No. 270.—A Thrilling Account of St. Frank's Holiday Adventures!

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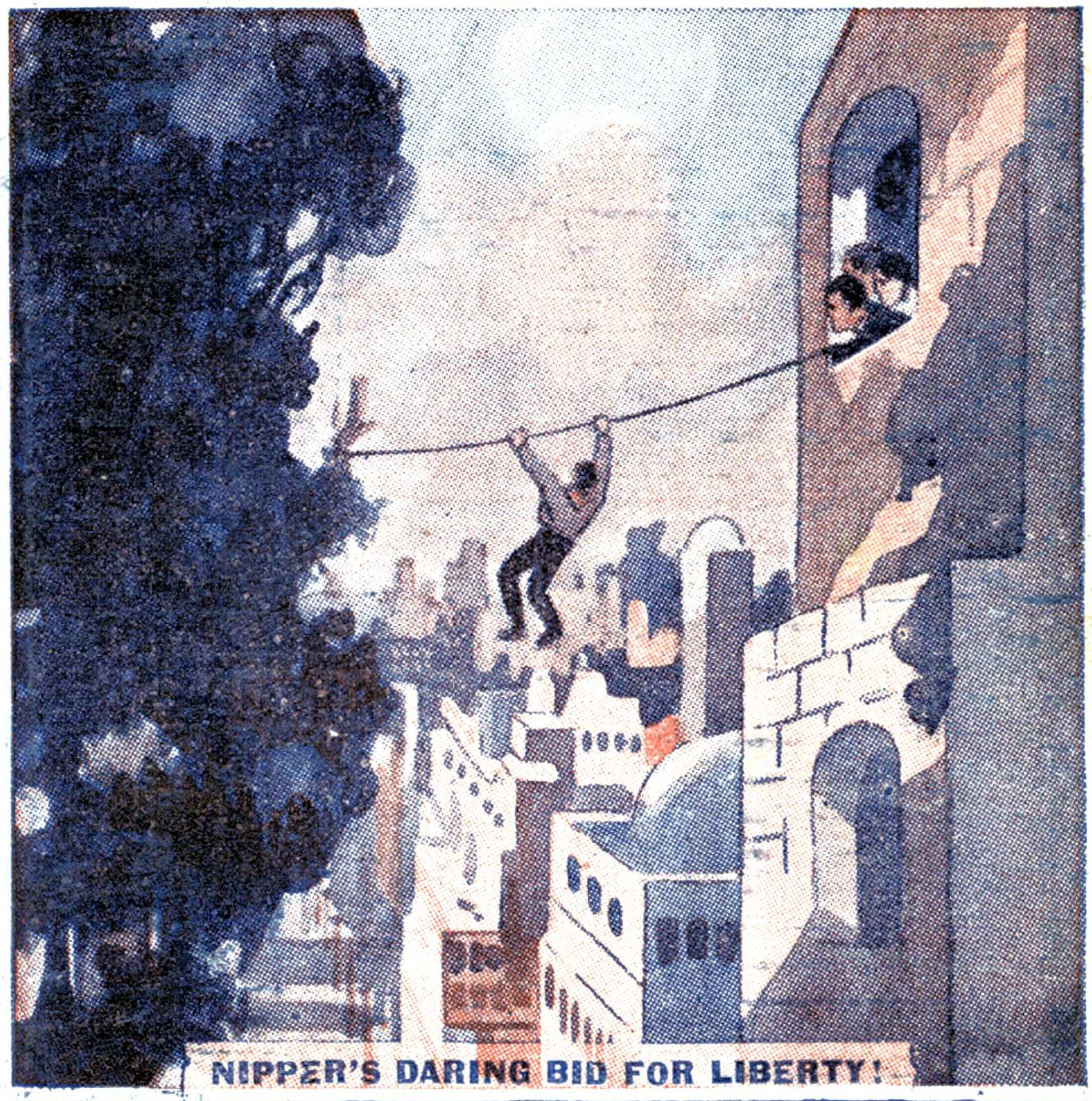

NIPPER'S DARING BID FOR LIBERTY!

ABANDONED AMONG THE ARZACS.

A Story of Thrilling Holiday Adventure in Unknown Brazil, introducing NELSON LEE, NIPPER, LORD DORRIMORE, UMLOSI, and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Dream City," "The White Giants," "The Modern El Dorado," etc.

August 7, 1920.

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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT ON THE MAJARRA.

CAPTAIN BURTON looked grim as he filled his pipe.

"Yes, doctor, there's going to be some trouble before long," he declared. "It will be a stiff fight, in my opinion—but if we all stand together, there's no reason why we shouldn't win the day!"

Dr. Brett nodded.

"While we've got life within us, we'll defend the yacht, Captain!" he declared grimly. "We've got machine guns, rifles, and any amount of willing hands. I don't see any reason why we should fear this mysterious enemy of ours."

"Man, there's no question of fear!" put in a raw boned individual who was sitting on the other side of the table. "Fighting is not in my line, I'm thinking, but I'm ready to do my bit when I'm called upon. And if any ugly Indians attempt to board this vessel—well, they'll find us more than ready for them. I've got a bit of an idea, cap'n, and I've been wondering if it would meet with your approval."

Captain Burton looked round.

"Any idea of yours, McNab, will receive my full consideration," he said. "I know well enough that you don't suggest anything unless it is good."

Mr. McNab, the chief engineer of The Wanderer, smiled

"The iden is not exectly an original one," he said. "At the same time, it's very effective. You tell me that you are wanting to repel this attack with as little bloodshed as possible?"

"Yes, Mac."

"That I will, then," said the chief engineer. "I've got a good many hoses ready to be fixed up—the tyre hoses. I can supply any amount of hot water, and I'll guarantee those hoses will be more effective than machine guns. Hoots, mon! Have ye ever faced a hose delivering boiling water at fifty gallons to the second?"

"I've never had such doubtful pleasure," smiled Dr. Brett.

"It's a good idea, Mac," said the captain briskly. "In fact, it's a wonderful idea. There's no need to have the water boiling, though. Hot water will be quite sufficient—just hot enough to scare the enemy without doing real injury. If you can fix that up, I shall be very pleased."

"You can look upon it as fixed up already, cap'n," said the chief engineer. "It's a verra simple idea, and it won't take me half an hour to get things ready."

"Good!" said the captain. "I should advise you to get busy as soon as possible—because it will be dawn in a couple of hours."

"Are you expecting an attack at dawn, then?" asked Dr. Brett.

"Yes!"

"But we believed that the attack would be made last night——"

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Captain Burton. "But no attack came—and the night, so far, has passed uneventfully. This leads me to believe that the enemy is waiting until daylight comes. In any case, doctor, you can be quite sure that the present peaceful state of affairs will not last for long!"

Dr. Brett nodded thoughtfully. He and his two companions were sitting in the very comfortable cabin of Captain Burton on the steam yacht, Wanderer. A soft electric light glowed overhead, and the tropical night was calm.

Outside, on deck, there were many vigilant watchers—members of the crew, armed with rifles, waiting—waiting for an attack which might come at any moment. The whole vessel's company was on the qui vive.

The Wanderer was moored on the River Majarra, almost in mid stream. The Majarra, a small tributary of the mighty Amazon, was practically an unknown river, and here, far from civilisation, Captain Burton and his crew were hourly expecting a grim attack upon the yacht.

It was a rather tense vigil for those on deck.

The tropical night was warm and still—and very dark, for the gigantic trees which grew on either bank of the stream, caused the river to be enshrouded in dense darkness. Strange sounds came from the forests.

Every now and again a weird cry would come floating across the water—the cry of some animal, probably, attacked by another beast of the jungle. And in the water itself there were deadly caymans—those brutes of the alligator tribe which abound in the Amazon regions.

There had been much excitement of late.

Only a day or two earlier, Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore and others had been on board the yacht. But they had gone—and those on the yacht had no idea when they would return.

Captain Burton lit his pipe, and puffed at it for a moment or two in silence. Then he looked across at Dr. Brett, and stroked his grizzled beard with one hand. There was a thoughtful expression in the skipper's eyes.

"We'll just review the position, doctor," said Captain Burton. "Lord Dorrimore fitted up this expedition to come out to the Amazon in search of Colonel Kerrigan. We arrived on the Majarra just over a week ago—and a happier party I have never seen."

Dr. Brett nodded.

"We did not anticipate, then, that such dramatic developments would take place," he said. "But in a country of this sort one must be prepared for almost anything. I'd give a great deal to see Mr. Lee back safe and sound."

"We all wish that," said the captain. "Now, originally, we had on board Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore and quite a number of boy's from St. Frank's—not forgetting a few fair members of the gentler sex. The majority of them still remain—but Mr. Lee and the others—including seven boys—are no longer with us."

Dr. Brett sighed.

"I'm worried, captain—I'm infernally worried!"

"I do not think you are quite so worried as I am," said the skipper gravely. "Mr. Lee and his lordship left us in order to make a flight in the airship. They disappeared over the forest, and when the airship returned, it contained only Mr. Lee and the mechanics."

"Yes, the others were left behind, owing to a scrap with an unknown enemy," said Dr. Brett. "There is much we don't know, captain. Mr. Lee brought a wonderful story with him concerning a marvellous city, inhabited by a still more marvellous race of white giants."

"That story is true, of course," said the captain. "Mr. Nelson Lee is not the kind of man to bring exaggerated yarns. But we won't discuss that, doctor. Mr. Lee did not remain long with us, but returned over the forests and the swamps the very instant the airship was ready for the journey."

"And from that moment we have not set eyes on him again," said Dr. Brett. "He and all the others have vanished—and we can only assume that they are in this wonderful city of El Dorado—as I believe it is called."

The captain removed his pipe.

"It is not merely a matter of assumption," he remarked. "Yesterday morn-

ing, as you know, the airship reappeared, and we were all nearly frantic with delight—for we had believed that the party had got lost. Then, to our astonishment, we found that Mr. Lee was not on board, and that the vessel was in the sole possession of a total stranger!"

"Yes, that was fairly staggering," said Dr. Brett grimly. "To find the airship in totally strange hands was a number one sized shock—as Dorri would put it. And then we learned, to our fresh consternation, that Mr. Lee's party had been taken prisoners. What I'm puzzling out is this—who is this man who seized the airship?"

"There can be only one solution," declared the captain. "You remember that Mr. Lee mentioned a fight in the air with a red aeroplane?"

"Yes—it was that fight which caused the airship to come back for fresh supplies of gas."

"Exactly," said Captain Burton. "Well, it is only too evident that this aeroplane attacked our party again—and probably forced the airship to descend, when they were all captured by these strange white giants. There is much that we do not know—but we can fill up the gaps quite easily. And we must come to the conclusion that our dear friends are helpless captives, and unable to escape."

"And now we are menaced," said the doctor, with clenched fists. "Good heavens, captain! I feel so deucedly helpless—I feel so furious! For this brute of a man to demand that we should surrender the yacht is insufferable."

"He does'na ken who he's dealing with, I'm thinking," said McNab roughly.

"By thunder, you're right there," exclaimed the captain, gripping his pipe fiercely between his teeth. "The infernal impudence! Ordering me to surrender the yacht without a fight! What the man's plan is I don't know, but he evidently thinks that we're a weak-kneed set of lubbers. He'll find a difference when he makes the promised attack. We're ready—we're on the alert for anything!"

The other two men nodded grimly.

As the captain had said, they knew certain facts, but they were in the darkness concerning many details. For example, they did not know that the man who had seized the airship was no less a person than the Comte de Plessigny.

This plausible scoundrel—a smooth mannered, smooth tongued individual of extremely polished demeanour—had appeared far away at St. Frank's before the holiday trip had commenced.

And it was somewhat staggering to discover that he was somewhere on the Amazon, and that he had some extremely drastic plans in mind concerning Lord Dorrimore and his entire party.

The count's chief scheme was to capture every soul on board—without a single exception—and to transport them, in batches, over the dense forest, and into the land of the Arzacs.

Whether the Comte de Plessigny would be able to carry out this plan remained to be seen. One thing was certain—he would make a grim attempt to do so. The count was not the kind of man to give up an undertaking lightly.

There was a tap on the door of the captain's cabin, and a moment later Mr. Hudson, the first officer, entered. He saluted.

"Dawn is just breaking, sir," he announced. "So far everything is all quiet, but there is no telling what might happen."

The skipper rose to his feet.

"We will come on deck, Mr. Hudson," he said. "Mr. McNab, you had better get below and fix up those hoses as quickly as possible. We may not want them for hours—but it is just possible that we shall require them almost at once."

The chief engineer nodded, and departed.

And Captain Burton and Dr. Brett passed on deck. At such an hour it was hardly to be supposed that any of the guests would be awake—under ordinary circumstances. But not a soul on the yacht was sleeping now.

Against the starboard rail a group of juniors were standing, chatting together in low voices. They were rather excited, and they gazed out across the river eagerly and intently.

"No sign yet, you chaps," remarked de Valerie.

"Well, it's hardly to be expected," remarked Reginald Pitt. "The attack won't come until the light gets stronger. I wouldn't mind betting a quid that we

shall be in the thick of it in less than an hour."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Timothy Tucker. "This is most distressing, my dear sir. Fighting is abhorrent. I am a great believer in peace—admitted. That is so. And you must realise that fighting is a very dreadful thing. It would be far better to take things easily——"

"Surrender, do you mean?" demanded Somerton grimly.

"In a way, yes——"

"Squash him!"

"Hold on! The silly ass can't help it," grinned Pitt. "He was born that way, I suppose. Personally, I'm longing for the scrap to start."

"You're welcome to it!" said Ralph Leslie Fullwood sneeringly. "I'm inclined to agree with Tucker. It's a mad idea to fight!"

"You needn't be afraid," exclaimed Somerton. "I don't suppose you'll be asked to join in the battle, Fullwood."

The cad of the Remove shrugged his shoulders.

"It doesn't matter whether I'm asked or not I'm not doing any scrappin'!" he said. "Lord Dorrimore brought us out on this ship for a holiday time—to spend the vacation on the Amazon. He didn't say anythin' about fightin' and undergoin' dangers——"

"Dry up, you funk!" snapped Pitt. "You know as well as I do that Lord Dorrimore had no idea of this fight coming off. It's as much of a surprise to Dorrie as it is to us. We find ourselves in this fix, and we've got to get out of it. It's merely a question of self defence."

"That's quite right," agreed Jack Grey. "We're not going to sit here, and allow ourselves to be captured by any beastly adventurer who likes to come along. Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the others have been made prisoners already—so it's up to us to retain our liberty; and to go to their assistance as soon as possible."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the talk!" said Pitt, nodding. "I'd give a whole term's pocket money to know what's become of Nipper and Fatty Little, and Handy, and the others. My only hat! Just to think of them being captured——"

"Hullo!" interrupted De Valerie quickly. "There's something afoot!"

