

THE BOY INVENTORS
and the
Electric HydroAëroplane

BY

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"THE BOY INVENTORS' DIVING TORPEDO BOAT,"
"THE BOY INVENTORS' FLYING SHIP,"
"THE BOY INVENTORS AND THE VANISHING GUN," and
"THE BOY INVENTORS' RADIO TELEPHONE," ETC., ETC.

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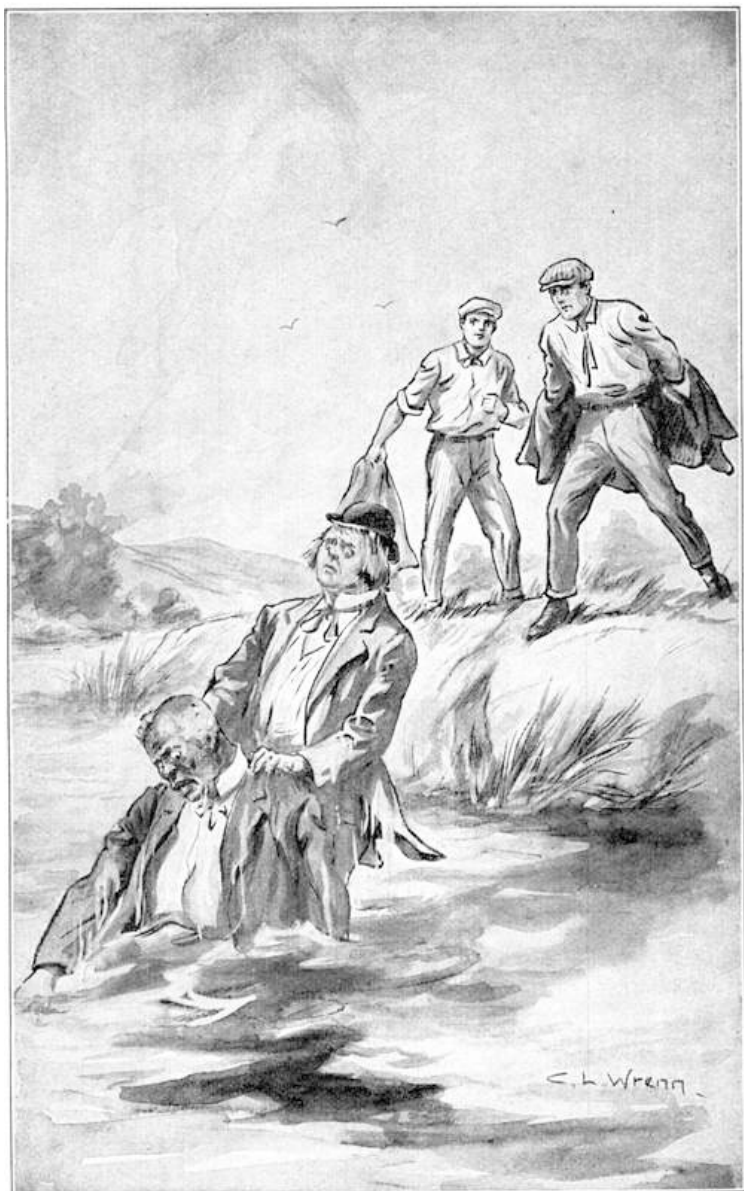
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Young Dill had seized Jupe by the back of the neck and dragged him, half drowned, to the shore.—Page 98

The Boy Inventors' Electric Hydroaeroplane

CHAPTER I.

A NEW FRIEND MADE.

“Are either Mr. Chadwick or Mr. Jesson about?”

“Humph!” and the gangling, rather disagreeable-looking youth who had answered the summons to the door of the Boy Inventors' workshop, gave a supercilious look over the dusty and worn, although carefully mended, clothes of the dark-eyed, dark-haired, slender youth who confronted him.

“What do you want to know that for, anyhow?” and upon the personal pronoun he placed a contemptuous emphasis.

“That is a question to which I can only reply when I can see either Jack Chadwick or Tom Jesson personally. My name is Ned Nevins,—not that either of them knows me,—but will you be so kind as to find out if they'll see me?”

“If you can't tell me your business, you can't see them. State what you want to me. If it's money—”

“It is not!”

The dark-eyed young visitor's eyes held a warning flash which the other lad, who was half a head taller and far stouter of build than Ned Nevins, affected not to notice.

“Well, you can't speak to them.” This with an air of finality.

“But you don't understand—”

“I do, perfectly. They are both far too busy to bother with any inquisitive kind of tramp that happens along.”

“Then you won’t let them know I would like to see them?”

The other’s voice rose angrily.

“I said ‘No’ once. N-O-*no*! Isn’t that enough?”

“Quite enough.”

Ned Nevins turned away. As he did so, the other lad, an employee of the Boy Inventors, and a former school chum, noticed that he had under his arm a box which he appeared to handle with unusual care. But Sam Hinkley noted also Ned’s dejected and downcast air. He decided to humiliate him still further.

“Get a move on—you. Skip!”

Ned hastened his pace. He felt too disappointed and tired to retort to the bully as he should have done. Sam Hinkley interpreted this as cowardice on Ned’s part, and being a natural bully he decided to improve the occasion according to his own delight. He came up behind Ned and gave the slightly-built lad a strong shove.

Ned faced ’round, and his pale face flushed an angry crimson.

“Don’t do that again, please!”

Young Hinkley’s rejoinder was to make a rush at him. He extended both his hands to shove the visitor, whom he had found so unwelcome, off the premises. But the next instant he met with a setback. Still holding his precious box under one arm, Ned’s fingers closed on the bully’s wrists. They shut down with a grip like steel handcuffs.

“Ow! Ouch! Leggo my hands,” roared Sam at the top of his voice.

“From what I’ve heard of Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson I don’t believe they would tolerate for an instant the way you have behaved toward me,” was the firm reply. “March!”

“Where are we going?” inquired Sam, writhing painfully under the young stranger’s powerful grip, unable to do anything, try as he would to shake it off.

“Straight into that workshop. From what I can hear, I believe we will find those whom I wish to see inside.”

Sam looked very uncomfortable. He was the son of fairly well-to-do parents in the little town of Nestorville, on the outskirts of which Mr. Chadwick’s home was situated. Jack and Tom had taken him on because he was a youth who had always shown mechanical ability and had pleaded persistently for a chance to work in the big experimental shop at High Towers.

But a fair trial of Sam Hinkley had not resulted in his rising in favor with his young employers. He had been detected in several mean acts. Besides, they felt he was hardly a lad to be trusted with the important secrets of the workshop, in which most of the inventions of the boys and their father and uncle were worked out. So that had Sam but known it, he was by no means so important a factor at High Towers as he imagined.

“Lemmo go and I’ll take you in,” howled Sam.

“Very well. You might have done so in the first place.”

But no sooner were Sam’s hands released than he aimed a savage blow at young Nevins.

“I’ll trim you for this, you—you scarecrow, you!” he bawled out. “I’ll fix you. I’ll—”

“Here, here! What’s all the trouble about?”

The question was asked by a tall, well-built youth with curly dark hair and sparkling, intelligent eyes, who had just appeared at the door of the workshop.

“I—I wanted to find Mr. Chadwick, Jr.,” began the newcomer, while Sam looked abashed.

“Sure you weren’t looking for trouble?” asked Jack, but a twinkle in his eyes belied the implied reproach in the question. He knew Sam Hinkley from the soles of his shoes up. Besides, he had witnessed the last part of the recent scene and realized how the land lay.

“Go back on your job,” he ordered Sam brusquely, “those bolts must be ready by noon at the latest.”

“Bu-bu-but—” began Sam, and then, reading what he saw in Jack’s eye aright, he obeyed, but not without a backward glance at Ned Nevins.

“Why—why, you are Jack—I mean Mister—”

“That’s all right,” was the smiling response, “I am Jack Chadwick. What did you wish to see me about?”

“Principally about getting a job. I—”

“I’m afraid there’s nothing here for you,” was the reply, as Jack glanced with interest at the intelligent face that gazed so eagerly into his own, and then, as he saw the travel-stained lad’s countenance fall he added, “You see this is an experimental shop mainly, and—”

“I know. I’ve heard all about your inventions, the Skyship and the diving Torpedo Boat and so on. I love mechanics and I’m sure I could make good if you’d give me a chance.”

“What is your name?”

“Nevins is my name, sir.”

“Ever had any experience along such lines?”

“Yes, sir, my uncle was an inventor. He was poor and worked in a machine-shop, but when he was at home he and I used to spend all our time in a workshop he had fitted up. You see my folks died a long time ago and I was brought up in my uncle’s home. He said that some day I’d be famous if I worked hard and that I had a natural ability for mechanics and—”

Ned Nevins stopped short, flushed over what he felt had been a conceited speech. But Jack glanced at him encouragingly. The young inventor was quick to read character. He began to take an interest in this ragged visitor, who had dropped down out of the skies, so to speak.

“But you are not living with your uncle now, Nevins?”

“Oh, no. He was killed a month or more ago in an accident in the mills. My aunt didn’t want me ’round the house; no more did my cousin. So I packed up what I had;

it wasn't much," with a rueful smile, "and—and—"

"Set out to seek your fortune. So far, if you don't mind my saying it, you don't appear to have succeeded very well. And so you want a job. How have you been making your way?"

"Doing odd jobs for farmers and so on. I'm clever at repairing automobile machinery, and I earned a little that way. You see, my object was to make my way here, otherwise I might have got two or three jobs in garages or machine shops."

"Why were you so anxious to come here?" demanded Jack, beginning to feel an interest in this persistent youngster.

"Because of a strange legacy my uncle left me."

"That's an odd reason."

"I know it; but may I explain?"

"Surely. Go ahead."

"Well, it was a legacy that he said would bring me fame and fortune some day. It may have been only an inventor's dream. My poor uncle had many such, or it may not be all that he thought of it. There were many reasons why I couldn't consult any one in my own town about it, and as I'd read of you and felt I could trust you and your advice, I sought you out. But if the invention, for that's what the legacy was, is worth anything or not, I want a job."

"Come on inside, Nevins. You seem to have the right stuff in you. We'll have a talk."

And with a wide-eyed youth behind him, Jack led the way into the workshop. Sam Hinkley viewed his young employer and the latter's companion with marked disfavor from his work bench.

"Wormed your way into the place already, have you?" he muttered. "I'll keep my eye on you, young fellow, and don't you forget it."

CHAPTER II.

AN INVENTION DESCRIBED.

Ned Nevins had told nothing but the simple truth when he stated that he had endured many hardships and much rough travel under unpleasant conditions in order to obtain an interview with the Boy Inventors.

He was a boy of singularly firm character and persistency or he would never have triumphed over the obstacles he had conquered in order to gain his ambition. When Ned's uncle, Jephtha Nevins, had died, he had entrusted to the boy the tin box which we have seen Ned guarding with so much care. It contained plans and specifications of an invention upon which the elder Nevins had spent all his spare time for many years.

Whether the invention was a practical one or not, Ned, skillful as he was in the line of mechanics, did not know. But his uncle's faith in the value of his invention was so great that he had inspired his nephew with almost implicit confidence in the soundness of his judgment.

Ned might have stayed in his home town and awaited a more favorable opportunity for setting out on his travels but for one thing. Jephtha Nevins had a son, a hulking ne'er-do-well sort of lad, or rather young man, for he was some years the senior of Ned, who was sixteen.

Following his father's death, "Hank" Nevins, as he was known among his cronies, made a big fuss when he learned that Ned had been left the plans of Jephtha Nevins' invention. There was little else but the furniture in the house and a small sum of money in the savings bank; and so Hank Nevins laid formal claim to the plans of the invention from which Jephtha Nevins had hoped so much.

But Ned refused absolutely to give them up to Hank. With almost his dying words, Jephtha Nevins had entrusted the plans to his nephew, for he had long since given up hopes of making anything out of Hank. In fact Ned knew that it had been his uncle's wish that Hank should know nothing of the invention, but in some way the latter had

discovered the fact of its existence, and he hoped, that by selling it, (provided it was in any way practical,) he might obtain some money which he could expend in dissipation.

When he found that Ned was unwilling, or rather refused absolutely, to give up the plans, Hank had flung out of the house with all manner of threats, among them being that he would force his cousin to give up the coveted plans by process of law. Ned knew nothing of law and like many persons similarly situated, the idea of Hank's resorting to lawyers to obtain possession of the plans alarmed him. Among Hank's acquaintances was a young law clerk of "sporty" proclivities. With the aid of this young limb of the law, Hank had succeeded in thoroughly alarming Ned as to the legality of his retention of the papers. Matters were constituted thus when Ned determined not to risk the possession of his uncle's plans any longer but to leave the small cottage, where they all lived, and seek counsel and aid elsewhere than in his native village.

From the first time he had read of them, the Boy Inventors had possessed a large place in Ned's mind. In his extremity, therefore, he had decided to seek them out and try to interest them in the untried invention.

"Sit down," said Jack, when the two boys were inside a small room at one end of the workshop which, for lack of a better word, was called the office. It was a very business-like looking room. Books on technical topics lined the shelves at one end of it. Models, samples of materials, test-tubes and other apparatus occupied most of the rest of the available space.

Under the book shelves, however, was a desk. It was to one of the chairs standing beside this latter piece of furniture that Jack motioned his odd guest.

Ned sank into the chair with an alacrity that made it plain that he was tired. He had, in fact, come some miles from his last stopping place that morning.

"I'm sorry that you had that trouble with Sam Hinkley," began Jack in a kindly tone, "he should have known better than to treat you as he did."

“Oh, that’s all right,” the other assured him hastily, “I’d have stood for a lot more than that in order to get a chance to see you and tell you what I’ve traveled a good way to say.”

“You said you had an invention, I think.”

“Yes; but it is not, properly speaking, mine,” and then Ned Nevins went on briefly to describe the circumstances by which he had come into possession of the plans in which both he and his uncle set so much store. But up to this point he had not mentioned the nature of the invention and Jack brought him to the point by a question.

“And just what may this invention be?”

Ned Nevins hesitated a few seconds before replying.

“I hardly know just what to call it,” he said, “but I guess an electric hydroaeroplane about describes it.”

Jack’s face betrayed his interest.

“You mean a craft capable of air and water travel that is driven by electricity?” he asked.

“That’s just it. But there are many novel features about it, however. My uncle set most store by one particular novelty in its construction, and that was the fact that it was driven by electricity instead of gasolene. Gasolene is bulky, dangerous and heavy to carry, and sometimes hard to obtain, but by using an electric generator, worked while the machine is in motion, the Nevins hydroaeroplane, as my uncle called it, has plenty of cheap power always obtainable and is simpler than gasolene-driven motors in a number of ways.”

“But about your storage batteries—I suppose that’s the idea?”

Ned Nevins nodded.

“That’s just the point I was coming to,” he said; “one of the most notable features of the Nevins hydroaeroplane is the fact that its power is furnished by storage batteries many times lighter than any yet constructed, and capable of developing many times the power. But the plans will show you all that far better than I can explain.”

“I should like to see them.”

Although he was interested and showed it, Jack Chadwick had seen far too many impracticable inventions to wax enthusiastic over any scheme till he had examined into it for himself. But he knew that if young Nevins had what he said he had, he was in possession of a big thing.

So it was with considerable expectancy that he watched young Nevins fumble with the lock of the battered tin case. Finally he opened the receptacle and drew out a roll of papers. These proved to be blue prints, and closely penned writings covering several foolscap sheets.

Naturally, Jack's attention was first directed to the blue prints that young Nevins eagerly spread out on the table before him. Accustomed as he was to such things, he read the intricate lines and tracings almost as plainly as print.

CHAPTER III.

AN IMPORTANT DECISION.

“Well, what do you think of it?”

Ned asked the question with almost pitiful eagerness. His tone clearly betrayed how much the answer meant to him.

“I think that the idea appears feasible, but of course, I can’t say anything definite yet,” was Jack’s rejoinder. “I will have to consult with my cousin, Tom Jesson—”

Ned nodded that he had heard of young Jesson, who had had so much to do with the Boy Inventors’ work.

“And after we have gone over the plans together we can tell you just what we think of it. Suppose that the idea appears to be possible to work out, what would your plans be?”

“That we each take an equal chance in the profits that may come from it,” replied Ned in quick, certain tones that showed he had thought the matter out all clearly in his own mind.

“Well, that would come later. You would be clearly entitled to more than a third share, for the invention practically belongs to you.”

“Yes, but I have no capital to put into its manufacture. My idea was that you would build the craft, with me to help, for I know my uncle’s ideas in regard to the craft backward, almost.”

Jack smiled.

“I see you have every detail figured out.”

“If you knew how much I have thought of it!” exclaimed Ned.

“I can well imagine that. Well, Ned, I can promise you one thing—if the invention offers any possibility of success we will undertake it. We have nothing on hand just now and this is surely a big idea you have brought us.”

“I believe in it,” declared the boy fervently.

“Well, that’s half the battle. Suppose you come and see us to-morrow morning. We will go over the plans to-night and see what we think of them. By the way, where are you staying?”

“Nowhere just at present. I came straight up here as soon as I arrived in Nestorville.”

“You must have been eager to see us.”

“I was, indeed. I had traveled a good many miles to do so, as I explained.”

“Well, Sam Hinkley’s father keeps a sort of hotel in Nestorville. It is cheaper than a regular first-class place but I think you will find it comfortable.”

“Anything will suit me. I shan’t sleep much to-night, anyhow,” replied Ned, taking no notice of the name that Jack had mentioned.

“Don’t build too many hopes, Ned. I should hate to have to disappoint you.”

The boys shook hands and parted. Jack watched the dusty figure of Ned Nevins as the boy wended his way down the hill.

“There goes a boy with the right stuff in him,” he said to himself. Although he was young in years, Jack Chadwick was ripe in experience, as those of our readers who have followed the adventures of the Boy Inventors through the various volumes know.

For the benefit of those who are making their first acquaintance with the two lads, we will briefly relate the careers of Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson, his cousin, up to the time that we resume our friendship with them in the present book.

Jack Chadwick’s father was the famous Professor Chadwick, whose various inventions had made him well-to-do, and who was known throughout the civilized world. The Chadwick method of steel reduction and the same inventor’s ingenious devices for rock boring and drilling came to the notice of the general public during the

construction of the Panama Canal. But Professor Chadwick had to his credit a host of other inventions which, if not quite so well known to the world at large, none the less played a large part in the history of civilization.

The Professor, whose wife had died soon after Jack's birth and before fame came to him, had purchased the estate of High Towers, lying a short distance from the pretty little town of Nestorville as a secluded place in which to carry on his researches. Not long after he had acquired it, Mr. Jasper Jesson, his brother-in-law and a well-known explorer and biologist, was reported missing while on an expedition in the tropics. As Mr. Jesson was also a widower, the care of young Tom Jesson, the explorer's only child, devolved upon Prof. Chadwick.

Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson had thus practically grown up together and were more like brothers than cousins. As time went on, both lads developed a strong liking for pursuits similar to the Professor's, and when still a young boy, Jack had invented a patent churn, which came into wide use, as well as improving many household devices. The Professor was delighted with the skill and adaptability of both boys, and aided them all he could in their chosen pursuits. They both took technical courses at a school in Boston, not far from which city Nestorville was situated.

Aeronautics before long began to engage their attention to the exclusion of every other study. Professor Chadwick, too, was interested in this topic, which was developed at High Towers, together with some experiments in an improved wireless plant.

In the first volume of this series, "The Boy Inventors' Wireless Triumph," we saw how the boys' hard work bore fruit in an adventurous voyage to Yucatan. They participated in many thrilling adventures and dangerous experiences which culminated in the finding of Tom Jesson's long missing father.

The next volume showed the boys in a new field of endeavor. There is brotherhood among inventors, and when a friend of Mr. Chadwick's, who was perplexed by problems connected with a new sort of gun, came to them

they were glad to aid him in any way they could.

This work involved them in a surprising series of experiences, not all of which were pleasant. In fact, at times, every ounce of resource, courage and perseverance, which both lads possessed to a high degree, was called into requisition to bring them out of their difficulties. This volume was called "The Boy Inventors' Vanishing Gun," and related, in considerable detail, the final triumphant outcome of the trials and tribulations which had beset the youthful mechanics.

In the third book dealing with our young friends, we found them essaying triumphs in a new element. This volume was called "The Boy Inventors' Diving Torpedo Boat." The boat was a masterpiece of mechanical construction and a long cruise the boys took in her under the surface of the waves provided a narrative of surpassing interest and gripping power. By the aid of their submarine torpedo boat the boys were enabled to play an important part in succoring some beleaguered Americans, who were in peril of their lives at the hands of a band of bloodthirsty Cuban revolutionists. The boys were put to a hard test during this period of their lives, but after all, their experiences endowed them with increased self-reliance and manliness which was to prove of inestimable benefit to them later on, when these qualities brought them successfully through adventures and trials more rigorous than any they had yet faced.

A Flying Ship was their next craft and in her the boys ventured on a unique quest through the untrodden regions of the Upper Amazon. An odd German professor was their companion and mentor. This was Professor Bismarck Von Dinkelspeil, who was as kind-hearted as he was eccentric. Professor Von Dinkelspeil was in search of an extraordinary inhabitant of the remote Brazilian jungles. The boys met him in a strange way and were enabled to offer him much assistance. Dick Donovan, a lively young reporter, and Captain Abe Sprowl, a rough-and-ready New England skipper, were others of their companions on what proved a unique cruise, the details of which were fully set forth in the volume immediately preceding the present, which was called "The Boy Inventors' Flying Ship."

Naturally interested in aeronautics as they were then, the two lads went into "executive session" over the plans of Ned Nevins' electrical hydroaeroplane as soon as Tom Jesson returned from Boston, which was late that afternoon. He had gone to the city to order some materials needed in a new landing device the boys were working on. Far into the night the two boys pored over the plans, waxing more and more enthusiastic as they progressed.

"It seems to me that this craft is as practical and as possible to construct as an electric roadster," declared Jack, as they concluded their labors.

"To build, yes, but how about it working when it is built?" said Tom Jesson, who was less of an idealist than his enthusiastic cousin.

"Are you willing to try it, Tom?"

"I am, yes. How about you?"

"I'm confident enough of success to risk some of the money we made out of that Yucatan treasure chest."

"Then I'll contribute my share, too. When do we start?"

"Nothing to hinder us getting on the job right away. This is too big a thing to keep waiting. We'll send for Ned Nevins first thing in the morning. If this invention turns out half as well as it looks, his legacy will make him famous as well as relieve him from want."

Possibly, if the boys could have looked into the future, Jack would not have spoken so confidently. Troubles they never dreamed of lay ahead of them, and, at that, in the near future.

CHAPTER IV.

NED TO THE RESCUE.

In the meantime, Ned Nevins had retraced his steps to Nestorville. It was a pleasant little village, with neat, white houses lining its elm-bordered streets, each with its trim lawn and flower beds. To the boy who had been wandering in the dusty roads so long, it appeared wonderfully homelike and pleasant, although his travel-stained garments looked doubly distasteful to him in the midst of so much neatness and unobtrusive prosperity.

He passed the main hotel of the place and continued down High Street till he came to a rather less pretentious-looking place, bearing over its door the name, "The Hinkley House." It was not until then that Ned suddenly recollected that Hinkley was the name by which Jack had referred to the disagreeable youth up at the workshop.

"Wonder if he's any relation?" thought Ned to himself as he ascended the steps and entered the office.

A man with bristly red hair, and a not over-pleasant expression of countenance, stood behind the desk writing in a big book.

"Well, boy?" he asked sharply, as Ned entered the place. "If you're selling anything we don't want nothing."

And then he resumed his writing without taking any more notice of Ned, who eyed him rather amusedly for a few seconds. Then he addressed him in a pleasant tone.

"I should like to get a room here, please."

"Humph!" the red-haired man looked up with a grunt rather suggestive of a certain barnyard animal. "A room, did you say?"

"Yes, sir. An inexpensive one. In fact, as cheap a one as you have."

"Sure *you* can pay for it?" was the uncompromising reply.

"I certainly can or I shouldn't have asked you for it,"

said Ned, with the same flash in his eyes as had come there when Sam Hinkley had addressed him so rudely that morning.

Apparently the landlord of the Hinkley House concluded that he had gone far enough, for in a more amiable tone he said:

“I can let you have a good room for a dollar. Want your meals?”

“For to-day anyway,” responded Ned, who had saved from his garage work along the road enough to make him feel sure of himself for a short time, anyhow.

The business was soon concluded and Ned was at liberty to go up to his room. As soon as he was alone, he drew a chair to the window and sat there thinking deeply. Naturally his thoughts all reverted to one subject, and that was: what would be the verdict at High Towers?

“If they only knew how much depended upon it,” thought the boy to himself, and then his fancy roamed back to that final scene when he had looked on his uncle for the last time and had received what to him was almost a sacred trust. From this his thoughts turned to his ne'er-do-well cousin and the latter's threats. His uncle had left no will and Ned was not quite certain in his own mind if he had any legal rights to the papers dealing with the electric hydroaeroplane.

“If they were to find out where I had come, they might try to make it unpleasant for me,” he thought with a momentary qualm, but the next moment he put these thoughts aside, and when he descended to dinner he was in a cheerful, hopeful frame of mind.

Mine host Hinkley's meals were not of the sort that could be described as Lucullan, but they were solid, and Ned ate with the hearty appetite of a growing boy. After he had finished, he decided to saunter out and see what he could of the town. It would at least help to pass away the time till the next day, upon which he felt his fate hung. For the life of him he could not have settled down to read or write till he knew definitely what the verdict upon his unique legacy was to be.

