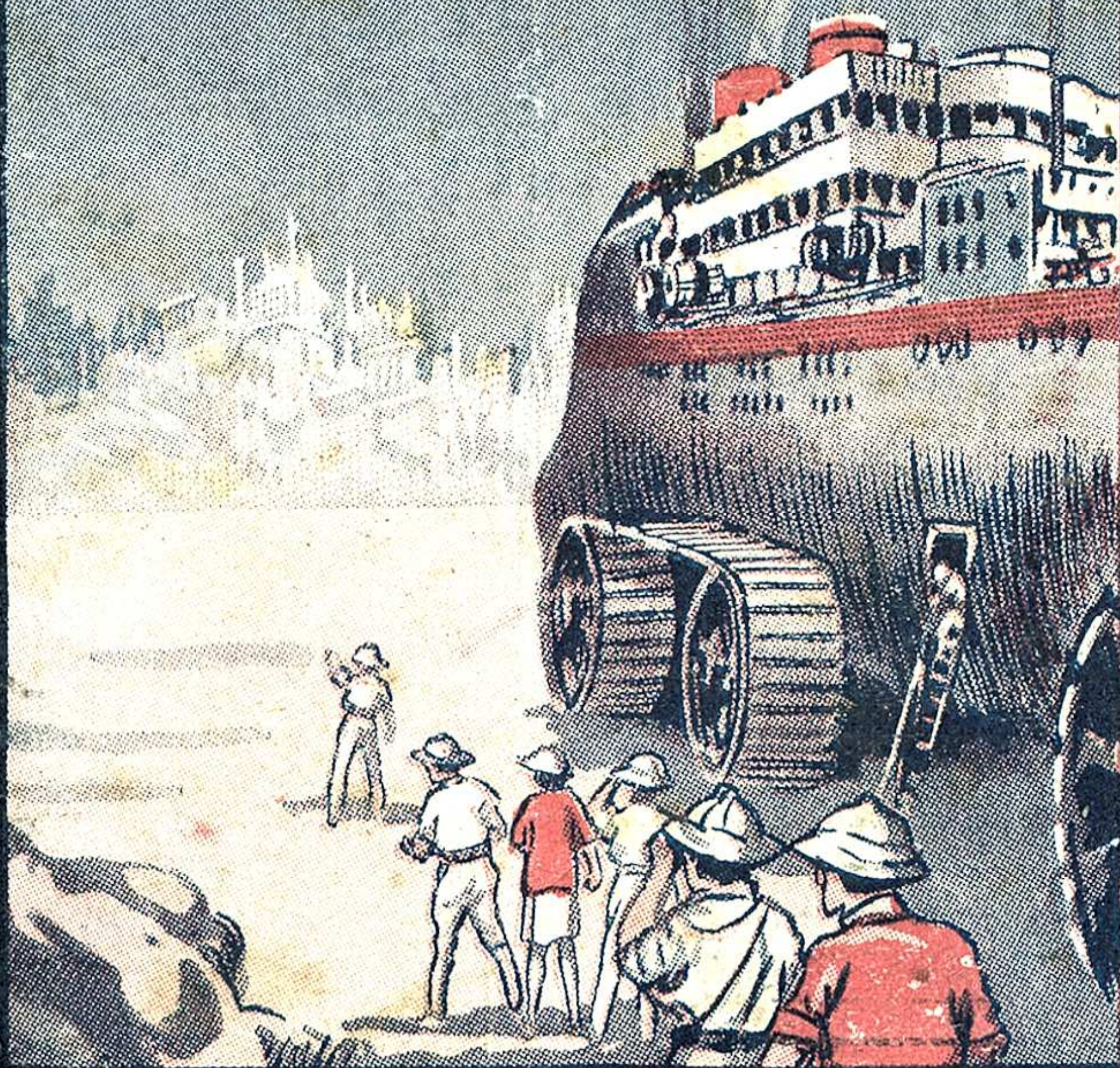


THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S IN THE SAHARA!

The NELSON LEE

LIBRARY *And St. Frank's Magazine.*

2^D



*The Ship of
The Sahara*

"A mirage!" cried several
of the spellbound onlookers.
(From This Week's Enthralling
Story.)



And so they went on, captives, always plodding forward to an unknown destination.



THE SHIP OF THE SAHARA!

A STORY OF WONDERFUL ADVENTURE WITH THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S IN THE GREAT SAHARA DESERT.

Led by Nelson Lee, a number of well-known Juniors of St. Frank's have set out on an expedition into the heart of the Sahara to rescue Sir Crawford Grey's exploration party, which a few weeks ago was captured by a hostile native tribe. The journey is being made on a specially constructed desert liner called *The Conqueror*. This marvellous triumph of engineering skill is fitted with every modern convenience of an ocean-going liner. The story—given below—of the voyage into the unknown desert holds one spell-bound throughout, and just near the end of this entrancing narrative is introduced a glimpse into the most wonderful of all discoveries—a secret of the Sahara that has lain dormant, unheard of and unsuspected, for nearly two thousand years.

THE EDITOR.

Related Throughout by Nipper and Set Down by E. Searles Brooks

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BOUNDLESS DESERT.

THE African sun blazed down pitilessly.

The cloudless sky shivered with the intense heat, and the distant horizon was hazy and obscure. In every direction stretched the undulating, arid desert. As far as the eye could reach there was no vestige of green—no indication of human dwelling.

This was the prospect from the deck of the *Conqueror*.

I was leaning idly against the rail, chatting with Edward Oswald Handforth and Irene Manners. The canvas awning overhead protected us from the glaring sun, but the heat was stifling, nevertheless.

"Just imagine what it would be like if we were riding on camels!" said Handforth. "Phew! It's bad enough on this ripping yacht—with every modern comfort imaginable.

"We shouldn't be riding on camels at this hour of the day, old son," I pointed out. "It's nearly lunch-time, and the sun's at its highest. If we were using the ordinary methods of desert travel, we should be resting now. Camel caravans generally progress in the early hours of the morning, before the sun gets up."

"Oh, well, don't argue about it," said Handforth. "I can't say I think much of the scenery," he added, with a sniff. "People talk about the Sahara as though it's something wonderful. You don't call this wonderful, I suppose?"

"Indeed, it is!" said Irene firmly. "I'm surprised at you, Ted!"

"Oh! I—I mean——"

"It's no good trying to alter your opinion now," interrupted the girl severely. "I'm afraid you haven't any eye for beauty, Ted!"

"By George! I know I jolly well have!" said Handforth promptly, regarding Irene with embarrassing intentness.

She flushed a little, and was slightly confused.

"There's something wonderful about the desert!" she went on hastily. "It's so vast—so terribly big. And there's something grim and awful about it, too. I should be terribly frightened if we only had a few camels to rely on, instead of the Conqueror."

"Yes, it's a tough proposition to explore these unknown parts of Central Africa, with nothing but a few camels between you and all hope of safety," I said, shaking my head.

"Central Africa?" repeated Handforth. "Rats! We're in the Sahara."

"This part of the Sahara is included in Central Africa," I replied. "I hope we soon come across some indications that Dorrie and his party are alive. We've been several days on the trip now, and we ought to be making some discoveries before long."

Handforth stared out dreamily across the desert.

"Wonderful!" he declared. "Beautiful! Some of the best scenery I've ever come across! So vast—so boundless—so stupendous—"

"You needn't trouble, old son," I grinned. "Irene's gone!"

Handforth came to himself with a start.

"I—I thought she was still here!" he said wrathfully. "Blow the desert! I've never seen such a rotten view in all my natural! And don't you bother me, either!" he added tartly, as his minor arrived on the scene, cheerful and smiling.

"Hallo! What's biting you?" asked Willy. "Go and eat coke!" said Edward Oswald irritably.

"That's the worst of being in love!" exclaimed Willy, as his major strode off along the deck. "How do you like the heat, Nipper? Archie's gracefully expiring in the lounge, and Fatty Little has eaten so much that he can't move out of his chair. But I don't feel the heat."

"It's not half so bad as it would be if we were on the desert itself," I pointed out. "There's a tremendous radiation from the sand, but we escape a good deal of that, being so high. And we can always get relief by going below. That makes a tremendous difference, my lad."

Willy nodded.

"We've got so used to this ship that we're taking it for granted," he remarked. "But, my hat! What a marvellous craft!"

The Third-Former's statement was in no way exaggerated. The Conqueror was, indeed, marvellous—indeed, staggering. No craft of this kind had ever before been built, or even imagined.

As I had said, progress on the desert sands would have been practically impossible—riding on camels. For the glare of the sun, and the radiating heat from the desert, would have made travelling too exhausting to be endured.

The heat on the deck of the Conqueror was terrific enough, but not nearly so severe as

the heat on the sands. And the interior of the yacht was scientifically cooled by a wonderful system of semi-refrigeration. Thus, the saloon, the lounges, and the state-rooms were always of a comfortable, even temperature.

All the discomforts of desert travel were dispensed with on the Conqueror. And we owed these astonishing benefits to our host, Mr. Travers Earle—the millionaire railway magnate, who was the inventor and owner of the wonderful land yacht.

We had started out from Kano, in Northern Nigeria, a week earlier, and had been travelling ever since, with only one or two stops. The Conqueror carried an enormous supply of water—sufficient for many weeks of continuous travel. But whenever possible her tanks were replenished, so that we should always have a full supply.

After we had left the inhabited country north of Kano, and had struck the virgin desert, we had progressed without pause—even travelling throughout the night. For the Conqueror had enormous search-lights, by which she could continue her progress unchecked.

And so far our quest had been in vain.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONQUEROR'S QUEST.



NELSON LEE was the leader of this expedition in search of our old friend, Lord Dorrimore, and his party.

It had been the gov'nor's original intention to take a comparatively small rescue-party into the desert, using the time-honoured camel train of historic renown. And Lee had practically made all his arrangements when Mr. Travers Earle had intervened.

The world-famous engineer had heard of the projected trip, and had expressed a keen desire to participate in the hunt. The story he told of his land yacht had sounded wildly fantastic at first; but he had convinced Nelson Lee of the Conqueror's reality.

And so, instead of a small party venturing into the desert, a great holiday crowd was on board—enjoying the thrills of this wonderful trip, in addition to being eager and anxious to find the lost friends.

Altogether there were over forty of us, quite apart from the crew—the latter alone numbering twenty odd. But as the vessel was designed to accommodate nearly a hundred, she was by no means crowded. Thus everybody was comfortable, and we had been enabled to carry extra supplies.

Most of the passengers were Remove juniors—all the most prominent St. Frank's fellows being on board. Even the Third Form was represented—by Handforth minor, Chubby Heath, and "Juicy" Lemon.

There were some young ladies with us, too—Irene Manners and Co., of the Moor View School—to say nothing of Winifred Pitt and Ena Handforth. And among the men there were Mr. Pitt himself, Sir Edward Handforth, M.P., and Mr. Hobart Manners—Irene's father. He was the Conqueror's chief engineer. Indeed, he was responsible for the vessel's existence, since it was he who had undertaken the entire construction work.

So, taking everything all round, we were one of the happiest parties that could be imagined. Mr. Pitt and Winnie were troubled, of course—and so were Nelson Lee and I. For we were worried on poor old Dorrie's score, horrified at the thought of the sporting peer having perished in the desert.

Mr. Pitt and his daughter were even more worried—for our cheerful, happy chum, Reggie Pitt, was a member of the missing party. It was only natural, therefore, that his father and sister should be deeply concerned.

But the great majority of the fellows had no such worries as this. They were politely sympathetic, of course, but there was so much to see, and so much to do, that they revelled whole-heartedly in the novel nature of their surroundings.

Dorrie's party was a small one—merely consisting of himself, Sir Crawford Grey, Jack Grey, Reggie Pitt, and Umlosi—and, of course, a few Hausa natives and cameleers. Weeks since they had completely vanished off the face of the desert—and no sign of them had been seen since, except for one or two indications that they had been carried off by mysterious foes.

And we were searching now—going deeper and deeper into the unexplored Sahara, hoping to come across some clue. It was a stupendous task—and one, indeed, that promised little hope of success.

For we had no direct road upon which to travel—only the endless, everlasting desert. It was tantamount to looking for a needle in a haystack. But Mr. Travers Earle was hopeful—indeed, highly optimistic. He knew the desert well, and declared that our present course was the only likely one. If Lord Dorrimore and his party were alive, they would almost certainly be in the region that lay ahead of us.

After leaving Kano, we had passed through cultivated, inhabited districts—much to the amazement and stupefaction of the peaceful natives. For a craft of this type was unknown in Hausaland—and, if it came to that, unknown in every other land also.

But we had soon left the picturesque country-side behind, the villages growing smaller, and further and further apart. The aspect of the landscape had changed, and we had easily marked the break-up of the bush-land, with wide belts of sand-desert intervening.

And now we were on the vast sea of sand-plain which lay well beyond the northern

outpost of Zinder, in the Western Sudan. We were, in fact, on the mighty, mysterious Sahara—with civilisation behind us, and with unknown, unexplored region ahead.

As far as we knew, human life was entirely absent from this sun-scorched land, where there were not even water-holes, or a single oasis. For we were right away from the recognised caravan trail—in a section of the Sahara which was avoided by all natives, on account of its inaccessibility. For every camel train is dependable upon its water supply.

And it was here that the Conqueror scored.

Mr. Earle held the view that the missing party had been captured by a strange tribe which sometimes appeared out of the unknown desert. These mysterious tribesmen had been seen by nomad Tuaregs, and other dwellers of the desert.

But no man knew whence they came, or how it was possible to discover their villages. For they lived out in this waterless waste, where ordinary camel caravans dared not venture.

The natives in the more populous country talked of these raiding tribesmen with open scepticism, declaring that all such stories were pure inventions, and that no desert dwellers of this nature existed. But Mr. Travers Earle was of a different opinion.

And he was now putting his theories to the test—a dream that he had long cherished. For he had built the Conqueror with the one idea of exploring the Sahara. It was merely a happy coincidence that we were keen upon searching for Dorrie's missing party at the same time. Mr. Earle's quest was, therefore, a double one, and thereby intensified in interest.

I was still on deck, chatting with Willy, when a sudden hail came from the look-out in the bows. I glanced quickly along the rail, and caught sight of the man at the vessel's extremity.

He was pointing out across the desert, and the very nature of his tense attitude sent a thrill through me.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST CLUE.



WILLY HANDFORTH grabbed at my sleeve.

"What is it?" he asked breathlessly.

"I don't know," I replied, in a tense voice. "But the look-out's seen something unusual—Hallo! We're altering our course! And slowing down, too!"

The motion of the Conqueror was amazingly smooth. Even when the ground was rough, the enormous vessel only swayed slightly—for all the shocks were absorbed and nullified by the enormous caterpillar

tractors and the extraordinarily effective suspension.

The vessel was capable of a speed of fifteen miles an hour over smooth desert, but only eight miles an hour or even less over rough ground. She could climb any hill or mountain slope—for, being constructed on the caterpillar system, almost any gradient was child's play to her. Her average cruising speed was ten miles an hour.

The Conqueror was a kind of super tank—a gigantic evolution of the famous war tanks that were used so successfully on the battle fronts. But in appearance the Conqueror had an uncanny resemblance to a sea-going yacht.

She was roughly a hundred feet long, and fifty feet wide, her main deck being twenty-five feet from the ground. And above this were the normal superstructures of an ordinary private yacht—saloons, chart-rooms, navigation bridge, etc.

There were two imposing funnels—which not only carried off the exhaust from the powerful oil-fuel engines, but acted as ventilators, too—and masts, carrying between them the wireless aerials.

And below, in the ice-cooled interior, the state-rooms and saloons and lounges were luxurious to a degree, and appointed in a manner that could only have been done by a millionaire.

"The look-out must have spotted something, that's certain," declared Willy. "But I'm blessed if I can see anything startling. There's nothing but bare desert everywhere."

"The look-out's got binoculars, and a telescope, don't forget," I pointed out. "He wouldn't have the course altered for nothing."

A number of juniors appeared from the main stairway, having heard that there was something afoot. Handforth and Co. arrived, and Fatty Little, and Tom Burton, and the Onions brothers, and even Archie Glenthorne. The latter was resplendent in spotless white.

"What-ho!" he exclaimed. "Good gad! This heat, what! I mean to say, it absolutely hits a chappie amidships, so to speak. It's like coming into a dashed oven!"

"You ought to be thankful that there's plenty of ice on board," remarked Bob Christine. "Just imagine what it would be like if the supply gave out! We shouldn't be able to live below at all!"

"The prospect," said Archie, "is utterly poisonous!"

"Well, you'd better prepare yourself—the ice can't last for ever," said Handforth. "It's a wonder to me how it's lasted as long as this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat-heads?" demanded Handy.

"My dear chap, there's no stock of ice on board," I grinned. "We make it according to requirements. Down below there's a

complete ice manufacturing plant—one of Mr. Earle's devices. It's a big improvement on any ordinary system!"

"Rot!" said Handforth gruffly. "How the dickens can ice be made in this heat?"

"I didn't think it necessary to explain that ice could easily be manufactured by means of chemicals, irrespective of the outside temperature. Handforth had a way of arguing that kept me quiet. But Church pointed out that the meat ships from Australia and New Zealand were really nothing else but floating refrigerators. So it was easy enough to understand how the Conqueror maintained a comparatively small plant.

In any case, our interest in the subject was dispelled, for Nelson Lee had now appeared, and he and Mr. Manners were gazing through binoculars at some small object which could be seen upon the desert, about a quarter of a mile away. We were speedily approaching it.

The desert itself was of hard, rocky sand, by no means flat, but rising in gently sloping hills and dropping into miniature valleys. Thus, at times, we had a wide horizon, and at other times the view was confined to a very small radius.

"Blessed if I can see what all the fuss is about!" said Handforth. "There's nothing there—only a piece of rock, or something!"

"No it isn't—it's a horse!" said Tommy Watson excitedly, as he stared through a small telescope. "At least, I think it's a horse. It's dead—lying on its side—No, it's a camel!"

Not many of the juniors were thrilled. But Nelson Lee looked at Mr. Manners significantly as they finally established the fact that the object was a dead camel. The thing was a mere skeleton—a mass of bones, with a few ragged strips of hide remaining.

And when the Conqueror had rolled majestically up, the vessel was halted, and those grim remains were examined, not at close quarters, but from the deck, which was quite near enough.

The sun had done its work well, and the corpse of the camel was nothing but a shrivelled, dried relic. For some little time Nelson Lee gazed down at the remains, and then he turned to Mr. Manners.

"On seconds thoughts, we'll make a closer inspection," he said briskly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY IN THE SAND.



FIVE minutes later Nelson Lee and two or three of the others were cautiously approaching the gruesome object in the sand. The heat was stupendous, arising from the sun-baked sand in choking waves,

Near by, the great bulk of the Conqueror rose like something solidly built into the ground. Her decks were crowded with juniors and other interested onlookers.

I had managed to accompany the inspection party, much to the jealousy of Handforth and many of the other juniors.

"All this fuss over a blessed skeleton!" growled Handforth. "It must have been lying there for years!"

This opinion was shared by most, but Nelson Lee apparently thought quite the opposite.

"Not more than two weeks old, at the outside," he declared, after he had made a

opinion that the camel was alive two weeks ago. And this part of the desert is a great many miles distant from every known caravan route."

