A MAP OF "LAGOON ISLAND" NEXT WEEK!

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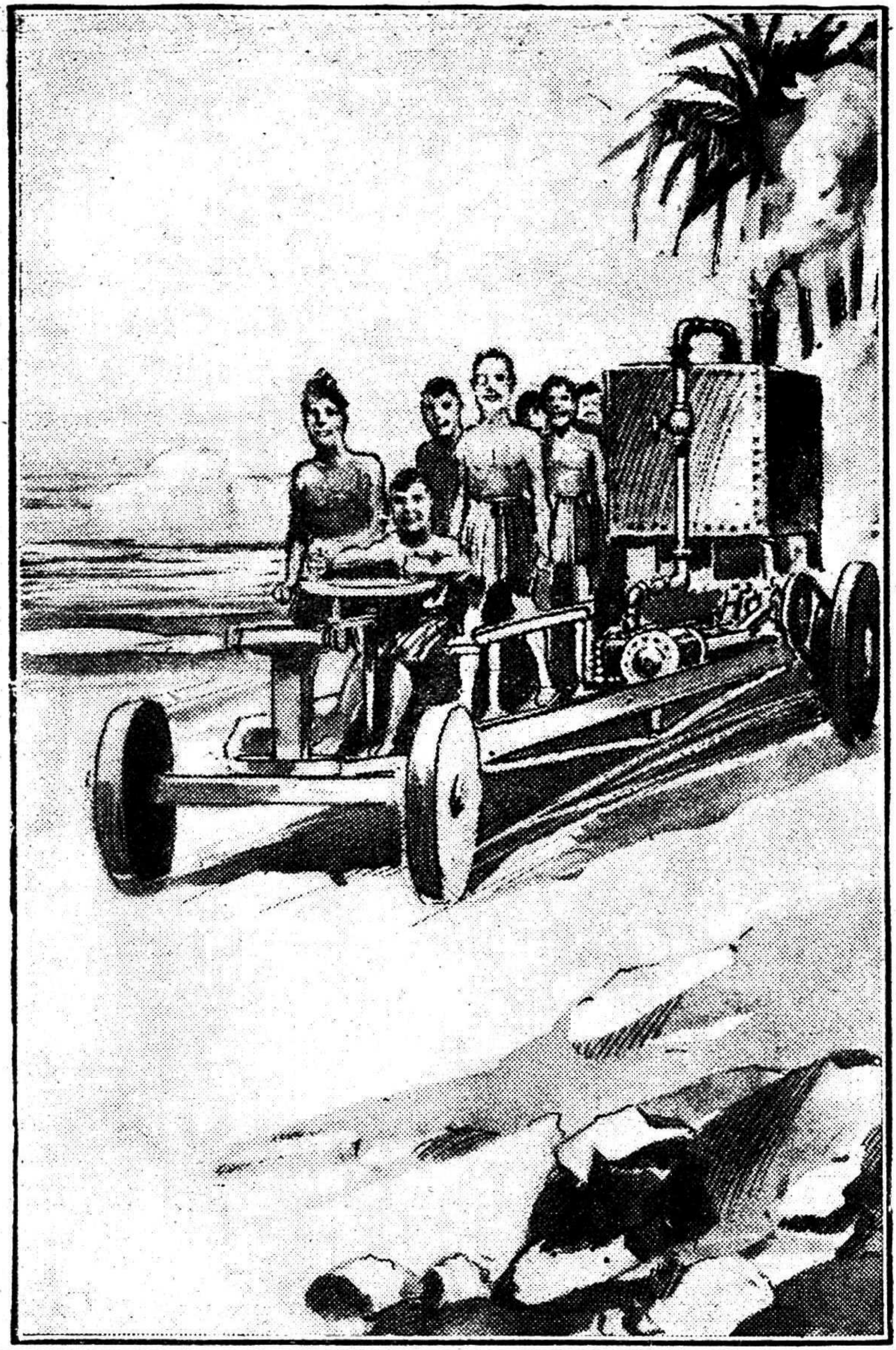
THESE TWO MAGNIFICENT PHOTOGRAPHS OF FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK

THE LORD OF THE ISLAND

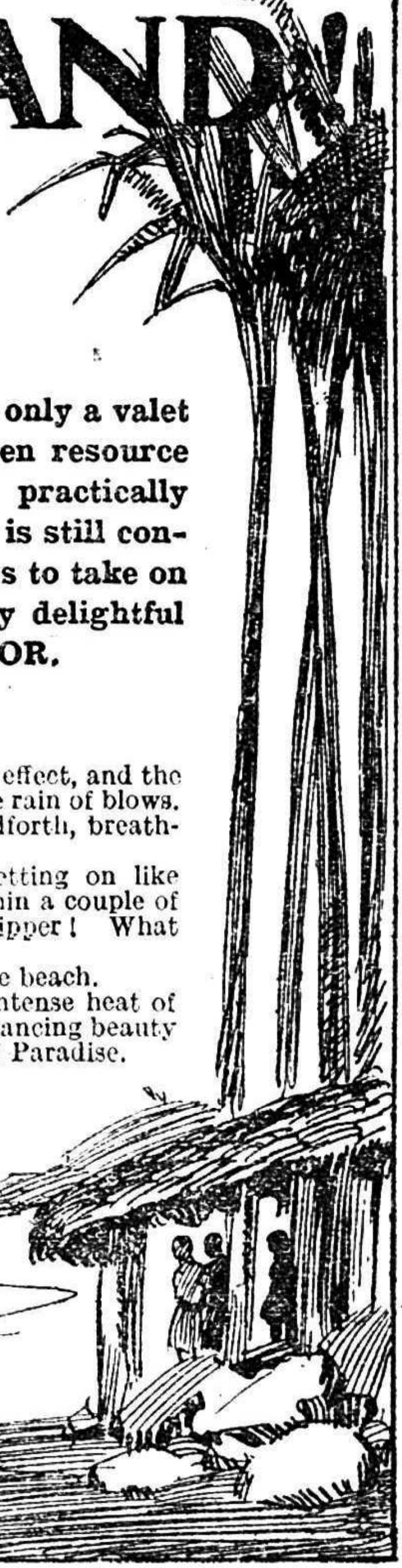
ANOTHER GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE ON A SOUTH SEA ISLAND. : :

No. 368 EVERY WEDNESDAY JUNE 24, 1922



With a jar, the locomotive lumbered out of the deep ruts, and bowled away erratically across the sands.

THE LORD OF THE ISLAND!



The Schoolboy Crusoe Series grows more fascinating every week. In "THE LORD OF THE ISLAND!" you will read how Phipps, only a valet in everyday life, proves his true worth when resource and adaptability are most required, by practically running the island. Nelson Lee, of course, is still convalescent, and it automatically falls to Phipps to take on the reins of government. There are many delightful surprises in this story.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

EXILED IN PARADISE.

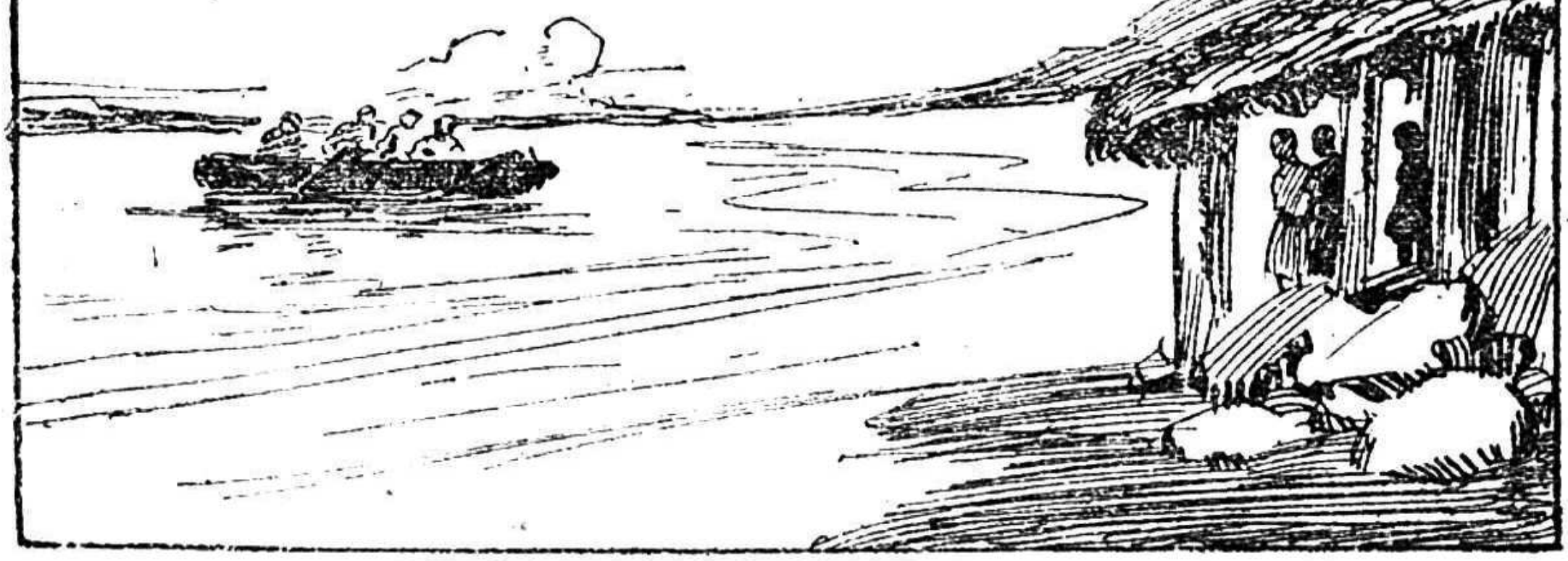
HANDFORTH swung his flint-headed axe with great effect, and the young sapling tottered and crashed over under the rain of blows.

"That's the tenth this afternoon!" said Handforth, breathlessly.

"Good man!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt. "We're getting on like steam. At this rate the mansion will be completed within a couple of days. Who's got the next bundle of canes? Hi! Nipper! What about some more binding creeper?"

"Coming along now!" I yelled, from a point down the beach.

The scene was one of great activity, in spite of the intense heat of the tropical afternoon. And the scene was also one of entrancing beauty—for Lagoon Island was one of Nature's own corners of Paradise.



The burning sun of the South Seas was beating down, and the white sands of the beach gleamed like crystal salt. The calm, placid lagoon, with its water of glorious azure.

It was a lake of sea water, protected from the storms of the vast ocean by a barrier reef of coral—which was foam covered and seething with spray about a quarter-of-a-mile from the island shore. On this reef the great ocean rollers thundered and roared.

And only the faintest echo of the disturbance on the reef came to that shore of silvery sands. The ripples were tiny, and splashed like faint music upon the foreshore. And the lagoon itself was delightfully ruffled by the breeze.

Just a little way back from the shore the palm trees came down, as though anxious to meet the water. Finding this impossible, they bent their graceful heads longingly towards the lagoon.

In great columns these palms were ranged along the shore—grove after grove, and all laden with nuts in all stages and sizes. Turning again towards the sea and the dazzling horizon—which was absolutely blank—one could see a group of three palms growing in solitary state on a little high portion of the reef—a spot which the sea never reached.

It was all very picturesque, and seen for the first time one could do nothing but stand and stare filled with something like awe at the bewildering gorgeousness of the whole outlook.

But these present inhabitants—juniors of St. Frank's College—were accustomed to the island's beauty. They had something better to do than to admire the scenery. They were all working at top speed, and in a manner that would have brought despair to a Trade Union official.

Their activity was all centred upon a strange looking structure which was taking shape in a clearing of the palm grove in the very centre of the bay. This structure was to be a house sufficiently large to accommodate the whole party, and to provide them with a home—a roof over their heads when the weather ceased to be as fine as it was just now.

Phipps had pointed out that there was no prospect of being rescued from the island. Therefore, everything had to be done from the standpoint that Lagoon Island was to be their permanent home—and the rainy seasons of the tropics would certainly come—and shelter was essential.

Phipps knew what he was talking about, for he had been to the South Seas in his youth—and, somehow, the boys took notice of everything Phipps said. Before coming on this trip, Phipps had merely been valet and general manservant to Archie Glenthorne—a menial. Now his whole status was changed. He was, in fact, to use an Americanism, the "Big Noise" of the Island.

The party of juniors, including myself, numbered twenty, and there were only two others on the island, as far as we knew—Phipps and Nelson Lee. But the latter was absolutely incapacitated. He was an invalid, and had to be cared for tenderly and gently.

It seemed ages since Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Wanderer, had crashed on to the island's barrier reef during the height of a tropical typhoon. As a matter of fact, less than a week had elapsed, but it really seemed as though we had been marooned on this tropic isle for a long period.

All the St. Frank's fellows had been got ashore during that terrible storm—partly owing to the unceasing energy and pluck of Nelson Lee. And the dear old guv'nor had paid heavily for his courage.

Battered and torn, he had been flung on the sandy beach after rescuing six or seven fellows from certain death. And when I found him, that same night, Nelson Lee was unconscious, with a broken arm, concussion, many gashes and bruises, and generally smashed up.

At first I had had a horrible fear that the guv'nor would not recover. But Phipps had again come to the rescue. To our amazement and delight we learned that this exceptional valet had served for three or four years in the British Red Cross, and what he didn't know about surgical first aid and setting bones was hardly worth troubling about.

Phipps had set Nelson Lee's fractured arm in such a manner that it was now doing well. But I was still very anxious about our patient, for he was weak and thin, having wasted away somewhat, and was mending very slowly.

But he was still himself—with his old smile, and his encouraging words. It was quite impossible, however, for Nelson Lee to engage actively in any work of the island. I would not even allow him to be bothered for suggestions. He was a patient, and was treated as such.

In the meantime, we were fending for ourselves—and Phipps, the invaluable, was proving himself to be a man of resource and ingenuity. Nothing ever upset the imperturbable calm of Archie's valet.

He was, in fact, a wonder.

Trained as a manservant, he knew how to control his features and himself. The most surprising things never ruffled the coolness of Phipps. He took everything as a matter of course, and was ever calm. And the suggestions he made, from time to time, were always carefully considered and well thought out. As a chef he had proved himself pre-eminent—even casting Fatty Little completely into the shade.

True, Fatty was now the recognised chef of the island—but he had been carefully coached by Phipps. Fatty knew how to make toffee, and he knew how to fry kippers and bake cakes. But when it came

to preparing fish without a stove, and cooking breadfruit and taro root he was done. This was where Phipps triumphed.

And so we had always fed sumptuously and were quite in love with the good things that the island provided in rich abundance. The food problem was non-existent, and we were able to confine ourselves to other matters.

We had had a bit of an alarm on one occasion, soon after our arrival on the island. We had seen a flickering light beyond the hills which rose in the centre of the island. At first we had imagined that savages were there, but there had been no sign of any sort. We apparently had the island to ourselves.

And it was concluded that the flickering light was due to some volcanic origin—for, undoubtedly, the island itself was of a volcanic nature. Just inland there was a great boiling geyser, and a big crater dominated the high ridge. Once or twice we had seen filmy wreaths of steam and smoke issuing forth.

So it was quite likely that beyond this ridge there was another crater—a small, active one which glowed at night. At all events, ever since our arrival we had seen no indication of other human presence.

During the first day of two we had been stricken with horror by the fate of Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi and Captain Bentley and his crew—who had all disappeared with the wreck of the Wanderer.

Without a doubt these good men had plunged to the bed of the ocean with the yacht. It was astounding, for we had found no trace of the wreckage—no sign whatever of that splendid vessel.

And now the fellows were almost resigned. They could not quite realise that we were probably doomed to live on this island for many years, and they entered into everything with the true gusto of boyhood. To them the whole adventure was one glorious holiday. Rescue was bound to come in a week or two! A ship would surely appear in sight!

And so they consoled themselves—little thinking what anxiety and worry was being felt at home. For, of course, the Wanderer had been due at Colombo on a certain date—and by this time she was undoubtedly posted as missing.

I could picture the feverish inquiries which were being made by cable and by wireless. And the result in every case would be nil. For the Wanderer had vanished with every soul on board. She would be given up for lost, and parents and guardians would mourn for those who were apparently dead.

And yet here we were—as strong and healthy as young lions, living like primitive natives on a South Sea island! And we had no means of communicating our plight to the outside world. We were schoolboy Crusoes—marooned, and with little prospect of returning to civilisation.

But there was so much to do that we had no time to think of such things. It was left to Nelson Lee, laid low as he was, to lie on his bed of dried grasses and leaves to think. And Nelson Lee was sad and concerned—and, I really believe, his recovery was retarded by his worried state of mind.

We had all decided that the beach was the best place for our future home. And so a clearing had been made in the very centre of the bay—a kind of alcove set back in the palm grove.

And here, with the palms on three sides of the structure, it grew into being, with a frontage to the azure lagoon. It would be a place of delight when it was finished.

It must not be imagined that our work was easy. We had no tools—absolutely nothing in the way of an axe and a saw—no hammers—no nails, and not a single item which assists a civilised builder.

We had to return to primitive methods. The task of clearing the ground for the house was a problem which seemed well nigh insuperable—until Phipps mentioned that some rocks in one of the little valleys inland were of a flinty nature. They were examined, and it was found that we could grind some of these stones to a sharp edge. Handles were ready for the taking, of course—straight saplings grew by the thousand. And with these stone axes bound by tough creepers to the handles, they proved to be effective tools.

Trees were cut down without much difficulty—and the stumps, about a foot high, served excellently for the foundations—for it would be better to have a clear air space beneath the house.

Great tree trunks were laid down for the flooring, and it was surprising how we managed to flatten them so that they were level. The spaces between were filled up with sand, and a smooth floor was the result.

It had been Phipps' idea to choose this spot, where four great palms could be used as the corner posts of the house. Only those trees in the centre of this space were removed. Thus we had our home really commenced by nature, and we merely had to lay the floor and build up the walls and fix on the roof.

There was no necessity to have thick walls. Not far distant inland there was an immense cane brake, where giant canes grew to a height of twenty feet. These were easy enough to cut down, and they were brought to the scene of operations in great bundles—the juniors working a whole day, with feverish energy, at this task alone.

And now the walls were practically completed, and the house was beginning to look presentable. There were two or three inner compartments—a living-room, sleeping accommodation, and at the rear a special place for cooking and for storing food. There was even a special little bedroom for Nelson Lee.

And as the boys moved about this scene

of activity, no stranger would have recognised them as juniors of St. Frank's. It was almost impossible to picture them wearing Etons and starched linen and shiny boots. For they looked regular primitive islanders with their sun-browned skins and their simple dresses of dried grass—a kind of short skirt reaching from the waist to the knees. Every other part of the body was bare.

And the juniors took to the life as a duck takes to water. They were healthier than they had ever been, and there was not the slightest doubt that the hard work was doing them good. The only fellow who really slacked was Archie Glenthorne. He was born lazy, and so we didn't trouble about forcing him to do his share.

We had been bare-footed ever since our arrival—having been cast ashore with practically no clothing. And even in such a short space of time our feet were becoming hard and leathery.

But it was necessary to be careful. For, though this place was like a paradise, there were hidden perils. Handforth had nearly been eaten by a shark—on another occasion he had just escaped death from an alligator. We thought it curious that alligators should exist in such a small island—but we did not even know exactly where this island was situated, except that it was in close proximity to the Equator.

And on more than one occasion our bare feet and ankles had had narrow escapes from centipedes of enormous size and deadly scorpions. At home, in England, we should have regarded these insects with horror. But here they seemed natural, and we did not care much.

The insects, in fact, were by far the worst feature of our island life. There were millions of them, and I cannot possibly hope to set down the various kinds. Flying horrors that settled upon you and stung—crawling things that wormed their way into your hair, or between your toes. And there was one fearful little creature which could pierce the hardest piece of wood in an extraordinarily short space of time. This same insect had also a fancy for boring a hole in human flesh, and more than one fellow was suffering from a nasty wound in consequence But, being young and healthy, we made light of these drawbacks.

On this particular afternoon Fatty Little was busily preparing the evening meal. He was always exempted from the other labour, as he was the most expert in the culinary art. And two fellows were generally detailed to assist him. On this occasion they were Griffith and Doyle.