In this frame of mind he wandered through the main street of the little town, which did not take very long, and soon found himself out upon the high road. The road was a pleasant winding one, and Ned walked on briskly, turning over in his mind, as he went, the many events that had recently transpired to work such a change in his career. He could not help an exultant leap of the heart as he thought of the possible outcome of a favorable opinion of the dead inventor's great lifework.

He was still revolving this thought in his mind when, on rounding a turn in the winding road, he came across a sight which temporarily put all other thoughts aside.

Stalled in the center of the road was a fine looking automobile. Ned, who, as we know, knew a lot about cars, recognized it as a machine of expensive make and as an imported car. Bent over the engine was a man who appeared to be trying to adjust whatever was the matter with the motor. Standing about were two other men. As Ned came up, one of them turned to him.

"Here, boy, do you know if there's a garage in Nestorville?"

Now, Ned knew that there was not, for he had looked about for one, thinking that if his mission at High Towers failed, he might chance to get employment in such a place till he got money enough to find a better job. So he replied in the negative.

The man, who wore auto goggles, and was big and broad, turned to his companion with a gesture of annoyance.

"Too bad, Smithers," he said in a vexed tone, "if Elmer there can't fix that motor we'll have to leave the car here and telephone into Boston for another."

The chauffeur straightened up from his labors over the refractory motor.

"I'm afraid we're stuck, sir," he said, "this car is a Dolores. If it was any American car now, I could—"

"Never mind that," interrupted the big man, with an impatient gesture. "I hired you as a competent chauffeur

and now the first break-down we have—”

“If it was an American car,” protested the man. “I don’t understand these Dolores and—”

“Maybe I can help you.”

It was Ned who spoke and the big man faced round on him in surprise.

“You!” he exclaimed. “What do you know about cars?”

“A little, sir.”

“Well, at any rate you can’t know less than Elmer,” said the big man with a disgusted look at his chauffeur, who looked downcast and abashed. “What do you want to do?”

“See if I can get your car going for you. I’m interested in this sort of thing, you know.”

“Umph! don’t look as if you owned a car,” commented the man who had been addressed as “Smithers.”

“That’ll do, Smithers,” spoke up the big man sharply. “Elmer owns that he’s up against it, so give the boy a chance to show what he can do.”

In one garage where he had worked for a time the “big man of the place” had owned, as it so happened, a Dolores car. Therefore Ned was not at sea when, in the overalls he had borrowed from the chauffeur, he set to work on the stubborn motor.

“Think you can fix it?” asked the big man, after Ned had requested the chauffeur to start the engine so that he could hear just what was the matter with it.

“I don’t know,” said Ned frankly. “It’s missing in two cylinders. Carburetor trouble, I think. The Dolores has a special make of carburetor, you know, a very sensitive and complicated variety.”

“Go to it, kid,” muttered the chauffeur. “If you can fix that mixed-up muss of springs and air-valves you’re a wonder.”

“If you’ll slow down the engine a while, I’ll try,” said

Ned, determined to do his best. It was characteristic of him that he was as interested in this vagrant bit of roadside trouble that had come his way as he would have been in some problem directly concerning himself. As it so happened, however, the problem he was about to try to solve did concern him and, at that, in no very distant manner.

Of this, however, he was not to become aware till later, and then in a manner which startled and rather alarmed him, considering the consequences it involved. But in blissful ignorance of all this, Ned went to work, determined to do all in his power to convince the two rather sceptical autoists that he was not boasting when he had said he thought he could help them out of their difficulties.

CHAPTER V. THE UNLUCKY STORY.

“Once more—that’s it!”

Ned suspended his labors for a moment and listened to the tune of the throbbing motor as the chauffeur started it up, following Ned’s adjustment of the carburetor.

“It’s working better already,” declared the big man. “Boy, you’re a wizard.”

Ned looked up smilingly. In the interest of the work, and the fascination he always felt in conquering the whims of a stubborn bit of machinery, he had quite forgotten for the moment all his trials and perplexities.

“I think I’m getting there all right,” he said confidently, “but it will take a little more time to fix it just right.”

“Ah! You believe in doing things thoroughly, I see.”

“I do, sir. Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well.”

“That’s a belief that will get you a long way in life, my boy,” said the big man. Ned hardly heard him, for the motor was once more roaring and pulsing. He tuned it up, listening to its explosions as a skilled musician might hearken critically to a piece of music.

As he listened, he tightened up a connection here or loosened a valve there till the big six-cylindereed motor was humming with the even pulsations of a sleeping baby.

“You can shut her off,” said he, addressing the chauffeur, and then turning to the big man he added, “I think you’ll find no more trouble, sir.”

“What! You have adjusted it, my boy?”

“As well as I can, sir, and, without bragging, I guess you’ll find everything all right now.”

“How long will it remain so?” asked the sceptical Smithers.

“For several weeks, at any rate.”

“You may take the wheel again, Elmer, and hustle us along. Young man, that you’re a mechanic of no mean ability I could see by the way you went to work. What is your name?”

“Ned Nevins, sir.”

“Live here?”

“I do just now, but I come from Millville, N.Y.”

The big man looked surprised.

“Are you any relation to Jephtha Nevins?”

“His nephew, sir. Did you know him?”

“Very well. I am Vaughn Kessler, the owner of the Kessler Mill. Your uncle was my foreman for many years. He was one of the best men we ever had; I was very sorry to hear of his death. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“No, thank you, sir, except—”

“Except what? Come, you’ll pardon my saying so, but you don’t look—well, very prosperous.”

“I am all right, thank you, sir, and have good prospects ahead of me,” replied Ned. “What I was going to ask you was not to mention my name in Millville or to say where you saw me if by any chance anyone should ask you.”

“But why? You are not under a cloud there surely, and if —”

“Oh, no sir! It is for quite another reason,” said Ned earnestly.

“Well, it shall be as you wish,” said Mr. Kessler, regarding the boy with some curiosity, “though why in the world you should make the request puzzles me. Good-bye, my boy, and thank you.”

He held out his hand and took Ned’s. The next minute the car that the boy had so cleverly placed back in running order moved swiftly off. As it receded along the road, Ned became conscious that there was something in his hand. It had been left by Mr. Kessler.

“It’s money!” exclaimed the boy, unclasping his fist. “Well, it won’t come amiss, although I wouldn’t have

thought of charging him for that little job.”

He unfolded the bill and then gave a little cry of astonishment. It was for twenty dollars,—a small fortune to Ned.

“Well, I am in luck!” he exclaimed. “If only my fortunes have changed, as this seems to indicate, I’ll be lucky tomorrow as well, and that is the dearest wish of my heart.”

It was well for Ned’s peace of mind that he did not know that Mr. Kessler, while fully intending to keep his promise of not mentioning Ned’s name or address at home in Millville, unconsciously let the cat out of the bag when he arrived at Lowell, Mass., his destination. His important interests, and those of his traveling companion, Mr. Smithers, made him a big man there and the late arrival of his automobile, which kept a momentous meeting waiting, called for explanations. To the newspaper men of Lowell, Mr. Kessler told how he had been aided by a shabbily clothed boy on a country road when a trained chauffeur had failed to adjust his car. It made an interesting story, and was telegraphed over the country by a correspondent of a news association. In due course it appeared in the Millville papers under this heading:

MILLVILLE MAGNATE AIDED

BY A LAD FROM THIS CITY.

Vaughn Kessler’s Stalled Auto Started

By Ned Nevins, Motor Genius.

The article beneath these headlines described the whole incident briefly, and stated that Ned was at present residing in the village of Nestorville, Mass. With but few exceptions, the fact that Mr. Kessler was concerned in the story was the chief feature of interest to readers of the article.

One individual in Millville read it with burning eyes. This was Hank Nevins, Ned’s cousin. Following Ned’s disappearance, he had used every means in his power to locate the boy. For this he had a good reason. Not alone did he want to recover the plans and designs of the electric hydroaeroplane, but he was prepared to offer a price for

them.

While Ned had been making his preparations to depart quietly from home, Hank, on the advice of his lawyer friend, had visited the head of an aeroplane manufacturing concern who happened to be visiting Millville. Hank had laid before the stranger as full a description as he could of his father's invention. He left out many important points but the stranger was quick to see possibilities in the idea and offered Hank a substantial sum if he would bring him the plans.

The offer aroused all of Hank's cupidity. He saw a way, as he thought, to a life of elegant leisure. Only one stumbling block interposed itself, and that was a seemingly insurmountable one.

Ned had vanished, and with him the papers that would have meant money to Hank. On the advice of his legal friend, Hank had advertised for Ned in the personal columns of half a dozen newspapers. But none of the carefully worded appeals to the boy to reveal himself had borne fruit. Hank was obliged to confess to Mr. Melville of the Blue Sky Aeroplane Company that he would be delayed in producing the plans, not admitting that it would be extremely unlikely that he could ever get possession of them at all.

"Well, any time you have them bring them to me," said Mr. Melville before he left Millville. "And my offer will hold good."

Hank's thoughts were not very pleasant ones as he left the aeroplane man's presence.

"The young blackguard, to run off like that," he grumbled. "Those plans mean dollars and cents now. How can I get them? If I could locate that runaway brat, I'd soon find a way."

And now, through that unfortunate article in the *Millville Clarion*, Ned Nevins' hiding place had been revealed to the last person on earth Ned would have wished to have known of it.

That night, as soon as his work was done, Hank sought

out his budding lawyer friend. The law, like all other professions, has its black sheep. Hank's friend bade fair to become one of these when he should ultimately be admitted to practice, which was his ambition. His eyes glistened when he heard of Hank's discovery.

"If only we could get those papers," muttered Hank, as the two sat together that night. "We'd both have money to burn, Miles."

Miles Sharkey was the name of Hank's crony, and the latter part of his appellation suited him from the ground up. In his projecting yellow teeth and undershot jaw, as well as in his fishy, shifting eyes, there was something suggestive of the rapaciousness and treachery of a shark.

"I think I can find a way to make him give them up, Hank," said Miles, after some moments spent in deep thought, "but it may take a little time to work out the details. Have you any idea what he can be doing in this Nestorville place?"

"Not on the first guess. Just a crazy notion of his, I reckon. But what's your plan, Miles."

"I'll have to think out the details," rejoined the redoubtable limb of the law, rubbing his tallowy hands together. "But I think we'll be able to make Cousin Ned disgorge before very long—for a consideration."

"On the day I get my money, you get yours," Hank assured him.

"Consider it settled then," said Miles. "I'd have to be a pretty poor lawyer if I couldn't think of a way."

"I—I'm not particular about law," blustered Hank, "anything to get those plans. He's only a kid, and once we've got 'em he can't do anything."

"It's a great pity you didn't get hold of them before he skipped out," said the worthy Miles. "Anyhow, it's all right. I'm smart enough to attend to that."

"Miles, you're a true friend." And as they parted, Hank clasped his companion's claw-like hand with a fervor worthy of being bestowed on a better man.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS ENEMIES ON THE TRAIL.

Ned Nevins walked back to the hotel with his brain in a whirl. In the first place, the twenty-dollar bill which he fondly fingered as it lay in his pocket, provided a stop-gap between want and what he hardly dared to consider, and that was, a refusal on the part of the Boy Inventors to have anything to do with his cherished plans.

In the second place, his encounter with Vaughn Kessler was a dubious source of satisfaction to him. From one point of view it had, of course, its pleasing side, but somehow, Ned could not free himself of an uneasy feeling that in some way the news of his whereabouts would get back to Millville. In what a devious way this was to happen he had, of course, no conception, and it was just as well for his peace of mind that he had not.

He arrived at the hotel a little time before supper, and having cleaned himself up as well as possible, and carefully brushed his hair and his garments, he descended to the porch and sank down into the most comfortable chair he could find, one commanding a good view of the street.

A boy came along with papers, and feeling that with his twenty-dollar bill snugly tucked in his pocket he could afford to indulge in a few luxuries, Ned bought two papers, one a local sheet, the other a Boston daily. He looked through the latter first and as his eye traveled down the columns it was caught by the Personal Column.

In this section of the paper were published notices to missing relatives and so forth. The type used was large and heavy and calculated to catch the eye.

What was Ned's astonishment to suddenly spy his own name at the head of a notice two or three paragraphs from the top of the list. He stared at it in some wonder for a minute before he read the notice itself.

"Why, who can be advertising for me?" he thought, and with the thought came an uncomfortable sensation at the recollection of the legal processes with which his cousin

had threatened him.

“I’ll read the notice, that’s the best way of solving the puzzle,” reflected the boy. Casting his eye over the paragraph, he read as follows:

“Ned Nevins: It will be to your advantage to communicate at once with your cousin at Millville, N.Y. Big opportunity.—H. Nevins.”

“That’s Hank! what sort of a trick is he up to now?” wondered Ned. “To ‘my advantage,’” he musingly went on. “I’d like to know what there is to ‘my advantage’ that Hank would be likely to take the trouble and expense to advertise about. ‘Big opportunity’—yes, a ‘big opportunity’ to get his hands on those papers. The idea of his thinking that I’d be softy enough to answer such an ‘ad’! No, indeed, you’ll never locate me in that way. I’m glad I asked Mr. Kessler to say nothing about having seen me. Hank is working harder than I thought possible for him to locate me, but he won’t do it if I can help it.”

Which shows that Ned, like most of the rest of us, placed undue confidence in his own ability to avoid unpleasantness. We already know how Fate was at work to over-reach him, playing with what appeared to be malignant favoritism, into the hands of those who wished him harm.

He was roused from his reverie by the sound of a quick step behind him, and then a hand was placed none too gently on his shoulder.

“It’s that fresh kid again!” exclaimed a grating, unpleasant voice. “Get up out of that chair instantly—do you hear me?”

“It’s Sam Hinkley!” exclaimed Ned to himself, without, however, looking around. Aloud he demanded:

“Well, what do you want?”

“That chair.”

“Unfortunately it is, as you see, occupied.”

“I wish it at once!”

“You do?”

“Yes!”

“You have a cool way of asking for it. Suppose I don’t give it to you?”

“You’ll be made to!”

“Who’ll make me?”

“I will, I guess. You don’t know who I am?”

“Oh, yes, I do. Your name is Sam Hinkley. I had a little argument with you this morning in which you came out second best, I fancy.”

“I’ll teach you a lesson, you tramp. Are you going to get up?”

“When the supper bell rings, I mean to.”

“Not till then?”

“No thanks, I’m very comfortable where I am.”

“That’s my chair.”

“Indeed, I thought it was one of those placed out here for the benefit of the guests.”

“So it is.”

“Well, I happen to be one.”

This answer took the blustering Sam rather aback. He thought that Ned had sought a chance to rest himself at the expense of the hotel’s hospitality. But it suited his purpose to appear incredulous.

“They don’t take in vagabonds here.”

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Ned was about to leap to his feet when he was spared that trouble by the chair being yanked from under him, and he fell sprawling on the floor of the porch.

“Haw! haw! haw!” bawled Sam, in high good humor at seeing Ned in such an undignified position.

“Ho! ho! ho!” echoed half a dozen of Sam’s cronies, who had been passing with him when he had spied Ned, to

whom Sam had taken an instinctive dislike. The “gang” had been invited by Sam to see the “fun.” If it had not been on the porch of his father’s hotel that Sam encountered Ned, he would have hesitated to try issues with him, for his experience of the morning had shown him that Ned, slender and rather delicate-looking as he was, was a foeman by no means to be despised. But on home grounds he felt safe.

He was rather taken aback, therefore, when Ned scrambled to his feet and advanced toward him instead of retreating, as the bully had expected Ned would do. There was a fire akindle in Ned’s eyes that Sam by no means liked, for he was at heart a coward, although accustomed to lording it over other boys of his own age not a little.

But with the eyes of his cronies fixed upon him expectantly, he felt that he could not retreat.

“What do you want?” he asked, in a voice that he tried to make belligerent, but which, somehow, did not hold quite the warlike note he would have liked.

“I want to give you something you need badly,” said Ned, without raising his voice, but there still glowed that same dangerous light in his eyes.

“Are you ready?”

“Rer-ready for what?” demanded Sam, in vain trying to look unimpressed by this quiet, business-like lad with the steady voice.

“For what I fancy is to be your first lesson in manners.”

CHAPTER VII. NED MAKES AN ENEMY.

A wavering look of indecision crept into Sam Hinkley's pug-nosed countenance. He would have liked to have the last few moments over again. He felt that he would have acted differently. But he tried to brazen it out.

"You strolling vagabond from goodness knows where, take that!"

It was a vicious blow, with plenty of force behind it, for Sam, although a bully and not possessed of an overabundance of courage, was still wiry and well muscled. But to his surprise his blow did not land. It should have collided with Ned's chin, but when its force was expended, Ned was not there.

He had stepped neatly aside and allowed Sam to launch his thunderbolt harmlessly. Sam's friends, grouped beneath the veranda on the sidewalk, closed into a compact little crowd. Plainly Sam was not going to carry all before him as had been his habit hitherto. His cronies saw this at once and some of them inwardly rejoiced.

The office of the little hotel was deserted, and nobody interfered. Sam gathered himself together to renew the combat. His brow grew black. Ned stood waiting. He made no attempt to defend himself. He merely eyed Sam Hinkley with a look of contempt that maddened that pugnacious bully.

Sam eyed his opponent viciously.

"Well?" queried Ned.

"Thought you were going to fight!" roared Sam.

"As I told you before, I'm not a fighter."

Sam rashly interpreted this as being a sign of weakness. He rushed in once more, swinging his big fists with more vigor than science. Once more Will-o'-the-Wisp Ned was not where he ought to have been, and Sam, carried off his feet by the vigor of his unopposed onslaught, collided with

a chair, tripped, and fell headlong on the floor to the porch.

This time the laugh that went up was not at Ned's expense. The boy stood in the same quiet attitude while Sam, his face crimson with anger and mortification, gathered himself up.

"This ain't fighting!" he bellowed angrily.

"You can call it anything you like—an acrobatic performance if you wish," rejoined Ned, without raising his voice or changing his position.

Now there is nothing more irritating than to lose your temper and to make an exhibition of yourself, while the one your rage is directed at stands as steady and unmoved as a rock, hardly deigning to reply to either threats or onslaughts.

Sam was almost beside himself with rage as, with blazing eyes, he made another dash at Ned. This time Ned did not step aside. He ducked under Sam's terrific left, and coming up, struck the bully a blow in the ribs that caused that worthy to emit a sound resembling:

"Oof!"

Ned took advantage of the momentary pause in hostilities to speak.

"Look here, Hinkley," said he. "I'm not a ruffian, and I don't like fighting. We'll call this off right here and now, if you say so. I'm willing—what do you say?"

"That I'm going to give you the licking of your life!" roared out the enraged Sam.

Again he rushed in, his arms working like twin piston rods. This time Ned did not avoid the other's rush. There was a rapid exchange of blows, and then suddenly—so suddenly that nobody saw just how it had happened, Sam Hinkley's head was jerked back.

Whack! Ned had taken advantage of a fraction of a second when the other was off his guard and landed a stinging blow full on Sam's pug nose. With a roar of anger Sam rushed in to retaliate. This time Ned was not quite quick enough. He stepped sideways to avoid the other's

onrush, but his foot slipped, and before he could recover his balance a heavy blow from Sam's ponderous fist sent him spinning across the porch.

Sam's adherents in the crowd watching the two lads set up a shout of delight. A broad grin overspread Sam's face.

"Guess that finishes the lesson," he jeered.

"On the contrary it's only just begun," retaliated Ned, and before Sam knew just what had happened, two smart blows had rattled against his ribs, the force of them making his teeth chatter as if with the cold.

But Sam speedily recovered himself, and for the next few minutes it was give and take, with the odds rather against Ned, who was lighter of build than the bully, and who was constantly forced back by the latter's rushes. Sam began to think it was all over.

"Well, Mr. Manners' Teacher, how about you now?" he sneered tauntingly.

Ned did not reply, but he watched Sam like a cat. He saw that the bully was beginning to wear out under the fast work of the last few minutes. His chest was heaving and his breath came pantingly. He guessed that Sam would have been glad to have called "quits" then and there.

But while Ned might have been willing enough not to fight at the beginning of the battle, his blood was up now, and he was determined to see the thing through. He despised fighting as being ruffianly and unnecessary, but, in a case like the present, he felt that if he allowed Sam Hinkley to walk over him, the latter would make it next to impossible for him to remain in Nestorville.

He avoided another of Sam's bull-like rushes with an agile step backward. As Sam's blow missed, Ned could hear him give a loud grunt, a sound that told he was tiring.

"I'm wearing him down," thought Ned, and watched carefully for an opening that might afford him a chance of terminating the battle.

Sam "rushed" Ned again. This time he, too, appeared to be desirous of ending the fight by a blow that would take all the fight out of his lightly built opponent. But his blow

landed on thin air.

Ned's opportunity had come. His fist shot out like a streak of lightning. It struck Sam under the chin, lifting him off his feet. He toppled and fell backward, landing among the chairs with a crash that sounded like a cook-stove falling downstairs.

"That settles him!" cried some of the crowd of boys that had gathered, and "settle" Sam it did, in more senses than one, for, aroused by the crash of his fall, the bully's father issued from the hotel and seizing his offspring by the scruff of the neck, angrily bade him get inside.



"It wasn't altogether his fault", explained Ned.—Page 37

“It wasn’t altogether his fault,” explained Ned. “I had his chair, you see, and—”

“That’ll do, young feller,” said the elder Hinkley brusquely, “that’s not the first time it’s happened. Sam had a licking coming to him and he got it. I ain’t got nothing to say, ’cepting that supper’s ready when you are.”

And in this eventful manner ended Ned’s first day in Nestorville. It had surely been an eventful one, thought the boy, as he reviewed the various experiences of the last twelve hours before turning into bed.

He was just about to turn out the light when his attention was attracted to the door-sill. Something white was being shoved under the door into the room. It was a folded bit of paper.

Ned sprang forward and picked it up. It was, as he had guessed, a note. He opened it, and as he perused its contents, a smile of good-natured contempt came over his face. This is what he read:

“You think you are smart, but you ain’t through with me yet. I’ll fix you and when I do I’ll fix you good. S. Hinkley.”

“Too bad,” said Ned to himself, as he finished reading. “I’ve not so many friends that I want to make any enemies. But after all, the quarrel was not of my making and I don’t intend to allow Sam Hinkley’s threats to worry me.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLANS ACCEPTED.

Ned presented himself at High Towers betimes the next morning. He found Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson awaiting him at the workshop. Mr. Chadwick was in New York attending to some business connected with his interests. Mr. Jesson was in Boston delivering a series of biological lectures, so that the boys had the place to themselves.

The eagerness of Ned to know the verdict of the two Boy Inventors must have shown itself very plainly on his face, for almost as soon as he had been introduced to Tom Jesson, Jack hastened to relieve the lad's anxiety.

"I suppose you want to know if it's good news or bad?" asked Jack.

"I've hardly slept all night thinking of it."

"Then I have something to tell you that you will be glad to hear. We will help you manufacture the craft your uncle designed and—"

Ned's glad outburst of thanks checked him for a moment, but Jack went on to explain that he and his cousin would take only one-quarter interest in the craft, leaving the remainder free and clear to Ned. The cost of manufacturing would be borne by the Boy Inventors and the patents, when the machine was completed, would rest in Ned's name.

"Is that satisfactory?" asked Jack when he had finished.

"Satisfactory!" burst out Ned. "It's generous—too generous!"

"Not at all. So far as money is concerned, when you know more about us, you will know that Tom and I have plenty, most of it realized from our inventions."

"I know but—"

"Hold on a minute. Here we are, just dying for a chance to get to work on something really new and neither of us

with brains enough to think up anything. You come along with just what we are looking for and we feel more like thanking you than considering we are doing anything wonderful.”

“Besides,” added Tom, “even one-quarter interest in the electric hydroaeroplane ought to yield a handsome profit.”

“If, and it’s a big ‘If,’” said Ned with a laugh, “we can get it to work. If not—”

“We wouldn’t tackle it if we didn’t think it was practicable,” said Jack decisively. “So that ends that. Now come along, Ned, and be initiated into the mysteries of the firm, for you know, you are now a working partner.”

“Say, fellows!” burst out Ned enthusiastically. “I don’t know how to thank you—”

“That’s all right. You help us out on building the machine and that will be thanks enough. When we’ve got it working, we’ll shine in your reflected glory and that will be satisfaction enough for us.”

The next hour was one of unmixed delight for Ned, interested, nay wrapped up in mechanics as he was. He had never seen a workshop fitted up on such a scale as that of Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson,—a private workshop, that is. Lathes and all sorts of machinery of the latest pattern were driven by a powerful gasolene engine. Facilities were at hand for making the parts of many of the boys’ devices. Three skilled machinists were also employed, and summoning them about him, Jack Chadwick briefly outlined to the interested men the big task they were about to undertake.

He was in the midst of his explanations, when Sam Hinkley strolled in. Jack looked at him sharply. One of his eyes was swollen and slightly discolored. He glared at Ned savagely and the look was not lost on Jack Chadwick.

As soon as he had an opportunity, Sam drew Jack aside and demanded, in an indignant and aggrieved voice, to know if Ned Nevins was to work in the shop.

“Yes, and on a partnership basis, too,” said Jack enthusiastically. “He has been the means of introducing us

to a wonderful invention. We are going to start in on the work of its construction right away.”

Sam did not appear interested in this information except that a jealous look crept into his eyes.

“I think you ought to know that he’s nothing but a rowdy,” he said. “I’ll bet any invention he’s been telling you about is a fake.”

“The plans look good to us,” responded Jack, “and we are going to risk it. What have you got against the boy, anyhow?”

“He’s a rowdy,” repeated Sam. “He blacked my eye last night.”