"You think that Lord Dorrimore's party came this way?"

"No, I don't think that," replied Nelson Lee.

"But——"

"I only regard it as a possibility," went on the famous detective quietly. "It is a very unwise proceeding to jump to conclusions, Sir Edward. The chances are that this camel formed a unit of the train we are seeking. But we mustn't take it for

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careful examination. "A fortnight ago this animal was alive and active. Rather significant, Manners!"

"Highly suggestive, in fact," declared Irene's father.

Sir Edward ceased fanning himself with his handkerchief.

"But good gracious, you're wrong, surely?" he puffed. "No skeleton could become so utterly dried as this in so short a time! I should say the animal died over six months ago. Confound this infernal heat!"

"It is because of the infernal heat that we must make our calculations much more closely," said Nelson Lee. "I stick to my

granted. By the appearance of the ground, I should imagine the party camped here. It must have been a comparatively small party, I assume."

The others could not see much evidence of a camp, until Nelson Lee pointed out a few apparently insignificant indications, which became very significant indeed when the detective explained their import.

"As you will see, there were several tents pitched here," he declared. "I don't suppose the untrained eye would note that fact, but it has long been my business to observe such things. If only we can find something to establish the identity of the camping party, we shall have made a dis-

covery of the highest importance. But we mustn't be too hopeful."

It was rather strange that the gov'nor should make that remark just then, for even while he was speaking I kicked against a metallic object as I skirted round the skeleton. Something glittered at my feet, and I picked it up with an ejaculation of surprise.

"Halt! Look at this, sir!" I exclaimed quickly.

I picked the thing up, and gasped. For it was a silver matchbox, and one that I had seen a score of times. It had been constantly used by Reggie Pitt at St. Frank's.

"Look, sir!" I shouted excitedly.

Nelson Lee took the matchbox quickly and turned it over in his fingers. It was burning hot, but in the tenseness of the moment we hardly noticed this fact. There were one or two matches inside, but they had long since exploded. The gov'nor turned the box over again.

"No initials, but interesting, nevertheless," he said. "It indicates that the party contained a white man—since a native would scarcely carry such an object as this—"

"A native!" I shouted. "It belongs to Reggie!"

Nelson Lee looked at me with sudden intensity.

"To young Pitt?" he asked slowly. "Are you sure of this?"

"I've seen him use it almost every day during last term," I replied. "Where's Mr. Pitt? He'll identify it in a tick. This is a wonderful discovery, sir. It proves that we're on the right trail!"

"Indeed it does!" agreed Nelson Lee keenly. "And it also proves that Mr. Earle knew what he was doing when he brought his ship out in this direction. Come, we will return."

Mr. Pitt was overjoyed, and alarmed in turn, when he saw the matchbox, for he recognised it at once, as I had anticipated. It was certainly one that had belonged to Reggie.

"But what does this mean, Mr. Lee?" he asked anxiously.

"It means that we have every reason to hope for the best," replied Lee. "It proves beyond question that your son was alive a comparatively short time ago—long after Dorrie's party had been given up as lost."

"Unless, of course, somebody else brought the matchbox to this spot," put in Mr. Travers Earle, his lean, leathery face full of concern. "I don't like to be a wet blanket—"

"I do not admit that somebody else could have brought this matchbox to the spot," put in Nelson Lee. "We have had plenty of evidence that Dorrie's party was captured—and not killed. It stands to reason, therefore, that they were alive when

they passed this way. Their progress was necessarily slow, and if we keep to the right direction we shall overtake them in the course of a day or so, for the Conqueror can cover as much desert in a few hours as a camel caravan can cover in a week."

"Yes," said Mr. Pitt eagerly. "Even less than the time you state, Mr. Lee. For if we only keep to our present speed of ten miles an hour we shall have progressed nearly two hundred and fifty miles by this time to-morrow, by travelling continuously."

"And no camel caravan could have gone that distance in a fortnight," commented Sir Edward. "By George! If we only keep to the right trail we'll be at their heels before to-morrow!"

There was general excitement when this knowledge was circulated. Nearly everybody had been assuming that weeks would pass before we would come upon the lost adventurers.

But now dramatically came the knowledge that we were practically within sight of our quarry.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERT CAPTIVES.



LORD DORRIMORE gave a grunt of pain as his camel lurched awkwardly over a rough patch of ground.

"Steady, old man, steady!" said his lordship. "I dare say you're sore, but I'll warrant I'm as sore again! That's better! Go easy on these bumps, for goodness sake!"

The lumbering camel apparently took no notice of this excellent advice. But the words were sufficient to prove that the unkempt rider had lost none of his indomitable spirit. For a man who could talk thus lightly to his steed in such circumstances was undoubtedly of iron.

Lord Dorrimore was beyond recognition.

His best friend would not have known him. He was ragged, unshaven, and altogether disreputable. More than anything else, he resembled a scarecrow. With weeks of growth on his chin, and with his skin tanned to a deep brown by the desert sun, he seemed to be some wild nomad.

But he retained his full health, and, being a man of enormous energy and strength, he had borne the hardships of the recent weeks with uncomplaining fortitude.

It was rather different with Sir Crawford Grey, who rode a camel just in Lord Dorrimore's rear. Sir Crawford was showing terrible signs of breaking up. He had recently suffered from fever, and this, combined with the awful trials of desert travel, had had due effect.

The baronet was weak and ill, but his spirit was strong, too. Never once had he complained, and he had set an example for his son which had more than once caused Jack Grey to feel a lump in his throat. Jack himself was a sturdy youngster, and his sufferings had made little mark.

It was the same with Reggie Pitt.

As ever, Reggie was the cheerful, sunny youngster of old. He was always ready to be humorous at the slightest provocation, and the fact that he and his companions were captives in the hands of strange foes, had not altered him in the least. Even now, after weeks of hardships, he was grinning

exclaimed. "Goodness knows it'll shine all right. But not in the way you mean. I've never known such heat in all my born days."

"And you were the chap who was always grumbling when it rained!" said Pitt. "There's no pleasing some people. Even Umlosi's been saying that the sun's too much of a good thing—and he fairly basks in the sunshine usually."

Umlosi was a little further down the line, a black figure, practically unclothed, hunched on the top of his camel in dejected attitude. The camel was no less dejected, for Umlosi was decidedly the biggest load in the whole train.

The long, stately camel caravan was

Five minutes later, Nelson Lee and two or three of the others were cautiously approaching the gruesome object in the sand. The heat was stupendous, arising from the sun-baked sand in choking waves.



cheerfully and addressing facetious remarks to Jack Grey.

"That beast of yours always reminds me of old Handy," he said, as his own steed came within speaking distance of the next camel. "There's an expression on his face just like Handy's—"

"Oh, don't rot, old man!" growled Jack. "I don't like to think of Handforth and Nipper and all the rest of the chaps. I don't suppose we shall ever see them again, anyhow!"

"Why this thusness, O pessimist?" asked Reggie. "We may be prisoners to-day, but to-morrow—who knows? The sun may shine!"

Jack groaned.

"Don't talk about the sun, either," he

plodding over the endless desert, and the hour was only a little after dawn. So far, the heat was not excessive, for mercifully the nights were comparatively cool. But before long the sun would blaze down with harsh, relentless intensity.

Derrie's party had been captives for so long that they were almost losing count of the days. And they kept ever onwards, moving always in the same direction, far out of reach of all known caravan routes, and on into the unexplored, mysterious recesses of the Sahara.

Their captors obviously knew their route well, for they were never without water. And sometimes they obtained their supplies from hidden wells—springs that were completely concealed by rocks, and which could

never have been located by chance wayfarers.

The party was not extremely big—some twenty-five or thirty camels and about fifteen men. But they greatly outnumbered Dorrimore's little bunch. And after the surprise attack, weeks ago, the prisoners had been quickly disarmed.

At that time, too, the enemy had numbered over fifty, so there had been utterly no chance for the unfortunate captives. They had been pounced upon and disarmed before any attempt at self-defence could be made.

The bulk of the enemy had gone on in advance, however, leaving these other men to bring the prisoners in. And what could Dorrie and Co. do to help themselves? How could they make any attempt to escape?

Indeed, any such effort would have been sheer suicide.

For once in this unknown, unexplored region a break-away from the main party would have ended in the most ghastly death imaginable—death by thirst in the sun-scorched desert.

And so they went on, captives, always plodding forward to an unknown destination.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BULLDOG SPIRIT.



UMLOSI was the most difficult prisoner of all to handle.

The famous Kutana chieftain positively refused to resign himself to his position. A great warrior in his own land—a fighter whose name was feared in countless kraals—he looked upon his present position as the most humiliating disaster that could possibly have occurred.

A prisoner—deprived of his celebrated spear—in the hands of these dogs of desert fellows! Umlosi had been nearly mad with rage at first, and his captors had had tremendous trouble with him. Indeed, on more than one occasion it had been touch and go with Umlosi's life.

Dorrie had seen that these desert men were losing all patience, and Dorrie easily understood that a continuation of Umlosi's attitude would inevitably result in his being cast adrift to perish in the desert, or speared to death—probably with his own trusty weapon.

And so, soon after the catastrophe had occurred, his lordship had solemnly and urgently warned Umlosi to adopt a passive attitude. At first Umlosi had refused, declaring that any such behaviour was impossible for a warrior of his blood.

But Dorrie had cunningly advised the black giant to store up his enmity, and to

take his revenge when the time was ripe—when the first opportunity occurred.

And, fortunately for Umlosi's skin, he had agreed. But the Kutana chief's patience—never a famous quantity—was becoming exhausted.

So far, he was obeying Dorrie's injunctions, and was accepting the various humiliations with silence. But all could see that the storm would break before so very long. For this desert journey seemed unending. Day succeeded day, and still the caravan plodded on across the dreary waste.

It was the general custom to march from an hour before dawn until the sun became too fierce for further travel. Then camp would be made, and the party would obtain grateful rest—although it was only possible to lie in the little tents, mercifully protected from the sun, and pant for breath in the blinding, devastating heat.

For the prisoners, the only real rest came at sundown. And then a few grateful hours of sleep were obtained before the next march commenced. It was an appalling ordeal. And it spoke volumes for the stamina of the two juniors that they were still healthy and strong. Indeed, they were becoming inured to the terrible climate.

They were all thankful for the rest which soon came—for the heat of the day made further progress impossible.

"How much longer is it going on?" asked Jack Grey wearily. "And where are we going to, anyhow?"

"My dear chap, what's the good of asking me riddles?" said Reggie. "We've gone over this a hundred times before, but we can never find any answer. We just imitate old Felix—and keep on walking still!"

"It's a thunderin' good thing you can keep your spirits up like this, young 'un!" said Lord Dorrimore approvingly. "By the Lord Harry! Fancy thinking of Felix out here! But you're right, Reggie—we certainly keep on walking still. And the question is—where are we goin' to? As far as I knew, this part of the Sahara was uninhabited, an' uninhabitable. It's a puzzle."

"Everything is a puzzle," growled Sir Crawford. "Why are we prisoners? Why do these men want us with them? The whole thing is mysterious and unaccountable. Even our captors are unlike any other desert dwellers I have ever encountered."

In this, Sir Crawford Grey was right. The men who had taken Dorrie and Co. captives belonged to a tribe that even Dorrie had never before seen. And his lordship's knowledge of Africa was profound.

Umlosi could not be expected to know much, because most of his journeyings had been in the forest lands, and not in these vast, desert fastnesses. But Dorrie had

been everywhere, and was a perfect encyclopedia of information on every known spot of the globe.

And yet Dorrie himself was confounded.

These men were of a new type to him—dark-skinned, but of a much finer physique than any other desert tribe he had ever encountered. They were not like the usual natives. They were splendidly built, with finely chiselled features.

And they never spoke. This was an astonishing fact. Not once since the journey began had these men uttered a single word within the hearing of their prisoners. And every attempt of Dorrie's to engage them in conversation had failed.

They would talk among themselves—at a distance. But whenever they fed their prisoners, or instructed them to prepare for another march, they used nothing but signs.

Dorrie had used every African dialect and language that he knew of—and he was acquainted with most. But his best Hausa fell on deaf ears. At least, no reply could be obtained. No matter what his lordship did, the strange captors refused to utter a word.

And this, in a way, was disconcerting. It added to the mysterious nature of their capture, and this march across the endless desert. But although Dorrie was inwardly furious, he maintained his customary geniality.

And he was curious, too.

An explorer by nature—a man who revelled in any new adventure—he couldn't help thinking that he and his party were perhaps on the verge of some discovery or other. And Dorrie's instinctive love for adventure almost compensated for the exhaustive trials he was called upon to endure.

For years he had bitterly complained of the creeping tide of modern civilisation. There were no further wild spots to explore—no fresh fields to conquer. He had come on this Sahara trip with Sir Crawford—a mere harmless expedition for the purpose of collecting specimens—in the hope that he might obtain some decent big-game hunting.

And then this disaster had occurred.

But for Dorrie it was not entirely barren. He had a feeling within him that something extraordinary would soon be revealed. And even Umlosi grimly talked of having had strange visions.

Escape was impossible, and the only chance of life was to remain passive and obedient to the orders of these strange captors. And what was the end to be?

And how could any possible rescue come? Certainly, the unfortunate prisoners had not the faintest inkling that a whole host of rescuers were even then within a few brief hours' journey away!

CHAPTER VII.

FORTY OF THE BEST.



ARCHIE GLEN-THORNE stretched himself languidly.

"Bally good, Phipps!" he said, as he drained the glass. "I must remark, old pineapple, that this lime-juice of yours is most frightfully decent. Kindly roll up with fresh supplies after the young master has indulged in forty of the best and brightest!"

"Very good, sir," said Phipps gravely.

"And now," said Archie, "be good enough to do the old vanishing act. Dash it all, Phipps, I can't very well slumber while you stand there like a dashed genie out of the 'Arabian Nights'!"

"No, sir," said Phipps. "I quite understand, sir."

"Good!" said Archie. "In fact, distinctly good! So what about rolling off—Good gad! The chappie's absolutely gone!" ejaculated Archie, as he opened his eyes and found that Phipps was no longer with him. "I mean to say, the lad is nothing more or less than a bally sprite, after all!"

The genial Archie was reclining languidly in a hammock, the latter being swung beneath the awning on deck, abaft the wireless house. The air was decidedly hot, but Archie had a fancy to doze in the open.

The Conqueror was rolling steadily on—maintaining her regular speed of ten miles an hour. It seemed little enough at first glance, and when leaning over the rail, a passenger could see that the great land yacht was only just crawling.

But the Conqueror went onwards relentlessly—day and night. She needed no rests, for her engines were untiring. And ten miles every hour meant two hundred and forty every twenty-four hours. She had been cruising for over a week, and was now a great deal more than a thousand miles from Kano, her starting-point. She was in the vast unexplored region of the Sahara, where travellers had never before penetrated.

Occasionally, the Conqueror would increase her progress to twelve or fourteen miles an hour, but at other times she would be compelled to slow down to a mere five or six—especially where the surface was rocky or sharply undulating.

But she never stopped—she triumphed over every obstacle in her path. Her great caterpillar tractors carried her onwards in the same steady, rolling motion—with scarcely a jerk or tremor in her sturdy hull, so perfect was the suspension.

Archie dozed off peacefully, knowing that he had full time for a nice half-hour's nap before tea. The soft purring sound of the moving tractors lulled him gently, and it was rather a rude shock when the hammock

was suddenly seized and swung violently to and fro.

"What-ho! Help, and all that sort of thing!" gasped Archie. "Oddslife! We've hit the good old cyclone—I say!" he added warmly, as he opened his eyes. "I say, chuck it, dash you! I don't want to use violent language, but chuck it!"

"You lazy bounder!" exclaimed Handforth curtly. "Going to sleep at this time of the day! You ought to be biffed!"

Archie sat up, annoyed.

"Allow me to inform you, laddie, that you're nothing more nor less than a bally disturber of the peace!" he declared. "I was just indulging in a rather ripping dream—"

"This is no time for dreaming," interrupted Handforth firmly. "I don't approve of this slacking—By George!"

He broke off, as he observed a second hammock near by. This one was empty, and it looked rather inviting. Handforth realised that Archie wasn't quite such a duffer, after all.

"All right—I'll let you sleep!" he said generously. "As a matter of fact, it's rather a good idea."

Archie sank back, too surprised to say much, and he watched Handforth as the latter plunged recklessly into the adjoining hammock. And it was some measure of compensation to Archie when Handforth turned a beautiful somersault and landed with a crash on the deck.

"Who—who did that?" he gasped blankly.

"Hammocks, dear old sunbeam, must be treated with a frightful amount of respect," said Archie happily. "I mean to say, you can't barge into a dashed hammock like that. At least, not without doing a shocking amount of damage to the deck."

Handforth picked himself up grimly, glared at Archie as though he was responsible for the accident, and entered the hammock again. But this time he observed more caution.

"H'm! Not so bad!" grunted Handforth, as he stretched himself out.

It was, in fact, so extremely comfortable that within three minutes he was sound asleep, and snoring peacefully, providing a lusty accompaniment to the purr of the tractors. Archie sat up in distress, and gazed at the slumbering Edward Oswald with dismay written on his face.

"Good gad! I thought the bally engines were going wrong!" he murmured. "I mean to say, of all the frightful dins! How can the chappie sleep with all that going on? It's a wonder he doesn't wake himself."

Archie was about to abandon the whole idea of having his nap when he observed something appear at the edge of the awning, just above Handforth's head. The object moved, and then fell with a kind

of plop into Handforth's hammock, close against the noisy junior's neck.

"Gadzooks!" murmured Archie.

He stared, rather fascinated.

The object was crawling leisurely over Handforth's chest, and it was nothing more nor less than a particularly sinister-looking lizard.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN OVERBOARD.



WILLY HANDFORTH wriggled.

"All right, sis—don't grab so hard!" he protested. "What's the idea of stopping me, anyhow?"

"I want you!" said his sister firmly. "What do you mean by pinching my handbag?"

"Your handbag?" repeated Willy innocently.

"My handbag!" said Ena, cold and deliberate. "It's no good—you can't get out of it, my lad! I distinctly saw you take my handbag while my back was turned! I'll bet you were looking for a safety-pin!"

"What do I want a safety-pin for?" scoffed Willy. "And how the dickens could you see me if your back was turned? You haven't got eyes in the rear of your head, I suppose."

"No, but the lounge is provided with mirrors," replied Ena calmly. "I'll bet you've torn something, or ripped a button off somewhere, but I won't inquire too closely. Anyhow, if you want a safety-pin, you've got to ask me for it. I won't allow this pilfering!"

Willy sniffed.

"You're a fine detective!" he said tartly. "You're just as bad as Ted! I didn't want any safety-pin—if I lose a button, I use string. As a matter of fact, I was borrowing your handbag to keep some lizards in!"

Even his sister's calm received a jolt.

"Lizards?" she repeated faintly.

"Oh, you needn't get scared!" snorted Willy. "It's like a girl to be frightened over a harmless reptile. I've got three lovely lizards—found 'em in the sand yesterday—but the giddy things keep escaping."

"And you were taking my handbag to keep them in?" demanded Ena, in an ominous voice. "You're dangerous. Go and get those lizards and throw them overboard!"

"Not likely!" retorted Willy. "I took a lot of trouble—"

"Throw them overboard!" repeated Ena coldly.

