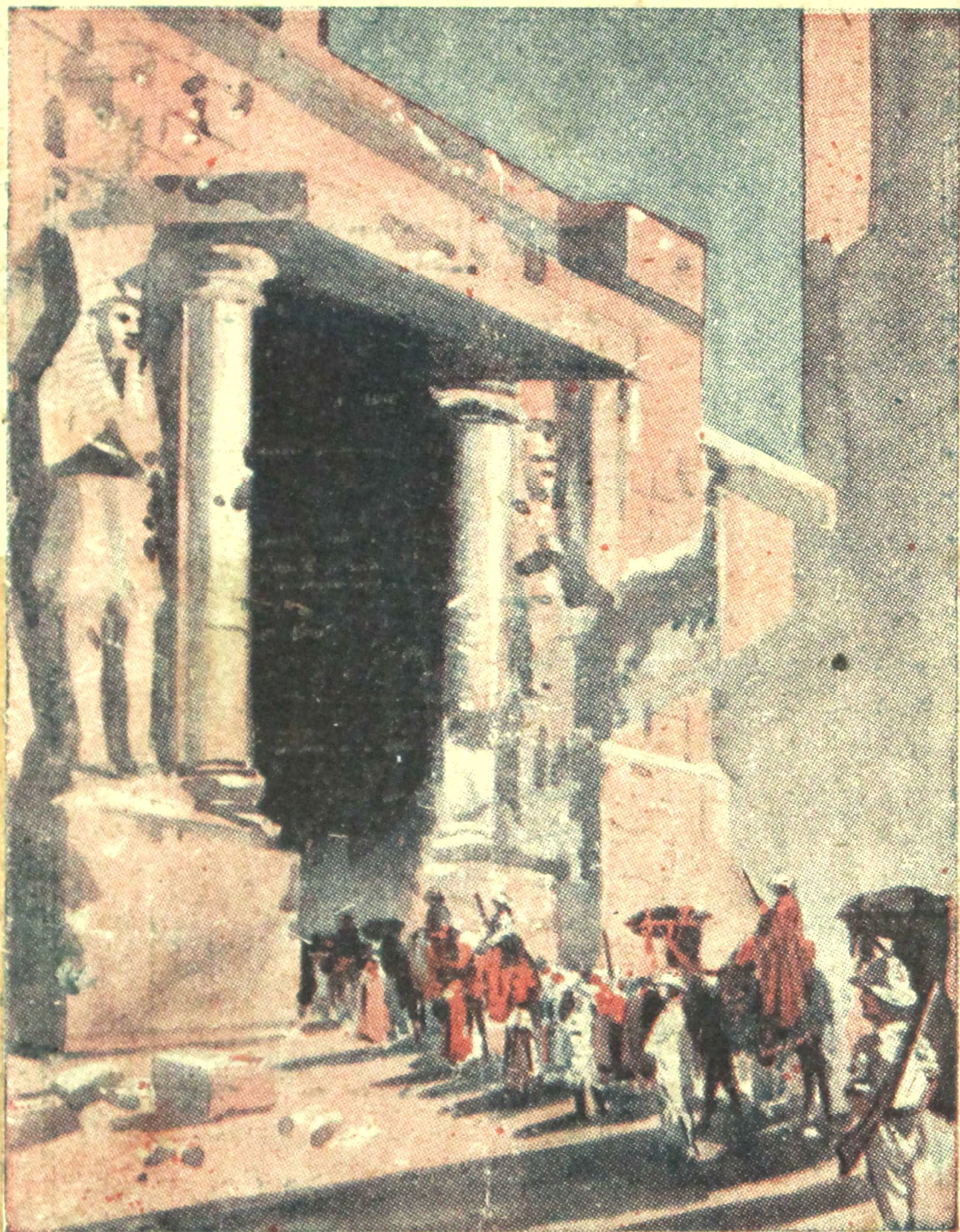


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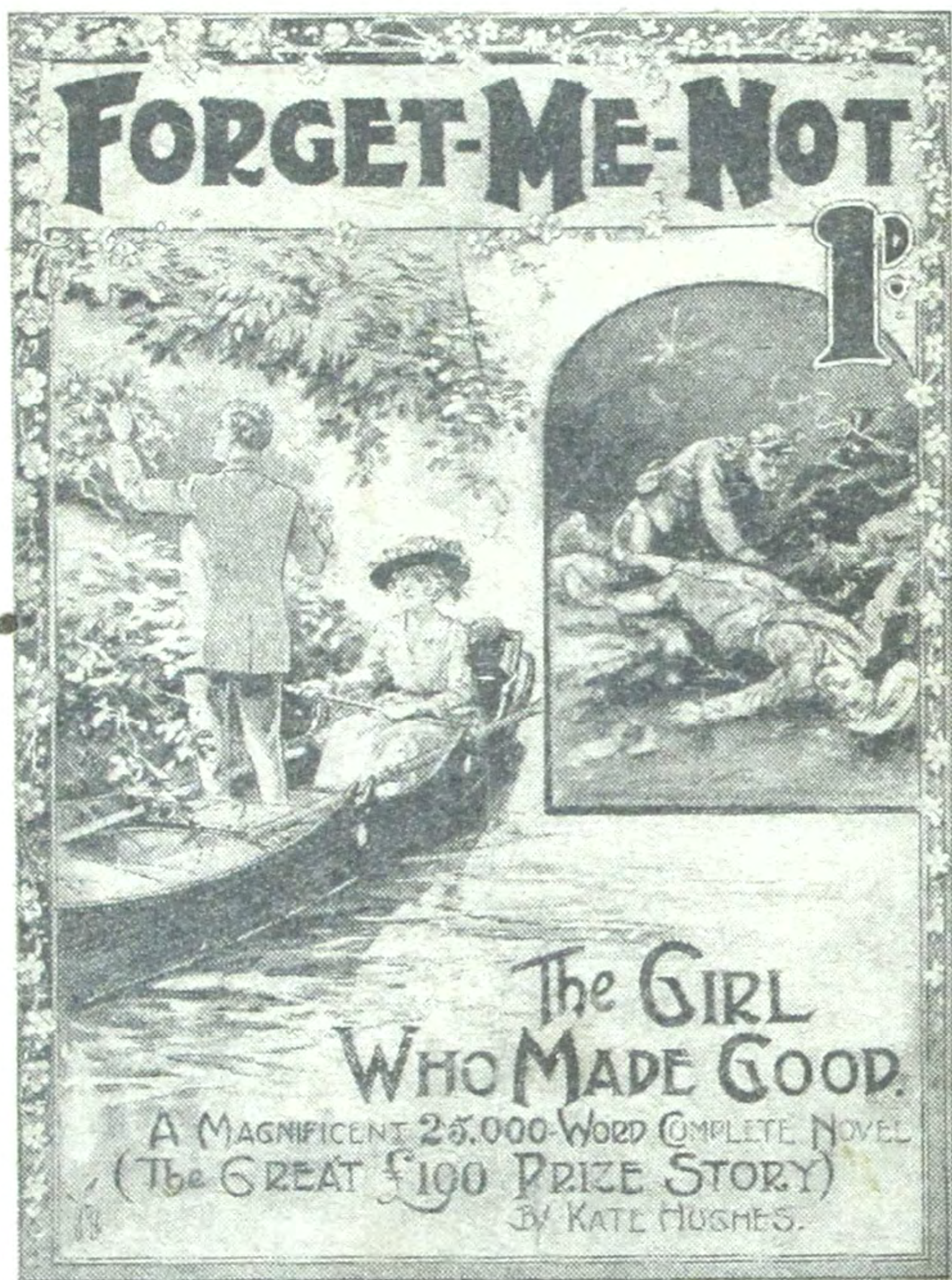


THE CITY OF BURNISHED BRONZE!

Being Another Adventurous Episode from the Pages of NIPPER'S NOTE-BOOK.
Set down by NIPPER, and Prepared for Publication by the Author of "The Yellow Shadow," "Nipper at St. Frank's," "The Ivory Seekers," "'Twi'xt Sunset and Dawn," "The Riddle of Yew Hollow, etc., etc.

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH SOME OLD FRIENDS ARRIVE AT GRAY'S INN ROAD, AND PROCEED TO MAKE THINGS HUM—LORD DORRIMORE RELATES A STRANGE STORY, AND THE GUV'NOR DECIDES THAT A SOJOURN IN EGYPT WILL DO US GOOD.

FIRST of all, I've got something to say which hasn't got anything to do with the yarn I'm now going to write.

That's a queer way to begin, but you'll understand in a minute.

Just lately I've been busy—in my spare time, of course—writing all about the adventures of Nelson Lee and my humble self at St. Frank's College. As everybody knows, we went to St. Frank's to escape the attentions of the Fu Chang Tong, a bloodthirsty Chinese secret society.

I've got a whole heap more to write about St. Frank's, but it's struck me that it is possible to have too much of a good thing. I'm not praising my own stuff, of course; I let other people do that!

Now, my idea is to sandwich in a few other adventures, now and again. This will relieve the monotony. So, although I haven't finished with St. Frank's by jolly long chalks, I'm now going to describe our thrilling adventures in the affair of the City of Burnished Bronze.

If you don't like it, send me a wire. 'Nipper, London,' will reach me—perhaps. But, in my opinion, this system will be the best all round. I asked the

guy'nor about it, and he told me not to worry him with trifles! Somehow or other, he doesn't seem to realise the importance of my Note-Book at all.

Well, having filled up a sheet of manuscript paper on nothing, so to speak, I'll get busy.

Nelson Lee and I were in the laboratory one warm afternoon. He was busy making a very intricate experiment, and I was busy—watching him do it. We weren't expecting visitors, and didn't want any.

But visitors arrived, all the same. And then we found out we did want 'em! I'll just explain all about it. The guy'nor was testing the strength of some horrible solution he'd just made, and this was a ticklish job. He wanted to be quiet. Then I heard somebody thumping up the stairs like an elephant. It was a most decided foot-step.

"Somebody coming, sir," I remarked.

"Then go into the consulting-room and see who it is," snapped Nelson Lee. "Tell him that I'm too busy to see anybody—even a Cabinet Minister. In fact, I'd rather see the greer than a Cabinet Minister. I distinctly told Mrs. Jones to admit nobody."

I grinned, and passed into the consulting-room. As I did so the door opened, and somebody entered. The visitor was a tall, sunburnt man, with twinkling eyes and curly hair. He grinned cheerfully.

"Hallo, Nipper!" he said. "How goes it?"

I stared at him, and gasped.

"Dorrie!" I roared delightedly.

"The one and only," he agreed. "Where's the sleuthhound?"

I rushed forward, and grabbed hold of his hand. He was smiling genially as I did my best to wrench his arm off.

"I thought you were out in the wilds of East Africa!" I exclaimed.

"I had to come to London on business," said the Right Honourable Lord Dorrimore. "Frightful bore, Nipper, but these things must be done. Let me repeat my former question—where's the sleuthhound?"

"You mean the guv'nor?" I grinned. "He's in the lab., making an experiment——"

But just then Nelson Lee appeared.

"This is a surprise, Dorrie," he said cordially. "I heard your voice—how could I mistake it? And what miracle has happened to bring you to London, of all places? I always understood that you detested London."

"So I do—it's the rottenest hole on earth," said Dorrie candidly. "I'm here for two reasons, professor. Business—and to see you. I'm going to cart you off into the Libyan Desert before a week's out."

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"Same old Dorrie!" he grinned. "Wherever I meet you, you always want to spirit me away into the wilds. It can't be done, old fellow. And, let me tell you, the Libyan Desert doesn't sound very enticing."

"Oh, well, you wait until you've heard the yarn," said Dorrie. "I'm com' to commission you, Lee. It's a proper detective case—not just a sportin' trip. It's necessary to offer you some sort of inducement. You an' your detective cases make me tired. Trackin' criminals, and bob-nobin' with policemen, and attendin' trials at the Old Bailey—Ye gods, what an existence!"

Lord Dorrimore sat down on the desk, regardless of the fact that he was squatting on the guv'nor's fountain-pen—which certainly wouldn't be improved. But Dorrie was about the clumsiest chap breathing. Houses weren't made to hold him. He loved the wilds, and the freedom of outdoor life.

He was a great pal of Nelson Lee's. It wasn't so many months since we had been out in East Africa with him. He'd carried us off into Kutana-land at that

time, after a pile of ivory. I've described that adventure in my Note-Book series already. The affair was quite fresh in my memory, and I wondered how old Umlosi was getting on. Umlosi was a Kutana chief, and a terrifically important person in his own estimation. And he undoubtedly was a splendid chap.

"You think my detective stories are boring, Dorrie," laughed Nelson Lee. "Well, I don't think I should like to spend my life in roaming the wild spots of the earth. We're built differently, you see—— Good gracious, what's that?"

An appalling commotion was going on outside, on the landing.

"Oh, that must be old Umlosi!" grinned Dorrimore.

"Umlosi!" I roared. "Have you brought him with you?"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" chuckled our visitor. "He wanted to see the great kraal of the white lords, and so I brought him along. Gad! It's a wonder my hair isn't grey! Umlosi's a good chap, but he's difficult to manage."

Dorrie gave a heave and jumped off the desk. There was a crack as the guv'nor's fountain-pen smashed—I'd been expecting it—and a blob of ink was distinctly visible on the rear portion of his lordship's breeches. But a trifle like that didn't worry him. And, incidentally, he'd pitched the telephone instrument over.

"Umlosi's a clumsy boulder," exclaimed Dorrie, without seeming to realise in the least that he was ten times clumsier than Umlosi could ever be. "I left him to bring up the baggage, and I expect he's havin' an argument with it on the landin'. I told him not to bring up the lot all at once."

He opened the door—only just in time, as it happened. For a huge figure floundered in, and proceeded to shed trunks and bags all over the floor. I guessed—rightly—that a few had fallen on the landing, so what the full load must have been I couldn't quite imagine.

And out of the debris, so to speak, strode Umlosi. He seemed quite proud of his achievement, and apparently considered it was the right thing to chuck Dorrie's luggage all over the show.

"Wau, N'Kose, where hast thou brought me, my father?" exclaimed Umlosi gravely. "It is even as the caves—— But it is Umtagati I see before me—he of the ways of a witch-

doctor! And Mauzie, of the shining eye! I greet thee, my masters!"

"How art thou, old friend?" said Nelson Lee cordially.

"Just as black as ever!" I grinned. "Only we can't see so much of you, Umlosi. Your manly figure isn't shown off to the best advantage."

"It is even as thou sayest, Manzie!" exclaimed Umlosi sadly, in his great deep voice. "Wau! These coverings for my body are like unto bandages round a wound! They cause an irritation which cannot be delayed. I would cast them off with scorn, but my father forbids it."

"Do you want to get locked up, you old idiot?" grinned Dorrie. "You'd look fine going about London with only a 'moocha' round your tummy, wouldn't you? Well, we're here, and that's something to be thankful for. We've descended on you like an avalanche, Lee. If you haven't got any spare rooms for us, we'll dig in the passage. Umlosi can sleep in the coal-cellar, anyhow!"

Things were soon straightened out. Umlosi insisted upon greeting the gov'nor and I about ten times. He'd been a king in his own country—Kutanaland—when we'd seen him last; but the roaming feeling had come on, and he had left his kraal for the Congo region—and had fallen in with Dorrie.