Jack, who had a pretty good insight into Sam’s character, could not repress a smile.

“I thought you were invincible, Sam.”

“He didn’t fight fair. He forced me into a row,” grumbled Sam. “I could have licked him all right if—”

“What had you been doing, Sam?”

“Nothing. He took my chair away and when I wanted it back he said I’d have to fight for it and—”

“And you did,” commented Jack with a dry smile. “Well, Sam, my advice is to forget it. If you think you’ve been injured I’m sorry, but Ned Nevins appears to me to be an inoffensive sort of a lad, quiet and unassuming.”

“Oh, he just puts on that to fool you,” muttered Sam.

At this juncture, Jack was called away by one of the machinists and Sam, with a very bad grace, turned to some unfinished work at his lathe. He was still engaged at this when Ned happened to pass by.

“I got your note last night, Hinkley,” he said. “Why didn’t you give it to me in person instead of slipping it under the door?”

Sam made a sound resembling “G-r-r-r-r-r” and went on with what he was doing.

“As I suppose you know,” resumed Ned, “we shall see a

good deal of each other in the future. Why can't we be friends?"

Sam's face contorted with rage as he dropped the tool he had been using and faced round on Ned.

"Because I hate you, that's why. You're nothing but an interloper and a faker and Jack Chadwick will find it out before very long."

"I'm sorry you think that, Sam."

"Why?" asked Sam, surprised at the other's calm, even tone. His outburst appeared to have no effect whatever upon the lad he had desired to impress with his enmity.

"Because I am afraid you are going to be disappointed," and with these words Ned passed on.

The next few weeks were busy ones about the workshop of the Boy Inventors, but gradually, almost imperceptibly, the electric hydroaeroplane began to take shape. The enthusiasm of the boys infected the workmen and even Sam Hinkley appeared to work with more than usual fervor.

Briefly described, the hydroaeroplane portion of the craft consisted of two twin boats, each about forty feet in length and constructed of a special aluminum alloy jointed together by strong vanadium connections. Between the pair of boats, which will be more fully described later, the storage tanks, which were the novel feature of the Jephtha Nevins craft, were placed.

In the center of each of the boats was a small raised cabin, the cabins being connected by a hollow passageway. At either end of the craft the wings, of biplane pattern, were attached. The wing spread was ninety-five feet which, with the craft's electric engines of enormous power, gave the giant air-craft a lifting capacity of two thousand pounds.

Above the storage batteries, and between the twin "boats," were the motors, each coupled to two sets of propellers placed fore and aft on either end of the craft and outside of the wings. A light, but strong, framework supported the outer bearings of the propellers and served

to give them sufficient projection to insure balance. The forward set of propellers were so "pitched" as to pull the craft through the air, while the after ones furnished a driving impulse.

One of the most important features of the invention was the device by which electricity was made while she was in flight or skimming over the water. This was a generator of considerable power geared to the shafts of the propellers. As the craft drove along, the storage batteries were constantly recharged by this device. For the initial, or starting "charge" the batteries were furnished with "juice" by a small compressed air-driven generator which could also be used in case of accident to the automatically driven device. Thus the necessity of gasoline was done away with and the Nevins craft was equipped, so far as power was concerned, to cross the Atlantic Ocean. But, of course, no such project entered into the minds of her young constructors.

The planes themselves were covered with sheets of aluminum attached to frames of radiolite, a metal as light as aluminum and of great tensile strength. Landing wheels, supported by powerful shock absorbers, provided for alighting, and special balancing devices, attached to the bow and to the stern of the novel craft, minimized the danger of coming to earth with too great a shock to the weighty fabric.

On the top of each cabin was a powerful search-light, and each was fitted out with two bunks and other conveniences as in the stateroom of an ocean liner. The pilot house was mounted above the covered passage, or tube, already referred to, which connected the two parts of the craft. It contained a wheel not unlike that of an ocean liner and levers to control the balancing wings and the pitch of the planes.

As for the engine-controls, the motor being electrically driven, the machinery to control it was wonderfully simple. An apparatus not unlike a switchboard, as may be seen in any powerhouse, was mounted within convenient reach of the helmsman. The light controls also were affixed to this board. Mastery of the huge craft was within instant power

of the driver. A signaling system to each cabin, in case of emergency, was another feature added to the general completeness of the equipment.

Such is a brief description of the Nevins electric hydroaeroplane, a craft in which the Boy Inventors were destined to meet as strange adventures as had ever fallen to their lot.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARRIVAL OF TROUBLE.

It would be tedious to dwell upon the details of the construction of the craft which the boys, by unanimous vote, had decided to call the Electric Monarch. The work went steadily on and Prof. Chadwick, who had returned soon after the boys started work, rendered them valuable assistance. The previous experience with aerial craft, which the Boy Inventors had had, made the work progress far more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case, although the plans and drawings left by Jephtha Nevins were so detailed and exact that they encountered but few very knotty problems.

One day, not very long before the Electric Monarch, which had been finished in scarlet and silver, was ready for her trial trip, two strangers appeared at the Hinkley House. One was a broad-shouldered, clumsy-looking young man with a shock of black hair and carelessly brushed clothes, the other a tall, cadaverous-looking person of about the same age with shifty, rat-like eyes and a general air of furtive watchfulness.

Some time before this event, Ned, as an active partner in the firm of the Boy Inventors, had taken up his residence at High Towers. There were two reasons for this. One was that it was far more convenient to the work which was being rushed to completion, the other that as the Electric Monarch neared the day for her trial trip, Ned grew more and more nervous about leaving the craft unwatched.

Accordingly, he had a small cot fixed up in the corner of the workshop where he slept at night. Ned himself would have been at a loss to account for this nervousness; nevertheless he felt a vague mistrust. It was not that he feared any harm Sam Hinkley might do to the craft, for although there was no love lost toward Ned on Sam's part, Ned was pretty sure that the Hinkley boy would not dare take active reprisals. But yet he felt that it was well to observe caution.

Sam came and went to his work as usual, and as he, as

well as the other workmen, had given their words not to let anything leak out about the Electric Monarch till she was ready for a flight, no uneasiness was felt about this circumstance.

As a matter of fact, even if it had been known that a big air craft was being constructed at High Towers, it would not have excited much comment in the village. The inhabitants of Nestorville had grown too used to hearing about strange inventions being built at the big house on the hill to feel any undue curiosity about them. And yet, Ned vaguely felt that danger threatened.

The two strangers gave out at the Hinkley House that they were traveling for a drug firm. They made themselves friendly with the proprietor who, after being presented with cigars, voted them two "good fellows." Perhaps he might have thought them "inquisitive fellows," too, if soon after his new guests' arrival, when he had been summoned to answer a long-distance telephone, he had noticed one of them slip up to the register, open it and search hurriedly for a name.

"It's there all right," whispered the one who had examined the book as he slipped out from behind the desk again. "'Ned Nevins—Boston.' I suppose he registered from there because he didn't want to run any chances of being asked questions about Millville."

"Shouldn't wonder, Miles," was the rejoinder of Hank Nevins, "but he didn't reckon that we was just as slick as he is."

The two "drug drummers" were Hank and his unsavory lawyer friend, Miles Sharkey. The two had been delayed in their pursuit of Ned by a very important handicap, namely, lack of funds. But on Hank having written to Mr. Mellville that they were on the track of the plans and had a good chance of securing them, the money for their expenses, (much to the surprise of both of them,) had been forwarded. They then lost no time in heading for Nestorville and laying plans for the recovery of the papers of the dead Jephtha Nevins.

When Landlord Hinkley came out of the telephone-

booth, one of his new guests stepped up to him.

“Recollect a young chap named Nevins?” he asked. It may be said here that Hank and Miles had registered under assumed names.

“Nevins?” repeated the landlord. “Nevins? Well, I should just say I did.”

“Stop here long?” asked Miles insinuatingly.

“Quite a few days till he went to live with them Chadwick boys up on the hill yonder.”

Hank and Miles exchanged significant glances. They were on the trail indeed now.

“Um-er, the Chadwick boys,” began Miles at a venture. “Chums of his, eh?”

“Yes, I guess so, in a manner of speaking. My son Sam works for ’em, too. He’s a bright lad, is Sam. Why, sir, I tell you around a bit of machinery that boy’s a marvel. Only last week my wife’s sewing machine went out of whack and gosh ter mighty ef that boy Sam didn’t have it all fixed up hunky dory in two shakes of a duck’s tail. Nuther time—”

There is no knowing how long Mr. Hinkley might have gone on extolling his son’s virtues had it not been for the fact that Miles and Hank were far too impatient to listen to a lengthy catalogue of Sam’s bright doings.

“Yes, yes,” rejoined Miles. “I’ve no doubt your son is a mighty bright boy, Mr. Hinkley.”

“Gets it from his father,” put in Hank with a clumsy attempt at a compliment.

Crude as the attempt at flattery was, Landlord Hinkley swallowed it whole. He smirked his acknowledgments.

“Thank you, Mr. Avery,” this was the name Hank had registered under. “Very handsome of you, I’m sure. Won’t you gentlemen hev a cigar?”

Both the gentlemen accepted with thanks, and while they puffed at Landlord Hinkley’s aromatic weeds, they pursued further the subject that was closest to their hearts.

“Fine cigars, these, Mr. Hinkley,” commented Miles, with a wink at Hank to show that the remark was ironical.

“Oh, yes indeed,” responded the landlord, “Flor de Telphono, we call ’em. Telephone cigars, you know.”

“Telephone cigars, that’s an odd name,” said Hank, with a wry face over his weed. Hank was one of those hollow-chested, pale-faced youths who think it smart to smoke but do so only with a great effort of will power.

“Yep, they calls ’em that, the boys says, because you can smoke ’em here and smell ’em in Boston.”

This choice witticism having being properly laughed at, Miles and Hank went further on their “fishing expedition.”

“These Chadwick boys now,” pursued Hank, “friends of young Nevins likely?”

“Wa’al, I dunno. I reckon he’s working for ’em on some sort of contraption. You know these Chadwick boys is right smart lads on such doodads. The Boy Inventors, they call ’em. Reckon maybe you’ve heard on ’em.”

“No, I don’t know that I have,” rejoined Miles. “So young Nevins is working for them, eh?”

“Er-huh. Has bin fer quite a spell.”

“Sort of mechanic, I suppose?”

“Wa’al, thar’ you got me,” admitted Mr. Hinkley. “I hearn’,” he went on, sinking his voice and growing confidential, “that them boys is working on some sort of er flyin’ machine er some sech foolishness.”

Miles and Hank flashed a glance of comprehension between them. They had reached their goal, then.

CHAPTER X.

HEINY PUMPERNICK DILL.

“Hey, you black feller, dis be der place py vere der Poy Inventors vork, I don’t dink?”

Old Jupe, the Chadwicks’ colored factotum, paused on his way from the village with a big basket and looked his questioner over from head to foot. It was an odd figure that he inspected. He found himself facing a blond-haired youth of about eighteen with apple-red cheeks and bright, twinkling blue eyes.

Perched on the top of the youth’s tow-colored head was a small derby rakishly tilted to one side. A green bob-tailed coat—it had probably once been black—was carefully buttoned over a striped blue and white vest. The turned up ends of his baggy trousers were so far from the tops of his low, yellow shoes that they showed about two inches of startling red socks.

“Who you done calling black feller?” demanded Jupe, with justifiable indignation. “Ah’m a genelman ob color ah am, and I wants that mistinctly undercunstumbled.”

“Vell, dond go py geddin’ a mads, Mister Gentlemans vot vos colored,” said the tow-headed youth in a conciliatory tone. “My name vos Heiny Bumperrick Dill.”

For answer Jupe threw back his woolly head and burst into a roar of laughter that showed two rows of white, gleaming teeth between his thick red lips.

“Ho! Ho! Ho!—Ha! Ha! Ha!” he exploded. “Oh! gollyupmtions! ef dat ain’t mostest funniest ting I eber heard.”

The tow-headed youth gazed at the negro’s mirth with an expression that was at first amazed and then grew rapidly indignant.

“Vos ist los midt you?” he demanded wrathfully.

“Loose? Der ain’t nutting loose wid me, am dere?”

demanded Jupe, fingering his waist band and in turn looking surprised.

“I saidt idt ‘Vos ist los!’” yelled the German boy. “Vot is idt der madder midt you anyvay?”

“Oh, dat name! Golly to goodness, chile! Dat name suttinly got on mah risibles. Heiny Pump it quick—oh! ha! ha! ha!” and throwing back his head, old Jupe went off into another spasm of mirth.

“I saidt idt Bumpernick—”

“Was dat you say. Bumper—”

“Nodt. Bumper-Bumper. P-U-M-P-ER—Bumper!”

Jupe scratched his woolly thatch. This was getting too much for him.

“P-U-M-P-E-R spells Pumper, chile,” he said.

“Dots vot I saidt idt, aind’t it? Bumper—Bumbernick. Dot’s my name, aind’t idt?”

“Say, lookah hyah, Massa Bumper, is you all crazy or am I?” demanded Jupe.

“Vos dot you say? I am grazy?” bellowed Heiny Pumpernick. He dropped a little wickerwork satchel he carried and doubled up his fists.

“I been adtletic feller alretty yet,” he shouted. “You bed my life you no comes making der funs by me, py chiminy, black feller!”

“Was dat? Who yo’ all calls black fellers—you—you—yaller-headed Dutchman,” ejaculated Jupe, thoroughly angry in his turn.

Now there is nothing on earth better calculated to arouse a German’s ire than to call him a Dutchman, and the same is the case when a negro is addressed as a “black fellow” or a “nigger.” Both the German youth and old Jupe were now fighting mad.

“I calls idt to you, black fellers,” sputtered out young Dill, doubling up his plump fists. “I’m an adtletic feller, I pet you mein lifes. You calls me Mister Dill oder I pust you

vun py der nose.”

“Ho! ho! ef you all do dat you be a dill in er pickle, ho! ho!”

“Who is dot vot you calls a bickle? By chiminy, nigger, look idt out midt yourself!”

Without more words the redoubtable Heiny Pumpernick Dill let fly with his fists at Jupe who, for his part, was ready enough to begin hostilities. Now it so happened that this Homeric battle took place on the banks of the large lake mentioned in other volumes of this series. It was a body of water used for experimenting with models of craft of various kinds and had been the scene of the testing out of the diving torpedo boat, as readers of the volume dealing with that invention will recollect.

The fist of the exasperated German youth, as it leaped out, landed on a spot on Jupe’s anatomy which, while it was not calculated to do him much injury, still gave him plenty to think about.

“Woof! Wha’ fo’ yo’ alls hit me in der stomick?” indignantly roared out Jupe. Without more ado he dropped the basket he had been burdened with and the lid burst open. Instantly the ground was covered with a score of lively hard-shell crabs, but in the heat of their anger neither of the combatants noticed this.

Jupe’s retaliation for the German youth’s blow was vigorous.

“Gollyumptions! Ah makes yo’ all call me a genelman ob color befo’ ah kicks yo’n off’n these hayar groun’s,” he cried indignantly.

The next minute it was Mr. Dill’s turn to cry “Oof!”

But he quickly recovered and then, closing in, the two pugilistic heroes engaged in a tussle which speedily brought them in a rolling, kicking, struggling heap to the ground. Over and over they rolled on the banks of the lake and their struggles speedily brought them among some of the escaped crabs. These lost no time in dealing with the combatants. One fastened itself into young Dill’s long yellow hair while another seized Jupe by the back of the

neck. Two piercing yells went up simultaneously.

“Oh! Ouch! Help! De debbil am got hold ob me by de neck!” roared out Jupe.

“Leggo mein hairs, py chiminy!” screeched the German boy. “Himmel! Donner! Blitzen!”

Over and over they rolled, with the crabs holding fast with a tenacious grip. Their struggles quickly brought them to the bank of the lake. What with anger, and what with pain, they were past noticing anything and just as Jack and Tom, who had been attracted by the uproar, came running down the gravel walk to ascertain its cause, a loud splash and a despairing yell announced the fact that the two doughty heroes had plunged into an element calculated to cool their wrath.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONVERTIBLE SAUSAGE MACHINE.

Jack and Tom arrived at the brink of the lake just as the two combatants, sputtering and splashing like a pair of grampuses, arose to the surface.

“It’s Jupe!” cried Jack, “but how in the name of time?”

“But who is the other fellow?” shouted Tom.

“Never mind that now. Jupe can’t swim and the water is deep there. We’ve got to get him out.”

The boys speedily stripped off their coats and kicked off their shoes preparatory to plunging to the rescue, but before they could do this, young Dill, who was a good swimmer, had seized Jupe by the back of the neck and dragged him, half drowned, to the shore. Jupe, dripping with water and mud, clambered out little the worse, except in appearance, for his adventure.

He was followed by young Dill, who was a sorry-looking object indeed. The water had caused the gaudy dye of his vest to run in great streaks down his light-colored pants. His hat, which had stuck to his head throughout the struggle, was sending streams of green water down over his rubicund face, while round his feet, as he emerged from the lake and stood before the boys, was a crimson puddle. The dye on young Dill’s socks was certainly not of the “fast” variety, except in color.

At the sight of the two extraordinary figures Jack and Tom could hardly refrain from bursting into roars of laughter. But they retained their gravity and looked sternly at Jupe.

“Perhaps you will explain what this means?” began Jack.

“Ah-ah-ah-ah,” sputtered Jupe, opening and shutting his mouth like a fish newly removed from the water.

“Well, we are waiting,” said Jack, while Tom turned away, suddenly overcome by a mysterious fit of coughing.

“Vait idt a minutes undt I vill explanation idt to you,” volunteered young Dill. “Dis is der vay idt vosn’t. I vos comin’ py der house to see der Poy Inventors undt I asked idt ob dis black—”

Jupe suddenly came to life. Shaking his woolly head like a poodle he shouted out:

“Don’ you alls done go fer ter call me no black feller,” he shouted.

“You no call idt to me Dutchman, I no call idt to you black fellers, aber no mans call me Dutchman.”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute! What’s all this about?” demanded Jack. “How are we to understand anything with all this jabber? You there, Mister—”

“Dill is mein name, sir,” said the young German with a dignity which assorted oddly with his weird appearance.

“Well, Mr. Dill, you appear to be in a pickle,” said Jack with a grin he could not repress. “Will you explain to me what was the cause of all this?”

“Ah-ah-ah,” began Jupe again, but Jack shook his head at him and the voluble young Dill told the story of the causes leading to the combat.

“Well, you both appear to have been well punished,” said Jack when he concluded, “and now perhaps you will tell me what you wanted to see us about.”

“Vot I wanted to see you abodt ain’d it?” asked the German boy.

“Yes.”

“I wanted to see idt der Poy Inventors alretty.”

“Well, you see them.” Young Dill’s face showed his astonishment, but he wisely repressed any comment. “What can we do for you?”

“You can do me for a fine inventions vot I haf,” responded the German youth. “I used to vurk midt a delicatessens pefore I pefome an inventors. I haf midt me in dis liddle satchel a motel of mein inventions.”

“Well, what is it? What is the nature of it?” demanded Jack.

“Idt iss a new kindt of sissage machine,” explained the proud youth, forgetting all about his recent immersion in the glow of the inventor’s enthusiasm, “chust py touching a lefer idt vill make bolognas, frankfurters, liebervurst, or any oder kindt of sissage dot is alretty. Vot you dink of him?”

“Huh!” grunted Jupe aside, “ah’s seed lots ob crazy inventors sense ah wourk hyah, but dis am de fustest sausage machine inventor dot I ebber clapped mah ole eyes on.” He stared at young Dill as if he had been a natural curiosity of some sort.

Jack bit his lip hard to keep from laughing. As for Tom, he exploded into a roar of laughter which he could not restrain. Young Dill looked bewildered.

“I seel idt to you der Dill Convertible Sausage Machine for fif dousandt tollars!” he exclaimed with the air of a person making an unheard-of offer.

“I am sorry, Mr. Dill,” said Jack, with exemplary gravity, “but we couldn’t handle your invention if you made a much cheaper price on it. However, you can no doubt dispose of it elsewhere.”

“Ugh! Yo’ alls better try er butcher shop, Dutchy,” muttered Jupe, “an’ ef dey don’ want it dere take it to a crazy house; maybe they kin use it and yo’ alls, too.”

“Budt don’d you tink idt iss a goodt inventions?” persisted young Dill.

“Excellent! Fine!” declared Jack, with a side wink at Tom. “But we couldn’t handle it at all. And now, Mr. Dill, we’ll have to say good morning. We are very busy. I’m sorry for what happened, but really you know you brought it partly on yourself.”

“Himmel! oder you hadt bought idt my convertible sissage machine I vould nodt haf cared if I hadt been drowned all over,” declared young Dill.

With a melancholy face he gathered up his little wicker

satchel. The boys were turning away when a sudden idea entered the young German's head. His face became irradiated with a ray of hope.

"I haf idt here a motel of der convertible sissage machine," he said, "aber you dakes me py der house I show you how to make bolognas, frankfurters, lieber—"

"It wouldn't be of the least use, Mr. Dill, you'd only be wasting your time," said Jack. "Excuse us now, please, we must hurry off."

The young German was left standing alone on the gravel walk in the midst of his rubicund puddle. He looked after the retreating figures of the two boys and Jupe with a melancholy countenance. But he was gratified none the less to observe that Jupe appeared to be getting what is commonly known as a "calling down."

"So dey don'd vant idt der convertible sissage machines," he muttered. "Vell dey don'd know dot dey let a fortune slip through dere fingers der same as sissage slip through my machine, ain'd idt."

His eyes fixed themselves on Jupe's humbled figure.

"Chust der same," he muttered in a low tone, "midt vun handt I can lick you—nigger!"

Having done this justice to his outraged feelings, young Dill wrung the water out of his coat-tails and set out on the road to Nestorville. He thought that he had seen the last of High Towers. Had he but known it he was destined to do the boys a singular service ere long, but as he trudged along singing "Hi-lee! hi-lo!" to himself in a melancholy voice he was totally unaware of this.

CHAPTER XII.

HANK AND MILES MEET THEIR MATCH.

“Mr. Avery” and “Mr. Reynolds,” the names by which Hank Nevins and Miles Sharkey had chosen respectively to be known, were seated on the porch of the Hinkley House taking their ease with their feet elevated so as to afford a good view of the soles of their boots to any passers-by, when young Dill came down the street.

Having recovered from his first disappointment, the young German, who came of a persevering race, determined to remain in Nestorville for a time at any rate and try to see the Boy Inventors again, regarding the Convertible Sausage Machine, at a more auspicious time. He had a small sum of money saved up, quite sufficient for his needs, and he resolved to buy some new clothes at the first opportunity and then make a more imposing descent upon High Towers.

As he rightly argued, his appearance that morning had not been calculated to inspire confidence.

“Der great inventors, aber Eddy’s son, aber Macaroni, der inventor of der hairless telegraph, nefer fall py a pond midt a nigger,” he mused. “Maype dose poys dink I am a faker. Aber I don’d plame dem. I gedt idt me a new oudfit of clothes undt den call aroundt again. ‘No trouble to show goodts’ as de used to say idt ven I vos in pisiness.”

This train of thought brought him as far as the Hinkley House where our Teutonic friend bethought him that after his strenuous exertions of the morning some dinner would be the proper thing.

“Dis looks idt like a goodt quietd hotel, aindt idt?” he said to himself. “I makes idt a pest (guest) of meinselt here, py chiminy.”

By some mischievous chance the odd figure of Mr. Dill, rendered doubly striking since his immersion, caught the eye of Hank Nevins,—alias Mr. Avery,—as he sat discussing, with his chum Miles, the best means of carrying out their designs against Ned Nevins and his Electric

Monarch.

There was nothing that Hank liked better than to tease some one who looked as if he might prove an unresisting victim, and here was one ready to his hand, at least so he judged.

“Hello, Dutchy,” he remarked amiably, “been taking a bath with your clothes on?”

Young Dill faced round on him and looked him over from top to toe.

“Aber I dink idt a bath do you no harm, mein freindt, aindt idt,” he remarked blandly, “midt or midoudt clothes on.”

This was not exactly what Hank had expected, and a subdued chuckle from some hangers on about the hotel porch did not increase his good humor.

“It’s a good thing we didn’t cross on the same boat,” observed Hank. “If I’d seen you I’d never have landed.”

“So—” observed young Dill amiably, “veel dere vos no chance of your seeing me alretty.”

Hank winked at the loungers in order to show them that he was now prepared to have some fun with the queer-looking German youth.

“Is that so? How was that, Dutchy?” he asked with a grin.

“Pecos I come on a *passenger* boat,” rejoined young Dill with all the equanimity in the world.

A look of intense discomfiture spread over Hank’s face.

“The Dutchman’s too much for him,” he heard some one whisper. As might be expected this remark did not tend to smooth over Hank’s feelings toward the simple-looking young German. Instead he determined to launch some shaft of wit at him that would squash him flatter than a pancake. But so far all his attempts had proved boomerangs.

“I suppose you know all about sausages?” he asked.

Young Dill's eyes glittered. Here was a subject in which he was deeply interested.

"Oh ches!" he burst out eagerly, "sissages und—"

"Never mind that, Sauerkraut," sneered Hank. "What kind of meat makes the best bologna?"

Young Dill, who was smart enough in his way, saw that some joke was going to be had at his expense if he did not look out. The loungers leaned forward expectantly. Hank looked triumphant. At last he thought he had the "Dutchman" up a tree.

"You vant to know vot kindt of meat makes idt pest bolognas?" he asked innocently.

"That's what I said, Dutch," grinned Hank.

"You ought to know dot aber bedder dan me alretty," said young Dill gravely.

"Is that so, old Sauerkraut? How's that?"