The juniors all stared at the bridge. A commotion had suddenly occurred, the lookout man from the bows having called out sharply. Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson were gazing through their binoculars up the river, and the second officer was giving some rapid orders.

And then it was seen what had caused the sudden excitement. The juniors, crowding to the rail, stared down the Majarra, and they uttered many exclamations of excitement and wonder.

For there, approaching the yacht at a rapid speed, were a large number of canoes. Each canoe contained three or four Indians, and they all held weapons—some of them with rifles, others with bows and arrows. In any case, it was quite certain that the Indians were hostile.

Turning round, Pitt could see that other canoes were approaching from the opposite direction, and, at the same time, both the river banks became alive with ugly brown figures, only partially clothed.

The attack was about to commence.

Captain Burton gave some quick instructions, and then he came hurrying down the bridge ladder and along the deck.

"Now, you boys, you must get below as quickly as possible!" he said grimly. "There is likely to be some fighting, and I cannot allow you on deck."

"Oh, sir, we sha'n't come to any harm——"

"I don't think you will," agreed Captain Burton. "You are going below, and you will be quite safe there. The ladies are already in the saloon, and all the portholes are closed and shuttered. There is no chance of a stray shot coming through. Hurry, boys!"

The juniors looked rather dismayed.

"Ain't--ain't we going to be allowed to stay on deck, sir?" asked Pitt. "We want to help—we want to join in the scrap——"

"I appreciate your willingness to render assistance, Pitt, but I am afraid I cannot let you take part in the fight," said the skipper quietly. "Lord Dorrimore is responsible to your parents for your safety—and he would not like me to endanger your limbs or your lives."

The juniors didn't like it at all, but they were compelled to obey orders. And they all trooped below, looking

glum and very disappointed. Of course, Fullwood and Co. were only too willing to scuttle down the companion—they were not at all inclined to take any risks.

Meanwhile, the Indian war canoes swept onwards.

"I can see what the idea is," exclaimed Captain Burton, as he surveyed the oncoming hordes. "They intend to overwhelm us in one swift attack. They mean to get close up to the yacht, climb on deck, and overpower us by sheer weight of numbers. But it won't happen, Mr. Hudson. I have no intention of letting these ugly brutes get the upper hand."

"We will do the best we can, sir, to prevent them!" said the first officer grimly. "I'm afraid we can't hope to beat the attack off without bloodshed ——"

"Bloodshed!" echoed Captain Burton. "There'll be plenty of bloodshed, Mr. Hudson—don't you make any mistake! These Indian savages have been urged on to attack us, and they must not grumble if we use every means in our power to defend ourselves. This fight is none of our making, and it is imperative that we should hold the yacht at all costs. Do not forget that we have many ladies on board—and I leave it to your imagination what would happen if the vessel was captured."

Mr. Hudson nodded, and looked grave.

"Yes, sir, we must fight to the last man, if necessary!" he said quietly. "Well, I'm game!"

"Good, Mr. Hudson—good!" said the skipper. "I hope everybody else has your spirit!"

The captain lost no time in giving orders. There was very little time to lose, for the hordes of Indians, in their canoes, were coming on at a rapid pace.

They were, in fact, surrounding the steam yacht from all sides. The idea, evidently, was to converge upon The Wanderer, and to attack her simultaneously from every quarter. Thus it would be an extremely difficult task to defend the decks.

But Captain Burton was prepared.

It was noticed by several officers that in some of the rear canoes of the attacking party there were one or two white men. These fellows seemed to be ruffians, by their appearance—it was quite certain that they were not possessed of any great amount of courage. Otherwise they would have led the attack, instead of pushing it on from the rear.

"We'll let them come fairly close, Mr. Hudson!" exclaimed Captain Burton. "And then, just when they think that they are about to take us by surprise, we'll give them a volley."

"Shall we fire into the canoes, sir?"

"Not at first, Mr. Hudson," replied the skipper. "I think it will be just as well to fire into the air—in order to give the Indians a fright. It might be sufficient—although I'm afraid it won't be. However, we may just as well save bloodshed until it is absolutely necessary."

The canoes were now within twenty yards of the yacht, and the moment for action had arrived.

Captain Burton gave a sign, and the air became filled with the cracking of scores of rifles. The din was really deafening, and that volley broke out with surprising abruptness.

The effect was immediate.

The canoes ceased their advance in a state of considerable confusion. One or two of the boats knocked together, two were capsized, and the Indians yelled with excitement and consternation.

Perhaps they had been told that they would meet with no resistance, and that it would be quite a simple matter to seize the yacht, and everybody on board. If this was the case, the savages were beginning to understand that the task was not to be so simple after all.

"I think that's given the beggars a bit of a shock!" said Captain Burton grimly. "But we'd better keep it up, Mr. Hudson—let them have another round!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The rifles spurted fire once more, and a few dozen bullets went flying over the river, although none of the shots were aimed directly at the enemy.

This sort of thing, however, did not last for long.

After the first halt of surprise the Indian canoes came on fiercely. The savages yelled and shrieked and seemed to be quite insane, and it was evident that they would capture the yacht unless something drastic was done

"Fire!" roared Captain Burton. "And this time fire into the midst of the boats!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Again the rifles spoke, and this time it was not a mere warning volley. Every bullet that went speeding on its way had a deadly mission, and at least a dozen of the savage Indians fell back screaming or toppled into the water.

And they replied to the fire. Arrows came whizzing on the deck of the yacht in great numbers. Only one or two men were struck; but these did not remain conscious for longer than a full minute after being pierced by an arrow.

The points were poisoned, and Dr. Brett had his hands very full for the remainder of the battle. The poison was deadly, but, if treated at once, the unfortunate sufferers could be saved. So Dr. Brett had all his work cut out to keep pace with the casualties.

Several times the Indians came within a few yards of the yacht's side, but they found it impossible to gain a footing on the vessel. Revolvers, rifles, and machine-guns were spurting fire from every quarter of the decks, and it was impossible for anything to live in the near vicinity. And at last, baffled and beaten, the canoes turned tail and went in all directions.

The attack had been short and sharp, and it had terminated in complete victory for the defenders of The Wanderer. But somehow Captain Burton had a feeling within him that this was only a preliminary skirmish—that the real attack was to come later.

These Indians had been sent forward to test the ability of those on the yacht—and they had discovered exactly what there was to contend with.

It would not be long before the really serious battle commenced—that, at all events, was Captain Burton's impression. And it was quite probable that the skipper was not far wrong in his surmise.

The Indians had been repulsed with heavy losses—the waters of the Majarra proved that. Caymans were busy, and here and there the water was stained an ominous colour. But, in the excitement, nobody thought of being very sensitive.

How long would it be before the actual battle commenced?

CHAPTER II.

A BID FOR LIBERTY.

LORD DORRIMORE glanced up at the sky.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed with a yawn. "I'm hanged if it's not dawn, an' we've been waitin' here the best part of the night!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, it doesn't matter, Dorrie," he said. "We have had a very entertaining conversation with Colonel Kerrigan, and I am sure our time has not been wasted."

"Personally, I have been simply boilin' over with curiosity and enjoyment," said Lord Dorrimore. "We came out to the Amazon to find Colonel Kerrigan—we came to El Dorado, an' we were captured. And, after bein' captured, we find ourselves in the same buildin' as Colonel Kerrigan himself. So far so good; but how in the name of all that's puzzlin' are we to escape?"

"That's what I've been wondering, Dorrie," I remarked, rising to my feet and stretching myself. "As far as I can see, we are in a pretty hopeless position. I'm not the kind of chap to growl, and to look on the dark side of things; but where is there any ray of hope in this position?"

"Yes, where?" repeated Dorrie, shrugging his shoulders.

"It's all very well to mimic me," I said grimly; "but just think, Dorrie! The airship is in the hands of the Comte de Plessigny, and we don't know what on earth he is doing now—it's a ten-to-one chance that he's attacking the party we left on the yacht, and if he succeeds in overpowering Captain Burton, there'll be no hope whatever of us ever getting away from this land of the unknown."

"You are quite right, Nipper, but I think it would be better if you had a little sleep now," said Nelson Lee smiling. "Thinking of these difficulties will not improve your mind, my lad. We are in a tight corner, and matters will not be improved by worrying. This land of the white giants is a land of wonders, and I have been intensely interested in everything I have seen. At the same time, one feels somewhat impressed when it is realised that there is no means of returning to civilisation."

Lord Dorrimore lit a cigarette.

"Well, I'm not givin' up hope," he remarked. "There's no tellin' what might happen, Lee, old man. This city is right in the middle of a glorious valley, the valley is surrounded by rocky ridges, and the ridges in turn are surrounded by a swamp which extends for hundreds of miles in every direction—a swamp that no human being can live in. The only possible means of getting to this country is by air—an' our only means of conveyance has been stolen from us."

"That is the position at the moment, Dorrie." I must confess," said Nelson Lee; "but I still have hopes——"

"That is the spirit, Mr. Lee!" put in Colonel Kerrigan, D.S.O. "I admire your optimism—and I have a strong idea that things will work out well in the finish."

"Of course they'll work out well!" said Dorrie lightly. "What did Umlosi say?"

"Goodness knows!" I exclaimed.

"Umlosi said that he had been seein' all sorts of red mists," remarked Lord Dorrimore gravely. "Umlosi declares that there's goin' to be somethin' really extravagant in the way of battle. There'll be gore knockin' about all over the show, we shall be in the thick of the fightin', an' in the end we shall escape, and the count—like the wicked villain in the novel—will be defeated. That's what Umlosi predicts."

The giant Kutana chief, who was standing by, smiled, revealing all his teeth.

"Thou art making fun of me, O N'Kose," he said in his deep, rumbling voice. "It is surely not thy intention to be doubtful, my master? I have indeed seen the red mists, and I know. My snake tells me that we shall yet undergo many hardships—we shall fight, and be in the midst of fighting. But all will be well. Thou must be of stout heart, N'Kose, and all will be well. I know—I have seen. Heed thou my words, my father, and fear not. I have spoken."

Dorrie clapped Umlosi on the back.

"Good man!" he exclaimed heartily. "As long as you continue to speak like that, you're all serene!"

Dawn was indeed breaking, as Lord Dorrimore had said a moment or two earlier. And before and below us lay the great city of El Dorado. We were high on the roof of one of the buildings—imprisoned there, and incapable of getting free.

The roof was quite flat, with a heavy stone parapet all round. And on this flat roof stood a small stone hut, and this was the dwelling-place of Colonel Kerrigan. He had been placed in captivity by the Comte de Plessigny's orders—and here, on this high roof, there was no chance of escape, for all the walls were sheer, and there was not foothold for any living thing except an insect.

Our party was not a large one, consisting of Nelson Lee himself, Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, Colonel Kerrigan, and the two mechanics who had been captured from the airship. My two particular chums, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, were prisoners with us—to say nothing of Fatty Little and Handforth and Co.

The juniors were, at the moment, sleeping soundly in Colonel Kerrigan's little building. I had intended to join them, but the colonel's story had been so interesting that I had not thought of sleep.

Kerrigan had told us everything. He had explained how he had reached this unknown land four or five years earlier, by means of a box-kite. He had constructed the contrivance, and had allowed himself to be carried by a favourable wind. And then, having arrived in El Dorado, the natives had not allowed him to return, for he proved himself to be valuable, and they had kept him.

But the Arzacs were by no means brutal—they were gigantic people, many of the men reaching nine feet in height. And they were cultivated, educated, and refined in their habits and customs, and, although they kept Colonel Kerrigan within their domain, he had perfect freedom to move where he liked, and to do exactly as he pleased.

It was only after the sensational arrival of the Comte de Plessigny that the colonel's troubles had commenced, for the count, appearing over El Dorado in a modern aeroplane, had been regarded as a super-being by the startled Arzacs. They had been more impressed by the count's aeroplane than by the count himself.

And they had received the new-comer with awe and respect, and they had made him their ruling chief without an hour's delay. A being who could fly through the air in a wondrous machine was capable of being a great king—this

was the way in which the Arzacs probably argued. At all events, the count had absolute power in El Dorado, and he had placed Colonel Kerrigan in captivity without a moment's loss of time.

"Well, I suppose we'd better be thinking about some sleep, guv'nor," I remarked, stretching myself. "It's dawn already, and goodness knows what will happen during this day. I expect we shall simply remain here for weeks and weeks—months—years——"

"Centuries!" remarked Dorrie calmly.

"Oh, well, it's no good being too optimistic," I said. "I think we'd better look on the dark side, and if anything good happens it'll come as a bit of a surprise. I was just wondering——"

"Hallo! There's somethin' doin'!" put in Lord Dorrimore, as he glanced along the roof. "Is it breakfast, or are we to be shifted into more palatial quarters?"

I glanced round, and saw that the massive stone opening in the roof had become visible, and several giants were coming through, and were now coming towards us.

"There doesn't seem to be much sign of breakfast!" I remarked.

"Eh—what's that?" came a gasping voice from within the little building. "Who—who's talking about brekker?"

Fatty Little appeared in the doorway, dazed, dishevelled, and sleepy-eyed.

"Didn't I hear something about breakfast?" he demanded eagerly.

"You—you glutton!" I exclaimed, looking at Fatty severely. "I believe if you were knocked senseless by a motor-'bus, and somebody happened to mention grub within a radius of fifty yards, you'd sit up and recover! There's no breakfast here, my son!"

"Oh, great doughnuts!" muttered Fatty, in dismay. "And I'm starving! I'm absolutely starving! It seems a rotten shame that we're not given plenty to eat in this place. There must be tons of grub!"

The giants did not waste any time in carrying out the plan they had evidently arranged. The rest of the juniors were brought out of the stone building, and they were placed in a clump, and I was forced to join them.

Nelson Lee, Umlosi, Dorrie, Colonel Kerrigan and the two mechanics were placed in another clump. And then we were marched off.

"What's the idea of this, guv'nor?" I shouted. "We're being separated, by the look of it!"

"So it seems, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee, from the other group. "In any case, we cannot do anything to help ourselves. We must submit quietly."

Further conversation was impossible, for the other juniors and myself were being forced down the steep stone stairs into the interior of the building. Nelson Lee and the other party were taken straight on, to the other corner of the roof, and we did not see any more of them.

Eight of the gigantic Arzacs formed our escort, and, after being taken along a sharp passage, we found ourselves in a small stone apartment. The door closed, and we were left to ourselves.

"Well, this is a rum idea!" said Handforth, looking round. "Jolly silly, I call it! What the dickens is the good of bringing us here? What's the idea of separating us from the others?"

"It's no good asking me, Handy," I replied. "We can't question these Arzacs, because we don't know the language. All we can do is to submit to everything, and wait. Perhaps an opportunity will present itself before long—an opportunity to get busy."

"I wish that opportunity would come soon!" sighed Fatty Little. "I'd like to get busy with my teeth, you know!"

