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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I:

THE ENEMY AT THE WALLS.

CONFUSION reigned supreme in El Dorado.

That wonderful city—the home of the Arzacs—was one blaze of light from end to end; from gigantic wall to gigantic wall. The time was well after midnight, but not one single inhabitant was asleep.

A great festival had been interrupted, for the enemy was at the gates!

The white giants were menaced by their traditional foes—the savage, ruthless Ciri-Ok-Baks, of the mud valley.

In the middle of the city's central square, Nelson Lee stood—and Umlosi and Captain Burton—and, in fact, every single member of Lord Dorrimore's party. All were there, including the juniors of St. Frank's, and the young lady guests, who had come out to Brazil for the summer holidays.

Not one of us had even guessed in our wildest moments that anything of this nature would take place. For the past few days we had been living in a maze of wonder and peril, for everything had not gone right with our expedition.

Lord Dorrimore had set out to find Colonel Kerrigan. It was with this object in view that the party had come up the Amazon, and had then entered the River Majarra. It was true enough that Colonel Kerrigan had been found, and he had been restored to his twin sister,

Miss Janet Kerrigan, who was overwhelmed with joy to see her brother, whom the world had thought to be dead.

But, in locating the colonel, we had got ourselves into terrible trouble.

For we had discovered that we had a deadly enemy in the Comte de Plessigny—that smooth-tongued rogue who had made himself first acquainted with us at St. Frank's. The count was here, and he was as cunning and as clever as ever.

Owing to his machinations, Dorrie's airship had been seized, the steam yacht had been attacked, and everybody had been taken prisoner. Not only that, but we had all been transported to El Dorado, where, until an hour since, we had been held prisoners by the Arzacs.

The count's scheme was really a simple one. In the past he had swindled Colonel Kerrigan right and left, and had appropriated the colonel's fortune. Therefore, Plessigny had no desire for Kerrigan to return to civilisation, and, in order to make absolutely certain, the rascally count had conceived the extraordinary idea of kidnapping every member of Lord Dorrimore's party, and leaving them all in El Dorado.

This strange city, with its highly civilised inhabitants of white giants, was situated hundreds of miles beyond a deadly Brazilian swamp—a swamp which extended round the land of the Arzacs in a complete circle, shutting off that tract of country from the outside world.

It was an amazing place.

For hundreds of centuries this country had never been connected with the world as we know it. That poisonous swamp had shut off everything; no living man could cross it from either side. Thus the Arzacs could never reach the great world, and the inhabitants of Brazil could never reach El Dorado.

We had succeeded only because we had come by airship. It was the first airship that had ever ventured to cross the terrible forests of unknown Brazil. We had been amply rewarded for our daring, for we had made discoveries which were destined to ring throughout the world.

But at last the Comte de Plessigny had been unmasked—and he had fled.

It had been discovered—when it was almost too late—that the count had been a deadly traitor—that he had been secretly planning the overthrow of El Dorado. For Plessigny had plotted with the Ciri-Ok-Baks, and these savage giants were even now outside the city walls, preparing for the most deadly onslaught within Arzac history.

It had been arranged by the count that the attack should commence at dawn—that the white giants should be surprised while they were still making merry and feasting. But the time was now only just after twelve-thirty, so there was at least two hours in which to make hurried preparations, for the Ciri-Ok-Baks were not yet ready—they themselves were preparing.

But what could be done in two short hours?

How would it be possible for the Arzacs to prepare themselves for war—to defend the city walls from the deadly attacks which would shortly be commencing?

"It's terrible, gov'nor—it's terrible!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "Oh, if you could only realise what the exact position is! There are thousands of these mud men outside the city walls—they are coming along full of determination to conquer El Dorado."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"And if they do conquer the town, Nipper, they will slaughter everybody within it!" he said grimly. "There is no doubt on that point. These mud men are deadly and savage; they will give no quarter. It will be death for everybody if they gain the upper hand."

"My only hat!" said Handforth blankly.

"But they won't win!"

"Of course not!"

"We can easily beat off a parcel of savages!"

"Rather!"

The juniors who were standing by, in an excited group, were unanimous in their opinion.

"I tell you, you chaps, you don't understand!" I shouted. "You haven't got any idea of what is in the wind. I have! I have seen with my own eyes, and it's an absolute fact that we are in a terrible position!"

I glanced round, and saw that Colonel Kerrigan was talking rapidly and earnestly with the ruling chiefs of the Arzac community. He was talking, of course, in their own language, and they were listening with grave concern. I knew that the colonel was telling them of the recent experience he had passed through—the experience which I had shared.

"You know all about it, sir, don't you?" I said, addressing Nelson Lee. "You know that Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi and the colonel and I succeeded in getting out of the city by means of a secret tunnel?"

"Yes, I know that, Nipper."

"Some of the other chaps were with us," I went on. "We all got outside the city—rather aimlessly. We didn't expect to do anything, and we were exceedingly surprised to find the count there, talking with an Arzac, who turned out to be a traitor. And then the pair of them went to a valley, five or six miles away—the valley of mud occupied by these savage giants, who are known as Ciri-Ok-Baks. Dorrie and all the rest of us followed, and we saw some amazing sights."

Lord Dorrimore, who was standing near by, nodded.

"We did!" he said grimly. "By the Lord Harry! We saw hundreds of gigantic towers being prepared—we saw thousands of these savages makin' ready for war. Huge catapult arrangements, millions of rounds of ammunition—stones, an' all that sort of thing, an' goodness knows what else. I tell you, Lee, we're goin' to be in the thick of it in less than an hour!"

"That is all the more reason why we

should be looking alive!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "There is no getting out of this now, so we must fight. We must fight with all our strength, Dorrie, in order to help the Arzacs. They are, at least, civilised, and they are a peaceful people. It is our duty to assist them."

"Rather!" said Dorrie. "That's goin' to be our game, professor. But I'm interruptin' Nipper. Go on, young 'un!"

I took a deep breath.

"Well, as I was telling you, sir, we saw all these preparations going on," I declared. "But before we could come back and give the warning—before we could take our story back to the Arzacs—we were captured. And we were taken into that city of mud, and placed in a filthy hovel of a hut, and there we remained throughout the whole of yesterday and right into the night. Oh, it was terrible! We knew what was going on—we knew that this attack on the city was being prepared—and yet we could do nothing. We were compelled to remain in that hut, helpless and at the mercy of those savages."

"Begad!" exclaimed Tragellis-West. "It was frightful, dear old boys—it was, really! There were spiders an' frightful-lookin' beetles, an'——"

"Bother the spiders and the beetles, Montie!" I interrupted. "They were a nuisance, but there are more important things to discuss."

"You are quite right, dear old boy," said Sir Montie. "I apologise. Pray proceed."

"Well, we had almost given it up as hopeless," I continued, "and then one of the huge mastodon—which these mud men have trained—got out of hand. The tremendous brute broke away from the men who were holding it, and it came charging straight down towards our hut. It collided with the wall, and cracked it to smithereens. And in the confusion which followed we were able to escape, and we ran every inch of the way to El Dorado. You know the rest—all of you. You know how we dashed in less than twenty minutes ago, and you know how we gave the warning."

"And we know how the Comte de Plessigny shot down several of his subjects, and fled!" said Dr. Brett grimly. "The infernal rogue! I should like to know what has become of him now—I

will warrant he is up to some further treachery!"

"We will deal with him later!" said Nelson Lee. "I do not think he will make himself very prominent, doctor. The Arzacs will be all against him after what has happened, and the count, I believe, will make off in the airship. But we have no time to discuss matters now—we must act."

"What can we do, sir?" I asked, panting hard.

"We can do a very great deal, my lad," replied Nelson Lee. "You must realise that the Arzacs have been feasting—they have been drinking, although none of them are actually intoxicated. At the same time, they are taken completely by surprise, and they are not prepared for this grim battle. We must do everything in our power to help in the defence of the city."

"Dash it all," muttered Ralph Leslie Fullwood, "that's their job—not ours!"

Nelson Lee looked at the cad of the Remove sharply.

"You need have no fear, Fullwood," he said quietly. "I shall not ask you to help in this enterprise."

"I—I didn't mean——"

"And you are quite wrong in saying that this is solely the concern of the Arzacs," went on the gov'nor. "You do not seem to realise that if these mud men enter the city they will institute a wholesale slaughter—and we shall be no exceptions. We shall, in fact, probably be the first to suffer; so, in assisting the Arzacs to defend the city, we shall be acting for ourselves also. This is a case of all hands to the pump—we must fight as we have never fought before!"

Umlosi, the giant Kutana chief, raised his hand, and his eyes were blazing with delight.

"Wau! I am happy, Umtagati, my master!" he exclaimed, in his rumbling voice. "This is a day I have been waiting for—I have been long waiting for! It will be an affair for men, this battle! Thou wilt be wise to place these boys in a place of safety, for it would be wrong to endanger their young lives."

"You need have no fear, Umlosi; I shall look after the boys—and the girls, too," said Nelson Lee. "At the moment I think it is far more important for us to see after the machine-guns and ammunition."

"The machine-guns, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"We haven't got any, sir!"

"We have not got them at the moment, but I know where they are kept," said Nelson Lee. "The count seized all the machine-guns on the yacht, and he transported them across to El Dorado in the airship. He also brought many cases of ammunition, rifles, cartridges, and a great assortment of bombs. It is only too obvious now that the count intended them for his own purposes, to use against the Arzacs. His scheme, probably, was to allow the mad men in the city, and to assist in the work of destruction with his own underlings; but the count has fled, and we shall be able to make use of those guns and the ammunition!"

"Hurrah!"

"Do you know where this store-house is, sir?" asked Mr. Hudson, the first officer of *The Wanderer*.

"Yes, Mr. Hudson, I do."

"Then, sir, let me advise you to go to it as soon as possible!" said Mr. Hudson grimly. "Don't you think it is possible that the count has gone there first—that he intends to take that ammunition away? He knows well enough that we shall use it if he does not——"

"You are right, Mr. Hudson!" said Nelson Lee quickly. "Come! We must not lose another second!"

The gov'nor hurried off, and with him went Dr. Brett, Mr. Hudson, and Lord Dorrimore. I followed with Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, Handforth and Co., and one or two others.

We didn't know what the rest of the party were doing—we didn't care. All was confusion, and we were tremendously excited.

Colonel Kerrigan had finished his confab with the Arzac chiefs, and they had gone off in various directions, issuing orders as fast as they could get them out. Men were running about like mad things—shouting, gesticulating, and doing their utmost to get defenders for the walls.

Every single man would be needed—every able-bodied individual, in fact. The Arzacs knew well enough that this was to be the most terrible battle within their history, and it was to be a life-and-death struggle. They had awakened to the fact that death was near by, and they were galvanised into action.

And while all this terrific activity was going on, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the others hurried straight down one of the wide streets, in the direction of a small building which contained the stores of machine-guns and ammunition.

As I have said, the whole city was brilliantly illuminated. At regular intervals along the great, wide streets there were huge, massive pillars, with balls of fire surmounting them. These powerful lights were caused by gas—a curious gas which came naturally from the ground, and which had been harnessed by the white giants.

"There's going to be some big events happening soon, my sons!" I panted, as we hurried along in the rear of Nelson Lee and his companions. "We'll help to get the machine-guns on to the walls, and we might be able to carry the ammunition—we can all be of some use in a crisis of this sort!"

"Rather!" said Handforth. "We'll all fight, too—I'm ready to do my bit!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Any old thing, dear old boys!" panted Sir Montie. "I'm quite game, you know!"

We hurried on, and presently we saw that those in front of us had turned out of the wide street, and were now going down a long, narrow paved path, with a marble building at the end. Just in front of this building there was a great fountain playing, with a huge basin of water at its foot. This fountain was placed on an imposing position, with white marble steps leading downwards in all directions.

But we had no eyes for the beauty of the scene at that moment. We were intent upon the building, and when we looked round we received a shock.

For we could see smoke issuing out of the windows of the building which stood at the foot of the marble steps. The smoke was coming out in dense clouds, and Nelson Lee and the others were just entering by the doorway.

"My only hat!" shouted Handforth. "The place is on fire!"

"Good heavens!"

"Then Mr. Hudson was right!" I shouted. "The count must have been here—he has set the whole place on fire, so that the ammunition will blow up, and the machine-guns be destroyed!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

"But, dear old boys, do you realise

what it means?" gasped Sir Montie, with horror in his voice. "Mr. Lee has already entered the place—and so have Dr. Brett and Mr. Hudson. They will be blown to atoms!"

He said no more, for just at that moment we had arrived at the doorway, and we blundered in. It was almost impossible to see anything, for the whole place was smothered with smoke, and we could see a dull red glow coming from the other side of the big, open apartment within.

"Guv'nor!" I shouted.

"Go back, Nipper—go back!" came Nelson Lee's voice, in urgent tones. "The count has set the place on fire!"

"I can see that, sir!" I gasped. "Why don't you come out? You'll get killed——"

"It's all right, young 'un—don't fear!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore. "The fire hasn't got to the ammunition boxes yet. That infernal rogue has set light to a lot of grass and other stuff which is on the floor, here. He hadn't got time to do much, you see. If we can only put it out we shall be all right—the ammunition cases are stacked away at the further wall!"

"Well, it seems terribly risky to me!" said Handforth.

Nelson Lee appeared in the doorway, and he was looking alarmed.