"Pecos der pest bologna is made midt calf's headt, undt you vos veel supplidt mid dot," drawled out young Dill, and without waiting to hear the roar of laughter that went up at Hank's expense, he wandered into the office and registered. His signature was a peculiar one. This is how it read on the register:

"Herr Heiny Pumpernick Dill,—Inventor At Large (and Small)—N. Y."

After ascertaining what time dinner would be ready, Herr Dill went to his room and busied himself till the meal was served by tidying up as well as he could, and removing the effects of his immersion. In this he could not but admit that he was not very successful, and he resolved immediately after dinner to saunter out and see what he could find in the way of smart attire in the village.

"I vunder now if I couldt gedt idt some yellow gloves," mused young Dill to himself as he carefully unpacked the model of the sausage machine and placed it on the floor.

"An inventor midt yellow gloves,—undt a redt necktie would be some class as an inventor. Aber he would be as

stylish as Macaroni oder Eddy's son."

He fussed over his invention for a while to pass away the time till the dinner bell rang out its summons. It was an odd-looking contrivance. From a cylindrical steel box projected several hooked steel arms manipulated with springs in a way which no one but the inventor could by any possibility have mastered.

While young Dill was working on one of these arms, there came a sudden sharp snap and he jerked his arm quickly out of the way and upwards.

"Himmel!" he exclaimed, "dot machine makes idt a preddy goodt trap alretty. Dot lefer nearly caught it mein fingers. Maype if I can't sell idt as a sissage machine, I make idt a purglar trap outd of idt alretty—Hi-lee! dere goes der dinner bell! Dinner! I am coming on der ger-jump!"

CHAPTER XIII.

READY FOR FLIGHT.

“Well, fellows, the Electric Monarch is ready for her trial trip at last.”

Thus spoke Jack Chadwick the following day. The body of the great land and water craft, looking like a butterfly with its wings off, stood, resplendent in glittering paint and varnish, inside the big construction shed.

All that remained to be done to fit her for the air was to equip the framework with the wings which were made detachable. This had been a necessary modification of Jephtha Nevins' plans, as the shed in which the craft had been constructed was not wide enough to permit the wings being attached while the Electric Monarch was still under cover.

At first this had proved quite a problem, but with the aid of Professor Chadwick who, as has been said, had taken an active part in the work, the boys evolved a plan whereby the wings, (or planes,) had been made detachable and could be bolted or unbolted at pleasure. As the weight of each plane did not exceed fifty pounds, despite its broad spread, the work of putting on or taking off the wings was a comparatively easy one.

It was an interested group that stood in the shed and surveyed their completed work. The Electric Monarch, they knew, was without question the most unique craft of its kind that had ever been constructed. Perfect in every detail as the great craft was, the boys felt a thrill of pride run through them as they viewed their completed handiwork. Professor Chadwick had spared no expense in aiding the boys at their task and the result was as perfect a bit of mechanism as had ever been assembled. Outside the shed the great wings were ranged on special racks ready for attachment.

To fit the Electric Monarch for flight all that was required was the charging of her powerful storage batteries. The craft would then be ready for the crucial test

which would prove whether she was to live up to her name or be merely a mass of expensive junk fit only for the scrap-pile.

It was small wonder then, that with the boys' feeling of glad pride, there was mingled no little anxiety. They stood on the threshold of either a monumental triumph or an ignoble failure.

"Well, Ned," said Jack, clapping their slender young assistant on the shoulder, "there's your Electric Monarch as fit for flight as she ever will be."

Ned Nevins turned his large eyes gratefully upon the boy he had learned within the past weeks to love and respect.

"If she succeeds it will be owing to you, Jack, and you, Tom," he said happily; "as for Professor Chadwick, I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay."

"Nonsense, my lad," spoke the Professor, with a kindly smile, "win or lose, we have all learned much during the last few weeks. Ned, your uncle, had he lived, would have been one of the world's great inventive geniuses."

"I know it. I am sure of it," said Ned gratefully. "My poor uncle! This would have been a proud day for him if he had lived."

He resolutely fought back his momentary feeling of sadness, and in order to regain his composure helped Jack adjust a brace and tighten one or two bolts.

"An' you alls means ter tell me widout confabulation or fear ob controversial flabbergumbugism dat dis yar monstrositfex am er gwine ter fly er swim?" demanded Jupe, lapsing, as he always did under excitement, into a perfect spasm of word coining.

"We hope so, Jupe," rejoined Tom. "Why, are you aching for a ride?"

"Who, me?" and Jupe's eyes grew wide. "No, sah! Ah'm nuthin' but jes er tumble-bug so far as de desirousness ob cirperambulatin' de air am consarned."

"So you wouldn't care to go up, Jupe?" inquired Ned,

with a smile.

“No, sah! Wid emphaticness, ah says, N-O-No! Ef dat ting eber fall frum de eternal hebbins!—Laws-ee! What a confabulating smashup dere is agwine ter be aroun’ hyar.”

“But we don’t figure that it will fall, Jupe. At any rate we are going to fly out over the water and then the twin boats will keep us afloat whatever happens.”

“Wa’al, sah, Massah Jack, be dat as it may, I’d rabber be on der groun’ lookin’ up dan in der sky lookin’ down,” declared the old negro with great positiveness.

“Let us make a final trip of inspection,” suggested the Professor. The idea was hailed gladly. Led by Mr. Chadwick, the lads, laughing and chatting gaily, went through the cabins and the strong structure designed to support the Electric Monarch when in flight.

The staterooms were finished with glittering paint and everything was spick and span as a new pin. Leaving the first cabin they passed through the connecting tube into the other one. This having been minutely examined, even down to the electric stove with which it was provided, the professor led the way into what was, to the boys, the most interesting part of the craft.

This was the pilot house. It has been already described, so we shall not go into any details further than to say that every appliance was in place, the wiring perfect, and all in readiness for the pilot to take the wheel and guide the most wonderful craft of the age on her initial flight.

Running fore-and-aft the entire length of the Electric Monarch, was a narrow plank runway. This was so that any part of the craft might be reached with ease when she was under way. The runway extended out to the bearings of the propellers already mentioned, and it would be part of the duty of whoever was entrusted with the oiling to venture out occasionally within reach of the whirling blades and apply lubricants to the bearings. On the water this would be a comparatively simple matter. None of the boys was quite sure in his mind just how this duty would appear when the craft was many hundreds of feet above the earth.

However, they were not worrying about such details as this just then. There was but one thought uppermost in the minds of each of the eager young constructors of the Electric Monarch.

Would she live up to expectations?

Possibly Ned, who was new to aerial work, was more nervous than his companions over the thought of the trial trip. This was not surprising. It requires courage of a rare sort to attempt for the first time to climb the air in an absolutely untried craft. Yet this was the ordeal they had to face. Moreover, there was a strong possibility that a failure might result in death.

“Have you decided yet upon the course we will take on the trial trip?” Jack inquired of his father as they finished their inspection, a tour, by the way, on which Sam had not been invited, to his great chagrin.

“Yes; if all goes well we will fly straight for the ocean, provided it is calm. That will give us a fine opportunity to test out the hydroplane devices.”

“I feel sure enough of success to plan a voyage across the Atlantic,” declared Tom confidently.

“That would be a little bit premature, my boy,” said the Professor, with a smile.

“But provided the Electric Monarch is all we expect, wouldn’t it be feasible?”

“I see no reason why not,” responded Mr. Chadwick. “At any rate in the present state of aeronautics, if the dream of a flight across the ocean is to come true, it seems to me that the Electric Monarch will be the first to make the adventurous voyage.”

“Ned, you will be famous yet,” declared Jack. “I can see the name of Ned Nevins in the Hall of Fame.”

“Huh! Maybe you see it in de bottom ob de deep blue sea,” sniffed Jupe sceptically. The old negro had no love for air craft since his experiences in the electric storm in Yucatan.

While the foregoing scene had been transpiring at High

Towers, a far different one had been taking place at the Hinkley House. Having finished his dinner, a meal at which he caused much merriment by his odd antics and remarks, young Dill had sauntered out in search of new apparel. He had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes in finding some striking attire. From the stock of the village tailor he had selected a suit of green, red and black check, originally made for some amateur theatricals, a red waistcoat and a funny little blue hat with what he called a "rudder" stuck on behind.

From the tailor shop, where he insisted on having his packages wrapped up, young Dill passed to the haberdashery where he invested in a startling necktie and some radiant socks. Then, with triumph in his eye, and with his purchases under his arm, he retraced his way to the hotel.

"By chiminy," he said to himself, as he hurried along quite unconscious of the wondering glances cast his way. "Py chiminy grickets, I show dem vot style is, I bet you my life!"

The German youth went straight to his room to change into his gorgeous raiment. He was still in the midst of this task, every now and then stealing a look at himself in the mirror, when his attention was arrested by the sound of voices in the next room.

The partitions in the Hinkley House were not particularly thick, this being caused by the fact that landlord Hinkley, being of an economical turn of mind, had partitioned off all his large rooms into two apartments when he became the proprietor of the hostelry.

As a consequence, conversations carried on in even ordinary tones were plainly audible in the adjoining rooms.

"Py chiminy, I hope dose fellers in der next room don'd talk it py dere schleep," mused young Dill as he tied his rainbow cravat, "or I get no schlumbers, ain'd idt?"

The next instant his attention; was attracted to the speakers in the adjoining room by a singular circumstance. It appeared that he himself was the topic of their conversation.

“That pig-headed Dutchman with the comedy clothes,”
was what he heard.

“Py chiminy, dot means me!” exclaimed young Dill, “der
vind vos in somedings. Dere vos a voodpile in der nigger in
dot next room. I dink I listen me a leedle closer, ain’d idt?”

CHAPTER XIV.

HEINY OVERHEARS THE PLOT.

Now, as my readers have no doubt seen by this time, Heiny Pumpnick Dill was no fool. In fact, despite his eccentric outside, the German youth possessed a keen, smart mind, which acted well in almost any emergency.

Giving a final flourish and grimace at himself in token of admiration of his new necktie, young Dill crept silently across the room and laid his ear against the partition. In this position he could hear every word that was being said in the next room.

“So you know that the Dutchman was at High Towers this morning?” said one of the voices, that of Miles Sharkey, although, of course, young Dill could not recognize it.

But he recognized the voice that replied without hesitation:

“Yes, I made it my business to find out about the sauerkraut-eating Heiny,” was the rejoinder.

“Ah-ha! Now comes it oudt!” exclaimed young Dill to himself. “Dot is der feller vot dinks he get funny midt me and laughs midt der wrong side of his face yet.”

“Is he a friend of that High Towers bunch?”

The voice that was unfamiliar to the German youth put the question.

“Aber am I ein friendt or not?” muttered young Dill. “I would like to know dot.”

“No, he’s no friend,” it was Hank speaking, “in fact, from what I hear, he got into a row of some sort up there to-day.”

“Aber dot’s right, budt idt vos in der lake vot I gedt,” said young Dill to himself.

“So he is not one of the crowd at all?”

“No. He’s just a butter-in of some sort. I hear they get a lot of cranks up there.”

“Oh, ho! So I’m a ker-ank, am I?” muttered the German boy, shaking his fist at the unconscious pair in the next room. “You vatch me! I bedt you my life some day I ker-ank you der wrong vay, mein freindt.”

“Well, crank or no crank, he certainly put it over on you before dinner to-day, Hank. I’d advise you to leave him alone in future.”

“So his name vos Hank,” murmured young Dill, as he listened. “All righd, Hank, you gedt fixed by a ker-ank—by chiminy, dot’s boetry de firstest vot I ever make!” exclaimed the lad, as he formed the involuntary rhyme.

“Oh, I’ll fix him, never fear,” rejoined Hank. “The tallow-headed buttinski! But first we’ve got other things to attend to. The Dutchman can wait.”

“You chust bedt he can vait, Mister Hank,” muttered Heiny, on his side of the partition, “vaiting is one of der best things he does, und ven he gedts idt goodt undt retty den he yump—by chiminy!—he yump!”

“That’s right, we had better discuss what we mean to do. If they make that trial trip to-morrow we shall have to act quickly,” said Miles in reply to Hank’s last remark.

“What did you find out?” he added.

“Well, I spent quite a bit of time snooping around up there. I found a fool of a colored man who told me a lot.”

“Dot vos der plack feller, I bedt you my life,” chuckled the German boy, with his ear to the partition. “Veil he iss a chump und dot’s der first true word der feller in der next room has spoken.”

“So the colored man was easy, eh?”

“Easy? I should say. I told him I was from Edison’s place and was just looking around. He didn’t loosen up much so I gave him a dollar and he told me all he knew. He’s a bigger chump than that Dutch kid.”

“So-o-o-o!” fairly hissed Heiny, on his side of the wall,

“veel, Mister Schmarddy, maype dot der Tutch poy is not so much of chump as you dink.”

“Well, what did he tell you?” demanded Miles impatiently.

“About all I wanted to know. I posed as being interested in young Nevins, but not wanting him to know that I was around till the success or failure of the Electric Hydroaeroplane was assured.”

“Now comes it oudt,” muttered Heiny, pricking up his ears.

“Yes, and then—upon my word you are slow. Hank,” came Miles’s voice.

“Humph! that’s all the thanks I get after all the work I’ve done,” came in an aggrieved voice from Hank.

“That’s all right, Hank. Of course I know you’ve done well. But get down to cases.”

“Well, then,” continued Hank in a sulky tone, “I learned that the Electric Monarch is completed. The trial trip will probably take place to-morrow morning, or it may be delayed till night. If we mean to strike, we must do so quickly.”

“Yes, if we can’t get hold of the plans we must do all we can to cripple the ship, for if once it is a proved success, our game is up.”

“That’s right. Confound that young cousin of mine. He’s checkmated me.”

“Not quite yet, Hank,” was the confident reply. “Even if we don’t get a chance to injure the ship or steal the plans, I’ve yet another scheme up my sleeve—a legal one.”

“A legal one?”

“Yes, I’m smart enough for that. But we won’t work it till the time comes. In the meanwhile we must do what we can to stop this trial trip from coming off.”

“Have you any plans in that respect?”

“No, I confess I hadn’t till you told me about that Dutch

boy. Why can't we use him?"

"What, that dunderhead!"

"Ah-ha! So-o-o-o I am a dunderhead, too, iss idt?" growled Heiny from his side of the partition. "I'm dunderheadt midt ears on my dunderheadt, though, py chiminys!"

He started counting on his pudgy fingers.

"Chump! Dutchman! Dunderheadt! Dot makes three! Very veel, Hank, I makes it all ger-skvare midt you before I gedts drough, I bet me."

"Of course he's a bonehead," came the other voice, which made poor Heiny squirm.

"But that's all the better for our purpose. If he had any sense he might suspect something. As it is—"

"He don'd know somedings," chuckled Heiny to himself.

"Hanged if I can see what you are driving at," growled Hank. "I wouldn't employ that Dutchman to mop off a floor."

"Of you did I mop idt midt you," muttered the young German indignantly.

"Now, listen, Hank," said Miles, "the German got into trouble up there to-day, you say? Very well, he's naturally sore at the whole High Towers crowd. All right. We go to him and offer him a chance to get even. Nobody would suspect him of contemplating any harm to anything or anybody; he hasn't got sense enough."

"Py golly, I premeditate harm to you all righdt, mister," grunted young Dill angrily.

"What do you mean to get him to do?" inquired Hank eagerly.

"We'll discuss that later. The thing to do now is to get him on our side."

"I'll attend to that," said Hank, "leave it to me to fix that Dutchman so that he'll eat out of my hand."

"Vell now dot is nice of you," said young Dill to himself

as the two men in the next room vacated it, closing the door behind them.

CHAPTER XV. THE BURGLAR TRAP.

The German lad finished his preparations for astonishing Nestorville with elaborate care. Having adjusted his derby at what he considered a fetching angle, he prepared to descend and to conquer.

“Maype so I cotch idt an heiress,” he said to himself, “undt den I bodder no more midt der convertible sissage machine.”

Heiny was perfectly right when he concluded that he was about to astonish Nestorville. The porch of the hotel was fairly well occupied when he descended, and the street was also pretty well thronged. The sight of the German youth in his tight-fitting check clothes, gaudy socks, rainbow tie and yellow gloves created an amount of attention which gratified Heiny to the full.

“For der first time dey see idt in dis penighted village vot clothes vears a chentleman,” he said to himself.

His first jar came when a small boy stepped up to him.

“Say, mister?” said the urchin.

“Vel, vot idt iss, mein poy?” asked Heiny.

“Wot cher sellin’?”

“Sellin’? I do not comprehension you.”

“What you advertisin’ then. Squirts Savory Soap or Odles Orient Oats?”

“Mein leedle poy, I adtvertise idt nuddings.”

“Nor sell nothing?”

“Nein. I am a chentleman of leisure undt an inventor.”

“Oh, climb back in der cage,” advised the rude urchin, and amidst a shout of laughter from his cronies he dashed off.

“Climb py der cage?” muttered young Dill, looking about. “I see no cage, undt efen if I didt I wouldn’t climb in

—no, sir, not vile I haf nice room midt conversationings thrown in free of charge for nuddings.”

“On a trip?” asked a tall gangling village youth of the “half-baked” age, approaching the German boy.

“No, I am oudt on der ocean sufferin’ seferely midt sea sickness,” responded Heiny with withering scorn, and the village youth subsided.

“I vonder vot is der madder midt me?” thought young Dill to himself, seeing that he was the observed of all observers in and about the hotel. “Oh, vell! I subbose dot a vell-dressed man is not often seen hereabouts.”

He sat down in a chair on the porch and before long a cadaverous-looking individual, with lank, black hair and a solemn countenance seated himself beside him.

“A stranger in our city, sir, I take it?” began the newcomer.

“Yes, dey all seem to dink I am stranger dan anydings dot dey see yet,” rejoined Heiny good-naturedly.

“A natural ignorance, my dear sir. You, I take it, come from the centers of cosmopolitanism?”

“Vell, I don’t know dot town. I come from New York,” was the German youth’s reply.

“A noble city, sir.”

“Vell, I don’d know about dot. Dey wouldn’d buy mein convertible sissage machine.”

“What, you are an inventor?”

“Ches, an inventor at large—(undt schmall)—” declared young Dill, throwing out his chest proudly.

“You must make a great deal of money.”

“Oh, enough to lif py meinsel—enough for dot! I don’d vant for nuddings. Der best in clothes or foodt is none too goodt for me,” and the German swelled with pride. He did not notice the glitter that had come into the eyes of the cadaverous man at the mention of money. He eyed young Dill cunningly and then asked:

“A guest of this hotel, sir?”

“Ches, I stop here. Idt iss nodt a badt blace but der pickles iss no good,” said young Dill loftily, as if he had been used to hotels all his life.

The cadaverous man leaned over toward the German youth confidentially.

“If you carry large sums with you I need not warn you of the danger of thieves.”

“Oh, no, I am careful midt mein money,” young Dill assured his new-found friend, “I always schleep midt idt in der toe of vun of mein shoes,”

“Ah, indeed. May I ask why?”

“Vell, you see, ker-ooks dey look under der pillow undt in der clothing but dey nefer dink of lookin’ py der toes of mein shoes. A goodt scheme, ain’d idt?”

“Excellent. Good evening, my dear young man. I have much enjoyed our conversation.”

And the cadaverous-looking man bowed himself out, looking back as he went with a covert smile on his face.

“Thank you, my Teutonic friend,” he said to himself as he made his way across the office. “I’m much obliged to you for confiding to ‘Deacon’ Terry the place where you hide your roll. To judge by your clothes it must be a fat one. I think I’ll investigate your shoes to-night.”

So thinking, “Deacon” Terry, the notorious hotel thief, examined the register, made sure of the location of “the inventor’s” room and then politely requested that his baggage be transferred to a room on that floor, as the room he had been assigned to did not please him. His request was at once granted, for the “Deacon” possessed an impressive, not to say ministerial manner, which gave not the least clue to his real character.

Without appearing to feel the slightest concern in them, young Dill watched, with intense interest, the movements of Hank Nevins and Miles Sharkey, following the conclusion of the evening meal. Matters were further complicated in the German youth’s mind by the fact that

they did not approach him, as he had expected, but instead, engaged the landlord's son in conversation.

By adroitly maneuvering, young Dill succeeded in getting into a position where a pillar in the lobby hid him from view and afforded a capital screen behind which to listen to the formation of the plot which he was sure was going forward. He had learned earlier in the day that Sam Hinkley worked at the High Towers workshop and was considerably surprised when he saw the boy allow himself to be drawn into talk with Hank and the man the German youth knew as "Der stranger."

"I'll bedt idt er pretzel dot der iss some more crooked pisiness going forvarts," he thought to himself as he watched Sam in deep conversation with the pair he already knew plotted mischief to the Electric Monarch. "Does two fellers iss so crooked dey could behind a corkscrew hide. I vatch undt lisen. Maybe I find idt oudt some more. If I do, I tell der poys by der Electric Monarch and den maybe dey give me a chob."

With this idea in mind, he worked his way to the position he adjudged most favorable for his eavesdropping. Now young Dill was no friend to sneaky ways, but in the present case he felt that the end justified almost any means. He knew enough to realize that the Boy Inventors' project was threatened by two men whom he instinctively felt were bad characters, even if he had not overheard their talk of the afternoon.

He had not listened long when all his suspicions were confirmed. With cunning skill Miles Sharkey was working on Sam Hinkley's hatred of Ned Nevins to enlist Sam in the plot against the Electric Monarch. But to young Dill's chagrin, he could not get close enough to hear all their conversation without risking being discovered. He had, therefore, to content himself with fragmentary bits. But such as these were, they were quite sufficient to inform him that Sam Hinkley was ready to turn traitor to his young employers.

"Then you'll do it?" were the last words the German youth heard Miles address to Sam Hinkley.

“You can depend on me to fix the young sneak,” he heard Sam answer. “But when do I get my money?”

“When we get ours from the party I told you about. Is that satisfactory?” asked Miles, who appeared to act as spokesman.

“That’s all right,” was Sam’s reply, as he strolled away, and the two conspirators exchanged triumphant glances.

“Now dey come py me, I bedt you my life,” muttered the young German to himself as he flopped into a chair and appeared engrossed in a newspaper which happened, by good luck, to be lying there. Sure enough it was not many minutes before he heard a honey voice addressing him.

It was Hank. He expressed great regret for the occurrences of the morning.

“I don’t know what got into me,” he said, “anyhow I apologize very sincerely.”

“Oh, dot’s all righdt,” said young Dill easily, “und at dot I don’d dink dot you hadt very much on me.”

Hank agreed, and then after some more conversation he approached the subject that young Dill knew he had been leading up to all the time.

“You know those Boy Inventors, as they call them, up at High Towers?” he asked.

“Vell, I can’t say dot I know dem,” replied Heiny truthfully, “but I like to get a chob by dem.”

“Oh, looking for a job, are you?”

“Ches, I needt some money preddy badtly und I don’d mindt telling you dot I aindt particular how I get idt alretty.”

Hank fell into the trap readily. “This fellow’s easier than I thought,” he chuckled to himself. He proceeded to “feel out” the German youth a little more, and then made him a confidant in their plans, young Dill appearing to fall in readily with all their schemes.

Briefly the plot was this. Young Dill was to present himself at High Towers in the morning. Seemingly he was

to be in quest of work. But his real mission was to take advantage of any opportunity that might present itself to disconnect one of the wires leading from the storage batteries to the motor. Failing in this, he was to injure the Electric Monarch in any way that he could, Hank having previously found out that young Dill understood considerable about machinery.

To all this the young German appeared to agree. In fact he was even enthusiastic.

“I guess I make more money on dis chob dan I vouldt outd of mein sissage machine,” he said.

“Money!” exclaimed Hank. “Why, if you can pull this thing off right you’ll be able to buy a new suit every ten minutes.”

“Den I’m your man,” said young Dill.

Soon after this he went to bed. He would have liked to go to High Towers that night but he knew that he was watched. Moreover, as there was to be no attempt made to injure the machine till the next morning, he would not have accomplished any useful purpose, except perhaps, to scare the plotters away, which was the last thing he wished to do.

Before turning in, the German youth expended a few loving caresses on the convertible sausage machine, and then, placing it on the floor, he tumbled into bed and soon his snores proclaimed that at least one guest of the Hinkley House was enjoying peaceful slumber.

It was after midnight that a door down the corridor from the German youth’s room was cautiously opened and the cadaverous head and lank black locks of “Deacon” Terry protruded themselves into the dimly lighted passage. Apparently satisfied that every one was in bed, the “Deacon” slipped out of his room and tip-toed down the passage to young Dill’s door.

Bending, he listened at the key-hole. The nasal music which greeted his ears caused a satisfied smile to creep over his features. He fumbled in his pocket for a minute and then a jingling sound proclaimed that he had found

what he was in search of—a bunch of skeleton keys.

With a deftness born of long practice the “Deacon” inserted one of the keys in the lock of young Dill’s door. There was the slightest of clicks and then the Deacon cautiously pushed the portal open. An instant’s pause, and then with the gliding motion of a snake, he slipped through the door.

“Snap!”

A sound like the firing of a pistol was followed almost immediately by a most appalling yell.

“Help! Ouch! Help!”

The next moment a figure came flying into the corridor. Attached to it was what at first sight appeared to be a gigantic spider. Down the corridor the figure fled, yelling at the top of his voice.

All through the hotel, doors could be heard opening and shouts and cries rang through the entire structure from office to garret!

“It’s fire!”

“There’s murder!”

“Call the police!”

“Thieves!”

“Fire! Fire!”

Mingling with these and a dozen other frantic cries from alarmed guests came the clanging of gongs as the night clerk, aroused from his doze in the office, sprang to the emergency alarm and pulled it. This redoubled the confusion.

