

ST. FRANK'S BOYS FIGHT CANNIBALS!

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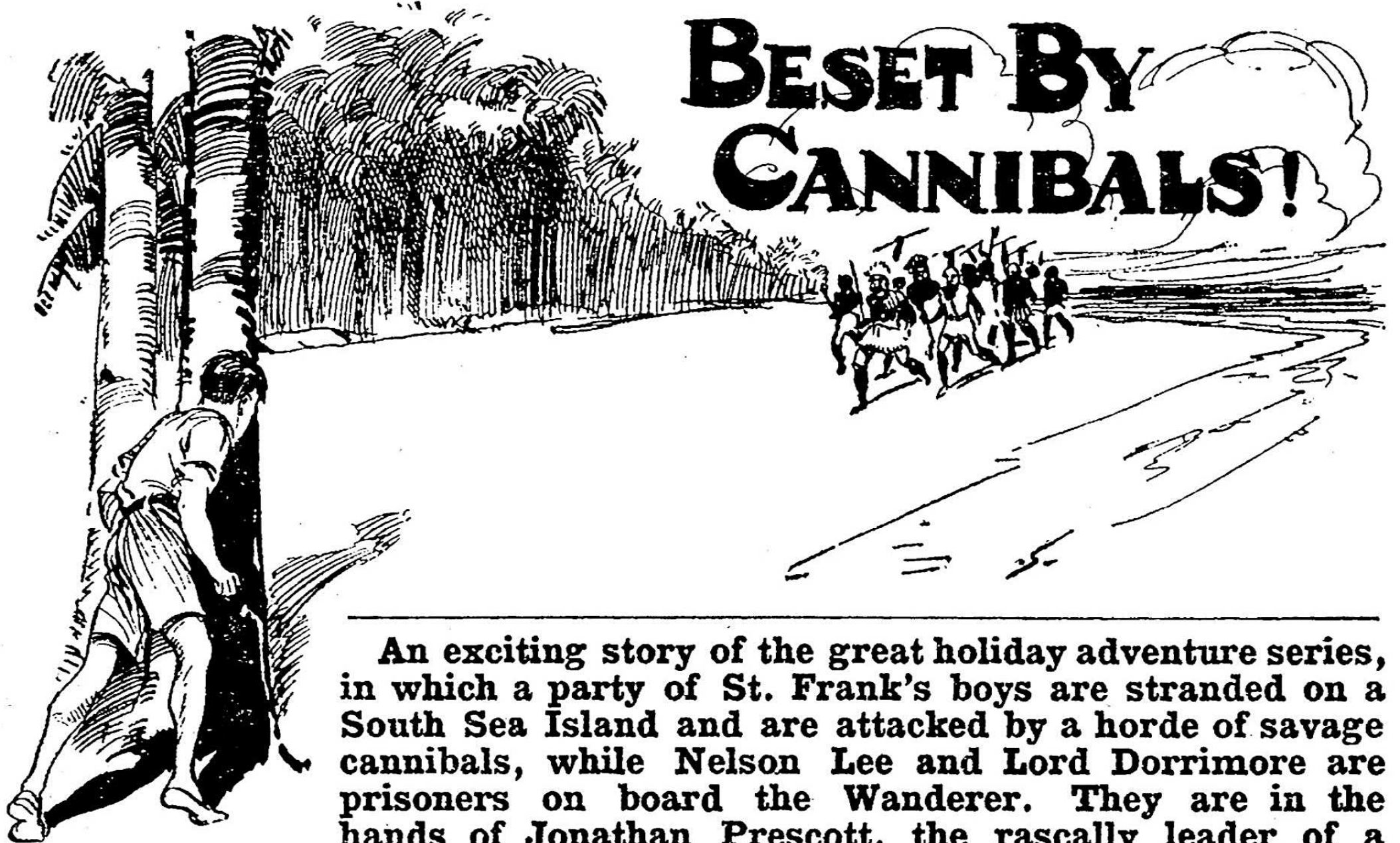
A hail of coconuts descended with devastating effect upon the advancing savages.

BESET BY CANNIBALS!



Around the flickering embers of a great fire, a hundred or more Solomon Islanders were indulging in an extraordinary war dance.

BESET BY CANNIBALS!



An exciting story of the great holiday adventure series, in which a party of St. Frank's boys are stranded on a South Sea Island and are attacked by a horde of savage cannibals, while Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore are prisoners on board the Wanderer. They are in the hands of Jonathan Prescott, the rascally leader of a rival expedition to exploit the valuable pearls on the island. Prescott's intention is to maroon Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and the crew of the Wanderer on a distant atoll. Altogether it is a capital story which will keep you thrilled to the last page.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

SOUNDS IN THE NIGHT.

"LISTEN!" said Nipper tensely.

On the still air of the tropic night came the soft, booming roar of the surf on the reef. It was subdued and monotonous, and such an integral part of the island itself that the listeners scarcely heard it.

It was something else which impressed itself upon their ears, a faint far-away howling, the sound rising and falling to the accompaniment of an uncanny throbbing, like the beating of distant drums.

"They're preparing for something all right," said Nipper grimly. "The beggars are not only howling, but they're performing their war-dance to the tune of their tom-toms. It doesn't seem very healthy."

The other St. Frank's fellows all burst into speech at once. The tension was too taut to last. There were over a score on the salt white sands, with the waters of the lagoon lapping gently near by. Overhead, the tropic moon sailed in a cloudless

sky, flooding Paradise Island with a silver brilliance.

In the neighbouring groves there was no pitchy darkness, as one might have supposed. Beneath the dense foliage of palm and artu and chapparel the night was luminously green, a queer, mysterious radiance which only enhanced the general air of impending danger.

"Healthy, eh?" repeated Edward Oswald Handforth. "In my opinion there's no danger at all. You're exaggerating everything, Nipper, you ass. Those natives are just having one of their tribal sprees, or something."

"Unfortunately, Brother Handforth, these tribal sprees occasionally involve a number of uninvited guests at the feast," said Browne of the Fifth. "And these guests, let me hasten to explain, form all the items on the menu, in various appetising dishes."

Handforth started.

"You fathead!" he muttered. "They wouldn't eat us!"

"I am prepared to admit that they would probably jib at a Handforth steak,

brother," replied Browne smoothly. "There are some propositions which even cannibals shy at. Upon the whole, we must accept it that you are safe, Brother Handforth. But there are others—such as myself—whom the cannibals would whisk into their stockpot with far more expedition than dignity. Undoubtedly we are already in the soup. Let us trust we do not figure in an entree."

Horace Stevens, the other representative of the Fifth Form in the party, tugged at William Napoleon Browne's sleeve.

"Cheese it, old man!" he said gruffly. "This is no time for jokes!"

Browne looked pained.

"Let me assure you, Brother Horace, that I am in no joking mood," he replied. "I am merely attempting to impress upon you the need for action. It has been well said that Heaven helps those who help themselves, and unless we move with considerable speed our cannibal neighbours will help themselves to some advantage."

"Browne's right," said Nipper, nodding. "He puts it in his usual long-winded way, but he realises the danger. I'd better just make the position clear, in case some of you don't know it. Unless the Wanderer turns up pretty soon we shall find ourselves in Queer Street."

"What's the good of the Wanderer turning up, anyhow?" growled Tommy Watson. "She's in the hands of that beast Prescott, and old Dorrie and Mr. Lee and the others are prisoners."

"All the same, we should be saved," declared Nipper. "Prescott wouldn't let these blacks attack us. He brought them here for pearl-diving, and although he's an unscrupulous rascal, he's no murderer. The Wanderer's return would be our salvation. But where is the Wanderer?"

"Echo answers where?" murmured Reggie Pitt.

"We've got to face the situation with a full knowledge of where we stand," went on Nipper grimly. "Paradise Island itself is one of the most glorious coral atolls in the Pacific, but its beauties are scarred by the human beings on it."

"Thanks awfully!" said Bob Christine.

"Brother Nipper has made himself clear, but one is apt to wonder which human beings he refers to," said Browne. "Let us hope he indicates the cheery throng on the other shore."

"I mean those Solomon Islanders, you chumps!" retorted Nipper. "Prescott brought them here as pearl-divers—two hundred strong—most of them from the interior of the Solomon Islands. They're savage beggars, with the instincts of cannibalism strong within them."

"Oh, but look here——"

"Treated properly, they're as harmless as children," continued Nipper grimly. "But once they run loose, they're liable to

get out of hand. And they're loose now. They've got hold of some rum, or something, and they're preparing for an attack. We may have an hour or two's grace, but the attack is certain."

"Well, I don't believe it," said Fullwood bluntly. "There ain't any cannibals nowadays. They're a thing of the past. Cannibals only appear in story books. All these Kanakas are civilised."

Nipper shook his head.

"Don't you believe it," he replied. "They may be civilised on the exterior, but the savage instinct is always there. It's lying dormant until an opportunity comes along for a good old orgy. Once these black fellows run amok, they're as dangerous as any of their forefathers. And these two hundred pearl-divers of Prescott's are on the warpath now. And, frankly, the position is about as bad as it could be. We are the only other human beings on the island, and we haven't got a weapon between the lot of us."

"Let's hope those blacks don't come near," said Church fervently. "If they do we're doomed. A score of us can't defend ourselves against two hundred drink-maddened cannibals."

"Why doesn't the Wanderer come back?" asked Fullwood gruffly.

"Where's that man of Prescott's?" demanded Handforth. "He left one or two fellows on the island, to look after the blacks. Huh! A fine way they've looked after 'em!" he added bitterly.

The juniors turned to a man who stood near by. It was he who had brought the warning of the native outbreak. He was considerably battered and frightened, and had originally been a member of the Samoa's crew. The Samoa was Prescott's schooner, and that ill-fated craft now lay on the bed of the lagoon, a charred and burnt-out wreck.

"What about the Wanderer?" demanded Handforth, grabbing the man by the shoulders and shaking him. "Can't you tell us anything? By George! We ought to have questioned this chap before. I bet he knows a lot!"

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR THE ATTACK.



NIPPER looked at the man keenly. He recognised him as a ruffian who went by the name of Nilsen. But although his name was Swedish, he looked a typical

American sailor of the bullying type.

"Yes, that's a good idea, Handy," said Nipper. "Look here, Nilsen, or whatever your name is. Where's the Wanderer

gone to? And when do you expect her back? Everything may depend upon this."

Nilsen grunted.

"Aw! How in blazes do I know when she'll come back?" he said savagely. "Old Man Prescott don't tell us his business. I guess there was three of us left with them blacks, and the other two are croaked by this time. I only made my getaway by chance."

"But about the Wanderer—"

"I don't know a thing!" interrupted Nilsen thickly. "She took them swell friends of yours to the other atoll—"

"The other atoll?" echoed Nipper staring. "What do you mean? This island is the only piece of land within a thousand miles!"

"I guess you don't know everything, sonny," retorted the man. "There's a blamed atoll, no bigger'n a dinner plate, thirty miles due west o' this dump. Old Man Prescott had the plan all doped out. He reckoned to leave Lord Dorrimore and the others on that islet so they'd be out of harm's way."

"Oh, so that was the game?" said Nipper slowly. "I'm beginning to see daylight now. Did you hear, you chaps? Dorrie and the guv'nor and the girls and all the others have been taken to this other island. So that's why the Wanderer stole out on the quiet!"

"Mebbe something's gone wrong," said Nilsen anxiously. "That blamed yacht ought to have been back here hours ago. I guess we're in for red murder if she don't show up pretty soon."

The situation was becoming clear to the puzzled St. Frank's fellows. They had wondered why the Wanderer had gone, and now they knew. Nilsen reeked of liquor, but he certainly knew what he was talking about. The cause of the native outbreak was apparent.

Nilsen and his fellow-guards had evidently indulged in a drinking bout—celebrating their temporary spell of freedom from authority—and the natives had got hold of the intoxicants. The rest could easily be imagined. Nilsen had fled, but his companions had perished in the fight. And now, having tasted blood once, the blacks were fairly ripe for mischief.

"Well, it's no good standing idle until the Wanderer comes back," said Nipper briskly. "We've all got to work. It may be some hours before those islanders decide to attack us. If so, all the better. But we'd better use every minute we've got in preparing some defences."

Fenton of the Sixth nodded.

"He's right," he declared. "In an emergency like this we've got to work together. I haven't butted in because most of you fellows are juniors, and Nipper seems to be

the best leader. I'm ready to obey any orders."

"Same here!" said Morrow.

William Napoleon Browne beamed.

"A noteworthy example, Brothers Fenton and Morrow," he said benevolently. "Let us, Brother Horace, profit by it. We four are seniors, but as we are in a sad minority, we must place ourselves under the junior command. Give forth your orders, Brother Nipper, and we will leap to obey."

Nipper looked at the seniors gratefully.

"It's jolly decent of you to talk like that," he said, feeling a little awkward. "Strictly speaking, it's your place to take charge of things, Fenton. You're the captain of St. Frank's—"

"Yes—when I'm at St. Frank's!" interrupted Edgar Fenton. "But just now we're all castaways on a desert island, and these fellows will take more notice of you than they will of me. So go ahead, old man."

And Nipper, without further argument, gave his orders. They were surprisingly crisp and decisive. Nipper had already planned out a defensive scheme in that active mind of his. The problem was a grave one. Without weapons the schoolboy party was grievously handicapped, so a few subtle plans were necessary. Nipper was a master mind at that sort of thing.

The only men in the party were Nilsen and Professor Sylvester Tucker—unless one mentions Umlosi, Lord Dorrimore's huge African friend of many a forest battle. Umlosi was almost equivalent to a dozen strong men in a fight, and just now he was at the top of his form. He was eagerly hoping that the cannibals would attack. He was a warrior first and last, and loved to fight intensely.

Professor Tucker was a man of peace, however. The absent-minded science master was quite out of his element, and he was bundled away, and requested to efface himself as much as possible. His eccentric nephew, Timothy Tucker, of the Fourth, was allotted the task of looking after him.

And all the others worked with might and main.

And now that they had something to do they felt better. The acute tension was relaxed. The fear of an attack lost its terrors. They weren't going to be scared by a mob of out-of-hand savages.

All the defence works were put into operation round the bamboo house. The juniors had built themselves a sturdy dwelling of bamboo and cane, and it stood in a clearing on the north-west shore of the lagoon. The coconut groves came right down to the beach, and in the heat of the day the house was delightfully cool, owing to the shade.

Sand was everywhere—and the spot was so peaceful that any thought of bloodshed seemed incongruous. Yet the danger was real enough—as the mysterious howling and throbbing in the distance testified. There was one heartening thought for the juniors. If they were without weapons, so were the cannibals! But there were two hundred of the blacks, and the menace was extreme. Weapons or no weapons, they would be a dangerously ugly enemy if they decided to attack the schoolboy camp.

So the defensive preparations went on at full speed.

CHAPTER III.

A SCOUTING EXPEDITION.



FATTY LITTLE clapped his hands, in lieu of a gong.

"Come on, you chaps! Grub!" he sang out. "All ready for the first sitting! Plenty of cocoa, too!"

There was a rush at once. Nipper had previously arranged that Fatty and four others should confine themselves solely to the food department. And the juniors would eat in two sections—one continuing hard at work while the other section fed. And vice versa.

It was now nearly dawn, and much had been accomplished. The breeze had practically died down, and the moon was sinking. And Paradise Island lay dreaming in the warm, tropical air. The lagoon was like a sheet of glass, and the thunder from the reef seemed dulled to a mere murmur. There were no further sounds from the native camp. The throbbing ceased, and many of the juniors were telling themselves that the danger was over.

"The rotters have probably drunk themselves into a stupor, and they're all asleep by now," said Handforth. "We've been working like niggers for nothing. It'll be daylight soon, and they wouldn't dare to attack us then."

"I shouldn't be too optimistic, old son," said Nipper. "They're just as likely to attack in daylight as in darkness—more likely, in fact. They'll realise how completely we're at their mercy."

"Mebbe the skunks have brewed some o' their infernal kava," put in Nilsen.

"Their what?" asked Handforth.

"Kava?" repeated Nipper slowly. "That's a kind of plant, isn't it? They make a beastly poisonous drink out of it, don't they?"

"You said it!" agreed Nilsen. "Sure, it's the worst kind of dope, once a man gets in its clutches. These blacks haven't tasted the stuff for weeks, and a big dose right now would have more effect than rum. I guess the swabs started their brewin' days ago!"

Fatty Little and his assistants had provided an ample spread, and all the juniors fared well. Nipper realised the importance of attending to the inner man, and no time was lost by feeding.

The defensive preparations had been going on apace. There was very little to see, but an incredible amount of work had been accomplished. Practically all the fellows were aching in every joint as a result of their labours. But they were cheerful about it. They were pleased with their work.

"I'm uneasy about those blacks," said Nipper, frowning, as he took a bite out of a sandwich. "Some of you chaps think this silence means safety—but it may mean danger."

"Wau! Wise words, young master," said Umlosi, nodding. "I like not this silence. Methinks the enemy is preparing for an attack. I know the ways of these jackals, and bid thee be ready."

"What about doing some scouting?" suggested Pitt.

"'Tis an excellent plan," said Umlosi. "Permit me to venture forth into the woods, O Manzie," he added, turning to Nipper. "I will learn the truth of this, and return with news."

"I'll tell you what—we'll both go," said Nipper. "You'll take charge, Reggie, won't you? We shan't be very long—but I want to know what those blessed Kanakas are up to."

"Dear old boy, it'll be frightfully risky," said Tregellis-West.

"Let Umlosi go alone!" urged Tommy Watson.

"No fear!" said Nipper. "There's no more danger in this scouting trip than in staying here. And there's nothing like being prepared. You needn't be worried about me—Umlosi's a good bodyguard!"

"Fear not, young masters," rumbled Umlosi. "Thy friend will be unharmed. I will see that no hurt befalls him."

Handforth considered that he ought to go scouting, too, but he was soon squashed. As Pitt remarked, they might as well release an elephant in the woods. Handforth was not renowned for his silent methods.

Umlosi and Nipper were soon off, and they disappeared among the trees like shadows of the night. The island, at this point, was little more than a ridge—a mere hundred yards or so from inner shore to outer shore.

Nipper and Umlosi progressed in a northern direction towards the shallow end of the lagoon, where the pearl fishery was situated. Just towards the north-east, the island broadened out again, and rose steeply to a rocky point which the juniors had christened Signal Hill.

The native camp was situated on the lagoon shore, just at the foot of this hill. The Kanakas had originally camped near the break in the reef, but had since been shifted.

The two scouts proceeded like ghosts. Umlosi, of course, was a past-master in the

art. He could move through the densest bush without causing a twig to crack. And Nipper, who was an ardent Boy Scout, had learned most of the tricks. He had the advantage, too, of all the training that Nelson Lee had given him. Umlosi could have had no better companion on such a mission.

"It's safe enough for us to go," whispered Nipper, as they progressed. "The blacks are bound to come in this direction, if they come at all—they can't get round the island from the other side because of the break. And we can spot them if they're on the lagoon."

"'Tis even as thou sayest, Manzie," agreed Umlosi. "If these accursed wolves are preparing to attack, we shall encounter them. And I will know of their presence while they are still afar. Have I not taken part in a thousand wars?"

"Yes, I'm quite comfortable," said Nipper. "You've got a nose like a bloodhound, and ears like nothing on earth! It's a jolly good thing we've got you with us, Umlosi, old man. You're worth your weight in solid gold!"

"Wau! Thou art a flatterer," said Umlosi softly.

They went on, Umlosi leading the way. They kept to the beach on the inner shore, so that they could keep the lagoon constantly in sight. But they took care to progress in the dense shadow of the trees. And at length they drew near to their objective.

At this point Umlosi deserted the beach and made his way through the thick bush. A glimmer of light was showing ahead, flickering weirdly. There was evidently a camp-fire in the natives' headquarters. But now that the scouts were close they could hear sounds.

Not the wild howling and throbbing that had previously disturbed the island, but a subdued, muffled beat, which was difficult to define. But within a few minutes the explanation was forthcoming.

Parting the dense foliage, Umlosi bade Nipper gaze through.

They were just on the edge of the native clearing. And there, before them, a strange scene was unfolded. The clearing was a big one, with the flickering embers of a great fire. And round it a hundred or more Solomon Islanders were indulging in an extraordinary war dance. They uttered no sound, and this was all the more impressive. Only the thudding of their feet on the sand broke the silence.

The savages were grotesquely decorated—a sure sign that they had "gone back" to a wild state. They were contorting themselves in a remarkable fashion, and the deliberate nature of their movements was fascinating to watch.

Other blacks were lying in the sand, exhausted by their mad efforts. For a moment Nipper felt relieved. There were signs that the danger was over. But Umlosi soon killed this hope.