Before anybody could make any comment, the great stone door opened again, and two of the giants appeared, looking very picturesque in their flowing robes, tall ornaments, and peculiar footwear. And they were carrying great golden trays, the trays being piled up with food.

"Hurrah!" roared Fatty, rushing forward. "I—I say! These giants are ripping fellows, you know!"

"If the grub's anything like the lot they gave us yesterday, I'm not very hungry—that's all!" said Handforth. "When I eat something, I like to see what it is. I don't want any horrible messes or green caterpillars, or something of that sort!"

"This stuff looks all right, Handy," I remarked.

The giants set the trays down upon the floor, looked at us curiously, and indicated the food with nods and with pointed fingers. Then they took their departure, closing the stone door heavily behind them.

"Grub!" exclaimed Fatty Little

gloatingly. "Oh, my only hat! Look at it! Grub by the ton! Fruit, too! Just look at it, you chaps!"

Fatty seized a large pancake-like article from one of the dishes. It was about as large round as a dinner plate, fully an inch thick, and roasted to a rich brown on both sides, being in appearance very much like an exaggerated muffin.

Fatty pitched into it, and there was a look of absolute ecstasy in his eyes. The other juniors looked at Fatty, and then they looked at the article he was eating.

"What's it like, Fatty?" asked Handforth.

"Lovely! Ripping!" mumbled Fatty, with his mouth full. "There's meat inside, you know. It tastes just like beef.

I picked up one of the huge muffins, and broke it in half. Right in the centre there was a layer of meat, and it certainly smelt delicious. I was somewhat puzzled with regard to the muffin itself, but I soon determined its nature.

"I think I know what it is," I said. "These things are made of mandioca."

"Which?"

"They're made of what, dear old boy?"

"Mandioca," I replied.

"And what the dickens is mandioca?" asked Handforth. "It sounds like a relation of tapioca!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Handy's not far wrong," I exclaimed. "Mandioca is a root which grows largely in Brazil—and other countries, too. This root has got venomous properties—it's poisonous."

"What!" gasped Fatty, holding his stomach.

"Poisonous!" hooted Church, who had just taken a bite.

"It's all right—you needn't worry," I grinned. "The root itself is poisonous, but it is put through certain processes, and a flour is manufactured from it. The poison all goes out in the juice, the flour being quite good. Haven't you read all about mandioca? The plant is crushed and well washed, then it's pressed into a dry mealy mass and roasted on hot plates, being turned over and over until it is nicely done. These people seem to have improved on the idea, and they've included meat inside."

"Well, they taste jolly fine, anyhow," said Fatty Little.

"Tapioca is a product of the residue," I remarked, as I commenced eating one of the mandioca cakes. "As long as they give us things of this sort we shall be all right. I'll bet those pancakes on that other tray are made of arrowroot."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Arrowroot doesn't grow in Brazil; it's an English plant!"

I grinned.

"My dear Handy there's no need to show your ignorance," I remarked. "The arrowroot is a native of Brazil, and it was called arrowroot because the Indians used it originally to cure the wounds made by poisonous arrows."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said McClure. "Is that really true?"

"Of course it is," I replied.

There were several kinds of fruit on other dishes, and we had no reason to grumble at the breakfast which had been supplied us. The fruit was quite as excellent as it looked, consisting of two lovely pineapples and about a dozen enormous apricots, which I recognised as para apricots. These were about as large as a huge orange, and they looked exceedingly tempting.

In addition, there was a bunch of very curious-looking bananas—huge fellows, with a reddish skin. They were very delicious, however, and we enjoyed them tremendously.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it, you know," remarked Tommy Watson. "Why are these giants keeping us prisoners? Why don't they let us go about the city as we like? There's no chance of our escaping."

"I expect they're simply carrying out the count's orders," I replied. "Steady on with that pineapple, Fatty—leave a bit for us!"

We were all quite satisfied with the meal, and it had been very palatable. I found myself looking round our new prison, and I was not particularly impressed. Why we had been separated from the men we did not know. Perhaps this, too, was one of the count's orders.

There was only one small window in the apartment—altogether too small for any of the giants to get through. It was just a tiny aperture six feet from the floor, and there was just about sufficient space for a slim youth to pass through. There was no glass, and the fresh morning air blew in upon us.

"I'd like to look out of that window,"

I remarked. "Just give me a shoulder, Tommy. I want a hoist up."

Watson and Church assisted me, and I was soon standing on their shoulders. From this position I could look out of the window quite clearly, and I saw El Dorado stretching away far beneath, for this prison of ours was high up in the building.

The wonderful city looked superb in the early morning sunlight, and I could see many of the giants moving about in various directions, all of them apparently keen upon their occupation. Everything was orderly and businesslike. I was so interested that I remained at the window for some time.

"Well, haven't you finished?" demanded Watson. "My shoulder's beginning to ache, you ass!"

"Don't be in a hurry, Tommy," I said. "I've got some more to see yet—— Great Scott!"

"What's up?"

"I—I can see something," I replied, in a tense voice.

"Go hon!"

"Marvellous!" said Handforth. "He can see something, you chaps!"

I took no notice of the juniors, but stared down at the ground, with intent, eager gaze, for I had seen something which had caused my heart to throb, and which set me fairly quivering with excitement.

Down on the ground, lying in the shadow of one of the great buildings, there was a huge enclosed yard—a big place with smooth ground, surrounded by a high wall. And right in the centre of this space stood an object which I recognised at once.

It was the red aeroplane!

It was the machine which the Comte de Plessigny had used in order to bring the airship down. True, we had forced the count to descend with a smashed propeller, but I could now see that the aeroplane was in perfect condition. A new propeller had been fitted.

I did not stop to puzzle out how that propeller had been obtained in El Dorado. It had either been made by the giants, in obedience to the count's orders, or— this was far more probable— the count had carried a spare propeller on the aeroplane.

In any case, there was the machine, looking trim and neat and ready for flight. The Comte de Plessigny himself, of course, was using Lord Dorrimore's airship, since the airship was by far the safer means of locomotion over the forests and swamp.

"If only I could get down," I sighed. "I'd pinch that 'bus, and I'd fly straight off to the Majarra—— Hi! Whoa! What the dickens——"

I collapsed on the floor, my chums having grown quite tired of holding me up.

"You silly asses!" I exclaimed wrathfully. "What did you do that for?"

"I don't see the fun of holding you up there all the morning!" said Tommy Watson. "And what were you staring at, anyhow?"

"The count's aeroplane," I replied.

"What!"

"It's down there, in a great courtyard, surrounded by a high wall," I explained. "There's a new propeller fitted, too, and the machine looks ready for the air. If only I could get down, I'd pinch the machine, and I'd fly straight off to the Majarra."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You couldn't pilot that aeroplane."

"Oh, couldn't he?" said Tommy Watson. "You don't know Nipper, then. He holds a pilot's certificate, and he's flown all sorts of aeroplanes in his time, although he's only a youngster!"

"Thanks, Tommy," I grinned. "There's nothing particularly clever in piloting a modern aeroplane. Once you've got the hang of the controls it's as easy as winking, and as safe as travelling in a railway train.

All the juniors were anxious to get up into the position where they could look through the window. And in time they were hoisted up, and they stared out upon El Dorado, and they examined the aeroplane far below. At last they had all seen, and we stood in a group discussing the situation.

"It's no good, Nipper," said Handforth. "That aeroplane might as well be a thousand miles away—we can't reach it. You're not proposing that somebody should jump out of the window, I suppose?"

"Well hardly," I replied. "If only we had a rope long enough I'd be tempted to scramble down, but we haven't got a rope long enough."

"We haven't got a rope at all," said McClure.

"We've got a short one," I replied. "But I don't see how that can come

in. But give me another hoist up and I'll take another squint. There's no telling, you know."

Three of the juniors helped me up and I clung to the window-sill and looked out into the open air. And then, after only one second's glance, a startling idea came to me.

"Ye gods and little fish-hooks!" I exclaimed intently.

"What's the matter?" asked Watson.

"Nothing—nothing," I replied. "I'm thinking—don't bother me!"

"The great man is using his brain-box!" exclaimed Handforth sarcastically. "Don't breathe, everybody!"

I took no notice of Handforth's chaff, but continued to look out of the window with that same concentrated gaze, for I had seen something which had set my wits to work, which had caused me to entertain certain hopes.

About thirty yards from the building in which we were imprisoned a huge tree grew, a mighty tropical tree with great branches and dense foliage. This tree hid a considerable portion of El Dorado from our gaze, and I had regretted this shortly before. But now I could see that that tree would probably come in very useful.

"Yes, it can be done!" I muttered. "And, what's more, it's going to be done!"

I jumped to the floor and looked at my chums with flushed face and gleaming eyes.

"Well, what's the wheeze?" asked Watson eagerly. "What's the idea, Nipper?"

"I'm going down," I replied.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I'm going down!" I repeated. "I'm going to see if that aeroplane is fit to be flown!"

"You—you potty ass!" said Handforth. "And how do you propose to go down—drop?"

"Not exactly," I replied. "There's a tree growing not far from this building, and it's enormously high—the upper branches are only fifteen or twenty feet away. If I can only get on one of those branches I can easily slip along it, get to the main trunk and climb to the ground."

The juniors stared at me almost pityingly.

"And is that what you call a good idea?" asked Handforth.

"Yes."

"Then I think your brain must have suffered!" said Handforth, with concern "How the dickens do you propose to get from this window to the tree branch—if it's twenty feet away? Even if this was a large window, and you could take a proper jump from it, the thing couldn't be done. But there's no hope of jumping from this window-sill, there's not room enough to get a good footing."

"Dear old boy, it's quite impossible to do as you suggest," said Sir Montie concernedly. "There's no hope whatever of reachin' that tree—there isn't, really!"

I proceeded to unbutton my waistcoat.

"Isn't there?" I asked grimly. "What do you call this?"

Having unfastened my waistcoat, I proceeded to uncoil a long length of silken rope from my body. It was thin, and it occupied very little space, but it was enormously strong. I had placed that length of silken cord round my middle before setting out from the yacht, because I thought it might possibly be used in some case of emergency. It is always just as well to be prepared. Nelson Lee had taught me many things of that nature.

"A rope!" gasped Tommy Watson. "You—you mean——"

"I mean that I'm going to throw a loop over one of the projections of that tree," I replied. "We can then secure the other end in this room, and I can swing hand over hand to the tree. The dense foliage almost hides this window from the streets, so I shan't be seen by any of the giants."

Handforth nearly exploded.

"You—you dotty idiot!" he roared. "Haven't you got any more sense than to trust your life on a piece of string like that? Why, it's not strong enough to hold a rabbit! It's as thin as a piece of cotton, and as soon as you allow your weight to drop on it, it'll snap!"

I smiled.

"You needn't be alarmed, Handy," I said. "This silken cord may be thin, but it's quite strong enough to bear the weight of three human beings. It's been tested, and you don't think I should carry a length of rope round me unless it was good?"

I didn't waste any more time, but was hoisted up to the window again, and then I made several unsuccessful attempts to

lasso a thick projection of the tree trunk —or, to be more exact, a projection from one of the thick branches. It was only about twenty feet from the window, and it would have been a simple job if I had had plenty of elbow space; but I was greatly restricted in that little window frame, and fully ten minutes had elapsed before success came to my efforts.

Then the loop coiled over the projection, and I drew it tight and pulled with all my weight.

"Got it!" I exclaimed exultantly. "Now we've only got to secure this end!"

This was not a difficult job. Within the room there was a piece of stonework which jutted out from the rest of the wall. And the end of the rope was made fast round this; there was no possibility of its becoming unfastened.

"Now I'm going!" I said firmly. "Good-bye, you chaps—wish me luck!"

"Rather!'

"Good luck, old man!"

"Wait, dear old boy—wait!" exclaimed Sir Montie. "Pray consider what you are doin'! You are takin' your life into your hands, and it may be all for nothin'. Supposin' you reach the aeroplane? Supposin' you get down there an' find it is ready to fly? What will be the good of goin' up?"

"It might be every good," I replied. "Even if I don't succeed in reaching the Majarra—even if I only take a flight round the city, I shall be able to observe all sorts of things, and I shall probably create an impression. If these Arzacs regard the count as a magician and a king because he can fly—well, they'll probably hail me in the same way. And if only I can get some power, the whole aspect of things will be changed."

"That's quite right," said Handforth. "My hat! It's a stunning wheeze, Nipper! But I jolly well hope that cord bears your weight—that's all!"

I was quite confident, and I mounted to the window, said good-bye to my chums once more, and then allowed all my weight to fall on the rope. It sagged considerably, and I did not feel particularly safe; but the silken cord was quite strong, and I passed hand over hand towards the tree branch. Beneath me yawned a chasm of one hundred and thirty feet at least.

If I released my grip, or if the cord broke—well, I should be sent down to certain death, for nothing on earth could save me.

However, this unfortunate event did not occur. I succeeded in reaching the tree branch, panting, with sore hands, but triumphant.

Then, without wasting any time, I turned round, waved to my excited chums, and then slithered down the branch towards the parent trunk.

To get to the ground was simply a matter of seconds. There was rather a long drop at the bottom, but I managed it all right, and reached the solid earth with only a few grazes and a shaking-up. Then, without pausing to look round, I made a bee-line for the count's aeroplane.

The tree was growing right in the enclosed space, so I did not find it necessary to climb any walls. I rushed to the aeroplane, and in less than one second I had clambered into the cockpit; then I crouched down low, in case any of the giants were near.

It did not take me long to find out all the details.

And I glowed with triumph at the result. The petrol gauge told me that the tanks were over half full, and there was sufficient spirit for a prolonged flight. The engine appeared to be in perfect condition, and everything was ready. It was clear to me that the count kept his machine here in readiness for instant departure, in case he found it necessary to leave El Dorado at a second's notice.

My mind was made up.

"I'll go!" I exclaimed. "Thank goodness there's a patent starter—it won't be necessary to wind up the propeller."

I glanced round keenly, and judged that I should be able to get into the air without colliding with any of the walls. The machine was very similar in design to a Sopwith snipe. It was one of those powerful aeroplanes which simply leave the ground in a leap—or, to use the term of the R.A.F., "they go up like a lift." Handled properly, this machine would simply bound into the air.

And then, just as I was about to start up, I heard a gasp behind me, and I turned as quick as a flash, expecting to see one of the giants. My heart was throbbing, and I was filled with rage,

for I believed that I was about to be robbed of this opportunity.

And then I gasped in another way—for Edward Oswald Handforth was standing below me on the ground.

"Gimme a hand up!" gasped Handforth. "I'm coming with you!"

I stared at him.

"You—you silly ass!" I exclaimed wrathfully. "What on earth——"

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" said Handforth, panting. "After I saw you go safely across that rope, I thought I might as well come with you—I shall be handy if there's any trouble. It didn't take me two minutes to slip down that tree. Well, is the 'bus all right?"

