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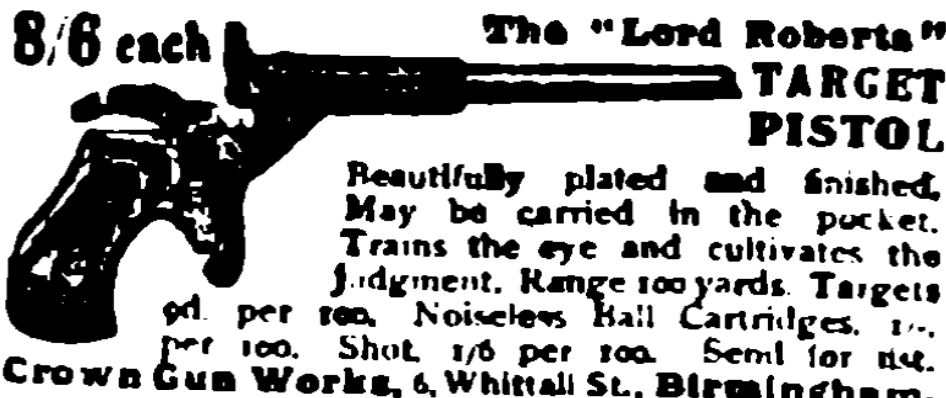


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CHAPTER I.

Making Plans—The Cry in the Night—Caine's News.

THE night was dark, windless and beautifully mild. On all sides stretched the delightfully hilly Surrey countryside, quiet and still. Utter blackness lay in every direction save one. From the lower window of a little creeper-covered cottage a soft radiance stole out into the night through the orange-coloured cotton blind. Somehow, that soft light had a singularly homely look about it.

There was an air of restfulness and peace in the scene. And inside the front room of the cottage all was contentment and lazy ease. Could an observer have peeped in he would have seen three men lolling comfortably in easy chairs, two of them smoking cigars and the other listening interestedly to the conversation of his companions. The old-fashioned lattice window was wide open, and the soft perfume of the flowers in the cottage garden stole sweetly into the low-ceilinged apartment.

Two of the men—those smoking and chatting—were aged, and white-haired. The other was much younger and seemed to be under-sized. A slight moustache adorned his upper lip, and his hair was dark and curly.

Who could have possibly guessed the truth?

Who could have recognised in those three the trio of indomitable spirits who had, for months past, been waging a grim and terrible war against the infamous League of the Green Triangle?

Nelson Lee, the celebrated detective; Nipper, his young assistant; and Douglas Clifford, the young man whose help had proved invaluable.

They were the three!

Seated in this quiet old-world cottage, on a calm spring night, it was a quaint setting for such a gathering. Yet they were all prepared for the parts they were playing, and fitted their surroundings perfectly.

The two white-haired men were, of course, Nelson Lee and Clifford; the other—with the scanty moustache—was Nipper. But why were they here? Why were they not discussing their business in Nelson Lee's own rooms in Gray's Inn Road? What was the reason for this mysterious behaviour?

"The position," Nelson Lee was saying, "is this. We three, strictly speaking, are dead. We are at the bottom of the Atlantic. We are defunct!"

Nipper grinned.

"We seem pretty lively for corpses, anyhow, gov'nor!" he remarked.

"You know very well what I mean, young 'un—and so do you, Clifford," pursued the detective, with a smile. "In our recent battle of wits with the Green Triangle we were securely locked in the cabin of a sinking yacht; and it was only by a sheer stroke of luck that we escaped. But we did escape, and arrived in England secretly. Professor Zingrave and his scoundrelly associates are positive that we all three perished in that shipwreck, and that Miss Vera Zingrave went to her death in addition. The fact that we are all alive and well is known only to ourselves."

Douglas Clifford nodded grimly.

"And now we're going to set to work and bust the league up to the skies, once and for all!" he said. "But that's hardly right; Zingrave and his fellow rogues won't go up to the skies—they'll take quite a different direction!"

Nelson Lee smiled quietly at the grim humour, and knocked the ash from his cigar into a little tray at his elbow.

Only a week had elapsed since they had landed in England after a terrible experience in the South Atlantic. They had all three been on board a steam yacht, belonging to the League of the Green Triangle, which had sailed the ocean for the express purpose of murdering two people—Edmund Gresswell, K.C., a Governing Member, who had turned traitor, and Vera Zingrave, the professor's own step-daughter. She had discovered the dread truth regarding Zingrave's true work, and he had deemed it advisable to settle the girl once and for all.

Vera had supposedly gone to the bottom with Nelson Lee, Nipper and Clifford; and she was now staying in North Wales under an assumed name, in the care of trustworthy friends of the great detective. He did not intend Zingrave to get warning of the real truth, for much depended upon secrecy being maintained.

The league thought their enemies to be dead—they were off their guard—and so the task of stamping out the pestilential organisation would be all the easier.

Douglas Clifford was very eager to get to work. It was he who originally supplied Nelson Lee with the inside information regarding the league's secrets which made the campaign possible. For months past he had been forced to assume the guise of an elderly man, but now it seemed as though the time was close at hand when he would be in a position to resume his own identity.

Informally, Clifford and Vera Zingrave were engaged to be married. She now knew everything regarding her father's villainy, and Clifford knew quite well that his marriage with Vera would be possible as soon as the league was finally settled with. Consequently, the young man was very eager to strike the blow which would ultimately bring the Green Triangle to ruin.

It had been Nelson Lee's idea to hire this furnished cottage. Here the trio could make their plans in quiet, and could use the cottage as a temporary base for their operations.

"We hold the trump card," said Nelson Lee quietly. "For Zingrave will be unprepared for activity. He knows that the police are entirely in the dark, and he thinks that we are dead. Our task is therefore made the easier."

"But how are we going to make a start, sir?" asked Nipper.

The detective slowly stroked his chin.

"There are many ways," he said. "One thing is certain, Nipper. The time has now come for a great offensive; we are going to tighten the net quickly and effectively. I mean to have no more beating about the bush. One way or another——"

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Nipper suddenly.

He turned in his seat and stared at the open window. He was sitting nearer to it than the others. The detective ceased speaking.

"I heard nothing," exclaimed Clifford. "What's wrong, Nipper?"

"Why, I heard a footstep——"

A gasping, choking cry sounded outside in the night. The next second, even as Nelson Lee and Clifford were starting to their feet, a thudding noise was heard against the door of the cottage—which opened straight into the front room.

"By James!"

Nelson Lee breathed the exclamation in a tense voice as he strode across to the door, Clifford and Nipper close behind. The detective turned the handle and flung the door open wide.

A man was lying huddled on the doorstep, and he now rolled across the threshold, his head falling into such a position that the light from the oil-lamp was shed full upon him. Clifford could not repress a low cry of horror. For the face was deathly pale, and there was a deep gash in the forehead, above the right eye. Blood was oozing from the wound, and trickled slowly down.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Clifford.

Nelson Lee, without a word, stepped out into the little garden of the cottage and gave a searching glance round in all directions. But there was no sign of a soul, and utter silence reigned.

So he turned and re-entered the cottage. Clifford and Nipper had dragged the unfortunate stranger in the room, and he was now propped in one of the easy chairs, breathing pantingly. Nelson Lee closed the door and went to the injured man's side.

"Bring the lamp nearer, Nipper!" he exclaimed sharply.

The lad did so, and the strong light gleamed upon the features of the newcomer. Nelson Lee started a trifle, and jerked his hand out. The next second a pair of false side-whiskers were in his fingers.

"Caine!" he exclaimed—"Martin Caine! Dear me, this is somewhat unexpected. I do not think our friend is seriously hurt. The brandy flask, Nipper!"

A dose of the fiery spirit was soon having due effect. Both Clifford and Nipper now recognised the man as Martin Caine, one of Nelson Lee's staunchest helpers. Caine was a controlling agent of the league, but he was working against the league, and not for it. During the past months he had given the detective many useful tips and items of information. Why he was down there was a puzzle; and why he was in such a sorry plight, was still a greater puzzle.

For, in addition to the gash on his forehead, he was soaked to the skin—dripping from head to foot.

In a very few minutes, however, he was able to give an account of himself. His eyes opened and a little colour returned to his cheeks. For some moments he turned his gaze from one to another about him, and finally a light of recognition crept into his eyes.

"Mr. Lee!" he murmured hoarsely. "I got here, then? I thought that I'd collapse on the way. By thunder, I've done 'em, though—I've hood-winked the brutes properly!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Take it calmly, Caine," he said gently. "You're quite all right now. This looks like a furrow caused by a revolver bullet on your forehead, but it's not serious. We'll soon have you fixed up. These wet things will have to be dragged off——"

"Oh, I'm all right, Mr. Lee," interjected Caine. "I want to tell you _____"

"Nonsense! We'll make you comfortable before you go into explanations. Just one question, however. Were you being followed?"

"No, Mr. Lee. I was quite alone."

The detective nodded again, and briskly set about the task of providing Caine with dry clothing, and with helping him to remove his wet things. Clifford gave a hand too; Nipper, meanwhile, preparing a meal.

By the time Caine had changed he was feeling altogether better; in fact, with a handkerchief bound round his head, he declared that he was as fit as a fiddle. He was certainly much improved in appearance by Nelson Lee's kindly administrations.

"I suppose you've guessed what it all means, sir," said Caine, before commencing to eat. "I've had a very narrow escape, but I'm safe enough now. The fools think they finished me."

"Evidently they were at fault," remarked Clifford drily. "You certainly appear to be a long way from the finish, Caine. By Jove! So your excellent league companions bowled you out at last?"

Caine nodded ruefully.

"Yes, and I don't know the exact reason," he replied. "Perhaps I have been shadowed lately, or perhaps the Governing Circle has had suspicions of me since that Ocean Queen affair. It was I who recommended Mr. Lee and Nipper to the skipper of the boat as two trustworthy hands. Their real identity was afterwards found out—and I suppose suspicion fell upon me."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Undoubtedly," he said. "You were at once suspected of being an accomplice. Well, tell us exactly what happened."

"I became aware that I was being shadowed early this evening," Caine replied. "I at once realised that the sooner I changed my identity the better, for I knew that it was all up with my position in the league. That's finished. Well, I've had a good deal of experience, and it didn't take me long to shake my pursuers off."

"What did you do then?"

"I disguised myself with side-whiskers and a thick wig, and then took a train down to this part of the country," replied the other. "You see, Mr. Lee, I knew exactly where you were, for you had already given me the tip, and I came down here to report and to receive orders. While I was walking from the station in the darkness, I discovered, to my dismay, that I was by no means so safe as I had supposed."

"You were followed?"

"By two men, Mr. Lee—possibly three. I'm not quite sure," answered Caine. "Anyhow, as I was cautiously looking round a bullet came whizzing through the darkness from an air pistol, and it caught me on my head slantingly, and knocked me as flat as a pancake. I wasn't exactly insensible, for I can remember the rotters bending over me."

"What followed?"

"Well, my brain was very acute, in spite of the blow I had received. Perhaps my wits were sharpened by the knowledge that I was doomed. I didn't move an eyelid, and pretended to be dead. My head, I knew, was bleeding like fury. The wheeze worked, for one of the men hoarsely said that I was dead—shot clean through the brain.

"The other fellow wanted to make positively sure by putting another bullet into my brain," went on Martin Caine grimly. "When I heard that I thought it was about time for me to come to life again. But the far-away sound of a motor-car brought things to a head, and I was quickly picked up, carried across a meadow, and laid in the grass beside a stream."

"My stars!" ejaculated Nipper. "That's why your clothes are soaking! The rotters chucked you in!"

Caine smiled.

"I can assure you I didn't jump in for the pleasure of it," he replied. "I was beginning to feel a little dizzy by then, and I knew that the loss of blood was having due effect. My head was throbbing agonisingly, and queer lights seemed to dance before my eyes. Well, before I realised what had happened, the brutes had tied a lump of stone to my feet, and I was chucked into the river."

"Dear me! How on earth did you manage to escape from that predicament?" asked Nelson Lee curiously.

"It sounds terrible enough, I know," replied Caine. "But actually it was as simple as anything could possibly be. When I plunged into the stream I sank like a stone, and that arrested my rapid slide into unconsciousness with a vengeance. The cold water revived me instantly, and it took me about ten seconds to double myself up and cut through the ropes which secured the stone with my claspknife. You see, gentlemen, the league men had thought me dead, and so it was quite sufficient to ensure my being carried to the bottom. They didn't reckon on my being able to cut the ropes."

"I should imagine it was a ticklish job," remarked Clifford.

"In moments like those, sir, we don't have much time to think of difficulties and possibilities," replied Martin Caine sagely. "I just took one gulp of water into my mouth, and knew that if I didn't act pretty sharp I should be lying at the bottom of that stream for good and all. I shot to the surface as soon as I had released the boulder, and came up close to the bank amongst some reeds."

"And then?" Nelson Lee queried.

"That's all, Mr. Lee. In the distance I could faintly see the figures of my assailants disappearing in the gloom. It was obvious they hadn't waited a second by the river bank—they were chicken-hearted blighters, anyhow! I waited a good fifteen minutes before I moved, and then dragged myself out of the river and made straight for this cottage."

"How far distant did all this happen?"

"About two miles. Oh, you needn't be afraid that the brutes followed me here," said Caine quickly. "They returned to the station in double quick time, thinking that they had performed their dirty work thoroughly."

"They didn't know where you were bound for?"

"How could they know?" asked the other. "By this time they're miles from here, Mr. Lee. And I'm in the same position as you, by a queer coincidence. The league men think they've 'outed' me, and the Governing Circle thinks that you and Nipper and Mr. Clifford are at the bottom of the Atlantic."

Nelson Lee drummed the table thoughtfully with his finger-tips.

"H'm! Perhaps this is all for the best, Caine," he exclaimed. "The final drama connected with the Green Triangle will soon commence, and you are, at least, out of further danger. But you did not say how you managed to reach this cottage."

"It was hard, sir—awfully hard," replied Caine. "I was chilled and stiff, and my head was hammering terribly. Out of precaution I didn't

walk along the road, but kept in the fields and meadows, paralled with the road."

"Excellent!" murmured Nelson Lee approvingly.

"I came over giddy once or twice, and stumbled over a root and caught my head against a tree-trunk. That started the bleeding again, and I was almost done when I saw the light of this lamp. I staggered up, and knew that I was going off properly. I just remember gasping out a hoarse cry, and then I sank down on the doorstep."

"Are you sure you were not followed?"

"Positive. Why, the best part of an hour had elapsed since the affair by the river. Besides, I was on the alert the whole time. Oh, no, Mr. Lee, those league hounds have gone home, and you're as safe here as ever."

Nelson Lee waved his hand over the table.