"They grow tired, O Manzie," he whispered. "Soon they will sleep. But it will be a brief respite only. These dogs are ready for war—prepared for the spilling of blood! Ere long they will awaken to a fresh frenzy—far worse than the first—and then will our danger be great!"

"But—but you can't be certain!" protested Nipper.

"I am certain, young master," said Umlosi impressively.

CHAPTER IV.

MARGONED.



"PENNY for 'em, old man?" said Lord Dorrimore languidly.

Nelson Lee turned sharply, and looked at his companion. Dorrie had approached silently in the powdery sand.

"They're not worth a penny, Dorrie," said Lee. "You know what they are, in any case. I'm thinking of our position—and the apparent hopelessness of it. By sheer ill luck, we've made a pretty ghastly mess of things, eh?"

"No need to talk like that," said his lordship. "The mess isn't ours, Lee. We've got to thank old Prescott for all this packet of trouble. How the deuce were we to know that he was such a dirty reptile? We knew he was several kinds of a rascal, but we never dreamed he'd go to these lengths!"

"If it was just a question of ourselves, Dorrie, it wouldn't matter," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But think of the boys! Think of Mrs. Stokes, and those girls! It's appalling!"

Lord Dorrimore threw his cigarette away, and idly watched the smoke curling up from it as it lay in the sand. The moonlight was so brilliant that the scene was nearly as bright as day.

The atoll was ridiculously small.

It was just a speck in the ocean, a dot in the rolling expanse of the far-flung Pacific. At no point was the "land" higher than a few feet, with odd clumps of palms growing near the edge of the lagoon. The island was a miniature edition of Paradise Island.

Just a mere coral reef, a living thing, with a tiny lagoon so shallow that nothing bigger than a ship's long-boat could navigate it. The only trees were the palms. Nothing else but sand—not even a blade of grass. And all around the ceaseless rollers of the Pacific, foaming and creaming upon the edge of the reef.

This was the prison Jonathan Prescott had consigned his prisoners to!

Escape was utterly impossible. They had no boat—not even an atom of wreckage. Their position would have been in no way improved, however, if Prescott had left them a dozen boats. For it would have been something like suicide to venture out upon

this tropic ocean in a small boat, without compass or other means of navigation.

But Prescott, although an unscrupulous rascal, and a man determined to gain his own ends, was not needlessly vindictive. He had marooned Lord Dorrimore's party on this insignificant atoll so that he could have free rein on the pearl island. Prescott had no intention of abandoning them there. It was just a subterfuge to get them temporarily out of the way. And he aimed to make them as comfortable as possible during their enforced stay.

Numbers of tents had been taken ashore—for the Wanderer had been splendidly equipped in this way. There were stores, too—enough to last the party three or four weeks—and a similar amount of fresh water. For there was no spring or stream here.

Rather ironically, Prescott had also left them a big supply of deck-chairs, cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery, and everything necessary for camp life. Books and magazines were in evidence, too. There was really nothing missing. But the very fact that they were utterly alone, beyond the reach of any ship, weighed heavily upon the unfortunates.

At present the camp was sleeping.

Irene & Co. and the other Moor View girls were in their tents, and even the officers and crew of the Wanderer had turned in. Only a few of the yacht's men had been kept on board by Prescott—just sufficient to run the ship.

Nelson Lee had strolled out into the moonlight to think, and Lord Dorrimore had come upon him unexpectedly. For he, too, had emerged from his tent with the same object in view. They stood looking at the moon-bathed ocean with sombre eyes.

"Well, there's not much to say, is there?" asked Dorrie at length. "Plenty to think about, old man—but thoughts are better than speech. We can only go round in the same old cycle, an' get back to the same point."

"There's just one possibility," mused Nelson Lee slowly.

"A possibility of what?"

"Rescue."

"Good gad!" ejaculated his lordship. "Let's hear it, old man! If you've got a piece of cheerin' news, I'd love to have it."

"The possibility is a very remote one, Dorrie," said Lee, shaking his head. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking about the Clyde."

"The Clyde?" repeated Dorrimore. "Captain McAndrew's schooner? Yes, but I don't see—"

"You may remember that Mr. Russell is part-owner of the Clyde," said Nelson Lee. "He was reminding me of it only this evening. And old McAndrew was left at Panama with the precise instructions to come straight on to Paradise Island as soon as his ship was in good fettle. It is getting near the time when he should be due."

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Dorrie. "It's a chance, as you say—but the old tub may go straight to the main island, and run slap into Prescott's lot!"

"On the other hand, it is just as likely that he will pass within sight of this atoll," said Nelson Lee. "In that case— But what is the use of conjecturing? We can only wait, and hope for some luck."

They were silent—little realising that luck was already joining hands with chance, and that both jades were working overtime in their favour!

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE WANDERER.



IN the meantime, a few happenings on the Wanderer were not entirely without interest.

With Captain Jason Hawke in command, and with Mr. Jonathan Prescott on the bridge with him, the famous steam-yacht had sailed for Paradise Island in the cool of the previous evening.

They were due to reach their destination before darkness snapped down.

The distance was barely thirty miles, and as the Wanderer was capable of a destroyer-like speed, the trip was obviously a brief one. With her engines only running at half power, Captain Hawke reckoned that she would be safe at her anchorage within ninety minutes, or well under the two hours, at least.

"Well, mister, I guess we've got that bunch nicely packed away," said Captain Hawke comfortably, as he leaned over the bridge-rail, and gazed at the spot on the ocean where the atoll had just vanished below the horizon. "They're safe there. There's not one chance in a million of any ship butting in. The nearest trade route is five hundred miles away."

Jonathan Prescott bit the end off a cigar, and nodded.

"Yes, everything's sure pretty now," he agreed. "We'll deal with those blamed boys in double quick time. Two or three weeks of hard work ought to clear that oyster-bed, and we can dump everything in the holds of this ship. The main thing is to get the stuff away."

"It'll be a bit difficult," said the skipper, his leathery face screwing itself into a thoughtful frown. "I guess we'd best go careful— Say, what's this? We ain't makin' the same headway. Gosh darn it, the engines have stopped!"

Captain Hawke strode into the chart-house, and found the man at the wheel equally puzzled. The yacht was just gliding through the water with very little way on her, and with her engines silent.

"What's the big idea?" demanded the skipper.

"No good asking me," said the other gruffly. "You'd better 'phone."
"Not so much darned lip!" snapped Hawke.

The man at the wheel was one of the Wanderer's crew, and there was no love lost between him and Captain Hawke. There were over a dozen of Dorrie's men on board—mostly in the engine-room and stokehold. The only officer was the third engineer, the others being ordinary hands.

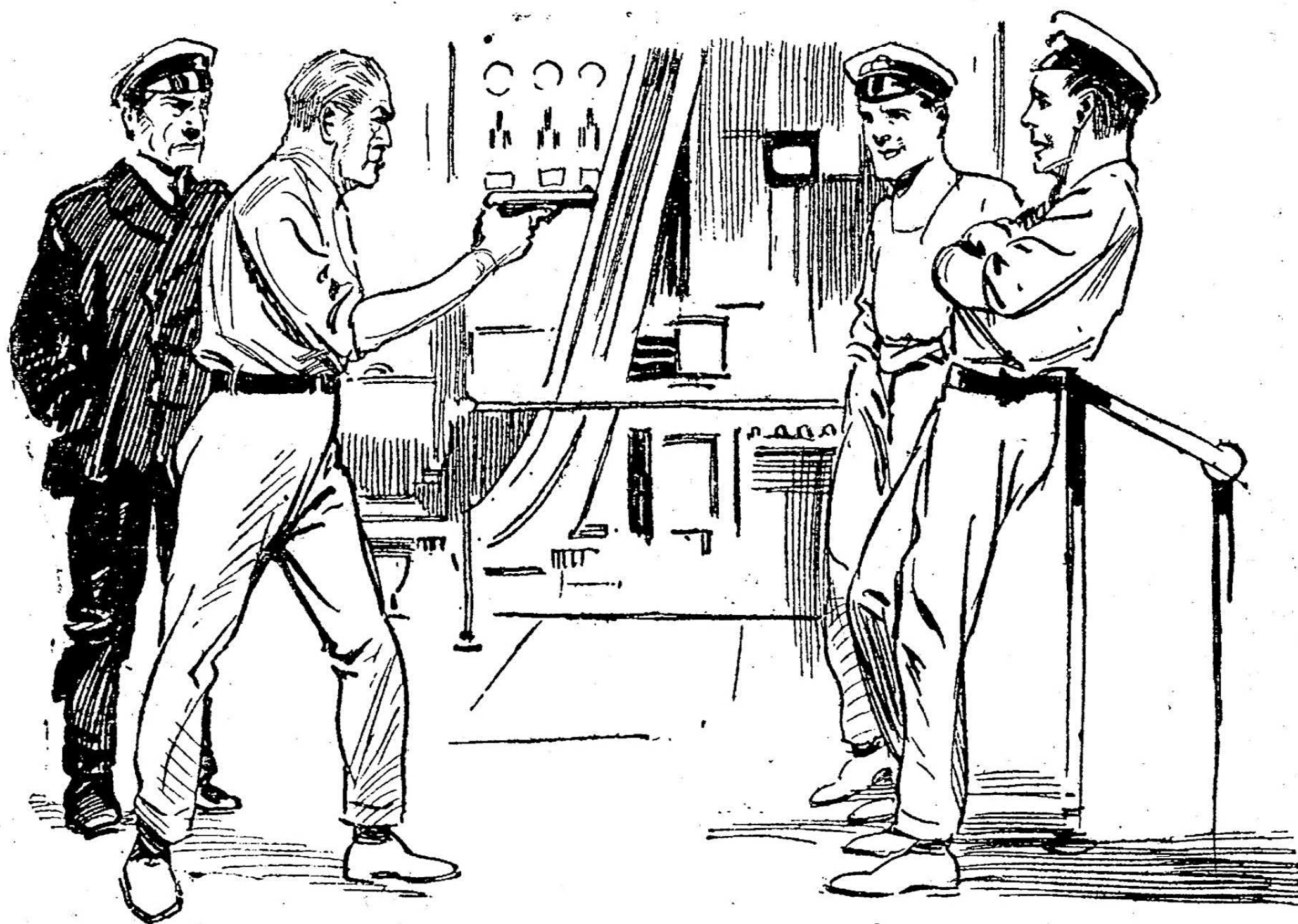
Hawke seized the engine-room telegraph, and signalled. But there came no answering clang. And when he used the telephone it was the same. He could get no reply whatever from below.

with the engines. I guess I'll come down with you."

Although Prescott spoke so scoffingly, he had received a big jolt. He threw his cigar away in his anxiety, and his face was grim when he followed Hawke down the iron stairs to the engine-room.

Everything was in good order. The heat was tremendous, and the air was heavy with the reek of oil and steam. The third engineer was lounging against his great steel charges, idly talking with a couple of his men. They glanced up casually as the two newcomers entered.

"Say, doesn't that telegraph work?" demanded Hawke.



"You'll start those engines, my young friend!" said Prescott grimly. "You'll start them right now! Do you get me?"

"Doggone it, there's something wrong here!" muttered Captain Hawke.

He left the charthouse, and found Prescott lighting his cigar.

"Everything all right now?" asked Prescott, turning.

"All right nothing!" retorted the captain. "Can't get any reply from the engine-room at all! By thunder! It looks fishy to me! If those guys have started any tricks—"

"Tricks?" said Prescott sharply. "By glory! You don't mean— Nonsense, Hawke! We've got these men where we want them—they wouldn't dare to monkey

"Why, yes," replied the third engineer. "Then why the blazes didn't you answer me two minutes ago?"

"I didn't fancy to."

"Didn't fancy to!" roared the captain furiously. "Good golly! What's this—mutiny? Why in thunder's name didn't you answer the 'phone?"

"Oh, we've decided to take a bit of a rest," said the engineer coolly.

"Rest?" gasped Prescott.

"That's the idea," smiled the engineer. "The heat's a bit overpowering, you know, and we don't fancy—"

"You infernal idiot!" interrupted Prescott harshly. "Try any of those funny tricks here, and I'll plug you with lead! Get me? I'm standing no monkey business from you fellows! You're outnumbered, and you haven't got a weapon between the lot o' you! Gosh! Are you mad enough to believe that you can defy the captain's orders?"

The third engineer looked round with an air of exaggerated surprise. He was a young fellow named Pelton, and had been with the Wanderer for over two years. He was one of Dorrie's most trusted officers, and a thoroughly efficient engineer.

"The captain isn't here to give any orders," he retorted, looking Prescott straight in the eye. "You marooned him with Lord Dorrimore, and——"

"I mean Captain Hawke!" yelled Prescott.

"Oh, this windjammer relic?" said Pelton, indicating Hawke, with a jerk of his head. "Why didn't you say so before? You surely don't expect us to recognise him as the skipper of this yacht?"

"Gosh darn my hide!" ejaculated Hawke, aghast.

"In case you fail to appreciate the situation, let me explain it," went on Pelton easily. "We don't fancy to get back to Paradise Island just yet, so we're on strike. Simple enough, isn't it? We'll probably let you know when we decide to resume our work again."

He turned away carelessly, and Jonathan Prescott uttered a bellow like an infuriated bull. There was something about the third engineer's attitude which meant business. He was quiet, calm, and typically British in his careless manner. But there was a world of determination behind his mask of indifference.

This, then, was the reason for the Wanderer's non-appearance! She was lying here, midway between the two atolls, drifting with the Pacific current, her engines idle, and her powerful propellers motionless!

CHAPTER VI.

JONATHAN PRESCOTT'S DILEMMA.



SLOWLY, menacingly, Prescott withdrew a revolver from his hip pocket. There was an expression of ugly anger on his face. He presented the revolver at the third engineer's breast.

"You'll start those engines, my young friend!" he said grimly. "You'll start them right now! Do you get me?"

Pelton laughed.

"A little melodrama, eh?" he said coolly. "Sorry, Mr. Prescott, but it doesn't impress me at all. I'm not getting any kick out of this stunt—as you would put it. Why not face realities?"

"By blazes, I'll fill you with holes unless you obey," roared Prescott.

"Go ahead—I'm waiting!" said Pelton, yawning.

The other two men stood there with amused smiles. Their acting was perfect. For, as a matter of fact, they were tense with acute anxiety. Would Prescott draw trigger in his fury?

"Let him have it, mister!" snarled Hawke thickly.

"I'll give him one more chance!" rapped out Prescott. "See here, young feller! I picked you out of the bunch of engine-room officers because you looked the tamest! Get busy and obey orders!"

"You can't always judge by looks, Mr. Prescott," said the third engineer carelessly. "I'm not half as tame as I seem to be. And I'm telling you straight from the shoulder that I'll start these engines when I please—and not before!"

"You—you mad young fool!" panted Prescott. "Do you realise that I'm threatening you with death? I'm not the kind of man to arouse——"

"You may be threatening me with death, but I'm not quite blind," interrupted Pelton curtly. "You can't bluff me, you Yankee crook! Go ahead—pull that trigger and kill me! And then where will you be? How do you fancy drifting across the Pacific without an engine working?"

Prescott started.

"You blamed simp!" he snapped. "You're not the only man who can control these engines——"

"I'm the only engineer on board, and my men are just as determined as I am," interrupted Pelton. "They are all skilled in their own jobs, but there's not one capable of taking full control. You thought you held all the cards, didn't you, Mr. Prescott? Allow me to point out that you don't! My men and I have got you in a cleft stick. You can't do a thing without us. So go ahead with this murder if you like!"

Prescott took a deep breath.

"Say, you're smart!" he said thickly. "Gosh darn it, you're smart! I've got to hand it to you that you're a cute guy! Gee! I never thought a Britisher had enough pep!"

Pelton grinned.

"Britishers don't make a song about their pep—but they've got plenty of the stuff in reserve!" he said coolly. "Sorry, Mr. Prescott, but we've made up our minds to go back to the small atoll. So if you'll give orders to the man at the wheel——"

"We're going straight ahead—back to that big lagoon!" interrupted Prescott harshly. "You've called my bluff, hang you, but I'm not standing any of this bunk! Unless you obey orders, I'll throw you all in irons, and Hawke's men will take full charge!"

The third engineer laughed with genuine merriment.

"That's good!" he chuckled. "Hawke's men, eh? Beachcombers, and such like from an old trading schooner? You apparently don't realise, Mr. Prescott, that this yacht is fitted with the most highly specialised engines in the world! They're something new—something revolutionary in shipping circles. Lord Dorrimore was about the first man to instal such engines on a privately owned vessel. Why, without my crowd you're as helpless as castaways on a raft! You'll just drift into the first storm that comes along!"

Jonathan Prescott cursed violently.

"You're right, darn you for a dog!" he shouted. "But I'll force you to obey me in the end! Say, Hawke, we'd best get out of this, and let them cool down. Maybe they'll come to their senses before long."

Prescott charged out of the engine-room, with Captain Hawke at his heels. He was feeling too exasperated and furious to trust himself, but he kept his revolver back. To kill these engineers would be fatal. The very thought of it was startling.

For, without Pelton and his men, the Wanderer would be a death-trap. There wasn't the faintest chance that any of Hawke's crew would be able to control the engines. And in the tropics a cyclone may sweep down with scarcely any warning. If one of these storms caught the Wanderer in her present helpless condition, she could never survive the ordeal. It was of the utmost importance to keep these engineers alive—and Pelton had realised it!"

In a word, he had found the weak spot in Prescott's armour.

And after a brief talk with his men he had decided to exploit the advantage. As Pelton had foreseen from the first, Prescott's threats were a mere bluff. He would never dare to harm them.

On deck, Jonathan Prescott and Captain Hawke paused.

"Well, what the thunder are we going to do?" asked Hawke bluntly. "Say, mister, your smart-Alec ideas ain't so good. No, sir. I guess we're sure side-tracked. You certainly made a break when you doped out this little game!"

"Break nothing!" snarled Prescott. "I'm not frightened by these fools! We'll get to the island, Hawke—leave it to me! Pelton was right; we daren't kill him. But, by thunder, we can do something else!"

"I'm darned if I can see daylight, anyway!" growled the skipper. "Give me a schooner or a barque, or any blamed thing with sails on, and I'll navigate it. But steam! Huh! I'll admit I'm beat!"

They went below, and indulged in a stiff whisky. And the night crept on and the Wanderer continued to slowly drift. Without Pelton's skilled hand she was a mere hulk. And Pelton had made up his mind

to be idle, unless Prescott fell in with his wishes.

The rogues weren't having everything their own way.

CHAPTER VII.

READY FOR THE ATTACK.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH sniffed.

"It's a swindle!" he said tartly. "We've been waiting for hours for this giddy attack, and nothing happens. I'm getting fed-up. If those blacks mean to rush us, why the dickens don't they get busy?"

Church shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no good glaring at me and asking riddles!" he retorted. "All the better if it is a swindle. You may revel in being attacked by cannibals, but I'm not partial to it. Let's hope the blacks cool down, and keep to their own side of the island."

"Hear, hear!" said McClure heartily.

Handforth gave his chums a withering glance.

"And you call yourselves examples of British valour!" he said sternly.

"Rats!" said Church. "We don't call ourselves anything of the sort. Mac and I are ready enough to face any danger that comes along; but we're not yelling with anxiety for murder to happen. Thank goodness we're not all as bloodthirsty as Umlosi and you. You're a pair, you two. All you think about is fighting!"

Handforth & Co. were standing on the beach, some little distance in front of the bamboo house. Other juniors were taking a spell of rest on the sands. Many were fast asleep, exhausted by their long hours of toil. Archie Glenthorpe was even indulging in a bathe. He was sitting in the shallow water, nodding dreamily, soothed by the sultry conditions.

It was practically midday, and the tropic sun was beating down with all its customary force. And still the cannibals held off. There hadn't been the slightest indication of an attack. This section of the island had been left severely alone.

Before dawn the boys had been keyed up to a high pitch of expectancy. They had been ready to face any attack. But hours had passed since then, hours of anxiety at first. But now the tense nature of the situation was relaxed. Everything possible had been done in the way of defence work. During those first hours the entire St. Frank's band had worked like demons.

There wasn't much to see for their labours, but they had all exhausted themselves. At concert pitch, they had piled

into the work. A few minor miracles had been performed, and now there was a spell of rest.

Some of the fellows were only too glad to sleep. But others, like Handforth, were keen upon the cannibals making their attack. They wanted to get it over and done with. The suspense was trying.

"The sooner the onslaught comes the better!" declared Handforth firmly. "I want to see how our defence system works."

"I'm not a bit curious," said McClure gruffly. "Nipper organised everything, and I'm satisfied with the theory, whether the defensive scheme is ever put into practice or not. I say, Nipper!" he added.

Nipper looked round, and approached.

"What's the latest?" asked McClure.

"Everything's about the same," replied Nipper, frowning. "I'm hanged if I can make it out, though. I expected trouble long ago. But Umlosi declares the attack is certain. He says the savages are just working themselves up to the right pitch. They'll attack with terrific violence before long."