All the rest of us were hard at work on the building operations. Nelson Lee was quietly resting in his little arbour, sheltered from the sun, and with Sir Montie Tregellis-West—Lee's nurse for the afternoon—in constant attendance.

Phipps was working harder than anybody, and it was an astonishing fact that he never seemed to get tired. He set a fine example to the juniors, and they were beginning to accept his leadership without question.

Phipps was looked to for everything—and he was showing what he could do. He was his new role of lord and master as though he had been born to it. Until now Phipps had never had a chance—but, having got it, he was showing what he could do. He was coming out strong.

And so the evening came on—with a grateful rest and a hearty meal for the twenty hungry fellows.

Another day had slipped by—and we were still exiles in paradise!

CHAPTER II.

REGGIE PITT'S SCHEME!

SIR MONTIE was looking rather anxious as he joined us at the evening meal, after being relieved by Bob Christine.

"Dear old boy, I'm afraid that Mr. Lee is not quite so well this evenin'," murmured Sir Montie as he squatted on the sand beside me. "I sincerely hope that my fears are wrong, but he looks most frightfully flushed—he does, really."

"Flushed!" I repeated anxiously.

"Yes, dear old boy, an' his eyes look much brighter than usual. Begad! I'm fearfully worried."

I got up at once, and beckoned to Phipps.

"Tregellis-West says that the guv'nor's worse!" I said quietly. "No need to tell the others—but I'd like you to come and have a look at him, Phipps."

"Very good, sir," said Phipps respectfully.

In spite of the altered conditions, Phipps had not lost his politeness. He was still the valet. And, without delay, we left the group of fellows, and went along the beach to the sheltered spot where Nelson Lee lay.

I had taken it for granted that the guv'nor was gradually improving, and I had not seen him since fairly early in the afternoon. Now I knelt down by his side and regarded him with great anxiety. Sir Montie was not the kind of fellow to exaggerate—and I was worried.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" I said. "Feeling fit?"

"Not quite so well this evening, Nipper," replied Nelson Lee, with a smile. "But it is a mere trifle. I am hoping to be well and active by the end of the week. This idleness is dreadfully irksome."

I looked at him critically. Yes, there was a brightness about his eyes which I did not like the look of, and a flush in his cheeks which told its own story. I could see that he was developing a slight touch of fever—

and, without any quinine or other medicine at our disposal, he was likely to get worse..

"Oh, you'll soon be all right, sir!" I declared cheerfully. "And once you're well, all our troubles will seem to fade away—because you'll do something, I know You look just a bit flushed, but I don't suppose it's much."

"Of course not, young 'un," said Nelson Lee.

His voice was weak—a mere shadow of its former robust self. And I felt a lump come in my throat as I looked at him—although I kept my face. I didn't want him to see that I was so affected.

But, without a doubt, Nelson Lee was laid low.

He was stones lighter, and his face was thin, and his cheeks hollow. More than once he had determined to get up and be about. But, although he walked a bit, he found it too much for him. He was so weak that he could hardly get about. And now—he had taken a turn for the worse!

I couldn't stay there—I had to get away.

To see him lying there like that—helpless and feverish—made me clench my fists and swallow once or twice. For I knew how deadly fever can be in these tropic zones. A touch—a rapid development for the worse—and then, like a candle, a man is snuffed out.

And sometimes the strongest go first. But I wouldn't even think of Nelson Lee snuffing out—it was too awful, too ghastly for contemplation.

He had to live—he had to live!

It was no use thinking any other way—and I wouldn't. But, all the time, the possibility of Nelson Lee succumbing to fever was in my mind. I tried to make myself believe that I had dismissed it, but it was ever present.

"Well, Phipps?" I asked, a few minutes later.

"I am afraid Mr. Lee is much worse, sir," said Phipps. "He has developed fever, and needs constant nursing. But there is no real cause for alarm, for the air is healthy and absolutely pure. I am quite certain that Mr. Lee will recover."

"You're not saying that to make me feel easy?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"And what about the guv'nor's arm?"

"It has set well and is doing splendidly," replied Phipps. "I would give a great deal for some quinine, Master Nipper—but I have discovered certain herbs in the woods which will serve as an excellent substitute. I will gather some at once and prepare a draught."

"Good man!" I exclaimed. "But you haven't had anything to eat——"

"That will do later," put in Phipps.

I offered to go with him, but he requested me to stay with the other fellows—for he did not want them to know that Lee was worse. And there would certainly be comment if I hurried off into the forest with Phipps.

L.I.N. Undefeatable heeled, and ungracefully capsized, pitching the entire War Ministry into the water.

And so, still filled with anxiety, I joined the other fellows on the sands—where they were squatting round in a circle, partaking of Fatty Little's special dishes. And they were certainly very appetising.

We had recently found large numbers of mangoes—and this delicious fruit added considerably to the delights of our menu. The mango is a very wonderful thing. Like the apple, it has many different varieties, and the flavour varies a great deal according to the size and condition.

The mangoes that we had discovered were of an excellent kind, and it is almost impossible to describe the flavour of a fully-ripe fruit. Peach, pear, strawberry, plum, apricot, and a dozen other flavours of the most exquisite kind could be mixed together—the best flavours out of all—and even then the result would not be anything like so glorious as a mango.

When you eat one you always experience fresh surprises, and you want to go into ecstasies—and do. They can be eaten raw, and cooked in various ways. And Fatty Little lost no opportunities to prepare them in fashions of his own—with banana or breadfruit. He provided some amazingly novel and luscious dishes.

And for meat we had birds—birds galore. Phipps had faked up a kind of catapult, and one or two of the fellows got quite expert in the manipulation of it, with the result that we feasted quite frequently on this new diet. Fish, of course, we could get out of the lagoon with consummate ease.

I found the juniors had finished, and they were squatting round in a semi-circle, chatting, glad of the rest after a hard day's work. Some had dropped off to sleep—including, of course, Archie Glenthorne.

Pitt was talking at the moment.

"It's all very well, but I maintain that Phipps' position is a bit wrong," Reggie was saying. "It's a good thing he isn't here, because we can discuss the subject openly."

"What's the matter with Phipps?" I asked, as I sat down.

"Nothing—that's just it."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the ass says that Phipps isn't treated well enough," put in Handforth. "That's rot. After all, he's only Archie's valet——"

"You're wrong," interrupted Pitt.

"Eh?"

"He was Archie's valet, you mean," went on Reggie. "In ordinary civilised life Phipps never has a chance of proving his worth. He never has an opportunity of coming to the surface and showing his real merit. But since we've been on this island Phipps has done wonders. Do you deny that?"

"Of course not," said Handforth. "Phipps has been jolly decent, and he's had one or two rather good ideas. Of course, they're really my ideas, because I thought of them first——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!" roared Handforth, glaring round. "If you suggest I didn't think of——"

"Peace, children!" interrupted Pitt, holding up his hand. "We don't want to start any arguments now. Phipps is in a false position. I believe in giving credit where credit is due."

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie, sitting up and blinking. "I mean to say, a most frightful bellow aroused me from a slice of the old dreamless just now. Tigers, what. Although, old tulips, I didn't know that tigers roamed——"

"Dry up, Archie—it was only Handforth," said Pitt.

"Gadzooks!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, that dashed roar just now! Really? Handforth—what? But, dash it all, hardly possible——"

"Are you saying that I've got a voice like a tiger?" roared Handforth.

"Absolutely!" gasped Archie, falling back. "Dash it all! Foghorns and hooters positively eclipsed, don't you know! My dear old onion, you really ought to see a bally specialist about it!"

"You—you——"

"I mean to say, to continue the old argument!" went on Archie. "Credit where credit is due, what? That is to say, Phipps! Absolutely, laddies! Phipps, as it were, is the absolute goods. The last word in effish., what? Always on the spot, and a kind of flowing bowl of wisdom!"

"Good for you, Archie," said Pitt. "That describes Phipps to a "T." He's the big man of the island, and there's no sense in saying anything else. He's not a servant any more, and I repeat that he's in a false position. It's up to us to put things right."

"And what do you reckon we can do," asked De Valerie.

"Why, we can place him on a fairer footing with ourselves," replied Pitt. "That is to say, we ought to give him to understand that, on this island, social differences are at an end. And he is, in fact, our equal."

"Dash it all!" exclaimed Archie, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, laddie, isn't that rather priceless? Phipps, don't you know—well, there you are, Phipps is Phipps! A deucedly brainy cove, and all that kind of rot, but—well—that is—hardly the absolute thing, what?"

"You're not a snob, are you?" asked Reggie.

"Gadzooks!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, that's a dashed poisonous question, old lad! We're pals—absolutely! And between pals it's hardly the real goods to talk about snobs, what? Absolutely not, old fruit! That is to say, Archie is decidedly not of that frightful tribe!"

"Then, although Phipps is technically your valet, in reality he is the chief fellow on this island," said Pitt. "Just consider what he's done since we've been here. Without any exaggeration, he's saved the situation——"

"And probably saved the guy'nor's life!" I added. "Yes, you're right, Reggie. Phipps is a valuable fellow, and he's a wonder. I vote that we give him the tip that he needn't regard us as his superior, we're not. In many respects, he's superior to us."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "The old works have been buzzing, dear lads. That is to say, the brain department has been doing several spasms of overtime. And, gadzooks, the thing's right. Phipps is bally well the monarch of all he surveys, what? The dashed king—and we're his subjects, and what not! I mean to say, Phipps has got about five hundred and sixty-three brains all rolled into one!"

Pitt grinned.

"Well, I wouldn't quite go as far as that," he chuckled. "Phipps has got a normal brain—but he's made of the right stuff. This venture has proved it, and Phipps has shown us all that he's true blue. Personally, I don't like to be called 'sir' by a chap who does everything. Strictly speaking, we ought to 'sir' him."

"I mean to say, what?" said Archie mildly.

"Yes!" insisted Pitt. And from now onwards we'll decide that Phipps is absolutely one of us—and not an inferior. The time has now come to put things right—on a sound footing. And I'm going to make another suggestion straight away. Hold yourselves ready for it!"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Handforth. "I've got scores of suggestions to make, and they'll knock your potty ideas into fits! To begin with, I reckon we ought to realise that——"

"Shut up!"

A dozen voices roared out the words, and Handforth glared.

"Look here——" he began.

"Silence for Reggie!"

Handforth tried to speak, but he was howled down again. The juniors were very anxious to hear Pitt's suggestion—for he had aroused their curiosity by his manner of announcing it.

"Good!" said Pitt calmly. "Now, my sons, look here. Things are at sixes and sevens just now. If it wasn't for Phipps we should all be in a state of chaos—and if you think for a minute or two, you'll agree with me."

"Piffle!" said Armstrong. "There's no chaos!"

"Reggie's right," I put in. "Phipps is the only one who's saved the situation. I can think of dozens of instances during the last few days when practically the whole crowd of you have been wrangling and arguing and quarrelling. Handy has suggested one thing, and you've howled——"

"That's only natural!" said De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you——" began Handforth.

"Don't start now!" I interrupted. "We'll continue the discussion. Pitt has suggested something—you've howled just the same. I've suggested something elee—the same howl. Why, there's been terrific trouble over building this house. Some of you didn't want to go for the canes, and you've growled. Some of you didn't want to help with the chopping—and you let everybody know it. It was only Phipps' tact that saved the situation. I agree solidly with Reggie. If it wasn't for Phipps there would be a state of chaos."

"Hear, hear!"

Most of the juniors saw the point, and agreed.

"Good!" said Pitt. "That's one thing settled. Now, what's the remedy? That's what we want to get at. I've got an idea—and I think it ought to work. We can't hope to have things going smoothly under the present conditions. Phipps is jolly helpful, but his influence isn't enough. There ought to be some form of Government."

"Government!" echoed the juniors.

"Yes," declared Pitt, rising to his feet, and looking round intently. "Government! This island of ours for the time being—it's a kind of complete community. There are all sorts of things to be done—every day. Even the smallest community has a Government—cannibal villages are ruled by a chief—and we ought to have our leaders, too."

"That's a splendid wheeze!" I declared. "I was about to suggest that we should vote for a leader—like the captain of a form—and the leader to have authority. But Pitt's suggestion is a lot better."

"Rather!"

"Sounds big, too!"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "A Government, what? A bally collection of chappies who do absolutely nothing and reel forth orders by the furlong, and all that kind of rot! A gathering of blighters who draw frightful salaries and get other people to do their jobs—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not talking about that kind of Government," grinned Pitt. "I know they're common enough—but ours will be efficient. As you'd say, Archie—absolutely! We'll vote carefully and thoroughly—and we'll do it this evening."

"Good!"

"First of all, we've got to elect a Prime Minister," went on Pitt.

"Oh, ripping!"

"Of course, I don't want to shove myself forward," began Handforth carelessly. "But I don't mind being nominated as Prime Minister, if you like——"

"We don't like!"

"Dry up, Handy!"

"Nothing doing!"

"Oh, all right—do you think I care?" sneered Handforth. "Of course, there'll be a lot of rotten favouritism! I'm expecting it, so I sha'n't be disappointed. But if somebody doesn't nominate me as candidate, there'll be trouble!"

And Handforth, turning, deliberately stared at Church and McClure. As though expecting something of the kind, these two juniors were taking an extraordinary amount of interest in the flight of some blue birds.

"It won't take us long to elect the Prime Minister!" said De Valerie. "And after that we'll get busy and elect his Government——"

"No, we won't," interrupted Pitt. "My idea is this—there'll be one election only. The Prime Minister will be chosen, and he will have absolute power."

"Absolute?" I asked.

"Absolute!" repeated Pitt. "A Prime Minister, after all, is really the ruler of a country. He selects his own ministers, and it ought to be the same here. Whoever becomes Prime Minister will have to appoint the chiefs of his various departments. Then there can't be any argument."

"And what if the Prime Minister rules in a rotten way?" asked Bob Christine. "Supposing, by some ghastly mistake, Handforth was made Prime Minister, and issued a decree that noses were to be punched at random? How should we get rid of him?"

"The Prime Minister will accept his post on the understanding that he is on trial for a week," replied Pitt. "He will have full and complete authority, but at the end of the week his subjects will be able to vote whether he shall remain in power or be kicked out."

"That's all right!" said De Valerie.

"And afterwards things ought to go on smoothly," continued Pitt. "The Prime Minister, having appointed his chiefs, will get his Government into working order, and then there will be an absolute end of chaos. Supposing there are four or five departments,

there won't be many fellows in each. Well, if there's a particularly big job on hand, one department will lend another department so many men. In that way the whole affairs of the island will go on smoothly. And I herewith nominate Phipps for the Premiership."

"I second the proposal!" I said promptly. "You only just got it out in time, Reggie—I had Phipps on the tip of my tongue."

"Good man!" grinned Reggie.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Phipps, don't you know, is priceless. A perfect bally peach and a dashed brainy cove. I mean to say, I jolly well stand up and third the proposal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the other juniors were talking all at once.

"Phipps!" said Armstrong. "That's rot. He's not one of us—he's only Archie's valet. We can't have him as Prime Minister."

"Of course not!" said Handforth promptly. "Now then, you rotters!" he added, in a fierce hiss. "Ain't you going to say anything?"

He lunged out with his foot, and sent Church sprawling. McClure scrambled to his feet, and threw up a hand.

"I propose Handforth!" he declared. "I think Handforth will make a rotten Prime —— I mean a ripping Prime Minister!"

He didn't mean it at all, but Handforth's fist was hovering near by.

The yell of laughter which went up ought to have told Handforth on the instant that his chances of being elected were extremely remote. But he was blind to the voice of the multitude.

"Well, ain't you going to vote for me?" he demanded, glaring round.

"Not yet!" grinned Pitt. "Of course, if Mr. Nelson Lee had been fit, there wouldn't have been any question about the Premiership. He would be elected solid. But he's jolly ill and we can't do better than to go for Phipps."

"I nominate Nipper," put in Watson.

"Hear, hear, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie.

"Good!" exclaimed Pitt. "We'll do the thing properly and at once. Hands up all those fellows who vote for Nipper."

Six hands went up—those of Watson, Tregellis-West, De Valerie, Dick Goodwin, Fatty Little, and Jack Grey.

"Six!" said Pitt. "Who votes for Handforth?"

Two solitary hands were raised aloft—very reluctantly.

"Two!" grinned Pitt. "Handy, you're an outsider!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth looked round dazedly.

"You're—you're all off your giddy rockers!" he howled. "I knew I could count on Church and McClure—because they'd jolly well know it if they deserted me! But what's the matter with the rest of you? Don't you know that I'm the best lead

"No good arguing!" interrupted Pitt. "Nipper's got six votes against your two—you're not even in the running. Left at the post!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here goes my hand for Phipps!" I exclaimed briskly.

It went up, and was followed immediately by ten others—Handforth didn't vote, and Talmadge was with Nelson Lee. But Talmadge recorded his vote immediately afterwards, for he sang out that he plunged for Phipps. He had been able to hear everything.

"Phipps wins!" declared Pitt. "Good egg! He's the man for the job—and he'll make things hum!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ISLAND GOVERNMENT!

THE fellows were delighted and enthusiastic. Reggie's scheme had come as a surprise, and here was not the slightest doubt that things would go on a lot better if the various departments were placed in authoritative hands. I was quite keen about the whole plan, and rather curious to see how Phipps would take the honour which had been thrust upon him so unexpectedly

He had received the majority of the votes because he had proved himself to be capable and tactful and thoroughly reliable. Furthermore, he was a man—the only man on the island—for Nelson Lee, being an invalid, could not be brought into consideration in this matter.

If Phipps had just been a valet, and nothing else, he would not have received any attention. But ever since our arrival it had been Phipps all the time—Phipps here and Phipps there. Nothing was done without Phipps. He was the mainspring of every enterprise.

So it was only natural that he should be selected as the Chief of the Government.

Soon after the decision had been made, Phipps himself appeared. He was carrying with him a number of leaves and roots—for the concoction of a draught for Nelson Lee. There was a rush for him at once and he was dragged down the beach.

"Steady, young gentlemen—steady!" said Phipps politely. "I'm busy just now with some medicine for Mr. Lee——"

"All right—we won't keep you long," said De Valerie. "We just want to let you know that you have been elected Prime Minister of Lagoon Island!"

Phipps smiled.

"An excellent joke, Master De Valerie," he said smoothly.

"Joke be hanged!" said Jack Grey. "It's the truth. We've been holding a meeting, Phipps, and we're going to have a Government to rule the island You're Prime Minis-

ter, and it's up to you to select the various chiefs of departments. Understand?"

Phipps looked round somewhat uncertainly.

"Somewhat bowled over, as you might say!" observed Archie. "But it's absolutely the stuff, Phipps. Every time, old tulip. Kindly consider yourself promoted, and so forth. You're the bally old Premier—the chappie who reels forth numerous yards of instruction, and all that kind of rot."

I assured Phipps that the thing was serious, and at last he understood that his leg was not being pulled, and that he had, indeed, been honoured. He took it in his usual calm, imperturbable way.

"Thank you, young gentlemen," he said smoothly. "I appreciate your action, and will do my utmost to fulfill my duties in a way which will meet with general satisfaction. But I beg of you to release me at the moment, as I wish to attend to Mr. Lee. Later on I shall be pleased to discuss matters."

That was Phipps all over—one thing at a time.

With hardly any change of expression he proceeded to make the concoction for Nelson Lee. Another man might have suffered from an attack of swelled head—but not Phipps. He wasn't that kind. At the same time, he fully appreciated the honour.

But, almost at once, there was a subtle kind of difference in him.

He looked round and surveyed the whole scene

Then he proceeded to give a few orders. He told Fatty Little and several others to clear away the remains of supper, and to stow any eatables in a special deep hole in the ground which served as a larder. He told some other fellows to make everything tidy round the half-built house. He gave orders to some more juniors to take gourds and fill them with water. In fact, he had everybody busy at something within five minutes.

And he did not ask, as hitherto. He gave his orders with confidence—quietly, politely. We all noticed the change, but nobody took offence. Phipps never did anything in a way that could possibly be offensive. But he clearly showed that he knew the difference in his status.

