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**The Spectre
of the Sea!**
or,
**The Ghost of
Pirate Cove!**

They all saw the thing now—a faintly elusive, spectral figure.

(See This Week's Story of the Strange Experiences of the St. Frank's Boy Scouts.)



A figure came running up at full speed—a mad, frantic rush. Nipper and one or two of the others barred the way, and the newcomer charged into them.



Or, THE GHOST OF PIRATE COVE!

An exciting story of the Boy Scouts of St. Frank's and of their encounter with a strange apparition.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

AN UNCANNY EXPERIENCE.

"WHAT'S that?" asked Bray sharply. He and his three companions came to an abrupt halt, and stood listening tensely. No sound reached their ears except the quiet swish of the sea on the shingle. Darkness almost enveloped the scene—only the faintest starlight relieved the intense blackness.

"I can't hear anything—" began John Busterfield Boots.

He paused, for a far-away cry had sounded out in the night.

"There it is again," said Bray softly. "I thought it was one of the Otters at first, but it sounds more like a seagull."

"It wasn't an Otter," declared Oldfield. "I know my patrol cry better than that. Come on—let's be moving. It must be getting close on eleven. I'm famished, too."

"Same here," said Billy Nation.

The four St. Frank's Fourth-Formers were on the beach just round the headland to the east of Shingle Bay. As Oldfield had remarked, the hour was nearly eleven o'clock, and the Scouts were not only tired, but hungry.

They belonged to the 2nd St. Frank's Troop, and there had been some special night practice this evening. In fact, the manoeuvres had been on a somewhat grand scale—the 1st Troop against the 2nd Troop, and all the Scouts had put their heart and soul into the work.

So far as Buster Boots knew, his rivals had

won the honours of the occasion. The 2nd Troop had been completely out-maneuvred during the course of the operations and were now straggling back to camp in semi-disorder.

Not that the 2nd Troop had any reason to worry. The whole adventure had been exciting and interesting, and one side was bound to be the loser. Nelson Lee and Beverley Stokes—the respective Scoutmasters—had taken active part in the manoeuvres, and they had granted the Scouts special permission to be up late. For in June the evenings are long, and as darkness had been essential, late hours were allowed. The Scouts would make up for it by rising correspondingly later in the morning.

The four Scouts on the beach were mixed. Two belonged to the Wolf Patrol, and the other two were Otters. Boots and Oldfield were their respective Patrol Leaders. They had met a mile away, and had decided to join forces. As the operations were now over, it only remained for them to get back to camp.

"I'm afraid we've done pretty badly," remarked Bray, as they trudged through the shingle, assisted by their staves. "The Lions and the Hawks had the best success of all, I hear."

"Well, never mind," said Buster cheerfully. "I understand that the Tigers were captured intact by our fellows. Poor old Handy! And he was going to do tremendous things, too!"

The Scouts went down the beach almost to

the water's edge, for the tide was fairly low, and the shingle gave place to sand. And this latter was much easier for walking upon.

The knowledge that the Tiger patrol had met with disaster afforded the Modern House juniors a good deal of satisfaction. For the Tigers included the redoubtable Handforth & Co., and it was pleasing to know that the celebrated Edward Oswald had been made a prisoner of war.

"We'll soon be in camp now," remarked Billy Nation hopefully. "Sandwiches and hot cocoa!"

"Let's hurry!" urged Bray. "The very mention of grub makes me hungrier than ever. These night practices are all very well, but they jolly well take it out of you! I've lost my appetite and found a donkey's!"

"That's natural!" grinned Buster Boots. "Where are we now? I haven't been round this beach much——"

"We're just in that little inlet they call Pirate Cove," said Oldfield. "It's really a part of Shingle Bay, but owing to the formation, it's a separate inlet all to itself. The water's always calm and smooth here, owing to those rocks."

He indicated some dim black objects which rose out of the sea several hundred yards from the shore. There were many rocks off the coast just here. Shingle Head, indeed, was one of the most treacherous headlands for miles, and had been the scene of many disastrous wrecks.

Far out gleamed the intermittent flashes of the Shingle Lighthouse, but here, on the beach, all was dark. The water in Pirate Cove was smooth and almost unruffled. Only the tiniest waves splashed musically upon the sandy beach.

"Another hundred yards, and we shall be able to climb the cliffs," said Nation. "And we shall be right opposite the camp. I say, come on! I can smell that giddy cocoa from here!"

The tired Scouts hastened their pace, the thoughts of hot cocoa spurring them on.

But Buster Boots, who was leading, slackened his speed as abruptly as he had hastened it.

"What on earth—— I say, can you fellows see anything out there?" he asked, with a curious note in his voice.

He had come to a complete halt, and was staring out over the waters of the bay. His companions stopped, too, and they wondered what it was that had caught Buster's eye.

"There's nothing——" began Oldfield.

"No, not that way——over here!" muttered Boots. "Great Scott! I can see something moving——"

He broke off, and the others caught their breath in. They all saw the thing now. It was dim, intangible, and more like a will-o'-the-wisp than anything else. A faintly elusive luminous spectral figure!

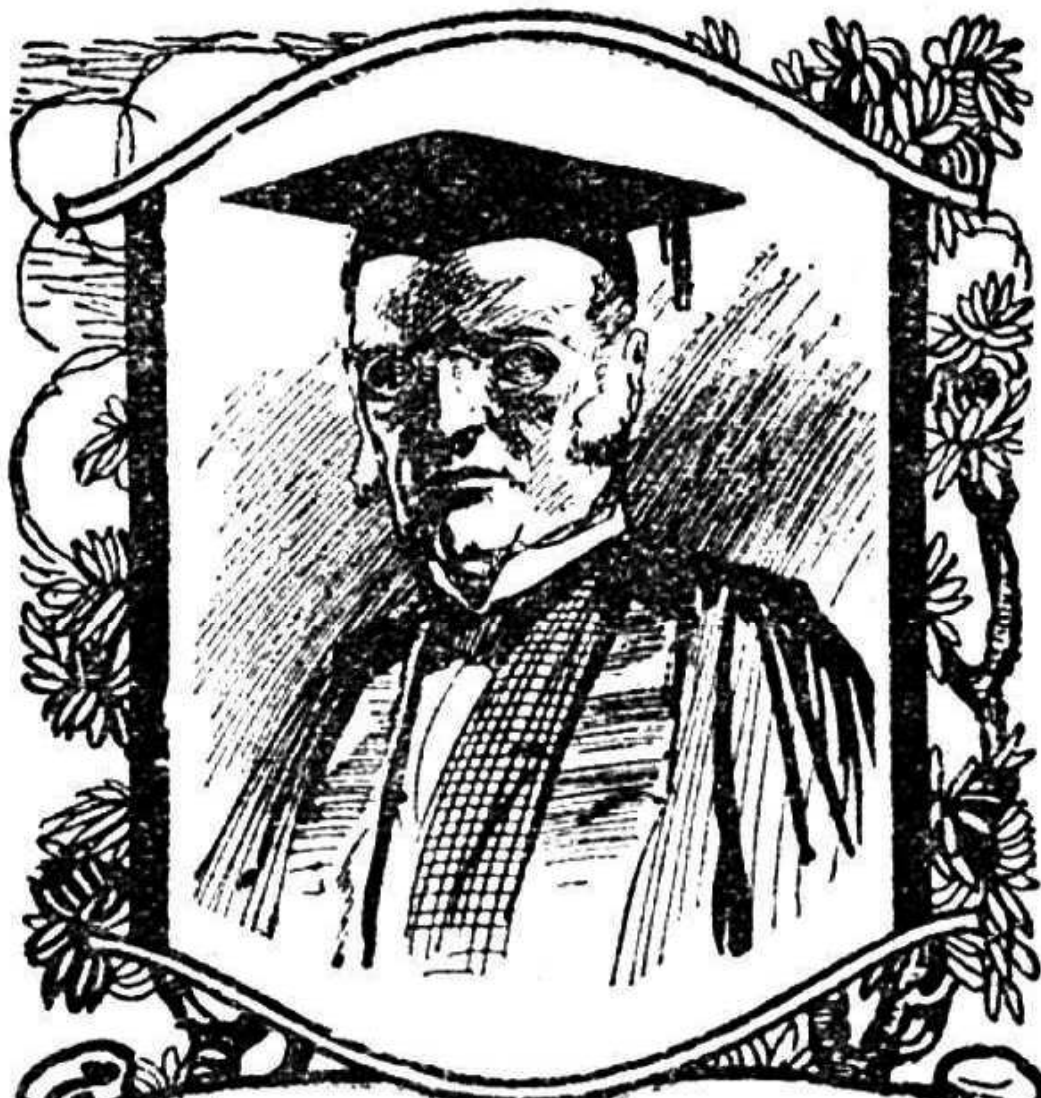
To the startled Scouts it appeared to be standing on the very water itself, and to have assumed a human shape. It was like some phantom of the deep—and Buster Boots had seen more than others. This uncanny spectre had risen slowly and deliberately out of the water.

"Must be some sort of illusion!" muttered Boots huskily. "Yet I don't quite see—— Great Scott!"

He uttered the final ejaculation with a gasp. For now that he looked at the water more closely, there was nothing to be seen! The ghostly figure had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared!

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Fifth Series—Masters.



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The Headmaster of St. Frank's. Kindly, but firm. Popular with seniors and juniors alike on account of his unvarying sense of justice.

CHAPTER II.

VERY STRANGE.

THE waters of Shingle Bay were as peaceful and undisturbed as ever.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Oldfield. "There's nothing there at all! Yet I can swear I saw something a minute ago——"



a sort of figure, with long, trailing hair. It was standing on the water, too—although that's impossible! Jolly queer!"

"Must have been our fancy," said Bray nervously.

They stared at the water, fascinated, and, at the same time, they were aware of an eerie, creepy feeling in the whole atmosphere. The peace of the summer's night had gone. The Scouts felt scared, although not one of them would have admitted it, even to themselves. The very dimness and unreality of the apparition had a disturbing effect upon their nerves. They each tried to believe that their eyes had deceived them—yet each knew that he had seen something.

"Oh, this is rot!" growled Boots. "There's nothing here—and never has been! Let's get into camp! And, look here! Don't say a word to the others—they'll only laugh at us."

They hurried away from the scene eagerly, and not one of the four could resist the temptation to glance over their shoulders. They saw nothing fresh. Pirate Cove was quiet and peaceful.

They were feeling a lot better by the time they had reached the top of the cliff-path. They were puffed and breathless from their climb, and the exercise had taken away that chilly sensation which had so gripped them on the beach. Furthermore, the lights of the camp gleamed a little distance ahead of them, and they could hear many voices, and could even catch an occasional waft of cooking.

"Don't forget—not a word!" said Boots. "You know what the chaps are—they'll only cackle if we mention anything about that ghost."

"I don't believe it was a ghost," said Billy Nation, shaking his head. "Just one of those optical illusions—the same as that five bob Harry said he was going to pay me back yesterday."

"Five bob?" said Oldfield, with a start. "Oh, yes! But that's no optical illusion, you fathead! I'm going to pay you back on Saturday."

"One of these days I'm going to have you write that down, sign it, and I'll have it framed!" grinned Billy Nation. "You're always making my accounts go wrong—"

"Blow your accounts!" interrupted Buster Boots. "We were talking about that rummy thing we saw. I've been thinking. It must have been a small shoal of fishes, or something like that. Lots of these fishes are phosphorescent, you know—they glow like anything in the dark."

"But the thing was standing on the water—" began Bray.

"That was just a trick of perspective," interrupted Buster sagely. "Your eyes can play all sorts of pranks at night, especially

when you're tired. Perhaps it was only the water itself—even that's phosphorescent at times."

And the four Scouts, dismissing the last of their fancies, strode into camp with their thoughts solely upon food and hot cocoa.

There were three camps altogether—or, to be more exact, three distinct sections of the one camp. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd St. Frank's Troops were all under canvas together. But each collection of tents was grouped to itself, and each had its own food department and its own separate organisation.

The 3rd Troop camp was dark and still. For the Scouts of Mr. Clifford's Troop—Willy Handforth and his fellow-fags—had taken no part in the night manoeuvres. It had merely been one Fourth-Form Troop against the other.

Boots and his companions arrived in camp just in time for the supper. It was a *à la fresco* affair, the Scouts munching sandwiches and holding mugs of cocoa, while they walked about or sprawled round the camp-fires.

"Oh, here you are, at last!" exclaimed Denny, of the Wolves. "We thought you'd got lost!"

His Patrol Leader eyed him sternly.

"You're the one who got lost!" said Boots, with a sniff. "You and Crowe and the rest. Where the dickens did you wander off to? Why couldn't you stick to your Patrol? What's the good of me giving orders?"

"I like that!" said Denny indignantly. "You and Bray went off by yourselves, and told us to follow on—"

"All right, we won't argue," interrupted Buster.

"That's the spirit I like," said Bob Christine, of the Buffaloes, as he strolled up. "It's no good holding an inquest over the business. Half the chaps are arguing and saying that if we'd done this and if we'd done that we should have whacked Nipper's Troop to pieces. But we haven't come out so bad. They got most of the honours, but we took ten captives."

"I'm more interested in sandwiches than captives," put in Billy Nation. "I can't see any coming this way."

"You fellows have just got in?" asked Christine.

"Yes, two or three minutes ago."

"Which way did you come? I didn't see you on the Downs—"

"That's not surprising," interrupted Buster. "We came along the beach, round Pirate Cove and then up the cliff path."

"Pirate Cove, eh?" said Bob Christine, with a grin. "You didn't happen to see the ghost, by any chance?"

The four late arrivals started, and glanced at one another.

CHAPTER III.

THE LEGEND OF PIRATE COVE.



BOB CHRISTINE did not fail to see the exchange of startled glances.

"Hallo, what's up?" he asked keenly.

"There's nothing up," replied Boots. "But what do you mean about the ghost? Which ghost?"

"The Phantom of Pirate Cove, of course," grinned Bob.

"But you speak as if there actually is one!" exclaimed Nation. "Who's told you anything about a ghost? And what's it like? And how does it appear?"

"My goodness, haven't you seen the local paper?" asked Christine.

"No."

"You fellows are behind the times," said Bob, shaking his head. "Handforth bought the paper, I think, and it's in No. 1 Camp now. But there's a whole paragraph about the ghost of Pirate Cove. Just a lot of journalistic tosh, of course."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Buster slowly.

"There's a legend, or something," explained Yorke, who had joined the group. "It's no good taking any notice of the rot. Pirates used to sail into the cove hundreds of years ago, and one night in June, an old fisherman was murdered in the cove—forced to walk the plank, or something. Anyhow, this year is the tercentenary of the affair."

"The which of the affair?" asked Boots.

"The tercentenary," said Yorke carelessly.

"He's only trying to show off!" grinned Bob Christine. "He got that word out of the newspaper report. It means that the murder took place three hundred years ago this June."

"There's a lot more besides," added Yorke. "But it's all pille, of course. Don't you fellows want something to eat—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Boots quietly. "I'd like to see that newspaper. As a matter of fact, we did see something in Pirate Cove."

Christine and the others stared.

"You saw something?" repeated Bob. "You don't mean—"

"We weren't going to say anything about it. But this makes it different," said Buster. "As we were coming through Pirate Cove, we caught sight of something on the water. It looked like an old man—a horrible-looking object, slightly luminous."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob. "How did it appear?"

"It rose up out of the sea, and then vanished."

"That's just what the newspaper said!" muttered Yorke. "Oh, but I say, what rot, you know! You fellows must have imagined it! The story got hold of you, and you thought you saw the thing—"

"But we didn't know anything about the story," interrupted Buster keenly. "That's

just the point. The imagination can play all sorts of tricks, especially when you're thinking about ghosts; but we weren't. I caught sight of the figure just as we were talking about hot cocoa. Ghosts were about the last things in our minds."

"It's rummy, I must admit," said Christine.

"Come on—we'll go and have a look at that newspaper," declared Boots.

Buster was a fellow who believed in action, and he moved off at once. Most of the others accompanied him. They entered the rival camp, and found plenty of activity there.

Handforth was busily explaining to a group of grinning Scouts exactly how and why he and his Patrol had got captured. And the leader of the Tigers gave his rivals a glare as they approached.

"What are you chaps doing in here?" he demanded gruffly.

"Where's that newspaper you were looking at this afternoon, old man?" asked Christine.

"Newspaper?"

"Yes; the Caistowe rag."

"I've got it," put in Reggie Pitt. "It's in my tent. I was rather interested in that story of Pirate Cove—"

"You'll be more interested in a minute," interrupted Bob. "Boots and three of our fellows have seen the ghost!"

"What!"

"Seen the ghost!"

"Don't yell about it," growled Buster. "And Christine's not quite right, either. We saw something—but whether it was a ghost or not I won't say. And you needn't accuse us of imagining things, because we didn't know anything about the ghost story until afterwards."

"What do you mean—you saw the ghost?" asked Handforth. "Don't talk rot! You know as well as I do that ghosts are only to be found in stories! I don't believe in 'em!"

"Just because you don't believe in 'em, it doesn't mean to say they're non-existent," put in Boots. "Heaps of famous men believe in ghosts—although, to be quite candid, I agree with you. All the same, I'd like to know what it was we saw in Pirate Cove."

Pitt had hurried off to his tent, and he now returned with the local newspaper. The visiting Scouts seized it, and Boots read the report by the flickering light of the nearest camp-fire.

CHAPTER IV.

HANDFORTH DOESN'T BELIEVE A WORD!



THE paragraph was not a particularly long one, and the Scouts had only been interested in it originally because Pirate Cove was so near to their own camp. To most of the fellows, in fact, the story was quite

new. And it now had added piquancy owing to the latest development.

"Read it out, old man—we all want to hear it," said Percy Bray.

"Even the reporter chap doesn't seem certain," remarked Boots. "There's this line at the top, in capitals—'SPECTRE OF THE SEA NEAR CAISTOWE'—and there's a query after it."

"It doesn't matter about the heading—let's hear the rest," said Billy Nation.

"This month is the tercentenary of the murder of an old fisherman in Pirate Cove," read Buster. "Three hundred years ago this June, one of the blackest crimes of local history was committed in Shingle Bay. The notorious Captain Savage, having ransacked the village of Caistowe, seized an old fisherman in his drunken frenzy, and took him on board his pirate ship. The unfortunate old man, so the story goes, was brutally tortured, and then forced to walk the plank. Just before his death dive, he cursed the buccaneer, and swore that he would return to bring death to the pirate."

"Is that all?" asked Nation, as Boots paused.

"No; of course not."

"Then let's hear the rest."

"No need to be in such a hurry," said Buster. "The fire keeps flickering, and some fathead's spilt a lot of tea on the newspaper. Here we are. It goes on like this—'Whether there is any truth in this legend remains problematical, but there is an old story to the effect that the fisherman's ghost was seen for years afterwards, haunting the waters of Pirate Cove. It is even told that the ghost guided Captain Savage's frigate, five years after the tragedy, upon the rocks of Shingle Bay. It is a fact, however, that Captain Savage met his death on that occasion, his ship being lost with all hands in the midst of an unprecedented June storm. And the legend further has it that the spectre appears every hundred years—but only in the month of June. There are records to prove that exactly one hundred years ago the ghost was seen night after night, appearing from the waters of Pirate Cove—and even walking on the surface of the sea. This legend, of course, must be accepted with all due reserve, since the Caistowe villagers of a hundred years ago were simple, superstitious souls. However, if the ghost is seen by any of our readers, we shall be pleased to have their reports.'"

