's agents have been at work again! Nipper started out from this house nearly three hours ago, intending to walk straight to the Cambridge Arms. He didn't arrive, and the road to Oldmarket is rather lonely——"

"By thunder! That reminds me of something!" put in the trainer sharply. "I have only just returned from Russell's training stables nearer the town. And as I was walking back something glinted in the moonlight on the surface of the road. I picked it up, and—— Here, see for yourself!"

"Nipper's pocket-knife!" ejaculated Nelson Lee sharply.

It was, indeed, the clasp-knife which Nipper had deliberately dropped

on the road. It had not been discovered by Nelson Lee himself but by Mitchell. Nipper's object, however, was achieved.

Nelson Lee thought quickly for a few seconds, and then he turned to the trainer.

"Come!" he exclaimed crisply. "We must investigate this matter, Mitchell. You must show me the exact spot where you found the knife. I begin to have grave fears that disaster has overtaken the lad!"

The trainer was decidedly disturbed, but eager enough to lead his companion to the spot where the knife had been found. Once there the detective produced a powerful electric torch, and flashed the light upon the ground. There had been practically no traffic, and the marks in the soft, damp sand told their own tale. To the detective's trained eye, the whole thing was startlingly clear.

"See!" he exclaimed grimly. "These marks, Mitchell. There was a struggle here, and Nipper dropped his knife while attempting to gain his freedom. Ah, by James, do you not notice the curious tracks of a motor-car? The vehicle came to a halt here, and then manœuvred round and went back on its own tracks. Without the slightest doubt Nipper was kidnapped and taken away by automobile!"

It was as plain as daylight. The wheel-marks were very distinct on the damp surface of the road. Moreover, the motor-car's wheels had been shod with new tyres of a decidedly distinctive pattern. The impressions of this pattern were clearly defined.

Nelson Lee did not waste a second.

Bidding Mitchell return, he, himself, hurried back to Oldmarket at the double. "Desperate ills need desperate remedies," and the present situation was desperate enough in all conscience. On the eve of the race Nipper had been spirited away; but his kidnappers had left clear traces of their villainous handiwork.

Nelson Lee rapidly explained this sudden dramatic surprise to Sir Terence when he arrived at the Cambridge Arms. The young baronet was decidedly alarmed.

"Nipper kidnapped!" he exclaimed blankly. "This is terrible, Mr. Lee. You say that you are going to get on the track. But suppose neither of you return in time for the race? What shall I do? What——"

"There is Poulter," interjected Nelson Lee quickly. "He is a good jockey, but I am rather doubtful as to his honesty. From what I have heard of his character I do not think he would be above bribery. But he is the only lad who really understands Blue Diamond, with the exception of Nipper. It is too late, now, to get another jockey. But we must not look on the dark side. I have strong hopes of finding Nipper and returning with him in good time."

A few minutes later the detective started on his journey. While he had been talking with Brent he had given orders for a fast motor-cycle to be made ready for him. And when he descended to the moonlit street he found a six-horse power twin-cylinder Royal Enfield awaiting him. The detective was pleased, for he knew that he would have no trouble with such a sturdy machine beneath him.

Arriving at the spot where the struggle had taken place, the detective then commenced the uncertain task of tracking the motor-car by means of the wheel-marks upon the road. The moon was now brilliant, and he could see the trail with perfect distinctness.

For the first twenty miles he had no difficulty whatever. Then he came upon a stretch of smooth, tarred road, and the tracks disappeared. He kept straight on, however, feeling sure that his quarry had taken the same

course. Opening the throttle he caused the *Enfield* to roar along at a terrific speed.

Several miles further on, at the foot of a deep incline, in a spot which was overhung by trees the ground was slightly muddy. And, upon slowing down, Nelson Lee distinctly saw the marks of the motor-car's wheels upon the road.

Feeling somewhat elated the detective tore on afresh. The league agents had never anticipated such a prompt pursuit as this, and Nelson Lee knew that he was on the right trail. Unless luck entirely deserted him his efforts would be successful.

On through the night he went, halting now and again to examine the surface of the road.

Some little time later he came upon a spot where the road forked. Both surfaces were tarred, and there was nothing to show which highway the quarry had taken. So Nelson Lee was compelled to choose at random.

After riding fully five miles he came upon another muddy patch. And here there were no wheel-marks whatever. Without hesitation Nelson Lee turned his machine round and sped back on his own tracks. He had been travelling quite slowly, in order to pick up the trail, and thus many precious minutes were wasted.