"Don't you believe it!" said Handforth sourly. "There'll be no trouble until after dark. These blacks wouldn't dare to have a whack at the camp in broad daylight."

Reggie Pitt and Napoleon Browne had come up.

"Let's hope you're right, Handy," said Pitt. "The longer the delay the better for us."

"Why? We're all prepared."

"Perhaps we are, but our preparations are a bit crude, at the best," put in Nipper. "We shall have all our work cut out to repel two hundred cannibals. And a delay might bring help."

"My idea exactly," nodded Pitt. "The Wanderer ought to have been in long ago. She might turn up any hour."

Reggie Pitt didn't know that the Wanderer was still wallowing helpless, with idle engines. Fate was certainly playing a queer trick. Pelton was defying Jonathan Prescott, but the St. Frank's fellows were the chief sufferers. If the third engineer had known of the happenings on Paradise Island he would have worked the Wanderer's engines at their highest pressure.

"All we can do is to wait, brothers," said Browne gently. "I will confess that it is a trying ordeal, but we must bear up. Patience—that is the watchword. If we steel ourselves and brace our muscles, we shall bear the burden more lightly. And ere long we may be in the centre of the soup. I have no doubt that that highly flavoured experience is waiting for us round the corner."

It was rather curious that Browne should make such a remark at that moment, for a figure came bursting through the trees and

ran up, panting. It was Bob Christine, one of three scouts who had been posted some distance from the camp.

"They're coming!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"What!"

"Swarms of 'em!" panted Christine. "Quick! Let's get inside—"

"They're coming!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "By George! What did I tell you?" he demanded, turning to Church and McClure. "Didn't I say they'd make their attack within the next few minutes?"

"I don't remember it!" gasped Church. "I thought you said there wouldn't be any trouble until after dark. You said they wouldn't dare to go for us in broad daylight."

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "Oh, well—"

"Don't stand there arguing!" shouted Christine. "They're coming, I tell you! We spotted 'em from a distance—crowds of the devils! They're all painted up, and they've got hundreds of spears—"

"Spears!"

"They must have made 'em out of the canes, or something," said Christine. "We couldn't see distinctly, but they looked like spears, anyhow. They're on the warpath, and we'd better be ready!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEFENCE SYSTEM AT WORK.



THE news spread like wildfire throughout the camp.

Everybody was awakened, and a rush was made for the house. Archie Glenthorne was plaintively bemoaning the fact that he couldn't finish his bathe. And Fatty Little was highly indignant because he had just got the mid-day meal ready for consumption.

"By pancakes!" he roared. "It's a pity these giddy blacks couldn't wait until after lunch!"

"You ass, they mean to collar us for their lunch!" said Handforth. "That's the idea. They've come along to grab us as their first course."

"Crude, Brother Handforth, but painfully truthful," said Browne sadly. "We may assume, however, that you are perfectly safe. I have been informed upon the best authority that cannibals always shy at tough meat. But, of course, they may deal with the problem by shoving you through a mincing machine."

"This is no time to be funny!" said Handforth gruffly.

The interior of the bamboo house was like a beehive. It fairly hummed with life

and activity. Everybody was safely within now, including Umlosi and Professor Tucker and Nilsen, the man who had first brought the alarm.

"Gosh, you young guys have got plenty of pep—but it's no good!" he said nervously. "You don't realise what this proposition is. We're all booked, as sure as the sun's shining!"

"If you can't do anything but croak you'd better keep quiet," said Nipper sharply. "The odds are overwhelming, but one white defender is worth a dozen black attackers. If we keep up our spirits we'll win!"

"Hurrah!"

"Wait until they make their rush!"

"We'll show 'em something!"

"Rather!" yelled Handforth. "Up, St. Frank's! Be ready for 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

The excitement was contagious. There was no sign of fear in any of the fellows. The most exposed points were held by Fenton and Morrow of the Sixth, Browne and Stevens of the Fifth, and Nipper and Handforth. Umlosi, of course, was difficult to manage. He hated the idea of keeping within the house. He wanted to rush out and meet the enemy face to face.

Drastic alterations had been made in the building.

Loopholes were provided in every wall, and the defenders stood at these waiting tensely for the enemy. But although the warning had come ten minutes earlier, there was still no sign of the blacks. But all the scouts had the same story to tell. The cannibals were coming.

There was nothing surprising in this affair.

Practically all those two hundred blacks were islanders of the worst type, men whom Jonathan Prescott had deliberately picked for their ignorance and savagery. He had wanted no semi-civilised Kanakas among his pearl-divers. All these men were from the interior. At their own work they were comparatively simple souls, hard workers, and as playful as children.

But they had been left alone on the island, they had turned against the guards—probably after provocation—and all authority over them was dead. Like children, they had now run loose. And when such savages as these run loose there is generally big trouble.

A cruel-looking Solomon Islander named Jat was the leader, and he gave no thought to the possible consequences. In most native uprisings the rebels are too ignorant to realise the punishment to come. They are creatures of the moment, and when their wild instincts gain the upper hand they literally run amok.

Jat was well aware that the only other occupants of the island consisted of a

mere handful of white boys. And his fevered, drink-soaked brain conceived the idea of attacking the camp, and committing deeds of bloodshed. His companions were just ready for such an orgy.

So the danger was acute, and by no means imaginary.

"Here they come!" shouted Handforth suddenly.

"My hat! He's right!"

"Look! Scores of 'em!"

The shouts were simultaneous, and they came from all sides of the bamboo house. And the excitement rose to fever-pitch. The cannibals were on the point of making their onslaught.

They came from every quarter, cunningly planning to take the house by storm. For the first few moments the blacks appeared in crouching attitudes, cautiously advancing. But then, when they found that nothing happened, they gained confidence.

And suddenly a wild yell arose, the first sound at close quarters the juniors had heard. It was taken up as though by magic. The air became filled with wild, demoniac cries. It was like the howling of a thousand wild things. It seemed impossible that a mere two hundred could fill the air with such ghastly sounds.

And then, in unison, the cannibals rushed.

They came swarming up from all sides, shouting, screaming, and leaping madly. It was a tense moment. The defenders were stunned and dazed by the sheer savagery of the attack. They had imagined these black fellows to be a dangerous crowd, but they were scarcely prepared for the fear-inspiring spectacle of this first maddened rush.

The last doubt had gone.

This was no mild affair, but a murderous onslaught by absolute cannibals. Once in the hands of these Solomon Islanders there wouldn't be a St. Frank's fellow alive by the end of ten minutes. The juniors were thunderstruck by the insane ferocity of the enemy.

The picture was impressed vividly upon their minds—the swarming blacks rushing towards the frail bamboo house from every quarter at the same moment. It wasn't an erratic, disordered attack, but a brainy advance. Jat knew the advantage he would gain by swift action. Once at close grips, the schoolboys could do nothing.

And so the cannibals swept on with wild screams of triumph.

And then came the shock—for the enemy. There was something gloriously dramatic about the next second. In a seething black mass, the savages closed in upon the bamboo house.

And then, like an earthquake, the very ground itself seemed to open out, and the enemy was swallowed up. It was the same on every side. The white sands opened, and

down crashed the blacks, falling one upon the other, shrieking, terrified, and effectively checked.

And a roar of triumph rose from the defenders.

"They're in—they're in!"

"The defences are successful!"

"Hurrah!"

"Now then—let 'em have it!"

CHAPTER IX.

BESET BY CANNIBALS.



"**H**URRAH!"
 "All together,
 you chaps! Fire!"
 Swish! Whizzz!
 Swish! Whizzz!

The air became filled with hurtling objects. In dozens they were sent out on all sides, and the confused enemy was caught in the full hail. Already frightened, they now became confused and terrorised.

As though by magic the situation had changed.

The blacks were checked—beaten back. And Nipper's was the brain which had conceived this masterly scheme.

The very simplicity of it was the chief cause of its success. But such a defence system had only been made possible by the long delay. Throughout the early hours of the morning the St. Frank's fellows had toiled.

Briefly, they had scooped out a huge trench, which completely encircled the bamboo house. With over twenty of them at work, they had made good progress, the sand being easy enough to handle. With every kind of improvised shovel they had laboured.

With scarcely a pause for rest, the juniors had completed the trench—an eight foot wide gap, well over six feet in depth. It was scarcely a wonder that the fellows had been lounging about exhausted!

The trench itself was a triumph, but the finishing touch was a stroke of genius. With rare cunning, Nipper had completely covered the trench with long canes and enormous leaves. And over the whole a light sprinkling of sand. Thus it had been impossible to detect the solid ground from the trap. The sand looked all the same.

The juniors, knowing exactly where the trench existed, had easily leapt the danger zone when retiring into the bamboo house just before the cannibals attacked.

And now the fight was at its height.

Rushing up in such numbers, and with such fury, the savages had been unable to check themselves. The foremost had crashed through the apparently solid ground, and those behind had piled on the top of them. Before they could pull back they were down.

The trench was literally swarming and writhing with a choking mass of humanity and canes and leaves and sand. Scarcely a dozen of the islanders checked themselves in time to avoid the trap.

And then, while confusion still reigned, something else rained!

A perfectly devastating volley of coconuts came swishing through the loopholes of the schoolboy fort. The interior of the house was stacked with piles and piles of green coconuts—these latter having been gathered in enormous numbers. They formed the only ammunition possible. And, used in the present fashion, they were very effective.

Swish! Whizzz! Swish!

The hail continued—destructive in its effect. Before the savages could extricate themselves from the trench, they were battered and pelted by the storm of coconuts. And at such close quarters the juniors found it impossible to miss their mark. And they hurled the nuts with great velocity.

"Keep it up!" shouted Fenton. "They're scared stiff! Keep it up, you chaps! Another round or two and they'll retreat!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll show 'em!" roared Handforth. "Come on, let's dodge out and meet 'em face to face! I'll knock the beggars into the middle of next week! Who's willing to follow me—"

"Stay where you are, fathead!" gasped Nipper. "There's no sense in asking for trouble! Good! They're beaten!"

The savages were certainly showing every sign of defeat. Instead of scrambling out of the trench on the inner side, and continuing the attack, they were fighting and struggling to get away. Jat's men had received such a surprise that all the fanatical fury was knocked out of them. Their one thought was to get out of this unsuspected trap.

Handforth was not to be denied.

In spite of Nipper's warning, he fairly hurled himself out of the house, carrying an armful of coconuts. Then he let fly. He was so excited that he took no notice of the spears which were hissing towards the fort.

A few of the savages had retired to a distance, and were recovering their shattered nerve. And they were hurling their spears. These latter were crudely made weapons, but effective enough in a direct hit,

Swish!

A coconut left Handforth's grip, and caught Jat a fearful crack in the centre of his forehead. The brute staggered just as he was taking aim, and his spear shot wide. Other spears, however, were coming dangerously close. In the meantime, the savages were continuing their retreat. They were now scrambling out of the trench quickly.

"Come in, Handy!" panted Church anxiously.

"Rats! I'm going after——"

Handforth's roar ended in a kind of choke. He swayed dizzily and fell. Church and McClure and several others were nearly sick with horror. They swept out, careless of the risk, and grabbed at Handforth. Edward Oswald was lying prone upon the sand.

"He's dead!" panted Church huskily.

"Get him inside—quick!" gasped Bob Christine.

Handforth was dragged in, and a sigh of relief went up. He was slowly recovering now, but there seemed to be no wound upon him. Church and McClure had expected to see half a dozen spears sticking out of him. But their reckless leader was only rubbing the back of his head.

"You—you careless fathead!" he snorted dazedly. "Who threw that coconut at me? I'm brained!"

"My goodness!" said Church faintly. "So that was it? You got in the line of fire, and received a coconut on the back of your head? And we thought you'd been speared! Thank goodness you're unhurt!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SECOND ATTACK!



HANDFORTH turned purple.

"Unhurt?" he howled. "I tell you I'm brained!"

"Much as I hate to contradict you, Brother Handforth, I must point out that such a fatality is impossible," said William Napoleon Browne, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow. "It is stated in all the textbooks that turnips have no brains whatever! Pulp, possibly, but——"

"You—you insulting Fifth Form ass!" snorted Handforth. "I believe you chucked that coconut at me! You did it deliberately, too!"

"Who knows?" sighed Browne. "It is just possible, Brother Ted, that I mistook you for one of the cannibals—quite an excusable error, I assure you. But let us not quarrel among ourselves. We are all men of peace!"

Handforth gave a bigger snort than ever and leapt to his feet. The bump on the back of his head wasn't so very serious, after all. Handforth had suspected that his skull was cracked, but Church pointed out that it would require a cannon-ball to cause such a disaster.

Edward Oswald, however, did not risk another dash out. The danger from his own friends was greater than the danger from the enemy! For it was impossible to

move outside the house without getting in the line of fire. Edward Oswald had quite overlooked this point earlier.

"Better go easy now," Nipper was shouting. "Only aim when you've got something definite to hit at. We want to reserve our ammunition."

"Yes," said Fenton. "No sense in wasting it."

Most of the excited juniors were hurling coconuts at random, and the supply was dwindling. The wholesale policy had been the best one at first, but now it was time to ease down. The cannibals had learned that their conquest was not to be an easy one.

It might be impossible to obtain further supplies of nuts. Nipper was under no misapprehension regarding the position. The blacks would be beaten off for the time being, but the peril was by no means over. If Jat and his men surrounded the house there could be no dashing out for further supplies of ammunition.

"We've won!" ejaculated Tommy Watson breathlessly. "Look! They're all bunking! We've beaten them off! Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

"Not so much cheering, my lads!" said Nipper swiftly. "You needn't think the fight's over——"

"But they're bunking!" said Jack Grey.

"They're only getting out of our line of fire," said Fenton quietly. "Nipper's right. The peril's only just beginning. In my opinion, the worst dangers are yet to come."

Browne shook his head sadly.

"I fear that Brother Fenton is somewhat pessimistic," he said. "And yet I am inclined to agree with him. We may be out of the ox-tail for the moment, but we are still clinging to the sides of the tureen. We are liable to slide back at any moment."

"Rats!" said Handforth. "The enemy's whacked!"

Too many of the juniors were of the same opinion, and the warnings of Nipper and Fenton and a few others fell on deaf ears. The majority of the fellows relaxed their vigilance and left the loopholes, clustering round Fatty Little for supplies of water.

"Well, the fight's over, and we might as well have lunch now," said Fatty briskly. "I've got heaps of sandwiches ready——"

"Lunch!" interrupted Browne tragically. "Lunch while Rome is burning! I beseech you, brothers, to return to your posts. Nothing but disaster can come of this unhappy indulgence."

"Go and eat coke!" said Watson tartly.

"If it's all the same to you, Brother Tommy, I would much prefer to eat sandwiches," replied Browne. "If others are willing to take the risk, why not I? The Brownes have never been known to fear."

There was certainly a lull. The last of the cannibals had crawled out of the trench,

and there was now no sign of the enemy. The entire force had retreated into the surrounding groves. And it was rather hard to realise that any attack had been made. Only the destroyed trap gave evidence of the recent onslaught.

"Prepare thyself for worse to come, young masters," rumbled Umlosi, as he turned from one of the loopholes. "This is but a trick. The dogs will return at any moment. And their second attack will be perilous indeed."

"You'd better take notice of what Umlosi says," shouted Nipper. "The blacks know of this trench now, and they'll leap it. We held them back once, but next time it will be a horse of a different colour."

"There aren't any horses here, ass!" said Handforth, staring. "These blacks haven't got anything except their fat-headed spears..."

"Look out!" yelled somebody. "They're coming!"

"My only hat!"

"Coming?" gasped Handforth. "But—but—"

He dashed to the nearest loophole, and stared out. Then he drew his breath in sharply. The savages had made a quick recovery, and were rushing to the attack again. And, as Nipper had said, this time they knew all about the trench, and were prepared for it. They came on with a terrific rush, their intention being clear.

Whizz! Swish!

The coconuts came shooting out from the loopholes, and many of the blacks were checked. But it was impossible to stem the tide completely. A large percentage of the attackers cleared the trench in one leap.

With wild, screaming cries of triumph, the savages were at close grips!

CHAPTER XI.

UMLOSI IN HIS ELEMENT.



THE moment of real peril had come.

Affairs were now critical—literally, the lives of the St. Frank's party hung in the balance. Once the tide turned in favour of the cannibals, no power on earth could prevent them sweeping through the schoolboy band like a forest fire.

They were just in the mood to massacre the entire defending force. Their earlier defeat had maddened them more than ever,

and one sight of blood would be sufficient to unleash the full horror of their savagery.

Was history about to repeat itself?

On how many occasions have a small band of desperate whites been torn to shreds by a horde of infuriated blacks? Such tragedies are seldom enough nowadays, fortunately, but they are still possible, nevertheless. When exceptional circumstances are present—as in this instance on Paradise Island—the untutored savage can be as murderous as his forefathers.

If such a massacre occurred, it would soon be over. Five horrifying minutes, and the St. Frank's fellows would be no more. At close grips, they could never hope to fight against these swarms.

And the blacks were practically at close grips already!

"Keep your heads!" shouted Nipper. "Hold together, you chaps!"

"I fear it will be a difficult task to keep our heads, Brother Horace," murmured Browne, as he hurled a coconut. "It has been hinted that our dusky friends make a hobby of collecting heads."

"Shut up, you ass!" panted Stevens.

"Buck up!" roared Handforth. "They're wavering!"

It was true. On three sides of the house the savages were hesitating before the devastating hail of coconuts. They came thickly. The juniors were using up their ammunition at full speed. They were careless. In a moment like this it was no time to think of preserving the supply.

Everything depended upon the next minute or two.

"They're breaking through on this side!" panted Boots desperately. "We can't hold 'em back! . . . Look out!"

He uttered the last two words in a yell, for two horrible faces appeared at the nearest loophole, and a wicked spear came thrusting through. It caught Buster Boots in the arm, and he spun round, his face screwed up with agony.

"You're hit!" said Christine, horrified.

"It's all right—carry on!" breathed Boots. "It's nothing!"

He staggered away, blood streaming down his arm. And on this side of the house affairs were desperate indeed. Elsewhere, the defenders were holding their ground, and beating the savages back.

But here the biggest onslaught was directed. It was possibly a chance move, for Jat was no master of strategy. He and his men were attacking wildly, their one thought being to smash through this frail fortress. Once that was accomplished, the rest would be easy.

Fully half of the enemy force was concentrating on the one side, while the other half was distributed over three sides. In this way, it seemed terribly possible that the blacks would smash through. They were already hurling themselves against the fragile

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wall, and it was straining and buckling under the pressure.

"Wau! Let me go forth!" thundered Umlosi.

Hurling coconuts was not in his line. He liked nothing better than getting at grips. His own trusty spear was on board the Wanderer, much to Umlosi's sadness. He was lost without it. He had provided himself with a substitute, and it was a deadly weapon; but it wasn't the same as his own.

Utterly careless of his own safety, the African chieftain leapt through the nearest opening, and was in the midst of the enemy. Now, in all truth, he was in his element! A fight! A battle! A hand-to-hand encounter with overwhelming odds! It was the right place for a warrior!

"Die, thou son of foulness!" bellowed Umlosi.

His spear flashed forward, and the nearest Solomon Islander fell back, run clean through. A dozen others hurled themselves at this unexpected giant. They received the shock of their lives.

Umlosi abandoned his spear, and used his bare hands.

The nearest man was seized as though in the grip of a gorilla. Screaming with terror, the savage was swung completely off his feet, and whirled round Umlosi's head like a limp piece of rag.

Swoosh!

Umlosi released his grip, and the man went hurtling through the air, to collide with half a dozen of his companions. The sound was ghastly. The wretch thudded to the ground, half his bones broken, and the others were all injured. Umlosi didn't waste a second, but pressed his advantage.

Leaping forward, he grasped another savage, and repeated the manoeuvre. Then, with his bare hands, he lashed out, stunning the enemy with single blows. His strength and ferocity were appalling. He was like a raging tornado careering through a peaceful countryside. He literally mowed down the enemy before him.

"My only hat!" breathed Bob Christine.

"Look at old Umlosi!"

"He'll get killed!"

"He can't last—it's impossible!"

At that very moment a spear buried itself in Umlosi's shoulder. He tore it out with a contemptuous laugh, and drove it deeply into the savage who had thrust it. The movement was lightning-like.

As though he hadn't been touched, Umlosi continued the fight. In all probability he felt no pain—he scarcely knew that he was wounded. The intensity of the battle was so great that he was carried away by it.

"Away, thou crawling reptiles!" he thundered. "Think ye we fear? Wau! Men do not fear scum of thy type! Take that, thou snake! And take that, thou insect!"

