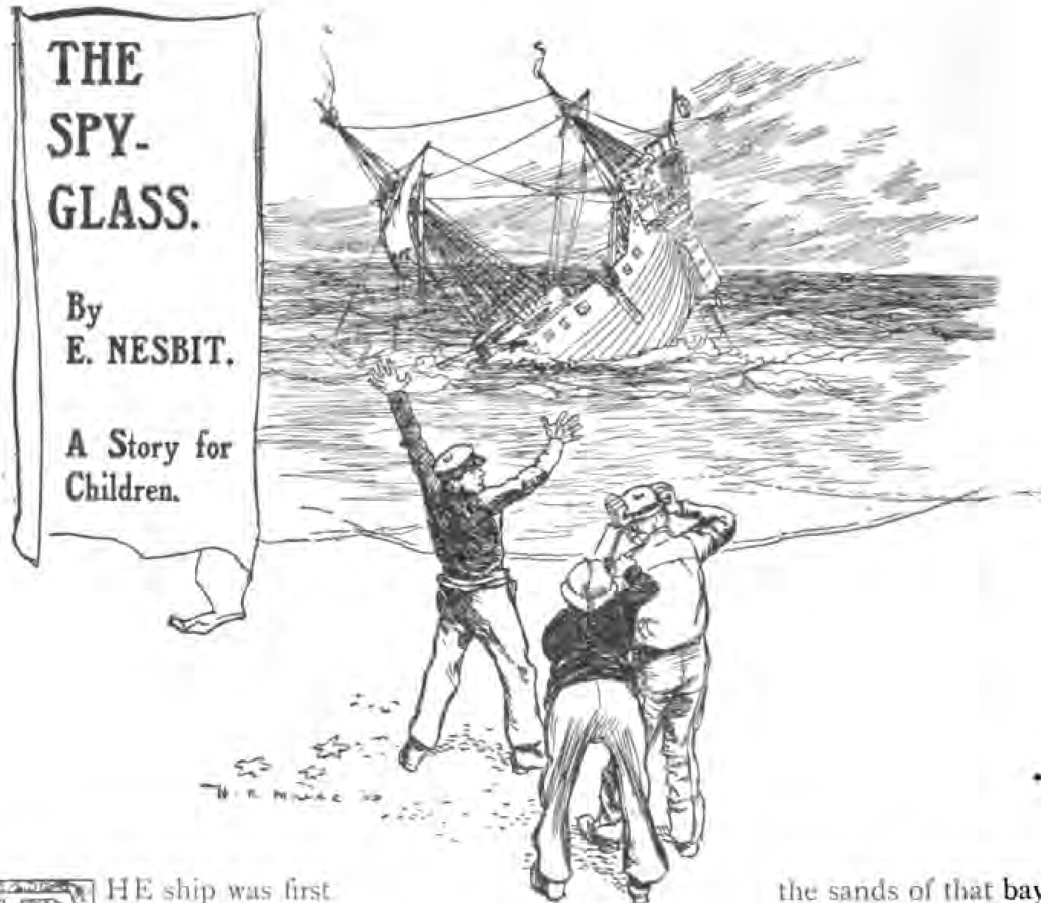
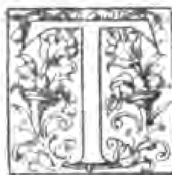


THE SPY-GLASS.

By E. NESBIT.

A Story for Children.



THE ship was first sighted off Dungeness. She was labouring heavily. Her paint was peculiar and her rig outlandish.

"Blessed if I ever see such a rig—nor such lines neither," old Hawkhurst said.

"She do be a rum 'un," said young Benenden, who had strolled along the beach with the glasses the gentleman gave him for saving the little boy from drowning. "Don't know as I ever see another just like her."

"I'll give half a dollar to any chap as can tell me where she hails from—and what port it is where they have ships o' that cut," said middle-aged Haversham to the group that had now gathered.

"George!" exclaimed young Benenden from under his field-glasses, "she's going." And she went. Her bow went down suddenly and she stood stern up in the water—like a duck after rain. Then quite slowly, with no unseemly hurry, but with no moment's change of what seemed to be her fixed purpose, the ship sank and the grey rolling waves wiped out the place where she had been.

