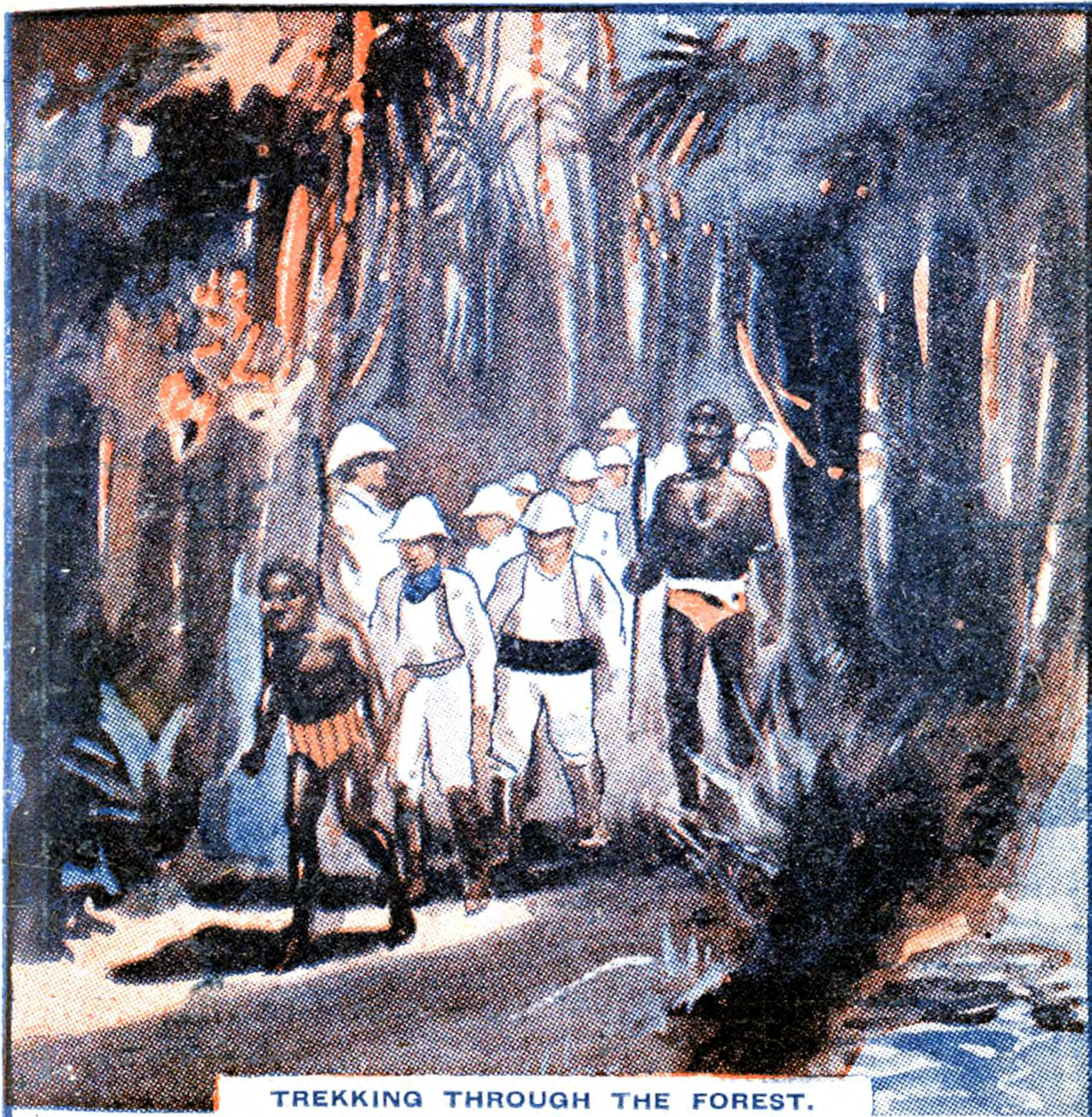


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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ON THE MIGHTY AMAZON.

"AMAZIN', dear old boy—positively amazin'!" Sir Montio Tregellis-West adjusted his pince-nez and stared out across the river to the swampy banks. There was certainly some cause for his expressions of wonder.

"You're quite right, Montie, old man," I said, nodding. "This river is about the most amazing waterway on the face of the earth. It's certainly the largest river on earth, and I think it contains more wonders than any portion of the globe."

"It's all so huge—so vast!" put in Tommy Watson. "You know, I can't quite realise that we're really on earth, you chaps. It seems almost unreal—it seems that we're living in another sphere altogether!"

Watson spoke with a note of awe and wonder in his voice. The other juniors who were near by—Handforth, Pitt, De Valeric, and one or two others—were too occupied in gazing at the ever-changing scene to engage in conversation.

For we were on the Amazon—hundreds and hundreds of miles up the Amazon, in fact, right in the heart of the wild forests. Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, *The Wanderer*, had been nosing her way up the mighty river for a good many days now, and we had

almost forgotten what it was like to see a civilised town.

Up there, in this section of the river, there were very few settlements, and we only saw a white man—that is, a stranger to us—once in a blue moon. We felt, somehow, that we had been cut off from the world—from the world we had always known.

For here everything was so different—everything was so absolutely stupendous. It was indeed a strange place for a party of schoolboys to find themselves in. But all the fellows from St. Frank's, who were Lord Dorrimore's guests on the ship, were enjoying themselves tremendously.

If it comes to that, the other guests were enjoying themselves just as much—the young ladies, for instance, declared that they were having the time of their lives. Watson's sister, Violet, was filled with wonder at everything she saw—and this same remark applies to the other girls.

Our party had been on the Amazon, as I said, for a good many days now. We were, in fact, almost at the end of our journey, for we had come to Brazil, and we had steamed up the Amazon, with a definite purpose in view; it was not merely an aimless pleasure trip, to be broken off at any moment.

Lord Dorrimore, to tell the truth, had set out on this expedition for the chief purpose of locating Colonel Kerrigan, D.S.O., the famous explorer. Colonel Kerrigan was popularly sup-

posed to be dead—he had been dead to the world for nearly five years.

But was he actually dead?

That was the question which Dorrie had come out to the Amazon to decide. Colonel Kerrigan's sister, Miss Janet Kerrigan, was absolutely positive that her brother still lived. She was his twin, and somehow she seemed to have an inspiration—there was a sort of telepathy between the two. At all events, Miss Kerrigan was prepared to stake all she possessed on the matter.

While in England, before coming out on this trip, she had had many visions—dreams, as it were. And in nearly every case she had seen her brother standing on a kind of pinnacle, stretching his hands towards civilisation, and appealing for help.

And in the background was a wonderful city—somewhat hazy, but, nevertheless, a city of stone and real architecture.

Whether these dreams of Aunt Janet's were mere figments of the imagination, remained to be seen; but both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore could not help believing, in some strange way, that Aunt Janet was right—at least, partially right. And so this expedition to the Amazon had been mapped out, and our object was to do everything in our power to find Colonel Kerrigan.

Whether we should succeed in this quest remained to be seen; but, at all events, we were all grimly determined to use every possible effort to bring our investigations to a satisfactory conclusion. It was quite possible that we should do nothing more than learn that Colonel Kerrigan was really dead. If this was the case, we should, at least, be free from all further doubt.

Naturally, the St. Frank's juniors were not particularly anxious concerning Colonel Kerrigan's fate. They had never seen him, they had never met him, and he was mainly regarded as a kind of myth. The fellows, therefore, looked upon this as a mere joy trip—a particularly ripping holiday.

Umlosi, the giant Kutana chief, was with us, and Umlosi was in his element. He was enjoying himself immensely, and later on he would probably prove to be very useful. At present, being on board ship, he could do nothing. He was enormously anxious to get ashore—to be in the forests; then, if necessary, to fight.

Umlosi was a great warrior, and he was never really happy unless he was having a scrap with some enemy or other.

As was only natural, Umlosi was intensely interested in everything we saw from the yacht's deck. The bird life of the great river, for example, was totally different to the bird life which Umlosi had been used to—the birds of the Amazon region were very different from those of others. This also applies to the trees, to the ferns, to the creepers; in fact, to everything and anything. Umlosi was anxious not to miss a single thing. It was all a great joy to him.

Nelson Lee had been on the Amazon before, but this trip was just as interesting to him as it was to us. There was always something new to see—something more to learn. We were fascinated with everything that came within the vision of our gaze. We had been interested right from the start—from the moment when we had entered the mighty mouth of the Amazon from the open sea.

It had seemed, then, as though we were on the ocean itself—for the Amazon is an enormous width at the mouth. Far up as Manaos, the river shipping had been quite thick; we had passed vessels by the dozen. But after we had gone past the Brazilian city of Manaos, the shipping became less. We only encountered smallish river steamers, plying up to Rio Negro, and up the Amazon.

And now we were hundreds of miles away from Manaos, and with every hour that passed we were penetrating farther and farther into the little known regions of the river.

There was always something new to watch—always something to claim our attention. It was difficult, indeed, to remain down below, even in the tremendous heat of the afternoon. We all wanted to stay on deck, watching the shore, watching the river itself. It seemed to have a strange, almost weird, fascination for us.

Everything on the Amazon was huge—everything seemed to grow on a large scale. Even the flies themselves were confoundingly fat and of a warlike nature.

Life on the Amazon was overgrown, so to speak. Things in England were puny and insignificant in comparison.

The trees which lined the banks of the river were of an appalling size, when we happened to get near to them. The

forest was bolt upright, and hardly varied a foot in its thickness. It presented a great green frontage to the river. It was known as the Matto Grosso, and beyond that impenetrable forest lay the unknown. It was a country which had never been explored by white men—a country which held many secrets, and which was a constant lure to adventurous explorers who were anxious to conquer fresh worlds.

Many were the expeditions which had started out to conquer the Matto Grosso; but of all these expeditions, not one of them had succeeded. The majority, indeed, had met with terrible and awful disaster; others had returned with their missions unfulfilled. The Matto Grosso lay still and calm—impervious to the puny efforts of mankind.

There was something grand about it—something which made us feel very unimportant. That great forest was an endless rampart, and the life which teemed within its recesses was practically unknown to us. We were only permitted to see the very outskirts—just the rough edge. Birds of coloured plumage were countless, and monkeys capered in the branches of great trees, and caused endless amusement to all on board.

The thickness of the forest was unvarying, and it lay right up to the river, a green frontier. The birds which flew about from tree to tree were of amazing colour, and cameras were busy among the members of the party almost from morning till night. All the juniors wanted to take home snapshots of this wonderful land.

It seemed like a paradise, with the glorious flowers festooned everywhere, and with a sense of wonderful peace brooding over the whole region. Yet it was a country of terrible dangers and perils.

It was a country which killed off white men like flies. Many regions were swampy; in fact, the Amazon itself was one mass of swamps. And in these regions particularly, Europeans were always liable to catch fever.

We were frequently troubled by rain-storms. Rain, in fact, came down with terrific force when it did come; there was nothing half-hearted about it.

The waters of the Amazon, so smooth-looking and inviting, were really treacherous places which no man could swim in, for the shallows were haunted by

caymans, or alligators. In Brazil they are called caymans, but they are practically the same breed as the better-known crocodile—and certainly they are just as dangerous.

One night we dropped anchor with the knowledge that we could reach the Majarra on the following day at noon. The Majarra was really a smaller tributary of the Amazon itself. The Amazon, of course, has many hundreds of tributaries, some important, some mere creeks, that have never been explored, and—probably never will be.

River steamers ply up and down many of these tributaries. The Puius, for example, is a well-known river—and a huge river, too. It starts, I believe, somewhere in Bolivia. There are other rivers, too, of a similar nature.

