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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ARZACS.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH shook his head dolefully.

"Well, we're in a fine old mess!" he exclaimed. "Instead of things getting better, they've got worse. And if we ever get out of this place, and return to civilisation, I shall be jolly surprised!"

"An' so shall I!" said Fullwood bitterly. "A fine state of affairs this is—I don't think! Lord Dorrimore ought to be jolly well ashamed of himself for bringin' us into this business, an' allowin' us to be captured——"

"You—you cad!" roared Handforth.

"Eh?"

"You rotter!"

"You silly ass!" snapped Fullwood. "What I said is quite true!"

"I'll show you whether it's quite true or not!" exclaimed Handforth wrathfully. "If you utter another word against Lord Dorrimore, you rotter, I'll punch your nose!"

"Why, you were just grumblin' yourself!" said Fullwood. "You were just sayin' that we should never get out of this place——"

"It doesn't matter what I was saying!" interrupted Handforth. "I was simply grumbling at the luck—I wasn't growling at Lord Dorrimore, and kicking up the dust. You know as well as I do

that Dorrie is absolutely innocent—that he did his utmost to prevent all this happening. It's just luck—bad luck and the wiliness of the Comte de Plessigny!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood shrugged his shoulders.

"You can call it what you like," he sneered. "All I know is that we came out on this trip with Lord Dorrimore, an' we are now prisoners in this confounded city, cut off from civilisation by a swamp over a hundred miles in extent. There's no hope of escape, an' we've simply got to sit here till we grow grey whiskers!"

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver.

"We are absolutely doomed!" put in Bell. "We're doomed to remain here until we die! An' you can't get away from the fact that Lord Dorrimore is responsible!"

Handforth rolled up his sleeves.

"All right!" he said ominously. "I'll show you what I'm going to do!"

"Hold on, Handy!" I interrupted, grasping his arm.

"And I don't want any interference from you, Nipper!" roared Handforth, turning on me.

"My dear old chap, what on earth is the good of arguing with these cads?" I asked. "You know as well as I do that they're absolutely hopeless—that they have always been cads, and are just as bad now. They came on this trip with us, and simply because things have gone wrong, they are ready to

blame everybody—they turn on Dorrie and Mr. Lee, and can do nothing else but growl. Let them growl—it doesn't hurt us, and it pleases them. And it shows that they're every bit as bad as over they were!"

Handforth nodded.

"Perhaps you're right, Nipper," he agreed. "I should be soiling my giddy fists if I punched their noses! They ain't fit to touch!"

And Handforth turned his back on the Nuts of the Remove in sheer disgust. The other juniors who were present were equally fed up with the growls and grumbles of Fullwood and Co.

The position was serious enough, in all conscience, but grumbling did not improve matters.

There were a good many representatives of the Remove Form of St. Frank's present. Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson and Reginald Pitt were chatting together in a group, and over in another corner De Valerie and Jack Grey and Church and McClure were having a little argument. Timothy Tucker was attempting to address the thin air in another corner, and Tom Burton was deep in conversation with the Hon. Douglas Singleton and the Duke of Somerton.

Morrow and Fenton of the Sixth were sitting together, talking earnestly, and young Stanley Kerrigan was excitedly discussing the whole situation with his two friends of the third—Chubby Heath and Owen Minor.

And all the St. Frank's fellows, including myself, were imprisoned in a huge stone apartment in a great building which was situated almost in the centre of the mysterious city of El Dorado—that wonderful city of gold and marble which lay hundreds and hundreds of miles behind the great barrier of the Brazilian unexplored forests.

We were cut off from the outside world by an impenetrable swamp—a poison swamp, infested by snakes and reptiles and insects.

In another apartment of the same great marble house, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Dr. Brett, and Captain Burton and all his crew—they were there prisoners just the same as we were.

In still another apartment, Lady Helen Tregellis-West was doing her utmost to cheer up the young ladies in her charge,

Ethel Church, Violet Watson, and several other girls. Miss Janet Kerrigan was there, also—to say nothing of the maids from Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, *The Wanderer*.

In point of fact—and in a nutshell—every single member of the yacht's company had been transported across that deadly swamp to El Dorado. Every member of the yacht's crew—male and female—every single guest—they were all here. Not a single individual had been left behind. The capture had been complete and absolute.

The Comte de Plessigny had triumphed.

"What we've got to do is to look at the position in a straightforward manner," I remarked seriously. It's no good grumbling, and it's no good blaming anybody. Things have just happened, and we've got to make the best of them. But I'm like the gov'nor—I never give up hope. It's all rot to say that we're doomed to stay here—there might be a hundred and one different ways in which we can escape—in which we can defeat the count and the Arzac as well."

"Dear old boy, that's the way to talk!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West approvingly. "You are just like Mr. Lee—you never throw up the sponge, begad! The position is simply appallin'—it is, really. At the same time we've got to buck up an' look things cheerfully in the face!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the style!" I said. "Now then, you chaps, listen to me. I'll just tell you exactly what happened from the very start—"

"We all know it, you ass!" said Handforth.

"That doesn't matter," I went on. "We might just as well be reminded of what has happened—in case anybody starts blaming Dorrie or Mr. Lee. It seems to me that some of you need a reminder on that question."

"Only Fullwood and those other cads!" said Reginald Pitt, with a glare at the chums of Study A.

"You can say what you bally well like!" sneered Fullwood. "I know the truth—an' I'm not afraid of saying it, either!"

"The truth is this, you cad!" I said warmly. "We all came out to the Amazon on Lord Dorrimore's yacht,

The Wanderer. After reaching the Amazon we went up the Majarra in the hope of finding some traces of Colonel Kerrigan. We really came out to Brazil to find Colonel Kerrigan—to search for him. Well, after we had got up the Majarra, we found plenty of evidence to indicate that the colonel had constructed a kind of kite, and had been blown across the deadly swamp to the unknown land beyond. What did Lord Dorrimore do then?"

"He brought out his airship from the hold of the yacht, put it together, and flew into the air!" said Tommy Watson.

"Exactly," I agreed. "Dorrie got his airship going, and then the first trip across the swamp was made—and El Dorado was discovered!"

"And what a marvellous city it is!" said Pitt. "If we weren't prisoners, and if our position wasn't quite so serious, we should all be nearly mad with enthusiasm—we should be off our rockers with delight. El Dorado is the most amazing place in the whole world!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It's the city of wonders!"

"There's no doubt about that," I agreed. "El Dorado is the most astonishing city anybody could wish to enter. Well, that first trip in the airship resulted, as I have said, in the discovery of El Dorado, and the extraordinary race of white giants which we now know to be called Arzacs. They appear to be quite civilised, and are peaceful, harmless sort of people—except when they are roused. And, then I have every reason to believe, they are perfect demons."

"But what does all this matter to us?" asked Church. "We know it."

"Possibly we do," I agreed. "At the same time, we might as well talk about it—there's nothing else for us to do, anyhow. Everything went all right on that first trip, except that the count attacked the airship in his aeroplane, and caused it to come down because the gas was escaping from the bag. But Nelson Lee got out of that hole all right, and then he returned to the yacht for repairs—after leaving six of us in this queer country. And when Nelson Lee returned in order to pick us up, we fell into the hands of the white giants—and that was mainly owing to an accident. Then, when we were brought to this city, we found the colonel here, and we knew that we had not come in vain."

"Meanwhile, things were happening

on the Majarra," remarked Reginald Pitt grimly.

"Things were!" I agreed. "For example, the count obtained hundreds and hundreds of savage Indians, and he started an attack on the yacht. It went all right at first—Captain Burton and his crew were able to boat off the Indians with ease. But then when the count came overhead in the airship, and dropped vapour bombs, things became too hot. That vapour caused everybody to swoon off, and to become insensible."

"Rather!" agreed De Valerie. "You don't know what it was like, Nipper—you weren't there. My only hat! Oh all the scraps! I've never been in anything so terrifically exciting!"

"We all did our best," said Pitt, shaking his head. "After that disaster occurred, some of us went down into the store room, and we got hold of some gas masks, and put them on. Then we went on deck, and we didn't care twopence about the vapour. We got hold of the hose pipes, and spurted hot water over those wretched Indians. But they were too many for us, and we were overpowered."

"Yes, and the rest is easily told," I said. "Once everybody was captured, the count simply transported the whole party over the swamp in the airship—making six or seven journeys. And now we're all here—everybody, including the ladies and the girls. Somehow, I can't help admiring the count for the clever way in which he has organised the whole business."

"I'd like to punch the rotter in the eye!" said Handforth aggressively.

"In any case, why is he doing it?" asked Tommy Watson. "He must be mad, you know. Why should he want to leave all of us here—right away from civilisation, where we can never be found?"

"I think the count has a very good reason of his own," I said. "It's connected with Colonel Kerrigan, I believe. The count doesn't want any of us to return to civilisation with the story that the colonel is still alive. Therefore, in order to make things absolutely certain, he has collared the lot of us, and he means to leave us here. The only point in the count's favour is that he has treated everybody in a gentlemanly manner, he has behaved perfectly in regard to the ladies."

"Yes, that's certainly a point in his favour," said Tommy Watson. "My sister and all the others are in the same building, and they're well looked after—they've got all sorts of attendants, and I don't think they'll come to any harm. These Arzac women are quite decent, I believe."

Fatty Little strolled up.

"Yes, and grub's all right!" he remarked. "That's one thing I will say. The grub they've supplied us with is absolutely A.1. Those mandioca cakes are simply gorgeous, and I could eat dozens of them! We've had beans, too, and sweet potatoes, and arrow root bread. And just think of the fruit!"

"Oh, you're always thinking of your tummy!" said Handforth.

"It's the best thing a chap can think of!" declared Fatty Little. "We've had pineapples, and para apricots, and those oval yellow things with only one or two seeds—I think they are called abierro, or something like that, we've had bread fruit, and that stuff preserved in syrup—bacuri. That goes down lovely with some of those cakes. I'm just wondering when we shall have the next meal—I'm as hungry as a hunter already. I think this air gives a fellow a keen appetite, you know."

"Any air would give you an appetite, Fatty,"—I chuckled. "Why, we only had the midday meal an hour ago. We shan't have anything else for two or three hours."

"That's what I'm thinking," groaned Fatty. "My hat! I think I shall have a sleep, and then the time will pass more quickly!"

We had been captives, so far, for just one whole day, and we had been treated well, and our Arzac guards seemed to be more curious than hostile.

The windows of the apartment where we were imprisoned were high in the wall, so that we could not look out upon the city. The room was quite bare, except for several very comfortable couches of reeds and tropical grasses. They were very cunningly made and extremely luxurious.

So far we had seen nothing of the Comte de Plessigny—the rascal who was really responsible for the whole disaster. The comte was chief of the Arzacs, the ruling king.

This seemed extraordinary enough, but it had a very simple explanation.

When the count had arrived at El Dorado, he had come on a fast aeroplane—a machine of the Sopwith Snipe type. And the Arzacs, who had never seen anything like it before, were tremendously impressed. They believed the count to be some wonderful being from another world—and they hailed him as their king.

Therefore, when the count landed he found himself held in great awe, and he was proclaimed the ruler of the whole country. Naturally, the count lost no time in taking full advantage of his position. To begin with, he had been greatly handicapped because he did not know anything of the Arzac language, which was quite a novel one.

However, the count had set himself to the task of learning many of the Arzac words, and—by great concentration and will power he had succeeded—to a certain extent.

He was able to understand a good deal that was said, and he could issue orders on his own account.

Naturally, he was compelled to resort to many signs in order to make himself fully understood, but he was getting better and better every day. Indeed, he had gained such a grasp of the language by now that he was able to make himself easily understood, and he could listen quite intelligently to the conversation of the Arzacs themselves.

We did not expect to see any sign of our gigantic guards until the evening came along—until the next mealtime arrived. But we were wrong. Almost at once the great stone door was opened, and twenty or thirty giants entered the apartment.

"Hallo!" said Pitt. "What's this?"

"Perhaps we're going to be taken out to the slaughter!" said Handforth. "Anyhow, it isn't grub time, so it must be something special!"

"Oh, great doughnuts!" groaned Fatty. "I thought we were going to have something more to eat!"

As a rule only three or four Arzacs entered with their gold trays filled with food. For gold in El Dorado was as common as dust. Gold was everywhere—ornamenting the houses, ornamenting the bodies of the Arzacs themselves, and, in fact, gold was like grass on the prairie. It had absolutely no value in this wonderful city, for the simple

reason that it could be obtained without the slightest trouble.

We had already seen one amazing lake of boiling gold—a volcanic phenomenon, no doubt. This lake was apparently the god of the Arzacs, for there were many priests in attendance, and they were worshipping the bubbling pool. The gold was all molten, and the sight was a very impressive one during the night.

These giants who had now entered our prison were huge fellows—not one of them being less than eight feet in height, and proportionately broad. They were attired in long flowing robes, gold ornaments, and a kind of sandal. They were almost white, and their features refined and well cut.

One of the Arzacs raised his hand for silence.

"Come!" he exclaimed in a deep, powerful voice.

"Hallo! He's beginning to learn the English language!" exclaimed Pitt. "I wonder what this means?"

The count had no doubt instructed the Arzacs in certain simple words, and that one word in this case was quite understandable—and it was the only word necessary. We had been told to "come," and so we had followed the Arzacs out of the apartment, and into a wide, smooth passage.