Arriving at the fork again he took the other road. But mile after mile went by, and there was no sign whatever that he was still upon the trail. Then, just as he was despairing, just when he was giving up hope, the surface of the road changed—probably at the border-line of two counties—and the fresh surface was composed of damp, sandy dust. Here, to the detective's joy, he quickly saw the motor-car's wheel-marks.

Filled with renewed confidence he continued his pursuit, and rode on rapidly and steadily. On several occasions he had similar difficulties to the one he had already experienced. But by dint of careful tracking and shrewd calculation, he stuck to the trail. Upon the whole, however, it was a slow business, and his speed on the average was by no means fast. Now and again he had covered the ground at close upon fifty miles an hour, but the many stoppages negatived this fast going.

By glancing at his wrist-watch he found that the time was close upon four o'clock, and he must have covered well over a hundred and twenty miles—possibly much more. And he seemed no nearer to his quarry. Where had *Nipper* been taken to?

Nelson Lee was travelling over the ground only a few hours after the limousine, and so the trail was comparatively fresh all the way. Other traffic was light, or he might have lost sight of the track altogether.

As he was riding along a particularly bare piece of country he sped down a curly hill. At the foot of this decline, as is common in such places, the surface was quite moist, and the wheel-marks were distinct and deep.

But, although there was no other road, Nelson Lee suddenly became aware, upon riding out of a patch of shade into the moonlight, that the trail had disappeared! The road before him was quite innocent of motor-car wheel marks.

"Scott! What can this mean?" he muttered perplexedly.

He throttled down, neatly turned in the road, and slowly went back. And now he saw a narrow opening between the hedges on one side. At one time a gate had barred the opening, but it had long since fallen to ruin, and only the posts remained.

"Ah! This looks interesting!" Nelson Lee murmured. "Run to earth, at last!"

He could see, now, that the automobile had turned up this narrow track, and it was equally certain that the car had not turned. Wheeling his

machine close against the hedge, he left it there and then made investigations.

By walking out into the main road again, and mounting a bank, he could see that the tiny lane led to some dim buildings three or four hundred yards away. By the appearance of the buildings, and by the presence of a swiftly running stream, he guessed that he was looking at a water-mill. And, so far as he could judge, the place was ramshackle and deserted.

"Nipper is a prisoner in that old mill," Nelson Lee told himself grimly. "Well, I've been successful so far, and now I must go very cautiously. It's up to me to liberate the lad and then get him back to Oldmarket in time for the race!"

Very cautiously he proceeded up the little lane, and before long he came in full sight of the building, and he could now see that it was indeed a ruined water-mill. Utter silence reigned, and he could see no sign of any life. Except for the moon's radiance there was no light of any description.

The spot was dreary and lonesome and seemingly deserted. This, probably, was the reason for its choice for this particular job. Nelson Lee pressed on, revolver in hand, and fully determined to effect his purpose.

But would he be successful?

Was it possible for the detective, unassisted, to rescue Nipper in the face of big odds? For, without a doubt, there would be at least two men on guard, and probably three.

Nelson Lee set his teeth grimly and crept on with resolute determination.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sir Terence is Worried—The Race—Lord Sylvester's Choice.

OLDMARKET was crowded.

The town had nearly doubled its population. As the trains arrived from St. Pancras and Liverpool Street, the crowded streets became more crowded still. Motor-cars, brakes, char-a-bancs, and pedestrians were all moving along in an endless procession towards the race-course. The hotels were overflowing, and in the bars men were packed tightly, and laughter and gay shouts filled the air.

The time sped by, and the day's racing opened with an Apprentice's Plate, and the Shire Cup Race was due to start thirty minutes later. The sun streamed down gloriously, and the course was gay and brilliant.

But in the private enclosure—in the "Birdcage"—Sir Terence Brent was pacing about with a very worried frown. With him was his fiancée, and she shared his concern. For he had explained the position to her.

There was ample reason for Brent's worry, for at this hour, when the race was almost due to start, there was utterly no sign of Nelson Lee or Nipper. Since the detective had started out the previous night Sir Terence had not heard a word from him. It was not only puzzling, but decidedly alarming.

While the young baronet was talking to his fiancée, an exciting race was being run, but neither of them took the slightest notice. In less than an hour Sir Terence's fortunes would be decided. He would either be a ruined man or would be possessed of a considerable sum with which to marry and settle down on his Irish estates.

With such vital issues at stake it is little wonder that Brent was nearly distracted. Since Nipper had not turned up it would be necessary for Poulter to ride Blue Diamond. And Poulter, although a good jockey, did not understand Blue Diamond as well as Nipper. For Nipper, lately, had been

constantly with the horse, and could make the animal do almost miraculous feats at a pinch. Moreover, Nipper was perfectly trustworthy, and would ride a straight race; whereas, Poulter might possibly pursue a crooked path. A liberal bribe may have been proffered to him, and—

Sir Terence's thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of Poulter himself. He informed Brent that he was just going in to change, and the young baronet, now giving up all hope, realised that Poulter would have to ride.