But the Majarra was practically untouched by mankind—that is, by white man. What lay up its waters no one knew. It was the mystery surrounding the whole adventure that made it so engrossing.

That night, just before turning in, most of us were lolling about on the deck, in the cool of the night air. It was glorious, sitting there out of the terrific heat of the day. The stars were shining like great searchlights overhead; they stood out in myriads of twinkling globes, and one cannot picture the scene unless one has actually been on the spot. And from the forests near by came the strange and rather sinister cries of the night—cries which we could not know the meaning of, and which we could only guess at. But we all felt secure on board *The Wanderer*.

"Well, boys, we're nearing the end of our journey now," said Lord Dorrimore, strolling over to a group of juniors who were standing near the rail. "Tomorrow we shall be steaming up the Majarra—and then some mighty interesting events will take place, I fancy."

"I hope so, sir!" said Handforth. "By the way, sir, how do you know that we're doing right in going up the Majarra?"

Dorrie shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know that we are doing right," he replied; "but we've taken on a guide, and we've got to do what the guide directs us. It's no good jibbing—so there you are. Personally, I've got a good deal to say for the young beggar."

"And so have I, Dorrie," I put in. "I think that little Indian boy is a real find, and he'll prove his value before long, or else I'm greatly mistaken."

We were referring to an Indian boy we had picked up a little lower down the stream, when we had stopped for a few hours opposite a rubber plantation, owned by an American firm. This Indian boy—a queer little fellow who wore next to nothing—had come on board selling fruit, and, quite by chance, Miss Kerrigan had seen on him a small charm, which originally belonged to Colonel Kerrigan himself.

This Indian boy had declared that the colonel had presented it to him, and he expressed his willingness to direct us to the exact spot where the explorer had last been seen. Naturally, Lord Dorrimore took advantage of the Indian boy's offer without hesitation.

We hadn't really found a name for him yet. His own name was practically unpronounceable, and we never really tried to conquer it. He could speak a kind of English, which was rather amusing to listen to, for it appeared that on the rubber plantation there had been two or three western Americans and some Chinese. The Chinese naturally spoke Pidgin English, and, consequently, the result was rather extraordinary. The little Indian boy spoke a queer mixture of American words, broken Pidgin English, and one or two Spanish words thrown in here and there.

Sometimes he was called Jim, sometimes Jack, and very often Sambo. But none of these names were very satisfactory, and we were somewhat puzzled to know what we should really dub him.

"Yes," went on Lord Dorrimore thoughtfully, "we shall be up the Majarra to-morrow, boys, and then we shall see a few things worth looking at. In any case, Douglas Fairbanks is directing the way, so we shall have to go—"

"Who, sir?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Douglas Fairbanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the laugh for?" asked Dorrie, in surprise.

"I don't think Mr. Douglas Fairbanks would be very complimented, sir, if he saw this little Indian boy," grinned Pitt. "It's a bit of an insult for you to compare him to a native of the Amazon district!"

"I was thinking about his teeth, you

see," explained Dorrie. "I've seen one or two ripping pictures featuring Douglas Fairbanks, and I was particularly struck by the athletic gentleman's teeth. Now, this Indian youth, he of the perfect English, has a smile which a fellow couldn't possibly tell from 'Duggy's.' He shows his teeth in just the same way, and has a merry twinkle in his eye."

"Well, we'll call him Douglas Fairbanks, too, then!" chuckled Handforth.

"You can call him what you like!" said Dorrie. "It doesn't matter a toss to me, my sons."

"I don't suppose Mr. Fairbanks will mind much, even if he does hear of it," grinned Pitt. "As regards the teeth, the name certainly is applicable; but it strikes me as being jolly funny!"

Everybody was grinning, and, personally, I was of the opinion that the name would stick to our young Indian friend for good.

CHAPTER II.

THE RECKLESSNESS OF HANDFORTH.

THE Majarra!

We had left the Amazon, and we were now in the comparatively narrow waters of the tributary. It was midday, and the sun was glaring down with pitiless and relentless force. And here there were fresh marvels to engage our attention—that seemed to fill us with delight and wonder..

The Majarra, we found, was a fairly wide river at the mouth, and at first, and during the morning, we saw little difference in the scenery. One might have still imagined that we were steaming up the Amazon itself; but, after an hour or two, the river narrowed down quite surprisingly. There were swamps on both sides, and any amount of low-lying islands, which were packed to suffocation with trees, creepers, and vegetation. The river itself teemed with life, and we were warned that it was very dangerous.

By three o'clock in the afternoon we wished to stop, as the current increased to a surprising degree—indeed, the yacht had a great deal of difficulty in making any headway at all, and she was a very powerful vessel. The water was deep

enough for an Atlantic liner, but the current was rather treacherous. However, this did not last for long. A little higher up the river broadened out again, and the current consequently became slower. It was this narrow strip that prevented any of the river steamers from making the journey, for they were small boats, in the main, and they were not capable of navigating the Majarra. And, in any case, there were no white settlements on this river; consequently, the Amazon steamers would have no object whatever in plying up the stream.

We dropped anchor in the evening, and Douglas Fairbanks assured us that very early on the morrow we should arrive at our destination. Meanwhile, we had nothing to do but to admire our surroundings.

The evening was hot and still, the air being particularly humid. Our clothing, light as it was, clung to us uncomfortably, and it was almost an effort to walk across the deck. The majority of us simply sat down in deck chairs, and lolled about.

Then somebody discovered that the air was much cooler down in the saloon and in the drawing-room. There were numerous electric fans there, and all sorts of modern contrivances for cooling the air; consequently, a good many fellows went below. The girls were below, too, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were playing billiards. Before the evening was fully out, the deck itself was practically deserted. Handforth and Co. seemed to have it to themselves: they were still sitting in deck chairs, finishing up an argument. There was no difference whatever in Handforth—he was still as self-willed and obstinate as he had ever been. Transferring Handy from St. Frank's to the Amazon made no difference to him whatever.

"Well, if we go on at this rate, we shall stick here arguing all night," exclaimed Church, irritably, at last. "I am going down below!"

"Nobody's stopping you!" snapped Handforth.

"I'm going, too," said McClure, rising to his feet. "I'm fed up with all his jaw!"

"You—you rotters!" roared Handforth as his chums walked away. "You ain't going to desert me, are you?"

Church looked round.

"You can come with us if you like!" he said. "Nobody's stopping you!"

McClure grinned, and Handforth glared. Then he was left alone on deck, staring at the companion. But he didn't arouse himself, he didn't follow his chums.

Handforth was determined to give Church and McClure a lesson. He would not join them at all. He would wait till they came back for him. Handy fondly imagined that his faithful chums could not possibly get on without him.

After a while he rose to his feet, went to the rail, and gazed out across the river. The water looked delightfully cool and inviting. It was as clear as a bell in this particular part, and Handy could see, right down, deep in the depths. The water was like crystal, and it seemed a terrible pity that bathing was not allowed.

Handforth was rather inclined to be rebellious. He really could not see any reason for Lord Dorriemore putting a ban on bathing.

"It's all rot!" Handforth told himself. "There's nothing dangerous in this giddy river! It's not the Amazon, with low-lying swamps, and all that sort of thing. This water is as clear as glass, and there's not an alligator in sight. I'm a dashed good mind to have a bathe, and chance it!"

Handforth had always been reckless, and he was just as reckless now. Any amount of lessons never taught him anything. He remained just as obstinate, and just as self-willed as before.

But he knew better than say a word about his project to anybody. If Nelson Lee or Lord Dorriemore got to know that Handforth was thinking about having a bathe—well, the bathe would never materialise. And Handforth did not want that.

He positively believed that there was no danger of any sort in having a bathe. The fact that Lord Dorriemore had warned the juniors not to bathe made no difference whatever.

Handforth's opinion was that it was safe. Therefore there would be no harm in going into the water. That's how Handforth looked at it.

He was perspiring freely, and the very thought of diving into that cool stream made him want to go below, and wrench his clothing off.

The desire was positively irresistible, and it did not take him more than ten seconds to make up his mind

"Yes, I'm going in!" he declared. "It's all tommy rot to say that there's any danger. I'm going to dive in, and if I see anything queer, it won't take me two seconds to come out. All I've got to do is to stick near the ladder, and then I shall be all right!"

Handforth went below, overlooking the fact that the accommodation ladder was not yet in position. He went along to the cabin which was occupied by himself and Church and McClure, and in less than five minutes he was already attired in his bathing costume.

The next part was to get on deck, and to dive overboard before anybody could notice him.

Handforth was rather doubtful of this. He slipped out, and made the companion stairs in safety. Then he hauled himself on deck, and no eyes were watching him. Within a few seconds he was at the rail, and he quickly jumped up, took a deep breath, and dived.

Splash!

Handforth went in, and soon came to the surface, shaking his head, and getting the water out of his eyes. It was delightful. He had never enjoyed a dive so much in his life before. He simply splashed about with the joy of being in the cool water. It was unspeakably grand.

"Danger!" gurgled Handforth. "Oh, what rot!"

There certainly seemed to be no danger at the moment. The water was clear, there was no sign of any lurking enemy, and the river itself was peaceful and calm.

Handforth was revelling in his bathe as he had never revelled before. It was so glorious that he could not contain himself. He let out several lusty shouts.

The first officer happened to be on the bridge, and he was at once attracted by the row. He stared down at Handforth in some surprise and alarm.

"You'd better come out of that, my boy!" he said quickly. "Who on earth gave you permission to go in?"

"I did, Mr. Hudson!" replied Handforth joyously.

"Were you not warned——"

"Oh, I've been warned about all sorts of things," went on Handforth. "But that doesn't make any difference. The water's simply grand, and if everybody else had sense, they would join me!"

"But, my boy, you must be very careful!" shouted the first officer. "The river may be quite safe at the moment, but there is no telling. A cayman does not show himself very particularly, and if you once get in the grip of one of those brutes—well, we shall never see you on board again!"

"Why, I'm blest if you are not just as scared as the rest," said Handforth, with much amusement. "There's no danger here, Mr. Hudson—not the slightest danger in the world. Hallo! There's Nipper! I say, Nipper, put on your bathing suit and join me!"

I had come on deck at that moment, and I was accompanied by Tregellis-West, and one or two other juniors. We all rushed to the rail, and gazed down at Handforth in amazement.

"Come out of that, you silly ass!" I shouted. "Who the dickens told you to go in?"

"That's what Mr. Hudson just asked me!" grinned Handforth, treading water, and looking up at us. "Why, you silly asses, there's no danger here—why don't you chaps be sensible, and come in?"

"If you don't come out of that in two minutes, my son, we'll jolly well fetch you out!" I said grimly. "You may not think there's any danger—but there is danger. Just because you don't happen to see anything it doesn't mean to say that this river is as safe as an ordinary swimming bath! Those alligator gentlemen——"

"Oh, rats to them!" said Handforth. "There's not a sign of one of them about here. We've left them all behind, in the swampy part of the river. You can't kid me that I'm in any peril. The water's simply glorious, and I'm staying here for another hour! Why don't you come in?"

"It seems safe enough," said Hart, looking down at the water. "I say, Nipper, why not chance it——"

"We're not going to chance it!" I interrupted. "And Handforth is coming out of that water pretty quick—I can tell you! The silly idiot doesn't know what danger he is running. It is absolutely a mad thing to go into the water!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Handforth, who had been listening. "I'm all right. I mean to have a bathe in the morning, like this, before we get under way!"

I was feeling rather worried about Handforth. I knew well enough that

even this clear part of the river was frequented by caymans, and, if Handforth once got in the grip of one of those dreadful creatures, there would be no chance for him whatever. One flick of its tail, one grip of its jaw, Handforth would be no more. The very thought was horrifying.