Umlosi was dark, and he stood fully six feet eight in his shoes. He was a tremendous man, with the strength of Hercules. His face was broad and good-humoured, and his teeth persisted in showing themselves whenever he spoke.

He was dressed in a light flannel suit, which was painfully too small for him. Perhaps this was why he likened his clothing to bandages round a wound. He wore a soft collar, and a Panama hat. Altogether, he presented a weird spectacle.

Hotel proprietors wouldn't look at him; Dorrie had tried to get rooms at several West End hotels, but Umlosi had frightened the managers. I wasn't a bit surprised at that. The black giant was rather indignant, for he couldn't realise what a quaint figure he cut.

So Lord Dorrimore had, as a last resort, come to Gray's Inn Road—he knew that he'd be welcome. He wanted to stay in London about a week, and the gov'nor said that he and Umlosi were at liberty to stop a month, if they chose.

Umlosi was what the Zulus call a ringed man—a "Keshla." And he had a huge amount of dignity—as befitted the chief of the Kutana tribe. He was a good old stick, though, and he simply worshipped Dorrie—whom he called "He-of-the-Shimmering-Eye." This was because Dorrie sometimes affected an eyeglass.

Mrs. Jones, our housekeeper, was highly excited at first, but the gov'nor soon calmed her down, and made her promise to prepare two extra bedrooms for our unexpected guests.

Then, after things were fairly straight, we all sat down in the consulting-room. A meal was being prepared by Mrs. Jones, meanwhile. Umlosi was very curious, and he took a great interest in everything.

"This is a strange and wonderful kraal, O Umtagati," he said, as he gazed out of the window at a passing motor-bus. "Thou hast perils greater even than the lion and the elephant. For are not these travelling houses a danger to all? Wau! Thou hast the railway in the streets!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"You'll get used to London before long, Umlosi," he said. "The travelling houses are merely tramcars, and they are not at all dangerous—if you steer clear of them."

"He had an argument with a taxi at Charing Cross," grinned Dorrie. "They met just out in the road, an' the taxi hit old Umlosi in the tummy. I thought he was done for—but the taxi stopped dead, and then started goin' backwards!"

This, of course, was a bit of an exaggeration. But Umlosi was possessed of terrific strength. He called the gov'nor Umtagati, because that meant wizard. He reckoned that Nelson Lee was a wizard.

"Are you busy at present, old man?" asked Dorrie abruptly.

"Not particularly," smiled Lee. "Why?"

"I want you to come out to Egypt with me."

"You weren't serious when you mentioned the Libyan Desert, were you?"

His lordship nodded.

"Serious? Of course I was serious," he replied. "Look here, Lee, I'm not going to persuade you. I'll spin the yarn—and I'll abide by your decision."

"I've got an idea that you'll take the case on."

"It's not another hunt for ivory, then?" I asked.

"Ivory—in the Libyan Desert?" grinned Dorrie. "Nipper, my lad. I want your obstinate guv'nor to help me to find an old pal of mine—and, incidentally, I want to reach the City of Burnished Bronze."

"The which?" I ejaculated, staring.

"The City of Burnished Bronze," said Lord Dorrimore. "I'm not dreamin'—I'm not recitin' something out of the 'Arabian Nights.' It's a reality. Well, Lee, what's the verdict?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I understood I was going to hear the yarn?" he suggested.

"I thought the lure of the Bronze City would fetch you," sighed Dorrie. "Well, here goes. Gimme one of those cigars to be chewing, though. Thanks."

His lordship made himself quite comfortable, and we waited. The guv'nor, I know, was mildly interested, but I was very keen. Umloei remained at the window. He was more interested in the street than in Dorrie's yarn.

"The whole thing really started about a year ago," commenced Lord Dorrimore. "I happened to be up in Khartum. Well, while I was there, I ran across an old chum of mine, Lawrence Mannering. You never met him, did you, Lee?"

"No; but I've heard you speak of him."

"Decent chap—one of the best," said Dorrie. "I always called him Pinkie, because he was fair skinned. Besides, Lawrence is a rotten name. Well, Pinkie, it seemed, was tryin' to get a chap to go with him on an expedition into the desert, west of the Saawa oasis. The object of this expedition was to search for a dead city, lost in the desert, known as the City of Burnished Bronze."

"I'd heard a bit about it, and I'm pretty sure the place really exists. Just at that time I was keen on gettin' down to British East Africa, and so I told Mannering I couldn't go with him, when he asked me. He was a bit disappointed, but we parted cheerfully enough."

"Months later, I heard that Pinkie had started for his Bronze City, which is somewhere on the borders of Senoussi-land, in the Libyan Desert, accompanied by Professor Reginald Lyle, the well-known Egyptologist. Well, later on still,

I obtained fresh news—news that startled me, too. You see, Lee, I'm not goin' into details now. I don't want to bore you. Heaven forbid! I'm anxious for you to be interested."

The guv'nor smiled.

"I'm quite interested," he said. "Don't worry yourself, Dorrie. What was this startling news?"

"I heard that poor Mannering was dead," replied our visitor, gravely. "That expedition had been a complete failure. Disaster had overtaken the caravan—they had got out of their course, experienced sandstorms, and I don't know what else. Anyhow, Pinkie died in the desert, and Lyle only just managed to get to civilisation. He and four Bedouins, and a few camels, were all that remained of the caravan. It was a shockin' tale. Quite common out there, though. Scores of expeditions started into the desert, and they're never heard of again. But Lyle managed to get back, and I heard that he was in Cairo, fittin' up a new expedition."

"Hadn't he had enough of it?" I asked.

"Evidently not. He wanted to succeed where Mannering had failed—that is, he was anxious to find the Bronze City, and reap the glory," said Dorrimore, puffing at his cigar. "Pinkie, of course, had given him all the known information about the mysterious place. As Pinkie told me himself, he'd spent a whole year rakin' up information. Lyle got the benefit of that, and so he was startin' out again—with a bigger caravan this time."

"I was doing nothing particular, so I ran up to Cairo, and had a chat with Lyle; I was anxious to hear how my poor old friend died. I say 'old,' but Pinkie was younger than myself. Well, as soon as ever I saw Lyle I had a queer feelin' down my back that he wasn't a straight chap. I'm a good judge of character, I believe. For example, I know that I'm speakin' to two of the best fellows in the world."

Nelson Lee grinned.

"None of your flattery," he said. "Go ahead with the story."

"My good old professor, I'm not flatterin' you," said Dorrimore, who always called the guv'nor "professor" for some unknown reason. "To be brief, I didn't like Lyle, and his attitude wasn't exactly friendly. He as good as

told me to go away and mind my own business. Anyhow, he didn't tell me much about poor Pinkie's death, and when I pressed him he turned nasty.

"This didn't please me, because I was genuinely cut up about Mannering's death. And when, a week later, I heard a queer yarn from an old Senoussi sheik I was chatty with, I became really suspicious. This old sheik fellow was an honest, truthful Johnnie, and quite above spinnin' a yarn.

"He told me that he had been in one of the nearer oases recently, and, while there, he'd heard a strange story from the lips of the very men who went through the experience—a party of nomad Bedouins. These Arabs, while crossing the desert south-west of Saawa, saw an exceptionally fine mirage. As clearly as though it had been real, they saw a small, unknown oasis, and on it was a European—quite alone. Not another soul was on the oasis except this white man.

"The Bedouins tried to find this oasis, but all their efforts were fruitless. The mirage faded away, but it's certain that there was an oasis, and that a white man actually stood upon it. Mirages are only reflection of real things, after all. When I heard the story I got thinking.

"I remembered Professor Lyle's strange attitude, and I put two and two together. I became infernally suspicious—especially as I found out that Lyle was a bit of a rotter in many ways. His name isn't very clean in Cairo or Alexandria—or anywhere along the Nile, in point of fact."

Dorrie paused to knock the ash from his cigar.

"And what were your suspicions?" I asked interestedly.

"Spoken baldly, they were these: I believe that Mannering is still alive, and the whole yarn about the disaster to the caravan was a faked-up affair," said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "I believe that Pinkie met with black treachery from Professor Lyle."

"But why?" asked Nelson Lee. "What was Lyle's object?"

"They may have quarrelled—anything you like," replied Dorrie. "Anyhow, I've got that conviction, and nothing will shake it. It's a case of jealousy and avarice. Lyle wants to reap all the glory."

"Avarice?" said Lee questioningly.

"Well, this Bronze City is supposed to contain a fabulous treasure," said our visitor. "Lyle wants to hook that. He didn't see why Mannering should have a hand in the pie. Having got Pinkie's secret from him, he turned on him—that's my idea.

"The scoundrel fought shy of actual murder, and so he marooned poor old Pinkie on this unknown oasis. I may as well tell you that I hunted up some of those Bedouins, and I've got a pretty shrewd idea as to where the oasis is to be found. It's right out of the track of things, and isn't to be found on any map."

"But can't Mr. Mannering escape?" I asked.

Dorrie shook his head.

"My dear Nipper," he said, "how can he escape? He hasn't got any camels, and it's suicide for a man to venture out upon the desert on foot. This oasis is never visited by a soul—because it is unknown. Mannering's a prisoner there—free to do just as he likes, but a prisoner just the same. To wander away from the oasis is to go to his death, and he's got too much sense to do that. Pinkie's alive, and he's praying every day for deliverance. I want to go out and deliver him. Now do you understand?"

"How is he keeping alive?" I asked, while the gov'nor remained thoughtful.

"Well, there's fresh water there—that's certain," replied Dorrie. "A small spring, I suppose. And dates and olives probably grow in abundance. These desert oases are often quite thick with date-palms and pomegranates, and things. Pinkie wouldn't die, although his diet would be somewhat restricted."

"It's all very well, Dorrie, but you've got no proof—no concrete evidence," said Nelson Lee. "You've built up this theory of yours on the strength of a Bedouin tale of a mirage. That's rather flimsy, isn't it?"

His lordship groaned.

"You're going to treat the whole thing like one of your police cases!" he said plaintively. "Who's talkin' about concrete evidence? I say that the facts, takin' them all together, seem fishy. And it's overwhelming odds that my suspicions are well-founded."

"I must admit that I agree with you there."

"Well, that's good enough!"

"Hardly," objected the great detective. "Do you think these vague suspicions of yours warrant a big expedition being sent out? The chances are that there's nothing in the tale, and, even if it is true you might never find the oasis."

Dorrie groaned again, only louder.

"You're pullin' the whole thing to pieces," he exclaimed. "I tell you, Lee, there's something inside me tells me that Pinkie is alive. I can't rest until I've made a big effort to save him. Anyhow, I've just heard that Lyle's second expedition has been delayed, and he hasn't started from Cairo yet. I had to come to London on business, and so I thought of you. I brought Umlosi along in order to save time. We can all go straight out to Cairo, and start from there, cuttin' straight across to the Saawa oasis."

"You've got it all planned," smiled the gov'nor.

"Of course I have. Will you come?"

"My dear man, give me time to consider!"

"I vote for going, gov'nor," I put in. "We can't let Mr. Mannering die in the desert! He's like Robinson Crusoe—only he's surrounded by sand instead of water."

"You've simply got to come, Lee," went on Dorrie. "You don't think I'm going out there without you, do you? You're the very man for the job. If we rescue Mannering we shall have to look out for Lyle and collar him. He'll have to pay for his scoundrelism. You're a detective——"

"Oh, that tongue of yours!" laughed Lee. "You're trying to get round me, Dorrie. But, really, I must consider."

"Consider what—finances?" asked his lordship quickly. "You needn't. I'm footing the bill all along. As you know, I'm blessed with a big fortune, and I don't care how much I spend on this business. I'm not talking as a friend now—but as a client. This is a proper detective case, Lee. I'm commissioning you to go out to Egypt to find Mannering. And I offer you a fee of five thousand pounds, spot cash, down on the nail, before we start, to accept my commission. Whether we succeed or fail makes no difference. That's business, isn't it?"

Nelson Lee rose, paced up and down for a moment or two, and then faced Lord Dorrimore.

"You've put it like that because you

think I shall consider it more favourably," he smiled. "It's a handsome offer, Dorrie—a princely one. I don't often get five thousand pound fees, as you may imagine. But I can't accept, old man."

Dorrie looked alarmed.

"You mean you won't come?" he asked blankly.

"I didn't say that," laughed the gov'nor. "I mean I can't accept this fee. We're friends, Dorrie. I don't want to make money out of you——"

"That's rot——"

"No, it isn't. If I decide to come with you I shall do so because of our friendship, and because I am really struck by your story. To tell you the truth, I think with you. I believe that Mannering is alive. But, before I finally decide, I should like you to tell me everything in fuller detail."

"That's easy," cried Dorrie.

"Of course it is. But I hear the gong," said Nelson Lee. "Mrs. Jones has prepared a meal, Dorrie. We'll adjourn this discussion until the evening."

"Oh, I say! Let's come to a decision right away!" protested his lordship. "Look here, Lee, there's a man in Cairo waiting to get a cable from me. When he gets it, he's goin' to make all preparations; and when we get out there we shall find everything ready. We'll be able to start into the desert right away."

Nelson Lee stroked his chin.

"Well, I say this, Dorrie," he replied. "If, upon closer examination of your story, I find no fatal flaw, I'll start for Senoussiland just as soon as ever you like. Nipper will come with me."

Lord Dorrimore jumped to his feet.

"Then it's settled," he exclaimed. "You're comin' along, Lee. And I'll make you accept that fee, see if I don't. Umlosi, you lump of anthracite!"

The Kutana chief showed us his teeth as he smiled.

"Thou hast wonderful names for me, N'Kose," he exclaimed. "Some of them are unknown to me; and were it not for the fact that thou art my father, I might even suspect that the words were insulting."

"Anthracite, my dear Umlosi, is coal—black stuff, you know," grinned Dorrie. "I must be a proud father, to have a hefty son like you. But haven't you heard what Umtagati has been saying?"

"It is even so, N'Kose," said Umlosi.

"Umtagati, my master, is to go with us into the white deserts, where water is as snows in Kutaland, where forests are unknown, and where the sun shines with the heat of that region below thou hast often spoken of."

"He's accusin' me of swearin'," said Dorrimore. "But you're right, Umlosi. Umtagati and Nipper—I mean Manzie—are going with us to Egypt. They haven't actually promised yet, but you needn't worry about that."

Umlosi nodded gravely.

"It is well, N'Kose," he said. "And I, for my part, will leave this great and wondrous kraal with no misgivings. London, as thou callest this vast place, is truly a land of amazement. But I am of the Kutanas, and I am not content here. It will be an hour of joy when I set foot on the floating city which will carry me across the great waters."

"That hour won't be long in coming, Umlosi," said his lordship. "And now, I suppose, we'd better think about grub. And if you dare to go back on your word, Lee, I'll lose all faith in mankind and become a monk!"

That dreadful threat only brought a smile to the gov'nor's face. But Lord Dorrimore needn't have had any fears. I knew well enough that Nelson Lee was keenly interested, and that we were destined to journey to the desert.

And that night the final promise was made.