Along this passage we went until we entered a doorway of tremendous dimensions. And when we got into the apartment we were greatly impressed. For it was a huge place, beautifully decorated and ornamented with gold, and there were many other people present. Nelson Lee was there, and Lord Dorrimore, and, in fact, all the members of our party. They were all there—Lady Helen Tregellis-West, Miss Janet Kerrigan, the girls, and the stewardesses from the yacht.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi stood in a group, and Colonel Kerrigan was talking with Dr. Brett and Captain Burton. Nelson Lee looked up as we appeared, and smiled.

"I am glad to see you still looking cheerful, boys," he called out. "That is the best way—keep up your good spirits, and everything will be well."

"We're as cheerful as anything, sir!" shouted Handforth. "Why not? Why should we be depressed? We know you're here, and before many days have passed we shall be free again, we shall

escape from this place, and the count will be squashed."

"Good old Handforth!" chuckled Lord Dorrimore. "Never say die—that's the spirit, old man!"

"Are we downhearted?" roared Handforth.

"No," bellowed all the other juniors.

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"There you are—listen to 'em!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of it, Lee? Not long ago we were standin' about with long faces, an' we were as gloomy as anythin'. An' here are these kids cheerin' an' askin' one another if they're downhearted. Upon my word, they've taught us a lesson!"

"We're not downhearted, either, Lord Dorrimore!" exclaimed Violet Watson, with sparkling eyes. "We're quite cheerful, and we know that everything will come all right!"

"Splendid—splendid!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "With such a spirit among us as this, we cannot fail to gain the day in the long run."

And then a slight hush fell on the assembly, for a figure had appeared at the end of the great apartment, a figure clothed in gorgeous robes and gold ornaments. Upon his head there rested a massive, crown-like ornamentation. But the figure was not that of an Arzac. He was smaller, and he was bearded.

In fact, the man was the Comte de Plessigny himself!

— — —

CHAPTER II.

THE COUNT'S PROGRAMME

THE count took his seat on a bench which was made of solid gold. Then he adjusted his pince-nez, and looked round with a benevolent, amiable expression.

"Well, my dear friends, I am pleased to see you all looking so well and cheerful!" he exclaimed, in his smooth, well-modulated voice. "It is quite a surprise to me, and you must allow me to congratulate you upon your excellent self-control."

"Listen to him!" muttered Handforth. "Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, would it?"

"Disgusting," muttered Pitt.

"The beastly old hypocrite!" said Fatty Little wrathfully.

"I do not want any interruptions, please," went on the Comte de Plessigny. "You boys will please understand that you must not talk while I am addressing you. If there is any interruption again I shall immediately clear the offenders out of this apartment."

There was a dead silence.

"I have brought you all together now because I am anxious to tell you exactly what my programme is," went on the count smoothly. "So far everything has gone perfectly—all my plans have been carried out to the exact detail. Not one hitch has occurred, and I am quite confident that I shall be successful in my other operations."

"I shouldn't be too sure, if I were you!" said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "You have certainly gained the upper hand, my friend, but it doesn't mean to say you'll keep it all the time. We may be prisoners, but we're not beaten."

"Wise words, O my father!" rumbled Umlosi, the Kutana chief. "Thou art of good spirit, and I am pleased to hear thy words. Wau! It is not for us to be of the heavy heart—it is not for us to be unhappy. For everything will come right before long. I have seen the red mist, and my snake tells me that freedom will be ours ere long. Heed my words, O my father, for I have spoken the truth!"

"Good man!" said Lord Dorrimore approvingly.

"I am afraid your black friend is rather too optimistic," said the Comte de Plessigny. "It will not be well to take too much heed of his words. I can assure you your chances of escaping from El Dorado are extremely thin—so thin, in fact, that you may as well resign yourselves to the inevitable now, at once. In case you have been worrying I may as well tell you that I have no intention of harming you."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "I thought perhaps that we were going to be thrown into the giddy pot!"

The Comte de Plessigny smiled.

"The Arzacs are not cannibals, my young friend. There is no danger of your being eaten. The Arzacs are very peaceful, and it is one of their rules to kill nobody. Their religion forbids them to kill—or even injure."

"What if they are attacked by an

enemy?" asked Lord Dorrimore curiously.

"In that case it is different," replied the count. "The Arzacs are only allowed to kill if they are attacked; they are only allowed to give battle in the event of danger. And then, let me tell you, these white giants are terrible people. Once they allow themselves to fight they fight with every ounce of their strength and determination. But there is no chance of any fighting taking place. The country is peaceful, and there will be no hostility shown towards you. You will be quite happy and peaceful in this city—and you will be able to spend your lives in comfort."

"How very alluring!" murmured Lord Dorrimore. "I am quite charmed!"

"I am gratified to find that you take your position so cheerfully, Lord Dorrimore," said the count. "However, let us proceed. Perhaps you are rather puzzled as to why I should have acted in such a strange manner. I will explain to you. You came out to the Majarra for the purpose of finding Colonel Kerrigan. You have found him, and it was your intention to take the colonel back to civilisation. Well, that is totally against my wishes. I do not wish Colonel Kerrigan to return. I do not intend him to return!"

"You infernal scoundrel!" said Colonel Kerrigan hotly. "I am well aware——"

"Wait!" interrupted the count. "I have not finished. It would have been quite easy for me to kill the colonel, and thus save any further trouble. But I did not choose that course—I was most anxious to avoid any bloodshed. Therefore I chose the most difficult course. I made my plans, and captured every one of you from the yacht. And now you are all here, safe and sound, with whole limbs, and in perfect health. You have been kidnapped, if you choose to look at it in that light. And here you will remain, beyond reach of civilisation."

"Don't you be so sure of that," said Lord Dorrimore. "There are many people in England who know our plans; they know we came out here with an airship, and when we fail to return, there will be another expedition sent out, and we shall be searched for."

"I have already thought of that possibility, my dear friend," smiled the

Comte de Plessigny. "And if you think that you will be rescued, you are greatly mistaken. You appear to be unaware of the fact that I shall return to civilisation before long. I shall take with me a most startling story. And that story will be of such a nature that no other expedition will come out with an airship. There is no danger of that whatever. You will be left here in El Dorado, and here you will remain. It is just possible that the outside world may discover you ten or twenty years hence—but not until then. By that time I shall be indifferent."

"And we've got to remain here for ten or twenty years!" gasped Fullwood. "It can't be true! I won't stop—I won't remain! If you'll take me away with you, my father will pay you anythin' you like!"

"So you are attempting to bribe me?" smiled the count.

"It isn't bribery!" shouted Fullwood frantically. "My father will do anythin' if you'll only take me back to England. I won't breathe a word about these others! I'll keep it mum, an' they can——"

"Dry up, you traitor!" bellowed Handforth. "By George! I'll smash you to atoms for this!"

He threw himself forward, and faced Fullwood squarely.

Crash!

"Yarrooh—ow—owowowow!" yelled Fullwood, going over backwards.

"Splendid — splendid!" chuckled Dorrie. "That is the stuff to give him, Handforth! —I am quite shocked. I had no idea that Master Fullwood was such an unscrupulous young bounder!"

Fullwood picked himself up, glaring.

"You—you cad!" he snarled. "If you dare touch me again——"

"Now, then, boys—now then!" interrupted the Comte de Plessigny. "There is no necessity for you to quarrel. We will let the matter pass, and now you will get back to your various apartments, and you will think over what I have said. Within four days I shall have left El Dorado for good, and then you will be able to roam about the city as you please. For I shall leave instructions that you are to be released, and that you are to be treated with every consideration. You will do as you like here. You will be treated as honoured guests."

Colonel Kerrigan strode forward, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming.

"One moment!" he exclaimed in a deadly voice. "I have something to say—and I intend to say it now!"

The colonel strode straight forward, until he was standing within a yard of the count himself.

Several of the Arzac guards came forward, and Colonel Kerrigan was seized, and held back.

"Let me go!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I intend to speak!"

He then uttered a long string of strange words, for the colonel, of course, could speak the Arzac tongue fluently. The giants who had seized him partially released their grip, and seemed uncertain.

The count waved his hand, and uttered three words in the same language—the Arzac language.

"You may as well speak, colonel. There is no reason why you should not have your say," he smiled. "No doubt you intend to tell these good people of my character. It is your desire to relate what happened on the Majarra four or five years ago. Well, well! It makes little difference whether you say it in my hearing or whether you say it later; you may as well speak."

The Arzac guards had released the colonel, who stood before us all with blazing eyes.

"Yes, I will speak!" he exclaimed. "I intend to tell you all what this man is—what a traitorous, treacherous scoundrel you have before you! To begin with, his title is a false one—he is no more the Comte de Plessigny than I am!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The awful spooker!"

"When I first knew him he called himself Robert Adams," went on Colonel Kerrigan grimly. "That was many years ago, in New Orleans. Robert Adams and I happened to meet one day in the same hotel. He had nothing particular to do, and I was on the lookout for a man who would come with me for a trip to the Amazon—an exploration trip. Well, this man Adams appeared to be such a gentleman, and he was so smooth tongued and kind that I was completely deceived. And then we started on that expedition—that trip that was to end in disaster for me. Adams is the man you now see before you here

—the man who calls himself the Comte de Plessigny."

The count smiled.

"You must allow me to correct you, my dear colonel," he said smoothly. "I am not——"

"Do you deny that you are the man?" demanded Colonel Kerrigan.

"No, I do not deny that," said De Plessigny. "I deny that my name is Adams. At the time you mention I certainly used that name—but only for purposes of my own. My real name is the name which is known to all these good people here—the Comte de Plessigny."

"If you expect them to believe that, you are evidently very hopeful," said the colonel contemptuously.

Nobody did believe it, as a matter of fact. I had suspected right from the start that the count was a fraud, and that he had no right whatever to the title, and, although he denied this, I was quite sure in my own mind that the colonel was right. The man was a mere adventurer, and he had called himself the Comte de Plessigny for his own uses. However, that was the name we had known him by, and I shall continue to refer to him as the count.

"Well, we started on this expedition, as I have said," proceeded the colonel. "We were very successful at first, and we penetrated right up the Majarra until we had left civilisation far behind. And then, by a piece of ill-luck, I became ill. I was stricken down by fever."

"Oh, how unfortunate!" murmured Violet Watson.

"I was nearly at death's door," went on the colonel. "For some unaccountable reason, our little case of medicines had become lost—Adams informed me that it had fallen out of the canoe—but now I have every reason to believe that he concealed the medicine so that I should not recover."

"The scoundrel!"

"The awful brute!"

"Proceed! Proceed!" smiled the count, with a wave of his hand. "Do not mind me in the least. I am quite an interested listener."

"Adams was exceedingly sympathetic, and he deceived me all along," said the colonel. "I had no idea of his treachery, no suspicion of his actual character. Well, he offered to go down to Manaos in order to obtain fresh supplies, and to hurry back as quickly as

he possibly could. I was left in the care of some Indians, who, by the way, were by no means gentle with me. The scoundrel left for Manaos in our launch, and I did not see him again until he appeared in El Dorado several weeks ago."

"I was unavoidably detained, my dear friend," murmured the Comte de Plessigny, with a chuckle.

"I know exactly why you did not return," said the colonel. "I have learned all the facts. I know, for example, that you went into Manaos, and you posed as me. You made yourself out to be Colonel Kerrigan. And for what reason?"

"Ah," said the Count mockingly, "now we are coming to it!"

"In Manaos I had left several valuable securities at the bank," went on the colonel. "My whole fortune was represented, and I had requested the count, as you call him, to recover those securities, and to despatch them at once to my sister in England. Instead of doing that, Adams appropriated everything for himself, using my name. And then he left me in the lurch—or, to be more exact, he came up the Majarra again—and it was his intention to finish me off, to kill me, and to leave me dead in the jungle."

"You are very precise as to your details," said the count smoothly. "I certainly did come up the Majarra again, but I intended finding you and taking you back with me to civilisation. But I could not find you, colonel. I was given to understand that you were dead."

"And I can easily understand how that came about," went on the colonel. "You arrived at the spot where you had left me, and you found it deserted, and you also found a newly made grave. You evidently mistook that grave for mine, and you did not trouble to search farther."

"Exactly!" said the count. "You have arrived at the truth, my friend."

"And yet there is a very simple explanation for that grave," went on Col. Kerrigan. "I was abandoned by the Indians who were looking after me. They left me in the jungle to die. But, then, when I was near to the point of death, another party of wandering Indians came upon me. One of their number had met with a serious accident, and he had died then and there. They buried him, and they took me with them to their own camping-ground, many miles

distant. And there I recovered slowly but surely.

"I was now in the heart of the jungle, and there was no way in which I could escape—alone. It would have been madness to attempt the journey through the forest without guides, and I could not get any of the Indians to act in that capacity."

"What did you do?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"I had heard many stories concerning a terrible swamp which existed not far distant," said the colonel. "I also heard stories of a mysterious city which lay beyond. I regarded it as a fable, and now I have only to conclude that a native at some remote period of the past succeeded in crossing the swamp. How he did so, I cannot imagine; but it might have been during a very dry period, when the swamp partially dried up. In any case, I decided to attempt the journey, and I constructed a huge box kite, and waited for a favourable wind. Then I placed my life in the hands of the elements, and in the hands of God. As you all know, I was successful in crossing the swamp, and I reached this wonderful land; but I was severely battered when I landed. I was nearly killed, in fact. The Arzacs found me, brought me to El Dorado, cared for me, and I was treated as one of themselves."