Two men fell in the same second, and Umlosi, yelling and shouting far worse than



His spear flashed forward, and the nearest Solomon Islander fell back, run clean through.

any of the enemy, continued his battle. He turned the tide. The savages fell back before him, terrified by this black giant who refused to die.

CHAPTER XII.

VICTORY FOR THE DEFENDERS.



"THEY'RE falling back!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go on—give 'em another volley!"

Mad with excitement, the defenders pressed their advantage. All the boys were dripping with perspiration, and gasping for breath. During those tense five minutes they had worked like madmen.

And Umlosi's wonderful stand turned the tide.

The cannibals had been furious at first, but Umlosi's strength and ferocity began to have another effect. The islanders regarded him as some bewitched being, whom it was impossible to kill. And once a superstitious fear of that kind beset them, they wavered.

And, wavering, they failed. The fight was at such a critical stage that a moment of hesitation was enough. The blacks fell back, and Umlosi followed them up. He sent two more men hurtling down into the trench. And then a cry went up—a wild cry, which was taken up by all the others.

What it was, the juniors didn't know. But the effect was magical. With one accord, the savages turned on their heels and fled. Their superstitious dread had taken possession of them.

"Hurnah!"

"They're bunking!"

"Come on, St. Frank's!"

In swarms the juniors piled out of the house. And then, with their actions unimpeded, they hurled their ammunition. In less than twenty seconds the last of the enemy had scrambled out of the trench, and had fled into the grove.

The battle was over.

And the field lay strewn with the killed and injured. Umlosi alone had accounted for eight of the brutes. Others were lying in the trench, groaning. Altogether the enemy casualties numbered between thirty and forty.

It was a victory indeed! But the defenders had not escaped scot-free. Five of the fellows were suffering from minor wounds, Buster Boots' being the most severe. His arm was badly torn, and had been bleeding freely.

Umlosi, too, was bearing many marks.

His shoulder was deeply gashed, and in addition to this injury he had no less than three smaller spear wounds. But he made light of his hurts. Indeed, he seemed very little affected, in spite of his tremendous effort.

"Waste not thy time on me, young masters," he growled, as the juniors gathered round. "Attend thine own wounds, and leave me be. What are these scratches but trifles? A fighting man cares nought for such!"

"All the same, Umlosi, you'll have to be washed and bandaged with the rest," said Nipper firmly. "By Jove! Your shoulder's in an awful mess! You're the worst casualty of the lot."

Now that the first tense excitement was over, a reaction had set in. The enemy had fled, and the defenders felt suddenly weak and exhausted. They dropped as they stood, panting for breath, and gasping for water. Fatty Little, whose very bulk had prevented him being in the forefront of the fighting, now rallied round with restoratives. And Nipper and Pitt and a few others got busy with bandages and antiseptic.

Professor Tucker was a rather comic sight. In the course of the fight he had nearly stripped himself to the waist, and he had taken as active a part as any of the juniors. He was now striding up and down outside, warlike and angry, with an armful of coconuts, ready to hurl them at the first figure he caught sight of.

"Better come inside, professor," called out Pitt. "You've got a nasty-looking tear on your left shoulder. We're administering first aid to the wounded."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted the professor. "I'm not wounded! Ridiculous! Don't bother me, young man! I am determined to beat these infernal rogues back!"

At last he was persuaded to come in, and he was attended to with the rest. Handforth had come through unscratched, but his minor had a bad cut on his face, and one of his ears was torn.

"Don't make a fuss, Ted!" he said tartly. "I suppose I can get a wound without you singing a song about it?"

"You're a careless young ass—that's what you are!" said Handforth, frowning. "I'll bet you practically asked for that jab! It's a jolly good thing you're not dead!"

"I'm a bit pleased about it myself," admitted Willy. "There's going to be a funeral or two soon, and it would be rather hard lines if I couldn't smell the flowers!"

"Don't joke about such subjects!" said Handforth sternly. "You don't seem to realise the narrow escape we've had. It was touch and go, my son! But now we're all safe—thanks mainly to Umlosi!"

"Good old coalbox!" said Willy, nodding. "But don't kid yourself, Ted. We're just about as safe as the man who picked up a bomb timed for midnight, and heard twelve o'clock striking!"

"What do you mean, you young duffer?"

"I mean that those savages are only just getting warmed up to their work," replied Willy. "When they attack again——"

"Attack again!" echoed Handforth. "Why, they're all dead!"

"Less than a dozen out of two hundred!" said Willy grimly. "Why, you chump, there aren't more than thirty enemy casualties altogether! That means there's still a force of a hundred-and-seventy against us."

Handforth scratched his head.

"H'm! I hadn't thought of that," he confessed. "Still, they're scared, and won't risk another attack."

"Not in daylight, I'll bet," agreed Willy. "But as soon as it's dark they'll probably have another shot. Our only hope is for the Wanderer to come along. Why the dickens hasn't she appeared yet?"

This was a question which most of the fellows were asking. Nipper shared Willy's opinion that the cannibals would make another attack after dark. And Fenton and Umlosi agreed with this view.

But for the moment the tension was over.

Within an hour the wounded were comfortable, and the others were recovering from the exhausting effects. A hearty meal was partaken of, and efforts were made to reorganise the defences. In the meantime, most of the enemy wounded had managed to crawl away. Umlosi quietly told the fellows that he would attend to the dead.

There was a lull, and the schoolboy party had gained the honours of the day. But why didn't help come? And how long would it be before they were compelled to give way before their relentless enemy?

CHAPTER XIII.

A GRIM DECISION.



JONATHAN PRESCOTT strode up and down the saloon, cursing savagely. "We've got to do something, Hawke," he snapped. "This infernal stoppage is ruining everything!"

"I guess we've bitten off more than we can chew, mister," said Captain Hawke gruffly. "These British guys have got us beat. We can't do a thing without 'em, and they know it. They're as safe from our guns as though they were wearing six-inch armour-plate! If we croak 'em we write our own death-warrants. This yacht wouldn't last an hour in a cyclone without skilled——"

"Don't I know it?" interrupted Prescott harshly. "They've defied us so far, but there must be some way of bringing the fools to their senses."

The skipper chuckled in his throat.

"Strikes me they ain't fools—and they're in their senses, sure enough," he replied. "If you an' me was in the same position, Mr. Prescott, we'd think ourselves almighty smart."

"Yes, I was wrong," admitted Prescott. "They're not fools, Hawke—darn them, I've got to confess they're blamed peppy! They've got us beat all right. But we've got to get out another scheme. Darnation! It's past midday already, and we've been lying idle for the best part of twenty-four hours."

Jonathan Prescott's exasperation was hardly to be wondered at. The afternoon was getting on, and all the previous night, and throughout the hours of the morning, the Wanderer had remained idle.

The weather remained calm and settled, with the sky cloudless. The glass was high, too, and although a stiffish breeze was blowing, there was every prospect of continued fair weather.

The Wanderer had drifted considerably during the night and the morning. She was now fifty or sixty miles away from Paradise Island, a helpless thing in the hands of her captors. Neither Hawke nor his men dared to interfere with the engine-room. And the small band of defiant engineers, led by young Pelton, maintained their attitude of determination.

Three times Prescott had gone down to Pelton's quarters. He had threatened, he had bribed, and he had pleaded. All to no purpose. Pelton simply refused to listen.

"There's only one way we'll start up the engines, Mr. Prescott," he said firmly. "And that way is to return to that atoll, pick up Lord Dorrimore and his party, and call this game off."

"You blamed dog!" roared Prescott. "If I did that I should admit myself beaten."

"Aren't you beaten?" asked the third engineer calmly.

"No, by thunder, I'm not!" said Jonathan Prescott. "I've made up my mind what I'll do—and I'll do it! I'll find a way to make you fellers get busy! You can't defy me for ever!"

After that conversation Prescott had stormed out of the third officer's quarters, and had cooled down on deck. But it was one thing to talk, and another to act. It really seemed as though the engineers had the trump card in their possession. Without them the Wanderer could not move. And they refused their skill unless Prescott capitulated.

The day dragged on, and another night came.

Prescott was worried. Inactivity always irritated him. He was typically American in his love of hustle. Like most Americans, too, his hustling methods accomplished no more than the average Britisher's calm, well-ordered actions. But Prescott could not be happy unless he was "up and doing."

He was anxious about the island. The fate of Lord Dorrimore and the others on the smaller atoll did not concern him. He was thinking about his pearl divers and the party of schoolboys.

"Heaven knows what might be happening!" he said that night, as he leaned against the rail with Sweeney, Captain Hawke's first mate. "We only left Nilsen and two others with that bunch of Kanakas. Maybe there's trouble afoot. I don't trust those blacks any."

"I guess there's no need to worry, boss," said Sweeney. "They're a tame crowd when they're looked after——"

"When they're looked after!" nodded Mr. Prescott. "We only meant to be away a few hours—and it's nearly two days already. Looks like being a week, by the way things are going. And I don't trust Nilsen too much. Those Kanakas may get out of hand and if that happened there'd be a whole heap o' blood flowin' around."

Prescott was fully alive to the possibilities, but Sweeney was in no way perturbed. He thought there was no chance of trouble.

"But you're right, boss—we can't go on like this," he added. "Why not try a little persuasion?"

"Gosh, darn you, haven't I tried everything?" snapped Prescott. "The beggars won't budge. Pointing a gun at 'em is about as much use as levelling a peashooter! They know darn well we can't croak 'em. Our own safety depends upon their being alive!"

Sweeney looked cunning.

"Alive, sure!" he agreed. "But a little pain might make them change their minds. Get me? No need to go too far, boss—just put the screw on until they give their promise. These Britishers are men of honour—I'll say that for them. Once you've got their word, they'll stick to it."

Prescott looked at the other squarely.

"What's the idea, Sweeney?" he demanded. "No need for fancy words with me."

You are suggesting torture, aren't you?"

"You said it!" agreed Sweeney coolly.

"And why not? Not too much of it, boss—just enough to bring 'em round. Might be a good idea to keelhaul the swabs, but they'd probably get chewed by sharks. And I guess we can't take such risks——"

"Wait!" interrupted Prescott tensely. "You've got the right idea, Sweeney! Torture! Put the screw on a bit, eh? No, we won't keelhaul them—that's too drastic. But we'll have the whole bunch up on deck, and we'll fill 'em up with salt water! Then we'll tie them to the rail, and see what tomorrow's sun will do!"

Sweeney gazed at Jonathan Prescott with sheer admiration.

"Boss," he said impressively, "it's a cinch!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRISONER.



NIPPER looked rather thoughtful.

"It's an old dodge, Nick, but there's no reason why it shouldn't be worked again," he said slowly.

"I don't know that it's been used in this particular way, either. But how are we going to try it?"

Nicodemus Trotwood shrugged his shoulders.

"I leave that to you," he said frankly. "I've just made the suggestion, and I'm ready to do my bit. But you're the fellow with the brains—you're the one to plan the affair."

"That's the worst of having a reputation for getting up stunts," said Nipper ruefully. "People expect all sorts of things. I shall have to think it over, Nick, and see if I can fake out something."

It was getting towards evening now, and the St. Frank's camp had received no further disturbance from the enemy. They had had three or four hours of peace, and the cannibals were conspicuous by their absence. They had withdrawn completely; but it was highly probable that unseen eyes were constantly watching the camp from the surrounding groves.

There were scarcely any signs of the recent conflict.

All the wounded had gone, and Umlosi had performed the last offices to the dead. The big surrounding trench had been rebuilt where it caved in, for although the blacks knew of its existence, it still formed an effective check—more particularly in view of a new addition.

It had been Reggie Pitt's idea—and a good one.

Long stakes with sharp points were driven deeply into the sand, with their spikes slanting outwards over the trench itself. Any sudden rush in the coming darkness would be impossible. For if the savages leapt the

trench as they had done before, they would impale themselves upon the deadly spikes. And any slow and deliberate attack would be detected well in advance.

And most of the juniors were now sleeping, with half a dozen on the watch. Nipper insisted upon his men getting as much rest as possible. Everybody would have to be on the alert during the night, and the hours of darkness would probably prove an anxious time.

And Nicodemus Trotwood had had an idea, too. Nipper was rather struck by it, and so were Fenton and Browne. Unfortunately, it involved getting hold of Jat, the cannibal leader.

"He's about the only man who understands English," said Nipper thoughtfully. "We might be able to work the dodge on him if we can only get him here. But there's not much chance of that."

"I'm afraid Trotwood's scheme is a bit too impossible," said Fenton. "It's good enough, provided we can capture the ring-leader; but there's not one chance in a thousand of that."

William Napoleon Browne sighed.

"Were it not for the fact that the Browne household would be desolated by the news of my early demise, I would volunteer to venture forth upon this mission," he said kindly. "But think of the tragedy if the Browne name died!"

"Perchance I can help in this enterprise, young masters," said Umlosi, who happened to be standing near by. "Thou hast not sought me—so will I offer myself."

"I didn't know you were there, Umlosi," said Nipper, turning. "You were so quiet that I thought you were asleep somewhere."

"I sleep not amid these trials and troubles, O Manzie," replied Umlosi gravely. "I think of many things. I think of N'Kose, my father. I think of Umtagati, he of the magic wizardry. I think of the perils of the night that is coming. The red mists are gathering thickly, young master."

"That's cheering, anyway," said Reggie Pitt.

"'Tis well to be prepared," rumbled Umlosi. "But this mission thou wert speaking of, Manzie. It is necessary that Jat, the leader of these reptiles, should be brought before thee. 'Tis enough! I go!"

"Wait a minute!" gasped Nipper. "Where are you going?"

"I go to bring Jat back to thy presence."

"But—but, you old chump, you can't do that!" ejaculated Nipper, in alarm. "You can't go out alone, and capture that brute single-handed!"

Umlosi's eyes flashed.

"Wau!" he said indignantly. "Am I a cur, or am I a warrior? Sayest thou I cannot bring that son of filth back with me? 'Tis a slight on my prowess, O Manzie. I go! Prepare thy plans for my return."

Without another word, the Kutana chief strode out, and contemptuously leapt the slanting spikes. From the inner side it was

a comparatively simple jump. He vanished into the coconut grove.

"Just like the old ass!" growled Nipper. "He doesn't care what danger he runs into. I believe he welcomed the scheme with open arms. He was just longing for more action."

Fenton shook his head.

"We shall probably never see him again," he said anxiously.

"Don't you believe it," said Nipper. "Umlosi is a living marvel. There's very little chance of danger. He can move through the forest like a shadow, and he's got as many lives as a cat. He'll be back before long, mark my words. And if he doesn't bring Jat with him I shall be surprised."

The others were dubious, but not for long.

For in less than twenty minutes a shout came from Handforth, who was at one of the openings.

"By George!" yelled Handforth. "Here comes Umlosi with one of those giddy cannibals! It's old Jat! He's captured the enemy leader!"

A minute later Umlosi was helped across the deadly spikes by the willing juniors. And Jat was with him. He was instantly surrounded by a dozen St. Frank's fellows, and excitement began to run high.

CHAPTER XV.

SPOOFING THE CANNIBAL CHIEF.



JAT was by no means comfortable. Umlosi had brought him by force, and the juniors never knew how the capture had been made. Umlosi was generally quiet on such points. He had made the capture, and that was enough.

Jat was apparently expecting to be hanged on the spot. There was not much of the brutal savage about him now. He was practically naked, and the crude daubings on his skin seemed grotesque at close quarters. And there was a queer kind of goat-like smell about the brute. His features were scarred and ugly, and he possessed practically no forehead.

"Heap sorry," he muttered fearfully. "Men, they go mad. I heap try to stop them. All same no good."

"You are lying!" said Nipper grimly. "You led the attack yourself?"

"No lie," protested Jat. "I good friend. Like white man, me."

"You can't get out of it like that, you rotter!" roared Handforth.

"Leave him to me, old man," said Nipper quietly. "He won't understand that sort of talk. Look here, Jat," he went on, facing

the savage. "You make heap big mistake. We all great witch doctors."

"Jat sorry," began the man. "Jat try to stop others——"

"You like see magic worked?" went on Nipper impressively. "I raise hand and the trees talk. I nod and the sand calls you. You drop dead if I wish!"

Jat was obviously alarmed, and he shook his head.

Nipper turned aside, and slowly raised his hand to one of the nearby trees. A tense silence fell on the scene. Jat looked at the tree with his eyes goggling. Then he shivered from head to foot.

"Jat, you big murderer!" said the tree loudly.

The savage chief fell back, his jaw chattering.

"Jat sorry!" he babbled. "All same peace now. No more fight."

"Murderer—murderer!" repeated the tree. It was startling. The voice was grim and clear, and without the slightest doubt it came from the tree-trunk. Jat stared with his eyes goggling worse than ever. He was utterly terrified.

"Me go!" he gasped. "Me afraid——"

"Then be more afraid!" said Nipper fiercely. "We are wizards. Do you think we can only make the trees talk? Our powers are enormous. See? Bring a lizard, somebody!"

Tommy Watson came forward with one of the familiar lizards which were to be found on the island. He placed the creature in the sand close by, and by chance it turned its head and looked up.

"Take Jat and hang him!" said the lizard in a thin, squeaky voice.

"You hear?" asked Nipper.

Jat was nearly on the point of collapse. His big frame and his savage strength were of no avail to him now.

"Jat sorry!" he babbled. "I not know——"

"Obey your white masters or die!" exclaimed the lizard contemptuously.

It scuttled off and vanished. Even the surrounding juniors felt startled. There was something decidedly uncanny about the whole business. Although they knew the truth, it was almost too much to believe.

Nicodemus Trotwood was thoroughly enjoying himself. The Fourth had known of his ventriloquial powers for long past, but nobody had believed him capable of such a masterpiece as this. He had timed the lizard to speak with almost a touch of genius. Nothing could have been more natural.

And while Nick seemed to be idly looking on he was causing these "miracles." Jat had never heard of ventriloquism in all his savage life, and the present phenomena were beyond him.

Jat was receiving the worst shock of all. He had led his men to believe that the schoolboy camp could be conquered with ease. The battle had been a big surprise, for the boys had held the fort. After that, Jat had been mysteriously captured and carried away. And now, to cap everything, he was finding that these white boys were capable of wizardry!

"Pay heed!" said Nipper. "We are showing you our powers. We will show you more. Listen! Hear the ground itself accuse you!"

Trotwood, having received his tip, proceeded to make the sands give voice. They did so in a deep rumble, uttering grim, accusing words. The effect was weird in the extreme.

"And now you shall listen to the voices from the air," declared Nipper. "Stand still, Jat! Stand where you are! One move and our powers may strike you dead! Stand perfectly still!"

Jat was hardly capable of the task. The juniors backed away and left the cannibal chief entirely on his own. Not one of his captors stood within ten yards. He formed the centre of the wide circle. His face had gone a peculiar colour, and his expression was drawn and fear-stricken. Slowly Nipper raised one of his hands.

And this time Jat was terrified indeed. For voices came at him from the air itself, from within a foot or two of his ears. At first they were mere whispers, hissing accusations. Then they grew louder and louder, until the air was filled with them.

"Murder!"

"Prepare yourself for death!"

"Fool! Think you can fight against witch doctors?"

The voices were all different, and they kept up a continuous string. Nicodemus Trotwood was excelling himself. As an exhibition of ventriloquism it was a masterpiece.

And Jat's self-control completely left him. Already on the verge of collapse, these unseen voices filled him with an insane terror. He suddenly gave a wild scream and ran.

He fled wildly, without knowing which direction he took. The boys involuntarily gave way before him.

"It's all right—let him go!" shouted Nipper. "We don't want him here, and the sooner he tells his bloodthirsty pals the better! Jolly good, Nick! You're a marvel!"

Jat had already vanished. Charging through the groves, he rejoined his companions in an exhausted condition, his nerves shattered to shreds. The plan had succeeded beyond all the juniors' hopes. Jat, the cannibal leader, was so fear-stricken that he would certainly lead no more!

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNEXPECTED RESULT.



NICODEMUS TROTWOOD found himself surrounded.

"Wonderful, old man!"

"Jolly good!"

"You've filled the rotter with blue funk!"

Nick accepted the compliments modestly. He didn't consider he had done anything particularly wonderful.

"No need to make a song about it," he growled. "If Jat's gone back to the others and spread the yarn that we're wizards, the game was worth the candle. Let's hope they're afraid to attack any more."

"By George!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "I'm blessed if I could have done it better myself! As a ventriloquist, I can appreciate the finer points——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Ted!" said Willy sadly. "Thinks he's a ventriloquist. Why, he couldn't throw his voice a couple of yards—unless he threw himself with it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wait until I've had some more practice!" roared Handforth, turning red. "I'll admit I'm a bit off colour at present, and I'm not a bit jealous because Trotwood had the job of scaring that black beast. But next time I'll show you what I can do!"

Everybody was highly excited. The complete terrorisation of Jat would probably make all the difference in the position. The brute would take the story back to his companions, and they would be impressed by it. It was quite possible that no further attack would be made.