"Yes—you'd better jump in at once," I said. "You're a silly ass to come, Handy; but it's too late to send you back now."

"Send me back!" echoed Handforth wrathfully. "I like your giddy nerve!"

"This machine is a single-seater," I reminded him. "It won't get off the ground so easily with a hulking great lump like you on board—and it might mean disaster for the two of us. It'll mean tremendously careful handling on my part—so I warn you."

"Oh, I'll take the risk," said Handforth lightly. "I can trust you, Nipper—you're a decent pilot!"

A moment later I touched the switch, the engine gave one or two preliminary splutters, and then roared into full and powerful song.

"My hat!" gasped Handforth. "We're moving!"

We were!

We simply shot forward and rushed straight at one of the towering walls. It seemed that nothing on earth could save us from a terrible disaster—from utter destruction.

"Oh goodness!" gasped Handforth faintly.

At precisely the right second I moved the controls, and the aeroplane simply jumped into the atmosphere like a live thing. It rose up at an angle which was positively staggering, and shot straight into the air, clearing the wall by many feet.

And below, from all directions, the giant Arzacs were rushing to the spot.

But they were too late. Handforth and I had escaped—we were in the air.

CHAPTER III.

AGAINST HOPELESS ODDS.

CRACK! Crack! Crack!

The second attack on The Wanderer was in full swing!

And this attack was appalling compared to that first skirmish with the enemy at dawn. Two hours had elapsed—two hours of comparative quiet—and now had come absolute pandemonium.

Captain Burton and his men were working like niggers—they were sweating from every pore—they were grimy and disfigured; but, so, far, they had succeeded in keeping the enemy back.

The River Majarra simply swarmed with Indians, with canoes, with the howling, yelling savages from the dense jungles.

Down below, in the saloon, were the juniors, and Lady Helen Tregellis-West with Miss Kerrigan—to say nothing of Violet Watson and the other girls. They were rather terrified by the conglomeration of noises on deck.

The portholes were battered tight, with the shutters in position. There was no chance of any stray shot coming down into the saloon. All those below were quite safe; but on deck there was a terrible difference.

This second attack had come suddenly and with appalling violence. Not only had the Indians come in the canoes, but hundreds of them swam out from the shore and attempted to board The Wanderer. They knew well enough that the caymans which infested the river would be disturbed, and would not attack them in the terrific commotion which ensued.

And it was this development which Captain Burton was not quite prepared for.

He had reckoned that it would be fairly easy to keep at bay the Indians in the canoes. For, with the machine-guns, and with many members of the crew armed with rifles, it was a simple task to pour a devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy.

But it was vastly different with swimmers.

For these natives were cunning—they were clever. They did not swim with their heads out of the water. They dived and splashed about to such an extent that a terrific commotion was caused, and it was really impossible to find any marks to fire at. The result was scores

and scores of the savages reached the vessel's side untouched, and they were able to climb up like monkeys. And at close quarters it was impossible to use machine-guns or rifles.

Before very long the battle developed into a hand-to-hand struggle, and it was noted by the defenders that the Indians, although they poured over in such large numbers, made no attempt whatever to kill any of the yacht's company.

The idea, in fact, seemed to be to capture the whites alive and uninjured.

And then, in the very thick of the battle, when everything was in a state of dreadful commotion, Mr. MacNab appeared. The chief engineer was looking very grim, and he had several stokers with him—all grimy and dirty.

"Now then, boys!" roared Mr. MacNab. "Ye know what wants doing, I'm thinking. We'll soon teach these black beggars a lesson!"

"Good man!" panted Mr. Hudson, wiping a smear of blood from his face. "I thought you would be up with those hoses before long, chief!"

The deck of The Wanderer was an amazing sight.

Up forward many members of the crew were fighting desperately with twenty or thirty Indians, who were nearly naked, were dripping with water, and determined to overpower the defenders. And they were coming over in great numbers all the time; in fact, it was utterly impossible to stem the tide.

The odds were hopeless.

Aft, it was the same tale. Stewards, stokers, deck hands—all were doing their bit towards defending the yacht, and the slippery decks were swarming with the live, ugly forms of the Indians. The rattle of the machine-guns had died away, and only now and again did a rifle shot ring out.

It was a hand-to-hand tussle now, and the air filled with yells, screams and shouts.

As regularly as clockwork Indians were hurled overboard into the water. Brawny stokers had no difficulty in dealing with one or two of the Indians, but when it came to half a dozen, even the strongest men were overwhelmed. And there were at least one dozen Indians to every white man.

Unless conditions altered rapidly, the end would soon come. The defenders would be overpowered, and the yacht would be at the mercy of the Comte de Plessigny's hired savages.

On the banks of the Majarra Captain Snagg was standing, watching operations with satisfaction. Not far off Mr. Cradley, the engineer of the count's yacht, Sunbeam, was yelling orders to the Indians.

And then came a change.

"Stand clear, boys!" boomed out the voice of Mr. MacNab. "Ye'd better run amidships—stand clear!"

The chief engineer was now standing on the bridge, and there were three other members of the engine-room staff with him. Each man held a huge fire hose.

"Look out, men!" roared Captain Burton. "There's hot water coming—you'd better stand clear!"

There was an immediate rush amidships, and the Indian attackers were rather at a loss. They could not understand why the defenders had given up the task so abruptly. The Indians yelled and screamed and danced in sheer triumph. They were left in almost complete possession of the yacht's decks. They had won!

But they soon discovered their mistake.

Sizzzzzzzz!

With a terrific hissing noise the hoses sent forth hundreds of gallons of steaming hot water. It came out in great solid columns, washing the decks fore and aft in great masses of steaming spray.

The yells of the Indians increased—they shrieked in terror—they jumped overboard. This form of defence had taken them completely by surprise.

The water was not boiling, and even those Indians who were caught were not seriously injured. The water was certainly hot, and most unpleasant, received in large quantities; but it was not scalding.

"Good!" roared Captain Burton. "Splendid, Mr. MacNab—splendid!"

"This is the stuff to give 'em, sir!" said Mr. Hudson grimly.

"Hurrah!"

The crew cheered themselves hoarse, for it seemed that they had beaten off the attack completely. The noise was still terrible; in fact, the din which now arose was far greater than it had been before.

The Indians were beaten—they were unable to stand those tremendous

columns of hot water, and so the tide was turned just at the critical moment.

But the change was not for long.

Owing to the tremendous noise and the state of hopeless confusion, nobody on the yacht's decks heard the whirring sound of engines high overhead. The dense clouds of steam completely obscured the river banks and the sky; but there, hovering right over the Majarra, was The Adventurer—Lord Dorrimore's airship!

And in the airship was the Comte de Plessigny, and two or three members of his steam launch, The Sunbeam. They were intent upon helping in the battle—and they had come at the right moment.

Boom!

Something exploded with a tremendous noise right amidships, close against the bridge.

"Good heavens!" shouted Captain Burton, startled.

The explosion, although noisy, had caused no damage whatever, but a tremendous cloud of white vapour arose from the spot. It rolled out in great volumes on every side, spreading in a startling manner.

Boom!

Another explosion took place, this time near the stern. And again the strange phenomenon took place, clouds of thick vapour spreading low over the decks, over the entire surface. And then the defenders know what had taken place. Bombs were being dropped from the airship!

But they were not explosive bombs or incendiary bombs. They were quite harmless in their effect, except that the vapour which they gave off was stupefying.

It was one of these bombs which had been exploded by accident which had resulted in Nelson Lee and his party being captured by the Arzacs. The Comte de Plessigny had discovered the nature of those bombs, and he was now using them against The Wanderer. Nothing could have been more effective.

While non-injurious, these special bombs were, nevertheless, deadly, for they rendered anybody within the radius of the vapour totally unconscious. Two deep breaths of that vapour was enough to send any man off to sleep for quite a considerable time, and their effect just now was disastrous.

Men were falling on all sides, uttering hoarse cries, and attempting to get clear of the ever-spreading clouds.

But it was useless.

There was no time to escape—no time to get into the clear air. Mr. MacNab was envoloped in a cloud of the vapour, and he sank to the dock unconscious. His helpers were similarly treated, and Mr. Hudson grasped Captain Burton's arm tightly.

"Come into the charthouse, sir—quick!" he gasped. "We shall be overcome in less than five seconds——"

"I can't desert my men, Mr. Hudson," said Captain Burton grimly.

"I didn't reckon on this infernal development. I thought we were getting the better——"

"Please come in, sir!" shouted Mr. Hudson hoarsely.

He did not wait for the skipper to act. He gave Captain Burton a heavy push, and they both went charging into the chart-house, and the door was slammed. In there they were quite safe for a time, for the deadly vapour could not penetrate. But outside on the bridge and on the decks the atmosphere was impossible. No human being could remain conscious within the zone of that white, harmless-looking, but treacherous, vapour. It seemed that the count had succeeded, and that his plans had materialised. The yacht's party was nearly done, the defence had failed.

Three minutes later the breeze had blown the vapour completely away, and from the enclosed chart-house Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson could see the result.

The spectacle was an appalling one.

Not a movement could be seen on the decks. Men were lying about in every direction, huddled up, lying on their backs, lying face downwards, and in all manner of positions. And every one was still—deathly still.

Not only members of the yacht's crew and officers, but a great many Indians had also fallen victims to the bomb. They were lying about in scores, huddled up on top of one another, still—all perfectly still.

Not that the Comte de Plessigny minded this. These Indians who had succumbed to the fumes were only a mere minority of the entire attacking party. The river was still alive with the savages, and they were seen now getting ready to return to the attack.

Mr. Hudson passed a hand over his forehead.

"Good heavens!" he muttered brokenly. "This—this is ghastly, sir! I didn't think these brutes would use poison gas——"

"Use what?" asked Burton sharply.

"Poison gas, sir——"

"Poison nonsense!" snapped the skipper. "Did you suppose all the men to be dead, Mr. Hudson?"

"Aren't they dead, sir?"

"Good gracious, no!" said the captain. "You know what those bombs are, don't you? They are filled with vapour, but it is only stupefying. Within an hour everybody will be perfectly well again, and they will feel no after effects, either."

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Mr. Hudson fervently.

"It is certainly fortunate that the fumes are not fatal," said Captain Burton. "At the same time, Mr. Hudson, our predicament is a terrible one. What can we do now? These other Indians will swarm on the decks and we shall be overwhelmed; it will be quite impossible to stem the tide. We can do nothing—nothing! And those young ladies below! Heaven help us, Mr. Hudson, I am afraid there is no hope! We shall be overwhelmed!"

Mr. Hudson made no reply. He was dazed by the shock of it all, he had supposed that the Indians would fail. But now the position was very different, it did not seem possible that any further defence could be made.

But down below many of the St. Frank's juniors were talking together excitedly. They had been viewing the scene on deck from the domed skylight of the smoking-room. By climbing on to the table they had been able to see through the clear windows, and they had watched the battle proceeding.

But now they were startled, and they knew exactly what had occurred.

"Mr. Lee told Nipper all about those bombs," said De Valerie, breathing hard. "They're harmless enough, but anybody who breathes the vapour at once becomes insensible. Look what's happened to the crew. We shall be overwhelmed by those Indians in a minute—they'll come swarming on board in hundreds."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Timothy Tucker, in great distress. "This is most unfortunate, my dear sir. Personally, I have a great respect for these Indian savages; they are human beings like ourselves, and have a perfect right to be treated as such. At the same time, it is most unwarrantable on their part to make this attack. I have half a mind to go out and remonstrate——"

"Gag that lunatic, somebody!" snapped Pitt. "We want to talk seriously—not listen to that fathead's rot!"

"My dear sir——"

Timothy Tucker could get no further. Somerton, Jack Grey, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, and Tom Burton seized him and pushed him into a lounge and smothered him with cushions.

Over on another lounge young Stanley Kerrigan was bravely attempting to keep his tears back. Young Heath and Owen minor, of the Third, were blubbing openly—they were only fags, and all this excitement was rather too much for them.

"Shall—shall we be killed and eaten?" asked Owen minor, between his sobs.

"You silly young ass!" snapped De Valerie. "Who's talking about being eaten? These Indians ain't cannibals!"

"They might be," said Heath nervously. "There's no telling, you know. There are all sorts of cannibals in Brazil—I've read about them!"

"Don't take any notice of those kids," said Pitt quickly. "I've got an idea, you chaps, and if it's going to be any use, we've got to get busy now—within a minute."

"What's the wheeze?"

"Out with it, Pitt!"

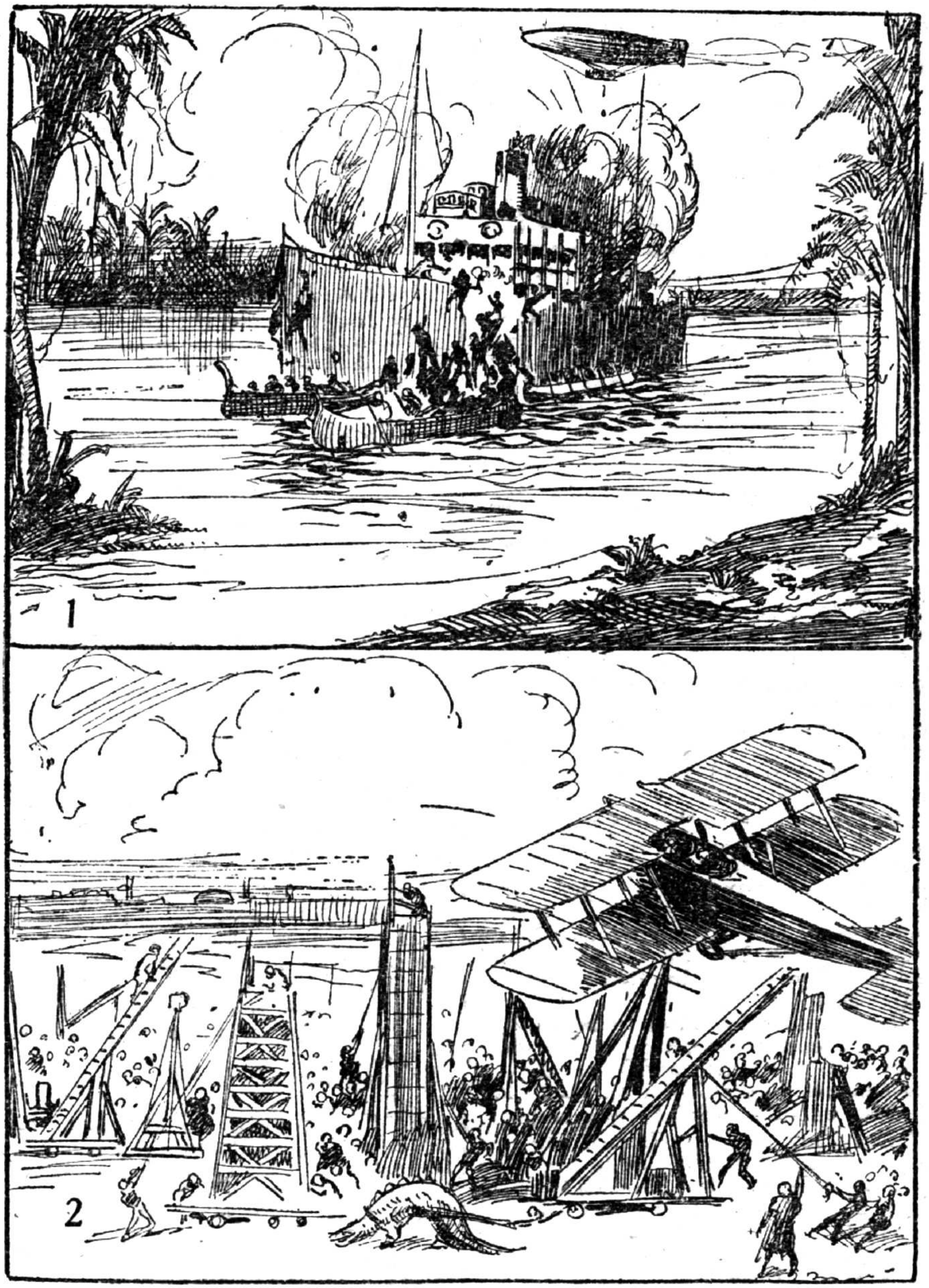
"Get it off your chest!"