"Go ahead, my dear Caine," he said. "Eat heartily—it will do you good."

Martin Caine turned to the excellent repast, but then faced his companions again. There was an eager look in his eyes now.

"But I've forgotten to tell you something, gentlemen," he exclaimed quickly. "I have extraordinary news to relate. You will, of course, all remember Sir Gordon Hyde, the famous astronomer?"

Clifford laughed.

"Astronomer!" he repeated. "I dare say Sir Gordon studied the stars a good deal, but he was one of the greatest scoundrels in Great Britain. Built an observatory on a little island off the coast of Scotland, and called it Solar Island. It was, as a matter of fact, a huge secret workshop of the league's, and Sir Gordon was cornered there by Mr. Lee."

"Well, not exactly cornered," said Nelson Lee. "Sir Gordon Hyde escaped in his yacht, and I and Nipper chased the vessel in a naval ship—a destroyer. When we caught the fugitive we discovered that Sir Gordon had jumped overboard; that he had committed suicide rather than face disgrace."

Martin Caine bent forward.

"Sir Gordon Hyde did not die!" he declared slowly. "Sir Gordon Hyde is in London at this very minute, and he is going to attend a meeting of the Governing Circle to-morrow evening at the Orpheum Club!"

"Dear me!" murmured Nelson Lee, rising and pacing the low room. "Sir Gordon Hyde alive! This is news, indeed!"

"Will it make any difference, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"No difference whatever, my lad. The League of the Green Triangle is even now tottering, and Sir Gordon Hyde will assuredly be buried in the ruins in company with his scoundrelly colleagues!"

But what did the supposedly dead baronet's return portend?

CHAPTER II.

At the Orpheum Club—Sir Gordon's Surprise—A Plan.

THE Orpheum Club was apparently one of the most select institutions in the whole of the West End of London. And it was not only select, but singularly exclusive. Professor Cyrus Zingrave, the chairman, had absolute power to elect or reject new members. But new members were very rare. Many had ceased to enter the magnificent portals of the Orpheum Club of late, but no others took their places.

For the Orpheum Club was actually the headquarters of the League of the Green Triangle. Every member of the club belonged to the Governing

Circle of the great criminal society. And during the past few months, owing to Nelson Lee's activity, many Governing Members had fallen, and no others had filled the vacant spaces.

The Orpheum Club was, nevertheless, always full of life of an evening, and on this particular night—the night following Martin Caine's dramatic appearance in Nelson Lee's country cottage—there seemed to be more animation than usual.

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Roger Hogarth, as he lounged into the smoking-room with Mr. Ernest Monkswell, a Member of Parliament, and one of the oldest Governing Members. "Begad! It almost seems like old times, my dear Monkswell. We are exceptionally gay to-night. Reminds me of the days when Foxcroft and Sylvester and Sims-Jameson and all the rest of the old crowd were knocking about. Dear, dear! It's amazing how quickly they have all departed, never to return!"

Monkswell, M.P., smiled.

"There's one of the old crowd who'll be back with us, anyhow!" he exclaimed. "I haven't seen him personally since his return, but I hope to have the pleasure to-night. Were you in the club when Hyde turned up?"

"Not so loud!" exclaimed Hogarth softly. "Don't use Hyde's name. He calls himself Stanley Ruthven now, and poses as an American. Yes, I was here, in this very smoking-room, with Zingrave when he calmly walked in."

"When was this?"

"Two nights ago—Thursday," replied Sir Roger, seating himself on a lounge in a secluded corner. "Sit down, Monkswell, and I'll tell you about it. You were away in your constituency, weren't you?"

"Yes; I only returned to-day."

"Then you know nothing about the affair, of course. Well, it was about ten o'clock on Thursday evening," explained the baronet confidentially. "Zingrave and I were sitting in that corner which is now occupied by Dr. Northrup, smoking and chatting. We were rather astonished to see a stranger walk boldly in and come straight across to us. He thrust out his hand and gripped Zingrave's."

"'Hallo, professor!' he exclaimed, in quite a calm voice. 'Didn't expect to see me again in this world, did you?'"

"He sat down between Zingrave and I, and we looked at him, decidedly taken aback. Before either of us could speak, however, he introduced himself as Mr. Stanley Ruthven, of Hartford, Connecticut. Zingrave commenced saying that he hadn't the honour of Mr. Ruthven's acquaintance when the stranger broke into a chuckle."

"But surely you recognised him as Hyde?" asked Monkswell, M.P.

"Not at all," replied Sir Roger, knocking the ash from his cigar. "Hyde, as you know well enough, was clean-shaven and had grey hair. This man, however, wore a full beard of 'ginger' colour, and had curly, brown hair. After he had chuckled he asked us to go with him to an ante-room, where we should be private. Having arrived there, Zingrave and I received a stunning surprise. Sir Gordon calmly removed his false beard and wig and addressed us in his usual well-known tones. Begad! It was as though the man had come back from the grave! He was altered a trifle, having been through a pretty hard time, but he was the same old Hyde—same old twist about his mouth when he smiled, same old scar under his left eye. The professor was as cool as possible; but I'm not such an infernally calm fellow as Zingrave. I fairly shouted with amazement, and wrung Hyde's hand again and again. He was intensely pleased with the reception we gave him——"

"Hallo!" interjected Monkswell abruptly. "Surely this is——"

"Jove! Yes—Hyde himself!" said Sir Roger softly.

They had turned, and were watching a man who had just entered the smoking-room. He was tall and upright, and wore a neat auburn beard and thick brown hair. A pair of gold-rimmed glasses rested upon the bridge of his nose; but Monkswell knew that these were not an added effect to the disguise, for Sir Gordon Hyde had always worn *puce-nez*.

"Come!" said Hogarth, with a chuckle. "I'll introduce you to Mr. Stanley Ruthven!"

Sir Gordon strolled across, however, accompanied by Dr. William Northrup, and he gripped Monkswell's hand warmly.

"No necessity for extreme caution here," said Hyde smoothly, and in his own voice. "We're in our own quarters, and there's nobody to overhear. By James, Monkswell, I'm glad to see you again. It's like old times to be back in the club!"

"How on earth did you manage to escape——"

"I will tell you about that later," interrupted Sir Gordon. "It was touch and go with me, but I'm not dead yet! I'm back with you all, and I hear that things haven't been running very smoothly of late."

"We've had some rough luck," Monkswell remarked.

"Well, well—perhaps I shall be able to turn the tide," said Sir Gordon calmly. "Oh, I'm not bombastic enough to suppose that my presence will make any appreciable difference; but I have got a fairly big card up my sleeve."

"Hallo, hallo!" said Sir Roger Hogarth. "Something startling, eh?"

"Yes—something startling!"

Sir Gordon's voice was cool but decisive. And his listeners knew that tone well; Hyde had always spoken so when he was about to spring a surprise upon his colleagues. He had been one of the league's most valuable members, and every individual of the Governing Circle was delighted to know that he was back again.

It was felt that the run of ill-luck would come to an end. Consequently, the Orpheum Club was lively and animated.

Very soon, however, the clubmen strolled from the smoking-room and lounges and card-rooms and billiard-saloons and made their way in twos and threes upstairs to the chairman's private apartment. There was simply to be a meeting of the club, in order to discuss some little details concerning an alteration in the grill-room.

At least, that is what the meeting purported to be.

But, once all the men were within the chairman's room the double doors were closed, and Professor Cyrus Zingrave glanced round the assembled throng. Not all the members of the Governing Circle were present. There were many absent; but these were either abroad or out of London, or unavoidably engaged.

"I think, gentlemen," said Zingrave musically, "we are ready."

There was a general murmur of agreement, and the professor moved nearer to the massive fireplace. The two baronets—Sir Roger Hogarth and Sir Gordon Hyde—were nearest to Zingrave, and they turned now, and waited. They knew well enough what was about to occur; for every Governing Member knew the secret of this apartment.

Zingrave took from his pocket a tiny needle, but blunt and stout. This he inserted into a little insignificant hole near the ornamental work of the mantelpiece. Instantly there was a slight click and a little portion of the woodwork slid back, revealing a deep cavity with a steel knob at the extremity. The thing was amazingly clever; for it would have been impossible for a searcher to find that secret knob if he persevered for days and weeks. Who would have guessed that the key was the almost invisible pinhole in the ornamental work?

Zingrave pulled the knob, and an astonishing thing happened. The whole fireplace commenced to slide silently back—fireplace, mantelpiece, wall and all! It was a masterpiece of building construction. Simultaneous with the movement of the fireplace the little cavity closed itself, concealing the steel knob once more.

A flight of narrow stairs occupied the very place which had been filled a moment before, by the fire-grate itself. But all this was quite ordinary to these men. They still chatted among themselves as they passed down the narrow stairs. Little electric lamps sunk into the wall, and flush with the face of it, provided illumination.

Zingrave led the way, and Sir Roger Hogarth waited until last, in order to close the secret opening. The professor and those following him soon found themselves in a wide passage. This was quite short, and at the end a great steel door barred the way.

It was like the door of a strong-room beneath a bank. The lock was intricate and massive, and was controlled by a combination. Zingrave performed several little movements, and the great mass of solid steel swung open. Then the Governing Members passed through into the council chamber of the league.

When all were inside the apartment the steel door was closed again. With this closed it was impossible for an attacking force—even supposing such a force discovered the secret of the fireplace above—to enter the Governing Chamber. It was necessary, first of all, to break down the steel door. And while that was being done the circle would have ample time in which to make their escape by other means. There was not a single stone left unturned to make the league's headquarters absolutely impregnable.

The chamber itself was a long, low apartment, with delicately shaded lamps shedding their soft light upon a rich mahogany table and luxurious, padded chairs. The men lounged in these chairs, smoking and chatting. Professor Zingrave stood at the head of the table, and rapped upon it.

"Gentlemen," he said smoothly, in his delightfully musical tones, "you all know the object of this meeting. It is to celebrate the return of our old and trusted friend, Sir Gordon Hyde. We welcome him back into our midst, and I am sure I am expressing the wishes of us all when I say that it is to be hoped he will remain with us for many years to come."

"Hear, hear!" murmured many voices.

"I am flattered, indeed!" smiled Sir Gordon Hyde.

"There is every prospect of good fortune ahead of us," proceeded Zingrave. "Recently, as you all know, Sir Roger Hogarth's yacht, the Ocean Queen, met with disaster while cruising in the South Atlantic. The league's most dangerous enemy was sent to his well-deserved death in that affair. I am referring to Mr. Nelson Lee, the private detective. Lee perished when the Ocean Queen went to the bottom; and his two assistants went with him—the lad Nipper and a man named John Merrick. My own step-daughter, Vera, also died. It was a drastic step, but necessary. She was heart and soul with Nelson Lee, and a danger to the league and to me."

"They are better dead!" said Sir Gordon Hyde callously.

"We must think of success—always success," went on Zingrave. "Anyone who stands in the way of the League of the Green Triangle must be thrust aside—and thrust aside so that there can be no possible return. The league has suffered enough set-backs of late, and now we must all work strenuously in order to restore to our organisation its former prosperity and glory."

"No amount of strenuous work will restore Foxcroft, Lord Sylvester, Sims, Jameson, and those others who have gone," said Dr. Northrup grimly.

The professor bent forward.

"There are others," he replied. "There are many influential men equally as capable as those you named, doctor. And what about the circle as it now stands? We are still powerful, still determined. The Green Triangle will soon be as prosperous as ever; and I think Sir Gordon Hyde will suggest the first step towards the ultimate triumph."

Hyde rose to his feet.

"I do not propose to go fully into my plan at this present meeting," he said. "I wish to address you again on Monday evening— But I will explain. As regards my escape from what appeared to be certain death, that was scarcely such a miracle as it seems. You may remember that I jumped overboard from my yacht when it was being chased by a British torpedo-boat-destroyer after the flight from Solar Island."

"That is correct," said Monkswell nodding. "The captain reported your death."

"Exactly. Perhaps he thought that I had gone to the bottom. But I was wearing a very efficient safety-belt beneath my clothes, and I did not sink. I admit freely that I anticipated death, but I was picked up by a tramp steamer bound for Cuba. I was landed at Havana—having told the skipper of the ship that I had been wrecked in a little sailing yacht. From Havana I worked my way to the United States, and took good care to conceal my real identity. Well, I won't weary you with details, but before long I arrived in New York, and there determined to manufacture a new identity for myself before returning to England. I did it so thoroughly that the name of Mr. Stanley Ruthven is now a well-known one in Hartford, Connecticut. Sir Gordon Hyde is indeed dead—and I live in his place."

"Excellent," murmured Zingrave.

"But while in Hartford I made acquaintance with a most extraordinary man," proceeded Sir Gordon smoothly. "His name is Joseph Blackmore, and he is a chemist by trade not a trading chemist, but an analytical expert. He is now in London, waiting for me to take his word that all is right. Blackmore is something of a black sheep, and I managed to learn his guilty secret; so, in a way, he fears me. But I am on the most amiable terms with the man, and I am convinced that he will prove to be a marvellously able asset to the Governing Circle."

"Dear me!" said Zingrave. "You propose to make this stranger a Governing Member?"

"Exactly! Have no fears, professor. He is a man in a thousand; a man who will turn the tide of fortune to an amazing degree. For Blackmore has made a most wonderful discovery—and he is willing to share it with the league. You ask why? I will tell you," said Hyde. "This discovery of Blackmore's requires capital to place it on a working basis, and he lacks capital. With the league behind him he will be heart and soul in his work, and we shall all reap the benefit."

"But what is this astonishing discovery?" asked Sir Roger Hogarth.

Hyde made no reply; but he felt in his coat pocket, and produced a little cardboard box. From a mass of wadding inside this he brought to light a small object which glittered and sparkled with a hundred thousand fires in the electric lights.

"A diamond!" exclaimed Zingrave, taking the stone. "Good gracious! What a size, Hyde! A diamond of singular purity and of enormous size. This is worth thousands of pounds. Where on earth did you find it?"

"I didn't find it—such diamonds are not to be found."

"I mean, how did you obtain it?" asked the professor interestedly.

"Cannot you guess what I am driving at?" asked Sir Gordon, his eyes

gleaming with strange excitement. "That magnificent diamond was not found—it was made!"

"Made!" gasped Hogarth.

"Yes, made—manufactured!" replied the other tensely. "Manufactured by Joseph Blackmore! And is capable of making thousands of other diamonds equally as pure—equally as valuable! And that stone is better than any that ever came out of the biggest South African mines!"

The Governing Circle was on its feet now, and all the men were clamouring round Zingrave. After a while the professor handed the superb diamond round, and order was partially restored. But the Governing Members were excited and eager to hear more. Sir Gordon, however, did not speak much longer.