But Nipper wanted to be sure.

"Look here, Umlosi, I suggest we do a bit of scouting," he said briskly. "You know where the blacks are camped, don't you? We'll sneak there and see what's happening."

"Wise counsel, O Manzie!" said Umlosi, nodding. "Let us go without delay. It will be well to know the facts."

And almost before any of the others realised it, Nipper and Umlosi were off. They vanished amid the trees, and were soon proceeding cautiously through the dim green twilight which enveloped the undergrowth. Nipper was feeling perfectly safe in the company of such an able forest tracker as Umlosi.

The journey was a brief one.

Almost before another hundred yards had been covered, Umlosi parted the bushes and motioned with his head. Beyond lay a hollow, where a tiny stream trickled down a rocky gorge in a miniature cascade. The evening light filled the clearing.

There was little fear of discovery, for the blacks were creating a great din. The

majority of them were leaping and dancing about in a circle, shouting and jabbering in a confusion of voices. And Jat was in the centre, doing his utmost to make himself heard.

"By Jove, he's telling 'em!" muttered Nipper tensely.

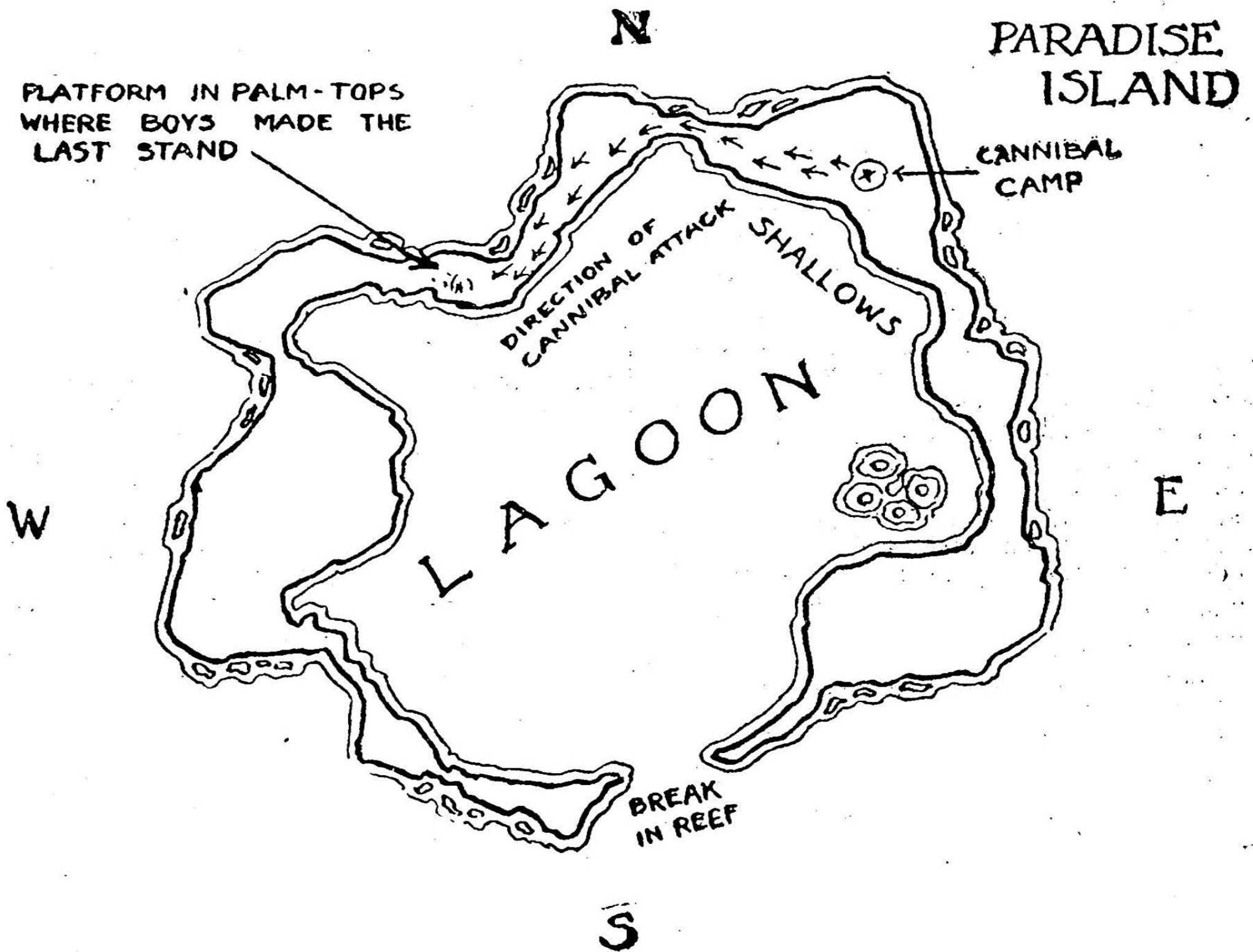
But this was hardly the truth. Jat was experiencing much difficulty. He found it impossible to lift his voice above the uproar. And both Nipper and Umlosi realised that his appearance was the cause of the din.

For Jat was so obviously terrified that his bloodthirsty companions were filled with a sudden anger against him. He had mysteriously left them, and had come back

It was like a pack of horrible wild beasts. He had never seen anything so revolting in his life. With one accord, over a hundred frenzied savages struggled in their clearing. And Jat— Once down, the unfortunate wretch was trampled upon and torn limb from limb by his former friends. They were now beyond any power of leadership, and their thirst for blood was unsatisfied.

"'Tis bad, my young master!" muttered Umlosi tensely. "Wau! Did I not warn thee that the red mists were gathering fast? Come! Let us hasten back to warn the camp."

Nipper gave a gulp and found his voice. "You—you think—" he began.



a ghost of his former swaggering self. As a leader, he was obviously of no further use.

"Wait until he makes himself heard!" whispered Nipper. "These beasts will soon alter their tone when they know what's happened. They're so excited that they won't give him a hearing— Great Scott!" he added huskily.

For something had happened which neither he nor Umlosi had looked for. One of the more excited islanders had struck at Jat, and he went down. And instantly, with a perfect howl of frenzy, the rest were upon him.

Nipper gazed, utterly sick.

"These accursed jackals will soon be upon us," interrupted Umlosi. "We must prepare for the worst attack of all! Night falls fast, Manzie, and with the darkness these carrion will be like devils let loose!"

They retraced their steps and hurried back to camp—Nipper heavy-hearted and anxious. Just when the fellows were thinking that the worst peril was over it was growing more acute. It was a grim example of the axiom that nothing should be taken for granted. The ventriloquist trick had succeeded with Jat beyond all hope, but the big army of cannibals had given Jat no opportunity to tell that impressive story!

Jat was dead, murdered by his own men,

and they were now leaderless. A murderous, infuriated mob, there was no telling what horrors they would be ready to commit. And with night rapidly approaching the situation was fraught with the utmost peril.

Nipper and Umlosi arrived without incident, and found the camp in a comparatively merry mood. Food and drink were on the go, and all the fellows were congratulating themselves upon the happy change in their position.

"Nothing to worry about now," Handforth was saying. "Those giddy blacks won't dare to attack us during the night, and the Wanderer's bound to turn up between now and the morning."

"I shall be jolly thankful to see her again," declared Reggie Pitt. "I'm not in love with Prescott or Captain Hawke, but they're a pair of angels compared to these black beggars!"

"I think there is no doubt, Brother Reggie, that the crisis is over," observed Browne, as he bit into a sandwich. "But stay! What have we here? Surely Brother Nipper is looking singularly downcast, considering the recent entertainment?"

Nipper went straight to the point.

"Everybody to his post," he said grimly. "Jat's been murdered, and the blacks are more out of hand than ever. There's another assault coming, and it looks like being a kind of grand finale!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST HOPE.



EVERYBODY stared, and Edward Oswald Handforth snorted.

"You're kidding!" he said gruffly. "This isn't the time to make jokes——"

"It's no joke!" interrupted

Nipper, his voice harsh with anxiety. "I tell you that Jat's been killed, and our danger's a thousand times worse than it was before. Things are at their very worst!"

His tone was such that the fellows were bound to heed. All the lighthearted expressions vanished, and the camp was filled with consternation. Briefly, Nipper explained what he and Umlosi had seen.

"That ventriloquist trick failed," concluded Nipper quietly. "We did our part properly, but Jat never had an opportunity of explaining his terror. And those demons are getting ready for another smack at us!"

"All right—let 'em smack!" said Willy Handforth. "Who cares? We've beaten 'em twice, and we'll beat 'em the third time."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the talk, Willy!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

Everybody gave a cheer, but it was rather subdued. A few of the more thoughtful fellows realised that the present position was acute. With night close at hand the blacks would have the advantage. And the schoolboy camp was gradually being worn down. Every fresh onslaught would find their resistance weaker. For while the blacks had the entire resources of the island at their disposal, the juniors were besieged. Their ammunition, too, was perilously low. A break-through would mean the end. Nobody dared to dwell upon that possibility. It wouldn't bear thinking of.

And while fresh preparations were being made the tropical twilight came and went. Darkness shut down like the drawing of a curtain, and the stars sprang out gleamingly in the velvety heavens. There was a moon, too, but so far it was hidden by the dense belt of groves.

Within the bamboo house all was silent.

The juniors had no lights, either; they would offer no marks for spears. To all intents and purposes the primitive dwelling was empty. The silence was only broken by the gentle lap of the lagoon on the coral sand, and the ceaseless murmur of the surf from the outer shore.

Beneath the trees the night was inky. All sounds of the cannibals had ceased. It was as though they had been mysteriously spirited off the island. Yet in reality figures were moving near the bamboo house.

As they approached, as noiseless as shadows, they spread out in a kind of fan. And the minutes ticked on with fearful slowness. An hour passed on—two hours. And still no attack came.

But during those two hours the blacks had surrounded the schoolboy camp like a ring of death. And now, inch by inch, the unseen figures were creeping nearer. The Solomon Islanders were utilising all their native cunning in this third attempt. They meant to make no mistake this time.

At last the trench was reached, and even the deadly spikes were located and negotiated in safety. By this time the moon was much higher and was shedding her glorious radiance upon the lagoon, converting that wide stretch of water into a vast pool of luminous silver. Beyond the reef the surf was breaking upon the strand in magical cascades of diamond spray. It was a night to be remembered; the tropics in their full glory.

And amid this earthly paradise death lurked in all its stark realism.

The St. Frank's camp was encircled by a horde of deadly savages with murder in their heathen hearts. But if anybody could have looked upon the island at that

moment such a possibility would have seemed wildly fantastic.

Indeed, the great wooded atoll was apparently devoid of all human life. There was no sign of any living thing, and peace feigned supreme.

And then, like a thunderclap it was shattered.

With one dreadful voice the blacks released their pent-up fury. For hours they had held it in, with that self-command peculiar to the savage. And now, at the very walls of the schoolboy camp, they released the flood of demoniacal rage.

It was like nothing on earth—nothing human.

And intermingled with the awful yells came the sounds of destruction. With their bare hands the savages were wrenching at the bamboo walls, and tearing them down. And they were doing this from every side at the same moment. There could be no escape from this devilishly organised onslaught.

The peaceful night had suddenly become hideous. And now indeed there could be no hope of salvation for the besieged schoolboys. They were not even attempting to repel these terrible invaders.

What chance was there, in any case?

Until the moment of actual attack the blacks had remained invisible. The sharpest eyes could not have seen them, the sharpest ears could not have detected any sound. Like horrid creatures from the nether world, they had surrounded the bamboo house.

And within thirty seconds after that first satanic yell they were through; the walls were shattered and gaping in a hundred places. And in a wild frenzy of suddenly released triumph, the cannibals were within the schoolboy stronghold.

They rushed in from every wall at the same moment. And they met one another. Of their victims there remained no single trace!

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT BAY.



THE shrieks of disappointed rage which went up were terrifying in themselves.

As though by magic, the blacks knew that they had once again been eluded. But how? By what miracle had the St. Frank's fellows escaped the trap?

The islanders were more like wild beasts than ever. They ran here and there, they tore round the wrecked house, shouting and screaming. But their quest was in-

vain. In some mysterious, uncanny way their victims had escaped.

And yet not so mysteriously, after all.

At that very moment Nipper and his stalwarts were listening to every sound. They were at bay, having escaped death by a final stratagem. But was it only a brief respite? There could be no further resistance now. It was the last stand—the final hope.

To be brief, the tree-tops were filled.

Clinging up there, amid the palm fronds, were all the St. Frank's fellows. Professor Tucker had proved astonishingly active under the spur of self-preservation, and he was as highly esconced as any of the juniors. Even Umlosi had been persuaded to climb up, although he had dearly longed to remain below, so that he would be in the thick of the fight.

The retreat had been carried out with masterly skill.

Once darkness had fallen, Nipper knew very well that any escape into the surrounding groves would be tantamount to suicide. These St. Frank's fellows, courageous though they were, were practically unskilled in the art of forest work. The blacks would have detected any retreat within ten seconds.

There had remained only one course.

One by one the fellows climbed up into the palm tops. And this had been comparatively safe, for a stiff breeze was blowing, and any sounds from overhead would be disguised by the continuous swishing and rustling of the trees.

Advance preparations had been made, of course.

From the very first Nipper had prepared this retreat as a last resort. During the course of the day a strong rope ladder had been constructed, and this had been carried up into the nearest tree and left hanging.

And this was not the only precautionary measure, either.

Scores of stout bamboos had been carried up by Nipper's instructions, and a number of crude platforms had been got ready. Secured by stout creepers, these platforms were sturdy enough, and they were a tremendous distance from the ground, at the very tops of the enormous trees.

Not only palms were employed, but other tropical giants, too.

And now at this fearful moment the platforms were filled with sprawling, crouching figures. Silence was absolutely essential, and even Handforth refrained from muttering the merest whisper. Unseen and unheard, the recent holders of the fort were now beyond reach.

Nipper had provided this final retreat as a kind of forlorn hope. He had known all along that it would probably only mean a brief delay. But while there was life there was hope. And when the night

attack on the bamboo house had been inevitable, the climb into the tree-tops had been the only possible course.

Everything depended upon the blacks now.

"Will they spot us?" muttered Nipper tensely. "That's the only question. Will they spot us, or will they rush off, searching for us in other parts of the island?"

Never had there been such tense moments.

For to be caught now would be truly frightful. But there was one possibility. The boys held the best position. Armed with long bamboos, they could strike down at any climbers, and hold the tree-top fort.

And when daylight came the Wanderer might return. Or the blacks might lose heart, and retreat of their own accord. If only the night could be safely passed!

The howling and screeching below went on with increasing fire and vigour. The crashing and smashing went on, too, as the primitive dwelling was literally torn down wall by wall. In their frenzy the savages were wreaking their fury on the house. It provided a clear index of what would happen if the juniors themselves were seized.

And then at this crucial moment one of those unavoidable mishaps occurred which no human being could guard against. At such a time of deadly peril it was the essence of misfortune.

An insect of some kind dropped from a high branch and landed upon the neck of one of the crouching juniors. He gave a gasp, and clutched at the thing. At the same second it stung or bit. As events afterwards proved, it was not dangerous, but the intense agony was excruciating for the moment.

Buster Boots, for he was the unfortunate junior, gave a sharp, involuntary cry. No power on earth could have stopped him uttering it, for the pain was deadly. Moreover, he thought the bite was fatal.

"You idiot!" hissed somebody. "Keep quiet—"

"I've been bitten!" gasped Boots. "Something stung me—"

"Ssshhh!"

But the warning was too late. In spite of the din below one or two sharp ears had detected that piercing cry from the tree-tops. And the secret was a secret no longer. In an instant a complete change came over the maddened crowd below. There was a kind of instantaneous hush, which sounded positively uncanny. And then a scream of triumph went up, which was worse than anything that had gone before.

It chilled the blood of the listeners.

It was a wild, insane uproar of frenzy. Gazing down through the leaves, the ground

could be faintly seen in the greenish radiance from the moonlight. And there, below, the blacks were dancing and capering and pointing upwards.

"Without being pessimistic, brothers, I rather fancy that this is the beginning of the last chapter," said William Napoleon Browne. "But who knows? We are still alive, and in a few moments we shall doubtless be kicking."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN ALL HOPE WAS DEAD!



NIPPER cleared his throat with difficulty. "This looks like the finish, you chaps," he said huskily.

"Well, nobody can say we didn't do our best. We tricked the beggars all along the line—but we can't make another retreat now."

"We can fight, anyhow!" said Handforth grimly. "They've got to swarm up these tree-trunks, and we've got plenty of improvised spears. Just wait until they get within reach!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

A perfect roar went up which rivalled the animal sounds from below. Now that all the need for secrecy was over, the juniors were only too glad to give voice to their own pent-up feelings.

"Come on—let's make as much noise as those brutes!" yelled somebody.

"Hurrah!"

And the howls of defiance which went up started Professor Tucker so much that he thought the enemy was upon him. And Umlosi was already beginning to swarm down from his perch, in readiness to meet the enemy half-way.

"Careful, old man!" panted Nipper. "You won't do any good—"

"Leave me to my own ways, young master," rumbled Umlosi. "It pleases me to fight these dogs at close grips. Methinks the end is near, and I am a warrior. If I die, I die fighting!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

Nipper had nothing else to say. His heart had nearly missed a beat at Umlosi's words. For when the great Kutana chief spoke of dying, then hope was dead, indeed! For in any ordinary battle Umlosi was the incarnation of defiance. Now he was deliberately going down to fight to the death.

Below, the savages were acting strangely. No attempts were being made to climb the trees. Indeed, the majority of the enemy forces had rushed off into the surrounding groves. Their shouts came weirdly through the darkness. Even Umlosi paused in his descent.

"I like not this strange turn!" he muttered. "Wau! 'Twould be better if the

wretches fought an open fight! There is some devilment afoot!"

"They've gone!" panted Handforth. "They're all bunking!"

"Don't you believe it, old man!" gasped Church. "It's only a ruse of some kind—they're trying to dish us!"

"Look!" shouted Trotwood. "They're gathering bushes!"

"Great Scott!" said Nipper, his voice breaking. "Don't you understand? They're going to pile the stuff round the house and under these trees, and then set fire to the lot!"

"Oh!"

"They're going to roast us alive!" went on Nipper hoarsely. "And we're trapped up here! We can't escape! It either means descending into the hands of these brutes, or waiting till the flames suffocate us!"

"We'll wait for the flames, old man," said Pitt quietly.

But very few other comments were made. The shock of the thing was staggering. Even Browne found his words failing him. The very horror of this situation numbed the entire St. Frank's force.

They had retreated into the tree-tops as a last chance of safety. And now, it seemed, they were doomed to the worst fate imaginable. If their peril had been great before, it was now a hundred times greater.

"It's no good—we're finished!" muttered Pitt brokenly. "Well, we tried our best. We made a pretty good stand——"

He broke off, and something seemed to clutch at his throat. Every inch of his skin quivered and trembled. His heart beat madly. And he rubbed his eyes in a dazed, bewildered fashion.

He had chanced to look out across the lagoon. From his perch he could see a gap in the foliage, and the silvery lagoon lay spread out before him—peaceful and tranquil. Far away, across the mile or two of shimmering water, was the break in the reef, with the gently heaving Pacific swell beyond.

And Reggie Pitt saw something which sent every ounce of his blood coursing wildly through his veins. It was a trick of the imagination, of course—a cruel phantasm of his vision. But it seemed to him that a ship was sailing majestically through the break in the reef into the lagoon!

Not the Wanderer—but a schooner, with her white sails gleaming gloriously in the brilliant moonlight. Pitt might not have been so utterly startled to see the Wanderer, but this strange sailing ship—this ghostly-looking vessel from nowhere! It was impossible!

But he rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Yes, it was still there! It was still coming onwards into the lagoon! Reggie clutched at the arm of the nearest fellow, who happened to be Jack Grey.

"Look!" he breathed. "Can—can you see it, too?"

Jack Grey looked, and gulped.

"A ship!" he shouted wildly. "A ship!" "Then—then it's true!" yelled Pitt. "I thought I was seeing things! Nipper—Handy—Fenton! There's a ship coming into the lagoon! A schooner—there's rescue near at hand——"

"You're mad!" panted Nipper, from another part of the crude platform.

"It's true, I tell you!" gasped Pitt. "But unless something's done the help will be too late! They can't know of our peril——" He broke off, and when he continued his voice was steadier. "I'll tell you what!" he said grimly. "I'll make a dash for it!"

"They'll get you!" panted Jack Grey frantically.

"They'll get all of us if I don't!" insisted Pitt. "There's a chance, I tell you! If I can leap from this palm into the next, I can dive straight down into the water—it's bending over that way already!"

By this time all the others had learned of the abrupt change in the situation. Excitement ran high. Many of the fellows believed that the whole story was false—for only a few could see through the tree-tops across to the lagoon. But hope had begun to rise.