"But you could not escape, of course?"

"There was no escape. There was no way of returning," said Col. Kerrigan quietly. "And so I resigned myself to the inevitable and remained here. And then, when everything was happy and smooth, Robert Adams turned up in his aeroplane. He at once caused me to be imprisoned, and he became the ruler of these simple giants. That is all. You know the man for what he is worth. You now know him to be a base scoundrel, who tricked me just as he has tricked you. He intends to return to civilisation with as much gold as he can take with him, and he intends to leave you here, helpless and abandoned in this hidden city."

"You are quite right, my friend, in your last remarks," said the Comte de Plessigny. "It is my intention exactly. You will all remain here, abandoned among the Arzacs. There will be no escape for you, and there will be no rescue. Within three days I shall have departed, and then you will be able to lead a happy, peaceful life. I am not a

bloodthirsty man. I am not a man who believes in violence. Therefore I shall leave you healthy and uninjured. I shall return to civilisation with a clear conscience."

The count waved his hand, uttered a few words in the Arzac language, and then we were all cleared out of the huge apartment. We had no further opportunity of speech. I was taken back with my chums to the room which we knew as our prison, and the other parties were also taken back to their respective apartments.

But there was a slight change.

Whether the Arzacs got mixed up, I do not know; but, in any case, we were not placed as we had been originally.

Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were with me and two or three other juniors. But we were somewhat surprised to find that all the other fellows did not come in after us. Instead, Col. Kerrigan was ushered into the apartment, and he was accompanied by Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, to say nothing of Douglas Fairbanks. This latter young gentleman was a small Indian boy, who had been given the name of the famous cinema star by Dorrie. This was because the Indian boy showed all his teeth when he smiled—a la Douglas Fairbanks. He was quite a cheerful little fellow, and we all liked him.

"Hallo!" said Lord Dorrimore calmly. "What's the meanin' of this? We've come to the wrong place, colonel!"

"So it seems, Lord Dorrimore," said Col. Kerrigan. "I imagined that we should be taken back to our original apartment, but here we are with some of the boys."

"All the better, sir," I exclaimed. "A change is good for everybody."

The colonel nodded, and he glanced round the bare apartment. Then a curious gleam came into his eyes, and he looked at Lord Dorrimore, and then he looked at me. I could see that something had rather startled him.

"Anything the matter, sir?" I asked.

"No, no, my boy," replied the colonel. "There is nothing the matter, I can assure you."

He spoke in a curious voice, and I wondered what he meant, but he said no more at the moment, and so I had not pressed the matter. But why had that gleam come into his eyes? Why had he looked about him so eagerly?

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET TUNNEL

LORD DORRIMORE looked round and smiled.

"Well, this is a queer business!" he remarked. "There are only seven of us here. What's the idea of dividin' us up like this?"

"I don't know, Dorrie," I said. "At first I thought we were all coming back as we had been originally placed. I thought that the other fellows were coming in this apartment with Tommy and Montic and I. But the rest of the chaps must have been taken to another room. Anyhow, we are all in the building, so it doesn't make any difference."

"Not a bit!" said Dorrie. "We're all prisoners, an' we're all helpless. It's a pity Lee isn't here, though. He and I were just discussing a method of escapin', an' now that's knocked on the head."

"What method, sir?" asked Watson eagerly.

"Oh, it's nothin' that I can tell you!" said his lordship. "We were just wonderin' if it was possible to do anythin' in that line, you know. We hadn't planned out anythin' of a concrete nature. But you can bet your last dollar that the professor won't sit still an' do nothin'. He's bound to get his wits to work straight away. The professor ain't the kind of man to sit quiet an' twiddle his thumbs."

"Thou art speaking strange words, N'Kose, but methinks I understand thee," said Umlosi. "And thou art surely right, my father. The great Umtagati is a man of wonders, and I, for one, have absolute faith in him. Ere long our position will be very different. Ere long we shall not be prisoners, but we shall be free. We shall be the masters of this base scoundrel. Heed thou my words, my father, for I am speaking the truth."

"Oh, I believe you, old man—of course I do," said Lord Dorrimore. "I've been in tight holes before. I've been in fixes that no man would ever expect to get out of. But luck has come my way, an' everythin' has been all serene. What about our adventures in the African desert only last year? We thought we were goin' to peg out then, didn't we? But everythin' came out all serene in the finish, an' everythin' will

come out all serene now. It's only a question of waitin'."

It is quite possible that Lord Dorrimore was not speaking absolutely from his heart. But he was a man who always kept cheerful, who always looked on the bright side. He would never accept defeat, and so he was doing his utmost to make everything appear rosy.

Douglas Fairbanks caught hold of my arm, and he looked at me seriously.

"We um in big hole—heap big hole, Mister Nipper," he exclaimed, shaking his head. "Allee samee bad. Me no think we get out of this. Very bad, I guess."

"We didn't think we'd get out of that other hole, Duggy," I said. "We didn't think we'd be rescued from the swamp two days ago. But we were rescued—and we were nearly on the point of death then. Those snakes were after us, but we're still alive now. There's no reason why we should give up hope."

"Me no give up hope—allee samee cheerful," grinned the Indian boy, suddenly changing his aspect. "But I guess I almighty scared, boss. Those big giants powerful men. We no escape. We um prisoners one time."

We were certainly prisoners, and the hours passed and nothing happened. I had been expecting the other juniors to be ushered in, and Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi and the Colonel expected to be removed to the other apartment. But this did not happen.

The order of things had been altered, and the Arzacs apparently did not think it worth while to make another change.

There were only seven of us here, as Lord Dorrimore had said—Dorrie himself, the colonel, Umlosi, Douglas Fairbanks, my two chums, and myself.

And just when darkness was coming on, the big stone door opened, and two of the giants appeared. They carried golden trays, filled with exceedingly palatable food and fruit.

"Supper!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "Good! I am feelin' quite peckish!"

The golden trays were laid down on the floor, and then the two guards departed. We were left alone to demolish the food, and we did not lose any time in getting to work. We had certainly not lost our appetites, and within two minutes the two golden trays were completely empty—not a single crumb was left.

"Well, this is a good sign, at all events," smiled the colonel. "Our appetites are healthy, and that proves that we are not worrying. As long as we keep cheerful, we shall be all right. When I was alone among the Arzacs, I had no hope whatever of getting away. But there is a big party of us here now, and I think it is quite on the cards that we may be able to bring off a coup. But it needs very careful thinking out and planning."

"That's what the professor is doin' now," said Dorrie. "He's full of ideas; he's full of plans. But there's no immediate hurry, an' when he does move you can bet your boots that he'll move in a way that will open everybody's eyes. If we only had our rifles and revolvers things might look better."

"They were all taken away from us, Dorrie," I said, shaking my head. "But we know where they are—that's one thing. They're all stowed away in a room at the bottom of this building; and there are boxes of ammunition, too, which came from the airship."

Dorrie smiled.

"My dear chap, you don't know what you're talking about," he went on. "Ammunition? Firearms? Why, that lot in the room beneath us only represents a handful. They're just our personal belongings. Don't you know what the count has done?"

"I can't say that I do know," I replied.

"Why, he's been over on that airship at least three times," said his lordship. "An' he's come back every time filled up with machine-guns and bombs an' ammunition. What on earth he is preparin' for, I don't know. But he's got all those machine-guns, an' enough rounds of cartridges to last out a terrific battle."

"Phew!" I whistled. "I wonder what his game is?"

"Dear old boy, it's no good askin' me," said Sir Montie. "I'm shockin'ly puzzled—I am, really. Why should the count do this? Why should he bring those machine-guns into El Dorado? He told us that there wasn't to be any fightin', and that everythin' would be smooth."

"You can't believe what the Count says, M'atie," I replied. "He's got some deep scheme up his sleeve, I believe. It's a certainty, in any case, that he wasn't telling us the truth. He brought us in there so that we should be deceived, and he didn't succeed."

We're not deceived, and we're on the lookout for another move at any moment."

While I was speaking, a thought came into my head, and I looked rather startled.

"I wonder if the Count is thinking about those other giants?" I said suddenly.

"Other giants?" repeated Tommy. "What other giants?"

"The people who live in mud huts," I replied. "Don't you remember? I told you all about it. When Handforth and I escaped in the aeroplane, we flew in the wrong direction at first, and we came upon a tremendous mud city, a place built of low, dirty-looking houses, which we examined at close quarters. All those buildings are of mud, and the giants themselves, although as big as the Arzacs, seemed to be of a lower type. They are not so white, and they are rough, savage-looking brutes."

"And they were preparing for battle, weren't they?" asked Watson.

"I believe so," I replied. "Anyhow, they were building all sorts of strange towers, and the whole place was alive with activity. It seems to me that an attack is expected on El Dorado, and the count has brought all these machine-guns in order to make the defence absolutely certain."

The colonel nodded slowly.

"There may be something in what you say, Nipper," he agreed. "I must confess that I am quite interested. These mud-men are very ferocious fellows, and once they go on the warpath they are determined and deadly."

"The which?" asked Dorrie.

"The mud-men."

"What a clean, healthy-soundin' name!"

"They are called mud-men because they live in buildings which are composed entirely of mud," replied the colonel. "And, during the rainy season, the country where they reside is nearly all mud. In the Arzac language they are called Ciri-Ok-Baks. That means men of mud."

"Do you know much about them?" asked Dorrie interestedly.

"A fair amount," replied the colonel. "They have been the enemies of the Arzacs for centuries. During the time I have been in El Dorado, as you call the city, the mud-men have only made one attack, and that was a very half-hearted

affair, which failed utterly. You see, the tremendously high walls which surround El Dorado form a certain guard against any attack from without. If the Ciri-Ok-Baks can only conquer the wall, they will also conquer the city. And you may be sure that they will wipe out every Arzac they can. They have no quarter in their fighting. They kill everybody—men, women, and children."

"I suppose they want to seize the city for themselves?" asked Dorrie.

"That is it exactly," replied the colonel. "They are jealous of the Arzacs, and they intend to wipe out the whole tribe, if they can. Then, when all the Arzacs are dead, the mud-men will occupy this wonderful city. That is their plan, I believe. But they will never succeed. It is impossible. They cannot succeed."

"It will be very cheerful if they try the game on while we're here," said Tommy Watson. "If they do happen to beat the Arzacs, I suppose we shall be killed as well?"

"There is no doubt of that," said the colonel gravely. "If the mud men ever gain a footing in El Dorado, not a soul will escape. We shall all be killed with the others. But, as I have said, there is no danger of El Dorado falling into the hands of these deadly Ciri-Ok-Baks!"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"I like their name," he remarked smoothly. "It's so melodious, by gad!"

"The Arzac tongue is rather difficult to get on with," smiled the colonel. "However, to return to the subject. I am very interested in what Nipper has told us. It certainly seems that the mud men are doing their utmost to get prepared for a fresh attack on the city. In that case, we are likely to have some exciting times before so very long."

"Good!" said Dorrie. "Anything to liven things up. I'm not the kind of chap who likes a quiet life!"

While he was speaking, the stone door again opened, and the two Arzacs appeared. They took the gold trays, and departed with them. We were left completely to ourselves, and this time it was apparently for the night. We should not be disturbed again until morning, when breakfast would be brought to us.

Our prison was not merely one apartment. I have forgotten to mention that there was an inner place, but, of course, all contained in the prison, for this

inner room had no door whatever, and only one tiny window, near the ceiling. And in this small apartment there was every facility for washing, etc.

Darkness came down at last, but we were not left in blackness. For, through the windows, streamed the strange, orange-coloured light which flooded El Dorado after nightfall.

The city was illuminated by hundreds and hundreds of huge orange balls—great flaming balls of fire which stood upon marble columns, over a hundred feet in height.

"How do they get that illumination, old man?" asked Dorrie, pointing to one of the windows.

"Eh? I—I was thinking— Oh! The light?" he said. "I think it is obtained by some means of natural gas, Lord Dorrimore. The Arzacs are a clever race, and they have succeeded in harnessing this gas, and they have used it for the purposes of illumination. By means of a special burner, the gas, when ignited, gives a huge ball of orange-coloured fire. It is quite wonderful!"

The colonel relapsed into his thoughtful mood.

"I'll give you a fiver for them, Kerrigan!" said Lord Dorrimore.

"Eh?"

"Your thoughts, I mean."

"Oh! I understand!" said the colonel. "As a matter of fact, Dorrimore, I intend to tell you exactly what I was thinking about. I don't wish to raise any false hopes, and I don't want you to imagine that there is any chance of our escaping. But it has struck me that you might care for a little flutter of excitement. It is dull remaining here, and I dare say we should all rather like a blow out in the fresh air."

Lord Dorrimore touched his head significantly.

"After all this time, too!" he said, shaking his head. "I didn't think you'd go off your rocker quite so soon, Kerrigan. How on earth can we go for a walk out in the open, when we're barred up in this place, with a stone door between us and the outside world as thick as a house?"

The colonel smiled.

"No, I am not going out of my mind, Dorrimore," he said quietly. "But it so happens that I have been in this apartment. I know it well. And I also know that in that far wall there is a secret door—"

"My only hat!"