When ships go down off Dungeness, things from them have a way of being washed up on the sands of that bay which curves from Dungeness to Folkestone, where the sea has bitten a piece out of the land—just such a half-moon-shaped piece as you bite out of a slice of bread and butter.

Now, if you live by the sea and are grown-up you know that if you find anything on the seashore your duty is to take it up to the coastguards and say, "Please, I've found this."

Edward, staying with an aunt at the seaside, but whose real home was in a little villa in the suburbs, was not grown-up—and he kept everything he found; and one thing he found was a square case of old leather embossed with odd little figures of men and animals and words that Edward could not read. There were several things inside: queer-looking instruments, rather like those in the little box of mathematical instruments that he had had as a prize at school; and in a groove of the soaked velvet lining lay a neat little brass telescope.

Edward picked it up and put it to his eye, and tried to see through it a little tug that was sturdily puffing up Channel. He failed to find the tug, and found himself gazing at a little cloud on the horizon. As he looked it grew larger and darker, and presently

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he looked through the glass again; but he found he needed both hands to keep it steady, so he set down the case with the other instruments on the sand at his feet and put the glass to his eye once more.

He had thought it was a sandy shore, but almost at once he saw that it was not sand but fine shingle, and the discovery of this mistake surprised him so much that he kept on looking at the shingle through the little telescope, which showed it quite plainly. And as he looked the shingle grew coarser.

Something hard pressed against his foot, and he lowered the glass.

He was surrounded by big stones, and they all seemed to be moving; some were tumbling off others that lay in heaps below them, and others were rolling away from the beach in every direction. And the place where he had put down the case was covered with great stones which he could not move.

The only person in sight was another boy in a blue jersey with red letters on his chest.

"Hi!" said Edward, and the boy also said "Hi!"

"Come along here," said Edward, "and I'll show you something."

"'LOOK!' HE SAID; 'LOOK!' AND POINTED."

"Right-o!" the boy remarked, and came.

This boy was staying at the camp where the white tents were below the Grand Redoubt, though his home was in the slums.

"I say," said Edward, "did you see anyone move these stones?"

"I ain't only just come up on to the sea-wall," said the boy, who was called Gustus.

"They all came round me," said Edward, rather pale. "I was just taking a squint through this little telescope I've found—and they came rolling up to me."

"Let's see what you found," said Gustus, and Edward gave him the glass. He directed it with inexpert fingers to the sea wall, so little trodden that on it the grass grows.

"Oh, look!" cried Edward, very loud. "Look at the grass!"

Gustus let the glass fall to long arm's length and said "Krikey!"

The grass and flowers on the sea-wall had grown a foot and a half—quite tropical they looked.

"Well?" said Edward.

"What's the matter wiv everyfink?" said Gustus. "We must both be a bit balmy, seems ter me."

"What's balmy?" asked Edward.

"Off your chump—looney—like what you and me is," said Gustus. "First you sees things, then I sees 'em."

"It was only fancy, I expect," said Edward. "I expect the grass on the sea-wall was always like that, really."

"Let's have a look through your spy-glass at that little barge," said Gustus, still holding the glass.

Edward snatched the glass from Gustus.

"Look!" he said; "look!" and pointed.

A hundred yards away stood a boot about as big as the bath you see Marat in at Madame Tussaud's.

"S'welp me," said Gustus, "we're asleep, both of us, and a-dreaming as things grow while we look at them."

"But we're not dreaming," Edward objected. "You let me pinch you and you'll see."

"No fun in that," said Gustus. "Tell you what—it's the spy-glass—that's what it is. Hold on; I'll put something up for you to look at—a mark like—something as doesn't matter."

He fumbled in his pocket and held up a boot-lace. Next moment he had dropped the boot-lace, which, swollen as it was with the magic of the glass, lay like a snake on the stone at his feet.

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So the glass *was* a magic glass, as, of course, you know already.

"My!" said Gustus; "wouldn't I like to look at my victuals through that there!"

Thus we find Edward of the villa—and through him Gustus of the slum—in possession of a unique instrument of magic. What could they do with it?

Both were agreed that it would be a fine thing to get some money and look at it, so that it would grow big. But Gustus never had any pocket-money, and Edward had had his confiscated to pay for a window he had not intended to break.

Gustus felt certain that someone would find out about the spy-glass and take it away from them. His experience was that anything you happened to like was always taken away.