And Handforth continued to splash about with serene indifference.

"Buck up, my sons!" he called up to us. "The water's grand, I tell you."

At that moment he spotted something which he took to be a log, some distance from him over to the shore. It seemed to be drifting sluggishly with the current, and Handforth struck out for it vigorously.

If I had seen him I should have yelled out a warning, but, just at that moment, my attention was distracted by the fact that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came up, having been sent for hastily by Mr. Hudson.

Both the gov'nor and Dorrie were startled to hear of Handforth's reckless escapade.

They hurried to the rail at once.

Meanwhile Handforth had arrived at his destination—the innocent-looking log. It was his intention to grab hold of it, and to get astride of the log, and then drift down past the yacht. Handforth thought it would be rather good sport.

And then he received a big shock!

In that second, Handforth knew well enough Lord Dorrimore's warning had been fully justified, and that he had been extremely foolish to dive into the water. For, just as Handforth was about to make a grab at the supposed log, the thing moved!

One end of it came out of the water, and rose in the air, curling as it did so. Handforth stopped suddenly, and gave a gasp. For, at the same moment, he caught sight of two wicked-looking eyes, and then, for the first time, he realised that he was at close quarters with a cayman!

"Good heavens!" gasped Handforth, faintly.

Several of the other juniors on deck had also seen Handforth's peril, and Violet Watson and Ethel Church, and two of the other girls were also aware of the Removite's danger.

"Oh, look—look!" screamed Ethel, pointing.

She was as pale as a ghost, and clung to Miss Violet for support. Tommy

Watson's sister was made of sterner stuff, however, and she turned round quickly.

"Can't something be done?" she asked, her pretty voice, quivering with anxiety. "Mr. Lee! Handforth is in terrible danger——"

"I know it, Miss Violet. I am well aware of it!" said Nelson Lee. "Poor boy! I don't know if we can do anything to save him!"

The gov'nor only said that in case a tragedy actually happened. For, even as the words were leaving his lips, his hand went round to his hip-pocket, and the next second a revolver gleamed in his fist.

Lord Dorrimore's hand was acting in the same manner at precisely the same moment.

As for myself, I hardly knew what I was doing—I hardly knew what to think. All I could do was to stare down at Handforth in a kind of fascinated horror. I expected to see the poor chap killed as we looked at him. I was simply held to the deck, unable to move a finger—unable to think clearly.

Handforth himself, it must be said, acted with surprising agility. He displayed great commonsense in that moment of peril. Without waiting to argue with the cayman, without pausing a second to try conclusions with the ugly monster, Handforth dived—he dived simply and swiftly.

It was fortunate that he did so, for the cayman lumbered round clumsily, with its tail lashing over the surface of the water on the spot where Handforth had just been floating.

The leader of Study D came to the surface, and wasted no time by glancing round. He simply struck out for the yacht's side with all the power he could put into it. But, left to himself, he would have found his task a hopeless one. The river monster would have overtaken him, and the end would have been terribly tragic.

Nelson Lee's revolver was ready, and he took steady aim. And he wasted no time in doing so. The whole affair happened so quickly that I hardly realised it—it was over almost before it had begun.

Crack!

Lee's revolver spat out a spurt of flame, and I stared at the cayman wonderingly. I knew well enough that a revolver bullet is almost useless against

such a creature as a cayman. There is only one really vulnerable spot, and that is the monster's eye. Its hide is so tough and hard that an ordinary revolver bullet will have no material effect.

But the gov'nor's aim was true.

Crack!

Barely a second after Lee's shot, Lord Dorrimore's revolver echoed the report. I don't know where his bullet went—possibly it entered the cayman's left eye, where Lee's had entered. At all events, the river monster lashed about in the water for a few minutes in a terrible frenzy of fury and riot.

The water was lashed into foam, and the noise was considerable. But the cayman did not follow Handforth—it was dead!

This, however, did not mean to say that there were no more fellows of the same variety knocking about the water. It was quite possible that the cayman had several companions in the near vicinity. The sooner Handforth was on deck the better.

Floats were flung over the side by several members of the crew in charge of Mr. Hudson. Handforth lost no time in grasping one of them as soon as he reached the vessel's side.

A moment later he was being hauled up, and when he stood on deck we all breathed with heartfelt relief.

"Look—look, down there!" panted McClure, who was almost white to the lips. "I can see some more of 'em, you chaps!"

We needed no telling. There were several other caymen about near the vessel's side. How Handforth had escaped was rather a miracle. It was just his usual luck, I suppose. But, however, Handforth generally managed to escape out of dangers by a hair's-breadth.

He usually blundered into terrible trouble, and blundered out of it again.

Miss Violet rushed up to Handforth, and her face was flushed with excitement. Handforth was there, looking bewildered, and looking decidedly scared.

"Oh, you silly boy!" said Violet reprovingly. "You ought not to have got into the water like that—you have given us all such a fright!"

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, Miss—Miss Violet," stammered Handforth. "You—you see—somehow I didn't know—"

His nerve gave out, and he simply

fled down the deck, and vanished into the vessel's interior.

And we all gathered into a knot, discussing the narrow escape which Handforth had just had. Church and McClure, of course, raced down after their leader.

"That was a marvellous shot of yours, gov'nor," I said, as Nelson Lee came up. "By jingo, you caught the brute right in the eye!"

"It is fortunate I did so, Nipper," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Another two seconds, and Handforth would have been done for. The reckless young idiot—he deserves a strong lecture for this!"

"He deserves a jolly good hiding, sir," I said. "He knew as well as the rest of us that it was dangerous to dive into these waters. I thought he could be trusted alone, but it seems that he can't!"

"Well, it's all over now, and the kid is quite unharmed," said Lord Dorrimore. "I think it'll be a lesson to him that he won't forget in a hurry, Lee. That shot of yours, old man, was great!"

"I think your shot was just as accurate, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "I cannot imagine what possessed the boy to go bathing in these waters!"

"Oh, I expect he was feeling warm, and thought a bathe would be rather nice," said Dorrie. "The young ass didn't realise that it might be a bathe of death!"

Umlosi, who was standing by, shook his head gravely.

"Wau! Thou art indeed a giant among men, Umtagati!" said the black giant. "With thy wondrous fire stick, thou saved the white lad from a terrible death. I praise thee, O my master!"

"That's all right, Umlosi," smiled Nelson Lee. "The shot was really a simple one, after all."

"It was a shot which meant life or death for that lad, O Umtagati," said Umlosi. "Thy aim is true, and thine hand steady. Thou art truly a wondrous warrior, O my master!"

We were still on deck, talking, when Handforth came up, fully dressed, with Church and McClure on either side of him.

"Here comes the silly ass!" said Pitt. "I think he deserves——"

"Leave him to me, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Handforth came straight up to us,

looking very sheepish and shamefaced. But his first words were rather unusual—for him.

"I want you chaps to grab hold of me, and to frog-march me round the deck!" he said. "I deserve more than that, and I give you full permission to do what you like. I'll run the gauntlet. I'll do any old thing. I was a double-barrelled idiot to dive into the water like that!"

"You were," I agreed promptly.

"Dear old boy, I really fail to find a word which would express my feelin's," declared Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "It was shockin'ly bad of you—it was really. You knew quite well that the river was dangerous, an' how in the world you were idiotic enough to go bathin' simply staggers me."

"I thought the water was safe enough," said Handforth. "It looks all right, you know!"

Nelson Lee strolled up.

"You must not judge by the looks, Handforth," he said sternly. "Let this incident be a lesson to you—let it sink in deeply. On no account must you disregard any warning of mine in future."

"I won't sir," said Handforth. "I'm awfully sorry I've caused you this worry and trouble, sir—and I want to thank you for what you did!"

"There is no necessity for you to thank me, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "You acted very foolishly, and there is nothing more to be said. I had intended giving you a very severe lecture, but I fancy this lesson has been sufficiently severe. I do not think that any words of mine will impress themselves upon you more than your narrow escape. My boy, you must be very thankful that you're alive and well at this present moment."

"I am, sir," said Handforth fervently. "That shot of yours was fine—I thought I was done for at the moment. I hope you'll do something to me, sir—I deserve a good swishing!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, it is quite refreshing to hear you speak in such a strain for once, Handforth," he remarked. "You do deserve a swishing, as you call it—I am quite in agreement with you; but we will let that pass. Never, under any circumstances, bathe in these waters until you are told it is perfectly safe to do so."

Handforth nodded.

"Trust me, sir," he said. "My goodness! I'm not going to have any more bathes while I'm on the Amazon—not me! I've had a lesson this evening that I sha'n't forget until I'm ninety-eight!"

Handforth's remark was probably quite correct—assuming that he actually did live to the ripe old age he had mentioned!

CHAPTER III.

A LAND OF WONDERS.

"WELL, we're here!" said Reginald Pitt, looking round. "We've arrived at the spot, my sons!"

"There's nothing particularly startling about it," said Watson. "And what do we do now?"

It was the following day, and the time was just after noon. Douglas Fairbanks had called a halt, and it seemed that we had travelled as far up the river as it was possible to go—at all events, there was no need for us to proceed any farther up the Majarra.

The Indian boy was talking to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, and some of the juniors were standing by, listening with interest. Young Stanley Kerrigan was there, his face flushed with excitement, and his eyes gleaming. He was enormously anxious, and it thrilled him to know that before very long he would see the very spot where his father had last been seen alive.

"You are quite sure that this is the place, my son?" Dorrie was asking.

"Me allee same heap big shore," declared Douglas Fairbanks, grinning hugely. "This de place, I guess. It is silly to go farther in ship; we now go on foot, and allee same find village. Indian people tell you much—me know!"

"Well, if you know, that's good enough," said Dorrie. "But how far shall we go on foot—how long would it take us?"

"Allee same one—two hour!" replied the Indian boy. "Journey not long, I guess. We soon reach um place. Me know dis river—me been here before, I reckon. Me seen um plenty time. I lead de way to place where mighty big white gentleman last seen. You trustee me—me know."

"I think we had better take a party ashore, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "We have apparently to journey to an Indian village, where we shall meet some of this boy's personal friends. We may be able to learn something of great value from them. In any case, we must do our best."

It was some little time before everything was fixed up. We had arrived at a portion of the river where the water was fairly narrow. It was almost possible to throw a stone from one river bank to the other. The water was very deep, and the current extremely sluggish. Giant tropical trees grew in great profusion, and the wild flowers and the creepers were quite bewildering in their varieties and colours.

The sun did not shine directly down here, owing to the tall trees and the great thickness of the foliage. We were in a kind of deep shadow, where the air was hot, still, and almost unbearably humid.

The bird life was amazing in its splendour and colour. Humming-birds were numerous, and the whole scene was one of tropical beauty and gorgeous colour. It was arranged that Nelson Lee himself should lead the shore party. Dorrie would come with us, Dr. Brett, Umlosi, and half a dozen of the juniors. There was a good deal of trouble about this.

All the St. Frank's fellows wanted to come—as, of course, was only natural. But on the first trip ashore, it was impossible to take the whole crowd—it was only a small party who could actually go.

At last, however, by a simple system of drawing lots, the matter was settled.

I was fortunate enough to be one of the lucky ones. Sir Montie was coming with us, too, Handforth, Pitt, Fatty Little, and Tom Burton. Young Stanley Kerrigan, of course, was going in any case.

In addition, we took four members of the yacht's crew, all fully armed with repeating rifles of the latest pattern. Nelson Lee was leaving nothing to chance, and he had no intention whatever of being caught by surprise by hostile natives.

It was quite likely that Douglas Fairbanks' friends would not be quite so amiable as he was.