"That diamond is merely a sample," he said calmly—"a sample handed to me by Blackmore for your inspection. When he is able to build a proper apparatus he will be in a position to make the most magnificent diamonds the world has ever seen. Think of the possibilities, gentlemen! Think of what value this man will be to the league!"

Zingrave was perfectly cool, and his eyes narrowed.

"Are you sure the man is not fooling you?" he asked.

"Fooling me?" repeated Sir Gordon sharply. "Come, come, professor, I am not the man to be bluffed. You know me well enough—you know that I was perhaps the most cautious man in the league. I positively assure you that I have spoken from personal knowledge. I am not merely passing Blackmore's word on to you."

"Ah, you have seen——"

"I have seen enough," interjected Hyde. "Why, man, that diamond is sufficient evidence! Look at it! Have you ever seen such a perfect stone? But I am not asking you to take my word or Blackmore's word. On Monday I want a full meeting of the circle to gather here; and then my new friend will thoroughly explain his system, and swear allegiance to the Green Triangle."

Professor Zingrave looked round the big table.

"On Monday, then," he said smoothly, "Can you all attend, gentlemen?"

There was general acquiescence.

"Excellent!" said Zingrave. "There are others, too, who are not at this meeting. They must certainly be present at such an important gathering. Sir Gordon's return to our midst, apparently, is to be signalled by the introduction of a new member who will do much to solve the league's present financial difficulties."

And thus it was arranged.

On Monday evening, at ten o'clock, the Governing Circle would gather in full; and Sir Gordon Hyde would introduce Joseph Blackmore—diamond-maker.

CHAPTER III.

Night Marauders—The League's Records—A Substitution.

CLICK!

It was extremely dark, and two dim figures were crouching against a small window, which looked out upon a high-walled, enclosed yard. Overhead, the sky was obscured by drifting clouds, and a considerable breeze rustled around the buildings. The two forms were scarcely visible, for they were merged in the shadows, and seemingly part of them.

"That's done the trick!" murmured a voice, as the click sounded.

"Yes; but we must be cautious—very cautious."

"Why?"

"Because there is a watchman," replied the other in a soft whisper. "But the time is now half-past one; and at that hour the watchman is taking a meal in his own quarters. Our information is reliable, so we know exactly what we are doing. By the time the watchman starts on his next round there will be no evidence to show that we are within the building. Come, follow me quietly!"

Noiselessly the window was raised, and two minutes later the pair of shadowy figures had slipped into the room, and the window was closed again.

All round was the blackest darkness, except where the window showed as a slightly less pitchy square. The apartment, in fact, was a small store-room at the rear of the Orpheum Club.

But what were these burglars doing in such an institution as the Orpheum Club? There were no valuables in the building, except silver and cutlery—and such booty was certainly not worth the trouble of securing. For the club plate was naturally not solid silver.

"Come on, gov'nor! Let's get a move on!"

"Not so fast, Nipper. We must act with extreme caution," replied the other warningly. "Don't forget that this is the stronghold of the league, and that much depends upon the success of this venture."

Nelson Lee's voice was smooth and calm. It was indeed the great detective and his young assistant who were adopting the role of burglars. Nelson Lee had his own reasons—and very excellent reasons—for embarking upon this enterprise.

During the day he had been making very careful inquiries—secret inquiries and investigations. The detective knew that a full meeting of the Governing Circle was to take place on the following night—Monday night. Accordingly, the detective was making preparations.

For it was during the full meeting of the circle that Nelson Lee intended making a huge raid upon the club.

The time for drastic action had arrived. The league was weak now, and it would be folly to allow the villainous criminal society to recuperate its strength and introduce fresh blood, and obtain new resources.

A fully organised raid was the only method to adopt now—a terrific raid which would end in the capture of the whole Governing Circle, Professor Zingrave included.

And the meeting which had been arranged to introduce Mr. Joseph Blackmore provided Nelson Lee with his opportunity. But there was work to be done beforehand; there was a certain task to be undertaken now.

From his pocket Nelson Lee took a small but powerful electric torch. But he did not press the button; he moved silently forward to the door of the room, which, he knew, led out upon a passageway. This passageway, in turn, led to a broad corridor, ending in the massive hall of the club.

"Everything depends upon our being silent, Nipper," murmured the detective. "Don't forget that the watchman is a member of the league, and he has probably secret and unknown methods of defending himself. We are in the league's headquarters, and Zingrave has assuredly taken the utmost precautions for guarding the place. We do not wish to come to grips with the watchman. The Governing Circle must have absolutely no inkling that there have been visitors during the night."

Nipper gave a soft chuckle.

"We're a pair of beauties, gov'nor!" he whispered. "Nice kind of job for Sunday night, I must say!"

"Don't allow your conscience to prick you, young 'un," murmured Nelson Lee. "Our consciences may be eased, as a matter of fact, by the knowledge that it is Monday morning—very early, but still, Monday morning!"

"Only my joke, sir," chuckled Nipper. "In any case, we're here for a jolly good object—to pave the way to the undoing of the greatest society of rogues in the whole giddy world. My stars! I can hardly realise that our campaign against the Green Triangle is nearly at an end!"

"Well, don't try to realise anything at the present—and let's have no more jokes," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You haven't got to think at all, Nipper—all you have to do is to keep by my side, and hold your tongue."

"Good enough, sir!"

Very quietly Nelson Lee opened the door of the room. The pair were now in the passageway. To their left lay the bulk of the building, and to their right the passage merely led to some further store-rooms. The night-watchman was now—or ought to be—enjoying his meal in quite a different part of the building. There was very little danger of running into the man. But it was best to be cautious.

As silently as two shadows the amateur burglars moved along the passage. They arrived in the great hall without incident, Nelson Lee flashing the light from his torch upon the floor at brief intervals.

The lofty hall was silent and gloomy. One flash of the light showed the pair where the great staircase lay, and they were soon mounting to the upper floor. Down one wide corridor after another they noiselessly moved; and at last Nelson Lee halted before a massive mahogany door, upon which a polished brass plate bore the inscription: "Chairman's Office—Private."

Without a single word Nelson Lee took from his pocket a small bunch of skeleton keys. The detective worked in complete darkness, and Nipper stood by keenly on the alert for the slightest suspicion of disturbance.

The minutes passed draggingly for Nipper, but at last he heard his master utter an almost inaudible sigh of satisfaction. It had been rather a long job—for seventeen minutes had passed altogether—but the door was now open.

Nelson Lee could have forced the lock in three minutes had he chosen. It was a very excellent lock, of the latest pattern; but, after all, it was only a very ordinary affair, such as are fitted on thousands of street doors in London. This one was of the most expensive and efficient variety. There was no reason why the chairman's office should be made impregnable, for the apartment contained nothing of an incriminating nature. Zingrave had not the slightest fear of the secret entrance of the Governing Chamber being found out.

But the detective had taken very particular pains, for it was necessary that he should leave no evidence whatever that the room had been entered. As the door swung open Nelson Lee felt before him and silently gripped the handle of a second door—a baize-covered door—which was just within. This, of course, was not locked at all. Within a minute Nelson Lee and Nipper were in the chairman's office, and both doors were closed upon them.

"Ah, now I can breathe a little more freely, Nipper!" murmured the detective. "The watchman cannot possibly enter this apartment, and we are safe until we make our exit. But I have no doubt that we shall accomplish that manœuvre successfully."

"Sure, sir," whispered Nipper. "But what's the next move?"

"We are going to visit the Governing Chamber of the League!"

"Easy enough to say, gov'nor——"

"And easy enough to accomplish," interrupted Nelson Lee coolly. "You

were rather sceptical, were you not, when I told you some time ago that I should make my way to the Governing Chamber with perfect ease? Well, I will now prove my words, my lad."

Nipper gripped his master's arm.

"My hat! It'll be a ripping experience to visit the rogue's lair!" he murmured eagerly. "Of course, you've been there before, sir, but I haven't."

Nelson Lee had, indeed, paid a visit to the Governing Chamber on one historic occasion. He had changed places with one of the members named Oscar Sillard, who was not intimately known, owing to his work necessitating him living in Devonshire—for Sillard had been the governor of Portmoor Prison. He had since gone to his doom; but Nelson Lee's ruse had never been detected, or even suspected. But the incident had occurred months before. Certain improvements had taken place since then.

Nelson Lee saw that the blind of the room was closely drawn, and a pair of heavy curtains were also pulled across the window. There was no possibility of any light escaping from the room.

It was, therefore, quite safe to switch the electric torch on, and this the detective did. Then he flashed the light closely over the ornamental enamelled woodwork of the fireplace. After less than a minute's search the torch was held stationary, and Nelson Lee pointed with his other hand.

"There, Nipper," he breathed, "do you see?"

"Yes, sir; I can see some carved woodwork."

"I do not mean that. Cannot you see something else?"

Nipper looked very closely.

"No, I'm blessed if I can see anything particularly startling," he replied. "There's a bit of a hole there, like the hole caused by a tack which has been driven in and removed. But I can't see any——"

"There is no necessity for you to look further, my lad," the detective exclaimed softly. "That tiny pin-hole is the key to the astonishing puzzle."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Nipper. "Are—are you sure?"

"You will see in a moment."

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

"This is not a time for going into long explanations, for we have work before us," replied Nelson Lee. "I do know the secret, and surely that is sufficient. Now, watch carefully."

"I'm all eyes, sir."

The detective took from his pocket a short piece of steel wire—piano-wire, in fact—and carefully inserted it in the tiny hole in the ornamental woodwork. The end struck on something metallic at once, and Nelson Lee pressed. He felt the wire spring back a trifle, and then the little panel opened, and revealed a polished metal knob.

"Crumbs!" said Nipper blankly.

"Really clever—eh, Nipper?" smiled Nelson Lee. "You ought to feel flattered, young 'un. I am initiating you into the secrets of the league—the most cherished secrets of all. Stand clear now, and watch again."

The knob was pulled, and the fireplace at once commenced sliding silently backwards. Nipper looked on with wide-open, staring eyes. Curiously enough, he wasn't wondering at the amazing thoroughness of this secret arrangement; but the thought struck him that Professor Zingrave would have a dozen blue fits if he could only know that Nelson Lee was very much alive at the present moment—and not at the bottom of the Atlantic—and that the detective was actually entering the league's secret Governing Chamber!

"By James! What an architect the fellow was who designed this!"

murmured Nelson Lee, with involuntary admiration. "What do you think of it, lad? The whole fireplace, the whole wall, has moved back."

"Let's get down the stairs, sir," said Nipper practically.

And in a few moments the pair were descending the flight of stone steps which led down to the hidden apartment below. The electric lights in the wall were not switched on, for the detective's torch provided all the illumination that was necessary.

The great steel strong-room door faced the daring intruders.

"Hallo—hallo!" muttered Nipper. "Now we're diddled, gov'nor. We can't pick this combination lock with a hair-pin, can we? The only thing to bust that down is a charge of dynamite, or an oxy-acetylene apparatus."

"Neither are necessary. I have a much simpler method."

"What's that, sir?"

"The correct combination, of course."

"By Jimmy! You know it, then?" breathed Nipper eagerly.

For answer his master fingered the knobs and levers for a few seconds, and then the massive door swung noiselessly open. Nipper chuckled gleefully.

"You're a marvel, gov'nor!" he said. "Talk about Maskelyne and Devant! You beat 'em hollow, blessed if you don't!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"The two gentlemen you just named, Nipper, perform remarkably clever tricks with prepared apparatus," he replied. "But I have merely opened a steel door by the usual simple method—that of setting the lock at the correct combination. Now we must proceed very carefully indeed."

"Why, sir?"

"Because it is essential that we should leave no trace of our visit."

Nelson Lee stepped forward into the Governing Chamber, flashing his light before him. Nipper followed, quivering with intense excitement. After flashing the beam of brilliant light about for a few moments, the detective turned to his young companion.

"You know the reason for this visit, Nipper?" he said quietly. "We are here for a very definite purpose. If possible, I mean to take away with me the secret records of the League of the Green Triangle."

"The secret records, gov'nor?" Nipper repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Somewhere in this grim apartment certain papers are hidden, recording all the league's big transactions. If at all possible I intend to gain possession of those papers. For they will be conclusive and absolute evidence of the league's infamy. Moreover, I strongly suspect that every Governing Member has signed a document swearing allegiance to the Green Triangle. These documents, doubtless, are secreted with the records, and you can imagine of what value they are. With those signed statements in the hands of the police every man will be exposed."

"If we get hold of the papers, sir, a raid won't be necessary," Nipper said shrewdly. "The police can simply arrest every Governing Member in his own house."

But Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am afraid that would not be satisfactory, my boy," he replied. "This job has got to be done thoroughly. The documents alone would really prove nothing, for the League of the Green Triangle is merely a myth so far as the police know. Every Governing Member would laugh at the signed documents and declare it to be a joke. On the other hand, what can they say if the raid takes place?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" said Nipper candidly.

"The great object is to catch all the Governing Members in this chamber," the detective said tensely. "The evidence will then be beyond doubt. With

the signed documents and the league's records in the possession of the police not a single man will have a ghost of a chance to slip out of the meshes of the net. Every man will be self-convicted—for the very fact of the circle being congregated together in this apartment will be positive proof of villainy. No escape will be possible."

"But suppose we can't find the records and the——"

"Now, Nipper, don't be a wet blanket," protested Nelson Lee gently. "Wait until we have searched in vain for an hour before you take that pessimistic view. While I commence the search you stand out in the passage, and listen intently for the first sign of alarm."

"How the dickens can the alarm have been given, sir?"

"I don't know. But the very opening of this strong-room door may have rung a bell in Zingrave's house," replied the detective keenly. "The professor is famous for his thoroughness. But I don't think anything like that has happened."

Very soon Nelson Lee was carefully commencing his search. He took the utmost pains to disturb nothing, and proceeded with his task deliberately and calmly. There was a very excellent reason for this preliminary work; for if the papers were not taken now they would probably never be taken at all.

At the crucial moment of the raid everything would be confusion. Nelson Lee was sure of that. And during the excitement Zingrave, knowing how intensely vital the written records and documents were, would probably find some means of destroying the damning evidence. And that would be nothing short of a disaster. If Zingrave destroyed anything it should be merely dummies of the originals.

The final blow against the league should be a fatal, knock-out blow.

In such a grim business as this there was to be no loop-hole of escape. A crushing, stunning exposure, ending all in one great crash—that was the programme.

Nipper stood out in the passage, and the minutes passed slowly. Dead silence reigned, except for an occasional movement of Nelson Lee in the Governing Chamber. After an hour had elapsed Nipper was aching—aching with standing. It was clear to him, by this time, that no alarm had been given.