"Oh, but look here—"

"At once!" said Miss Handforth.

"Oh, all right!" groaned Willy. "It's no good trying to stand against your determination! I never knew such a girl for having her own giddy way! You'll make my life a misery unless I agree."

"You're right—I shall!" replied Ena calmly. "I'm not going to let you collect lizards on this ship!"

Willy moved up the imposing staircase sideways, and was rather dismayed when he saw that his sister was following him.

"No need for you, to come, sis!" he growled.

"All the same, I'm coming," said Ena. "Do you think I believe you? You must think I'm a duffer! I shan't give you any peace until you've thrown those lizards overboard in my presence. That's final!"

"Oh, I say! Look here——" shouted Willy indignantly.

"Final!" repeated Ena patiently.

Willy fumed, he raved, and point-blank refused to move another step. But in the end his sister prevailed. She always did. She possessed an iron will, and neither Willy nor Edward Oswald had ever beaten her.

"My only hat!" moaned Willy, at length. "Why on earth did the pater bring you? Nothing but trouble all day long! And this is supposed to be a holiday!" he added bitterly. "I can't even collect lizards!"

"You're wasting time," said Ena briefly.

They went on deck, and found Irene Manners and Winnie Pitt already there. Both girls were looking very charming in light georgette frocks. Winnie was a little smaller than Irene, and she resembled her brother in the matter of colouring—being dark. And she was extremely neat and pretty.

"I shan't be long, girls," said Ena. "I'm just going to make this young rascal throw some lizards overboard."

"Lizards!" repeated Irene.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Willy, staring. "Something's happened! Oh, my goodness! Quick! Look at Ted! And the poor old chump doesn't even know anything about it!"

Willy was grinning with callous enjoyment.

His elder brother was still sleeping peacefully. Two lizards were snuggling round his neck, and a third reptile was just investigating Edward Oswald's hair. Surprisingly enough, Handforth slept soundly.

"Oh!" cried Irene, horrified.

"It's all right—don't get scared!" said Willy. "They're harmless—they don't bite much!"

"Then—then they do bite?" asked Winnie, in alarm.

"Oh, well, just a bit, I suppose," said Willy. "All lizards have got to eat—and I suppose they bite occasionally. But there's no danger of them sampling Ted! He's not tasty enough!"

"Ted—Ted!" shouted Irene urgently. "Quick!"

"Oh, let him sleep!" said Ena. "If he wakes up, and finds those lizards all over him, he'll wreck the ship! Besides, they might bite if they're disturbed."

"They'll poison him!" exclaimed Irene, horrified.

"You mean, he'll poison the lizards!" jeered Willy.

Handforth, dimly hearing his name called in his sleep, opened his eyes, and looked round. He saw Irene at once, and sat up abruptly. Two strange-looking wriggling things dropped from his neck to his lap. And at the same moment Handforth became aware that something was moving in his hair.

As a matter of fact, the third lizard seemed intent upon making a nest, but it looked out in alarm as Handforth sat up. Irene and Winnie gazed at the junior in horror. Ena was quite calm, and Willy was openly grinning.

"Anything wrong?" asked Handforth sleepily. "Here, chuck it! Who's ruffling my hair?"

He put his hand up, believing that some jcker was behind the hammock. But Handforth stiffened as his hand came into contact with something cold—something that wriggled in his grip. And at the same second he caught sight of the other lizards in his lap.

"Yaroooooh!" he booted wildly.

He gave one terrific leap out of the hammock—a leap which caused Willy to shout with approval. It was one of the neatest pieces of gymnastic work that he had ever seen.

Edward Oswald staggered to the side of the ship, struck the rail, and, before he knew it, he had over-balanced. He reeled clean over, and dropped sheer!

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER CLUE.



"OH!" The girls were startled, and they ran to the rail with their hearts in their mouths. It was twenty-five feet to the ground, and even

Willy lost his grip, and felt his heart leap.

"He's not here—oh, he's not here!" exclaimed Winnie, pale and shaken. "He—he must have got caught in the tractors——"

"No, that's impossible—it's too awful!" said Ena huskily.

They didn't think of giving the alarm—for the whole thing had happened in a few seconds. Below there was nothing but sand—loose, fine sand. The Conqueror was ploughing her way along unhindered by the loose nature of the surface.

And there was no sign of Handforth. He had gone overboard here, but there was not the slightest indication of his presence. The sand was bare and empty.

But then just as Willy was going to yell for help, an arm appeared, some distance behind the Conqueror. It was thrust up from a great pile of loose sand, and the next second Handforth himself appeared—rising like some spectre from the sea.

"Hi! Wait for me!" he gasped thickly.

Willy gave a snort.

"I knew it!" he said disgustedly. "Just like Ted! Gives us all a scare, and he's as safe as we are! But I suppose we'd better stop the ship, or he's bound to grumble!"

Handforth was certainly very active for a seriously injured person. He had struggled out of the sand, and was plunging on after the Conqueror perspiring freely from every pore. He apparently feared that he would get left behind.

And it was now quite clear that he had fallen well over the tractors, and his drop had been broken by the loose nature of the sand. The alarm was given, and the vessel was stopped. And Handforth came on board, hot, breathless, and well-nigh exhausted.

He didn't wait to make any inquiries about the lizards, but staggered below to indulge in a bath. And Willy felt that the lizards had not been collected for nothing, after all.

Nelson Lee took the opportunity to go on a scouting trip. Now that the Conqueror was stopped, one of the small tractors was lowered from its davits, and Lee took charge. And I was hugely delighted when he gave me permission to accompany him.

There were several of these whippets slung from davits round the decks, like life-boats on a liner. And they answered the same purpose. If any disaster occurred to the mother ship—if, for example, she became hopelessly disabled in the desert—these small tractors were capable of carrying her entire passenger list back to civilization.

And the tractors were useful in other ways, too.

They could be used for scouting purposes, for on good ground they were capable of double the speed of the Conqueror. They were easily good for a speed of thirty miles an hour.

And now that the heat of the day was waning, Nelson Lee was intent upon some observation work. His plan was to go well ahead of the land yacht, and scour the desert for some sign or indication of the camel caravan's passage. The whippet, by the way, was able to maintain wireless communication with the parent ship continuously.

And that was the real reason why I was taken—because I could look after the wireless while the gov'nor operated the whippet itself. The machine was driven in very much the same way as a motor-car, and with no more trouble.

We were soon speeding over the desert, and before so very long we had gained a considerable lead, the Conqueror being far back in the dim distance. She looked more than ever like a sea-going ship now.

"After all, Nipper, we are only feeling our way," said Nelson Lee. "It's guesswork, more or less, and we shall have to trust to luck."

"But we know the camel train came in this direction, sir," I pointed out.

"Precisely," said the gov'nor. "But we don't know that we are on the exact route. And, by scouting in this way, there is just a chance that we may hit upon something."

But it seemed that the gov'nor's hopes were in vain.

For hours we scoured the desert—always keeping the Conqueror just in sight. We zig-zagged this way and that way, crossing and re-crossing the path that the land yacht would follow, and going further and further afield at every attempt.

Finally, in the quickly descending twilight, we got so far away that the Conqueror was entirely lost sight of. And the vastness of the desert seemed intensified. The utter loneliness and desolation of this great waste was driven home to me with appalling force.

"Ugh!" I said, with a shiver. "How awful to be stranded in a place like this, sir! I say, let's go back—"

"What's this, Nipper—what's this?" broke in Lee sharply. "Upon my word! I believe—"

He broke off, swung the tractor round, brought it to a standstill, and leapt out. I followed, and there, in front of us, were the unmistakable signs of a recent camp!

And after a careful examination it became clear to us that this camp had not been struck for more than three days! And we could see, in the sand, the trail which the camel caravan had taken—stretching away into the everlasting distance.

"Yes, it's the same—always the same!" murmured Nelson Lee. "But the Conqueror is several points off her course, Nipper. It's just possible we may be able to follow these tracks continuously."

Overjoyed, we wirelessly sent the news to the land yacht, and in due course the Conqueror rolled up, her course altered. The whippet was raised on the davits again, and the gov'nor and I stepped on board.

And the chase continued—with every one of us feeling more and more certain that we were getting to the end of the trail.

CHAPTER X.

THE COLUMN OF FIRE.



UMLOSI shifted his position and grunted. "Wau! Methinks the scurvy dogs are preparing for departure, N'kose!" he rumbled.

"Another night of marching—another day of toil! We have come to a poor end, my father—thou and I."

"We're not at the end yet, you old crow!" said Lord Dorrimore severely. "There's plenty of life in my frame—and so there is in yours! All we've got to do is to wait."

"Wise words, N'kose, but hast thou not used them oft?" growled the black giant. "'Tis an endless wait, this game thou hast told me to play. These pigs who order us have all in their favour, and we naught!"

"That's true enough—at present," agreed Dorrie. "But don't forget the old saying, Umlosi—as well known in your tongue as it is in mine—everything comes to him who waits!"

"Ay, my father, but it is sometimes possible to wait too long!"

"Oh, you're hopeless!" growled Dorrie. "You always were a confounded pessimist, but this business seems to have made you as sour as vinegar! Go to sleep, and try and have one of your good dreams!"

"My dreams are black and sinister, N'kose," rumbled Umlosi. "Not an hour since I had a strange vision——"

"If it's a tale of woe, don't tell it!" interrupted Dorrie. "We've had quite enough of your croaking, you old sinner! Dry up, and hold your peace! To be quite frank, I'm fed up with you!"

"Strange words, my master, but thy meaning is clear," said Umlosi gruffly.

They were in one of the small tents, and certain sounds of activity from without gave them a clear indication that the camels were being loaded for the next march. It was well past midnight, and the night was black. The coolness was exceedingly welcome.

The roaring of camels could be heard—a certain sign that the ungainly beasts were being loaded. For camels are surprisingly tender brutes, and burst forth into roars at the slightest provocation. They only have to be touched by the cameleers, and they lustily roar their complaints in no uncertain tone.

Sir Crawford Grey was in the same tent—but he was still sleeping. And Dorrie had no intention of disturbing him until he was absolutely forced. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey were slumbering in an adjoining tent.

"Yes, we shall soon be making a start now," said Dorrie. "I can't quite make out where these fellows are heading for—Ye gods!" he ejaculated abruptly.

Fumbling idly in his jacket pocket, his

fingers had slipped through a hole in the lining. Subconsciously, Dorrie had felt beyond. And his fingers came in contact with an object which made his heart leap for joy.

"Shades of Mr. Player!" he breathed. "A cigarette, Umlosi! Absolutely a whole cigarette!"

"Thou art excited, my father—and for what?" grumbled Umlosi, not without disdain. "Is it that the smoke-tube pleases thee so mightily? Wau! A strange pleasure, methinks!"

Dorrie was fairly quivering with glee.

His last cigarette—as he supposed—had gone weeks ago. During the long period of captivity, he would have given any amount of money for a brief smoke. And now, quite unexpectedly, he had discovered a solitary cigarette in the lining of his tattered jacket. It was crumpled and dried, but a cigarette, nevertheless.

"Thank goodness, I've got a match!" he breathed. "I shall have to let Sir Crawford in on this! By gad, we'll have a few puffs each, and preserve the rest for another occasion!"

He handled the cigarette with loving care—a pitiful caricature of a cigarette which at any ordinary time Dorrie would have scorned. He awoke Sir Crawford, and the latter was almost as delighted as Dorrie. Any little surprise of this sort was a kind of red-letter occasion—an incident to be remembered for years.

Dorrie struck his match and lit the cigarette with huge enjoyment. He took two luxurious puffs, and tossed the match away. Then he passed the cigarette over to Sir Crawford.

"Heavenly!" breathed Dorrie, in an ecstatic voice.

Umlosi gave a sudden roar of alarm. He moved with the agility of a snake, and only just in the nick of time. For a burst of flame leapt up by his side. Dorrie's match had ignited a loose piece of calico—and the next second the flame leapt up with almost explosive force.

"Outside—quick!" gasped Dorrie.

They staggered out of the tent, and they had no sooner got into the open before the tent fabric caught alight with a hissing roar. The flimsy structure burned almost like celluloid, for it was so dry. And a flaming, towering torch of fire leapt skywards.

CHAPTER XI

THE ACCIDENTAL SIGNAL.



MR. TRAVERS EARLE folded his arms on the bridge-rail, and gazed out over the dark, mysterious desert.

"I wonder if we shall meet with any luck to-morrow, Mr. Lee?" he said reflectively

"Somehow, I think we ought to strike something very quickly now."

Nelson Lee knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I am quite optimistic, Mr. Earle," he replied. "I believe we are on the right course, and I am equally convinced that Lord Dorrmore is alive. And we have to thank this amazing vessel of yours for everything."

"She is doing well, isn't she?" said the inventor, his voice eloquent of his satisfaction. "I don't mind admitting, Mr. Lee, that the Conqueror is even exceeding my own hopes."

"And when you first came to me in London I was quite ready to turn your suggestion down," smiled Nelson Lee. "And yet, as a matter of fact, without this ship we should have been unable to come on this quest. At all events, we should have been faced with a hopeless task."

The pair were taking a turn on the bridge in the early hours of the morning. Night was on the desert, and the Conqueror was ploughing steadily onwards with never a pause. She was like her sister of the ocean—keeping continuously on and thus eating up the miles, notwithstanding her apparently slow rate of progress. It was the continuous travelling, which told.

A single searchlight was in operation—pointing downwards, and only illuminating the ground immediately ahead. The steersman was able to pick his course with ease. And the darkness enclosed the Conqueror on every side.

Overhead, the stars were gleaming, and the coolness of the air was grateful after the stifling heat of the burning day.

There was something very wonderful about this monster land car, consuming the miles of desert waste with never-ceasing regularity. The beat of her powerful engines was like a lulling throb, and if there had been any to see, her progression would have looked almost nil. And there was never the slightest peril of capsizing, or collision—even in the darkest hours of the night.

For at the modest speed of ten miles an hour, every rough boulder and every loose patch of shifting sand could be carefully avoided. The Conqueror, under the eagle eye of the steersman picked her way deliberately and easily across the vast plain.

Occasionally there would be jagged masses of rock, sometimes rising to a height of several hundred feet. And the vessel would make a detour round such obstacles, always coming back to her true course at the earliest possible moment.

And she was particularly imposing at night, gliding over the desert with a smooth, rolling motion, as though she were on runners. Her caterpillar tractors were surprisingly noiseless, and the vibration was almost nil. It was very pleasant on the bridge.

Mr. Earle shifted his loose-limbed form, and stretched himself.

"Well, I think I'll turn in," he observed. "Everything's going well, and Mr. Manners is on duty in the chart-house."

"I'll join you," said Nelson Lee. "And I'm hoping—"

He paused, staring out across the desert in a curiously intense manner. For the past five minutes the Conqueror had been leisurely climbing a gently sloping rise. And now she had topped the eminence, and would soon glide down into the next shallow valley.

At the moment, however, the visibility was extensive, and the air as clear as crystal. And over on the port bow, and nearly dead ahead, a tiny, yellowish glow was visible on the rim of the horizon.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Mr. Earle tensely. "What on earth—"

"A fire of some kind," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But I can't quite understand it, Mr. Earle. No camp-fire would cause such a blaze as this. I wonder if it can be a signal?"

"By Jove!" murmured the inventor softly.

They stood there, gazing out eagerly. The man in the bows had already given a low hail, for he, too, had seen the spot of light. Nelson Lee gave instructions for the searchlight to be cut off, and it was instantly extinguished.

The light on the horizon now became more apparent.

"It's a certainty that the light is caused by human agency," murmured the detective. "And yet this region is absolutely barren and uninhabited. It seems certain that we are on the right track—and that Lord Dorrmore and his captors are ahead."

"We should overtake them in a very few hours," said Mr. Earle.

"I wouldn't quite say that," exclaimed Lee, shaking his head. "This desert air is most deceptive—and we are at the summit of an unusually high prominence. The source of that light may be forty or fifty miles distant."

Mr. Travers Earle nodded.

"Probably more," he agreed. "And there is no telling what detours we shall be compelled to make before we reach that particular spot. But I shall certainly set our course towards the light, and maintain it without deviation—except for unavoidable detours."

The millionaire was right. The distance to that light may have been anything between forty and sixty miles—but it was more than likely that the Conqueror would

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be compelled to cover double this ground in order to reach the spot.

For the great Sahara desert of Central Africa is very different to the Northern deserts—hilly, even mountainous, with untold pitfalls in the path. It is well nigh impossible to set a straight course and travel as the crow flies. And the Conqueror had many precious souls on board, and neither Nelson Lee nor Mr. Earle were prepared to take unnecessary risks.

"Let us hope that our surmise is correct, and that this light is indeed a signal," said Lee. "We will do our best to show that the light has been seen—to give hope and courage to our lost friends."

Nelson Lee's meaning was soon clear, for a few minutes later all the Conqueror's searchlights were in operation, the powerful beams sweeping the heavens continuously, so that they might be seen in the far, mysterious distance.

CHAPTER XII.

HOPE—AND ALARM.



REGGIE PITT grinned. "Well, it was exciting enough while it lasted," he remarked. "Reminded me of Guy Fawkes—only there weren't any fireworks."

"We shall probably get the fireworks before long," said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "Our charming jailers don't seem to be in a particularly good humour. And why should they be? If it was my tent, I should be just as annoyed."

They were standing in a little group in the middle of the camp. All the prisoners were bunched together—where they had been hustled by their mysterious captors at the height of the fire.

And both tents had gone, Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey having been roused out of theirs just in time to escape the peril. The tents, as dry and as inflammable as tinder, had roared up into flames so quickly that no attempt could be made to save them.

Round about, in the gloom of the night, the camels were roaring with uneasiness and alarm. But they were being quietened, and order was practically restored. For the tents were now nothing but a little heap of charred embers.

As Dorrie had remarked, the men of the desert were in no way pleased. They had handled their prisoners roughly—although they still spoke no word. But, at a safe distance, they were conversing together in low tones.

"Well, it doesn't matter much, anyhow," said Sir Crawford Grey wearily. "We shall probably be on the march again before long."

"The only infernal pity is about that cigarette!" growled Dorrie. "I dropped it, somehow, and—"



And before he knew it, Handy had overbalanced. He reeled clean over, and dropped sheer!

"Dad!" broke in Jack, tugging at his father's sleeve. "What's that over there?" "Eh? What do you mean, my boy?" asked Sir Crawford, struck by the tense, eager note in Jack's voice. "Over where? I don't understand what you are referring to—"

"Look—right in the sky!" gasped Jack. "No, not there—over this way! I saw a kind of beam—like the swing of a searchlight—"

"Steady, young 'un!" growled Dorrie. "There are no searchlights in the Sahara—at least, not in this part of it. We're four or five hundred miles away from the nearest civilisation. Your eyes must be getting strained from the continual glare of sunlight—"

"Great Scott!" shouted Pitt. "It's true, Dorrie! Can't you see? And there's more than one— Look! There are three beams—there goes one, now, sweeping across—"

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore hoarsely.

He was startled more than he cared to admit. Both he and Sir Crawford had fully believed that Jack was a victim of his own imagination—and the imagination is apt to play queer tricks in the Sahara, after weeks and weeks of endless monotony, camel-riding over the sun-scorched desert.