"Boys, I command you to go back—to stand at least three hundred yards distant!" he ordered curtly.

"But, sir——"

"Do as I tell you!" commanded the guv'nor.

It was impossible to argue further. The juniors backed away, and hurried off. As a matter of fact, they were rather nervous—they were expecting the whole building to blow up into a thousand atoms at any moment. But I did not go back as the guv'nor had ordered—I was so excited that I rushed past him, and went into the building. I bumped into Lord Dorrimore, and he tried to pull me back. But I charged on, until I was able to see exactly how the position stood.

The whole floor space of the big stone apartment was on fire. It was smothered with the grass, and this was blazing and smoking in a way which rather scared me. Mr. Hudson and Dr. Brett were stamping with their feet, and doing their utmost to put the fire out. But

it seemed to me that it was a hopeless task—that nothing would be able to extinguish the flames except a great volume of water.

"It's no good!" I panted huskily. "You won't be able to do it, Dorrie. You'd better get out while you're safe——"

A hand grasped my shoulder, and I was swung round.

"You heard what I said, Nipper!" snapped Nelson Lee angrily. "There is danger here—and I do not intend you to remain."

"But you're here, sir, and I want to be here, too——"

"I quite realise that, my boy, and I appreciate your feelings," said Nelson Lee, in a more kindly tone. "At the same time, I cannot allow you to risk your life. Lord Dorrimore and I and the others will do our utmost to extinguish the fire—but if we find it is impossible we will give it up, and we will make a break for safety. Now you must go!"

There was nothing else for it.

I groped my way through the smoke until I reached the opening. Then, taking a deep breath, I rushed across the open space, up the steps of the fountain, and found the other juniors collected there, looking on with scared, pale faces.

"Well?" asked Tommy Watson huskily.

"I don't know—I'm in a horrible funk!" I said shakily. "The guv'nor's in there, and I believe he's going to be blown up! Can't we do something? Can't we do anything to help?"

"It doesn't seem like it!" said Handforth, his voice hoarse and quivering. "Oh, why don't they come out?"

And we stood there, gazing at the smoking building with apprehension and fear.

What was to be done?

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE.

IT was impossible for me to keep still. Knowing that the guv'nor was in deadly peril, I wanted to be with him—I wanted to do everything in my power to drag him out of that awful place. If only one of the cartridges happened to explode—if one of the

bombs got in the way of the fire—it would be all up. There would be a series of short explosions, then one devastating roar. Nelson Lee, Dorrie—everything would go up in one terrific report. I looked round rather wildly—and my eyes suddenly became fixed.

I was gazing at the fountain.

And my heart began to throb heavily. There was the fountain, playing its waters peacefully. And there was the great basin of water, containing thousands of gallons. I gave a terrible shout, for a sudden idea had come to me.

"Look!" I gasped. "Look there!"

"Where?" panted Handforth, rather startled.

"All this water here!" I went on. "Don't you see it? If we can only break this barrier, the water will go rushing down these steps, it will enter the building, and it will swamp that floor, putting the fire out in less than five seconds!"

"Bogad!"

"Great Scott!"

"But we can't do it, Nipper—it's impossible!" shouted Tommy Watson. "This stonework is as hard as iron!"

"Yes, that's the difficulty!" I said.

"But surely we can do something? With all this water here we ought to be able to use it somehow or other."

"It's all very well to talk like that," said Handforth. "But how on earth are we going to smash this wall down? It's made of solid stone, and it would need a volcanic eruption to shift it!"

"Dear old boys, Umlosi is comin' this way!" put in Sir Montie quickly. "Perhaps he can—"

I looked round desperately.

"Umlosi!" I shouted. "Here—I want you at once!"

The Kutana chief, who was near by, came up at the double.

"Thou art calling me, O Nimble one!" he rumbled. "Methinks thou art in trouble!"

"I haven't got time to explain, Umlosi, but I want you to smash this wall, if you can, so that the water can rush out down the steps!" I exclaimed urgently. "Do you think it is possible?"

Umlosi looked at the stonework with keen eyes. He did not understand what was in the wind, but he knew by my tone that the matter was very important, and that there was not a second to waste.

He shook his head slowly and deliberately.

"Nay, Manzie, I fear that it is impossible!" he exclaimed. "It would require a mighty weapon—but stay! I see something which might be of assistance!"

He darted off, and we looked in the direction he had gone. We saw him stoop down and pick up a heavy marble block. It must have weighed at least two hundredweight, but Umlosi picked it up, and came running back as though the stone block only weighed a mere stone.

"Do you think——" I began.

"Watch, Manzie—do thou watch!" shouted Umlosi in a powerful voice.

He mounted the steps, swung the stone high above his head, and then, with every ounce of his terrific strength, he sent that block of solid weight hurtling at the ornamental wall of the basin.

Crash!

The stone block struck with a terrific splintering crack. It had been sent with appalling force, and it could not fail to do some damage. But whether it would break the wall down was the question. We had not long to wait.

Several jagged cracks appeared in the white marble, and from these the water began hissing in furious spurts. But it was only a trickle, after all, and the water went splashing down the steps harmlessly.

"It's failed!" gasped Handforth. "We shall be too late!"

"Wait, O thou impatient one!" shouted Umlosi. "The wall is cracked—it is but a simple matter to finish the task!"

Umlosi commenced tearing at the marble work with all his strength. He tugged and pulled and exerted every ounce of energy.

Crash!

A portion came away, and the water went pouring down in a cascade. But this did not satisfy Umlosi. He pulled again and again—and then, with a mighty roar, a huge portion of the wall came away, disintegrating into a hundred fragments.

And with a tremendous roaring splashing noise the whole contents of that fountain rushed down the steps like a miniature Niagara.

"Hurrah!" I shouted huskily.

The main body of the water was rushing straight towards the doorway of the building which was on fire. And at that moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came staggering out through the smoke, and I knew by their very attitude that they had given up the task as hopeless—that they had come out in order to escape from the explosion which was liable to occur at any second.

They were caught by the terrific rush of water, bowled over, and swept into the building again. Had the matter not been so deadly serious we should have roared at that incident. Nelson Lee and the others were simply taken off their feet and swirled away.

The basin was emptied in less than two minutes, but the whole floor of that burning building was now flooded, and the water was swirling about, filled with charred grasses, and ashes and dirt. Dense clouds of steam came out of the doorway and out of the windows.

We rushed down the steps, and splashed through the water until we were inside the building. And there we found Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the others picking themselves up—drenched to the skin, but looking extremely relieved.

"The fire's out!" I roared. "By jingo! We succeeded, after all!"

Nelson Lee clapped me on the back with a wet hand.

"Splendid. Nipper—splendid!" he exclaimed. "That idea of yours was a marvellous one. A minute longer, and this building would have been blown to atoms—destroying all our ammunition, machine guns and bombs. My boy, you have saved the situation!"

"It was Umlosi who did it, sir!" I said quickly.

"Nay, thou art surely wrong, O. Nimble one!" put in Umlosi, in his rumbling voice. "I was merely the instrument—it was thy brains that thought out the scheme. I used my strength—that is all. The credit is due to thee, Manzie."

"Credit!" snorted Lord Dorrimore. "A fat lot of credit is due to Nipper. I don't think! Look at my beautiful white suit? Look at it! By the Lord Harry! I shall mistake myself for a scarecrow after this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We could not help roaring at Dorrie's appearance—for he was certainly a very

bedraggled sight. But he was only joking, and he grinned at us cheerfully. He was tremendously relieved by what had happened,, and he clapped me on the back vigorously.

"Jokin' apart, young un', you deserve half-a-dozen putty medals!" he declared. "That waterfall came in the nick of time. Another fifty seconds, an' we should have gone up into the clouds. By the way, I hope you haven't ruined all the giddy ammunition?"

"It's waterproof, Dorrie—and, besides, it is out of reach," said Nelson Lee. "One or two cases have got wet, but they contain cartridges, and they will come to no harm. But there is not a moment to waste—we must get these goods out of this place as soon as possible, and they must be mounted round the walls of the city, at the most important points. We need men—dozens of them!"

There were plenty of men ready. Colonel Kerrigan had given precise instructions, and the Arzacs were only too willing to obey. They knew well enough that the position was terribly serious, and that their best course was to allow Nelson Lee and the colonel and the others to take command. It was the colonel who did most of the ordering—since he could speak the Arzac tongue, whilst we could not.

And everything went on smoothly and rapidly.

There were plenty of men ready, guns, and these were rapidly taken up to the battlements. There were hundreds of men on the job, and they worked in parties. Captain Burton and every member of his crew were hard at it, and they had each a separate command. They were placed in command of large parties of Arzacs, and these gigantic men were only too willing to do anything they were told.

And while this work was proceeding—the work of placing the bombs and the ammunition and the machine guns on the city walls, other large parties of Arzacs were preparing their own weapons. They were swarming over the battlements in hundreds and thousands, getting ready for the fray which was almost due to start.

The whole city was one vast hive of activity. Men were running hither and thither, but now there was very little confusion. After that first terrible half-hour, order was restored, and the Arzacs

went about their business in a keen, active manner.

They were alive to the fact that their peril was deadly, and that they must use every effort if the city was to be saved from the savage attackers.

For the extent of the danger was not known.

Scouts had been sent out in all directions, and they had come back reporting that the city was surrounded—that the Ciri-Ok-Baks were in tremendous force on every hand—north, south, east and west. They were intent upon making a vast onslaught on the city walls—an onslaught which would take place simultaneously on every side.

At the same time, the main attack was to be directed against the gateway of the city. This was obvious, by the huge number of savages who were collecting there. Once the main gates were passed, the enemy would pour into the city in a deluge.

For these gates were of tremendous size. They were of stone, and were almost as massive as the wall itself. How they had been erected was a puzzle to me—a puzzle which I could never understand. It was an engineering feat of the most astounding character.

The other gates of the city were smaller, and could be held with ease. It was these main gates which caused anxiety to the Arzacs. But there were plenty of machine guns—plenty of men. And we were all confident that the enemy could be driven back.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were in command of the operations at this most important point. Nelson Lee had three machine guns on one side of the gate, and Dorrie had three on the other. These guns were mounted right on top of the battlements, hundreds of feet from the ground. And from that advantageous position, it was possible to pour a devastating fire into the ranks of the enemy.

The wall which entirely encircled El Dorado was a wonderful piece of work. It was tremendously high, and so wide that a railway train could have been run along the top with ease. Hundreds of men could be accommodated, and it was quite possible that fierce hand to hand encounters would take place on that wall during the course of the battle.

If once the mud men obtained a footing—if once they got on the wall in

their thousands—it would be impossible to hold them. For they would swarm over, and they would enter the city.

It was extremely fortunate that we had brought the warning in time. For during those two brief hours much was done in the way of defensive preparations.

The Ciri-Ok-Baks were not quite ready for the attack—they had intended it to begin at dawn—and it was still an hour from dawn, even now.

Of course, the enemy knew well enough that their surprise had not come off. They knew that the Arzacs were preparing to defend the city. And, consequently, their own movements were now greatly hastened.

They no longer attempted to move silently, or to act in secret. They pressed their plans forward as hard as they possibly could.

They did not mean to wait until dawn—they intended to attack at the earliest possible moment.

I found myself on the battlements, gazing down into the darkness beyond the city. I could see dim movements, and I could hear many voices, and the rumble of heavy articles.

At regular intervals round the walls there were great staircases, up which the Arzacs would run at the double.

But these staircases were cunningly contrived, for they could be rendered useless at any moment—they could be drawn back flush with the wall, so that they were non-existent. Thus, if the enemy swarmed over the battlements in large numbers, they would be unable to get down into the city streets.

I was rather dazed by all the noise and bustle. It was a scene of amazing activity—a scene of feverish energy.

The air was filled with shouts, men were moving about in hundreds at the double. The Arzac women had been sent into the houses in order to be in safety. But many of them were helping, too—they were carrying great baskets of huge stones to the foot of the wall, where they were carried up to the battlements by the men.

As for Lord Dorrimore's party—the members of the yacht's crew, the girls, Lady Helen Trogollis-West, and all the others—they were parted. They were in many different parts of the city.

The members of the yacht's crew, for example, were helping with the defences

—they were doing their utmost to get everything prepared for the onslaught when it came.

The juniors, including myself, were dodging about all over the place, trying to help—eager to do something.

As for the girls, in charge of Lady Helen Tregellis-West, they were still in the great central square, rather frightened, and considerably excited.

But they did not remain there long. They were taken into a large building not far from the centre of the city. And there, behind massive walls and tightly closed doors, they were told to remain. They were safe there, even in the event of the fighting penetrating right into the city streets.

They were safe, and it was their duty to remain as calm as possible, and to await the result of the great battle.

I staggered up to the top of the great wall near the gates, and I found Nelson Lee in his shirt-sleeves, perspiring freely, and working hard at the machine guns, getting them in perfect trim.

"Anything I can do, sir?" I asked briskly.

The gov'nor looked round.

"Yes, Nipper, you can go and collect all the boys—every member of the St. Frank's party," he replied. "Then you will take them all into the big central building."

"What for, sir?" I asked.

"I have no intention of allowing any of you boys to take part in this fighting," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I want you to understand that now, and I want you to heed my words, Nipper. The battle is going to be too grim—too deadly for any of you boys to take part in it."

"Oh, I say, gov'nor," I protested, "I want to be with you!"

Nelson Lee laid his hand on my shoulder.