We should soon be off to rescue Mr. Lawrence Mannering from an unknown oasis in the heart of the great desert—and, incidentally, we were booked for the City of Burnished Bronze.

CHAPTER II.

BENEATH THE SHADOW OF THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GHIZEH—WE START INTO THE DESERT, AND ARRIVE AT THE OASIS OF SAJAWA—HERE WE LEARN THINGS—AND I HAVE A LITTLE WRESTLING MATCH WITH A WILY BEDOUIN.

NELSON LEE, attired in white drill, and a pith helmet, was superintending the work of half a dozen Arabs. I looked on interestedly. I got quite hot doing so. I should have got hot in any case—whether I was doing anything or not. We were on the brink of the great adventure.

I'm not going to describe our journey out to Alexandria and Cairo, and our doings in the latter city. It would make tedious reading, for nothing happened that wasn't just ordinary. Of course, Cairo's a fine place, and I could fill pages writing about it—but this yarn doesn't happen to be a travellers' guide.

When we arrived in Cairo we found that Lord Dorrimore's friend had been very busy. Practically all the arrangements were made, and the caravan was complete. All we had to do was to get the things in order.

And now, at last, we were about to make the start.

Our caravan consisted of Nelson Lee, Dorrie, Umlosi, myself, and twelve Senoussi—and, of course, a number of camels. There were twenty-four camels altogether. In physique and most other things the Senoussi are miles superior to the Bedouins. And, while the latter are the most frightful liars, the Senoussi can be relied upon almost always.

It was for this reason that Dorrie had chosen all Senoussi to accompany us, and act as attendants. We weren't bound for Senoussiland itself, of course—the Egyptian Government wouldn't have allowed us to. I'd often heard of the Mahdi. This gentleman lived in a place called Kufra, I believe—a big oasis situated in the very heart of the inaccessible Sahara.

Exactly where it was nobody knew. The mysterious stronghold of the Mahdi is hidden in the wastes of the desert. I don't think any white man has ever penetrated there—or, in fact, anybody else, except the Senoussi themselves.

There are, it is judged, about eight millions of these followers of the Mahdi, and they are something of a menace. The Egyptian Government has its work cut out to keep things going smoothly. For the Senoussi are fanatical, and they hate the Christians.

At the same time, the hospitality of the Senoussi is proverbial. And they are generally affable and straightforward in ordinary life. Their dress is simple, consisting of a white burnous, sandals and a white turban.

The start was being made from the foot of the Great Pyramid at Ghizeh, and now all was ready. Umlosi was a different being. The old ruffian had discarded his uncomfortable clothing, and was now attired in his "moecha"

and previous little else. A fine necklace of lions' claws adorned his neck, and his skin shone like burnished copper.

"Wau! It is well, Manzie!" he exclaimed, as he approached me with sparkling eyes. "These great sands are strange to me, a chief of the far-off Kutanas; but are they not better than the perils of the great white kraals across the broad waters? Last night I had a strange dream——"

"Oh, you're always dreaming!" I grinned.

"Thou speakest lightly, O Manzie of the shining eye," said Umlooi. "Yet I am serious and even troubled. The mists swam before my eyes, and I saw many things. And it is even as N'Kose, my father, sayest. I saw a depression in the desert, and there lay the white man, Mannering. He was lonely, was this poor white man. And I saw a wonderful kraal of shimmering metals——"

"Hallo, talking about your visions again?" grinned Lord Dorrmore, coming up. "I suppose you didn't happen to see a few mountains of pearls and diamonds, or anything of that sort? If you did, it'll cheer us up amazin'ly."

Umlooi smiled broadly.

"Thou art pleased to be light-tongued, my father," he exclaimed. "But my dreams are my dreams."

"Nobody'll deny that, I'm sure," said Dorrie. "You're welcome to 'em, my son. As a rule, you see red mists and gallons of gore. And I've noticed that there's generally a heap big scrap in store when you dream that way. So it's cheering to hear that there's no gore this time."

"You fellows all ready?" asked Nelson Lee, coming up.

We got busy then, and in a very short time the start was made. At the last minute our Senoussi prostrated themselves before the great desert, and prayed for a safe journey and a swift one. This was a pretty significant reminder of the perils of the desert.

The sun was shining almost overpoweringly and the sands were like the top of a kitchen-range. Camel-riding isn't at all bad. After you've got used to the peculiar swaying gait, you're quite comfortable.

"Well, we're off," shouted out Dorrie. "Good luck to us!"

Although the sun was fierce, the day was really a glorious one. We left the

plateau of Ghizeh, and turned our faces towards far-off Saawa. The oasis of Saawa was our first objective. There were several smaller oases we should strike en route, of course; but from Saawa we should plunge into the Unknown.

Nelson Lee did not regard this affair as a holiday; he had come out to find Mr. Lawrence Mannering—or to finally establish the fact that he really died. If successful in the former, the gov'nor would consider himself well repaid for the time spent. The trip was costing us nothing, for Dorrie financed everything—although, from the gov'nor's point of view, this was a detail.

To begin with, the journey across the desert was interesting. It was novel, too. I had been in the desert before, but not in this particular region. I still have distinct recollections of visiting a mysterious pyramid in the neighbourhood of the Fayyum—but that was when the gov'nor was fighting the League of the Green Triangle.

The sky was cloudless, and it shimmered with a thousand darts of golden light. The sands of the desert stretched away as far as the eye could reach, in limitless expanses, ochre and violet.

There was a strange fascination in that great waste.

The silence could almost be heard. That sounds queer, doesn't it? But anybody who has been upon the desert will know what I mean.

It was a silence which is like nothing else on earth. Once you've experienced it, you can never forget it. The tremendous silence of the bygone dead. I had an idea that if we succeeded in finding "Pinkie," we should find him insane. How could any man live on a deserted oasis, utterly alone—alone with that dreadful silence—and remain in possession of his wits.

I have never been on the desert myself, but I can imagine what it can be like. The very thought appalled me. But, if Dorrie's theory was true, what a dastardly trick! To maroon a man upon a lone oasis, miles out of the track of civilisation!

To be upon a desert island, surrounded by uncharted seas, was infinitely preferable to Mannering's fate. For on such an island he would have the comforting sounds of the breaking waves. But on this oasis there was nothing—nothing

but the terrible silence in his ears the whole time.

Soon after we started, making in a north-westerly direction towards the Natron Valley, we skirted a curious petrified forest. I was greatly interested. There were great tree trunks and logs, but they were wood no longer—for, during the ages, they had become turned to stone.

These were found in various places, and it was conclusive evidence that, in the dim past, forests flourished where there was now nothing but desert sand.

From the Natron Valley we went due west, and reckoned to reach Saawa oasis after a few more days of travel. This journey was interesting and somewhat uncomfortable at times, but nothing of any particular importance occurred. So I don't think I'd better waste much space on describing it.

The heat, of course, was slightly different to that which travellers experience when they are in the neighbourhood of the North Pole. We didn't get any snow in the Libyan Desert. We should have welcomed some, but by some curious chance, it didn't snow at all! Perhaps there was something wrong with the weather.

I do know, though, that the thermometer registered something like 115 degrees—in the shade! That doesn't look like snow, does it? It's really a wonder we weren't melted like candles in an oven.

We had big white sunshades, and these afforded us some little relief. And this'll show you how extremely comfortable the journey was; to avoid being quite choked, we had to muffle our mouths, the heat-waves rising from the baked sands were so appallingly suffocating.

Oh, yes, we should have welcomed some snow all right! We had a good supply of water, and so we had no actual experience of that curse of the desert—thirst. I am quite sure we weren't anxious to try it. But I mustn't speak too soon. We were destined to have a taste before so very long!

Our camels were fine creatures—the very best Dorrie could obtain. As a rule we travelled throughout the day, ten or twelve hours at a stretch, without halting, or without getting off the camels. For luncheon we had something while

riding, swinging to the animal's slouching, swaying walk.

Well, to cut it short, we arrived at the oasis of Saawa without mishap. Here we pitched our tents in the neighbourhood of the Egyptian Government building. According to Dorrie, it was about ten days journey to the unmapped oasis on which poor Mannering was supposed to be. And Dorrie had a pretty idea in which direction it lay.

The Saawa oasis was a pretty big place. It was a huge natural depression in the desert, with salt marshes and lakes here and there. The population was, of course, mostly Senoussi, and they numbered nearly five thousand.

There was plenty of water at Saawa. Altogether, there were over a hundred fresh water wells, most of them enclosed in lovely gardens, with all sorts of tropical growth flourishing.

Silvery olive trees and tall palms were all over the place, and there were plenty of roses and vines. As for fruit, we found oranges and pomegranates and dates, and other delicacies.

Our camels, who hadn't had a drink for several days, soon made up for lost time at Saawa. We hardly recognised them when they'd had their fill. Their tummies bulged considerably; their sides swelled, and their ribs disappeared.

After our tents had been pitched I was left with Umlosi to look after things, and to get grub ready, while Dorrie and the gov'nor went off to interview people—officials of some sort, I believe.

Eight of our Senoussi servants were dismissed here; we were only taking four with us into the unknown desert. These four were trusted fellows, and they knew the desert well. Dorrie, in fact, was relying on them to get us through safely.

Umlosi was a great chef, in his own way. Sometimes, when the fit took him, he could produce some ripping dishes. But, being a great chief, he didn't demean himself by descending to cookery unless he had a pain in the region of the belt—in other words, unless he was hungry.

He had a particular liking for a luscious dish of roasted caterpillars—at least, that's what Dorrie said. Happily, Umlosi was unable to serve up anything of that sort here. I draw the line at roasted caterpillars. I'd rather go hungry for six months!

By the time the grub was ready evening was closing in, and the air wasn't so hot. But our tents were pitched beneath some shady trees, so we were all right, anyhow. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore returned just at the right time.

"Thy nostrils are keen, N'Kose," grinned Umlosi. "The smell of the grub, as thou callest the food, reached thee even from afar. It is even as I would have wished, my father."

"And it's even as I would have wished, my son," said Dorrie cheerfully. "We've had a bit of good news, so I'm feelin' happy. We'll celebrate by gorging ourselves to our heart's content—or until the fodder's all eaten."

"Thy words are those of a man such as thou hast told me of in the great kraal of London," said Umlosi. "The man who eats with a great heartiness in times of war, when he should be sparing, so that others may not be ill-fed."

"He means a food-hog," I grinned.

"That's all right," said Dorrie. "Umlosi's a most complimentary chap. I'm a food-hog and a glutton. All right, you black lump of activity, I've got a few choice names for you, but I can't think of 'em now."

"What's this good news, guv'nor?" I asked.

"Dorrie'll tell you," said Nelson Lee. "He's good at talking."

"That's my strong point," agreed his lordship languidly. "I don't know that it is good news, after all. Nothing special, at all events. While the professor and I were exploring just now we ran into an amiable gentleman with a name a mile long—the Sheik Wekiel of Naawa, I believe."

"Who's he, when he's at home?"

"The Mahdi's agent, I think," said Dorrie. "Well, this chap, Whiskers—Whiskers is shorter than his own name, and suits him better—told us that Professor Lyle left the oasis only a week or two ago. That's good news, really. I thought Lyle had left for the Bronze City months back. He must have been delayed somehow. You see, young 'un, he's only just ahead of us, and we may collar him in the Bronze City itself. If we do we'll quietly drop him down one of the wells."

"But we're not going to the City of Bronze," I said.

"That's where you're wrong, Nipper—we are," said Dorrie, as he started on the food. "We're goin' to rescue poor old Pinkie, then we're goin' on to the mysterious city."

"Suppose we don't find the oasis?"

"Oh, we'll find it all right—I know which way to go, and I've got a good compass," said Dorrie lightly. "And from the oasis of Timbuctoo—that's as good as any other name—it'll be easy to strike across the desert to the Bronze City. Our only trouble is water. It's a pity somebody hasn't invented a way of compressin' water into tablets, isn't it? It would be handy to carry a gallon or so in the waistcoat pocket. There's a chance for your scientific abilities, Lee."

Nelson Lee grinned.

"You're optimistic, Dorrie," he said. "I don't like to dishearten you, but I really think that our chances of being successful in this enterprise are slim. However, time will show."

"You make a fine couple," said Dorrimore, shaking his head. "Tryin' to make me miserable all the time. Old Umlosi's got more faith than you two have! We're goin' to get to the oasis, aren't we, Umlosi?"

The black giant looked grave.

"It is as thou sayest, N'Kose," he agreed. "Have I not the best of reasons for speaking these words? My dreams have been many, my father. I have seen this strange spot in the desert, where water is found amid the sands, and where thy friend, with the strange name of Mannering, is awaiting our arrival. I have seen, also, a city of wondrous appearance—a city of domes and minarets which glisten in the sun like molten brass. I have dreamed of—"

Dorrie groaned.

"I've started him now!" he exclaimed. "Umlosi, your dreams are rippin', really, but they're liable to get borin'. I dare say there's something in what you say, though. I'm always willin' to trust to your dreams—when they are dreams. Sometimes they're horrid nightmares, and then I like to forget 'em. Let's hope you don't have any nightmares this trip."

"It is not for me to control that which cometh into my sleep, O Thou-of-the-Shimmering-Eye," said Umlosi, in his deep voice. "Whether it be a dream, or a mare of the night, it comes. Thou

art wise, O my father, for thy errand will be successful. I have it within me that all will come right. But there will be the flowing of blood ere we return to the lands of the forests and rivers again.

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"I thought there'd be blood in it somewhere," he said. "Well, I hope it's not my blood, that's all. I want my fluid of life to flow through my own veins, thanks. It's more use there than flowing away to waste."

"It is ill to jest on such matters, N'Kose," said Umlosi gravely.

"Is it? Oh, well, it'll have to be ill, then," was Dorrie's cheerful reply. "We start in the morning for Pinkie's allotment. The camels are fresh enough—they haven't done much hard work."

After the meal I went with the gov'nor to have a look round. This Senoussi settlement was interesting, but—to my mind—dull. I wondered how the people could live in peace and comfort out here, far from civilisation. It was a desert outpost, for all beyond was sand, more sand, and still more sand. The great Sahara stretched away for hundreds of miles.

We went to "bed" early, for the start into the great waste was to be made soon after dawn. The gov'nor and Dorrie and I rolled into our blankets in one of the tents and went off to sleep quickly. Umlosi was in one of the other tents—we had three—among a pile of baggage. He preferred to sleep in solitary state.

Perhaps it was the excitement of the adventure, and the problematical nature of our search which kept me near the waking point. Anyhow, though I slept, I woke up now and again. Or Umlosi's snores might have had something to do with it. I was in the middle tent with the gov'nor and Dorrie, so Umlosi's unmusical efforts were plainly audible. A brick wall wouldn't have drowned them—let alone a barrier of canvas.

At all events, I was dreaming of a terrific thunderstorm when I woke up again. Umlosi was going ahead splendidly. That's why I was dreaming of thunder, I suppose. There wasn't any other kind of thunder.

But, from the interior of the other tent—which contained a lot of our stores—I thought I heard a slight sound. I listened dreamily, and without interest.

Then I distinctly heard somebody moving. Who could be there?

I sat up, and found that Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were fast asleep.

"Some rotten sneak-thief, I suppose," I told myself. "I'd better investigate."