But Dorrie could now see that the boys were right. Their keen young eyes had detected the extraordinary beams sooner than their elders. They were so dim and far away as to be almost invisible. Had the sky been clouded, the searchlights would have shown up prominently. But in this clear, crystal air the beams were almost lost.

But Jack had seen them—and so had Reggie.

And now the entire group stood silent—fascinated. Far, far away, right over the horizon, the strange searchlights were pointing their beams heavenwards. They all came from the same spot. Umlösi was the first to break the silence.

"Wau! Methinks this is tagati, my master!" he growled. "It is magic, for how can there be such things on the desert? It would be well if the Great Wizard were here—he who knows all! It were sad that Umtagati were not with us! For he would surely explain this strange thing."

"You mean good old Lee?" said Dorrie. "By gad! I wonder where he is now? Our old friend, Umlösi—the one man I'd love to clasp by the hand before all others! I'm afraid we shan't see Umtagati for many, many weeks, old man."

Little did Dorrie know that "Umtagati" was even then operating the searchlights which could be seen in the distance! And now that the fact was established—now that Dorrie and Co. had satisfied themselves that their eyes had not deceived them—they were almost lost in wonder.

"But, after all, the searchlights can't be

very far off," said Jack Grey excitedly. "Not more than fifty or sixty miles anyhow. And they're back in the desert where we've come from, too. I say! Perhaps there's a rescue-party on the way—"

"Just what I was thinking!" declared Reggie.

"Come, come! Don't get any such silly ideas into your heads, my boys," said Sir Crawford uneasily. "You mustn't get excited. There may be no hope for us at all."

But he was hoping all the time—even while he spoke the words. For those searchlight beams—an evidence of mechanical device of distant civilisation—had made the hearts of all these captives beat and throb with newly inspired hope.

And at the same time the men of the desert took alarm.

They could be seen pointing excitedly into the sky, talking rapidly to themselves. And it wasn't long before the camp was hastily and precipitately struck.

And long before dawn the camel train was plodding on its way once more—onwards, and into the mysterious heart of the Sahara.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS.



ARCHIE GLEN-THORNE carefully adjusted his monocle.

"I must observe, dear old scouts, that the vista appears to be somewhat jagged," he remarked critically. "I mean to say, all these dashed hillocks, and so forth. Hardly pleasing to the old optics, what?"

Archie was standing against the deck-rail, gazing out over the desert. And a number of other Remove fellows were near by—all of them eager and intent. It was quite early, and the breakfast-gong had not yet sounded.

"What do you expect to see in the Sahara—tropical forests and fields of corn?" asked Handforth sarcastically.

"Well, to be exact, no," replied Archie. "But the old prospect is somewhat less inspiring than it was yesterday, if you follow me."

"Archie's right," I declared. "The scenery isn't so open this morning—we seem to be climbing upwards gradually, and those peaks in the distance are interesting, too!"

Since darkness had fallen the previous evening the Conqueror had rolled steadily on, covering well over a hundred miles of desert, and we could easily detect the change.

The ground was becoming rougher—the sandy, desert-like appearance was altering. Here and there, at intervals, we would pass some rough, stunted bushes, sun-dried and parched.

And, far ahead, where the Conqueror was making for, a kind of mountain range was looming more and more distinct. There had been no sign of it the previous day, and we were all interested and inquisitive.

This remarkable mountain range could not be in any way connected with the Asben Mountains—for these latter had been left remotely behind days ago, and the desert ship was now far beyond any point hitherto explored by white men.

We had all heard the story of how a point of yellow light had been seen on the horizon—and some of the juniors expected that we should overtake the missing party at once.

But Nelson Lee did not share this view.

He and Sir Edward Handforth were on the bridge, greatly interested in the mountains ahead. It was not an ordinary range—but, as far as Lee could judge, the rocky crags rose cliff-high from the desert, and raised their summits far into the sky.

"We have undoubtedly been climbing for the past twelve hours or so—but the difference in altitude is very slight," commented Lee. "But these mountains rise straight up in the form of a vast barrier. There is no question that we shall be compelled to make an extensive detour."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed Sir Edward. "We can't very well scale the mountains, can we? Although, by George, this craft seems to be capable of any wonder!"

"I'm afraid there is a limit to her powers," smiled Nelson Lee. "And if we come upon a steep barrier of rock, we can do nothing but find a way round."

Nelson Lee frankly told the juniors that there was not the slightest occasion for them to get excited. There was no prospect of anything unusual happening for hours—at the very earliest.

And when breakfast was over, and we came on deck again, the mountain range appeared to be as far away as ever. The distances were deceptive, and difficult to judge.

"It'll be nightfall before we get anywhere near those hills," I declared. "It's rather rummy, the way they seem to stick straight up from the desert. I think we shall make some discoveries before long."

"It's about time!" growled Tommy Watson.

But his impatience subsided when he thoroughly understood that it would be evening before anything could possibly occur to break the monotony. And the excitement was gradually dying down among the others.

It was getting hot, too—for the sun beat down from a cloudless sky, and the decks were soon burning. Even under the awnings, the heat waves surged up in suffocating volumes.

"Oh, dear! I think we'd better go below!" exclaimed Irene, rather dismayed. "We can't possibly play tennis in this heat. It seems to be getting worse every day."

"I don't think it's worse, really," said Winnie. "And the sun doesn't hurt anybody—it's good for you. Why not have just one game, to see if we can stand the heat?"

"Good idea!" declared Handforth. "Blow the sun!"

"Not much good blowing it!" remarked Willy, shaking his head. "That won't make it any cooler."

"Fathead!" said his major tartly.

"Ted!" said Irene, with a severe look.

"Eh? Oh, I—I didn't mean—" began Handforth.

"I don't like you to speak to Willy in that abrupt way!" said Irene. "It isn't at all nice, and—"

"Don't you worry about Willy," interrupted Ena Handforth. "That's the only way to address him. He doesn't understand anything else. Are we going to have this game or not? Or are you boys going to talk all the morning?"

The game was hardly successful. They were playing a kind of tennis, in an open part of the deck. But the heat compelled them to desist after a brief five minutes of play.

"Phew! That was a bit of a frost!" said Handforth, wiping his perspiring brow.

"Frost?" groaned Church. "If this is your idea of frost, I wonder what temperature you need to feel hot?"

Handforth sank into a deck chair without deigning to reply. He was rather disconsolate. Irene and Co. had gone below, and Edward Oswald felt the morning was going to be empty.

But he was quite wrong.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUN CURE.



CHURCH fanned himself feebly.

"My hat! This is killing!" he panted.

"Come on—let's get below! I can't stand this heat any longer!"

"Rubbish! You can't call this hot!" snapped Handforth.

He had, as a matter of fact, been on the point of suggesting the same thing as Church. But now that the latter had spoken, Handforth regarded it as a duty to disagree.

"You can stay here if you like!" said McClure. "But we're going below. Thank goodness Mr. Earle provided a giddy ice-plant on board. Just think how we've got to thank modern science!"

Handforth laughed sarcastically.

"You're dotty!" he declared. "The sun's the finest thing in the world—a certain cure for everything! A chap who once gets used to the sun can stand any feat of endurance."

He never gets ill, and he's as strong as an ox! That's what the sun does!"

"Who told you that dotty story?" asked Church. "The sun may be all right in England, but out here it's going to burn you up if you're not careful."

"The sun's the sun, wherever a chap happens to be," argued Handforth. "Haven't you read all about the sun cure? People are going in for it by the hundred. It's one of the latest fads. I've a good mind to try it myself—I've been feeling a bit out of sorts."

Church and McClure allowed themselves to grin. Their leader had never looked more robust and healthy in all his existence. He was the very picture of youthful fitness. Always in the pink of condition, this African trip had even added to Handforth's celebrated vigour.

"Yes," he went on reflectively, "I've been feeling a bit rocky these last few days, and the sun cure would put me right in next to no time. But I don't think I'll try it, because— Well, it's a bit awkward."

"How is it awkward?" asked McClure.

"You've got to wear as little as possible to make the cure effective," said Handforth. "Of course, I could go into the bows—it's private enough up there—"

"And you could wear a bathing costume," suggested Church. "But I can't see that it's necessary to expose yourself as much as all that. Your head will be bare, and that's the part that needs curing more than any other!"

Handforth looked at his chum suspiciously.

"What do you mean—my head needs curing?" he demanded.

"Oh, well—you look strong enough everywhere else," replied Church. "And all ills come from the brain, you know. You've got to expose the weakest part to the sun."

"Then you can't do better than go about without a hat on!" said McClure heartily.

Fortunately, Handforth was deep in thought, or he might have detected some sinister meaning in these remarks.

"No, I won't do it!" he decided finally. "I'll go below, and write some Trackett Grim stories—all ready for next term. And I've got heaps of letters to reply to—letters from general readers, you know—that I brought along with me."

"Poor general readers!" grinned Church. "I'm afraid they'll have to wait a long time for their giddy answers! And I'm surprised at you, Handy, and I feel compelled to say so."

"Surprised at me?"

"Yes—and disappointed," said Church sorrowfully.

"Look here, you fathead—"

"I always thought you were a fellow to be as good as your word," went on Church. "You said you were going to try this sun

cure—and now you back out of it. It isn't like our Handy—is it, McClure?"

"Not a bit!" said McClure sadly.

Handforth snorted.

"You chumps!" he said witheringly. "You faithless traitors! Of course I'm going to try the sun cure! I'll have an hour's spell now—just to give it a good trial."

And with an expression of grim determination on his face, Handforth marched along the deck, and went into the very bows of the Conqueror—where there was quite enough space for him to lounge in comfort. And it had the advantage of being private, too.

Handforth didn't don a bathing costume—he wasn't quite as enthusiastic as all that. But he opened his flimsy silk shirt, and lay there with his brawny chest and neck bared, and with his sleeves rolled up. The sun beat down upon him fiercely, and the glare was so much that he found it impossible to keep his eyes open. The heat was relaxing, too, and almost before Handforth knew it, he was dozing off. And in less than five minutes he was sound asleep, and snoring with all his usual lustiness.

And then Willy appeared. Willy, in fact, had just heard all about this sun bath idea from Church and McClure—and Willy had come along to tell his major exactly what he thought of him—and to threaten to fetch Ena instantly unless Handforth threw up the scheme.

Willy knew that such a threat would be instantly effective—because Edward Oswald feared his matter-of-fact sister more than he feared a regiment of soldiers. And, excellent as a sun bath may be in a temperate zone, it was simply asking for trouble to test the cure in the Sahara.

Willy gazed at Edward Oswald's slumbering form, and he hesitated. He half expected to see blisters rising on his major's skin. Fortunately, Handforth had a very thick hide.

"I don't know!" murmured Willy thoughtfully. "It seems a pity to wake him up. He's so jolly keen on this sun cure that I don't like to disappoint him. I'm always an obliging chap—so I'll give him a little help."

Willy sped off, grinning happily.

CHAPTER XV.

CURED!



HANDFORTH was still grinning when he returned, a few minutes afterwards. He was greatly pleased to find that his major was still slumbering soundly.

He had counted upon this.

It was quite a safe assumption, for once Handforth went to sleep, it took something like an earthquake to awaken him.

"Good!" murmured Willy. "Now for the giddy cure!"

Willy was a very thoughtful, kind-hearted junior. He hated to think of his elder brother being disappointed over this sun bath. Besides, it was necessary to awaken the reckless idiot soon, or he would scorch himself seriously.

But to awaken him now would be to spoil the cure. So Willy, always ready to oblige, thought it a rather good expedient to provide a special cure of his own.

He had returned with all the necessary ingredients for imparting a splendid imitation of tanning. In other words, he had brought a brush, and a small pot of dark-looking stain. The stain was perfectly harmless and odourless, and, as a matter of fact, Willy had borrowed it out of his major's theatrical make-up box—which, to say the least, was a bit of a nerve.

"I always told Ted that we shouldn't have an opportunity for amateur theatricals, but I was wrong," murmured Willy. "Anyhow, that giddy box of tricks has come in useful, after all! And now for the cure!"

He calmly knelt beside his unconscious brother, and applied the stain carefully and swiftly. He hadn't the slightest fear of Handforth waking up. A scrubbing brush would have been required for that purpose—and Willy's brush was a camel-hair, and as soft as silk.

With wonderful speed, the stain was spread on—over Handforth's face, his neck, his chest, and his arms. And Willy was so accustomed to his brother's heavy method of sleeping, that he had no compunction in pushing him about, and even rolling him over.

once or twice. Handforth grunted, and mumbled, but he didn't arouse himself. And, finally, Willy stood up, and surveyed his handiwork.

"Topping!" he declared. "If Ted isn't cured after this, he ought to be! I've never seen anything so terrific! I shouldn't be surprised if Irene faints, but I can't help her troubles!"

As a final move, Willy buttoned his major's shirt, pulled his sleeves down, and fastened them. Then, having concealed the stain, he delivered a heavy punch on the muscles of Handforth's left arm.

"Wake up, Ted!" shouted Willy. "You'll kill yourself if you stay here."

Handforth sat up, in considerable pain. That punch of Willy's had been well directed. The upper part of the arm is a tender spot—and Willy was much practised in this particular pastime. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon would have vouched for the truth of it.

"Who—who did that?" demanded Handforth thickly.

"I did!" said Willy. "You can't stay here, you ass!"

"Why not?" said Handforth, looking round. "Hallo! I must have dropped

asleep! I was just having a sun bath. Clear off, you young rotter, or I'll slaughter you!"

"Yah!" jeered Willy. "You couldn't touch me! If you come near me, you bully, I'll knock you overboard!"

Handforth leapt to his feet with a roar. He didn't realise that he was neatly falling into the trap that Willy had set for him. The fag bolted, and Handforth sped after him like the wind—which was exactly what Willy required.

The Third Former was even more delighted when he found himself amidships, under the big canvas awning. For a number of Remove fellows were there, looking out over the desert, to say nothing of Irene and Co. Willy badly wanted an audience—and here it was, all ready for him.

"Pax!" he gasped, as he ran into the crowd. "Ease up, Ted, old man! I—I didn't mean what I said!"

Handforth pulled himself up, breathing hard. He was confused to find the girls there—and trebly confused because they were all looking at him in a manner that he couldn't understand. Even the juniors were staring, open-eyed. He might have been a ghost, by the way they gazed at him.

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene, at last. "Oh, Ted!"

"Is—is anything the matter?" asked Handforth blankly.

"It's all right—I can explain it," put in Willy calmly. "Ted is a great believer in the sun cure, and I found him having a good old bath in the sunshine——"

"It's a pity he couldn't use one of the proper bath-rooms!" said De Valerie.

"I mean he was having a sun bath," explained Willy. "And just look at the result! He ought to have known what would happen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared with appreciation, and Handforth was more puzzled than ever. Everybody was still staring at him, and he turned appealingly to Irene.

"Have all these chaps gone mad, Miss Irene?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm sorry, Ted, but I don't want to speak to you!" said Irene stiffly. "I thought you were quite a nice boy before—but I couldn't possibly be friends with you while you're so dreadfully black!"

She turned coldly, and Marjorie and Doris and the other girls were compelled to face about, too, in order to conceal their mirthful faces. Irene had been very distant and severe—but nobody but Handforth was deceived. She was merely pulling his leg.

"Black!" said Handforth blankly. "But—but— Why, what the— Great pip! What—what's happened to me?"

He frantically tore up his shirt sleeves, and uttered a yell of horror when he saw that his arms were a deep, chocolate brown. The expression on his face was so tragic that it became absolutely funny.

"Poor old Handy!" I said, shaking my head. "You went in for a sun cure and you've come out like a side of bacon!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ROUGH ON HANDY.



HANDFORTH seemed to stagger. "I'm — I'm as black as a nigger!" he panted. "Oh, my hat! I—I never thought the sun was so powerful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wouldn't matter so much if it was only your arms," remarked Willy, shaking his head. "But I believe you're like it all over!"

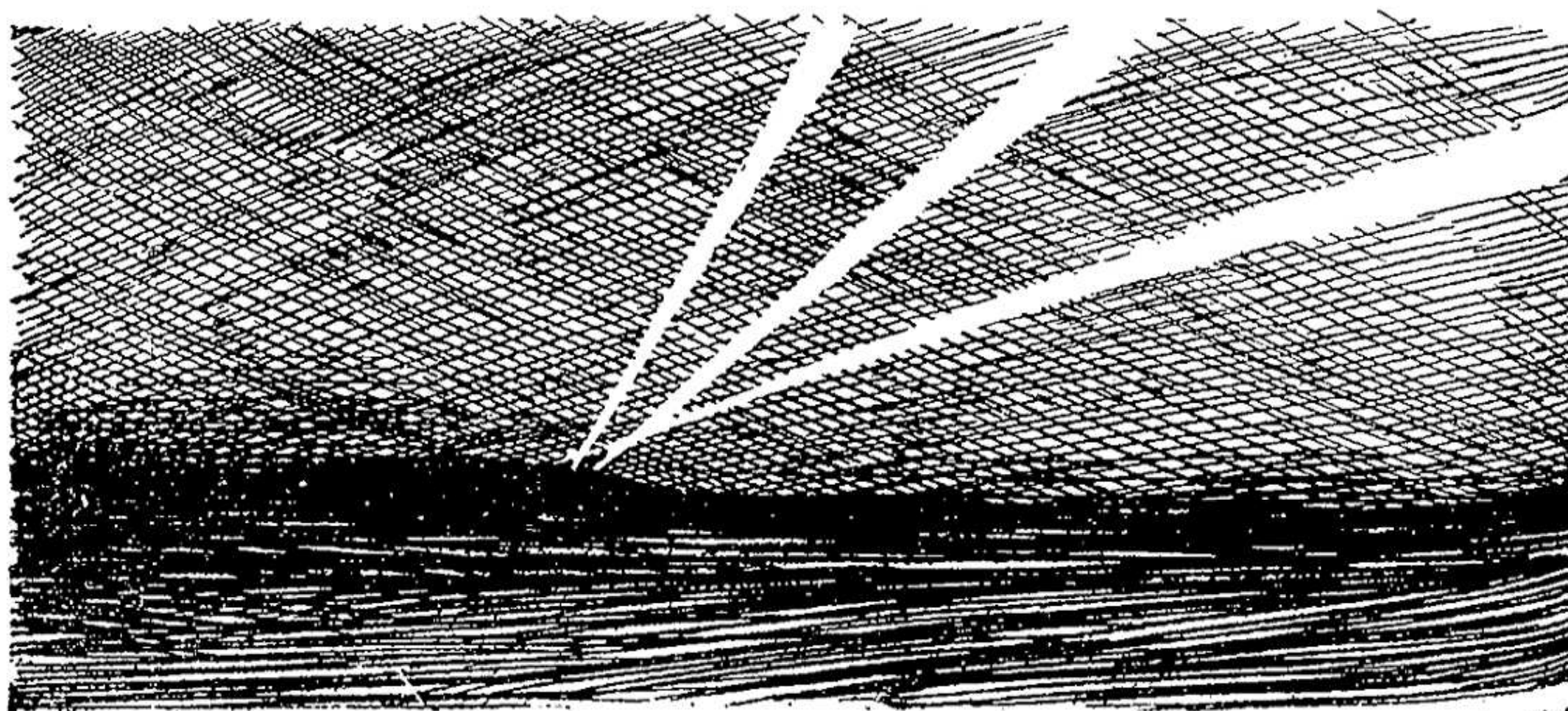
should have had a funeral on our hands! You're lucky to still be alive! This is what comes of taking liberties with the Sahara sun!"