"I dare say you do, my lad," he said quietly. "But it cannot be. Really, you must do as I say."

"But, gov'nor—"

"Now, Nipper, there is no time for arguments," said Nelson Lee. "I want you to be with the other boys because you are their leader, in a way. I want you to look after them, and see that they do not get out of the building. It is most essential that you should all remain there. Do not forget that Lord Dorrimore and I are responsible for

your safety—and we cannot afford to take any risks."

"That's quite right, Nipper, my son," put in Lord Dorrimore. "It's beastly hard lines, I expect, but it can't be helped."

I was rather rebellious.

"I don't see it at all, sir," I protested. "The other chaps ought to be in a place of safety I'll admit—but I'm different. I want to be with you, gov'nor. I want to—"

"I quite see your point, young 'un, and I appreciate it," interrupted Nelson Lee. "At the same time you must understand that the other boys will be very jealous if you are allowed to roam about as you will, and they are not. If I let you remain on the battlement here the other boys will not like it. Therefore you must be with them."

"I suppose you're right, sir," I said. "At the same time, it's rotten! I badly wanted to be up here, so that I could see the whole fight."

"My dear kid, you can see everything," put in Lord Dorrimore. "In that central building there is a flat roof, and it towers high above these walls. You'll be able to see the whole course of the fightin' from there—an' in safety, too."

"I don't want safety!" I interrupted. "If there's any danger to the gov'nor, I want to share it!"

But it was quite useless.

Nelson Lee would not let me remain. And, fearing that the juniors would not take any notice of me, he came down into the city with me, and, together, we rounded up every member of the St. Frank's party—the Removites, the fags, and Morrow and Frinton of the Sixth. Even those two seniors were not allowed to take part in any fighting.

And we were hustled away to the central building just as the battle was beginning. We were placed there, behind closed doors, and we were told we were not to move under any circumstances.

"It's rotten—it's absolutely rotten!" declared Handforth grimly. "What's the good of a fight like this if we can't take part in it? I've always had a tremendous respect for Mr. Lee, but now I think he's—"

"It's no good grumbling, Handy," I put in. "I'd like to be out there, too, but you must realise that it is impossible. If things—get really bad—if it

becomes a case of every man to the pump—well, perhaps we shall have a chance. But at present we must stand idle, and watch."

"That's about all that we can do," said Pitt disconsolately. "But we can see everything rippingly from the roof—that's one consolation!"

We lost no time in getting up to the roof. And there, stretching out before us on all sides we beheld the amazing spectacle.

The walls were crammed and crowded with Arzacs, all of them ready and waiting to engage the enemy when he made his onslaught. It was an astounding sight, and we gazed upon it spellbound.

The great flaring orange-coloured lights were all over the city, casting a terrific glare over the scene. And from beyond the walls we could hear the shrill trumpeting of the giant mastodons—we could hear the rumbling of the great towers as they were moved up into position. And we could hear the shouts of the Ciri-Ok-Baks.

The battle was beginning—the great fight was just about to become serious.

And, as we watched, I wondered if we should win the day—I wondered if the Arzacs would be successful in their defence.

Somehow I felt that we should be lucky if we succeeded in beating back the savage mud men. I had seen their preparations, I had seen their thousands, and I knew that our task was to be a terribly stiff one.

And while all the juniors stood there on the roof of that central building, the battle round the walls of El Dorado raged.

CHAPTER III.

THE REMOVE TAKES A HAND.

"WE shall be in the thick of it in less than five minutes, Dorrie!" exclaimed Nelson Lee quickly. "You'd better get back to your guns at once! There is no telling when these brutes will begin in earnest!"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"I'm all right!" he exclaimed. "I've got three jolly good men on my guns, and these Arzacs are willin' to help in any direction. As you say we shall soon be in the thick of it."

Near the great gateway, on the top of the huge walls, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were waiting for the battle to commence in their section. It had already begun in other parts of the city, and the Arzacs were fighting in grim earnest.

Several of the great portable towers had already been brought into position, and they were literally swarming with the determined mud men.

Those towers were smothered with these savage giants as a pot of jam is smothered with flies. They were clinging all over it in swarms—up the sides, and on the great platform which formed the top.

The towers were extremely cunningly constructed, ladders being provided on all sides, and a tremendous platform on the top, which came exactly level with the top of the wall.

Thus, once the tower was in the right position, it was a comparatively simple matter for the attackers to charge straight on to the battlements, and engage the defenders.

And this was already happening in two or three parts of the city walls. At least six of these great towers had been placed in position, and the Ciri-Ok-Baks were attempting to gain a footing on the wall.

So far they had not succeeded, but the battle had only just commenced. It had not become fierce, and the attackers were only just beginning to feel their way.

Nelson Lee stood looking on ready for action at any moment. He was deeply impressed by all he saw. The noise of strife filled the air, and there were shrieks, cries and yells, from both sides. Down below in the gloom at the base of the wall, many dim figures could be seen. The whole ground for hundreds and hundreds of yards away seethed with humanity—thousands of the mud men being there ready to go to the attack when the word came.

Nelson Lee had with him three members of the yacht's crew, and they were all capable of using firearms, and, what was more important, they were able to manipulate the machine guns.

So far, Nelson Lee was reserving his fire. He did not see any necessity to pour away his bullets at a chance objective. He was waiting until the attackers came in force—until it was

certain that much damage would be done.

Lord Dorrimore, on the other side of the gate, was waiting in just the same way. But it was not destined that they should wait for long. For the battle was growing fiercer with every moment that passed. The attackers were coming on in swarms—in droves.

And with them were the mighty mastodons—trained for battle by these strange savage giants. The mastodons were used to haul up the great towers—and to do anything that demanded strength and brute force.

Whizz-z-zzz!

Nelson Lee started. Something huge had just whizzed past his head—within a foot. It was something tremendously large—quite as big as a football. And it went crashing down into the city, and splintered to fragments in one of the main streets, causing a party of Arzacs to scatter precipitately.

Nelson Lee saw it clearly, and he whistled.

"A stone!" he muttered. "A stone weighing every ounce of half a hundred-weight! These fellows must have some very powerful engines of war to throw stones of that size to this tremendous height!"

Whizzz!

Another stone came, and Nelson Lee gripped his hands. He knew well enough that these stones were being directed towards him and his party. And, gazing down keenly, he could dimly see a group of great figures about thirty yards away from the wall. They had with them a great, cumbersome structure which Lee had not been able to understand so far.

But now he knew what it was.

"Do you see that, Smithson?" asked Nelson Lee, addressing one of the men.

"I did that, sir!" replied the man grimly. "It nearly took the hair off my head! I don't quite fancy stones of that size coming along, sir! One blow would brain us all!"

"You are right, Smithson!" said Nelson Lee. "We must deal with the peril as rapidly as possible."

"They must be using a kind of giant catapult, sir——"

"No, Smithson, it is not a catapult," interrupted Nelson Lee. "I take the thing to be a ballista."

"And what's that, sir?"

"The ballista is an instrument of war which was used by the Romans, and by earlier peoples," said Nelson Lee. "It was used extensively in the Middle Ages, too—sometimes called by another name. It is a gigantic arrangement with springs, which is capable of throwing large stones a great distance. These people are well supplied with such contrivances."

Nelson Lee was quite right. There were a good many of the ballistas round the city walls, and now they were all getting into operation. They were all hurling stones with a regularity which was disconcerting over the walls.

Many of them struck the defenders as they stood there. Others fell into the city streets, killing anybody they happened to fall upon.

The ballista which menaced Nelson Lee and his little party on the battlements near the gates, was working at full pressure, and the great stones were hurtling up one after another.

"This won't do," said Nelson Lee grimly. "You'd better send a volley into the crowd, Smithson."

Zizzzzz!

The machine gun spluttered and roared.

And from below there came many shrieks and yells of terror. And after that the ballista was quiet. Not another stone came up for some considerable time. But other men were now upon the instrument of war, and the stones were again hurled up to the battlements.

But the machine gun was now going almost continuously, sending a devastating rain of bullets down among the mud men.

The battle in fact was growing fiercer at all points.

Nelson Lee watched, and he was working overtime. He had taken the machine gun himself. And now, with keen eye and steady hand, he was operating the gun to the best advantage.

Lord Dorrimore, on the battlements on the far side of the gateway, was working just as hard. So far there had been no towers coming to this particular section of the wall. There had been no hand-to-hand fighting.

But all along the wall, in other places, the towers were in position, and the mud men were swarming on to the walls,

and they were fighting fiercely with the Arzacs.

And then, out of the gloom came two towering, huge forms. Nelson Lee knew what they were. They were two towers, being placed in position as rapidly as possible. They came lumbering over the ground, and then, with a double crash, they joined up with the wall. And, at the same time, in spite of the terrible fire from the machine guns, hundreds of mud men came swarming up the towers, with the intention of driving all before them.

"Now, men!" shouted Nelson Lee urgently. "We must fight with every inch of our strength!"

The machine gun was now useless. It was a hand-to-hand tussle. It was impossible to use a quick-firing gun at such close range. Revolvers and rifles were spitting viciously, and, although they caused tremendous havoc, there were such numbers of attackers that it was impossible to drive them all back.

Others came on when their fellows fell—others swarmed up the towers, charged over the platform, and hurled themselves at the wall.

These men were desperate, they fought with a bravery which was amazing. They cared nothing for death—they came on regardless of the defences. It seemed as though they did not value life in the slightest degree.

And Nelson Lee was in the thick of the fighting in a moment. His revolver was now useless, and he was using the butt, hitting out with all his strength to right and to left. It was a grim, deadly tussle.

But Nelson Lee was showing the Arzacs what a magnificent fighter he was. The great giants even paused in the middle of the fighting to watch this white man—to watch this man who had come from the unknown lands beyond. He was tall, slim, but he looked frail. Indeed, to the Arzacs, Nelson Lee was a mere pigmy.

And yet he was fighting as though he were a bigger giant than ever. His clothing in tatters, his face grimy and smeared with blood, he fought with amazing energy.

Time after time it seemed as though nothing in the world could save Nelson Lee from instant death. The giants were all round him—enemy and friend. It

was almost impossible to distinguish one from the other in the general melee.

Smithson and the other men were fighting, too, and they were doing wonders. The Arzacs were busy on all sides, using their hands mostly, although many of them possessed great clubs, which they wielded with terrific strength and determination.

And then Nelson Lee went down.

He had been struck by the fist of one of the mud men. The fellow had taken the great detective from behind, and Lee had not been able to turn in time to defend himself. He went down, and a terrific axe was whirled aloft.

Smithson uttered a shriek of warning, which was really a cry of terror. It seemed as though nothing could save Nelson Lee from destruction. The axe was wielded by a towering giant, and he was intent upon killing the detective in one blow.

But a black figure rushed forward, roaring at the top of his voice. It was Umlosi, and he grasped the mud man round the waist, whirled him aloft, as though he had been a mere child, and sent him flying over the battlements.

The giant went down like a stone, screaming wildly.

"Wau!" roared Umlosi. "This is indeed a fight, my master!"

Nelson Lee staggered to his feet, and gripped Umlosi's hand.

"Thanks, old man!" he said huskily.

"Nay, Umtagati, thou art wrong in thanking me!" said Umlosi. "It is just as well that I should—"

He got no further, for he found himself surrounded. And then Umlosi let himself go in a manner which was really astounding. Giant after giant he attacked, and every one of them went flying over into space—down to instant death. Umlosi was in his element now; he loved nothing better than a grim, gory fight. He was a warrior to the backbone, and this affair was absolutely to his liking.

His intervention had just come in time to turn the tide. The mud men were rather taken aback, and they had lost so many in this short encounter that they fell back on to their platform, momentarily terrified.

And then Nelson Lee got his machine-guns going again, and the fire he poured on to that platform was so terrible that it was impossible for any living being to remain there.

And just then Mr. Hudson came dashing along the wall, and he carried over his shoulder a heavy bag. The first officer of the Wanderer was looking rather a scarecrow, but he did not care.

"I've got bombs!" he shouted. "We'll soon deal with this tower, Mr. Lee!"

Boom! Boom!

Several of the bombs were thrown with deadly effect. The platform of the tower simply vanished into a thousand splinters, and the giants were carried down with the wreckage. Another tower was treated in the same way, and the fight at that point of the wall was for the moment over.

But the respite was only short.

Other towers were brought up, hundreds of other Ciri-Ok-Baks came charging into the fray. There was not a moment's rest for anybody. It was one deadly, breathless fight all along.

Nobody was allowed a breathing space. The battle was fiercer and fiercer with every moment that passed. And not only here, near the gateway, but in all other parts of the giant walls.

El Dorado was attacked from every quarter; the wonderful city was menaced on all sides. The place was besieged, and it was rapidly becoming a question as to whether El Dorado would be able to hold out.

Would the city fall?

It was utterly impossible to say, at that moment, which side was gaining the mastery. The battle was so fierce, and so confused, that no answer could be given. It was just a question of time.

And dawn was now breaking—daylight was coming!

And on the roof of the central building, the St. Frank's juniors were watching with interest and excitement. They could see everything—they could see the battle raging on the walls on every hand. And they could tell whether the tide was going in the favour of the Arzacs, or whether the Arzacs were getting overwhelmed.

So far it was seen that the defenders were holding the fortress. They were not giving way. In one or two places, perhaps, there were gaps, and the mud men were pouring through. But those gaps were soon closed up—at great expense, it is true—but they were closed.