"Begad!"

"A—a secret door"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie.

"Is this true?"

"Quite true!"

"A secret door!" I shouted. "Why, we can escape, then——"

"I told you not to get excited, my lad," said the colonel, shaking his finger at me. "No, we cannot escape. I want you to understand that even if we get out of the city, we shall still be prisoners, we shall have no chance whatever of returning to civilisation."

"But we can get out of this prison?"

"Yes."

"An' out of the city?" asked Dorrie.

"Exactly."

"Well, that's a move in the right direction!" I exclaimed eagerly. "Why, we might even be able to locate the airship, and to——"

"No, that is impossible, Nipper," said the colonel. "The airship is within the city walls, and this tunnel leads right out beyond the city wall. Do you understand? If we go on this little expedition, we shall do it merely as a matter of pleasure—as a little relaxation. It is just possible, of course, that we may hit upon something of great interest—we may possibly find a method of defeating the count. But I do not hope for that."

"I do!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "I am hopin' all the time, old man. An' anythin' is better than nothin'. There's no telling what we can do if we get out of the city. But how do you know about this secret door? And why didn't you tell us before?"

"It was really unnecessary to tell you earlier," said the colonel. "I thought perhaps you would be very impatient, and so I decided to keep my own counsel until the time arrived for us to make a move. And you ask how I know about this door?"

"Yes."

"Well, as you are aware, I was allowed to roam about the city just as I pleased, before Adams returned," said the colonel. "Or before the count returned, as you call him. And one day when I was roaming about this building—which is known as the prison house—I chanced to find this secret door. It was not properly closed, and, upon investigation, I found that it could be opened with extreme ease."

"But if we go through it, and then the Arzacs come in here, they'll know that we have escaped, and they'll come after us," put in Tommy Watson.

"That is quite possible, of course," said Colonel Kerrigan. "But I do not think the Arzacs will bother us again until the morning. In any case, even supposing they do come after us, they can only make us prisoners once more, and bring us back to this spot. So it will make practically no difference. Do you propose that we should take the trip?"

"Rather!"

"You bet your sweet life!" said Dorrie.

"Thou art surely right, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "It is well to get away from this place, and to get into the open. One does not know what might happen. I am all eagerness to do as my master suggests."

The colonel nodded.

"Very well, we will wait about an hour longer, and then we will venture out," he said. "There is no reason why we should hurry."

"Well, let's see if the door is all right," I said eagerly. "Can you open it now, colonel?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Get busy, then," said Dorrie. "I am one of those chaps who don't believe a thing until I see it, you know."

The colonel smiled, and he walked across the apartment to a far corner. Then he crouched down, felt the stonework carefully with his fingers for several minutes, and then, quite suddenly, a square of about four feet opened out. The stone moved back, revealing a dark cavity.

"Anybody got a match?" I asked, turning round.

"Here's one," said Lord Dorrimore.

He struck a match, and he held the light through the opening. Dimly, we could see a low passage, leading downwards at an acute angle. The draught of air which came up was rather musty, but quite breathable.

"Let's go down now, sir!" said Tommy Watson intently.

"No, not yet, my lad," said the colonel. "It is not quite dark—and we do not wish to take unnecessary chances."

He waited very impatiently, but, at last, the hour had passed. And then the colonel decided that the time had

arrived for us to venture on the little trip. We all thoroughly understood that we should return later on—that the journey was only to be a bit of excitement in order to make us tired, so that we should sleep properly.

At the same time, however, I was hopeful that something good might come of this journey. We never could tell, and anything was better than sitting still, doing nothing.

Colonel Kerrigan led the way, Lord Dorrimore went next, and then Umlosi, then myself, and the others behind. It was intensely dark, and we struck matches every now and again—although the colonel said he did not require them.

He had been through the passage on two or three occasions, and he knew that there were no pitfalls.

After descending the long, steep slope, we found the tunnel was quite level, and we walked along it quickly. There were no turnings, there were no dips; it was one straight path, like the subway of an Underground railway in London.

I was feeling quite excited, in spite of the colonel's constant reminder that we should do nothing. I had a kind of feeling that we should be able to benefit by this journey, that we should be able to do something that would bring us nearer to freedom—to victory.

The tunnel seemed interminable. We went on and on and on, and we never got to the end of it.

But we knew, of course, that we were travelling right under the city of El Dorado—that we were going straight out towards the quiet, deserted country beyond the city walls. For, after nightfall, the gates of El Dorado were closed securely, and not a soul was allowed out.

At last, after we had been following the tunnel for what seemed a tremendous time, we distinctly felt a cold draught of air blowing in our faces. This proved conclusively that we were nearing the exit.

And, quite suddenly, we came upon it.

Our way was barred by many thick, tropical bushes. We forced our way through these eagerly, and then, almost before we were aware of it, we found the stars overhead, and the lovely countryside stretching away into the distance. After the intense blackness of the tunnel, we were able to see quite distinctly in the gloom of the night.

We had escaped from El Dorado!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAITOR KING

LORD DORRIMORE took a deep breath.

"This is splendid!" he exclaimed. "Even if we have to get back to that prison, it's jolly fine to be out in the open for a spell. But are we quite safe from observation here, colonel? Isn't it possible that we shall run across some of these cheerful little gentlemen with the flowing robes an' gold ornaments?"

"Do you mean the Arzacs?"

"Yes."

"There is no chance of us running into any of them," replied Colonel Kerrigan. "It is one of the laws of the race that after nightfall every man, woman, and child shall be within the gates. The gates are then closed and locked until dawn. There is a very excellent reason for this, for there are strange and terrible animals roaming about the country—animals that are supposed to be extinct among civilised nations."

"But what about the crops, an' all that sort of thing?" asked Dorrie. "Don't these animals have supper off the vegetables?"

"Occasionally there is an affair of that kind," replied the colonel. "But these Arzacs have special means for protecting their crops, Dorrimore. They have wires and poisoned barbs, and all manner of other protective instruments. It is very seldom that any of these forest brutes penetrate into the cultivated area."

"Oh, I see!" said Dorrie. "That makes it better. There's not much chance of us running across one of the merry specimens, then?"

"Not unless we penetrate into the forest," replied the colonel. "And then, of course, it is quite likely that we shall see something interesting. But I have discovered that on the average these monster brutes are afraid of human beings. Their brains are very small compared to the brains of the animals of to-day, and they do not care to be in the vicinity where human beings exist. They are forest creatures pure and simple—and they prefer the forest."

"Begad! That's awfully interesting," remarked Sir Montie. "I'm feelin' much more comfortable, dear old boys!"

We walked on several hundred yards, until we came to a broad road. And then we looked back, standing in the shade of a big tree, and we could see the great, gigantic walls of El Dorado.

They looked like huge skyscrapers, all put together in one block. And over them there was a haze of orange-coloured light—the reflection from the thousands of pillars of fire within the city.

"It's marvellous!" I exclaimed, in rather an awed tone. "Just to think of this place being here, hundreds of miles behind the deadly swamps of Brazil. It seems more like a dream, Dorrie. I can hardly believe that it is true."

"It's more like a nightmare, to my mind," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "Well, now that we're out here, what are we goin' to do? I propose that we take a stroll round the city walls, an' we might be able to see somethin'—"

"Hush!" interrupted Kerrigan quickly.

"But why, what—"

"There are figures approaching!" muttered the colonel. "I do not understand it—but see!"

He pointed, and we all crouched round the tree, in complete concealment. And from the direction of the city walls we could see two figures coming out towards the road, which ran right past the tree under which we were standing. One of the figures was small, and the other gigantic.

In short, one was a normal human being, and the other a giant.

"Great Scott!" I muttered. "That must be the count!"

"Without the slightest doubt, my lad," said Kerrigan. "There is no one else sufficiently small to fit the description. And there is one of the Arzac priests with him—to judge by the robes. I really cannot understand why they should be outside the city walls at this hour."

"Perhaps we shall be able to discover something, if we only wait," said Lord Dorrimore. "I had a feeling in the back of my spine that we should do somethin' on this trip. Hallo! The pair have come to a halt, an' appear to be havin' a confabulation."

We watched, greatly interested, and very curious. It was quite impossible for us to hear anything that was said, of course, for the two men were too far distant. And, in any case, they were prob-

ably talking in the Arzac tongue. Colonel Kerrigan turned to us, and I could see that his eyes were gleaming.

"Wait here!" he whispered. "I am going nearer, but I shall return soon."

"My dear man, you'll be spotted," said Dorrie urgently. "Don't let your-
self be seen—"

"It's quite all right, Dorrimore," interrupted the colonel. "I shall be able to creep round in the cover of the bushes, and I might possibly overhear what the men are saying. It may be of intense value to us. We do not know."

Before we could say anything else the colonel was gone. We did not hear a sound of him, and we did not see a single glimpse of him. But the minutes passed, and at length, fully a quarter of an hour had elapsed. And then Colonel Kerrigan was still absent—he had completely vanished.

"I don't believe in this!" I murmured. "We're simply doing nothing, Dorrie. Why shouldn't we act on our own account?"

"How?" asked his lordship.

"Well, we can easily rush forward, surprise the count, and take him prisoner," I explained. "Don't you see?"

"Not exactly," said Dorrie. "We can take the count prisoner, I've no doubt. But what's the good of it? What should we gain? The alarm would be given at once, and we should soon be captured ourselves."

"I was thinking of collaring him, and whisking him down the tunnel," I said. "Then we can threaten all sorts of awful things unless he gives us the airship—"

"There may be somethin' in the idea, but it's too late now," said Dorrie. "They're movin'. By jingo, they're comin' in this direction, too!"

"Shall we pounce on the rotters?" I asked eagerly.

"No, I don't think so, Nipper—we had better not be rash," said Dorrie. "Let us hear what the colonel has to say first."

The Comte de Plessigny and his huge companion came along the road, and they passed within ten yards of us, going on at a straight walk, direct away from the city. It was quite clear that they had set out on a journey, and that they were in rather a hurry, too.

By the time they had vanished into the gloom we heard a sound in our rear,

and Colonel Kerrigan was once more with us. And now he was looking grim, determined, and thoroughly startled.

"Well," asked Dorrie, "did you hear anythin'?"

"I can hardly believe that it is true!" said Colonel Kerrigan, his voice quivering with emotion. "By heaven! The base scoundrel! The traitorous brute!"

"Meanin' the count?" inquired Dorrie languidly.

"Yes!"

"Oh, we knew long ago that he was a traitor——"

"But—but you don't understand, Lord Dorrimore—you don't understand!" interrupted Colonel Kerrigan.

"I have been listening to their conversation—and, although the count cannot speak the language fluently, he was nevertheless able to make himself understood. And the priest repeated everything, so I was able to hear. I know the whole truth, and, frankly, I am staggered!"

"You look a bit bowled over," remarked Dorrie.

"I will tell you in a few words what is taking place," said the colonel. "The priest who is with the count is a traitor to the Arzacs—he is hand in glove with the Ciri-Ok-Baks, and it is his intention to betray El Dorado to the enemy!"

"Phew!"

"Begad!"

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie blankly.

"It's true—perfectly true!" went on the colonel. "I have been suspecting something of this nature for many months past. I have known that some of these priests are treacherous, and they do not care a straw for their fellow-countrymen. And this man is a base traitor—he is determined to assist the Comte de Plessigny in betraying the Arzacs to the mud men."

"Then the count is a traitor himself?" I asked.

"That is not at all surprising," said Colonel Kerrigan grimly. "Don't you realise what this means, my boy? Don't you realise the absolute truth? The Comte de Plessigny is now making his way to the mud city, and he means to confer with the Ciri-Ok-Baks, and everything is to be planned for the coup to take place to-morrow night!"

"To-morrow night!" echoed Dorrie.

"That doesn't give them much time!"

"But you do not realise that everything is prepared—they have their army ready, their weapons, their trained animals!" said the colonel. "They are simply awaiting the moment when they can enter the city at last. The count is arranging everything. He intends to give a tremendous big festival to-morrow—a feast—in which there will be eating, drinking and dancing. By the evening the whole city will be in a state of intoxication, for a festival in El Dorado is something like the ancient festivals in Babylon. Everybody joins in and the whole city goes mad!"

"My only hat!" said Watson in a startled voice.

"Do you realise what it will mean?" went on the colonel. "Tomorrow night the city will be absolutely unprotected. There will not be a single man fit to fight. And then this attack will come from the mud men—an attack which it will be impossible to defeat!"

"Seems that we're in for some lively times, then," said Lord Dorrimore. "Ah, talkin' about Babylon, it reminds me of that cheerful individual, Belshazzar, who was caught nappin' in Babylon by Cyrus. There was a terrific feast then, if I remember history aright—and Cyrus simply walked in without any trouble."

"Yes, you are quite right," said the colonel. "It strikes me that Plessigny has borrowed a page from history, he is intending to work this affair on very much the same lines. But that is of no concern—we must think of the danger. Once these mud men gain the mastery, they will sweep through the city in thousands, and they will kill everybody—including your party, Dorrimore!"

"And including us!" said Dorrie. "This needs some thinkin' out, colonel. What can we do?"

Kerrigan clenched his fists.

"We must give a warning!" he declared. "We must warn the Arzacs of their peril—and of the count's treachery. It will mean everything to us, for it will place the Arzacs on our side. But how can it be done?"