In the midst of the pandemonium there came skyrocketing madly down the stairs into the half-dressed crowd swarming in the lobby, an extraordinary and alarming figure. It was that of a man clad only in shirt and trousers upon whose face was stamped the wildest terror. Frightened cries broke from his lips and the horrified onlookers perceived that, attached to him, behind, was a gigantic spider, or such at least the thing appeared.

With a last frantic cry the victim of the repulsive-looking creature gave a bound and fell headlong on the floor of the crowded lobby. As he did so there was a metallic clang, the "spider" was detached from his waistband and the excited crowd saw that it was in reality a metallic device of some sort.

It was just at this moment that the fire department and the police department, the latter consisting of two men and a chief, with a resplendent star of pie-plate proportions, burst into the thronged lobby. The chief rushed up to the prostrate man and raised him to his feet.

The instant his eyes encountered the other's face, the village functionary gave a cry of astonishment.

"It's 'Deacon' Terry, the crook!" he exclaimed, with a firm grip on the man. "There's a description and a reward out for his capture."

"What have you been up to now?" asked one of the policemen, but before the discomfited thief could reply, a strange figure in red and white striped pajamas shoved its way through the excited throng that jammed the lobby.

"I can tell you dot. Dot feller dere vos try to make a robberies midt mein room. Mein burglar trap—dot used to be a sissage machine—makes a capture by him."

"Who in thunder are you?" demanded the chief, regarding the wild-looking German youth with amazement.

"I am Heiny Pumpnick Dill, inventor at large (undt schmall) of der Convertible Sissage Machine. Dot iss, idt used to be a sissage machine—now I make idt of him a burglar trap."

"Say, is this fellow crazy or what?" exclaimed the chief, who had been unable, not unnaturally, to make head or tail of this jargon.

"I think I can explain, chief," said the night clerk, coming forward. "It's plain enough that this fellow,—the 'Deacon' as you call him,—tried to get into Mr. Dill's room. He succeeded, but instead of robbing Dill he was seized by this what-you-may-call it."

He indicated the sausage machine lying in a heap of spider-like limbs and springs on the floor near-by.

“Dot is not a what-you-mighdt-call-idt—” began young Dill indignantly, “idt is a sissage machine. I pudt him der door py ven I go to mein schleep. I suppose dot dis feller got ger-grabbed by idt ven he come to take all der money dot I told him early in der efenin’ I hadt in mein shoes.”

It was some time before things quieted down and the notorious “Deacon” was taken off to the village lock-up. Young Dill was the recipient of many congratulations on the success of his “burglar-trap.” But somehow they did not please him. As he returned to his interrupted slumbers he muttered to himself:

“I am a preddy bum inventor alretty. I don’d know meinselv vot I invent. Here I go to vurk undt make idt a fine sissage machine undt now I haf to turn idt into a burglar-trap—Himmel!”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOST LEVER.

Bright and early the next morning the young inventors, and the workmen attached to their "plant," wheeled out the framework of the Electric Monarch and the business of attaching the wings was begun. It was just half an hour from the time the work began to the moment when the last bolt was in place, and like a huge red and silver butterfly the wonderful craft stood poised ready for flight.

The boys had had but little sleep and their dreams had been of skimming the air or gliding over the surface of the sea. Now, as they stood back and gazed at their completed handiwork, they felt a proud thrill of work well done. Come what might of the trial trip, they felt that they had done their very best.

Only one thing marred their delight at the completion of their long task. Professor Chadwick, who from time to time suffered from severe headaches, would be unable to accompany them on the initial voyage. Instead, one of the workmen, a man named Joyce, was selected to go along.

When everything was in readiness for the start, Jack visited his father's study. He was in hopes that even at the eleventh hour the Professor might feel well enough to accompany them. He well knew what a disappointment it was to his father to have to remain behind. But Professor Chadwick had been warned by his physician not to risk excitement when suffering from one of his nervous headaches.

Jack found his father lying on a lounge in the library.

"No, Jack, my boy," he said in answer to the boy's anxious inquiries, "I'm afraid the trial trip must be made without me. I am under doctor's orders and cannot disobey them."

"I wish you could come, father," replied the boy, "but if everything goes off all right you will have many opportunities to ride in the Electric Monarch. Now, since you can't come, I am going to entrust to your care the plans

and blue prints of the craft.”

“Yes, they will be safer here.”

“I have just brought them from the workshop. See, here they are,” and Jack produced a voluminous roll of papers. “We are responsible to Ned Nevins for the safety of these and we must see that they are looked after carefully.”

“Put them in the safe, my boy, and then give me the combination. If I feel better later on I should like to look them over.”

Jack went to a large wall safe in one corner of the room, opened it and placed the papers within. He then gave the combination to his father on a slip of paper. When this had been done he felt easier in his mind.

“They are safe enough now,” he thought. He mixed his father a draught of medicine and then, summoning a servant, he told her to be ready to answer any call from the library, in which room Professor Chadwick intended to spend the day.

When this had been done Jack felt that further delay would be useless. Bidding his father good-bye, and promising to give him every detail of the trip on his return, the boy hurried out to join his comrades.

It was a cloudless day. There was not a breath of wind to stir the leaves. A better morning for the testing of the Electric Monarch could not have been imagined.

“Well, Tom, we’re all ready, I guess.”

“As ready as we ever will be, Jack. The big moment is due. Everything all right to your mind, Ned?”

“Down to the last nut on the last bolt,” replied young Nevins positively.

“Then we had better climb on board and get ready for the start.”

Joyce, a stalwart, middle-aged mechanic, followed the boys on board the Electric Monarch. They first visited the pilot house. It had already been decided that Jack, on account of his previous experience with aerial craft, was to

have the wheel. He gave a last look over the equipment. The next instant he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

“The landing lever is gone!” he exclaimed.

“What!” the cry came from all three of his companions simultaneously.

“It’s gone!” cried the boy. “Look here, it’s been unbolted from the sector. Boys, the trial trip is off if we can’t find it.”

As it was the landing lever that controlled the descending impetus of the craft, it can readily be seen that it would have been foolhardy—suicidal, in fact—to have attempted to start without it.

“It was here the last thing last night,” cried Ned. “I know because I looked the whole craft over before I turned in.”

“Just the same, it is gone,” declared Tom.

“Somebody has taken it,” struck in Joyce.

“Yes, somebody with a spite against us,” added Ned, and in his mind the thought of Sam Hinkley flashed up.

“Has anybody seen Sam about this morning?” he asked.

No, nobody had. The boy had not put in his usual appearance, which seemed odd, for recently he had appeared to take more interest than usual in the Electric Monarch.

“You surely don’t suspect—” began Tom.

“I don’t know what to say,” interrupted Jack, “it looks odd, that’s all.”

“But what object could he have had in taking it?” asked Tom.

“Better ask Ned that,” was the response. “He told Ned he’d get even with him some time for giving him a lesson on the porch of the Hinkley House.”

“Well, suspicions won’t find that lever,” said Ned. “Suppose we look for it. Let’s start a hunt.”

“Not much use,” declared Joyce. “Whoever took that lever has hidden it where we can’t find it.”

“I guess that’s so,” admitted Jack ruefully. “I don’t want to accuse any one till we know, but it looks as if—”

A shout from beside the ship interrupted him. It was Jupe. He was pointing down the hill.

“Gollyumption!” shouted the old negro, who had been an interested though inactive onlooker. “Hyar comes dat crazy Dutch kid!”

Sure enough, up the hill was coming, as fast as his pudgy legs would carry him, the rotund form of the doughty inventor of the convertible sausage machine.

“Bother him. We don’t want that pest around now. Hullo! what’s the matter with him?”

For young Dill was waving his arms like a windmill. He dashed up, puffing like a locomotive, the next minute. It was plain he was wildly excited about something. But for some seconds he could only puff and gesticulate while his eyes rolled as if he had eaten something that had disagreed with him.

“What’s the trouble, are you sick?” asked Jack, looking down from the pilot house.

“Aber-poof—Poys! You haf missed idt somedings—poof—from der—sheeps?”

“Sheeps?” exclaimed Tom, puzzled.

“He means ship,” exclaimed Jack. “Say, fellows, he knows something about the missing lever. Is that it, Heiny?”

“Ches. Der liver of der sheep iss gone, ain’d idt?”

“It certainly has. Do you know anything about it?”

By this time Heiny had recovered his breath. In a torrent of speech that nothing could stop he rattled off the story of the overheard conversation, of Sam’s treachery and of the way in which he had seemingly fallen in with the conspirators’ plans. Early that morning he had got out of bed and tracked Sam Hinkley to High Towers. He had watched while the treacherous youth had unscrewed the lever and then had followed him through the fields to an

abandoned well into which the rascally boy had thrown it. During his narrative, Heiny gave a good description of Hank Nevins and Miles Sharkey, from which Ned had no difficulty in identifying the plotters. The manner in which they had discovered his whereabouts, though, was, of course, a mystery to the lad.

But there was no time to waste just then in discussing the best means of ensuring the punishment of the conspirators. The main desire of all the boys was to get back the lever and be off on the interrupted test. Under young Dill's guidance the old well was soon found. It was almost filled up with rubbish and it was an easy matter to get the lever out.

"I don't know how we can reward you for this service," Jack said to young Dill as they made their way back to the Electric Monarch.

"Dere is an easy vay to do dot," said the young German, with the air of one who already has his mind made up.

"Well, what is it?"

"Make me der mashed shot of der Elegdrig Monarch."

"The what?" Jack regarded the lad with a puzzled look. Young Dill had certainly done them a splendid service and Jack, as they all did, wished to reward him for it in some substantial way.

"Der mashed shot—der goot luck—der—"

"Oh, the mascot!" cried Jack.

"Dot's idt. I make idt a fine mashed shot. I am strong. I am villing. I am an inventor, at large (undt schmall) und—"

"But just what are the duties of a mascot? If I make you one I'd like to be sure you understand them," said Jack with a wink at his companions.

"Oh, dot vos easy. Der dooties of a mashed shot are to sit in a corner undt keep making a noise like a rabbid's foot oder a horse's-boot."

"Horseshoe, I guess you mean. However, you seem to

have a pretty good idea of the job and we can use you, anyhow, I guess.”

“Den I gedt der chob?”

“Yes, you are one of the crew of the Electric Monarch.”

“Hoch! Der Monarch!” shouted Heiny Dill, throwing his funny little “rudder” hat high in the air, “ven do vee start?”

“Thanks to your clever detective work, right away.”

CHAPTER XVII.

OFF AT LAST!

The frame of the Electric Monarch thrilled to the first impulse of her powerful motors. But that thrill was nothing to the sense of suppressed excitement that ran through the boys' veins as Jack, with throbbing pulses, set the lever that sent the electric current into the driving machinery.

Outwardly calm, every person on board stood at his station waiting the word for the start. Tom Jesson was in the bow, Joyce, oil can in hand, was at the stern. Ned Nevins, pale but keeping a firm grip on his nerves, stood by the motors. His "big moment" had come at last. The dream of Jephth Nevins was to be put to the test.

Heiny Dill had had a special office created for him at the last moment. He was, in addition to his self-conferred title of mascot, the "chief cook and bottle washer"—in other words, the steward of the Electric Monarch. He felt the responsibilities of his office to the full as he stood with his rotund face stuck out of the port cabin window waiting for the start. He already had the electric stove going and a big kettle of boiling water on it. Just why, he could not have said, but he felt that it was in line with his responsible position to be doing something.

"Hold tight, everybody. We're going up!"

The shout from the pilot house was like a bugle call. Each boy involuntarily straightened up at his post. The propellers beat the air faster and faster. On the "bridge deck" the boys held tightly to their caps. It was like being in a hurricane. The mighty power of the motors made a roaring noise, like the voice of a cataract. The craft shook from stem to stern like a live thing struggling against captivity.

Suddenly there came a jerk and a yell from Heiny as, amidst a crashing of pots and pans, he was flung to the floor. On the "bridge deck" the crew hung on tight. Their faces showed the tense strain as Jack applied full power.

Off like an arrow from a bow shot the great craft across

the smooth slope leading down to the lake. The speed was terrific. The craft pitched and swayed so that it was only by holding on for dear life that the boys could keep their feet.

“Ledt me oudt! Ledt me oudt!” shrieked Heiny, from amidst the wreckage of his cooking utensils. “I don’d vant to be a mashed shot!”

“Gracious, if we don’t rise in a second we’ll be in the lake!” cried Tom in dismay, but above the roaring of the motors and propellers no one heard him. But the same thought was in the minds of all. Ned, white as ashes, peered straight ahead as the massive craft dashed down the hill. Were all their hopes doomed to disaster, after all?

In the pilot house Jack saw the impending disaster. He threw his entire weight against the lever that set the wings at a rising inclination. The device was new and stiff. His most strenuous exertions failed to move it.

He heard a voice at his shoulder. It was Ned Nevins. He had guessed that something was the matter and had clawed his way into the pilot house down the pitching, swaying bridge.

“The rising lever! Quick!” he cried.

“I can’t move it. It’s stuck!” shouted back Jack.

Ned braced his foot against the sector and both boys threw the last ounce of their strength into making the refractory bit of machinery move. It did, with a suddenness that threw them both to the floor of the pilot house.

But the next instant they gave a glad shout of delight which echoed from one end of the craft to the other.

The Electric Monarch was rising, shooting straight upward toward the blue heavens at tremendous speed!

Jack scrambled to his feet like a shot. For one instant the Electric Monarch was shooting skyward without a guiding hand at the wheel. The next moment her young skipper, with a firm grasp of the spokes, was directing her course due eastward toward the ocean.

While he did this, Ned set to work with oil can and file on the lever which had so nearly caused disaster. He soon

had it fixed and had taken to heart a lesson which had for its text, "It's the little things that count."

"Gracious," he said to Jack, as they shot straight onward at a height the barograph showed to be 2,500 feet, "that lever came near wrecking us."

"Never mind that now," was the response, "just see how splendidly she is behaving. Ned, old boy, the Electric Monarch is a success. A bigger success than we dared to hope."

"She is indeed," said Ned, almost reverentially, as he glanced down from the pilot house window at the landscape flying by far below them. It was his first experience in the air and he felt just a bit creepy and scared.

But that feeling soon wore off, and before a glittering expanse of water in the distance showed them that the ocean lay before them, Ned Nevins, the virtual owner of the Electric Monarch, was at work on the motors, oiling and adjusting as if he had been an engineer of a flying ship all his life.

The motion of the craft was delightfully smooth and even. If it had not been for the furious wind of the propellers, and the roaring of the motor, it would have been difficult to believe they were moving at all. Yet the speed indicator showed that they had attained a velocity of fifty miles an hour and their maximum speed had not by any means been reached.

Jack knew that with new machinery it would have been risking over-heated bearings and all manner of engine trouble, to let the Electric Monarch out to her full capacity.

Jack's cheeks glowed and his eyes shone as the craft drove onward, with his firm hands on the controlling wheel. It was invigorating and blood-quickenning to feel the way in which the Electric Monarch responded instantly to every move of the controlling devices.

"Of course the Electric Monarch isn't mine, nor have I any right to any share in her but the builder's, and yet I can't help feeling that we all have a part in her," said the

boy to himself. "That Jephtha Nevins must have been a wonder. If he had only lived, this would have been a proud day for him. He certainly left Ned a great legacy in those plans. I wonder—"

Jack broke off short in his ruminations. The plans! It was true they were in the safe at High Towers, but it was also true that just the moment before sailing they had learned that enemies were interested in securing them. Enemies backed by powerful interests, too, judging by what Heiny Dill had said.

A troubled look crossed Jack's face. His father was ill. In case intruders gained access to the library, he could make but a feeble resistance. But the next moment he dismissed the thought as ridiculous. How could any one know where the plans had been placed? And even so, if an attempt was made to blow open the safe, the servants would be bound to hear.

"Just the same," thought the boy, "I wish we'd notified the police before we started."

But at that moment a wind flaw struck the Electric Monarch and Jack's attention was fully occupied in handling the craft as she heeled over like a ship in a heavy sea. When she was once more on an even keel, he had other matters to occupy his mind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NED'S TERRIBLE PERIL.

Beneath the Electric Monarch, soaring eagle-like far above it, a glimmering speck against the blue, lay the Atlantic. The ocean was in a calm mood. Viewed from above, its surface appeared to be as smooth as a mirror.

But Jack knew that appearances were deceptive. The Atlantic is never absolutely at rest. Even on the calmest days its bosom heaves with long, swinging swells, running shoreward to break in heavy, thunderous surf on the beach. He drew from a pocket beside the wheel the glasses with which the receptacle was equipped.

Controlling the wheel with one hand, he raised the glasses to his eyes with the other. He gazed downward through them and saw that the sea was lazily swelling in long, oily combers, which could be ridden with ease even by a cockleshell of a boat, whereas the Electric Monarch was actually two capable cabin cruisers fastened together Siamese-twin-like by ligaments of vanadium and steel and aluminum alloy.

"It's safe enough to go down," said Jack to himself and sounded two blasts on the electric whistle.

This was the signal to the engineer to come into the pilot house for a consultation. Ned soon presented himself. He was grimy but happy.

"How's everything running?" asked Jack.

"Smooth as oil. You'd think the motors had been in commission for a long time instead of being on their initial trip."

"That's good. I didn't have much fear but they would work all right. I'm going to try a drop, Ned."

Jack watched Ned narrowly to see if the news had any effect upon him but Ned simply nodded his head in a business-like way and remarked:

"Very well, sir."

At this juncture there came a shrill whistle on one of the speaking tubes leading to the helmsman's wheel.

"Hullo, there's Tom calling from the stern," cried Jack, "wonder what's up now."

He placed the tube to his ear and then gave an exclamation of concern.

"Oh, that's too bad."

"What's the trouble?" asked Ned.

"Why, Tom has an attack of air-sickness. It's pretty bad while it lasts, but fortunately it is soon over. I'm going to call him in to lie down in the cabin a while. Can you leave your motors and stand watch astern, Ned?"

"Certainly. They're all right for half an hour, anyhow. The current's fine." The boy glanced at the indicator, which showed a strong, steady supply of "juice." Jack hailed Tom through the speaking tube and ordered him to come in at once and lie down. He then hailed Heiny, who by this time had gotten over his first scare, and told him to get some hot coffee ready.

"Tom will be ready for duty before long," said Jack, as Ned left the pilot house, passing, as he made his way aft, Tom, who looked white and ill. But he assured Ned it was nothing, simply an attack of air-sickness which would soon pass over.

Ned took up his place in the stern between the two long supporting frameworks of the rear propellers. The wind was terrific but otherwise he felt no inconvenience except from the excessive vibration. He had not been standing there more than a few minutes, keeping a watchful eye all about him, when he noticed that the port stern bearing of one of the propellers was beginning to smoke.

"Hullo! We'll be having a hot box first thing we know," said Ned to himself. "I've got to oil that fellow and look sharp about it, too."

He glanced out over the path he would have to travel. Ned was a plucky boy, but he felt a qualm pass through him as he looked. The propeller was fully ten feet out from

the main structure of the craft and was supported by a thin framework of braces.

The task in front of Ned was to straddle this framework and make his way aft to the heated bearing, with nothing but 2,500 feet of space beneath his shoe soles. For a minute he felt tempted to ask Jack for instructions. But then his pride, always keen with Ned, came to his rescue.

“I’ll do it,” he determined, taking a firm grip on his faculties. “But it’s going to be some job.”

He gripped his oil can firmly, resolved to waste no more time. Then clambering up to the framework, he straddled himself over the top part of it, holding on to the lower part of it as best he could with his feet.

It was like riding a bucking broncho in mid-air. The gale from the big propellers swept around Ned like a hurricane. He felt his cap swept off his head and dared not look downward to watch it go hurtling toward the sea. He knew that the sight would be too much for his nerves.

Rallying himself with an effort, Ned began his dangerous crawl along the framework. The further out from the main structure of the craft he got the more nerve-racking became the task. The slender framework shook and swayed as if it was determined to shake him off, and send him flying into space.

Ned gripped his handholds till the paint flaked off on his palms. But little by little he managed to work his way toward the bearing. The propeller, a whirring blur before his eyes, dazzled him. The wind from it seemed to catch his breath and jam it back down his throat. He clung to his perch with the courage of desperation.

At last he reached a point from which he could reach the bearing. He raised the oil cup and doused the smoking metal with oil. And then, his duty done, he was horrified to feel a sudden wave of deadly nausea sweep over him. The sea seemed to rush up toward him, and his senses swam in a wild delirium.

“I must get back! I must! I must!” he said to himself, and then the terrible grip of air-sickness descended upon

him again and again, and deprived him of all power to move.

Almost three thousand feet in the air, perched on a slender, bucking framework, and a prey to the most severe form of air-sickness, Ned's position was perilous, indeed.

Suddenly he felt his senses leaving him. For a second he fought against insensibility with all the power he possessed. But it overmastered him. Ned felt his head swimming round and round like a detached body in an aurora of blazing light. All at once something seemed to give way.

He felt himself falling! falling!

Then a blackness like night shut down upon him and he knew no more.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later when Tom presented himself to Jack and announced that he was fit for duty.

"Very well, Tom, go back to your post and send Ned to resume his."

Tom left the cabin. In less than ten seconds he was back. His face was blanched and his lips white. Jack noticed he was trembling violently.

"What in the world is the matter, are you ill?" demanded Jack.

"No—no, it's Ned."

"What's up? Anything the matter with him?"

"He's—he's g-g-g-gone!"

"Gone!"

"That's right. I went aft and there was no sign of him. Joyce says nothing has been seen of him up forward."

"Great Scott!"

The boys faced each other with the fear of a great calamity on their faces. If Ned was not on board he must have fallen from the Electric Monarch while she was in mid-air. In such a case there was no need to debate over

the fate of the young comrade they had grown to love.

“I can’t leave the wheel, Tom, you must do what you can,” said Jack, his voice trembling in spite of himself.

Tom stammered some reply and left the pilot house. He summoned young Dill.

“Come aft with me,” he ordered. “We’re afraid an accident has happened.”

“An accident! vot sort of an accident?” blurted out the German youth.

“We’re afraid that Ned Nevins has fallen overboard.”

“Donnervetter!”

“You must keep a cool head, Dill, and do what I tell you.”

“I am as cool as a whole barrel of cucumbers,” was the reply.

“Then come with me. There’s one chance in ten thousand that he may be on board and alive.”

Silently the two made their way aft along the heaving, swaying bridge, a dreadful fear gnawing at their hearts.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DISGRUNTLED CRONIES.

To say that the departure of the Electric Monarch from High Towers had caused a sensation in Nestorville would be putting it mildly. The town simply went wild.

School was dismissed, business came to a standstill, and the streets were thronged from end to end with excited townspeople.

“What’s the trouble?” demanded Hank Nevins, as the waitress dropped the plate of ham and eggs she was about to bring him and his worthy companion, Miles Sharkey, and regardless of the crash and the spatter, dashed into the street.

“Hark, what’s that they’re calling out?” cried Hank suddenly.

“Listen!”

Miles put down his knife and fork which he had grasped expectantly and pricked up his ears. In another minute the cry,—which had grown to a roar,—came to their ears with the distinctness of a thunder clap and with much the same effect.

“Airship!—Airship!”

The cry reverberated through the village like a call to arms. Men shouted and women screamed while small boys went charging up and down with their heads in the air regardless of whom they bumped into.

“Great Juniper!” gasped out Hank, spilling his coffee in his agitation, “do you suppose—?”

“I don’t suppose anything. Let’s make sure,” cried Miles.

Hatless they rushed into the street but nobody paid any attention to their agitation. Everybody was equally excited. It was indeed a thrilling sight. Far above the heads of the gaping crowd an immense scarlet and silver shape was skimming on wings that shimmered in the bright sunlight.

“Hurrah!” yelled a man, and a hundred took up the cry half hysterically.

“It’s flying!” cried out an old lady, as if there was any doubt about it.

“What is it?” asked somebody.

“It’s an airship,” was the reply.

“Wa’al, it ain’t like any I’ve ever saw,” came the response. “It looks as big as a house. It’s got cabins on it, too.”

“Must be some more of the work of them boys up at High Towers,” hazarded Schultz, the blacksmith, who sometimes did odd jobs for the boys.

“Like as not it is,” agreed somebody else. “Them boys ’ull break their necks some day, sure.”

“You mean they’ll make Nestorville famous,” spoke up Schultz in the capacity of the boys’ champion. “They’re the brainiest kids in America to-day.”

“Oh, they don’t amount to very much,” came a sneering voice behind the sturdy blacksmith.

He faced round instantly. The remark had come from Hank who, with Miles at his side, was watching the successful flight with what feelings may be imagined.

Schultz looked angry and was not afraid to let his irritation show. Hank began to wish he’d kept quiet.

“What was that you said, mister?” asked the blacksmith.

“I just said anybody could do that who had the time,” said Hank, modifying his speech somewhat.

“Well, you couldn’t do it, mister; it takes *brains* to do anything like that. That lets you out.”

The crowd in the vicinity began to titter. Hank hated being laughed at, and his anger made him imprudent.

“That’s a stolen idea, anyhow,” he roared out at the top of his voice. “The plans from which that airship was made belong to me.”

“Hush! Are you crazy?” exclaimed Miles, jerking Hank’s sleeve.

“No, I’m not! They do belong to me. That craft was designed by my father, Jeptha Nevins, and I can prove it, what’s more.”

“If that’s so, why didn’t you build one yourself?” demanded Schultz.

“I didn’t have time to before thieves stole the plans. I’ll get even, though. I’ll fix ’em. They won’t rob me!”