"So it only appears in June, and only in every hundredth year," smiled Nipper, who was listening. "Well, if we don't buck up and see it soon, we shan't have another chance. It's getting towards the end of June now, and we don't want to wait a hundred years, do we?"

"It's all very well to make fun," growled Buster. "But we saw something in Pirate Cove—and it came out of the water, too!"

"An old man, all in rags, and with seaweed over him!" declared Nation.

"And then he suddenly vanished," added Bray. "It simply disappeared as we were looking at it, and the water was left without a ripple on it. One of the rummiest things I've ever seen."

"Rats!" said Jack Grey. "You simply saw some phosphorescence on the water, and imagined the rest. Why, even this newspaper writer treats the whole thing as a kind of joke. It's only been printed to fill up some space."

"I wouldn't exactly say that," exclaimed Nipper. "The legend is bona fide enough—everybody in Caistowe knows about it."

"If everybody knows, what's it printed for?" demanded Handforth.

"For the benefit of visitors, of course," said Nipper.

"Well, I don't believe a word of it!" retorted Handforth flatly. "Not a giddy word! Every village has got its own pet ghost story, but it's only the ignorant cottagers who believe it. Caistowe's a pretty big town nowadays, and all this rot about the ghost makes me wild."

"Well, there's no need to glare at us!" said Church tartly. "We didn't ask for the ghost to appear."

"But it's such a lot of rubbish!" protested Handforth indignantly. "Printing bosh like that, by George! As for these chaps seeing anything, they're dotty! Take my advice, Buster, and go to bed! What you need is a night's sleep! And you'd better take some salts—your liver's out of order!"

Buster Boots grinned.

"Oh, well, we won't talk about it any longer," he said. "We shall be too late for the grub unless we hurry off. Thanks for the paper, Reggie. We shan't let the ghost keep us awake to-night."

The Modern House Scouts went off to their own camp, and although the subject of the ghost was discussed for some little time, it was soon dropped. There were too many other matters for the Scouts to attend to.

Handforth & Co. were late in getting into their tent, for Handforth had insisted upon Church and McClure tightening all the tent ropes. After a look at the sky, he had declared that some wind was probable. And his chums were compelled to do a lot of extra work.

The other three Tigers, in the meantime, were in bed and asleep. Burton, Owen major, and Goodwin had fortunately escaped the extra labour. And this seemed to be more by design than accident.

For just as Church and McClure were about to enter the tent—when the camp was settling down into quietness—Edward Oswald pulled them up.

"Hold!" he whispered. "We're not going to bed yet!"

"Look here, Handy—"

"No arguments!" muttered Handforth. "We're going off to Pirate Cove to have a look for that ghost!"

CHAPTER V.

THE APPARITION AGAIN.



CHURCH and McClure stared at their leader indignantly.

"We're going to look for the ghost?" ejaculated Church.

"Yes."

"Now?" asked McClure.

"Yes, now."

"But twenty minutes ago you were saying that the whole story was a lot of piffle, and that you didn't believe a word of it!" exclaimed Church warmly. "You said it was rot from beginning to end!"

"So it is!"

"You don't believe there's a ghost at all?" asked McClure.

"Of course I don't; ghosts don't exist!"

Handforth's chums looked at him grimly.

"Then we're going down to Pirate Cove to look for something which isn't there!" snorted Church. "We're tired out, we're fed-up, and you expect us to go off on a wild-goose chase—"

"It isn't a wild-goose chase; it's a ghost-hunt!"

"But there isn't a ghost!" said McClure exasperated.

"That's nothing to do with the point," said Handforth obstinately. "I'm going to satisfy myself that Boots and those other chaps were talking out of their hats!"

"All right—why not go?" asked Church. "McClure and I are satisfied already. So that's settled, eh? Don't forget to close the flap when you come in, old man. It looks a bit like rain—"

"You—you deserters!" hissed Handforth.

"You insubordinate rotters! I'm your Patrol Leader, and I order you to come with me!"

"Yes, but—"

"What about the Scout law?" asked Handforth sternly. "What about law 7? A Scout obeys orders of his parents, Patrol Leader, or Scoutmaster without question. Do you call this obeying orders without question?"

Church and McClure gave it up. They were good Scouts, but their Patrol Leader occasionally taxed their patience to the utmost. Not that their position was any different now from what it had always been. Scouts or no, they generally succumbed to Handforth's domination.

So the celebrated trio of Study D stole silently out of the camp without anybody being the wiser. It was obvious to Church and McClure that Handforth was not quite so sceptical as he made out.

But Edward Oswald was always keen upon any kind of investigation. There was nothing he liked better than a secret mission—detective work of any sort. And

the ghost-hunt appealed to him strongly. He scoffed at ghosts, and he wanted to establish the non-existence of this one.

"You chaps are jolly clever—but you never think!" growled Handforth, as they reached the cliff edge. "My idea in going to Pirate Cove is to find out the truth. We'll prove exactly what this apparition is, and in the morning we'll give those Modern House chaps a shock. We'll make 'em the laughing-stock of the camp."

"That'll be lovely!" said Church, with a yawn.

"And how are we going to do it?" asked McClure.

"I've been thinking," said Handforth. "I've come to the conclusion that those chaps saw a rock, or a patch of seaweed. Well, if we can see the same thing, and prove exactly what it is, we shall have 'em on toast. Don't forget the way they collared us to-night in the manoeuvres. I want revenge!"

"Well, there's something in that," admitted McClure, nodding. "It'll be rather a lark if we can prove that Buster and those other chaps were scared by a patch of seaweed! Why didn't you explain this before?"

"Because I thought you had enough wits to think of it for yourselves," replied Handforth tartly. "But I was wrong. It's no good expecting turnips to think. Just you follow me, and I'll do everything."

Church and McClure didn't take the insult seriously. If Handforth really regarded them as turnips, he wouldn't want them with him. And they wouldn't have let him go alone, in any case. He was quite liable to swim off somewhere, and drown himself—at least, so his faithful chums thought.

They reached the beach at length, and ploughed their way through the shingle, the countless pebbles crunching noisily beneath their feet.

"We shall disturb the ghost with all this row," said Church.

"Fathead! Ghosts can't hear!" replied Handforth. "Besides, a rock or a patch of seaweed isn't going to be scared away, I suppose? I've a good mind to take my clothes off and swim out."

"Don't be silly; we can see all right from the beach," put in McClure.

They approached the water's edge, where the waves were breaking to the accompaniment of a quiet hiss. The sea was very calm and even on the exposed stretches of beach the waves were small. Here, in Pirate Cove, they were tiny.

The night was dark, and it was difficult to distinguish the rock formations at the outlet of the bay. Behind rose the cliffs, and the three juniors seemed to be cut off and isolated from the rest of the world.

Perhaps it was the knowledge of their mission, or it may have been the lonely

nature of their surroundings, but all three were aware of a tense, eerie sensation. When they spoke, they did so in whispers. To talk loudly here seemed as impossible as shouting within a cathedral.

"Everything's finished now!" breathed Church. "It's past midnight, and there won't be any ghost—"

Curiously enough, while the word was on his very lips, and while the juniors were looking out across the cove, something appeared. Something rose from the depths of the sea about a hundred yards out.

"What—what's that?" muttered McClure shakily.

stride, it came gliding over the surface of the water towards the beach.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY.



EVEN Handforth, sceptic though he was, felt his flesh creep, and he had a wild desire to turn on his heel and flee. Only his strength of will saved him

from flight.

And Church and McClure, clinging to



The sudden light revealed the six juniors all sitting up in their camp beds, with startled expressions on their faces.

The others found it almost impossible to reply. They stared, fascinated. For the thing which appeared before them was faintly luminous, intangible, and unreal.

Gradually it rose higher and higher, coming up out of the sea like a very wraith of the deep. To the watching juniors it seemed that the thing took definite shape; they could distinguish the bent figure of an old man with a long, straggling beard, and a white, ghastly face. He was entangled in seaweed from head to foot.

And this startling apparition hovered on the surface of the water, visible, but almost transparent in its shadowy unreality. And then, with uncannily human

their leader, were practically struck motionless with horror and fear. Never before had they seen anything so ghostly as this phantom of the deep.

The three Scouts could only stand there and stare.

This awful thing was coming straight towards them, and not wading through the water, but actually gliding upon the surface of it! They could see no ripple in its wake; the figure came on, taking more definite shape as it approached. It was an old man, with a pale, mask-like face and sightless, staring eyes. The festoons of seaweed hung down, dripping with water.

The phantom raised an arm as it came nearer, pointing straight at the horror-stricken juniors. And then, just as they were about to take to their heels, the ghastly vision sank slowly and gradually beneath the surface.

Inch by inch it went, that hand still pointing at the watchers. The hand was the last thing to disappear. And nothing but the black surface of the sea remained—undisturbed, and without even a ripple.

Church suddenly shivered from head to foot.

"Let's—let's get away!" he muttered hoarsely.

His voice seemed to break the spell. His two companions moved, and Handforth ran down to the water's edge, and stared harder than ever. There was nothing there—nothing whatever.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Handforth. It seemed as though he would plunge right in, but Church and McClure held him back. There was something about the Cove which turned them cold. Even though the ghost had vanished the sensation was still in the air.

"Let's get back to camp!" whispered McClure.

"Wait a minute—I want to have a look round!" said Handforth grimly. "By George! I believe there's something in this ghost story after all!"

"Something in it!" echoed Church. "It's true every bit of it! That—that thing we saw wasn't a patch of phosphorescent water, or luminous seaweed. It was the ghost of that old fisherman, who was murdered three hundred years ago. I could see his face—all waxen and death-like! And his eyes—staring—"

"Shut up!" muttered McClure, with a shiver. "I saw it all, too! And the thing was walking on the water—walking on it as easily as we can walk on land!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I suppose it wasn't trickery?" he said, frowning.

"It couldn't have been trickery; no human being could walk on the water like that!" said Church. "It's easy enough to fake up a ghost on land, but you can't mess about with the sea. Besides, it rose out of the water before our very eyes, and vanished in the same way. And now there's nothing there—absolutely nothing!! No human being could dive under water, and stay there. I tell you it was a real ghost. I'm scared, too; I don't mind admitting it!"

"Same here!" muttered McClure. "My skin's all gone cold and tight! Let's—let's get back to camp! My goodness! I'm afraid of this rotten place. That horrible thing may come back!"

Handforth felt in very much the same condition as his chums, but he only

grunted. He walked up and down the beach, looking for footprints in the sand—for any clue that would indicate trickery. But the sand was undisturbed, just as it had been left by the receding tide. And further up the beach footprints were impossible, for there was nothing but shingle.

And gazing over the water was of no avail. The sea was quite undisturbed, and the problem was unfathomable. How had that phantom been able to walk over the water? How had it arisen from the depths, and descended again? If really supernatural, the phenomena could be understood. But if the result of trickery, there was no feasible explanation.

Even Handforth was shaken, and the conviction was upon him that he and his chums had gazed upon a psychic materialisation of the dead. That pointing figure had been, indeed, nothing more substantial than an actual ghost.

"All right—we'll get back to camp!" said Handforth unsteadily. "Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea, though, to take one of these boats out—"

"No, no!" interrupted Church tensely. "Let's get away! That—that horrible thing might climb into the boat out of the sea—"

He broke off and hurried up the beach at a run. McClure followed. And Handforth, who could see that his chums were thoroughly unnerved, lost no time in joining them.

And the secret of Pirate Cove remained unsolved.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORNING AFTER.



"GOOD gad!" Archie Glen-thorne sat up in his camp-bed with a gasp. A large spot of water had dropped on his nose, and wakened him.

Upon the roof of the tent, near his head, rain was pouring down in a steady, drenching torrent.

"What ho! Morning, and all that!" murmured Archie. "And a dashed frightful morning, too, by the sound of it. It seems to me that this camping stuff isn't all that it's cracked up to be!"

It was within ten minutes of the time for the camp to bestir itself, and the other members of the Lion Patrol were still asleep.

Archie looked up at the canvas, and noticed that water was penetrating the material. A drop was just about to fall, and he rubbed the canvas vigorously.

"I mean to say, this sort of thing is somewhat mouldy!" he murmured. "It seems to me that a more substantial roof

is indicated. However, forty more of the good old winks—Oddslike!"

He broke off with a gulp, for a regular succession of drops descended the back of his neck. And the sensation was chilling in the extreme. Cold water on the spine in the early hours of the morning is never exactly delightful.

Archie leapt out of bed with a yelp.

"Help!" he murmured. "Phipps, laddie, kindly dash to the young master's assistance. The old S.O.S. is being broadcast—"

"Anything the matter, Archie?" asked Nipper, sitting up. "Hallo, it's raining!"

"Absolutely!" groaned Archie. "Raining, what? It seems to me, laddie, that the good old clouds are concentrating their fury upon this one bally tent. Of all the frightful experiences, this is about the most frightful. If you ask me, this Boy Scout stuff is getting too dashed murky for words!"

Nipper grinned.

"Don't you worry, Archie—I expect it's only a shower," he replied. "There seems to be a leak just over your bed."

"Good gad! Is that what you call a leak?" asked Archie plaintively. "It's more like a burst! And yet, dash it, the canvas looks perfectly sound! A bally mystery, old chestnut!"

"I believe you've been rubbing the canvas," said Nipper. "That's the worst thing you can do. It's the one way to admit the rain. But there's a silver lining to every cloud—and as this rain has got you out of bed before anybody else in camp, it's created a record."

Archie proceeded to dress himself with speed. Since he had been a Scout he had revealed the fact that he was as capable as any of the other juniors. Phipps, his valet, was a mere luxury—and by no means a necessity. Camp life was doing Archie a world of good.

The tent was by no means large. All the sleeping tents in the camp were of the bell-shaped variety, and six fellows occupied each—one tent for each Patrol.

There was a general air of gloom about this morning.

As soon as the camp got really alive, and breakfast was on the go, spirits revived a little, but the rain made everybody miserable. It was the first taste of real rain that the campers had had.

There had been showers hitherto, but nothing much to worry about. This morning the sky was grey, and the rain was descending in a steady, relentless downpour. It was enough to dishearten the most confirmed optimist.

It was still pouring when the 1st Troop entered their marquee for morning lessons. For this was no ordinary holiday camp. All the juniors were really under canvas because St. Frank's was in the throes of rebuilding, and there was no room for the entire school. Only the seniors were ac-

commodated there this half. And the Junior School, Boy Scouts for the time being, were in camp.

"If this beastly rain is going to continue, we might as well give up all hope," growled De Valerie, as he took his place. "Rain isn't so bad at St. Frank's—we've got the common-rooms and the studies. But here we've either got to stick in the tents, or get wet through."

"It's bound to clear up before lessons are over," declared Reggie Pitt. "It's got to, my sons. We've got some more manoeuvres on for this evening, and we can't have them cancelled."

Nelson Lee, looking very business-like in his Scoutmaster's uniform, appeared a moment later. The gloom of his Troop was not reflected upon his face. In fact, he was more cheerful than usual.

"Well, boys, we mustn't allow this drenching to affect our spirits," he said genially. "Upon my word! I've never seen such a collection of long faces! This won't do at all!"

"But the rain looks like keeping on sir," growled Armstrong.

"And suppose it does?" asked Lee. "There are plenty of things we can do. And it's never any good worrying about the weather—it's the one thing we can't alter. Handforth, I hardly expected to see you looking so glum."

"Eh? Me?" said Handforth, with a start. "Glum, sir? I'm not glum—I'm just thinking."

"If you think with the same concentration over your lessons, I shall be thoroughly satisfied," said Nelson Lee drily.

Work commenced, and the Scouts were soon immersed. But Nelson Lee was not the only one who noticed Handforth's unusual pre-occupation. The Leader of the Tigers was not only thoughtful, but positively grave. Nobody had heard him shouting this morning, and for some reason he seemed subdued. And Church and McClure were just the same.

But the other Scouts were to have the explanation very soon.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THEIR HONOUR.



NELSON LEE briskly closed his book, and stepped to the tent exit. Lessons were

just over, and there had been no rain for at least an hour. The first glance outside was cheering. Patches of blue were appearing in the heavens, and the clouds were dispersing.

"I think it's going to be fine, after all," said Nelson Lee, as he turned back to the class. "Before you dismiss, there's one little thing I wish to discuss. Last night,

I believe, there was quite a lot of talk about a ghost."

"Oh, that was nothing, sir," said Pitt. "One or two of those Modern House fellows thought they saw something in Pirate Cove—but I expect it was only their fancy."

"I advise you all to take no notice of these ridiculous stories," said Nelson Lee. "The tale is merely a hashed-up legend, which should have been forgotten long since. You mustn't take any notice—"

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," interrupted Handforth. "I don't believe in ghosts, as a rule, but I believe there's something in this!"

"Indeed?" said the Scoutmaster-Detective. "I'm surprised to hear this from you, Handforth. I thought you were a strict materialist?"

"A which, sir?"

"I thought you had a contempt for all ghosts, and such like?"

"I always used to have, sir," said Handforth. "But I'm not so sure now. Of course, it was all trickery—I'll bet my boots on that! What's more, I mean to get to the bottom of this mystery, and unmask the rotter."

"Which mystery, Handforth?" demanded Nelson Lee. "What on earth are you talking about? What do you know about this ghost of Pirate Cove?"

"We saw it, sir—"

"You saw it!" echoed Lee. "Who was with you—and when did this happen?"

"Last night, sir—after lights-out," replied Edward Oswald. "Church and McClure were with me. We went down to the beach to have a look—just to prove that Buster Boots and those other chaps were all wrong."

"But instead of proving them wrong, sir, we proved them to be right," put in Church. "We saw the ghost, too—a horrible-looking thing!"

The Scouts listened, astonished. This was the first they had heard of Handforth & Co.'s trip to the beach. And it proved an

explanation for the Tigers' subdued air this morning. Nelson Lee frowned slightly, and came nearer.

"Oh, so you three boys broke bounds last night?" he asked sternly.

Handforth started.

"Broke bounds?" he repeated. "I—I—er— The fact is, sir— Well, yes, I suppose we did!" he added lamely. "It didn't strike me at the time, though."

"I'm not at all surprised to hear that," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But you must tell me exactly what took place—and then

I must decide whether to punish you or not. By what I understand, two or three boys of the 2nd Troop fancied they saw something in Pirate Cove last night. And you went down to the beach to have a look for this elusive apparition?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time did you go?"

"Oh, late, sir—it must have been after midnight."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Lee. "Well, since you have admitted this escapade without any coercion, you might as well tell me the rest. You went to Pirate Cove—and you actually saw the ghost?"

"Yes, sir!" said Handforth & Co. in one voice.

"Describe exactly what happened," said Lee.

Handforth went into full details. He told Nelson Lee and the other Scouts exactly what he and Church and McClure had seen—how the awful apparition had risen out of the sea, had

walked upon the surface, and had then sunk back into the water with that dreadful pointing hand.

"Come, come!" said Nelson Lee, at length. "I do not doubt the main part of your story, Handforth, but surely you have drawn upon your imagination? You cannot expect me to believe that the spectre actually walked upon the water?"

"But it did, sir—we all saw it!" put in Church quickly.

"It was horrible, sir!" added McClure,

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

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No. 2.—Mr. Nelson Lee.