"Look here, youngster!" said the baronet grimly. "You've got to ride Blue Diamond to victory! You've got to win this race for me!"

"Don't you worry, sir," replied the lad. "I sha'n't fail. If it's in the horse I'll be first past the winning-post—and I'll romp home by a length, too!"

"Do your best, my boy—do your best!"

Poulter went off with a somewhat arrogant swagger. He certainly seemed confident enough; but, inwardly, he was telling himself that Blue Diamond would never win. He would have loved to have ridden the favourite to victory, but the bait which had been offered to him effectually drowned all his scruples.

He went into dress, and when he emerged he was attired in the pink cap and blue and black jacket of the Mitchell stables. He carried with him his saddle, bridle and whip, and walked into the weighing-room.

He turned the scales satisfactorily, and then emerged and mounted Blue Diamond. It was almost time for the race to start—the most important race of the day—and as he cantered past the grand stand there was a distinct murmur. Blue Diamond was a magnificent animal, and there were thousands of people who had wagered big sums of money on him.

"The die is cast now," exclaimed Sir Terence, to his fiancée. "Well, we must hope for the best. But I have not the confidence I should have had if Nipper had been in the pigskin. What has happened? Why hasn't Lee—"

"Don't worry yourself, Terry," interrupted the girl gently. "It's too late now, for the race is just starting."

They stood watching, Brent's heart beating fast. So much depended upon the outcome of the next few minutes! He thrust all thoughts of Nelson Lee and Nipper from his mind, and settled himself to watch the fateful race. What a game of chance it was. Either ruin or prosperity—and it all depended upon his horse being just a trifle faster than five others.

On the brow of the hill the white flag was lifted. It was too late now for Nipper to mount Blue Diamond, even if he arrived. As Sir Terence had said, the die was cast. Upon the flag being lifted two horses galloped, but they were stopped, turned back, and again induced to take their places in the line.

Then the starter dropped his flag. The white flag was lowered also, and a bell sounded in the stands. Instantly a roar arose.

"Off!"

"They're off—they're off!"

The cry burst forth thunderously as the horses swept away. It was a magnificent start, and one which is to be seen on no other racecourse in the world except an English one. There was scarcely half a length's distance between the first horse and the last.

Sir Terence's heart commenced pounding away with the tense excitement, and there were others who were excited in addition—there were others who were smiling confidently. For in the grand stand Lord Sylvester and Sir Roger Hogarth, side by side, watched the race. Like Sir Terence, very much depended upon the result of the race for them. Brent's success meant

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their failure, and their success meant Brent's ruin. It was a grim enough situation.

"Blue Diamond leads!"

The cry went up from hundreds of throats, and field-glasses were pressed to hundreds of eyes. It was seen that Blue Diamond had broken the line and was leading by a clear two lengths. Behind him came the rest of the field in a mad gallop.

Then one horse—Lord Sylvester's Speedwell—forged ahead, and was very soon pounding almost neck and neck alongside the favourite. As the race proceeded the positions of the horses changed. At the Ditch Mile Post Blue Diamond was still leading, but it could be seen that he was not striding with his former assurance. Speedwell crept up, and this time he forged slightly ahead.

"He's beat!"

"The favourite's beaten!"

The shout rang out excitedly and madly. The rest of the horses were nowhere; it was clearly a race between Blue Diamond and Speedwell. But which of the two would win? Lord Sylvester knew quite well that Blue Diamond could win, but that he was being held back by his jockey. And Sir Terence seemed to choke as the possibility of a defeat dawned upon him. He had been certain of success, and yet—

At the Abingdon Mile Post Speedwell was leading by a length, and the result of the race seemed assured. It seemed to Brent as though the whole scene had darkened and grown dim. Speedwell was leading, and Blue Diamond was obviously out of the running.

But there was suddenly another shout—this time a howling, excited roar. Just past the Abingdon Mile Post a miracle seemed to happen. Although Speedwell was going magnificently, an apparently certain winner, there was a rush like a reek by his side, and Blue Diamond forged up with the utmost ease.

"The favourite wins!"

"Blue Diamond wins!"

The two horses forged steadily up the hill. Speedwell's jockey was flogging the horse and spurring him mercilessly, but Speedwell was doing every inch of speed he was capable of. Both jockeys raised their whips in a simultaneous flash.