Then, having set others to work, he worked himself.

The draught he prepared for Nelson Lee did not look at all palatable—a thick, greenish fluid which had been concocted from the crushed leaves and roots. But Phipps evidently knew what he was doing. And Nelson Lee swallowed the draught without a word. He, at all events, had absolute confidence in this man.

Shortly afterwards the guv'nor was sleeping peacefully, and seemed slightly better. Some of the flush had gone from his cheeks. Phipps was looking pleased, and he confided to me that these South Sea Islands contained sufficient medicinal herbs to start a laboratory.

"You think the guv'nor will be better now?" I inquired.

"I have every reason to believe that he will sleep quietly until the morning," replied

"By Jove!" I exclaimed intensely. "Don't you see? Can't you understand? This is the wreckage from the Wanderer!

Phipps. "And I shall then hope for some signs of improvement."

By this time the juniors had finished their various tasks, and the evening was drawing on. Very soon the short tropical twilight would be upon us, and then the daylight would snap out, to be replaced by the brilliant starry night.

Phipps joined the crowd of juniors, and he was immediately the centre of attraction. A speech was demanded.

"It's very kind of you, young gentlemen, and I think it would be better if we proceeded with business at once," said Phipps. "During the last half-hour I have been thinking matters over, and I have decided upon the appointments which I consider necessary."

"Good!"

"Let's have the stuff, laddie!"

"I consider that there shall be four departments," said Phipps. "I have been considering matters, and I have selected the young gentlemen for the various posts. There must be a Food Department, of course, and there can be no doubt that Master Little is best suited for that task."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fatty!"

"Always on the grub business!"

"Then there must be a Housing Department," continued Phipps. "The house will presently be built, of course, but we shall need additions, and repairs will constantly be necessary. I therefore consider that a Housing Department is essential, and I appoint Master Pitt as the chief."

"Good!"

"More important still," said Phipps calmly. "Is the Department for the Defence of the Island. So far we have had no visits from blacks, but this does not mean to say that there are no natives here. I think it quite likely that savages are in the vicinity—if not on this island, on other islands within a comparatively small distance, and capable of being traversed by war canoe."

"That's quite likely, Phipps," I agreed.

"It is most important that we should have defences ready," said Phipps. "The work of this department will consist of building barricades and defence works—with the active co-operation of the Housing Department. We must also provide ourselves with weapons for defending our domain against any possible invader. I appoint Master Nipper as the Chief of Defences."

"Couldn't have a better man!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Nipper's the chap!"

"Good old Nipper!"

I was rather pleased with this appointment, for it was, as Phipps had said, the most important department of all. To defend ourselves against any possible enemy was of vital necessity.

"There is one other matter which needs consideration," said Phipps. "I certainly think we ought to have a Clothing Department, and request Master Tregellis-West to accept this post."

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "But, my dear old boy, I don't know anythin' about governing—I don't really! It's a rippin' honour, but at the same time I really wish you'd choose somebody else——"

"Rats!" interrupted Tommy Watson. "You're the very man for the post. Clothing is just in your line, Montie."

"But why have a Clothing Department at all?" asked De Valerie. "We're not wearing much, and it'll simply be a waste of time——"

"I hardly think so, Master De Valerie," said Phipps. "I will admit that the matter of clothing appears to be insignificant. But if you will consider for a moment you will see that this must be provided for. We are dressed in grasses, and this form of attire is constantly wearing out and requires renewal. It will be the duty of the Clothing Department to have supplies always in readiness. It will be a small department, consisting of Master Tregellis-West and one assistant."

Sir Montie agreed at length—for, as Phipps had made clear, it really was essential that fresh supplies of grass attire should be ready. With two juniors always on the job, there would never be any trouble.

"I do not see the necessity for any other department," went on Phipps "Indeed, if we have any more, there will not be a large number of young gentlemen to officiate in the various duties——"

"Hold on!" put in Handforth firmly. "It's just about time I butted in! What about me? What department do I come in? Where do I rule?"

"You don't rule anywhere!" said Christine.

"Huh! Don't I?" roared Handforth. "We'll jolly soon see about that! If I'm not made chief of a department, there'll be a row! I'm not the kind of chap to make a fuss, but when it comes to this kind of thing I'm going to jib. Now then, Phipps—what about it?"

Phipps met Handforth's eye quite calmly.

"I must confess, Master Handforth, that I had not thought about you for any particular position," he said. "And I really do not see the necessity——"

"Oh, don't you?" snapped Handforth. "Then you'd better see it quick! After all, you're nobody, and I'm going to have my rights——"

"Have him shoved in prison for insubordination, Phipps!" suggested Armstrong. "You're Prime Minister—you're the chief of the whole crowd. I wouldn't stand this kind of thing if I were you!"

"Of course not—shut him up, Phipps!"

"It'll take more than Phipps to shut me up!" bellowed Handforth. "I'm one of the leaders, and I'm jolly well going to lead!"

"Really, Master Handforth, I cannot think of any department which is necessary," said Phipps gently. "I know that

you would not care to accept the position of Clothing Chief——"

"A job like that's no good to me!" said Handforth tartly.

"I cannot alter the arrangements regarding Food and Housing and Defences," said Phipps. "And it seems most unnecessary to establish any other department. I am sorry, Master Handforth, but I must insist upon obedience."

"O—o—obedience!" stuttered Handforth dazedly. "You—you talk to me of obedience! Why, you—you——"

"Dry up, Handy!"

"Squash him!"

"Sit on him!"

The weight of opinion was absolutely against the determined leader of Study D. He was seized, whirled round, and about half-a-dozen fellows laid him flat on the sands and used him as a seat. Handforth was squashed. And after that he agreed to be quiet.

He glared round as soon as he had regained his feet.

"Of course, I might have expected it!" he said bitterly. "Favouritism and jealousy! You're all jolly well jealous of me! You know I should do the job better than any of you, and that's why you leave me out! All right—rats to you! Blow you! Do you think I care? Pah! Not a rap!"

And Handforth turned his back—but thought of something a second later.

"Don't forget!" he roared, pointing at Phipps. "Before long you'll come a mucker! You'll fail miserably, and then I shall be elected Prime Minister instead of you! And then, by George, I'll have my revenge! I'll jolly well shove you in prison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Handy's settled, so we'll get on with the washing," chuckled Pitt. "We've got to decide about our departments."

"Master Nipper will have power to select his own men," said Phipps. "You, Master Pitt will select yours. And I've just been thinking there may possibly be a department for Master Handforth, after all."

"Eh?" said Handforth gruffly.

"An idea has just occurred to me, Master Handforth——"

"Forget it!" snapped Handforth. "Do you think I want an appointment in your rotten Government? I wouldn't accept it now—even if you offered it! I'm fed up! I'll jolly well set up an Opposition."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it might be an excellent idea to institute a War Department," said Phipps gravely. "And I cannot think of any better chief for such a department than Master Handforth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

Handforth's eyes sparkled.

"A War Department!" he exclaimed. "By George! We need one, too! At any minute we might be in the thick of fighting!"

"But the Defence Department will attend to that!" put in Tommy Watson.

"Not necessarily," said Phipps. "The Defence Department will be fully occupied in constructing the stockade, and in manufacturing bows and arrows, and other weapons of defence. A War Department, consisting of three young gentlemen would, I think, be entirely satisfactory."

I nodded with approval.

"You've hit it, Phipps," I said. "That's a tophole suggestion."

I saw at once the genius behind the idea. By that one stroke Phipps stamped himself as a man of wonderful tact and judgment. He knew that Handforth would always be a malcontent—not maliciously so, but simply because it was his nature to kick up a fuss. He was one of the best-hearted chaps in the world, but if he didn't get his own way he let everybody know it.

And here, by creating a department that was not really necessary, Handforth was completely disposed of, and he and Church and McClure would be no trouble whatever.

Moreover, there was very little chance of any more happening—and, if it did, the War Department would naturally be merged with the Defence Department—and so would every other section of the Government. The creation of the War Department was merely to keep Handforth quiet. It was a stroke of masterful leadership on Phipps' part.

"Of course, Master Handforth, if you do not care to accept——" began Phipps.

"Well, I don't like keeping up a row," said Handforth carelessly. "Just to please you, Phipps, I'll accept the appointment."

There were many chuckles, and Handforth snorted.

"Of course, I knew you'd cackle!" he said bitterly. "And you needn't think that the War Department will be a mere empty one. It won't! I'm going to make things hum! I select Church and McClure as my subordinates—and if they don't jolly well obey orders there'll be ructions!"

Church and McClure groaned inwardly. This was a disaster. They were bound to serve under Handforth—and he was a Minister in the Government! From that moment Church and McClure were slaves!

The other departments were soon arranged. Fatty Little selected Dick Goodwin and Doyle as his assistants—and they were quite satisfied. I appointed Watson, Christine, Yorke, Talmadge, and De Valerie. And Pitt selected Jack Grey, Armstrong, Griffith, Clapson, and Oldfield. This meant six fellows each in the Defence and Housing Departments, three for the War Department, and three for the Food Department—and two for the Ministry of Clothing.

"There's one assistant for you, Montie," I grinned.

"Begad!" said Tregellis-West. "But, dear old boy, there's no selection, you know—there isn't, really! I've only got Archie left out of the whole crowd—because nobody else wants him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, this is dashed foul!" exclaimed Archie. "It seems to me that I'm not much in demand, what? Well, there you are! That, as it were, is it! Archie remains unemployed."

"I hardly think so, sir," said Phipps gently. "You are Master Tregellis-West's assistant in the Clothing Department."

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "But, really! Look here, and all that sort of thing! Clothing, what? The old glad rags, and so forth! But I can't do it, Phipps—absolutely not!"

"It's all right, Archie—you'll get on all right," I grinned. "Out of all the lot of us, you and Montie are the finest chaps for attending to the wardrobe! What you don't know about clothing amounts to nothing. Wait until to-morrow, and you'll find that everything runs as smooth as glass."

When the fellows went to sleep that night they were all animated and excited—for on the morrow the Island Government would get to work. And I was convinced that the scheme would pan out with great success. There would be no more arguments regarding who should help with the house—who should prepare food—who should do dozens of other things. All the juniors would work under their own chiefs, who had complete authority to give orders, and see that they were obeyed. And, above all, there was Phipps, the Prime Minister—who would give his instructions to the various chiefs.

Under this system of government misunderstandings and arguments would be absolutely avoided.

But would it all pan out as we expected? If we had only known it, the morrow was to bring some very big surprises!

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAR DEPARTMENT GETS BUSY!

PHIPPS was a changed man in the morning.

It was not a change that could be noticed much. But I was on the look-out for it, and had no difficulty in seeing that Phipps was not the valet of old. He was the Prime Minister of Lagoon Island—the lord of all he surveyed.

The Food Department started the day well, providing an excellent breakfast. Then Phipps drew his Ministers together and suggested the work for the day. The Ministers then separated and gave their orders.

It worked beautifully—except for one detail.

The War Ministry refused to comply with the request of the Building Department. Pitt wanted Handforth and his men to assist in the Housing Scheme. But Handforth had ideas of his own.

"Nothing doing!" he said firmly. "The War Department has other work!"

"But, my dear ass, we want to get the house completed——"

"Can't help that," interrupted Handforth. "I'm in a position of authority—and I'm not going to take orders from anybody. I'm War Minister, and I'm jolly well going to let everybody know it!"

Reggie groaned.

"This means we've lost three men!" he said. "Oh, you prize ass! At any rate, you'll lend me Church and McClure——"

"Sorry," said Handforth. "I've got work for them!"

Pitt gave it up, knowing that it was perfectly useless to argue. Somebody suggested that there ought to be a Cabinet Council—the Cabinet consisting of the Government chiefs—to decide whether Handforth should give in or not. But this idea was not proceeded with.

Pitt knew that it would be objectless to appeal to the Prime Minister. For Phipps might give instructions to Handforth—but Handforth, in his present mood, would not carry them out.

So, while all the others set about their various tasks in the glorious morning sunlight, Handforth gathered his men together, and held a council. Church and McClure were inclined to be sullen.

"It's all very well to ride the high horse, but it's not fair," declared Church indignantly. "We ought to be working on the house. We want to get it done—and it's jolly interesting, too——"

"Dry up!" interjected Handforth. "I don't want any insubordination! You'll obey my orders—or be punched on the nose!"

"But look here——"

"Listen!" roared Handforth. "We're the War Department, don't forget. At any moment we might be attacked by cannibals!"

"Rot!" muttered McClure.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Look here, Arnold McClure, I don't want any muttering!" snapped Handforth. "If you want to say something—say it! We need bows and arrows! Right! We'll make some! We need blow-pipes——"

"Blow-pipes?" repeated Church.

"Yes, of course," said Handy. "I've read about 'em, you know. Blow-pipes are dangerous. You make a hollow thing and some arrows, and you shove the ends of the arrows into poison—arsenic, or something! Then you blow the arrows out of the pipes!"

Church and McClure looked rather blank.

"Arrows?" said Church. "You mean darts, I suppose?"

"What's the difference between an arrow and a dart?" demanded Handforth. "Don't quibble! We're going to get busy on the job soon. But, first of all, there's something else to consider. I was thinking of it before brekker this morning. We've got to have a navy!"

"A which?" gasped Church.

"A navy!"

"Oh, he's only being funny!" said McClure, with a yawn.

"Funny!" thundered Handforth. "I'm serious, you babbling lunatics! What's the good of a War Department if it doesn't provide a navy? It's all very well to have defences and things on the shore—but we want a navy so that we can give battle in the lagoon!"

"And where's the navy coming from?" asked McClure patiently.

"We'll make it!" replied Handforth.

"Oh, good!" said Church. "That's frightfully interesting! So we're going to make a navy?"

"Yes!"

"Dreadnoughts and battle-cruisers and destroyers and submarines——"

"You—you blithering idiot!" howled Handforth. "I don't mean a navy like that! How can we have battle-cruisers here?"

"Well, you didn't explain——"

"When I say a navy, I mean a boat of some kind," broke in Handforth. "We're going to build a boat immediately. Then we'll go across the lagoon, examine the reef, and set up some defences on it!"

"Defence work is Nipper's department," said McClure.

"It's mine, too!" declared Handforth. "Come on. We'll soon have a boat ready. If we work hard enough we shall be afloat before dinner time!"

The word soon got about that Handforth was thinking of constructing a navy, and the yells of laughter stopped all the other work for a short time. Handforth was chipped unmercifully.

"All right—wait and see!" roared Handy. "This department is going to do things! Wait until we've got our boat afloat—then you'll look green! I'll jolly well show you!"

"How do you propose to make the boat?" asked De Valerie, grinning.

"Easy!" said Handforth. "Some thin wood or bark, and seats and things, and tie it all together with creepers!"

"And you'll brave the sharks in a thing like that?"

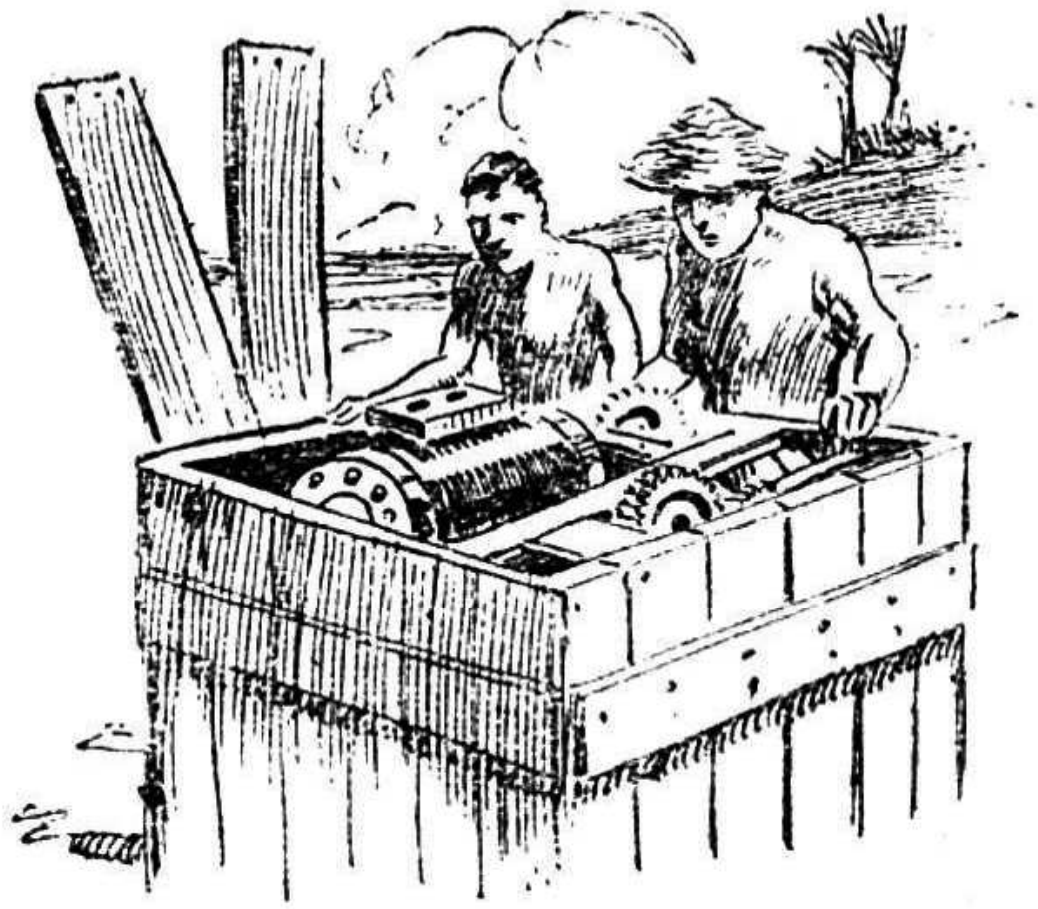
"Why not?"

"Because it'll be certain death—that's why not!" said De Valerie. "Why, you ass, a boat of that sort would collapse in next to no time—and then you'd be at the mercy of the sharks! In the deep part of the lagoon they swim about in dozens!"

"This, perhaps, was a bit of exaggeration, but De Valerie wanted to choke Handforth off. He might as well have tried to stem the Gulf Stream. Once Handforth made up his mind he wouldn't shift.

But he would sometimes bend a little—and he did so now.

Phipps heard of the scheme, and, after thinking for a few minutes, he left the building operations and went over to Handforth



"Another rotten engine!" growled Christine. "What's the good of that? We can't do anything with stuff like this!"

"You intend building a boat, Master Handforth?" he asked.

"Yes, I do! It's no good you trying to stop me——"

"Not at all!" interrupted the Prime Minister calmly. "I was merely about to offer a suggestion. The idea of constructing a—er—navy is an excellent one. A boat will be very useful in many ways."

"Of course it will," said Handforth. "Glad you've got some sense, Phipps."

"I do not think you can do better than build a dug-out," went on Phipps. "It will be far easier and much more stable when completed."

"A dug-out?" repeated Handforth; "what's the good of a dug-out? A dug-out is where you dive into to get out of the way of artillery——"

"A dug-out is a boat, Master Handforth," interrupted Phipps. "A big tree-trunk, hollowed out in the middle and provided with paddles. Such a craft is rather clumsy, but surprisingly serviceable."

Handforth nodded.

"Of course," he agreed. "That, really, is my idea—only you spoke before I could get the words out! A dug-out—of course! The very thing! Now we shall have to carve a tree down——"

"There is a fallen tree just beyond the palm groves," said Phipps. "It is lying between two chapparel trees. It has been down some years and is quite dry. It will be fairly easy to hollow out."

"Oh, good!" said Handforth. "We'll go and inspect it."

So, after all, it was Phipps again who did the thing. Handy would have wasted time trying to make a ramshackle craft out of bark and creeper—and he would have failed.

Phipps made the really sensible suggestion of building a dug-out.

Handforth and Co. found the great trunk without difficulty. It was evidently the legacy of some tropical storm, and it lay half hidden with undergrowth and creepers and lichen. The trunk was perfectly straight, and no better tree could have been found for the purpose in hand.

"The very thing!" said Handforth, with approval.