"I will, if you'll give me a chance to speak," said Pitt. "Did you notice the way those Indians cleared off as soon as the hoses started their streams of hot water?"

"Yes," said De Valerie. "The Indians couldn't stand that sort of thing, and if those bombs hadn't dropped, Mr. MacNab would have done the trick perfectly."

"Well, the fumes have cleared off by now," said Pitt. "I suggest that we go out in a body, seize those hoses, and turn them on the Indians."

"You silly ass!" said Jack Grey. "What's the good of that? As soon as we appear there'll be another bomb dropped—and then we shall be rendered insensible!"



1. Scores of the savages swarmed up the sides of The Wanderer like monkeys.

2. Some strange-looking towers of wood, of a tremendous height, were being erected.

"I don't think so," said Pitt, his eyes gleaming strangely. "Down below, in one of the store-rooms, there are dozens of gas-masks——"

"What!"

"Gas-masks!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, gas-masks!" repeated Pitt grimly. "Lord Dorrimore brought them for some reason—I don't know for what. Perhaps they were to wear while these bombs were being thrown. Anyhow, we can make use of them now—if we only act at once!"

Everybody wanted to volunteer, everybody was anxious to don those masks and to rush on deck and operate the hoses. But only three other fellows were required, and Pitt chose them. He selected De Valerie, Tom Burton, Jack Grey, and Somerton. Then the four juniors left the smoking-room, and rapidly made their way to the store-room, far below.

It did not take them long to find the gas-masks and to don them. Then, looking very queer specimens of humanity, they pelted up the companion, and at last emerged on deck.

As they did so they saw that the Indians were now swarming over the rail in dozens at a time, intent upon seizing the yacht now they had the chance.

"Quick!" gasped Pitt. "There's no time to lose!"

He did not realise that his words were muffled, and that nobody else could hear them through the mask. Not that the juniors needed any urging. They rushed at the bridge and succeeded in getting there before they could be spotted by the Indians. Then Pitt got his hose going, and he swept it over the decks rapidly.

Sizzzzzz!

The steaming hot water spurted out in cascades, and a second later the other hoses were got into operation. In the chart-house Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson watched with new-born hope.

"Upon my soul," exclaimed the captain, with great admiration in his voice, "this is splendid, Mr. Hudson! Fancy those boys having the wit and sagacity to fetch those gas-masks up! It may be the turning point of our fortunes!"

"Yes, sir, I——"

Boom!

A bomb dropped on deck, quite close to the bridge, but this was not one of the vapour bombs. It was a kind of glorified firework, and it exploded with a terrific noise, and sent out showers of sparks. The Indians backed away in terror, but as soon as they discovered that the thing was harmless they returned to the attack.

And thus, for a short period, the issue was in the balance.

Pitt and his assistants did their utmost with the hoses. They played the steaming water over the decks in continuous streams, keeping the savage Indians at bay.

But it could not last for long.

The Indians were not only present in hundreds, but almost in thousands. They swarmed over the rail in hordes, and the hose-pipes could not deal with them all.

One batch of savages succeeded in getting round, and they took refuge immediately under the bridge, where the hoses could not play upon them. Captain Burton came charging out of the charthouse, his revolver gripped in his fist.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Again and again he drew trigger, and for every report a savage fell to the deck, screaming and writhing.

The whole surface of the yacht was one struggling mass of humanity, intermixed with the clouds of steam which rose on all sides.

The fierceness of the battle was terrific, and it could not last for long now. A dozen Indians came swarming up, and before Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson could use their revolvers with much effect they were surrounded. The Indians simply threw themselves at the captain and the first officer, and the two men were hurled down. Once down they were helpless. They were held tight, and the yelling Indians did not give their prisoners any chance of escaping.

It was the same with Pitt and his helpers.

Fighting gamely till the last, they continued to play the hose-pipes in every direction. But the forces they were compelled to contend with were too much. Wave after wave of the Indians came surging forward, and it was impossible to beat them all back. Many got through, and Reginald Pitt was the first to fall. He went down, surrounded by savages.

De Valerie and Tom Burton went to his rescue, and they only sealed their

own fate. Within a minute they were surrounded and forced over—captives.

Somerton was the last to go down, but he went down and then the end came swiftly.

There was not a defender on deck who was still at liberty. They had all been captured—were insensible. The dreadful truth was only too apparent.

The entire yacht's company had been captured. Those below were defenceless, they would be unable to protect themselves once the hordes of savages went below.

Captain Snagg, on the bank of the river, saw that victory had come, and he and Mr. Cradley lost no time in paddling over in a canoe. They mounted the ladder and came on deck.

And they came on as victors.

The capture of The Wanderer had been effected. The comte de Plessigny had won!

CHAPTER IV.

MAKING DISCOVERIES.

"GORGEOUS!" gasped Handforth exultantly.

Barely two minutes had passed since we left the ground in the Comte de Plessigny's red aeroplane, and we were already between four and five thousand feet up. The machine was certainly a buzzer. She had a tremendously powerful engine, and was capable of developing terrific speed.

"Gorgeous!" repeated Handforth, grabbing my shoulders. "Nipper, you're a wonder—you're absolutely it! You deserve gold medals for this!"

"Dry up, you ass—and don't grab hold of me!" I shouted, turning my head for a moment. "How do you expect me to control the giddy thing if you keep bothering?"

The aeroplane was a single-seater, and there was really no room for Handforth at all, but he had squashed himself behind me somehow, and there was just sufficient room, although I found it rather difficult to operate the foot controls.

The engine was making a terrific roar, and even when Handforth shouted at the top of his voice I had some difficulty in understanding what he said.

But this did not matter much—conversation was not at all important. We had left the ground, and we were now flying triumphantly over El Dorado. I found a great sensation of exultation growing in my veins. I had done something which might lead to great developments. An opportunity had come, and I had seized it.

I was delighted with the behaviour of the aeroplane. It was a better machine than I had even supposed, and she answered her controls magnificently. We swept over El Dorado, going round in ever-widening circles, and, glancing over, I could see the Arzacs standing in the streets, staring up at us.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore saw the aeroplane, too, and they did not know who was piloting it; they probably thought that the count had returned.

Nelson Lee, in any case, would have been considerably astonished if he had known that I was crouching in the cockpit, and that Handforth was squashed behind me.

However, it was impossible for me to let the guv'nor know anything about our little escapade. My chief desire was to fly straight over the swamp and get to the Majarra, for I wanted to see what was occurring. And, if possible, I wished to foil the count's plans.

Therefore, I glanced at the compass and headed the aeroplane straight over the city walls, and made into the open country, travelling in the direction which I judged to be the right one.

For it was largely a matter of luck with us. I did not know the country, and I did not know the exact position. I knew that I should have to trust to my sense of direction. Certainly we had done the journey before by air, and I had noticed one or two landmarks, and these would probably be of great assistance.

"Well, we've done it, Handy!" I roared, turning my head. "We're up in the air, and we've pinched the count's old 'bus. If we could only ruin all his plans, I shall feel deserving of those gold medals you referred to a little while ago!"

Handforth slapped my back, and caused me to jerk the "joystick." As a result, we gave a giddy swerve, and dived like a stone for about fifty feet.

"You—you silly ass!" I gasped, when I had got the machine under control again. "What the dickens do you think you're playing at?"

"Great pip," panted Handforth, "I—I thought we were out of control!"

"So we were for a minute, you fathead!" I yelled. "Don't slap me like that—you'll kill the pair of us!"

"Sorry!" said Handforth. "I was only going to congratulate you, old man. This is simply glorious, we've got out of El Dorado, and we're on the track of the beastly count!"

The aeroplane was speeding along at a rate which was certainly nothing under one hundred miles an hour. And we had already left El Dorado far behind, and it was a mere haze on the horizon.

But whether we were going in exactly the right direction I did not know. I kept a sharp look-out for any sign on the ground which I might recognise—a spur of rock or a clump of trees.

But, so far, I had seen nothing. We were just rushing through the air, and the ground beneath us formed an ever-changing panorama.

"I don't think we're right, Handy!" I exclaimed, after a while. "I think we're going in the wrong direction!"

"Oh, we'll find our way all right!" said Handforth confidently.

But the minutes passed, and I began to grow somewhat anxious. And then, shortly afterwards, I discovered for certain that we were not on our correct course, for instead of coming to the high rocky ridge which formed the rim of the wonderful valley, we were now flying over dense forest land with patches of clear country here and there.

And, in the distance ahead, I saw signs of activity—smoke was rising, tiny dots were moving about in clusters, and there were other objects which I recognised as dwellings.

"I say, Handy, this is queer!" I exclaimed. "We seem to be coming to another town!"

"Well, that's not surprising," said Handforth. "I expect they're Arzacs, you know. El Dorado is only the capital of the country—the chief city!"

I shook my head.

"I don't think so," I said. "According to what Colonel Kerrigan told us, the Arzacs live in El Dorado solely, and in and about the surrounding district. The colonel didn't mention anything about any other settlement; but he did say something else, Handy. He mentioned that fifty or sixty miles to the south of El Dorado there was another tribe of giants, living in the forest—a primitive tribe with hostile intentions. I think we have struck that tribe now—which proves that we are completely on the wrong course. We'd better turn back."

"Not yet," said Handforth.

"Let's have a look at these merchants first!"

I consented, for I was really curious on my own account—and it was only really necessary to travel a few more miles before we were right over the gold town.

As we came nearer, I throttled down the engine considerably, until we were descending in a long, straight glide, and growing nearer and nearer to our objective.

At last we were only five or six hundred feet from the ground, and we were able to see everything clearly and distinctly.

We were passing over meadows and fields and cultivated areas; but the cultivation here was nothing like so good as it was in El Dorado. And we could already see the houses, and we were by no means impressed.

For, although these were large and cumbersome, they were not masterpieces of architecture like those in El Dorado. They were, on the contrary, rough sun-baked affairs without windows, and mere holes for doors—they were, in short, glorified mud huts.

And as we swooped down over this strange town we saw that the inhabitants, although large and brawny, were by no means refined.

They were a coarse, ugly looking lot, much darker skinned than the Arzacs, and with bearded faces and hairy limbs.

They stared up at the aeroplane as though in awe, and we could see them running in all directions, as though afraid. We had certainly caused something of a sensation.

But there were other things that I noted.

And these things filled me with wonder—and curiosity. Near the outskirts of this mud city, thousands of these savage giants were engaged upon some tremendously active work. Trees were being brought in by the dozen, men were using primitive implements, and building was going on—but not house building.

Some strange-looking towers were being erected—towers of wood, of a

very curious design. They rose into the air to a tremendous height, and although we were flying three or four hundred feet up, I somehow felt that I needed to get higher, in order to avoid collision with these wooden towers.

And the giants were swarming over them like flies—they were swarming in masses, all of them being active and hard at work.

And then Handforth let out a terrific yell.

"Look!" he roared excitedly. "Great Scott! Do you see him, Nipper? Look—look!"

He pointed with a shaking hand, and I followed the direction in some surprise. And then I saw what had caused Handforth to get so excited.

A large number of immense animals were being used to draw in massive tree trunks. The animals were apparently domesticated, for they were working quietly and were in perfect control.

They were huge monsters, with great hairy bodies and formidable curved tusks.

"They're — they're mammoths!" shouted Handforth.

And somehow I felt that Handforth was right. These great animals were certainly very much like elephants in appearance; but they were larger, clumsier, and their bodies were covered with long coarse hair. The tusks, too, were tremendous, and were curved almost into a half-circle.

"It—it's extraordinary!" went on Handforth. "Mammoths are only fossil things—they lived thousands of years ago, in prehistoric times!"

"A lot of those prehistoric animals and reptiles seem to have survived in this stretch of country, Handy," I remarked. "I don't believe these things are mammoths, either."

"Rats! I'll bet a quid they are!" said Handforth.

"No, they look more like mastodons to me!"

"Mastodons?"

"Yes; they're the same sort of thing as a mammoth, but more primitive in type," I replied. "It's impossible to see at such a distance as this, but they look just like pictures of mastodons I have seen in scientific books. My word, Handy, we're having some rare experiences on this trip!"

"Rather!" said Handforth.

We did not talk any longer. Three times I sent the aeroplane over and over the mud city, and I took in everything that there was to be seen.

Undoubtedly active preparations were being made for some great undertaking. There were scores of the great towers I have mentioned, and other towers were in the course of erection. Not only this, but some very curious-looking articles were being made—huge tree trunks on rollers, and many great contrivances which somehow struck me as being very much like catapults. I was greatly impressed, and I could not quite understand what it all meant.

But there was really no time to investigate closely; we did not have a very large amount of petrol in the tanks, and it was essential that we should start for the Majarra at once. I knew which was the right direction now, and I turned the nose of the machine round, and set off at once.

Climbing high, we once more sighted El Dorado, and passed that wonderful city on our left. And it was not long before I recognised the rocky ridge, with the dense swamp beyond; I knew now that we were on the right course.

"It's a bit risky, Handy, you know!" I remarked, as we started crossing that deadly swamp. "If anything happens to the engine, or our petrol runs out, we shall be doomed."

"I'm ready to chance it," said Handforth promptly. "Don't you worry about me, Nipper!"

"All right—as long as you know," I said. "This swamp is a terrible kind of place, Handy, and if once we descend it will be utterly impossible to get into the air again."