So, quietly rising, I left the tent, and went outside. The stars were shining gorgeously, and there wasn't a breath of wind. Everything was silent. I'd brought a little electric-torch with me, and I went to the stores-tent, and pulled back the flap.

A sharp exclamation came from a dim figure. I pressed the switch, and saw a shabbily clothed Arab. He had just risen to his feet, but his hands were empty. I'd just surprised him in time.

"What's the game?" I asked sharply.

He didn't understand my words, of course, not being an English scholar. But he understood my tone. And, seeing that I was not a full-grown man, he decided to make a dash for it.

I knew he decided this, because he suddenly flung himself at me. My torch went flying, and in a second we were struggling fiercely. But the Bedouin thief didn't get away so easily as he had anticipated.

"Gov'nor!" I roared. "Dorrie!"

The Bedouin growled out something absolutely unprintable—at least, it can't be printed, for I didn't understand the lingo. He was alarmed and desperate, and as I heard Nelson Lee and Dorrie moving, I received a blow on the chest that sent me staggering.

The marauder scudded round the tents like lightning, and disappeared into the gloom. And then, of course—when it was too late—the gov'nor and Dorrie arrived. They came just as I was scrambling to my feet.

"Hallo, it's Nipper," said his lordship sleepily. "I thought murder was bein' done. Is this a new game, young 'un—or are you having one of Umlosi's famous nightmares? You look a bit flustered."

"Didn't you see him?" I yelled.

"This is what comes of eating too much supper," said Dorrie. "I warned you, you young glut—"

"I haven't been dreaming," I broke in. "There was a dirty Arab monkey-ing with our stores. I shouldn't be surprised if he's pinched a lot of things. He slipped through my fingers."

"Only a petty pilferer, I suppose,"

remarked Nelson Lee. "Let's have a look at the things, anyhow."

We examined the stores, but found nothing missing. So we went back to our blankets again. But we little realised how this seemingly trivial incident was to flood back to our minds before many days had passed.

CHAPTER III

OFF INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN—WE ENCOUNTER A SANDSTORM—OR A SANDSTORM ENCOUNTERS US—AND WE ALL BECOME POSSESSED OF UNLIMITED GRIT—THEN A DISCOVERY IS MADE WHICH FILLS US ALL WITH HORROR AND DESPAIR.

CAMELS are queer fish.

They're not fish at all, really, but that's my way of putting it. Anybody—even a kid in an infant's class—will tell you that a camel isn't a fish. But it's a ship, isn't it? At least, they call camels the ships of the desert.

And they're queer merchants. Of course, we had riding camels, and baggage-camels. After all the bustle of preparation, our reduced caravan started out at daybreak from the oasis of Saawa. This time we were only taking four Senoussi with us.

We were off into the land of mystery—a practically unexplored region.

Just at the start I saw some stars; in fact, I saw lots of them, although the sun was shining brilliantly. You see, I had grown a bit careless about mounting my camel, and thought I could do it swankily. But my over-confidence only led to a most undignified fall—and, as I mentioned, there were lots of stars to be seen. I saw plenty, at any rate. The others only grinned and chuckled.

Now, a mehari, or riding-camel, looks a very docile creature. All camels look more or less docile, in fact. But looks are deceptive. Camels are the most obstinate, tricky, troublesome blighters in existence. That's my opinion, anyhow. Perhaps my own particular camel was a specially tricky beast.

The Saharan camel is steered, so to speak, with a guiding-rein which passed through a ring in his right nostril. A queer idea, but that's how it's done. Before you can mount the angular steed you have to make him squat down on

his haunches. Then you seize him by the nostril, and, at the same time, turn his napper towards the near side of the saddle. You grab the rein in the right hand, and shove it on the front of the saddle. Then you have to throw your right leg over, and, as the beast rises, cross your feet on his neck—because there aren't any stirrups. It's quite a performance, but you get used to it.

I thought I'd got used to it. As the camel rises he performs several weird gyrations. First of all he jerks his body violently forward, then backwards, and it wants some doing to keep your balance.

I thought it would be rather good to "show off" a bit. So I hung on carelessly while my camel rose to his feet. The next second the double jerk, being rather more severe than usual—the camel seemed in a hurry to rise—took me by surprise. I shot out of the saddle, and landed on my back in the sand. I lay there for quite a minute, trying to count the stars; and, meanwhile, Dorrie politely remarked that it wasn't a time for going to sleep.

The next time I was more cautious, and managed to keep my balance. But camels are queer fish, as I've already stated. If you want to dismount it's practically certain that your camel will refuse to squat. Then you've got a choice of two things; you can either wait until the beast makes up its mind to squat down—and that may not be until you have coaxed him for five or ten minutes—or you can jump off his back, a drop of about ten feet. And then there's a chance of breaking a leg. Upon the whole, I prefer a decent motor-bike. Unfortunately, however, motor-bikes can't be used in the desert; the surface isn't good enough. The jigger would be up to its hubs in sand all the while. And, of course, petrol-depots are few and far between; so few and far between that there aren't any at all.

However, in spite of these little drawbacks, we started off all right. We left Saawa behind us, and started on the ten days' journey to the oasis of Timbuctoo. That's what Dorrie called it, anyway. The real Timbuctoo, of course, was thousands of miles away, in West Africa.

For the first two days our journey was perfect. The heat wasn't so excessive as before, and we made splendid progress. But during the third day a

hot wind came down upon us stiflingly. And from that moment our troubles began.

Ten days was the utmost limit for our camels—they couldn't go further than that without more water. By that time we hoped to strike the isolated oasis. But in the evening of the fourth day we encountered a sandstorm.

They're called simoons, or simooms, I believe. I'd heard talk about them, but I didn't think that we should have to experience one. But this simoom wasn't our chief trouble.

Towards the evening, after a tedious day's journey, my camel became rather irritable and restless. I've heard that camel-riding makes people sick sometimes, but I wasn't affected that way—because I'm a good sailor. And "the ships of the desert" resemble ships of the sea in their swaying motion. It's just like that of a ship in a heavy swell.

My camel wasn't at all particular about his manners. If he didn't want to do anything, shouting and beating him only made him worse. He was like the rest of his species—infernally obstinate.

This evening he was rather less tractable than usual. Now and again he'd turn his head rapidly and snap at a fly. If one of my legs happened to be in the way he'd have a go at it incidentally. But I was just too quick for him every time. I'd heard that camels often bite choice pieces out of their rider's legs in this way.

"The sky looks jolly queer," I exclaimed, glancing up. "Perhaps that's got something to do with this beast's ill-temper. I say, Lord Dorrie, what's in the wind?"

Dorrimore shook his head.

"Doesn't seem to be any wind," he remarked. "Dead calm, in fact. The sky looks a bit queer, though. I don't like it. We're going to have a change of some sort—and a change for the worse, I expect."

The horizon ahead, and on all sides, had disappeared in a thick coppery haze. It was difficult to tell where the sky ended and where the desert began. And the sun, rather low down, looked like a disc of bronze. The blue of the sky had given place to a dull yellow hue.

"The signs are ominous, O my masters," called out Umlosi, from his camel, and looking rather ludicrous

perched up there. Umlosi didn't like camels, but it was better than walking.

"That's right, be cheerful," I grunted.

"It is my wish to be cheerful, Man-zie," replied Umlosi. "But how can there be cheerfulness when the signs are even as these? We are in a strange land, and thou must understand that strange things come to pass. Ere long the calm will disappear, and a great wind will come blowing down upon us—a wind that has the heat of a forest fire——"

"In other words," put in Nelson Lee grimly—"a sandstorm. That's what we're in for, Nipper. And, sandstorms, in the Libyan Desert, are ugly customers. We had better prepare ourselves for the onslaught."

"Even as thou sayest, Umtagati, we shall be wise making ready," said Umlosi.

Although we all tried to be indifferent, we were all very much concerned. The African simoom is a terrible phenomenon. On many an occasion whole caravans have been wiped out in the space of ten minutes.

For the storm is generally short—and that was a comfort. But the heat and dryness is so suffocating that death is inevitable if the storm happens to be severe. And the dust—the fine sand—driven by the high wind—is simply appalling.

We dismounted without trouble, for the camels were very obedient for once. I expect they knew what was coming well enough. And while we were preparing for the storm we heard a low moaning sound in the far distance. The sun had disappeared, and a deep gloom had settled over the desert. The heat, however, was more suffocating than ever.

And then, all in a moment, the storm was upon us. It really took us by surprise, and if it had been of the worst type we should have perished. But, providentially, the simoom was only moderate.

I really can't describe it—it was so awful.

I only know that we were just suffocating for hours and hours. The heat had increased to a terrible intensity, the hot wind beating on us like the blast from a furnace. And with it came clouds of fine, choking sand. It was ghastly.

I don't know what happened to the others. My own senses reeled, and I became so dazed and confused that I don't know exactly what did happen. But after the hours had passed, and I was just on the point of lapsing into unconsciousness, the sandstorm cleared off abruptly. I had been aware of strange flashes of lightning, but the roar of the wind prevented me hearing thunder—if there had been any. And, naturally, there had been no rain. The lightning was caused by the friction of sand on the air.

I managed to scramble up, and saw that the air was clear. I'd kept my eyes closed and my hands pressed over them, and only about an ounce of sand had got into them—quite a trifle. My ears and nose and hair were choked up.

Everybody and everything was smothered completely, and if the simoom had lasted five minutes longer this record of our adventures would never have been written. I saw that the gov'nor was busily unstrapping one of the big water-bags.

"Ain't—ain't we dead?" I gasped sandily.

"By jing! We ought to be!" panted Lord Dorrimore. "By a piece of luck, it only lasted five minutes—"

"Five minutes?" I echoed. "You mean five hours!"

But Dorrie was right. The whole show had only taken five minutes from first to last. And I'd been quite positive that hours and hours had passed. As the storm hadn't been very severe, we weren't really harmed. The four Senoussi, in fact, who were used to these delightful interludes, appeared quite indifferent.

I felt thirsty enough to drink a gallon, and I eagerly watched the gov'nor getting out the water. At midday we had emptied the bag we had been using, and he was now starting on one of the full ones.

Our water was carried in large bags made of goatskin. These water skins are very porous, and they keep the water wonderfully cool. But naturally, at the same time, they lose a lot of water daily. A good goatskin, I believe, loses about one tenth of its contents in twenty-four hours.

But we had a large supply of these water bags, so we were in no danger of running short. Some of these bags,

when full, weighed between fifty and sixty pounds.

I staggered to my feet, and shook the fine particles of sand out of my ears and hair. Before we could go on we should have to strip ourselves completely. But water was the first thing to think about. We were so exhausted that it was positively torturing to move.

But I managed to get over to Nelson Lee's side. Dorrie and Umloai were close by.

"Wau!" grunted the black giant. "Thou has brought me to a strange country, N'Kose, my father. The swamps and the forests of Kutaland are places of glory compared to this accursed waste. It is well that my clothing is scant, or my discomfort would be even as thine."

"That's not a bad idea at all," exclaimed Dorrie. "I think we shall have to go about in bathing suits, Lee. They'd be cool—Hullo! What's wrong? Has the water gone niffy?"

For the gov'nor, having poured out a bag of water, was sniffing at it keenly. Finally he placed his tongue into it, and then spat it out with great haste. And when he looked up at us there was a grim, hard glint in his bloodshot eyes. All our eyes were bloodshot, in fact, owing to the gritty sand.

"What's the matter, gov'nor?" I asked huskily. "Let's have some of that water, for goodness' sake. I don't care if it tastes a bit wonky—"

"You can't touch this water, Nipper," exclaimed Nelson Lee hoarsely. "Great Heaven! I begin to suspect that we have met with the foulest of foul treachery."

"What do you mean, old man?" asked Dorrie quietly.

"I mean that this water is unfit to drink!"

"Great Scott! What's wrong with it?"

"It is—poisoned!"

I think we were all too dazed by the effects of the sandstorm to fully realise the awful nature of the gov'nor's statement. But I moved a step nearer, and I saw that Dorrie's face had gone rather pale.

"Poisoned?" I echoed. "Can't—can't we drink it at all?"

The great detective shook his head.

"A cupful of this water would not necessarily mean death," he replied. "But, instead of quenching our thirsts,

it would make us mad for water. It is poisoned in such a way that to drink it would be fatal."

"Do you know what the poison is?" I asked dully.

"Yes. But that doesn't matter now," replied Nelson Lee. "There are other water-bags, Nipper, and this disaster may not be so overwhelming as we now imagine. It is even possible that this is the only one affected—that it was so affected by accident."

We all helped to examine the other water-bags. These were the largest of all, containing our main supply. With feverish haste we opened them. And in every case the verdict was the same—the water was undrinkable!

We were out upon the desert, four days' journey from the nearest well, and there was not a single drop of water for us to drink! Even in the second I grasped the appalling horror of the situation.

Our whole party would perish miserably—we should die the most frightful death of any—from thirst!

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON LEE'S DISCOVERY SAVES THE SITUATION IN THE NICK OF TIME—WE QUENCH OUR THIRST WITH SOME FLUID, WHICH, ALTHOUGH TASTING HORRIBLE, IS NEVERTHELESS EFFECTIVE—WE ARRIVE AT TIMBUCTOO.

UMLOSI seemed quite calm.

"Thou hast thine enemy to thanks for this, N'Kose," he exclaimed gravely. "But is it for us to rave and to storm? Ere long we shall be lying upon the sands, food for the vultures——"

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Dorrimore. "I expect that's true enough, Umlosi, but we don't want to shout about it. Lee, what the deuce can it mean? All our water poisoned? Why weren't the other bags poisoned—the ones we've already emptied?"

The gov'nor looked thoughtful.

"This was a deliberately premeditated affair, Dorrie," he replied. "We have been allowed to get so far into the desert that a return is impossible. We cannot hope to reach the Saawa oasis without water. If every bag had been poisoned we should, of course, have turned back soon after the start."

"That's right enough," I exclaimed huskily. "But how did they know which bags to poison, and which bags not to poison? And who did it? It's—it's uncanny!"

"Not in the least, Nipper; the explanation is simplicity itself," replied Nelson Lee. "As you all know, we have some large goatskins, and some small ones. We have always made a practice of using the small ones first. Thus, we have not discovered this terrible thing until now."

"But—but——"

"You remember that Bedouin, whom we suspected of pilfering?" went on Lee. "In reality, he was engaged in tampering with our water-bags. And, obviously, he had been talking with some of the Senoussi servants we dismissed at Saawa. From them he learned that we should not touch the large skins until we were at least four days out on the desert. By Jove! It's a devilish business!"

"But why should that confounded Arab interfere with us?" asked Dorrie blankly. "We hadn't done him any harm, that I'm aware of——"

"Don't forget that Professor Lyle was at Saawa only a week or two ago," interposed Nelson Lee. "In all probability, he heard that we were on our way from Cairo. And so he made preparations. We know nothing for certain, but it needs very little imagination to arrive at something like the truth. In any case, what does it matter? We must look at this thing fairly in the face—we are doomed."

"But—how awful!" I muttered.

The news was stunning. We couldn't go back, and we couldn't go forward. We could attempt to, of course, but what would be the use? We should simply go on until we dropped.