“For heaven’s sake, be quiet. Everybody’s looking at you. You’ll ruin our plans.”

Miles Sharkey impatiently jerked at Hank’s sleeve. He would have liked to put an emphatic hand over his noisy companion’s mouth. But Hank at last saw reason. As the Electric Monarch soared off into the distance, melting into the sky like a vanishing bird, he consented to allow Miles to lead him away.

They had not gone very far when round a corner came Sam Hinkley. He was out of breath and much excited.

“Did you see it?” he cried.

“See it? Do you think we are blind?” roared Hank. “What kind of bungling is this? Didn’t you get the lever? How did they come to start?”

“Just what I’d like to know,” said Sam with equal heat. “I did my part of the work all right. I detached the lever and hid it in an old well. They must have had another one some place and put it on at the last moment.”

“I guess that’s it,” said Miles pacifically, but Hank refused to calm down. It galled his bitter nature to the quick to see the Electric Monarch in successful flight when he had hoped and schemed for a failure.

“I wonder what’s become of the Dutchman,” he snarled. “He’s ten times brighter than you are, Hinkley,” which, as we know, was perfectly correct, though not in just the way Hank meant it.

“How do I know where your Dutchman is,” growled

Sam, "I tell you I'm through with you. I risked a lot to steal that lever and this is all the thanks I get for it. Gimme my money."

Hank affected great surprise. So did Miles. They both stared at Sam as if they thought he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"Money? What money?" exclaimed Miles.

"Why, the money for crippling the machine."

A cunning smile crept over Miles's face.

"Yes, the money for crippling the machine!" he sneered, "but you see, my young friend, you didn't do any such thing. In fact, for all we know, you never went near it."

"So you're going to cheat me out of it, eh?" roared Sam. "But you won't. I'll see the police, I'll—"

But he stopped short as Miles burst into a roar of ironical laughter.

"See the police and tell them you didn't get money for doing some crooked work! You're considerable of a fool, Sam Hinkley, but I guess you aren't fool enough for that."

As this was so beyond doubt, Sam had to content himself with slinking off, muttering threats about "getting even" which the two conspirators did not much trouble themselves about. In fact they were beginning to worry about young Dill. It was past the hour when he had said he would meet them, and they began to feel uneasy.

It was as well for their peace of mind that they did not know the true state of affairs, otherwise they would have suffered still more perturbation of spirit.

CHAPTER XX.

TOM TO THE RESCUE.

With a feeling of anxiety such as he had never before known, Tom leaned out over the stern framework. He had hazarded a guess that Ned might have been rash enough to have attempted to gain the stern propeller bearings.

But his surprise and relief were not any the less on that account when he saw, lying limp and senseless across the slender stern shaft supports, the body of his young chum, for such Ned had grown to be in their weeks of work and association.

“Great Glory!” he exclaimed in his relief. “Heiny, hurray! he’s alive. Had an attack of air-sickness I guess, and it’s knocked him out.”

But in the midst of his jubilation came another thought,—a reflection that sent the hot blood curdling like ice water through Tom’s veins. Suppose the boy were suddenly to regain consciousness and, not realizing where he was, attempt to raise himself? In such a case he must inevitably be dashed to death through space.

Still further reflection, after the first gush of his joy at finding his comrade alive had subsided, convinced Tom that to get him on board from his perilous position would be no mean undertaking in itself. Ned lay some eight feet out from the end of the “running-bridge.” His inert form was balanced across the swaying, vibrating framework. Would that framework—it looked as slender as a spider’s web—bear the weight of the two boys?

Tom thought it would. He knew the care with which every section of the Electric Monarch had been constructed. Every rivet and bolt in her had been tested and retested to three times the strain that would be placed upon it.

“I’ll risk it,” decided Tom. “Here, Heiny, hold my coat.”

He stripped off his khaki Norfolk swiftly and handed it to the German who, too stupefied by the sight of Ned’s

perilous position to say anything, stood gaping, open-mouthed, powerless to speak or move. He took Tom's coat mechanically. Then speech came to him.

"Vot you do, hein?"

"Can't you see I'm going out there to get Ned on board again?"

"Himmel! You preak your neg."

"I don't think so."

So saying Tom cautiously got astride of the framework, and began worming his way toward Ned's still form. It was terrible work, but Tom knew that the return trip would be still more accompanied by peril. Steeling himself to the task in hand, he worked slowly forward while Heiny stood petrified watching him.

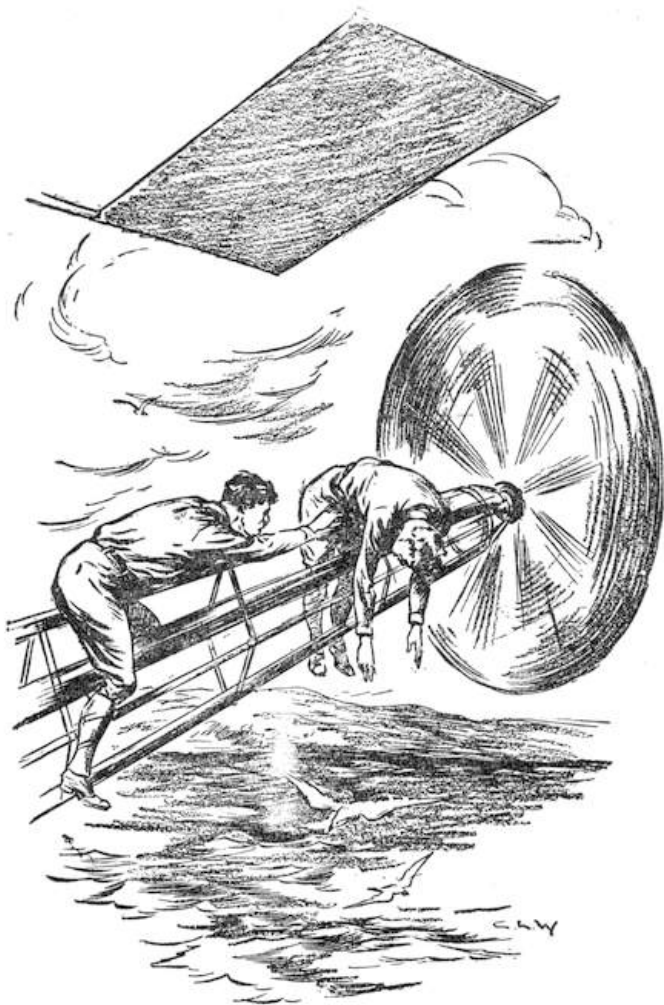
Foot by foot, or inch by inch, as it seemed to Tom, he drew closer to the form of the boy he had come to rescue. At last he could touch him and look into his white face.

The boy lay as limp as a bundle, and in Tom's eyes it was better so. It made his task so much the easier. He extended his hands and got a firm grip on Ned's body.

Then he began to work his way backwards. It was agonizing work. In order to keep Ned balanced on the narrow strut, he was compelled to use only his feet to steady himself. Both hands were required to hold Ned on the perilous perch. Tom dared not look downward. The thought of the profundity of space that lay beneath them made him sick and dizzy.

Tom could never tell just how that journey was made. It was only a few feet, but it seemed like so many miles. Ever present in his mind, too, was the danger of Ned's regaining consciousness and making some sudden move. In such a case they might both be doomed to death.

The wind from the propellers blew against Tom with vicious intensity. His legs ached as if they would drop off, for he had them alone to depend on both for balance and motion. But at last, somehow or other, he came within reach of Heiny Dill's grasp.



He extended his hands and got a firm grip on Ned's body.

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The German lad was ready. As Tom felt the last ounce of his strength oozing from him he felt, too, a strong grasp on his shoulders.

“Stetty! Stetty!” came a voice in his ears.

“I’m all right,” muttered Tom thickly. He helped Heiny drag Ned in to safety and then he, too, almost gave out. But he knew that Jack in the pilot house would be eagerly awaiting news. So putting aside his weariness he seized the stern speaking tube and sent the good news to the young commander. This done, Ned was taken to the cabin and restoratives administered from the Electric Monarch’s medicine chest, with which she had been provided in the anticipation that some day the boys might want to take a long voyage.

Ned, who was naturally full of vitality, was soon himself again and insisted on taking his watch at the motors. As for Tom, his buoyant nature took even less time in recovering from the strain that had been put upon it. We will leave it to the imagination what the boys had to say to each other when Ned learned that it was Tom who had saved his life at the risk of his own.

Not long after this Jack, who had taken the craft quite a distance out to sea, determined to turn back landward and make a swift flight home. He judged they had done quite enough to prove the Electric Monarch’s worth and in this the others agreed with him.

They were perhaps a mile off the shore when Joyce, on the lookout forward, gave a sudden sharp hail through the speaking tube.

“Ship below us, sir.”

“What is she?” hailed back Jack.

“Looks like a steamer. Passenger boat, I guess.”

“I reckon I’ll give her a call,” said Jack to himself as he hung up the tube. “My! won’t her passengers be surprised, though.”

He took out the binoculars and had a look at the steamer Joyce had made out. She was a fair-sized vessel with one black funnel amidships. Her white upperworks showed she was a passenger craft.

Jack hailed Ned Nevins on the engine platform.

“Put on your best bib and tucker, Ned, we’re going calling.”

“Calling!” came back the astonished exclamation.

“Yes, deep sea calling. Hail Tom and tell him to look his prettiest. Too bad we didn’t bring any cards.”

CHAPTER XXI. SALUTING A STEAMER.

The Electric Monarch gave a dive and a swoop that caused all Heiny Dill's qualms to come back tenfold.

"Himmel! Ve are sinking. Man der boat-lifes!" he yelled, but nobody paid any attention to him and he speedily recovered his equanimity, and with his rotund face poked out of the cabin port watched, with as much interest as any one else on board, the approach of the steamer.

"She's a Boston and Portland liner bound north," declared Jack to Ned Nevins who, as the motor did not need any attention just then, stood at the young skipper's side in the pilot house.

"How can you tell?"

"By her smokestack. Black with a white band."

On came the steamer as the Electric Monarch swooped downward in a graceful curve to meet her. As the hydroaeroplane commenced her dive, there burst from the steamer's whistle a jet of white smoke. Immediately after, the boys heard the booming greeting of the vessel's siren.

Jack pressed the button that controlled the Electric Monarch's siren and the next moment the hydroaeroplane was screeching an answering salute. They were now quite close to the steamer and could see her uniformed officers on the bridge and her decks black with passengers, their upturned faces looking like white discs.

"My! I'll bet there's a tall lot of speculation going on on board that craft right now," said Ned, as the two boys gazed downward.

"I guess you're right. It isn't every day that the passengers of a liner have a chance to see a craft like this in action," was the response.

Excitement did, indeed, appear to be rife on board the craft beneath them. Passengers could be seen clambering to all sorts of points of vantage. Handkerchiefs were

frantically waved and the ship's whistle was kept constantly roaring salutes.

Astern of the Electric Monarch fluttered the Stars and Stripes. Jack snatched up the speaking tube connecting with the stern lookout post. When Tom responded he ordered him to dip the colors in response to the steamer's salutes.

A few moments afterward Jack and Ned saw the liner's ensign glide slowly down the jack-staff and then ascend again as she acknowledged the mid-air courtesy.

"Can't we turn and follow her?" asked Ned, as the steamer, with a great creamy bow wave curling away from her sharp cutwater, sped on her way.

"Certainly. For a short distance, anyway. We might as well show them our paces."

Jack swung the Electric Monarch in a sharp circle and they could feel the equilibrium devices grate and vibrate as the big craft was "banked" at a sharp angle. By this time the steamer had put quite an interval between herself and the Electric Monarch. But Jack let the hydroaeroplane out a notch more than he had been doing.

The Electric Monarch answered the quickened impulses of her propellers like a race horse. In a flash, as it seemed, she was once more abreast of the steam vessel.

"Look," cried Ned, suddenly, "there's a man clambering up on the jack-staff."

The venturesome passenger had gained the stern railing. He hopped to the top of it and then began to swarm up the jack-staff from the summit of which fluttered the flag. Holding on with one hand he waved frantically with the other. The boys were in the act of acknowledging the salute when Jack gave a sharp cry.

"Gracious! He's overboard!"

Like a stone the man had suddenly dropped from the jack-staff into the swirling water astern of the steamer. How he had lost his hold was a mystery. It all happened in a flash. One second he was waving, the next they saw him

falling down into the sea and then the waters closed over him.

The steamer's whistle sounded in short quick jerks. It was the signal to man the lifeboats. The boys could see the passengers and the crew rushing about in seeming confusion, but in the case of the latter, as they knew, the apparent chaos represented order.

And now, amidst the white, boiling wake of the vessel, they could make out the dark speck of a man's head. He was swimming for his life, swimming desperately to avoid being drawn into the suction of the propeller. Jack's hand sought a lever.

Ned looked at him questioningly. But he did not speak. He was pretty sure in his own mind what the young skipper of the Electric Monarch was going to do.

This belief was speedily verified. Jack drew back the lever and the planes took a downward slant. Simultaneously Jack flashed on the red lights that signaled to the stern and bow lookouts that a descent was to be made. Joyce in the bow and Tom in the stern had seen the accident, but of course had not left their posts. The flash of the red lamps at their stations apprised them that the Electric Monarch was about to make her first essay at saving life.

Down shot the big craft with a swiftness that made it seem as if she must inevitably shoot straight to the bottom of the sea. Even Ned, secure as he felt while Jack had the wheel, flashed a doubtful look at the young skipper. But he said nothing and the next moment he was to be glad that he had remained silent.

With iron nerve, Jack allowed the Electric Monarch to drop like a swooping fish eagle, and then, without the quiver of a muscle, he turned apparent disaster aside with a swift manipulation of the leveling lever. The bow of the Electric Monarch raised and struck the water at an angle that caused her to glide along the surface much as a newly launched vessel might take to sea.

It was a masterly bit of handling. The spray flew high above the Electric Monarch, completely hiding her for an

instant from the view of those on board the steamer. A great cry went up when it was seen that she was safe and riding like a duck on the heaving surface of the sea. To many of those on board it had appeared as if the big craft must have sunk. Their relief expressed itself in a mighty cheer.

Those on board the Monarch felt no less relief. Tom and Joyce had stuck grimly to their posts but both had felt their hearts beat quicker as they neared the water. As it was, a good drenching was all they had received, and they had but scant time to give any attention to that, for Jack instantly headed the Electric Monarch in the direction in which the bobbing head of the swimmer had last been seen.

Presently Ned gave a shout.

“There he is!”

Sure enough, not twenty yards from the Electric Monarch as she lay on the waves, was the form of the swimmer.

“Stick it out! We’ll get you!” shouted Tom, from his post astern.

The swimmer waved a confident hand in reply. He did not appear at all incommoded by his accident. On the contrary, he was swimming leisurely as if he rather enjoyed his bath than otherwise. The boys gazed at him in astonishment. Within the next few minutes they were destined to be yet more surprised.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

The surprise in store for them was this. The swimmer was an old friend of theirs.

“Captain Sprowl!” shouted Jack, as they neared him.

“Aye! aye! my hearty!” came back the response, in the old New Englander’s hearty voice, “lay alongside and I’ll come aboard.”

“What, you know him!” demanded Ned.

“Do we? I should say so. He was in command of Professor Dinkelspiel’s yacht when the mutineers sunk her. After that he was with us all through that Amazon country I told you about.”

But it was no time to enter into explanations. The Electric Monarch was skillfully maneuvered alongside the doughty old mariner before the boats from the steamer had fairly left the vessel’s side. Tom, who had also recognized Captain Sprowl, ran forward from his post in the stern and threw him a line. Five minutes later they were all standing in the pilot-house listening to the captain’s story of how he had come to loosen his hold of the jack-staff and plunge into the sea.

“You see, my hearties,” he said, “I was sure it was you in this here sky-hooting, sea-scooting contraption and so I says to myself, ‘I’ll give ’em a proper salute, I will, ship-shape, man-o-war fashion.’”

“Well, you certainly did, Captain,” laughed Jack, “but what in the world were you doing on that ship?”

The captain looked knowing.

“I am on my way to Portstown, Maine,” he said. “There’s a big fair there next week and one of the features of it is to be an aerial carnival. I’m to be in charge of the airship part of it and I’ve booked some of the best aviators in the country.”

The boys looked interested. Anything to do with airships

always appealed to them.

“It’s just come to me,” resumed the captain, “that maybe you’d like to bring this contraption up thar’ and try for some of the prizes. What do you say?”

It was characteristic of Captain Sprowl that, regardless of his wet clothes and recent narrow escape, he made no more of it than if everything was all right and he had come on board the Electric Monarch in quite the ordinary course of events.

“Well, you see, Captain, this ship, the Electric Monarch we call it, isn’t ours at all. It really belongs to Ned Nevins here.”

“That is, a share of it does,” spoke Ned modestly.

“Well, what does Ned say?” inquired the captain, as Heiny entered the pilot house with steaming hot coffee which Jack had ordered got ready as soon as they struck the water.

“Ned says—yes!” responded the lad, “but how about you, Jack and Tom?”

“So far as I’m concerned I think it would be a splendid thing,” said Jack. “It would give us a chance to try out the Electric Monarch in competition with other air craft, and then, too, the voyage up there would put her through her paces in great shape. My answer is—yes.”

“Same here,” declared Tom with positiveness.

“Ches, dot suids me,” said Heiny, balancing his tray like a born waiter while the captain gulped down his steaming coffee.

“Then we’ll call it settled,” said the captain. “I’ll send you entry blanks on my arrival at Portstown. Be ready to start as soon as possible.”

“Don’t worry about that, Captain,” said Jack, “we certainly shall be ready.”

By this time the boats from the steamer had come alongside and the singular interview had to be concluded.

“Well, I think it is safe to say that a business deal was

never conducted under more curious auspices than this one," laughed Jack, as the captain prepared to board one of the boats. "I guess you'd be ready to talk business if you fell out of a balloon, Captain."

"If there was an undertaker handy, I would," said the captain. And with a cheerful wave of his hand, the stout old seaman stepped into a boat and was rowed back to the steamer.

As the vessel got under way again the Electric Monarch took to the air, rising as easily from the water as she had from the land. With parting cheers and mutual salutes the two craft parted, the steamer to resume her northward voyage, the Electric Monarch to turn homeward after an eventful trial trip which, so far as the boys could see, had been a success in every particular.

On the homeward voyage some brisk breezes were encountered, but the Electric Monarch behaved splendidly. A short distance outside the village of Enderby, Jack, who had surrendered the wheel to Ned, in order to initiate him into handling the craft that bore his name, spied a black dot in the distance.

It was high in the air and traveling rapidly toward them. It was some minutes before they made out what it was.

"A balloon!" They all made the discovery simultaneously. The big gas bag was traveling fast and on a course which would bring it across the Electric Monarch's bows. As it came closer they saw that it was colored a brilliant red and bore on the sides of its gas bag in huge letters, "New Yorker."

"Why, that's one of the balloons that went up in that contest at New York," cried Jack. "They started from Brooklyn last night. My! they've made good time."

On came the balloon, driving fast. In it were two men clad in khaki and wearing close-fitting caps. They waved frantically to the lads in the Electric Monarch and the hydroaeroplane was brought close alongside the balloon, keeping up with it easily.

One of the men in the balloon basket snatched up a

megaphone. Placing it to his lips, he shouted:

“Ahoy! what craft is that?”

“The Electric Monarch of Nestorville, Mass.,” rejoined Jack, in true air-sailor fashion. “What craft is that?”

“The New Yorker, of New York, pilots Augustus Yost and Alan Frawley, will you report us?”

“We sure will. When are you coming down?”

“We don’t know. This is an endurance race—we’ll keep up as long as possible. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” and so ended a scene which ten years ago would have been scoffed at as impossible, yet it was only the other day that newspaper readers perused the account of an aeroplane towing a disabled dirigible into her hangar.

But we must now hasten home to High Towers with the boys. They arrived there without further incident, having made excellent time. The workmen who had been left behind were there to help them make a landing, and once more the Electric Monarch rested on dry land.

Hardly had she touched the ground, however, before Jupe was seen running from the house at top speed. He was shouting something, but till he got close by they could not make out what it was. Then his words became clearer.

“It’s my father!” cried Jack, in an alarmed voice.

“What can be the matter?” cried Tom.

“I don’t know, but it must be something serious,” declared Jack, with a pale face, as Jupe came panting up.

“Oh, Massa Jack,” he wailed, “yo’ fadder am turrble sick, sah. Dey heard de bell ring an’ hurry up to der liberry. Dey foun’ him lyin’ on de flo’ widout his senses.”

“Gracious!” cried Jack, “we must hurry to the house at once.”

“An’—an’ dat ain’ de wustest,” stammered out Jupe.

“Well, what else?”

“De do’ ob de safe done be open an’ it look lak’ some papers bin done taken out!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LOST PLANS.

But, for the time being, the condition of the safe did not occupy any place in Jack's thoughts. His sole care was for his father. Hastening to the house at top speed, he found that Professor Chadwick had been placed in bed and a physician summoned.

The doctor was coming out of the room just as Jack, with a pale, agitated face, came flying in.

"Oh! Dr. Goodenough," he exclaimed, "how is dad? What has happened?"

"Be calm, my lad," said the doctor kindly, placing a hand on the excited boy's shoulder. "Your father has suffered nothing worse than an attack of vertigo brought on by overwork and study. A few weeks' quiet will make him perfectly well again, and then I shall forbid him overexerting himself."

"Can I see him?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Not just now. He is still only partly conscious. From what I can gather, the servant who answered the bell found him lying on the floor of the library unconscious. He was carried to his room, and I was sent for at once."

"When can I see him?" demanded Jack anxiously, and Tom, who had now arrived, repeated the question.

"Probably this evening, when I shall pay another visit."

"He is only suffering from vertigo, doctor?" asked Jack, with curious insistence, "not from any—any injuries?"

"Injuries? I don't understand you."

"He had not been in any struggle, then? That's what I mean."

"Of course not. What an odd question!" The doctor looked at Jack quizzically. "I shall have you under my care next," he said jokingly.

“I thought that perhaps—”

Jack hesitated.

“Go on, my lad. I can see there is something on your mind. What is it?”

“Just this, doctor. Old Jupe, our colored man, told me that the door of the library safe, in which some valuable papers were deposited, was open when my father was found.”

The doctor’s face grew serious.

“I knew nothing of this,” he said. “Were there any signs that a violent entry had been effected?”

“That I don’t know, doctor. Naturally I came here first to find out my father’s condition.”

“It need give you no worry, my boy. I can assure you of that. Let us go to the library at once. What you have just told me may place a very different light on the matter.” And the doctor’s face grew serious.

“How is your father, Jack?”

Jack turned, and saw Ned Nevins, who was, by this time, one of the household, at his elbow. The boy’s face was troubled, for he had a genuine affection and regard for the good Professor.

“He has simply had a stroke of vertigo. It is nothing serious, Dr. Goodenough says. But, Ned, the safe—”

“I know. I heard what Jupe said.”

“Ned, the papers—your papers—may be stolen. How can I—”

“Say nothing about it, Jack. So long as your father has not been injured I do not care. Do you think that gang of rascals would have dared to break in here?”

“We can’t tell anything till we have examined the library. We are going there now. Come along.”

In the library everything was in order. The servant who had answered the bell was summoned and declared that things were exactly as they were when she replied to the

Professor's summons. He was lying at the foot of a desk when she entered the room and was quite unconscious.

"Let us examine the safe," said Dr. Goodenough.

The door of the safe was ajar, and the servant declared that it had not been touched by any one since the discovery of the Professor's unconscious form.

"You are quite certain of this?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, yes, sir. Positive."

"Jack, where were the papers put?"

"In a drawer inside the safe, doctor."

The boy had swung the door of the safe open, and the next instant he turned a white, startled face on the others.

"The drawer is empty. It has been robbed!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"Keep cool, my boy," admonished the doctor. "You are sure the safe was closed when you left?"

"I shut it myself, doctor. There is not a chance that I could be mistaken."

"And the combination?"

"I gave it to my father with my own hands. It was the last thing I did before I left."

"Then the safe could only have been forced open unless some one possessing the combination opened it."

"That is the only way any one could have gained access to its contents."

"And yet there is not the slightest evidence that these doors have been forced," said the doctor, who had been examining the safe. "This is a most mysterious occurrence."

"How could the robbers have opened it?" demanded Jack.

"How did they get in, anyhow?" Tom wanted to know. The boy had been looking about the room. "This window is closed and locked with a snap-lock on the inside. Uncle

must have felt chilly and closed it, or was it shut when you left, Jack?"

"It was shut," said Jack positively. "I recollect that, because I asked dad if he didn't want it closed, and he asked me to shut it."

"There's soft mould in the flower bed outside," struck in Ned. "If any one had come in that way they must have left their footprints on the dirt."

"That is so," agreed the doctor. "Let us look at the ground outside the window."

But an examination of the flower bed only deepened the mystery. It was a bed about five feet wide, and there was no possibility of any one's having stepped across it without leaving the imprint of his feet. It had rained two days before, too, so that the ground was moist and would have readily retained any impression.

Yet there was not the slightest trace of a footprint to be seen. The little group exchanged puzzled glances.

"Perhaps somebody got in by the front door," suggested Jack, but on inquiry it was learned that Jupe had been busy polishing floors in the front part of the house most of the day, and nobody could have got past without being seen. The only other entrance to the house was by the kitchen, and the cook was certain that nobody had come in through her domain.

As a last resort they examined the scuttle on the roof. It locked on the inside, and the fastenings had not been tampered with. Completely nonplussed, the investigators halted and talked matters over. Dr. Goodenough eventually decided to question Professor Chadwick that evening if he should be strong enough.