"I don't know," said Dorrie. "We can't go into the city, and shout out the news, can we? We should only be captured, an' the Arzacs wouldn't take any notice of us."

The colonel nodded.



Then something broke into view about twenty yards ahead of us, and it dashed across the narrow path. It was something which fairly made my hair stand on end—something which seemed utterly impossible.

"That is the difficulty," he said. "Perhaps it will be just as well if we follow the count and this priest. If we follow them to the outskirts of the mud city, then we shall be able to see the preparations with our own eyes, and we can take back a full and complete story of the proposed coup. If we do nothing it will be fatal to El Dorado. At dawn the attack will come——"

"But you just said that it wouldn't come until the evening!" I put in.

"I did not make myself quite clear," replied Colonel Kerrigan. "It is this way, Nipper. To-morrow the count will arrange a big festival, and this will reach its height during to-morrow evening, and by midnight practically everybody will be too dead tired to dance any longer. There will be much drinking of wine, too, and the majority of the men will be intoxicated. They will sleep like logs throughout the night—and at dawn the attack will come.

"Of what use will the Arzac warriors be? No use whatever! They will simply be overwhelmed by the determined mud men. But it will be wise for us to go to this mud city, and see with our own eyes what is taking place."

"Yes, I think you're right," said Lord Dorrimore. "By gad, what a scheme! The count means to let these savage brutes in, so that we shall all be wiped out completely in the battle—and the count fondly kids himself that he won't have our blood on his hands. That's the idea. What a piece of extraordinary luck that we came out at this time!"

"It is beyond my understanding," said Colonel Kerrigan quietly. "I think some higher power must have directed our steps, Lord Dorrimore. For this visit on our part will probably mean not only the salvation of our party, but the salvation of the whole Arzac race."

We did not lose any time in setting forth on our trip. The journey, according to the colonel, was not very long—five miles at the most. This would not actually take us into the city of mud, but it would lead us to a hill overlooking the city, and from there we should be able to see everything that was going on in the valley.

By taking the road we should lose much time, for it was longer, so we crept right through the forest, the colonel declaring that he knew every inch of the ground, and would not lead

us astray. He had roamed these forests many times during the daytime, and he knew exactly which way to go.

If it had not been for the grave thoughts which filled our minds, that journey would have been extremely interesting—we should have enjoyed it immensely.

For it was indeed a wonderful trip.

We saw many strange sights during our walk through the forest. There were some extraordinary frogs and toads to be seen, some of them measuring at least nine or ten inches—great huge things which jumped across our path like animals, croaking loudly. And there were moths, too—moths of the most astounding variety.

I could write whole chapters concerning the moths we saw. Many of them extremely beautiful, and one type—of which we saw many specimens—was fairly staggering. These moths were at least ten or twelve inches across the wings, and they were wonderfully beautiful. The wings appeared to be transparent, and the bodies were highly coloured, and extremely graceful.

We were passing a huge tree when Tommy Watson halted, and pointed.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Just look at that caterpillar! He's a beauty!"

Tommy put out his hand, in order to pick the caterpillar from the tree when Colonel Kerrigan started forward and pushed Watson's hand up.

"Don't touch it!" he shouted.

"My—my goodness!" gasped Tommy. "What—what's the matter, sir?"

"That caterpillar is one which is known in many parts of Brazil," said Colonel Kerrigan. "In some places they are called tataranas. The slightest touch of that caterpillar will cause burning pains of an intense nature."

"Great Scott!"

"Burning pains, from a caterpillar?"

"Exactly," said the colonel. "And they not only affect the hand, but the whole side of the body, and those burning pains last for many hours. It is very fortunate that you did not touch the caterpillar, Watson."

Tommy looked at the caterpillar rather startled.

"Well, he looks harmless enough, sir," he remarked. "Fancy a beastly caterpillar causing burning pains all over you! I shall be careful not to touch any of these giddy things in future!"

"That is by far the better way," agreed the colonel. "But come on—we have no time to waste."

He had hardly spoken when there was a terrific cracking in the jungle, near by. We all stood there, startled, and Sir Montio grabbed my arm.

"Dear old boy," he murmured. "What is it?"

"Goodness knows," I said.

And then something broke into view about twenty yards ahead of us, and it dashed across the narrow path. It was something which fairly made my hair stand on end—something which seemed utterly impossible.

The thing looked very much like a rhinoceros, but it was at least four times as big as any rhinoceros in the civilised world.

It was a huge cumbersome thing like a great building crashing through the forest. There were two terrific horns sticking out of its head, and there was a terrible smell wafted towards us as the thing dashed by.

But it was not the smell, it was the appearance of the animal—which surprised us most. It was its appalling size. It could have trampled the whole party of us to pulp in less than one moment. We stood stock still as it went lumbering and cracking through the forest.

"What—what was it?" asked Watson faintly.

The colonel wiped his brow.

"I think it is what our scientists would term a titanotherium," he said. "It is a prehistoric animal belonging to the early Cainozoic period. I think I am right in saying that."

"It doesn't matter to me whether you are right or wrong, old man," said Dorrie. "I don't want to see any more of these fellows—not unless I have an elephant gun handy. I don't quite fancy coming through a forest of this sort unarmed. I feel decidedly helpless, you know!"

"I don't think we shall be troubled by any more of these creatures," said the colonel. "I am quite surprised that we should have encountered this titanotherium. As you saw, he was terrified at our approach!"

"Not so terrified as we were, by gad!" murmured Lord Dorrimore.

"Talk about the Congo forests, Dor-

rie," I said. "They're not in it with this!"

We went on our way, and when we came to a little clearing we were again started to hear terrible noises, harsh and shrieking, accompanied by a leathery flapping of wings. And then the stars were blotted out for a moment, and, looking up, we saw several gigantic shapes hovering in the air.

"Pterodactyls!" I yelled. "What horrible looking creatures!"

The great flying lizards did not hover in the air for long, but they cleared off—which was just as well. We did not forget how one of them had come down, and had attempted to carry Sir Montio off. But we were rather more safe here, for we could still easily dodge under the trees—where the pterodactyls could not reach us.

But after that, we met with no more adventures. The ground became more open, and at last, after roaming miles we came to the spot where we could look down upon the city of Ciri-Ok-Baks—the City of Mud.

And a really astonishing sight met our gaze.

The whole place was illuminated by flares—they were blazing in hundreds of different spots. And thousands of men were moving about in great activity.

Gigantic towers were being erected—huge, massive things which rose in the air like factory chimneys. And, upon the ground, there were large numbers of gigantic animals, not unlike elephants.

"My only hat!" said Tommy Watson. "What are those huge brutes down there?"

"Mammoths, by the look of them," said Dorrie.

"Their jaws seem too long for mammoths," I put in. "You remember, Dorrie, I told you about these things before? Handforth and I saw them when we flew over the place. I think they look more like mastodons, the long-jawed variety, which scientists call tetra-belodom."

"My dear fellow, there's no need to crack your jaw about it!" said Dorrie. "It's far better to say mastodon and done with it. Or you can call them elephants if you like—I don't care. In any case, they seem to be quite tame, and they're used as we use horses!"

"Yes, there is no doubt that they

are trained," said Colonel Kerrigan. "They will use those animals in order to assist the attack upon El Dorado. They have done so on former occasions, but with very little success. During the last ten or twenty years these people have trained the animals to a wonderful extent, and if they once succeed in getting within the city, there will be no quarter. Everybody will be killed!"

We continued looking at the active preparations which were going on, and we were vastly impressed. There was not the slightest doubt that all this activity meant the eve of a great battle. A tremendous onslaught upon El Dorado was being planned.

We did not venture to go nearer, for it would have been extremely risky. And so, after standing there watching for well over half-an-hour, we decided to make our way back. And during the return journey Lord Dorrimore and Colonel Kerrigan were determined to talk over the whole situation, and to plan out a method of warning the Arzacs of their coming peril.

But, as it turned out, this was not to be.

Just as we were about to make a move—just as we were ready to start on the journey back—we heard many movements, and then we saw figures—figures coming towards us from all directions.

Lord Dorrimore drew in his breath sharply.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed. "We've been spotted!"

Before anything else could be said, dozens of great figures dashed towards us, and we were surrounded. Resistance was absolutely useless. We had no weapons, and to use our fists would have been futile.

We were surrounded and captured. A minute earlier we had had no idea of our peril—we had had no idea that we were in any danger whatever.

But now we were captured by the mud men. We were securely in the hands of these ugly, treacherous brutes.

The colonel spoke rapidly, and he did his utmost, but it was useless. Kerrigan could talk the Ciri-Ok-Bak's language, for it resembled the Arzac tongue in many respects. But, although the colonel did his best, it was useless.

We were prisoners, and we were held. Our position, instead of being improved, was rendered fifty times more perilous!

CHAPTER V.

THE FEAST BEFORE THE SLAUGHTER.

"IT'S a mystery!" declared De Valerie, shaking his head. "Nobody seems to know what's become of them. Even Mr. Lee's puzzled!"

"Perhaps they've been taken away, and are dead by this time!" said Handforth gloomily. "I shouldn't be surprised at anything that happened in this place, you know. By what I can hear terrific preparations are being made for something!"

The St. Frank's fellows were talking together in a big group. It was broad daylight, and the sun was shining gloriously overhead. And the juniors were not in the great building which had been their prison hitherto.

They had been taken outside, into a great courtyard, and surrounded by high walls. And here they were at liberty to go where they pleased, for it was utterly impossible for them to scale those walls. And the juniors were not the only ones who were there. Nelson Lee and Captain Burton and Dr. Brett were also present, in addition to the officers and crew of the yacht. The ladies were still inside the building, and they had not been seen by the juniors that day.

Nelson Lee was chatting with Dr. Brett earnestly.

"I don't pretend to understand it, Brett," said the famous schoolmaster detective. "There are seven of them missing—Dorrimore, Umlosi, the colonel himself, and Nipper and his three chums, and that little Indian boy. It is really extraordinary. By what I can understand they were all missing from their prison when the guards went in with their breakfast this morning. And nothing has been seen of them, and nothing heard."

"It's a mystery, Mr. Lee," said Brett. "I'm rather uneasy, too. Things seem to be getting worse instead of better. What do you think would be the best course for us to adopt?"

"We can do nothing, Brett—nothing whatever," replied Nelson Lee. "We must accept the position as it stands, and we must make our plans carefully."

"But you just said we could do nothing."

"Nothing at the moment, I mean,"

replied Nelson Lee. "But you need not think that I intend to be idle for long. You need not imagine that I have resigned myself to my fate. On the contrary, Brett, I intend to do everything in my power to defeat the Comte de Plessigny before he goes off in Dorrie's airship."

"I wonder what all these preparations are?" asked Captain Burton, strolling up. "It seems to me that something is being got ready, Mr. Lee. Haven't you noticed the way in which these giants are moving about? Haven't you noticed the smiles on their faces, and haven't you noticed the signs of activity which keep coming to us from beyond these walls?"

"Yes, I have noticed everything," replied Nelson Lee. "I do not pretend to understand what it means, but it is quite evident that something is being done—something of an unusual nature."

The morning dragged on, and when the usual dinner hour arrived, the juniors were rather startled to find that no food was brought to them. Fatty Little, in fact, was in a terrible way.

"It's half an hour past the usual time!" he wailed. "They must have forgotten us, you chaps! I'm nearly starving, you know, and unless I have some grub jolly soon, I'll simply faint away!"

"Oh, dry up, you porpoise!"

"You won't come to any harm if you don't have any grub for a week!"

"After the breakfast you ate this morning, it's impossible for you to be hungry now!" said Handforth, glaring. "Why, you demolished all your own grub, half of mine, and——"

"That doesn't matter," said Fatty Little indignantly. "They don't give us enough—that's the trouble. I'm not grumbling at the quality of the stuff—it's generally been all serene. But I do think they might give us a feed at the right time!"

Another half hour dragged by, and still there was no sign of anything making its appearance.

But then something else occurred—something which made all the juniors look at one another in astonishment. For drums were sounding—deep, loud-toned drums, which beat upon the air with a reverberating noise. And this drum beating was kept up continuously without a pause.

"I wonder what on earth it can be?" asked De Valerie. "We've never heard anything like this before!"

"I tell you there's something special on," said Reginald Pitt. "It's absolutely obvious. There you are—listen to that!"

Thousands of voices were raised, and the air was filled with the strange cries, which appeared to be a kind of cheer.

It had hardly died away before a door in the great wall opened, and several figures appeared. All of them were clothed gorgeously in flowing robes and gold ornaments, and in the midst of the group came the Comte de Plessigny. He was smiling genially, and he looked very harmless.

"Come, my friends—come!" he exclaimed, when he drew near. "I have much pleasure in inviting you to a great feast—the feast of El Dorado!"

"Hurrah!" roared Fatty Little excitedly.

"Dry up, you ass!" hissed Handforth.

"It's a feast!" gasped Fatty. "A feed, you know!"

"I am gratified to know that one of my prisoners is pleased, at least!" smiled the count. "I can assure you, my friends, that this feast will be something of an extraordinary nature. You will be delighted, I can assure you. There will be dancing, there will be drinking, there will be mirth. It is an occasion such as has not occurred in El Dorado for the last fifty years. The festivities will last right into the night, and it will be an amazing scene."

All the juniors were naturally curious, and at the same time they were suspicious. They could hardly believe that the count was speaking the actual truth.