Handforth did not seem to mind—he was a reckless bounder at all times. And so we went on, growing nearer and nearer to the River Majarra. At last we left the deadly swamp behind us, and the vast Brazilian forests were immediately below, with the Amazon clearly discernible in the dim distance ahead.

But we did not want to get to the Amazon—our objective was the Majarra.

And, through binoculars, we had no difficulty in recognising that river. As though to help us, we caught sight of Lord Dorrimore's airship. It was apparently in charge of the Comte de Plessigny, and the airship was just

descending below the trees, with the intention of making a landing.

In order to avoid being seen ourselves, we came down until we were flying only a few hundred feet above the tree tops, and then, when I saw a suitable spot, I decided to land.

We were now about one mile from the Majarra, and, I judged, not much farther from the spot where the airship had disappeared below the trees. And just here there happened to be quite a decent piece of landing ground, so I brought the machine down neatly, and we came to earth with hardly a bump.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Handforth, as we jolted to a standstill. "You're a marvel, Nipper!"

"Rats!" I said. "There's nothing marvellous in handling an aeroplane like this—she almost flies herself. Now, look here. I want you to stay here, Handy, in charge of the 'bus, until I come back. I'm just going to press forward on foot, in order to see what's doing. I'll just scout about for information."

"I'd like to come with you," said Handforth. "Still, I suppose it's necessary for one of us to remain here. You'd better buzz off, and get back as quickly as you can."

I was rather surprised to find Handforth so agreeable—he generally argued about everything, and wasted time. Before he could say anything further I left him, and pushed off through the undergrowth.

It was by no means a simple task to reach the banks of the Majarra. The distance was not short, but the forest was dense, and I had some difficulty in keeping my bearings. However, in the end I was successful, and at last I saw the river gleaming in front of me.

Breaking through, I came within full sight of the Majarra. And I found that my calculations had not been far wrong, for, stepping out on to the bank, I looked up and down the river, and there, about half a mile away from me, right down the stream, I could see The Wanderer.

And, with the aid of my binoculars, I could distinguish many figures moving about the decks—figures which had no right to be there, for I recognised them as Indians—savages!

I was rather startled.

Not far from the yacht lay Dorrie's airship at anchor, on its little platform, and it did not take me long to realise that a real disaster had occurred.

What was that airship doing down there? What were the Indians doing, swarming over the yacht's decks? What had been happening down there on the river?

Obviously there had been much excitement, and there had been trouble. It seemed to me that Captain Burton and his party had been overpowered, or had surrendered; but somehow I couldn't quite bring myself to believe that the skipper would ever surrender to anybody. If he had been beaten, he had only succumbed after fighting to the finish.

And I was filled with tremendous anxiety. What should I do? I did not dare to show myself, in case a number of the Indians attacked me. It would be very risky to approach any closer, and yet I was determined to find out more; to go back to El Dorado with no definite news would be ridiculous.

I was just turning away, with the intention of making my way through the forest up the river, in order to obtain a clearer view of the yacht, when I heard the crackle of a twig near by. In a flash my revolver was out, and my finger was on the trigger.

"Who's that?" I demanded sharply.

A lithe, brown figure appeared.

"Allee samee me, young boss!" said a voice that was well known to me. "I guess you heap big surprised, eh?"

I lowered my revolver and looked at the grinning face of the Indian boy.

He was Douglas Fairbanks.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

I WAS extremely pleased to see the Indian boy.

I should probably be able to obtain a good deal of information from him. Douglas Fairbanks was quite a keen little fellow, and he could talk English fairly well. It had been Lord Dorrimore who named the little chap after the famous cinema star, and Dorrie had perpetrated this merely because the Indian boy revealed all his perfect teeth when he smiled.

"Come here, Duggy!" I exclaimed, beckoning to the youngster. "What are

you doing here—so far from the yacht? I want you to tell me what has been happening——"

"Heap big trouble—me see it all!" said Douglas Fairbanks, shaking his head. "Allee samee bad, Mister Nipper. Me um see everything what happen. Captain Burton and all of 'em taken prisoners one time!"

"Prisoners?" I echoed sharply.

"I guess that's sure the truth!" said Douglas Fairbanks, looking at me earnestly. "Me come ashore—me escape and swim. Caymans very much afraid—do nothing. Everybody else captured, Mister Nipper. Terrible bad—allee samee awful luck."

I looked grave, and I knew that I could accept the Indian boy's words.

"Was anybody killed?" I asked anxiously.

Duggy nodded.

"Heap plenty kill!" he replied unconcernedly. "Oh, yes, sure! Allee samee ten—twenty—thirty. All killed!"

"Good heavens!" I echoed, aghast. "Do—do you mean Captain Burton and the crew, and——"

"Guess you make mistake, Mister Nipper!" grinned Douglas Fairbanks. "Me talkin' about Indians—all killed. No white man killed—only Indians, and they no good. I wish all kill! Best ting!"

It did not take me very long to get something like the truth from the Indian boy. In his own peculiar way he described the battle which had recently taken place—he described how many of the Indians had been killed during the attack, and how at last the Comte de Plessigny had won the day by casting down the deadly vapour bombs.

I learned everything, and I decided that it would be utterly useless for me to approach the yacht—to do so, indeed, would be to merely give myself into the count's hands.

The best thing would be for us to get back to the aeroplane, and to return to El Dorado at once. I wanted to tell Nelson Lee all about it, and to leave the rest to him. He would know the best thing to be done.

And I also decided to take Douglas Fairbanks with me. He had proved to be a very faithful servant, and it was just possible that he would be useful in the future, too. Quite apart from all this, he was anxious to come with me—he was anxious to get away from the Indians. This tribe was the deadly enemy of his own tribe, and he described them as pigs and worms and beasts, and several other choice names. If he fell into their hands, he would be at once killed.

"Right you are, Duggy," I said briskly. "You'd better come along with me."

"That's sure um right one time!" grinned Douglas Fairbanks. "I kinder reckon you're one heap big guy!"

"That's all right!" I chuckled. "We shall have to squash you into the aeroplane somehow or other. I don't exactly know where you'll sit, but there'll probably be room."

We hurried away through the undergrowth, and in due course we arrived at the aeroplane, where Handforth was still sitting in the cockpit. He greeted us with a wave of his hand as soon as we appeared.

"You bounder, Nipper!" he exclaimed. "I thought you'd got lost!"

"I haven't been away long, have I?" I asked.

"Only about an hour!" replied Handforth. "Well, what's the news? Have you discovered anything?"

I nodded.

"I've discovered a lot!" I replied grimly. "I've discovered that the entire yacht's party has been captured by the Comte de Plessigny!"

"My only hat!"

"The Wanderer is simply swarming with Indians, and goodness knows what has happened to all the rest of the chaps, Tommy's sister, and the other girls. I tell you, Handy, it's awful!"

Handforth looked rather scared.

"All in the hands of Indians!" he exclaimed huskily. "I—I say, Nipper! They'll—they'll cut them to pieces, you know—they'll boil them up for breakfast, and do all sorts of horrible things ——"

"I don't think there's much danger of that, Handy," I interrupted, shaking my head. "According to what Duggy tells me, the Indians apparently had strict orders not to kill and not to injure, for, although they swarmed over the decks in overwhelming numbers, they did not once attempt to kill any of the yacht's crew. Captain Burton and his men have simply been taken prisoners. The count must have some other plan in mind—and that plan is to transport

every one of Lord Dorrimore's party—ladies included—to El Dorado. He's got the airship, and now he's captured the yacht. It will be quite a simple matter."

Handforth looked rather relieved.

"Well, that's not so bad," he said. "If we're all together I sha'n't grumble much. And we can easily think of some plan of escape when we're in El Dorado."

"Easily?" I repeated. "Oh, yes! With the airship gone, and with no means of communicating with the outside world, it'll be very easy, won't it? Unless we do something before the count departs in the airship, we shall be absolutely abandoned, Handy. We shall be abandoned among the Arzacs!"

But Handforth refused to be depressed. He considered that the news, although serious, was by no means startling. He looked at it in a rather peculiar way. He considered that once we were all together in El Dorado we should be more content, and there would be more chances of our getting completely away. Personally, I did not agree with him. Once we were secure prisoners in that city of wonders—well, we should probably remain prisoners for the rest of our lives.

In any case, the best thing to do was to communicate with Nelson Lee at once—at the earliest moment. So I turned to the aeroplane and climbed in.

Douglas Fairbanks managed to stow himself away, and then we started up the engine and took to the air.

It was a rather ticklish business rising in that piece of ground, surrounded as it was by heavy forests. But I managed the trick neatly, and we were soon speeding over the jungle, mounting higher and higher with every revolution of the propeller.

The Indian boy was rather scared to begin with, and he was certainly tremendously excited. But when he had grown somewhat accustomed to the motion he was filled with wondering delight, and he was so eager to stare below at the ever-changing panorama of the forest that he more than once nearly toppled over.

The aeroplane was so fast that we had reached the edge of the forest almost before we knew it, and we were now speeding over the swamp. The difference could be seen quite plainly, for here—over the swamp—the whole aspect of the country was vastly changed.

There were none of those gigantic, handsome trees. Everything was intensely green and the trees seemed to be stunted, and they were clogged together in dense masses, with tremendous undergrowth. Only here and there could we see bare spaces of ground, and this appeared to be mud for the most part. Dotted about, all over the swamp, there were pools—miniature lakes and lagoons. And they were all as still as glass, except where the water was disturbed by the movement of some deadly reptile.

We were on the right track, however, and I knew that within thirty minutes we should reach the edge of the swamp and would be flying over comparatively safe ground.

And now I received an uneasy little twinge.

For the engine was not running so perfectly as it had been. One of the cylinders continually missed, and before so very long it was missing badly. The engine, too, developed a most unhealthy conk, and although I attempted to locate the trouble, I could not do so.

"Do you hear it, Handy?" I asked.

"Hear what?"

"That conk in the engine!" I shouted. "It doesn't sound good at all!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" roared Handforth. "We're still going along—— Great pip!"

Without the slightest warning the engine had given a tremendous splutter, and a burst of smoke came pouring out and enveloped us. I throttled right down quickly, and we immediately lost speed.

"I don't like it, Handy!" I said, with much concern. "I hope to goodness we reach a safe landing-place before the engine fails altogether!"

As I spoke I opened the throttle again, and the engine picked up sluggishly and not on all the twelve cylinders.

She was misfiring in a shocking manner now, and again I throttled down.

And this time the real disaster occurred.

When I pushed forward the lever there was no response. The engine stopped, and all my efforts to restart it were in vain.

I did everything possible; I used every means within my knowledge to get

the engine restarted. But no—it would not have it.

The motor had failed!

I stared at Handforth dumbly, utterly unable to say a word.

I knew exactly what this meant, and my heart was throbbing wildly with anxiety and alarm. With the engine stopped we could not continue to fly—we were already gliding down towards the swamp. And there was no landing-place, there was no solid earth on which to alight.

And, even supposing that we did land safely, what chance was there for us to get into the air again? What chance was there for us to be rescued?

"Can't you get it going again?" roared Handforth wildly.

"No," I shouted; "she's failed, old man! We've got to come down!"

"Good heavens!"

We could really say no more. And now my sole efforts were needed in another direction. It was useless to waste further time on the engine. The main thing was to select a spot which seemed the best for landing purposes.

And there was not much to pick from. Trees grew everywhere, except in two spots, which were about half a mile apart. One of these spots was covered with pools, and I judged the ground to be a hopeless morass. The other place was rather more promising, for the ground looked smooth and solid. It was, in any case, the only possible landing ground.

So I brought the aeroplane swiftly down, and took to the earth as gently as it was possible.

Exactly what happened after that I don't precisely remember.

The wheels touched the ground for a second, we jumped up again, and then touched once more. Then it seemed as though a terrific brake had been applied.

As a matter of fact, the wheels clogged badly, and the aeroplane ran along for several feet, swaying from side to side in a most alarming manner.

Then she heeled right over, the tail rising up above our heads.

Handforth and Douglas Fairbanks were flung out like stones from a catapult, and I fell on the top of them. I was bruised and rather dazed, and when I picked myself up I saw something which filled me with utter dismay.

"Oh, my only topper!" gasped Handforth. "Where—where are we?"

"I'm afraid it's all up, Handy," I said quietly. "Look at the aeroplane!"

We extricated ourselves somehow or other, and we found that Douglas Fairbanks was sitting on the ground, quite unhurt. He was grinning cheerfully, and did not seem to realise the danger at all. And then we surveyed our machine.

It was standing right on its nose, the propellor was smashed to atoms, and the wings were crumpled up. High overhead hung the tail, and this, too, was smashed. It would be utterly impossible to repair the machine, and we knew at once that our position was appalling.

We had come down in the swamp, and there was no possible way of reaching civilisation on foot. I had realised that it had been just possible for us to meet with such a disaster, but now that it had come I was staggered.

And now that we could see the swamp at close quarters we realised what a dreadful place it actually was. Even the ground on which we were standing—the most solid spot for miles—was spongy and treacherous. Our feet sank to our ankles with every step we took. The ground was nothing but ooze, and our footprints filled up with stinking water with every step we took.

And the vegetation was not at all like that of the forest. Everything was dripping with moisture, and the air was intensely hot—a damp, steaming heat like that of a Turkish bath.

Insects buzzed about in countless numbers, and I will swear that a fly shot past my head like a bird. It was, indeed, almost as large as a sparrow.

"My hat!" said Handforth huskily.

We moved about, going towards the trees, and we walked aimlessly, hardly realising the deadly nature of our position. On the outskirts of the little clearing there were tangled creepers and coarse, treacherous weeds. And as we moved forward, something else moved.

The reeds rustled and crackled about ten yards away, and then a curious grunting sound came to our ears.

"What—what was that?" asked Handforth, looking round wildly.

I grabbed my revolver and held it ready. Something appeared among the reeds—something which caused my heart almost to stop beating. Douglas Fairbanks dodged behind me, yelling for help.

And there, in the slimy puddles of

water near the soft, spongy trees, lay something horrible.

We saw a great ugly creature, with mottled skin. And it croaked with tremendous loudness.

"It's—it's a frog!" roared Handforth in amazement. "A frog—as big as a horse!"

This was rather an exaggeration, but the reptile was certainly as large as a goat. Its dull, hideous eyes were glaring straight at us, and we could see its skin distended like bladders, all speckled and mottled. The reptile feet hammered against the ooze distinctly, and it was apparently determined to attack us, for we were intruders in its domain.

"It's not a frog, Handy," I exclaimed. "It's a labyrinthodon!"

"A—a what?"

"A labyrinthodon!"

"What the dickens is that?" asked Handforth.

"It's a thing which was supposed to have vanished off the face of the earth centuries and hundreds of centuries ago," I replied. "It's a giant toad—a frog, and it only lived in the dim ages of the past when the earth was new. And now we find one here—in this terrible Brazilian swamp."