But the lad was very sceptical as to whether his master would be successful in his efforts. Nipper, to tell the truth, was pretty certain that the result of this visit would be nil.

Nipper, however, was quite wrong.

The lad was on the point of going in to his master to protest against the futility of the search when he heard Nelson Lee utter a short, low exclamation of intense satisfaction. It was the first sound Nipper had heard his master utter, and the lad knew well enough what it portended.

In four strides he was in the chamber.

Nelson Lee was in the far quarter, close against the panelled wall, and the light from his electric torch was projected upon a little patch of flooring.

"Hallo, sir! What have you found?" Nipper asked eagerly.

"Come and see, young 'un—come and see!"

The lad quickly crossed the carpeted floor, and in a moment he was by his master's side. Nelson Lee was kneeling, and right before him a cavity about a foot square yawned in the flooring—for the carpet was turned back at this corner.

"My stars! You've found it, then?"

"I think so, Nipper." Nelson Lee was groping in the black cavity. "I searched every inch of the flooring three or four times before I located this.

The walls, I soon determined, were bare of any hidden cupboard, and so I turned my attentions to the floor. But the opening was so cunningly concealed that it was only by the closest possible scrutiny that I made the discovery."

"But I can't imagine why the cavity should be made so secret," Nipper remarked. "What does it matter here, in the very Governing Chamber? They'd be perfectly safe even in the drawer of the table. Zingrave thinks the place to be impregnable."

"Quite so, but— Ah, I think I have an explanation!"

Nelson Lee had been bending with his head close against the opening, the light from the torch playing into the recess. He remained in this position for several moments, and when he finally straightened his back he held up to Nipper's gaze a cloth-covered volume and a small book which looked like a diary.

"I think we have the prizes here, young 'un," said the detective coolly. "They were tucked in a little well-like hollow beneath the flooring. And there is an exceedingly ingenious device there also."

"A device, gov'nor?"

"Exactly. That is what I was examining for so long. Above the sunken well I mentioned there is a little metal tank, and an electrical apparatus. Without touching the contrivance—for that would be too risky—I can form a shrewd guess as to its nature. The tank is filled with some chemical acid, and the pressing of an electric button, probably hidden in some portion of this room, opens a tap. The corrosive acid will then flood the cavity containing these books, and consume them entirely within a space of a minute—thus destroying the deadly evidence of the league's crimes. A very ingenious arrangement—eh, Nipper?"

"I should say so, sir!"

"I am sure that my explanation is correct," went on the detective calmly. "There are certain signs which prove a strong chemical acid to be present, and, really, there can be no other explanation. Pungent fumes would probably arise, and for that reason the cavity is placed right under the floor, so that no knowledge of the books' destruction would be suspected until it was too late. We, however, have gained possession of the valuable records intact."

Nelson Lee opened the volumes, and examined their contents for several minutes. Then he looked up with gleaming eyes.

"Everything is here—everything!" he exclaimed. "Zingrave has kept a very excellent diary of the league's doings, and this volume will prove to be very interesting reading. The smaller book contains signatures of all the men in the Governing Circle—a whole page being devoted to each signature, with the league's written oath above. The last man to become a Governing Member, I see, is Mr. Victor Conan."

"My hat! He's the big city financier."

"Undoubtedly. Well, Mr. Conan will very soon realise the error of his ways," said Lee grimly. "But hand me my bag, Nipper. We will perform a little substitution."

From his bag the detective produced several books which he had brought in readiness. Two of these almost corresponded in size with the league's books. They were composed of blank sheets, but were, of course, very different in appearance to the originals. But Nelson Lee deemed it a wise plan to place them in the cavity. If Zingrave went to the secret opening for any other reason he would not suspect that a substitution had taken place—for at a casual glance they seemed identical with those which had been removed.

A few minutes later the carpet was in position again, and there was

nothing to show that anything had been touched. Without any further delay, Nelson Lee and Nipper left the Governing Chamber and closed the massive steel door behind them, locking it securely. Nelson Lee was quite convinced that Zingrave would have no suspicion of what had occurred.

The two amateur burglars made their exit in exactly the same way as they had entered. Owing to their extreme caution they did not encounter the watchman—or, indeed, hear or see any sign of him. Perhaps the worthy man was having a little nap while on duty.

In any case, Nelson Lee and Nipper slipped through the little store-room window, closed it securely behind them, and then made their way like shadows out of the enclosed yard.

The great detective was intensely satisfied with the result of the night's work. The League of the Green Triangle was even now tottering dizzily, and upon the following night the final all-destroying crash would come.

CHAPTER IV.

A Council of War—A Stunning Shock—The Steel Grill.

“NINE o'clock! Time's getting on!”

Detective-inspector Lennard closed his hunter-watch with a snap, and replaced it in his pocket.

“Things'll begin to move presently, Mr. Lee,” he went on crisply. “Well, I'm feeling game for anything to-night. I only hope the raid will meet with the success you anticipate.”

“A hitch is liable to occur, of course,” Nelson Lee exclaimed. “But we have drawn the net very tight, Lennard, and, to be quite candid, I do not see any possible loop-hole of escape for Zingrave and his colleagues. We have got them in a firm grip at last!”

“It's good of you to say 'we.' So far as I am concerned I have done nothing really worthy of praise,” said Lennard. “It is you who have put me on this job, Mr. Lee, and it'll mean big things for me at the Yard if we bring it off successfully.”

“As I certainly trust we shall,” said Nelson Lee quietly. “Everything is prepared, and Professor Zingrave is quite off his guard. You see, Lennard, we have everything in our favour. Zingrave thinks that Nipper and I are dead, and he has a wholesome contempt for the official detective force.”

Detective-inspector Lennard grunted.

“Perhaps he won't have such a contempt when he finds himself in a prison cell,” he exclaimed, with grim emphasis. “What is your opinion regarding the prospects of to-night's job, Mr. Merrick?”

Lennard had turned in his seat, and put the last question to Douglas Clifford, who, as is generally known, concealed his real identity under the name of Mr. John Merrick and a very excellent disguise.

“I think we shall smash the league to smithereens,” said Clifford, with shining eyes. “It's the very night I've been waiting for for months. To see the Green Triangle crushed into the dust is my keenest wish.”

The three men were comfortably seated in Detective-inspector Lennard's private room at Scotland Yard. Nipper was also present, and the lad was sitting quietly in his chair, listening to all that was going on, and taking a keen interest in the proceedings. But Nipper was somewhat impatient, although he did his best to conceal his feelings. The lad had his task allotted out to him, and he was eager to get to business. He would be glad when the “palaver” ended and brisk action commenced.

The time was now a few minutes after nine, and at ten o'clock precisely the full meeting of the Governing Circle was timed to take place. As Lennard had said, events would soon begin to move.

Douglas Clifford, too, was booked to play an important part in the night's doings. The preparations for Nelson Lee's great raid on the Orpheum Club were minute and thorough to the last degree.

A better opportunity for such a raid could not possibly occur. At the present time Zingrave was totally off his guard, and was utterly unprepared for a carefully planned onslaught. He thought that Nelson Lee was dead—murdered by the league. But Nelson Lee was very much alive, and was in possession of secrets which would have left the professor flabbergasted could he have but known their nature.

To-night, too, a full gathering of the Governing Circle was to congregate at the Orpheum Club. Nelson Lee could not have chosen a better moment. Every man would be caught red-handed.

There was a certain indescribable feeling in the air of Detective-inspector Lennard's office. The culminating point of the great campaign had come. There was a tension in the atmosphere, a tightening of the muscles. Elaborate preparations had been made, but there was, nevertheless, a considerable amount of uncertainty. Exactly what transpired on this eventful night would depend to a large extent upon the individual efforts of these four who were now gathered together.

But it was a great object to aim for. If the Governing Circle was captured intact, the League of the Green Triangle would be demolished.

It is true there were thousands of ordinary working members of the league. But with the leaders of the great organisation unmasked, the great following of humble members would be disbanded and broken up. It was the Governing Circle which really constituted the league. The whole great structure of roguery would automatically collapse when the leaders fell.

To judge by the appearance of the Orpheum Club on this particular night, it was quite evident that the clubmen had no foreboding of disaster. Everyone was in the best of spirits, and laughter ran high. There was a general feeling that the league's spell of ill-luck had come to an end, and that great prosperity was in store.

In sublime unconsciousness of the threatening peril, the members of the Governing Circle chatted together easily and light-heartedly. But even now the great shadow was hanging over their heads, but they were blind to it. They saw no sign. They suspected nothing.

Men had been called from all quarters, some from great distances, in order to attend this meeting, for it was one of the rules of the league that when a new Governing Member was nominated, every man should be present. There were one or two, of course, who were abroad, and these could certainly not put in an appearance.

But the circle would be as complete as possible.

In one of the lounges Professor Zingrave was chatting amiably with Monkswell, M.P., Dr. Northrup, and Sir Roger Hogarth. Mr. Victor Conan, the latest member, was also there, engaged in a friendly argument with the little Japanese nobleman, Prince Yoni-Saka. This latter gentleman was one of the league's greatest workers, although he performed his tasks in absolute secrecy.

At a quarter-to-ten there was not a single man left to arrive. All were there. Sir Gordon Hyde was keeping to himself somewhat. That is to say, he confined his attentions to a strange-looking man who was with him. Many curious glances were cast upon Sir Gordon's companion. He was Mr. Joseph Blackmore, the man of whom Hyde spoke so enthusiastically.

There was certainly not much in Mr. Blackmore's appearance to rouse

enthusiasm. He had a rather sinister look upon his features. His back was decidedly bent, and his eyes gleamed with a strange, half-mad light.

Zingrave himself gave the signal for his companions to congregate in the chairman's office, and ten o'clock was just striking when the circle took their seats round the long table in the Governing Chamber.

As usual, Zingrave stood at the head. On his left were Sir Gordon Hyde and Mr. Joseph Blackmore. The latter had been blindfolded the very instant he had entered the chairman's room, and the thick handkerchief had just been removed. He had seen nothing of the clever mechanism which opened the way to this strange underground council-chamber.

"It is not my intention to make a speech," Professor Zingrave exclaimed softly, amid a general hush. "It is for Sir Gordon Hyde to do the talking, and for his companion to prove to us all that he is worthy of becoming a member of our organisation."

And the professor seated himself.

All eyes were now turned upon Sir Gordon Hyde and the queer-looking man by his side. The latter appeared to be somewhat nervous, and his eyes shifted about continuously. Sir Gordon, however, was icily calm.

He rose to his feet with an engaging smile.

"I think," he said coolly, "that I have a big surprise for you. Are you ready, Blackmore?"

"Yes!" rapped out the other tensely.

"Then stand back! Now!"

An amazing thing happened. Zingrave and all the Members of the Circle were astounded at the words which Sir Gordon Hyde and Blackmore uttered. But their astonishment turned to sheer stupefaction and the wildest alarm the next moment.

With lightning-like rapidity, both Sir Gordon Hyde and his companion performed some quick movements. Sir Gordon dragged off a double disguise, and Blackmore straightened himself up like a released spring and jerked a wig from his head and the black beard from his chin.

"Now!" roared a well-known voice. "I think I hold the trump-card, Professor Cyrus Zingrave!"

Zingrave uttered a choking cry.

"Am I mad?" he panted. "Nelson Lee! Great heavens—Nelson Lee!"

It was astounding, but perfectly true. Sir Gordon Hyde was none other than Nelson Lee himself, and Mr. Joseph Blackmore was merely another name for Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard!

The shock was stunning in its awful force.

Both Nelson Lee and Lennard held revolvers in their right hands, and the glittering, steely-blue barrels did not waver a fraction of an inch in the firm grips of the two men. Their nerves were of iron, and they were both deadly calm.

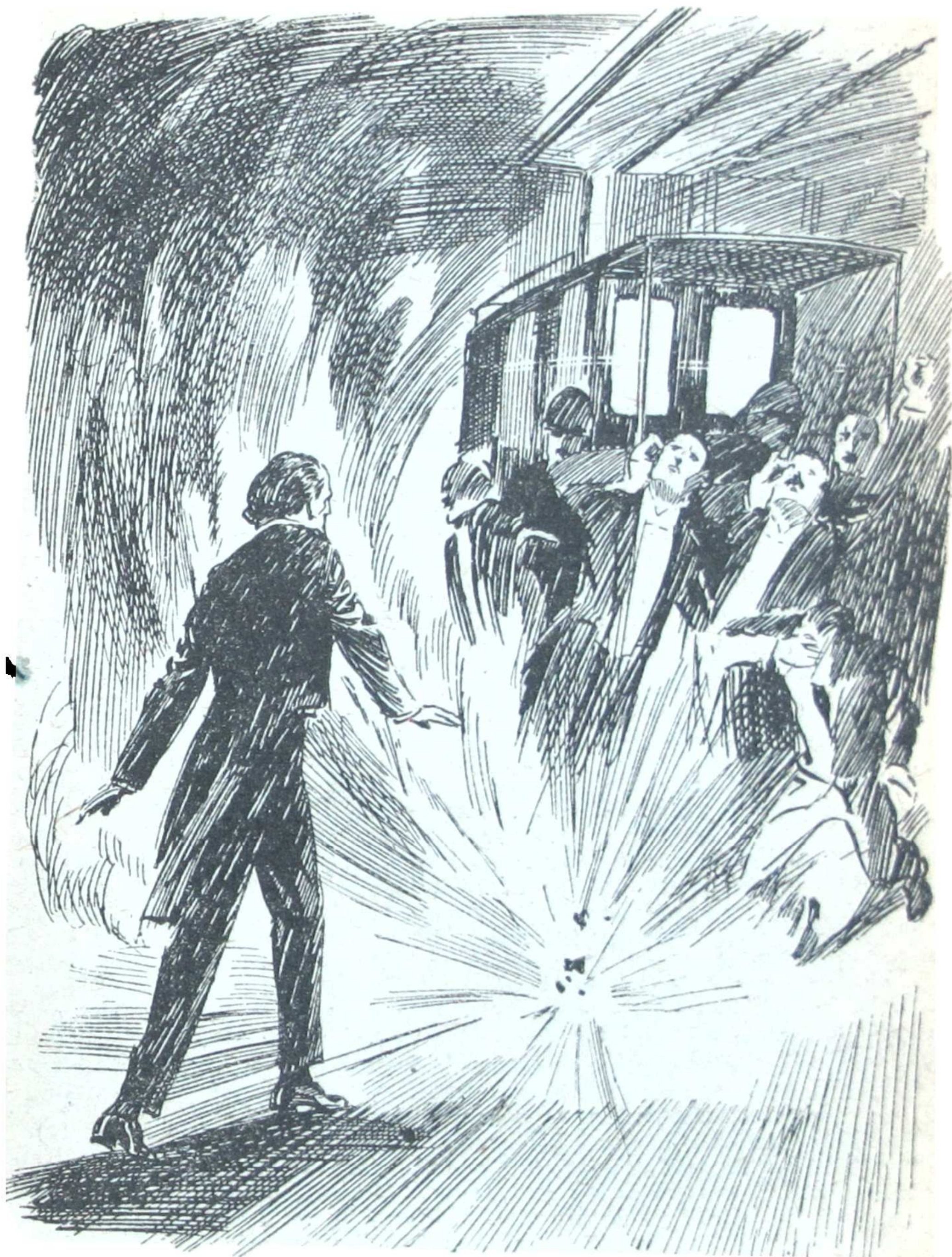
"The first man who attempts any suspicious movements will be shot without hesitation!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, in crisp, cutting tones. "This is not a hollow threat, as you will find to your cost if you disregard it! Hands up—every man of you!"