"I been thinking," said Gustus, on the third day. "When I'm a man I'm a-going to be a burglar. You has to use your head-piece in that trade, I tell you. So I don't think thinking's swipes, like some blokes do. And I think p'r'aps it don't turn everything big. An' if we could find out what it don't turn big we could see what we wanted to turn big on what it didn't turn big, and then it wouldn't turn anything big except what we wanted it to. See?"

Edward did not see; and I don't suppose you do, either.

So Gustus went on to explain that teacher had told him there were some substances impervious to light, and some to cold, and so on and so forth, and that what they wanted was a substance that should be impervious to the magic effects of the spy-glass.

"So if we get a tanner and set it on a plate and squint at it it'll get bigger—but so'll the plate. And we don't want to litter the place up with plates the bigness of cart-wheels. But if the plate didn't get big we could look at the tanner till it covered the plate, and then go on looking and looking and looking and see nothing but the tanner till it was as big as a circus. See?"

This time Edward did see. But they got no farther, because it was time to go to the circus. There was a circus at Dymchurch just then, and that was what made Gustus think of the sixpence growing to that size.

It was a very nice circus, and all the boys from the camp went to it—also Edward, who managed to scramble over and wriggle under benches till he was sitting next to his friend.

It was the size of the elephant that did it. Edward had not seen an elephant before, and when he saw it, instead of saying, "What a size he is!" as everybody else did, he said to himself, "What a size I could make him!" and pulled out the spy-glass, and by a miracle of good luck or bad got it levelled at the elephant as it went by. He turned the glass slowly as the elephant went out, and the elephant only just got out in time. Another moment and it would have been too big to get through the door. The audience cheered madly. They thought it was a clever trick; and so it would have been, very clever.

"You silly cuckoo," said Gustus, bitterly; "now you've turned that great thing loose on the country, and how's his keeper to manage him?"

"I could make the keeper big, too."

"Then if I was you I should just bunk out and do it."

Edward obeyed, slipped under the canvas of the circus tent, and found himself on the yellow, trampled grass of the field among guy-ropes, orange-peel, banana-skins, and dirty paper. Far above him and everyone else towered the elephant—it was now as big as the church.

Edward pointed the glass at the man who was patting the elephant's foot and telling it to "Come down with you!" Edward was very much frightened. He did not know whether you could be put in prison for making an elephant's keeper about forty times his proper size. But he felt that something must be done to control the gigantic mountain of black-lead-coloured living flesh. So he looked at the keeper through the spy-glass, but the keeper remained his normal size!

In the shock of this failure he dropped the spy-glass, picked it up, and tried once more to fix the keeper. Instead he only got a circle of black-lead-coloured elephant; and while he was trying to find the keeper, and finding nothing but more and more of the elephant, a shout startled him and he dropped the glass once more.

"Well," said one of the men, "what a turn it give me! I thought Jumbo'd grown as big as a railway station, s'welp me if I didn't."

"Now, that's rum," said another, "so did I."

"And he *ain't*," said a third; "seems to me he's a bit below his usual figure. Got a bit thin or somethink, ain't he?"

Edward slipped back into the tent unobserved.

"It's all right," he whispered to his friend; "he's gone back to his proper size; and the man didn't change at all."

He told all that had happened.

"Ho!" Gustus said, slowly—"Ho! All

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"FAR ABOVE HIM AND EVERYONE ELSE TOWERED THE ELEPHANT."

right. Conjuring's a rum thing. You don't never know where you are!"

That evening after tea Edward went as he had been told to do to the place on the shore where the big stones had taught him the magic of the spy-glass.

Gustus was already at the tryst.

"See here," he said, "I'm a goin' to do something brave and fearless, I am, like Lord Nelson and the boy on the fire-ship. You out with that spy-glass, an' I'll let you look at *me*. Then we'll know where we are."

Very much afraid, Edward pulled out the glass and looked.

And nothing happened!

"That's number one," said Gustus. "Now, number two."

He snatched the telescope from Edward's hand, and turned it round and looked through the other end at the great stones. Edward, standing by, saw them get smaller and smaller—turn to pebbles, to beach, to sand. When Gustus turned the glass to the giant grass and flowers on the sea-wall, they also drew back into themselves, got smaller and smaller, and presently were as they had been before ever Edward picked up the magic spy-glass.