We backed away, and I decided not to fire my revolver until the brute was actually coming for us.

"Kill it!" exclaimed Handforth hoarsely. "Fire your revolver, Nipper!"

"Not yet," I replied tensely.

"Why not?"

"Because it may not attack us, and there's no sense in firing until it does," I replied. "I don't think I could kill it, in any case, this revolver would be of no more use than a peashooter."

To our great relief, the labyrinthodon turned away, and moved off with ungainly motion into the trees.

"Thank goodness!" I exclaimed.

We went in the opposite direction, and before long we were walking in the forest—the swamp forest. The trees here were not like ordinary trees, they were spongy and soft, and absolutely moist. The ground beneath our feet quivered as we walked, and there were little pools which sent up bubbles that burst with a terrible stench.

The whole place was a nightmare—a terrible, awful nightmare. Glancing up, I looked at the branches overhead, and I caught my breath in sharply.

"Look!" I gasped. "Oh, my goodness!"

Handforth looked up, and his eyes nearly started from his head.

For there, high over us, were snakes—not one, but dozens. They were festooned among the branches, and the sight was one which caused us to become almost terrified.

Some of the snakes were large, and they were all beautifully coloured. There was one fellow fully thirty feet in length, while others were small, deadly-looking serpents.

"I—I say!" panted Handforth. "We'd better get out of this!"

We did not lose any time in doing so. We found that it was too risky to enter the forests. Our best plan would be to stay in the open space, the glare of the sun was far better than this home of reptiles.

We went back to the aeroplane, and stood looking at it for quite a long time without speaking. Then we attempted to bring the machine on to an even keel, and succeeded in doing so. But she was smashed hopelessly, and we felt that our doom was sealed.

The heat was so intense that we were perspiring from every paw, and our clothing was soaked through already. The heat was moist and damp, and terribly unhealthy.

We sat in the cockpit for some time, feeling altogether too miserable to say much. Conversation, indeed, seemed out of the question. What was there to talk about? What could we say, what could we discuss?

The very worst had happened, we had come down in the swamp. And there was no escape, there was nothing to do except wait until some of these terrible monsters came along and finished us. We knew well enough that we could not live to see another day—unless we were rescued. And to think of being rescued was absurd, there was absolutely no chance of that.

At night, when darkness descended upon the swamp, then the beasts and reptiles and insects would be at their busiest. And in the morning we should be dead, there was no doubt on that point whatever. We could never live through one horrible night.

Fully two hours must have elapsed in this way, with hardly fifty words being exchanged. It was the end. It was the finish of us.

I found myself thinking of Nelson Lee, of Sir Montie and Tommy. I wondered how they would take it, what they would say when we failed to return. And I could hardly keep the tears back from my eyes when I thought of the guv'nor. I knew he would be cut up, for he and I loved one another dearly. And a death like this was too ghastly to think about; it was the very last thing I should have wished for.

And then, just when I was getting into a really hopeless state of despondency, Douglas Fairbanks uttered a tremendous yell.

"Look!" he screamed. "Up in um sky! Great snakes! Do you see um, boss?"

"What on earth's the matter, Duggy?" I asked huskily. "You—you gave me a start!"

"Hurrah!" roared Handforth at the top of his voice. "The airship!"

"What!"

I stared up into the sky, my heart throbbing wildly.

"Oh, my hat!" I exclaimed.

For there, high up in the clouds, was the Adventurer—Lord Dorrimore's airship. She was coming over from the west, and she was sailing on a course that would bring her immediately over the spot where we were standing.

"Wave!" I shouted. "Tear your shirt off and wave it! Wave anything! We must attract their attention!"

"Can't we make a fire?" asked Handforth excitedly. "They'll see the smoke!"

"It's a good idea," I declared. "We can take some petrol, and tear some of the canvas off, and then pile a lot of green stuff on the top—it will cause a terrific column of smoke!"

It did not take us long to do this, and we lit the fire a good distance from the aeroplane itself—we did not want to destroy the machine.

A huge column of smoke rose into the air, and it could not have missed the observation of those in the car of the airship. Even the Comte de Plessigny—rogue though he was—would come to our rescue. He would never allow us to remain in there in the swamp—if he knew of our predicament.

We stood there, ankle deep in the ooze, watching and waiting. The airship came right overhead and we could hear the dull throbbing of her engines as she sailed serenely through the sky. But, so far, there had been no sign.

We signalled frantically, we even yelled in our excitement, but the Adventurer continued on her course, and the beat of her engines continued at the same tone.

"They're not going to stop!" gasped Handforth dully.

And this seemed to be the case—although the thing seemed to be utterly impossible. The airship continued on her course—she had already flown over the spot where we were so frantically signalling. And we could now see her stern, and we could distinguish one or two figures in the car.

A moment or two before I had been feeling buoyed up with tremendous hope. But now I went as limp as a rag—I felt weak and ill. We had not been seen—or at least, those in the airship had no intention of descending to our rescue.

We were doomed!

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE COUNT.

THE Comte de Plessigny smiled with extreme cheerfulness.

He was standing on the deck of The Wanderer, and he had come on board as a conqueror. His underlings had won the day, and Captain Burton and his crew were all prisoners.

Captain Snagg, Mr. Cradley and the other members of the Sunbeam's crew, were also much in evidence. They were in charge of the Indians—the savages who had made victory certain.

The Indians were lining the decks, and each man was fully armed. Captain Snagg had taken command of the bridge, and he liked his task quite well, apparently.

"Excellent—excellent!" murmured the Comte de Plessigny in gentle tones. "This is really splendid, my dear Captain Snagg. I thought we should gain the victory, but I did not hope for such complete success as this. You are quite certain that nobody has been injured?"

"Hardly a scratch, sir," said the captain. "Those bombs of yours did a lot of damage at the moment, but everybody has recovered by this time, and they are all below."

"Splendid!" said the count calmly.

"I should like you to bring Captain Burton and the chief engineer and all the other officers on deck—I wish to have a word with them."

"Very good, sir," said Captain Snagg.

He departed, and very soon afterwards, Captain Burton, Dr. Brett, Mr. Hudson, and the other officers of The Wanderer trooped up from the saloon. They were all looking grim and grave, and they bestowed glances upon the count which left him quite unmoved. All the prisoners had their hands securely tied behind their backs.

"You infernal scoundrel!" exclaimed Captain Burton thickly.

The count smiled.

"I am sorry you take your defeat so badly, Burton," he said. "I gave you full warning yesterday that I intended capturing the yacht. You will at least give me the credit which is due to me. I have caused no bloodshed on your side, and not a single member of your crew has been injured."

"What does this mean, de Plessigny?" demanded Dr. Brett quietly. "I knew you the very moment I saw you face to face. Surely you can give us some explanation of this extraordinary conduct on your part?"

"My dear Dr. Brett, it is not my intention to explain myself at all," said the count smoothly. "I have every reason for doing what I have done—and you will understand fully later on. At the present moment there is not sufficient time to go into any lengthy discussions. I think I remember you at St. Frank's—eh?"

"You remember me in Bellton, probably," replied the doctor. "You are the Comte de Plessigny, and you occupied a house on the outskirts of Bannington. Furthermore, you are a rogue—you were a rogue then, and your actions now, count, have proved you to be——"

"Tut—tut!" interrupted the count. "What is the use of mentioning such obvious matters? I am a rogue—yes. I admit it. Why not. Why should I attempt to paint myself white when I am far from innocent? My dear sir, my plans are quite simple, as you will presently discover."

"What are they?" demanded Captain Burton gruffly.

"You will very soon discover them," said de Plessigny. "In short, you are to be transported to El Dorado—you are to join Mr. Lee, Lord Dorrimore and the others."

"Everybody on board?"

"Yes—everybody on board!" replied the count smoothly. "Not a single member of this party will be left within reach of civilisation. It is my scheme, and I intend to carry it out."

The captain's eyes blazed.

"But there are ladies—there are young, innocent girls!" he exclaimed. "Surely you do not mean to interfere—"

"The young ladies will come to no harm whatever," interrupted de Plessigny. "You may rely upon me. Captain Burton, to act in a perfectly honourable manner. I may be a rogue in some respects, but I am a gentleman with regard to the gentle sex. Every lady on board this vessel will be treated with the utmost deference—they will be treated with respect and honour. Any employee of mine who takes the slightest liberty will be instantly shot."

Dr. Brett and Captain Burton looked rather relieved—for, somehow, they knew that they could believe the count's statement. He was a rogue, but at the same time, he was not a brute and a beast. This had been proved by the fact that the count had not allowed any of the crew to suffer. He had captured the yacht without having a single member of its crew killed or even injured.

And then the first batch was selected—the first party to leave in the airship for El Dorado.

It was still morning, and there was time enough to do the journey over and over again before night came. In fact, the count was hopeful of being able to transport the whole party on that day.

So there was no time to be lost.

Captain Burton, of course, was the chief member of the first party. It also included Dr. Brett, Mr. McNab, Mr. Hudson, and a good many of the juniors. They were all excited and eager—and not at all scared.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it, you chaps," said De Valerie. "The Comte de Plessigny! My only hat! Fancy him being here—and fancy him pinching Lord Dorrimore's airship, and using it to transport us all over the forest!"

"It's beyond me!" said Reginald Pitt. "Thank goodness we're going to be joined up once more. When we're with Mr. Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi, we

shall be able to do things. If the count thinks that he'll be able to keep us all prisoners he'll be jolly well mistaken!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The count's plans have gone all right so far, but they'll be messed up before long!" predicted Jack Grey. "Personally, I'm rather glad this has happened!"

"Glad!"

"Yes, I am!"

"You—you silly ass!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Grey quietly. "I didn't like the idea of Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore being hundreds of miles away from us—in this wonderful city they talk about. I didn't like them being separated—and being kept prisoners. When we're all together it'll be far better. The party will be complete again, and there's no telling what might happen."

"Yes, I'm not so sure that you're not right," said De Valerie. "Perhaps it will be better——"

"Now then, youngsters—now then!" exclaimed Captain Snagg, walking along the deck. "Look lively! We've got no time to lose, and you're now going for a nice little airship ride—tuppence all the way!"

The juniors were placed in boats, and then, they were rowed down the river to the spot where the airship was resting. It was not long before they were on board, and they found Captain Burton and the other prisoners already there—and all of them, of course, were securely bound by the wrists.

The party was quate a large one, but the airship was capable of carrying everybody.

When everything was ready, the anchors were cast off, and the engines commenced whirring musically. Then the graceful craft rose into the air, mounted higher and higher, and set off across the forest for El Dorado. Captain Snagg and Mr. Cradley were left behind in charge of the yacht—and they had been given express orders to treat everybody gently and with kindness.

The ladies were all below in their various cabins, and in the saloon—they had quite a large portion of the yacht completely to themselves, and they were not interfered with. The count had taken no advantage of the fact that he had got the ladies prisoners in his hands. He behaved like a gentleman throughout.

Their turn to be transported would come later. The count thought it far better to get rid of the more dangerous prisoners first—the active members of the party—Captain Burton and his officers.

And so the airship set off in the clear morning sunlight, and she covered the distance quickly. It was not long before the forest was left behind, and then the swamp came into view. Dr. Brett was intensely interested in everything he saw—for Nelson Lee, of course, had hinted at these wonders. The doctor was now seeing everything with his own eyes.

It was noticed that the swamp was a very different colour to the forest. It was intensely green—a bright, unhealthy-looking green compared to the forest land. And as the airship continued on her course, the lookout in the bows of the car noticed something of an unusual nature far below. He attracted the count's attention, and pointed it out.

"A column of smoke, eh?" said the count curiously. "That's very strange! I was under the impression that the swamp was absolutely uninhabitable. How is it, then, that smoke is rising? Probably some dry leaves set on fire by the action of the sun!"

The airship drew nearer to the spot, and the count leaned over the rail, focusing his binoculars. Dr. Brett, Captain Burton, and the others were also interested. They knew that this column of smoke in the swamp was most unusual.

And then the count uttered a startled exclamation.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated, "The aeroplane—my aeroplane!"

A grim gleam came into his eyes as he realised the truth.

"Yes, I can recognise one of the figures, too—there are three figures!" went on the count. "One of them is Nipper—the infernal young scamp! He must have escaped, and he brought the aeroplane out, and attempted to fly to the Majarra!"

"Good luck to him!" said Dr. Brett.

"I think he's met with bad luck!" exclaimed de Plessigny grimly. "He and his two companions have come down in the swamp, and the aeroplane is wrecked. Very well! They will remain there! Since they have had the audacity to steal my aeroplane, they must put up with the consequences. I shall certainly not descend in order to pick them up!"

Dr. Brett stared.

"You intend to leave them to die?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, they have brought it on themselves!"

"You heartless wretch!" roared Captain Burton. "By the great marling spike! You talk in a very indignant tone about Nipper having stolen your aeroplane—what have you done with this airship? Is it yours? Was it presented to you by Lord Dorrimore?"

The count smiled.

"I appreciate your point, Captain Burton," he said. "Time is precious, and——"

"Good heavens! You cannot mean what you say!" exclaimed Dr. Brett huskily. "Think what it means, count! Think of the terrible death these boys will suffer. You must descend—you simply must!"

"And I shall not—that is my final word!"

The count leaned over the rail again, and focused his binoculars. The airship was now directly over the spot, and the waving figures of the three below could be seen. And the airship continued on her course, without a single alteration in the beat of her engines. It was then that I assumed that rescue was not to come—that we were to be left to our fate.

But on the airship a rather dramatic incident took place.

Captain Burton was on one side of the count, and Dr. Brett was on the other. And, as though by one impulse, they moved forward, and they grasped de Plessigny with their bound hands. Between the two of them they were able to lift the count completely off his feet. And there he lay on the rail.

"Release me—release me!" he screamed. "You fools! You will have me over——"

"You must promise to descend, and rescue those boys, or we will pitch you——"

"I will descend—I will descend!" said the count frantically.

Dr. Brett was afraid that the count would not keep his promise. But he did. He gave instructions at once, and the airship swung round, and her engines were slowed down. Then she descended gracefully, until she was only a few feet above the ground. Then, creeping along, she went straight towards the spot where the smoke had been seen.

Handforth was nearly frantic by this time, frantic with excitement and relief. I took it rather more quietly, but I was feeling intensely thankful. The Indian boy simply yelled himself husky, and he danced about like a mad thing.

But, as I had feared, we were taken on board the airship as prisoners, and the count was by no means gentle. He was furious with me for having wrecked his aeroplane, and he surveyed it with concern. He probably realised that it was capable of being salved; the engine was quite all right in the main.

But we were rescued from that deadly swamp, and that was the main thing.

. . . . . .

By nightfall the count's plans had been carried out.