There was nothing like being on the safe side. In all probability we should meet with no dangers at all. Prepared-

ness was, however, essential. The Brazilian forests are not exactly peaceful.

By one o'clock the accommodation ladder was in position, and The Wanderer's little launch was ready to take the party ashore—for the yacht itself was in mid-stream. The water was shallow near the banks.

"Well, we're all ready now," said Reginald Pitt. "I've got my camera, and we shall be able to get a good few snapshots. Hallo! Have you got a camera, too, Fatty? It seems to be a big one."

Fatty Little grinned.

"Rats!" he said. "This isn't a camera!"

He was holding a large, square leather case, and it was so full that it bulged somewhat dangerously. The fastenings were strained to their utmost. I chuckled as I glanced at it.

"Grub!" I said. "Enough for the whole party."

"Great pancakes!" ejaculated Fatty. "This is just a snack for me, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only a few sandwiches, and cakes and pastries," said the fat junior. "There ain't enough to go round. I thought it would be as well to be prepared. A chap never knows what might happen!"

"You needn't be afraid of starving, my son," I said. "Or even going hungry, if it comes to that. And we shall find tons of fruit in the forest—to say nothing of nuts, berries, and goodness knows what else. Still, I suppose you'll manage to eat all that lot you've got in addition, eh?"

"Rather!" said Fatty. "I was allowing for that, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty's appetite was always a source of amusement to the other fellows. He was certainly never satisfied, and the one thing he thought of always was grub—grub, and nothing else but grub. When he awoke in the morning he was thinking of his tummy, and when he went to bed at night he was still pondering on the same subject. It was a kind of religion with Fatty Little.

Nelson Lee came hurrying along the deck.

"Well, boys, we're all ready now," he said briskly. "You'd better get down into the launch as quickly as possible."

"Rather, sir!"

The fellows tumbled down the accommodation ladder rather excitedly. This was the first real trip ashore—at least, the first journey into the jungle itself. And it promised to be rather interesting and exciting. I was carrying a revolver with me—because I could handle one fairly decently, and it was just as well to be on the safe side.

We all entered the launch, and then made the very short trip to the shore. On the yacht, the rail was lined with the other juniors—who were all extremely envious—the girls, and the other members of the party. They waved us a farewell.

"You might think we were going away for a month!" grinned Handforth. "We shall be back by tea-time—if Douglas Fairbanks has been telling the truth!"

"This native village, I believe, is only a mile or two from the river," I said. "I'm rather curious to find out what'll happen when we get there. These pals of Duggy's may not be so harmless as he is. Still, we are well armed, so we're in no danger."

"Dear old boys," murmured Sir Montie, "just look at Umlosi!"

We glanced round, and smiled when we saw the giant Kutana chief a short distance away from us. Umlosi was overjoyed to be on solid ground again. He was capering round in a most undignified manner—in a way which he would never have descended to under ordinary circumstances. But he had been so long on the yacht that it was like being released from prison, to be ashore.

He saw us watching him, and he came bounding over towards us—his white drill suit being in imminent danger of bursting. Umlosi was not at all particular about clothing, and he would have much preferred to cast the majority of it off, light though it was.

"Wah! I am indeed pleased to be away from the great kraal that floats on the water," said Umlosi, in his deep, rumbling voice. "But I am sorely troubled, my young masters!"

"Troubled?" I repeated. "What about?"

"Thou must surely know, oh Manzie, that this journey into the forest is to be of short duration," said Umlosi, in a sad voice. "We are to return before nightfall—and then we shall once more remain on the floating kraal. Oh, Nimble One!"

"You needn't be sad, old son!" I grinned. "We shall soon be off in earnest now. This is just a preliminary trip, you know. As soon as we find some real information, we shall make a stand accordingly."

"Mayhap it will happen as thou sayest, oh, Manzie," said Umlosi. "Last night I had dreams—in which I saw the red mists before mine eyes, and methinks there is some wondrous adventure near at hand."

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore, coming up. "You had red mists before your eyes, oh, thou of the Coal-box face—that looks pretty bad!"

"Not so, N'Kose, my father!" said Umlosi. "It is good, for I see much fighting. I see blood flowing freely!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "That sounds pretty off-side, you chaps!"

"You mustn't take too much notice of Umlosi," I grinned. "He frequently has these mists, and dreams, and all the rest of it. But, somehow, it often happens that he's right to a certain degree. You can take it for granted that we're going to have some exciting times before long."

"Good!" said Pitt. "There's not much sense in coming out to the Amazon unless we have some excitement. The sooner it turns up the better—that's what I say!"

Handforth nodded.

"I sha'n't be satisfied until we've had a few scraps with the cannibals," he said grimly. "Then there's all sorts of wild animals to encounter—snakes, and jaguars, and elephants——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at, you asses!" said Handforth, glaring.

"Not about the elephants?" I grinned. "I don't think you'll find any of those gentlemen in this region, Handy. Elephants don't grow here, you know."

"Well, lions, then!" said Handforth. "I'm not particular!"

"Well, that's one good thing," I said. "I don't think you'll find any lions, either," I said. "And, if it comes to that, you're not likely to have much luck in the way of cannibals. These Indian tribes may be hostile, but they're not of a cannibalistic nature. At the same time, I expect we shall find plenty of excitement."

It was not long before we started off for our journey through the forest. Douglas Fairbanks led the way, since he was familiar with this particular neighbourhood. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-more followed immediately behind, then two members of the crew, Umlosi, we six juniors, and two other members of the crew brought up in the rear. Rifles and revolvers were close at hand in case of emergencies.

This was not actually the virgin forest—it had been broken by man on many an occasion—indeed, there was quite a well-defined path through the forest. I had been expecting that we should be compelled to literally fight our way yard by yard. But this was not the case; our journey through the forest was comparatively easy.

We lost sight of The Wanderer within three minutes, and then one might have supposed that we were thousands of miles away from any river and from civilisation. We were buried right inside the forest, with nothing but nature on every side.

The effect was rather curious. The heat, as we walked, became greater—closer, if that be clearly understood. We were sheltered from the direct rays of the sun, but, at the same time, a strange and uncanny sultriness rose up from the lower regions. The effect was by no means pleasant at first; it produced a nervous tension which was not at all to my liking.

"Dear old boy, I am feelin' frightfully queer—I am, really!" murmured Sir Montie, turning to me. "This forest, you know, seems to be frightfully weird, you know. I don't know whether it has the same effect on you, you know —"

"Yes, Montie," I broke in, "I think it has that effect on everybody. I dare say we shall get used to it before long, but it certainly seems rather rummy to begin with."

After a while the ground was somewhat open, and it was not so thickly wooded. We came upon patches of sunlight, where graceful palms grew in clusters and singly. The ferns in the undergrowth were delightful in their varieties and beauty. Trees of every description were passed on the way. Mimosa, bombax, myrtle, and rubber trees were everywhere, and there generally dominated by palms. The flowers were positively bewildering — great

masses of rich colour, in such profusion that the mind was somewhat at a loss.

"Isn't it marvellous!" remarked Pitt, in tones of great admiration. "I've never seen anything so gorgeous in all my life! Africa can't compare with this place for beauty!"

Handforth grunted.

"I'm not so sure about beauty!" he growled. "A beastly insect just stung me on the neck, and there's a bump rising as big as an egg!"

"You mustn't take any notice of insects, Handy," grinned Pitt. "I've had a good few bite me already—and the mosquitoes at night, as you know, are a bit of a handful."

This was quite correct. We had been troubled by mosquitoes for quite a while now—but usually late in the evening. And the mosquitoes of this region were aggressive fellows, who would not let you alone. But we were rapidly becoming accustomed to the tropical insects which flew through the air in myriads.

"Good heavens!" shouted one of the juniors abruptly. "Look—look up there! Oh, my goodness!"

Nelson Lee looked up sharply.

"What is it?" he asked, holding his revolver ready.

"There, sir, up in that tree!"

Everybody looked up in the tree indicated, and I gave a sudden little gasp. Handforth stared up with his eyes goggling somewhat.

"Shoot it!" he shouted, rather huskily. "Oh, my hat! What an awful-looking creature!"

"Kill it, sir!"

But Nelson Lee only laughed.

"There is no reason why I should kill that creature, my boy," he smiled. "It is quite harmless, I assure you."

The fellows could hardly believe that this was the case, for the object in the tree was indeed a terrible-looking thing.

It seemed to be some dream monster—a positive nightmare. It was fully five feet in length, and the neck and back were furnished with a high crest, made up of several spines. A similar row of spines were to be seen beneath the chin. The body and tail were long, and seemed to be compressed, and its face was truly awful.

"What—what is it, sir?" asked Handforth, in a startled voice.

"An iguana," replied Nelson Lee.

"A which, sir?"

"It is a kind of a giant lizard,"

replied Nelson Lee. "They are quite harmless, my boys, and it may come as a surprise to you, but the flesh of the iguana is greatly esteemed as food."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Pitt. "I would not touch a bit even if I was starving!"

"Oh, I'm not so sure!" said Fatty Little. "You can't judge by the look of an animal what its flesh will be like when it's cooked. I wouldn't mind tasting a bit, anyhow."

"Oh, you'd eat anything!" said Handforth, with his eyes still fixed upon the iguana. "My hat! And that thing's harmless! Somehow I can't quite believe it!"

We passed on, and I am quite sure that the majority of the fellows were glad to be out of reach of that awful-looking lizard. Its very size made one feel rather nervous.

Shortly afterwards we entered upon a large clearing, with a path faintly discernible, winding its way through to the forest on the other side. One or two enormous trees grew in the centre, trees which made us fairly stand still and stare. They were nothing less than two hundred feet in height, and they were wonderfully impressive.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie. "Look at all those butterflies, dear old boys! Ain't they simply gorgeous?"

"Butterflies?" repeated Dorrie, looking round. "I can't see any butterflies, my lad."

"They're flying all round, sir," said Sir Montie.

"Oh, those!" said Dorrie, smiling. "They're not butterflies, my son—they're humming-birds."

"Begad!"

"Well, they're jolly lovely, anyhow!" said Handforth. "What glorious colours! But don't they fly about beautifully? This place seems to be a paradise!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Nelson Lee. "Death lurks in almost every yard of this country, in one way or another. It is always wise to be on one's guard. Wild animals, poisonous insects, snakes, and——"

"Snakes, sir?" said Pitt. "We've never seen any yet."

"You are quite likely to see a few snakes at any moment," said Nelson Lee grimly. "On no account approach one, if you do. The snakes of this region are frequently of a very deadly character."

"Hallo! There's something else over

there!" I put in suddenly. "What's that thing in the trees?"

I pointed to a clump of trees away to the left, and Nelson Lee looked.

"Oh, that gentleman is a sloth," he replied. "A fairly big fellow, too, by the look of him. I dare say you have seen some of the smaller varieties at the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park."

We all stared at the sloth with interest. It was a queer-looking animal. It was hanging upside-down, clinging to a branch of one of the trees. The four limbs were greatly elongated by the look of them, and the creature was clinging to the tree by means of hooks in its feet. The whole body was covered with long, coarse hair, which seemed to have a peculiar greenish colour. And it was moving slowly and deliberately, as though weak and tired with old age.

"It doesn't seem to be a very energetic specimen, anyhow," remarked Pitt.

"Sloths are the laziest creatures on earth," smiled Nelson Lee. "They are never in a hurry, my boy."

"Are they dangerous, sir?" asked Tom Burton.

"Not at all," replied Nelson Lee. "At least, not to my knowledge. If we do not interfere with the sloth, it will not interfere with us. But we must be getting on; all these stoppages are delaying us."

We continued our journey in the forest, having almost forgotten our objective. We were fascinated by everything that we saw, and had overlooked for the moment that we were bound for the little Indian village from which we should probably learn some news regarding the late Colonel Ker-rigan.