And we should drop long before the next day had gone. Our thirsts were already almost overpowering, because of the sandstorm. And it was horrifying to know that we had bags and bags of water which was utterly undrinkable. We should, indeed, have been more resigned had there been no water at all.

"We'd better pour it away!" said Dorrie quietly. "After a bit, we shall become so maddened that we shall drink it in spite of its deadly nature. And that would mean unnecessary torture. Heaven knows we shall have enough torture as it is!"

"Wise words, O, my father," rumbled Umlosi. "It is better to cast away the temptation even now. I am sad. For is this not a miserable death to die? It has always been my dream to die in the thick of battle, with the clashing of spears in my ears, and with the sight of blood in my eyes. I am a fighter, my masters, and it is a poor death to die from a paltry thirst!"

"Yours may be a paltry thirst, Umlosi—mine isn't!" I said, with a weak attempt to be cheerful. "I've got a thirst as powerful as— Oh, I don't know how powerful it is, but I do know that it's not paltry!"

We didn't talk much after that. Dorrie explained the situation to the Senoussi. These men were quiet, sensible fellows, and they knew that the position was no fault of our own. They accepted the situation with the stoicism of their race. The calm truth was that we should all die within twenty-four hours.

It was a bit staggering.

Look whichever way we may, there was not a glimmer of hope. We had water, but it might as well have been sand, for all the use it was.

We just stood on the desert, too exhausted to do much or say much. The sandstorm had cleared off completely, and the sky was clear and blue. The sun was just setting, gloriously golden. Was this the last sunset I should ever see?

At last, in spite of our weakened state, we set to work and erected the tents. Then Dorrie and the gov'nor and I got rid of as much sand as possible, and settled down to rest. There was a supply of brandy in the stores, and we all had a good tot.

This had a wonderful effect. It allayed our burning thirst somewhat, and it served to revive us. But there wasn't enough brandy to take us back to Saawa—and Saawa was the nearest water-spot.

Food seemed out of the question. Our thirsts were still awful, and we simply couldn't eat without drinking first. If we had lost all our grub we shouldn't have minded so much. We could easily have fasted for four days. But water—! Water in the desert is the mainstay of life.

It was the most appalling calamity imaginable. And we were so utterly stunned by the knowledge that we expressed no opinions, as to the murderous

scoundrel who had placed us in this position.

"Well, I suppose we shall have to sit here, and wait for the end," said Lord Dorrimore, with unwonted gravity. "Poor old Pinkie! We sha'n't get to him, after all! It's rotten, Lee. I—I say, old man, I'm awfully sorry—"

"Sorry for what?" asked the gov'nor sharply.

"Why, for draggin' you into this awful death—"

"Don't be an ass, Dorrie!" interjected Nelson Lee. "Don't blame yourself for this catastrophe. We're all in it together, and there's no need for you to apologise for dragging us into the awful death. It's a pity—an infernal pity—but we're not going to snivel."

"Thy words are brave, O Umtagati!" said Umlosi. "Why should we cry over the milk that has been spilt, as thou sayest? Death comes but once, and if it be sooner than we expect, we must accept the position. But I am sad. It is cruel, indeed, that Manzie should die. His years are few—"

"Oh, don't be sad on my account," I said quietly. "I don't want to live, Umlosi. If the gov'nor dies, why, I'm content to go with him."

Nelson Lee's eyes were suspiciously moist.

"That's like you, young 'un," he said. "You're true blue, and it makes me a bit sad, too. If there was only the slightest loophole— By why should we talk in this strain? There is no hope—none at all."

And, very soon, we ceased talking, because the effort was too painful. Our throats were hard and dry; the fine sand had penetrated even to our lungs, and already the ghastly agonies of thirst were making themselves apparent.

I pictured to myself an Arab I had once seen. He had come in from the desert, where he had lost himself for a time; he had arrived only in the nick of time. His eyes had been bloodshot, his lips twice their normal size; his tongue, blue and dry, had lolled out of his mouth.

Should we be like that?

I shuddered, and looked at Dorrie and Nelson Lee. They were both lost in their thoughts.

"Hadn't—hadn't we better make a—try for it, gov'nor?" I said huskily.

"To get back to Saawa, you mean?"



UMLOSI'S GREAT FIGHT!—(See p. 24.)

"Yes, sir."

"That's what I've been thinkin'," put in Dorrie. "We can only fail, anyhow. And we shall die happier if we know that we've been tryin' to get back. We can't sit here an' mope. Man alive, we'll go mad!"

"We can make the attempt—but we shall fail."

"I know that," said his lordship. "But it's better than sittin' still. And, I say, we'd better pitch the water away—it'll only tempt us. Do you know what poison has been used, Lee?"

The gov'nor nodded.

"It is a somewhat uncommon mineral poison," he replied. "It's effect is deadly, but it is diluted to a tremendous extent in this water. Under ordinary circumstances—if we were in England, say—a draught of the water would cause no fatal results. But here, with no fresh water at all, we should only suffer maddening torture; for the water, instead of quenching our thirst, would set up an irritation which would be torturing in the extreme. There is an antidote, of course, but—"

Lee ceased speaking suddenly.

Then, without another word, he left us, and disappeared round the tent. We were too languid to follow him—although, somehow, I felt that the gov'nor had remembered something important.

When he came back, after about a quarter of an hour, he found us still silent. Rest was impossible; my thirst was already maddening. What would it be like to-morrow, when the sun was pouring down with scorching intensity? I preferred not to think of that picture.

"Look here, you three," said the gov'nor abruptly. "I don't want to raise your hopes needlessly. So don't get excited. But there's just a chance that we may get out of this hole yet."

"A—chance?" asked Dorrie deliberately.

"Exactly."

"Thou art jesting, Umtagati," growled Umkwa.

"Nay, old friend, I would not jest on such a matter," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"You see this mug of water? I've just drawn it from one of the bags. I'm not going to ask you to drink it—but I'm going to drink myself."

"No, gov'nor—don't!" I gasped, in alarm.

"It's all right, Nipper; if I die now the end will only be a little sooner for me—that's all," said Lee. "But listen for a moment. When I was talking a short time ago an idea struck me. This poisoned water is deadly, as I said. But, by adding a certain mineral salt, the effect of the poison is completely nullified. Well, we've got a good supply of that mineral salt in our medicine-trunk. I remembered that, and I'm putting my theory to the test."

"By gum!" I breathed tensely. "Do—do you—you think——"

"I am not sure, Nipper," interposed Lee. "I positively believe that, by adding this mineral, the water is now drinkable—and, indeed, as wholesome as ever, although unpleasant to the taste. The poison is utterly killed. That, I repeat, is my idea. There is only one way to test my theory, and that is by drinking. I'm not going to ask you fellows to risk it—so watch me."

"Hold on!" gasped Dorrie. "How can we tell if your idea is right or wrong?"

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"If I'm right, I shall survive," he replied. "If I'm wrong—— Well, in less than a minute the poison will take effect. I shall be able to tell you whether I'm going to live or die. In an hour, indeed, I shall lapse into a state of complete coma—from which there will be no awakening."

"Don't risk it, gov'nor!" I muttered fearfully. "Oh, don't—— Oh!"

For, with a hand that was perfectly steady, the gov'nor had lifted the mug to his lips. He emptied the vessel completely, and then smiled.

"By Jove! How delightful!" he exclaimed. "Well, it's over."

We sat silent, staring at him in awe and fear. A minute passed—two minutes—three. Then the detective rose to his feet and stretched himself. He smiled down at us with serene calmness.

"Who wants a drink?" he asked genially.

"Is—is the water all right?" I gasped.

"Perfectly," smiled the gov'nor. "Rather amusing, isn't it? We have been talking of a horrible death, and all the while the water is harmless. We shall be able to continue our journey, exactly as we planned."

"How—how do you know——"

"My dear Nipper, if the poison had

still been active, I should have been suffering the most dreadful agony by this time," replied Lee. "To tell you the truth, I should have been writhing in the sand, foaming at the mouth, in the throes of the most terrible torture conceivable. I didn't go into these details before—but I can now. Don't you understand, ye cripples? The water's all right! My idea has panned out the right way."

Lord Dorrimore passed a hand over his brow.

"It's beyond me," he murmured. "Gimme a drink, old man. You look chirpy enough, anyhow. I'd drink sewer water at this moment!"

We were soon drinking. The water tasted bitter and sickly, and altogether nasty; but it was the most delightful drink I'd ever had. Nelson Lee had completely killed the poison—but, in doing so, the water had become horribly unpleasant to the taste. But it was thirst-quenching and wholesome.

Everybody drank, and then we thought about making some tea. This would disguise the beastly taste, anyhow. And, strange to say, we weren't at all excited. We were saved—but we remained quite calm.

Dorrie laughed easily.

"Lee, you're a marvel," he exclaimed. "If it hadn't been for your amazing knowledge of poisons, an' all that, we should have perished. You ought to have been a chemist, old man. You are a chemist, in fact. By Jing! I want to shout, but my throat's still a bit off-colour."

Umlosi gave a grunt.

"Truly thou art named well, my master," he exclaimed. "Thou art Umtagati—the wizard. Thy powers are even as those of the witch-doctors of my own people. But I insult thee, Umtagati. Thou art a master of the wizards. The witch-doctors of the Kutanas are even as insects that crawl, compared to thee. Wau! How can words tell of my admiration? O, thou mighty worker of magic, I grovel at thy feet."

And Umlosi proceeded to grovel.

"Get up, you old idiot!" grinned the gov'nor. "I haven't done anything clever. It's merely a simple chemical phenomenon. I was asleep—I ought to have thought of it at the very first. But I wasn't quite sure, you see."

At the end of an hour, however, we

were all quite sure. We had suffered no ill-effects, and the hot tea was quite palatable.

It was a merry meal we sat down to after darkness had fallen. The grim clouds had lifted, and all was well again. Professor Lyle's villainy—if he was actually the author of the crime—had come to nothing. The gov'nor's profound knowledge of chemistry had saved us.

We slept like tops, and arose at dawn refreshed and robust in health. Every bag of water had been treated, and the whole supply was now drinkable. And the gov'nor and Dorrie decided to press on into the desert.

Everything seemed lovely in the brilliant morning sunlight. The very desert sands glistened and gleamed with glory. I had not hoped to see another dawn—except while suffering from burning thirst, and with the knowledge of death within me. But now—Well, now, the danger had passed.

Our camels, of course, were in no need of water; they were able to carry their own supply.

That day we made fine progress, and our water, although somewhat unpleasant to the taste, was quite refreshing.

I don't think I'll bother to describe the rest of our journey in detail. We had troubles and worries, but they were only slight. And on one occasion we got out of our course. In the end, however, we sighted a peculiar formation of rocks. These rose from the sands in towering heights. Now, according to Dorrie's information, the oasis lay half a day's journey beyond these rocks.

Our spirits were high. Dorrie, before coming to England, had made the most exhaustive inquiries, and he had succeeded in finding an aged Senoussi who told of a small, desolate oasis, which was quite out of the track of things. This oasis was never visited, and the chances were that it was the oasis we were looking out for. If it wasn't, we should have to start all over again.

But it was!

It was evening when we sighted the tiny haven of the desert. Through binoculars I saw a few stunted trees and a kind of hill, with vegetation growing upon it. And, as we drew nearer, the place took definite shape. It was an

oasis, but there was no sign of human life.

We were all silent as our caravan approached. It was comforting to know that we ourselves were safe, for here we should be able to procure fresh water. A return to Saawa was only a matter of a nine days' journey. But what of Lawrence Mannering? Was he here—or had he perished?

When we were within half a mile Lord Dorrimore let out a loud hail. He was anxious, but he did not allow us to see this—or he tried not to. And we, in sympathy, yelled also. Umlosi and the guv'nor sent up a terrific shout.

But the oasis remained deserted.

"I'm afraid we've come to the wrong spot, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "Either that, or Mannering——"

"By glory! Look there!" roared Dorrie excitedly.

At the top of a rise, just ahead of us, a strange figure had risen into view. Was that the figure of a man? Surely not! I stared in awe and wonder. The thing was nearly naked, but I made out that it wore the remains of a pair of white drill trousers. They were dingy yellow now, and ended halfway down the figure's thighs. Above he wore nothing at all.

His head was smothered with matted, straggly hair, and his face was well-nigh invisible amid the growth of hair. He came towards us with a staggering gait, his arms waving wildly. Strange cries came from his lips.

"Good heavens!" muttered Dorrie. "Is that poor old Pinkie?"

"If so, he must be mad," said the guv'nor. "I expected it, Dorrie."

The wild figure ran towards us, and we came to a halt. My camel wouldn't squat, so I jumped down, and landed violently. Dorrie and Lee were already down. And the strange figure rushed up, panting violently. His eyes were glittering with an overpowering excitement. And then, quite suddenly, a wild cry came from his lips.

"Dorrimore!" he shouted shrilly. "Dorrimore! I'm dreaming—oh, this can't be true! Dorrimore——"

"It's Pinkie!" roared Dorrie, rushing forward. "You're not dreamin', old man. It's real enough. I've come along to dig you out of this mess. Thank good-

ness, you're all right. Give us your fist, old son!"

The wild figure stood, swaying uncertainly.

"Thank Heaven!" he muttered huskily. "I—I knew I should be saved——"

His emotion overcame him, and he sank down into the sand, clutching at Dorrie's feet, and sobbing violently. He was, in fact, hysterical, and it was a pitiful sight. Dorrie didn't know what to do.

"It's all right, old chap," he said gently. "Don't make an ass of yourself, you know. Have a drop of brandy—it'll do you good."

Lawrence Mannering lifted his head. His bronzed cheeks were streaming with tears, and there was a light of wonderful thankfulness in his eyes. But he was incapable of speech at that moment.

Exactly two hours later he was a changed man.

Our camp was made in the centre of the little oasis, under the shade of some palms. The tents were up, and everything was a-bustle. We had quenched our thirsts with draughts of delightfully cool, fresh water.

Mannering had been led to the oasis, sobbing, but he recovered shortly afterwards, and we left him alone with Dorrimore for a time. And, after two hours, as I said, he was completely changed.

He had recovered his composure, for one thing—and Dorrie had altered his appearance amazingly. When he emerged from the tent he was attired in a new white drill suit, with a soft collar and a pith helmet. His hair had been cut, and he had shaved himself.

We could now see that he was a man of about thirty-five, with even features, and kindly brown eyes. And Professor Lyle had declared that Mannering had died in the desert! It was proved beyond doubt now that Dorrie's suspicions had been well founded, and that Lyle was an unmitigated scoundrel.

"I—I don't know what to say, Mr. Lee," he exclaimed quietly. "What can I say? I only know that you have saved me from a living hell. Within another month I should have gone mad. Indeed, I was on the verge when I saw your caravan. You came just in time to avert the disaster."

"You must thank Dorrie for your deliverance, Mr. Mannering," smiled the gov'nor.

"Don't call him Mr. Mannering, for goodness' sake," grinned Dorrie. "He's Pinkie. I've told him all about it—we've been exchangin' yarns, in fact, while the forests were bein' cleared. We'll be able to make a cushion out of all the surplus hair an' whiskers."