"That's it!" roared Lennard. "Up with your hands, you cattle!"

The official detective was somewhat excited, although quite ready for instant action.

The Governing Circle had uttered no intelligible word, but now they rose from their chairs, all with pale faces, and backed away from the two detectives with horror and alarm in their staring eyes. In less than a minute the whole crowd of them were bunched together beyond the table, their arms uplifted, their breath sounding forcedly.

It was an amazing spectacle.



There was a sharp explosion, and on the very instant Nelson Lee knew that Zingrave had indeed been bluffing, for there was no concussion worth noticing. The explosion was merely like that of a huge firework. But the result was staggering. In every direction from the floor great, impenetrable clouds of yellow smoke rolled up. In less than two seconds the whole garage was filled with choking fumes. (See page 33.)

Those men, every one well known in society, more than one titled, crouching back like a rabble of mutinous convicts. It was as though each had been dealt a terrible blow. They were stunned—dazed by the knowledge which slowly forced itself upon their numbed brains.

The great blow had fallen!

The blow which they had all looked upon as impossible had descended when every man was feeling more secure than ever. But to Zingrave the shock was worst of all. He had been positively certain that Nelson Lee had perished in the wreck of the *Ocean Queen*. And yet the detective was here—here, accompanied by a Scotland Yard official—in the very sacred walls of the Governing Chamber!

"You—you demon!" gasped the professor hoarsely. "You infernal——"
Nelson Lee smiled.

"I assure you there is nothing demonical or infernal in connection with my presence here," he exclaimed suavely. "Perhaps you think I have made a prisoner of Sir Gordon Hyde, and have come here in his place! It may interest you to know that Sir Gordon Hyde has never set foot within this apartment since he went to his well-deserved death months ago. Sir Gordon did not escape. To the best of my knowledge, he is now resting in his watery grave. It was I who put in an appearance last Thursday evening in the guise of Mr. Stanley Ruthven. It was I who removed that disguise and revealed myself as Sir Gordon Hyde. The trick succeeded, and you all swallowed my story in the most engaging fashion."

"Begad, the man's uncanny!" gasped out Sir Roger Hogarth fearfully.

"Not at all! There was nothing uncanny in my movements that I am aware of," replied Nelson Lee easily. "Now, now, Dr. Northrup, kindly keep your hands above your head! Yes, it is I who have been throwing dust in your eyes during these last few days. On Saturday night I was present at a meeting in this very Governing Chamber. And I learned the secret of the fireplace upstairs, and became quite aware of the combination of the lock of this steel door. Your well-preserved secrets became mine."

The famous detective could scarcely be blamed for allowing just a note of triumph to creep into his voice. Nelson Lee had played the part of the resuscitated Sir Gordon Hyde from the very outset. Soon after Martin Caine had made his announcement that night in the country cottage, the detective had calmly explained that it had been he who had so surprised the members of the Orpheum Club. Nelson Lee had conceived the plan and had carried it out without informing Nipper or Douglas Clifford of his intentions. But they had, of course, been fully aware of them after Caine's revelation, and Lee had secured Inspector Lennard's aid for this final coup.

"Let me give you all a word of excellent advice," went on the great detective, eyeing the startled Governing Members keenly. "There is no sense whatever in attempting resistance! Even if one or more of you escape, you will be hounded down like the criminals you are by the country's police. It will save much trouble if you surrender without fuss."

Professor Zingrave lowered his head.

"It is best," he said simply. "We are beaten—utterly beaten!"

The scientist's voice was low and husky. He was crushed by this terrible blow. All the vitality had left him, and he was weak and limp. His customary suaveness had deserted him, and left him nervous and shivering.

"Regarding my story of Mr. Blackmore and the manufactured diamonds," said Nelson Lee, "that story, of course, was merely a ruse. I think you will admit that it succeeded most admirably. I was anxious to catch the whole crowd of you together, and I knew that the only time the circle was complete, or as complete as possible, was when a new member was about to be elected. Accordingly I adopted the diamond-maker dodge,

which has the added advantage of my being supported by a very able second."

Nelson Lee ceased speaking, and there was a moment's silence. He exchanged glances with Lennard, and the latter elevated his eyebrows.

They could both see that the prisoners were getting restless. It was a tiresome job keeping their hands elevated above their heads, and by this time, too, the dress-clothed rogues were beginning to recover their shattered nerves.

But Nelson Lee was perfectly at ease.

He had not told the circle all, for in less than a minute's time a score of Scotland Yard's picked men would enter the chamber with handcuffs ready, and would render the prisoners incapable of resistance.

These Yard men had been given precise information beforehand by Nelson Lee, and they knew exactly how to gain access to the hidden apartment.

It was only a matter of seconds now.

Knowing that reinforcements were due to arrive at any moment, Nelson Lee and Lennard were naturally easy in mind. Their gleaming revolvers, too, gave them a feeling of perfect confidence. The Governing Circle was quite at their mercy.

The great raid was a thorough success.

Zingrave turned a pair of feverish eyes upon Nelson Lee.

"How did you escape?" he demanded hoarsely. "How did you escape from the Ocean Queen? You were left in a death-trap!"

"Really, this is hardly a time to enter into explanations," interjected the detective. "In any case, I do not feel inclined to satisfy your curiosity, professor. I am alive, as you can see——"

"Yes, I can see," said Zingrave bitterly. "Fool that I was to be deceived by your acting! You are a clever man, Nelson Lee, and you have beaten me at the moment when I least expected disaster. This is the end—the end of everything. By all the stars in heaven, what a miserable climax to my ambitions!"

The professor bowed his head in utter dejection.

"Why should we stand this?" muttered Sir Roger Hogarth desperately. "We are many, and there are only two against us——"

"It is worth the risk!" agreed Monkewell, M.P., with livid face. "I, for one, do not accept——"

Detective-inspector Lennard swore gently, and glanced anxiously at the door.

"Now then!" he exclaimed curtly. "No tricks, my friends. You are all covered, and Lee's threat to use our revolvers wasn't an empty one. At the first sign of movement we'll shoot—and shoot to kill. Such scum as you don't count!"

Nelson Lee drew his breath in with sudden sharpness.

"Ah!" he murmured easily.

For the sound of heavy feet descending stairs had come to his acute ears. The Scotland Yard men were on the point of entering, and this tense situation would be eased. The Orpheum Club was raided, and the raiders would have their prisoners within the next few minutes.

Then, without the slightest warning, all the electric lights snapped out!

The Governing Chamber was plunged into inky darkness.

In one second all was dire confusion. Detective-inspector Lennard roared out a furious exclamation, and he suddenly felt Nelson Lee's hand on his sleeve.

The detective, in fact, was not at all astonished at this development. He had half-expected something of the sort—only he had anticipated the move earlier. He knew the league's resources better than Lennard, and knew that

Zingrave wasn't likely to accept the situation with the dazed bitterness he affected.

Through the inky blackness came the professor's voice, loud and perfectly cool.

"You know what to do, gentlemen!" he rapped out crisply. "Don't lose your heads, or we shall fail. Stand clear--stand clear!"

Lennard jerked Nelson Lee's hand from his sleeve.

"What the dooce is the matter with you, Lee?" he raved furiously. "Come on, man! We can't let the brutes escape——"

"Back!" shouted the detective—"back!"

He literally dragged Lennard backwards, and the pair of them staggered several paces rearwards.

A clatter of heavy metal sounded, and then a banging thud. Nelson Lee's suspicions were justified. He had not known the precise nature of the peril; but he had guessed that something startling was about to happen.

The whole incident had not occupied ten seconds. The police outside were only just struggling with the combination of the steel door.

"What's happened?" yelled Lennard frantically.

"Use your light, man—use your light!"

While Nelson Lee was speaking he whipped out his own electric-torch, and pressed the button. At the same second the inspector's light sliced through the darkness. The two beams flashed across the apartment.

"Heavens!" gasped Lennard faintly.

Within a yard of them a thick grill of dull steelwork stretched from ceiling to floor, and from wall to wall!

The portion of the room which they occupied was quite separated from that portion which contained the members of the circle! The grill had evidently descended from the ceiling; but it was there, for all the world like a great mass of garden-trellis, only it was made of steel instead of weak wood.

Lennard gripped the metal bars and shook them frantically. They quivered and rattled, but to shift them an inch was impossible. If Nelson Lee hadn't dragged his companion back the grill would have descended full upon their heads, and that would have probably meant their deaths. For the force with which the steelwork had fallen had been prodigious. The whole room had been shaken by the shock.

"By James!" said Nelson Lee tensely. "What amazing forethought!"

Lennard was too dazed to reply. The light from the torches revealed another astonishing sight, too. In the other compartment of the room—the portion which was out of reach—a gaping square hole could be seen in the wall. Yet that spot had been blank a minute before. The door was so cunningly contrived that there was utterly no sign of it when closed.

Now, to Lennard's furious chagrin, he and Nelson Lee saw the last of the Governing Members disappearing into the blackness of the tunnel beyond. And as they watched the last man vanished, and the wall resumed its former aspect. Not a single trace of the opening was left.

"I'm done—I'm finished!" panted the Scotland Yard man weakly.

He and the detective were in the Governing Chamber quite alone! Before their very eyes the Green Triangle rogues had made their escape.

Nelson Lee had suspected the presence of an emergency exit—had known that such an exit existed, in fact. And he had prepared fully for such an event as this. But he had not anticipated anything in the nature of the steel grill.

But he was quite cool and easy.

"Cheer up, Lennard!" he said briskly. "No need to look blue——"

"They've gone—they've beaten us at the post!" groaned the inspector, almost weeping with chagrin.

The Governing Circle had certainly gone; that fact was undeniable. But Nelson Lee was by no means beaten!

CHAPTER V.

The Double Trap—The Capture—A Surprise for Zingrave.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR LENNARD turned towards the door as it opened. The whole amazing incident of the steel grill had taken place in the space of a minute, and the raiding police-officers had only just gained an entry.

They were all in plain clothes—for they were C.I.D. men—and two or three of them now entered the Governing Chamber, looking ready for anything. But when they saw that Lennard and Nelson Lee were alone they halted, and stared.

"Why, what the thunder——"

"That'll do, Pemberton—that'll do!" snapped Lennard testily. "Stare, man—stare! You won't see any prisoners to nab if you stare until Doomsday! The infernal hounds have tricked us. Look at that rotten barrier across the room."

Detective-sergeant Pemberton was inclined to make the atmosphere blue. His language was certainly impressive.

"That won't serve any purpose," growled Lennard. "No sense in firing off your whole vocabulary at the grill, Pemberton—language won't shift it. Get outside, and wait for further orders."

"Very good, sir. But——"

"Oh, don't start again, man!"

Pemberton retired, with his men, and Lennard looked at Nelson Lee rather helplessly. To tell the truth, the inspector was too amazed and furious to think clearly. He was surprised to see Nelson Lee calmly lighting a cigar.

"You're dashed cool, I must say!" he grunted. "All the job-lot slipped through our fingers, and you're as calm as a summer sea."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Forgive me, Lennard," he said, "but I have a little confession to make."

"Eh? A confession? What the dooce——"

"If Zingrave had a last card up his sleeve, so have I," went on the detective. "I didn't take you fully into my confidence, my dear man, because I thought you would have quite sufficient to think about without being bothered with a matter which really is beyond your province."

Lennard stared.

"I don't follow," he said pathetically. "I wish you'd be lucid, Lee!"

"Well, I interviewed the chief of Scotland Yard, and arranged a little affair with him," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "In the event of you and your men failing—through no fault of your own—I prepared still another surprise for our mutual friend, Professor Zingrave. By this time Zingrave has probably received the second shock."

"What the blazes do you mean?"

"I mean that a force of police are stationed at a certain spot, accompanied by Nipper and Mr. Clifford," Nelson Lee answered. "You see, I don't want our game to slip through the meshes of the net. To all appearances they have done so; but I think we shall prove differently before long."

"By Jove! I begin to understand, Lee!" said Lennard eagerly.

"I already knew that there was an emergency exit somewhere in this apartment," went on the detective. "I guessed that all along; but while in Sir Gordon Hyde's shoes I made positively sure of the matter. I put several questions to Hogarth and others concerning the exit in this room, but I daren't appear too curious."

"Why not?"

"My dear fellow, what a question to ask! Why not? Well, being Sir Gordon Hyde, I naturally knew of the exit. To have asked pointed questions about it would have brought suspicion on me. But it wasn't this end which interested me—it was the other end. I carelessly asked one of my fellow-members if the emergency exit was still the same as before."

"And what did he say?"

"By a stroke of luck he imparted the very information I required," Nelson Lee replied. "Yet there was nothing astonishing in that; for, of course, I was supposed to know it for myself. In reply to my question—it was Dr. Northup I tackled—he said that the garage in Metcalf Lane was always kept in readiness just the same as of old. But there were three motor-cars now, instead of two."

"By George!" ejaculated Detective-inspector Lennard.

"You follow the significance of my story?" asked Nelson Lee, knocking the ash from his cigar. "Metcalf Lane, as you know, is a narrow alley some little distance behind the Orpheum Club. It was obvious to me, therefore, that a tunnel led from this chamber to the garage in Metcalf Lane. Accordingly, I stationed a strong force of police in the garage, with Nipper and Clifford, before you and I entered the club."

"Then—then by this time——"

"By this time the whole gang of rogues are probably in handcuffs," said Nelson Lee carelessly.

Lennard gripped the detective's hand and wrung it warmly.

"By George, you're splendid, Lee!" he cried enthusiastically. "You think of everything. I only hope no hitch has occurred!"

"A miscarriage of the plan is possible; but I do not anticipate failure," Nelson Lee said. "Now let me advise you, Lennard. Don't interfere with that grill at present, for I'm pretty sure a party of blacksmiths would be needed to shift it. But remain here with several of your men, and guard the place with every care."