However, it really seemed that such was the case. It really seemed that the count had told them the honest truth on this occasion.

For, very shortly afterwards, all the prisoners were taken through the big door in the wall, and they emerged into the vast central space of the city. It was a huge square, with massive building on either side, and quite bare at ordinary times.

But now the square presented an astonishing spectacle.

There were tables by the thousand—stone tables, they appeared to be, and each table was filled to the brim with food, fruit, wine! Not only this, but along every street within view there

were other tables, and the Arzacs were already beginning the festivities.

Right in the centre of the great square a space had been left—a space about fifty feet across. And here, in front of this space, sat the Comte de Plessigny, in great splendour. He was surrounded by the gold priests, and he waved his hand as Nelson Lee and all the other prisoners appeared.

From the opposite direction came the ladies, attended by many of the Arzac women. Everything was certainly being done in a grand style, and the prisoners did not feel like prisoners. They were being treated, rather, as honoured guests.

The count knew, of course, that any attempt to escape would be quite hopeless, since there were so many people present that all the movements of the prisoners could be seen. They were hemmed in by the thousands of guests—by the Arzacs.

And then the feast commenced. Every single person in the city had been invited. Everybody of the Arzac race—excepting those who were ill, and those who were too old—were in the streets, in the sunlight. There was dancing, singing, outing. It was one great gay scene of festivity and gaiety.

And the prisoners sat in the place of honour, in the centre of the square, opposite to the Comte de Plessigny.

The girls, it might as well be mentioned, were intensely interested in all they saw, and forgot for the time being that they were prisoners. They were fascinated by the whole scene—they were almost overwhelmed by everything. The juniors, too, were in very much the same state of mind. They had been expecting nothing of this nature—therefore it came as a great surprise.

Nelson Lee, although he looked interested, was very worried. He was worried concerning those who were missing—he was worried concerning me. He could not know what had happened—it was impossible for him to even guess.

"I have an idea, Brett, that all this has a meaning," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I cannot think that the count has got up this feast for nothing—for mere show. There is something behind it all—something of which we do not know."

"That's how I feel, Mr. Lee," said the doctor, nodding. "But what can it be? And where is Nipper? Where is

Lord Dorrimore, and what has become of Colonel Kerrigan? I'm terribly uneasy, and I don't mind confessing it!"

"I do not think you are as uneasy as I am doctor," said Nelson Lee. "I am convinced that the count has some card up his sleeve—a card which he will produce before so very long. I wish I could guess what his plan is. I wish I could detect the truth."

But, in spite of Nelson Lee's uneasiness, he couldn't help taking great interest in everything there was to be seen. For, truly, the spectacle was an astounding one.

The feast appeared to be never ending—much to Fatty Little's intense satisfaction. It seemed to be the idea of the guests to remain seated at the tables the whole day long, and far into the evening. There were, of course, intervals. And during these intervals there were entertainments.

On one occasion twenty or thirty men came into the square in front of the count, and there they gave some wonderful exhibitions of strength. They jumped, they danced, they engaged in a rough kind of wrestling match. And there were feats of strength, and curious games which the boys could not possibly understand.

After this exhibition, came another bout of feasting and drinking. Then a good many Arzac girls came into the arena, attired in gorgeous robes. And they danced—they danced really entrancingly.

They were big, in proportion to the other giants. But, nevertheless, they were extremely graceful and dainty. The manner in which they danced was decidedly alluring.

The whole scene was one of gaiety and colour and gorgeous enjoyment. And the Comte de Plessigny sat looking on with the utmost serenity.

For he knew what was coming!

He knew exactly what this feast meant. And the Arzacs themselves were in total ignorance of the truth. They had no idea that this feast had been specially arranged—that it was a blind in order to get the whole race of Arzacs in a helpless condition.

For, at dawn—which would not be many hours hence—the tremendous attack of the mud men would commence. The attack on El Dorado from without.

And once that attack started, there would be no stopping it. Once the Ciri-

Ok-Baks gained the advantage they would wipe everything before them. They would assail the city walls, they would swarm over, and then the end would come swiftly.

The Comte de Plessigny, as he sat on his throne, pictured to himself the scenes which would follow in the first dim light of day the following morning.

The mud men would arrive in thousands. They would swarm over the walls with weapons, and they would sweep through the city streets. Everybody would be annihilated—everybody would be wiped out.

And the Ciri-Ok-Baks would make no exceptions of the strangers within the gates. Lord Dorrimore's entire party would be killed. And who could blame the count? Who could accuse him of bloodshed?

How could he be blamed for what these savage mud men did?

That, at all events, is the way in which the count looked at the matter. He did not seem to realise that it was he who was betraying El Dorado into the hands of the enemy. He did not look at it in that light at all. If he had done so, he would have realised that if Lord Dorrimore's party was killed, he—the count—would be the murderer.

"Well, this is a feast, and no giddy mistake!" remarked Reginald Pitt, as he attacked a portion of pineapple. "I must say that these Arzacs treat their prisoners well—if this is an example."

"It's gorgeous!" chuckled Fatty Little. "My only hat! It's simply lovely!"

"I suppose you don't care much whether you ever escape from this place or not?" asked Fullwood sneeringly.

Fatty nodded.

"It doesn't matter much to me," he said frankly. "We've got all the grub we can eat, we're as happy as anything, and there you are! Grub is the main thing in this world!"

"Oh, he's hopeless!" said Handforth. "I want to get back to the yacht again. I want to see civilisation once more. I'd give a whole term's pocket-money to see a copy of a daily paper at this moment!"

Everybody grinned, and then the juniors were greatly interested in the next event in the programme.

There were so many things to see, in fact, that the spectators could hardly keep count.

And, as night drew on, the whole city became a blaze of light. There were extra lights round this square—hundreds of great pillars, with the balls of orange fire surmounting them.

And from every street, and from every portion of the city came the sound of singing, of great voices raised in gaiety.

It was Babylon over again.

While the whole race of Arzacs feasted, while they were gay, the enemy was outside the gates, waiting for the moment to strike. The enemy were even now approaching, and shortly after midnight they would be in position—they would be ready to strike that fatal blow.

And one thing was absolutely certain.

If this attack materialised—if these mud men were able to strike their deadly blow—Lord Dorrimore's party would go under. Nothing on earth could save them, for the Ciri-Ok-Baks would kill everything in their path—every man, woman, child, and animal. When on the warpath they were ruthless.

And so the evening dragged on.

The hour grew later and later, and at last midnight was near. By this time the festivities were at their height. Nobody had thought of sleep, and everybody was drinking a curious pungent-tasting wine. This wine had not been brought forward until after ten o'clock. And now it was being disposed of freely.

The juniors had some of it, but only a little, and the effect of the wine was to send their blood coursing through their veins in a most exhilarating manner. They were not intoxicated by any means; they had not known that the wine was liable to cause intoxication.

But the giants themselves were drinking of the wine freely. And they very soon showed how the stuff was affecting them.

The dancing grew more wild, the shouts louder, the laughter more hilarious.

Nelson Lee was anxious to get out of it all; he did not care to be here. He particularly wanted to take Lady Helen Tregellis-West and her young charges completely out of this atmosphere. But it could not be done. There was no means of getting away. Nelson Lee could not even ask permission to return to the prison, for he could not speak the Arzac tongue.

And though Lord Dorrimore's party remained, they were all obliged to stay in their positions and to watch the festivities.

Not that there was anything unpleasant to be seen. Nobody was actually drunk; the giants were only extremely gay and lighthearted. They danced, they shouted, they enjoyed themselves tremendously. And the Comte de Plessigny sat watching—watching with great enjoyment and ease.

For he knew what was in store.

"Well, I'm getting tired!" remarked Handforth, with a yawn. "This giddy feast has gone on long enough, I should think. What's the time?"

"Just about midnight," said Pitt.

"Then it's time we were all in bed—
asleep, anyhow," said Handforth. "They don't seem to have any beds in this town. I wonder when the dickens we shall be taken back to our hotel?"

"We've simply got to wait until these Arzacs make a move," said De Valerie. "It's no good wondering, and it's no good grumbling. It's simply a question of waiting."

"Well, I don't care much how long I have to wait," said Fatty. "As soon as one lot of grub goes there's another lot shoved on the table. I've never had such a feed in all my life!"

"You look it, too!" said Handforth grimly. "You—you glutton!"

"Eh?"

"You greedy porpoise!"

"Look here, Handforth, I——"

"You've eaten about as much as ten elephants," said Handforth. "If you live after to-morrow I shall be surprised!"

Fatty was quite unabashed. He was enjoying himself tremendously, and that was all that mattered. Personally, he considered that being a captive in the hands of the Arzacs was not at all a hardship. He regarded it more or less as a holiday.

Midnight!

It was past midnight, in fact, and the Comte de Plessigny was only waiting now—waiting for the few more hours which would elapse before the first streak of dawn would appear in the sky. And then, with a pendemonium of sounds, the battle would start—the terrible battle which would result in the complete annihilation of the Arzac race.

Nothing on earth could save the city.

The attack would come without warn-

ing, and the Arzacs would be overwhelmed before they could even think of defending their capital.

It would be a crushing defeat—a slashing, overpowering slaughter.

And there was only one possible thing which could save the city from this dread disaster.

And that was to receive warning now—at once!

If that warning came—if it came before twelve-thirty—there would be just a chance that the Arzacs could put up a defence before dawn. But was there any chance of such a warning arriving?

The Comte de Plessigny was quite certain that it was impossible for any warning to arrive. But the Comte de Plessigny was wrong!

And before many minutes had elapsed he would find that out!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CITY OF THE MUD MEN.

SIR MONTIE TREGELLIS-WEST shuddered.

"Dear old boys, this is simply frightful—it is really!" he complained. "I am quite sure there are all sorts of appallin' insects crawlin' about, an' I can feel things on my neck!"

"You mustn't take any notice of them, Montie," I said grimly. "This hut seems to be infested with spiders and beetles, and all manner of other things. In a tropical country a fellow has to get used to insects."

"But they're such horrible crawly things, dear old fellow," protested Sir Montie. "I feel shockin'ly uncomfortable. Bein' prisoners in El Dorado—it's not at all bad, begad! But this is different!"

It was different!

We had been taken down into the city of the mud men—it was, as a matter of fact, only a huge mud village. By this I do not mean to imply that the whole place was simply smothered with mud. This was not the case.

The ground was quite dry, and there were all sorts of tropical trees growing on every hand. But all the houses in the town were composed of mud—baked by the sun. They were wretched places, and hardly any better than the hovels

occupied by the most primitive Indians in the Brazilian forest.

It was daylight now, and we had spent practically the whole night in this wretched insect-infested hut.

The morning sun streamed in through a crack in the wall—a crack which extended almost from the top of the building to the bottom. It was quite impossible for us to widen that crack, for the mud was baked as hard as a brick, and we could do nothing. But it provided a kind of window, through which we could watch and look at the preparations which were being made.

We had not slept during the whole night, and this was not surprising, considering our position.

The mud building was not at all large, and its smell was very distasteful.

In the darkness we had not cared to lay down, for we instinctively felt that the place was not clean—that it was swarming with beetles and spiders and other tropical insects.

"What are 'we goin' to do—that's the question?" said Lord Dorrimore. "We know exactly what is happenin', an' we know what will happen to El Dorado unless we move. Everybody in the city will be wiped out—everybody will be killed once these mud men get on the spot."

"You are quite right, Dorrimore," said Colonel Kerrigan. "There is no doubt about that whatever. We had better realise the full truth now—at once. During to-day these people are making the final preparations, and to-night, as soon as darkness falls, they will move on towards the city. They will get everything into motion, and by dawn they will be fully prepared for the onslaught."

"And the Arzacs will be unprepared!" I said miserably. "Oh, my goodness! What a position! Can't we do something, Dorrie?"

"My brains ain't capable of dealin' with the situation," said Dorrimore, shaking his head.

"I think we're all a bit dazed," I said. "What can we do? It seems to me that it's utterly impossible for us to move a finger. Even if we succeeded in getting out of this hut—and that's practically impossible—we should never get out of this place. We should be spotted and stopped. What I can't understand is why we have been saved—

why we haven't been killed out of hand."

"I think there is one explanation for that," said Colonel Kerrigan. "We were captured after the Comte de Plessigny had taken his departure, and, therefore, these savage giants do not know what to do with us. They are waiting to communicate with the count before taking any drastic steps. Probably they are afraid to injure us, knowing that we are a different type of being."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Dorrie. "I noticed they looked at Umlosi in a very peculiar way. I think they thought he'd been smearin' his face with soot, or somethin'!"

"It is well to see that thou art cheerful, O N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "It is well. Methinks it will be impossible for us to take any great action. We must wait until luck turns our way—as it surely will. Heed my words, my father."

We managed to get some sleep somehow, two or three of us sleeping at one time, and the others remaining awake.

I had only just dozed off when a tremendous great spider came crawling over my head, and I jumped to my feet with a terrific yell.

"Look at it!" I gasped. "Why, it's six inches across!"

The spider was indeed a monster—a terrific great thing with a hairy body and enormous, hairy legs. It scuttled away to the side of the hut, and then disappeared through a crevice. After that I decided to sleep sitting up, but even then I could only doze.

The others were just the same. It was impossible for us to have any comfort in this terrible building.