"Lyle betrayed me," said Pinkie, his eyes gleaming. "He drugged me, and left me on this oasis. When I recovered I was alone. How could I get away? I thought I was doomed to die of madness in the desert. My position was all the more galling because I knew that the Bronze City was within four days' camel journey."

"Only four days from here?" I ejaculated.

"That's all."

"Well, let's have some grub," said Lord Dorrimore practically. "You'll welcome a change, Pinkie, after a diet of dates an' olives and things. They're good enough, but they're liable to get monotonous. Umlosi's been busy, I see. Allow me to present you to Umlosi, Pinkie. He's a royal prince, and a thundering good fellow in every way."

Umlosi grinned.

"This is a great day, O man of solitude," he exclaimed. "My masters have journeyed far to render thee assistance. It is well. Our mission has been successful, even as I dreamed it would be. But I had other dreams. I saw a city of wondrous metals, which shimmered in the light of the sun, and glowed beneath the moon's silver rays. And there were men there, my master—bronzed men, and one with a skin that was even as thine."

"You're wrong there, old friend," smiled Mannering. "The City of Burnished Bronze is deserted—"

"It is not so, O N'Kose," interrupted Umlosi. "These men are intruders—they are thine enemies. Waul! I am impatient to be on the move, so that I may meet this craven wretch who treated thee so foully. He is in the City of Shining Metals, master, with his treacherous servants."

Dorrie nodded to Mannering.

"Umlosi's right, I'll wager," he said. "Lyle's got to the Bronze City, and he's there now. By Jove, we shall probably

collar him red-handed. Then we'll take him back to Saawa with us, and— But we'll decide what to do when we've got him."

"Wise words, O Shimmering Eye," murmured Umlosi. "My snake tells me that the white reptile, thine enemy, will never return to Saawa. There will be the flowing of blood, and his bones will lie in the City of Shining Metals for evermore."

Somehow or other, Umlosi's solemn words made us think Nelson Lee was looking rather grim as we proceeded to demolish our evening meal. The gov'nor did not care to regard this affair as one of his detective cases.

But, of course, it was, actually. Dorrie would certainly have perished in the desert had he come out alone. For the incident of the poisoned water-bags would have occurred just the same—but Nelson Lee would not have been present to save the caravan.

We had reached a definite point in our investigation. Lawrence Mannering had been found, alive and well, and thus it was obvious that Lyle had cruelly and treacherously turned upon the man who had led that ill-fated expedition to the City of Bronze.

Indeed, Pinkie himself told a story which was sufficiently damning. We were all eager and anxious to lay hands upon Reginald Lyle. The man was something of a noted Egyptologist; but, for all his scientific attainments, he was undoubtedly a scallywag. At the commencement he had hesitated at murder; but, finding that Lord Dorrimore was on his track, he had conceived the awful plot which had nearly resulted in our deaths.

Reginald Lyle was within four days' march of us—if Umlosi's prediction turned out to be true. And, judging from the information we had obtained at the oasis of Saawa, there was a distinct probability of finding Lyle at the dead city.

So far we had been successful. Could we hope to be successful to the very end? Well, anyhow, we did hope, and after remaining a full day at the oasis of "Timbuctoo" we pulled up our tents, and the caravan moved onwards.

Our ships of the desert, so to speak, set full sail for the City of Burnished Bronze.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE DEAD CITY—WE MET WITH A SURPRISE—AND MISFORTUNE DESCENDS UPON US—THEN UMLOSI PROCEEDS TO CAUSE TROUBLE.

"**A** MAZIN!" said Lord Dorrimore in a tone of intense admiration. "Thou art surely wise in thy choice of a word, N'Kose, my father!" exclaimed Umlosi. "For is not this one of the most amazing sights our eyes have ever beheld? My dreams were as water unto wine, compared to this spectacle of wonder. Thy great kraal of London is mighty, indeed, but how canst thou think of that whilst gazing upon this?"

To tell the truth straight out, we were within sight of the City of Burnished Bronze! We'd been five days out upon the desert, having been delayed by going off in the wrong direction, but at last our objective was reached.

This, in itself, was a triumph

We had found the lost city; we had arrived at the gates of the Bronze City. Considering that we had no positive information as to directions it was almost providential that we had succeeded at all. Dorrie and the gov'nor declare even now that we met with the most astounding good luck. For it was, after all, more by luck than anything else that we arrived at our destination.

It was evening, and the sun was low in the sky. Darkness would not come until an hour had passed—and then it would come suddenly. But, in the evening sunlight, the scene was grand in the extreme.

Behind us stretched the vast desert; it stretched to right and to left. But, right ahead, there gleamed a strange and wonderful city of the dead—a city deserted countless years ago.

Senoussi caravans had sometimes sighted this city, as we well knew, but none had ventured to explore it. For these sons of the desert are superstitious to a degree, and they had avoided the place.

We rode our camels slowly, and gazed ahead with admiration. The rays of the sun touched scores of domes and walls, and they seemed to shine and glimmer like burnished bronze.

The city was of considerable extent, and surrounded by a high jagged wall. That wall, at one time, had probably

been smooth and even; but now it was falling to decay.

The place had had no inhabitants for more years than I cared to think about. Mannering and Dorrie had come here, because they were anxious to make history. But the gov'nor and I meant business—and that business was to get hold of Professor Reginald Lyle.

Our caravan was heading straight for a white gateway. Buildings of all sizes and shapes were to be seen through the gateway, but there was not a sign or a sound of any human inhabitant.

At last we arrived at the gateway, and we entered in wondering silence. Dorrie and Mannering led, Nelson Lee and I came close behind, then Umlosi, and then the Senoussi servants.

We could see, now, that the buildings were not made of metal, but of some curious, bronze-coloured stone, which was highly polished, and shone like bronze itself. But there were countless decorations of copper and brass, all burnished in some wonderful manner, so that they had kept their polish through all the years.

We arrived at a big square, but did not dismount. In the centre of this square a well could be seen, and there was a pool of sparkling water. Here and there palms grew, as though they had been placed there by human hands but recently.

And over all reigned a solemn, awe-inspiring, brooding silence. The effect was almost uncanny. It was the city of the dead, indeed. For the most part the buildings were well preserved, but the majority of them were in a state of semi-ruin.

The square was paved with stone, but much sand was covering it, and here and there were traces of coarse grass. The gov'nor, practical as usual, was looking rather worried.

"We have seen no sign of Lyle's party," he remarked. "Perhaps he has not arrived yet, or his camp is situated in a distant quarter of the city. It is quite possible that he approached from a different direction, and entered by another gateway. In any case, we had better be cautious."

"My dear old chap," said Dorrie, "we're more than a match for that hound. His caravan isn't so large as ours, in any case, and if he's fool enough

to show fight we have the superiority of numbers."

Mannering looked rather grim.

"I'm rather anxious to meet Lyle!" he exclaimed. "I sha'n't enjoy exploring this place until he and I have settled accounts."

"Well, it doesn't look as if you're going to meet him yet awhile," said Dorrimore lightly. "Suppose we make a camp here? I don't think we can better this place—and I'm rather keen to sample that water."

We all dismounted, and were soon busy watering the camels and, incidentally, watering ourselves. It was a spring of unusual purity, and the water was as cool as ice. Camping here was like civilisation compared to the open desert. But that brooding silence seemed to subdue us somewhat, and we could not shake the effect off.

We were just thinking of pitching the tents, when something happened. Although there were plenty of buildings here, we didn't relish the idea of occupying any of them. We were all busy except Pinkie. He stood a little apart from us, gazing up at one of the buildings with undisguised admiration and joy.

He had been set upon leading an expedition to this place for years; and now, having reached his goal after terrible trials, it seemed all the more welcome to him. And, by the look of things, he had forstalled his rival ever now.

Had retribution overtaken Lyle? Had his caravan been suffocated in a sand-storm? It was quite possible. I thought of this and I paused to look at Mannering. And then, as I mentioned, something happened.

Pinkie, who was some way from us, uttered a sudden yell.

We all looked towards him, rather startled.

"Look out!" roared Pinkie. "We've been ambushed—"

He didn't get any further—or, at least, I didn't hear the rest of his remark. For, a series of fiendish cries rent the air from every direction. And then dozens of Bedouins poured from all the buildings, and rushed towards us.

Then the disaster came.

We were all totally unprepared, and the Bedouins were upon us before we could even attempt to grasp any weapon. We fought like the dickens, but it was

useless. We were quite surrounded, and I, for my part, expected to feel a knife in my ribs. But I was merely grasped by two sturdy sons of the desert, and held a prisoner. Dorrie and the guv'nor and Pinkie were in a similar plight.

Umlösi, poor chap, had been on one of the camels at the first alarm, and in leaping down he had caught his foot in the saddle. As a result, he brought his head a terrific crash upon the stones, and effectively stunned himself. Thus, our greatest fighting man was put out of the running at the very start.

He and our four Senoussi servants were collared without any trouble. The Bedouins were yelling and shouting and jabbering. And, near one of the buildings, I saw a man in European clothing—Professor Lyle!

We—that is Dorrie, the guv'nor, Mannering and I—were hustled without ceremony across the square and hurled into one of the buildings. A stone door was crashed to, and we heard a prop being jammed into place.

The whole affair was over in less than a minute, and we were left gasping. What had happened to Umlösi and the rest of our party, we didn't know; but what we did know was that a disaster of the first magnitude had befallen us.

Nelson Lee was simply furious.

I had seldom seen him so terribly angry. But his anger was directed against himself more than anybody else.

"We were fools—fools!" he exclaimed fiercely—"and I was the biggest fool of us all!"

"But—but we didn't know—" began Dorrie.

"Didn't know!" raved the guv'nor. "We ought to have known! Great Heaven! To think that we should walk into such a trap—when we were actually anticipating something of the sort! Dorrie, this is a terrible misfortune."

"It's appallin'!" said his lordship dazedly.

"But I don't know what happened, yet!" I gasped. "Are we all here? Where's old Umlösi? I hope he isn't hurt—"

"Killed, probably," interjected Nelson Lee bitterly.

"I think you're a bit too hard on Mannering. How could we be aware of this? Lyle's caravan, I understood,

was only a small one. Yet I'll swear those Arab rascals numbered a score."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That is where we made the blunder," he said. "We knew that Lyle's caravan was smaller than ours, so we thought we were safe. Moreover, there was no sign of Lyle or his men. Yet the truth is perfectly obvious."

"Blessed if I can see it, anyhow!" I grunted.

"Lyle, on his way here, evidently fell in with a large party of wandering Bedouins," said Lee. "Having some idea that he was being pursued, Lyle persuaded the Arabs to attach themselves to his party. He probably offered them considerable inducements in the shape of spot cash. At all events, these Bedouins were not with Lyle when he left Saawa. As for the rest—well, our astute enemy must have spotted us in the far distance. He made plans accordingly, and allowed us to enter the city without giving a sign. Thus, when we were totally unprepared, his men swooped down and took us by surprise."

"Well, it wasn't our fault," said Dorrimore. "No good blamin' ourselves. How could we know? We ought to be thankful we're alive. Those Bedouins, with their wicked-lookin' yataghans, could have polished us off in no time."

"Lyle probably gave orders that nobody was to be killed," said Nelson Lee. "But the preposterous nature of the whole position! We came here to capture Lyle—and he has captured us! 'Pon my soul, Dorrie, I'm furious."

"That's all very well, Mr. Lee," said Mannering. "I'm furious myself—but I don't think we ought to revile ourselves for what has happened. As a matter of fact, we were on the look out for an ambush; but Lyle had a card up his sleeve which we weren't aware of. It's first blood to him—that's all."

Nelson Lee was silent.

We looked round our prison, now, and saw that it was only a tiny square building, with the one door, and a little slit of a window. The window was open to the four winds, of course, but so narrow that nothing larger than a terrier could have squeezed through. And the walls were two feet thick.

I pressed up against the slit, and peered out into the square. The slanting rays of the setting sun streamed

across the wide space, and I could see our camels and stores being examined by the Bedouins. They were looking pleased with themselves, and they certainly had good cause. There was no sign of Umlosi.

But, right away in the distance, down a long street, I saw Professor Lyle. He was walking briskly towards a high temple-like building. As I watched, he disappeared into the temple.

Of course, the rotter had seen that everything was O.K.—that we were collared fairly and squarely—and he had gone off to his headquarters.

"Can't we get out of this hole?" I asked desperately.

"I'll be the first to leave—if you'll show me the way," replied Dorrie. "My dear Nipper, we're like convicts in Dartmoor gaol; we can't get out of this cell by sheer force. If we do escape, it'll be by some ruse or other."

This didn't sound very hopeful, and we all remained silent. The gov'nor was thinking deeply. Then, through the slit of a window, we heard a commotion. We didn't trouble to look, however. It was only the Bedouins celebrating.

I was nearest the window, and I suddenly started.

A well-known voice came to my ears.

"Thou pigs and sons of pigs!" roared the voice. "Wau! This is going to be a good fight, methinks! I see the red mists, and my muscles tighten. Come on, thou straight nosed dogs—I am ready for thee!"

I caught in my breath with a gasp, and looked outside.

Then I gave a whoop.

"Umlosi's got free!" I shouted excitedly. "My stars! He's fighting about a hundred Arabs, single-handed!"

This was an exaggeration, as I realised at the time. But there, just outside another square building, similar to our own prison, stood Umlosi—or, rather, danced Umlosi.

We all crowded round the little slit of a window, gazing out upon the square. Fortunately, I had the premier position, and so I could see everything splendidly. I was sitting in the stalls, so to speak.

And I was filled with wild enthusiasm as I witnessed old Umlosi's wonderful performance of spear-work. He was, in fact, engaged in mortal combat with no less than thirteen or fourteen Bedouins.

It was a glorious fight.

CHAPTER VI.

UMLOSI SAVES THE SITUATION—AND THEN THE TABLES ARE TURNED UPON THE ENEMY—WE CAPTURE LYLE—BUT HE AGAIN RESORTS TO TRICKERY.

UMLOSI had succeeded in getting out of his prison. I learned afterwards that he had been thrown down contemptuously by the Arabs. What did he matter? He was only a nigger—and a stunned nigger at that.

But the Bedouins made a large-sized mistake when they underestimated Umlosi's capabilities. For the black giant soon recovered from his temporary dizziness—his skull was as thick as a cannon-ball, and just about as hard.

As he told us later on, he was not placed with our Senoussi servants; he had been pitched into a little square building, and the Arabs had not secured the door at all tightly. Of course, they had made the mistake of thinking that he was put completely out of action.

But Umlosi was a fighting man from head to foot; he came from a fighting race, and was the champion of his tribe. His first thought upon recovering was for reprisals. He didn't dally about, and hold secret sessions, or cabinet councils, or anything of that sort. He'd been knocked about, and somebody was going to suffer! Umlosi didn't realise the fact that his head was nearly cracked by the paving stones of the square. These Bedouins had been the cause of the whole trouble, and so they should experience on their own account!

Umlosi got out of his prison easily enough. By a stroke of luck, he spotted the great assegai lying in the sand some yards off. He made a dash for it, and then let out a whoop of defiance.

After that the fun started. It was then that I heard the commotion, and I watched the fight with bated breath. Somehow or other, although the odds were so overwhelming, I had terrific faith in our Kutana friend.