"But if the blighters are all collared——"

"Ah, we don't know about that. Discovering the trap in the garage, several of our excellent friends may have doubled back, and they will be absolutely desperate. Don't relax your vigilance for a second, Lennard."

"I won't!" declared the inspector relentlessly.

"There's no reason why I should remain here," said Nelson Lee. "I am going round to the garage to see how things have gone. I have done my part of the job, so I'm anxious to know how my assistants have fared."

As it happened, however, the great detective didn't find it necessary to leave the Governing Chamber.

His elaborate plans for the downfall of the Green Triangle had been so well laid that he was convinced of success. There seemed absolutely no loophole of escape for the clever criminals.

When the chamber had been plunged into darkness, Lee had promptly realised that the safest thing to do was to stand quietly back and wait.

Professor Zingrave had acted according to the well-planned scheme which every Governing Member knew by heart. A raid had been considered

impossible; but Zingrave had always impressed his fellow-rogues with the necessity for being prepared.

And one of the men—Monkswell, it had been—had pressed the hidden switch which extinguished all the lights. After that everybody acted according to the oft-rehearsed plan. In two strides Zingrave reached the switch which controlled the secret emergency exit, and he and his companions had passed swiftly through into a cold, narrow tunnel.

They knew that pursuit was impossible, for the steel grill prevented any chase. And as the other end of the tunnel was unknown—so Zingrave fondly imagined—there was a distinct chance that flight would be possible.

Every man knew, however, that the end had come.

The League of the Green Triangle was shattered at last. Even if they escaped from the clutches of the law they would be disgraced, ruined, and for ever hunted.

But to escape—to escape!

That was the urgency of the moment.

Professor Zingrave was quite calm. He knew that there was a very frail hope of his associates escaping justice. But he was not thinking of the others—he was thinking solely of himself.

At this last extremity the instinct of self-preservation took possession of Zingrave, and he cared not a snap of the fingers what happened to his colleagues. It was his own skin which was so precious. And he knew that once he was in the open air, under the stars, he would be able to laugh at the police.

For the professor had made careful plans for this dire moment—plans which were known only to himself. In spite of his professions to the circle that all should stand together in a crisis, Zingrave was treacherous to a degree. He had prepared a haven of refuge for himself, careless of what happened to his companions.

But to get clear of the club—that was the all-important object.

Zingrave was as cool as ice. The calamity had steadied his nerves, and had braced him up for a supreme effort. The first thing he did, after the secret door had been closed, was to rap out a sharp order.

The tunnel which led to the garage in Metcalf Lane was narrow and low. At first the escaping rogues had felt madly impelled to dash along the tunnel to freedom. But the professor checked his companions, and they halted.

“We must keep calm,” Zingrave exclaimed sharply. “Everything depends upon speed now, and if we lose our heads we shall blunder disastrously.”

“But there is not a second to lose!” exclaimed Sir Roger Hogarth, who was shivering with sheer cowardly terror. “That grill may be torn down—”

“Nonsense! Pull yourself together, Hogarth!” snapped the professor. “The grill is so constructed that hours of work are necessary to force it. There is no possibility of pursuit. We must quietly enter the garage, and leave in batches, so that no suspicion will fall upon the automobiles.”

Zingrave's voice was still soft, but there was a husky note in it. It echoed along the low tunnel booming, and the furthest man heard the words plainly; for the Governing Members were stretched along the tunnel in single file.

And their leader's words instilled them with a certain confidence. After all, there was no immediate danger now. Pursuit was out of the question, and the carefully kept garage in Metcalf Lane was unsuspected. There was, at least, a sporting chance for the criminals. What they did after they had

cleared from the neighbourhood could be decided later; but there were many refuges of the league where they could hide.

Zingrave turned as he finished speaking. In the wall of the tunnel was a sunken depression. Here a dull metal lever controlled the solid stone door—which was quite in view on this side. And close to the metal lever a little electric switch was fastened on the wall.

“The league’s private records!” said the professor grimly. “We must not forget them! They, at least, will not fall into the hands of the police!”

He pressed the switch down.

“Will the apparatus work?” asked Dr. Northup, who was nearest.

“Failure to work is impossible,” Zingrave replied curtly. “The acid has now been released, and the books are already destroyed.”

Little did Professor Zingrave think that only dummies had been consumed.

He was quite satisfied that the records were destroyed, and without further delay he passed along the tunnel to the head of his companions. Then, in single file still, the men followed Zingrave.

The passage was not of any great length. It sloped upwards slightly, and gave a sharp turn to the right just before the end was reached. A door, similar to the one at the other end, barred the way.

Zingrave halted before it, and pulled the lever which controlled it. Slowly the stone slab shifted back, and revealed a pitchy black opening beyond. The tunnel itself was illuminated by occasional electric lights. But the garage was in total darkness.

“Come!” said the professor. “And follow the plan we have already arranged.”

In many of the men’s minds the plan was more or less hazy, for they had never considered such an emergency as this possible. But they were quite prepared to follow Zingrave and to make a desperate flight in the waiting motor-cars.

The professor stepped into the darkness of the garage, and reached round to the wall for the electric light switch. But a firm grip took hold of his wrist from out of the darkness. It was cold, and sent a chill right through Zingrave’s wiry frame.

He had imagined the garage to be absolutely deserted.

And yet, from out of the darkness, an unseen hand had grasped his wrist with vice-like pressure. For a moment the professor stood stock-still, too amazed for movement. Full realisation was dawning upon his brain.

This raid was no half-planned affair!

Zingrave knew now—even if he had not before—that there was to be no escape. He was a strong man, a man with a will of iron, but he seemed to crumple up at this stunning shock. Previously he had affected weakness; but now it was deadly reality.

Without a word being uttered the grip on Zingrave’s wrist tightened, and the professor was jerked roughly forward, and he felt a pair of brawny hands clap upon his shoulders. At the same second Sir Roger Hogarth, who followed, was also made prisoner.

“Trapped!” croaked the baronet shrilly. “By Heaven! This is the end!”

The other Governing Members heard the desperately uttered words, and a panic seized them all. Pushing one another, shouting and clawing, they stampeded into the garage.

A shout rang out clearly in a boyish voice.

“Here they come! Up with the lights!”

It was Nipper who yelled out the words, and the next second the electric lights were switched on in their full brilliance.

An amazing scene was revealed.

The garage was a big building, and the three motor-cars which had occupied the floor, had been removed. The whole space was empty and bare. Empty, that is, except for a large body of police!

And these were grappling determinedly with the baffled rogues. It was a dismal end to the Green Triangle's carefully conceived plans.

The sight, moreover, was astonishing. The Governing Members were all attired in spotless evening dress. Diamonds glittered from their shirt-fronts and fingers. More than one bore a title—and all were well-known gentlemen!

And they were grappling with the police as though they had been a gang of roughs!

The sword of justice had fallen at last.

The struggle was short and sharp. The police did not outnumber the criminals, but there was not an ounce of fight left in the majority of the exposed scoundrels. One or two of them fought with desperate fierceness, but for the most part they gave in without a struggle. Indeed, the shock had weakened them so much that to struggle was a sheer physical impossibility.

Nipper stood looking on with gleaming eyes. The raid had been a success! Deep down in Nipper's heart, the lad had had an uneasy suspicion that the great criminal organisation would reveal a trump card at the last moment. But it was now obvious that the league's last card had been played, and had lost.

Nipper was expecting his master to appear at any moment. But as he looked at the tunnel entrance there was no sign of either Nelson Lee or Detective-inspector Lennard. No league members were lurking in the passage; they had all blundered headlong into the hands of the police.

And now, as Nipper looked round, he saw that all were held. The prisoners were bunched together in a great group, filling half the garage, and the police were surrounding them with drawn truncheons.

"Where's the gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

He addressed a bearded gentleman by his side. The bearded gentleman was Douglas Clifford, and he shook his head.

"Can't make it out," he said shortly. "I thought Lee would put in an appearance behind this rabble. But there's no sign of him."

Nipper didn't wait for further conversation. He pulled a neat little revolver from his pocket, cocked it with all the assurance in the world, and darted along the tunnel. He ran swiftly, and met nobody. At last he was faced by the door which opened into the governing chamber.

The lad was somewhat anxious now.

"Zingrave's a devil!" he muttered to himself. "There's no telling what might have happened to the gov'nor and Lennard. My stars! If the gov'nor's come to any harm, I'll——"

He broke off, his alarm increasing as his thought dwelt upon the subject. It was obvious that the Governing Circle had made their escape from Nelson Lee and Lennard. It was therefore obvious, also, that Nelson Lee and Lennard must have been tricked in some way. A cold hand seemed to clutch at Nipper's throat as he realised that his beloved master might even now be lying cold in death!

His eyes rested upon the lever set in the wall. Without hesitation he grasped it, and pulled it over fiercely. At once there was a slight noise,

and upon looking round he saw the stone slab rolling back, and he could gaze fully into the Governing Chamber.

Nipper stepped through the opening with wide-open eyes, and with a cry of amazement on his lips.

For the thing he saw was sufficiently startling. A huge steel grill was slowly ascending from the floor of the chamber, and disappearing through the ceiling! It looked to Nipper, at that moment, for all the world like the safety curtain of a theatre being drawn up. It was moving slowly and steadily, with a slight rattling noise.

And behind the grill Nelson Lee and Detective-inspector Lennard were standing fixedly in one position. They had been chatting together when the startling thing occurred, and they now looked up with surprise in their eyes. Nelson Lee's cigar was smouldering quietly between his fingers.

"Dear me! Nipper has come to the rescue!" exclaimed the detective complacently. "Well done, young 'un!"

"Are you all right, gov'nor?" panted Nipper.

"My dear lad, do I look all wrong?" smiled Nelson Lee. "Your dramatic appearance has settled all doubts, for it is now obvious that our friends have fallen into the trap. But how on earth did you manage to shift this grill?"

The trio turned their eyes to the ceiling, and were in time to see the lower part of the grill disappear, and a portion of the ceiling slide into position. There was no mark or sign to show what had occurred.

"So that's why you couldn't follow, sir?" said Nipper. "I didn't do anything, except pull a lever to open the door. I suppose that acted in two ways."

"Obviously, my boy. The steel work descended with a terrific crash, but its weight prevented any such swift return. Well, you have saved me a long detour, for I was just about to make my way round to Metcalf Lane."

"Are all the rotters captured?" asked Lennard, at this point.

"Every man-jack of them, sir," replied Nipper promptly. "Zingrave looks as though the end of the world has come. But I say, you two were in a pretty pickle! Blessed if you weren't copped in here like a couple of monkeys at the Zoo!"

"Scarcely a complimentary comparison!" Nelson Lee remarked severely. "In fact, Nipper, it is a decidedly odious comparison. We both know that Mr. Lennard is somewhat the reverse of handsome——"

The inspector grinned.

"Speak for yourself, Lee!" he said cheerfully. "But hadn't we better get along the passage and see what's happening?"

"An excellent suggestion!"

The trio could afford to be jovial. The great raid had been a success from every point of view.

Before leaving the Governing Chamber, Lee pulled the carpet back and examined the secret cavity beneath the flooring. As he opened it he staggered back, for a cloud of pungent fumes arose. One flash of his torch within was sufficient.

"My poor books are utterly demolished," he remarked, with a smile. "The acid has eaten them to a mere pulp. I wonder what Zingrave would say could he know that the real records of the league are safely at Scotland Yard?"

The three lost no time in traversing the tunnel, and when they emerged into the garage they were just in time to witness a surprising little scene. Only a few minutes had elapsed since Nipper had departed, and no move had been made by the police. They were, in fact, awaiting the arrival of

conveyances in which to remove their prisoners, for it was not advisable to take them to the police-station in the open motor-cars.

A messenger had been despatched the very instant the capture had been effected, and the vehicles were due to arrive at any moment.

As Nelson Lee, Lennard, and Nipper halted in the doorway, they paused. Professor Zingrave was standing in front of his colleagues, and quite close to the massive doors. A brawny policeman held Zingrave in a vice-like grip.

And standing before the professor was Douglas Clifford.

"Ah," murmured Nelson Lee, "Clifford told me that he was going to do something of this nature if he had the chance! Friend Zingrave is about to receive a most unpleasant shock. It will be decidedly interesting to watch the expression of his face."

"I don't understand——" began Lennard.

"Watch, my dear fellow! Watch!"

And Detective-inspector Lennard watched with great curiosity.

CHAPTER VI.

Zingrave Learns the Truth—A Desperate Move—The Escape

DOUGLAS CLIFFORD was as cool as he had ever been in all his life. His hand was steady and his eye firmly set. This moment was one he had looked forward to for months past. It was Clifford's moment of triumph.

Before the raid had taken place, Nelson Lee had restored the young man's hair to its natural colour—a dark brown. And Clifford had shaved his beard off and had removed every trace of disguise.

He was no longer "Mr. John Merrick," the elderly man of leisure, but Douglas Clifford himself. He was back in his own personality. Since the League of the Green Triangle was demolished, he was now in no danger from the murderous society. He was himself once more, and could breathe freely.

The first thought that had entered Clifford's mind was one which thrilled him with delightful pleasure. Vera Zingrave had practically given her word that when he could resume his own identity, when he could become the young man he really was, she would consent to become his wife.

It was a glorious thought, and one which filled Clifford with the greatest joy possible. Vera had been telegraphed during the day, and he knew that she would be in London, at a friend's house, that night. In the morning Clifford would call, and he had firmly resolved to put the all-important question without delay. Indeed, he had already purchased a magnificent diamond-ring. Clifford had no doubts as to the answer he would receive.

But there was grim work to perform before that delightful interview took place. All along Clifford had intended to face Zingrave at the moment of the latter's defeat. The time had now arrived.

Clifford had no intention of gloating over his defeated foe, but he was determined that Zingrave should know the truth. Zingrave should be made to understand the reason for the league's rapid downfall.

At present the young man was wearing a false wig and beard, and now he stood before Zingrave with perfect calmness.

"Well, professor, do you know me?" he asked quietly.

"I know that you are the man who should have gone to his death in the Ocean—— Bah! But why should I talk to you?" exclaimed Zingrave

harshly. "I do not intend to incriminate myself by the use of unwary words!"

Clifford deliberately removed his disguise. He stood there, with flushed face, making a very handsome figure, for Clifford was well proportioned, evenly featured, and decidedly good-looking.

Zingrave started forward, his eyes staring.

"Am I dreaming?" he murmured huskily. "Oh, it must be wrong! You are Douglas Clifford, the young man who, years ago, was taken to Strathrie Castle and imprisoned there! But no; such a thing cannot be!"