And the fight proceeded with deadly intensity.

"My only hat!" panted Handforth. "What a battle!"

"It's terrible, dear old boys! It is simply appallin'!" exclaimed Sir Montio Tregellis-West. "The loss of life must be shockin'—it must really!"

"That can't be helped, Montio," I said. "What are these people to do? What can they do except defend their city? They know well enough that if these mud men get in everybody will be annihilated——"

"Yes, dear old fellow, I quite realise that," said Sir Montio. "An' the only thing is to defend the city—even if it means the loss of thousands of lives. I don't mind about these Ciri-Ok-Baks gettin' killed—they deserve it, begad! But it is awfully distressin' to think of the Arzacs going under!"

"It was awfully distressing to think of British Tommies going under in the Great War with Germany!" said Roginald Pitt smoothly. "But they went under, didn't they? Hundreds and thousands of them died for the dear old country—and they died like heroes. It's just the same here, Montio. If these men don't die, the mud men will get in, and then it will mean death for all!"

"I—I think it's absolutely mad!" exclaimed Fullwood, shivering visibly. "It's more than a joke—this is! I'm jolly sorry I came on this bally expedition!"

"Yes, I expect you are!" snapped Handforth. "You're sorry about anything that means a little danger for your beastly skin! You're a funk, Fullwood, that's what's the matter with you!"

Fullwood scowled.

"We didn't come out to Brazil to go through dangers of this sort!" he snarled. "When I get home I'm goin' to make a whole song about this beastly business——"

"Wait till you get home before you start talking in that way!" I interrupted grimly. "We may not ever get out of this place, Fullwood. If we do, you'll have to thank Lord Dorrimore with all your heart for having saved you from death. You miserable cad! If you can't talk anything better than that rubbish, you'd better hold your tongue!"

There was such an amount of contempt in my tone that Fullwood shrivelled up. He said no more. And Handforth who had already pushed back

his cuffs in order to give Fullwood a hiding turned away.

"He ain't worth touchin'!" he said disgustedly. "Hallo! That looks rather bad over there Nipper! Don't you see? The mud men are getting through!"

"My only hat!"

"Begad!"

"Where—where do you mean?" shouted Tommy Watson excitedly.

Handforth pointed, but it was quite unnecessary, for I had already seen. And he was quite right in what he said. There had been a grim struggle over towards our left, a good distance away from the main gates. And the Arzac had fallen back, many of them killed, and hundreds wounded. The mud men were pouring over the walls in a continuous stream, and at least three hundred of them were coming down the steps, and they were swarming into the city streets.

They had not been stopped—they had been allowed to come on—and once within the city it would be extremely difficult to deal with them. For most of the defenders were on the walls, and such a large party as this would drive all before it.

I looked down into the streets with sudden apprehension. For I could see that these invaders were all armed with heavy axes and great stakes of wood. They were coming along at the double shouting and yelling, and killing all before them.

"They won't last for long," I said. "The Arzacs will soon get up a counter-attack, and then these brutes will be wiped out. But what damage will they do first? That's the question. By jingo! Look there! They're making straight for the house where the girls are!"

"What!"

"My sister!" roared Tommy Watson. "She's in there! We must do something!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Handforth. "What can we do up here—like a set of giddy dummies? What can we do?"

"I don't know, Handy, but we've got to do something!" I interrupted grimly. "Don't you see? This invading force is going straight for the house where all the girls are in hiding. If once the doors are broken down, the girls and Lady Helen Tregellis-West and Miss Kerrigan will be killed on the spot! They will be done to death before we can take half-

a dozen breaths. We must do something, you chaps—we simply must!"

"But we can't fight that lot! There are hundreds of them!" gasped Reginald Pitt. "Oh, my goodness! This is terrible! Why don't the Arzacs come? Why don't they come and drive these brutes back? It will be too late soon! They are almost at the building already!"

I clenched my fists, and looked round desperately. My brain was working overtime. I was attempting to find some idea. I was trying to get hold of some scheme whereby it would be possible to defeat this attack of the mud men.

And I did get an idea—an idea which fairly made me gasp at first.

"The petrol!" I shouted hoarsely.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"The—the petrol!"

"Yes!" I roared. "Don't you remember? There's a tremendous great drum of petrol down behind one of these buildings, quite near by. The count brought it over from the yacht—he brought it in several journeys, evidently in preparation for further flight with the airship."

"Yes, we know the petrol's there!" exclaimed Tommy Watson impatiently.

"But how can that help us? What can we do with a drum of petrol, you ass?"

"We can do everything!" I replied. "Come on! There's not a second to waste!"

I dashed down from the roof, and the other juniors came rushing after me. They did not know what the plan was, but they did not care. They were tremendously excited to be in this business, and they badly wanted to take a hand in the fighting.

Here was our opportunity.

The Remove was taking part in the gigantic tussle!

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALL OF EL DORADO.

THE air was filled with strange noises, and as we streamed out of the building, into the wide streets, we could see hundreds of the savage mud men charging along towards the buildings in the immediate vicinity.

And it was quite certain that they were intent upon smashing down the doors of the house where the girls were seeking shelter.

"It couldn't be better!" I panted. "That petrol is just up here—at the end of this narrow street. The ground slopes, and all we have to do is to smash open that drum, and allow the petrol to pour down. It will rush down in a cascade, and the whole space in front of that building will be swamped with petrol."

"But petrol won't kill those rotters!" shouted Handforth.

"No; but it will drive them back!" I replied grimly.

"How, you ass?"

"We've only got to set a match to it——"

"You—you mean, set the petrol on fire!"

"Yes!" I replied promptly.

"Great Scott!"

"My only topper!"

"Great flying pancakes!" gasped Fatty Little. "But—but we shall set the buildings on fire!"

"No, we sha'n't!" I replied. "The petrol will only be in a thin sheet, and it will burn itself out before anything serious can happen. Besides, these buildings are all of stone, and there is nothing to catch alight. In any case, the situation is so desperate that we must take desperate measures in order to deal with it!"

There was not time to be lost in talking—every second was of value. And the whole crowd of us rushed up the narrow street, until we came to the spot where the great drum of petrol was standing. It had been brought from the yacht by the wily Count de Plessigny. Naturally, it had not been brought in one journey, for it was altogether too heavy for the airship to carry.

The count had brought the drum empty originally, and had then transported the petrol in small two gallon cans. Evidently he had required the cans for some other purpose, and so the petrol had been emptied into this one large drum.

"Lend a hand!" I shouted quickly.

The big drum was turned over on its side, and then the huge filler cap was removed. The petrol came surging out in a great cascade, and went running down the smooth-paved street towards

the front of the building—towards the spot where the invaders were attempting to smash down the doors.

I had got this idea because of that other affair—when we had smashed open the fountain basin in order to swamp the water down those steps. This was very much the same sort of thing—but vastly different.

And the situation really was very desperate.

This large band of mud men had gained admittance into the city, and they were quite alone—they had not been attacked by any Arzacs. Somehow or other they had been allowed to come in, and nobody had stopped them. And now they were wreaking their will upon the city, smashing everything they came to, and doing all the damage they could.

But this was not the worst. These giants were intent upon smashing into the building where the girls were seeking refuge.

Perhaps these invaders had seen faces at the windows, and they knew that enemies were within—they knew that if they smashed down the doors they would have plenty of people to slaughter.

And the petrol went charging down the slight hill, until it was pouring about the feet of the Ciri-Ok-Baks. The savages took no notice whatever of the spirit—they took it for water, perhaps, and did not trouble.

And then one of the juniors gave a shout, for it was seen that at least fifty of the enemy were coming up the street, rushing as hard as they could go.

"We've been spotted!" shouted Pitt. "My hat! Unless we do something quick we shall be overwhelmed!"

The petrol was nearly all out of the drum, and I decided to drop a match at once—there was no time to be lost, for, if we delayed too long, we should find ourselves taken by the mud men, and we should be killed on the spot.

"Look out!" I roared urgently. "Get back—all of you! Get back, you asses!"

"Mind how you do it, Nipper!" shouted Tommy Watson. "Unless you're careful that petrol will swamp you, and then you'll be killed——"

"Don't mind me!" I said. "I shall be all right—the wind is blowing down the hill, as it happens—and that's just as it should be!"

The juniors ran away, helter-skelter. And I took out a box of matches, ignited one, and then placed it to the ground, on the very extremity of the swirling petrol. As I did so I threw myself back with all my strength.

There was a terrific, blinding roar, and I felt a terrible wave of hot air pass over me, scorching my eyebrows, and causing my hair to singe. And I was half blinded by the terrible glare. One huge sheet of flame had shot down the street in a flash. It enveloped the buildings—it enveloped everything; and the mud men turned, shrieking with terror, and they rushed away as though they had suddenly become bereft of their senses.

Many of them were caught in the flames, and lay there—killed almost instantaneously.

The whole great building was surrounded by the sheet of roaring flame. It towered up to the skies, and licked at the walls. And the invaders went rushing away, shrieking and screaming at the top of their voices. And they ran right into the arms of a great party of Arzacs who had come in order to deal with these savages.

I don't know exactly what happened to the invaders; perhaps they were all killed, or taken prisoners. We had done our work, and we had done it well.

"Now we'll get back to our roof!" I panted. "Thank Heaven we were in time!"

"We've saved the girls, anyhow!" said Handforth, with great satisfaction. "My hat! That was a stunning idea of yours, Nipper!"

"It was the only thing to be done!" I said. "It may seem rather horrible on the face of it—it may seem awful to envelope those fellows in a blinding sheet of flame, but there was nothing else for it. And, in any case, they were killed on the spot—and it was not a bit worse than throwing bombs."

"Not so bad, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie. "Bombs will kill some, but others are mutilated horribly. All those who were caught by that petrol were killed. It was a quick death!"

Meanwhile, the battle round the walls was proceeding with feverish energy. There was not a moment of rest for anybody. It was one long struggle for supremacy on both sides.

The scene was one which almost staggered the senses, it was so appalling, yet so magnificent. Daylight had now come in full, and the sun was shining gloriously; it shone upon a scene which had never been seen by civilised eyes.

The city of El Dorado was besieged; the enemy was hammering at the walls, attempting to drive back the defenders—attempting to gain an entry into the city, so that they could wipe out every Arzac in the place.

Already there had been many casualties; hundreds had been killed, but the majority of the deaths had been on the Ciri-Ok-Baka's side.

The noise was tremendous. Clouds of smoke arose on all sides—smoke and dust. And the air was filled with the shrieks of the wounded and the yells of the fighters.

Nelson Lee was still holding his point with tenacity—and the same applies to Lord Dorrimore. They were doing fine, and the attackers had had no chance of gaining a footing on that section of the wall which was held by Lord Dorrimore and his party.

And, with the coming of day, the fighting grew more intense than ever—if such a thing was possible. There was no question of secrecy now—no surprise attacks on any portion of the walls.

It had resolved itself into a grim battle for supremacy—it was a battle which would go on until one side or the other proved itself to be the better.

As a spectacle, the fight was greater than anything the ordinary imagination could grasp.

The great towers, which had been placed in position against the walls of the city, were still there, and they were constantly being climbed by hundreds of the mud men. While others were defeated and sent crashing to the ground, still more of the enemy came pouring up, in order to keep on the battle.

There was not a moment's respite for anybody. Attackers and defenders were doing their utmost; they were fighting with every ounce of their energy, and with a fury and recklessness which was positively staggering.

In comparison with a modern battle, the loss of life was quite slight. The warfare of to-day, as the average person knows it, means a devastating fire from artillery, bombs thrown from flying aeroplanes overhead, raging fire from machine-guns.



1. With every ounce of his strength the great black warrior sent the heavy stone hurtling against the wall of the basin.

2. Boom-oom! There was a terrible, devastating explosion, which struck the air like a thousand thunderclaps.

All this, of course, was absent, with the exception of one or two isolated machine-guns which were in the hands of Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and the others.

The Arzacs themselves, for the main part, were fighting with their bare hands, or with the aid of stout wooden poles.

There were great ballistas, it is true, but these did not cause very much damage now that the daylight had come. The great stones which were thrown by these instruments of war could be seen, for, although the stones were thrown with great velocity, they could not be hidden from view, and when one came tearing through the air it was possible for the defenders to dodge, and to allow the missiles to go whirling past.

It was quite obvious that the mud men were being led in a certain kind of way—there was a generalship being displayed which was rather clever. The man in command of the operations knew what he was doing.

For example, there were many attacks being made against the city walls on the farther side, and it was quite clear that these attacks were only executed in order to draw large numbers of the Arzacs away from the main gates.

For it was here that the main attack was directed.

All the other attacks were merely engineered in order to keep the defenders busy.

The enemy was determined to enter the city, and the only way of entering was by means of the main gateway. Isolated parties might possibly be able to overthrow the Arzacs on the battlements, and these isolated parties would possibly get down into the city itself.

But no good would come of this; such parties would soon be attacked and rendered helpless. It was only by a tremendous drive that the Ciri-Ok-Baks would hope to conquer El Dorado, and that drive would have to come by means of the main gates.

Once these were conquered—once they were down—it would be quite easy for the enemy to pour through in one never-ending stream; they would be able to enter the city in triumph, and nothing in the world would stop them.