He was simply a marvel with his assegai, and, although the Bedouins were armed in their own peculiar way, they weren't a match for Umlosi. The men of the desert had lances and yataghans—dagger-like, double curved sabres.

They were nimble fellows—lean, wiry, and hardy. But they were rather below middle stature, and Umlosi simply

towered above them, like a liner over a submarine. And his strength was simply terrific.

But, in spite of Umlosi's size, he was every bit as nimble as the Bedouins themselves. One blow of his assegai meant death—positive, certain death. For when Umlosi thrust, he thrust to kill.

It was his death or theirs. I don't think he cared tuppence whether he died or not. He was seeing the red mists, and when he was in that state he was in the seventh heaven of glory. A fight of this sort was sheer joy to him. If he went under—well, that was just the kind of death he wanted to die.

But Umlosi didn't go under—not he!

The yells and shouts of the Arabs rent the air, and Umlosi's own cries were tremendous.

"Die, thou narrow-headed scum!" he shouted, as he fought. "Didst thou think to keep me in prison? Thou fools and double fools, thou art fighting the King of the Kutanas, and thou shalt shed thy blood upon these sands. Ha, ha! That was tricky, my fine friend—but see, I am even more tricky than thou!"

One of the Bedouins had flung himself at Umlosi from the rear. But the black chief was equal to the attack. His spear swung round, dripping blood, and the next second it pierced the heart of the Arab who was about to drive his yataghan home.

Five of Umlosi's attackers had already fallen, and the others were beginning to look scared; but reinforcements were arriving, and the five were soon replaced.

"Thou canst come in hundreds!" belated Umlosi defiantly. "I am ready for all of thee, thou desert pigs!"

As Umlosi was speaking, he backed against the polished bronze wall of one of the buildings. Great as was his valour, and his contempt for these Arabs, he nevertheless realised the advantages to be gained by having his back to the wall. Once surrounded, he would be struck down by sheer weight of numbers. But now he could not be surrounded.

"Oh, he'll win, guv'nor!" I gasped.

"I believe he will, Nipper. But the odds are terrible, and we must be prepared to see him fall——"

"He won't fall!" declared Dorrio excitedly. "By jing! I'd like to be out there helpin' him. Just look at the old

bounder! He's keepin' 'em at bay—
Woa! 'That was a near 'un!"

A Bedouin had flung his lance with unerring aim, and the weapon had flown straight at Umlosi's bared chest. But, with a movement as swift as lightning, he jerked aside, and the lance crashed against the wall, and fell. At the same second Umlosi gave a deathblow to another of his enemies.

The fight proceeded; it was truly fearful, and it was soon apparent that the Arabs were losing heart. They did not know how to deal with this amazing mountain of blackness.

If we escaped, we should certainly owe our deliverance to Umlosi—that was certain. His assegai swirled this way and that, parrying thrusts from the deadly yataghans and lances.

Umlosi himself seemed to bear a charmed life. So far he had only been scratched on one arm. Yet, in reality, there was nothing extraordinary in his success. For he was a fighter of exceptional merit, he possessed a deadly weapon, and he had his back to the wall.

Four more Bedouins went down, and then the others, realising that they would share the fate of their comrades if they remained, turned tail and fled between the buildings.

"Come back, thou cowardly reptiles!" he shouted. "Hast thou no heart for further fight? Wau! I am disgusted. The battle was just raging well, and my arm was becoming nimble. Come back, thou desert scorpions."

But the Bedouins had had quite enough, and, very impolitely, they refused to entertain Umlosi's proposal. He stood there, gazing round him in surprise. He had been quite prepared to go on for another hour, if necessary.

"Hurrah!" I yelled. "Good old Umlosi!"

"I hear the voice of Manzie!" declared Umlosi. "I come to thee, thou youth of the shining eyes! I come to thee, N'Kose—I come to thee, Umtagati! These enemies of thine are defeated!"

And the black giant ran across the square with light, nimble strides. He grinned at me as he approached the window, and the next moment the door prop was down, and we all crowded out.

"Good man, Umlosi!" exclaimed Dorrimore. "That was a splendid fight, old friend. Thou has done well!"

"Did I not come to serve thee,

N'Kose, my father?" asked Umlosi. "I should be but a poor specimen to travel thus far, eating thy food, and drinking thy water—although, mayhap, the water tasted not good at one time—without rendering thee aid when it is within my power to do so. I am happy, my masters."

"You've jolly good cause to be, too!" I declared enthusiastically. "You fought magnificently, Umlosi, and you deserve a dozen pats on the back and five hundred iron crosses!"

"Thou art surely joking, Manzie. I have heard tell of the crosses that are of iron," said Umlosi. "Are they not presented as a token of savagery to those soldiers of the white race that are as the serpents?"

"Never mind iron crosses!" exclaimed Dorrie. "My particular wish, just now, is to get my fingers round Mr. Lyle's throat. Either he's been scared by this rumpus, or he hasn't heard anything of it. Did anybody see where he went to?"

I nodded.

"Yes, I saw him go into a building quite a long way off," I replied.

"Good, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "You'd better lead the way to that spot. Personally, I have an idea that Lyle is in ignorance of this debacle amongst his valiant troops. If so, we shall surprise him—as he surprised us."

It was growing dark rapidly, and so we decided to lose no time. I led the way across the square, and made for the temple in the distance. Our camels were still in the centre of the square, most of them contentedly lying down, and waiting for a feed to come along.

But the Arabs had completely disappeared, and we guessed they were fleeing to their own camp in another part of the city. In all probability, they had decided to leave this dread place without loss of time—forsaking the noble Lyle and all his works.

At any rate, we were not molested as we made our way towards the temple. We walked straight in without hesitation, and saw at once that it was used as a camp. Boxes and trunks and bales were lying everywhere, and it was undoubtedly Lyle's headquarters.

Upon a ledge stood a small lamp, and this was burning brightly. Our footsteps rang clearly through the building. It was not so very large, but in a perfect

state of preservation. And the air within was deliciously cool.

A figure appeared from behind a row of pillars, and came towards us.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded a harsh voice. "Why are you walking in here without orders—Why, what—"

"We just want a word with you, Professor Lyle!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

The man stood stock still for a second.

"A thousand curses!" he snarled. "Those fools have let you out, then?"

Before the gov'nor could reply, Lyle turned on his heel, and fled. He went behind the pillars, and we heard him pelting down some steps. With a series of shouts, we gave chase.

Just behind the pillars we saw a flight of stone steps leading downwards into what was evidently a cellar. A candle was burning there, and I, who reached the bottom at the same time as the gov'nor, saw that the place was after the style of a crypt.

Lyle was disappearing into the shadows at the far end of the underground chamber. And then, quite suddenly, a crash sounded, followed by a wild cry. Dead silence followed.

"What's happened?" panted Dorri-more.

"I don't know—but we'll soon find out!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

We hurried forward, the gov'nor picking up the candle and carrying it with him. In the flooring of the cellar there yawned a jagged hole. Weakened by age, it had given way beneath Lyle's weight.

And there, lying below us in another underground cavern, lay the man who had caused us so much trouble and danger. He was unconscious, and bleeding. The fall itself had not been so severe, for the distance was only slight, but the man had evidently caught his head on a projecting piece of stonework.

The gov'nor dropped down first, after making sure that the rest of the stone flooring was sound. He dragged Lyle's unconscious form aside, and we all followed him. The candle was still in the gov'nor's hand.

"He's not hurt much," exclaimed Nelson Lee, after a short examination. "I expect he will come round in a few minutes—"

"Great Scott! What's all this?" I gasped suddenly.

Leo and Dorrie and Mannering and Umlosi had turned. And then they, too, cried out aloud. For, lying upon two great stone shelves, were piles of—precious stones! At least, that's what they looked like at first sight. They were all cut perfectly, and the innumerable facets glistened like a thousand colours.

Lying close to them was a huge mound of dull brown coins of curious design. I thought, at first, that they were copper or bronze. But we soon found that they were really made of pure gold—only they had been tarnished with age.

"It's a treasure!" I gasped wonderingly. "I—I say, we must be dreaming. I—I suppose all these things are bits of glass?"

But Nelson Lee, who had been examining the piles, shook his head.

"They are diamonds—rubies—sapphires!" he declared quietly. 'Pon my soul, Dorrie, this journey was worth undertaking! This lot's worth a cool million, at the very least."

"Fan me!" murmured Lord Dorri-more. "I'm faintin', you know! Did you expect to find diamonds an' things here, Pinkie?"

"I hadn't the least idea that such a treasure existed!" replied Mannering, in an awed voice. "I don't believe Lyle knew of it, either. He was merely out for glory. He got an idea that he'd like his name to go down in history."

The finding of this treasure had taken us all by surprise; but, after the first shock, we calmed down. It was a glorious find, no doubt, and it sent our spirits soaring; but, somehow, we weren't so very excited.

"There seems to be another chamber over here," said Dorrie. "There might be another million or two lyin' about loose. If so, we'll give Umlosi one of 'em—one of the millions—for his good services!"

"Thou are jesting, N'Kose," grinned Umlosi. "What want I with these glasses? They are pretty things, mayhap, for women and girls, but of what use are they to men—such as thou and I?"

We laughed, and passed into another crypt very similar to the first. A heavy stone door had barred our way, with a huge cross-piece to keep it in position—

this cross-piece slipping into slots. Umlosi had to lift that length of stone up, but it was propped against the wall, without being removed.

"H'm," said Nelson Lee. "Nothing here."

He moved into the caravan, and we had all followed, eager to see if there were any other treasures. Umlosi, who seemed less interested than any of us, brought up the rear.

"No luck!" I exclaimed. "The place is as bare as a prison cell—and there's no other exit, either. Well, we mustn't grumble——"

Slam! Crash!

We all turned round with a united gasp. The heavy stone door had slammed to, and even as we stared at it, we heard the stone cross-piece drop into its slot with a dull thud.

CHAPTER VII.

TRICKED AGAIN—BUT EVERYTHING TURNS OUT ALL RIGHT IN THE END—AND LYLE SHOWS A SPARK OF DECENCY—WE RETURN TO CIVILISATION

NELSON LEE uttered a sharp cry. "Did you touch the door, Umlosi?" he asked quickly.

"I, Umtagati?" said Umlosi. "Thou art mistaken. The door crashed——"

"It must have swung to of its own accord," I put in. "Let's press against it——"

A husky voice came to us, dimly and indistinctly.

"You are imprisoned, my friends!" it said. "You scored a little while ago, but the fates were against you. I leave the City of Burnished Bronze to-night—taking with me the treasure you so kindly discovered!"

"Lyle!" muttered Mannering, between his teeth.

We waited, but no further sound came to us. We gazed at one another in the flickering candle-light. We were all rather pale, and Umlosi's eyes were glittering dangerously.

"It would have been well to have choked that vile wröteh, N'Kose," he said, almost reproachfully. "We are helpless, indeed. Even I, who possess the strength of four other men, can do nothing here."

One look at the stone door told us

that nothing short of a dynamite charge would bring it down.

"Phew!" said Dorrimore. "We do have some changes, and no mistake! This time it looks as though we were in a proper fix. We haven't got Umlosi to fish us out of this hole."

"Well, I'm not going to blame myself, or anybody else," said Nelson Lee. "In this instance, our position is the result of pure misfortune. While we were entering this place Lyle recovered—and took advantage of the fact that we were at a disadvantage. The position is serious."

The gov'nor needn't have told us that. We knew only too well that the position was serious.

At one time, perhaps, Lyle would not have resorted to this baseness. But he had gone so far, now, that he couldn't back out. His villainy had led him so deep that he didn't care what he did.

He was desperate—and, at one blow, he had imprisoned us all. The way was clear for him to return to the oasis of Saawa, and civilisation, with the knowledge that we should never survive.

For how could we escape?

I could see the end—the dreadful end. We should just remain in the crypt until we starved, or suffocated. And, meanwhile, Professor Lyle would be fleeing with the treasure!

The wheel of fortune had turned rapidly, and we were now completely helpless. It was the most astounding piece of ill-luck we had ever experienced. For this was no deliberately-planned affair.

Lyle had been finished—he had come to his natural end, so to speak. And then, by a pure stroke of chance, he saw an opportunity to defeat us. Coming to his senses while we were within the inner cavern, he must have staggered up, slamming the door. Thus, in one stroke, he outwitted us all—and he was one against five!

Such a sate of affairs could only be the result of fickle chance.

"An' we didn't have time to have a decent feed, either!" said Dorrie regretfully. "But luck hasn't deserted us. We'll get out all right."

"Not by our own efforts, Dorrie," said the gov'nor.

"Can't we do anything at all?" I asked, trying to be calm. "Have we got to sit here, and wait for the end?"

"Why, we were better off before Umlosi fished us out of that other place!"

"That's unkind," said Mannering. "Umlosi put up a wonderful fight, and he rescued us all. Then we collared Lyle. Somehow, or other, though, he's got the better of us. I suppose he wasn't shamming when you examined him, Mr. Lee?"

The guv'nor shook his head.

"Oh, no," he replied. "Lyle wasn't shamming. He was really unconscious—and, indeed, he must be in a pretty bad way now. But he's got us locked up here, and we are helpless."

"Perhaps there'll be an earthquake," said Dorrie hopefully. "Umlosi, you old image, can't you think of something? You're lookin' pretty cheerful, anyhow. Why don't you behave like a doomed man ought to?"

Umlosi's lips parted in a smile.

"It is not for me to add my voice to thine, N'Kose," he said. "But my snake tells me that this death is not to be ours. Ere long we shall be free, and the bones of thine enemy will be rotting."

"I hope your snake's right—that's all!" said Dorrie. "It generally is—an' that's some comfort. But, unless Lyle repents, I don't see how we can get out of this hole. We're trapped."

We examined the crypt thoroughly, but there was no exit but the one door. Nelson Lee made us all cheerful by declaring that within a couple of hours the air would become foul and unbreathable.

"Oh, well, it'll soon be over, then," said Mannering quietly. "I'd rather die that way, than linger on, hungry and thirsty, until——"

"Don't!" pleaded Dorrimore. "Don't rub it in, old man!"

Nelson Lee bent down, and looked keenly at the floor. Then he went on to his knees, and placed the candle close beside him. The stone slabs which formed the flooring were flush with one another, but here and there cracks could be seen.

"If we could only get one of these slabs up, there might be a chance," said the guv'nor keenly. "Even if there is no other crypt beneath—and that is quite possible—we could, at least, use

the stone as a means of battering the door——"

"Great Scott!" yelled Dorrie suddenly.

"What's the matter?" I gasped, startled by his tone.

"Look there! Ye gods and little fishes!" roared Lord Dorrimore. "The door's open!"

We all stared at the great stone door. It stood wide open, and, gazing in upon us, was one of our Senoussi servants! He was smiling cheerfully, and looked very pleased with himself.

But he wasn't so pleased as we were!

The explanation was quite simple. We hadn't been in any danger at all, really. And Professor Lyle's triumph was very short-lived. For, outside, we found him—dead.

The four Senoussi, it appeared, had been imprisoned in a building quite close to the spot where Umlosi had fought his great battle. And one of the Bedouins had entered the window of the Senoussi prison. Almost immediately after Umlosi had gone, these faithful fellows had used the lance to jerk away the prop which held the door of the building secure—this had been done from the little window.