"Now we know all about it—I *don't* think," said Gustus. "To-morrow we'll have a look at that there model engine of yours that you say works."

They did. They had a look at it through the spy-glass, and it became a quite efficient motor; of rather an odd pattern it is true, and very bumpy, but capable of quite a decent speed. They went up to the hills in it, and so unusual was its design that no one who saw it ever forgot it. People talk about that rummy motor at Bonnington and Aldington to this day. The boys stopped often, to use the spy-glass on various objects. Trees, for instance, could be made to grow surprisingly, and there were patches of giant wheat found that year near Ashford which were never satisfactorily accounted for. Blackberries, too, could be enlarged to a most wonderful and delicious fruit.

It was a beautiful ride. As they came home they met a woman driving a weak-looking little cow. It went by on one side of the engine and the woman went by on the other. When they were restored to each other the cow was nearly the size of a cart-horse and the woman did not recognise it. She ran back along the road after her cow, which must, she said, have taken fright at the beastly motor. She scolded violently as she went. So the boys had to make the cow small again, when she wasn't looking.

"This is all very well," said Gustus; "but

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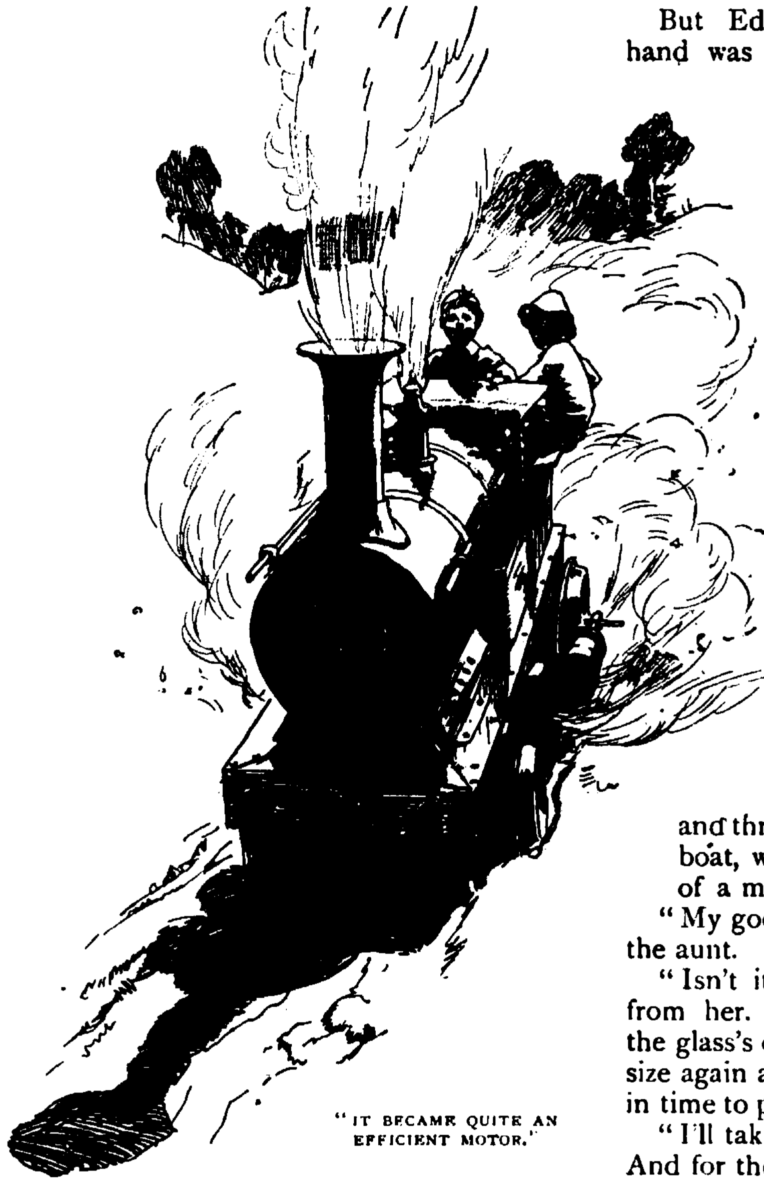

"IT BECAME QUITE AN EFFICIENT MOTOR."

we've got our fortune to make, I *don't* think. We've got to get hold of a tanner—or a bob would be better. I see I shall have to do some thinking," he added.