At the slightest touch of the whip Blue Diamond simply leapt ahead, leaving Speedwell as though the latter were almost standing. When failure

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seemed certain, success had come; and Sir Terence, in a wild burst of excitement, flung his silk hat high in the air and yelled with all his strength.

It was a splendid finish. To Brent's delight, and Lord Sylvester's utter dismay, Blue Diamond flew past Tattersall's ring, leading by two lengths, and when the winning-post was reached Speedwell was fully three lengths in the rear.

Blue Diamond had won—had won easily!

"I think," said Nelson Lee calmly, "that I've a little surprise for you, Sir Terence."

"By George, I've had one surprise already!" exclaimed Brent breathlessly. "Blue Diamond has won! Poulter, my lad, you were simply splendid!"

Nelson Lee and Brent were standing in the jockeys' dressing-room. At the conclusion of the race Brent had found, to his amazement, that the detective was standing by his side, and after the excitement was over—after Brent had proudly led his horse in—he and Poulter and Nelson Lee had gathered together here.

"This is the surprise," said the famous detective quietly.

And Poulter, to Brent's amazement, ripped off his auburn hair, rubbed a scar from his cheek, made one or two deft touches, and Nipper was revealed!

"Nipper!" gasped Brent amazedly. "Then—then you rode Blue Diamond all the time! I—I thought——"

"Yes, I rode your horse, Sir Terence," said Nipper cheerfully. "And, by gum, what a race it was! If that hound, Poulter, had been in the pig-skin there would have been a different finish."

And then Nelson Lee explained. He described how he had tracked Nipper to the old water-mill. The rescue of the lad had proved quite a simple matter, for the league men were utterly unprepared for Nelson Lee's visit. The detective had found Nipper in a cellar of the mill, bound hand and foot, and unable to move. Having freed the lad the pair lost no time in entering a room where Nipper's three captors were enjoying a game of cards. While Nelson Lee covered them with his revolver, Nipper had bound them all in turn. The trio had then been placed in the motor-car, and Nelson Lee had driven straight to the nearest big police-station. Here the three were handed over on a charge of abduction.

"You wonder why I didn't reveal myself—why Nipper didn't come and take his place at the start of the race?" Nelson Lee proceeded. "I will explain. Had Lord Sylvester known of Nipper's presence he would probably have resorted to some final villainy in an attempt to ruin you. By letting his lordship think that the kidnapping scheme had succeeded, everything was quite easy.

"Long before the race started Nipper and I concealed ourselves in this dressing-room—in that cupboard over in the corner. When Poulter came in to dress we calmly confronted him, and told him that it had come to my ears that he had agreed to lose the race. It was merely a chance shot, but it went home. Poulter immediately crumpled up and confessed, and the wretched youth will, in due course, be warned off the Turf."

"But where is he?" asked Brent, in astonishment.

"In that cupboard, bound up," replied Nelson Lee smoothly. "You see, for the success of my plan it was necessary that Poulter should seemingly ride Blue Diamond. Therefore, Nipper quickly donned the colours, and then I disguised him into a fairly passable imitation of Poulter—very great care was not necessary."

"And what's the programme now?" asked Sir Terence.

"We are now going to deal with Lord Sylvester," replied the detective grimly. "I have delayed action so far because had I exposed him beforehand more strenuous efforts would probably have been made to bring about your ruin."

Nelson Lee knew quite well that had Lord Sylvester been dealt with before the race, Sir Roger Hogarth would certainly have moved heaven and earth to attain his ends. But, by pursuing this course, the detective had utterly foiled the scoundrels, and Sir Terence Brent had emerged with flying colours.

But Lord Sylvester was warned of his coming downfall. How the warning had been given Nelson Lee could never discover; but the racing peer settled the matter once and for all by acting drastically.

When Nelson Lee, Nipper, a Scotland Yard official, and Rupert Mitchell arrived at Sylvester's house they found that a tragedy had occurred. Mitchell was quite willing to give evidence of Lord Sylvester's guilt—for Sylvester had actually taken part in the supposed maiming of Blue Diamond.

The scoundrelly peer shot himself. Rather than face disgrace he chose this course. But, when discovered, he was not dead, but fully conscious, and dying fast. And he performed a last good service, for he informed Brent of the valuable hematite deposits on his Irish estates, and the real reason for desiring Blue Diamond to lose was made evident. Thus Brent came into his own, and gained far greater fortunes than he had ever dreamed of.

But the League of the Green Triangle had lost yet another powerful Governing Member; it had not gained a penny piece, and its decline was more pronounced than ever.

It seemed as though Nelson Lee's great campaign was drawing to a close.

THE END.

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