Needs no introduction. Famous for his detective genius, but equally famous for his sportsmanship and popularity with schoolboys.

with a shiver. "An old man with a dead face—and covered with seaweed from head to foot! I couldn't imagine anything more ghastly. And it walked—actually walked on the water as though it were solid ground."

McClure spoke with vehemence and intensity. His very tone proved that the previous night's experience had affected him deeply. And Handforth and Church were in a similar condition. The other Scouts could not help being greatly impressed.

"Under the circumstances, I will refrain from inflicting any punishments," said Nelson Lee quietly. "We were all late last night, anyhow. But let there be no more of this ghost-hunting at present. Nothing but harm can come of such expeditions."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth submissively.

"I am not going to forbid you to leave the camp after lights-out, but I am going to place you all upon your honour," went on Nelson Lee. "I want you to remain strictly within the bounds of the camp—not only after lights-out, but even before. As soon as darkness falls, I trust you, upon your honour, to stay within the camp, and to refrain from any foolish ghost hunts. That is all. You are Scouts—and a Scout's honour is to be trusted."

And Lee felt satisfied that this was sufficient. The effect of the previous night's adventure on Handforth & Co. was so obvious that he wanted to put a stop to any similar occurrence.

CHAPTER IX.

HANDFORTH, THE CHANGELING.



FINE weather prevailed for the rest of the day, and the afternoon turned out to be sunny and brilliant. Lessons over, the Scouts were able to indulge in various forms of sport and practice.

And such things as ghosts and spectral figures from the sea seemed remote and ridiculous. Under the depressing weather conditions of the morning, they hadn't seemed so absurd. But by tea-time, under the influence of the sun, Handforth was already beginning to change his tone. Even Church and McClure began to wonder if their imagination had played tricks with them.

"Seen any ghosts lately, Ted?" asked Willy Handforth, as he strolled through No. 1 Camp with his Patrol of Third Form braves. "Seen any horrible apparitions?"

His major frowned.

"I'm seeing one now!" he retorted, glaring at Willy and then glancing round.

"It's no good—there's no audience!" said Willy sadly. "A brilliant remark like

that, too! What's this we hear about Pirate Cove? Some of the fellows are saying that you saw a green ghost walking on the sea, and beckoning you to go in and drown yourselves."

"Don't be a young ass!" said Handforth curtly. "I don't believe in ghosts—never did. As a matter of fact, Church and McClure got windy, and started seeing things."

Church and McClure, who had just come up, started violently.

"What's that?" demanded Church. "We started seeing things? What about you? You saw that ghost as plainly as we did—"

"I've been thinking it over," interrupted Handforth airily. "It's all rot! Ghosts don't exist! We must have seen an optical illusion of some kind, and what with the darkness and—"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped McClure blankly.

The brilliant sunlight had removed the last of their fears, but they were still as firmly convinced as ever that they had seen something uncanny the previous night. And Handforth's complete change of front staggered them.

"What are you jiggered about?" demanded Handforth.

"About your attitude," said McClure. "You know as well as I do that we all saw that ghost together. You're not going to deny—"

"Oh, leave it!" interrupted Willy. "We can't stop here while Ted acts the giddy goat! He's always changing—he never knows his own mind for five minutes at a time! Before long he'll be saying that he didn't see anything at all."

And Willy marched off with his Patrol, having uttered a perfectly true prophecy. For a little later on, round the camp-fire, Edward Oswald fulfilled his minor's prediction.

"Rather a pity we can't go on a ghost hunt to-night," remarked Reggie Pitt, as he strolled up to the Tigers' camp-fire. "It's turned out fine, and there's something rather fascinating about a ghost."

Handforth sniffed.

"It's a pity you can't drop that business!" he growled. "Ghosts? Rot! We didn't see anything last night at all—it was all pure imagination!"

"What!" gasped Church and McClure.

"Imagination!" said Handforth firmly. "Whoever heard of a ghost coming up out of the sea, pointing accusing fingers, and vanishing?"

"To say nothing of walking on the water," grinned Nick Trotwood, the Leader of the Curlews. "We've heard of a ghost like that, Handy—and we heard about it from you, too."

"Yes, I know," admitted Handforth. "I must have been dotty. It was all the fault

of Church and McClure—they put those fat-headed ideas into my head. They got so jolly scared that they even made me think funny things. Of course, there wasn't anything at all—not even a giddy moonbeam!"

The audience grinned. Handforth was always amusing. And his present change of front was only what most of the fellows expected. In just the same way, they wouldn't have been in the least surprised if he had declared that there were two ghosts. One never knew what Handforth was going to say or do next.

"So you don't believe in ghosts at all?" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"No, I don't!"

"And if you saw one in camp, you wouldn't be scared?"

"Scared?" sneered Handforth. "I'd like to see the ghost that's going to scare me! I'm not bragging—I'm just normally level-headed, that's all! And there's always a logical explanation of these rummy happenings. I don't care how queer it is—nothing will scare me."

"I'm glad you told us you're not bragging, because it sounds like it," said Church sarcastically. "I'd just like somebody to come along and scare you. You need taking down a peg or two!"

Handforth stiffened.

"Is that the way to talk to your Patrol Leader?" he roared.

"We're off duty now, and I'm not talking to any Patrol Leader!" retorted Church tartly. "I'm talking to a chump who doesn't know his own giddy mind! My hat! After the way you saw that ghost, too! I'd just love to see the thing come along now and frighten you into fits!"

"Well, I wouldn't!" said McClure. "I've seen it once—and that's enough for me! It'll be a fine state of things if that ghost walks into camp!"

Handforth threw a log on the fire with unnecessary force.

"Ghosts!" he snorted. "Huh! What absolute rot!"

CHAPTER X.

STRANGE HAPPENINGS IN THE TIGERS' TENT.



SHINGLE CAMP was at rest.

Lights had just been put out, and everything was quiet. After the heavy rain, the sky had cleared, and now the stars were shining brilliantly in the velvety sky. Hardly a breath of wind stirred, and the night was intensely gloomy.

In the tent of the Tiger Patrol, the six Scouts were just settling down for the night. All were in bed, and the subject of ghosts had been rigidly barred from all conversation during the past hour. It isn't

a wise course to talk about ghosts just before going to bed.

Handforth was tired after a strenuous evening. He had been putting his Patrol through its paces, and his followers had been quite content to let their leader do most of the work. So Edward Oswald was comfortably tired.

He was just dozing off when an extraordinary sound came from the centre of the tent. It was a kind of moan—uncanny and mysterious. And the fact that it came from the centre, where there was nothing but feet, made it all the more unaccountable.

"Who's making that horrible noise?" demanded Handforth, sitting up.

"I—I thought it was you," ejaculated Dick Goodwin, from the other side of the tent. "By gum! It sounded like somebody in awful pain——"

He was interrupted by a repetition of the moan.

"There it is again!" whispered Church, sitting up. "Who's got a light? There's something in the tent——"

He broke off as Tom Burton switched on an electric-torch. The sudden light revealed the six juniors all sitting up in their camp-beds, with startled expressions on their faces. With the darkness destroyed, the uncanny feeling in the atmosphere was relieved.

"What's the game?" demanded Handforth, looking round suspiciously. "Were you making that noise, Church?"

"Of course I wasn't!" said Church shakily.

A laugh sounded near the central tent-pole—a soft, deep-voiced laugh, with a weird note in it. It appeared to sound from the very air itself, and came from a spot where none of the juniors could be.

"Great Scott!" muttered Church. "There's—there's something funny about this! That—that ghost——"

"The ghost?" echoed Handforth blankly. "You idiots! You're playing a trick on me! One of you chaps made that sound!"

"We didn't—honour bright!" panted Owen major.

"Honest Injun, Handy!" urged McClure.

"Souise my scuppers, that's right!" put in Tom Burton.

All five juniors insisted upon their innocence, and Handforth knew well enough that they wouldn't tell him a deliberate lie. And the scared looks on their faces were sufficiently eloquent.

"But—but somebody laughed, that's certain," muttered Edward Oswald. "And it came from the middle—— Eh, what did you say, Church?"

"I didn't speak!" declared Church.

"But you must have done!" gasped Handforth. "Somebody whispered in my ear a

second ago—you must have leaned out of your bed—”

“I didn't, I tell you!” insisted Church.

For a second there was a tense silence. All six Tigers sat there motionless. A whisper sounded—a whisper that rose into a soft-toned, but wild-sounding laugh. And it was in the very air itself—apparently in every part of the tent at once. The sound died away.

“My only hat!”

Handforth leapt out of bed, and made for the flap. He didn't trouble to dress himself. He went out clad only in pyjamas.

“There's somebody fooling about outside,” he declared grimly.

But as soon as he found himself in the darkness outside the tent, the uncanny sense of some ghastly presence reasserted itself. Perhaps it was mere imagination—he didn't know. But he paused irresolutely after he had taken one or two strides. Then, obtaining a firmer grip on himself, he hurried round the tent.

There was nothing to be seen—not a soul was anywhere near.

“Well, I'm jiggered!” muttered Handforth, pausing, and staring round into the darkness.

“Foolish boy—foolish boy!” whispered a voice behind him.

“Eh?” gasped Edward Oswald, spinning round.

Then he gulped. He was alone—there wasn't anything near. The starlight was sufficient for him to see anything within a radius of five or six feet. And nothing living could have whispered in his ear so closely and have dodged away in such a short time—for he had spun round in a second.

“Oh, my goodness!” breathed Handforth shakily.

“Thou art brave—thou who laughs at spirits!” said a soft, deep voice immediately against his ear. “'Tis well thou art being taught a lesson!”

Something cold seemed to grip Handforth from head to foot. The voice was with him—next to him—but there was nobody to speak the words! It was a voice out of the very air itself!

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNSEEN PRESENCE.



IT took a great deal to scare Edward Oswald Handforth—but he was scared now.

Even the sight of the spectral figure in Pirate Cove had not exactly frightened him. He had been startled, and he had felt a desire to flee from the spot.

But his condition had been nothing in comparison to his condition now.

He stood there, transfixed.

A kind of cold perspiration broke out, and his one desire was to dash back into the tent, where there was light, and human companionship. But he couldn't move. It was as though some unseen power held him.

The very loneliness affected him.

Although the other members of his Patrol were so near, and although various sounds came from neighbouring tents, he felt that he was isolated. He stood there in the darkness, and the knowledge that a voice had come to him from the atmosphere chilled him to the marrow.

It came again—even closer this time.

“Well, brave one?” it whispered mockingly. “Since thou dost not believe in spirits, perchance thou art now brave and careless? Thou didst see me yesternight arise from the sea. Perchance thou wilt see me again—”

The voice broke off, and ended in a kind of fiendish cackle.

And Handforth, in one flash, recovered the use of his faculties. He let out a terrified yell—but, somehow, the very force of his lungs choked the sound and muffled it. He flew round the tent, dashed in, and collided with Church and McClure, who were just about to emerge.

“Look out!” panted Church, as he staggered back.

“The light! Let's have the light!” gasped Handforth. “There's that voice out there! It spoke to me—like some old chap would speak hundreds of years ago!”

“You're dreaming!” said McClure, in a startled voice.

“I tell you I'm not!”

“Souise me! It seems to me you're scared, shipmate,” said the Bo'sun. “You'd better get into port, and drop your anchor. Slip into berth, Handy, and—”

“Yes, by George, I will!” muttered Handforth hoarsely.

He jumped into bed, and pulled the clothes over him. He sat there, shivering. The electric torch was playing upon him, and the other juniors could see his pale, drawn face. They had seldom seen the leader of Study D so stricken.

“You're scared!” said Church, staring.

“I—I don't know!” muttered Handforth. “I believe I am!”

“You said that no ghost would scare you—”

“I didn't mean it!” muttered Edward Oswald. “But this wasn't a ghost! It was only a voice! It was only—”

A moan sounded near him, low and vibrant.

“There it is again!” he panted, shrinking aside.

“There's what?” asked Owen major.

“Didn't—didn't you hear a moan?”

"You must be dotty!" declared Church. "What are you talking about? It seems to me you're hearing things that don't exist! Nobody in this tent moaned, and if you heard something——"

"I DID!" shouted Handforth desperately. "I distinctly heard—— WHAT'S THAT?" he added, his voice rising, as the tent-flap moved, and a dim face appeared in the opening.

Burton swung the torch round, and the face was revealed as a human one. It belonged, in fact, to Nicodemus Trotwood.

"All cosy and comfy in here?" asked Nick cheerfully. "Hallo, Handy! You're looking a bit white about the gills! I didn't mean to scare you badly, old man. But when I heard you yell just now——"

Handforth stared at him dazedly.

"You—you didn't mean to scare me?" he repeated, in a dull voice.

"Just a little ventriloquism," explained Nick calmly.

"Ventriloquism!"

"Voice-throwing, you know," grinned the Curlew.

"It's a good thing you came, Trotty," put in Church. "Handy was just about on the verge of fainting, you know. My hat! I never thought you could scare anybody like that!"

Handforth sat up in his bed, a deep flush replacing his recent pallor. A light of understanding was entering his eyes. Ventriloquism! Then that voice had been Nick Trotwood's! The ventriloquist of the Fourth had deliberately spoofed him! The whole thing had been a jape!

"Do—do you mean to tell me that it was you who did that moaning and whispering?" demanded Handforth faintly.

"Of course!"

"It was you who spoke to me outside?"

"Little me!" grinned Nick. "I wasn't far off—just against the next tent. You ought to congratulate me on my marvellous exhibition of voice-throwing. How do I go as a ghost? And what about that beautiful old English? It took about seven of us to think of those words!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other Tigers burst into a shout of laughter at the sight of Handforth's face. And some more faces appeared at the tent flap—including Nipper's, Pitt's, and De Valerie's.

Handforth gave one leap, and hurled himself at Nicodemus.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALARM IN THE CAMP.



"GRAB him!" gasped Church frantically. Before Handforth could execute his fell design, the Tigers seized him, and drew him back. He struggled vio-

lently.

"Steady, old man!" grinned McClure. "We don't want to arouse the whole camp, you know. And it was only a joke, after all."

"A joke!" hooted Handforth. "D'you call it a joke to scare a chap out of his wits? You might have turned me grey!"

Nick Trotwood chuckled.

"Don't take it badly, old son," he said. "A joke's a joke—we don't want to quarrel. You've admitted that you were scared, and that's all we wanted to know."

"Scared!" roared Handforth. "Who was scared?"

"Why, you just said——"

"Never mind what I just said!" howled Handforth. "If you say I was scared, I'll biff you on the nose! I knew it was you all the time, you funny ass! D'you think you can deceive me with that fatheaded ventriloquism?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's cool denial that he had been scared was too much. All his listeners roared with laughter. They were all feeling glad that the tension was over. For, truth to tell, Trotwood's clever moaning had even affected them, although they had known from the first that Nick was the author.

"Round the camp fire you told us that no ghost would scare you—and that nothing supernatural would make you get the wind up," explained the Leader of the Curlews. "In fact, you were so jolly certain about it that we decided to put you to the test. So don't blame us. We were only trying to find out the truth."

"Well, you found it out!" snorted Handforth. "I was as calm as ice all the time! I may have pretended to be a bit scared, just to keep the thing up——"

"Oh!"

It was a long-drawn-out roar from everybody. And Handforth, in his heart, knew that his denial carried no weight.

"Next time you won't be quite so jolly certain!" said Nick. "Not that there's going to be any next time—we've proved our point, and there's an end of it. I think we'll all get to bed now. Don't any of you fellows imagine that there's a ghost about——"

"What was that?" broke in Nipper suddenly.

He was just outside the tent, and he

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turned his head sharply, and looked across the camp towards one of the other tents. A sudden yell had broken the comparative stillness—a fearful shout of terror.

A figure came running up at full speed—a mad, frantic rush. Nipper and one or two of the others barred the way, and the newcomer charged into them. He proved to be Teddy Long, of the Eagles.

“What’s the matter with you, you ass?” demanded Pitt sharply.

“The ghost!” screamed Long. “I’ve seen it!”

“Don’t make all that noise——”

“I’ve seen it!” shrieked the junior, who was fairly beside himself with sheer terror. “It’s coming this way—I know it’s coming this way! Let’s get away from here——”

“Hold him, for goodness’ sake!” said Nipper sharply. “He’ll waken the whole camp with these shouts!”

But Teddy Long was almost demented. He uttered scream after scream—piercing and awful to listen to. There was no doubt that he was terribly frightened. Handforth and his recent scare were forgotten. And Edward Oswald himself came rushing out, with all the other Tigers.

And the Scouts felt their blood run cold as they listened to Long’s screams. They were almost bloodcurdling in their intensity—an eloquent indication that something of a very unusual nature must have temporarily bereft him of his wits.

Lights were appearing all over the camp. Voices were sounding, and even the two adjoining camps were awakening into activity. Those shouts penetrated far on the night air.

Just as the juniors had succeeded in silencing the distracted Teddy Long, Nelson Lee came hurrying up. He was only partially dressed, and he was looking grave and troubled.

“Thank goodness you’ve come, sir!” said Nipper breathlessly. “The poor chap’s almost out of his mind!”

“But what happened?” asked Lee sharply.

“We don’t know, sir,” said Pitt. “He came running up, screaming at the top of his voice, and saying that he’s seen the ghost. Then he seemed to go fairly off his nut, and started all this shindy.”

Nelson Lee took Long by the shoulders and shook him. The unfortunate Scout was as pale as death, and he was shaking from head to foot. Teddy Long had never been renowned for his courage, and he was liable to be frightened at the slightest thing.

“What is the matter, Long?” asked Lee gently. “What did you shout like that for?”

“The ghost!” breathed Long huskily. “I saw the ghost!”

“Nonsense!” said the Scoutmaster. “There is no ghost in this camp——”



“And there it was, all greenish and horrible, with seaweed hanging down, and—and Don’t let it come here! Don’t let it come”
His voice trailed away, and he hung limp in Nelson Lee’s arms.

“I—I thought I heard something, sir, and came out of my tent!” whispered Teddy. “And there it was, all greenish and horrible, with seaweed hanging down, and—and—— Don’t let it come here!” he added shrilly.

His voice trailed away, and he hung limp in Nelson Lee’s arms.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER ALARM.



TEDDY LONG had fainted.

The sneak of the Fourth had succumbed to his terror, and lay like a dead thing in Nelson Lee’s arms. The detective knew at once that this was serious. Even Teddy, with all his cowardice, would never have fainted at any ordinary fright. He must have seen something which had shaken him to the very core.

“Keep to your tents, boys; I’ll deal with Long,” said Lee curtly. “I’ll take

him to my own tent, and see after him there. Are there any Eagles here? If so, fetch Long's bed, and bring it into my tent."

De Valerie was an Eagle, and Teddy Long was a member of his Patrol. In a moment De Valerie was hastening to his own tent and getting his Patrol to work. Other Scouts were gathering in groups, and talking together in low, excited voices.

There was a general feeling of uneasiness in the camp.

Rumours of what had happened had reached the 2nd and 3rd Troops, and the uneasiness was even spreading to the other camps. It was known on all sides that the ghost had been seen.

A good many fellows openly scoffed, declaring that Long would be frightened by his own shadow. But the majority were greatly startled. Even Long wouldn't have fainted unless he had really seen something.

"I don't like this place!" remarked Jack Grey, peering round into the gloom. "It's too near Pirate Cove for me! Only just down the cliff path, you know, and the beach is down there——"

"But you're not scared, Jack?" asked Pitt curiously.