They stopped in a quiet road close by Dymchurch; the engine was made small again, and Edward went home with it under his arm.

It was the next day that they found the shilling on the road. They could hardly believe their good luck. They went out on to the shore with it, put it on Edward's hand while Gustus looked at it with the glass, and the shilling began to grow.

"It's as big as a saucer," said Edward, "and it's heavy. I'll rest it on these stones. It's as big as a plate; it's as big as a tea-tray; it's as big as a cart-wheel."

And it was.

"Now," said Gustus, "we'll go and borrow a cart to take it away. Come on."

But Edward could not come on. His hand was in the hollow between the two stones, and above lay tons of silver. He could not move, and the stones couldn't move. There was nothing for it but to look at the great round lump of silver through the wrong end of the spy-glass till it got small enough for Edward to lift it. And then, unfortunately, Gustus looked a little too long, and the shilling, having gone back to its own size, went a little farther—and it went to sixpenny size, and then went out altogether.

So nobody got anything by that.

And now came the time when, as was to be expected, Edward dropped the telescope in his aunt's presence. She said, "What's that?" picked it up with quite unfair quickness, and looked through it, and through the open window at a fishing-boat, which instantly swelled to the size of a man-of-war.

"My goodness! what a strong glass!" said the aunt.

"Isn't it?" said Edward, gently taking it from her. He looked at the ship through the glass's other end till she got to her proper size again and then smaller. He just stopped in time to prevent her disappearing altogether.

"I'll take care of it for you," said the aunt. And for the first time in their lives Edward said "No" to his aunt.

It was a terrible moment.

Edward, quite frenzied by his own courage, turned the glass on one object after another—the furniture grew as he looked, and when he lowered the glass the aunt was pinned fast between a monster table-leg and a giant chiffonier.

"There!" said Edward. "And I sha'n't let you out till you say you won't take it to take care of either."

"Oh, have it your own way," said the aunt, faintly, and closed her eyes. When she opened them the furniture was its right size and Edward was gone. He had twinges of conscience, but the aunt never mentioned the subject again. I have reason to suppose that *she* supposed that she had had a fit of an unusual and alarming nature.

Next day the boys in the camp were to go back to their slums. Edward and Gustus

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parted on the seashore and Edward cried. He had never met a boy whom he liked as he liked Gustus. And Gustus himself was almost melted.

"I will say for you you're more like a man and less like a snivelling white rabbit now than what you was when I met you. Well, we ain't done nothing to speak of with that there conjuring trick of yours, but we've 'ad a right good time. So long. See you 'gain some day."

Edward hesitated, spluttered, and still weeping flung his arms round Gustus.

"'Ere, none o' that," said Gustus, sternly. "If you ain't man enough to know better, I am. Shake 'ands like a Briton; right about face—and part game."

He suited the action to the word.

Edward went back to his aunt snivelling, defenceless but happy. He had never had a friend except Gustus, and now he had given Gustus the greatest treasure that he possessed.

For Edward was not such a white rabbit as he seemed. And in that last embrace he had managed to slip the little telescope into the pocket of the reefer-coat which Gustus wore, ready for his journey.

And the holidays ended and Edward went back to his villa. Be sure he had given Gustus his home address, and begged him to write, but Gustus never did.

Presently Edward's father came home from India, and they left his aunt to her villa and went to live on a sloping hill at Chislehurst, at a jolly little house which was Edward's father's very own. They were not rich, and Edward could not go to a very good school, and, though there was enough to eat and wear, what there was was very plain. For Edward's father had been wounded, and somehow had not got a pension.

Now one night in the next summer Edward woke up in his bed with the feeling that there was someone in the room. And there was. A dark figure was squeezing itself through the window. Edward was far too frightened to scream. He simply lay and listened to his heart. It was like listening to a cheap American clock. The next moment a lantern flashed in his eyes and a masked face bent over him.

"Where does your father keep his money?" said a muffled voice.

"In the b-b-b-b-bank," replied the wretched Edward, truthfully.

"I mean what he's got in the house."

"In his trousers pocket," said Edward, "only he puts it in the dressing-table drawer at night."

"You must go and get it," said the burglar, for such he plainly was.

"Must I?" said Edward, wondering how he could get out of betraying his father's confidence and being branded as a criminal.

"Yes," said the burglar in an awful voice; "get up and go."