"And how are we going to shift it?" asked Church. "It weighs a terrific amount, and we shall never be able to move it by ourselves."

Handforth scoffed at the idea, and attempted to lift one end of the tree-trunk. It was like trying to lift a house. And Handforth realised that all the fellows would be required for this task.

So he had to appeal to his fellow-Ministers for assistance. At first we kidded him that we wouldn't help, and he nearly punched the Minister of Housing on the nose. However, we agreed at last, and every available fellow was put on the job.

There were sixteen of us, and we managed to get the big trunk out of the grove and on to the sandy beach. There it lay in the shade of the palms—and Handforth and Co. lost no time in getting to work.

Phipps told them what to do, however, and before the morning was out the heavy task was well on the way. It was a big job to hollow out such a trunk—especially when it is realised that the juniors had nothing but flint tools to work with.

By the evening just a little had been scooped out, and the ends chopped off neatly and trimmed up. Handforth was greatly disappointed, for he had wanted the "navy" to be afloat that day.

This, of course, was impossible. But there was no immediate hurry. Time passed leisurely on this tropic isle. We did not keep count, and took little notice. The fellows were enjoying themselves tremendously—in spite of the fact that we were cut off from civilisation.

The house was nearing completion.

Only the roof remained to be put on—and this was commenced. I was busily planning the defence works, and by the time we had finished, the place would be like a fort. It would resemble a stronghold of the old days of the Hudson Bay Company, in Canada.

Nelson Lee was no worse, but no better. He remained slightly feverish, but showed no sign of delirium. The fact that the fever had not taken a firm grip on him relieved me a lot.

The next day was one of bustling activity again. The various departments were hard at work without a pause—and the War Ministry caused no trouble. For they were so busy on the navy that they had no time to quarrel even. Handforth was an enthusiastic worker once he was fairly on the go, and his chief anxiety was to get the boat ready for the water.

Again he was disappointed at the end of the day because the craft wasn't finished. But it was just like Handforth to be impatient. He always wanted things done on the instant. The most arduous tasks were expected to be accomplished by a mere stroke—in Handforth's opinion.

Somebody suggested making a raft, as this would be so simple. Merely tie some logs together and the thing was done.

"A jolly decent wheeze, too!" said Bob Christine. "A fat lot better than messing about with a giddy tree-trunk! Even when the thing's done it won't float! As soon as anybody gets into it it'll tip 'em into the lagoon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right—cackle away!" sneered Handforth. "Do you think I care? But you'd better jolly well stop this rot!" he added, in a roar. "I'm not going to have the War Ministry ridiculed by a lot of Government underlings! I'm a Minister—and I'm not going to be cheeked!"

"Still, after all, the idea of a raft is quite sound," I declared. "You can make a big raft, Handforth, and supply it with paddles and rudder and everything complete. You can make it a kind of battle-cruiser—and the dug-out will be equivalent to a fast destroyer."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"It'll be a fast destroyer all right when it tips its occupants into the lagoon," he said. "The sharks will see to that! Personally, I'd rather trust myself to the good old-fashioned raft."

Handforth sniffed.

"Do you think I hadn't planned out a raft? It's all fixed—I've decided on it."

"During the last ten seconds!" grinned Christine. "All right, Handy—we know you, old son, but it's good work, and go ahead with it. The sooner the navy gets launched, the better."

But it wasn't until the afternoon of the next day that the dug-out was ready for launching. For two days and a half the War Department—which, apparently, incorporated the Admiralty—had been hard at work hollowing out the tree-trunk. And now the job was done, and the first vessel of the Island Navy was ready for commission. She had seats and paddles and everything. But, so far, she lacked a crew.

The dug-out was capable of seating ten fellows, and probably more. It was between twenty and twenty-five feet long, and Handforth had adorned the prow by fixing on a kind of figure-head—contrary to strong advice from Phipps and myself. There was no need to make the dug-out more top heavy than it naturally was.

By this time, also, the house was complete—and a surprisingly compact structure it proved to be. We had had nothing but the most primitive tools, and were without nails and hammers. Every piece of the structure had been braced together by means of props and twines. And now it was quite enormously strong, and sheltered from all sides except the beach—and there was not

much likelihood of trouble coming from that direction.

The house was large, with a roof which sloped practically down to the ground. And it was made from thousands of canes, interlaced with great dried leaves, and all so cunningly bound that it was practically weather-proof. The roof was of thick grasses, and capable of withstanding the strongest tropical rainstorm. The only trouble likely to ensue was that which would be caused by insects. We couldn't hope to keep the insects out. But we were getting accustomed to them by now, and so we didn't care much.

The foundations were raised a foot from the ground, so that there was a clear air space right beneath. The floor was heavy and solid and levelled with sand. Nelson Lee had already been transferred into his own cool apartment, and I was feeling intensely happy, because the fever had left him and he was slowly but surely improving.

The Food Department moved its quarters, transferring from the beach to the rear section of the new house. Here Fatty Little presided in full state, and was in his glory. A proper fireplace had been built for him—a cunningly-designed affair of stones and mud plaster, with a chimney, all complete. Fatty was able to revel in his surroundings.

The Defence Ministry was still hard at work—and the Housing Department was now lending a hand. For I was losing no time in completing the fortifications. It was my plan to entirely surround the house with a high barricade, composed of small saplings set along like a fence, and driven firm into the ground. At intervals there would be little loopholes. And the top of the fence would be sharply spiked. There was nothing like being prepared.

But, this afternoon, the whole Government abandoned its work for the purpose of coming down to the beach to watch the launching of the dug-out—which Handforth had already christened the "L.I.N. Undefeatable." He had carved the name on at the last moment, and the juniors roared when they saw it.

"Undefeatable, eh?" grinned De Valerie. "Why, the giddy thing only needs a tap and it'll turn turtle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And what does 'L.I.N.' mean?" demanded Armstrong.

Handforth gazed at him pityingly.

"You poor fathead!" he sneered. "L.I.N. means 'Lagoon Island Navy,' of course. What did you think it meant?"

"Goodness knows," replied Armstrong. "But I'll bet you get a ducking the first time you step into it—always providing, of course, that the thing floats! I expect it'll sink like a stone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this the way to treat the navy?" howled Handforth fiercely. "Crew—'shun! March to your quarters!"

But the crew was endeavouring to steal silently away. The only fellows who had consented to risk their lives in the dug-out were, of course, Church and McClure; the unfortunate underlings of the War Ministry had only agreed after being severely battered by their chief. There was not the slightest doubt that Handforth made an ideal War Minister! He was always waging war against his own staff, so it was pretty certain be would be aggressive against an enemy.

Church and McClure groaned and came back.

"Look here," said Church uncomfortably. "It's all very well to go out on the lagoon on a raft—but I'm jolly scared of that thing! Who ever heard of trying to paddle a tree trunk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cowards!" thundered Handforth. "You—you traitors! If you don't jolly well get in, I'll go off alone!"

"Good!" said McClure promptly.

But it was useless. Handforth was determined—and when Handforth was in this condition, he simply had to be pandered to. Nobody else would risk stepping into the Undefeatable, until it had proved that its name was justified.

However, we all helped to carry the dug-out to the tiny rippling waves which tinkled musically upon the silver sands. It was necessary to wade in and hold the dug-out in position—in order to save it from capsizing.

Handforth jumped in the front and seized his paddle. Church and McClure, looking rather white, took their places amidships and astern.

"Right!" roared Handforth. "Let her go!"

One might have supposed that he expected the dug-out to shoot forward like a suddenly-released aeroplane. It certainly did shoot a bit—because we all gave it a terrific heave which sent it surging out from the shore.

Surprisingly enough, it kept afloat, and in an upright position—and looked quite picturesque and serviceable. Handforth paddled vigorously, the Undefeatable wobbled in an ominous manner, and Church and McClure forgot to assist. They clung to the sides, looking round anxiously for sharks.

But there was no real danger of sharks here, or I wouldn't have let the War Minister venture out. The water was shallow, and quite secure.

"There you are!" roared Handforth triumphantly. "What did I tell you?"

He turned round, his face flushed with victory. Unfortunately, he leaned overside—being quite unfamiliar with the peculiar pranks which dug-outs get up to. L.I.N. Undefeatable heeled over, and ungracefully capsized, pitching the entire War Ministry into the water.

And the audience on the sands sank back and howled!

CHAPTER V.

THE DISCOVERY ON THE REEF!

"HA, HA, HA!"

The entire populace, as Archie observed, was most frightfully tickled. The juniors roared as Handforth and Co. came to the surface, splashing and gasping. Handforth had his back to the dug-out, and didn't see it.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "It's foundered."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gone to the bottom—after all the trouble we took," spluttered Handforth furiously. "By George! Somebody's going to pay for this! I'll bet those two fatheads leaned out, or something—— Why, what the—— Yarooooh!"

Something hit Handforth a fearful crash on the back of the head. It was only the L.I.N. Undefeatable, which Church and McClure had swung round in order to set it right. They miejudged the length of the craft, and Handforth received the blows with full force. This, at all events, was the charitable explanation—although some fellows darkly hinted that the War Ministry staff had maliciously intended to assassinate their chief.

From the shore it was the funniest thing we had seen ever since we arrived on the island, and the yells were loud and long. Even Phipps unbent to such an extent that there was a suspicion of tears in his eyes.

Handforth plunged under the surface, and came up spluttering.

"Who did that?" he bellowed. "Oh! So—so the giddy navy hasn't sunk, after all! What's the idea of jabbing me in the back of the head?"

"Sorry!" gasped Church. "Quite an accident!"

For once Handforth's chums were safe, for he could not very well get at them. And, in any case, he was so relieved to find that L.I.N. Undefeatable was afloat that he didn't even think of attending to his chums.

"Better bring her inshore, Handy!" I sang out. "I'll get aboard, if you like, and so will Pitt and De Valerie and a few others."

"Will we?" said De Valerie dubiously.

"The boat's all right—safe as houses," I replied. "But you must know how to handle these things—they tip over at once. We'll remove the ornament from the front, and the whole show will be more stable."

The dug-out was brought to the shore, and Handforth and Co. held it while about eight fellows went in. I took the forward paddle, and carefully instructed the others not to lean overside on any account. They were to kneel steady in the bottom of the craft and wield their paddles in accordance with my stroke.

Plunging into the lagoon had not harmed Handforth and Co. in the least, since they wore so little that a ducking was nothing. And the water itself was as warm as a heated swimming bath.

The juniors were rather astonished to find that the Undefeatable skimmed along quite safely, although somewhat clumsily. I had been in a dug-out many a time, and knew exactly how to handle one. I gave instructions constantly, and we paddled up and down the shore for some little time—and Handforth fumed on the beach.

"If I'd have known you were going out like this, I wouldn't have allowed it!" he roared, shaking his fist at us. "You rotters! Bring that ship back! It belongs to the navy—and you're all outsiders. It's a nice thing when the War Department has to stand still and look on!"

"Deucedly hard lines, what?" said Archie languidly. "In other words, old bean, the most dashed kind of cheek! I mean to say, it's somewhat thick when the bally old constructor chappie has to look on!"

"You wait till they come ashore!" said Handforth darkly.

We soon arrived, and Handforth, bubbling with indignation, was allowed to climb on board. He nearly upset the whole crowd of us as a commencement—being the clumsiest fellow under the sun.

"Now look here, Handy," I said seriously. "All joking apart, this dug-out is a credit to the War Department——"

"Who said it wasn't?" asked Handforth.

"Ahem! Well, nobody!" I replied. "But I just want to point out that, although the ship is quite capable of sailing the briny ocean, it's not like a rowing-boat or a dinghy. You can't play about in it—and as for standing up, or leaning overboard—it simply means the whole shoot capsizing!"

"What's the idea of telling me this?" asked Handforth.

"It's all right to capsize a craft in these shallow waters," I replied. "You can do that as long as you like—but out there, in the deep water, it might mean tragedy if the dug-out goes over. There are sharks knocking about."

Handforth nodded.

"Don't be an ass!" he growled. You can trust me!"

When he spoke in that tone, I knew that he was sincere. He wouldn't intentionally upset the dug-out—but this doesn't mean to say that he wouldn't do it by accident. However, a thing of that sort had to be chanced—and almost at once we started off right across the lagoon.

There were ten of us in the dug-out. The figurehead had been removed—amid great protests from Handforth—and the dug-out was now more stable in the water. And it accommodated the ten of us comfortably. It was enormously long and unwieldy, yet I was surprised at the ease with which it could be manœuvred.

"We'll make straight across the bay, and land on the point of the reef where those

three palms are growing," I said. "Then we'll do a bit of exploring."

"That's the idea," agreed Pitt.

And so we commenced paddling across Shark Bay—as we had christened this particular part of the coast line—owing to the fact that Handforth had nearly been caught by a shark in these waters.

The three palm trees grew on a point of the reef well over to the left, and so we cut across Sandy Head and made for our destination in a straight line. On the other side of Shark Bay lay Coral Point, with Palm Island some distance beyond. Palm Island was a tiny patch of white sand where two palm trees grew in the middle of that portion of the lagoon. The reef, with the sea thundering for ever upon its coral surface, lay in a smother of foam.

We were soon in the deep waters, and although the dug-out rocked a bit, there was really no danger of it turning over. Handforth was particularly careful, and I was rather surprised. Perhaps his previous experience with a shark had warned him to be very careful.

Once or twice we paused, fascinated by the scene.

For, from here, the whole aspect of things was different. Looking back, we could see the sweeping bay with the gleaming sand and the glorious green of the trees beyond. A number of fellows were moving about, watching us. And in the background of the shore lay the newly built house, snugly surrounded by cocoanut palms. And right away in the distance rose the hills, on the high ridge—beyond which we had not explored.

Rounding Sandy Head we came within sight of One Mile Stretch. This was a long length of beach which ran approximately for a mile in one straight line, the ground rising towards the headland—which we had termed Lone Tree Crag, because an enormous palm grew in solitary state at the top of the cliff.

Gazing over the side of the dug-out, we could see right down into the depths of the lagoon. The water was as clear and transparent as crystal, and it really seemed impossible that it could be water at all. We seemed to be gazing merely through a piece of gauze. The lagoon bed could be seen, with masses of coral and patches of sand. Starfish lying on the bed of the sea were distinctly visible, and all other kinds of fish swam to and fro, quite unconcerned. But so far we had seen no sign of a shark.

"Isn't it ripping?" exclaimed Pitt enthusiastically. "I'd no idea that things would be so different from out here. It was a jolly fine idea to build a boat. Good for Handy!"

"Yes, and you jolly well grumbled at first!" said Handforth.

We proceeded, and in due course we arrived upon the reef. I had expected that we should have a little difficulty in landing, but this was not the case. The dug-out grounded with ease, and we all scrambled on to the coral. We knew it, too—for it was spiky and hard and most painful to tread upon.

But a little way beyond there was the sand where the three palm trees grew, and here we could walk about with ease and comfort.

Talking out here was not exactly easy. The thunder of the reef was now tremendous, and the spray came hissing over us at intervals. And this was a new sight to us, and we stood there entranced.

The great rollers of the wide ocean surged up, broke with mighty crashes, and the foam hissed and roared.

"This is the stuff!" shouted De Valerie. "I'd like to have a bathe out here—in the rollers——"

"You ass!" I interrupted. "You'd be dragged back in a minute, and that would be the end of you!"

On the margin of the reef there was lichen growing on the rock. In itself, even this lichen was a form of coral. And in the pools at the very edge of the surf branching coral could be seen.

And there were all colours of the rainbow in the various pools. And wonderful things to be seen—gigantic slugs and jellyfish shaped like globes. And here and there one could see the bones of cuttle fish, and occasionally shark's teeth. There were crabs and starfish, and so many other things that it is impossible to describe them.

And while we were admiring these new marvels, there suddenly came a yell of absolute amazement from Reginald Pitt. He had left us, and was picking his way along the reef to a spot which was half-hidden by a high mass of rock. He had just rounded this mass, and now he stood stock still, staring.

"What's wrong?" I shouted.

Pitt turned, his face flushed, his eyes glittering.

"Quick—quick!" he yelled. "Come here, you chaps!"

There was something in his tone which made us leap across the reef, careless of spiky rocks and treacherous pools. And we went round the mass of coral and joined Reggie Pitt. He had not altered the direction of his gaze, but was still looking out towards the sea. Just at first I had an idea that he had seen a smudge of smoke or a sail upon the horizon. It was something exceptionally urgent, at all events, to make Reggie excited.

But now that we were by his side I knew that I was wrong. For he was not looking out to sea, but as some great wooden cases which were jammed between the coral rocks almost immediately in front of us.

They had been invisible from the other part of the reef, and from the shore by reason of the jutting out mass of seaweed-covered rock, which rose fairly high, and acted as a shield.

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

"My—my only hat!"

(*Continued on page 23.*)

Brief Notes about "Our Footballers"

Being a short account of the careers of the famous footballers whose photographs we are presenting to readers with this number. Specially written for "The Nelson Lee Library" by "Rover."

R. T. WOODHOUSE.

ROLAND WOODHOUSE is a hard-working little forward who had done tremendous work for Preston during the past few seasons, and who had many goals to his credit. He was born at Wyland, and before the war was playing with the junior team of that name. During the war he served in the trenches of France and Flanders, first with the T.M.B. and later with the infantry; and when he was "demobbed," and returned to England in 1919, he joined up in the ranks of the Lancashire F.C., where a representative of Preston found him. He made his first appearance with the Prestonian First League side in March, 1919, and so well did he show up on that occasion that he was given a permanent place thereafter.

Woodhouse is not blessed with a superfluity of inches, for he is only 5 ft. 5 in. in height, but he has proved many times that his small stature is in no way a handicap to him. He can leap to head a ball as high as the tallest, and does not dodge a charge which is hurled at him fairly, however hefty his opponent might be. As is only to be expected, he is a cunning little trickster, and has a whole heap of amusing little tricks and dodges he brings out on occasions which baffle the most astute of opposing half-backs. Taken all round, Woodhouse is one of the cleverest little forwards Preston has ever possessed.

He created something of a sensation last season by notching a hat-trick against Burnley. Weight, 10 st. 4 lb.

T. FERGUSON.

THOMAS FERGUSON, the first team goalkeeper for Falkirk, came into the world twenty-four years ago at Longriggent, near Clacmannan, and. as a junior, gained honours with Bedley. Three years ago his abilities were recognised by the Airdrieonians and Falkirk simultaneously, and there was a question for a short time which club he would eventually sign for. This question was settled by Ferguson himself, who chose Falkirk; and with the leaguers Ferguson made great strides, till now his name is linked with the best custodians in Scotland, and those who know say that, "as sure as there's anything under the sun, Tommy will get his cap before long." He probably would have done so last season, had not the brilliance of Kenny Campbell, the first choice man, prevented it.

Falkirk are to be envied in possessing such a clever performer between the uprights as is Ferguson, and forwards are to be praised when they get the ball past him. For Tommy is the safest of goalkeepers, and is an adept at dealing with every sort of shot under the sun. Penalties, pot-shots, corners—they are all as one to him. He saves them all.

A shade under 5 ft. 11 in. in his socks, and weighing 13 st. 7 lb., Ferguson is a man of admirable physique. He is always in training and, away from football, indulges in many athletic sports that are foreign to his own profession. He is also a strict teetotaler.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 31. EDITED BY NIPPER. June 24, 1922.

Editorial Office,
The Beach,
A South Sea Island.

My Dear Readers,

Another week has gone by, and so much has happened in the time that it seems like some remote age since we were all enjoying the comforts of Lord Dorrie's hospitality on board the "Wanderer." It is difficult to believe that our gallant host, with his crew and magnificent yacht, should now be lying at the bottom of the sea. But for the thought of this most unfortunate tragedy, we should all be as happy as sandboys in our new found kingdom.

Necessity is the Mother of Invention.

We have everything we require to keep us alive and well. Never before have I realised how true is the old saying "Necessity is the Mother of Invention." Not a day passed but we discovered something new by which to make our lot easier. Clothing, furniture, tools, have had to be manufactured from the natural resources of the island. One thing leads to another. The crude construction of a boat, for instance, has enabled us to salvage some useful materials from the wreck, all of which will be turned to good account.