"Such a thing can be!" Clifford interjected cuttingly. "I am Douglas Clifford, Professor Zingrave! Perhaps I can refresh your memory? I escaped from Strathrie Castle many months ago, after being incarcerated for five long years in a ghastly dungeon. It was Mr. Nelson Lee who assisted my escape." Here Clifford waved his hand towards the great detective. "It was Mr. Nelson Lee who entered into a compact with me to fight the Green Triangle tooth and nail until it was crushed into the dust!"

"But—but we captured you!" gasped Zingrave.

"Precisely! You captured me almost immediately after my escape," went on the young man relentlessly. "League agents took me to the seashore and plunged me into a deadly quicksand. They waited and watched me disappear below the surface. But by a merciful providence I escaped, and again by Mr. Lee's help. You thought that I was dead, but I disguised myself, and ever since Mr. Nelson Lee and I have been working grimly and quietly to the end which has come about to-night. I swore to myself that you should know these facts when the right moment arrived, Professor Zingrave. You have now been told, and perhaps you will understand why the league has declined so surely and rapidly. There was no escape for you in the long run. There was no escape for those Governing Members who have already gone. We held the upper hand the whole time, for we were eating into the very heart of your organisation, and ruining its vitality. As I suspected all along, the final collapse has come with dramatic suddenness."

Clifford ceased speaking, his face now more flushed, and his breath somewhat forced by the emotion which filled him.

"Splendid!" murmured Nelson Lee. "It was just as well that Zingrave should know."

"Rather, sir!" murmured Nipper. "Mr. Clifford's told him off properly, hasn't he?"

Zingrave stood as though hypnotised. His free hand he passed over his eyes again and again, and the constable allowed him to move forward a trifle as he swayed, but the burly minion of the law did not release the pressure.

Already Zingrave had known that the game was up. But now it was borne upon him that there never had been the slightest chance of the League of the Green Triangle surviving. He understood in a moment why so many disasters had taken place. Nothing but disgrace and ruin faced him. He would spend the rest of his life in prison!

The thought seemed to electrify the professor into sudden life.

He had not given up the ghost yet. Even now he had a last final card up his sleeve, but this card was one for his own use alone. For his colleagues he did not care a rap; they were doomed. Nothing could save them from the disgrace they had so richly earned. But Zingrave had a last move to make which might possibly pan out successfully.

It was self now—only self!

Without warning, he flung his arm back, and caught the constable who

was holding him a tremendous swing across his eyes. The man could not retain his grip under such circumstances, and in an instant Zingrave was free. He took a step backwards, and planted himself against the door. In one brief, swift look round, he saw all that was going on. The police-inspector had started forward. Nelson Lee and Lennard were in the act of dashing across the garage.

And then Professor Zingrave spoke.

"Stand back!" he cried, in a terrible voice. "Stand back, all of you!"

There was something in his tone which absolutely compelled obedience. His strange, uncanny eyes were glittering with a fire that had never before been seen there, and with one swift movement he jerked from his waistcoat pocket a small glass tube, sealed at the end.

"I warn you!" he shouted fiercely. "This is the end—the last act! Rather than be taken to prison, I will die on this very spot! But I shall not die alone! Every man of you will come with me, to keep me company!"

"Bluff!" roared Lennard. "Grip him, you dunderheads!"

"Fools! Fools!" said Zingrave steadily. "This tube in my hand contains the most deadly explosive known to science. Were I to drop it to the floor, you would all perish in a fraction of a second!"

The words were deadly enough, and Lennard halted in his tracks as though petrified. He certainly had no desire to be blown into a thousand fragments, and he knew that a man in Zingrave's state of mind was quite capable of following up his threat by instant action.

Suicide, in fact, was the only release for the professor, and it fitted in with his character that he should send his undoers to death with him.

Nelson Lee himself was rather doubtful as to the truth of the assertion. He did not think it possible that Zingrave would carry such a deadly object in his waistcoat-pocket. But it was possible—decidedly possible, and prudence urged the detective to hold back.

"Don't move, any of you!" said Nelson Lee curtly. "Perhaps this is merely bluff, but it is too risky to apply a test."

"Bluff!" echoed Zingrave, with a shrill, mad laugh. "I will show you whether it is bluff!"

Nipper turned pale.

"Look out!" the lad roared. "He's going to throw it!"

"Hold his hand!" bellowed Lennard desperately.

But there was nobody near enough to prevent Zingrave carrying out his deadly purpose. All eyes were fixed upon his convulsed face, and everybody knew that nothing could prevent the disaster.

In that one moment, every soul in the garage expected to die on the spot. That Zingrave would encompass his own destruction was nothing to be wondered at. He was mad now—mad with fury and hatred.

The professor's hand jerked, and a little glass tube shot straight for the centre of the floor.

Crash!

There was a sharp explosion, and on the very instant Nelson Lee knew that Zingrave had indeed been bluffing, for there was no concussion worth noticing. The explosion was merely like that of a huge firework.

But the result was staggering.

In every direction from the floor great, impenetrable clouds of yellow smoke rolled up. In less than two seconds the whole garage was filled with choking fumes. And they did not clear. The object which Zingrave had thrown was sending forth cloud after cloud of the thick vapour.

In a second Lennard, Nelson Lee, and several others were groping about blindly and helplessly. Only Nipper escaped the full force of the smoke-cloud. Even as Zingrave had prepared to throw it, Nipper had dashed for-

ward like a streak of lightning across the garage, and when the smoke-bomb fell, Nipper was within a yard of Zingrave's side.

The ruse had succeeded. The glass tube had not contained explosive, but a secret chemical compound of Zingrave's own manufacture. The effect of it was not poisonous, but it caught the throat and caused the most violent coughing. The eyes of all those present, too, were smarting and running with water. Zingrave's colleagues were utterly incapable of escaping. They, at least, were safe enough.

Nelson Lee staggered across to the big door. As he drew near to it, he groped blindly with his hands, and felt that it was standing ajar.

In an instant the detective had flung it open to its widest extent, and the cool night air rapidly drove the yellow fumes away.

But Professor Cyrus Zingrave had vanished!

CHAPTER VII.

. What Nipper Did—Zingrave's Desperate Act—Conclusion.

ZINGRAVE had escaped!

There was no doubt about that whatever. A few deep draughts of pure air soon relieved the tightening of Nelson Lee's lungs. The fumes had been almost overpowering, but their effect soon passed.

The garage contained Dr. Northrup, Monkswell, M.P., and every other member of the Governing Circle. But Zingrave, the chief, had slipped away. His ruse had been successful.

But Nelson Lee was not foolish enough to blame himself for what had occurred. It was impossible that he should have been prepared for such an amazing expedient. With all those police present the detective naturally considered his own work finished. It was for the police to look after their prisoners now. But Nelson Lee did not attempt to shift the blame from his own shoulders on to those of the police. In truth, nobody was at fault. The whole incident had been unprecedented and startling.

The police officers did not relax their grips upon their prisoners; at least, once the smoke had cleared they grabbed their charges more fiercely than ever.

"The very pick of the lot escaped!" exclaimed Detective-inspector Lennard bitterly. "By thunder, what an amazing crook! But we must get busy——"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Nelson Lee abruptly.

"What's the matter?"

"Nipper is not here," the detective replied. "By James! I wonder if the lad has beaten the lot of us, and is now on Zingrave's track?"

Lennard's eyes opened wider.

"It certainly looks like it," he said. "In any case, we'd better move ourselves briskly. After all, Zingrave can't have got far, and we'll soon have him nabbed. The police-net doesn't allow many criminals to slip through its meshes once they're marked down!"

Nelson Lee stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Nipper gone!" he murmured. "I wonder—I wonder!"

But while Nelson Lee was wondering Master Nipper was acting. The lad was, indeed, hot upon Professor Zingrave's trail. That dash of the lad's across the garage had placed him the nearest to the professor's side at the moment of the explosion. Nipper had had a desperate idea in mind of catching the supposed explosive bomb as it fell. But he was just too late,

and the glass tube whizzed past him as he dashed up. The next second the cloud of choking vapour had completely enveloped him. The lad staggered drunkenly, and even in that tense moment attempted to grab at Zingrave. But the yellow fog prevented him seeing anything at all, and he was forced, moreover, to keep his eyes tightly closed.

He groped round him blindly, and more by luck than anything else gripped the edge of the door. Zingrave had passed out, and had left the door slightly ajar. With staggering gait Nipper lurched out into the night. He ran forward drunkenly, and then opened his eyes. At first he had seen nothing, but then, through his enforced tears, he caught a single glimpse of a running form at the far end of the little lane.

Without thinking of those in the garage the lad gave instant chase. All his mind was concentrated upon following Zingrave and capturing him before he got clear away.

By the time Nipper reached the end of the lane he was feeling much better, and he turned the corner and found himself in a wider road. There, on the opposite pavement, Zingrave was calmly walking along, with all the assurance of an honest citizen. He glanced back, and Nipper dodged round the corner like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Good! The blighter didn't see me," muttered Nipper exultantly.

The lad was now keen and determined. It struck him with force that he alone had escaped from the fumes in time to follow the fugitive. The others, he knew, were even now plunging about in that horrible, impenetrable fog.

Within two minutes the young detective was quietly tracking the escaping criminal. Nipper was a past-master in the art of shadowing. There was not an official detective in the whole Criminal Investigation Department who could approach Nipper's smartness at this particular game.

Professor Zingrave, although he half suspected pursuit, had no notion that the lad was fairly close at his heels.

In a very short time the scoundrelly scientist was satisfied that he had made a safe escape.

Had he had no other object in view than that of blindly fleeing, Zingrave would probably have realised the futility of his ruse. For, in an ordinary way, there is very little chance of a man escaping the police even if he does happen to get free. In the long run he will be captured. Several days of skulking, perhaps, and then recapture.

But Zingrave had a definite plan in mind.

It was a plan which had been formulated and perfected months—years—before. At the back of the professor's mind there had always been a lurking dread of capture. And he had prepared a certain retreat for himself which was completely beyond the reach of the police.

And now he was making for that retreat with all swiftness. A few minutes' grace was all he had—he knew that. Within a quarter of an hour the hue and cry would be raised.

But Zingrave only wanted those few minutes. When they had expired he would be safe from arrest. So now he was striding swiftly along, congratulating himself that he, at least, would escape the clutches of the law. His fellow-rogues were doomed—nothing on earth could save them.

The Orpheum Club was not very far distant from Grosvenor Square—certainly no more than a few minutes' walk—and the professor, to Nipper's astonishment, was now making straight for Grosvenor Square, where his own private residence was situated.

What could be the meaning of it?

Nipper was very curious. What sense was there in Zingrave making for his own home? He would simply walk into fresh danger; or perhaps, Nipper

shrewdly thought, the professor guessed that his own house would be the last place to be searched.

To the lad's fresh surprise Zingrave did not turn into Grosvenor Square itself, but took a turning which led him to the rear of one side of the square. The lad was fully determined to have Zingrave arrested immediately if he could only spot a policeman. Nipper knew well enough that to attempt anything on his own would only end in disaster to himself.

He was now fairly close behind his quarry, and was moving with extreme caution.

Crouching in a gateway he saw Zingrave enter a low doorway which was set in a high wall. The very instant the door closed Nipper dashed up.

He turned the handle, and found that the door was locked on the inside. The professor, in fact, had opened it with a key, and Nipper guessed at once that the door led into the scientist's own garden.

Desperately the lad looked round him, and saw that with a considerable effort he might possibly manage to scramble to the summit of the wall.

He took a long sideways run, and hurled himself into the air. Nipper was an athletic youngster, and his fingers gripped the top of the wall firmly. The rest was easy. He hauled himself up with the agility of a monkey, and without considering the danger, he dropped into the garden.

He fell behind some bushes, without making a sound. And now he parted the leaves and stared through. The whole of Professor Zingrave's garden lay before his gaze. The stars were shining overhead, and a dim light filled the garden. Apparently all was dark, but the starlight was sufficient for Nipper to make out the outstanding objects.

And he saw the professor's form at once.

Zingrave was standing beside a small ornamental lake which occupied the very centre of the garden. On three sides the lake was surrounded by lawns, and on the fourth side by a beautifully kept rockery.

The lake itself was not large, and in the middle of it a carved fountain stood out against the background.

Nipper could see Zingrave standing motionless, gazing down into the still water. He had no suspicion that his movements were being watched.

"Hallo--hallo!" murmured Nipper. "This looks fishy! Zinny's got home, but he seems to be considering whether he should take a last plunge. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he commits suicide in the end."

But why hadn't the professor taken poison, or something equally as swift? Why should he come here? Perhaps it was because he wanted to die in his own grounds. Nipper knew that even the most callous criminals sometimes displayed the most surprising sentimentality.

Was this the professor's last retreat?

It was grim enough, but quite possible. Zingrave's brain was a strange one, and it may have fixed itself upon this one desperate expedient. Rather than be made to stand his trial at the Old Bailey he would end all in a swift plunge.

"What the dickens can I do?" muttered Nipper.

While he was wondering he saw a movement of the solitary figure. Then, as he watched, Professor Cyrus Zingrave raised his hands above his head and dived.

Down—down!

Splash! The professor's body struck the water, and then there was dead silence. For a second Nipper stood petrified.

"He's done it!" gasped the lad. "He's drowned himself!"

Nipper dashed out of his place of concealment, and ran swiftly to the edge

of the lake. A few big bubbles were lazily bursting on the surface, and many ripples were nearing the edges of the water.

But of Zingrave there was no sign.

He had plunged to his last sleep. For a few moments Nipper thought of diving in in an attempt to save the desperate man. But there was nothing to see—the professor had vanished. His body must have plunged down to the lake-bottom and become entangled in some weeds or metal-work of the fountain.

“Good heavens!” murmured Nipper, aghast.

How long he remained there he did not exactly know. He was somewhat stunned by the shock of this unexpected tragedy. But Professor Cyrus Zingrave had killed himself—that was obvious. His life of crime was at an end.

When Nipper gazed at the lake again he saw that the ripples had subsided, and that all was quiet and still.

“I’ll tell the gov’nor!” muttered the lad huskily.

He turned away, hurried to the garden door, and found that it was merely fitted with a patent latch-lock—and, therefore, easily opened from the inside. He pressed back the knob, and opened the door.

Leaving it slightly ajar he hastened away. Running swiftly, he soon arrived in the vicinity of the Orpheum Club. Here there were many signs to show him that the police were active. He met an inspector on the wide pavement.

“Where’s Mr. Lee?” he asked breathlessly.

“Hallo! It’s you, Nipper,” said the inspector. “Your boss is in Metcalf Lane, I think. He’s raving about Zingrave having given him the slip.”

“Given the police the slip, you mean!” flashed Nipper.

And he was off before the inspector could reply. Just at the entrance of Metcalf Lane Nipper came upon Nelson Lee and Detective-inspector Lennard. The pair were talking earnestly.