"Absolutely!" declared Archie, examining Handforth carefully, through his monocle. "It seems to me, dear old chunk of tar, that the Sahara sun has ticked you off pretty extensively. I mean to say, you could become a nigger minstrel without any dashed make-up whatever."

Handforth clung to a deck-chair rather limply.

"But—but what am I going to do?" he asked. "I can't live like this—I can't go about as black as a Hottentot! Isn't there a cure of some kind?"

"There might be," I said. "You've had a sun-bath, old man, and it wouldn't be a bad scheme to try a bath of a different



Can you find the correct wording out of the story to go underneath this picture

"All over!" repeated Handforth tragically.

He opened his shirt with trembling fingers, and then groaned. His chest was as black as his arms! And then his sister politely came forward with a mirror and held it before him.

"I'm not sure it hasn't improved your appearance," she said calmly. "You look almost human now, Ted. This dark tanning has hidden up all the ugliness. How do you like yourself?"

Handforth saw his reflection, and nearly fainted.

"But—but I didn't think the sun could do this!" he ejaculated, in alarm and horror. "And I wasn't there long, either! If ever I find the chap who started that talk about sun-baths, I—I'll——"

"It's a jolly good thing I woke you up when I did," put in Willy firmly. "Why, in another ten minutes you would have been shrivelled up to a clinker—and then we

type. I've got an idea that your complexion isn't permanent."

Handforth looked at me with wild hope.

"You—you mean it'll wear off?" he breathed eagerly.

"No—I mean it'll wash off!" I said. "You've apparently overlooked the fact it was Willy who woke you up——"

"Willy!" repeated Handforth, with a start.

"And I shouldn't be surprised if he was alone with you for five or ten minutes before he woke you up," put in McClure casually.

Handforth turned to his minor with terrible calmness.

"Do you know anything about this awful business?" he asked fiercely. "Answer me, you little rotter! If you've been up to your tricks, I'll—— By George! I might have known it! You've all been spoofing me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not black at all—I've been stained with something!" hooted Handforth. "I'll—I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Willy made a swift move below, and Handforth was about to tear after him when he nearly collided with somebody who was just coming up on deck. The newcomer was Sir Edward Handforth.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Handy's pater. "Who—who is this? What are you doing in this part of the ship—"

"Off, don't stop me now, pater!" said Handforth impatiently. "It's only me—"

"Edward!" gasped his father, horrified. "What—what on earth have you been doing to yourself? How have you got yourself into this extraordinary condition?"

"I didn't do it!" roared Handforth.

"Don't you dare to shout at me, sir!" bellowed Sir Edward. "Confound it, I

Handforth paused in the very act of seizing his minor.

"By George!" he breathed. "Black-mail!"

"Rats!" retorted Willy. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature! Do you think I want a couple of black eyes, and to be laid up for the rest of the trip? Promise me you won't lay a finger on me, and I'll help you."

Handforth knew that he was beaten.

"All right, you little criminal!" he panted. "I promise!"

"Good!" said Willy cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, you only need to wash yourself! I got that stain out of your own make-up box—and you can get rid of the complexion in two minutes—"

"Then—then you've spoofed me?" howled Handforth wrathfully.



See Page iii of cover for particulars of a new and fascinating competition.

won't put up with such insolence. Go below at once, and make yourself presentable— Good heavens! The boy's mad!"

Sir Edward gazed after his son blankly, for Edward Oswald had scooted below like a rabbit diving into its burrow. He made straight for his own state-room, charged in, and found Willy waiting there. His minor was perfectly calm and collected.

"Now!" said Handforth, in a voice that was thick with menace. "Now, my lad! I'm going to tan you until you're blue!"

"Then we shall both be tanned!" said Willy.

"I don't want any of your cheek!" roared his major.

"Then don't be funny!" said Willy.

"I've come here especially to do you a good turn. Give me your word of honour that you won't biff me, and I'll tell you exactly how to get that rich complexion off yourself."

"Exactly!" grinned Willy. "So long, old dear!"

He sauntered out of the cabin, leaving his major speechless.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VILLAGE OF THE VEILED MEN. DESOLATION!



D Lord Dorrinore had been in many remote corners of the earth, but never had he seen such a picture of utter, dreary desolation as this.

The caravan had reached the very end of the world, it seemed. For hours the camels had been plodding—with that mysterious, silent, elastic tread so peculiar to the beasts. For hours the long, oddly assorted cavalcade had been mounting higher and higher into the hills—those unknown hills in the very heart of the Sahara.

And now, looming before them in the short twilight of the desert evening, rose an incredibly high range of mountain peaks—a range which seemed to extend in jagged rockiness for scores of miles. It was an apparently impassible barrier which no human being could conquer.

In the other direction, and all around, lay the desert. Grim, sun-parched, silent and utterly barren. And the spot was made even more desolate by the knowledge that all traces of civilisation lay many, many hundreds of miles distant.

Dorrie dimly remembered having heard a native legend of some mighty mountain peaks in the heart of the Sahara. But there had never been any corroboration of this native tale, and no white man had given it credence. Certainly no party had ever risked almost certain death in the desert in an attempt to look for this mythical range of mountains.

—And yet here they were—ugly, majestic, and somehow suggestive of something indescribably sinister. If ever Lord Dorri-more had felt inclined to be despondent, he felt so now. But he did not allow his feelings to become apparent on his cheery face.

"Well, boys, we seem to be getting to the end of the trip," he observed lightly. "Goodness knows what the end is, but we're still alive and kicking—and that's the main thing."

"We're alive, but I don't know about kicking, sir," said Reggie Pitt. "I wonder why we've been brought to this mountain range? I hope they aren't going to make us climb these peaks!"

They were standing with Dorrie, idle, while one or two minor adjustments were made to a camel load which had come loose. And the captives were seizing the opportunity to stretch their legs, after some arduous riding.

"Well, there's one consolation—if we climb those peaks it ought to be a bit cooler," said Jack Grey. "I wonder where we are? I mean, what lies beyond this range?"

"That's an easy one," replied Dorrie. "Desert, my lad—about a thousand miles of it, or more."

"It doesn't seem possible," ejaculated Sir Crawford Grey.

"But it's a fact—you can't make a fool of geography," said his lordship. "We haven't half crossed the Sahara, but I should roughly say that we're in about the middle. Therefore, there's a whole slice of it beyond these mountains."

"What a cheerful prospect!" said Reggie, with a groan.

"Yes—we shall need all our spirits," said Dorrie. "But we're doing well, young 'uns—we're keeping as cheery as though we were just on a holiday jaunt. And

that's the keynote of anybody's morale—to keep cheerful. Umlosi's the only one who keeps grumbling."

"Wau! Thou art surely unkind in thy words, my father," growled Umlosi, offended. "Have I not continuously held myself in check against these heathen pigs? Have I not suffered indignities untold so that peace could be maintained? I am tiring, N'Kose. Methinks I shall break loose ere long, and commit great slaughter among these vermin!"

"Better wait till you get your spear back," suggested Dorrie, shaking his head.

Umlosi rumbled something beneath his breath—some fierce remark in his own tongue concerning the desert men who had captured them all. And further conversation was rendered impossible, for the camel train was about to restart.

Although they were helpless prisoners, they were in no way confined or interfered with. These enemies of theirs knew how impossible it was for any escape to be attempted. And Dorrie and Co. were surely not mad enough to wander off into the desert—to invite certain death. Their only hope of life was to stick to the caravan.

They were all weary and suffering from the effects of hardship, and shortage of water. This last march had been the worst of all. The water had practically given out, and many camels had expired—from the effects of forced marches and insufficient sustenance.

Dorrie judged that water and food would soon be reached—for the caravan could scarcely last out another forty-eight hours. And the close proximity of these mountains indicated water was at hand.

And it turned out that Dorrie was right.

They progressed onwards for another three hours—during which time darkness descended and enveloped the desert. But no halt was made. These men evidently knew their ground with uncanny certainty. Rocks were encountered in profusion—great masses of crags rising up at intervals. But never once did the caravan pause or falter.

And then, at last, twinkling lights were observed almost immediately ahead—upon rounding a great bluff of rocky projections. And for the prisoners, at least, the sight was a stirring one.

For it meant rest—sleep—water.

And presently the weary camel train marched into a strange village of primitive character. It was quite small, the entire population hardly exceeding two or three hundred. The dwellings were of rock, built cunningly but in the most primitive fashion.

And the villagers who came crowding round the travellers, were tall, Arab-like men, who all wore veils over the lower portion of their faces—only their eyes gleaming out, exposed.

A strange turn of events, indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE MIGHTY GORGE.



MOONLIGHT gave the scene a picturesque beauty. But in reality this spot was probably grim and ugly enough by daylight. The soft radiance from the moon lent the village a certain charm.

It appeared to nestle at the very foot of the great peaks—indeed, there seemed to way of getting beyond. The inhabitants of this remarkable desert settlement were apparently some little known type of nomad Arabs. But Lord Dorrimore was very puzzled.

"They're not a bit like the Veiled People of the Asben region," he said thoughtfully. "Those fellows are little enough known—but they're certainly a distinct tribe, and have been encountered by many white men."

"Don't you think these people are the same?" asked Sir Crawford.

"No. The only resemblance is that they are veiled in identically the same way," replied Dorrie. "But our friends here are of mightier build—their physique is infinitely superior in every way. And their language is quite different."

"Have you heard them speaking, sir?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"I thought I caught a few words," replied his lordship. "Either I'm mad, or my ears have gone wrong. But I could swear one or two of the words sounded like Latin to me."

"Latin!" ejaculated Sir Crawford, in amazement.

"Absurd, isn't it?" laughed Dorrie. "Of course I was wrong—just a trick of the hearing, I suppose. It stands to reason that there can't be any Latin spoken in this nomad tribe of desert dwellers."

"Naturally!" agreed Sir Crawford. "I suppose we must be thankful that we have reached a human habitation of any kind, for here there is at least shelter, and food and water."

"I wonder which hotel we shall stay in?" asked Reggie, as he looked round. "Personally, I prefer the Ritz, over the road."

But the prisoners had no choice. They were soon taken into one of the stone huts, and rough food was placed before them, but, more welcome still, a plentiful supply of cool, crystal water. They hadn't tasted such glorious water since leaving civilisation.

And then afterwards sleep.

But not for long. Well before the night was far advanced they were roughly awakened and ordered out of the hut, not by word of mouth, but by signs. For these strange men still maintained silence.

And then commenced another march—but this time it was of a very different character. They were taken on foot out

of the village and straight towards the towering crags.

There seemed no pass in this direction, But Lord Dorrimore suspected that an opening of some kind must surely exist. And this, after all, was an obvious conclusion, although the barrier appeared to be utterly and absolutely solid, rising sheer upwards for thousands of feet.

But it soon became clear that there was a mighty pass here—a natural canyon of stupendous proportions. It was as though the hand of nature had slit the mountains down from summit to base, just as a saw-cut will leave a groove in a plank of wood.

At the base the canyon was no more than a hundred feet wide, and the rock walls extended upwards at precisely the same distance apart, so even, that it seemed impossible they could be a natural formation.

Yet no other explanation was tenable, for human ingenuity could never have accomplished such a staggering feat as this.

The pass was as black as pitch, for the moonlight did not penetrate. And the experience was an eerie one for the prisoners. They were marched onwards, through the night, in the most inky darkness.

Without question, their captors knew the ground as an Australian tracker knows the bush. And Dorrie believed that there was some special reason for this night journey. It was not intended that the prisoners should see the exact nature or character of this remarkable gorge.

The first faint glimmerings of dawn were being heralded in the sky when the party suddenly emerged from the great canyon. A turn, and they passed out of the enormous defile and out on to open ground. And there, in the pale moonlight, seeming almost bright after the stygian blackness of the pass, they beheld a vast valley, sloping gently down before them.

"Out on the desert again!" said Reggie Pitt wearily. "What's the next thing, I wonder? Hallo! Look over there! My only hat! Lights—hundreds and thousands of them!"

They stared, bewildered, excited, in spite of their weariness.

For, surely enough, twinkling lights could be seen in the far distance. Not an odd collection, like those of a village, but a mighty mass of radiant points, like the street lamps of a great city.

"What can it mean, dad?" asked Jack Grey huskily.

"Heaven only knows, my boy," said Sir Crawford. "I can think of no possible explanation, no reasonable solution to this problem. What is this in front of us?"

Lord Dorrimore shook his head.

"I'm beaten," he declared. "I don't often admit that; but this time I'm absolutely whacked, by gad!"

And they continued to stare before them at those winking lights in the distance. Somehow they all felt that the daylight would reveal some great and stupendous surprise.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEARER AND NEARER.



A RCHIE THORNE regarded himself with approval in the cabin mirror.

"Yes, Phipps, I think we'll do, what!" he asked.

"I mean to say, this priceless Palm Beach suit absolutely suits the young master—Good gad! Did you hear that, Phipps?"

"Hear what, sir?"

"Why, that pun, dash it!" said Archie.

"Positively unconscious, don't you know. Well, what about it, Phipps? Am I all serene for the morning dash? That is to say, shall I pass muster on deck, laddie?"

"I rather fancy so, sir," said Phipps solemnly. "If I might make the remark, Master Archie, I have seldom seen you looking so pleasingly neat and fashionable."

Archie beamed.

"Well, that's frightfully encouraging, Phipps," he declared. "If you say the young master is tophole, then there's no need to worry. We will proceed to whizz forth, Phipps, and inspect the good old morning."

And Archie lounged elegantly out of the state-room and made his way up the big stairway, and so on deck. He found over half the Remove fellows already there, and there seemed to be a little excitement.

It was morning, and the Conqueror had been rolling steadily onwards throughout the night. The heat was intense, but not so exhausting as it had been a day or two earlier. The sun had lost a great deal of its terrible power.

This was probably because the land yacht had been climbing steadily for well over twenty-four hours—mounting higher and higher, but so gradually that the movement was almost imperceptible.

"Hallo, Archie!" said Alf Brent, as the elegant junior joined him. "I wondered how long it would be before you turned out. Bravo! You're looking as neat as a new pin!"

Archie beamed.

"I trust," he observed, "that I shall always do so, old scream. Nothing could be more horrible than to picture myself in a second-hand condish. But what's the scheme, Alf, old dear?"

"What scheme?"

"We appear to be motionless, if you grasp the old trend," said Archie. "I sincerely trust the engine department hasn't struck a snag, or some such poisonous proposition.

I mean, how utterly frightful if we should be stuck here for a month or so!"

Alf Brent grinned.

"I don't suppose I ought to smile; but if we stick here for a month or two, Archie, we shall stick here for ever," he replied. "But you needn't worry. As far as I know the engines are as good as ever. We've stopped for another reason. Mr. Lee and Mr. Earle and one or two of the others have gone ashore, so to speak."

"Gone ashore?"

"Well, you know what I mean—I always look upon this thing as a ship," said Alf. "There they are, look—investigating the remains of a camp, by what I can judge."

Archie went to the rail, where most of the other fellows were congregated. And he could easily see that Nelson Lee and several others were moving about on the desert. The Conqueror was standing perfectly still, imposing and stately, amid the vast waste.

As a matter of fact, the look-out had seen signs of the camp from his post in the bows of the vessel. And a halt had been called while Nelson Lee inspected the spot. There was no question that the camp was very recent, not more than twenty-four or thirty hours old.

"I can't quite understand it," said Sir Edward Handforth bluntly. "I should have thought we could have overtaken the party long before this—hours ago, in fact."

"If we were following a direct trail, we should undoubtedly have done so, Sir Edward," replied Lee. "But you must remember that we are feeling our way—travelling largely by guesswork, in fact. And we have been compelled to make several extensive detours during the night, in order to avoid rough ground. Ground which would have endangered the Conqueror's safety."

"H'm! Hadn't thought of that!" said Sir Edward, nodding.

"Instead of covering a hundred miles, say, in a direct line, we have traversed something nearer five hundred during these past two days," said Nelson Lee. "But, as this camp shows, we are fairly correct in our reckoning. To-day ought to see some interesting developments."

The marks in the sand, as Lee could plainly see, were caused by a recent camp of considerable size. There must have been a number of camels; tents had been pitched, and food had been prepared.

Nelson Lee was looking towards the great mountains which could be clearly seen in the distance—dim, mysterious, and vague. But it was becoming more and more obvious that the quarry had progressed in that direction. And Nelson Lee was just a little troubled.

For mountains would stay the Conqueror's progress. She was capable of travelling over level ground and up any ordinarily

steep hill. But she was not capable of ascending mountains.

And unless the other party was overtaken soon it might be too late.

So it was necessary for all speed to be made without any delay. The desert was hard and rocky here, so that tracks were difficult to follow. There were no great seas of smooth, undulating sand, no shifting dunes, such as one imagines to exist in the heart of the Sahara.

Instead, the entire landscape was rough and rocky in the extreme, and a more desolate spot could scarcely be imagined. It was as though the Conqueror had penetrated to the most forsaken of all earthly places.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CITY OF MARBLE.



MR. REGINALD PITT was eager and anxious.

"Why do you say that, Mr. Lee?" he asked quickly. "What has made you come to that conclusion?"

"Look at these charred remains," replied Lee. "There is a ring here, bent and twisted with heat, and a good many other metal rings of the same kind. There is no shadow of doubt that the fire was caused by the conflagration of a fairly big tent."

"An accident, surely?" asked Mr. Earle.



They staggered out of the tent, and they had no sooner got into the open before the tent fabric caught alight with a hissing roar.

Lee was about to suggest an immediate return to the land yacht, when a hail came from Mr. Earle, some distance away. The inventor was examining the ground eagerly, turning over the sandy surface with his stick.

"Come and look at this, Lee!" he exclaimed keenly. "This sand was not here originally; it has been strewn over this particular area for a definite purpose."

They made a swift examination, and discovered, beneath the sand, a large amount of sooty char, which was very obviously the remains of a fairly big fire.

"This explains that light we saw in the sky," exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly. "But was the fire accidental or deliberate? I am more than ever convinced that the fire was a signal."

"If the fire had been accidental, why should our unknown quarry take pains to hide up all traces of it?" retorted Lee. "To my mind, it seems clear enough that Lord Dorrmore fired the tent as a signal, and our searchlights were probably seen immediately afterwards, proving that the signal had not been in vain. So these unknown enemies, who have taken Dorrie's party into captivity, did the best they could to cover up their tracks."

"By George, sir, that's an infernally shrewd piece of deduction!" declared Sir Edward enthusiastically. "You're right, Mr. Lee. There's no other way to look at it. We'll press on with all speed, by gad!"

And it wasn't long before the Conqueror was again progressing smoothly and steadily on her course over the desert. And that

grim, mysterious mountain range was always the objective.

The morning passed quite uneventfully. All the passengers were imbued with a kind of secret impatience. They knew that the chase was nearing an end, and everybody was on tenterhooks.

What would be the result of their long journey? Would they succeed in finding the lost expedition, or had they been chasing a myth? There was a great deal of speculation among the juniors, and also among the girls. And it was generally admitted that we had a fair chance of success.