Our Prime Minister.

I cannot help remarking here that there must be something radically wrong with the big outside world which can find no better employment for Phipp's genius than in the obscure capacity of a gentleman's valet. That a man of his resource and adaptability should be so wasted is, to my mind, a national loss. Though he may be thought nothing of at home, he is honoured and respected out here, and his election as Prime Minister in our Commonwealth testifies to the confidence placed in his guidance.

Looking to the Future.

We have been so busy coping with the immediate difficulties of our situation that we have not had much opportunity hitherto of giving the future a thought. Now we are beginning to realise that we might have to remain on the island for quite a long time before we can communicate with the outside world. How long we shall have to wait for our deliverance, we do not know—many of us, I think, do not particularly care.

Next Week's New Feature.

In any case, it has been necessary to establish some form of government in order to deal with the many problems and dangers that are likely to arise. For instance, there is the possibility of invasion which calls for a Ministry of Defence to devise ways and means to safeguard our security. Next week I hope to be able to give you a full report in this Magazine of our Parliamentary debates and speeches.

The Guv'nor.

You will all be glad to hear that the Guv'nor is progressing favourably, and is most interested in Phipps' administration.

Your old pal,
Nipper (The Editor).

South Sea Island Impressions.

By JACK GREY.

THERE are few more delightful places in the world than can be found among some of the islands of the South Pacific. The sunny climate cooled by sea breezes is healthy and productive of exuberant tropical growth inland, and many beautiful varieties of marine life on its coral bound coasts.

BIRDS.

Gorgeously plumaged birds may be seen on these islands, such as, the "boatswain's bird," the "frigate bird," and the "phaeton bird," whose long red, black and white tail feathers make favourite ornaments for native head-dresses. In the woods are magnificent pigeons, which are sometimes used as postmen by the islanders.

FRUIT.

Many kinds of fruit grow on these islands besides the cocoanut. Figs, limes, citrons, pine-apples, bananas, bread-fruit, guavas and several kinds of wild fruits are to be found.

FLOWERS.

The air is laden with the sweet perfumes of flowering tropical plants amid the tangled greenery of the woods, which are resplendant with red and yellow blossoms of hibiscus, the white gardenia, the trumpet blossoms of the datura, the variegated hues and shapes of croton bushes, the gorgeous purple of bougainvillea and other blooms in enchanting profusion.

STAPLE FOODS.

The staple food among the islanders is the bread-fruit and the pandanus, a woody fruit like a course pineapple, which is ground into flour or mashed up into a cake.

TREES.

Of trees, one of the most useful is the paper mulberry, for its inner bark provides the natives with cloth. There are fine shade and timber trees—the spreading banyan, the ends of whose branches reach the ground and take root, the gigantic chestnut of the Pacific, whose buttressed trunk may measure a dozen yards round, the utu, like a huge magnolia with dark glossy leaves, two feet long, and pink-tipped snowball flowers strewing the ground for months. Then there is the tamanu, with its mahogany-like wood, the coral tree, with its blood-red blossom and its deciduous leaves, the apape, a tall, bare trunk crowned by a pale-green fruit tuft, the graceful candle-nut, with its silvery foliage and the funereal casuarina, whose drooping hair-like foliage overhangs old tombs.

FISH.

There are fish around these islands of numerous varieties, some of which are of most brilliant hues, from gold to black velvet spangled with peacock sheen. Some of these fairy-like creatures are poisonous, at least in certain seasons, and some do not taste as well as they look. Besides the shark, there are some dangerous fish, such as the sword-fish and the sting-ray. One must not omit to mention the huge, hideous cuttle-fish, that squirts an inky fluid under the spear. You will find also great turtles sometimes weighing hundreds of pounds, laying piles of soft eggs like tennis balls, a welcome find to a hungry man. Among the bigger fry of fish are whales and porpoises. Crabs, prawns of many varieties are abundantly plentiful on the sea-shore. It is quite a common sight to see some of these crabs climbing a cocoanut tree and with their powerful claws crack a nut, causing an explosion like the report of a gun.

GAME.

The almost total absence of game on these islands is probably one of the reasons why cannibalism is common among some of the tribes. But many of our domestic animals such as the horse and the dog, the pig and the cow have been introduced by white men, and seem to thrive very well.

EXTRACTS FROM MY DIARY

By REGINALD PITT.

A Large Spider.

I HAD a bit of a scare to-day. I went with some of the fellows gathering canes for building the house, and we passed through the palm groves, and then cut across a lovely grassy valley, with brilliant flowers growing in wild profusion. It was a bit marshy, too. I had tumbled down into a kind of hollow. And then, all at once, I saw something. In other words, I got the wind up.

There was a spider just in front of me, and actually touching my bare leg! At least, it did for a moment. And the ghastly thing was as large as a tea-plate. I nearly fainted on the spot.

And, somehow, I couldn't move. The fearful creature fascinated me. It was as smooth as velvet, and I could see the eyes closely grouped together, and they blazed like gems in the sunlight—a most extraordinary effect. To my horror it ran up my leg, and felt as heavy as a kitten. Every second I expected to be bitten. Then I gave one terrific yell.

The spider shot off and vanished beneath a mass of ferns. I breathed a great sigh of relief, and turned round—to find Phipps grinning down at me. I told him there was nothing to laugh at, and then he said that the gigantic spider was perfectly harmless. It was of a kind which is found in Samoa. Indeed, the Samoan children play with such spiders.

A Sting Ray.

Went out over the lagoon in Handy's dugout. Quite a decent craft, and can be managed O.K. Saw strange things down through the clear water. The most extraordinary was a gigantic flat fish which Mr. Lee afterwards told me must have been a sting ray. It darkened yards of the water, and cast an immense shadow on the lagoon's bed, with its flat, table-like body. It seemed to have a nightmare-like face designed on its back, and swinging behind there was a great tail like a steel rope. A thing like that could kill a chap in a minute. The lagoon isn't as glorious as it seems.

A New Danger.

We're pretty certain that this island is volcanic. Early this morning we were a bit startled by a kind of tremor which ran through the ground. Then there were a couple of dull-sounding reports. And looking over towards the ridge in the centre of the island we saw great clouds of peculiar-looking steam rising. Let's hope the giddy volcano isn't going to erupt, and bury us all!

The Clothes Minister Gets Busy.

The Clothing Department has been getting very busy. Montie is the chief, but Archie, surprisingly enough, has come out strong. Result—Archie a vision of glory. Like other Government officials, he attends to his own wants first. He surprised the natives by appearing with a necklace of threaded shells, with more shells round his arms, like bangles. The effect was quite good, but nobody but Archie could wear 'em. Chaps with plenty to do can't be hampered.

Also the War Minister.

Trouble in the War Department. This, of course, has been expected, so nobody is surprised. Handforth demands that his subordinates shall undertake drilling. He argues that a War Department must be prepared for war. But Church and McClure point out that a War Office never goes to war itself—it only directs others. A War Department, in fact, has a soft time of it. Handforth means to change it all—and he's doing it. His underlings have my greatest sympathy. They are in a state of war all the time. One look at their faces confirms this statement. As soon as Church's black eye gets better, he will probably be suffering from a thick ear. And vice-versa with McClure. The War Minister generally manages to keep them well supplied with signs of the fray.

WONDERS OF THE TROPICS!

By BOB CHRISTINE

No. 2.—STRANGE FISH

I HAVE already said a few things about the coral reef which surrounds Lagoon Island. And now I want to write bout some of the wonders which are to be seen in the deep pools of the reef and in the lagoon. Since Handforth has made it possible—by providing a dugout—to go to the reef, we have seen all sorts of fresh marvels.

Going along the reef one day I went for a swim in a deep pool. The water seemed shallow at first, but then I suddenly found that it was about twenty feet in depth just below me.

The water was like crystal, so clear that I could see every detail on the sandy bottom, and on the walls of coral. Mind you, I don't think I shall be able to describe the things I saw properly. The finest writer in the world couldn't put on paper the actual wonders of such a pool as this. The beauty of the thing was absolutely marvellous, and mere words seem futile.

However, I'll do my best. The various corals were covered with vivid colours, and the tip of every piece of stone was as gay as an Oriental flower bed. And the slight current caused them to sway as though in a gentle breeze. They looked like flowers.

Yet how extraordinary it was to realise that they were really stalks of solid limestone—capable of cutting and tearing anything that came upon them. And all about these sprays of rocks were fishes. But what fishes! Every colour one could think of, as bright as birds and butterflies. One who has only seen fish in England cannot have the slightest conception of the fish seen in a South Sea lagoon.

And this pool, I believe, was a sort of specimen case—there was every kind of fish there, all enclosed, so that they couldn't get out. And it was glorious to loll in the water and watch them. Some were shaped very much like mackerel, perhaps a foot long, and a brilliant violet in colour, with a quieter hue down the backbone and on the fins. The gill covers were bright scarlet.

There were flat fish, which I believed to be a small edition of the sting ray, and other fish of a most peculiar shape, with brown stripes like a zebra, with an iminense fan-like wing on its back, and another on its stomach. I described this later to Mr. Lee, and he said it must have been an acanthurus vefifer, a type which is common to Polynesia.

Another beautiful fish plainly visible was a squat-looking thing, golden coloured, with two great brown stripes across its body, and a long, spike-like article which grew out of its back. It nearly broke my jaw to repeat it, but Phipps told me it was a heniochus macrolepidotus. How the dickens does Phipps know these things?

The most peculiar-looking article was another gold one with a blue pattern all over it; and still another which was red all over, with whacking great fins and a kind of fence on its back. It was something like a huge goldfish, and I found out that it was called a pterois miles.

There was a strange-looking fish with a greenish back, turning to black underneath, and covered with great red spots. Its fins were blue near the body, and red at the tips.

A gorgeous-looking thing was one all red and green stripes, but one of the very prettiest was a fish of shimmering blue, which darted about in a most bewildering fashion. Right across its middle there seemed to be a green band, so clearly marked that it looked artificial.

What I have put down here is just a faint idea of the wonders which this crystal pool contained. When there was nothing particular to do I spent hours looking into this one pool alone. The fascination of it was absolutely gripping. Such fish as these are a delight to the eye, and so marvellous that one wonders how nature can be so clever. The more a chap goes into these tropical wonders, the more he realises how puny mankind really is!

(*Continued from page* 17.)

"What are they?"

"How the dickens did they get here?"

"Goodness knows!"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed tensely. "Don't you see? Can't you understand? This is wreckage from the Wanderer!"

The juniors were all silent for just a brief spell. They had not thought of this explanation, and now that they knew they were rather horrified Yet, at the same time, they were excited and thrilled.

"The—the Wanderer!" exclaimed Church huskily. "Then—then there's no doubt about her having gone to the bottom!"

"There never was any doubt!" growled Handforth. "The yacht's lost, you ass. And this—this is the very first sign that we have seen of the old boat! Well, thank goodness we found something—it's done away with all doubt!"

"That's just what I was thinking," I exclaimed. "This is clear, positive proof that the Wanderer struck on this part of the reef—just as we originally supposed. And this—this is all that is left of it!"

I spoke very quietly, and I don't suppose the others heard me very well, owing to the thunder of the surf. But I couldn't help it. There was a kind of lump in my throat.

For, through all the doubts and uncertainties, I had cherished a faint hope that something might have happened unknown to us—something which would bring the Wanderer back, with those precious lives on board. But this evidence now before us seemed to be conclusive.

Wreckage!

What other evidence did we need? It cannot be denied, however, that practically all the juniors forgot their grief in the excitement of the find. They had grown accustomed to the loss of Dorrie and Umlosi and Yung Ching and the others. For days they had accepted the inevitable. And the tragedy had begun to lose its horror. That horror had been revived for a few brief moments now, but it soon passed.

"Packing cases!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "We may be able to rescue 'em! And it's quite likely they contain all sorts of things—tinned food, perhaps! By George, I'd give anything for some sardines or corned beef!"

All the other juniors instinctively smacked their lips. On board the yacht they had frequently expressed their dislike for corned beef, and were glad that none of it was included in Dorrie's supplies. The crew fared off it, of course, but not the passengers.

But now what a difference!

The very thought of corned beef and sardines and other tinned goods made the fellows madly eager to open the cases and explore the contents. After living on the island fare for a time—excellent as it was—they longed for some reminder of civilisation.

But I shook my head.

"No use looking for grub in these cases," I said. "To the best of my belief, they only contain machinery."

"Machinery!" repeated Handforth. "How do you know?"

"You chaps have got pretty rotten memories," I said.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything," I replied. "These huge packing cases were lashed to the forward deck of the Wanderer—and so was that big zinc tank," I added, pointing. "Don't you remember seeing them there, covered with a tarpaulin?"

"By Jingo, yes!" exclaimed Pitt. "That's right! And I wouldn't mind betting my boots—which I haven't got—that the whole giddy lot was shot off when the yacht struck against the reef.'

"Of course," I agreed. "The jar was so terrific that they were jerked free, and tumbled overside."

We crawled as near as possible, and then distinctly saw that there were two very heavy wooden packing cases of substantial size, and iron bound. They were partially smashed, and lying in a pool of the reef, slightly submerged. Next to them there was a smaller case, and about twenty yards away, in another hollow of the reef lay a zinc tank—a kind of boiler, entirely enclosed. I don't know exactly what this tank had been used for, or why it had been on the yacht's deck—but that, after all, is immaterial.

The tank appeared to be perfectly whole, and was unharmed except for one or two dents, but we couldn't tell exactly until we had made a closer inspection—and it would be somewhat difficult to get to that part of the reef.

"Well, anyway let's get the lids off," suggested Handforth briskly. "It'll be pretty easy, because the woodwork's smashed already. Come on—this way! Follow me, and you'll be all right!"

Handforth plunged forward, and dived headfirst into a deep pool. There was a fearful commotion in the water, then Handy came to the surface.

"Yaroooh!" he howled. "There's some sharp coral down here that nearly brained me! Oh, my goodness I'm hurt!"

"'Follow me, and you'll be all right!'" quoted Pitt, with a grin. "Looks like it, doesn't it? You've got to be careful, Handy. It doesn't do to go dashing about on a coral reef."

We picked our way round very cautiously, stepping from rock to rock, and at last we arrived right against the packing-cases. Here the spray was hissing over us all the time, the tiny particles of water coming down like showers of scintillating diamonds, as the sunlight caught them.

And near by there was a deep pool, with a surface which was hardly disturbed, and which, in itself, was a place of wonder and absolute delight. Fish of every glorious hue could be seen down in the crystal depths, and corals lined the walls of the pool like rainbow coloured Oriental flowers.

We found, after all, that the sodden wooden lids of the cases could be removed. They were all smashed in to a certain degree. I could see that these cases would not be submerged even at high tide. Now that the sea was calm there was no danger of this wreckage being washed away.

At the same time, it would be necessary to salve the things as quickly as possible, if we wanted them, for tropical storms spring up without warning, and if we dallied we might lose this booty for good.

Handforth began wrenching at the smashed woodwork, and it was so warped and swollen by the action of the sea that the boards were bulging outwards already, and needed only a comparatively little pressure to force them apart.

And it was found almost at once that I was right.

The biggest case of all contained machinery—things that seemed to be the various parts of some great engine or other. The second case contained further parts, and numerous tools—great spanners and screwdrivers. We could only see just a few, for we only investigated the top layers. But there was plenty of satisfaction to be gained.

"Good!" said Pitt. "These things will come in jolly handy, you know! Hammers and spanners and things We haven't got a tool on the island—and think what we can do with all this lot!"

"Rather!"

"Couldn't have anything more useful."

The fellows were right, for the only tools on the island were those which we had made ourselves—and they were crude and only half effective. We could well do with some really good implements.

"Now, it's not much good standing here and looking at the things," I exclaimed. "We've got to get the whole job lot ashore—as quickly as possible. We must have the complete outfit across the lagoon before this evening."

"Easy!" declared Handforth. "We'll unpack the things here, and then transport them in the dug-out."

"Good wheeze!"

"Bad wheeze!" I said. "Too slow!"

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We can make two or three journeys——"

"My dear chap, it would take us two or three dozen journeys," I interrupted. "Quite apart from that, these cases probably contain whacking great heavy things that will need a dozen of us to lift. How do you reckon to carry things like that in a dug-out?"

"Oh, the Undefeatable is a good craft!" said Handforth proudly.

"Very likely—but not good enough for this kind of work," I said. "She'd jolly soon be defeated if we shoved that zinc tank on her!"

"Oh, we can tow the giddy tank ashore," declared Handforth. "In any case, how the dickens do you propose to get the stuff across the lagoon if we don't transport it by the Navy?"

I grinned.

"The Navy will transport it all right," I said. "But the Navy needs a big craft first—and I suggest we go ashore and build it at once—all hands to the pumps. Every Government employee from every department—including the Prime Minister! To be exact we've got to build a raft!"

"That's the stuff!" said Pitt, nodding. "A raft—that's just what we need. It won't take long to rope some logs together. Then we can tow the thing across the lagoon, and load her up."

Even Handforth agreed that this was by far the better plan—and without any further delay we started off to take our news back to the shore, and to make big preparations for the salvage work.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HORROR OF THE POOL!

HANDFORTH made no attempt to leave the spoils.

"You chaps can go—I'm staying here!" he said. "There's no need for me to come across. I can be unpacking these giddy cases while you do the trip and make the raft."

"And get out of all the hard work!" said De Valerie. "You knowing bounder! You look after yourself, don't you?"

"It's all right—let him stay!" I said. "This unpacking is pretty hard work, and we couldn't leave a better chap than Handforth. He'll have a tremendous lot done by the time we come back."

This, of course, was just a little bit of diplomacy on my part. I wasn't particularly keen about Handforth in the dug-out, and he would certainly cause trouble ashore while the raft was being constructed. Handy had the best intentions, but he couldn't help stirring up strife.

He nodded with approval—little realising that I was pulling his leg. Then he grabbed hold of Church, who was just on the point of going.

"You'd better stay, too!" he said briskly. "I shall need an assistant, and you'll do as well as anybody else."

"But I want to——"

"You want to do what?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "Don't you understand that I'm your chief, and if I give an order you've got to obey it without question? Another word, my son, and I'll jolly well punch your nose!"

Church subsided—merely for the sake of peace. Handforth would probably have detained the other member of the War Department, but McClure had taken care to get near the dug-out, which was some distance along the reef.

We were soon off, and Handforth and

Church were left out there, on the reef. They didn't waste any time, but got busy unpacking as soon as possible.

Many of the parts of the machinery were too heavy for them to shift. But they unearthed connecting rods, bolts and nuts, and similar articles, most of them being well wrapped up in sacking or canvas. And they were all so well greased that the water had hardly caused a speck of rust.

"I don't reckon these things'll be much good," said Church, as he looked at them lying on the rocks. "What can we do with them? Parts of an engine like this are about as much use on a desert island as an electric fan would be at the North Pole!"

"They won't be any good as an engine, of course, but we can use the parts for all sorts of things. There's a hundred-and-one different ways in which we can utilise these chunks of machinery."

Now and again they gazed over the reef towards the shore—being compelled to walk several yards round the hump of projecting coral.

And, gazing across the lagoon, they could see tremendous activity on the beach. The dug-out was drawn up on the salt-white sands, and every available hand was employed in bringing great logs down to the beach. Phipps was directing operations, and the raft would soon be taking shape.

After about an hour the two juniors came to very heavy articles which they could not shift, and so they turned their attention to the second packing case. Just as Handforth was about to go towards it he noticed a movement in a deep pool near by—that pool which looked so fairylike and attractive.

"A giddy fish, I suppose," said Handforth. "My hat! Just come and have a look at this coral here! I don't usually go dotty over these kind of things, but this is absolutely glorious!"

He bent closer, and just at that moment an extraordinary thing happened. Handforth was right in the pool up to his middle, staring down at the wonders which could be clearly seen through the glorious water. And then, without warning, a rope appeared to clutch him round the left ankle.

Handforth was so surprised that he stood stock still with his mouth open. It felt as though somebody had gripped him by the foot. But the grip tightened—just like a slip-knot in a long rope which has been drawn taut.