As may be imagined, the mystery of the theft of the papers cast a gloom over the household. Jack felt that he was partly responsible, and said so to Ned Nevins. But the latter indignantly bade him to say nothing about it.

"Let us be glad that the robbers did not injure your father," he said. "The plans are gone and that is all there is to it."

“But if they are not recovered, Ned, how can we ever make restitution to you?”

“If they are not recovered we still have the Electric Monarch. We must hurry and draw up another set of plans based upon her structure and rush them through the patent office.”

“That’s about the only thing to do,” agreed Jack ruefully, “but I can’t tell you how bad I feel, Ned, over the loss of your property which you entrusted to our care.”

“Forget it,” said Ned boyishly, and, although the expression was slangish, it conveyed to Jack a sense of consolation, for he felt that Ned would never blame him for the loss of Jephtha Nevins’s lifework.

CHAPTER XXIV. A BAFFLING ROBBERY.

Dr. Goodenough's visit that night did not serve to throw any light on the mystery of the safe robbery. In the meantime the police had been summoned, and investigated the premises without getting any nearer a solution of the puzzle than the boys and Doctor Goodenough had done.

Jack had taken it upon himself that afternoon before supper to telephone to the Hinkley House. He learned there that Sam was out and not expected back for some time. Heiny Dill was dispatched to the village to learn further particulars, and returned with the report that Hank Nevins and Miles Sharkey had both left the Hinkley House shortly before his arrival on the scene.

The young amateur detective had trailed them as far as the depot, only to find that they had taken the train bound south a few moments before he arrived. He had learned, however, that they had spent most of the day previous to their departure in the hotel. This only served to make matters the more baffling.

By common consent, whether justly or unjustly, the boys had been inclined to suspect either Hank or Miles with being concerned in the robbery. But it seemed that they had a complete alibi. Sam Hinkley, too, had been seen about the village on and off most of the day, and thus he also was eliminated. But the boys had not suspected Sam in the matter, anyway, so this information was not a surprise to them.

"This is a mystery for fair," declared Jack, when Heiny Dill had duly reported the facts to him. "Fellows, we are stumped."

"Possibly to-night your father will be able to talk and throw some light on the matter," suggested Ned.

"Perhaps so. I am sure I hope that he will. A mystery like this gets on your nerves. The only people I can think of who knew of the existence of the plans, except ourselves,

are Hank and his friend Sharkey. From what you say of them, Ned, I guess they wouldn't stick at anything; from what Heiny Dill has found out we know it was impossible for them to be here at about the time of the robbery. Dad was found unconscious about an hour after we left. At that time Hank and his friend were in the village. They were seen there talking to Sam Hinkley."

"If we could get hold of Sam maybe he could tell us something," suggested Tom.

When Dr. Goodenough arrived that evening he informed Jack that Professor Chadwick had sufficiently recovered to be able to talk. With what eagerness they all awaited the outcome of that interview may be imagined. But so far as helping to clear up the mystery was concerned, Professor Chadwick was as powerless as any of them.

"After Jack had closed the window and left," he said, "I lay down upon the lounge. After a time I felt better and thought I would get a book. I rose from the couch and went toward the bookcase. I can recollect nothing more till I found myself in bed with Dr. Goodenough in attendance on me."

"Nothing else at all?" gently urged the doctor.

"Nothing except that Jupe came in to tell me that the Electric Monarch had started successfully on her maiden voyage."

"You can recall nobody attempting to force the window or open the safe?"

Professor Chadwick shook his head positively.

"Nothing like that at all, doctor," he said, with conviction.

"And nobody but Jupe entered the room, to your knowledge?"

"Nobody," declared Professor Chadwick, "and I think we can safely leave Jupe out of the question."

Late that night Jack called up the Hinkley House and discovered that Sam had not returned.

"I thought he was up to your place," said Landlord

Hinkley. "I've no idee whar' the boy hes gone. He ain't often out this late at night. I hope he ain't up to any monkey shines. If he be, I'll whale him good, big as he be."

Jack decided that it was no use telling Sam's father of all that had occurred since the morning. But when he hung up the receiver he was a sadly perplexed boy. When Heiny Dill departed for the hotel that night he promised to find out what he could. On his return the next morning he reported that a wire had been received from Sam, who said that he was going to New York. Landlord Hinkley found, incidentally, that the funds to finance Sam's journey had been taken from his cash drawer. This was the sum total of young Dill's information, and it was not enlightening.

In fact, it complicated the puzzle, for if Sam was not implicated in the robbery, and there was nothing to make them believe that he was, there was no apparent reason why he should decamp so suddenly, unless he feared that he might be prosecuted for the theft of the lever. The boys, therefore, were forced to conclude that this was the reason for Sam's flight.

As for the sudden departure of Hank and Miles Sharkey, that was more understandable. They had practically hired Sam to make his desperate attempt to cripple the Electric Monarch, and knew that their plans must have been foiled when they saw the craft take to the air. This being so, they had probably argued that Sam would be arrested and would implicate them. Flight, then, must have seemed to them to be their wisest course.

And so, for the present, the mystery of the stolen plans had to be given up by the police and those most interested in the recovery of the papers, as an unsolvable puzzle. Of the startling way in which it was to be cleared up, none of those concerned had the slightest inkling. From day to day the boys feared to hear of the plans being filed in the patent office. But, although through Prof. Chadwick's patent lawyers in Washington, they kept in constant touch with the National Capital, no such papers turned up. In the meantime the boys busied themselves making as complete a set of duplicate plans as possible, covering every patentable feature of the Electric Monarch.

CHAPTER XXV. OFF TO THE FAIR.

Two days after the mysterious disappearance of the plans of the Electric Monarch the promised entry blanks for the Aëro Carnival at Portstown arrived. Inclosed with them the worthy captain had sent a copy of a Portstown newspaper in which there was announced in flaring capitals the following:

“CAPTAIN ABE SPROWL, IN CHARGE OF THE AËRO CARNIVAL, ANNOUNCES THAT HE HAS ENGAGED, AT UNPRECEDENTED EXPENSE, THE NEWEST MARVEL OF THE AIR, THE MOTOR-DRIVEN HYDROAEROPLANE, THE ELECTRIC MONARCH, OWNED AND INVENTED BY NED NEVINS, THE YOUTHFUL INVENTOR. THE MACHINE WILL MAKE A FLIGHT FROM NESTORVILLE TO THE SHOW GROUNDS, AND WILL BE ON VIEW DAILY DURING THE CARNIVAL.”

“Well, what do you think of that?” gasped out Jack, as he read this flamboyant announcement out aloud to his companions. “As a press agent Captain Sprowl is certainly a wonder. It looks as if we’d have to go now, boys, doesn’t it?”

“It sure does,” agreed Tom, “but I wish he hadn’t run that fool notice. We don’t want all that notoriety just now.”

“No, indeed. Not till the plans are all safely filed in the patent office,” agreed Ned, with a serious look. “Queer, that whoever took the other set hasn’t tried to place them on record yet, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I can’t understand it,” agreed Jack; “it looks as if they had something up their sleeves that we know nothing about. However, there is no use worrying over it. I guess we ought to be thankful that things are as they are.”

Heiny Dill arrived a few moments later. In honor of his new job he had purchased a more flaring tie than ever, and his socks were of a lurid purple.

“Any news of Sam, Heiny?” inquired Jack, as the young German sauntered up, whistling blithely, to where the lads stood grouped about the Electric Monarch, on which some minor adjustments were being made.

“Nodt a vord,” responded young Dill, “he hass made idt a vanishment as if he hadt dropped der eardt off.”

“Well, I don’t hear any complaints about his absence,” declared Tom. “So far as we are concerned we don’t care if he never comes back. I’m sorry for his father, though.”

“Veil, der oldt man is bearing oop midt remargable composure alretty,” declared Heiny, cocking his head on one side and giving a “yodle” more remarkable for vigor than harmony.

“When do we start, fellows?” asked Jack that afternoon when he had filled out the entry blanks and they had been mailed by Heiny Dill.

“The Electric Monarch is ready to go this minute,” said Tom. “I was just talking to Joyce.”

“Then what do you say about to-morrow?” asked Jack.

“Suits me,” said Ned, who wanted nothing better than to be riding in the Electric Monarch again.

“Me, too,” said Tom. “I’m tired of being on *terra firma*.”

So it was arranged that the start for the Portstown Fair should be made the next morning. Professor Chadwick was still too weak to attempt to accompany the boys, but he wished them all sorts of luck and a good time.

“We’re sure to have a good time, anyhow,” Tom assured him.

Till late that night the boys worked on stocking up the larder of the Electric Monarch with all manner of canned foods. Heiny Dill, who was as fond of good things as most boys, watched these preparations with glittering eyes. He smacked his lips visibly as he stowed away the provisions on shelves in his domain.

The boys slept little that night, awaking early to find it a slightly overcast morning with a promise of fair weather

later on. There was but little wind, however, and everything appeared to be propitious for a speedy, uneventful voyage to Portstown.

Before leaving, Jack affixed to the "navigation-desk," in the pilot house, an "aërial map" of the route. This was a map on which various landmarks, easily discernible from a height, were noted down, and it was issued by the Aëronautical Society of America. Maps such as these are of the utmost use to airmen who naturally would find little to guide them in an ordinary map or chart. Marked in red ink on the aërial map were various arrows showing the probable direction of the wind in crossing various bits of high ground or in passing over cities.

The air is by no means, as might be imagined, a smooth road to travel. It is full of "billows," aërial "cliffs" caused by up-drafts, and vast, empty pockets wherein nothing but a vacuum exists, and which many airmen claim are the greatest source of danger to aviators that the atmosphere contains.

As there was nothing to cause delay, the Electric Monarch's motors were started spinning almost as soon as it was broad daylight. Everything proved to be in perfect order, and after the tuning-up process the boys took their stations on the craft. As before, Joyce had the bow lookout and Ned Nevins alternated between the pilot house and the motor-platform.

Professor Chadwick and Jupe waved them farewell as they shot upward, and before very long the village of Nestorville and High Towers lay far behind them. Jack sent the Electric Monarch straight up on an inclined aërial staircase till she had gained the height of five thousand feet. At this altitude they proceeded steadily along, the height being sufficient to avoid any danger from upward thrusting air currents.

The morning passed uneventfully, and shortly before noon Heiny Dill announced that lunch was ready. They took this in relays, Ned relieving Jack at the wheel while the young skipper ate. They passed over several towns and small villages, and through the glasses they could plainly see the flurry they were causing down below. It amused

them to watch the scurrying atoms which they knew were human beings rushing about and pointing upward as the Electric Monarch passed high above their heads.

Not long after lunch, as they were passing over what seemed to be a large farm, they saw several men running along below them. Suddenly one elevated and aimed a gun at the fast flying craft. Of course the Electric Monarch was far too high for the charge to reach her, but the boys could see the puff of smoke that accompanied the discharge, and knew that if they had been lower they would have felt shot pattering about them.

“That’s a specimen of what Atwood, the trans-continental flier, had to contend against,” said Jack. “The more ignorant people are, the more they dislike to see modern inventions. I’ll bet if that fellow with the gun could have hit us he would.”

“His intentions seemed serious, anyhow,” laughed Ned, “but the Electric Monarch is a hard bird to bring down.”

About an hour later Jack decided to drop down closer to the earth. He wished to test the effect of the currents near to the heated surface on the Electric Monarch. Accordingly the craft was brought down till at times she was rushing along at not more than two or three hundred feet from the earth.

They were flying over a large, prosperous-looking farm at a fair rate of speed when there came a sudden check in the air craft’s movement. She plunged violently and pitched forward as if about to capsize.

“It’s the grapnel line!” shouted Ned, “it’s gotten loose and hooked on to the roof of that barn!”

At the same instant there came a sound of rending and tearing wood as the steel points of the grapnel dug into the roof of a rickety old barn and tore it loose from the rafters. Jack acted like a flash. He set his descending planes and came to earth in a beautifully executed dive in a stubble field just beyond the farm buildings.

“The grapnel must have torn loose from its fastenings,” he said; “lucky it was no worse. As it is—”

He broke off short. Running toward them from the farmhouse came the farmer and two of his hired men. The farmer carried in his hand a formidable looking gun. As he drew close to the boys he leveled it at them. At the same time he cried out angrily:

“Stay right where ye be. Don’cher move, doggone yer, er I’ll shoot.”

The look in his eye, as well as the menace in his voice, convinced the boys that the threat was no idle one. The man was thoroughly angry over the accidental damage to his barn. On he came with leveled gun, shouting threats, while the two hired men kept up a steady accompaniment.

“Well, this is a fine fix,” commented Jack. “I guess we’ll have to settle for that roof before we leave here.”

“You kin jes’ bet ye’ll hev ter,” roared the farmer, who had overheard him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNLUCKY MISHAP.

“That’s all right, sir. We’re willing to pay you whatever is right for the damage we have done,” said Jack, in as pacific a voice as he could assume.

“Fine times these be when a passel of kids kin come along in a flyin’ contraption an’ take off a man’s roof!” exclaimed the angry farmer, far from being pacified.

“It was an accident,” declared Jack; “we are just as sorry for it as you are.”

The farmer in his rage had paid not the slightest attention to the Electric Monarch, but his two hired men stood looking at it with open mouths. They had never seen anything like it, and the farmer’s orders to them to “close up” fell upon deaf ears.

“Accident be dol-dinged,” exclaimed Farmer Turpin angrily; “it warn’t no accident. You done it a-pupose.”

“We certainly did not,” replied Jack, with some heat. “Do you suppose we’d want to wreck our craft for a rotten old roof?”

“Rotten old roof!” bellowed the farmer furiously. “I’ll show yer how rotten it was. It’ll cost yer a hundred dollars fer ther damage you’ve done.”

“Ridiculous,” said Jack, who had been looking at the damaged roof. It was old and moss-grown and had covered one of the oldest buildings on the farm.

The boards of the antiquated structure were split and paintless. Wind and weather must have had their way with it for many years. Jack pointed out these facts to the irate farmer. But he proved recalcitrant.

“I want a hundred dollars fer thet thar roof er you don’t go on,” said he.

“Rubbish. See here, we don’t want to do damage and not settle for it, but that isn’t to say that we can be bled like that. We’re not so foolish. I’ll give you twenty-five dollars

for that six feet or so of roof we've injured."

An obstinate look, an expression of fixed stubbornness, came over the farmer's face.

"I got yer here an' yer goin' ter pay my price. Ther justice of ther peace here ain't friendly to automobuls and sich-like, an' I reckon ef I say so he'll give yer all a week in jail as well as a fine. How'd you like that, hey?"

"Threats like that don't frighten us," said Jack stoutly, although inwardly he began to feel somewhat worried over the prospects ahead. If the farmer proved as pig-headed as seemed likely it might mean that they would have to pay his outrageous price or else be sent to prison by some cross-grained old justice of the peace.

Of course the boy felt that the farmer's threat was more or less of a "bluff," but still he knew from experience the prejudice that a great many people, especially in remote parts of the country, still felt against automobiles and every innovation of that type.

"Don't scare you, hey?" sneered the farmer. "Wa'al, I cal'kerlate ter put quite a change in yer feelings afore long. Climb down out 'er that thar sky-buggy an' look slippy."

The boys held a hasty consultation. Things began to look bad.

"Maybe we'd better pay the old wooden-head his hundred and be getting on," said Ned. "We don't want to be arrested or anything like that."

"I think that's all a bluff," said Jack. "Still, if we humor him it may be better than to fight him."

"Wa'al, are yer comin'?" demanded the farmer.

"Oh, dry up," growled out Joyce, unable to contain himself any longer.

"Dry up, hey?" snorted the farmer. "I guess you'll do the dryin' yerselves. I wouldn't take no money now. It's satisfaction I want. I'll hev the whole passel of yer up afore the squire in the morning."

This certainly looked ominous. The man was clearly as

stubborn as one of his own oxen, and had made up his mind to be as ugly as he could. Jack wished that Joyce had not made his unfortunate remark and tried to smooth matters over. But it was no use attempting to calm the ruffled feelings of the angry agriculturist.

“Climb out of thar now and be right smart about it,” he snorted. “I’ll show you thet you can’t sass Si Turpin and not suffer for it.”

“But, see here—” began Jack.

“It ain’t no use argyfyin’, young feller. The whole passel of yer goes over to Mill Creek in ther mornin’ I reckon the squire ’ull give you a lesson you won’t fergit.”

“Can’t you be reasonable?” struck in Tom. “We’re on our way to Portstown. It’s important that we hurry up. We’ve got to be there at a certain time.”

“I don’t give a hoop in Hannibal what ye’ve got ter do!” snorted the farmer. “You’ve got to go afore the squire fust. Reckon he’ll soak yer good. He gave a party of automobubblists a good dose last week. I reckon he’ll be all cocked and primed fer you sky-buggy fellers.”

“Well, I guess it’s a case of pile out,” said Jack, with a rueful grin. “This old fellow is as obstinate as a mule. We can only hope to make a good impression on this squire, whoever he is.”

“To judge from his description,” said Tom, “he must be a nice, whole-souled old party.”

“No palaverin’, now. Git right out. I’ll fix you up with quarters in the barn where you won’t git out, and give yer the rogues’ march in the morning.”

There was no help for it. One by one they clambered out, while the hired men stood by with broad grins. They were delivered over to these representatives of the enemy while Farmer Turpin marched grimly behind with his gun.

“Take ’em to the red barn, Reuben,” he ordered, and the boys were presently marched into a large barn partially filled with hay.

“Now I guess ye’ll stay put for a while,” remarked the

farmer, with grim humor, as he prepared to close the door.

“You old clod-hopper, for two cents I’d bust that hook nose of yours in,” roared out Joyce angrily.

“That’ll be used agin’ yer at yer trial!” declared the farmer malevolently. “Yes, sir, that’ll be used agin’ yer. Threats of violence, hey? Oh, the squire will fix you fellers good and plenty.”

The doors were banged to and padlocked on the outside. For some time they could hear the farmer pacing up and down as if waiting to see if they would not make some further complaint. But they all remained silent. They were determined not to give him the satisfaction of thinking that he had worried them. Heiny Dill even began to sing to himself.

By and by the steady pacing of the farmer’s feet outside died away.

“I guess he’s gone to eat supper,” said Tom. “My! how hungry I am.”

This reminded all the others of their appetites, too.

“Maybe he’ll send us something to eat,” suggested Ned hopefully.

But his optimism was not to be rewarded. It grew dark and the captives in the barn sat supperless and disconsolate. They did not face a pleasant prospect, supposing the squire to be all that he had been represented by the malevolent old farmer.

How long they sat thus they did not know, but on Jack’s suggestion they were about to find themselves beds in the hay when there came a tapping at the barn door.

“Supper!” cried Tom, but it wasn’t, it was the man called Reuben, or Reuben Rugg, as he announced himself.

“What do you want?” asked Jack.

“Be you fellers goin’ ter Portstown?”

“We were.”

“Well, if a feller let you fellers out would you give a feller

a ride to Portstown if a feller wanted ter git thar'?"

"We sure would, Reuben. Who wants to go to Portstown?"

"I'm ther feller that would like ter go with you fellers. I don't want ter work fer this feller any longer an' if I got to Portstown I've got a feller thar' that's a kind uv er brother-in-law ter me. So if you fellers want ter git out, this feller 'ull steal the key when old Turpin's asleep and turn you loose."

"Good for you, Reuben. How long will it be before old Turpin, as you call him, goes to bed?"

"Jes' as soon as he gets through writing out what he calls a commitment agin' you fellers. I reckon it 'ud go hard with you if you was ter be taken afore the squire. He's a larruper, the squire is. He give me a month once fer takin' too much red-eye and lickin' ther constabule."

"Well, you watch and wait, Reuben," said Jack; "we'll be all ready when you are."

They heard Reuben's heavy footsteps retreating, and then followed a period that seemed years in extent. But at its termination Reuben's cautious voice was heard.

"I'm a-goin' ter open ther door now. Be you fellers ready?"

"We've been ready for the last ten years," declared Tom, referring to the length of time it appeared that Reuben had been gone.

The lock clicked and the doors swung open. One by one they cautiously filed out and tip-toed across the yard to the place where the Electric Monarch lay bulked in dark shadow. Luckily, it was moonlight, and the craft lay in a sixty-acre field so that there was plenty of opportunity to get a good start.

"Old Turpin didn't monkey at all with the machine, did he, Reuben?" asked Jack, as they crept along. He was not quite sure how far the farmer's malevolence might have led him.

Reuben gave a suppressed chuckle.

“Turpin touch it? Not him. He wanted to, but the old woman told him thet ef he did as like as not he’d get electric—something or other.”

“Electrocuted?”

“Likely. Say, be you really going ter Portstown?”

“Certainly. You’re not scared, are you?” said Jack with an inward smile.

“Naw, but I got a funny kind ‘er prickly feelin’ down my back like what I git when straw gits down my neck in threshing time,” admitted Reuben with a nervous giggle.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

As silently as possible the escaped captives made for the Electric Monarch. They had almost gained the side of the craft when an unexpected obstacle barred their further progress. The interruption was in the form of a big white bulldog.

“Gosh all hemlock!” gasped Reuben, “I plumb forgot about old Lion.”

“Is he mean?” asked Tom.

“Mean, wa’al he’s a sight meaner than old Turpin hisself, and thet’s a-goin’ some.”

As if to show that his character had been described correctly, Lion gave a low growl and then, without any further warning, sprang straight at Jack. The boy jerked up his foot and caught the animal under the chin. With a yapping bark it tumbled back, but collected itself in an instant for another spring.

At the same instant the boys heard a window go up in the farmhouse.

“Wow!” exclaimed Tom, “about this time watch out for trouble.”

“Lion! Lion!” came a voice which they recognized as Turpin’s.

The dog gave a yapping bark. Simultaneously old Turpin must have seen, by the moonlight, that the barn door in which the boys had been confined was open.

“Maw! Maw!” they heard him yell at the top of his lungs, “the boys is got out, gimme my gun!”

Lion at the same instant decided to make another attack, but in the brief pause while he was listening to his master’s voice Tom had taken time by the forelock and picked up a big rock. As Lion made another spring Tom flung the rock.



“Maw! Maw!” They heard him yell at the top of his lungs, “the boys is got out”.—Page 131

There was a howl of dismay from Lion, who rushed toward the house. Shouts and cries filled the air.

“Maw! the young varmint hev killed Lion!”

“Paw, take arter ’em. Hev the law on ’em.”

Then came another feminine voice.

“Look out, paw, they’re des’prit characters. They might kill you.”

“That’s the old man’s darter. Teaches school,” said Reuben laconically, “we’d best be lighting out o’ here.”

They scrambled on board in less time than it takes to tell it. Jack jumped for the controls and turned full power into the motor. There was a yell of dismay from Reuben as the Electric Monarch leaped forward like a horse under the lash. The amazed farm hand would have rolled overboard had it not been for Tom, who grabbed him by the collar as he lost his balance and fell sprawling on the bridge.

“Hey! Whoa thar’! Come back, you young varmints!”

The voice of Farmer Turpin came shrilly out of the night. Then behind them came a streak of flame and the roar of an explosion. Looking backward they could see the figure of the farmer sprawling on his back, kicking and yelling frantically.

“Gosh ter mighty,” exclaimed Reuben, who was by this time on his feet, “the old man fired both barrels of his scatter gun ter oncet.”

“Up we go!” cried Jack, and almost simultaneously, with his exclamation, the Electric Monarch shot up toward the star-sprinkled sky at an angle that almost sent Reuben into hysterics.

“Hey, stop this flying threshing machine,” he yelled, “lemme out! Lemme—”

Tom placed a hand over the frightened farm hand’s mouth.

“You want to get to Portstown, don’t you?”

“Yer—yer—yes, sir.

“Well, you’re going there by the air-line express. Now be quiet. Heiny, for goodness sake, cook us up some supper, and look lively about it,—we’re almost famished.”

The next morning will be one long remembered in Portstown. Early rising citizens saw, swooping down from the skies, a vast aerial craft manned by a crew of youths anxiously looking over the side to descry the best landing place. They had arrived above the town shortly before daylight but Jack had decided to cruise about till the light grew stronger, not wishing to risk a landing in the dark. He adopted, in fact, the same tactics that the captain of a vessel about to enter a strange port would employ.

By the time the Electric Monarch swooped down into the twenty-acre park in which the fair was to be held, there was a crowd of several hundred people in the streets clamoring about the entrance to the fenced grounds. The Electric Monarch was actually a fact, a circumstance which was astonishing to a good many of the Portstown folks who had thought that Captain Sprowl's flowery advertisement was a good deal in the nature of an exaggeration. But now they had seen, with their own eyes, the most wonderful craft of its kind in existence, and the whole town was wild with excitement and curiosity.

Early as the hour was, Captain Sprowl, who had been on the lookout for the boys, soon came dashing into the grounds in a runabout automobile. He extended them a hearty welcome and showed them where they would be quartered during the carnival, that is, if they wished to camp on the grounds. The boys unanimously voted in favor of the camping proposal. They decided that it would be much more fun than stopping at a hotel.

They accompanied the captain to the hotel for breakfast, however, a big crowd following them through the streets, much to the boys' embarrassment. The captain, however, gloried in the notoriety.

"It shows what good advertising will do," he said, glowing with pride, as he escorted his young charges through the streets. Reuben did not accompany them. He had gone out to find his brother-in-law. In the meantime the captain, at the boys' solicitation, had promised to get him a job on the fair grounds if he did not find employment at anything else, an offer which Reuben subsequently accepted.

Breakfast was a merry meal, and the boys had much to tell of their experiences on the trip. After they had finished, they returned to the fair grounds and were shown round by the captain. Several of the aviators who were to take part in the carnival had already arrived and erected their tents with gay festoons of bunting floating over them.