And at the same time we were aware of a feeling that the excitement would soon be over. If we rescued Dorrie and Co., there would be nothing else to do but to turn back and go home.

But it was possible that Mr. Earle would decide to continue onwards, and completely cross the Sahara, until we struck Algiers, or some similar town in Northern Africa.

The juniors talked of these things animatedly, scarcely appreciating the fact that the Conqueror's water supply was running low. Mr. Earle, in fact, was just a little anxious on this account.

He had hoped to replenish the tanks before this, but for days we had traversed the arid desert without any sign of a spring or a water-hole.

Not that there was any cause for anxiety. The Conqueror still had water enough to take her safely back to the Kano region. But Mr. Travers Earle didn't want to go over the same ground. He was keen to cross the Sahara, from south to north. But this would be impossible unless the water-tanks were completely filled.

When the luncheon-gong sounded, we were ready enough to go below and partake of the meal. For the intense heat of the Sahara had not affected our appetites.

"What a relief!" exclaimed Tommy Watson, as we entered the ice-cooled saloon. "Thank goodness for this lovely coolness! I'm blessed if I can understand how it's done!"

"By a refrigerating system, you ass," said Handforth.

"Yes, I know, but you can't have ice without water—and it seems so wasteful to use water for making ice so that the inside of the ship shall be kept cool," argued Watson. "It isn't as though we've got a constant supply of water in the Sahara."

And Tommy wasn't the only one who was puzzled on this point. He didn't know that the refrigerating system was really an emergency supply of water—only to be used in case of dire necessity, if the general supply of the ship became exhausted.

The water employed for making the ice was permanent. There was no necessity for a constant supply to keep the ship cool,

for this same comparatively small quantity was used over and over again. Mr. Earle's patent system was most ingenious, and certainly effective. And if the yacht's ordinary water ran out, we had this other supply to fall back on.

Luncheon was a cheerful meal, for everybody was bitten by the same fever. We felt that something big would soon happen. Even Mrs. Manners was quite excited, and her daughter and the other girls talked of what they would wear when they met Lord Dorrimore.

The juniors were restless over the meal, fearing that they were missing something by not being on deck. And, curiously enough, they were fully justified in this restlessness.

For luncheon was still in full swing when Mr. Manners, on the bridge, turned away from the man at the wheel and gazed casually ahead. And an ejaculation of amazement escaped him.

For there, right in the distance, lay a most extraordinary sight—a great vista of green fields, forests, and even gleaming streams. And set in the centre of this staggering paradise was a city—a beautiful, imposing city of marble mansions and other stately buildings!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WONDERFUL MIRAGE.



MR. HOBART MANNERS stared fixedly.

The first coherent thought that entered his mind was that he was suffering from some hallucination. It was utterly impossible that this magical scene could be a reality.

Surely it was a picture of his own imagination? Only a few minutes earlier he had glanced ahead, and there had been nothing but the barren desert and the distant mountains. But now, lying down in a deep hollow, was this staggering scene of greenness and beauty.

For hours the Conqueror had been climbing, and she had just reached the summit of an immense natural plateau of the desert. For miles—for ten or twenty miles—the desert sloped gently downwards, and when Mr. Manners had looked before, he had seen nothing but the drab sand and the ugly rocks.

A hail came from the look-out man—one that was charged with breathless excitement. And just at this time Willy Handforth appeared on deck, having sneaked up to see if there was anything fresh.

He took one look over the rail, gasped, rubbed his eyes, and then he sped back into the dining saloon like a rabbit.

"Quick—everybody!" he yelled. "There's a marvellous valley in sight—fields, rivers, houses!"

"Impossible!" said Nelson Lee sharply.
 "It's a fact, sir!" shouted Willy.
 "Quick—come up on deck and have a look!"

The juniors, at least, needed no second invitation. They forgot their meal, and rushed helter-skelter upstairs to the deck. The girls were just as excited, and lost no time in following. The grown-ups were rather more sedate.

"This must be one of that young rascal's little jokes," said Nelson Lee grimly. "I'm afraid I shall have to talk to him severely——"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, sir!" roared Sir Edward Handforth. "He's my son, and I'll thrash him until he smarts, by George! I'll teach him to play these childish tricks——"

"Oh, Sir Edward!" interrupted Mrs. Manners protestingly. "After all, the boy was only having a harmless little joke on the others——"

"Joke, madam?" snorted Sir Edward. "I'm afraid I can't agree with you! My luncheon is completely upset——"

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Pitt, in a startled voice. "Was the boy right? Listen! There is certainly something most unusual to be seen, at all events."

This was not guesswork, for the sound of excited shouting and cheering floated down into the sumptuous dining-room. And the young people would never cheer like this if Willy had tricked them.

"We'll go on deck—and settle the point," said Nelson Lee crisply. "Of course, young Handforth's statement is incredible—indeed, impossible. We are in the heart of the Sahara, where there are no such things as rivers and forests—still less a city."

But they were all vaguely excited as they hurried on deck. They found the juniors and the girls crowding against the rail, pointing, shouting, and behaving with wild excitement.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nelson Lee, aghast.

He stood there, staring out over the desert, more astounded than he would have cared to admit. For he, too, could see that extraordinary scene—the fields, the woodlands, the gently winding streams, the marble city, glistening in the noonday sun.

The incredible scene lay several miles distant in the shallow valley. And the Conqueror was heading straight towards the meadowland, which seemed, somehow, to be vague and hazy where it merged with the desert.

"Hurrah! Civilisation again!" yelled a dozen juniors.

"Thank goodness!"

We all stared, fascinated. But after a bit I rubbed my eyes, for the wonderful picture seemed to be a little less clear. And even as I watched the whole vista of gorgeous green became drab and almost transparent, until, finally, nothing but the desert remained.

Desert—barren and sun-scorched—in every direction, as far as the eye could see!

"It's gone!" shouted Handforth blankly.

"Yes, my boy, it's gone—because it was nothing but a mirage," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"A mirage, sir?"

"Yes. Where you thought you saw fields and rivers, there is nothing but desert," replied the gov'nor. "But you needn't be disappointed, my boys—I can guarantee that there will be some strange revelations before long."

For Nelson Lee knew that that wonderfully realistic mirage was a reflection of the real scene. But how? Could it be possible that such a green spot existed—here, in the heart of the Sahara?

The sun had played a trick with them, by providing that mirage, so that they could catch a glimpse of something that was still hidden—hidden, probably, by the mountain peaks.

What amazing revelations lay ahead for the Conqueror and her party?

THE END.

"TRAPPED IN THE DESERT!"

Next Week's Great Story of This Wonderful Adventure Series.

MY AMERICAN NOTEBOOK

(Continued from page 28)

In Los Angeles, they are real works of art—enormous frames, mostly painted white, with artistic posters displayed to the very best advantage. And each hoarding is set on a well-kept lawn, with neat shrubs and flower-beds.

And then Westlake Park was reached, and I sat forward and stared. For this little park is certainly a gem—particularly in the month of April. Beautiful palm-

trees, a delightful lake, green lawns, and numerous flower-beds. But it was the palms that enchanted me most. The place looked a perfect paradise, and I made up my mind to take a walk through these leafy avenues as soon as ever I had fixed up my apartment.

Everything, too, looked so delightfully fresh and sweet and green after the contrast of my railway journey across the wastes of New Mexico and the desert lands of California.

Next week: "Charlie Chaplin at Work."



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

By the Author of our St Frank's Stories.



No. 35. THE CITY OF PALMS.

MY first impression of Los Angeles was disappointing. But this can scarcely be wondered at, because I arrived during a thunderstorm, with rain descending in torrents. And I had always been given to understand that Los Angeles was a city of perpetual sunshine!

In all fairness, I must hasten to explain that this thunderstorm was, indeed, a most unusual phenomenon, and the inhabitants were completely at a loss to account for it. I didn't quite believe them at the time, but I did later—for after that storm had passed the sun shone, and the weather remained gloriously fine for long weeks.

I was disappointed, too, with the railway-station. It wasn't quite what I had expected in such a celebrated city as Los Angeles. The Santa Fe Station is a very poor affair, insignificantly small compared to its importance. It is just a case of a station having neglected to grow according to its surroundings. They'll probably have a new building completely—and a magnificent one—within a few months. They do things very rapidly in Los Angeles, when it comes to building.

I had already booked an apartment in a block of flats near Westlake Park. The name sounded good, and I was expecting something quite nice. But I was rather startled during the taxi drive from the station towards the centre of the town.

Muddy streets—enormous potholes in the road—and scarcely a sign of a tree or a

speck of green! Squalid houses and thickly congested traffic! And this place was the "Gem of the Pacific"—the city of palms!

Of course, I wasn't to know that Santa Fe Station is situated in the very worst part of the town—the manufacturing centre. And Los Angeles is just the same as any other city—it has its good points and its bad. Perhaps it was just as well that I saw the bad ones first, so that my surprises in the future would be pleasant.

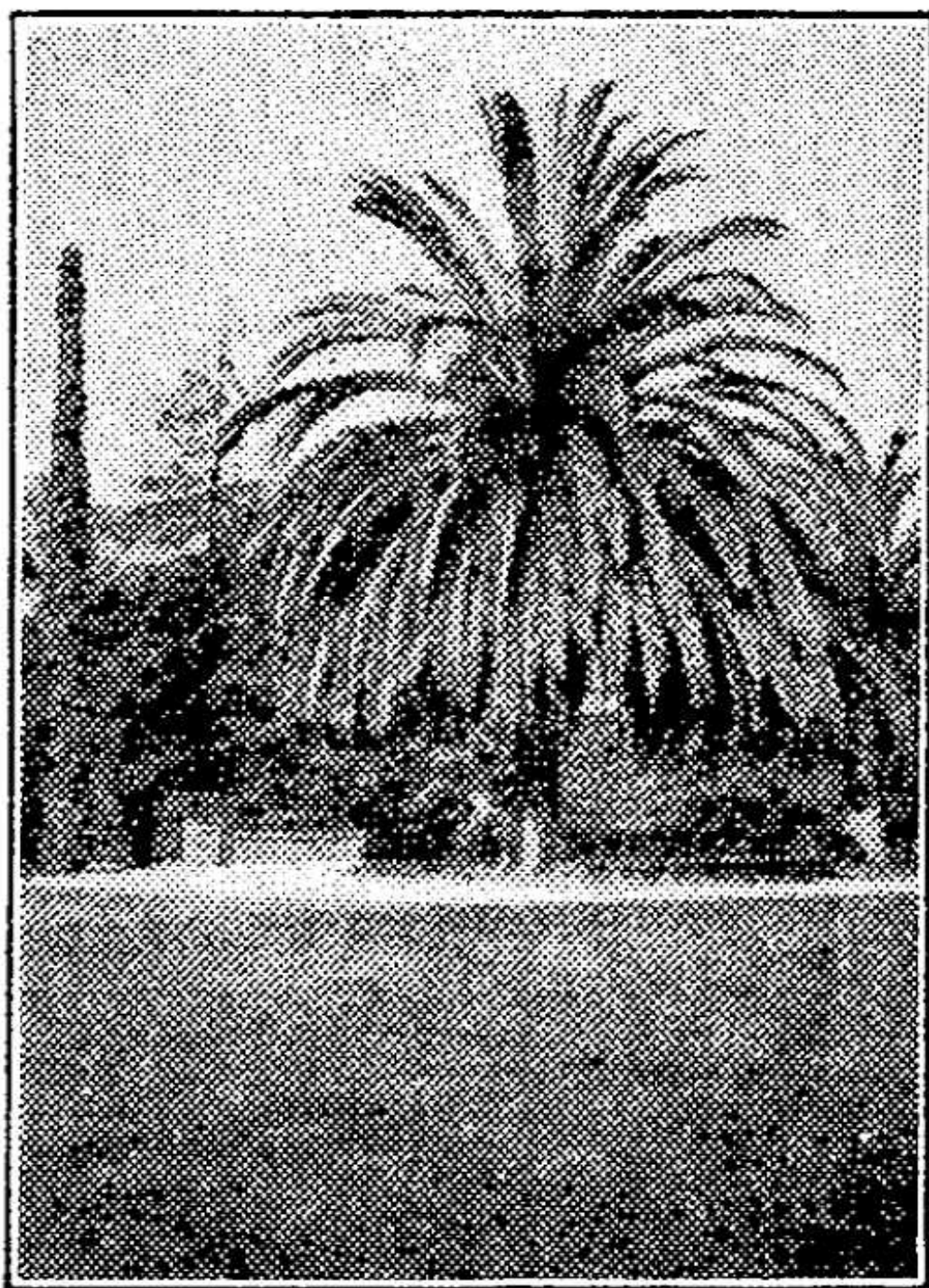
As a matter of fact, they were—very pleasant indeed.

For after passing along Broadway the clouds began to pass, and the sun came out. And my taxi quickly made its way to Seventh Street, up which it turned, and proceeded to halt every few yards.

For the traffic in Los Angeles is regulated in a rather strange manner, but I intend dealing with this in another place. After passing Hill Street, Olive Street, Flower Street, and one or two others, the traffic regulations became different, and the taxi was able to proceed along its course as any well-intentioned taxi should.

Almost before I knew it we were quite out of the "downtown" crush, and speeding along a well-paved road towards the Wilshire district. And one thing particularly caught my eye and held my attention. I was charmed beyond measure by the perfectly wonderful advertisement boardings.

I have never seen anything so beautiful.
(Continued on page 27.)



ON WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, near WESTLAKE PARK, LOS ANGELES.

(From a snap by the author)



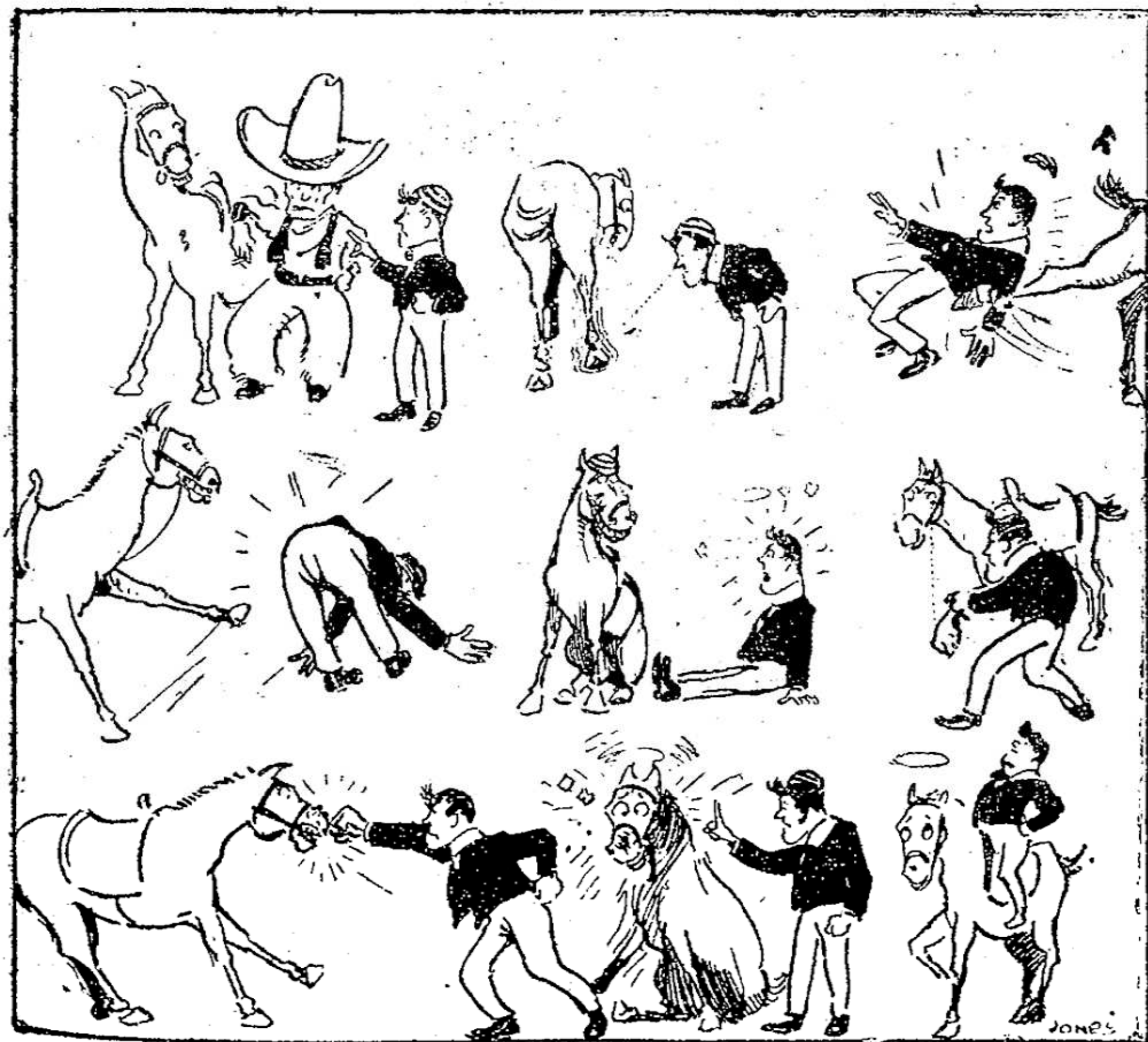
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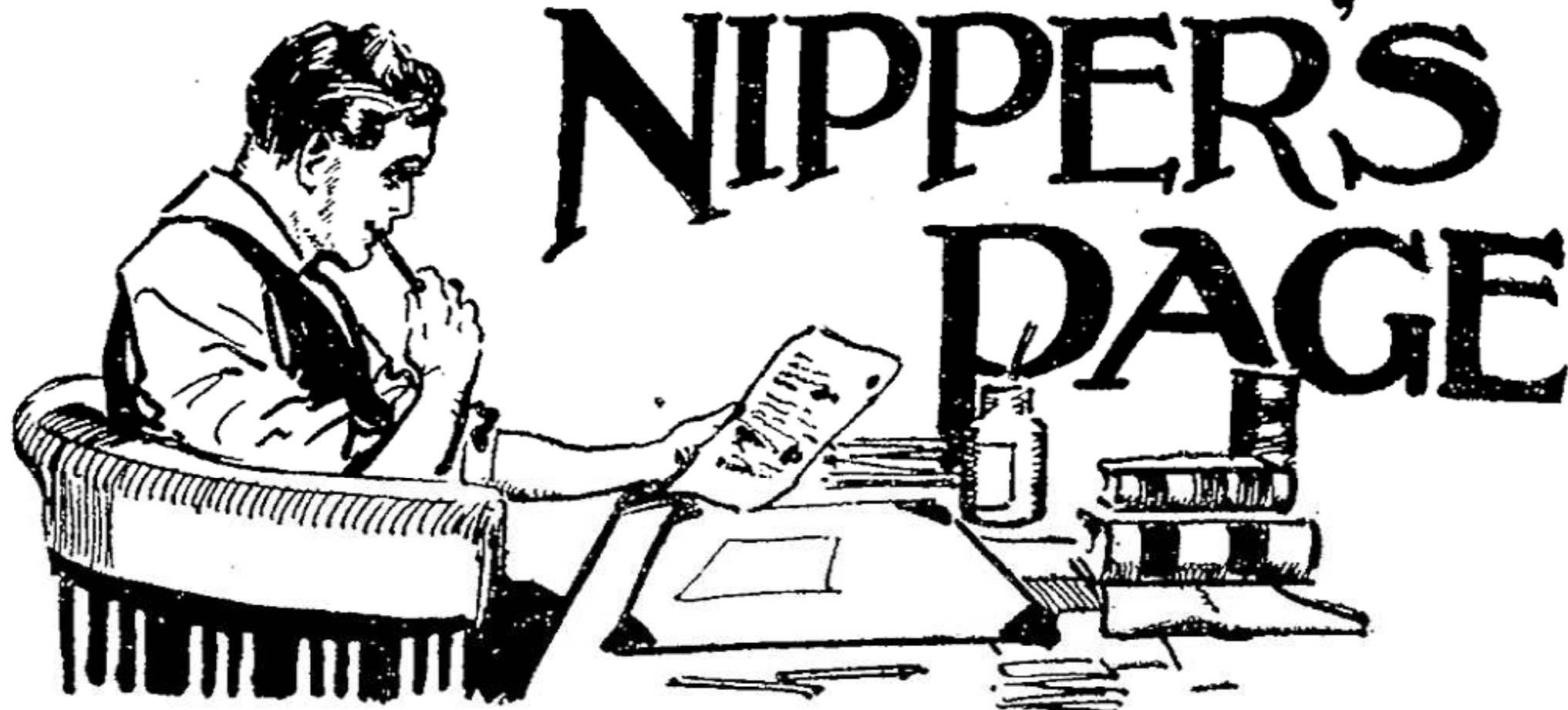


ADVENTURES OF E. O. HANDFORTH

A Story Without Words

HANDY AT THE RODEO





Editorial Office,
Study C,
St. Frank's.