Umlosi was oblivious of all ordinary matters. His whole attention was given to the wonderful sights which surrounded us. All this was new to the great Kutana chief. There were a great many things on the great Amazon plain which Umlosi had never seen before. It was not like Africa, and the giant black was amazed with wonder and delight.

"I am filled with pleasure, O Nimble One!" said Umlosi, turning to me as we walked along. "This is indeed a great day! Methinks that this great land is one of beauty and charm. I am filled with admiration, O Manzie!"

"Yes, Umlosi, this country is a bit staggering at first," I agreed. "It's so full of surprises that we can't appreciate them all quickly enough."

We soon entered the thick jungle again, and as we passed along through the tangled masses of trees, we saw many other wonderful sights. As Nelson Lee had intimated, it was not long before we encountered some snakes.

It was Handforth who pointed them out, high up in the trees amongst the branches, vivid in their colourings, and wicked in their looks. But they were high above us, and we were in no danger.

And then quite suddenly we reached our destination.

Turning a little bend in the narrow path we came into another clearing, and we caught sight of rough dwellings, made of wood and grasses. A few human figures were in sight, most of them nearly devoid of clothing, and there was a babble of voices.

Our arrival was evidently causing some little excitement.

CHAPTER IV.

NEWS OF THE COLONEL.

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS was a most important person.

He had been acting as our guide up till now, but he was also an interpreter. It was necessary for him to question the natives, and then translate their replies into English. It was a task he revelled in, and he was grinning all over his face with pleasure.

We found the Indian village to be a very small, grubby place, and the Indians themselves were a grubby lot, too. They seemed rather scared, and at first were too nervous to interview at all.

Douglas Fairbanks, however, could not remain quiet. He gabbled at them like one o'clock, and quickly put them in possession of the fact that we were perfectly harmless, and we had only come to gain a little information, and that we should depart peacefully as soon as we had gained our object.

The Indians were undersized and half naked. I was not at all impressed by them, and they struck me as being a

treacherous-looking lot. I should not have cared to be left alone with them for very long.

A kind of council was held in the middle of the clearing. The male members of the little Indian settlement were all grouped around us, looking deadly serious, and extremely stolid. Away in the background, clustered round the huts, were the women and children; they were too nervous to come near. As a preliminary, Lord Dorrimore distributed a fair amount of ornaments and jewellery—trinkets and such like. The Indians did not seem to be very impressed, but I expect they were delighted in their own way.

"Now, look here, Douglas Fairbanks!" said Dorrie. "What you've got to do is this, my son. Listen to my instructions carefully, and then get busy with your own special lingo."

"Me understand, boss," said Douglas Fairbanks. "You talkee, and me allee samee repeat to Indian man. He answers—I guess!"

"All right; go ahead," said Dorrie. "What we want to know is this. Do these natives remember anything concerning Colonel Kerrigan, the big white man who was in this region several years ago? I want you to ask these fellows if they remember the white man. That will do for the start. Get busy!"

Douglas Fairbanks nodded and turned to the villagers.

Then he commenced gabbling away at a terrific speed, and for some little time the natives looked as blank and stolid as ever. Then some of them seemed to become rather more intelligent, and they nodded repeatedly. After that two of them talked and talked, until we thought they would never stop. But at last our Indian guide turned to us.

"Allee same remember much!" he exclaimed. "They know plenty, boss. Allee same remember white man!"

"Good!" said Nelson Lee. "What else, my boy?"

"White man no more here," said Douglas Fairbanks. "White man gone—him gone one year, two year, three year—more than that, boss! Him no more here. Him gone up in 'um sky."

"Up in the sky?" repeated Dorrie wonderingly.

"Sure, dat's what 'um say," said our guide. "Plenty much gone, boss. Allee same, up in 'um sky!"

We looked at the Indians curiously.

They were still talking—now amongst themselves. And several of them were pointing continuously to the sky. Then they looked at us, and apparently thought that we understood.

"What do they mean, sir?" asked Stanley Kerrigan. "Do—do they mean that dad is dead? That he has gone up to heaven?"

Nelson Lee compressed his lips.

"I don't quite know, Stanley. But I cannot quite believe that these ignorant natives mean that your father has gone to heaven. I expect they know precious little about heaven, my boy. Their actions must be capable of some other interpretation. But we shall soon know."

"Has that fellow gone dotty?" asked Handforth.

We looked at one of the Indians—an old man, and probably the father of the village, so to speak. He was on his feet, and he was making curious motions with his hands and arms, as though he was endeavouring to describe some object. It was quite impossible to understand what he meant, but he seemed to think that we ought to know. And then he pointed to the sky again, and once more repeated his gyrations.

"The chap's dotty!" said Handforth.

"Don't you believe it," I said. "He's trying to make us understand something, but in his own primitive way he can't quite do it. What do you make of those signs, guv'nor?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I must confess, Nipper, that I am somewhat puzzled," he replied. "However, we must not give up."

"Perhaps Duggy will be able to find out," said Lord Dorrimore.

Douglas Fairbanks lost no further time in putting questions to the natives. After they had been talking for some time he turned to us again.

"Me no understand, boss," he said, with a painful expression on his quaint-looking face. "Allee samee strange things. Indians talk of big house which went up in the air. I guess they must be sure loco!"

Nelson Lee smiled at this bit of American slang.

"A house that went up in the air?" he repeated slowly. "That certainly sounds somewhat extraordinary, my lad. But there must be some explanation. Wait! I have an idea! By

James, I wonder if it can be possible that——"

Nelson Lee paused, and Dorrie looked at him curiously.

"Well?" he said. "Go on, old man!"

"Not yet," said Nelson Lee. "I have a little test I should like to put to these men. My idea is rather wild, and I don't suppose it is accurate and true. But it is just as well to make sure."

The guv'nor pulled a notebook out of his pocket, and then commenced drawing several objects in pencil. They were rough little pictures, but clear enough. I was surprised to see that the first object he drew was a balloon. What could his idea be?

Lord Dorrimore was equally astonished, and the other juniors were looking on with mild expressions of wonder. They were even more surprised when Nelson Lee proceeded to draw a parachute. Finally the guv'nor executed a very creditable picture of a box-kite.

"What on earth's the idea?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, I expect you will laugh at me, Nipper!" said Nelson Lee. "In all probability this notion of mine is absurd, but I just want to satisfy myself."

He took a step forward and held his pocket-book in front of the group of natives. They gazed at it blankly for a few moments, but then their expressions changed. They gabbled to one another, their eyes gleamed, and they were obviously excited.

Then they pointed to one of the drawings. They pointed continuously, and followed this up by looking at the sky, and by jerking their fingers upwards. The meaning of it all was quite obvious, and could not possibly be mistaken.

"This is splendid—far better than I ever thought!" said Nelson Lee keenly. "Don't you understand, Dorrie? All these Indians are pointing to the box-kite!"

"By gad!" said Dorrie, taking a deep breath.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed, startled. "Do you mean to say, guv'nor, that Colonel Kerrigan constructed a box-kite, and went up into the air on it?"

"That is the only possible explanation, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "These

Indians started by pointing into the sky, and we could not quite understand their meaning. Then, after the old gentleman had made certain movements with his hands, I had a dim impression that he was attempting to describe something which went up into the air with the colonel. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Very well, then," said Nelson Lee. "It stands to reason that the colonel could only leave the earth in one of three ways, that was clear. A balloon, a parachute, or a box-kite. An aeroplane, of course, is quite out of the question in this region. It was very doubtful if the colonel had brought a balloon with him, and a parachute was also a questionable alternative. The box-kite, however, struck me as being possible. But I drew all three in order to see what effect it had on the natives. As you have observed, they all point point-blank to the box-kite."

"But where could the colonel have got a box-kite from, sir?" asked Handforth.

"It is fairly clear, Handforth, that the colonel manufactured it himself," said Nelson Lee. "On one occasion, a year or two ago, I myself did the very same thing. I was with Nipper in a desert in North America, and we escaped from certain death by constructing a rough kite, and we allowed ourselves to be carried up by the wind and deposited into safety. It was a risky expedient, but it saved our lives. The colonel obviously did something of the same nature, but with a different object."

"What could his object be," asked Stanley excitedly. "There is just a chance your father is alive—but I should advise you not to hope to find him. The colonel constructed the box-kite of some materials and he went up into the sky with it. What for, I do not know, but it is quite possible that we shall find this out before long."

An answer was provided almost at once by Douglas Fairbanks. That cheerful youth knew a great deal more than we had supposed—and he was proving himself to be an extremely valuable individual.

He had been listening to our conversation with interest and he now grasped Nelson Lee's sleeve and plucked at it. His face was flushed with a sudden ex-

citement and was looking far more intelligent than usual. Nelson Lee turned to him and regarded him with interest.

"Well Duggy" he said "what is it?"

"Me know!" said the Indian boy grimly. "Me allee samee know truth, boss!"

"You know why the colonel constructed the box-kite?"

"Sure!" said Douglas Fairbanks. "Me know why big white man make box 'um kite! Big white man explorer—want to see over forest—and no go."

"Him no go!" repeated Nelson Lee. "What do you mean?"

"Allee same heap big swamp!" said Douglas Fairbanks, shaking his head. "Lil way over there, boss," he added, pointing over the trees. "Swamp, him mighty big proposition, I guess. Allee samee quick death!"

"A swamp!" repeated Dorrie. "There are plenty of swamps about here, my boy. The colonel wouldn't construct a kite just in order to cross a swamp——"

"You no understand, boss," said Duggy. "Me know! Me heap big clever person! You bet your sweet life! This swamp miles long—miles and miles and miles and miles!"

"How many more miles?" asked Dorrie.

"Him big swamp; so big 'um can't describe him!" said the Indian boy, stretching his hands in order to indicate that the swamp was of an enormous size. "Terrible, boss—swamp so big, no man cross it! Never been crossed by anybody—not by Indian or white man or animal! Nobody know what beyond—allee same mystery!"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I am beginning to understand much more clearly," he said. "I have heard from several people that there is a terrible swamp in this region, Dorrie. It is unknown in its depth, and it extends for hundreds of miles. As Duggy has said, nothing human can live on it, and it has never been crossed. It is a swamp infested by fever, poisonous insects by the million, and there are snakes galore. It is quite impossible for anybody to walk upon it, or to cross it. The colonel evidently constructed this box-kite with the idea of solving the difficulty."

"Then—then dad must have fallen into the swamp, and is dead," said Stanley, with dismay.

"Not necessarily, my boy," said



1. Crack ! Nelson Lee's revolver spat out just in the nick of time.

2. In a moment the huge snake had coiled itself round Fatty's ample form.

Dorrie. "It is quite likely that the Colonel crossed the swamp, and could not possibly get back. Then, at all events, this tallies with your aunt's peculiar visions. It is a likely supposition, in my opinion."

"I am inclined to agree with you, old man," said Nelson Lee. "Kerrigan may have crossed the swamp in the kite, and then found it impossible to get back. He is, therefore, marooned hundreds of miles away—from civilisation, and no possible means of getting back."

The idea was a fascinating one, and we were all intensely interested. The swamp that Douglas Fairbanks had mentioned was indeed a reality, and we had heard many stories concerning it.

It was regarded as a kind of myth down the Amazon, in Manaos, and other towns. Many people did not believe that it actually existed, and they were inclined to look upon the yarn as a mere tale. But I believed it to be true—and so did the gov'nor.

Itself, the swamp formed a complete barrier, some miles behind the river. Exploration was finally stopped at that point where the swamp commenced. It was supposed to extend for so many miles that no human being had ever discovered its actual size and its depth—that is, the distance across it—had never been tested.