Pitt was a fellow of action as well as Nipper. Nipper was anxious to make the bid for rescue, but Pitt was not to be denied. With a muttered word of farewell, he clasped Jack Grey's hand for a moment, and then swung himself from the platform.

CHAPTER XX.

REGINALD PITT'S DASH.



WITH a firm grip, Reggie Pitt seized the palm. Then, with all the strength he could command he flung himself outwards. It seemed inevitable that he must fall sheer, and crash to the ground, far below.

But he had judged his distance well.

And the next second he struck the neighbouring palm, and clutched. Grazed and bruised, he clung there. And then, with scarcely a pause, he took his second leap. It was a magnificent effort. He swept outwards and downwards, and plunged into the shallow water near the coral beach.

With a sickening jar he struck the sands, but except for a certain numbness there were no ill-effects. Fortunately, he had broken no bones—the water being just sufficiently deep to save him.

In a flash he was off, swimming weakly, but determinedly.

His arms were all right, but the lower part of his body dragged, and his legs seemed like some useless encumbrance. Every second he expected to feel a spear pierce him. But the blacks were unaware of his leap. They had been creating such a din that Pitt had escaped unnoticed. And they

were too intent upon their terrible purpose to look towards the lagoon.

Quickly the numbness vanished from Reggie's lower limbs, and he found himself swimming more strongly. His hopes revived. He swam with grim, set purpose. But the schooner seemed a terrible, terrible distance away.

Already her sails were being furled, and Pitt could hear the sound of chains coming across the placid stretch of water. The vessel's anchor was being prepared for lowering. But he was a powerful swimmer, and he struck out as he had never struck out before.

By now his full powers had returned.

With every ounce of strength within him, he plunged onwards. Curiously enough, the thought of sharks never entered his head. Once he got out of the shallows there would be a slight danger from sharks. But Pitt was so intent upon his purpose that he didn't even care. It would have made no difference to him if the lagoon had been infested with the brutes—and it wasn't.

There was a slight chance of meeting a stray monster, but the risk had to be taken. The lives of more than a score depended upon the success of Reggie's daring swim. He drew nearer and nearer to his objective.

He had ceased to puzzle as to the identity of this ship. It didn't matter. The main thing was to scramble on board, and give a warning. It would be awkward if she proved to be a foreigner, but surely somebody on board would understand English.

As he swam he could see that the schooner was now riding at anchor. Her masts and spars were bare, and men were busy aloft and on deck. The moonlight was so brilliant that the picture was almost like day. The vessel's captain had not hesitated to enter the break in the reef, and secure a safe anchorage within the lagoon.

Pitt was now becoming considerably exhausted. Knowing the dreadful danger, he had not spared himself, and he was only dimly aware of his condition. One thought imbued him—to get on board that vessel, and gasp out his brief story.

He was afraid to look back. He had an awful feeling that he would see a glare on the lagoon shore—a glare that would denote the destruction of all his comrades. Nevertheless, as he turned over on his side to change his stroke he did venture a glance.

The darkness on the north-western shore remained deep. The belt of woodland adjacent to the schoolboy camp stood out like a dark ridge against the luminous sky. As yet there was no sign of a lurid glare.

And the effect on Reggie was so heartening that he put all his remaining strength into the final strokes of his swim. He dashed on, splashing considerably, for he made no pretence of style. His one object was to get to the schooner, and to get there as quickly as possible.

A ripple showed on the surface of the

water comparatively close at hand, and vanished. Pitt didn't see it. It may have been a shark, or it may have been some other night denizen of the tropic lagoon. But Reggie's great commotion as he swam probably served him well.

He was aware of shouts as he drew close, and he became aware of the fact that many heads were bending overside as he reached the vessel's starboard bows. A rope came hissing through the water, and he grabbed it.

"Hold tight to that, whoever you are!" came a hail. "Got it?"

"Yes!" panted Pitt faintly.

"Good! Hold tight!"

Pitt hardly remembered being hauled on board. The one thing that impressed him was that he had been addressed in English. It was a glorious piece of information. He didn't even marvel at the miracle of this happening—a British vessel putting into an unknown island at such a crucial moment.

"By stars! It's one o' them boys!" ejaculated a voice near him. "It's one of the holiday party, right enough! But where's the Wanderer? Where's the rest of the crowd?"

Pitt clutched at the speaker unsteadily.

"Quick!" he breathed. "Help! Cannibals—surrounding practically all our chaps—terrible danger—"

"The boy's demented!" said the man whom Pitt grasped. "Steady, young 'un! Barker, fetch the skipper here—and be quick about it!"

"I, 'i, sir!"

A sailor was about to dash off, but Pitt grasped him.

"There's no time!" he said hoarsely. "Get a boat, and lower it! Take guns—fire extinguishers—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the officer. "Are you one of Lord Dorrimore's schoolboy party?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"We're the Clyde—Captain McAndrew—"

"Captain McAndrew!" gasped Pitt joyously. "My goodness! I remember now! You—you followed from Panama, didn't you? There's terrible trouble ashore—haven't got time to explain fully—"

"Hoots, Mr. Rogers, what's the trouble about?" demanded a voice.

Several of the men gave way, and Captain McAndrew himself came bustling up.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE LAST MINUTE.



"PLEASE don't ask any questions now!" panted Pitt, his voice becoming positively frantic. "My name's Pitt—I'm one of Dorrie's party. There's been terrible trouble, and lots of our chaps are trapped by cannibals—"

"Cannibals!" shouted the skipper. "Ye're daft, laddie—"

"It's true—it's true!" insisted Pitt. "Prescott brought them here—they're his pearl divers, and they've run amok! Prescott has stolen the Wanderer, too! But please get a boat ready at once!"

The old Scotch skipper turned on his heel.

"Look alive, Mr. Rogers!" he said crisply. "Get the long boat out, and man it. And I'll ha'e ye know that sharp's the word!"

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Rogers—who appeared to be the mate.

He hurried off, and within a minute a tremendous activity was afoot. Reggie Pitt relaxed against Captain McAndrew—for he knew that he could do no more until the boat was ready.

"We want rifles—plenty of them!" he breathed. "And fire-extinguishers, too—although they won't be much good if we're too late. We've got to be quick, captain."

"Steady, lad," interrupted the captain kindly. "We're losing no time, I'm tellin' ye. Ye're not quite ye'sel', so just rest awhile, and recover some of your breath."

There was a brief pause. Pitt was, indeed, in a bad way. During his swim he hadn't realised how he was taking it out of himself. But now that a rest spell had come he was almost on the point of swooning. Only the knowledge of his comrades' terrible danger kept him in his true senses.

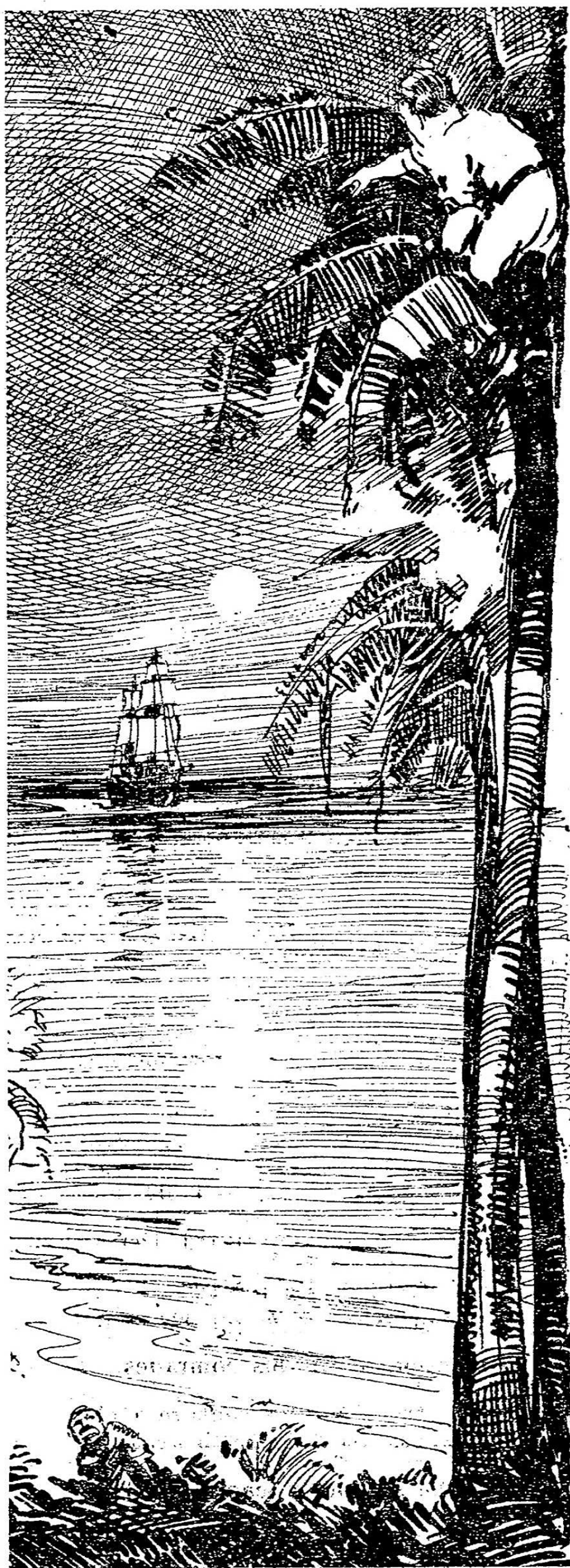
Captain McAndrew himself was sorely puzzled.

Weeks earlier he had encountered the Wanderer near the entrance to the Panama Canal. The Clyde was partly owned by Mr. Warner Russell—the Canadian who had been the whole cause of this pearling trip to Paradise Island. And Captain McAndrew had promised to follow the Wanderer as soon as his ship was re-conditioned. Under no circumstances could the Clyde have arrived at a more opportune moment!

But Captain McAndrew had cautiously entered the lagoon, wondering if he had struck the right island. He had expected to find the Wanderer at anchor, and many signs of activity. As the wind had been fair, and the moonlight so brilliant, he had sailed straight in, and it was fortunate that he had acted in this bold manner.

Before Pitt could attempt to tell any part of his story the boat was ready. The skipper was sceptical regarding the rumour of cannibals, but he could not afford to ignore it, for Pitt's attitude was unmistakable. But old McAndrew had an inkling that serious trouble was afoot.

Even the brief words that Pitt had spoken were significant. Prescott had seized the Wanderer, his native divers had run amok, a number of schoolboys were in deadly peril. It all pieced together, and the hardy Scotsman had had enough experience of the South Seas to realise that such a series of happenings was by no means improbable.



Perhaps it was a trick of the imagination—a cruel phantasm of his vision. But it seemed to Pitt that a ship was sailing majestically through the break in the reef into the lagoon!

He acted promptly, much to Pitt's relief.

With almost every available man, Captain McAndrew descended into the boat, and all hands were armed with rifles. There were no fire extinguishers, however, since the Clyde carried none. As a kind of emergency, a couple of pails were flung into the boat at the last minute, and it was a mercy they were.

"Which way, young man?" asked Mr. Rogers briskly.

Pitt pointed, and the boat sped away, hissing over the tranquil water at a great pace. Even the sailors had caught some of Reggie's fever, and they put their backs into the rowing with a will. And Pitt sat

of the rowlocks and the splash of their oars a weird sound came across the water. It was caused by the screaming and insane yelling of the triumphant Solomon Islanders. Fairly intoxicated with victory, the blacks were preparing to get their victims. They were absolutely unaware of the Clyde's proximity and the boat's approach.

"Look!" shouted Pitt suddenly.

He leapt up, and stood there pointing. A spark of light had appeared—a spark which swiftly grew into a flickering blaze. It came from a point up the sandy beach, where the groves came down almost to the water. At the same second the boat grounded softly in the white coral sand.

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there, his gaze fixed intently upon the line of trees. At any moment he expected to see a glare—a glare that would mean death and destruction to the schoolboy party.

Although the boat was skimming so fast, it seemed to Pitt that it was only wallowing in the water, and the journey was like an unending nightmare. In reality, the distance was covered in an extraordinarily short space of time. Nearer and nearer swept the boat to the north-western shore.

"By the stars!" ejaculated Mr. Rogers suddenly. "Listen to that!"

Although the men rowed unceasingly, they strained their ears. And above the clatter

"By thunder, the boy was right!" roared Captain McAndrew. "Look at 'em! Swarms of the black devils!"

There could be no longer any doubt. The moonlight was streaming upon the scene. The naked, painted forms of the savages were now apparent. They were clearly illuminated by the glare from the blaze.

Crack, crack, crack!

Almost without waiting for orders, the sailors flung themselves on the sand, knelt, and fired. A shattering volley rang out, and several wild screams testified to the accuracy of the aim. Other shouts arose—a conglomeration of different sounds.

The blacks, taken completely by surprise, ran helter-skelter in all directions, terror-stricken and frightened by the familiar sound of rifle-shots. Only too well did they know what that sound meant.

And from the palm-tops came the yelling of the treed party. But the flames were taking hold, and a vast bonfire was beginning to roar upwards. Within a few moments the bamboo house would flare up like a gigantic torch.

"Water!" gasped Pitt frantically. "Quick—the buckets!"

CHAPTER XXII.

SAVED!



GRABBING one of the buckets himself, Reggie filled it with water and ran madly up the beach. He clean forgot the danger from the savages. Not that it

mattered. That one volley had sent them flying precipitately for the safety of the neighbouring grove.

At close quarters, Pitt found himself facing an apparently unquenchable blaze. An immense amount of brushwood had been piled up round the bamboo house, and a portion of this was burning with a fearful, devastating roar.

Swish!

With one sweep of his arm he emptied his bucket over the flames, and the effect was comparatively nil. He fell back and stared up.

"Quick! Down, everybody!" he yelled. "You've still got time, if you buck up! The blacks have gone—we'll keep this fire in check until you can all get down! But for goodness' sake make haste!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, Reggie!"

A storm of cheering broke out, and the tree-tops became alive with figures. The first juniors came swarming down. Another bucket of water had arrived by this time, and it was swiftly emptied. And during the next three or four desperate minutes the two buckets were raced up and down the beach, and a continuous succession of dampeners was provided.

They proved effective in checking the flames temporarily, but ineffective in quelling them altogether. For, as fast as the men worked, the flames increased their power. But without those buckets of water, the St. Frank's party would have had less chance of reaching safety. Even as it was, several of them were scorched and half-suffocated before dropping to the ground.

But at last the peril was over.

The final member of the party had dropped, and this was Professor Sylvester Tucker. He was naturally slower than the

agile juniors, and might have remained in the tree-top until too late, but for the help of Umlosi.

"Are we all here?" asked Nipper breathlessly.

"I think so," panted Handforth. "Quick—let's look 'em over!"

There was a hasty kind of roll-call, and it was found that everybody had reached the ground. It was a merciful thing, too, for the bamboo house was now beyond all possible control, and no efforts were being made to check the flames further.

They were leaping up in an ever-increasing volume, and this part of the island was made lurid by the tremendous glare. The first signs of dawn were in the sky, and the stars were already beginning to lose their power.

But nobody thought of the stars or the dawn or the conflagration.

In some way that seemed miraculous, they had been saved. The savages had fled, and there was now no further sign of them. Instead, a party of sturdy sailors were on hand—sailors who looked singularly honest in comparison to Prescott's motley crew.

For the first time the fellows began to take notice. Falling back down the beach, away from the heat, they saw the Clyde, anchored out there in the lagoon. And one or two of the fellows recognised Captain McAndrew's rugged features.

"It's all right, you chaps!" said Pitt happily. "This looks like the end of our troubles. It's Captain McAndrew, and he's on our side. We might be able to dish old Prescott even now."

"By George, yes!" roared Handforth. "The Wanderer hasn't come back yet, and when it does we shall be able to trap everybody beautifully! By the way, where's that beast Nillsen? He's been one of us until now, but he's a rotten enemy, and he'd better be shoved in irons!"

"Hear, hear!"

Nillsen, terrified by his recent experience, was only too glad to do anything he was told. He and two others had been left to guard the pearl divers, and Nillsen had little doubt that his two companions were dead. He had no desire to be left ashore.

"Well, boys, I'm thinking ye're thirsty and hungry, and tired," said Captain McAndrew, as the excitement died down a bit. "Ye'd best come aboard an' take some rest. Nae doot we'll think of something to be done."

"About Mr. Lee and Dorrie and the others, you mean?" asked Nipper.

"Ay, that's what I mean!" agreed the skipper, nodding. "I don't rightly ken what's happened yet, but we'll soon have things straight. I'm no sae sure that yon blacks are quelled. We canna do better than get awa' while we're safe."

This was sound advice. The frenzied savages had fled at the first volley of rifle-

shots, and one or two men had been either killed or wounded. But there was a distinct possibility that the wretches would recover themselves and make a sudden attack.

So a retreat from the beach was the order of the hour.

All the boys were piled into the waiting boat, and Mr. Rogers took charge. There was not sufficient room for everybody, so Captain McAndrew and most of his men remained on the sand with fully cocked rifles.

The boat pulled out to the Clyde with all speed, and her human cargo was discharged. Then it was taken shorewards by a couple of men, and the others were taken off. By this time it was almost full daylight, and the great fire was losing some of its impressiveness. The recent junior camp had vanished, and nothing remained but a big area of red-hot embers. On all sides the groves were burning. But the fire was losing its intensity. Before many hours had passed—unless a high wind sprang up—it would probably die a natural death.

Once on the Clyde, safe and sound, the reaction among the juniors was great. A large percentage of them had flopped down on the deck, and were sprawling in all attitudes, sleeping like logs. Only Nipper and Fenton and Browne and a few others kept their wits about them.

"Well, I never expected to see daylight again," declared Nipper quietly. "I've been in a few tight corners, but that was about the worst one of all!"

"I'm inclined to agree, Brother Nipper, that the outlook was somewhat murky an hour since," admitted Browne. "And even now, let me point out that we are by no means out of the soup. It is still swishing round our ankles. I have no desire to be pessimistic——"

"Don't be an ass, Browne," said Stevens. "There's no danger now—those blacks wouldn't be mad enough to attack the ship——"

"I will grant that the blacks are a back number—indeed, we can safely say they are out of print," declared Napoleon Browne. "But let me remind you that the Wanderer is overdue. And, should she turn up, with our old friend Captain Hawke at the wheel, there may be a fairly hot shindy. I cannot see Mr. Prescott viewing the Clyde with unstinted joy."

"You're right, old man," said Nipper grimly. "There's about only one thing for us to do, and that is to clear out. By Jove! Why shouldn't we sail to the small atoll and see what's happened to the rest of our crowd?"

"A scheme that sparkles with brilliance, Brother Nipper," said Browne with enthusiasm. "Let us seek out the captain,

and put this suggestion to him without waste of words."

"We will!" declared Nipper, "but I'll do the talking!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DRASTIC MEASURES.



At almost exactly the same moment another drama was taking place sixty or seventy miles distant from Paradise Island. And Fate was getting to work in her own peculiar way on this bright tropic morning.

The Wanderer was still a helpless hulk. With her engines silent, she drifted with the Pacific current. And Jonathan Prescott's exasperation had reached such a point that he was ready to commit any act of brutality in order to gain his ends. The long delay had made him intensely irritable. He was worried sick by the whole business.

"We'll settle this thing one way or the other to-day, Hawke!" he declared harshly. "The sky's clear, and the sun's shining with greater power than usual. I guess the conditions couldn't be better."

"You said something that time, mister," nodded Captain Hawke. "Those doggone swabs will be ready to obey any orders before noon. That's the way I'm figgerin' things out, anyways."

"I believe you're right, Hawke," said Prescott. "Where's Sweeney? Why doesn't he bring 'em up? What the thunder's the good o' me giving orders if they're ignored?" he went on, flying into a rage. "Get below, an' see what's doing—an' make it snappy!"

The leathery old skipper grunted.

"Mebbe you'll remember that I'm captain o' this blamed craft!" he growled. "Best give your orders to some o' the hands, Mr. Prescott. I take orders from no man on my own deck!"

"Your own deck be hanged!" roared Prescott. "You infernal fool, you couldn't command a river ferry! See where I've got to by relyin' on your supposed seamanship? I'm about as useful here as a mouse on a floating box-lid!"

"Sail's my line—not steam!" retorted Captain Hawke curtly. "Give me any craft with sails on her——"

"Don't go into that again!" snarled Prescott. "You've made a mighty poor show, Hawke, an' don't forget it! Get below, an' see what's delayin' Sweeney. An' no infernal back-answers."

Their nerves were on edge. A heated scene might have followed, only Sweeney himself appeared at this moment. He was accompanied by a number of Hawke's ruffianly crew. And they were escorting Engineer Pelton and his stubborn com-

panions. Lord Dorrimore's faithful men were all bound in a string, with their hands tethered behind them.