The boys were much disappointed, however, to learn that an air craft they had been most anxious to see was not yet on the grounds. This was the celebrated Sky Eagle, a big dirigible, equipped with wireless and one of the first aërial craft to be so fitted. The captain told them that the dirigible was on the way, however, and was expected ere long on the grounds.

“Have you been notified by them, then?” asked Jack, rather puzzled as to how the captain could have such information.

“Yes, they sent us a message by wireless not long since that they expected to arrive to-day.”

“Then there is a wireless plant in the town?” asked Tom, somewhat surprised.

“There’s one right on the grounds,” rejoined the captain, “it’s one of the exhibits. See the aërials over yonder?”

Sure enough, in one corner of the grounds the spider-like strands of a vertical aërial mast could be seen leading into a hut about which a small crowd was clustered. The captain explained that the operator of the plant was even then trying to locate the Sky Eagle. He had hardly finished explaining this when a boy came rushing out of the wireless hut in hot haste.

“There’s a messenger now. Maybe he’s looking for me!” cried the captain. “Hey, boy!”

The boy turned and came running toward them.

“I was just looking for you, Captain,” he said. “Hutchings, the operator, wants to see you.”

“News from the Sky Eagle?” asked the captain.

“I don’t know, but he said it was important.”

The boys hurried after the captain to the wireless hut. Inside they found Hutchings, the operator, greatly excited.

“Bad news for you, Captain,” he said, holding out a yellow sheet of paper, “a message from the Sky Eagle. She is disabled and drifting out to sea.”

“By the trident of Neptune!” exclaimed the captain, scanning the message, “this is bad.”

He read the message aloud:

“On Board Sky Eagle.—We are disabled. Drifting out to sea off Scatiute. Send help.—Jennings, operator.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DIRIGIBLE IN DANGER.

“Where is Scatiute?” asked Jack.

“About twenty miles south of here,” responded the captain. Then turning to the operator he asked, “Have you tried to get in communication with the Sky Eagle again?”

“Yes, sir, but with no success. Looks as if her wireless had gone out of business. That message came in more than an hour ago. We’ve been looking all over for you.”

“Great guns, boys, this is serious!” exclaimed the captain in an agitated voice. “Who knows what may have happened to those poor fellows! I must try to get hold of them, somehow. But just how I don’t know.”

“There’s Alvin’s dirigible on the grounds,” suggested the operator. “Maybe he’d go.”

“I’ll try him,” declared the captain. “It’s in the cause of common humanity. I should think he’d go.”

But Lester Alvin, the owner of the Cloud Scooter, declared he had not enough gasoline to make the trip. Two other dirigible operators were appealed to, but both of them had excuses of one sort or another to offer. The captain hastened back to the wireless hut where he had left the boys.

“Any news yet?” he asked anxiously of Hutchings the operator.

Hutchings shook his head.

“I can’t get in touch with them at all,” he said. “I can’t even raise a station that’s seen them passing over.”

The captain passed a bewildered hand across his forehead.

“What under the heavens are we to do?” he said. “I’ve appealed to those dirigible fellows in vain. They’ve all got one excuse or another to offer. I guess, though, the main trouble with them is ‘cold feet’ to put it into plain English.”

“And in the meantime those poor fellows on the Sky Eagle may be drifting helplessly over the ocean,” said Jack.

“Yes, and the worst of it is that their wireless appears to be out of order. If that was working they could summon help from some ship. But as it is—”

The captain broke off despairingly. He gazed up at the sky as if seeking inspiration there and then down at the ground. But he remained as perplexed as before.

In the meantime Jack and his companions had been holding an eager consultation. As the captain turned to Hutchings for the twentieth time with a demand to know if he had heard anything yet, Jack stepped forward.

“Captain,” he said, “I guess that we can help you out.”

“What do you mean, boy?”

“That we will go out on a hunt for the Sky Eagle.”

The captain looked dumfounded. Then he gave a vigorous shake of the head.

“No, my boy, I couldn’t allow that.”

“Why not? We have—”

“I wouldn’t be responsible for sending you boys on such a voyage.”

“There would be no real danger. We have a capable ship. We know how to handle her. She is as good on the water as on land.”

“I know all that, Jack, but what would your father say?”

“That it is our duty to go to the aid of those poor fellows on the Sky Eagle.”

The captain scratched his head in bewilderment.

“I don’t know what to say,” he said hesitatingly, at length.

Just then Hutchings interrupted.

“Hold on, here’s a message coming now,” he said.

“Ah! That’s the Sky Eagle,” said the captain. “We worried ourselves unnecessarily, after all.”

But it was not the Sky Eagle that was wirelessly. The captain’s rejoicing had been premature. Hutchings held up his hand to enjoin silence.

Then as the dots and dashes came out of space into the watch-case receivers at his ears he read off the message as it came.

“Scatiute Wireless Station.—Big dirigible seen drifting east. Making signals of distress. Do you know anything about her?”

“Great guns!” puffed the captain. “Just as I thought, she’s drifting out to sea sure enough. Raise ’em at Scatiute, Hutchings. Ask ’em what appears to be the matter with her.”

Hutchings applied himself to his key and in a few minutes he had this answer.

“Impossible to tell what is trouble. Appears to be in gas bag but not sure. Should send help, if possible.”

“That settles it!” cried Jack, “we’ll go after her.”

“I ought to say no, but somehow, all I can say is ‘Go ahead, my boys, and good luck!’” cried the captain, clasping the boy’s hand.

No time was to be lost and the boys hastened from the wireless office to where the Electric Monarch stood surrounded by an admiring crowd. There was great excitement as the boys were seen climbing on board. People came running from all parts of the grounds for, early as the hour was, there was still quite a small crowd scattered about inspecting the various air craft.

“What is it?” “Are they going to make a flight?”

These and a hundred other questions were bandied about from mouth to mouth. The boys worked like beavers and it was evident even to the dullest-witted onlooker that there was something unusual in the wind.

In ten minutes everything was ready. At the last

moment Jack had requested a coil of good strong rope, which was loaned to him by one of the dirigible men. When this had been taken on board all was ready for the start. The boy took his place in the pilot house and the others assumed their stations. Ned oiled up the motor and Tom saw that the stern propeller bearings were in good working order.

“Good-bye and good luck!” hailed the captain as Jack’s hand sought the starting switch.

At that moment, and just as the first impulses of the motor throbbed through the frame of the Electric Monarch, there was a sudden motion in the crowd.

“Lemme through!” bawled a voice, which Ned Nevins recognized with a start. It was Hank Nevins, his ne’er-do-well cousin. Close at Hank’s heels came Miles Sharkey. The two elbowed their way through the crowd, followed by a thickset man who bore the unmistakable stamp of an officer of the law. Miles Sharkey was waving a paper above his head.

“Hold on!” he bawled at the top of his voice, “don’t let that craft go up!”

“Why not?” yelled Captain Sprowl, his face purple.

“This officer will explain,” cried Hank, “we got a conjunction.”

“Injunction,” he means, explained Miles, the law sharp, with a grin. “We’ve got an injunction prohibiting those boys from handling the Electric Monarch.”

The captain stood aghast. The boys on the Electric Monarch could not catch just what was going on but they knew that the controversy concerned them.

“On what grounds did you obtain this injunction?” demanded the captain, controlling himself with difficulty.

“On the grounds that this craft belongs to Hank Nevins here. It was built from plans left to him by his father,” cried Miles.

“How do you know they were left to him?”

“We have found a will. It was only discovered a few days ago after that young thief on board the Monarch there had appropriated the plans himself.”

“Is this right, officer?” demanded the confused captain in a bewildered way. “I ain’t much of a hand at the law myself.”

“It’s right, all right,” said the officer stolidly. “They’ve got an injunction restraining this craft from flying,—that’s the law.”

“He! he! he!” chuckled Hank. “This is the time I’ve fixed my smart young cousin. There was a will, after all.”

Jack was becoming impatient. From the pilot house he shouted down to the captain:

“Shall we go ahead?”

The captain was about to reply in the negative, explaining that the law must be complied with, when Hank shoved rudely against the old seaman, almost pushing him over.

“Lemme by,” he snarled. “I’ll attend to this!”

It was then that the vials of the captain’s wrath boiled over.

“You young limb!” he bellowed. “D’ye think I’ll sacrifice human life for a thousand injunctions? Go ahead, boys!”

There was a roar and shout, and the Electric Monarch jumped forward. The crowd scattered right and left. Hank and Miles leaped after the craft. The wind from the propellers caught the former and hurled him to the ground.

“Stop ’em!” bellowed Miles, and then he turned furiously on the officer. “Why don’t you stop ’em, you—you muttonhead?”

“Keep a civil tongue in you, young feller,” warned the officer. “There’s no power on earth’ll stop ’em now. That injunction will have to wait.”

A mighty cheer from the crowd drowned Miles’s furious reply.

The Electric Monarch had taken the air in a graceful, sweeping slant. The powerful craft was off on an errand of life or death.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DARING RESCUE.

Entirely unconscious of the fact that they were law breakers, the boys' hearts beat high with the love of adventure as the Electric Monarch soared above Portstown, saluted by scores of whistles, and dashed off south in the direction of Scatiute.

The lads had been in many surprising adventures, but they had never encountered such a crisis as the present one. Somewhere out above the ocean, the glimmer of which they could catch to the eastward, was drifting a crippled dirigible with three men on board. It was their task to find that craft and rescue the men.

The captain had confided to Jack the names of the men, and so, when Ned put the question to him a short time after the start he was able to inform him.

"The owner of the Sky Eagle is Mr. Holmes Morse of New York," he said; "with him, acting as engineer, is a man named Tyler and the operator is named Jennings."

"Tyler!" exclaimed Ned, as if the name struck a key in his memory. "It is odd, but that was the name of one of my uncle's closest friends. He was an engineer who took up aërial work. I wonder if it could be the same."

"It might be. But Tyler is a very common name."

"To be sure, but the coincidence in the names and occupations struck me."

"By the way, talking of that, didn't I hear you say that in the crowd that gathered about us before we started, you saw your rascally cousin, Hank?"

"I did," rejoined Ned, "but what in the world he could have been doing here I can't imagine. Miles Sharkey was with him, too. I'll bet they were up to some mischief."

"Connected with the Electric Monarch?"

"Naturally; what else would they have been doing in Portstown."

“But how could they have known that we were there?”

“I suppose they read that advertisement of the captain’s. He said he had it put in every paper of any prominence.”

“I guess that’s it. It was plain enough that they were kicking up some sort of a rumpus just as we were leaving.”

“So it looked to me. They were waving some sort of a paper.”

“Well, it isn’t our funeral. The captain gave us the word to go, and that’s all we’ve got to do with it. I’d give a good deal to know, though, just what they were trying to do.”

Perhaps it was just as well for Ned that he did not know. The knowledge that the Electric Monarch was not his any longer but had been legally left to his cousin would have made him absolutely miserable, for his whole being was wrapped up in the craft.

“Keep a bright lookout for the lighthouse at Scatiute, Ned—we ought to be sighting it at almost any moment now.”

“I’m watching for it,” rejoined Ned, as he went back to the motor platform to oil the bearings.

Not more than ten minutes later Jack’s sharp eyes caught sight of a white finger pointing upward to the sky at the extremity of a rocky point. He guessed that this must be Scatiute. The Electric Monarch had been skirting the coast, but as they swung by the lighthouse, Jack headed her straight out to sea.

Then began a period of tension that was to endure for several hours. Below them lay the glittering sea, calm and heaving gently, and flashing in the bright sunlight. But from even that height, with the extended horizon the elevation gave them, none of the watchers on the Electric Monarch could detect any sign of the craft they had come in search of.

As hour after hour went by without a sign of her, Jack’s heart began to sink. What if they were too late—if the Sky Eagle had sunk, carrying with her, into the depths of the sea, her unfortunate crew?

The thought was a serious one, and Jack, with a sober, thoughtful face speeded up the Electric Monarch a trifle so as to lose no time in case the Sky Eagle was yet above the surface of the sea.

There was but little wind, but what there was, was off shore, so that the Sky Eagle must have drifted seaward very rapidly. Her occupants would naturally have kept as much gas as possible in the bag in order to keep her above the waves. In such a case the drift would have been even more rapid than if the bag had been partially deflated.

Suddenly Joyce's deep bass voice came booming from the forward lookout, from which position he had been scanning the sea with binoculars.

"There's something dead ahead of us!"

Instantly the Electric Monarch fairly vibrated excitement. Ned hastened into the pilot house to Jack's side. He found the young skipper with the binoculars at his eyes.

"Can you make out what it is?" he asked.

"I'm not quite certain, yet. Whatever it is, it appears to be almost floating on the sea. It may be a small craft, and the floating effect may be caused by a refraction of the light or it may be—"

"The Sky Eagle!" Ned finished for him.

The next moment Joyce's voice came thrilling through the speaking tube from the forward lookout.

"It's a balloon! She's almost in the sea!"

Simultaneously Jack had descried what the distant object was. "The balloon" as Joyce called it was, without doubt, the Sky Eagle. But the dirigible was perilously near to the water. In fact she appeared to be almost touching the surface. Would they be in time?

"Hold tight!" warned Jack. "I'm going to let her out every notch."

With a deep whirring roar the propellers began to beat the air faster. As they churned the atmosphere at fifteen

hundred revolutions a minute, the Electric Monarch responded nobly to the powerful impulse. She was making faster speed than ever before. The hand of the indicator crept up and up.

“Fifty—fifty-five—sixty—sixty-five—seventy!”

“Seventy miles an hour!” gasped Ned. “Will she hold together?”

“She’s got to,” said Jack grimly, as he grasped the spokes of his wheel more firmly. At that speed the “pull” of the rudder was terrific. He only hoped that it would not be dragged out of its fastenings.

The Electric Monarch’s frame creaked and complained, and every brace and wire in her structure hummed a separate song as they cut through the air. Luckily, the wind was with them, or the craft, strong as she was, might not have endured the cruel strain.

Every second brought them closer to the stranded and disabled dirigible. They could see the unfortunate craft quite plainly now. She lay with a shriveled and collapsed gas bag almost on the surface of the waves. A jagged rent in one side showed what had brought her down into such perilous proximity to the waves.

From time to time, so close was she to the water, a larger wave than usual would lap up against the under part of the craft’s structure, and drench the men marooned on board the sinking dirigible.

“Only just in time!” exclaimed Jack, as he manipulated his descending levers, cut down the power and landed in the water not twenty yards from the sinking Sky Eagle, with skill that resulted in hardly a splash.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGE MEETING.

The work of rescue was not easily accomplished. The boys did not dare attach a rope to the dirigible as there was a chance that the craft would sink at any moment. But by good luck the occupants of the craft had on board a plank which they used in climbing in and out of the airship's substructure.

This came in useful now. Under Jack's direction the plank was extended between the two craft and one by one the luckless voyagers of the Sky Eagle were transferred to the Electric Monarch. Great was their wonderment at the surprising craft that had effected their rescue when they had given up all hope.

Greater still was their gratitude to the brave lads who, at the risk of their lives, had followed the ocean air-lanes in search of the missing dirigible.

"We owe our lives to you, lads. I do not know how I can ever thank you," declared Mr. Morse, the owner of the craft.

In the meantime Henry Tyler, the machinist and engineer of the Sky Eagle, had been staring at Ned Nevins with an amazement that was akin to unbelief.

"Surely you are Ned, Jephtha Nevins's nephew?" he exclaimed at length.

"Yes, and you are Henry Tyler, his dearest friend!" replied Ned, as the two warmly shook hands.

"So it was the same Tyler after all," smiled Jack, after they had all been introduced.

"It certainly is a small world," declared Mr. Morse smilingly. "So this is the lad whose uncle designed this wonderful craft and left him the plans of it! My boy, you have a legacy worth more than a great deal of money."

"We think so at any rate," said Ned, smiling at his chums.

“But where in the world have you been hiding yourself?” asked Henry Tyler of Ned Nevins as they prepared to get under way, having transferred a few instruments, and so forth, from the Sky Eagle.

“Why, have you been looking for me?” asked Ned in some surprise.

“Yes, for weeks. But I could obtain no clew to your whereabouts. No one in Millville appeared to know what had become of you.”

“I have been at Nestorville with my two good friends, Jack Chadwick and Tom Jesson. Had it not been for them the Electric Monarch would never have been built,” said Ned, gratefully.

“I wanted to deliver to you a package left in my care by your uncle not long before he died,” said Tyler. “He charged me to give it to you after his death, which, it seemed, he felt was not far off. I have kept it with me always, hoping some time to meet you and now I can at last deliver it into the hands of its rightful owner.”

Ned, with some wonderment, took from Tyler’s hands a long yellow envelope. He had no time to open it just then, for Jack ordered all hands to their posts for the return voyage. They had hardly risen into the air before the Sky Eagle was seen to settle down upon the water with a sliding motion.

Suddenly she gave a swoop downward and the next instant the sea had hidden her from view.

“Good-bye, old ship,” said Mr. Morse, with some emotion, “may you rest well.”

Such was the requiem of the Sky Eagle. As to the manner in which she had become disabled, Mr. Morse explained to the boys that the heat of the sun had burst the bag and that following that disaster the engines had broken down. Helpless, and with the gas leaking from the momentarily enlarging rent, the Sky Eagle drifted rapidly out to sea.

Death stared the voyagers in the face, and they had prepared to meet their fate as calmly as possible when, upon the horizon, they descried, winging her way toward them, the form of the Electric Monarch. Mr. Morse declared that words could not describe their emotions as they sighted the outlines of the rescue ship.

The run back to the shore was made without incident. The boys flew straight for the Fair Grounds, where they were received with what resembled an ovation. Word of their gallant voyage of rescue had leaked out, and the town went wild over them. They surged about the Electric Monarch as she landed and fairly mobbed the boys. Cheers rang out deafeningly, and the band played, at the direction of Captain Sprowl, "Hail to the Chief," that being the most appropriate tune the old captain could think of.

It was in the midst of all this excitement that a stoutly built, red-faced man came elbowing through the crowd that surrounded the boys and made his way to where they stood in a blushing, embarrassed group.

"Which of you is Ned Nevins?" he demanded.

"Right here," said Ned, stepping forward. "What do you want?"

"You must come with me," was the response.

"But why? I—"

"Young man, you are under arrest," and the red-faced man threw back his coat and disclosed a star.

"Under arrest!" echoed Ned. "What for?"

"For disobeying an injunction of the court. Come with me."

CHAPTER XXXI.

NED COMES INTO HIS OWN.

Ned's dismay may be imagined. He was taken straight to the magistrate's courtroom where the charge against him was heard. In the meantime, Captain Sprowl had engaged a lawyer for him, and the courtroom was thronged when Ned's case was called. His lawyer cautioned Ned to let him do all the talking and the boy, feeling very nervous and ill at ease before the battery of eyes aimed in his direction, sat silent while the attorney explained to the court the circumstances of the case.

The magistrate heard him out and agreed with him that it seemed a hardship that the boy should be held for disobeying an injunction in order to save lives, but he declared that he had no powers in the matter, as the injunction had been issued by the higher court. It would be for that court to decide in the matter, and that therefore he had no choice but to hold Ned in bonds of \$2,000 for contempt of court. Poor Ned turned pale when he heard this, but the lawyer hastily assured him that it meant nothing, and was merely a formality.

"I've got the money right here!" bellowed Captain Sprowl from the rear of the courtroom, flourishing a bundle of bills like a madman.

"Order in the court!" shouted the bailiffs frantically, for the captain's actions had caused a storm of applause.

The next day Ned's case came up before the court which had issued the injunction. Hank and Miles Sharkey, with greedy, triumphant faces, sat in front seats to witness the lad's discomfiture. Ned, seeing their eyes fixed on him, held himself together bravely. In his eyes there was an almost excited light. However, he appeared to be awaiting some sort of a climax.

As for the other boys, they were openly shaking hands in the back of the courtroom and slapping each other on the back. Captain Sprowl bore a wide grin and Ned's lawyer looked well pleased.

Hank and Miles noted these signs of satisfaction, and they began to grow uneasy. This uneasiness increased to positive alarm when Ned's lawyer, instead of opening the proceeding in the usual way, asked to see a copy of the will, on the strength of which the injunction had been granted.

"Um-er-er, this is an unusual proceeding, may it please your honor," stammered Miles, who, not anticipating anything but plain sailing, had decided to save a lawyer's fee and act as his own attorney.

But the court overruled him and Miles was compelled to produce what purported to be the last will and testament of Jeptha Nevins, deceased, in which he left, "all papers, plans, prints and designs of my inventions whatsoever to my beloved son, Henry Nevins."

"If your honor pleases, may I examine that will?" asked Ned's lawyer.

The court bowed its assent. Miles, with trembling hands, passed the paper over to the attorney. Hank rose to his feet and tried to tip-toe out, but he was stopped by a bailiff who told him that he had orders not to let witnesses in the case out of the courtroom. Miserable and dejected, Hank slipped back into his seat. His face was pasty white and his knees shook. But he did not look a whit more wretched and abject than Miles Sharkey, who nervously fingered his face and drummed on the table alternately, while Ned's lawyer scanned the will Miles had handed him.

The lawyer finally ceased his examination of the paper, and then clearing his throat solemnly, he said:

"Acting for the defendant in this case I pronounce this will a forgery." There was a buzz of excitement through the courtroom. Miles tried to speak, but words would not come from his dry lips. Hank looked ghastly and sank back in his seat in a wilted, crumpled heap.

"And furthermore," relentlessly proceeded the attorney, "we have a genuine will antedating this spurious one. If your honor will give me permission I will produce it."

Forthwith he placed in evidence the will of Jeptha Nevins by which he left specifically to Ned the plans of the

Electric Monarch and the proceeds of his other inventions. (The will had been contained in the envelope which Henry Tyler had handed to Ned on board the Electric Monarch the day before.)

“We can prove that this is the genuine signature of Jephtha Nevins and that the other is a base forgery,” continued the attorney, “and I would ask your honor to make out a commitment for Miles Sharkey on the charge of forgery in the first degree and to hold Henry Nevins on a charge of aiding and abetting the same.”

“I didn’t aid nor abet nothin’,” shrieked out Hank despairingly, “it was Miles done it all, your honor.”

“Shut up, you fool,” hissed Miles, but it was too late. Hank had let the cat out of the bag with a vengeance. The commitments were made out and in due course of time both Miles and Hank paid the penalty of their rascality in the form of prison sentences. Hank, however, received a light punishment, as it was clear that Miles Sharkey, who had hoped to reap big profits from the Mellville concern, had been the ring leader in the plot.

We have no space here to relate how the Electric Monarch acquitted herself at the big aëro carnival. But suffice it to say that she won every event for which she was entered, and at the conclusion of the meet Ned was approached by the representative of an aëro-craft manufacturing concern with an offer to build ships of the Electric Monarch type, paying him a handsome bonus and a royalty.

On their return to High Towers, the boys found Prof. Chadwick very much better, almost in his usual health, in fact, although Dr. Goodenough laughingly said that he was “booked for a long vacation.”

One day, not long after their return to their home, which, by the way, was now also Ned Nevins’, the gentleman who had tried to make negotiations with Ned at the carnival paid a visit to High Towers to try to close a deal with the young inventor.

Professor Chadwick and Dr. Goodenough were called into consultation, and after a long conference, it was

decided that it would be to Ned's advantage to accept the firm's offer, more especially as he would, under their terms, retain an interest in the Electric Monarch type of hydroaeroplane.

When these arrangements had been concluded, Professor Chadwick reached into a drawer of his desk, at which he was seated, in order to produce blotting paper to sign the contracts. But as he opened the drawer he suddenly paused, turned deathly pale, and pressed his hand to his forehead.

"What is the matter, are you ill?" cried the doctor in a concerned voice.

The boys, full of anxiety and alarm, repeated the question. But Professor Chadwick waved them aside.

"No, not ill," he exclaimed in a strange voice. "Wait—wait! It is coming back to me now!"

He pressed a spring in his desk, and a secret drawer flew open. As it did so, they all uttered a shout of astonishment.

It contained the long-missing plans!

The mystery was soon explained. The Professor's memory had come back to him with a rush when he opened the drawer for the blotting paper. On the day of the trial trip of the Electric Monarch, it will be recalled, he had been left behind. After the boys' departure, (as it came back to him, he had begun to feel uneasy about the plans, secure though they seemed to be in the safe.)

He decided to find a better hiding place than the safe even, for them, and with that object in view arose from the lounge and opened the receptacle. Taking out the papers, he placed them in the secret drawer of the desk. Hardly had he done so, however, when an attack of vertigo seized him and he fell unconscious. Now that his memory had come back suddenly, as he seated himself once more at the desk, all became clear.

And so the mystery of the vanished plans was cleared up with satisfaction to all of them. After all, they had wrongfully suspected Hank and his allies, and they were glad to learn that their suspicions had been unfounded.

There is little more to tell. Heiny Dill finally evolved a burglar trap out of his invention, but he makes more money working for the Boy Inventors at High Towers than he does out of his numerous eccentric contrivances. Sam Hinkley returned to Nestorville not long after his invasion of New York, and after he had begged for forgiveness, his father finally gave him the post of night clerk in the hotel, which he fills admirably. Of the fate of Hank and Miles we are already informed.

And so, with Ned Nevins prosperous and happy, and the Boy Inventors broadened and improved by their experiences with the Electric Monarch, we will, for the present, leave them with the best of wishes for their future undertakings. Knowing them to be always on the alert for the latest developments in scientific progress, we are not greatly surprised to learn that their next experimental experiences will be described in a volume entitled, "The Boy Inventors' Radio Telephone."

THE END

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