What lay beyond was a complete and absolute mystery. The country had never been explored, and the possibilities were enormous.

"But what was the use of us thinking of the matter? We could not cross the swamp, we had no box-kites, and even if we had it would have made no difference. The enterprise was altogether too risky for serious consideration.

One party had attempted to solve the problem by starting a trip to the other side of the continent—hoping to get to the unexplored region from there. But they had met with the same difficulty. They had come across this dreadful swamp, and it was absolutely out of the question to get across.

It seemed, therefore, that this horrible morass formed a kind of circle—a sort of sea—with a huge tract of land—like an island, in the centre.

That great tract of land had never been seen by modern eyes—no human being had ever crossed the swamp in order to get to it. There was some-

thing thrilling about the whole idea. If it turned out to be true, there were endless possibilities.

And it now seemed that Colonel Kerrigan had crossed the swamp on the box-kite, and was now on this huge island—that is, the tract of land which the swamp surrounded. We were all impressed.

What was far more to the point, Douglas Fairbanks declared he could lead us to a hill-top, within a couple of miles, where we could view the swamp with our own eyes. He would take us to a place where we could see for miles across the swamp itself.

Nelson Lee decided that it would be as well to take advantage of Duggy's knowledge.

We had learned some very valuable information in the Indian village, and we realised that we were fully repaid for our troubles in coming. And the Indians were highly delighted, too—for they were the richer by many trinkets and ornaments, which they valued far more than an Englishman would have valued a handful of the biggest and most expensive diamonds known.

We took our departure, after learning that the colonel had stayed for several weeks in the Indian village. He had been there, resting after a bout of fever—during which he had nearly died. It was after his sojourn in the village that he had made his box-kite, and had commenced his perilous trip over the swamp.

The Indian boy assumed the lead again—a position he was by no means unaware of. He knew quite well that he was an important person, and he let us all see it.

He led the way through the village, and then left the beaten track, until we were making our way to the forest itself—where no man ever set foot before.

After a while the ground became clearer, and then, finally, we came upon a rough hill, which ascended steeply. The sun was glaring down with terrific power, and we were soon perspiring from every pore.

But at last we reached the top of the hill—a very high hill, too. And then Douglas Fairbanks took us round to the other side, and pointed right out into the distance.

We had a magnificent view from there. We could see for twenty or thirty miles in the clear, brilliant atmosphere.

The hill, this side, went down much more steeply, and, right up the foot, the forest grew in dense profusion. But it soon thinned out, and we could see patches of water here and there.

"Me know!" said Douglas Fairbanks, nodding his head. "That 'um swamp, boss. Him mighty heap big swamp! Allee samee bad place! Quick death—him there—sure!"

"It looks all right!" said Handforth. "A jolly fine place, I should say!"

"You really cannot judge from this distance, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "As far as eye can see, the whole country is one dreadful swamp—a place which is infested with fever and death."

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "It stretches right away to the horizon. There's no end to the bally thing! It's limits are beyond dreams!"

Very soon several pairs of binoculars were focussed on the swamp, and there was no doubt that the stories were true—and were not merely traveller's yarns.

Down in that green morass snakes could be numbered by the thousand—by the million, in fact. Insects buzzed about in such numbers that no human being could possibly live in the atmosphere. And there was fever—poisonous fumes coming from the swamp, and endless other perils.

To even attempt to cross that stretch of land would be a mad act. It would be certain death for any party, and there would be no escape, once the swamp had the party in its clutches.

"Do you think we could get across, sir?" asked young Stanley Kerrigan, with great anxiety in his voice.

"Not on foot, my boy," said Nelson Lee, kindly.

"Couldn't we get across on the yacht, sir?"

"Oh, no," replied Lee. "I may as well tell you at once, my lad, that it is utterly out of the question to attempt to cross it by either boat or ship, or on foot. That is why your father constructed the box-kite—for he knew that the only method was to go by air. He was blown across by a high wind, probably, and he has vanished. He has been missing for over four years, and he will be missing for all time unless he is rescued."

"But we're going to rescue him, aren't we, sir?" asked Stanley.

"I hope so, my boy," put in Dorrie,

with a curious note in his voice. "I certainly hope so—and I can assure you that I'm not hoping in vain. I've got a card up my sleeve that'll give you a bit of a surprise before long!"

CHAPTER V.

PERILS OF THE FOREST.

THE return journey was just as interesting as the trip out; in fact, far more interesting, now that we had definite information to take back to the yacht. We had news of the colonel, and I could picture the delight we should give to Aunt Janet when we told her.

But I was rather puzzled about what Dorrimore had said. He intimated clearly that there was a chance of us crossing the swamp. Personally, I couldn't see how it was to be done. We certainly had no box-kites, and we had no aeroplanes. And to think of crossing the swamp on foot was absolutely preposterous.

I found myself near his lordship after we had been walking for some time, and I tapped him on the subject.

"What's the idea, Dorrie?" I asked.

"The idea of what, my son?"

"Why, you said you had a card up your sleeve, or something—that we shall probably be able to cross the swamp," I said. "How do you make that out? How will it be possible for us to get across—"

"Little boys should be seen, and not heard," interrupted Lord Dorrimore, calmly. "Ask no questions, and I sha'n't be tempted to tell any whoppers! But I've got a little surprise—and I'm not going to spring it just yet. Get your brainbox to work, and see if you can't think of something."

He would say no more, and I was left still wondering. I dropped back among the other fellows, and noticed that Fatty Little was not with them. Handforth was having an argument, and there was nothing unusual in this. Edward Oswald Handforth would argue on his death bed.

"Where's Fatty?" I asked, as I walked in step with them.

"Fatty?" repeated Pitt. "I thought he was behind."

We glanced round, and there was no sign of Fatty Little. The two members of the yacht's crew who had brought up the rear on the outward journey, were not far in front, and it seemed quite likely that Fatty Little had dropped behind for some reason.

"The silly fat ass!" said Handforth. "What the dickens does he mean by dropping out like this? I expect he's gone to have some grub, or something!"

"I say, giv'nor!" I shouted. "Hold on a minute!"

Nelson Lee, who was in front, halted, and looked back.

"What's wrong, Nipper?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir—only Fatty has stopped behind for something, and we want to go back and look for him!" I called.

"We shan't be a minute!"

Pitt and Handforth and Sir Montie came with me. And we quickly retraced our steps along the path, and turned a bend. Here the forest was very thick, not even a single ray of sunlight penetrated through the dense masses of foliage overhead. The air was terribly hot and oppressive, and the whole place reeked of vegetation and dank odours.

"There he is, the ass!" said Handforth grimly.

Fatty Little was just off the path, and he was busily engaged in plucking some bright, orange-coloured berries from a bush near-by. The bush was a good size, and it was literally smothered with the berries. The latter were very attractive looking, and they were as large as eggs, being peculiarly mottled. Fatty looked up and grinned.

"Shan't be a minute, you chaps!" he shouted. "You needn't wait for me!"

"Gorging again!" said Pitt. "Well, I'm jiggered! If that chap doesn't take the bun! He demolished all the grub that was in that case, and now he's filling himself up with fruit! If he doesn't expire from overeating one of these days I shall be surprised!"

"Dear old boys, I hope those berries are safe," remarked Sir Montie, with much concern. "You know, some of these trees are frightfully treacherous—the fruit looks good enough for a king to eat, but it's poisonous! Mr. Lee warned us against eating fruit without asking him first."

Montie's words put an idea into my

head, and I was determined to carry it into effect. Though the berries which Fatty had been eating were quite harmless—in fact, they were delicious and refreshing; but I assumed a very serious expression as I drew up to Fatty Little.

"There was no need for you to come up for me!" said Fatty, with his fingers stained by the fruit, and with his mouth full up. "I shan't be a minute. I shall soon catch you up!"

"How do you know those things are safe to eat?" asked Handforth grimly.

"You ass, they're lovely!" said Fatty. "Taste one and try for yourself!"

"Good heavens!" I shouted in a startled voice. "Do—do you mean to say that you have been eating these berries, Fatty?"

He looked at me rather anxiously.

"Yes; I've eaten a lot of them!" he said.

"Poor old Fatty!" I said sadly. "I don't suppose a few would harm you—but a lot of them—I say, Fatty, tell me exactly how many you have eaten. A handful?"

"More like a couple of pounds!" said Fatty. "Why, they're not bad for you, are they?"

"He ought to have been looked after!" I said, turning to the other fellows, and seizing the opportunity to wink. "He must have been dotty to have eaten all these berries like this! He knows well enough that there are hundreds of different varieties of poisonous berries in these forests!"

"Poisonous berries!" gasped Fatty, dropping the fruit on the ground as though it had suddenly become red hot. "Do—do you mean to say——"

"Take it steadily, old son," I said in a sad voice. "If you get excited, it'll make it worse. I don't think there's any chance now at all."

"No—no chance!" panted Fatty. "Do—do you mean that there's no chance of saving me?"

"You can't say that you weren't warned," I said. "You know well enough that Nelson Lee told us all that we mustn't touch a single fruit unless we were familiar with it, and unless we had permission to eat it. These berries look all right, but you can't always go by the looks."

Poor Fatty Little was quite white by this time, and he was really scared. As a matter of fact, he deserved to be—and

it was my idea in giving him the lesson; he needed it.

His appetite was so enormous that he was quite capable of swallowing any fruit or berries that he happened to come across. And, in that way, it would not be long before he demolished something which would finally put an end to his career. There were many varieties of poisonous fruit in the forest, and for Fatty to sample them promiscuously was positively fatal. It was therefore necessary to give him a little fright.

"I expect he'll be able to get back to the yacht without assistance," I said, addressing Sir Montie and Handforth and Pitt. "Poor old chap! He doesn't need assistance now—it's quite likely, in fact, he won't feel any effect for an hour or two."

"Shall—shall I be bad later on?" asked Fatty hastily.

"I remember some chap who sampled some poisonous berries in Africa," I said musingly. "He was a member of a party the gov'nor and I were with—quite a nice fellow, too. The silly was hungry, or thirsty, and he ate these berries thinking they were all right. And he didn't know anything about it until three or four hours later—and then, without warning, he fell to the ground, gave several convulsive wriggles, and—well, you can guess the rest!"

Fatty grabbed my arm and stared at me.

"Shall I do that?" he gasped. "Shall I fall down, and wriggle, and—and peg out?"

"You know jolly well that it's dangerous to eat fruit without any knowledge of it!" I said sternly. "Anything that happens now will be entirely your own fault, Fatty. The first effect will be one of an enormous thirst, I expect. You will be wanting water by the time we get to the yacht, and then—"

I shrugged my shoulders and said no more.

It was quite correct—Fatty would certainly be in want of water by the time we got to the yacht. We should all be thirsty, if it came to that. But my words were capable of a different construction—and Fatty Little, of course, looked on the worst side. He was quite certain that he was poisoned, and he hardly knew what he was doing.

"Oh, well, we sha'n't miss him much," said Handforth carelessly.

"There'll be all the more grub for the rest of us when Fatty's gone. We don't particularly want to lose him, I know; but, if he goes and does these idiotic things—well, he'll have to take the consequences."

"That's right enough," agreed Pitt, nodding.

"Begad! But it'll be frightfully sad, you know," said Sir Montie, adjusting his pince-nez, and eyeing Fatty Little curiously. "I don't believe he's getting thinner, dear old boys. He seems fatter than ever, in fact—he does, really. I was just wondering if we should do something to ease his last moments—"

"Oh, great pancakes!" gasped Fatty, in sudden alarm. "I—I want water! Gimme water! I—I shall die—if I don't have a drink!"