For those gates were hundreds of feet wide, and thousands of men could enter in one straight line. Furthermore, the

roadway immediately within the city was wide, and there would be no means of defending it; therefore, it was at the main gates that the most drastic attacks were made.

And Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were holding this section of the wall. They were menaced on every side, but they held out. Towers, ballistas, and other methods of warfare were adopted to break down the defence, but it was all useless. The mud men used hundreds of their warriors in order to gain their end, but they failed.

On one or two occasions, however, it was touch-and-go.

The towers were placed against the walls again and again, and they were filled with swarming giants, who threw themselves into the fray with a reckless abandon which was quite startling. Again and again these towers were pushed over. The Arzacs had provided themselves with long poles—tree trunks, in fact—and with these they did deadly havoc.

Fifty or a hundred men were placed on each pole, and then the poles were pushed against the towers, and the men heaved with all their strength. Nothing in the world could save the towers from destruction, for they were pushed outwards and outwards until they overbalanced.

Then, with terrible crashes, the gigantic structures went down, causing death and injury to hundreds of the enemy.

But there was another menace.

The Ciri-Ok-Baks had brought tree trunks of their own—not small ones, but huge, great, massive tree trunks, only capable of being handled by three or four hundred men.

And these vast battering rams were used in order to hammer against the great stone gates of the city. Nelson Lee was rather worried when this battering was continued in spite of all efforts to stop it.

"Upon my soul, Brett, they are tenacious beggars!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, turning to Dr. Brett, who was assisting the defence. "We are pouring a continued fire into their ranks, but they take no notice. As soon as the men go down their places are taken by others. They do not seem to care whether they live or die."

"They are so infernally excited that they hardly know what they are doing,"

said Dr. Brett. "I don't like these battering rams, Mr. Lee. Before long one of those stone gates will give way, and then——"

"We must try bomb-throwing—we must try everything!" interrupted Nelson Lee grimly. "If once these giants get through the gateway, there will be no holding them back; they will come through in one continuous stream, and they will defy all efforts or resistance. I tell you, Brett, we must hold them now, or we shall not hold them at all!"

Dr. Brett nodded.

"You are right, Mr. Lee—you are absolutely right!" he agreed. "But they are pouring up in thousands—they seem as keen as ever. And it makes no difference what we do; it makes no difference how many we kill; the ranks are filled again, and they come onwards."

Dr. Brett was quite right in what he said. It really made no difference what the defenders did to these savage giants. They were grimly determined to carry this battle through until they either succeeded, or until they were practically annihilated. It was indeed to be a battle to the death.

A great number of bombs were thrown, and these caused considerable havoc. The machine-guns kept up a hail of fire, and other methods were used. The Arzacs, for example, were standing on the battlements, and they were pitching down huge chunks of stone in a never-ceasing rain.

And it must not be supposed that the fighting was only going on at this one point—at the section of the wall near the gateway. The very opposite was the case.

The great battle was proceeding round the entire city. The Ciri-Ok-Baks were attacking on every hand, in thousands. They were scaling the walls in many places by means of the storming towers, and in many places they succeeded in getting through, but only small bands of them, so there was no real danger so far.

But the centre of the whole fight—the most important point in the whole operation—was at the gateway, for it was here that success or failure meant everything.

The battle continued without a moment's respite all through the morning. Nobody was allowed a second's

rest; it was one long fight, desperate and determined.

And at noon the Ciri-Ok-Baks made their greatest effort—an effort which was successful in many ways.

It might have been supposed that the attackers would become exhausted after such a long period of fighting—that they would be incapable of making any one special effort to force their way through into the city.

But this was wrong.

The mud men were grimly determined, and they were cleverly handled, for at noon it was seen that something special was taking place—some large operation was being put into practice, which demanded very special means to defeat it.

Reserves were brought up in great numbers—thousands of men who had not been in the fighting hitherto, and they came on with shouts of fury and excitement. There was no doubt that these men were brave—their bravery was of a type which could not be disregarded. They did not seem to know what danger was—they did not care.

Nelson Lee, who was watching intently, and with much anxiety, saw that at least thirty of the great storming towers were being brought forward. The huge mastodons were hauling the towers along, and it was obvious that a great concerted effort was being made.

At the same time other towers were being placed in position against the sections of the great wall further round the city. These thirty towers were being directed against the gateway—fifteen towers on either side—and they were operated so smartly, and placed against the wall with such rapidity, that it was impossible to stop them.

The machine-guns were barking viciously, rifles were spitting, and hundreds and hundreds of stones were being cast down.

But it made no difference.

The Ciri-Ok-Baks came on like a great flood. They swarmed up the towers in hundreds, they over-ran the walls, and the fighting became of a fierce nature.

Hand-to-hand encounters were in progress on all sides, and Nelson Lee and his own men were working as they had not worked before. It was one terrible rush—it was touch-and-go.

And, meanwhile, hundreds more of the enemy were down below at the

gates, with the battering rams, and they were pounding upon the great stone gateways with terrific energy.

Owing to this new attack from the towers, it was impossible to give full attention to the storming party at the gates. The Arzacs and Nelson Lee and the other members of Dorrie's party were compelled to use all their efforts to protect the wall. It was really a covering movement—these towers were only brought up so that the defenders would be compelled to give battle to them—and, meanwhile, the great gates were being battered down.

It was, without doubt, a clever manœuvre.

Nelson Lee, almost stripped, was fighting with a fury which amazed the Arzacs near by. Blood was streaming from his hands, from his face, and he was in a terrific perspiration. Grimy, smothered with dust and powder, he seemed to be a superhuman man. He fought desperately and with an energy which set a fine example to all the others.

And Umlosi, too, was in his element. The great Kutana chief was enjoying himself far more than he could express. This battle was absolutely to his liking. It was a grim tussle, and Umlosi had every opportunity of fighting in a manner after his own heart.

But, although they did such wonders—although they were working in a marvellous way, it was not sufficient.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

There was a sudden commotion, a terrific amount of noise, and clouds of dust arose. Nelson Lee, pausing for a moment in the battle, found himself unattacked. He had an opportunity of glancing down, and there he saw the Ciri-Ok-Baks pouring through the gateway in one continuous stream. They were shouting with triumph, they were yelling at the top of their voices, and they were driving the mastodons through into the city.

El Dorado had fallen!

The massive gates were down—they had been smashed to atoms, and the enemy was pouring through.

Nelson Lee bit his lip.

He knew what this meant. He was under no false impression regarding the terrific disaster which had occurred. The gates had not been held—the Ciri-Ok-

Baks had conquered! They were entering the city in their thousands.

Nelson Lee knew well enough that it would be utterly impossible for him and his companions to remain in their present position. Within fifteen minutes they would be completely encircled, and then would come the end. There would be no prisoners taken—every man of them would be killed on the spot by the savage giants who had invaded the city.

There was only one thing to be done.

"I'm afraid we're in a tight corner, Brett!" said Nelson Lee, breathing hard. "We must retreat!"

"Yes, I think you're right, Lee!" panted Dr. Brett. "It's the only thing to be done—unless we want to be killed!"

"We must retreat now, while we have time," said Nelson Lee. "It is absolutely hopeless to remain here, on this wall. These mud men have entered and they will soon be surrounding us. And then there will be no hope whatever. I detest retreating, but it must be done!"

"Yes, it's the only way——"

Crash! Crash!

Two of the great towers were sent toppling over, and they fell amid the shrieks and cries of those attackers who were upon them.

The confusion was tremendous. It was the height of the battle now, and it was impossible for the defenders to know exactly what was happening. But it was known by all near the gates that a retreat must be made. And so, much as it went against Nelson Lee's grain to do so, he fell back.

He and his men, carrying their machine guns and ammunition, descended from the wall, and then they took up their position in the main streets, a considerable distance from the gateway. Here, ambushed by tall buildings, they were determined to send a devastating fire into the mud men as they approached.

Happily, there was only one way of entering the city now. The great gateway led on to a wide road, which passed straight through the city into the central square.

There were no side turnings in this road—the buildings were flush on either side, forming a great avenue. Thus it was impossible for the invaders to spread out on either side. They must come along that one roadway—they must

charge straight through into the centre of the city.

And so there was just a slight possibility of the road being held. But Nelson Lee was doubtful. Even with all those machine guns, he knew that it would not be possible to check the advance.

Hundreds of the enemy would fall—but thousands would get through. And that was just the position. El Dorado had fallen, and the position seemed hopeless. What was to be done? Nelson Lee was rather desperate, and he was looking anxious and pale.

If something could be done to stop that advance all might yet be well. But would it be possible? How could the mud men be held back? They were through the gateway, and they were pouring into the city.

In any case, if they were to be stopped, not a second was to be lost. And as Nelson Lee stood there, with clenched fists, waiting for the onslaught, he suddenly found a slim figure beside him. That figure belonged to me. I had come up, knowing full well what had occurred, and I was terribly anxious.

"Guv'nor!" I gasped, "it's no good stopping here, you'll be overwhelmed in less than ten minutes! You'd better come back, and take up a position in one of the buildings——"

"Why have you come, Nipper?" demanded the guv'nor curtly. "Go back—there is danger here!"

"I know there is danger, sir, that's why I've come!" I said huskily. "You've got to retreat, sir. It's no good! The mud men are in the city, and we shall all be overwhelmed unless we do something!"

"I am well aware of the truth, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But I am remaining here. There is just a chance that with our machine guns we can hold the advance back. See! The invaders are already coming along this wide street, and they are coming in one solid body!"

"It's impossible to hold them back, sir!" I gasped. "If we only had some more petrol we might be able to do it!"

"Some more petrol?" put in Dr. Brett sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, out with it, young 'un!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

I looked at them with intense admira-

tion. They were all there, for they had all retreated from the wall at the same time. And now they were waiting here, determined to fight to the last rather than let the Ciri-Ok-Baks swarm into the city.

"Yes, the petrol!" I exclaimed. "Didn't you see what we did an hour or two ago?"

"No, I do not understand you!" said Nelson Lee.

It did not take me more than two minutes to explain what had occurred. How we had descended from our building, and how we had driven the small invading party of mud men back by setting fire to the petrol. Nelson Lee was impressed, and he patted me on the shoulder.

"It was a splendid idea, Nipper!" he declared. "And, as you say, it would be fine if we could find some more petrol. But there is none. However, it would require a much larger—— By James!"

"What's the matter, sir?" I asked sharply.

Nelson Lee did not reply. There was a queer light in his eyes—a light which gleamed and burned. And I knew he had got an idea. I knew that Nelson Lee was thinking of something, probably some desperate expedient. He looked at me, and his fists were clenched. "There is just one chance, Nipper!" he exclaimed tensely. "That talk of the petrol has put something into my head. There is just a chance, I tell you, but we must not lose a fraction of a second!"

"But—but what's the idea, sir?" I gasped.

"Come," said Nelson Lee, "I will tell you!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

COLONEL KERRIGAN, dusty, grimy, and perspiring, joined us a moment later.

"I'm afraid the worst has happened, Mr. Lee," he said huskily. "The brutes are in, and there will be no stopping them now! It won't be long before the end comes!"

"We mustn't give up hope just yet, colonel," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I know the position is bad—in fact, it is appalling, but there is just one chance

that we shall be able to frustrate the mud men after all."

The colonel shook his head.

"I don't see it, Mr. Lee," he said. "They are here in overwhelming numbers—they have brought every man in the whole race, and every boy, too, I believe. There are still thousands of them on the walls, and the Arzacs are compelled to remain there in order to hold them in check. And, meanwhile, the greater portion of the invading army will enter by the gateway, and they will take the Arzacs in the rear, and then—well, I leave you to imagine what will happen."

"I think there is a chance, as I have just said!" exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly. "And, as it happens, colonel, you are the very man I wanted to see above all others."

"I am gratified," said Kerrigan, with a faint smile.

"I will explain myself," went on Nelson Lee. "You were telling me a day or two back, of this wonderful lighting gas which supplies El Dorado with illumination."

"Yes," said the colonel.

"I think you told me that the gas was natural, and that the Arzacs have succeeded in harnessing it, and thus supplying the city?"

"That is quite correct," said Colonel Kerrigan. "But why should we discuss that question now, Mr. Lee, with all this danger on hand? Upon my soul, I do not see the idea——"

Crash!

A great stone fell to the road, only fifty yards away, splintering into a thousand fragments, and sending splinters flying in every direction.

"It doesn't seem particularly safe here," I remarked. "I can't understand what you mean, gov'nor. What's the idea? What's the wheeze? How on earth are we going to——"

"My dear Nipper, you are wasting time by asking all those questions," interrupted Nelson Lee. "You must simply stand there and listen—and do not interrupt. Colonel, I want you to tell me about that gas. I think I understood you to say that, a day or two back, that the Arzacs had laid tremendous pipes under the city, along the tunnels which abound underground."

The colonel nodded.

"That is quite correct, Mr. Lee," he said. "The source of this gas is a great natural fissure, just outside the city. The gas roars out of that fissure at a tremendous velocity, and it has never been known to decrease in power. The Arzacs have succeeded in conducting this gas along specially laid pipes, and thus to the pillars which we see all over the city. You will probably have noticed that the lights are burning constantly—day and night. This is necessary, the gas is always coming, and cannot be stored."