"*No*," said Edward, and he was as much surprised at his courage as you are.

"Bravo!" said the burglar, flinging off his mask. "I see you *aren't* such a white rabbit as what I thought you."

"It's Gustus," said Edward. "Oh, Gustus, I'm so glad! Oh, Gustus, I'm so sorry! I always hoped you wouldn't be a burglar. And now you are."

"I am so," said Gustus, with pride; "but," he added, sadly, "this is my first burglary."

"Couldn't it be the last?" suggested Edward.

"That," replied Gustus, "depends on you."

"I'll do anything," said Edward, "anything."

"You see," said Gustus, sitting down on the edge of the bed, in a confidential attitude, with the dark lantern in one hand and the mask in the other, "when you're as hard up as we are, there's not much of a living to be made honest. I'm sure I wonder we don't all of us turn burglars, so I do. And that glass of yours—you little beggar—you did me proper—sticking of that thing in my pocket like what you did. Well, it kept us alive last winter, that's a cert. I used to look at the victuals with it, like what I said I would. A farden's worth o' pease-pudden was a dinner for three when that glass was about, and a penn'orth o' block-trimmings turned into a big beefsteak almost. They used to wonder how I got so much for the money. But I'm always funky o' being found out—or of losing the blessed spy-glass—or of someone pinching it. So we got to do what I always said—make some use of it. And if I go along and nick your father's dibs we'll make our fortunes right away."

"No," said Edward, "but I'll ask father."

"Rot." Gustus was crisp and contemptuous. "He'd think you was off your chump, and he'd get me lagged."

"It would be stealing," said Edward.

"Not when you'll pay it back."

"Yes, it would," said Edward. "Oh, don't ask me—I can't."

"Then I shall," said Gustus. "Where's his room?"

"Oh, don't!" said Edward. "I've got a half-sovereign of my own. I'll give you that."

"Lawk!" said Gustus. "Why the blue monkeys couldn't you say so? Come on."

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He pulled Edward out of bed by the leg, hurried his clothes on anyhow, and half-dragged, half-coaxed him through the window and down by the ivy and the chicken-house roof. They stood face to face in the sloping garden and Edward's teeth chattered. Gustus caught him by his hand and led him away.

At the other end of the shrubbery, where the rockery was, Gustus stooped and dragged out a big clinker—then another, and another. There was a hole like a big rabbit-hole. If Edward had really been a white rabbit it would just have fitted him.

"I'll go first," said Gustus, and went, head-foremost. "Come on," he said, hollowly, from inside. And Edward, too, went. It was dreadful crawling into that damp hole in the dark. As his head got through the hole he saw that it led to a cave, and below him stood a dark figure. The lighted lantern was on the ground.

"Come on," said Gustus; "I'll catch you if you fall."

With a rush and a scramble Edward got in.

"It's caves," said Gustus; "a chap I know that goes about the country bottoming cane-chairs, 'e told me about it. And I nosed about and found you lived here. So then I thought what a go. So now we'll put your half-shiner down and look at it, and we'll have a gold-mine, and you can pretend to find it."

"Halves!" said Edward, briefly and firmly.

"You're a man," said Gustus. "Now, then!" He led the way through a maze of chalk caves till they came to a convenient spot, which he had marked. And now Edward emptied his pockets on the sand—he had brought all the contents of his money-box, and there was more silver than gold, and more copper than either, and more odd rubbish than there was anything else. You know what a boy's pockets are like. Stones and putty, and slate-pencils and marbles—I urge in excuse that Edward was a little boy—a bit of plasticine, and pieces of wood.

"No time to sort 'em," said Gustus, and, putting the lantern in a suitable position, he got out the glass and began to look through it at the tumbled heap.

And the heap began to grow. It grew out sideways till it touched the walls of the recess, and outwards till it touched the top of the recess, and then it slowly worked out into the big cave and came nearer and nearer to the boys. Everything grew—stones, putty, money, wood, plasticine, and the chalk of the cave itself.

Gustus patted the growing mass as though it were alive and he loved it.

"Here's clothes, and beef, and bread, and tea, and coffee—and baccy—and a good school, and me a engineer. I feel it all a-growing and a-growing. You feel of it, Teddy."

Edward obediently put his hand on the side of the pile.

"I say—stop!" he cried, suddenly.