“Nipper!” ejaculated Nelson Lee suddenly.

He grabbed his young assistant’s arm.

“We were properly caught in that dose of poison gas stuff,” he said.

“But what about you, young ‘un? Where did you hop off to?”

“I followed Zingrave, sir!”

“Oh, you followed Zingrave—eh?” said the detective. “By James, you’ve done well, my boy! Have you—”

“He’s dead, sir!” burst out Nipper.

Nelson Lee and Lennard started.

“Dead!” cried the inspector.

“Yes, sir—he committed suicide!”

“Dear me! Are you sure of this, Nipper?” asked Nelson Lee quietly.

“Well, I don’t see how I could be anything else,” replied the lad. “I saw Zingrave plunge to his death! He’s drowned himself in his own lake!”

And, in a few words, he related what had happened. The two men listened quietly, and when he had done Nelson Lee patted his back.

“You have done well, nevertheless, Nipper,” said the great detective.

“You could not prevent the tragedy; and we know that Zingrave has gone to his last account. Perhaps it is better that this has happened.”

Lennard grunted.

“I’ve lost my chief prisoner!” he said ruefully.

“Upon my soul, you have no cause to grumble,” said Nelson Lee. “You’ve got the greatest selection of society criminals that the police ever captured. The newspapers to-morrow will be simply raving.”

The inspector nodded.

"Well, what's to be done?" he asked. "About Zingrave, I mean?"

"There is only one thing for us to do," said Lee. "You must take a batch of men to Grosvenor Square, and drag that lake for Zingrave's body. He'll have to be lodged in the mortuary as soon as you have secured him. I'll come with you, Lennard."

"Good!" said the official detective.

He hurried off to attend to matters, leaving Nelson Lee and Nipper talking. Douglas Clifford had joined them now. And Nipper could scarcely recognise the young man as the keen worker who had helped so strenuously in the campaign against the Green Triangle.

"Well, it's over," said Clifford, when he had heard of Zingrave's fate. "We have had some exciting times together, Lee, but the end is just as we anticipated. The rotten league is demolished—and I'm myself again."

The great secret society was indeed crushed out of existence. Everything had crumpled up together—and with appalling swiftness. The Orpheum Club was in the hands of the police, and there had been many more arrests in addition to the Governing Circle.

Acting on information given by Nelson Lee—who, in turn, had obtained it from Martin Caine—the police had arrested a great number of the league's controlling agents and ordinary members. A panic has set in among the workers for the league, and many had come forward, eager to turn King's evidence against their comrades.

The Green Triangle was finally shattered.

Martin Caine had gladly accepted a position which Douglas Clifford had offered him. The man had been a faithful assistant, and Nelson Lee was glad that Clifford had decided to keep Caine as a servant. The detective knew that Caine was a valuable man, and he would probably be useful to Nelson Lee on some future occasion.

The Governing Circle were all lodged in cells within an hour of their arrest, and it was certain that their sentences would be severe. Many, indeed, would have to answer to the charge of murder. But their fate was richly deserved. The fact that they were nearly all well-known public men rendered their punishment all the more warranted.

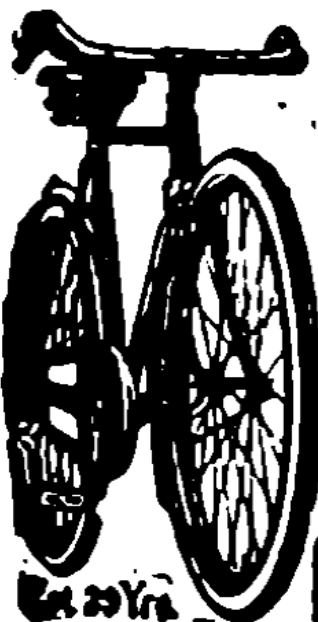
"It's rather a pity Zingrave committed suicide," Clifford said, after a short silence. "It's a miserable finish for him. I thought he would, perhaps, stand his trial boldly, and with the calm assurance which was characteristic of him."

"He was at his wit's end," said Nelson Lee. "Suicide was the swiftest way out of his appalling difficulties. He knew that he would assuredly have been hanged had he waited for the trial."

Very soon Detective-inspector Lennard was ready with his men. Clifford went to his flat, for he was tired, and he wanted to ring up Vera on the 'phone. It was very late, but he knew she would be waiting to hear from him. He had promised to ring her up; and, to Clifford, the fulfilment of that promise was all-important.

Nelson Lee and Nipper accompanied Lennard on his grim errand. The garden in Grosvenor Square was reached, and the police swiftly

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got to work. The lake was dragged thoroughly. Lennard had believed that the body would be recovered without any difficulty whatever.

But an amazing discovery followed.

Even now Professor Zingrave was not at the end of his tether.

There was no body in the lake! The water was absolutely empty of any foreign substance except weeds and mud. After an hour's hard work the police were forced to acknowledge the stunning fact. The lake was empty!

"Zingrave has escaped, after all!" said Lennard huskily. "Nipper must have been mistaken——"

"I was not mistaken!" exclaimed Nipper, with conviction. "I saw Zingrave take the dive as plainly as I see you standing there, Inspector Lennard. He plunged into the water and sank to the bottom."

"Are you sure he didn't come up on the other side of the fountain, my lad?" asked Nelson Lee, who was strangely uneasy.

"No, he didn't," declared Nipper flatly. "He sank like a stone. I don't know what it means, but I'm positive of what I'm saying. - When I arrived at the side of the lake only a few bubbles remained."

"But the body is not in the lake," said Lennard testily.

"It must be—it must be!"

Nipper was amazed, and with a very good reason. But a further investigation only made the astounding fact clearer. Professor Zingrave had not died, after all. He had completely escaped.

The explanation of the extraordinary puzzle was quite simple.

Zingrave, as a matter of fact, was within twenty yards of Nelson Lee and Nipper at the very moment they were discussing the strange affair with Inspector Lennard.

When the professor had plunged to his death—as it seemed—he had been diving, in reality, to a haven of refuge. The lake was an artificial one, with concrete sides. Zingrave had built the lake a year or two before; and while doing so, had provided himself with a secret retreat to use in a moment of dire necessity.

That dire necessity had arisen now, and he had skulked into his retreat. Six feet below the water, in one side of the concrete wall, was a narrow opening. A short submerged tunnel led for a distance of eight feet right beneath the beautifully kept rockery. At the end of the tunnel stone steps led upwards into a small cave-like apartment.

Zingrave had simply plunged into the water, had gripped some stone projections about the tunnel's mouth, and had quickly walked along the short submerged passage to the steps—being, of course, under water the whole time. But when he mounted the steps he emerged into the dry again, and found himself in the hidden cavern.

Here he was hiding. Clothes were there—clothes, food and many other things which the professor had always kept in readiness. Moreover, a vast fortune was stowed away in a metal cashbox—a fortune in foreign securities.

Zingrave would live for a week in his retreat, and then he would emerge, closely disguised, and escape from the country.

That was his programme.

But would he be successful. Would he escape justice and Nelson Lee at the very last minute?

It was a stiff problem.

THE END.

Next week's long complete detective story will be entitled: "The Mystery of the Moor:" a Tale of "Jim the Penman."

NEIL THE WRECKER

A Thrilling Story
of Adventure in
the North Sea.

By DAVID GOODWIN.

Sauce for the Gander!

WHILE as the crushed chalk upon the floor, his face tight set, Hal stood firm, and looked his captor between the eyes. He was utterly without fear, and the Boer saw it.

A terrible light blazed in the blue eyes of the sunburnt man. For a moment he made no movement. He gazed at the blazoned insolence of those bold letters on the board, and his huge chest heaved as if it would crack. Ben West, who had stared thunderstruck while the words grew under the boy's hand, suddenly found his voice.

"Well done, Hal!" he shouted fiercely. "Well done! Well done! Death to all traitors, and God save the King!"

With a savage oath the second Boer raised his sjambok to cut Ben across the mouth; but, as the blow was about to fall, the tall man shot out his arm and grasped the striker's wrist.

"Hold!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

The whip fell to the floor.

"So," said the tall Boer, turning slowly upon Hal, "you have chosen to disobey!"

His burning eyes sought those of the boy, and scanned them grimly; but he found no sign of fear or shrinking.

"You hear me?" he said hoarsely, coming a step nearer.

"You have your answer," replied Hal, quietly and coldly, nodding towards the board.

All emotion had died in him. He knew that nothing could wring a traitorous word from him now, even in sport, and for the Boer's brutality he had nothing but contempt. The lash had failed, the cold steel had failed, and there on the blackboard was the result. Hal felt no tinge of pride, except the clean pride of having done his duty in the face of odds.

The brutal glare faded from the Boer's eyes. He set his lips tight and drew himself up.

"You have saved your skin," he said, slowly and grimly. "Had you flinched one hairbreadth; had you given the faintest sign of having done this out of bravado, the whip would even now be cutting you to ribbons!"

Hal glanced at Deventer in astonishment. The man's tone was changed.

"Accursed Englander as you are," continued Deventer, "you have yet acted as I would have had my own son act, in such a case. I respect your courage, at least. Even that insult"—he pointed to the board—"shall stand until another of your countrymen wipes it out, at my orders. Stand back by the wall!"

Hal did so, a little dazed and bewildered. Cruelty he had been prepared for, but not for this.

"You are a white man after all, according to your lights," he said to the Boer, as he stepped back and left the field clear; "can't you see that you're playing a blackguard's game in bullying defenceless prisoners like this? I thought you were mad, but you don't look like it now. What earthly reason can you have for it?"

Deventer glared at him.

"Reason!" he said thickly. "Better not ask me that, or I might set about you yet! Reason! Listen here, and you'll guess whether I'm mad or not! My only son was killed at Vlakfontein, and your cursed Rooineks and their priest even refused him Christian burial, because he was a Boer!"

"I'm sorry for your son," said Hal, beginning for the first time to understand; "many a brave fellow on both sides lost his life. But as for the other part, I don't believe a word of it! Our men were as careful of the Boer wounded, and the dead, too, as of their own. You must have seen little of the fighting, or you'd know it. But even if such a beastly thing were true—and I'll swear it wasn't—why in the name of sense should you want to revenge yourself on two fellows off a North Sea trawler, who never did you any harm?"

"Enough! I warned you not to speak of that!" he said, grinding his teeth. "Your father was Forsyth, the chaplain who refused to read the service for the dead over my son! Now do you wonder? And that tall lout there"—he pointed to Ben—"is the son of West, whose brother shot the boy, and bragged of it as though he had played a man's part! That debt has yet to be paid!"

Hal could only stare in utter amazement.

"My father!" he exclaimed in bewildered tones. "My father a chaplain in the Transvaal War? He was Parson Mack, of the 'Helping Hand' Mission Boat. He was never south of the English Channel in his life, and he was drowned at sea in '98, the very month the war began! And any trawlerman on the Dogger could tell you that!"

"Of course he could!" cried Ben, as soon as he could find his voice, for astonishment. "This beats any yarn I ever heard! As for me, my father never had a brother, and has never been nearer South Africa than Plymouth Sound! Who's been filling you up with this lies, and why have you swallowed them? You must have been dreaming!"

Deventer's face changed. For some seconds he stared keenly into Hal's face, and then into the eyes of Ben.

"By George, I see it easy enough!" cried Hal, with a sudden, bitter laugh. "Haggart Neil has been pitching you this tale! He's made a catspaw of you!"

"They're lyin'—an' they know it—an' so do you, Jan!" snarled Haggart scornfully. "What else should they say, to get quit o' what you owe them!"

Deventer turned slowly upon him, and the Boer's eyes looked more terrible than even the boy's had seen them. Neil began to turn pale, and made a furtive movement towards the door.

"It's you that are lying, man!" he said in grating tones. "I can see truth in those boys' faces, and a lad who has endured what this one did for the sake of his flag, does not tell falsehoods for nothing! Guard that door, Piet—don't let him out! You made a catspaw of me, did you!" His eyes burned like coals. "You deceived me, and put me to shame before these Englanders, for your own ends and your own revenge! Well, you shall pay the debt for them! Piet, bring him out here!"

(Continued overleaf.)

"No, no!" shrieked Haggart, squirming in the grip of the second Boer, who held him as easily as a ferrier pinning a rat. "Jan, you're not goin' back on me! I tell ye it's true——"

"Truss him up!" said Deventer grimly, and as Neil was bound with the cords that had been used on Hal, he gripped the sjambok. Then he paused.

"Stop!" he said suddenly, "a better punishment still. He would have delivered up the son of his enemy by a lie. He shall see his own son pay the debt! Bring out the boy!"

Haggart was thrust back, and Simon, pinioned in a moment, was hauled forward, blubbering with fright and begging for mercy. Haggart gave a broken cry.

"No! that! No! that!" he cried desperately; "flog me if ye must do it, Jan! Gi'e it me twice ower if ye will! Let the bairn go!"

Ruffian as he was, Haggart Neil had one soft spot in his heart. He loved his son, and for no other living creature would he have offered to suffer pain.

"You shall see it through!" said the Boer pitilessly, "Jan Deventer does not shrink from his enemies, but neither does he deal in lies, and so you shall learn! But we have a coward here, a very different breed from the other lads, and I will show you that! Take up that chalk first, you cub!"

"I will, I will!" cried Simon eagerly, and, seizing a piece of chalk, he darted towards the blackboard whereon Hal had scrawled his defiant message. Then Simon checked himself, and turned round.

"No!" he cried suddenly, "ye'll flog me whether I do or not! What's the use o' me doin' anything!"

He flung the chalk to the far end of the room and looked at Deventer trembling and nearly blubbering afresh.

"You're right, you whelp!" snapped Deventer; "nothing would save you from paying for all! Do you think I would take from you what I took from this English brat, who at least has grit in him. He is a boy with the heart of a man; but you and your father are curs to the marrow! Bind him! Take the whip, Piet—I will watch this!"

Haggart was beside himself with rage and anxiety. All fear seemed to have left him. He entreated and threatened Deventer by turns, he offered himself again in the boy's place; he would give money, service, anything. The big Boer looked him steadily in the face a moment, and then made a sign to Piet, who brought the sjambok down with whistling force across Simon Neil's shoulders. The boy gave a piercing yell.

"Save him. Can nae one save him!" panted Haggart.

Hal turned sick. Any enmity he might have felt towards Simon was wiped out for the moment. He had felt the lash himself. The cold brutality of the performance made his heart swell with rage. Haggart, and Simon were at least of the same race as himself, but this brutal Dutchman——

He sprang forward as the whip was raised again, and before it could fall he grasped it.

"You cowardly dog, you shall not flog him!" he cried.

(To be concluded shortly.)