"I'm not exactly scared!" growled Jack. "But—— Well, you know what I mean. What with all the talk of that ghost, and everything else, a chap doesn't feel any too easy at night-time. It'll be a job to get back to sleep again. We shall all be listening, and fancying things."

There was a great deal of truth in Grey's remark. And although the camp quietened down soon afterwards, the Scouts did not easily drop off into slumber. Nelson Lee had sent word round that Long had recovered, and was now sleeping peacefully. But this was not much consolation.

In the Lions' tent Nipper was wakeful.

The camp was now quiet, and Nipper was wondering if he should get up and have a prowling round. He was on his honour not to leave the camp, but there was nothing to bar him from walking about among the tents. He wanted to find out, if possible, exactly what had scared Teddy Long.

The other Lions were wakeful, too, with the single exception of Archie Glenthorne. He was slumbering as peacefully as usual—but this was nothing to wonder at. Archie could sleep at any time of the day or night.

At last, after a full half-hour had elapsed, the steady breathing of the other Lions told Nipper that they had all dropped off. His resolve to go out and prowl was not so strong now. He was inclined to doze on his own account, and the bed was very comfortable. After all, why should he trouble to get up and go out in the damp grass!

He had just decided that the game wasn't worth the candle when he sat up. It may have been his fancy, but he could have sworn that he had heard a low, uncanny kind of laugh. It wasn't the same kind of laugh that Nicodemus Trotwood had made, and in any case, Nick wouldn't attempt any further ventriloquism now. That joke had been perpetrated against Handforth alone.

After a moment's hesitation, Nipper slid silently out of bed and dressed himself in the space of a minute. He had placed his clothing ready in the darkness, so that he could feel it without trouble.

He emerged from the tent and looked round.

The camp was quite dark. Not a light showed in any tent. As Nipper stood there, under the stars, he could dimly hear the echo of the surf on the shingle, down below on the beach. The tide would be pretty well up by now, and the waves naturally larger and more powerful.

"Well, I'm blessed if I thought I was fanciful!" murmured Nipper. "Perhaps that sound was merely one of the chaps in a nightmare, in one of the other tents. It's not surprising, after what's happened——"

He broke off, and peered tensely ahead. He had seen a dim figure creeping round the next tent. And there was nothing ghostly about it—only mysterious.

"Who's that?" he whispered softly.

"Great Scott! You gave me a start!" came Reggie Pitt's voice. "What on earth are you doing out here, Nipper?"

"If it comes to that, what are you doing?" asked Nipper, as Pitt joined him.

"I thought I heard something a minute or two ago."

"So did I!" whispered Nipper. "Perhaps it was you——"

"No fear!" interrupted Reggie. "It was a kind of laugh—pretty beastly, too. I wasn't quite sure——"

The words died on his lips, for Nipper had suddenly gripped him, and Pitt could feel that his companion had become rigid. Reggie turned, and stared in the same direction as Nipper. Then he caught his breath in with a hiss, and wondered if his eyes were deceiving him.

Something was visible about a hundred yards away, on the outskirts of the camp. It was a dim, uncertain figure—but in spite of the darkness it was quite visible.

It was the figure of an old man, and instead of walking across the ground, he moved with a slow, noiseless glide. It was weird to watch. And although the Scouts could not be certain at this distance, it seemed to them that the apparition was festooned with long, trailing seaweed.

"The ghost!" breathed Pitt huskily.

"Quick!" muttered Nipper. "We'll chase it! Are you game?"

"Yes," said Reggie, between his teeth. "Come on!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING ON THEIR NERVES.



BOTH the Scouts were half fearful of the result of their chase. But they didn't hesitate a moment. The spectral figure was here—

would not be breaking their paroles by chasing it.

And now they knew the reason for Teddy Long's scare, and they weren't surprised at the unfortunate junior's condition. The sight of this ghastly thing must have almost turned his fragile brain.

If either Nipper or Pitt had been alone it is probable that they would have hesitated. But one was company for the other, and they ran forward at the top of their speed.

The phantom still hovered in the distance like a will o' the wisp—dim and intangible, yet startlingly visible. Nipper felt the conviction upon him that the object could not be human. It was altogether too flimsy—too unreal. And yet it was so amazingly like an old man in rags and tatters or trailing weeds.

The two Scouts ran on noiselessly, for they were purposely refraining from any outcry so that the camp should not be aroused. The ghost halted, and seemed to be awaiting their approach. Indeed, as they drew nearer, it raised one of its gaunt arms and pointed towards them.

Then, with a wild cackle, low, but distinctly audible, it whisked round, seemed to dissolve into a long streak, and then vanished, upwards, into the very air itself. The effect was startling in the extreme.

Instinctively, Nipper and Pitt halted. Nothing but the bare, grassy down lay ahead. There was no figure visible, human or otherwise, and in the starlight the juniors could see the barren nature of the grassland. There was not a bush near by, not even a tree behind which a possible trickster could have sought cover.

And yet, a bare two seconds earlier, that fearful thing had been in front of them. Now they were alone. It was impossible to give further chase, in any case, since they had reached the outskirts of the camp, and had given their word not to proceed further.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Nipper tensely.

"Did—did you see?" panted Reggie. "It seemed to go into a streak, and the

last I saw of it was three or four feet from the ground. It simply faded into the very air!"

"It's about the rummiest business I've ever struck!" exclaimed Nipper. "It's no good asking me what I make of it, because I'm flummoxed. I don't believe in ghosts on principle, but this thing—well, I'm blessed if I know what to think!"

"Same here," said Pitt. "Without any question it's the same figure that Handforth & Co. saw on the beach last night. But why did it come here? What's it doing in camp?"

"I told you it's no good asking me anything," said Nipper. "I'm just as much in the dark as you are. By jingo! I'd like to go and have a word with the gov'nor! I don't think I'd better, though," he added slowly. "And if we rouse the camp now, there'd be a frightful upheaval. Half the fellows will want to clear out at once!"

But the two juniors didn't go back to their tents immediately. They made a complete round of the camp, and then paused for some little time at the spot where they had last seen the phantom figure. Everything was now quiet and peaceful, however, and there seemed no sign of the apparition returning.

So Nipper and Pitt went to bed—but not to sleep immediately. The remembrance of that strange figure clung to them, and it was well into the small hours before they closed their eyes in slumber.

Consequently, they were both a trifle heavy the next morning when the camp awoke into its usual activity. But with plenty of work to do, they soon became their usual bright selves.

And it wasn't long before they gained an idea of the general state of mind. The ghost of Pirate Cove was the one topic of conversation, and the majority of the fellows were beginning to agitate, in little private groups, for a change of camping ground.

Neither Pitt nor Nipper said anything about their own adventure. There would have been a great deal more talk if they had done so. Even as it was, the Scouts were uneasy. The stories of the ghost, culminating in Teddy Long's terror, had begun to get on their nerves.

And as many Scouts pointed out, it would be easy enough to shift from the vicinity of Pirate Cove. The downs were public property, and anybody could camp on them if they chose.

But the agitators did not raise their voices very high.

The Scoutmasters of each Troop, in any case, heard nothing, and so nothing was done. And as the day was brilliantly fine, and there was plenty to do in the way of

Scout practice, the ghost was almost forgotten again.

The effect of the daylight was just the same as before. Juniors were scoffing at their former fears. But with the approach of nightfall the uneasiness returned with redoubled force. It was noticeable round the camp-fires in particular, after night had fallen.

There was not the usual air of comfortable ease. Fellows glanced over their shoulders now and again, into the shadows of the night. Round some of the camp-fires they began talking about the ghost. But the subject was invariably squashed by somebody.

The fact remained, however, that the entire camp was on edge. A feeling had spread to the other Troops, and all the Scouts were on the tiptoe of expectancy. They had an idea that something was going to happen.

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING A TRAP.



NOBODY particularly noticed it, but the Lions were not round their camp-fire, as usual, this evening. All six members of the Lion Patrol were absent. If the other Scouts thought anything at all, they possibly believed that Nipper and his men were visiting one of the other camps.

But, as a matter of fact, the Lions were in their own tent. They had gone there immediately after the evening meal. Nipper had called his Patrol together earnestly.

"Don't say anything to the others," he had said. "But I've got an idea. The less we can talk about that ghost, the better. But, if possible, I want to set a trap to-night."

"A trap?" repeated Tommy Watson. "For the ghost, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"A dashed priceless scheme, laddie," said Archie approvingly. "I mean to say, these bally ghosts ought to be locked up. It's a bit too frightfully muddy when they whiz into the old camp and dash about the tents."

"That's just it, Archie," said Nipper. "Now, although the ghost seems to be a mere will o' the wisp, I can't help thinking that there's trickery at work. Acting upon that theory, the chances are that the trickster will come back to-night. And it's only logical to suppose that he'll be a little more bold. He'll probably come right among the tents."

"That's a bit thick, isn't it?" asked Tommy Watson dubiously. "The ghost only appears down by the seashore, in Pirate Cove—"

"It was in the camp last night," interrupted Nipper quietly.

"Good gad!"

"In the camp?"

"Yes," replied Nipper. "Now, you fellows, don't laugh—Reggie Pitt is quite ready to substantiate my story if you doubt it. We both saw the thing together."

And Nipper gave a detailed account of what he and Reggie had seen. The others listened with uneasy expressions. There was no doubting the truth of their leader's statement.

"So it's quite possible that the apparition will come again to-night," said Nipper. "Now, we've got two hours work, at least, and I don't want any of the other fellows to know what we're doing."

"What's the game?" asked Alf Brent.

"It's quite a simple idea," replied Nipper. "We're going to dig a big pit—it needn't be particularly deep—and then we'll cover it over with thin sticks, with some turf or grass on the top. By the time we've done, it'll look like solid ground in the darkness."

"By Jove! That's a brainy idea," declared the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "So if the ghost comes along, and walks over that spot, he'll fall right into the trap?"

"Exactly!"

"But how can we make the pit without anybody else knowing?" asked Watson. "They're bound to see us at work, and ask questions."

"Not at all," said Nipper. "We'll dig the pit in this tent, and deal with the excavated earth afterwards. And as soon as we've got the job done, it'll be easy enough to take the tent down and pitch it a few yards away. We can simply say that we fancy a new position, if anybody asks."

And so, soon after that conversation, the Lion Patrol got to work.

By the time the call sounded for lights-out, the pit was well on the way to being completed. The camp settled down for the night, but not with its usual care-free happiness. In almost every tent there was a feeling of tension.

The Lions continued their work, and at length the pit was completed to Nipper's satisfaction. By daylight, it would not have stood the test for a moment. But in the gloom of night the covered hole was indistinguishable from the other ground.

As it happened, the Lions took down their tent, and repitched it without any of the other Scouts asking questions. By this time the whole camp was fairly settled down.

"Not so bad, eh?" asked Nipper, rubbing some of the grime off his hands. "One step on there, and anything that weighs as much as seven pounds will crash through. It'll have to be a pretty airy ghost to negotiate it in safety."

"Of course, there's no certainty that the

ghost will come this way at all," remarked Watson.

"Yes, I know that, but we've got to take the chance," replied Nipper. "And it's not much of a chance, either. Our tent stands well aside now, and if the ghost wants to walk through the camp, he's almost certain to come this way. Anyhow, we shall see what we shall see."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I mean to say, a somewhat brainy remark, laddie. But if you haven't got any frightful objections, I'd rather think I'd like to indulge in forty of the best. Life has been somewhat strenuous during the past hour, dash it!"

"Good old Archie!" grinned Brent. "You've worked like a Trojan. Never let us hear that you can't do as well as the rest of us! It's all piffle about your needing Phipps."

Archie smiled languidly, and tumbled into bed.

But most of the other Lions remained fully dressed—waiting, alert and wakeful, for the first sign of the ghost.

CHAPTER XVI.

HANDFORTH ON THE TRACK.



"WELL, everything seems quiet to-night, anyhow," remarked Church with a yawn. "Thank goodness for that. I'm tired. And no more ghost hunts for me, either. It's a good thing Mr. Lee prohibited us from leaving the camp—"

"Don't be in such a hurry!" interrupted Handforth. "Don't you get undressed until I give the order!"

The Tigers, in their sleeping tent, were preparing for the night.

"What do you mean—until you give the order?" asked Owen major. "Look here, Handy—that's rotten! We don't take orders from you unless we're on Patrol work. It's bed-time now—"

"Scouts are always liable to be called on for work," interrupted Handforth severely. "There are no off duty hours for a Scout—his duty is to remain ready for any emergency. So I don't want any more of that piffle from you, Charles Owen!"

"But we can't go out—it's against orders!" growled Owen defiantly.

"It may be against orders to leave the camp, but we can set a watch all round the camp," replied Handforth. "That's what I mean to do to-night. And if there's any sign of the ghost appearing, we'll lay

an ambush and collar him. We've got to spread ourselves to every corner of the camp."

So Nipper, it seemed, was not the only one who was making preparations. But whereas the Lions had eagerly supported their leader, the Tigers were totally opposed to any such thing. In fact, they flatly refused.

Owen major and Dick Goodwin stated their intention of getting into bed, and Church and McClure, spurred by this example, were also defiant. The Bo'sun, as good-natured as ever, was willing enough for anything.

"You—you rotters!" exclaimed Handforth bitterly. "Is this what you call being true Scouts? Refuse to obey your leader's orders when he gives 'em?"

"Rats!" said Church. "We're all supposed to be in bed and asleep, so your orders don't count! Hang it all, we've got to have some rest some time. It's bad enough to obey you throughout the day."

"Hear, hear!" said the others.

And Handforth was not in a position to insist. What Church said was literally true. Under the rules of this camp, he had no power to order them about after bed-time. And it would have been a fatal mistake to make any disturbance. So Handforth contented himself with sarcasm.

"You'll be sorry for this!" he said sourly. "After I've captured the ghost single-handed, you'll wish you'd stuck to me! Instead of sharing the honour, you'll miss everything."

"We don't mind chancing it," said Owen major. "And the sooner you're gone, the better, Handy. That ghost may be prowling about even now. Goodness knows why you're so keen, though. I should have thought last night's experience would have been enough."

"Last night's experience hasn't got anything to do with it!" snorted Handforth. "And don't you remind me of that rotten affair, either. I haven't got even with Nick Trotwood yet, but I will one of these days. Well, I'm off!"

"Good!"

"And if you ask me to let you come now, I won't!" he went on. "I'm fed-up with you—you're all traitors! Blow you! Go to sleep, and snore to your hearts' content!"

Handforth stalked out of the tent in a huff, and the other Tigers were relieved. The tension, for the time being, was over. They were all convinced that Handforth would wander back after fifteen or twenty minutes. In the meantime, the Tigers were getting straight to sleep.

Handforth, out in the open, felt no particular enthusiasm for his self-imposed task. He couldn't help remembering how he had

ventured out of his tent the previous night. But, of course, this was different. Nicodemus Trotwood wouldn't cause any whispers or moans to sound.

But the darkness of the camp, and the general feeling that the ghost would walk to-night, made Handforth very cautious. He crept along quietly and carefully. He didn't want any of the other Scouts to come out and ask him what he was doing.

He took another stride, and his foot seemed to sway beneath him. The ground, instead of being as solid as it looked, appeared unstable and fragile. His foot crashed clean through a number of twigs. Handforth pitched forward with a startled, amazed gasp.

Crash!

The next moment he went headlong through the ground itself, and lay at the bottom of the Lion Patrol's carefully prepared pit. The noise of that descent could have been heard throughout the camp—and actually was.

As for Handforth, he received the shock of his life.

He had passed over this ground time after time, and it had always been solid. Knowing nothing of what had been prepared, the leader of Study D was taken completely off his guard. It seemed staggering that he should have plunged right into the ground as though it were hollow.

He lay at the bottom of the pit, covered with sticks, turf and grass. And for the life of him he couldn't understand what had happened.

They had been waiting for a little while, until the whole camp was finally settled down. There was not much chance of the ghostly figure appearing before midnight.

But yet something had crashed into the pit. The noise had come to the Lions with terrific force—for the pit was only just outside their tent. They rushed out, pell mell.

Other Patrols were disturbed, too, but they were not so early on the scene. Nipper had an electric torch, and he flashed it on. The pit was broken and wrecked—all that carefully prepared surface being destroyed.

Standing on the edge, Nipper directed the light from his torch downwards, hardly knowing what to expect. He certainly had no anticipation of seeing Edward Oswald Handforth.

Yet that celebrated amateur detective was sitting in the bottom of the pit half buried in debris. There was a dazed, dreamy look on his face. He blinked up into the light.

"Handy!" ejaculated Nipper, aghast.

"Well, I'm blessed!" snorted Tommy Watson. "The fathead's ruined everything! What about all our work? All that for nothing! And everybody in the camp is aroused, too!"

"What—what's happened?" asked Handforth, struggling to his feet.

The Lions gazed at him wrathfully.

"You've ruined our trap—that's what's happened!" retorted Nipper. "What the dickens were you doing over here? Why couldn't you stick in ass?"

"But—but I don't know what's happened!" said Handforth dazedly. "I seem to have fallen down somewhere! But I don't remember—"

"Oh, yank him out, and carry him back to his own tent!" exclaimed Brent warmly. "A Tiger, eh? He ought to have been a giddy elephant! Of all the clumsy fatheads, he's the clumsiest!"

Two or three of the Lions jumped down into the pit, and Handforth was hauled

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CHAPTER XVII.

MANY WATCHERS.



"GREAT Scott!"

"He's fallen in the pit!"

The Lions, in their tent, started up with startled exclamations.

Nipper had been about to venture out with two or three of the others.

out. He was now dimly beginning to appreciate the position. He wasn't hurt much, although he certainly suffered from one or two bruises.

"You—you dotty lunatics!" he snorted. "So you dug this pit? What's the game? A nice thing, I must say, preparing man-traps!"

"You chump, it was a ghost trap!" snapped Singleton. "Who the dickens would have expected this duffer to come barging in? It'll take us an hour to put that cover on again!"