Some food was brought to us, but we could not touch it. It was ghastly stuff, unfit for a pig to eat. I believe it was composed of crushed insects, dried in the sun—or some such concoction as that. In any case, I would rather starve for a week than touch anything of that nature.

The day passed somehow or other, and, at length, the dusk descended over the city of mud. And then the flares began to blaze out again, and the signs of activity were increased.

There had been very little doing during the heat of the day, and I judged that the mud men were taking rest—were sleeping, in preparation for the great battle which was coming.

But now that dusk had come—now that night was nearly upon us—the savage giants were getting ready. Outside, in the city itself, tremendous activities were in progress.

Huge parties of men were getting towers ready—those gigantic towers which we had seen in course of construction. They were supplied with wheels—great wooden wheels, made from sections of round tree-trunks. I had no doubt that the Comte de Plessigny had instructed these people in the art of manufacturing wheels.

Through that crack in the wall we could see a great deal of what was going on. And we were greatly interested, in spite of our discomfort.

"It's frightful, dear old boys!" said Sir Montie. "Can't we do somethin'—can't we make a move? Standin' about in here is simply appallin'! We know that these people are goin' to El Dorado to smash up the city, and to kill everybody. We know that they are goin' to kill Nelson Lee an' everybody else of our party."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, clenching my fists. "Surely there is something we can do—surely we can——"

"My dear boy, it is quite useless to go on in that way," interrupted Colonel Korrigan gently. "We are helpless, and it will be just as well if you realise that fact now—at once. We cannot move, we cannot do a thing. We are compelled to remain here."

"That's what I know. I'm sure of it, sir. But I can't help saying things. I can't help feeling that we ought to do something."

Two or three minutes later the door of the mud hut was opened. It was a door composed of great masses of wood, and it was quite impossible for us to move it. But it was opened from the outside, and two of the mud men appeared. They glared in upon us, and one of them carried some dirty-looking water. He handed it to us, and then Umlosi acted.

He suddenly brought round his fist, and drove that container of water into the giant's face. Then Umlosi followed it up with a terrific drive which sent the man flying backwards.

"Come, my masters!" shouted Umlosi. "We must make an attempt. It is useless to stand idle!"

"Hurrah!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Come on, you chaps!" I shouted thickly.

We dashed out of the hut, and for a moment I thought that we might be able to escape. But the giant whom Umlosi had knocked over was on his feet again, and he had closed with the great Kutana chief. The pair were fighting furiously, and the giant was shouting at the top of his voice.

We did our best to escape without being seen but we could not leave Umlosi there alone, fighting this man. We all attacked the giant, and then we found ourselves surrounded. Within four minutes we were back in the hut, and the door was closed. I felt all my strength ooze out of me. I felt like flopping on the ground, and sobbing. It was too terrible—too awful.

We had made a bid for liberty, and we had failed.

We were all panting heavily, and for some moments hardly a word was said. Then Lord Dorrimore patted me on the shoulder gently.

"It's no good, old man!" he said quietly. "We've done our best—and we can't do any more. Umlosi, you're a brick—an' it's a wonder to me that we're not all lyin' dead. I was expectin' those brutes to knock every one of us flyin'!"

"I am sick at heart, O N'Koso!" said Umlosi brokenly. "It seems that we are doomed to remain here—and these accursed people will go to that great city of strange lights, and they will murder everybody. Umtagati, my master, he will be killed! Wau! But it cannot be—it will not be!"

"I'm afraid it's got to be, Umlosi!" I said grimly.

"Nay, Manzie, thou art wrong!" said Umlosi, his eyes gleaming strangely. "Thou art wrong I repeat! For I know, within me, that this terrible thing cannot happen! I know that all will come right!"

Colonel Korrigan shrugged his shoulders.

"It is all very well to talk like that, my friend, but you know as well as I do that we cannot escape!" he said. "I am the last man in the world to give up hope—I am the last man to sit down and——"

"But you don't know Umlosi, Colonel Kerrigan," said Dorrie quickly. "He is a wonderful chap at guessin' things."

Whenever he says that everythin' will go all right—everythin' does go all right. Whenever he says that there is goin' to be terrible trouble—well, terrible trouble follows. He's uncanny in that way."

"Thou are surely right, N'Kose!" rumbled Umlosi. "A moment ago I was feeling depressed—I was feeling all would go wrong, but now a great wave of hope has come over me, a wave which will not be suppressed. I know that everything will go smoothly ere long. Heed my words, my masters, for they are true. I have spoken."

Somehow, we felt much more cheerful after that. And we were more content to wait. What we were waiting for we did not know. But, somehow, we all felt, inwardly, that something would happen before long—that something would turn up in our favour.

And, strangely enough, something did happen.

Hours passed, and at last we knew that the evening was well advanced. Ten o'clock had already gone, and it was getting on towards eleven. By this time the vast majority of the Ciri-Ok-Baks' army had left. But it was still going—it was still going in one long train.

Men, mastodons, and implements of war—they were all streaming out of the city in a never-ending line—and they were taking the road towards El Dorado.

There must have been hundreds and hundreds of these tame mastodons in the hands of the mud men. And the animals, though fierce, were well under control. Now and then one of the gigantic brutes would break out, and he would prove rather troublesome. But, on the whole, the mud men had the great animals in control.

Curiously enough, it was one of these mastodons that brought salvation to us, it was one of those great mammals which opened the way for us to go to El Dorado, and to give the warning of the coming attack.

Through the crack in the wall we could see many of these animals being prepared for the march. They were quite close to us, and their keepers were shouting at them, and the backs of the mastodons were filled with various implements of war. Stones, and all manner of other articles.

One of the great brutes was rather troublesome, and he would not move in line with the rest. And we could see

two of the great mud men jabbing pointed sticks into the animal's flesh.

The brute did not seem to like this, for he trumpeted shrilly—with a noise which rang through our ears.

And then the animal seemed to go mad.

He dashed round, knocked two of the Ciri-Ok Baks flying—killing them on the spot—and then the mastodon came charging straight towards our hut.

"Look out!" I gasped.

Crash!

The whole building shook and shivered as the monster struck the wall. Pieces of mud came dropping down on our heads—hard caked mud like lumps of brick. And then the mastodon charged on, causing great havoc through the streets of the strange settlement.

Lord Dorrie looked at that crack in the wall, and a gasp came from his lips.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, with unusual emotion. "Look, ye cripples!"

We looked, and there we saw something which made our eyes open wider.

The crack had extended, and there were other cracks near to it. The whole section of the wall, in fact, had been shattered, and it was only holding itself in position by a few shreds of dried grass—with which the mud was liberally mixed.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Colonel Kerrigan, his voice rather unsteady. "Providence has come to our aid!"

Dorrie dashed at the wall, and he touched it with his fingers. Lumps of dried mud came away, and dropped to the floor. Within two minutes there was a hole sufficiently large for all of us to crawl through. And everything in front was darkness—there were no mud men near—those who had been on the spot had rushed off in chase of the unruly mastodon. Our chance had come.

One by one we stepped through the hole in the wall of the hut, and less than a minute later we were dashing away through the darkness, towards the forest. And we escaped.

We got completely away from the city of the Ciri-Ok-Baks! There was no pursuit, for the giant savages did not know that we had got free. And then we ran as we had never ran before.

We ran through the forest—we stopped for nothing—we were intent upon reaching El Dorado in time to give warning.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TURNING OF THE TABLES

THE Comte de Plessigny glanced at his watch.

"Dawn will be here within three hours!" he murmured. "Everything is going well—no hitch has occurred, and no hitch can occur now!"

He was speaking to himself, and he gazed out over the scene of gaiety with much approval.

Midnight had come and gone, and the Arzacs were still making merry. The feasting was still going on, the drinking was still going on, and there were parties of the giants dancing and making gay.

Nelson Lee and the other members of Lord Dorrimore's party were still present—since they had been unable to leave. The Comte de Plessigny intended them to be there when the attack came—so that they would be among the first to fall.

The count was decidedly pleased with everything. He knew well enough that the Arzacs had no idea of their coming peril.

This great festival had been arranged on purpose. With such scenes of gaiety going on, it was impossible for the Arzacs to know what was occurring outside the city walls. As a rule a kind of watch was kept, but there was no watch being kept to-night.

It was a night of gaiety—a night of festivity.

Nelson Lee was more anxious than ever. And he had every reason to be anxious. For he could see that the count was exceedingly light-hearted. Plessigny showed quite plainly that he was on the lookout for something. The very manner in which he glanced at his watch at regular intervals proved that he was expecting something to happen. What was that something?

Nelson Lee was uneasy in mind, for he did not know. At the same time he guessed that the count had a grim card up his sleeve—and Nelson Lee knew that that card would very soon be played.

The schoolmaster-detective was very anxious concerning the young ladies of the party. They were all out here in the open—and they were all tired and sleepy, and extremely anxious to get back to their quarters.

But, so far, no sign had been made that there was to be a return. The Arzacs were making merry, everybody was joining in the tremendous festivities. And by now, although there was no sign of drunkenness, the white giants were incapable of anything serious. They were intoxicated by the whole gaiety of the affair. They did not care for anything—all they wanted was merriment, laughter and song.

And outside the walls of the city the attack was being prepared!

Even now many of the great towers were being placed in position, so that the mud men should have them in perfect readiness when the right moment arrived. The mastodons were there in large numbers—for these great creatures were to be used to batter down the great gates, and to sweep through the city, dealing death and destruction as they went.

And then came the surprise.

Shouts were heard down one of the main streets of the city, out of sight of the big square. Many of the Arzacs were seen running, and there was quite a lot of excitement. The Comte de Plessigny did not know what it meant, but there were others who did. I, for example, was well aware of the truth.

For I was running through that main street of El Dorado with Lord Dorrimore, Umlosi, my chums, and Colonel Korrigan. We had succeeded in gaining admittance—but only because of the colonel's presence.

He had taken us to a tiny door, low in the wall, which was a private door—a door only known to a chosen few.

We had entered by that way, and were now within the streets of the city—making our way towards the central square.

At last we were within sight of the great arena. We had not been molested during our run through the city. The white giants had stared at us, they had halted, and they had displayed great curiosity. But we had not been stopped.

And now we burst suddenly into view.

Nelson Lee rose to his feet with a shout, and all the other juniors rose, too.

"It's Nipper!" roared Pitt at the top of his voice. "Nipper and Lord Dorrimore and the others!"

"Hurrah!"

"Thank goodness they've come!"

"Oh, hurrah—hurrah!" shouted all the girls, in one voice.

But we did not take any notice of our friends. I hardly gave the gov'nor a glance; in fact. We were rushing straight towards the Comte de Plessigny—who was now on his feet, looking rather startled. We dashed across the space, and Colonel Kerrigan simply hurled himself upon the Comte de Plessigny, and grasped him by the throat.

"You infernal rogue!" he shouted thickly. "I'm going to choke the life out of you—"

"You fool—you mad fool!" gasped the count.

He shouted some words to the Arzacs who were near by, and a moment later Colonel Kerrigan was dragged off, and held securely.

"Tell them!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore intently. "Tell them of their peril—tell them that the city is about to be attacked, and that they were betrayed by their king!"

But Colonel Kerrigan did not need any prompting—he was already shouting at the top of his voice, speaking in Arzac tongue. And he spoke so vehemently, so grimly, that the Arzacs were compelled to listen to him.

We could see the white giants gazing from the colonel towards the Comte de Plessigny, and it was quite clear they were in a state of doubt.

And then, from outside, came some curious sounds. At the very first sound of those signs, a hush fell over the city, a deep hush which was wonderfully impressive.

And then we heard.

There was the shrill trumpeting of those great mastodons. There was the low murmur of voices, caused by many men talking in low tones. There was the grind of wheels upon hard ground. And then there came to our ears the scraping of objects against the city walls.

From every side came shouts of anger and fury from the Arzacs—the shouts of amazement and consternation.

For they knew now what had happened!

They knew that the Ciri-Ok-Baks were making an attack—and those who were near enough were quite certain that Colonel Kerrigan was telling the truth. The Comte de Plessigny had turned traitor—he had delivered the city over to the enemy!

If the Arzacs had any doubt with regard to this point, that doubt was very soon dispelled.

For, abruptly, the count whipped out a revolver, and pulled the trigger again and again.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three of the Arzacs fell to the ground, writhing with pain. They had been shot down by their king—and this was a positive indication that the count was their enemy.

"Do you think I care," yelled Plessigny. "No! It is too late now! You are all going to be wiped out—you are all going to be killed! I have beaten you. I have won the game!"

Still shooting with his revolver, the count dashed away, and those who tried to stop him were shot down ruthlessly. And he disappeared behind one of the great buildings.

And then confusion reigned supreme.

The Arzacs were running about in all directions, many of them too dazed and bewildered to know what to do. But we were not interfered with. We had brought the alarm, and therefore we were respected—we were honoured. From that moment onwards there was no danger of the Arzacs harming us. We had proved ourselves to be their friends—and they would not turn on us now.

But what of the attack on the great city?

How was it to be beaten off? The Ciri-Ok-Baks were outside, they were hammering at the city gates already. The gigantic towers were being placed in position, and before another hour had elapsed the savage giants would be swarming over in their hundreds and thousands.

.

The battle of the giants was something of an appalling nature. It was a battle which will live in my memory as long as I can breathe. It was something which absolutely staggered the sense, and which made a fellow realise how small he was.