"I—I say!" he gasped suddenly. "Some—something's grabbed—— Great Scott!"

At that second a thing like a black whip-lash hissed out of the water, and seized Handforth by the upper part of his right arm. It twirled itself round, drew as tight as a piece of elastic, and held firm.

"Yarooooh!" howled Handforth wildly. "Quick! What—what the dickens is it, Churchy? I—I'm collared!"

But Church was too horrified to answer. He didn't know what these strange ropes meant, but he could see that Handforth was in dire trouble, and he could hardly move for a few moments.

He knew that Handforth had been caught, but Church did not even think of a fish, or any monster of the deep. He believed that Handforth had become entangled in some particularly tenacious seaweed—some stuff that was like rope. But only a few seconds later Church discovered that his first impression was wrong.

For the black ropes were moving—quivering—and others were coming out of the water—lashing about, and seizing on to Handforth at different parts of his body. Two of them were quivering over his back, and his left arm was already bound tightly to his side, so he could not move it.

But even Handforth was absolutely in the dark regarding the nature of this fearsome thing. He only knew that he was in great pain, and that the ropes were gripping him with terrible tenacity. The harder he struggled, the harder they seemed to clutch. And, slowly but surely he was being dragged further and further into the pool.

"Good heavens!" gasped Church faintly.

His face was as pale as a sheet, and he wondered for one dreadful second whether he was dreaming—whether this was some fearsome nightmare. For the thing he gazed upon was like nothing on earth.

Church had been vainly trying to seek where the lashing ropes came from. And now, in one flash, the truth was obvious to him. For just under the surface of the water, and even now emerging, there was a face!

A face such as Church had never beheld.

It was absolutely awful, with great eyes, as wide as breakfast plates, and they had a stony glare in them which held Church in a trance. These eyes were looking straight at Handforth.

There was a heavy beak hanging down in front of the eyes. And this beak worked about in the most extraordinary manner. But this Church only glimpsed. For he could not take his attention from those appalling eyes. Their expression was enough to make one's blood run cold. For the eyes were passionless, stony—and yet absolutely full of hatred and deadly purpose.

Even then Church didn't know the truth—he didn't know that this thing was an enormous octopod—a denizen of the deep water. This was not his environment—this comparatively shallow pool on the reef. He had no business there.

Probably he had come in with the previous tide, and had been having an excellent meal on crabs. But he had eaten not wisely, but too well—with the result that the tide had departed before he was ready. Thus the octopod was left stranded in the pool. And now he had been disturbed by Handforth—and obviously resented it. He was intent upon destroying the invader.

"Help!" screamed Handforth. "Can't—can't you do something? I—I'm absolutely held as tight as anything! I—I can't move!

These—these—— Ow! Yaroooh! Quick, you ass!"

Handforth's voice brought Church to himself. A flush of colour came into his cheeks, and he knew that Handforth was in horrible peril and that he would probably go to his death.

It seemed strange that it was nearly always Handforth who got into these troubles. But the explanation was not far to seek. He was always reckless—always quite careless of possible dangers.

Handforth still had his right arm free, but this was precious little good to him, for he possessed no weapon, and at any moment this arm, too, might be caught in the tolls, and held.

"Hold on!" gasped Church hoarsely. "I—I'll do something!"

He didn't know what to do—he hadn't the faintest idea. It was obviously useless to dash into the pool himself—for he, too, would be clutched and held. And the horror of that face was still upon him.

Then, as his gaze roved round, he caught sight of the heap of stuff which had already been unpacked from the cases. Right on the top were two or three steel spanners which were very heavy, and which contained no outer bindings.

Church made a dive, grasped the spanner, and twirled round. Then he took a wild, hasty aim, and hurled the spanner with every ounce of his strength—straight at that face, which was just emerging from the water.

Considering the hastiness of aim, the result was extraordinary. For the heavy spanner, whizzing through the air, hit the octopod fairly and squarely between those two terrible eyes.

It shivered and shook all over, like some enormous black jelly. And almost as it did so the crystal water of the pool turned to inky blackness. For the octopod is provided with such methods of concealing himself. He possesses an ink bag—and he had released its contents now.

Handforth felt the whip-like thongs loosen somewhat, and he thought that he was going to get free. He did, indeed, manage to wrench his left arm away. But when he attempted to scramble out of the pool, those ropes tightened again and held him a prisoner.

"Oh—oh, my goodness!" groaned Church. "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Gimme a chunk of wood—anything!" roared Handforth.

Church darted away, and grabbed up one of the big planks which had come from the top of the largest packing-case. As it happened, this piece was exactly suitable for the purpose. The plank was split, and one end of it was as sharp as a spear, for it tapered down to a point. Church dashed up, and thrust it into his chum's hand.

He, himself, couldn't reach out into the pool—but Handforth could.

"Now then, you ugly brute!" he shouted thickly. "Take that!"

Whizzzz!

Handforth thrust the plank forward with all his strength. And the sharp point of it penetrated the soft, jelly-like carcase. At the very same second the lashing ropes released him, and commenced shooting about wildly.

Handforth had no desire to stay there for the purpose of seeing what happened afterwards. He turned and scrambled out of the pool with the agility of a monkey. He threw himself on the rocks, almost sobbing for breath, and with his face screwed up into an expression of agony.

"Handy!" panted Church. "Are—are you all right?"

"You—you dotty ass!" moaned Handforth. "Do I look all right? Should I be lying here if I was all right? I'm dying—pegging out!"

"Oh!" said Church frantically.

He caught sight of the octopod for a moment as it came to the surface of the now inky pool. That wooden spear was still protruding, and now and again a black rope would lash out and beat upon the water. But within a few moments the commotion subsided.

"Well?" demanded Handforth gruffly. "Ain't you going to say good-bye? Are you going to let me die on the rocks here?"

Church turned, his face working with emotion.

"Oh, Handy!" he muttered. "You—you're not dying! It can't be true! You—you'll get all right soon!"

"I'm nearly at my last gasp!" said Handforth desperately. "It—it's all up with me, Churchy! Say good-bye to the other chaps, won't you?"

"But—but you look all right——"

"You fathead!" roared Handforth. "I ought to know, I suppose?"

"Yes, but—but——"

Biff!

Handforth's fist shot out, and Church rolled over on the rocks. He hadn't felt the biff much, because Handforth's fist did not contain its usual power. Church had only gone over because the blow had been unexpected. And he liked it. The very fact that Handforth could punch at all proved that he was not half so bad as he tried to make out.

"I think I feel a bit better now!" growled Handforth, sitting up. "My hat! What a horrible thing! Of course, any other chap would have been dead long ago! But it takes more than a lobster to kill me!"

"Lobster!" said Church, staring.

"Of course it was—they grow to a terrific size out here!" replied Handforth. "I thought my arms were all over cuts and things, but I can't see much wrong!" he added, as he examined himself.

"It wasn't a lobster," declared Church. "The giddy thing was a cuttlefish—or I know! An octopod! Mr. Lee was telling us

that those things were to be found in these quarters!"

"Well, that's what I meant!" said Handforth, standing up. "Don't quibble! An octopod—of course! Just fancy the rotten thing grabbing hold of me. The terrific nerve, you know! Me!"

"A thing like that wouldn't care if you were a King!" said Church. "An octopod doesn't pick and choose!"

"Well, anyway, I got the best of it!" said Handforth. "Of course, you did a bit, I'll admit!" he added, with an air of condescension. "That board was pretty handy. And we killed the rotter!"

"Jolly good thing, too!" said Church shakily.

He, if anything, seemed to be more affected than Handforth did himself. For it had been horrible to see his chum struggling vainly against the power of that fearsome monster of the deep. It had undoubtedly been a very narrow escape. And Church had just as undoubtedly saved Handforth's life.

Edward Oswald realised this, too.

"It was very decent of you, Churchy," he said quietly. "The way you chucked that spanner was a treat! And you were pretty quick, too, with the plank of wood! Good man! Why, you jolly well saved my life!"

"Oh, rot!" growled Church. "I—I'm only too glad to see you all right, Handy!"

"Well, that's settled!" said Handforth. "Let's get to work again!"

But it was some little time before the juniors were themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING LIKE AN IDEA!

THE morning sun beat down from a sky which was flecked with filmy white clouds. The palms stirred gently in the breeze, and the air was as pure as any air could possibly be.

Drawn up on the beach, with the tiny waves splashing against its stern, was the Lagoon Island Navy—in other words, Handforth's dug-out. And near by lay a cumbersome raft. It was a big, ugly, roughly-constructed thing—but it had served its purpose.

For there, on the beach, lay a conglomeration of machinery.

The work had been completed the previous evening, just before darkness snapped down. And we had had no opportunity of examining our spoils until now. In the darkness we had been unable to do anything.

Everything had been brought away from the reef, including the zinc tank.

Handforth was quite himself this morning. We had heard all about his narrow escape

"Help!" screamed Handforth, "I can't move! Yarrooh! Quick, you ass!"

from the octopod. Handy had been talking about it until he went to sleep, so there was not much chance of our being left in ignorance. Handforth was quite proud of the fact that he had most of the narrow shaves on the island. The other fellows said he was welcome to them.

"Now, there's a lot to be done this morning!" I exclaimed briskly, as soon as breakfast had been disposed of. "We've got to sort out all the salvage, and it's quite likely that a lot of it will be very useful."

"I can do with that tank!" said Fatty Little. "I've had my eye on it since last night! Jolly fine for storing water—or, better still, we'll carve the giddy thing up and make a lot of saucepans!"

"Good wheeze!"

"We'll see about that!" I went on. "I'm not so sure about carving the tank up. It'll be far better to keep it whole. I'm more interested in the other stuff. That engine, for example."

"It seems to be all complete," remarked Pitt. "I wonder what it really is?"

"A donkey-engine, Master Pitt," said Phipps.

"Which means that it won't go, I suppose?" grinned Reggie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Donkey-engines are rather different to donkey's, sir," smiled Phipps. "Moreover, donkeys are excellent animals if one understands them. This engine was, I believe, intended for use on the yacht."

"Of course!" I agreed. "It's a kind of subsidiary engine for working winches and capstans and things, and they're generally driven by steam from the main boilers. We couldn't have found anything less useful!"

"I mean to say, absolutely!" said Archie. "A bally old engine, what? Well, as it were, a chappie hasn't got much dashed use for the old locomotive stuff round about this region, what?"

"A locomotive would be pretty useful—

but this doesn't happen to be a locomotive," I replied. "In fact, the engine's no good at all—except in bits. We may find some use for the various parts. The cylinder, for example, will possibly find its way into the kitchen as a tank or a saucepan!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, a donkey-engine hasn't got any boiler," I went on. "It hasn't got any wheels, or anything. It's only useful when it's connected with the main boilers of a steamer. Still, we'll have a look at the stuff and see what we can do."

"That's it!"

We were holding this conversation in the main living-room of the house. It was surprisingly comfortable—and as cool as possible. The thatched roof allowed no heat to penetrate through, and the whole building stood in the shade of the lofty palms.

We had slept better that night, for we were provided with extremely comfortable hammocks. This was an idea adopted by Phipps. It was all very well sleeping on the floor—but the floor was hard and uncomfortable.

The hammocks had been easily made. We had an abundance of cocoanut fibre in hand, and Phipps had set a number of fellows to work, roughly weaving the stuff into a rude form of cocoanut matting.

The juniors found that it could be easily done, and the result was gratifying. Each hammock was of decent size, and suspended from four posts which were driven into the floor. In this way we were clear of the ground and also clear of nocturnal insects—not completely, but to a great extent.

The next scheme on hand, as soon as the more important work of completing the defences had been done, would be to make furniture. We had some big ideas on this subject, and there was no doubt that we should have plenty to occupy our time for long enough to come.

Tables were required—chairs, and other articles for household use. Chairs could be very easily made, and I was hoping that we should find tools among the salvage which would assist us.

Nelson Lee was still improving, and I did not worry about him. There was no doubt that he had been laid very low, and at the beginning it had seemed just possible that he might succumb to fever. But the guv'nor's iron constitution stood him in good stead.

And now, as day succeeded day, he was getting better and better. The colour was returning to his cheeks, the old smile to his eyes. And before long he would be easily able to get about. Once having taken the turn, he would improve with great rapidity. Nelson Lee had astonishing recuperative powers.

He had his own little bedroom—quiet and secluded, and made as comfortable as we could manage, with an extra special hammock, and a kind of deck-chair arrangement, where he could lie at his ease during the day.

The guv'nor was rather sad to hear the news that we had brought from the reef. For, without doubt, this provided the one item of evidence to prove that Dorrie and Umlosi and the rest had gone to the bottom.

"Of course, we still hoped against hope that the Wanderer might have drifted back into deep water, and that she had been carried away from the island on an ocean current. If this proved to be the case—although the chance was slim—Dorrie would surely return in due course with a rescue party. But his great difficulty would be in locating Lagoon Island. He might search for weeks and weeks without coming across this uncharted scrap of paradise.

And we dismissed all such thoughts from our minds—we dismissed them as an idle dream.

Happily, there was a great deal to occupy the attention of the juniors—a great deal to keep their thoughts busy and their fingers at work. Idleness would have resulted in thinking—and thinking meant moping—and moping, in turn, meant despondence and possibly panic

It was only occasionally that the fellows referred to England and home—and their own dear ones. They were confident that some day, before long, they would be taken off, and would return. And in the meantime they were content with their surroundings. They didn't mind much being so many Robinson Crusoes.

We sallied down to the beach, where the little waves were breaking with silvery splashes upon the sandy shore. The lagoon looked perfect this morning—as blue as the cornflower, and so transparent that even at an acute angle we could see right through the depths.

But we were all eager to examine the salvage by full sunlight.

We knew about the donkey-engine, but were still in ignorance regarding the actual contents of the third case—which was quite a small one. This was the only box which had not been unpacked. There had been no time overnight.

The beach was strewn with various pieces of mechanism—pistons, cogs, castings, oil cups, driving wheels, connecting rods, and such like. Even the most unlearned fellow could see that these were the various parts of a steam engine.

Just a little further along tools were laid out—and these filled our hearts with joy. How useful they would be! Spanners, hammers, screwdrivers, pincers, and pliers, and, best of all, a heavy vice. In a thousand and one ways these tools would come in useful. Difficulties which had seemed insuperable yesterday, were easily possible to-day.

"We won't bother about these things now," I said briskly. "Let's get busy on the smaller case."

"Rather!"

"Open it!"

"Begad! We're frightfully anxious, dear old boy!"

"Well, I mean to say, absolutely!" observed Archie. "Curiosity, don't you know, caused the bally old cat to positively expire. But I don't think there's much danger of that in this case, what?"

There was no doubt that all the fellows were intensely curious—so curious that they could hardly contain their bottled-up impatience. The smaller case was iron-bound and quite intact. Having found it possible to lift it, we had brought it away from the reef just as it was, conveying it across the lagoon on the raft. We had done this because darkness had been creeping over us.

Needless to say, the larger packing cases had also been brought ashore. After emptying them it was easy enough to free them from the rocks and bring them across the lagoon. These smooth, white boards would come in exactly right for the manufacture of the tables and chairs.

We set to work with hammers, and the lid of the small case was soon being raised. The juniors crowded round in tremendous eagerness. All sorts of speculations were made regarding the contents of this box. Fatty was the most anxious of all, for he was hoping against hope that tinned food would be brought to light.

The various Government Departments completely forgot their normal duties on this exciting occasion, and we all gathered round to watch the proceedings. I was just as curious as any of the others.

With so many tools at our disposal—it was glorious to feel them in our grip—we soon wrenched the heavy iron bands away, and then the lid was taken off. Inside we could see a mass of sodden shavings and other packing material.

"Buck up—let's have a look!"

"Pull the stuff out!"

"I'll bet it's grub!"

"Rats! More machinery!"

And the last guess proved to be correct. For we soon discovered that this case was filled with heavy pieces of metal and similar articles. Most of the fellows were greatly disappointed.

"Another rotten engine!" growled Christine. "What's the good of that? We can't do anything with stuff like this!"

"Of course not!"

"Might as well chuck it back in the sea!"

"Hold on!" I interrupted, as I investigated the stuff. "I'm not so sure that this won't be useful! By Jove! Do you see, Phipps? Do you gather what it is? Look here!"

Phipps nodded.

"An electric dynamo, sir," he said. "Evidently a small plant for the manufacture of electric light."

"Gadzooks!" said Archie. "Electric light, what? I mean to say, that'll be somewhat priceless, and all that kind of thing! A dashed improvement on the old darkness, as you might say!"

"Electric light!"

"Oh!"

The juniors were excited again. And we quickly unpacked the various articles, and my first suggestion was proved to be correct. The box contained a complete installation for manufacturing electric light.

The dynamo was there, and many coils of wire, switches, contact breakers, fuse boxes and wires, insulation tape, and at least a dozen vacuum lamps. These latter, I was glad to see, were quite intact, the filaments being unharmed.

I looked up with gleaming eyes.

"This is a find and no mistake!" I exclaimed. "In a couple of days we'll have electric light all over the house—in the living-room and everywhere! We'll have heating things for Fatty, too!"

"What!" said Fatty Little.

"There are some cooking devices here," I said. "They're all fitted with plugs so that you can fit them into the holders. Why, the whole thing's complete! It must have cost a tremendous amount of money!"

"But what was it doing on the yacht?"

"Goodness knows," I replied. "Dorrie had all sorts of plans. He'd been to the Solomon Islands before, you know—and that was our destination. I think poor old Dorrie knew some people in the Solomons, or the New Hebrides—and I'll bet you anything you like he was taking this little installation as a present. That's just's the kind of thing Dorrie would do."

"Rather!" agreed Sir Montie. "Begad! Ain't it frightful, old boys? It makes me feel a little chokey—it does, really!"

We were all silent for a few moments as we thought of Dorrie and the plans he had made for our trip among the Solomon Islands. Without a doubt, my surmise was the correct one. This electric-lighting set was utterly useless on the yacht—but invaluable to an isolated white man in his bungalow on a South Sea Island. Dorrie had been one of the most generous men living, and it would delight his heart to make such a present as this.

"Electric light!" said Handforth. "By George! That'll be ripping, you know! But hold on! There's the dynamo here, or the generator, or whatever it's called—but what the dickens have you got to drive it?"

"Oh!"

"There's no power!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors were rather dismayed by the discovery.

"I've got a ripping wheeze!" said Handforth suddenly. "What about this steam engine? We'll jolly well put the steam engine together, and——"

"Even if we could get it together, it would be useless," I interrupted. "It's miles too big for this electric-light set, Handy. In any case, it would be a shame to use it. There's a much better wheeze."

"Oh, is there?" said Handforth grimly. "What is it?"

"Water!"

"What?"

"Water!" I repeated.

"Water?" yelled Handforth.

"You heard me the first time!" I said calmly. "Water, my son—w-a-t-e-r! We can drive this dynamo without the least trouble and without any bother. It's a simple job."

"How the dickens do you make that out?" asked Tommy Watson.

"In the first place, there's about ten times as much wire here as we need," I said. "The makers were jolly sensible to put a large supply of wire in. Look at this great coil of insulated cable! What we've got to do is to set the generating plant just against the river, back through the palm groves. There'll be heaps of wire to reach to the house."

"But what's the good of shoving the plant in the river?" demanded Handforth.

"That wouldn't be any good at all," I replied. "But it'll be easy enough to manufacture a water-wheel. The river will drive the wheel, and the wheel will drive the electric-light plant. Water power is as common as anything for making electric light."

The juniors followed my reasoning, and were enthusiastic at once. It would certainly be comparatively easy to do as I had said. For there was sufficient wire for all purposes. I examined the plant with great thoroughness, and was assured that the immersion in the sea had not done it any particular harm. By the time we wanted to use it, everything would be all right.

Then I turned my attention to the donkey-engine.

Already an idea had come into my mind. It was rather grotesque, and I hardly considered it seriously. But after I had made a careful inspection of the little steam engine, I turned to the fellows.

"I've got a wheeze!" I said calmly.

"Another one?" asked Reginald Pitt.