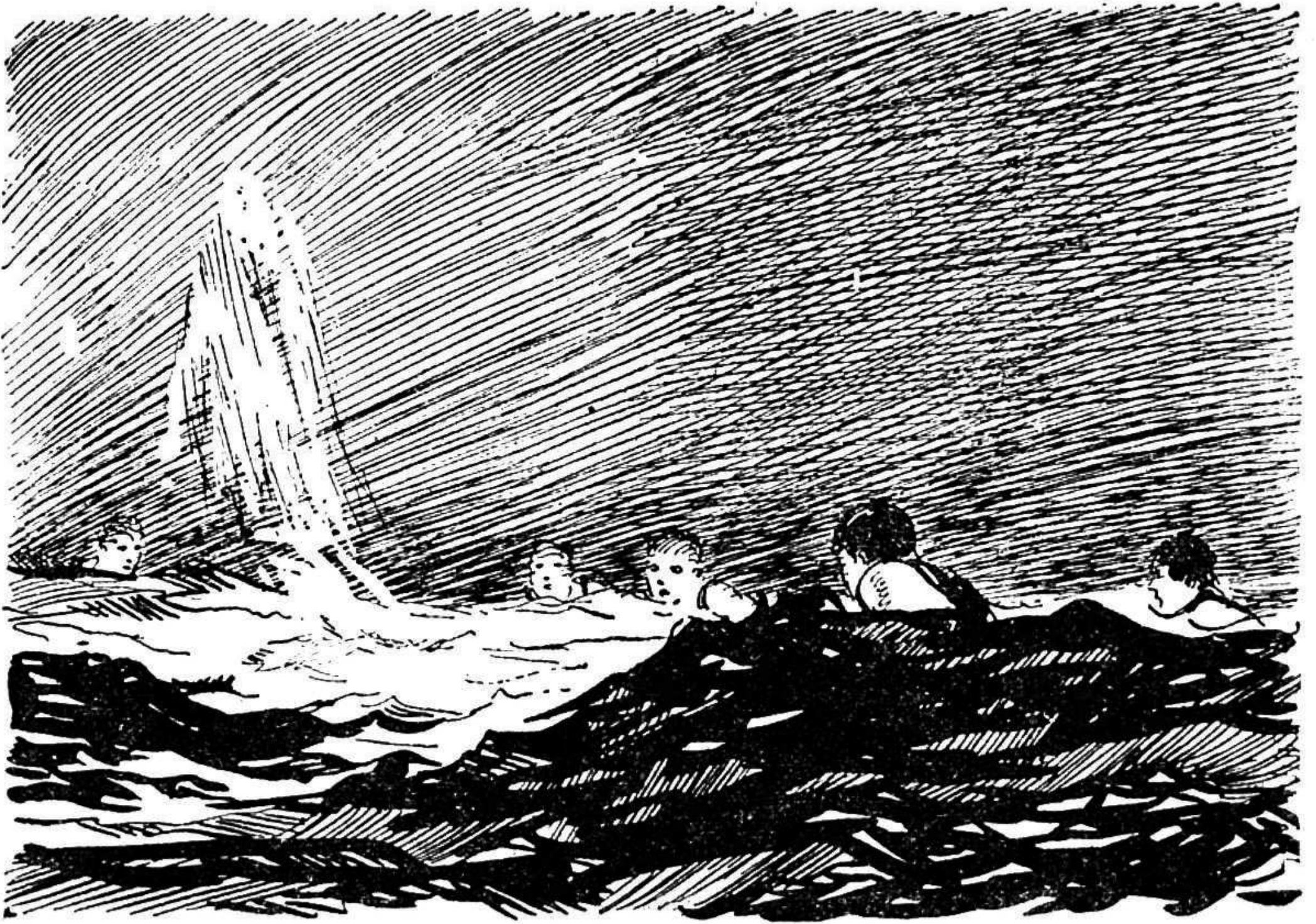
By this time, a few other Scouts were

built this trap especially for the ghost," he added, turning to the others. "There's just a chance it'll come to-night—in fact, it's distinctly probable. So we thought it would be a good idea to make a few preparations."

"Then it's a case of all hands to the pump," said Pitt briskly. "If we all pile in, it won't take us long to set this trap again. Are you Lions going to watch for the ghost afterwards?"

"That was the idea."

"Then we'll all watch," said Pitt. "It's only right that every Patrol should be



And in the same second the sea all round the spectre became alive. With powerful strokes, and careless of noise, the surrounding juniors swept towards the apparition.

on the scene, including Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, Bertie Onions, Nick Trotwood, and De Valerie. In fact, there were one or two members of almost every Patrol.

"We thought there was some more excitement," said Reggie Pitt. "But it's only Handforth again—"

"Don't blame me!" roared Handforth. "How was I to know they'd dug a pit, and covered it with straw and grass? I might have been killed! It wouldn't have been so bad if I had been warned."

"My dear chap, how were we to know that you'd be prowling about after lights out?" interrupted Nipper patiently. "We

represented. I vote we spread ourselves out, and take cover singly. Then, if the ghost appears, we'll remain still, and pounce on it if the opportunity arises."

Most of the others agreed to this. Watching for the ghost didn't seem so bad, with so many of them on the job. And the prospect of seeing the spectre fall headlong into Nipper's pit was decidedly attractive. If the ghost was caused by any human agency—and was, indeed, a man dressed up, the pit would prove a fatal snare. For, once caught in that trap, the trickster would have no opportunity of escaping.

The Scouts were rather relieved that Nelson Lee didn't join them. An adventure of this kind was better kept to themselves. And well within half an hour they had succeeded in setting the trap as cunningly as before.

And then the Scouts placed themselves in advantageous positions. All of them found effective concealment, and as soon as they had settled down, the camp looked as quiet as ever.

Anybody entering the camp from the surrounding downs would instantly assume that all the Scouts were safely in bed, and fast asleep. It was practically impossible to know that many alert eyes were watchful—that many figures lurked in unexpected corners.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SPECTRE OF THE SEA.



ELEVEN o'clock. The chimes sounded clearly and distinctly on the night air from one of the Caistowe churches. And the camp was still peaceful. No

further disturbance had occurred.

But the hidden watchers were not quite so eager as they had been. An hour had elapsed since they had taken up their positions. And an hour of inactivity to most boys—even Scouts—is not exactly conducive to good cheer. Most of the watchers were beginning to feel that this affair was very much of a frost.

"Not much good waiting any longer," whispered Jack Grey, as he crept silently to the spot where Reggie Pitt sprawled in the grass. "Aren't you getting fed up, Reggie?"

"Not yet," breathed Pitt. "At the same time, I'm a bit disappointed. I expected there'd be more action than this. But don't lose heart, my son—you never know your luck."

"Oh, there'll be no ghost to-night."

"Strictly speaking, it ought to appear at twelve o'clock—that's the correct hour, according to the best authorities," said Reggie. "So that means we've got to keep on the watch for another hour. Think you'll be able to stick it?"

"Of course I can stick it—but we shall feel the effect of it in the morning," growled Jack. "I'm not sure that it's a good idea, either. What guarantee is there that the ghost will appear at all?"

"My hat!" grinned Pitt. "Ghost hunt to-night! Ghost guaranteed, or money refunded! What do you expect, you ass? How can there be any guarantee on a question like this? It's just a chance—and the odds are in our favour. The ghost appeared

last night, and the night before, so it's likely enough that it'll appear again."

"Well, I haven't seen it yet!" said Jack sceptically.

And his view was the view of the majority. They had never seen the ghost with their own eyes, and, consequently, they were inclined to cast doubts upon its reality.

The Tigers had seen the apparition once, on the beach, and Nipper and Pitt had seen it in the camp. But everybody else had only heard about it, and that made all the difference. Even Teddy Long's condition—for Long had been kept in bed all day—did not convince the Scouts. "Seeing is believing," and it was in the hope of seeing that the Scouts now remained wakeful. They were half fearful of gazing upon the ghost, and yet they wanted to do so. There was a fascination about the whole affair.

But after eleven o'clock had struck, and still nothing happened, the most optimistic fellows began to nod at their posts. After all, this ghost-hunting business wasn't half so exciting as people made out. And the Scouts began to long for their comfortable beds.

For once, Handforth was quiet. Nobody knew where he was, or what had happened to him, and it was generally assumed that he had fallen off to sleep somewhere.

But Edward Oswald was watching, the same as the others.

But he was the only Tiger awake, and consequently there was no squabbling. If Church and McClure had accompanied him, as he had first desired, there would probably have been a different tale to tell.

Nipper was crouching down close to one of the tents, with Tommy Watson by his side. The latter was nearly dozing off, but Nipper made no attempt to arouse him. He was beginning to feel that bed was the best thing. And if nothing happened by the time the half-hour struck, he decided that he would advise his chums to abandon the watch.

And just as he had come to this conclusion, a changed atmosphere made itself apparent. Nipper didn't exactly know why, but he felt suddenly tense. A whisper or two had reached his ears—a faint sound from one or two of the other watching Scouts.

Raising himself slightly, he looked down the camp in the direction of the cliffs. Then he caught his breath in. A dim, intangible figure was gliding slowly and impressively into the camp. It was faintly luminous—the figure of an old man, walking with a peculiarly fairy-like gait, and seeming to glide over the ground with an uncanny ease.

It was the ghost again.

"Let's get to bed!" muttered Watson sleepily. "I'm fed up—"

"Quiet, you ass!" breathed Nipper. "It's here!" "Eh? Here?" gasped Watson. "You don't mean— My goodness! What— what's that?"

He stared blankly at the apparition, and clutched Nipper by the arm. This was the first time Watson had seen the dreadful-looking thing, and for a moment he felt that his heart would stop beating.

Undoubtedly, there was something horribly spectral and unreal about the ghost. There was no solidity about it whatever—no suggestion that it might be a fake. Nipper stared at the mysterious presence with acute suspicion. But for the life of him he couldn't decide what it was, or how it was caused.

Even though he was suspecting trickery, and his wits were on the alert, he couldn't help a little catch coming into his throat. And there was a sensation of coldness and tightness on his skin. This phantom from the deep was amazingly spiritual in looks, and the whole atmosphere appeared to be charged with psychic mystery.

If any spiritualists had been present they would have declared positively that this apparition was a visitor from the dead. There would have been no two ways about it. Although suspecting a trick, and looking for a trick, Nipper could see no sign of a trick.

The ghost came on with that same eerie, will-o'-the-wisp appearance. It was visible, and yet dim and indistinct. The outline of the old man could be seen, the dead face and staring eyes. Yet not one of the watching Scouts would be able to give any actual description of the ghost. It was so unreal—and yet so real.

But a thrill entered Nipper's heart as he watched.

For the ghost was coming straight towards the carefully-prepared trap—gliding onwards without a sound, and making for the spot where the snare was laid. Now would be the test!

Within a minute the truth would be known—and it would be proved whether this Thing was ghost or trickster.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEYOND ALL BELIEF.



TOMMY WATSON clung to Nipper with a fierce clutch which told eloquently of his feelings. He said nothing, but Nipper could hear his heart beating. Tommy would never have admitted it, but he was badly scared.

The ghost came on, pausing at intervals to turn and raise one of its gaunt, bony arms. And many of the Scouts could see the festooned seaweed hanging down. But al-

though the night was silent, and the watchers themselves made no noise, no sound came from the ghost.

It only needed one shout—one gasp of fear from a watcher—and the spell would be broken; within a minute the camp would be in a state of disorder. But, so far, the spell was as strong as ever.

And then the startled Scouts received the great surprise.

The ghost made for the trap in a peculiarly deliberate way—as though it were some living presence, with a full knowledge of the snare. And instead of avoiding it, the apparition sought it!

And, arriving on the actual spot, the ghost passed from the solid ground on to the unstable covering of sticks and grass. A child could not have found support on that frail foundation.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper, aghast.

For the ghost was now actually over the trap—dancing on it—and showing every sign that it knew the whole truth. It was, indeed, performing its capers in order to show the watchers what contempt it had for the trap! It was a dance of derision—a dance of defiance!

And a low, cackling laugh sounded from the figure. With outstretched arm, it turned round, and seemed to take in the whole camp with one sweep. And it was standing right over the trap still!

Nipper steeled himself for a spring. He would decide once and for all! But it required every ounce of his spirit and will-power to make the effort. He had been certain, positive, that if the ghost stepped over that trap, it would crash through.

That it had not done so was a clear proof of the ghost's intangibility—of its spectral nature. Of what avail, therefore, was it to make any attempt to catch it? Nipper wanted to satisfy himself, and he steeled himself for the rush.

At the same time, one of the other Scouts found the spectacle too much for him. He uttered a gasping shout, and, with the silence destroyed, the shout was taken up by others. There sounded a rush of feet on the turf, some distance away.

Nipper paused in the act of rushing out from cover.

He stared, and rubbed his eyes. The apparition had vanished in one flash—streaking upwards in exactly the same manner as it had streaked the night before. And now there was nothing to be seen—nothing but black darkness.

Indeed, the darkness seemed even more intense after the disappearance of the luminous, glowing figure. If any evidence had been needed that a spirit had visited the camp, this proof had surely been provided.

Nipper ran out, staring round him.

In the immediate vicinity of the trap there was nothing. Was it fancy, though, or did Nipper catch a glimpse of some black, intangible shape? He ran up with his heart

beating almost wildly. He had allowed his imagination to run riot. There was nothing there!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Nipper, coming to a halt.

He was joined by other Scouts a moment later.

"Is it trapped?" demanded Handforth breathlessly. "It seemed to vanish into thin air, but——"

"There's nothing here, old man," replied Nipper. "It walked right over the trap, and seemed to enjoy it! I say, this is too rummy for words!"

"It was a ghost! A real ghost!" panted Tommy Watson shakily.

"Yes, rather!"

"No doubt about it at all!"

"I can't believe it!" said Handforth tensely. "But yet, what else is there to believe? My goodness, there's something uncanny about this place—you can feel it in the very air! I don't believe in ghosts, of course, but after what's just happened——"

"Let's get some lights!" interrupted somebody shakily. "This—this darkness is awful! We ought to have some camp-fires burning all night! And to-morrow we'll shift from this camping-ground! I wouldn't stay here another night for all I could see!"

"No fear!"

"It's—it's too jolly weird for me!"

The Scouts talked loudly—careless of disturbing others. They needed something to restore their courage. And it was something to hear their own voices.

But many other Scouts were aroused, and before long the whole camp was in a state of subdued excitement. Hardly anybody remained asleep. The wakefulness spread to the other Troops, too.

And Nelson Lee came along to find out what all the noise was about. He found groups of Scouts agitating for an immediate departure. Some of the fellows even wanted to take up their tents now, and shift to a fresh pitch.

The situation was becoming acute.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AGITATORS.



NELSON LEE listened keenly while Nipper gave an exact account of what had happened.

"H'm! It sounds very wonderful," admitted Lee, at length. "It is rather a pity I did not see this with my own eyes. But do all you can, Nipper, to quell this feeling of fear and apprehension."

"But the fellows are scared half out of their wits, sir."

The pair were talking alone, although there were many other Scouts in near

proximity. Some of them were rekindling the camp-fires, for there was something cheering and bright about the flames.

"They'll be much better to-morrow," said Nelson Lee. "Do all you can to make the boys comfortable for to-night. Personally, Nipper, I am convinced that trickery is at the bottom of the whole series of phenomena."

"Trickery, sir?"

"Yes."

"That's what I thought, but it doesn't seem possible!" said Nipper. "That ghost walked right over the specially prepared trap. That's the clinching point, guv'nor! How can you explain a thing like that?"

"I'm not going to attempt to explain it," replied Lee. "I simply repeat that I suspect trickery. Extraordinary things are done by illusionists on the stage, and they are not assisted by the darkness of night, as our own particular trickster is. You can set your mind at rest, young 'un, that there is nothing supernatural about this apparition."

"Well, it's jolly good to hear you say that, guv'nor, because I was getting a bit doubtful," said Nipper, with relief. "In fact, I don't mind admitting that I was just a bit scared. When I saw the Thing walking over that trap, I just scratched my head and stared."

Nipper managed to instil the other Scouts with plenty of confidence. Handforth and Pitt and others persuaded their Patrols to return to bed, and to leave everything until the morning. Nipper was beginning to wonder if Nelson Lee had talked about trickery for the sole purpose of allaying the fears of the camp.

For, try as he would, Nipper couldn't find any plausible explanation. He went back to bed, still puzzled. And when morning came, with the welcome sunlight, he was no further in his search for an explanation.

The trap was just as he and his companions had left it. Nothing was disturbed, and the turf on all sides was too much disturbed and trodden down to make any search for footprints successful. But Nipper made a very close, careful examination.

And he found something which rather thrilled him.

It was nothing much to look at—just a tiny, shrivelled piece of seaweed. He was convinced that it had dropped from the ghost's covering. And if this was actually the case, there was much to be satisfied with. For no visitant from the dead—whether he was from the sea or not—would cover himself with real seaweed.

Nipper said nothing about his find to the others.

During breakfast the adventures of the night were the only topic of conversation. The Scouts of No. 1 Troop were the most interested, for they were more closely concerned than the others. But Buster Boots & Co., of the 2nd Troop, were keen to hear all the details. And the fags of the 3rd Troop

were constantly running up and asking endless questions.

In short, the whole camp was in a state of agitation and uncertainty.

When lessons started for the day, there was a total absence of the usual quietness. Nelson Lee noticed it as soon as he entered the marquee where the Ancient House Fourth-Formers were collected.

"Can we shift camp to-day, sir?" shouted somebody.

"We'd like to go further along the Downs, sir."

"We can't stick another night here, sir!"

There were many similar shouts, and Nelson Lee looked at the boys with a quiet smile.

"There is really no need, boys, for you to get into this excited condition," he declared. "As for shifting the camp, I cannot give my consent. I have already had a consultation with Mr. Stokes and Mr. Clifford, and we have agreed that there is no justification for such an upheaval. Shifting the camp is not such an easy task as you seem to imagine. And there is no other spot quite so convenient as this one."

"But we don't want to stop here, sir!" declared Fullwood, who was one of Armstrong's Patrol of Foxes. "We can't get any sleep at night, and that ghost is only a spirit. Some of the chaps are saying that there's trickery at work. But it isn't possible, sir!"

"Indeed, Fullwood?"

"That legend is right, sir," went on Fullwood. "The ghost will probably appear every night for the rest of this month, and it's not fair to keep us here. We all want to shift, sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"We all agree with Fullwood, sir!"

"In that case, I am rather sorry for you," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But I am the Scoutmaster of this Troop, and it is your duty to accept my decision as final. We shall not shift from this spot. It is very conveniently situated. We are near a farm, where we obtain our dairy supplies—we are in close proximity to the river, with plenty of excellent water, and the beach is handy for bathing. There is no other camping-ground with half the advantages of this one within six or seven miles. No, boys, I cannot agree to this drastic change."

"But what about the ghost, sir?"

"The ghost?" repeated Nelson Lee. "Well, the sooner we lay it, the better. According to all rumours, it comes from Pirate Cove. Well, I release you from your parole. To-night, if you wish, you may organise as many ghost hunts as you desire—and there will be no bounds. Do just as you please, boys. If you decide to hunt this ghost down, I am with you wholeheartedly. Somehow, I think there will be no further trouble after to-night."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONSIDERABLE ACTIVITY.



HERE was something significant about Nelson Lee's latest plan.

Mr. Beverley Stokes and Mr. Clifford, the other Scoutmasters, had given similar facilities to their own Troops. There would be no barriers to-night. All Scouts would be allowed to organise as many ghost-hunts as they pleased, and bounds would be non-existent.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, my sons," declared Nipper, as he discussed the matter with the Lions. "The gov'nor wouldn't take such a wholesale step unless he knew something. It's as clear as daylight that he wants us to be on the watch for The Old Man of The Sea."

"But why?" asked Watson.

"It's no good asking me why—but I suspect there's a little game on," replied Nipper. "The gov'nor wants to scotch this ghost for good and all. And he seems to think that we can help. Well, I've got a little idea of my own!"

"What, another one?" asked Brent.

"Anything like the ghost trap?" said Watson. "By the way, we ought to fill that hole up, you know. Some of the chaps nearly fell into it this morning—"

"Plenty of time for that," said Nipper. "No, this new idea is quite different. The gov'nor has suggested that we should watch for the ghost on the beach—down in Pirate Cove. He seems to have an idea that it'll appear on the water again."

"It strikes me that Mr. Lee knows a great deal about it, begad!" remarked Tregellis-West. "Dear old boys, I believe he suspects all sorts of things—I do, really."

"Well, you can bet your boots that the gov'nor has got something up his sleeve," declared Nipper. "He wouldn't want us all to watch in Pirate Cove unless he was practically certain that something would happen. So there'll be no doubts about to-night's ghost-watch. Something's going to happen—and something dramatic, too!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorpe. "Laddie, I trust you will forgive me, and all that sort of thing, but will it be necessary for me to join the old party? What I mean is, unless I obtain my full eight hours, the tissues are absolutely useless. So kindly leave me out of all the arrangements—"

"You can do as you please, Archie," grinned Nipper. "All the same, you're a lazy bounder—"

"But what about this idea of yours?" interrupted Brent.