The quartette had then hurried along to the temple, in our footsteps. They had encountered Professor Lyle emerging from the cellar. And, in the heat of the moment, they had slain him—they had settled accounts with the traitor. For acting thus drastically they couldn't be blamed.

But Lyle, knowing that he was rapidly dying, had repented of his sins to some extent, and he told the Senoussi where we were imprisoned. By the time we reached him, he was dead.

The concrete result of the expedition was this: We had rescued Lawrence Mannering, and we had brought Professor Reginald Lyle to book. Incidentally, we shared the treasure, and Nelson Lee and I presented our lot—and it was a considerable fortune in itself—to the British Red Cross Society.

Professor Lyle had failed: he had gained nothing but a scoundrel's death by his base villainy and treachery.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—(See p. iv of cover.)

BEGIN THIS THRILLING SERIAL TO-DAY!

The Boxing Sailor

A STORY OF THE RING AND LIFE IN THE NAVY.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

Read this first!

TOM CRAWLEY, light-weight boxer and stoker aboard *H.M.S. Flyer*, makes his first public appearance in a contest with **Jimmy Yowl**, lightning feather-weight. He wins the fight, and with the prize-money replaces his father's torpedoed fishing smack. Tom is jealous of

BOB RANDLE—who, the lad considers, is a "slacker"—on the grounds that Bob seems to find favour in the eyes of

MARY THWAITES, the pretty daughter of **Fisherman Thwaites**, of whom Tom is very fond.

FISHERMAN CRAWLEY'S smack is chartered as a mine-sweeper, which is torpedoed by a German submarine. Old Thomas Crawley is taken prisoner and carried on board the U-boat. The others are put afloat on a raft. They are soon picked up by a British destroyer and landed near *Weathersea*. Tom and Bob go to meet them, and Mary is very anxious about the fate of old Tom Crawley. Meanwhile a big boxing match is fixed up between **Jerry Nelson** and Tom. It is a draw, and just as the audience are about to leave the hall a whirring noise is heard. A moment later something strikes the building itself. The building however, is not much hurt, and Tom is able to get his mother home. He then goes round to see Mrs. Thwaites, and is much relieved to find her cottage is untouched. Bidding her good-bye he continues his way to the harbour. Here he sees **Captain Walsh**, the commander of the *Flyer*, who tells him the ship will be ready to engage the enemy in a day or two. The next day Mary asks him to go with her to say good-bye to Bob, who is leaving for the Front. Tom sees that Mary is crying as she bids Bob adieu, and all the way back he is filled with hate of Bob, of Mary and of himself. Just as they reach the harbour they meet a party of blue-jackets.

"Hullo, Tom! you're wanted," they cry. "The *Flyer's* going out on Special Service."

(Now read this week's instalment.)

THE HUN MURDERERS AT WORK.

IN that moment of supreme agitation, when he felt his whole outlook on life undergoing a change, Tom Crawley was glad of the opportunity of doing something.

To go to sea in the old *Flyer*, with a chance of taking it out of the Hun, was a sheer delight to him just then.

How he and his mates raced down to the harbour! How they leapt into the boats that were waiting for them there, and were pulled swiftly aboard the destroyer.

One and all asked the same question, in bated breath, "What's up?"

They could only hazard a guess. Opinions were conservative. "Submarines," said some. "Enemy destroyers," said the others.

The latter were in the minority. The "submarines" had it.

At any rate, here was the *Flyer*, ready for sea, and within a few minutes she glided from her moorings, and shot past the harbour's mouth like a greyhound, the sad-eyed and sober fishermen watching her departure without a murmur.

They, like the rest of the inhabitants of our tight little island, forebore to cheer. The time for cheering and flag-wagging was not yet. They left all that sort of thing to Fritz, confident that, when at last the time did come, they would be justified in indulging in a demonstration such as the Huns could never hope to equal.

As Tom hurried about his duties, he swept the sea, when opportunity offered, with eager eyes, "looking for trouble," as he termed it.

Here and there he could see the submarine chasers busy. Overhead flew a naval airship, dipping every now and then, as her pilot steered her into the wind. Further along the coast there was another of these small, but decidedly

useful, craft. There were also several seaplanes to be seen, these operating a mile or two off the land.

"Yes. It must be submarines," thought Tom.

He'd forgotten all about Bob Randle, or Mary, or his father in captivity. All he wanted was a submarine to show herself for just a moment, so that the Flyer might accomplish her revenge.

The light was not over good just now, though the day was nearing its close. Great masses of fleecy cloud drifted along before a stiffish breeze. White caps showed upon the sea.

The atmosphere was oppressive. The minds of all aboard were filled with a vague expectancy.

They covered a good many sea miles at a fast speed, and then, in the distance, sweeping smoothly upon her journey from France to Britain, they espied a majestic hospital ship.

There was no mistaking her, even if some of them could not distinguish the big disc bearing the red cross which was painted so clearly upon her sides.

She was a grand vessel, one used for much longer voyages than to France and back during the piping times of peace; yet she had never fulfilled such a splendid mission as now.

It was her duty to bring the anguished and broken sufferers of the war home to peace and rest, and she had a thousand times over justified her existence.

So steady was she that she hardly dipped at all to the swell.

Right ahead of her swept a destroyer. In the distance, astern of her, were two similar war vessels.

Her journey had almost ended. Ere long she would be safe in port.

"Ain't she a beauty?" exclaimed Seaman Tomkins. "Gosh, if a German submarine was to git 'er now!"

"Don't tawk rot!" answered Tom peevishly, for he was excited and a bit unstrung. "As if a U-boat would show 'erself, with all them destroyers about! Not likely——"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, ere there were signs of agitation on the bridge, commands were telegraphed below, and like magic the speed of the destroyer was increased, and her course was altered.

An instant later one of her guns spoke, then spoke again.

Bang! Bang! Boom!

Every man stood at his post. All eyes were directed ahead.

At what? Ah! Tom Crawley saw now, as he eyed the spot where the shells were bursting.

There a low whale-back stood revealed, as the sea lapped it, with an irregular superstructure above. Tom had seen such things before.

It was a U-boat. A bitter anathema rang from his lips.

What was the enemy's intention? Too soon he knew.

That flattened seam that appeared on the surface of the lapping sea was the wake left behind by a torpedo, which was sweeping swiftly on its way towards the hospital ship.

The commander of the ship of mercy had acted promptly, and altered her course. It was a gallant endeavour to escape the approaching doom.

She might do it.

Alas, no! Of a sudden there was a tremendous report, a mighty fountain of water, which bore upwards with it pieces of flying debris from the shattered hull of the magnificent ship.

The infamous commander of the U-boat had accomplished his purpose.

He had driven his torpedo into the hull of the hospital ship, and doubtless was chuckling at his success.

Perhaps his chuckle was killed by the advancing Nemesis, for the Flyer, shell-ing the while at her best speed, rushed madly at the submarine, it being Captain Walsh's fond hope that he might reach the murder boat before she had time to execute her porpoise dive and vanish in the depths of the sea.

GOT HER!

"TOM—Tom Crawley!"

"What's the matter?" asked Tom, his voice quivering in the deep stress of his agitation.

"Look! She ain't gone under yet, and I don't believe she can dive. We've got her!"

Crawley fastened his eyes on the U-boat, and certainly it did seem as if her movements were erratic. And she didn't dive.

Yet the sailor boy could hardly believe

that they would be able to finish her. It seemed altogether too much to hope for.

Then a ringing laugh left his lips, and he turned to Tomkins A.B. with flashing eyes and a beaming face.

"Here, don't you see what's happened?" he shouted. "One of our shells touched lucky. We've damaged her steering gear, and she can't dive."

Tomkins opened wide his mouth, and let forth a rolling cheer.

His shipmates, realising, too, what was amiss with the Hun, did likewise. How they yelled, and there was a satisfaction expressed on the faces of the officers on the bridge, too.

They also realised that the Flyer had got her.

The destroyer simply ate up the distance that separated the rival war craft.

Nearer and nearer she swept, and then the Huns came swarming up to the sea-washed deck of the submarine like so many panic-stricken ants.

Their antics displayed a lively fear. They waved their arms, they shouted, they ran up and down. One man clasped his hands and assumed an attitude of supplication. An officer—they could tell he was an officer because of the distinguishing gold braid, raised his right arm, and signalled to the destroyer.

The thing he held was a white flag, which he flickered frantically.

Captain Walsh turned his eyes upon the hospital ship, saw a big hole in her side, and noticed that she had already taken a list to port.

Nor had she made much progress towards the land. He knew what that meant. She was doomed.

No watertight compartments could save her. They would merely prolong her agony, that was all.

A film formed before the brave officer's eyes. When it cleared, his face was turned towards the submarine, upon which the destroyer he commanded was rushing with headlong speed.

Her guns were silent now. Orders were signalled down to the stokehold and engine-room.

Captain Walsh leant shouting over the bridge.

"Stand by there, all of you?" he yelled, and his voice rang like a trumpet. "We're going to ram her."

How the sailors cheered. Like magic the distance that separated the two

vessels diminished. The submarine was scarcely moving. She lay there helpless, like a log.

And, as they saw the doom rushing down upon them, the Germans gave vent to a despairing cry:

"Mercy, Kamerads, mercy!"

Mercy! And what mercy had they shown the wounded heroes, the doctors, and the nurses aboard the hospital ship. Now that they were themselves concerned, they took a very different view of the situation.

Mercy! They should have none. At least, none until their devil's ship had been sent to the bottom of the sea.

A hundred yards, and no more, separated the two ships. Fifty yards.

"Look out!" yelled Tom Crawley.

And then the bows of the destroyer crashed into the frail shell of the submarine. All aboard the Flyer felt the shock, and some of the men were hurled off their feet.

Tom steadied himself by an effort, and, as the destroyer recoiled and swerved aside, he laughed.

"Never mind how many shells she's got," he roared. "The Flyer's smashed through them all. She's done for."

Done for! Half the men aboard the U-boat had hurled themselves into the sea in a panic-stricken attempt to escape the merciless bows of the British destroyer. It was as well, for, as they rose high above the deck of the U-boat, so they would have slain and mangled any German within reach.

"Hard astern," was the signal now telegraphed below, and the Flyer, under slow speed, backed away.

There lay the submarine, with a gash in her iron hull, through which the water was pouring, and out of which great bubbles were rising.

Was it a vital wound? It looked to be so.

The Jack tars looked stolidly on.

Let the Huns boast about the successes of their murder craft; here was one the less at any rate.

The submarine began to settle down. Lower and lower sank her hull, and they could see her stern, with the steering gear showing, slowly rising above the surface. Now the greater part of her length was under water, and oil was floating, and bubbles rising in their thousands.

(Continued on p. iii of cover.)

Yes, she had been vitally wounded, and was now sinking.

Suddenly she disappeared. The screams and cries of terror rang from the lips of the German sailors floating in the sea.

Some of them were signalling frantically to the men aboard the British destroyer. They begged pitifully for mercy.

"I wouldn't save a single one of 'em," declared Tomkins. "Why shouldn't they drown as well as our boys?"

Tom Crawley made no answer, but watched those bobbing heads and terrified faces with pitying eyes. He was young. He hadn't come so often in contact with death to have become callous and indifferent to human suffering. And they were strong men who were drowning here.

Captain Walsh was watching the hospital ship. Boats had been lowered, and she seemed to be sinking but slowly. The other destroyers were standing by. Everything seemed to be conducted in orderly fashion aboard her. There was no immediate hurry for the Flyer to join her sister ships.

And so he ordered the destroyer to move to the assistance of the Germans. Soon she was among those bobbing heads, and the Hun seamen redoubled their cries.

One man, with a sort of dying effort, managed to swim within a yard or two of the destroyer's iron hull, and they were Tom's eyes that he gazed despairingly into.

"Mercy. Kamerad—save me!" he moaned.

"Save you?" answered Tom bitterly. "No, you drown, and that's too good a fate for you!"

"Mercy—save me! I haf a mother, a sweetheart; I am not a bad man—save me, save me——"

Just then Tom thought of Mary, and of his father, of his mother at home, and pictured himself in a similar situation to that this youthful Hun found himself in. What would he think if the mercy this boy now called for were denied him?

"I'm sinking!" moaned the German, and his head went under, and came up again. "I can swim no more——"

There was death in the gleam of his eyes, in the awful expression of his face. Tom could stand it no longer, and,

hurling himself into the sea, trod water, while he supported his enemy, and held the Hun's head above the surface, so that he could rest and breathe.

The work of rescue did not take very long. Soon every man they could see had been hauled aboard the Flyer, and a rope thrown to Tom Crawley had been drawn up, with him dangling on the end of it like a newly caught codfish.

With the water dripping and running from him, Tom stood there, and faced his comrades.

"It was plucky of yer, kid," remarked Tomkins. "But I'm blowed if I'd have risked my life to save a Hun. He might have knifed yer."

But Tom didn't mind. He had his reward in the look the German, a mere boy, cast him, as he sat huddled up upon the deck.

"I owe you my live," said the German boy. "And I shand forged id. What's your name, please?"

"Oh, my name's Tom Crawley," said the sailor boy, as he moved hurriedly away. "And—hello, mates, look! We're going to help rescue the poor fellows on that sinking hospital ship."

Had he not turned his eyes on the doomed liner, he would have noticed that the German had started at the mention of his name. He hadn't seen the start. His mind was set on other things, and already the Flyer was dashing swiftly to the spot where the big hospital ship was slowly settling down, for there was work to be done there.

THE RESCUE.

THERE was something incredibly sublime and pathetic in the death of the majestic liner which had been turned into a Red Cross ship for the benefit of our wounded in France.

Here was a mighty vessel, built to defy storm and tempest, and to brave the elements, without the slightest fear of her ever coming to any harm.

She had cost a huge fortune to build, and had served as a pattern to several ships of the same class that had come after her.

She was British, every plate and bolt and rivet in her, built by a British firm, a triumph for the great shipbuilding yard that had turned her out.

And yet, in spite of her strength and
(Continued overleaf.)

night, she was doomed to die, riven to the heart by a torpedo fired from a German under-water pirate ship. Her death was the death of a giant, and her agony endured for long.

When the Flyer arrived within bow-shot of her, she had settled down for'ard, and the wounded had been brought up upon her decks, the nurses, doctors, and the rank and file of the R.A.M.C. standing by.

It was wonderful to see what order prevailed aboard, how every word of command was promptly obeyed, but without flurry.

Had there been any chicken-hearts aboard, they must have gained courage by the example set them by the officers.

Even the most timid of the female nurses did their duty, and what terrors of anticipation they must have endured.

The wounded were carried to the boats and lifted in. The attendants followed, and, when the boats were full, they were lowered down into the sea.

Then they were let loose, and pulled gently away.

Boat after boat had been sent down over her sides, and only the lighter cases were left aboard the Red Cross ship.

Suddenly, there was an explosion on board her, and steam burst fiercely from her sides and decks.

Quickly came the order:

"Save yourselves who can!"

(To be continued.)

NEXT WEEK'S STORY will be entitled:

"The Messages of Mystery!"

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