"A little bit more," said Gustus.

"Drop it, I say," said Edward, so fiercely that Gustus, in his surprise, actually did drop the glass, and it rolled away into the darkness.

"Now you've done it," said Gustus. "I daresay it's smashed."

"I don't care if it is," said Edward. "Why didn't you stop when I said stop? My hand's caught."

"So it is," said Gustus. "It's fast between the rock and this precious Tom Tiddler's ground of ours. Hold on a bit."

"I'LL FIND THE GLASS AND MAKE THE GOLD SMALLER, SO AS YOU CAN GET YOUR HAND OUT."

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"I can't help holding on," said Edward, bitterly.

"I mean, don't you fret. I'll find the glass in a jiffy and make the gold smaller, so as you can get your hand out."

But Gustus could not find the glass. And, what is more, no one ever has found it to this day.

"It's no good," said Gustus, at last. "I'll go and find your father. They must come and dig you out."

"And they'll lag you if they see you. You said they would," said Edward, not at all sure what lagging was, but sure that it was something dreadful. "Write a letter and put it in his letter-box. They'll find it in the morning."

"And leave you pinned by the hand all night? Likely—I *don't* think," said Gustus.

"I'd rather," said Edward, bravely, but his voice was weak. "I couldn't bear you to be lagged, Gustus. I do love you so."

"None of that," said Gustus, sternly. "I'll leave you the lamp; I can find my way with matches. Keep up your pecker, and never say die."

"I won't say it—I promise I won't," said Edward, bravely. "Oh, Gustus!"

That was how it happened that Edward's father was roused from slumber by violent shakings from an unknown hand, while an unknown voice uttered these surprising words:—

"Edward is in the gold and silver and copper mine that we've found under your garden. Come along and get him out."

When Edward's father was at last persuaded that Gustus was not a silly dream—and this took some time—he got up.

He did not believe a word that Gustus said, even when Gustus added "S'welp me!" which he did several times.

But Edward's bed was empty—his clothes gone.

Edward's father got the gardener from next door—with, at the suggestion of Gustus, a pick—the hole in the rockery was enlarged, and all three got in.

And when they got to the place where Edward was, there, sure enough, was Edward, pinned by the hand between a piece of wood and a piece of rock. Neither the father nor the gardener noticed any metal. Edward had fainted.

They got him out; a couple of strokes with the pick released his hand, but it was bruised and bleeding.

They all turned to go, but they had not gone twenty yards before there was a crash and a report like thunder, and a slow, rumbling, rattling noise very dreadful to hear.

"Get out of this quick, sir," said the gardener; "the roof's fell in; this part of the caves ain't safe."

Edward was very feverish and ill for several days, during which he told his father the whole story—of which his father did not believe a word. But he was kind to Gustus, because Gustus was evidently fond of Edward.

When Edward was well enough to walk in the garden his father and he found that a good deal of the shrubbery had sunk, so that the trees looked as though they were growing in a pit.

It spoiled the look of the garden, and Edward's father decided to move the trees to the other side.

When this was done the first tree uprooted showed a dark hollow below it. The man is not born who will not examine and explore a dark hollow in his own grounds. So Edward's father explored.

This is the true story of the discovery of that extraordinary vein of silver, copper, and gold which has excited so much interest in scientific and mining circles. Learned papers have been written about it, learned professors have been rude to each other about it, but no one knows how it came there except Gustus and Edward and you and me. Edward's father is quite as ignorant as anyone else, but he is much richer than most of them; and, at any rate, he knows that it was Gustus who first told him of the gold-mine, and who risked being lagged—arrested by the police, that is—rather than let Edward wait till morning with his hand fast between gold and rock.

So Edward and Gustus have been to a good preparatory school, and now they are at Winchester, and presently they will be at Oxford. And when Gustus is twenty-one he will have half the money that came from the gold-mine. And then he and Edward mean to start a school of their own. And the boys who are to go to it are to be the sort of boys who go to the summer camp of the Grand Redoubt near the sea—the kind of boy that Gustus was.

So the spy-glass will do some good, after all, though it *was* so unmanageable to begin with.

Perhaps it may even be found again. But I rather hope it won't. It might, really, have done much more mischief than it did—and if anyone found it, it might do more yet.

There is no moral to this story, except . . . But, no—there is no moral.

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