"Yes, I have observed that," said Nelson Lee. "You said something about an old supply pipe which was dis-used——"

"Yes, exactly," said the colonel. "Many years ago these pipes were laid in a different way, but it was proved unsuccessful, for there were many leakages. It was soon after I arrived in El Dorado that the Arzacs laid the fresh pipes down, and altered the whole system. The old pipe runs almost beneath this very road, as a matter of fact, and there is a gaping hole just near the main gateway. The gas was in the habit of escaping there, and it caused deadly havoc to those people who were constantly coming in and going out of the city."

"That is just my idea!" said Nelson Lee keenly. "Is it possible to divert this gas, colonel?"

"To divert it?"

"Yes."

"But I don't quite understand——"

"I think you will in a moment," interrupted Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you see? If we can only divert this gas back into its old piping, it will run straight along, and there will be large escapes of the vapour through holes near the gateway——"

"Large escapes!" shouted the colonel. "Why, man alive, that pipe is riddled—the gas would simply pour out in one terrific volume, enveloping the whole street——"

"My only hat!" I roared. "I can see the idea now!"

"Precisely!" agreed Nelson Lee. "If we can only divert this gas, colonel, it will rush along the old pipe, and it will come out in a tremendous stream near the gateway, enveloping the street, as you say. These Ciri-Ok-Baks will be overwhelmed by the gas fumes, and they

will be unable to pass. They will be unable to make their advance along the street, and so——"

"By heavens! It is a magnificent scheme!" exclaimed Colonel Kerrigan, his face suddenly flushing. "Your idea, Mr. Lee, is the finest one that could possibly have occurred to anybody. Yes! The gas can be diverted!"

"Hurrah!" I roared.

"It can be diverted with the greatest ease!" went on the colonel excitedly. "Come with me! I will show you!"

Colonel Kerrigan turned abruptly on his heels, and ran with all speed down the great street, until, at length, he came to a tall building. Into this he plunged, and we soon found that it had been converted into a kind of hospital. Here there was a great number of wounded Arzacs, being cared for by their women folk. The place, in fact, was filled to overflowing with the injured.

But we could not stop to even look at them.

We dashed on, following the colonel, until at length he turned into another doorway, and then plunged down many steps. At last we found ourselves in a wide tunnel, and the colonel was hurrying along with all speed.

"Where are we making for, sir?" I panted as I ran.

"I don't know, Nipper!" replied Lee. "But the colonel is not leading us on a fool's errand—you can be quite sure of that."

A few minutes more elapsed, and then Colonel Kerrigan came to a halt. The tunnel was quite light, for here and there, against the walls, there were tiny burners, and these burners were supplied with strange orange-coloured lights. We were almost in daylight—for the illumination was so brilliant.

The colonel halted against a terrific stone structure, with many levers near it. Away to our left stretched a square sectional tunnel, but not large enough to admit the passage of a human being. The colonel pointed, and he was breathing hard.

"You see?" he exclaimed. "This is the spot where the gas was originally diverted. At one time it passed along this square tunnel, Mr. Lee, but was then altered until it now goes straight ahead, as you will observe."

"I don't understand," I said, looking puzzled.

"Yet it is quite simple," went on the colonel. "This great stone door is really the end of the gas pipe. If we swing this door round, the gas will be immediately diverted into this other square tunnel—and thus it will roll along and find its exit near the gateway as you have suggested. It will put out all the lights in the city, but that does not matter a toss—since the sun is shining. And by to-night we can divert the gas back to its original course."

"But we shall get smothered while we are doing it, sir," I protested.

"No, Nipper; the arrangement is very cunningly contrived," said the colonel.

"The Arzacs were prepared, in case of emergency, to divert the gas to the old pipe. And so this door is on a sliding principal. It simply moves along, and no gas is allowed to come out in our direction. But if we shift this door eight feet to the right, the present pipes will be closed, and the old one reopened. If you will examine the structure you will understand exactly what I mean."

I was too excited to examine anything. I was fairly dancing with impatience, and I urged the colonel to be quick about the alteration. But this was rather a difficult task, for the stone sliding-door worked slowly. It required the united efforts of the three of us to shift it at all.

But, gradually, inch by inch, we succeeded in moving the door. And then, when we were about halfway through the task, we found that the lights in our tunnel were becoming dim.

"Good," panted the colonel, as he worked. "You see it? The pressure is already decreasing, and that means that a great portion of the gas is going along this disused tunnel. In another minute or two these lights will be extinguished completely."

The colonel was right.

After we had pulled at the door for another three minutes we succeeded in getting it right over. And by then we were in total darkness. The gas had been diverted, as Nelson Lee had planned.

We did not waste any time, although we were almost dropping with exhaustion after our efforts. We wanted to get out into the open—we wanted to see what the result of this experiment would be.

It was necessary to grope our way

back, for we were in total darkness, and we did not carry any matches on us. But, at length, we arrived at the end of the tunnel, and we once more found ourselves in the building which had been transformed into a hospital.

We hurried through, and emerged into the open street. Then we rushed along, towards the main gateway, back to the spot where Lord Dorrimore and Captain Burton and Mr. Hudson were all waiting with the machine guns—waiting to pour a devastating fire into the Ciri-Ok-Baks when they advanced towards the centre of the town.

So far nothing had happened of an extraordinary nature. The sounds of strife were still coming from every hand, and, although we were in comparative quiet, it was quite clear that the battle was progressing with ever increasing fury.

I glanced round me with great interest.

There, on the tops of the great walls, hundreds of grappling figures could be seen—clear cut against the sky-line. Gigantic figures, battling fiercely.

Great stones were coming over into the city with a regularity which was rather disconcerting. They fell in every direction, cracking to the ground, and splintering into fragments.

And there, along the great main highway, a vast number of the enemy were pouring, many of the mastodons being with them. The idea, apparently, was to drive a thick wedge right into the centre of the city.

We arrived back at the ambush without being harmed, and now we were extremely anxious—for we had seen no results of our experiment—except for the one fact that all the lights on the great pillars had been extinguished.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Lord Dorrimore as we came up. "The position is still the same, as far as I can see."

"Wait!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "Don't you see? Ah! There is already confusion among the ranks of the enemy. Colonel, I think our plan has succeeded. I am sure that the effect will be stupendous!"

Nelson Lee was staring down the great, broad street towards the gateway. Coming along that street were thousands of the mud men, and they were all carrying great stone axes and heavy chunks

of wood. They were determined to push straight forward, and to capture the city.

But, in the rear, and quite near to the gateway, where the Ciri-Ok-Baks were pouring in in one continuous stream, there seemed to be a confusion. Men were staggering, the mastodons were getting out of hand, and there was a tremendous commotion.

Shouts and yells filled the air, and I knew only too well what it meant. I knew why those men were staggering—I knew why the mastodons were becoming maddened.

The gas was affecting them! The gas, pouring up from the roadway, was poisoning the atmosphere.

And then something of rather an appalling nature took place.

Over to our left, Captain Burton was firing busily with two machine-guns, and he was pouring a terrific fire into the ranks of the enemy. I don't exactly know how it happened, but I expect some of those bullets struck the marble, and caused sparks. Or it might have been the sun, or some other reason.

But it made little difference.

The effect was there—and it was such an effect that I can hardly find words adequate enough to describe what followed.

Boom-oom!

There was a terrible, devastating explosion, which struck the air like a thousand thunder-claps rolled into one. I had a dim, momentary vision of a great, blinding sheet of flame roaring up from the roadway to a height of a thousand feet. It simply blotted out the whole atmosphere for that one second.

And then I was flung backwards by the terrible concussion which came along the street. I struck the ground, and rolled over and over, picking myself up considerably dazed.

On all sides other figures had fallen—had been flung. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were together in one heap, with Colonel Kerrigan close by.

A terrible sound filled our ears—the yells and shrieks of wounded men, cries of utter terror, and Heaven only knows what else. Buildings on all sides had tottered, cracks were appearing, and the air was filled with dust and terrific clouds of smoke.

And there, right in front of us, rose a great wall of flame—further along the

streets, and near to the main gateway. This wall of flame rose into the air to a height of about three hundred feet, and it was making such a noise that it was utterly impossible to hear oneself speak. It was a roar—a terrific roar which blotted out every other sound.

"Great heavens!" I gasped. "What—what has happened?"

"The gas!" said Colonel Kerrigan huskily. "It exploded!"

"By the Lord Harry!"

Yes, that was the truth of it. The gas, pouring out from the broken paving stones of the road, had somehow become ignited, and after that one terrific explosion the gas, being alight, was roaring up in a terrific flame from the road.

And that flame barred the way—it made it impossible for anybody to enter the city by means of the main gates—and it made it equally impossible for anybody to leave.

The result was staggering.

It was far greater than we had even hoped for, for one moment's thought told me what it actually meant. The mud men were prevented from entering as they had planned, and those who had succeeded in getting into the city were unable to retreat. A great number of the enemy were trapped—hopelessly trapped!

And every ounce of fight had been knocked out of them. They were too terrified by that terrible explosion to fight any more. They ran helter-skelter in every direction, screaming and yelling and waving their hands. They fell easy prisoners, and at least seven hundred of them were captured, and rendered helpless.

The other Ciri-Ok-Baks, who were already entering the city, were compelled to fall back in confusion. The mastodons ran riot, and they alone caused terrible havoc among the ranks of the enemy.

Hundreds and hundreds of the mud men had been killed outright by that explosion—they had been blown to atoms.

And on the walls of the city the effect of this disaster was soon felt. The mud men there knew well enough that disaster had occurred—that their comrades had not succeeded in getting through as they had hoped. It was known through the whole city in less than five minutes that the enemy had been beaten—that they were being

driven back, and that the battle had been won.

There was not the slightest doubt with regard to this.

Not so long before El Dorado had fallen—El Dorado had been entered, and the enemy had had every right to assume that they had won the day. But this affair had altered the whole aspect of the case. This deadly explosion had caused confusion among the Ciri-Ok-Baks, to say nothing of hundreds of deaths.

And the way was barred!

That was the main thing—that was the point which was more important than anything else. The way was barred! The great gates had been beaten down, but it was still impossible for the enemy to enter the city. The great sheet of flame, rising up from the roadway, made it utterly out of the question for any enemy to pass.

There was danger of fire, of course—a great danger. Many of the buildings, in fact, were already blazing.

But what did this matter?

Even if fifty buildings were destroyed, it would be a very light loss, compared to what might have happened, for, but for that explosion, the Ciri-Ok-Baks would have won—they would have taken the city completely, and every soul would have been destroyed.

Outside the main gateway there was terrific confusion. The enemy was falling back in utter rout. They had failed, and this failure soon made itself known throughout the entire forces of the enemy.

It echoed round the city walls, and the Ciri-Ok-Baks lost heart. They fell easy victims to the determined Arzacs.

And that last half-hour of the battle was the most deadly of all.

The great storming towers were sent crashing over one after another, carrying with them hundreds of the enemy.

And, finally, the Arzacs made certain of their victory.

They poured out of the city in terrific numbers, by means of the smaller gateways—which, of course, could be easily held. And now there was no danger in venturing out.

For the enemy was routed—the enemy had no fight left in him, and the Arzacs gave chase. They had got the enemy on the run, and they were triumphant. It was a fine ending to the battle—a tremendously great conclusion.

The Arzacs had won—they had de-

londed their city to the last, and they had beaten back the savage giants who had attempted to bring about the overthrow of El Dorado.

But nothing could get over the one fact—the fact which stood out beyond all others. This victory had been brought about solely because of Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and every other member of our party.

The Arzacs, left to themselves, would have been beaten—they would have been wiped completely off the face of the earth. It was we who had saved the day—and the Arzacs were well aware of this fact!

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEROES OF THE HOUR.

"HURRAH!"

The Remove fellows came swarming down from the top of the building where they had been imprisoned, and now they rushed into the streets, shouting and waving their caps wildly. They had been able to see everything from the roof—they had seen that the enemy had been routed, and that victory had come to the defenders.

"They're beaten!" roared Handforth.

"They're whacked!"

"Hurrah!"

"It was touch and go, though!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt. "I thought we were all going to be wiped up not less than an hour ago. It was that terrific explosion which turned the tide! I wonder how it happened?"

"Well, I'll bet it wasn't an accident!" said Tommy Watson. "It was done deliberately, or I'll eat my hat!"

Fatty Little came puffing up.

"What's that about eating?" he asked anxiously.

"I was only talking about eating my hat, you ass!" grinned Watson.

"Oh, that ain't any good!" said Fatty. "I was just wondering when we should get some more grub! I'm starving, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't had anything to eat since last night!" exclaimed Fatty, in a horrified voice. "Just think of it! Last

night, you know! That's hours and hours ago! I don't know how I've survived—but there's been so much excitement that I forgot all about eating——"

Handforth staggered.

"You—you forgot?" he gasped.

"Yes, you ass!"

"It ain't possible!" said Handforth faintly. "It ain't possible for you to forget about grub, Fatty! Why, if there were volcanoes and earthquakes and tornadoes raging, you'd remember your grub! We're all feeling a bit peckish, but we must wait a little longer. There's too much confusion now to——"

"Hallo, you chaps!" I exclaimed, rushing along. "What do you think of it?"

"Grand!" said Pitt. "These rotters are completely whacked!"

"Yes, thanks to the gov'nor!" I said.

"Mr. Lee?"

"Yes—it was he who saved the city!" I replied, with pride. "Didn't you see that explosion—don't you see that terrific wall of flame over there?"

"Yes—what about it?"