From first to last the issue was in the balance. It was one grim battle, without one single pause for breath.

But it is utterly impossible for me to go into any details concerning it now. I need space to tell of this wonderful fight, I need space to set down all the staggering facts which took place. But the Arzacs won—that, of course, is obvious.

And so, for the moment, I can say no more, I must reserve the description of the terrific battle for another time. But it was an appalling affair.

As I stood there in the centre of El Dorado, with all the confusion raging round me, I somehow knew what was to follow.

I knew that we were in the thick of the fighting, I knew that it would be up to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the rest of us to save the Arzacs—if they were to be saved.

And I was right.

The moment for action had come—and we were not found wanting!

The encounter between the two races of giants was the most amazing battle that had ever occurred within living memory, and it was to be a battle of the most startling fury and fierceness.

The battle of the giants was to be a battle indeed.

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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. They meet the ruffians and, after a fight, in which both are wounded, take them prisoners again.

(Now read on.)

The Search for Gold Resumed.

"YES," Jack Royce answered grimly, "I think we've beaten you at last, Snaith. You've been an awful trouble to us ever since the three of us came to Canada, but I don't think you'll be much more trouble from now on. That hole in your leg will keep you on your back quite a while."

Obed Snaith groaned again, and his body twitched convulsively. Although, Jack thought there was no immediate danger for the man, there could be no doubt of it that he was suffering acute pain—probably greater pain than ever he had made the three comrades suffer. Snaith's face was beaded with sweat, it was ashen in colour.

"And what do you propose to do with us now," asked the villain, trying to grin, but failing most miserably.

"Hand you over to the Mounted Police, of course," said Jack. "We'll have a lot of charges to make against you. But we sha'n't do as we did before, Snaith. We shall keep you our prisoners personally until we can find a patrol."

"But," Teddy Royce put in quickly, "we're not so far from Dead Breed Lake now, Jack. We're surely not turning back? And we can't take these two fellows in our one canoe."

Jack Royce clucked his tongue thoughtfully. But he did not answer his brother's question immediately.

He addressed Snaith again. Olesen, the crying coward, he ignored completely. He knew that the great Swede was nobody much to worry about. Snaith was the master villain in this pair. Olesen was only a great, clumsy accomplice, who did, in the main, only what Snaith told him to do.

"Tell me all you can about the plot between you and Cardone, in England, against Gerald here," he said sharply. "I know a lot—how Septimus Cardone offered you a thousand pounds to kill Gerald. But I want to know exactly why he was so anxious to get rid of Gerald."

Snaith's face distorted into a snarl of absolutely bestial fury. He tried again to sit upright, but could not do so. He was an unlovely sight to look upon as Jack stared down on him.

"Cardone!" gritted the beaten ruffian. "Yes, it was Cardone and his miserable thousand pounds that brought me to this! Cardone! Wal, boys, I'll say this: if I get behind the bars, Cardone goes soon after me! Yes, he did offer me a thousand of your British pounds to do your pal in. He had a reason for wanting to get the boy out of the way. The reason? Wal, he misappropriated Telford's fortune, and he was afraid Telford might want to know too much about it."

"I guessed as much as that," said Jack. "I wasn't at all convinced that all Gerald's money had been lost by the failure of certain companies—"

"Lost!" cried Snaith. "Wal, I know this much: it isn't lost. Cardone's making money hand over fist with it. Telford's fortune's bigger now than it was when his father died. And Cardone offered me a paltry thousand to put the boy out of the way. A thousand! By gosh, if ever I meet Cardone again, I'll—I'll—"

But the man fainted with sheer pain just then, and the next few minutes were spent in restoring him.

"Well," said Jack, "we know that much. We'll see Snaith tells it all at his trial, and then, I think, your guardian, Telford, will find himself in far more trouble than he'll be able to get himself out of, lawyer or no lawyer."

Gerald eyed him with some awe in his gaze.

"So really I'm a rich man!" he said. "I've been cheated out of my own, by the man my father trusted me, to when he died! I came out here, and went through all I've gone through—dragging you two into my troubles. Why, even Teddy here might have died on my account! My goodness! If ever I meet my guardian face to face—and I shall!"

Teddy hugged his arm affectionately. It was clear that Gerald was very upset. And

Gerald, though he blamed himself out of all reason, was right. Most, if not all, the adventures these three had shared together had been the direct outcome of Cardone's evil actions. If it had not been for Cardone, life would have been a pleasant thing for them—or so Gerald said, in the bitterness of his soul. But Teddy put another light on the matter, in his simple, boyish way.

"Don't talk rot about us, old man," he said. "Remember, if it hadn't been for Cardone, perhaps we never should have met you. And, in spite of all, we've had some pretty good times together."

Teddy's memory was a conveniently short one. They certainly had had some exciting and not unpleasant experiences together, and he chose to remember those, rather than the unpleasant ones he and Gerald had shared at Snaith's hands.

"Well, then," said Gerald, "we'll have to get straight back home. I'll meet Cardone face to face, and I'll make him give up to me the fortune he stole from me! I'll tear it out of him with my own hands, if necessary. We'll all go back right now. Come on! We might as well start at once."

But Jack Royce laughed softly.

"Don't get rattled, partner," he said. "There's lots of things against doing that. There's the matter of cash, to begin with. We haven't got the price of our fares home, even steerage. Another thing, we're out on the gold trail, remember, and very near Dead Breed Lake. Teddy and I want some gold awfully badly, even if you won't want much now."

"You'll share my fortune, when I get it, of course," Gerald said. "You've stuck to me like bricks, and—"

"You might as well choke that off right now," said Jack sternly. "Teddy and I aren't looking for easy money like that. No; we're going on to Dead Breed Lake, to see if Mervyn, the Mad Prospector's gold is there, as he claimed it to be."

Gerald cooled down somewhat. Jack's sounder wisdom was not long in coming home to him. It was an easy matter to talk about starting at that moment back to the Old Country; but there were decided obstacles in the way of that. There were obstacles other than those mentioned by Jack. Not the least was, of course, the Royce brothers' pride. They were not going to accept free gifts even from a friend like Gerald. And, again, there was more than the chance that there was nothing in Snaith's story at all. The truth of that would have to be proved later—if it could be proved.

"Well, then," said Teddy at length, "what are we going to do with these two blighters?"

"There's only one thing I can see for us to do," said Jack. "We must leave them here. One of us will have to stay behind to guard them. I don't want them to slip through my hands again. And, besides,

Snaith would only die if left here alone, or with Olesen, who would sneak off and leave him, sure as fate, the moment our backs were turned. So one of us stays here; the other two go on in the canoe to Dead Breed Lake. There we'll look round for the gold, and if we find it we'll come straight back, pick up these chaps and the guard, and get back to the survey camp as soon as possible. With care, we ought to be able to get these two up-river in our canoe."

"And who's to be the one left behind?" asked Teddy, his face falling at Jack's decision, wise one though it was. "Me, I suppose, being the kid of the party!"

Jack laughed.

"We'll draw lots for it," he said.

But Gerald Telford would not agree to that.

"Whoever else stays behind," he said, "Jack'll have to go on. Teddy and I are greenhorns from the word 'Go!' and Jack has the experience. So Teddy and I'll toss for it."

Jack pulled a half-dollar from his pocket and spun it into the air. It came down on the back of his hand.

"Tails!" called Teddy.

He was very anxious to go ahead. Ever since coming to Canada he had dreamed of the day when he could see Dead Breed Lake, when he would discover the rich treasure of gold which he was sure the dead Mad Prospector had found there and bequeathed to Jack.

The half-dollar showed heads.

"Rot!" cried Teddy savagely.

He picked up Jack's rifle, shouldered it, and began then and there to march sentry-go over the two wounded prisoners. He scowled abominably at these two unworthy people, but at the same time he had hard work to keep the disappointed tears back from his eyes.

"I'll stay, old chap!" said Gerald, seeing how badly the youngster had taken the spin of the coin against him. "I don't mind, and, anyhow, I'm to have a fortune of my own."

"Shut up!" Teddy growled fiercely. "I'm a sportsman, ain't I? Think I can't lose a toss gamely? But, by Jumpiter!" He shook his fist at the still weeping Olesen. "If you make the slightest bit of bother, you great, ugly, fat, walrus-like lump of nothing, I'll—I'll give you such a dashed good hiding that— Oh, dash!"

He sat down abruptly. Jack smiled, understanding his young brother's feelings. Gerald did not try again to exchange places with Teddy, but helped Jack while the big fellow took from out their canoe sufficient provisions to keep Teddy and his prisoners for several days. They had not much food to spare, but they found there would be enough, with care, to feed the two extra mouths that the defeat of Snaith and Olesen had thrust upon them. But their

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

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List and Special Offer of Sample Cycle
MEAD CYCLE CO. Ltd.
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STRENGTHEN YOUR NERVES.—Nervous-
 ness deprives you of employment, pleasures, and
 many advantages in life. If you wish to prosper
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 ticulars.—**GODFREY ELLIOTT-SMITH, Ltd.,** 527,
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NICKEL SILVER WATCHES

Delivered on First Payment of

**2/- ONLY. YOU
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WHILST PAYING
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Gent's full-size Railway-
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 Watch. Stout Nickel Silver
 or Oxidised Damp and
 Dustproof cases, plain dial,
 perfectly balanced superior
 Lever movement, splendid
 timekeeper. Price for either
 pocket or wrist, 15/- each.
 Luminous dial (see time in
 dark).—2/- extra. Ladies'
 Chain or Wrist, 2/- extra.

We will send either of
 these watches on receipt
 of P.O. for 2/-. After receiving watch you
 send us a further 2/-, and promise to pay
 the remaining 11/- by weekly or monthly
 instalments. For cash with order enclose
 14/- only. Five years' warranty given with
 every watch.

To avoid disappointment send 2/- and 6d.
 extra postage at once. No unpleasant in-
 quiries. All orders executed in rotation.

THE LEVER WATCH CO.

(M. DEPT.).
 42a, Stockwell Green, London, S.W.9.

CUT THIS OUT.

The Nelson Lee Library. Pen Coupon. Value 2d.
 Send this coupon with P.O. for only 5/- direct to
 the Fleet Pen Co., 119, Fleet St., London,
 E.C.4. In return you will receive (post free) a
 splendid British Made 14-ct. Gold Nibbed Fleet
 Fountain Pen, value 10/6. If you save 12 further
 coupons, each will count as 2d. off the price; so
 you may send 13 coupons, and only 3/-. Say
 whether you want a fine, medium, or broad nib.
 This great offer is made to introduce the famous
 Fleet Pen to THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY readers.
Self-Filling, or Safety Models 2/- extra.

DUTTON'S 24 HOUR

DUTTON'S SHORTHAND has only 6 rules and
 29 characters. Complete theory learned in
 24 hours. Practice quickly gives high speeds.
 Send 2 stamps for illustrated booklet containing
 specimen lessons to **DUTTON'S COLLEGE**
 (Desk 303), **SKEGNESS**, London Branch; 92
 and 93, Great Russell Street, W.C.1. Manchester
 Branch; 5, 8, 9, Victoria Buildings, St. Mary's
 Gate.

SHORTHAND

FOOTBALLS, 10/6, 15/6. Match size.
 with best bladder. **Boxing**
Gloves, per four, 8/6. Tan Cape, best, 17/6. Postage
 9d. on all. Money returned if not satisfied.—**TOM**
CARPENTER, 69, Morecomb Street,
Walworth, S.E. 17.

MAGIC TRICKS.—Illusions, etc. Parcels, 2/6, 5/6,
 and 10/6. Sample Trick 1/-. **T. W. HARRISON,**
239, Pentonville Road, London, N. 1.

CURLY HAIR!—"My bristles were made curly in a
 few days," writes R. Welch. "Curly" curls straightest
 hair, 1/5, 2/6 (2d. stamps accepted).—**SUMMERS (Dept.**
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PHOTO POSTCARDS OF YOURSELF, 1/3
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PHOTO MATERIAL. CATALOGUE AND SAMPLES
FREE.—**HACKETTS, JULY ROAD, LIVERPOOL.**

WATCH YOURSELF GROW

by using the
 Girvan System.
 Mr. Briggs reports 5 ins.
 increase; Driver E.F., 3
 ins.; Seaman Mosedale,
 3 ins. No drugs; no ap-
 pances. Health and
 physique improved. Send
 3d. Stamps for particu-
 lars and £100. Guar-
 antee to the Girvan System.
 Dept. N.M.P., 17, Stroud
 Green Road, London, N. 4.



THREE BOYS IN CANADA.

(Continued from page 32.)

canoe was very light indeed as Jack and
 Gerald set off on the final stage of their
 journey to Dead Breed Lake.

They left Teddy sitting disconsolately on
 a rock beside the river, the rifle laid across
 his knees. As they rounded the bend that
 took the canoe out of Teddy's sight, the
 youngster waved his hat, Jack and Gerald
 waved theirs, and then the two elder
 Britishers bent their backs to their paddles,
 knowing that the utmost effort would be
 needed before they could reach their desti-
 nation, have a fair look round, and return
 to Teddy before the food ran out. To be
 sure, there was the chance of finding game,
 but time was too precious to take many
 chances of this sort.

(Another grand instalment of this
 ripping serial next week.)