"Oh, yes," said Nipper. "I want two of you chaps to come with me into the water. Pitt's keen on it, and so is Handy. We'll go in some little time before the

rest of the chaps get down to the beach. And then we'll gently paddle about, with only just our heads above water, making no noise."

"But what on earth for?" asked Watson.

"According to the gov'nor's suspicions, the ghost will appear on the water again," replied Nipper. "Well, if we're actually swimming about—unseen and unheard—we shall stand a much better chance of making a dash at the ghost when it appears."

"Yes, but we shall be too near to be pleasant," remarked Watson.

At the same time, he agreed to be one of the swimmers. Altogether six fellows fell in with Nipper's suggestion. They were all good swimmers, and there was a distinct understanding that they should remain dead quiet. It would probably be necessary to swim silently about for over an hour, but nobody minded this much. Even at night the sea was quite warm as the water in Pirate Cove was shallow.

Indeed, it wouldn't even be necessary to swim, for the tide would be fairly low, and at that particular portion of the beach one could walk on the level sand for two or three hundred yards, with the water no higher than one's armpits.

It was half-holiday that day, and during the afternoon the Scouts forgot all about the ghost, and played cricket. For this purpose, they borrowed a neighbouring ground, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

It was not until later that thoughts of the ghost returned. By dusk everybody was as keen as mustard on the hunt, and there were many valiant fellows who declared that it would be their privilege to make the capture.

But later on, after the camp-fires were going, these stalwarts were not quite so insistent. Darkness made all the difference. With the failing of daylight, so came the failing of courage. It is easy to talk about hunting ghosts when the sun is shining.

The affair takes on a different aspect when only the stars gleam overhead.

Nevertheless, there were plenty of preparations later on, when the camp should have been settling down for the night. Parties of Scouts went off for the beach, and it seemed that three-parts of the camp had decided to wait in Pirate Cove for the coming of the ghost.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST MANIFESTATION.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

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"ALL right, Tommy?"

"Fine, thanks!" murmured Watson.

"Water suit you?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Tommy Watson softly. "The water's as warm as toast. I wouldn't have believed it unless I was in. I say, this is rather a decent way of hunting a ghost. Business and pleasure combined, as it were."

Reggie Pitt nodded. He had just glided up out of the surrounded darkness, and none of the Scouts watching on the beach suspected that the waters of the little cove contained a number of swimming figures.

It was close upon eleven o'clock, and the watchers were becoming tense with expectancy. At any moment now the ghost might appear. And nobody suffered from nerves.

All were anxious and eager to see the apparition.

It was just the difference between a few and a crowd. If there had only been half a dozen Scouts on the watch, they would have felt nervous and uneasy. But the beach was fairly packed with fellows—and their very numbers made any kind of apprehension impossible.

Furthermore, some of the Caistowe visitors had got wind of the affair, and had come over, too. There was a great audience waiting—all ready to give the ghost a welcome when it showed up.

In the water were Nipper and Pitt, and the other fellows who had decided to watch

at closer quarters than all the rest. In the darkness they were invisible. Nipper had carefully impressed upon his chums the necessity for silence. Each swimmer was to keep his own place, and to take care that nothing but his head showed above water. As an added precaution, the swimmers had stained their arms and faces.

Even at close quarters they could not be seen.

And so they waited, eager and tense. The water was quite comfortably warm, and there was no necessity to do a great deal of active swimming in order to keep the circulation going.

Nipper was rather doubtful about Handforth, but the Leader of the Tigers had insisted. And when he insisted, it was far better to let him have his own way. For once Handforth proved that he was capable of silence.

He kept to his own part of the cove, and no sound came from his direction. There was no danger—no chance of any fellow being seized by cramp, and sinking. For the water in this part of the bay was no deeper than five feet, at the most.

So for a good deal of the time the swimmers simply stood on the sand, and leisurely waded about. And they took a deep interest in the proceedings on the beach. Dimly they could see the crowds of watchers.

Nipper was not quite so satisfied as he thought he would be. He was beginning to have doubts as to whether the ghost would come at all. So many watchers might scare the apparition away for the night. Ghosts—particularly trick ghosts—are not over fond of too much publicity.

But Nipper needn't have worried.

At about twenty past eleven he was silently wading towards Pitt, to have a few words, when he heard a long-drawn-out sound from the beach. It was something between a gasp and a sigh.

And he knew instinctively what it meant.

He glanced round swiftly. Then he stared. Further out in the cove, in the direction of the open sea, the phantom had suddenly appeared! It was even then rising slowly and mysteriously from the water.

"My hat!" breathed Nipper

Although he had been expecting this, and although he was convinced of fakery, he couldn't help being impressed. The ghost continued to rise out of the sea, and at last it stood there, actually upon the water. One hand was outstretched, pointing dramatically towards the crowds of watchers.

And now a tense silence prevailed.

The ghost, visible in a luminous, glowing way against the black background of sea, advanced up the cove. And it walked on the surface of the sea as though the water itself was solid. This fact alone was uncanny enough. And the ghost's very appearance was awe-inspiring.

"By Jove!" murmured Nipper. "If that's a trick, it's the best thing I've ever seen!"

His head was on a level with the water,

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page 31.**

and so he was able to judge this apparition even better than those on the beach. The ghost came on, and it appeared to just touch the water with a fairy-like step. It was so intangible and unreal that solidity seemed impossible. Indeed, it was impossible.

But how was the thing worked?

Once the first shock was over, Nipper now experienced nothing but curiosity. His nerves were steady, and he was prepared for the coming struggle.

The only thing he wanted to know was what this ghost actually was, and how it was operated. He dismissed all thoughts of the supernatural. He convinced himself that it was a clever piece of stage management. And, foot by foot, he edged nearer.

At the same time, the other swimmers were circling in. The ghost, all unconscious of the ever-narrowing circle, came right on. Nipper's scheme was undoubtedly a clever one.

The ghost, as he had proved, was capable of vanishing at a second's notice. And if the hunters had remained upon the beach the spectre could easily have vanished at the first plunge of would-be captors into the waves.

But the ghost was unsuspecting now. He

knew nothing of these invisible, silent figures who were slowly but surely surrounding him from every side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PROOF.



“WELL, it beats me hollow!”

Reginald Pitt made this remark

to himself as he waited tensely for Nipper to give the signal. The circle had

narrowed down now, and the phantom was

with startling clearness amid the tense silence. And in the same second the sea all round the spectre became alive. With powerful strokes and careless of noise, the surrounding juniors swept towards the apparition.

This latter swayed at the first sign of danger. And then, with a most un-ghost-like curse, it dropped into the sea in a kind of heap. But by this time Nipper and the others were right upon it.

“Quick! Grab him!” shouted Pitt. “He’s only a fake!”

A roar of voices now came from the beach. For with the tension suddenly

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comparatively near. And even at these close quarters it still had the same air of wraith-like intangibility.

At the same time, the death face was more mask-like, and the dragging seaweed was unnaturally luminous. It seemed to Pitt that it was a prepared effect. And now he could see no feet upon the water.

From a greater distance it had seemed that the old man was actually walking. But now that illusion was destroyed. The ghost was simply gliding over the sea.

“Right!” came a sudden shout.

It was Nipper’s voice, and it rang out

snapped, the scores of excited watchers found their voices. Everybody knew that something dramatic had happened.

But none knew it so well as Nipper and his fellow-conspirators.

Nipper, at the first grab, seized something soft and spongy. He held on, fighting desperately. He was aware of a dark patch in the sea—the head and shoulders of a hidden swimmer. And they were not the head and shoulders of one of the juniors. They were too big and burly.

“Hold him!” roared Handforth. “It’s a man! I just saw him! What the—?”

Something struck him violently in the face, and Handforth lost a great deal of interest in the affair. He believed that he had been hit by a lashing fist. But he wasn't quite sure; it might have been a foot.

The "ghost," whoever he was, had proved himself to be at least equal to the occasion. Taken completely by surprise, there was every reason to expect his capture—particularly as there were so many against him.

But he eluded them all.

Nipper was still grabbing the spongy substance in his hand, but that was all. The other juniors were splashing about, and searching for their captive. But in the confusion they merely assisted the unknown to escape.

"Where is he?" panted Pitt, at length.

"It's no good now; he's gone," replied Nipper. "I think he must have dived under water and swum for it. He's a fine swimmer, that's certain, or he wouldn't be engaged on this job at all."

"Well, it's not much good looking now," exclaimed De Valerie. "He's probably got behind those rocks, and it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. The rotter has slipped away in the darkness!"

"But who was he?" demanded Handforth.

"I don't know, but I just caught one fleeting glimpse," replied Nipper. "It's just a chance shot, but I believe the man was Simon Trapp—Captain Starkey's pal—the mate of the schooner Lotus!"

"Captain Starkey!"

The juniors uttered the name with a sudden sense of realisation. They remembered that rascally old skipper and his schooner. They had had an adventure with Mr. Trapp only a week earlier. And there were plenty of fellows in the Scouts' camp who suspected Captain Starkey was engaged in smuggling operations off the coast, and that he was using some of the deep caves of the neighbourhood for the purpose of storing away his goods.

"Anyhow, I've got something here," went on Nipper, pulling his hand out of the water. "Behold, the ghost!"

He raised his hand out of the water, and the other Scouts stared at it blankly. It glowed with a strangely luminous light. It was just a bundle of rags and seaweed by all appearances. But Nipper, who was holding it, knew that the contrivance was even more elaborate.

"Let's get ashore," he said crisply. "We can't examine it properly here, and I'm curious to see exactly how it's made!"

And all the Scouts waded ashore, full of expectancy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NELSON LEE'S SUSPICIONS.



CROWDS surrounded the swimmers as they came out of the softly breaking surf. And a perfect flood of light from a dozen electric torches played upon Nipper and the thing he held in his hand.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth indignantly. "Is that thing the ghost? Do you mean to say we were scared of that theatrical trumpery?"

"Surprising, but nevertheless true!" grinned Reggie. "But seeing this trumpery at a distance, in total darkness, and seeing it at close quarters in a flood of light, are two very different things."

"Let's have a look at it!"

Scouts crowded round eagerly as Nipper laid the "costume" down on the sands. A brief examination sufficed to show what it was, and how it was made.

"Don't you see?" asked Nipper. "There is a kind of wire framework inside, with a pole. These rags were just hung over it, with a lot of seaweed dragging down. And the whole affair seems to have been treated with some phosphorous stuff, to give it a luminous effect."

"Same old trick!" said Pitt. "Why we've worked that phosphorous stuff ourselves before now."

"Exactly," said Nipper; "but it always seems to work. Look at the face—just a cheap mask with a couple of painted eyes. Whoever would believe that this thing could look horrifying at a distance?"

"But how the dickens did it walk on the water?" demanded Church.

"Nothing simpler," said Nipper. "The fellow who operated it simply kept the contrivance under water while he was swimming, and at the right moment he hoisted it up out of the water, as though it were a spectre rising from the deep. It's not very heavy, and it could easily be raised up until it was almost clear of the surface. Then, as the fellow waded towards the shore, it would naturally seem as if the "ghost" was walking on the water."

"Well I'm blessed!"

"The arm can be worked by one of those wires, I think," went on Nipper. "You just pull one and the arm raises itself. This skeleton hand is just a piece of wood, painted white."

"Yes, I can understand all this; but how do you account for the ghost walking over that man-trapping camp?" asked Brent.

Nipper looked thoughtful.

"I've been thinking about that," he replied. "The man must have known about

the man-trap; in all probability he was prowling about in the darkness, and saw us putting the cover on after Handy had fallen through it."

"Prowling about the camp?" repeated Grey.

"Yes," replied Nipper. "I'll bet the fellow was dressed all in black, his face included, something like ours. It's the only way to ensure invisibility in the darkness. By taking care to crouch down, so that he didn't appear above the sky-line, he wouldn't be visible even at close range."

"But how did he walk over that trap?" insisted Brent.

"I think he must have made a special contrivance—another pole, I believe," replied Nipper. "In that way he could walk beside the trap, and cause the ghost to hover right over it. And as soon as he saw we were making a rush at him, he whisked a dark cloth, or something like that, over this contrivance, and caused it to vanish. That's how these things are done. It was easy enough for him to slip away between the tents and leave no sign."

"But who the dickens has done it—and why?"

"The man must have been mad!"

There were all sorts of comments; and now that the ghost was revealed as a mere fake, all thoughts of the supernatural vanished. The Scouts were as full of confidence as ever. And, indeed, many declared that the whole thing was a swindle. They were quite indignant about it.

A little later on, Nipper was discussing the matter with Nelson Lee.

"There's one thing I want to know, guv'nor," he said pointedly. "How did you know the ghost would appear for certain to-night?"

"I didn't know for certain—I merely drew my own conclusions."

"But why, sir?" asked Nipper. "You don't draw conclusions without a good cause! Look here, I believe that old Jonas Starkey is at the bottom of this business, and I believe that Simon Trapp was the man who operated the ghost!"

"Dear me, Nipper, you are singularly shrewd!" said Lee. "I have every reason to believe that your surmise is correct. I am strongly suspicious that Starkey is engaged in some nefarious work on the coast here, and he has a dread that you boys will interfere with his operations. He knows only too well that boys are keen upon exploring caves. And Captain Starkey has many good reasons for desiring those caves to himself."

"Smuggling, eh?" said Nipper keenly. "But fancy old Starkey trying to scare us away by an old dodge of that sort."

"It's the old dodges that generally succeed," said Lee grimly. "This one nearly succeeded, Nipper. You will remember how the boys insisted upon a change of camp, which was just what Starkey anticipated."

"I suppose you've been working on this affair yourself, sir?"

"In a way, yes," admitted Lee. "I took certain measures to ensure Starkey knowing that a number of boys would be on watch in Pirate Cove to-night. The prompt appearance of the ghost is fairly conclusive evidence that Starkey is the responsible party. What do you think, young 'un?"

"I think it's a dead cert, sir," replied Nipper promptly.

"But if Captain Jonas Starkey thought that he had driven the St. Frank's Scouts away from the vicinity, he had made a very big mistake. His cunning scheme, in truth, was to have the very opposite effect."

THE END.

WHY IS CAPTAIN STARKEY TRYING TO SCARE THE ST. FRANK'S SCOUTS FROM SHINGLE HEAD?

Read all about it in next week's narrative:

"THE LOST PATROL!"

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

My dear Readers,

I cannot address you yet as "League-ites," but I feel I can safely do so next week, when most of you, I hope, will have qualified as members. In the two previous announcements I have tried to give you some idea of the great possibilities for the future development of the League, how we propose to organise it so that you will all share in the great work of its construction as in the triumphs and rewards of its success. The system we are adopting of appointing a number of enthusiastic volunteers as local Organising Officers is known in business circles as decentralisation—a long word that means much to the success of any big organisation. In other words, the St. Frank's League will have centres, presided over by officers, dotted all over the Empire, with one G.H.Q. It will be a league of clubs as well as a league of members.

OBJECTS OF THE LEAGUE.

Below I give a list of some of the objects for which the League is being formed:

- 1.—To knit together a bond of friendship and understanding between readers far and near.
- 2.—To devote space in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY for: Introductions to members at home and overseas, the insertion of small advertisements free to members, League notes and news, contributions of short articles and paragraphs of general interest by members, etc.
- 3.—Special competitions for members.
- 4.—The formation of local clubs and sports clubs affiliated to the League.
- 5.—Help and advice to members in choosing and qualifying for careers and trades.
- 6.—The formation of a St. Frank's League Magazine, embracing features in paragraph 2, offering in addition opportunities for the publication of stories and sketches by members.
- 7.—To form a correspondence school for training members at cost price for trades or business careers.
- 8.—To start an employment bureau for the benefit of members.
- 9.—To advise members on emigration to the Colonies.
- 10.—To arrange an annual muster and sports festival.

MEMBERS' APPLICATION COUPON.

There are many more advantages, which, if I had the space this week, I could mention, and probably you will have quite a number of suggestions to make. But that will all come as the League develops. We must first set the wheels of our organisa-

tion in motion, and the first step in this direction is the enrolment of members. We want every reader to qualify as soon as possible. For that reason, I have made the conditions very simple—just one new regular reader to get! If you will now turn to page iii of the cover, you will find the coupon to fill in and full instructions.

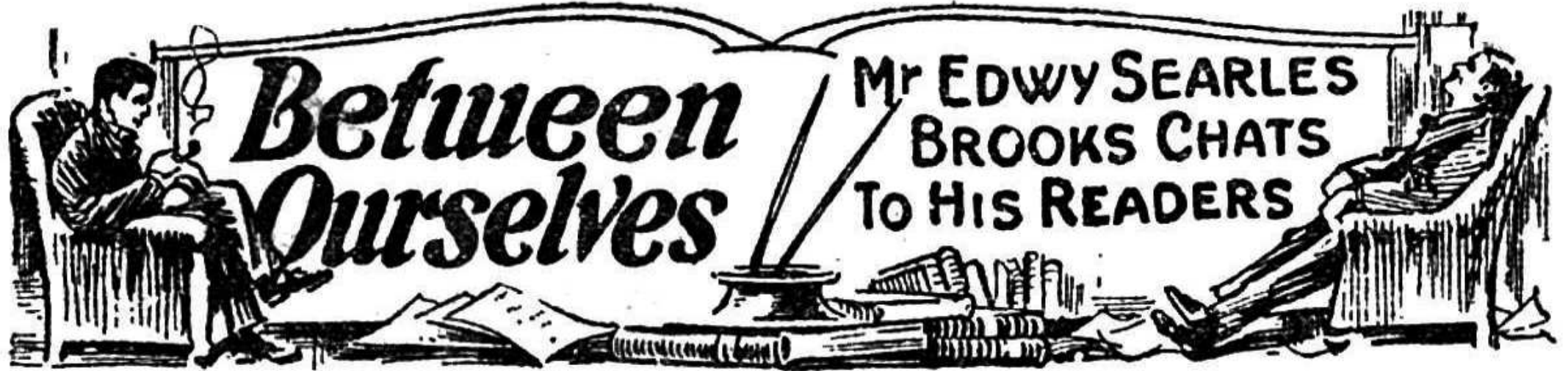
WHY THE LEAGUE REQUIRES NEW READERS.

My reason for requiring one new regular reader from each applicant as a condition for membership is not merely a scheme for getting new readers, as it might seem to appear. Though new readers are always welcome, from the League point of view it is from this source that we may look for new members, after every existing reader has made up his mind to join. And the bigger the number of members the nearer we are to realising the schemes I have outlined above.

FOUNDATION MEMBERS.

This is an honorary distinction I am giving to that loyal band of volunteers who quite distinct from the rank of Organising Officers up to the end of last week—June 20th. I want you to understand that it is quite distinct from the rank of organising Officer, who may, through various reasons, find himself unable to continue working for the League in this capacity. Once an Organising Officer has had the honour of Foundation Member conferred on him, he will retain this title whether in or out of office so long as he remains a member of the League. After due consideration, I have decided to limit the number of Foundation Members to a thousand, and these will represent the first thousand members of the League. As I have previously explained, every member of the League will have a number given him. The earliest members to join—and these are the Organising Officers up to date—will begin from number one upwards in rotation. When the total number of Organising Officers has been returned, there will probably be a few hundred vacancies for Foundation Members. These vacancies I am keeping open for the first batch of members to qualify this week. So hurry up, dear readers, and send along your applications as soon as you have procured your new regular reader. Foundation Members will have their membership certificates specially stamped as such, although, of course, the number itself will be sufficient indication that they belong to the distinguished band of pioneer members. As regards overseas readers, I am reserving an extra five hundred numbers to give them an opportunity of becoming Foundation Members.