"It was the gov'nor's idea to divert the gas, and to use it to stop the enemy," I said. "But Mr. Lee didn't think of the possibility of the gas exploding—that was more or less an accident. But it's a good thing it happened, because it has finally clinched the matter. The enemy is routed, my sons, and he is fleeing in the utmost disorder, after suffering terrible losses."

"Hurrah!"

"Good egg!" said Fatty. "But I'm just wondering about some grub!"

"Well, boys, thank goodness it is all over!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, coming up at that moment. "We have succeeded, and El Dorado is safe."

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!" roared somebody.

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

The cheers were given with a terrific gusto.

"Three cheers for Lord Dorrimore!"

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for everybody!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were so excited and so light-hearted that they cheered at anything. They rushed about with flushed faces, doing anything they possibly could to assist. But the battle was over now—it was completely finished.

Only a few Ciri-Ok-Baks remained in

the city, and these were our prisoners. The others were fleeing before the victorious Arzacs—they were being chased back to their own valley, and it was quite certain that El Dorado would not be troubled by another attack for many, many years to come. This affair had been a lesson to the savage mud men, which they would not forget for generations.

"It reminds me of the Germans, you know," said Handforth. "They thought they were capable of beating the whole giddy earth, and they started a terrific war; but they found that they'd bitten off more than they could chew, and they had to retreat, with their tails between their legs! It's just the same in this case, only on a tiny scale!"

Almost immediately afterwards we were extremely gratified to see Lady Helen Tregellis-West and the girls come hurrying out of a building near by. They were accompanied by the stewardesses from the yacht, and all the other lady members of the party. And there were a good many Arzac women, too.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed Violet Watson, rushing up to her brother. "Wasn't it simply dreadful?"

"It was glorious!" said Watson.

"Oh, you wicked boy!" said Violet, her pretty face flushed, and her eyes gleaming. "It was dreadful—it was awful! But we have won—and that is everything. Oh, I was terribly frightened at first; I didn't know what I was doing!"

"Oh, well, girls can't be expected to show bravery in a battle," said Tommy Watson, with a superior air. "There's been a heap of excitement, but it's all over now—and I'm not sure that you ought to be out here, sis."

"Why not, Tom?"

"Because there are some horrible sights to see!" said Watson. "All the bodies haven't been cleared away yet, and there is blood lying about in pools, and——"

"You—you awful boy!" exclaimed Ethel Church. "Don't talk like that, please!"

But it was the truth, nevertheless. There were many bodies lying about the streets, but not in this immediate vicinity. They were mainly near the gates, and at the foot of the walls. The centre of the city, where we were stand-

ing, was quite clear and untouched. The fighting had not penetrated to this point.

The girls were not allowed to remain out for long. They were soon taken back into their place of safety, and then food was brought to them. Food was also brought to the juniors, and they were rather glad of it, for they were tremendously hungry. Fatty Little absolutely surpassed himself. He demolished more food than he had ever been known to demolish during one meal before.

Confusion reigned throughout the afternoon—and this was only to be expected.

There was much to clear up—there was a great deal to be done.

The great sheet of flame which had barred the main gateway of the city was soon extinguished. It had easily been done, by simply shifting the great sliding door back to its original position, and thus diverting the gas on to its proper course once more. Then the hundreds and hundreds of burners had to be ignited throughout the city—otherwise the gas was going to waste, and blowing down, and poisoning the atmosphere.

But it was all accomplished by the evening. And by that time, too, the victorious Arzac army had returned—after inflicting terrible punishment upon the mud men. The Ciri-Ok-Baks, in fact, had been defeated utterly and completely. Their effectives had been reduced to about one-third of their original strength, and the possibility of a second attack was absolutely nil. It was, in fact, out of the question for the mud men to make any further attempt to bring about the fall of El Dorado.

Men were working at double pressure throughout the afternoon and throughout the evening. The city was being cleared up—the marks of the fighting were being eradicated.

And this was a long task.

Lord Dorrimore's party had collected together once more, and Nelson Lee was looking quite clean and fresh—with one or two bandages, and portions of plaster. Dorrie himself had hardly been touched, and he was extremely cheerful and light hearted. Umlosi, however, was suffering from several deep gashes, and he presented a somewhat remarkable appearance with his great patches of plaster, and his many bandages. But Umlosi was happy—he had received those wounds

in battle, and for every wound on his person, he had killed a dozen of the enemy.

"Wau, O Nimble One!" rumbled Umlosi, into my ear. "Was it not a great fight?"

"It was!" I replied.

"Was it not glorious—was it not a fight which a man could revel in?" demanded Umlosi.

"It was!" I said, in a solemn voice.

"Thou art surely right, O Manzie!" said Umlosi. "It was a fight such as I have never had the pleasure of being in before. Wau! It was a battle of men—a battle of giants. I would not have missed this day's work for my kingdom, even!"

"I wonder what has become of the Comte de Plessigny?" put in Lord Dorrimore, strolling up. "We haven't seen anythin' of him during the whole day—not since the fight started. I don't suppose the beggar is in the city at all!"

"My dear Dorrie, surely you know what happened?" asked Nelson Lee. "The count escaped in the airship—he went right away over the swamp—and I judge he has returned to the Majarra. It is very doubtful if we shall see anything of him again."

"Oh, so that's the game, is it?" said Dorrie calmly. "The blighter not only pinched my yacht, but he's pinched the airship, and he's taken it away. If you ask me, old man, we're in a pretty kettle of fish!"

"Hush, Dorrie!" said Lee, quietly. "There is no need to talk of our own troubles just now. Let us get over this excitement first."

Dorrie nodded, and said no more.

But it was quite true that the Comte de Plessigny had escaped in the airship. As soon as he discovered that he had failed—as soon as he found out that his plans had gone completely wrong—he fled from the city. He fled away in the airship, and it was highly probable that he would never return. For the count knew only too well that once he was seized by the Arzacs, he would receive no mercy.

He had betrayed them—and they knew it. Therefore, death would be his reward if ever he descended in El Dorado again.

The Arzacs were grateful to us—their gratitude, in fact, was not able to be

expressed. They did not know what to do to show us how they honoured us—they did not know how to act in order to prove that they were our slaves—and that we were worth it.

Colonel Kerrigan, of course, was able to speak the Arzac language, and it was to him that the chiefs of the race expressed their feelings. They were very flowery in their words, and they invited us to remain in El Dorado for the remainder of our lives. They wanted us to be there—they wanted to honour us to the fullest extent of their power.

And the next day, after we had had a long, welcome sleep, there was a tremendous feast in our honour. It was a feast which really surpassed that original feast by far.

For now we were the guests—and not the prisoners.

But, although we enjoyed ourselves—although we appreciated everything that was being done by our host—we could not help feeling uneasy.

For we knew that the count had gone, and he had taken the airship with him. There was no means of getting back to civilisation. We were in El Dorado—we were imprisoned in their country, for there was no way out of it.

And, during that feast, the juniors could not help discussing the subject. Everything was gay around them. The feast of victory was a tremendous affair, and the Arzacs were letting themselves go in a manner which surprised even themselves.

"Well, it's all very well, you chaps," said Handforth. "But what's to become of us? That's what I want to know."

"We're all right!" said Fatty Little attacking a pineapple. "What's wrong with this?"

"I'm not thinking of the minute—I'm not thinking of to-day!" said Handforth. "How are we going to get back to England? What about the new term?"

"Bother the new term!" said Fatty.

"I suppose you want to see your pater again, don't you?" asked Pitt.

"Well, rather!" said Fatty Little. "Of course I want to see the pater again. Don't talk rot!"

"Well, it seems very probable that you won't see your pater again!" said Handforth. "Don't you realise, you ass, that we are imprisoned in El Dorado?"

"Rats! We're guests now!"

"Yes, we are the guests of the Arzacs—I'll admit that!" said Handy. "But how are we going to get out? The battle is over now, and the excitement is over. And we can think of our position with clear heads. And I'm in a blue funk—I don't mind admitting it."

"Same here, Handy!" said Pitt.

"We're all in the same hold, mess-mates," put in Tom Burton. "Souise me! I don't know what's going to happen, and I don't know how we shall ever cross that swamp. The airship has gone, and we can't use it. We're all in this country, and there's no way of getting out of it. Swab my maindecks! We're in a pretty tight hole, if you ask me!"

"Who's talking about holes?" inquired Lord Dorrimore strolling up.

"We are, sir!" said Pitt. "We're in a frightful hole. We can't get out of this country now, and it seems that we shall be compelled to remain here for the rest of our lives!"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"Don't you believe it!" he said calmly.

"Why, have you got any plan, sir?"

"Not a bit of one—not a ghost of a plan," said Dorrie. "But Umlosi has been seein' things in his dreams again—he's been seein' red mists, and all that sort of rot, an' he declares quite positively that we're goin' to have a terrific lot more excitement yet—that there'll be floods, an' fire, an' goodness knows what else. An' ultimately, we shall get back to the Majarra, an' to the dear old Wanderer!"

"Oh! Umlosi says that, does he?" I said slowly. "I wonder what it means, Dorrie?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Well, there's no sense in worrying," I went on. "All we can do is to hang tight and wait for something to happen. Personally, I can't possibly believe that the situation is hopeless—that we shall never be able to get away. Surely we can do something—surely we can find a means of crossing that swamp again!"

I tried to speak cheerfully, but I think I failed. For, although I spoke with hope in my voice, there was no hope in my breast.

And when I thought of the position, I grew solemn.

There was a big responsibility resting on the shoulders of Nelson Lee and Lord

Dorrimore. We were all here—all the St. Frank's fellows, all the girls, and the entire yacht's crew. Lord Dorrimore was really responsible for our safety, and if we were compelled to remain in El Dorado it would be terrible.

It was all very well to remain in that wonderful city for a time—to stay there in order to see the sights, and to enjoy ourselves. But the thought of being compelled to stay—to stay until we were old men and old women—well, that rather took the pleasure out of it.

Umlosi was really the only cheerful one among the lot of us. He simply would not accept the view that we were doomed to remain in this strange land.

He was convinced that we should be able to escape—and that we should escape very shortly. How, he did not know. When pressed for information, Umlosi could say nothing.

And while we were talking there, Colonel Kerrigan was in deep conversation with three members of the Arzac race—the three chief men of the Government—for, of course, El Dorado had its own Government, in a way.

The colonel was in conversation with these giants for some time, and, at last, he came away and joined us.

"I have been asking the Arzacs if there is any possibility of getting away," he said quietly. "I'm afraid that nothing can be done."

"Nothing at all, colonel?" asked Dorrie.

"No, Lord Dorrimore. I have questioned the giants closely with regard to the swamp," went on the colonel. "I have asked them if there is any known method of getting over—if there is any channel by which we might possibly be able to reach the outside world."

"And there is nothing?"

"Nothing at all," said the colonel. "The swamp extends entirely round this country, and it is a swamp which is poisonous and deadly. The Arzacs themselves have attempted time after time to penetrate—they have tried to get through, in order to find out what lays beyond. But every one of their attempts have been failures, and they have been compelled to give it up as hopeless."

"That seems very cheerful!" said Lord Dorrimore. "The airship has gone, and we can't cross the swamp on foot—

so what is there to be done? We've got to remain here—we've got to wait here until somebody comes along by air in order to find out where we are. That may be six months—it may be in six years—or it may be in sixty!"

"Oh, my only hat!" said Tommy Watson. "Then we're in an awful pickle!"

"It seems like it, my lad!" said Dorrie. "But there's no need to give up hope. There may not be any channel through this swamp, and there may not be any airships handy. But I absolutely refuse to give up the thing as hopeless. If there's not one way, we'll find another. And if the other way doesn't succeed, we can use our efforts in still a different direction. All we can do is to go on—trying, trying, trying. In the end we shall probably succeed. But one thing is certain—we must get out of this country—we must return to civilisation."

"You are right, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee grimly. "We have had plenty of excitement in El Dorado, and we have many marvellous stories to take back with us to England. And we must return—that is absolutely essential. We cannot remain in this country all our lives!"

And that was the spirit which was likely to help us very considerably.

We were determined—every one of us—to escape from El Dorado. We were absolutely fixed in mind that we were going to get out of this country, and that we were going to return to civilisation.

If we had given up the thing as hopeless, we might not have done anything at all. We might have remained there for good.

But we were never hopeless for one moment. It was taken for granted that we should escape—that we should defeat that swamp. And so we set our wits

to work—or, to be more exact, Nelson Lee set his wits to work, for he was the brains of the party. It was up to him to suggest a way out, and it was up to us to help him to carry out his scheme.

But what that scheme was we did not know—Nelson Lee himself did not know.

The battle of the giants was over, and it had resulted in complete victory for the Arzacs—our true friends. For the inhabitants of El Dorado were now on the best of terms with us—they worshipped us in a manner which could plainly be seen. They were overwhelmed with gratitude, for they knew well enough that it was owing to our assistance that the city had been saved from the savage Ciri-Ok-Baks.

But now this excitement was over.

The next thing on the programme was to find a method of getting back to the Majarra—to the yacht. And we placed our faith in Nelson Lee. We were quite satisfied that the gov'nor would be able to do something—although, on the face of it, it looked absolutely impossible.

As events turned out, it was not left entirely in Nelson Lee's hands. The events which took place very shortly after that battle were so startling and so utterly unexpected that we were all amazed and staggered.

And it must not be supposed that we had finished with the Comte de Plessigny.

We had not!