"Oh, here they are!" went on Prescott, striding forward. "Good! That's the way, Sweeney. Tie the whole bunch to the port rail, and you needn't be particular about the knots. The tighter the better!"

"I get you, boss!" said the mate, nodding.

"What's this—a new stunt?" asked Pelton calmly. "When it comes to a scrap, Mr. Prescott, we're compelled to give you best. But you needn't fool yourself that we'll knuckle under. Those engines won't be started until we choose——"

"No?" interrupted Prescott contemptuously. "We'll see, my fine young Britisher. The man who defies Jonathan Prescott is up against an almighty big snag. I guess you'll learn all about it during the next hour or so!"

The third engineer did not trouble to answer. But even Pelton had not the faintest inkling of the horror which was to follow. He knew Prescott to be a rascal, but he did not appreciate the man's state of mind. Prescott was so anxious to get back to Paradise Island that he was prepared for any kind of desperate expedient.

And his companions were not left in doubt for long.

Sweeney and two other men presently returned with a big bucket and a mug. The mug was dipped into the bucket and held to Pelton's lips.

"Mebbe you're thirsty?" asked Sweeney, with a sneer. "We ain't the kind of guys to let a feller go without a drink. No, sir. Just take as much as you want."

"What's that stuff?" demanded Pelton, with a start. "Good heavens! You—you—— It's salt water, you blackguard! It's sea-water!"

"Ain't you sure cute?" grinned Sweeney. "Now then, fellers, hold him tight! And drink, you hobo!"

While Sweeney's men held Pelton tightly, the mate forced the mug to Pelton's mouth and made him drink. At first Pelton resisted with all his powers. But against three powerful men, and bound as he was, his efforts were futile. A full pint of sea-water was forced down his throat. Sick and horrified, he gasped for breath after the ordeal was over.

"You devils!" he panted hoarsely. "You infernal devils!"

Crash!

Sweeney brought the back of his hand across the engineer's unprotected face, and for a moment it seemed that Pelton would smash his ropes. But such a superhuman effort was beyond his powers. He could only fall back limply, and inwardly resolve to repay that insult on a future occasion.

And he was startled and horrified by the position, too.

It had been easy enough for the engine-room staff to snap their fingers at Prescott's former threats. They knew that they were more valuable alive than dead. But Pelton was not prepared for this torture.

One by one his men were treated in the same way. There wasn't a man who drank the sea-water willingly. In every case it had to be forced down. But it was forced—there was no escaping the ordeal. And at last the full truth became clear.

All the victims were bound to the port rail of the Wanderer. They were bare to the waist, and the full intensity of the tropic sun was heating upon them. As a scheme of torture it excelled anything devised by the Spanish Inquisitors of old.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTAIN MCANDREW ACTS.



CAPTAIN McANDREW thoughtfully stroked his bristling beard.

"It's a queer story, boys, but I don't doubt ye," he said slowly.

"So there's another island, thirty miles due west of this one? The wind's favourable, too. I'm thinkin' it'll be our best move to pay a visit."

"We've got to go, captain—there's nothing else for it," declared Nipper. "We're puzzled about the Wanderer; even Nilsen doesn't understand it. He expected the yacht back here two days ago, and on the evening of the day she left. And still she's missing. I'm beginning to believe she ran aground on the reef of the other island."

"Mebbe ye're right. These reefs are treacherous things," nodded the skipper. "Well, the old Clyde is sound enough, an' we'll be able to save every soul."

The Scotsman had been impressed by the juniors' story. He had learned how Prescott had made his coup, how Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee and the others had been taken away. Nilsen was questioned, and the man was only too ready to tell everything he knew.

And Captain McAndrew's course was clear.

He could do nothing but pay a visit to this small island without loss of time. It was the only way of ascertaining the full truth. Already the Clyde had performed splendid services. But for her timely arrival the St. Frank's party would have been wiped out long before this. There was now a distinct possibility that she would spoil the rest of Prescott's plan by

rescuing the other half of the Wanderer's company.

While the sun was still low the anchor was raised, the sails were set, and the Clyde swept gracefully out into the open sea. The breeze was freshening, if anything, and the voyage to the small atoll presented no difficulties.

"Come on, you chaps, we'd better go and get some sleep," said Nipper, as he came across Handforth, and one or two others amidships. "It'll take us two or three hours at least before we can get to the other atoll. We might as well get a bit of rest."

"We're just looking at the island," said Handforth. "The fire's dying down—in fact, it's practically dead now. Those blacks seem to have vanished into thin air. There's not a sign of 'em."

"They had the scare of their lives," nodded Nipper. "They thought they had the island to themselves, and we were at their mercy. The firing of those shots, and the sight of the sailors, must have filled them with sheer terror. They're skulking in the bush."

Handforth snorted.

"According to all I've read, cannibals fight like the dickens," he declared. "They make short work of a handful of whites, and Captain McAndrew only brought eight or nine men with him. Think of it. A hundred and fifty yelling blacks being scared off by three or four rifle shots."

"That's just the whole point, old man," said Nipper quietly. "We're not living in the past now. Those Solomon Islanders are pearl-divers, and under ordinary circumstances they'd be as harmless as children. They got some drink into them, ran wild, and found they had the island to themselves, except for a score of unarmed school-boys. What was the result? They fairly let themselves go, and meant to massacre us."

"And when a few white men came along with rifles they crumpled up like a pricked bladder," said Reggie Pitt. "You're right, Nipper. Those blacks could be a horrible menace against our party, but any real opposition dished them. Thank goodness it's all over!"

"Well, let's get below and turn in," said Nipper.

And within ten minutes the Clyde was as sedate as ever, with scarcely any indication of her numerous passengers.

Captain McAndrew was anxious. He had expected to find the pearling going on at high speed, and he was naturally interested because he was Mr. Russell's partner. To learn that Jonathan Prescott held the upper hand was a shock. And there seemed little prospect of outwitting the rascal. For if Prescott held the Wanderer, he held all the trump cards.

There was one chance—that the Wanderer was aground on the reef. This would have the effect of drawing Prescott's teeth, but it wasn't a very pleasing prospect from every other standpoint. Such a possibility, however, accounted for the Wanderer's non-return.

With every inch of sail set the Clyde swept onwards.

And Fate, in the meantime, was continuing her job. For the Wanderer, a considerable number of miles to the southward, was still lying helpless. But there was every prospect of a change.

And if that change did come about Prescott would know nothing whatever of the Clyde's arrival and departure. From every point of view the schooner could not have dropped in more opportunely.

The heat of the day was increasing. The sun was getting higher, and the tropic blaze was powerful. Even in the shade the heat was trying. In the full glare the effect was enormously intensified. And imagine that effect combined with the tortures of a craving thirst.

Prescott had adopted a dangerous expedient.

It may seem a fairly light punishment to have salt water forced down one's throat. Alone, it might have been so. But combined with all the other circumstances, Prescott's crime was little short of hideous.

The effects, after only a short spell, were startling.

Pelton and his companions were suffering worse agonies than they had believed it possible for the human frame to endure. And yet they had not been treated with any actual brutality. Each man had simply had a pint of sea-water poured down his throat.

The sun did the rest.

There is no torture like the torture of thirst. And Prescott scarcely realised that he was endangering the sanity of every one of his victims. He was determined to get his own way, and he hardened his heart.

The aspect of the prisoners was becoming pitiful.

Already they were drooping at their bonds. Their expressions had changed, their faces were becoming blotchy, and their tongues were hanging out, swollen, and awful to look upon.

"I guess it's up to you to say the word," declared Prescott repeatedly, as he periodically paced up and down. "I'm just filled with anxiety to give you an honest drink. It's yours for the asking, on the condition you know."

"You inhuman devil!" panted Pelton thickly. "You can torture us all you like, you can see us die, but I'll never give in!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A SHOCK FOR JONATHAN PRESCOTT.



HALF an hour elapsed. During this period Prescott took care to make himself scarce. He gave orders that nobody else should approach the prisoners. For thirty minutes they were left entirely alone. Not one of their captors was even in sight.

And during that half-hour the change was startling.

Under the full glare of that tropic sun the wonder of it was that they didn't all go stark mad. Fortunately Pelton and his companions were men of great constitutional strength. They were on the verge, but there was still a chance of recovery.

Pelton was perhaps the least affected. It might have been his grim determination that was helping him to bear up under this awful strain. He was the officer in command, and he was the one who had defied Prescott from the first. The responsibility was his.

And although he suffered untold agonies he held himself in hand. Again and again he swore that he would never give in. He had defied these brutes, and he would defy them to the bitter end.

As for Prescott, he was in a state of mental agony.

To do the man justice, he was horrified at his own handiwork. Again and again he almost made up his mind to give the order for the prisoners to be released and succoured. The thing was too much for him. To see those men going mad before his eyes was too ghastly.

"I can't stand it, Hawke—I can't stand it!" panted Prescott at last. "Get for'ard and cut those men loose. I'll go a long way to get those pearls, but, by thunder, I won't have this crime on my hands! Cut them loose, I tell you!"

"Steady, mister!" said the skipper. "I guess it seems a pity to knuckle under just when they're ready to give in. Another ten minutes——"

"No!" panted Prescott. "Not another second. I tell you I can't stand it! Man alive, can't you realise they're going stark mad? It's worse than death for those poor wretches. By gosh! I'll go myself——"

He paused, for Sweeney, the mate, came running up.

"Quick, boss—the time's ripe!" he said swiftly.

"They're—they're not dead?" croaked Prescott.

"Dead nothing!" retorted the mate, staring. "They're just about ready to crumple up. They're all in!"



Pitt hardly remembered being hauled on board. The one thing that impressed him was that he had been addressed in English.

Prescott caught his breath in sharply. In a second his heart was hardened again. There was still a chance! If only Pelton would give his word now, the object would be achieved.

With swift footsteps he paced forward.

And the time was certainly ripe, as Sweeney had said. The third engineer was still grim—still obstinate. He bore his sufferings with a stoicism which was amazing. But the sufferings of his companions cut him to the quick.

The effect on the various men was different. One burly stoker was lightheaded, and was attempting to sing, in spite of his swollen tongue. Two others lolled listlessly at their bonds, too far gone to feel pain or to realise the horror of their predicament. The man next to Pelton was fighting madly for his breath—an object of acute pity.

But the man on the other side was the worst of all. He was already raving—screaming insanely and foaming at the mouth. His sufferings were appalling. And Pelton could stand it no longer. Ready enough to defy Prescott to the last on his own account, he found it impossible to condemn his fellows to this awful torture. It was for him to give the word.

"Prescott!" he shouted thickly. "Hi, Hawke!"

One of the other sufferers was roused by the shouts.

"We've got to give in, Bob!" he gurgled. "I can't stand this—I'm going out of my mind! Water! Give me water! I can't stand——"

Prescott came running up, and behind him was Sweeney, with a bucket of crystal water and a mug.

"Well," rapped out Prescott, "what's the verdict?"

He stared at the third engineer aghast. He hadn't dreamed that the situation was as bad as this. Even at that moment Prescott was ready to give the order for Sweeney to cut the men down. But for one second he hesitated, and during that second Pelton spoke the word. The third engineer was not to know that his torturer was wavering.

"You've won, Prescott!" panted the engineer. "We give in."

"You give in?" repeated Prescott swiftly. "Say, is that straight? On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour," said Pelton. "We're ready to obey orders."

As he spoke the words he sagged down, swooning. His iron determination had failed him now that the crisis was over. With triumph surging in his breast, Jonathan Prescott let out a bellow.

"Quick, you fools!" he yelled. "Cut them down!"

In less than a minute the victims were freed, and fresh water was administered very sparingly—for it would have been fatal to allow the sufferers to drink deeply. They were taken below into the gloriously cool saloon, and there they received first aid.

And one by one they slowly recovered. Prescott was intensely relieved to find that succour had not come too late. Every man responded to the treatment. Even the worst cases were showing signs of complete recovery.

Prescott was in no hurry now.

The sufferers were allowed to rest for three hours, and by the end of that time they were showing signs of a return to normal. They were weak, shaky, and limp, but in full possession of their wits. Prescott was happy. He had Pelton's word, and he knew that it could be relied upon. These Britishers were men of honour—Prescott gave them that credit.

Towards afternoon Pelton was brought on deck.

"I guess I'm sorry for what happened," said Prescott abruptly. "But I just had to get you round somehow. I take it that your promise holds good?"

"I gave you my word," said Pelton quietly. "The less we discuss the matter the better. What do you want?"

"Take your men below, and get the engines going," ordered Prescott. "That's all. Obey orders, and I'll do my best to make up for this morning's affair. I guess

you won't find me a hard man if you rub me the right way."

Pelton turned on his heel and walked off. And two hours later the Wanderer was a thing of life once more. Under full control, and with her wonderful engines throbbing, she sped over the tropic sea in the direction of Paradise Island. Long before sundown she arrived, and took up her old anchorage in the lagoon.

"Gee, it's good to be back!" said Prescott, as he prepared to go ashore in the motor-boat. "Where's Nilsen? Why doesn't the rascal show up? I'm darned if there's any activity over on the pearling ground, either! Looks like something wrong, Hawke."

"It sure does," agreed the skipper grimly. And soon afterwards a shock of the first magnitude was upon them. An inspection of the pearl fishery was ominously significant. There were many signs of dreadful events. Not a native was to be seen, but there were the remains of a feast—bones—bones that Prescott dared not examine closely.

"Good gosh!" he panted. "There's been devilry afoot while we've been away! It's the fault of those accursed engineers! They caused the delay, and they're responsible!"

This was a cowardly evasion of the blame. "And what about the boys?" went on Prescott harshly. "We haven't seen a sign of 'em! We'll get to their camp and find out——"

He didn't wait to say anything further. And the biggest shock of all now confronted him; for the schoolboy camp was no more! A charred, stark gap in the grove—nothing else! No sign of a living thing! The St. Frank's fellows had vanished, and the conclusion was dreadfully obvious. Knowing nothing of the Clyde's visit, Prescott's assumption could be understood.

"They're dead—the whole crowd!" he said hoarsely. "Those Kanakas must have made a clean sweep—and they've probably eaten the lot!"

It was an appalling conclusion—but it seemed to be verified later, when the island was thoroughly combed. The blacks were rounded up—now a battle-scarred and subdued mob. And the number of missing and wounded was more eloquent than any spoken words.

Prescott was horrified—and from that moment he was a changed man.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LUCK TURNS.



IRENE MANNERS pulled herself up short, and stared.

"Look!" she said breathlessly.

"What is it, Renie?" asked Doris Berkeley. "There's

nothing there——"

"I—I thought I saw something," interrupted Irene, the flush leaving her cheeks. "Oh, it was silly! But, do you know, for an instant I fancied I saw the gleam of a white sail on the horizon. I expect it was only a seagull."

Several of the Moor View girls were wandering about on the coral on the outer beach of the tiny atoll. It was midday, and the tropic sun was beating down fiercely. The island was quivering in the heat.

But the girls found it impossible to remain still all the time. The most dreadful feature of their enforced stay on the island was the sameness of every hour. There was nothing to do. The island was a mere ring of sand, with a shallow lagoon and a few palms. Nothing else. The whole speck could be explored within a couple of hours. There wasn't an inch of the isle that the girls had not been over.

They had stores and water for another week—and Prescott would certainly come before that period was over. Lee was satisfied that the man was no murderer. And every member of the marooned party was eagerly looking forward to the rascal's return. They would almost welcome him. Lee, indeed, was wondering if it wouldn't be good policy to make a compromise. Left to himself, he would never have done so. But he was thinking of the younger people.

The girls on the outer beach continued to look across the dazzling water. It rather hurt their eyes, for the glare was painful. Repeatedly, all members of the party found themselves searching the horizon for a sail. And everybody knew that the hope was vain.

"It's funny how we see things that aren't really there," remarked Ena Handforth slowly. "Just now I thought I could see something white, too—I say!" she added, shading her eyes. "I believe— Look out there—"

"It is—it is!" cried Irene excitedly. "I told you so at first! It's a ship—I know it's a ship! Look! Can't you see the sails?"

By this time others were aware of the startling development. Nelson Lee had glanced at the girls curiously, wondering why they were excited. And, seeing them staring, he had gazed in the same direction. At first he saw nothing, then it seemed to him that a dazzling white speck was visible.

"What's that, Dorrie?" he asked tensely.

"Eh?" said Lord Dorrimore, who was sprawling in the shade.

"By Jove!" breathed Nelson Lee softly. "It's a ship!"

"A what?" yelled Dorrie violently.

That one word aroused him so thoroughly that he was a changed man in the space of two seconds.

Everybody was now out on the sands, staring seaward. Captain Burton himself, the members of his crew, Mr. and Mrs. Stokes—the whole crowd, in fact—joined in the general excitement.

And there was scarcely less commotion on the Clyde herself.

All the juniors were awake, and refreshed. They had slept well, and had eaten well, and their dreadful experience on Paradise Island seemed like some distant nightmare. Even Reggie Pitt was only feeling a little strained from the effects of his valiant swim.

The bows were fairly lined with the juniors. They swarmed there, staring ahead. Behind and above them the schooner's billowing sails were filled with the breeze, and the vessel was careering merrily along through the hissing water. There was something exhilarating in the experience.

"It's the island right enough!" said Nipper, with satisfaction, as he stared through a telescope. "By jingo, I can see figures, too! And the tents! They're safe, by the look of it!"

"But where's the Wanderer?" asked Pitt.

But nobody was thinking about the Wanderer. The one glorious fact which stood out above all others was that the other section of the holiday party was within sight. They were being reunited. And even more—for Captain McAndrew and his crew formed a valuable addition.

On the atoll the excitement increased when somebody detected the schoolboys through binoculars. The situation was growing better and better. And it was only a matter of a brief hour before the full truth was known.

The Clyde dropped her anchor a half a mile distant—for Captain McAndrew was reluctant to come too close to that treacherous reef. Boats were lowered, and the skipper and all the boys were brought ashore.

They came into the shallow lagoon shouting joyously—a clear indication to Lee and the others that all was well. And for the next ten minutes there was nothing but confusion and wild greetings.

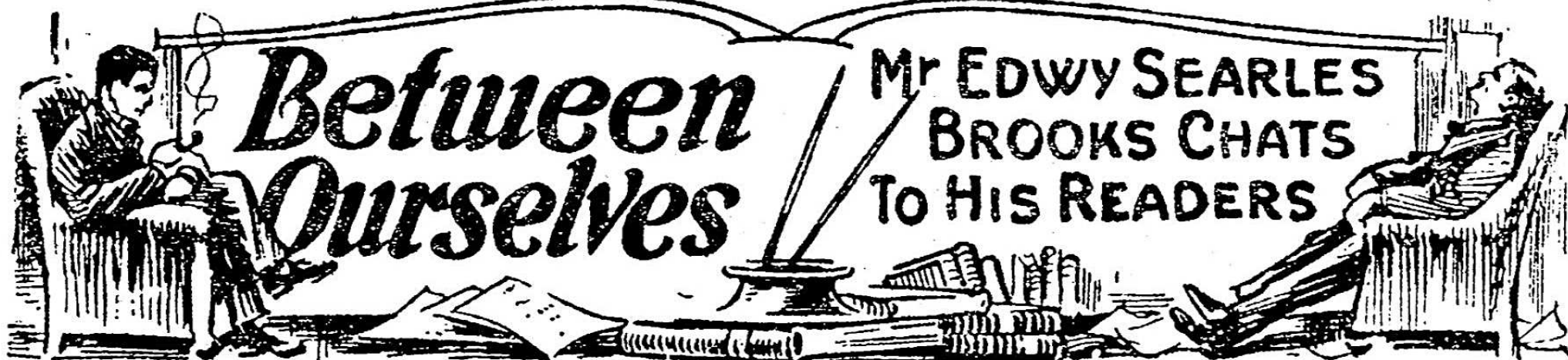
The entire holiday party was intact again! And Captain McAndrew's vessel was ready to serve the adventurers. Absolutely unknown to Jonathan Prescott, his two parties of prisoners were joined together, and a ship was waiting to assist them in their revenge.

Until now, events had prospered well for Prescott and his men. But the luck had turned at last! And the immediate future promised something exceptionally thrilling in the way of retribution!

THE END.

THE PUNISHMENT OF JONATHAN PRESCOTT AND HIS GANG WILL BE TOLD NEXT WEEK IN ANOTHER FINE LONG STORY OF THIS EXCITING SERIES, ENTITLED:—

"THE DEMON OF THE REEF!"



Mr EDWY SEARLES
BROOKS CHATS
TO HIS READERS

(NOTE.—If any readers write to me I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks likely to interest the majority. If you have any suggestions send them along. If you have any grumbles make them to me. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY—THE ST. FRANK'S WEEKLY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But though ALL letters afford me an equal amount of pleasure, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies here to whatever points of widespread appeal may have been raised in them.—E.S.B.)