It was his imagination that was working now. He was probably thirsty, but my words had exaggerated his own sensation, and he was inclined to go in some little panic. Perhaps the lesson was rather cruel, but I was hard-hearted. It was highly necessary for Fatty to have a fright—and a pretty severe one, too. In the future he would not be quite so ready to eat any nice-looking fruit that came within his vision.

"Water!" he panted. "I—I say, you chaps, please get me some water! I'm nearly choking, you know. Great dump-lings! I shall die in less than two minutes!"

I decided that the lesson had proceeded far enough.

"Look here, Fatty," I said, grinning. "you don't seem to realise that we've simply been pulling your leg— Hi! Where are you off to?"

Fatty had been taking no notice of my words, and suddenly, without the slightest warning, he dashed off through the trees, and disappeared from our view. We heard him blundering away down a little gulley.

"Come back, you silly ass!" I roared, in sudden alarm.

But Fatty took no notice, but continued his headlong career. I immediately followed, and Handforth and Pitt and Sir Montie came after me. Nelson Lee and the others, some way up the path, realised that something was wrong, and they came along at a quick speed in our rear. I hurried out to Fatty, and within a moment or two I realised why he had dashed off so quickly, for I

caught a glimpse of water through the trees, and I knew that Fatty had simply rushed out here to get a drink. Well, perhaps it was all the better.

Just near the water there was a little break in the trees, and I found myself standing on the bank. Fatty had plunged in to his knees, and was bending down, cupping the water in his two palms, and drinking the water greedily. He was totally oblivious to all his surroundings.

"You silly porpoise!" I grinned. "You're not poisoned!"

"Eh?" said Fatty, turning his head. "Those berries are quite harmless!" I said. "What prompted you to run away like that?"

Fatty stared at me.

"But—but you said I was poisoned!" he declared. "You chaps told me that I should die——"

"I told you nothing of the sort," I interrupted. "I simply made a few remarks about poisonous berries, and you immediately took it for granted that you'd eaten some of the same sort. I thought you needed a lesson—so I thought I'd give you one!"

Fatty Little glared.

"Why, you silly ass!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "What the dickens do you mean by spoofing me like that? I could have eaten a tremendous lot more of that fruit by this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh——"

"Look here, Fatty," I interrupted sternly. "Those berries looked all right, and tasted all right—and, as it happens, they were quite harmless. But there are plenty of berries in this region which taste all right, look all right, but which are absolutely deadly. You mustn't take such risks—it's not worth it. It was simply dotty of you to stay behind, and eat those berries, without saying a word to Mr. Lee or Dorrie. I thought you needed a lesson, so I gave you one."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Fatty. "Of all the dotty ideas!"

"Come out of that water, and we'll join the others," I said. "There's no sense in delaying the journey like this. I don't suppose Mr. Lee will take you on another trip at all, Fatty!"

This tip—or, rather, intimation—gave Fatty something of a turn, and he lost no time in scrambling out of the water. At least, he attempted to do so, but one

of his feet had got stuck in the mud, and he had some difficulty in freeing himself.

The place was curiously dim. It was not a river, but a kind of pool, like a little backwash from a little stream, and, all round, the tropical trees and undergrowth stood like a huge wall. The water itself was almost stagnant, although it seemed quite clear and pure.

Over on the other side, the surface was choked with creepers and weeds. Everything seemed to be rank and stagnant, and intensely still. There was a slight current, but it moved so slowly that it seemed practically stationary. Out in the centre the water was fairly deep, by the look of it, but near the hedges here it was shallow.

Overhead, the branches of the trees stretched in a great natural arbour, and the heat of the afternoon simply hit one in the face. It was just like being in a superheated conservatory.

And then suddenly an appalling thing happened.

I heard a movement in the branches of the trees over Fatty's head. I looked up, and then saw a huge form come down to the water. In a second I knew what it was, and I gave a shout of real terror and horror.

The thing was a snake!

In a moment it had coiled itself round Fatty Little's ample form, and the fat junior gave a shout of surprise and fright. There was little wonder—the snake was an anaconda!

Just for the moment I was too staggered to move—I could only stare, thunderstruck. The situation, which had been rather humorous a moment before, now became full of peril and terror.

And the anaconda was one of the largest I had ever seen; in fact, the largest. It was an enormous brute, fully thirty feet in length. It had just gripped Fatty fairly lightly; but I knew that the giant boa-constrictor—as the snake actually was—was capable of crushing Fatty to death in less than a second.

There was not a second to be lost.

The anaconda had no poison fangs, but it killed its victims by encircling its deadly coils round, and crushing any object to powder or pulp. I had no time to look at the snake's colouring, or to see its head or eyes—all I was thinking about was Fatty Little's deadly peril.

Quick as a flash I whipped out my revolver, and I levelled it. Handforth and the other juniors were simply struck helpless with horror, and could only watch, expecting to hear Fatty's death cry at any second.

Crack!

I pulled the trigger, and a bullet whizzed on its mission of death. It was a risky proceeding, shooting at the snake, for there was always a chance of hitting Fatty. But this was no time to hesitate—it was no time to pick and choose; the delay of one second might mean death to the imprisoned junior.

But my bullet sped true, and it hit the gigantic snake in the head. And this was the very moment of peril, for in its contortions it would probably crush the junior to pulp.

Crack! Crack!

Two more shots rang out in my ear, and I gave a half-turn round, and found both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore there—they had taken shots, too; and their bullets were as true as mine.

The anaconda released its tail from the branches overhead, and the mighty reptile fell into the water, which sent great waves surging up the banks.

Fatty disappeared into the water at the same time, and I feared that he was lost.

"Where is he?" shouted Handforth wildly. "Oh, good heavens! Poor old Fatty——"

"Look—look!" said Sir Montie huskily.

At that moment Fatty Little appeared. The water all round him was stirred up into foam, for the huge anaconda was struggling in its death agony. How on earth Fatty managed to escape those terrific blows was a miracle—but he did escape.

The next second he came blundering towards the bank, and after a few moments he reached it, and we helped him on to the dry land. Once there, he collapsed, and lay panting at our feet.

The anaconda now had ceased its struggles, and had disappeared altogether—it was dead.

Nelson Lee, and Umlosi, and Dorrie—in fact, all the members of the party—collected round, and Fatty Little was regarded with concern and anxiety.

"Are you all right, my boy?" asked Nelson Lee quickly.

"I—I'm all right, sir!" said Fatty

weakly, sitting up. "Oh, great bloaters! I—I thought I was done for! That—that rotten thing put its coils all round me, and I felt my giddy ribs were going to crack! If Nipper hadn't fired at the moment he did, I should be dead by this time. Thanks awfully, Nipper, for saving my life!"

"Rats!" I said. "The gov'nor and Dorrie fired——"

"But it was your shot that saved me," said the fat junior. "The snake was just getting a hold when you fired. The bullet went into its head, I believe, and it relaxed its grip at once, and I was able to breathe again. This forest doesn't seem to be such a paradise, after all."

"I warned you, my boy, that the Amazon forests are places of terrible danger," said Nelson Lee. "It was very foolish of you to go into this water without looking round first. And how did you come here?"

We soon explained the facts, and Nelson Lee listened grimly. He agreed with us that our lesson had been well-deserved—that it was all the better for Fatty to have a fright concerning the berries he had been eating. We had certainly not anticipated that Fatty would make a dive for the nearest water, and that he would get himself into fresh peril.

By some extraordinary trick of fate, he was hardly hurt—only one or two bruises. He had had a marvellous escape from certain death.

Somewhat dazed at first, Fatty was able to walk with us back to the trodden path. But after a while he was feeling quite himself again—we knew this by the fact that he complained of his hunger. If Fatty was hungry, there could not be much the matter with him.

Umlosi was in rather despondent mood during the rest of the trip.

"Wah, Manzie, it is indeed a great pity that I was not on the spot earlier!" he said to me several times. "Had I been there, it would have been unnecessary to use the weapon which spits fire, and which sends lead hastening through the air, for I would have made quick work of the snake with my bare hands!"

"I don't think so, Umlosi!" I said. "An anaconda is a strong merchant, and you wouldn't have been able to do anything, strong as you are. The end would have come very quickly—and then we

should have lost both Fatty Little and you as well."

But Umlosi did not see it in this light. He was greatly disappointed because he had not been able to take a hand in the rescue.

But Umlosi needn't have been so despondent. Before long he was to have many chances of showing how his strength could be utilised, and how his efforts would assist us all.

We had been to the native village, and we had found out a great deal concerning Colonel Kerrigan. At the same time, we had also learned that extreme caution must be exercised. These forests were places of death and danger, and it was up to us to be prepared.

CHAPTER VI.

DORRIE'S LITTLE SURPRISE.

BOOM—rumble—boom?

The sound rolled out deeply and solemnly overhead as we came out of the path, to the River Majarrah from The Wanderer near by.

It was evening, and we had arrived back. But the sun had disappeared, and the sky was obscured by masses of terrifying looking clouds. A storm was coming up—that was certain. We heard the first sounds of it a few minutes before, and it was apparently about to break in record time.

"We'd better get on board as soon as possible," said Nelson Lee, glancing anxiously at the sky. "These tropical storms are simply terrible, and it would not be advisable for us to be caught here."

"It's all right—they've seen us, and the boat's already waiting," said Dorrie calmly. "We shall make The Wanderer all right—don't worry."

Nelson Lee was not worrying on his own account—he was thinking of us. We heard cheers from the yacht as we appeared on the river bank, and very shortly afterwards we were safely on the little launch, speeding away across the water to the ship's side.

Boom! Boom!

A clap of thunder rolled out which fairly deafened us, and it went echoing

across the river in a most uncanny manner.

We reached the accommodation ladder, and then we all scrambled up, thirsty, tired, but content.

"Well, you've got back, then!" said Tommy Watson, grabbing my arm. "Lucky beggars! I wish I'd been with you! Have you discovered anything?"

"Oh, lots," I replied. "But Mr. Lee will tell you all about it—there's no need for me to say it first. I expect the governor will tell everybody—in a group. Anyhow, we will——"

Crash! Crash!

The rest of my sentence was completely drowned by the peals of thunder that cannoned over head. The lightning was terrible, vivid flashes of fire across the heavens. And at that moment the rain came down.

Somehow, I felt like a little ant would feel if a bucket of water was suddenly turned over it. The rain came down in sheets—in dense, solid masses. I was soaked to the skin before I could move a yard.

Not that this was at all unpleasant. The cool rain, in fact, was decidedly refreshing and enjoyable. I stood there, revelling in it.

It was impossible to see across the decks even. The trees, the river—everything was blotted out by the downpour. I have seen tropical storms on many occasions, but this storm fairly left all the others standing. It was appalling in its violence and fury.

Thunder boomed every moment, and the lightning was so intense that it was really impossible to remain on deck.

The yacht's crew found it necessary to get extremely busy. For everything of a loose nature was liable to be washed away. The decks were flooded in next to no time, and the water poured down the companion way in a great cascade.

Even below, it was impossible to speak. At least, it was impossible to make oneself heard. The beating of the rain and the peals of thunder, caused such an amount of noise that we were all deafened. The girls, in fact, were rather terrified. They had never experienced anything of this nature before, and it startled them.

On the Amazon there is an enormous annual rainfall, and it was because of this, perhaps, that the trees and the vegetation was so vast. But, fortunately,

this present storm did not last for long. It was just a taster, so to speak, an indication that we were not to have fine, sunny days all the time.

The thunder grew less, and the rain ceased almost as abruptly as it begun. And when we went up on deck again the sky was clear, the sun was shining brilliantly over the trees, and the decks were steaming in clouds.

The rain had cooled the air considerably, and now a most pleasant soft breeze sprang up, making the evening very enjoyable.