That base scoundrel had departed from El Dorado, but he was filled with anger and fury at the manner in which he had been defeated. And, if the count could do anything to destroy every one of us, he would do it. So, we had not finished with the Comte de Plessigny.

And we were very shortly to find out that the count was as active and as cunning as ever!

THE END.

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THREE BOYS IN CANADA

By S. S. GORDON

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

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by ruffians. After several adventures the lads eventually capture the villains and hand them over to Tall Wolf, chief of a band of Red Indians. But the ruffians escape, and the three lads realise that no time must be lost in getting to the gold mine at Dead Breed Lake. They meet the ruffians and, after a fight, in which both are wounded, take them prisoners again. It is arranged that Teddy shall guard the prisoners while Jack and Gerald proceed to Dead Breed Lake, where, in the following chapter, it will be told how they unexpectedly found untold wealth.

(Now read on.)

Dead Breed Lake.

TWO very hard days' paddling followed for Jack Royce and Gerald Telford. But nothing much beyond the grueling work happened. It was late evening of the second day after leaving Teddy with the prisoners that, after the canoe had travelled swiftly for some miles down a river that was lined at either side by towering, rocky banks, the frail craft suddenly ran into much stiller water than that of the Little Slave.

Then they knew they were in Dead Breed Lake at last.

The lake was a broad stretch of water, gloomy-looking, forbidding to the eye. It measured some four miles by three, and it was almost entirely surrounded by dark hills that dropped away sharply into the water. Trees cast their sombre shadows into the lake, and the stillness of the place was uncanny to them, after the days of whispering trees on the river bank and the rippling of swiftly flowing water.

"Just the sort of place you would expect a madman to find the gold he'd been looking for all his life," said Jack, ceasing from his work. "What a place! I suppose the scenery's grand enough, but the grimness of the place would get on my nerves soon. Now I wonder where the Mad Prospector found his lode?"

He put his hand in his pocket and took out the chart old Mervyn had given him. He studied it intently for some time. The lake itself had been roughly reproduced on

the paper, and in a certain spot, to the north-west of it, was a cross. They had entered the lake from the south-east corner.

"That cross means the place he struck metal," said Jack: "if he did strike it. But it'll take some finding."

"He mentions a lone tree," said Gerald, who had a copy of the map, which he was examining. "A lone tree to the north-west of the lake. That oughtn't to be hard to find."

They bent their backs to their work again, and forced their light canoe across the broad, still bosom of the waters. There was not a sign of human life here, of course. Jack calculated they must be hundreds of miles from the nearest white habitation, and such a gloomy, sombre spot as this would hardly appeal to the Red Men as a dwelling-place. The hills that surrounded them were heavily wooded.

The calls of loons sounded in their ears all the while, making their surroundings seem more mournful. But they worked hard, steering due north-west. For half an hour or so they paddled, when suddenly Jack pointed ahead of him, and ceased paddling. As yet they were still nearly a quarter of a mile from the shore they were aiming for.

"Now," said Jack, "doesn't that strike you as funny, old man?"

He pointed to something that was distinctly odd. Thrust up out of the water was a tree. There was just one, a poplar at that.

"A tree growing in the middle of a lake!" Gerald said. "By Jove! And there's just one, too!"

They paddled their canoe up to the tree. They found that it was alive. Indeed, the foliage was abundant on it.

"And what's this?" asked Gerald, pointing to the trunk of the tree. He leaned over the gunnel of the canoe, and scanned some marks on the bark of the poplar.

"Letters-carved here," he announced. "Cut with a knife. What do they say? 'Mervyn's Lode,' begad!"

The two young adventurers looked at each other. Jack scratched his head. Then he suddenly looked down into the water. He could see the bottom of the lake here, for the water was wonderfully clear. They seemed to be floating on a depth of no more than ten feet. He could see the roots of this poplar tree, and also he could see that the bottom of the lake here was grassy;

not sandy or muddy, or thronged with water-weeds, as any normal lake would have been.

"It looks to me," he said, "as though this were Mervyn's lone tree. I believe I know what has happened, old man. These things do happen sometimes. Somewhere, where the water runs out of the lake again, there must have been a landslide recently, blocking up the outlet, and causing the waters of the lake to rise. Before the landslide that tree grew out of dry ground. The surface of this lake has been increased acres and acres by that stoppage."

"Yes," said Gerald, "that may be so; but—but what about the Mad Prospector's gold?"

"That, if there is any," said Jack grimly, "is also under water now. So, it looks as if Teddy's going to be very disappointed after all. However, we don't know there is any gold. Mervyn was mad."

Gerald was looking over the side and down into the depths of the lake. His eyes were as good as Jack's, and he could see everything at the bottom. He evidently saw something there that Jack had overlooked, something that rested at the bole of this partly submerged poplar.

"What are you going to do, partner?" Jack asked, as Gerald, his eyes gleaming a trifle, peeled off his coat and shirt, kicked off his boots, and loosened his breeches.

"Dive," said Gerald curtly; and the next moment he had dropped over into the depths.

Jack steadied the canoe and watched him. He saw Gerald forcing himself downwards. He watched the shadowy figure of his comrade as he got lower and lower, sending up bubbles from below as he worked.

Gerald was an excellent man in the water. He stayed under quite a long while, and when at length he did rise to the surface, gasping, his hands were clenched.

"Take it!" he panted. "There's some more down there. Not much; but it looks as if Mervyn knew what he was talking about."

Jack Royce took that which Gerald handed to him. His big, hard hands grasped several small pieces of metal—yellow metal. For fifteen seconds the big Britisher could hardly believe the truth. Then his heart began to slog heavily, while Gerald dived again.

"Gold!" he said. "At last!"

There were several sizable nuggets he held in his fists, all purest gold, he knew. He tried them with his teeth; he rubbed them together. He knew that they were gold.

Gerald came up again, with another double handful. These he dropped at Jack's feet in the canoe, and dived for a third time. At length, however, he came to the surface for good, and clambered carefully into the canoe.

"I saw the stuff lying there, at the foot of the tree," he said. "I've got it all. There was little enough; just a small pile. But I got it all. It was lying in such a

neat pile that it must have been put there—by Mervyn, eh?"

Jack fingered the yellow metal very thoughtfully. But there was a great hope burning in his heart now. He was not a fellow who loved money for money's sake; but lack of capital had always stood in his way. There was big work to be done in Canada by a man who had the means whereby to start. Jack loved Canada passionately, and he wanted to see the country developed much further than it was. He knew he had it in him to do big things, and the possibility of finding wealth enough to enable him to launch out on these much-desired enterprises was very good to him.

"The lode is under the water here," he said, "and not far from that tree. Mervyn must have left that bit there because he had got more than he could carry out. Of course, we'll never know what poor old Mervyn actually did. But now I am sure there is a lot of gold down there, and the question is, how are we to get it? It won't be lying on the ground. It'll have to be dug for; diving-bells might solve the problem."

"Look here," said Gerald suddenly, "I think there's a simpler idea than that. Let's paddle along now, and find out where the water runs away from the lake. This bit of gold we've found will be worth, perhaps, five hundred pounds, no more; so, of course, we haven't finished our search yet."

Jack nodded, and they steered their canoe for what looked like a narrow gap in the hills to the west of them. Sure enough, after a little hard paddling, they came to the canyon through which the waters of the lake overflowed.

A great, raw scar on one hillside told them that their conjecture had been a sound one; a landslide had occurred, and very recently at that. The falling debris had dropped into this canyon, had dammed it up to such a height that the surface of Dead Breed Lake had had to rise and expand. The dam was a formidable one. Never would the waters be strong enough to wear it down.

"That dam could be moved, if we had the men, the tools, and dynamite," said Gerald. "Blow away ten or twelve feet of that, and in a very short time the waters would drop, and the ground about that tree would be free again, and workable."

"It would take a lot of men. We'd have to start up a mining camp. Men's wages are high, material costs a lot; transport is out of sight, almost. We couldn't do it," said Jack. "It would cost us thousands of pounds."

"And, if what Snaith says is true, I'm going to get my fortune back," said Gerald. "That's seventy thousand pounds, I believe. So I'll tell you what we'll do, old man. We've got enough gold here to pay our way back to England. We'll first register this

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

spot as a claim; the area for some yards round the tree. That will make it safe for us when we come back. When I've got my money we'll start a company, we'll get the men, the material, the transport, and we'll have a real old gold-mining concern of our own."

They argued and wrangled about it for a long while. But, though Jack would not at first listen to the idea of Gerald using his recovered wealth—if he recovered it—he was talked down at length. Jack was too proud for his own good, anyhow.

"I'm having my share in this, you ass!" Gerald said at length impatiently. "I'll get my capital back some times over. So let's go back to Teddy and tell him what we've found. The kid will be mad with delight, I know, when he knows all."

Final Plans.

THEY found Teddy very bored and fed up with life. But the youngster brightened up wonderfully when they told him of the luck they had had. Indeed, he threw away his rifle, and danced a jig about the stricken forms of his prisoners, both lying practically where they had lain when Jack and Gerald had left them.

"Didn't I tell you!" he almost shrieked. "Oh, you great, unbelieving ass, Jack. Gold! And you've got some of it with you! How much more of it is there?"

His enthusiasm was damped to a certain extent when he heard of the organisation, the work that would be required ere the full extent of Mervyn's lode could be ascertained. He seemed far more joyful over the handful of metal they let him finger than the prospect of floating a mining company. But he was young, and always had thought that gold in the gold regions was merely picked up off the ground.

"And there's a tolerable amount of real hard graft to get done before we see the rest of it, young 'un," said Jack. "We've got to get Snaith and Olesen handed over to the police. We've got to arrange with Simpson, the surveyor, to let us get back to Edmonton, and then we've got to get back to Edmonton, itself a long job. In about three months, I should say, we ought to be back in England, but not before."

Teddy, who in his excitement had forgotten temporarily how deep in the wilds he was at this moment, felt sad. But his was not the nature to be depressed for long. He buckled to manfully, and, the morning after the reunion of the three comrades, the two prisoners were laid down in the big canoe, the three adventurers got inside it, and then there began a long, long struggle against the stream, to get back to where they had left Simpson's surveying party.

But they rejoined Simpson in due time, though by then both Olesen and Snaith were pretty well on the point of collapse. Simpson heard their story with interest, and, knowing Jack was a great friend of Sander-

son, one of the most influential men in Canada's railroading circles, did all he could to help the friends back to civilisation.

Snaith and Olesen were handed over to the Mounted Police safely. There was a patrol of that splendid corps stationed not more than fifty miles from where Simpson's camp was.

But disposing of the two ruffians took time. The three comrades also had to accompany the police, as Snaith and his confederate were got down to the railroad by stages. At Edmonton, after weeks of tedious travel, the scoundrels were put in hospital.

"We'll be needed as witnesses against them," said Jack disgustedly, when they had secured rooms in a good hotel at Edmonton. "And we've also got to register our claims on Dead Breed Lake. However, the Mounted Police say that we shall not be wanted for a clear month, as those two beauties won't be fit to stand their trial before. So I think we'll be able to get home and out here again before we're wanted. Heigho! No one can say our life isn't full of action!"

"I'd be rather glad to see the Old Country again," said Teddy. "I'd feel like a wanderer returned."

"After being out here only six months!" said Jack, with a grin. "Well, a lot's happened in the time, I'll admit."

"It seems like six years," said Teddy.

"But I suppose we'll not find much at home to keep us, after we've got Gerald's affairs fixed up. How long'll that take, Gerald?"

"I can't say," said Gerald. "It depends on how my guardian behaves. But I've got a scheme. I think I'll be able to frighten him so much with it that he'll be easier to handle. We'll send a cable to him, as from Snaith, saying that I'm done in. See the point? When we walk into his presence later he'll have a fit, and probably he'll throw up the sponge. Anyhow, I'm going to try it!"

"It's more likely we'll find him under arrest when we get back," said Jack. "The police here know what Snaith said about him; and——"

"And will arrange for him to be arrested over there?" asked Gerald. "I don't think so. Or, anyhow, not just yet. You see, they haven't got much of a yarn to send over to England yet. After Snaith's trial they may have something more substantial."

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and nothing more was said for some time about Gerald's scheme. But Gerald did as he said he would do, and soon after then the three chums boarded the train that was to take them from Edmonton to Montreal. From there they would sail by the first available steamship to the Old Country.

(The concluding chapter of "Three Boys in Canada" will appear next week, when an important announcement will be made of a forthcoming serial.)

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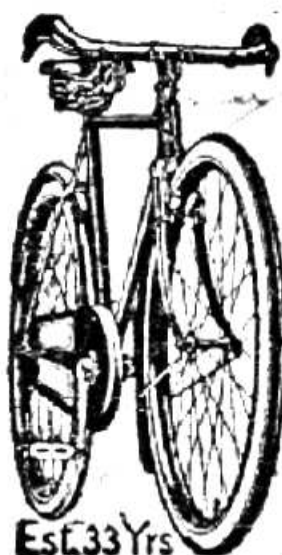
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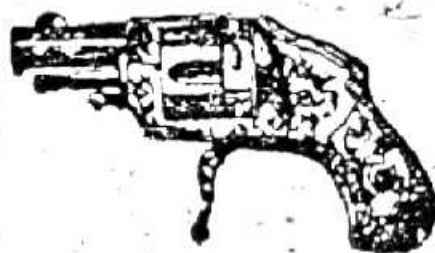
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