Although I've only got a comparatively small batch of letters to acknowledge this week, they include no less than nine from South Africa. And nearly half of these—four, to be exact—ask for the introduction of a South African boy at St. Frank's. Many of my previous correspondents from the same colony have made a similar request. —I can see I shall have to give the subject my serious consideration.

On this occasion, in fact, the bulk of my letters are from one or another of our Colonies. I can assure their writers that they are none the less welcome on that account, especially as most of the letters are particularly chummy, enthusiastic and encouraging.

I am glad to note many applications from these overseas readers for appointment as Organising Officers for The St. Frank's League. These I am indicating by an asterisk against the names. All will receive Foundation Membership Certificates in due course, with details of initial procedure.

Now for the acknowledgments. They'll all go in one paragraph this week.

Donald E. Mackenzie (Durban, S.A.), T. Williams* (Johannesburg, S.A.) A. C. Cleeve Sculthorpe* (Errington, Vancouver, B.C.), John R. Blokdyk* (Brakpan, Transvaal, S.A.), A. P. Marnitz* (Johannesburg, S.A.), Solomon Arkin* (Cape Town, S.A.),

Ernest Kay (Walworth, S.E.17), Lord Herbert Mauleverer (Selsey), Richard Ferrell (Gateshead), Horatio (Darlington), William Heymanson (Northampton), Bonzo (Gillingham), J. Keith (Christchurch, N.Z.), T. W. Fryer (Hurstville, Sydney, N.S.W.), Charles Watson* (Melbourne), Elonora Lees (Sydney, N.S.W.), Thomas H. Denteith* (Perth, Australia), E. A. Mittelholzer (New Amsterdam, Berbice, British Guiana), Charles A. Blann* (Pietermaritzburg, Natal, S.A.), Harold Wolf van Reenen* (Parow, S.A.), W. Sage* (Port Elizabeth, S.A.), Israel Herr* (Johannesburg, S.A.), Ivan E. Fredericks* (Woodstock, Cape Town, S.A.), J. J. M. P. Harvey Keating (London, S.W.1.), H. F. Prentice (Sparkhill, Birmingham), A.B.C. (Aspatria), Twin Tomboys (Circencester).

By the way, the Chief Officer of the League advanced that closing date for overseas Organising Officer volunteers (Form-free) from August 8th to September 12th. This was in case any had taken the former as the dispatching instead of the receiving date. Anyhow, all applications received by September 12th will be honoured. In other words, the applicants will be given one of the hundred Foundation Membership numbers reserved for each country, as described by the Chief Officer in July 4th issue of Our Paper. This distinction will also be conferred on the prompt qualifying ordinary membership applicants, who will be given any remaining numbers, out of each hundred, unclaimed by the pioneer Organising Officers in each country. So there's still time for many of the nearer overseas readers to get the coveted letters "F.M." in front of the membership numbers on their League certificates, unless the five hundred reserved (1,001 to 1,500) are all snapped up in the meantime.

But here I am again, poaching on the Chief Officer's preserves. It won't do. But he's one of the right sort, and won't grumble. And fortunately we're in such close touch with each other that there's no danger of either of us making conflicting statements. It's all you readers I'm thinking of. To confuse you is the very last thing we want. In fact, we don't want that at all. What we DO want is for all the St. Frank's League procedure to be "as simple

as ABC." That's a fine slogan of the Chief Officer's, and we're all trying hard to live up to it.

There won't be a prouder man in England than myself when the League membership reaches 100,000. I have a great ambition myself to join the League as its hundred-thousandth member. Is my aspiration too high? Why, if only a tenth part of our readers joined, each one bringing in only one other member, the total I have named would be easily overreached. Now then, all you loyal readers, are you going to cap your previous highly appreciated encouragement by granting me my one great desire?

Three points of very special general interest are repeatedly raised in the letters which I have acknowledged above. They are: 1. The strange antagonism of some parents to Our Paper. 2. Reintroducing old characters into my stories. 3. At what age is one too old to read Our Paper? Well, suppose I give collective replies on these three points? Yes, I will—a paragraph for each.

I am enough of an egotist to be perfectly sure that a reading of any one of my tales will be sufficient to convince any doubters. But it will be far more convincing if I let others speak. So next week—I haven't the room this week—I propose to print a few quotations from this week's letters which will bear me out. They'll at least afford ammunition for the loyalists to fire into the doubters. I shan't give the names of the writers, because that would be unfair without first obtaining their permission. But they'll all recognise their own words, and if they have the courage of their convictions I should be grateful for their permission to use what they have said in another way, with their names and addresses attached, at some future time.

There are, according to you enthusiastic readers, so many interesting characters at St. Frank's—to say nothing of its environs—that it would be a sheer impossibility to frequently introduce more than a small minority of them. Still, I am keeping a careful note of your majority desires. So you can rely upon me to bring in again, from time to time, those characters most persistently asked for. But you'll have to leave it to me to do this only when the stories themselves will be the gainers thereby. Will that satisfy all you impatient ones? Leave it to me, and you shall have everything you really want. Meanwhile, if your desires are not realised quickly enough, just rest assured that they are not forgotten. All in good time.

The next one's easy. Nobody—of any age or of either sex—is too old to read the St. Frank's stories. Every post brings me abundant evidence that they are constantly read by all and sundry, irrespective of class, years, or reader. I have always suspected this. But with the fact being so repeatedly confirmed, I now strive more than ever to give my tales a universal appeal, never forgetting, however, that they are primarily written for the youngsters.

No less than three of my correspondents this week ask for a resumption of my American Notebook Series. I shouldn't refer to this as a matter of general interest on this ground alone. But the extraordinary thing is that quite a large number of previous correspondents have also made the same request. In fact, I'm beginning to think I may be called upon to write up some more of those U.S.A. experiences. But I don't want to do anything of the kind if it means excluding something of a more popular nature from the pages of Our Paper. Suppose we drop "Between Ourselves" to make room for some new American Notes? How would that suit?

Another idea. There'll be a St. Frank's League Magazine, I suppose, in course of time. Perhaps the League members might not quarrel about it if an occasional few paragraphs about my American experiences appeared in that?

Those individual replies are in for short shrift this week, I can see. Just when I had been hoping, too, to deal with them all. Worse still. I had even anticipated delving into my arrears pile to wipe off a few belated answers to former correspondents. But I haven't travelled far on the right road to reach my goal, have I? Forgive me, if you can, and I'll try to make some atonement in my future paragraphs.

Your imaginary advertisements are quite good, Donald E. Mackenzie, and I'll file them away for possible use in the coming ST. FRANK'S MAGAZINE. Your own taste for humour in the St. Frank's stories seems to be pretty general. So I'm trying my little best to get as near to some as I can in each story.

So you've introduced your two cousins, your brother, and your mother to THE ST. FRANK'S WEEKLY, T. Williams? You ARE a loyal supporter.

My space is full, and I am reluctantly compelled to place the rest of this week's letters, marked for individual attention, at the bottom of my postponed pile.

E.S.B.

HOW TO MAKE A LIGHTWEIGHT TENT FOR CAMPING.

By DICK GOODWIN.

THE tent at Fig. 1, if made of light material, can be carried on a cycle, and if divided between two people is not too heavy for a trek. It is of the simplest construction, is easily erected on

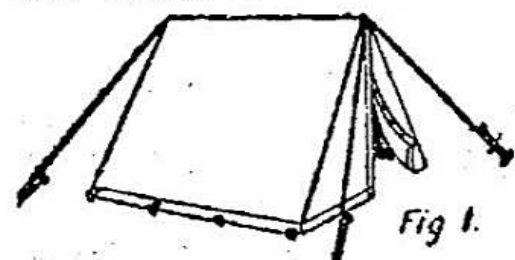


Fig. 1.

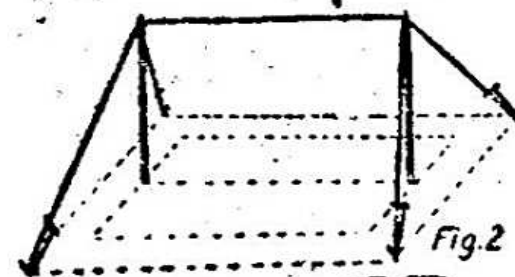


Fig. 2.

two uprights with a ridge-rope between, and kept rigid with four guy ropes, as at Fig. 2. For convenience of transport the poles should be in two pieces. Round wood $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter, should be cut to a length of 2 ft. 9 in., and one length fitted with a 6 in. or 8 in. length of brass tube screwed on half-way down. The other end and one end of the other piece is fitted with a $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. length of the same tube and a 6 in. wire nail driven in with the ends rounded off as at A and B, Fig. 3.

FITTING THE RIDGE.

Instead of the rope ridge, a wooden pole can be used, as at C. To make this, fit on the ends of a 5 ft. 9 in. length of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter round, two lengths of brass or zinc tube as at D, flatten it as at E, solder and drill a hole and finally shape as at F. An alternate method of fitting a ridge pole is shown at G. The main dimensions of the tent are given at Fig. 4, which shows a plan and an end view, together

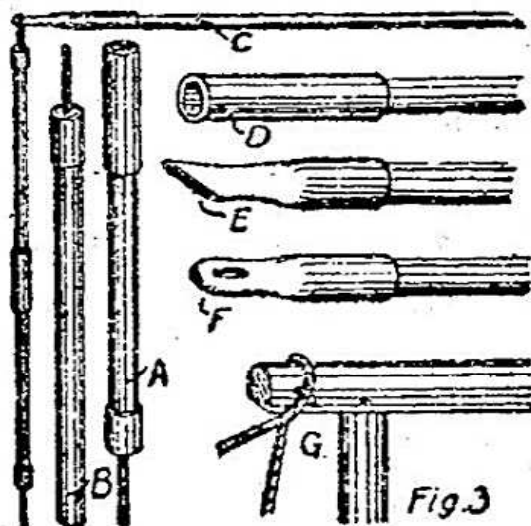


Fig. 3.

with the method of securing the ridge and guy ropes at H. The method of making the latter parts is shown at J and K, Fig. 5, the end of the rope is looped over a galvanised sailmaker's thimble, L, and either spliced or bound with twine. Tent pegs, M, and toggles, N, should be made from beech, the latter being 4 in. by $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{3}{8}$ in., with holes $\frac{7}{8}$ in. from the ends; the pegs are 12 in. long and cut from 1 in. by $\frac{5}{8}$ in. wood.

MAKING THE COVERING.

The layout of the canvas covering is shown at Fig. 6, and consists of 5 separate pieces, providing the main piece is 6 ft. wide, otherwise material must be sewn together to provide this width and a total length of 12 ft. The main piece is hemmed 4 in. at both ends,

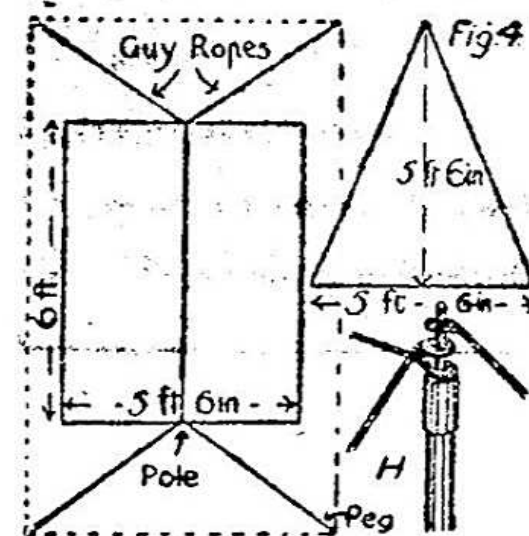


Fig. 4.

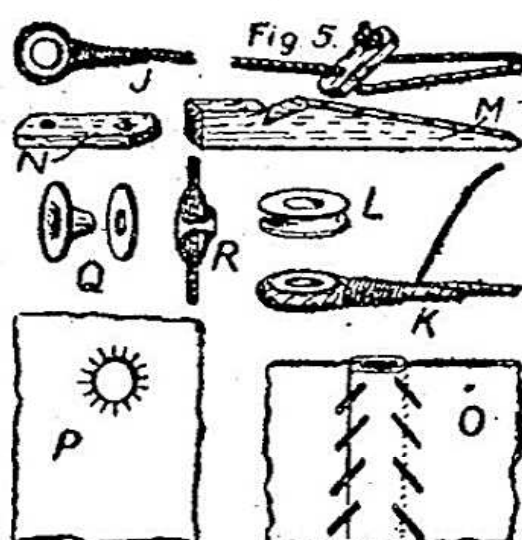


Fig. 5.

care being taken to keep the ends parallel. With a good quality of calico, the sewing can be done on a machine, but with heavier material, hand sewing is necessary as a rule. For ordinary purposes, good calico will be found quite satisfactory. Rain will not penetrate if care is

taken to avoid touching the inside when wet. Other suitable and even lighter materials can be obtained from a good tentmaker, but they are generally more expensive than calico and not so easily procurable.

THE END FLAPS.

The end flaps should be cut out as at Fig. 7. A 4 in. hem is made on the bottom and a 2 in. hem at the sides. The best method of hand-sewing for joining the flaps to the mainpiece is shown at O, Fig. 5. It will now be necessary to

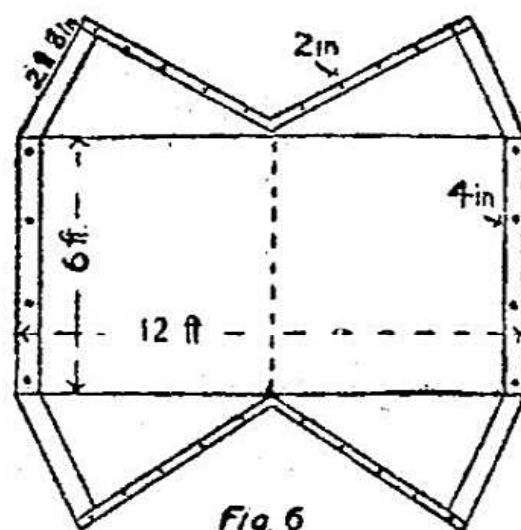


Fig. 6.

make eyelets, one at each end of the ridge of the main piece for fitting on the top of the poles, four at least along the 4 in. hem and about 5 along the 2 in. hem on the flaps.

MAKING THE EYELETS.

One method is to cut out a small round hole and sew round it in the same manner as in buttonholing, as shown at P; this will be quite satisfactory if the tent is not used very often, but the better plan is to use brass eyelets and washers as at Q. These are fastened together with a punch and give a neat and strong opening as at R. Short rope loops are secured in the holes along the bottom of the tent as at Fig. 8, the rope being knotted inside, or fastened to wooden pegs, so that it cannot be pulled through. The loops on the flaps should be long enough to loop one through the other, as at Fig. 9, this enabling the tent to be fastened from the inside.



Fig. 7.

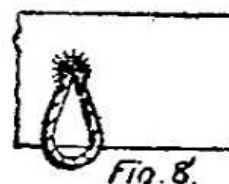


Fig. 8.

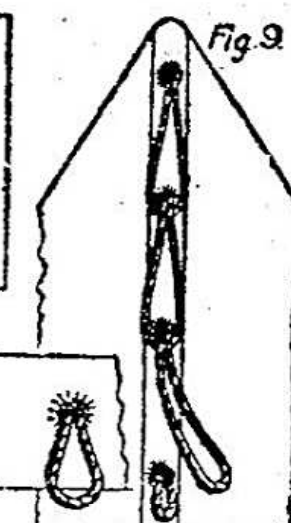


Fig. 9.

ERECTING THE TENT.

In erecting the tent, pick out a suitable spot, not in a hollow in case of rain, place the poles through the holes in the ridge and push the ends in the ground. The guy ropes should be pegged down and the toggles pulled up taut. Short pegs will be necessary for holding down the sides of the tent; these should be made to the same shape as the long ones and about 8 in. long. It will be necessary to use a ground sheet inside the tent, and great care must be taken to avoid tearing the material.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of
BRENTWOOD SCHOOL



Brentwood School was founded in 1557 by Sir Anthony Browne. Although many new buildings have been added in the course of the school's long history, the ancient "Big School" is still used every day. In 1924 a beautiful Memorial Hall was erected. There are six boarding houses. The school is richly endowed, and offers valuable Leaving Scholarships to the Universities.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(All communications to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer,
The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway
House, London, E.C.4.)

My dear Leagueites,

I am eagerly looking forward along with you to the eventful day when I can announce that the required number of members has been reached and that we can proceed without further delay with the organisation of local clubs and other objects for which the League is being formed.

During the last two or three weeks prior to time of writing (August 4th), many readers have been breaking up for the summer holidays, and this important event, taken in conjunction with the excitement of going away to the seaside, may explain why so many of my readers have not yet qualified for membership of the League. They have been too busy thinking about the holidays. Still, I am not grumbling, for there is a steady flow of new members coming in every week, and I have a feeling that before long this constant stream of new recruits will develop into a flood.

A number of Leagueites have written to ask me if I intend issuing distinguishing badges to members other than the bronze, silver and gold medallion awards. For some days past, I have been seriously considering how this could be done without adding to the present cost of running the League. As it is, the illuminated certificates, the enclosures, extra labour and postage for enrolling members costs much more per member than the individual member spends in order to qualify. So after thinking it over, one of those happy brain waves came to my rescue, and I tell it to you now only as a suggestion, subject

to being scrapped if found to be too expensive. It is that I should offer you all at cost price a small oblong clasp, on which is fitted the St. Frank's College colours in shot silk, and bearing the title, "The St. Frank's League" across the top. The clasp would be made to be worn in the lapel of the coat, with a small concealed hook underneath to which the bronze, silver or gold medal could be suspended, if desired.

I am much indebted to Member 305 for the following artistic and inexpensive method of framing the League Members' Certificate:

All that is required is a piece of glass measuring 9 inches by 11½ inches, costing 6d., and some passe-partout, costing another 6d. You simply place the glass over the certificate and bind the passe-partout around the edges so that it overlaps the glass, forming a neat frame, and also overlaps the back of the certificate, which should be protected by a piece of brown paper. The passe-partout can be obtained in various shades from any picture-frame maker. Black or dark green looks best.

A member has written to ask the translation of the St. Frank's motto, "Consilic et Animis." Although I have answered this query once before, I have no doubt there are many new readers who will be interested to know that the nearest English equivalent to the above motto is "Industry and Courage."

Your sincere friend,

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

SOME ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE

- (1) Getting to know your fellow-readers from near at home to the most distant outposts of the Empire.
- (2) Joining local sports and social clubs affiliated to the League.
- (3) Entering for competitions run for the benefit of members.
- (4) Qualifying for various awards by promoting the growth of the League.
- (5) Opportunities for contributing short articles, stories, and sketches to the League Magazine.
- (6) Space for short notices and free adverts. for members in the above Magazine.
- (7) Advice on choosing a trade or calling in life, on emigration to the colonies, dependencies, or abroad.
- (8) An employment bureau for members of the League.
- (9) Tours to interesting places in England and on the Continent, camping-out holidays, and sea-trips, specially arranged for members of the League.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from TWO copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the

forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

These Application Forms can be posted for 1d., provided the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. It then becomes out of date and useless.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 10. Aug. 29, 1925

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR BRONZE MEDAL.

I, Member No.....(give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This leaves me.....(state number, or, if none, signify with a dash) introductions to make to entitle me to a Bronze Medal.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

FOOTBALL! FOOTBALL!! FOOTBALL!!!

Every lad loves reading stirring tales of the football field;
every lad, then, should not fail to read

"A Failure at Football!"

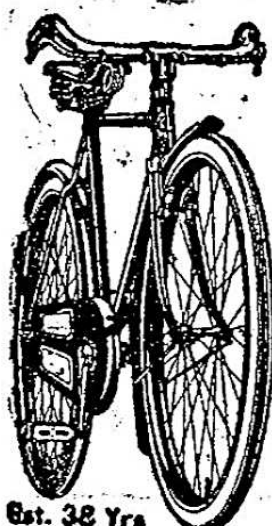
By JOHN W. WHEWAY.

"A Trap for the 'Twister'!"

By BRUCE BRYANT.

Two great soccer tales written by famous authors who
know their subject thoroughly. See this week's

BOYS' REALM — OUT ON WEDNESDAY — 2D.



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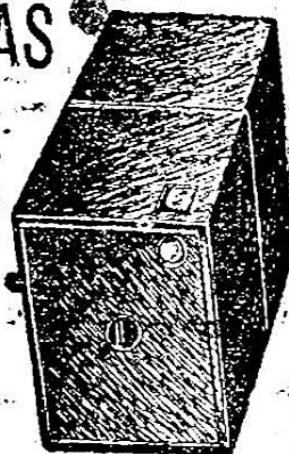
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