"Oh, this isn't connected with the electric light at all," I said. "We can't get busy on that, anyway. We must let the water dry out, or it won't be any good at all. We'd better leave the electric light for a couple of days."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "We'll start on it at once!"

"Of course!"

"We'll see about that," I said. "Don't forget that the Defence Department has got to finish the barricades. We'll try and push that work on to the War Office, so that we can——"

"Oh, will you?" snapped the War Minister. "We've got our own work!"

"Wait until I've finished," I went on. "Look here, it seems a pity to waste all this good stuff. Here are all the parts for putting together a perfect steam engine. There's even a jolly good supply of engine oil! My scheme is to put the thing together, and——"

"Not long ago you said it was a dud idea!" interrupted Handforth.

"No, I didn't," I denied. "I only said that it would be silly to use the steam engine for making the electric light—the river will do the job better. No, I suggest that we make a locomotive!"

"A what?"

"A which?"

"A locomotive!" I repeated; "a thing with wheels, that runs along, you know."

"Fathead!" said Christine. "We know what a locomotive is! But I'd be awfully interested to know how the thump you're going to make a boiler and a fire-box and wheels, and all the rest of it!"

"Good!" I said. "I'll tell you. I'm not saying that we shall be successful—but there's just a chance. And if it's a failure there won't be any harm done. To begin with, we've got tools now, and we can use them. There's the big zinc tank—a tremendously strong thing. That ought to serve well as a boiler."

"By jingo, yes!"

"As for the fire-box, that ought to be comparatively easy," I went on. "There's plenty of sheet metal out of the larger case, and rivets, too. We'll fake up the boiler and the fire-box, and fit the engine to it, so as to make one complete unit. The driving-wheel is supplied with connecting rods and everything. So I should think there's at least a possibility of success."

"Very likely," agreed Pitt. "But how about a carriage—and wheels?"

"While I'm busy with my department doing the engineering job, somebody else will have to be manufacturing the necessary carriage," I said. "You can make wheels from tree-trunks—there are plenty of round trees knocking about. The wheels will have to be pretty broad to travel on this sand. There's no telling what a chap can do until he tries. And if we try hard enough, I daresay we shall manage to fake up some kind of a snorting monster that might go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A great stunt!"

"Rather!"

Nobody thought the scheme would ever work—but it was something to do—it was something exciting and interesting. And there was always the possible chance that the experiment might prove successful.

Reginald Pitt offered to place himself and his department at my disposal, and then we began work in real earnest. The enthusiasm

was tremendous, even Phipps entering into the spirit of the thing, and helping with might and main.

In fact, Phipps was ready with all sorts of helpful ideas, and before the day came to an end the engine had begun to take shape. The various parts were fitted together, and we began to get a better idea of how the thing could be done.

Throughout the next day work was pushed on at full speed. Hammerings and bangings were audible throughout the long hours of daylight. And by the evening the boiler and the fire-box had been fitted.

I made a preliminary test. Logs were brought, and a fire was lit in the fire-box and steam was soon got up. I had fitted a big safety-valve, so there was absolutely no possibility of an explosion.

That experiment was a success.

Once steam was up, and the starting-lever pushed over, the donkey-engine clanked away with a shattering din and a mighty escape of steam. And it seemed to possess a tremendous lot of power.

"Great!" I exclaimed, with gleaming eyes. "It'll work!"

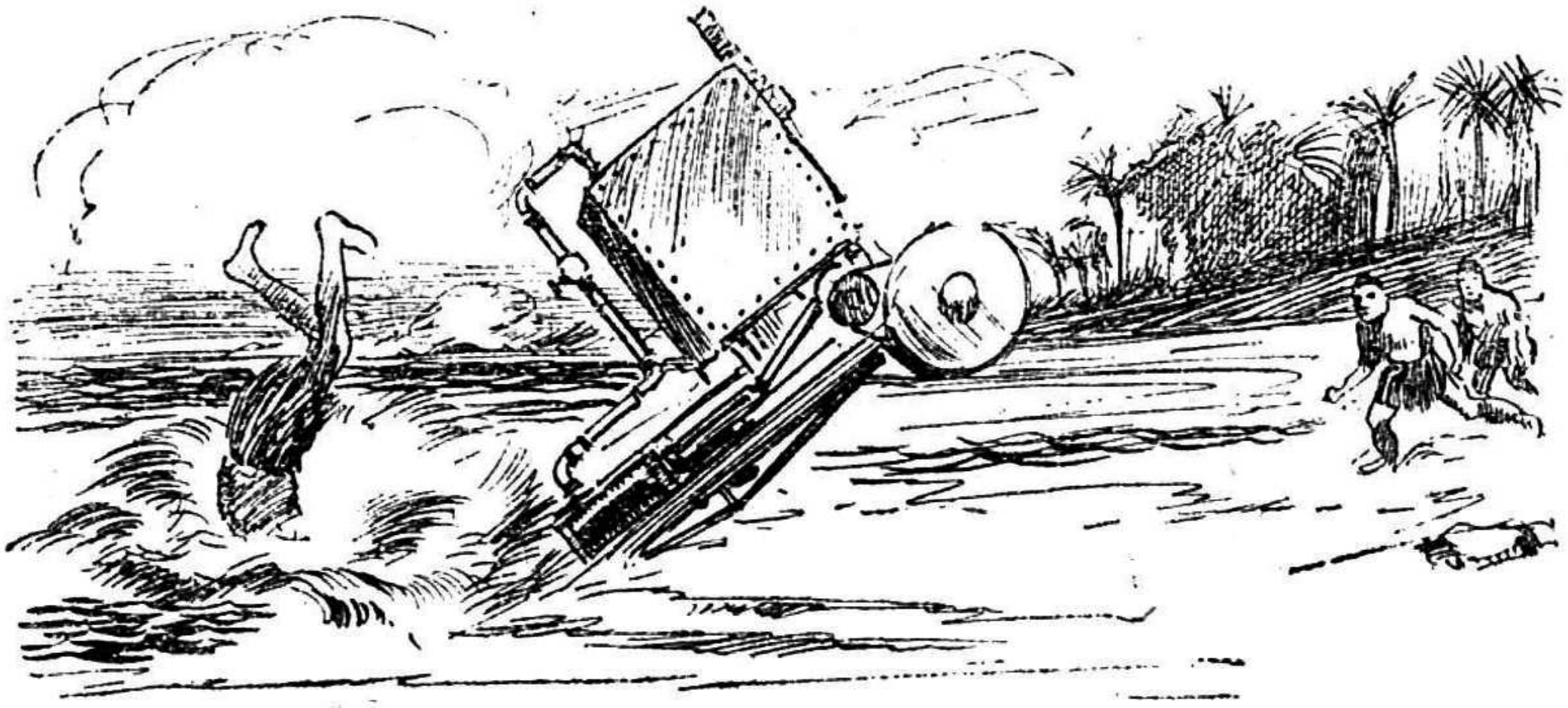
"Marvellous!" declared De Valerie. "I'm not kidding—I mean it! I reckon it's absolutely marvellous that we've got the giddy thing to go!"

And, in a way, I suppose it was. I had hardly expected such a big success. And Reggie Pitt and his men were almost ready with their section, too.

They had constructed a heavy carriage of logs. The wheels had been carefully selected from a particularly big tree which had taken hours and hours to fell. It had been a very long job obtaining four sections suitable for the work. But, by dint of great energy and enterprise, the work had been accomplished.

And now the carriage for the engine had taken definite shape. It was rather low, and the wheels had been firmly fixed on by means of great iron rods—spare parts which really belonged to the engine—and which served as excellent axles. And another big rod was used for driving purposes.

It was not until the noon of the day following that we had succeeded in levering the engine on to the carriage. It was a tremendous task, and we had despaired at times. But at length it was ready—and the wheels were dug deeply into the sands. It was quite possible that we shouldn't be able to shift the thing now!



The Rocket plunged straight into the lagoon, and Handforth was pitched head first over the steering-wheel.

And then, with a great crowd of fellows collecting round, we built a fire in the box, and steam was raised. Nelson Lee was sitting outside the house, looking on with mild amusement.

It filled us all with intense delight to see him there. For he had recovered a great deal of his usual strength, and was mending with every hour that passed. His broken arm had set splendidly, and the wound was healing.

It took some time to get steam up. For it must be remembered that this engine was of the most primitive type, having a zinc tank for a boiler. The wonder of it was that the thing raised any steam at all!

And it really seemed impossible that it could propel itself. That cumbersome carriage was enough to break the heart of any engine. The whole contrivance, viewed from a short distance away, looked like some

nightmare object. In many respects it resembled a Heath Robinson sketch!

There were the four thick wooden wheels and the carriage of logs—with a huge compartment in front for the driver, with a kind of tender which was filled with chips and blocks of wood. Steering could be effected by means of a tremendous lever arrangement. You pushed it forward, and the engine would go to the right—you pulled it back and it would go to the left. At least, this was the idea.

Set upon this prehistoric carriage was the most fearsome engine anybody could imagine. The boiler was stuck in a prominent position, and a funnel had been constructed which projected about a foot above. Volumes of smoke and sparks were issuing forth—very much like a cooking stove! Steam was hissing out of every corner, and the works, which occupied the central portion of the carriage were smothered in oil, and the delightful atmosphere of Lagoon Island was polluted.

The engineers—Pitt and myself—were practically as oily as the engine. Handforth was in the same condition—not because he was an engineer, but because he persisted in pushing himself forward. He had a kind of idea that he was in charge of the operations.

"Dash it all!" observed Archie, backing away. "I mean to say, what? Deucedly poisonous atmosphere, and all that kind of rot! The bally air is positively foul, if you grasp my meaning. Large consignments of niff in the offing, so to speak!"

"And heat, too!" grinned Armstrong. "Phew! The blessed thing will blow up in a minute."

"Rats!" I said. "There's no danger of that."

Before allowing us to get steam up Nelson Lee himself had come down to the beach and made an examination. He was greeted joyously, for this was the first time he had really come out. And he announced that the engine was quite safe, and expressed much doubt as to whether it would go.

The guv'nor had had no desire to see us all blown to bits, and he had insisted upon looking at our handiwork before we proceeded. He was satisfied, and so everything was all right.

At last the safety-valve was hissing forth volumes of steam, and I stood upon the footplate with the starting lever in my hand. I saw that everything was in order, and then grinned at the others. "Stand away—I'm going to start her!" I yelled. "If she won't go, you chaps have got to give her a shove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All hands to the pump!"

"Give her a heave!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

I gently jerked the lever over, opening the

(*Continued on next page.*)

throttle a tiny portion. The steam went hissing into the cylinder, and the whole contraption gave a convulsive jerk and a quiver. The steam hissed out with a terrific roar.

But the engine didn't move!

"Now then—all together!" roared Pitt.

But before any of the fellows could put their shoulders to the thing I pulled the lever over a bit more. This time the carriage itself gave a jerk and a leap. The engine snorted and spurted and shook all over.

Then, with a jar which nearly sent me flying over backwards, the locomotive lumbered out of the deep ruts, and bowled away erratically across the sands—hissing, roaring, and puffing!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROCKET NO. 2!

"HURRAH!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"She's going!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

The crowd of fellows went rushing after the snorting steam engine. Pitt and Handforth had managed to scramble on at the last moment, and Pitt was now grabbing the steering-lever. I needed all my attention for the mechanism. Handforth simply clung on behind. And the extraordinary part of it was that the engine gathered speed like a district train!

It clanked away and rattled and throbbed, and fairly shot over the sands. Perhaps the gear was too high. At all events, the engine was a huge success, and it required a great deal of management! I was compelled to throttle down a good bit, or we should probably have come to grief.

For Pitt was having difficulty with the steering.

We were buzzing along, leaving clouds of steam and drops of oil behind, and we were edging nearer and nearer to the sea. It really seemed that we should finally plunge into the lagoon—more particularly as Pitt pushed the steering-lever the wrong way.

We had called the engine the Rocket No. 2, and she was certainly acting like some kind of a gigantic firework. Sparks were hissing in great quantities out of the funnel, occasionally accompanied by chunks of cinder.

We gave a terrific lurch as Reggie pulled the steering-lever—and made a bee-line for the lagoon.

"Look out!" I yelled.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Pitt.

I shut off steam, and Reggie used all his strength on the steering-lever. In fact, he used a bit too much strength, for we careered round with such force that the whole contraption nearly overturned. We went charging up the beach again, losing speed rapidly now.

"Go on—open the giddy throttle!" shouted Pitt.

I did so.

Puff—puff—puff! Clank—rattle—roar!

The Rocket No. 2 answered at once, and we could feel the jerking impulse as the driving-rod clanked up and down. The steam puffed out of the funnel and we performed a wide circle, going back on our own tracks. Looking along the beach, it seemed that a great traction engine had been there.

The crowd of juniors surrounded us, shouting and urging me to stop. They all wanted to go for a ride. At last I closed the throttle again, and the Rocket No. 2 came to a standstill.

"Hurrah!"

"She's terrific!"

"Let's go for a ride, Nipper!"

"Why not make a trailer and hook it on the back?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Half-a-dozen juniors jumped all over the engine, and two of them nearly got burnt by accidentally leaning against the boiler. Practically every other part of the engine was just as hot.

"The thing's like a tank!" grinned Pitt. "Now we've got to see what it'll do in the bush. It's not much good waltzing up and down the beach."

Again I started the thing, and off we went, snorting and hissing. This time we had a number of passengers. Pitt was still at the steering-lever, and he was getting quite an expert.

He was fogged now and again, because the wheels wouldn't always answer to the lever. There was a good bit of play, and, in consequence, the engine would sometimes shoot off at a tangent—a most awkward predicament when we were in close proximity to trees.

I yelled to Pitt to steer clear of trees. This was a bit of a difficulty, for the palms grew right down to the sand. However, there was one spot where the palms were rather thinner. There would be enough room for the Rocket to pass, and, beyond, there was a grassy hill, with shrubs growing in profusion, to say nothing of saplings and creepers and giant canes.

"Look out—better go easy here!" roared some of the fellows.

But I wanted to see what the Rocket could do in the way of rough travel. I opened the throttle to its widest extent, and shouted to the fellows to look out. It was slightly uphill, or I wouldn't have taken the chance.

Crash—crash—crash!

The lumbering monster hit the shrubs and the saplings and charged through. Then it jerked and careered on its way, dipping and diving and threatening to throw us off at any moment.

But it carved a way through the canes and bushes, narrowly missing holes in the ground in which it would have become jammed. And we went round in a wide

circle, still snorting away, and then returned on our own tracks.

Arriving on the beach, I opened the throttle to see what she could do. We fairly whizzed along, the whole contraption vibrating so much that I half expected it to fall to pieces.

But we pulled up at last, and I jumped off.

"There you are—nearly as good as Stevenson's Rocket No 1!" I grinned. "She'll come in jolly handy for all sorts of purposes. But there's one use for her that is the most important of all. She's absolutely worth her weight in gold."

"How?" asked McClure.

"Why, supposing we're attacked by savages?" I asked. "It's quite likely that this island is visited by cannibals at different times in the year—and it's on the cards that there are blacks actually on the island now—beyond that central ridge."

"Yes, but what's the good of this engine in a fight?"

"What good were the Tanks in the Big War?" I asked keenly. "Why, it wouldn't take us long to fit armour all round this."

"By Jingo, that's a good idea!"

"And the very appearance of the thing—charging out of the stockade—would scare any amount of cannibals out of their wits. They'd simply flee to a man! I tell you, the old bus is immensely valuable."

The other fellows were quite in agreement. And then Handforth insisted upon taking command of the Rocket. He declared that he was the Minister of the War Department, and if this engine was to be an instrument of war, he would have control of it!

Arguing with Handforth was useless. And for the sake of peace I allowed him to take control. I had an idea that disaster would follow, but it wouldn't be anything very serious. Good as the Rocket was she couldn't go at sufficient speed to do anybody much harm.

Handforth arrived in the driver's cab, and stood there examining the mechanism with a highly important air. He oiled one or two places that didn't need any oil at all, and carefully examined the firebox, piling on a few more logs of wood. Then he had a look at the pressure guage, and nodded.

"All serene!" he declared. "Come on, you chaps!"

"No thanks!" grinned De Valerie. "We'd rather not risk our lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asses," roared Handforth. "If you were safe with Nipper, you'll be safe with me—safer, because I'm going to do the steering as well!"

"That's settled it!" said Christine. "I'll go on the next trip."

"I don't suppose there'll be any next trip!" said Pitt. "Handy will probably drive the bus into the lagoon, and try to explore the sea-bed! Either that, or he'll knock half-a-dozen palm trees down!"

Handforth snorted with disgust, and opened the throttle.

"I'll soon show you—— Wow—yarooh!"

Handforth was always the same—he never did anything gently. And instead of opening the throttle by degrees, he gave it one tug and opened it wide! The locomotive gave a jerk which sent Handforth flying backwards clean over on to the sand! And the Rocket shot forward, absolutely unattended!

At least four fellows were nearly run over in the first four seconds. It was only by the exercise of monkey-like agility that they dashed out of the way. But Handforth made up for his error.

"Look out!" he howled. "Stop it!"

Already a number of juniors were dashing after the lumbering Rocket. But Handforth leapt to his feet, and tore away. He overtook the engine quickly.

"Stop, you rotter!" he bellowed evidently expecting it to obey. "You—you blithering ass! Starting off like that!"

By a superhuman effort he gained the engine at the back, hauled himself in, and pushed the throttle hard over.

The puffing ceased, but the engine still had some way on it—and it was making straight for the lagoon.

Handforth wrenched at the steering-handle, and the engine swerved to one side, its great thick wheels sending up showers of sand, owing to the sudden force. And two wheels lifted themselves completely into the air.

For one fatal second the Rocket poised, and everybody expected to see her crash over. But she just managed to right herself—and only because Handforth wobbled the lever again. Finding that everything was all right, he opened the throttle and careered away along the bay at great speed. He evidently meant to go on an exploration tour, for he took the engine right to the end of the bay. Nobody followed—it was hot work running in the sun.

"Oh, he'll come back all right," said Pitt. "Somehow, Handy always manages to scrape out. It's marvellous how he does it!"

We stood in a clump, watching.

Handforth reached the end of the bay, and then swung round in a wide circle. The Rocket was dipping and wobbling and behaving in a most erratic fashion, but still, she managed to get round all right. Then Handforth came back along the straight stretch.

He was smothered in oil, hot and black.

"Now then—I'll show 'em!" he said warmly.

Crash!

He pulled the throttle hard over. The rocket leapt forward, and came along the beach at full speed, kicking up a truly shattering din. The vibration was so intense, in fact, that Handforth decided that he had opened the throttle just a shade too far.

He seized it, and pushed. Nothing happened.

"Great Pip!" gasped Handforth.

He pushed harder, but with no result. In slamming the throttle over, he had jammed it, and all his efforts to close the thing were

fruitless. And the lumbering vehicle continued to career along like a wild thing.

Handforth suddenly found it necessary to devote all his attention to the steering, for there was a rather rough patch here. The Rocket swayed and dipped and tossed—but got through all right.

And by now it was nearly upon us.

Handforth gazed over at us as he shot past.

"I can't stop the rotten thing!" he howled.

"Pull the lever!" I shouted.

"Fathead!" bawled Handforth. "It's jammed!"

"I mean to say, somewhat awk.!" observed Archie adjusting his monocle. "Jammed, what? It seems to me, old onions, that there's going to be a most poisonous smash up. Absolutely! The old conglomeration of pistons and what not will presently disintegrate!"

"Oh, the ass!" gasped Church. "He'll be killed!"

"Never!" said Pitt. "You can't kill Handforth! He's like a cat—he's got nine lives!"

"He'll need 'em!" said McClure.

We watched Handforth anxiously. And then we could see that Handforth was doing his best under the circumstances. Failing to close the throttle, he gave all his attention to the steering. Up that part of the bay the ground rose fairly steeply from the beach, and there were numbers of bushes and young trees beyond.

Handforth was not without common sense. He decided that the steep slope would slow the engine down, and then the bushes and young trees would bring its career to a standstill. Unfortunately, things did not happen in this way.