My dear Chums,

It is now nearly a fortnight since the vac. started, and most of my friends departed to the seaside, country or abroad. As you know, a large number of the Remove fellows went off with Nelson Lee to Africa to try to rescue Pitt and Grey, who, with Sir Crawford Grey, Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, are believed to have been carried off prisoners by some desert tribe. I was rather sorry not to have been able to have gone also. They appear to be having a jolly good time on The Conqueror. A long letter has arrived from Nipper, together with a few articles for the Mag. from other Juniors, some of which you will find in this issue of the Mag.

NIPPER'S MESSAGE.

Space precludes me from publishing Nipper's letter in the Mag. Much of what he says, however, is contained in the long narrative appearing in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. But he has asked me to give you this message, which I have much pleasure in quoting from his letter: "Give my best wishes to all my chums and readers of the Old Mag., and tell them that my thoughts are constantly flitting back to dear Old England, St. Frank's and the loyal supporters of the Lil' Old Paper."

THE MIRAGE.

A mirage is a common enough optical illusion in the clear atmosphere of the sun-scorched desert. Occasionally, I have heard of a mirage being seen in England. About two years ago it was reported in the London papers that a mirage could be seen one hot summer's day from Trafalgar Square looking through the Admiralty Arches to-

wards Buckingham Palace. I shall be interested to hear from any of my chums who have actually seen a mirage in England. This phenomenon is explained this week in an article by Augustus Hart. As the writer says, a mirage is a kind of reflection in the atmosphere of some actual scene peculiar to the country in which it is found. In the desert, for instance, a mirage usually takes the form of low hills, or jebels—as they are called in Egypt—or as oases showing a blue patch of water fringed with palm trees.

WHAT NIPPER SAW.

Low hills and oases, of course, exist in the desert, but no traveller in those parts would expect to find in the desert a mirage such as Nipper describes. I am not discrediting Nipper's account of it in his narrative and in his letter to me, for his statement is borne out by every other member of the party. What they saw was a reflection of something absolutely foreign to the known characteristics of Sahara's sandy wastes.

ON THE BRINK OF A NEW WORLD.

It is my belief, and the next few weeks will decide, that Nelson Lee's expedition is on the brink of a new world, isolated and hidden in the heart of the Sahara. One must not forget that they are traversing a hitherto unexplored region, and it would not be the first time in history that popular conceptions concerning an unknown country have been completely disproved by the discoveries of intrepid explorers.

I hope, anyhow, that they will succeed in finding Sir Crawford Grey's party safe and sound before very long.

With every good wish,
Your old chum,
BUSTER (Acting-Editor).

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



THE HAUNTED COLONEL!

A Thrilling, Baffling, and Amazing
Story of Trackett Grim and His
Assistant Splinter.

By
E. O. HANDFORTH

"**T**WICE one are two," muttered Trackett Grim softly. "Add six. That will total nine. Subtract two. That will leave five. Yes. Dear me! Humph!"

The world's greatest incriminator was working out a difficult mathematical problem. He had his slate across his knees, and a slate pencil rested on the floor. The great problem was difficult of solution, and Grim wiped out the last figure by wetting his finger and rubbing it on the slate.

Then he began adding up the figures again. Grim was a man who never gave in and never made mistakes. If figures would not add up correctly, he added them up incorrectly, and vice versa. But there was no more time at that moment for vice versa.

"Guv'nor!" a bright young voice interrupted. "Here comes a new client!"

Grim was all alertness at once. He threw away the slate with a clatter and swallowed the pencil.

"How do you know it's a new client, Splinter?" he asked.

"Because they never come twice," the clever lad replied.

There was no more time for speech. Grim swung round five times on his swivel armchair, and Splinter took up a spelling-book and pretended to be deeply engrossed in a boy's story.

The door opened, and Mrs. Bones, the housekeeper showed in the client.

Grim's keen, clear-cut features at once told him that his visitor was a member of the Army. Though no ordinary man could have told that. Even Splinter would not have known.

The man was dressed in a red coat with blue trousers. He carried a sword, and a knapsack was over his shoulders. He wore spurs and riding-boots. Otherwise, he looked just like an ordinary civilian.

"Oddsfish!" he remarked through his

white moustaches. "Oddsfish, I repeat, sir, and are you Colonel Grim?"

"Halt!" ordered Grim at once, using Army slang to put his visitor at his ease. "Fall in, there, by the right! Left turn! As you were! Easy!"

"You amaze me, confound you, sir!" exploded the man, falling into an armchair. "You must be a master of every language. Why, I haven't heard those words since I retired from the Army in '66."

"I often amaze people," Grim went on modestly. "Will you be surprised to learn that your upper lip is unshaven, that you have a large nose, and when you sit down your body bends at the waist?"

"You astound me, sir!" roared the Army man, his eyes goggling. "But I cannot bandy words with you, damme! I am Colonel Plumbarmy, and I need your services badly. I am in dire straits."

"And you have come here to ask my help?" Grim interrupted sagely.

"Great guns, sir, yes!" exploded the colonel. "I am in danger of death!"

"In other words," Grim added, "your life is in danger. You need not explain; I quite understand. Someone or something is threatening you with the extinction of life, or, if I may put it so, with murder, or other words to that effect."

"Exactly," the colonel agreed, sinking his voice. "But it is no ordinary person. Sir, believe me or believe me not, I am haunted!"

At the terrible words, Grim, clever man though he was, felt his hair begin to stand up on the top of his head. After it had stood up for a minute or two, it sat down again. Not till then did Grim reply. And when he did his voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir," he said, "that you, a man of the most upright character and honourable traditions—a member of the British Army and a respectable citizen of the Empire—do you



Otherwise he looked just like an ordinary civilian.

mean to tell me in sober truth that you are haunted?"

The colonel nodded. Grim was too clever for him.

"That is so, bomb me!" he went on. "I am haunted by—by a—a moving picture!"

"At this terrible explanation, Grim suddenly choked. His excitement brought up the slate pencil he had swallowed, and it hit Splinter with a crash. But Grim was too brave a man to care.

"The films!" he gasped, going pale and dark by turns. "I knew it. The films have done it! Sir, you should not go to the pictures if they effect you in this way!"

Colonel Plumbarmy left his chair and crawled across the floor to the incriminator's side. Then he climbed on to Grim's knee and put his lips to the great man's ear.

"You don't understand," he whispered, looking carefully three times round the room. "It is not the films. It is a picture of my ancestor which haunts me."

"Your aunt's sister!" cried Grim. "Great Christmas! That is worse than ever! So your aunt had a sister. She would be your aunt as well. Therefore, you must have two aunts. It is indeed terrible!"

Strong man though he was, Grim was almost overcome by grief at the awful thought. But the colonel, though old, was brave. He took the incriminator's hand and climbed back to the floor.

"I have a portrait gallery," he explained, "and in it are pictures of my ancestors. One of these is a man named Sir James Plumbarmy. And it is this picture that haunts me. Every night the painted canvas leaves its frame and comes into my bedroom. Grim, my dear old fruit, it is terrible! It is ghastly!"

By this time, Grim had completely pulled himself together. Though he could not understand what the colonel was talking

about, he sensed a deep and appalling mystery. At once his nerves tightened to such a pitch that his cuff-links snapped and clattered to the floor. But Grim did not heed them.

"Tell me all!" he asked icily. "From what you say, your slumbers are disturbed by a man who lives in a picture-frame. Now, colonel, tell me this. Is there a lost will?"

At the incriminator's words the colonel paled once more.

"You are a wizard, hang my platoon!" he

said. "There is a will, though it is not lost."

Grim's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"And in this will," he went on, "there is some money left to somebody?"

"True!" hissed the colonel. "If I were to die to-morrow the money left me by my uncle would all go to—to my old and trusted retainer, Boodge by name. So long as I live the money is mine. But—"

"So you suspect Boodge," cut in Grim, his face knotted in lines of deep excitement. "Think before you make such a charge against an innocent man. Has he ever tried to hurt you in any way?"

"Never," the colonel said at once. "And I do not for a moment suspect he is haunting me. Once he threw me out of the back window, but that was a sheer accident, as he explained. Several times he has hit me on the head with a gold-nobbed walking-stick. But that, again, is quite natural, as he told me afterwards."

"Then Boodge is ruled out," Grim went on thoughtfully. "And you tell me that a painted portrait actually walks out of its frame and comes into your room at night. Well, there is only one thing. Splinter and I will come and investigate. There is something very fishy here, colonel."

"Just as I thought," the Army man agreed. "When can you come?"

"At once," Grim replied. "Where do you live?"

"At Waterloo House, Sussex," the colonel returned. "It is called after a well-known railway-station. But how are you to get there?"

"We will return with you in your car," Grim explained.

"Great guns!" shouted the colonel. "I have no car. I came on horseback."

"Then your horse must take us all," Grim said simply.

A few minutes later the colonel, Grim, and Splinter were all seated on the horse and cantering quietly along the lanes to Waterloo House. They arrived there at dinner-time, and in a few moments the three were seated round the hospitable board.

Grim's keen eyes roamed hither and thither. Then they roamed where and whence, and after that they roamed there and thereabouts. They missed nothing. His trained gaze noted everything. That was how it was he noticed a man in evening-dress hovering behind the colonel's chair.

"Who is that man?" he asked in a whisper.

"It is Boodge, my old retainer," the colonel replied. "You cannot possibly suspect him."

"Of course not," Grim returned at once.

But, all the same, his eyes never left the sinister form of the retainer, Boodge. Nor were his suspicions quite unfounded. During the meal several curious things occurred, though the incriminator did not attach much importance to them at the time.

First of all, Boodge hit the colonel on the head with a soup plate. Luckily, the old man was only stunned, and soon came round with the aid of a little whisky. Later, Grim himself was pushed in the back by a rib of beef which Boodge was handing round. And during desert Splinter was savagely struck on the head with a stick of asparagus.

These incidents, trivial as they were, nevertheless impressed Grim, for he made it a rule never to let anything, however small, pass unnoticed. Thus it was that he observed Boodge's action as they left the dining-room.

Immediately in front of the door were four steps leading down to the hall. And as the colonel left the room, Grim saw Boodge deliberately push him from behind. The colonel fell down the steps and lay for a few hours unconscious.

Luckily, he was quite well when he recovered. But it was then bed-time, and Grim was unable to ask him any more questions. But his suspicions were roused, for he could not believe Boodge was quite as harmless as the colonel believed.

As soon as Grim and the lad were safely in their room, Grim suddenly turned.

"I am not going to bed to-night," he said softly.

"Heavens!" gasped the lad, quite unaware of the clue the great incriminator had picked up at dinner. "Do you mean you are going to keep late hours to-night?"

"I mean," Grim said impressively, "that I am going to watch."

Grim was right again. Instead of going to bed he only pretended to do so. And after three loud snores he threw his boots on the floor and then hastily affixed a pair of rubbers on his feet. Then, with great bravery, he opened the door of the room, bidding Splinter to feign sleep.

Just outside was the picture gallery where the pictures were. The picture near the door was the very one which the colonel had pointed out as being haunted. Grim therefore took up his position immediately in front of it.

One, two, three, four hours passed, and it was after midnight. Dawn came and then day. Grim stood like a statue. Day passed and night followed. One, two, three struck on the clock, and another weary night was over.

But, no! As dawn was about to strike, Grim noticed something moving. It was the haunted picture!

And as Grim looked the frame suddenly swung back and the figure stepped out. There was no time to cry out. The figure walked out of the frame and went straight to the colonel's bed-room. Without knocking, it entered the room. Straight to the colonel's bed it went and then raised its right hand on high. And clasped in the hand was a ghostly hair-brush!

At once Grim saw it all. The ghost was about to hit the defenceless colonel with

The colonel fell down the steps and lay for a few hours unconscious.



His automatic was trained on the picture. He had also by him an axe and a hammer in case the ghost proved violent.



the brush. But even as the hand swung, Grim acted. He suddenly sprang forward and put his fingers to his lips, emitting a shrill whistle. The effect was magical. Throwing the hair-brush to the floor the spectre dashed round and hurriedly left the room.

But in that short space of time, Grim had noticed something. The spectre's features were exactly like those of the retainer, Boodge.

Grim dashed after the fugitive, but he was too late. He saw the ghost utterly vanish into the haunted picture! And, though Grim tapped on the canvas, there was no reply. Baffled, the incriminator returned to the colonel's room. He was awake and out of bed. But he could explain nothing to Grim.

Nevertheless, the world-famous incriminator was not beaten. He was only puzzled. He had never believed in the supernatural. But the fact that a ghostly figure had emerged from the picture was certainly baffling.

But by breakfast-time he had determined on another plan. Although there was not an atom of proof, he decided to suspect Boodge! It was a wonderful piece of deduction on his part. And when he confided his suspicions to Splinter, the clever lad fainted and had to go to bed for the rest of the day.

So it came about that Grim had to work the final act in this great drama of mystery and crime absolutely alone and singlehanded!

But he made his plans most carefully. He had an armchair placed immediately in front of the picture. In this he was going to sit. To one side he placed a large, flat bath full of water. And to the other side

he built a small barricade consisting of a table and a wire fireguard.

In this way the ghost, when he appeared, would be sure to tumble into the bath! Grim was pleased with his foresight. But he was half-afraid that Boodge, the retainer, might be suspicious. For several times he saw the fellow looking at him while he made his preparations.

In order to put him off the scent, Grim purposely said in the retainer's hearing that he intended to have a bath that night, and Boodge went away with his suspicions apparently allayed.

The day crawled by, and then night suddenly fell upon the old house. Grim hastily put on his dressing-gown and crept into his armchair. His automatic bristled with cartridges, and he also had by him an axe and a hammer, in case the ghost proved violent.

One struck, two struck! In fact, the hours struck in the same order as already described. And once more, as dawn was about to strike, the picture-frame opened with a whir and the ghost jumped out. But this time was his last! For he went head-first into the bath!

"Hooray!" shouted Grim, and caught the figure up in his arms. Then he recoiled a step. For, as he had half-suspected, it was Boodge, the retainer.

Half the mystery was now cleared up by Grim's wonderful sagacity. But there was still other work to be done before he could hand Boodge over to the police.

Grim knew that the police would be in bed at this hour of night. So he thought he would send Boodge to sleep. He did this very cleverly with his hammer.

Then palpitating with excitement, he strode to the picture and examined it.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated. "The picture is false! It is in reality a door!"

At once the whole mystery was cleared up. The picture was really a secret door, leading into the gallery from a secret passage.

Grim dashed into the colonel's bed-room and explained everything to him. Then he woke up Boodge, who confessed everything.

And now, dear reader, we must draw a veil over the proceedings. It would take too long to show how the man had planned his diabolical plot. Suffice it to say that he had meant to kill the colonel in order to benefit by the will already mentioned. How he was foiled was entirely due to one man's cleverness and foresight—the great brain of Trackett Grim!

Splinter duly recovered from his faint, and was able to travel back to London with the incriminator. The general is still in the pink; Boodge, the trusted retainer, is still in clink.

THE END.



E. SOPP'S FABLES

By EDGAR SOPP, of the Fifth.

No. 34.—THE FABLE OF THE
FARMER AND THE TRESPASSERS.

NOW, there lived in the vicinity of St. Frank's a Grumpy Old Farmer named Holt, who was of a disposition Most Morose, and ever on the lookout for some offence of the Boys of St. Frank's. And, behold, it came to pass that certain of these Boys did pass through some of the said Farmer's fields, that they might the More Quickly reach the place whither they would go. Perceiving this, the Farmer proceeded

TO GO OFF THE DEEP END.

And he did follow and pursue them, and on coming up he did Assail Them with much Vulgar Abuse, going so far as to Accuse Them of having Evil Designs on his Orchard—this latter Place of Joy being at no great Distance. The False Charge Nipper did Stoutly Repel, with much anger and heat, informing Holt that he ought to go and Eat coke, and Le-arn a few Manners from his Pigs. They had done his Land no harm, but were merely Crossing It. As for his Fruit, they had not so much as thought of the Blessed Stuff. And he did Add Further that only respect for the Farmer's age, and regard for the Honour of St. Frank's did restrain them from

ROLLING HIM IN ONE OF HIS OWN
DITCHES.

And, lo, a certain Fiery Youth with much Fistic Ability—Handforth, to wit—did Give Vent to a roar. And he and one or two others Less Self-controlled than the Mighty Nipper did make as if to lay Violent Hands on Holt. And Nipper did Restrain Them, and did Remind Them that in Law they were Trespassers, so that Legally the Farmer was in the Right. 'Twas also the Law, quoth he, that if a Trespasser did Offer to pay for any damage he had caused the Matter Ended, and there could be brought against him No Further Charge. Thereupon he challenged Farmer Holt to

Assess the Damage which had been done to his Land, proffering to pay it There and Then. Taken thus in confusion the Farmer Knew Not what to say, and did Gaze upon them Speechless. Whereupon Nipper, with a Sweet Smile, offered him Half-a-crown as Quittance, which was Refused by Holt, and they did Pass On. And the Farmer did Shake his Fist, and shout that

HE WOULD HAVE THE LAW ON THEM.

And, behold, he did Summon them before the Justices for Trespass, and did demand Damages. But the Justices, having heard the Cause, did ask Holt if it were true that Two-and-sixpence had Been Offered him on the spot to Cover the Damage. Learning from him that this was True, they did inform him that he had No Case, the law of the matter being that if a Trespasser offered to Make Good any damage he had Committed no further Cause of Action against him could lie. Furthermore, they did state their opinion in Emphatic Terms that the Boys of St. Frank's had committed No Offence, and that Farmer Holt was

AN UNNEIGHBOURLY CURMUDGEON.