Lord Dorrimore's entire party was transported to the secret city of El Dorado.

They were in the hands of the Arzacs, and the Comte de Plessigny was the ruling chief.

What hope was there for any of us to escape?

I was quite sure that Nelson Lee had no intention of sitting still and giving up hope. Personally, I was full of determination to do something to defeat the count's scheme. And I could not help remembering those other giants—those savage fellows, who were making such active preparations with their towers and with their mastodons.

An attack was coming, but even I did not picture that battle as it actually was. The biggest excitement of the whole trip was yet to come!

The most thrilling adventures were in store.

THE END.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY!

A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by ruffians. After several adventures the lads eventually capture the villains and hand them over to Tall Wolf, chief of a band of Red Indians. But the ruffians escape, and the three lads realise that no time must be lost in getting to the gold mine at Dead Breed Lake. In the following chapter you will read how our adventurers meet with their old enemies.

(Now read on.)

How Teddy and Gerald Get Their Own Back on the Rogues.

AS they dropped their loads of fresh meat, they looked about them. Jack had not returned yet, apparently, and everything seemed about as they had left it, they thought, until——

Teddy suddenly gave a cry and stepped close to the canoe that had so nearly sunk beneath him and Gerald.

"Look, Gerald!" he gasped, pointing at the craft, still lying bottom upwards.

Gerald followed the direction of Teddy's pointing finger, and he too gave out a cry, though he was perhaps quicker than his companion to recognise what had been done, and his cry was one of anger as much as of surprise.

For that canoe now had been cut about to an extent that made it entirely unfit for further service, quite impossible to repair.

Where there had been just one hole formerly, the whole bottom of the craft now was slashed into ribbons. Great gaping holes stared up at the horrified lads—holes that could have been made with only one sort of implement.

"Somebody's been here, old chap," said Gerald huskily, "and has chopped the canoe to shreds with an axe!"

"But——" Teddy began. Then he strode over to the second canoe, the one Jack Royce had used. This, too, had been treated in the same manner as the first one. Not even the most expert canoe builder amongst the Canadian Indians could have made anything like a canoe out of what was left of those two craft.

"My hat!" Teddy groaned. "What will Jack say?"

"I know well enough what Jack'll say," said Gerald slowly. "And he'll be right, too. He'll say that we two aren't fit to be left on our own for a minute. The worst of it is, I think I can guess who did this dirty trick."

"You mean Snaith and Olesen?" Teddy asked. "It looks the sort of work they'd go in for. Let's see if they've pinched any of our stuff, shall we?"

They went through their stores, and found, sure enough, that they had been rifled. Most of their spare ammunition had gone, and all the biscuits. Their blankets had been left to them. This further discovery did not tend to cheer them up.

"Well, anyhow," Gerald said at length, "it tells us one thing plainly enough. Snaith and Olesen weren't in front of us until just now. They were following us, and they passed this spot after we landed the canoes. Fat lot of good knowing that's going to be to us, though! Question is, what are we going to do now?"

Teddy nearly jumped in the air as an idea smote him. Before he voiced it, he saw to his rifle, which he reloaded. There was a rather suggestive grimness about his young lips as he looked at length at his comrade.

"Snaith and Olesen," he said, "aren't very far ahead of us, and now they think they've stopped us getting on to Dead Breed Lake, the chances are they won't hurry much to-day, at all events. I'm going to follow them downstream on foot."

"H'm!" said Gerald doubtfully. "Hadn't we better wait till old Jack turns up again before we do anything?"

"No," said Teddy obstinately, "for two reasons. First, I'm not at all keen on

meeting Jack till I've done something to put this matter right. He's bound to be shirty, because, I suppose, he expected us to stay by the canoes and guard them when he left us. Instead of which, we went off deer-hunting. Then, second, Jack may be hours before he returns, and all the time Snaith's getting further down-stream. We'll have to walk like blazes as it is, to get to the place where he camps to-night, before he leaves it again in the morning."

"But what are you proposing to do?" Gerald asked.

"Turn about's fair play," said Teddy. "Those rotters smashed up our canoe, making it so that we'd have to walk back. I suppose they guessed we shouldn't carry on and walk to Dead Breed Lake, but that we should get back to the survey camp, beaten. Well, I'm going to pinch the canoe they're travelling in, and they can do the walking, if there's any to be done! And you can please yourself whether you come in with me or not. Anyhow, I'm going, and I'm starting now!"

"Well," said Gerald, "your wheeze is bold enough, and, with rifles, we ought to be able to look after ourselves. But we must leave a note behind to tell Jack where we are going this time. The last time we went off we forgot to do that, and Jack got the wind up no end about us—and I don't blame him. I suppose we are only a couple of kids."

Teddy grabbed up a chunk of bacon, and tied up some flour that Snaith had left into his handkerchief. These he stuffed into his pockets, while Gerald scribbled a hurried note to Jack, explaining what they had done. Then, the preliminaries finished, they set off at a swinging walk to follow the stream in its downward course.

By this time it was well on towards noon, and the sun was beating down on them intensely. But they were fairly light-hearted as they tramped along, little caring for any possible danger that might be awaiting them at the end of the journey. Both were very young, very heedless of the future, content only to live in the present. They were full of animal spirits, and their pluck was undeniable. Also, both thought it was a duty they owed Jack, their leader, to put right what had come about through their own carelessness.

They covered many miles downstream, never leaving the water's edge for very long at a time, and watching out carefully for a sign of their enemies' canoe or canoes. How many they had between them the boys did not know.

But they knew well enough that, while Snaith and Olesen were travelling, they were covering more miles in an hour than they themselves could possibly cover by walking. They would, if Snaith and Olesen continued to paddle till sunset, have to walk for hours after dark to catch up to their halting-place. And then they did not know which side of the river the villains would camp on.

It was, indeed, getting very dark, and they were still walking doggedly along, when, gleaming from the other side of the river, they saw a camp-fire. The sight of this caused them to halt, and Teddy scratched his chin disgustedly.

"Luck's not with us to-night, old chap," he said. "We'll have to swim across to 'em. They might have been more reasonable, and have camped on this side!"

Gerald chuckled, and strained his eyes for sight of human figures near the camp-fire. But the distance across the river at this point was fully half a mile, and, though they could see a figure, they could not make out whether it were red man or white.

"Of course," Gerald said, "that may not be their fire. It may belong to some Indians."

"That's the nuisance of it," said Teddy. "We don't know. But we can't assume anything, old chap. I suppose we're good enough to swim all that distance, Gerald?"

"I suppose so," said Gerald. "Don't know whether I feel like doing it in my clothes, and with a rifle in my hand."

"We'll wait a bit, till we think they're asleep, then we'll leave our rifles on the bank here, and our clothes," said Teddy. "After all, if we're quiet, they needn't know we're anywhere near."

They sat down and waited patiently until they saw the glow of the camp-fire die down. Then Teddy rose to his feet, propped his rifle against a boulder, and began to undress himself. Gerald followed his example.

Silently they slipped into the water, and strongly struck out for the opposite bank. Very fortunately for them, the river was smooth-running and free of serious currents at this point, though it was a long distance to swim for boys—and tired boys at that—they swam doggedly on side by side, wasting no breath by talking, and their white limbs flashing in the moonlight as they moved them.

Both were capital swimmers now, though Teddy was certainly the better of the two.

At length, they reached the shallows at the other side, but many yards downstream from the camp-fire. They drew themselves out of the water, and began to walk upstream.

The night was warm enough, and they felt no chill on their bare bodies as they stole upstream again. Soon they came to the open place where this camp was pitched, and there they halted in the shadows of trees, and peered at two recumbent forms that lay near the almost expired fire.

"It's Snaith and Olesen, all right," Teddy whispered, at length. "And that's their canoe, sitting on the water close by. We'll have a look at it, shall we?"

They soon found the canoe. Snaith and Olesen were apparently as careless with their craft as the three young adventurers had been, for it was sitting unheeded on the water, moored to a tree, and it contained most of the things that had been stolen from

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

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the boys' camp that morning. Also it contained one rifle.

"That goes overboard first thing," said Teddy grimly. "I suppose they have another with them, but I'm not going to look for that. It's a bigger canoe than ours were. So it'll hold the three of us comfortably. I hope these beasts enjoy their walk back—if they go back."

"They might do what we might have had to do," Gerald said; "they might walk forward, still hoping to get at that gold."

"Fat lot they'd get away from the lake without anything to carry it in," was Teddy's scornful comment, as he stepped into the canoe and seized one of the two paddles there.

Neither he nor Gerald cared two straws that the canoe probably contained articles essential to the well-being of Snaith and Olesen. Anyhow, the latter two rogues had not cared much about the youngsters' feelings when they had performed that diabolical act against their canoes—an act which might easily have stranded the three and caused them to starve in the wilderness.

It was only just, perhaps, that the three youngsters, whom these two hated so bitterly should have the initiative they had. Certainly, neither Snaith nor Olesen, as they snored heavily beside their fire, dreamed that the boys they had thought to score off so well had turned the tables on them.

Teddy and Gerald dipped their paddles quietly, and propelled the big canoe straight across the river. On the other side they retrieved their clothes and their rifles. They donned the former, laid the latter in the bottom of their purloined craft, and then set to work steadily to paddle upstream.

It was a long, hard job, light though the canoe was comparatively. But all through that night they paddled, until the sun was well up. And they had not reached the scene of their own last camp before they suddenly heard a hail on the right bank. They looked shorewards, to see a figure that looked like Jack Royce's, standing there at the water's edge.

At once they turned the canoe's head towards land, and a few moments later, the weary-eyed Teddy was grinning impudently at his big brother, while Jack frowned at the two of them.

"'Sall right, old chap!" Teddy murmured drowsily. "We've got another canoe. I say, I hope you got some brekker ready for us? I'm famished, and so's Gerald."

"You young scamp!" said Jack sternly. "How dare you start off on your own! I've been waiting about all night for you, and began to walk downstream when it became light."

"You ought to have stayed in camp and got brekker, old chap," said Teddy. "Not much further to go, is there?"

"About three miles," said Jack. "Here, let me get in. I'll paddle the thing up for you. You look tuckered out."

An hour later all three were back beside the slashed canoes, and Jack Royce was roaring with laughter at Teddy's account of their recent adventures.

"As easy as pie," Teddy grumbled, his mouth full of bacon and bannock. "Those fellows never even guessed we were near 'em. I quite expected a bit of a scrap. But we've landed them nicely now. Why, one big canoe's worth two small 'uns any day. Two can paddle while one rests. I think I'll do most of the resting to-day."

"We'll start as soon as you think you're fit," Jack said. "I congratulate you on your sublime cheek, and hope Snaith's curses on your devoted heads won't blister you too much."

Teddy shrugged his shoulders at Snaith, and, a little later, the prospecting party was again well on its way downstream. This time, with two sturdy paddlers at work on this larger craft, they got on remarkably well—so well, that they passed the spot which Teddy and Gerald recognised as the camp of Snaith and Olesen long before dark.

"Wonder which way they're walking?" Teddy murmured, as he rested from his labours and gazed shorewards. "I'll bet they——"

A shot whipped out spitefully, cutting Teddy's words short. A bullet zipped over their heads, and instinctively all three ducked as it struck the water to their right with a sharp little phutt.

Jack Royce muttered something under his breath, and snatched up his own rifle.

"They haven't moved either way," he said. "They're still at the same spot. And they've still got a rifle, it seems!"

Crack!

Another shot came their way, and this time the bullet splintered the gunnel of their canoe. Jack Royce raised his rifle, and, squatting back in the canoe, rested his elbows on his knees.

There was a dreadfully grim light in Jack's eyes now. All the humour had gone out of his face. And Gerald and Teddy, too, were silent as they crouched forward in the canoe and let it drift idly downstream.

Then Jack's rifle spoke suddenly, and Teddy and Gerald, with fascinated eyes, looked shorewards. They were just in time to see something that looked like a hat disappear behind a boulder.

It was plain what had happened, and Teddy found himself feeling ashamed at not having thought of this before. Snaith and Olesen had guessed how they had come to lose their canoe, and had waited, expecting the young adventurers to come downstream.

Another shot came their direction, and so closely that Gerald's hat was sent bowling into the water. But as soon as the puff of smoke showed at the side of the river, Jack's weapon spoke again, and as he pulled the trigger there was a set look about the big young Britisher's face. He was shooting to hit this time. The need to do so was desperate, for the rifle their enemies held was in capable hands, and it was obvious that the enemies were shooting to kill. To

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take human life is a dreadful thing for the average man to contemplate—but there are times when self-defence compels a man to do things which, in normal times, he would shudder to think of.

As Jack's second shot sounded, a figure came from behind the boulder it had dodged behind. It staggered to the water's edge, stood there for a moment, then toppled head-first into the flood. Then Jack saw another target, and aimed at that. Now he had the range properly. His second victim crumpled slowly to earth, the rifle it had been holding describing an arc in the sunlight, and falling into the river many feet away from him who had held it.

"Paddle shorewards, boys!" said Jack quietly, ejecting his spent cartridge-case and ramming another shot into the chamber. "I think they're safe enough now."

With hearts beating violently, Teddy and Gerald forced the canoe towards the shore. As they came nearer to land, they saw some struggling going on in the water. A hand was thrown up heavenwards, and a strangled sort of shriek bit through the air.

"That's Olesen," said Jack. "Steer for him first. If he's still alive, we can't leave him to drown."

They got Olesen to dry land, and, still holding his rifle ready, Jack approached the spot where Snaith had fallen. He found that villain lying on his face, his fingers convulsively gripping the grass on which he lay. He was groaning.

"Neither of them dead, thank goodness!" said Jack, in great relief. "Now, Olesen, what's the matter with you?"

Olesen had a bullet in the shoulder, and was making more fuss about it than was at all necessary. But then, all the boys knew Olesen to be an arrant coward. The man's shoulder was broken, and his arm was hanging limply by his side.

"You can wait," said Jack curtly. "Snaith wants first attention."

"What are you going to do with them, then?" Teddy asked. "Are we going to have 'em on our hands now?"

Jack made no reply, but worked steadily and not unskilfully at his unsavoury job. His bullet, he found, had severed an artery in the blackguard's leg, and had also broken the bone. It was a very serious wound. But, with the aid of a tourniquet and the strength of Gerald, he managed to stanch the flow of blood in a measure, and also set the broken bone with the aid of two improvised splints. Gerald helped him greatly, showing that he, too, possessed some knowledge of first-aid. Teddy, on the other hand, busied himself with Olesen, who sat there and roared and squirmed at the youngster's touch, while the tears rolled down his face like the great baby he was.

At length, Jack gave a grunt, and Snaith's eyelids flickered open. The man gave a groan, tried to sit up, shrieked, and sank back again on his grassy bed.

"So," he gasped, "you've beaten me, Royce, have you?"

(To be continued.)

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