Unseen to Handforth, there was a steep sandhill just in the middle of the rise—a dip, and then a bank. Too late Handforth became aware of this difficulty. The Rocket charged down the dip, met the bank, and the next second it seemed to try to climb up into the air.

The front wheels came completely off the ground, and the lumbering engine swung round, and shot round in a semi-circle. Why it didn't smash to pieces on the spot will always be a mystery.

The direction was altered so rapidly that Handforth had no time to regain control. What happened next took place within the space of a few seconds.

The Rocket charged straight down to the lagoon, still hissing and roaring—but not quite so vigorously now, because the steam pressure had greatly decreased. But nothing on earth could avert the disaster.

The Rocket plunged straight into the lagoon!

After going about twelve feet into the water the front wheels jammed against a hidden rock. And Handforth was lifted right out of the footplate, and he pitched head first over the steering-wheel and dived into the water, to vanish in the midst of a terrific cloud of roaring steam.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGURES IN THE GLOOM!

EVERYBODY thought that Handforth was half killed.

It seemed impossible that he could have escaped injury. We all dashed down the beach at full speed. The Rocket herself had vanished. All we could see was a cloud of dense steam which rose from the lagoon. And there was no sign of Handforth, either.

"Oh, the ass—the idiot!" shouted McClure. "He's killed himself!"

"Oh, what a shame!" panted Church.

And just then, as we were nearing the spot, a figure came splashing and stamping out of the water. The figure belonged to Edward Oswald Handforth himself, and upon his face there was an expression of great indignation.

"Ain't—ain't you hurt?" gasped Church.

"Hurt!" roared Handforth. "Of course I'm not hurt, you ass! You don't think it hurts a chap to dive into the water, I suppose? But this blessed engine tried to kill me!"

"Better punch its nose!" said Pitt, grinning.

The clouds of steam were now subsiding, and we could see that the Rocket was only half immersed. I was pretty certain that she was wrecked and of no further use.

But as soon as we had hauled her out by main force—every fellow being necessary for the task—we found that no great harm was done. The front wheels were a bit battered, but still serviceable. And although steam had been escaping everywhere, the chief mechanism was unharmed.

The great clouds of steam which we had seen had been caused by the water filling the firebox and putting out the fire. In fact, the Rocket was still quite useful, and we left her there, just clear of the high-water mark.

And, much relieved, and highly delighted with the afternoon's work, we got busy on something of great importance. To be exact, we dived into the lagoon, and had a jolly good bathe.

And then, feeling refreshed and clean, we returned to the house for tea—which Fatty had prepared. It was a first-class meal of fried fish, baked taro root, breadfruit fritters, and cocoanut pudding.

Fatty had been concocting all sorts of dishes, and the things he could produce from cocoanuts were rather marvellous. He used the cocoanut oil, after extracting it, to fry the fish in—and he had seized several pieces of iron to make frying pans. The result was a much improved tea.

And on this occasion, for the first time, Fatty gave us something hot to drink. He called it tea, for want of a better name, and it was certainly very palatable. It was

mostly cocoanut milk, with an extract from dried and boiled bananas.

The result was a most delicious drink, served all hot in cocoanut shells—which acted as excellent cups. Now that Fatty had a stove, he was doing much better, and was rather proud of himself when he heard our terms of praise.

After tea it was nearly dark—but only for a short time. For now there was a moon—a nearly full moon which rose like an imitation of the sun itself. This tropical moon was of astonishing brilliance. It lit up the whole bay and the reef in a kind of silvery brilliance. It was so bright, in fact, that we could see to go about almost as well as in the daytime.

We discussed the scheme for making electric light, and decided that it would be a certain success. If we had made the engine go, it was pretty certain that we could succeed in the lesser task of making the water-wheel, and providing the power to drive the plant.

We decided that we should start work on that job on the morrow.

In the house everything was ready for bed—for we never bothered about any supper. Tea was the last meal of the day. For, as a rule, we went to sleep soon after sundown.

But on this occasion some of the fellows were tempted to remain awake and active, for the moonlight was so glorious.

Handforth and Co. were strolling on the beach, watching the phosphorescent waves as they broke with gentle splashes upon the sands.

"What a glorious night!" said Church. "It makes a chap feel thoughtful, you know. Only this afternoon you may have been killed——"

"Oh, don't jaw about that," said Handforth. "I've got an idea."

"Eh?"

Church and McClure looked at their leader rather apprehensively. He had used a tone which was well known to them. When Handforth had an idea he generally had a very extraordinary one. And he always wanted to go at it straight away, without the loss of a minute.

He was most unreasonable, too. Both Church and McClure were tired, and they wanted to get to bed. And it was quite on the cards that Handforth's idea would keep them up for hours.

"Yes an idea!" repeated Handy. "It's such a lovely night that it would be dotty to go to bed now. Everything is in order—everything is ready for war, in case we're attacked."

Handforth was quite right in this remark. The house was partially fortified already, and that work would now be proceeded with. Phipps was the General-in-Command of all the operations, and it could not be denied that he was a very capable leader. Almost every important scheme for our comfort and safety had been devised by Phipps. And his leadership was accepted without question.

He was no longer Archie's valet—he was the big man of the island.

Handforth looked up at the moon, and then stared away across the tree tops.

"We're going exploring!" he said calmly.

"Exploring!"

"Yes!"

"Now?"

"Now!" repeated Handforth. "Got anything to say?"

"Of course we have!" declared Church. "You must be dotty to suggest an exploration trip now—at night! What can we do? Where can we go? We might meet all sorts of wild animals——"

"Wild rot!" interrupted Handforth. "There aren't any wild animals on the island. As for the alligators, we can steer clear of Death Valley. My scheme is to make for the hills. I want to see what's on the other side."

"But—but it's impossible——"

"We're going!"

Church and McClure gazed at one another helplessly.

"I say, look here, Handy," said Church persuasively. "We can't go exploring now. Why it's impossible to get over that ridge in the daytime—so it stands to reason we can't do it to-night!"

Handforth snorted.

"That only shows how dotty you are!" he said. "In the daytime the sun's as hot as blazes, and you can hardly move. But by moonlight it'll be lovely. We shall be able to climb with ease, and once we're over on the other side we shall be able to see right across in this clear moonlight."

It was absolutely useless arguing.

Church and McClure simply had to go—at least, they had to agree that they would go. But they were still hoping that the other fellows would hold Handforth back by force.

Church made some excuse to go back to the house, but Handforth grabbed him.

"No, you don't!" he said grimly. "I'm not going to have the others know anything about this. We're going off at once—without saying a word. That's why I asked you to come down here for a stroll!"

"You—you swindler!" said McClure indignantly. "You deliberately decoyed us out here—— You—yarooooh!"

"That's for calling me a swindler!" said Handforth, as McClure picked himself up. "Any more insubordination, and I'll jolly well kick you out of the War Ministry."

"Do you think I care?" snapped McClure. "I'd be glad to go!"

"Oh, would you?" growled Handforth. "You—you traitor! You'll stick by me, or I'll make you black and blue! Come on—we want to get back as soon as possible. And we'll surprise the other chaps when we tell 'em where we've been!"

Church and McClure had done their best. As usual, they had failed. And so, with-

cut any further argument, the trio dived into the palms, and pressed on towards the centre of the island.

Even Handforth was rather astonished by the intense thickness of the palm grove. In the daytime these groves were in deep shadow—cool and delightful. But at night, even with the moon shining full, they were inky black.

As Handforth and Co. progressed, they were somewhat pestered by mosquitoes—not that they cared much. And now and again a rustle would be heard in the undergrowth—perhaps a squeal or a little grunt.

"Wild pigs!" said Handforth. "They won't do us any harm!"

His chums weren't so sure. But, as it happened, they came to no harm. And they soon broke out of the wooded country, and came upon the rising hills which led towards the great volcanic ridge in the centre of the island.

At times the juniors would find spiders' webs across the path, from bush to bush. And these webs were of enormous strength—so tough that they would easily have removed a man's hat. Of the spiders themselves the juniors saw nothing, and they were rather glad of this. The tropical spiders of this island were fearsome-looking monsters.

They began climbing the rocky ground.

Handforth was certainly correct in saying that the climb would be comparatively easy by moonlight. It was. Without the sun beating down upon them, the juniors found the going fairly all right. And they could see with perfect distinctness. Turning back after reaching a good height, it was possible to look right across the groves, and out on to the glittering lagoon. The reef lay like a band of white surrounding the island.

And then the three juniors met with a stroke of luck.

They didn't exactly know how it was, but they found themselves in a steep gully—a miniature canyon which appeared to cut right through the hills. They picked their way over rocks, and round boulders. And then, abruptly, without even believing that such a thing could be, they found themselves staring out over a stretch of sloping land which ended up in forest-land—and then the lagoon and the sea.

They were on the other side of the ridge!

For the first time they were gazing upon the unexplored side of the island. The reef here was irregular and patchy, and it seemed that there were many breaks in it, for the white line of foam was not continuous. And the coastline of the island was very irregular, with many inlets and rocky coves and bays. Indeed, this side of the island was vastly different to the one the boys already knew.

A portion of it lay slightly hidden by a hill near the shore, which rose up with its crown surmounted by palm trees. They could not see the reef beyond that point.

"By George!" said Handforth. "What did I tell you!"

But Church and McClure had forgotten—they were fascinated.

"Look!" whispered Church suddenly. "There's a light there!"

"Great Scott, yes!"

They all stared. And there was not one light, but several! A portion of the beach could be distinctly seen in the gleaming, shimmering moonlight. And one or two figures could be seen moving about on the beach.

"A cannibal village!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "That's what it is, I'll bet!"

"But—but look——"

The words stopped in McClure's throat. For just then fresh lights had appeared from some trees only a short distance from the ridge. And there, in the gloom, numbers of figures could be seen moving along in a procession—the leaders carrying flaming torches!

The significance of the thing could not be missed.

"Blacks!" gasped Church. "Savages! They're coming this way—it means an attack on our side of the island!"

There could be no doubt about it. And, filled with alarm and excitement, Handforth and Co. dashed back through the gully and ran for camp. They arrived hot, breathless and filled with intense excitement.

The alarm was given, and within a few minutes the whole camp was on the alert. The defences were made secure, and everything was in readiness.

But would the attack come before dawn?

We were all in a state of uncertainty, and nobody thought of sleep. At last we were to have a clash with the black inhabitants of the island!

If we had known what perils and amazing adventures lay in front of us we should have been even more excited than we actually were.

THE END.

The NEW USHER

BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF

Tom Tartar at School

EVERY BOY SHOULD READ THIS ABSORBING STORY OF SCHOOL LIFE, WHICH HAS ONLY JUST STARTED!

FROM LAST WEEK.

Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor, arrives at Wrasper's School. There is something mysterious about him, for he will allow no one to enter his room, where he plays sweet music at night on a kind of harmonium.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER III.

The Phantom Hearse.

THE sounds floated up and down the old house with a far-off sweetness that entranced the listener.

"What can it be?" said Sam. "I've never heard anything like it."

"Nor I," said Tom, sleepily. "Anyway, we ought to be very much obliged to the Cherub."

"Perhaps he's a real cherub!" suggested McLara.

There was a general laugh at this.

"No," said Tom. "Achilles Chopps is earthly enough. Cherubs don't act as assistant masters. What are you doing, Sam? Why don't you get into bed?"

"I'm only pulling up the blind a little," replied Sam. "It's a lovely moonlight night."

"Oh, bother the moonlight," said half a dozen voices. "Get into bed."

An exclamation burst from Sam's lips.

"What now?" asked Tom, who was feeling sleepy.

"Here!—quick! Oh! you are too late."

Sam staggered back and sank into a sitting position on his bed.

"This is stranger than all!" he groaned.

"Why don't you say what it is?" growled Tom.

"I saw something go by the gate."

"Something! What?"

"A hearse!" replied Sam.

The other boys had been dozing off, but in a moment they were all wide awake and sitting up in their beds.

"Bosh!" said one.

"Stuff!" said another.

"I saw it," said Sam; "and a mourning-coach as well."

"But think of it, Sam," urged Tom. "How could a funeral take place at this hour?"

"I saw everything as I tell you," said Sam, doggedly. "Two horses to each carriage, drivers, plumes, and everything."

As he spoke he crept into bed and rolled himself up in the clothes, shivering.

"I don't want to talk any more about it," he said. "Good-night."

"Sam's joking," thought Tom, and, turning round, he fell asleep.

But Sam was not joking, and in the morning he was very serious indeed about the matter.

"I ought to know what I saw," he said. "The moon was nearly at the full, and it was light enough to see things smaller than a hearse."

Of course, such a story could not help getting about the school, and before the day was over everybody had heard of it.

Mr. Wrasper sent for Sam and reproved him for "getting up a scare."

Sam denied having done anything of the sort. He was positive about what he had seen.

"It went slowly creeping past the gates," he said. "I couldn't be mistaken."

Mr. Achilles Chopps chaffed him in his good-natured, genial way.

"Very well, sir," said Sam. "If you won't believe me I can't help it. It's all true."

On Wooden Jerry the story had a most terrifying effect.

He was a great believer in signs, and looked on this as a very portentous one.

"There's a black plague coming into the

village," he said to Peggy, "and you'll be the first took off."

Poor Peggy was also superstitious, and this alarming announcement went home to her maidenly bosom.

She was in hourly expectation of the black plague arriving.

Wishing to make a few purchases at Widow Blake's shop, Tom Tartar went down to the village after dinner.

As he was passing the inn three or four of the tradesmen came out, talking earnestly together.

Baynes, the carpenter and wheelwright, caught sight of Tom, and beckoned him to stop.

"Here's a gentleman as will give his opinion on it," he said.

Tom stopped, of course. He was on speaking terms with everyone in the village. His adventures with the poacher had made him famous.

"I don't know that my opinion is worth anything," Tom said; "unless you want to know something about cricket or football."

"It bean't about either," said Baynes. "Now, sir, let me ask if you think it likely that sich a thing as a hearse went through this 'ere village late at night?"

Tom was evidently startled by the query. He had no idea that Sam's story had got outside the school.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Tom.

"Well, sir," said Baynes, "here's Jim Squirrel says he saw one last night."

Jim Squirrel was the village blacksmith, a big, burly fellow, simple as a child.

He looked very sheepish as Tom turned to him.

"I seed un," he said.

"What time?" asked Tom.

"About a quarter to ten," replied Squirrel. "I'd been across for supper beer, and I wor a-coming back when I seed it coming on."

"Which way?"

"From quarry side of village up past the school."

"Any other carriages with it?"

"A mourning one, in course. I stood under the tree, and shook so that my teeth rattled in my head."

Tom was getting a little nervous about this affair.

Jim Squirrel spoke like a man who was telling the truth.

"Was there no rattle of harness?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Nor creaking of wheels?"

"None as I heerd, sir; and the driver never moved, nor did them as was in the carriage. They all sat still and upright, as if they had been chipped out of stone."

"It's very odd," said Tom.

"That's what we all say," said Baynes. "The fact was, when Jim came out for his supper beer he had a drop o' summat else, and——"

"I had nowt else," said Jim, with a threatening motion of his hand. "I be a sober man, and I won't ha' it said I drink."

"You don't drink, Jim," Baynes said gently; "and if you say you took nothing I believe you."

"Ask landlord," said Jim, sullenly.

"There's no need to do that," said Tom; "Squirrel's story is quite true—others saw the same thing."

"Where be ye now?" asked Squirrel.

"It be a puzzle," said Baynes, scratching his head. "Whose hearse? Maybe it bode no good to Sir Claude."

"It warn't o' this world," said Squirrel, "for it didn't make no more noise than a puff of smoke going by."

"I am sorry I can't explain it," said Tom; "but, of course, the idea of its being any but a real hearse is absurd. Good-day."

He walked on, marvelling at the strange confirmation of Sam's story.

That it was anything supernatural he did not believe, and yet it was not easy to account for the strange appearance any other way.

"I like a mystery," he said to himself, as he entered the widow's shop, "and I think I will try to solve this one. But where am I to begin?"

CHAPTER IV.

An Evening with Achilles Chopps.

ON returning to the school, Tom lost no time in telling what he had heard, first to his chums, and then to Mr. Wrasper.

After Tom had left him, Mr. Wrasper sent for his assistant, told him the story, and asked his advice.

"My advice, sir," replied Mr. Chopps, "is to let the matter drop. If you like, I will myself see Tartar, and ask him to do his best to stop the story circulating further. It will only scare the boys."

Greatly surprised was Tom when Mr. Chopps drew him on one side, and said gently:

"I'm interested in this story you heard in the village to-day, my boy. Mr. Wrasper has been telling me about it, but I'd like to hear it in fuller detail. Will you come to my room some time after tea and satisfy my curiosity?"

Into his room!

The mysterious Bluebeard chamber of the house!

Tom felt his pulse quicken at the thought, and he could barely say he would come with pleasure without showing how it affected him.

"Don't say anything to the other boys," said Mr. Chopps, as he was turning away. "I have great faith in your discretion, Tartar."

And so they parted, Tom in a state of excited anticipation.

"In his room," he thought. "I wonder what it is like? I shall see, too, that wonderful musical instrument on which he plays so beautifully."

As the time drew near for his visit to Mr. Chopps' room, a strange feeling took possession of Tom.

It was not a feeling of pleasure or awe, but a mixture of the two.

Yet what particular pleasure was to be expected from the visit? And what was there in the cherub-like master, so genial in his ways, that anyone should stand in awe of him?

When the appointed time came, Tom made his way to the corridor out of which the master's private room opened.

He tapped softly on the door. Instantly the door was unlocked from the inside, and Achilles Chopps appeared.

"Ah, Tartar, you have come, eh?" he said smilingly. "Welcome to my humble quarters!"

He drew Tom into the room, and then carefully locked the door again.

Tom looked around him curiously.

The apartment was extremely comfortable, being better furnished than any other room in the house.

Curios and knicknacks abounded, and on the walls were a number of small but first-rate pictures.

In the bay window was a writing-desk, with a curious sort of lamp upon it, with a reflector that was, at the time they entered, turned round to the room, so as to throw the light outside.

Mr. Chopps noticed it at once, and, walking to the window, turned it round.

"I am a lover of order," he said, "and cannot bear anything the least bit out of place."

So it seemed, for the room was the very perfection of neatness and order.

There were several small Indian cabinets, but—no musical instrument!

Mr. Chopps bade Tom take a seat in a very cosy chair.

"We will have some coffee while we talk," he said; "provided you like coffee."

Tom assented, and the tutor took out of one of the Indian cabinets a small silver kettle and a spirit lamp, and from another cups, sugar, and spoons. He also produced a tin of condensed milk.

"I like a cup of coffee in the quiet here," he said; "and I flatter myself that I can make one."

He boiled the water with the spirit lamp, and presently put before Tom a cup of coffee, the like of which he had never tasted before.

"Good is it?" he said.

"It seems too good to be coffee," replied Tom.

"Good coffee," said Mr. Chopps, "is an exhilarating drink. Let us have a talk."

They had a talk indeed.

Tom's tongue was somehow loosened by the coffee, and ere long he was telling the placid Mr. Chopps not only the hearse story, but the whole history of his past adventures in the school.

He also gave him an idea, under skilful questioning, of the nature and natural abilities of all the boys.

He told him more, indeed, than he ever intended to tell anybody.

He even told him of his boyish regard for Lottie Fenn.

Mr. Chopps listened with the utmost interest. Then he suddenly asked

"How do you like my room?"

"I think it's jolly snug!" replied Tom.

"Yes, not bad, is it? All these things lying about were left me by an uncle who was a great traveller. I have quite a lot of other curios carved in ivory and set with jewels which I will show you at some future time. I am never tired of examining my treasures—that is why I spend so much time alone in this room."

"But you amuse yourself with other things—music, for instance?" said Tom.

"Now that figure on the bureau yonder," said Mr. Chopps, ignoring the remark about music," is, as you see, only four inches high, and yet thousands used to worship it. My uncle brought it away at the risk of his life. But come, Tartar, drink your coffee before it gets cold."

Tom obeyed him, and was beginning to talk again when Mr. Chopps checked him.

(To be continued.)

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