And, in the fullness of their wisdom, the Bannington Beaks did also place it on record that this Foolhardy Farmer was a disagreeable fellow altogether, who did Deserve to be smartly Fined Himself for taking up the Time of the Court with a case so Trumpy. So that Nipper and his chums did leave the Hall of Justice with all the Honours of Victory, and they did receive Showers of Thanks from the Delighted Denizens of the neighbourhood, among whom the Potty Plaintiff was heartily disliked for his Meanness and Ill-temper.

MORAL: BE ON THE SAFE SIDE. AND
NEVER TRESPASS AT ALL.

IN REPLY to YOURS

Correspondence Answered
by **UNCLE EDWARD**



(NOTE.—Readers of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY can write to me, and I will reply on this page. But don't expect a reply for three weeks or a month. Address your letters or postcards to **UNCLE EDWARD**, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.—**UNCLE EDWARD**.)

J. HOPPER (Shrewsbury): Of course I write my stories seriously. Can't you tell that by the way they're written? As for Nipper, I don't think he's very fond of Doris, as you suggest. In fact, he doesn't care for girls at all—he's just like me. We strong, sporting chaps haven't any time for such follies. I don't send my Trackett Grim stories to a big London magazine because I'm loyal to the School, and wouldn't dream of depriving the Mag of my literary work.

WOTESANAME (Timbuctoo): I don't think you live in Timbuctoo at all. More like Shropshire. I've found this out because I'm a detective—but I shan't tell you how I got on the track. The postmark was nearly blurred out, anyhow. Nobody could tell it was Shifnal. So you think my replies are funny? Like your cheek! You want to know a cure for pimples? All right, I'll tell you one. As soon as ever they begin to appear, push them in firmly with the head of a French nail, and keep them down flush with the skin until they grow tired of the fight, and give it up. Thanks for your nice remarks about the Trackett Grim stories. But if Willy writes a story for the Mag I shall refuse to own him as a brother.

J. G. (Castleford): I never count the biffs I distribute. Don't you think I've got anything else to do? Glad you liked the circus series so much. Hope you were just as enthusiastic about the Dr. Stokes stories.

D. MASSEY (Manchester): I don't know whether your initial is a D or a W, so you'd better practice your signature a bit more thoroughly, or you'll get into trouble. As for those photographs you mention, it's quite likely they'll appear sooner or later. I don't know about the Trackett Grim stories in book form. There's so much jealousy that an author hasn't got much chance nowadays. The rest of your letter is simply one long insult, but I treat it with lofty scorn. You can go and eat coke!

F. DERRY, F. NIGHTINGALE, J. NIGHTINGALE, W. GRIGGS, T. BROWN, and J. BOURNE (Brockley): Six of you, all on one thin sheet of paper! Thanks awfully! It's saved me a lot of trouble in replying. Have we been to Wembley? What a question to ask! Of course we have, but I haven't got enough space here to tell you what wonderful things we think about it. The scenic railway was topping, anyhow. So you like stories with Lord Dorrimore in them. All right—you'll get them now. Nipper is just over 15, and I'm about the same age. You needn't worry much about Church and McClure—they couldn't get on without me. I'm a bit suspicious about that cut on your finger—lots of our chaps make that excuse.

J. L. (Edmonton): I've asked Nipper about re-publishing the old stories, but he doesn't think it can be done just yet. That portrait gallery and Who's Who will come along in due course. I've just read the last part of your letter, where you talk about my brains. You rotter! If I had read this first, I wouldn't have given you a reply at all. In fact, I'm going to tell the Editor to cut it out—so you won't even see it.

L. TAYLOR (Reading): Fenton of the Sixth is nearly 18. Thanks for your other cheery remarks, and I hope "the old brain box" has now fully recovered.

MURIEL LINDEMAN (Wilts): I don't want to be critical, but I'm afraid you'll never be a great artist. That sketch on the first page of your letter is nothing more nor less than a libel on yourself. It must be. No human being has got a mouth like that! Dinty Todd is still in England, I think, and perhaps he'll turn up at St. Frank's again one day.

I liked him as much as you do. He's a sport. Sorry to hear that you and your little girl quarrel, but I suppose you soon make it up again. It's a pity your brother is so obstinate—he ought to give us a fair chance, anyway. Thanks awfully for your very nice remarks, and don't forget to write again soon.

PHYLLIS CASTLETON (Oxon.): I am jolly glad you noticed that awful mistake in the picture. I don't look a bit like that drawing of me. I'm never dirty, or inky, or ugly, but I wouldn't go so far as to say I'm handsome. I leave that sort of thing to other people—and they never say it! I'm sure that Marjorie will be very pleased with what you say when I tell her. As for that idea of yours regarding a companion paper—go up one! It's a ripping suggestion, and perhaps it'll come true one of these days. You're too late about asking me not to hurt the artist. By this time his black eye's nearly got well, and his teeth are all tight again—although the graze on my knuckles still hurts a bit.

S. M. (Worthing): My poor, pitiful chump! Don't you think I've tried to make the Trackett Grim stories longer? But every time I do it, Nipper carves whole slices away. It's a rotten cheek, but I've simply got to suffer in silence. As for dotting Nipper in the eye, I'd do this in a minute, only I respect him too much. He's such a fine boxer, too. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to take a few lessons in writing, my son. Do you go to school, or do you always play truant? Your riddle is silly. A man without brains couldn't be like me, because I've got plenty.

BERNARD WILLIAM MESSEM (Forest Gate): You don't tell me the name of the forest you live in, but it must be somewhere near the gate, or you wouldn't put it. You say you don't like my batting. You wouldn't like my punching, either. And who's careless? When I'm getting runs, I swipe at anything. In fact, I'm just like Fender, of Surrey. You are quite wrong about Nipper. He hasn't got any parents at all—although I suppose he had some in the first place. Mr. Nelson Lee is his guardian, and they're great pals.

EILEEN (Balham): When you say that Willy could write better Trackett Grim stories than me—well, I'd better not put what's in my mind, or the Editor will cut it out. And you a girl, too! And why do you only suppose I'm good-looking? You can't judge by that rotten picture of me at the top of this page. I've already biffed the artist half-a-dozen times as a punishment. No, I don't go all of a doo-dah when Irene comes up. The idea! You are quite

right about the insults—glad you admit the fact. Don't let it happen again!

RONALD (South Croydon): Sorry, old man, but I haven't been able to send that diagram to you as requested. Too jolly busy. As for the rate of pocket-money the fellows get I can't possibly give this, as it's so varied according to the meanness or generosity of different paters. How the dickens can I arrange for a new boy to come to the school named Ronald Dennis? The next new chap may be named Simon Twinkle, for all I know. Be sensible, for goodness' sake! Those four telephones on my desk have gone now, as you'll see. They worried me too much.

KEN (Liverpool): So you think I'm the best chap at St. Frank's? I had an idea you were a good sort as soon as I opened your letter. I don't think I'll biff Nipper and Co., as you ask, because there might be a lot of unpleasantness—and you know how I hate arguments. Yes, it left the cricket team it would certainly go to pot. I told Irene that you called her a peach (although you told me not to). She asked me to tick you off, but I don't think I will, because I agree with you. And you needn't fear that I shall give up the Trackett Grim stories. I've got so many new plots in my head that I can't decide which one to write first.

CYRIL C. (Bungay): The Moor View School is about half-a-mile from St. Frank's—up the lane towards Bannington Moor. I don't know whether I shall be made Captain of the School when I go up into the Sixth. It's a long way off yet, so I don't worry about it. As you mean to read the Old Paper until your last days, it's just possible I might go up into the Sixth before you finally peg out. We'll live in hopes, anyway.

A GIRL READER (Wellingborough): Didn't your hand ache, Phyllis, by the time you'd finished writing that letter. Hope you don't mind me calling you Phyllis. But you needn't worry—I won't mention it, as you apparently don't want your name published. A letter like yours, from a constant reader, is a real treat. But it's so long that I can't answer it fully here. I'm snowed up this week. But I'll give you another reply next week. Don't think I'm grumbling because your letter's a long one—the longer they are the better I like 'em! And ask any old questions you like! I'm here!

ROSY AND ADA (Leeds): I'm just over fifteen, and Nipper's a month or two more. Teddy Long shares Study B. with Arthur Hubbard.

NOTE.—I've got quite a lot of other letters to reply to, but all my space is filled up, so I shall have to leave them until next week.

UNCLE EDWARD.



PEEPS INTO PEPYS' DIARY.

By GUY PEPYS of the Remove.

MONDAY.—Now crossing the desert in the Conqueror. A wonderful ship, full of surprises. Inspecting and studying her wearieeth me never. What modern science achieveth passeth description. Not only doth necessary food, but the luxuries of civilisation, attend us in this travelling palace. The problem of conquering the waste places of the earth seemeth to have been solved. Yet at times have I misgivings. What if all this complicated machinery should be put out of gear and brought to a standstill by some little mishap? Verily the end is not yet, and I do look to the future with some trepidation.

TUESDAY.—Mightily interested in the ship's company. Note that in these strange surroundings all the fellows do display the same characteristics as at the school. Archie and Sir Montie do exhibit the same anxiety regarding their attire, and do vie with each other in elegance. To them the set of a tie or the crease of a trouser leg be momentous things. His Grace of Somerton sheweth all his old careless disregard of personal adornment. How these fellows would dress were there no ladies aboard—but I draw a veil.

WEDNESDAY.—A singular fact it is that wherever we be the Handforths seem to be the life of the company. Truly they be a family with well defined and outstanding characteristics. Edward Oswald and Willy we know. Here one would lay them aside, but they are of those who cannot be ignored. Willy with his lizards, and his big brother with his sunbaths, and his falling overboard and getting buried in sand, do keep us continually amused. Sir Oswald is of vehement and explosive temperament, and a word to him may at any moment

be as a spark to a powder-barrel. His elder son a reproduction.

THURSDAY.—Ena Handforth doth amuse us mightily. To see this little chit subduing and terrorising the blustering Edward Oswald checkmating the scheming Willy, and cajoling the stern Sir Edward, is a liberal education with regard to the irresistibility of female charm. Oft have I wondered at hen-pecked husbands. But here we have a brusque father and two boisterous sons, chicken-pecked. A sight for the gods!

FRIDAY.—Great commotion throughout the ship, caused by the report that a fire had been seen some distance ahead. Such a thing on the desert almost unheard of. Believed to be a signal. Raised high hopes that we should soon come up with Lord Dorrimore and his party. Nelson Lee did brighten up visibly. For days past he hath been showing signs of great strain. And verily his anxiety and responsibility must be painfully heavy, and weigh mightily upon his spirit. The position seemeth indeed from some points of view to be a terrible one.

SATURDAY.—Did count over my money—for no particular reason—and did discover, to my satisfaction and content, that it was the same in amount as when we set out. The first time such a thing has happened in my experience, since my money usually melteth away unaccountably. Not that there is aught surprising in this, since money cannot be spent in the desert. Travellers in this solitariness must carry what suffices for their needs. Did bless and thank our millionaire host for his wise thoughtfulness in providing so amply for all our wants. Hapless would be our plight in this vast wilderness if we had naught but camels and their pack-loads to rely on.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 8.—A CURIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH A SNAKE.

ONE of the most nerve-trying ordeals I ever went through, though it was not attended with any danger, was in connection with a harmless snake. It was at Dr. Brazil's Butantan Institute, near San Paulo, in Brazil. This is both a snake farm and a laboratory, and it is famed throughout that Empire—I may say through the world—for its antitoxins, or antidotes, to snake poison. There are tens of thousands of snakes of all sorts, mostly poisonous, at this weird establishment.

Dr. Brazil suggested that I should take up one of the snakes—a mussurana, one of the non-poisonous variety, about seven feet long, of a chocolate colour, spotted, a yellow on the underside. It was a trial of faith and nerve. However, I picked it up, and it at once coiled itself round my neck and began to lick my face with its three-pronged tongue. I didn't care for these kisses at all, and untwined the reptile from my neck and held it out at arm's length, to which it offered no resistance.

A jararaca, one of the deadliest of the venomous snakes, was now let out on the floor—a beautiful creature, golden yellow, and almost as big as the other. The mussurana at once attacked it, but there was no fight to speak of, for the jararaca was dead in less than a minute, killed by a bite close to the head. The jararaca is no match for the mussurana in a fight.

The marvellous thing, however, is that the mussurana is not only non-poisonous itself, but is proof against the poison of others. The one I had handled, after killing the jararaca, proceeded calmly to eat it, or rather to swallow it. How it is done baffles one. To see one seven-foot snake getting another seven-foot snake inside it is a wondrous spectacle. But that such things really do occur I can testify.

It would be difficult, I imagine, to overestimate the value of the mussurana in a country like Brazil, where poisonous snakes literally swarm. Thanks to Dr. Brazil's antitoxins, deaths from snake-bite are rare. But the Indians knew quite as much as he does centuries ago—perhaps more.

MIRAGES By Augustus Hart

A MIRAGE, meaning to look at and to be reflected, is a very interesting and mysterious phenomenon, and to the traveller it may be a very tantalising one; to view it may be almost torture.

Mirages are among the things we know little about. Of course, the scientist is ever-ready with his explanation of them. He tells us that "a ray of light traversing a homogeneous medium is deviated from its rectilinear path when it enters a medium of different refractive index. It is therefore readily seen that the path of a ray through continuously varying media is necessarily curvilinear, being compounded of an infinite number of infinitesimally small rectilinear deviations."

"Readily seen," is it? Hardly. The scientist doesn't make us much wiser.

What we know is that in a hot, sandy desert, pictures of rivers and lakes, houses

and cities, men and animals, may appear suddenly—how, nobody knows—and may fade away even under our gaze.

We know that at sea, when no actual ship can be seen on the water, figures of ships may be seen in the air, upside down, as if they were falling headlong into the ocean, and that icebergs may be seen in the same way.

Both in the desert and on the sea the mirage is due to hot air, which affects the refractive qualities of the atmosphere, making it more dense or less.

In the Straits of Messina the atmosphere plays queer tricks, and produces what is called the Fata Morgana. You look at an object on the opposite shore, and it appears to be drawn out in length to a ridiculous extent, but vertically—i.e., upright. The peculiar refractive index there created acts as a continuous magnifying lens, but only in the sense of lengthening, drawing out vertically. The Spectre of the Brocken, in the Black Forest, is produced in the same way.

This "looming" may occur anywhere in misty and foggy weather.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

No. 38.—CANFORD SCHOOL, WIMBORNE.



Until 1922, this handsome edifice was a private residence belonging to Lord Wimborne, for in that year it became converted into one of our most recently founded public schools. The building stands in 200 acres of grounds, 100 acres of which are playing-fields, with 15 acres of kitchen garden. The village of Canford Magna was also bought with the school. There are altogether 180 boys in the school, and they are divided into three Houses—Wimborne, Franklin's, and School. All the boys are boarded at the school. The games played

are Soccer, cricket, and tennis, and other sports include swimming, boating, and cycling. In addition, there are fishing, debating, and swimming clubs organised by the boys.

The above particulars were sent in by a reader, to whom I am accordingly presenting the original pen drawing by Mr. Briscoe. If your school has not yet appeared in this series, send along photo, badge, and brief history, and the original sketch will become your property after it has appeared in the "Mag."

"NELSON LEE" MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION.

Boys! Here's the splendid little competition which you can all enter. It need only cost you the stamp for a postcard or letter, and you will find that it is quite a novel idea we have hit upon.

On Page 21 of this issue you will find a picture drawn to illustrate a certain part of this week's great story, "The Ship of the Sahara," as you will see when you read the yarn.

Now you know that under our pictures we always have a line or two describing the incident shown. Well, this time we want you to find the best wording to be put underneath this picture.

A Prize of £1 1s. will be awarded to the reader who sends what, in the Editor's opinion, is the best inscription for the picture, and Twelve Consolation Prizes will go to the readers whose efforts are next best.

All inscriptions must be taken from the actual text of the story, and they must not exceed 25 WORDS in length. Each inscription must be written on one of these coupons, which must be posted to:

"MYSTERY PICTURE NO. 2,"

C/o "Nelson Lee Library,"

Gough House, Gough Square, E.C.4.

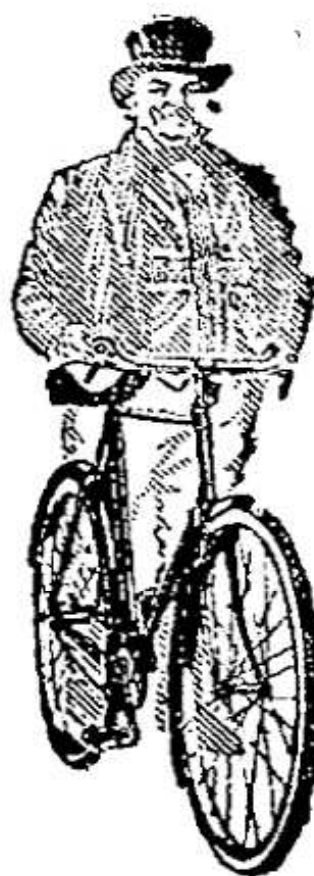
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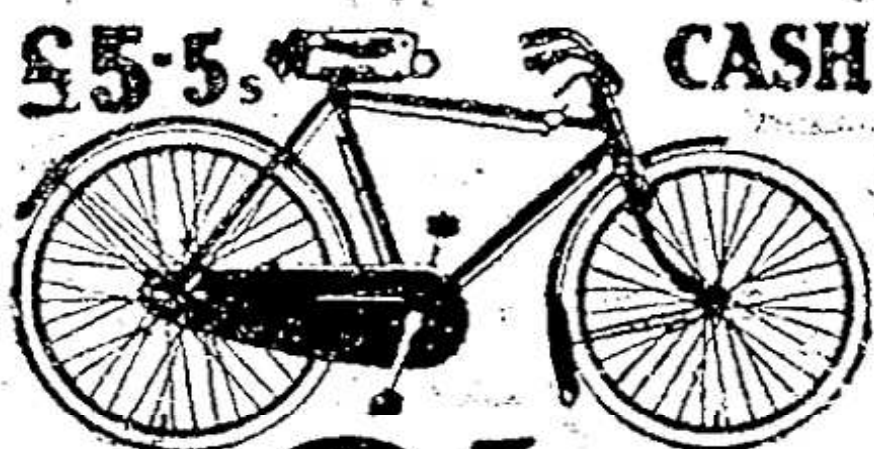
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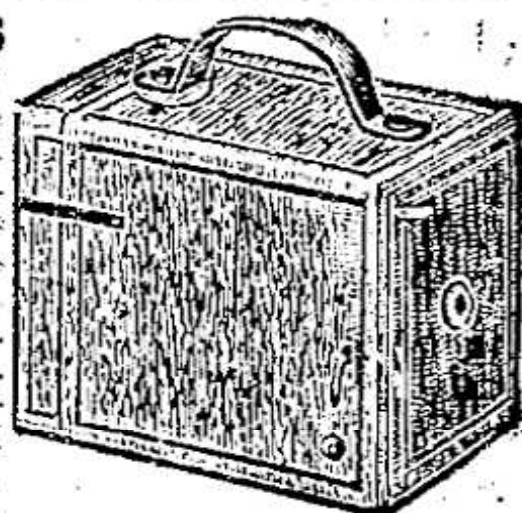
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