(Continued on page iii of cover.)



Mr EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

NOTE.—If any readers write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. If you have any suggestions—send them along. If you have any grumbles make them to me. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o, The Editor, the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. So it's up to you to let me know your likes and dislikes. E.S.B.).

All letters acknowledged below have been personally read by me, and I thank their writers most heartily. But although ALL letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies to those of general interest.

I am always getting queries concerning my name, Edwy. Lots of you seem to think that it's an abbreviation of Edward, or just a pen-name. You seem to be one of these chaps, Francis Norman. A few weeks ago I explained that Edwy is my real name, and not a nom-de-plume. Being fair, my parents evidently decided to name me after the Saxon king, Edwy The Fair, who succeeded his uncle Eadred in 955, when he was little more than fifteen years old. My unfortunate namesake only reigned four years, and died when he was nineteen. But what's the good of me telling you history? You ought to know it!

Glad you liked the cricket series, B. W. Messer, and I notice that you won't be satisfied until I've promised to write a football series for the autumn or winter. You've asked me to put it to the readers, so I'm doing so. As you say, there's nothing like being in time. I think I shall have to prepare a series of yarns in which the great winter game is featured—with several of the juniors playing for the First Eleven, eh? Let's have some opinions!

So you want a page set apart for advertising articles which readers want to purchase, sell, or exchange, L. Sharp? I think your wish will be granted before long—for a

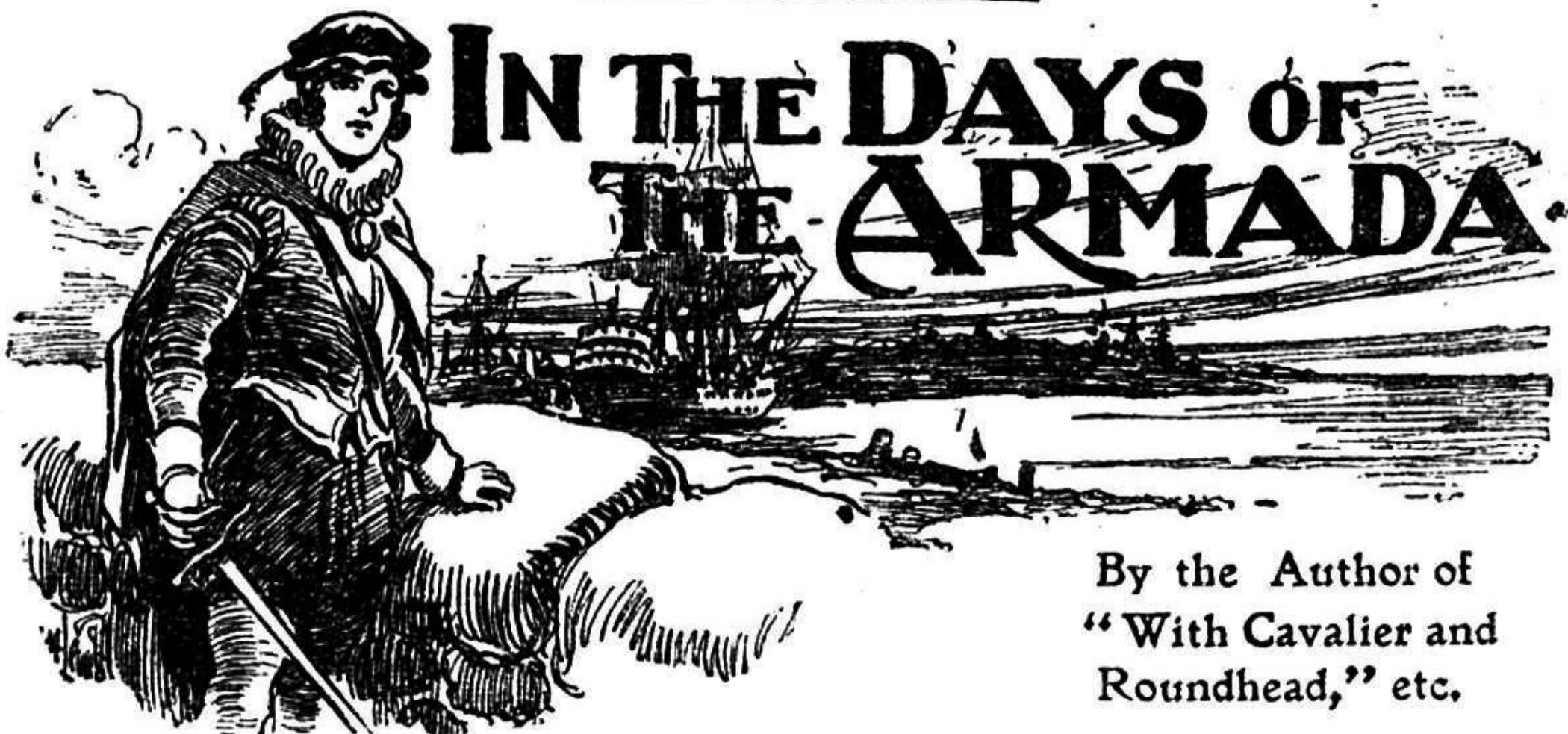
page of that kind is bound to be included after the St. Frank's League has worked itself into shape. Needless to say, only League members will have the privilege of this advertising medium—which will be a kind of free exchange and mart.

Thanks awfully, A. Redgate. Don't mind me at all! So I'm a fathead for leaving Nipper out of the captaincy? All you have to do is to read my reply to L. F. Reilly, last week. Regarding your letter, which you truthfully describe as "scrawly piffle," I liked it immensely—which was just as well, since you tell me that if I don't like it, I shall have to lump it. My dear chap, I don't lump any letters—I like 'em all. And in spite of your fears, my waste-paper basket is still unacquainted with your correspondence, or that of any other reader. You chump, do you think I invite readers to write to me, so that I can have the pleasure of filling up my w.p.b.? Or do you imagine I want to get fire-lighting paper on the cheap? Write as often as you like, old son.

Charles Price (Leeds), J. Gearman (Hobart, Tasmania), The Black Eagle (Durban, S. Africa), Aberdonian (Aberdeen), William Shrimpton (Poplar), William Olley (East Ham.) You are quite right, Charlie Price, in what you say—"we have always got to wait for what we want." At all events, if we don't wait, the prize has little or no value. If a thing's good it's WORTH waiting for, and I'm perfectly certain that everybody—including yourself—will welcome the St. Frank's League with enthusiasm. But you mustn't be impatient. It will take some little time for the League to grow and develop. And Rome wasn't built in a day. We've all got to work hard to get members to start with, for until the League membership is a fairly big one it won't be possible to develop the social and sporting side of the association. So take my advice, everybody, and help in the good work of getting members. Don't be afraid to take your coats off to the job. The sooner the League gets a big membership, the sooner shall we start the formation of local clubs, and all the rest of the interesting programme.

(Other replies unavoidably held over.)

A STIRRING TALE OF A BRITISH BOY'S EXPLOITS WHEN SIR FRANCIS DRAKE
SAILED THE HIGH SEAS.



By the Author of
"With Cavalier and
Roundhead," etc.

FOR NEW READERS.—The story begins in 1587, when Giles Montford, the sixteen-year-old master of Templeton, decides to take up arms under Drake against the Spaniards, in defiance of his uncle, Don Ferdinand Gonzales, who has invited him to go over to Spain. Giles is sent to London on an important mission, and returns with a dispatch from the queen to Admiral Drake. He has barely arrived back at Templeton when the house is rushed by five Spanish soldiers, and Giles is overpowered and carried off to Spain as a prisoner of his uncle, Don Gonzales. While on his way to Seville with the Don, the captive is rescued by his trusty servitor, Simon Trent, and a young English lad, Master Rookwood, both disguised as Spaniards. After a hot chase, they all safely reach the English ship, Dame Mary. Here they meet the great Admiral Drake, and serve under his flag. Giles experiences his first battle at sea, taking an active part in a great victory against the Spanish Fleet. He then returns to England on the Adventure.

(Now read on.)

IT was early in July when the Adventure entered the English Channel, and on the 8th of that month it sailed up the Thames and fastened to a buoy off the Tower wharf. Giles wrote a short letter to Sir Richard Edgecumbe and one to Hereward Tomewell, while Sydney also took advantage of the opportunity to write to his father.

The letters were given to Captain Vane, who had to report to Lord Howard, and he promised to have them forwarded to their destinations. He was absent all the after-

noon, and when he returned an hour after dark he briefly announced that he had orders to start for Holland at midnight.

His manner showed that he had heard news of an unusual and thrilling nature, and the excitement and curiosity of the crew were aroused to a still further degree when they were instructed to load the vessel with a large store of arms and provisions that was piled on the wharf.

Officers and men toiled alike, and the cargo was soon transferred to the ship's hold. Shortly before midnight a horseman, muffled in a light cloak, brought a bundle of dispatches to Captain Vane, and a few minutes later the Adventure slipped its mooring-line and started down the Thames.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH DIRK MAAS SHOWS HIS SKILL AS A PILOT.

BY morning the Adventure was off Sheerness, and beating across the Channel with a favouring wind and tide. Captain Vane kept a constant look-out, and rarely opened his lips, except to give an occasional order. He was not ordinarily a taciturn man, and his silence indicated that he was worried and perplexed.

As the day wore on the men and officers quietly discussed the situation among themselves, and it was generally believed that the present undertaking was one of unusual peril and difficulty. No one on board—except the captain—had any knowledge of events in Holland during the past month or

two, else the object of this hasty voyage might have been less of a mystery.

The low, flat coast was sighted late in the afternoon, and an hour after dark the Adventure entered the mouth of the Western Scheldt, and dropped anchor as noiselessly as possible off the town of Flushing. All the lights on the vessel had been previously extinguished.

Captain Vane now called officers and men forward, and briefly explained what was before them.

"Our destination," he said, "is the town of Sluys, which lies up the River Zwin, and is within a few hours' sail. For several weeks it has been besieged by a large force of Spaniards under the Duke of Parma, and though it is still holding out, the situation is critical. My orders are to deliver these arms and supplies to the garrison, and I have also important dispatches for Sir Roger Williams, the English commander, and for the Dutch governor of the town.

"I will not conceal from you that it is a perilous and difficult enterprise. The Spaniards have blocked the river for some distance below the town with a line of boats, and these are protected by batteries on either shore. But I rely on your improved courage and discretion, my brave fellows, to take the Adventure safely through whatever dangers may arise."

At this a loud murmur of assent broke out, and the eager tones of officers and men showed that the enterprise was none the less welcome because of its difficulty.

"I have instructions to wait here for a pilot," Captain Vane added, "and as soon as he arrives we will start. The darkness of the night will favour us, and if we can creep up the river without noise we have every chance of eluding the vigilance of the Spaniards and running the blockade in safety. If we are discovered we must fight our way, and so it will be wise to prepare for the worst."

No time was lost in doing this. After being cautioned against unnecessary noise and loud talking, men and officers scattered to their posts. Captain Vane held a short consultation with the sailing-master and the master-gunner, and then made a tour of the deck to see that the cannon were in good order and that plenty of powder and ball were at hand.

He also divided the seamen into two parties to repel boarders, and assigned officers to each command. Giles and Sydney were in one party, and Trent was in the other. Some time was spent in buckling on pieces of armour and in putting pikes and arquebuses in order for a possible attack, since Captain Vane had declared that the Spaniards were well provided with boats.

Then ensued a long and tedious wait. The night was very still, and an occasional sound came floating over the water from the town. The street lights could be seen, and here

and there a tall spire stood out blackly against the steel-blue sky.

Though Flushing was in the possession of English troops, Captain Vane did not wish it to be known that the Adventure was in the harbour. He probably feared that Spanish spies would suspect the intention of the vessel, and would find a way to get word up the river to the Duke of Parma.

It was nearly midnight when the dip of muffled oars was heard from the direction of the town, and presently a skiff containing a single occupant hove alongside the stern of the Adventure. He made fast with a rope that was long enough to permit the boat to trail behind, and then climbed nimbly to the deck, where Captain Vane was awaiting him.

It was too dark to see what the man looked like. He made a stiff salute, and, taking a letter from under his hat, he handed it to Captain Vane.

"From the English Governor of Flushing," he said curtly.

"Your name, sir?" demanded the captain.

"Dirk Maas," was the immediate reply.

Captain Vane nodded.

"That is correct," he said. "Come this way."

The captain also invited the officers to follow, and included Giles and Sydney. The whole party went below, where a light was burning dimly in the hold.

While Captain Vane opened and read the letter the others scrutinised Dirk Maas with considerable interest. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a face that was unusually keen and crafty for a Dutchman. In fact, he looked like an Englishman, and the officers had noted with surprise that he spoke the English tongue perfectly.

Captain Vane folded the letter and tucked it into his belt.

"The Governor gives a good report of you," he said, turning to the man. "You have been of great service, both as a pilot and as a dispatch-bearer."

Dirk Maas nodded. He was plainly a man of few words.

"You expected me?" asked the captain.

"I was told to meet a ship in the harbour to-night, and take it up to Sluys," was the reply.

"When were you there last?"

"Two days ago. I went up and back the same night."

"And what is the situation?"

"The garrison still holds the town, but it is hard pressed."

"Then we are sorely needed," muttered Captain Vane. "And now concerning this bridge of boats, which you have doubtless seen closely. Can it be easily broken?"

"It is weak in the middle," replied Dirk Maas, suddenly showing an interest in the conversation, "and your ship will cut right through it. There is little risk on so dark

a night. I know every foot of the channel, and will bring you safe to Sluys before daylight."

"We will start at once," said Captain Vane, giving his companions a nod of assurance that seemed to say, "It is all right; the man is to be trusted." He led the way to the deck, and the anchors were lifted as noiselessly as possible. Dirk Maas hurried forward to his post, and a moment later the Adventure was rippling swiftly across the quiet surface of the Scheldt.

Mile after mile slipped behind, and at last the passage up the narrow River Zwin was fairly begun. There was enough breeze to fill what canvas was spread, and the ship left a foamy wake in its stern as it cut through the middle of the channel. It was very dark, and the low outline of the banks could be seen but faintly.

There was utter silence on deck, and the dusky groups of still figures seemed like the ghostly crew of some supernatural craft. Now and then the spell was broken when Dirk Maas gave a low-spoken word of command, which passed from mouth to mouth to its destination.

Captain Vane and his officers were assembled forward, gazing with almost breathless suspense into the murky gloom that lay ahead as far as the eye could reach. Gunners and seamen were at their posts of duty, ready for action at any moment the dreaded storm might burst.

With soft footsteps Trent crept up to Giles and Sydney, who were standing near the group of officers. He was there for a minute or two before the lads discovered his presence.

"Ho, Stephen, is that you?" whispered Giles. "This sort of thing makes me feel shivery. It is rather different from Cadiz Harbour by daylight."

"But I think we are going to get through all right," added Sydney. "Our pilot evidently knows his trade well. Ay, and the channel!"

"I doubt not he does," replied Trent. "He may know it too well. I would have an easier mind were we safe past the blockade."

"What do you mean?" asked Giles, in a tone of surprise.

"I mistrust this Dirk Maas," Trent whispered, bending closer to the lads. "I peeped into the hold when you were down there with the captain, and so had a good look at the fellow in the light. May I be hanged and quartered if I don't believe he would sell his soul for a handful of gold."

"He is ill-favoured, I admit," replied Giles; "but what of it? Looks hang no man."

"Ay, but I have run across him before, when I was fighting in Holland under Sir Richard Edgumbe," whispered Trent. "I can't say when or where, but I'll stake my

life on two things: he is the same man, and his name was not Dirk Maas then."

The lads began to feel uneasy.

"You ought to tell Captain Vane this," said Sydney.

Trent shook his head.

"No, it won't do," he answered. "I could prove nothing. But I'll keep a sharp eye on Master Dutchman until——"

He paused abruptly as a low ripple of excitement fell from the lips of the officers.

The lads discovered instantly what it meant, and they forgot all about Trent's warning as they looked ahead, and saw a dark line stretching across the channel at a distance of several hundred yards. This was certainly the barrier of boats, and far beyond it were a few glimmering lights—the lights of Sluys, beyond a doubt.

Already the Adventure was in the midst of the enemy. Right and left from the low banks rose earthworks and batteries, and to the rear many a flickering glow told of camp-fires sheltered by ditch and moat.

But the terrible soldiers of the Duke of Parma seemed oblivious to the foe that was stealing between their lines. Not a sound from gun or sentry broke the stillness of the night as the Adventure glided straight on with its ghostly crew.

Nearer and nearer came the blockade, and as yet no sign of discovery. Once safely through the barrier, and Captain Vane and his daring men could laugh at guns and batteries. Now the critical moment was at hand, and every heart throbbed with suspense as the ship glided straight and swiftly at the black, threatening mass.

There was a tremendous crash, followed by the rending and splintering of frail planks. The Adventure quivered from bow to stern, heeled partly over, and then backed helplessly away from the wreckage of the shattered boats. The daring attempt had failed!

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH THE ADVENTURE FALLS INTO A SPANISH TRAP.

AT first no one realised just what had happened, for the shock of the collision pitched fully two-thirds of the crew off their feet. Giles fell forward among the prostrate officers, while Sydney and Trent rolled together against the bulwarks.

Low cries and imprecations mingled with the loud slapping of the waves, the clatter of pikes and other weapons, and the rumbling growl of escaped cannon-balls rolling from point to point.

Then, as the agitated heavings of the ship partly ceased, the men scrambled hurriedly to their feet, dimly conscious that a great calamity had occurred. A hush of horror seemed to spread suddenly over the

deck as it was seen that the vessel's progress was stopped—that the chain of boats remained intact and unbroken.

Within less than half a minute after the crash, and while the stupor of despair rested on officers and seamen, the storm burst with terrific fury. From right and left the low banks blazed with vivid red flashes, and cannon after cannon sent a thunderous echo over the flat sand-dunes and canals of Holland. The storm of iron missiles shrieked and hissed through the air.

The Spanish batteries lay a little way downstream from the barrier of boats, and therefore there was no danger that they would pour their diagonal fire into each other. From the very first their aim was remarkably true, considering that the target was almost invisible in the gloom. This fact, combined with the sudden and simultaneous attack, showed unmistakably that preparations had been made beforehand, and that the English ship had been expected.

For a time something like panic reigned on board the *Adventure*, which was completely at the mercy of the foe. Shot after shot pierced and splintered the bulwarks, screamed overhead among the sails and spars, or hissed across the deck, leaving a trail of dead and dying behind.

Three-quarters of the mainmast were broken off from the stump, and the ponderous mass crushed half a dozen poor wretches in its fall. Sydney was so close that he felt the rush of wind on his cheeks, while the concussion threw him off his legs. Frightened by his narrow escape he jumped up and ran blindly into Giles.

Both lads went down together, and they did not dare to rise. While the iron shower dealt death and destruction around them, they crouched flat on the deck, expecting that every instant would be their last. They saw officers and seamen running to and fro in terror, and heard Captain Vane's voice ringing sharply above the awful din and turmoil.

The Spaniards were firing high—no doubt purposely, as after events showed—and had they aimed lower the *Adventure* must have been speedily sunk. For a space that seemed like hours, though it was really but several minutes, the fury of the bombardment continued without cessation, carrying away sails, spars, and rigging. But not a shot struck below the water-line, and the ship floated as staunchly as ever.

Suddenly the cannonade dwindled to a straggling fire, and then ceased altogether. The mystery of this was quickly explained. The *Adventure* had drifted slowly down between the batteries with the ebb tide, where, in the deep gloom, a continuation of the fusillade would have done more damage to friends than to foes.

But there was no hope to be gleaned from this respite. Already the night rang with

the eager tramp of feet as the Spanish soldiery crowded into their boats. The sharp commands of their officers could be plainly heard. Nothing was left to the hapless Englishmen but to submit to capture or to die hard.

As the ship floated on the survivors gathered around Captain Vane to receive his last orders. The gallant commander was spattered with blood, and a fragment of a spar had broken his left arm. He could scarcely speak for rage and grief as he saw what havoc had been wrought among his brave followers.

It was truly heartrending to see the mangled bodies lying here and there on the deck amid the splinters and fallen spars, and to hear the groans and cries of the dying and wounded. The dead and disabled numbered more than a score.

If one thing could have roused the survivors more than another to a last desperate defence it was the thirst for vengeance. This was uppermost in their hearts now, and it left no room for fear or shrinking. To strike while strength lasted, and then to perish like Englishmen—that was their resolve. They swore to it on their swords, by the memory of their slain comrades. And, listening to these grim and terrible oaths, Giles and Sydney felt almost reconciled to their fate. At the same time, their hearts, too, burned for vengeance.

"Stand by to repel boarders!" Captain Vane cried hoarsely. "They will soon be upon us. Let us fight to the last, men, and keep the mastery of the old ship as long as you can. England will hear of our deeds this night, and will honour our memory. We are dying in a good cause. It is no disgrace that we have failed in so desperate an enterprise."

He was answered by hoarse and hearty cheering, and by a ringing clatter of weapons. Then, as the seamen were about to scatter to their posts of duty, Stephen Trent stalked quickly forward.

"Ay, but why have we failed, Captain Vane?" he shouted. "I will tell you why. It was because we trusted to that fiend of a Dutchman. He was a Spanish spy, hired to drag us into this trap. The blockade was ready to hurl our ship back, and yonder batteries had their guns trained on us from the time we came within range. Do you still doubt it? Then find Dirk Maas—if you can."

Captain Vane started like a man who is suddenly shot, and the truth of Trent's words flashed upon him with terrible force. He tried to speak, but his first utterance was drowned in a roar of fury. Like ravenous wolves, seamen and officers dispersed to all parts of the vessel, seeking in the gloom for the traitorous wretch of whose perfidy they were convinced.

No thought was given to the approaching boats. Some dashed to the hold and some to the sleeping quarters; others broke into the cabins under the poop-deck, and battered furniture with swords and pikes.

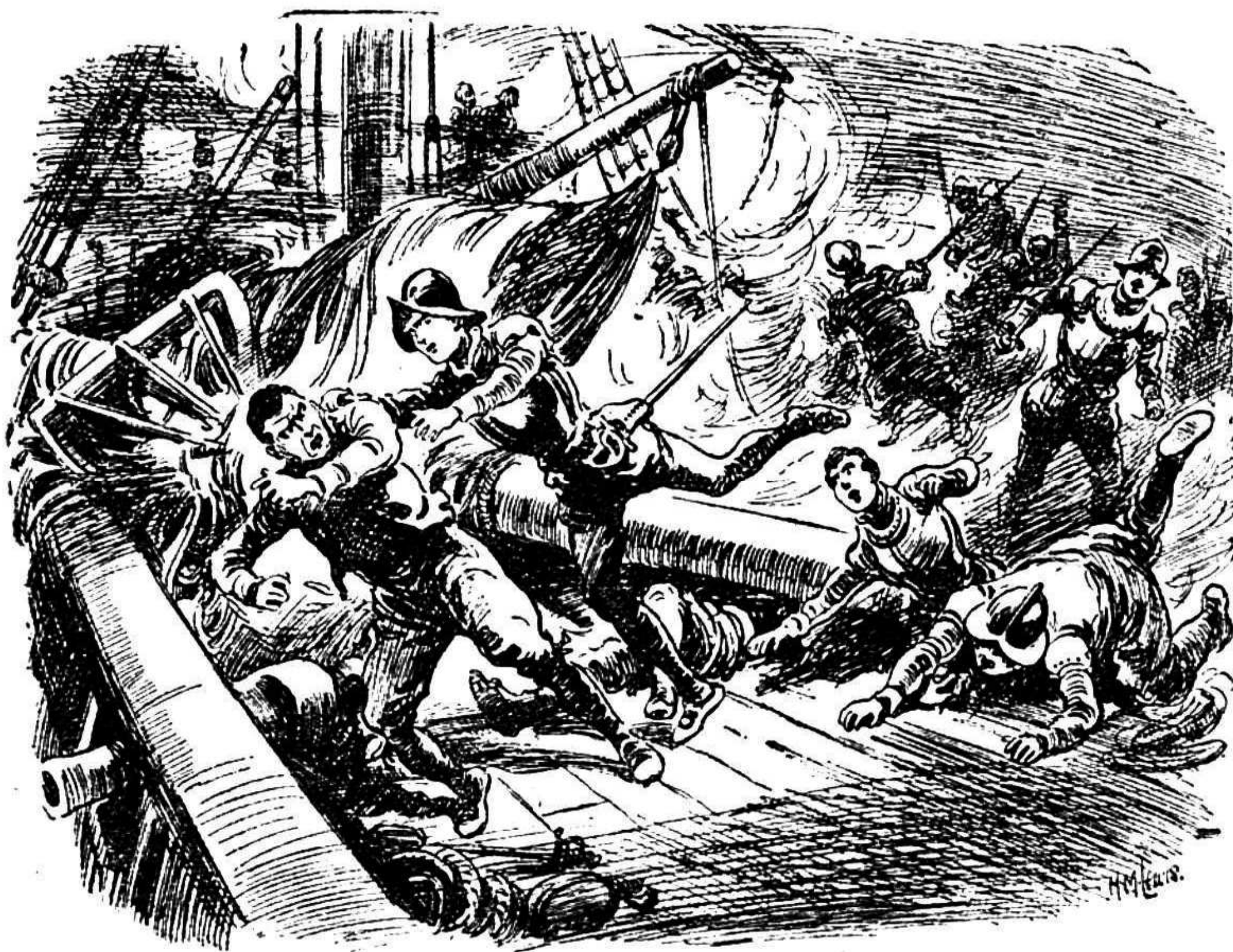
To Giles and Sydney alone did it occur that the pilot might have been struck down by the cannonade, and they began to hunt among the dead and dying. They had met with no success when Trent came up to them.

"No use, lads!" he cried. "The foul knave dropped into the water the moment the ship struck, depend upon it. For the chance

"Look!" the lad whispered. "Who is that?"

Trent and Giles looked, and their hearts beat with a fierce joy. In the tall, massive figure that had just risen from the shadows that lurked about the fallen mast there was no mistaking Dirk Maas. He must have been lying there crippled quite a time, for as he took a single step it was seen that he limped badly.

Either he was ignorant that any of the crew were near, or else he believed that the darkness screened him from observation. With a furtive look to right and left that



Before his companions could rise, Giles dashed past them, overtaking and leaping upon the traitor just as he reached the bulwark.

of one thrust at him I would let the Spaniards put me to death by every fiendish torture of the Inquisition. Ay, and gladly."

"I hoped a ball might have found him," replied Giles, "but I fear you are right. He had his skiff moored to the stern of the ship, and by that he doubtless escaped amid the first excitement."

"But it will do no harm to look for the craft," muttered Trent, making a stride towards the stern of the vessel.

He stopped short at a low gasp of excitement from Sydney, who was pointing a trembling arm across the deck.

showed his terror, he scrambled over the mast and made a stealthy rush for the side of the ship.

It was all done very quickly, but the traitor had hardly started when Trent and the two lads were in hot pursuit, yelling with passion at every step. In his mad haste Sydney tripped over the mast, and when he sprawled on hands and knees on the other side, he, in turn, upset Trent.

Before his companions could rise, Giles dashed past them, overtaking and leaping upon the traitor just as he reached the bulwark. With a snarl Dirk Maas turned

on his assailant, struck him a brutal blow in the face, and then wrenched loose.

Though stunned and half-blinded, Giles made another desperate effort to grasp that ruffian, forgetting in his excitement that he had a sword at his belt. But he came in hard contact with the bulwark, and fell back, and as he staggered to his feet he heard a dull splash.

By this time half of the crew had come clattering across the deck, divining readily what the commotion meant, and a row of savage faces peered over the top of the bulwark, while a score of hands held weapons in readiness. Trent pulled Giles alongside of him, and they watched together the surface of the black water.

An instant later the head and shoulders of Dirk Maas shot to the top twenty feet out from the ship's side. He gave a shrill cry, and began to swim with might and main. The appeal was barely answered from a group of swiftly approaching boats when a yell arose from the waiting avengers. Strong arms hurled pikes and swords at the living target, and half a dozen pistols flashed and roared.

There was slight danger of all missing at such close range. With a shriek Dirk Maas threw up his arms and sank from sight, pierced by both bullets and pikes. From the deck of the *Adventure* rose a cry of mad triumph.

The tragedy that ended the life of the foul traitor was barely over when the scene changed. From both sides of the ship boats laden with Spanish soldiers were rapidly approaching, and as Captain Vane's commanding voice summoned his men to their posts they obeyed as quickly and sharply as though it was but a call to drill.

Those who remained of the two parties previously singled out at once prepared to give the boarders a hot reception. The ship's cook and carpenter dashed below, where they had a fire in readiness. The bombardiers ranged themselves at the guns, and Captain Vane appointed Trent to the place of the master-gunner, who was lying dead under the mast.

Before the boats could get near enough to the sides of the ship for safety, a raking fire was poured into them. Many were sunk or disabled, and cries of agony mingled with the loud explosions and the hoarse volleys of English cheers.

But boat after boat loomed out of the darkness, and pressed through the deadly cannonade to the very side of the ship, until a score of them were washing and grinding against the timbers.

In the terrific struggle that followed the guns were useless for firing purposes, but they were made to do service in another way. As the horde of yelling and cursing Spanish soldiers tried to swarm up the ship's side, the gunners tore the pieces of

cannon from the embrasures and hurled them down into the boats. Death followed every cast, as the bottoms dropped out of the crafts thus attacked and left the occupants to struggle in the water.

But fresh boats were constantly bringing reinforcements from both shores, and as the desperate Spaniards hoisted one another to the low bulwarks of the *Adventure*, the plucky Englishmen saw that the end could not be long delayed.

Every man fought with stubborn fury, shooting and hacking at the invaders, and beating them back into the water with pikes. But still they came on from both sides, gaining a foothold on the deck here and there, in spite of the most fearful resistance, in spite of scalding water ladled upon them by the cook and the streams of boiling pitch that were liberally scattered by the carpenter's hands.

At last a concentrated assault near the vessel's stern poured at least a score of Spaniards over the bulwark and down upon the deck. The foremost was instantly slain, but the rest advanced with reckless valour, making room for more behind, and driving the Englishmen before them.

Trent and half a dozen comrades hurried to the relief of the party, which included Giles and Sydney, and a fresh attack was made upon the foe. A terrific hand-to-hand combat ensued, both sides fighting like madmen. Sydney was felled to the deck by a pike, and as Giles thrust his sword at the Spaniard who had struck the blow a ball from a pistol or an arquebuse hit him on the head. Everything seemed to grow dark, and he fell heavily across the body of his friend.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH AN UNPLEASANT DUTY IS FORCED UPON STEPHEN TRENT.

TRENT did not see the lads go down, but at the first opportunity he looked anxiously round for them and found them missing. Then he realised what had happened, and with grief and rage in his heart he dashed anew at the foemen.

It was a brave sight to see his blade flashing right and left, and at every telling stroke his exultant shout rang above the hoarse tumult. Though he recklessly exposed himself, caring not how soon death should come, he seemed to bear a charmed life. His desperate prowess and valour stimulated his comrades, and they supported him with such energy that the Spaniards were first checked, and then driven stubbornly back to the bulwark.

Meanwhile, the party on the other side of the ship, where the assault was less vigorously conducted, had successfully re-

pelled the boarders by hurling down pieces of cannon and broken spars. Then, seeing how the fight was going with their comrades, they hurried across the deck.

So fierce an attack was now made on the Spaniards that they could not withstand it. Many were slain in the very act of climbing over the bulwark, and as they fell they knocked down those who were scrambling up from below. The few who gained the deck were surrounded and hacked and clubbed to death.

There now ensued a brief lull in the fight, which gave the defenders a chance to scatter again to their posts. The carpenter and cook hurried up from below with more hot water and pitch. Captain Vane was still alive, and his hearty voice cheered and encouraged the men for what was likely to prove the last struggle.

It was not long delayed. With yelling and shouting the Spaniards closed in on the ship again from both sides, and swarmed nimbly up to the bulwarks. Fresh boats had drawn near, and these held soldiers who were armed with arquebuses. They took no part in the boarding, but from a little distance they singled out the Englishmen at every chance, and fired at them with keen aim.

Here and there some brave officer or seaman could be seen to stagger back from the bulwark and fall down in a quivering heap. The ship's carpenter was shot through the head as he was leaning over the water, and he and his kettle of boiling pitch plunged together into one of the Spanish boats.

But the fate of their comrades only roused the survivors to a greater degree of desperation and ferocity, and the Spaniards, as they swarmed again and again up both sides of the ship, met with a resistance that fairly disheartened them.

During the height of the assault, and just as Captain Vane had run his sword between the ribs of a Spanish boarder, his arm was tapped from behind. He wheeled round, and was amazed almost beyond words to find himself face to face with a stranger—a slim, English-looking man, whose scanty garments were dripping with water; he was unarmed, except for a dagger fastened at his waist.

"Who are you?" gasped the captain. "Where did you come from?"

"From Sluys, sir," was the reply. "A comrade is waiting farther up the river in a boat. I swam down to the barricade, climbed over it, and swam on to the ship. A rope aided me to reach the forward deck. None of the Spanish boats are near the bow, and in the darkness I was not seen."

"A brave deed, truly!" exclaimed Captain Vane. "Is there any hope of aid from the town?"

"None, sir; we have not a single vessel, and but few boats. When the Spanish

batteries opened fire, Sir Roger Williams suspected what it meant, and he ordered me to come down to the English ship and to bring back any dispatches that its captain might have for Sluys. If you are a good swimmer you can escape and return with me."

"Nay, my country would blush for me did I yield to so cowardly a temptation!" cried Captain Vane. "I shall stand by my ship to the last, and I bid you tell Sir Roger that I died like an Englishman. But here are the dispatches. Take them back with you."

He was about to produce the packet when something occurred that checked his hand. A desperate assault at a weak point suddenly poured a number of Spaniards over the bulwark and down upon the deck. They drove the defenders steadily back, and in the hot struggle that ensued the messenger from Sluys was the first to fall, stabbed in the throat by a pike-point.

Captain Vane caught sight of the messenger under his feet as he stubbornly retreated before the advancing foemen, and he was sorely perplexed to know what to do. The dispatches must be saved, since the opportunity was ready, but he could not bring himself to desert the ship, even at the call of so imperative a duty.

He realised that but brief time was left to decide, for the Spaniards were now pouring thickly over the bulwarks, and on both sides the Englishmen were falling back toward the centre of the ship. A husky roar of triumph swelled on the air as the invaders found that the hard-won victory was at last within their grasp.

But Captain Vane's right arm was not idle while his mind was thus engaged, and he struck more than one mortal blow as he retreated foot by foot with those who remained of his gallant crew. The terrific hand-to-hand struggle grew fiercer and fiercer, and the swarthy-faced Spaniards increased in numbers as boat after boat tumbled its occupants upon the deck of the Adventure.

"Down with the Spaniards!" cried a ringing voice. "Strike for old England, comrades, and no surrender. Die like men—fighting to the last. Ay, taste that, you knave!"

The speaker was Trent, and with the last word he drove his sword deep into the chest of a burly Spaniard, sending him reeling back among his companions.

With a sudden impulse, Captain Vane pushed to the spot and caught Trent by the arm.

"I want you!" he shouted. "This way."

He dragged him to the centre of the deck, where there was a little space between the two slowly closing lines of defenders.

(The further adventures of Giles in Holland will be described next week.)

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The
Nelson Lee Library," of
SEDBERGH SCHOOL.



This fine old school in Yorkshire was founded as long ago as 1525 by Dr. Roger Lupton, Provost of Eton, and was endowed by him with lands, which were later confiscated by Edward VI. The school was, however, saved by the efforts of Thomas

Lever, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, and re-endowed by other lands. The school was reconstituted in 1874, and the buildings were extended that year. The boys number 384, and are distributed into seven houses. Rugby football is played.

(Continued from page 31.)

Next week, in a letter I shall address to all overseas readers, I will supply full particulars on this and other matters of special interest to them.

BRONZE MEDALS.

Members who have secured an additional six new regular readers are eligible for the St. Frank's League bronze medal, with the monogram "S.F.L." thereon. Members who

wish to become Organising Officers will now be required, first of all, to qualify for their bronze medal—particulars are given below. Next week I hope to deal more fully with that very important executive body, upon which the success of the League will largely depend—the Organising Officers.

Yours sincerely,

THE EDITOR.
(Chief Officer of S.F.L.)

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete coupons from TWO copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the coupons fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of coupon. The second coupon is for your new regular reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of coupon. Both coupons are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new regular readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete coupons are needed, and these

must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the coupons are sent in. On one of the coupons fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of coupon. The other coupon is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the coupon. Now pin both coupons together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in coupons for two or more new readers at once, provided the coupons are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the coupons are sent in.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE COUPON No. 1. June 27, 1925.

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION

A

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" since(give date), I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to derive all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have obtained one new regular reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second coupon attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR BRONZE MEDAL.

I, Member No.....(give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have obtained one more new regular reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second coupon attached hereto. This leaves me (state number, or, if none, signify with a dash) new regular readers to obtain to entitle me to a Bronze Medal.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" (No....., dated), and have now decided to become a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

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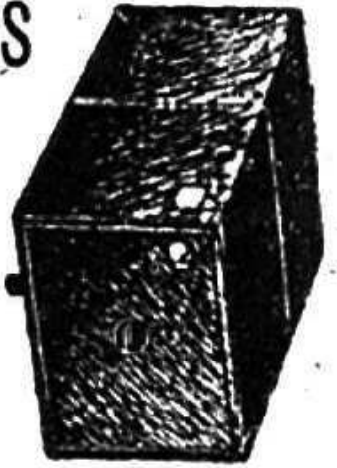
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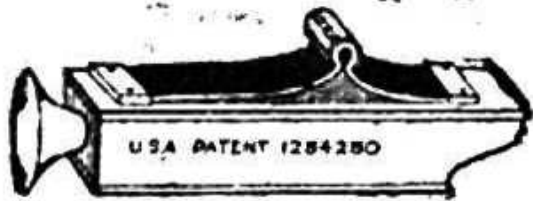
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