We all changed our clothing, and then found the tea was ready under the awning of the promenade deck. Aunt Janet was extremely anxious to hear what had happened, and she was not kept waiting for long.

Lord Dorrimore acted as the spokesman, and he told all the members of the party exactly what had happened on our trip. Dorrie did the thing thoroughly.

He related our adventures in the Indian village, and he told Aunt Janet the news concerning her brother. She was overjoyed, and she was all the more certain that her vision was true—that Colonel Kerrigan had crossed the swamp, and was now safe and sound, but unable to return to civilisation.

There were many expressions of concern when Dorrie related the adventure which had befallen Fatty Little. But Fatty did not seem any the worse for it. He was eating his tea as though he had not tasted food for months, and he was grinning with pleasure.

"It takes more than a beastly anaconda to do me in," he declared. "Still, at the same time, I should have been pulp by this time if Nipper hadn't used his revolver.

"Oh, don't be so awful!" protested Violet Watson. "It was a terrible adventure, Fatty, and I think you're very lucky to get out of it so very lightly."

"And so do I, Miss Violet," replied Fatty. "Nipper saved my life, and I don't know what to do to thank him."

"There's no need to do anything, my son," I said. "The less we can say about it the better. What I'm anxious to know is how Lord Dorrimore proposes to get over that swamp?"

Dorrie chuckled.

"Well, there is a way," he exclaimed smoothly.

"Going by air, you mean?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"But we can't do that, Dorrie!"

"Why not?"

"Well, because we haven't got any means of going into the air!" I replied. "We can't put wings on the yacht, can we?"

"Certainly we could," grinned Dorrie. "But that doesn't mean to say that the yacht would fly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's all very well being funny," I protested. "But it doesn't alter the fact that we're still in the same position. How on earth can we cross the swamp—that's what I want to know. Boats are useless, we can't go on foot, and—and there's nothing else."

"You're quite right, my son," said Dorrie. "There is nothing else. If we mean to cross the swamp, we shall have to do so by air—an' I don't particularly hanker after the idea of goin' up in a bally box kite! It doesn't seem quite safe enough for my likin'."

"But what else is there, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Well, there's this, for example," replied Lord Dorrimore smoothly.

He fished about in his breast pocket, and produced a thin slip of pasteboard about the size of a postcard. I judged it to be a photograph, and this was right. Dorrie passed it round, and when it came to me I gazed at the photo with great interest.

What I saw was rather surprising.

The picture was that of a slow, but very business-like looking airship. It was not an airship of the ordinary design, but something quite new. The gas bag was extremely big in appearance, very much like a Zeppelin, or the R. 34. But it was slow, and there was only one carriage underneath—a well-built car but not enclosed. There was a deck-rail all round, and the motors were evidently behind, at the rear of the car.

The airship was fitted with two propellers—both of them fixed to outriggers from the car itself. And on the front of the gas bag was painted the name, in great big letters. "Adventurer."

The whole thing was the neatest aircraft I have ever seen.

I looked up at Dorrie rather curiously.

"What's this?" I asked in surprise.

"A photograph, my son."

"I know that!" I replied. "But what is it—a photograph of what?"

"An airship!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what airship?" I yelled. "It's all very well to show us this, Dorrie, but what's the good of it? We can't go back to England for the airship, I suppose?"

"It won't be necessary to do that," replied Dorrie.

"Why not?"

"Because the airship is here."

"Here!"

The shout was uttered by every junior on deck.

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "are you trying to imitate the thunder?"

"But—but what do you mean?" I asked excitedly. "How can the airship be here, Dorrie?"

"Well, it's not exactly here," said Lord Dorrimore, with a patient sigh. "It's down below, if you want to know. It's in the hold!"

I jumped to my feet.

"In—in the hold," I echoed. "Great Scott! You don't mean to say that you've brought an airship out with you, Dorrie?"

"That's exactly what I mean to say," replied his lordship.

"My hat!"

"Great pip!"

"Begad!"

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" exclaimed Miss Violet.

"There's only one stipulation I make," said Lord Dorrimore. "This airship is a special sort of thing, and it cost a pile of money—you can guess that for yourselves. I'm not particularly anxious to see it wrecked. Therefore I must insist that Master Little does not come on board."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The airship is capable of carrying a ton or two, but when it comes to Fatty

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Falstaff!"

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference to me!" said Fatty, who was still busy with his tea. "I know I'm big—but a chap can't enjoy life unless he's big. How should I get on without my appetite, I should like to know?"

"I dare say you'd manage to scrape through life all right," said Dorrie calmly. "The fact is, my son, you eat too much now. You're quite welcome to everythin' in the yacht—it doesn't worry me a jot—but I'm thinkin' about your

health. If you keep growin' at the rate you're growin' now, you'll be like a balloon when you're fifty——"

"Not in weight, sir!" grinned Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But we were all excited about Lord Dorrimore's bombshell—his little surprise, as he called it. It was extremely interesting to learn that he had brought a complete airship out from England with him. We had known nothing about it—and he had kept it quiet until now.

And yet the airship was down below, all packed up in cases, and in separate parts, ready to assemble at any given moment.

The airship, we learned, was specially constructed, and was capable of being put together in a very short time. Several members of the crew were capable mechanics—they had been shipped on board for the especial purpose, and they knew every single bolt and nut of the airship, and would be able to put it together without the slightest trouble.

"But what about gas?" asked Tommy Watson. "You can't fly an airship without gas!"

"Well, hardly," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "I think gas is fairly essential."

"I suppose you've brought a big supply?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not quite in my dotage yet," said Lord Dorrimore, with a smile. "I shouldn't bring out an airship to the Amazon if I didn't bring any gas. Down below, in the forward hold, there are a few thousand tubes of compressed hydrogen—no, it's not hydrogen, it's something better. It's a new kind of gas that doesn't escape so much, an' it's lighter, too. It costs about six times as much as hydrogen—but that's only a detail. One can't afford to pick and choose on a trip of this sort. I had the best thing for the purpose, an' I didn't care a jot what it costs. Fortunately, I can afford to have these little luxuries."

"But what about when the gas runs out?" asked Watson.

"Well, then we shan't be able to use the airship any more," said Dorrie. "That stands to reason. But I've taken all precautions. There are enough cylinders below to fill the bally gas bag three times over. So that allows us plenty for leakage and wastage, and all that sort of thing. We shall make the yacht our base. An' we shall go back

wards and forwards from here. You see, I realised it was no good comin' out to the Amazon unless we had some special kind of craft to suit our purpose."

"A jolly ripping idea, sir," I said. "There's only one point I think that might be uncertain. Supposing a sudden thunderstorm comes up—like that storm we just experienced—how about the airship then? If she's fully inflated, and lies somewhere about here, why—she'd be a wreck in less than half-an hour."

"Dorrie has taken all precautions, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "The airship is provided with floats, and it will remain on the surface of the river. There are also some special guards to protect the airship against a sudden storm. I think everything will be quite all right; but, of course, it is just as well not to be too certain."

After tea the juniors collected together, and animatedly discussed the situation. We learned that the airship was to be erected at once—on the morrow.

In fact, active preparations were commenced that very evening. Men were sent down into the hold to prepare the various parts of the airship for hoisting up on deck. A large space was cleared, and here the erection was to take place.

"My hat! It's a glorious adventure, and no mistake!" declared Handforth, just before dinner time. "There's no telling what'll lead to, either. I'm terrifically anxious to get to the other side of that swamp, and to see what exists there. If we can only find Colonel Kerrigan—well, our mission will be a huge success."

"Rather!" I agreed. "And, somehow, I've got an idea in my head that everything will turn out O.K. I don't suppose you chaps will be permitted to make a trip in the airship at first. Dorrie can't afford to take any risks."

"Dash it all, I'm going!" said Handforth firmly.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Handy," said Church. "Lord Dorrimore has got to look after his guests—he's got other people to think about. Personally, I'm as eager as anybody to go on board the airship, but we must be patient, and wait our turn."

"That's the spirit," I said heartily.

"Oh, it's all very well for you to talk!" said Handforth gruffly. "I expect you'll go up on the first trip!"

"That's very likely," I agreed.

"Well, I don't consider that it's fair," said Handforth. "Why should you go —"

"My dear old chap, all you've got to do is to be reasonable," I said. "I don't happen to have any parents, and if the airship comes a cropper, and I come a cropper with it—well, nobody will worry particularly. The guv'nor will go up, and I shall go up with him. With you fellows it is different. You've got parents and brothers and sisters—in England—and a trip in an airship in this region is always a jolly risky proceeding."

Most of the fellows were quite ready to see the point, and they realised that it was out of the question for them to take a trip in the airship to begin with. But they also realised the immense possibilities which now unfolded themselves.

With only the yacht as a means of conveyance, there had been utterly no hope of getting across the terrible stretch of swamp, that morass which extended for hundreds of miles.

With the airship it was different.

There would be nothing easier than for us to fly over the swamp, and to accomplish each trip in an hour or two. A journey of a hundred miles through the virgin forest would occupy anything from a week to a month, but with the airship it could be accomplished in two hours. The vessel was an enormous advantage. And even now we hardly realised its value.

With regard to the swamp, that stretch of country was impassable and out of the question. On foot nothing could be done—the airship was the only means of crossing it. And very soon we should learn the secret of that country which lay beyond the morass.

It was growing very dusk when we went down into the saloon for dinner. And the decks were left quiet and deserted. For there was no reason to keep any watch there. The yacht's fires had been allowed to die down, for we were booked to remain on this portion of the Majarra for several weeks, in all probability. The anchorage was safe, and there were no hostile tribes in that region.

Towards the end of dinner, Miss Violet just happened to mention that she had left her dainty handkerchief on a deck!

chair, under the canvas awning. At least half-a-dozen juniors leapt to their feet, and asked to be excused.

But I was first, and I quickly hurried up on deck in order to obtain the handkerchief. Any one of Miss Violet's wishes were always complied with on the spot. The only fellow who was an utter cad was Ralph Leslie Fullwood, and he did not count. We had almost ceased to remember that he remained on board. He was a nonentity, and he remained, for the most part, with his own chums, Gulliver and Bell.

I went on deck, and found it extremely dark and gloomy. I was wearing rubber-soled shoes, and I made no noise as I slipped quietly round the wireless room. Then I saw something.

I came to a halt, instinctively.

A figure was moving stealthily across the deck, and he was not aware of my presence. I couldn't quite see who the man was, or what he was—the gloom was too deep for that.

But I was certain that the fellow was no member of the yacht's crew—neither was he a native, since he was attired in ordinary European clothing.

And he was acting in a very strange way. He dodged about from point to point, in an evident endeavour to escape observation from the bridge, where a member of the crew was on duty.

I watched with interest.

I knew well enough that this man was no member of the crew—all Captain Burton's fellows were staunch and true, and of the best quality; moreover, they would have had no reason for creeping about in this sinister fashion. This man had evidently come on board for some reason—but even there I was puzzled.

There were no Europeans in this district, and no native would attire himself in ordinary clothing. I walked forward, meaning to investigate on the spot, and to satisfy myself.

But the fellow became aware of my attentions, and he looked round quickly, came to a halt, and stared at me in the dimness.

"I say, what are you doing there?" I asked sharply.

The man did not reply. He remained still just for a few seconds more, and then he turned on his heel and hurried to the rail.

"Hold on!" I shouted quickly. "I want a word——"

Splash!

The figure dived overboard even as I was rushing up to him. I caught a faint glimpse of the fellow in the water, and I felt rather horrified. A cayman might easily make a grab at the man, and then——

But I soon saw that my momentary fears were unnecessary, for a light canoe was resting against the yacht's side, and the man quickly hauled himself aboard, and pushed off. His paddles were put into operation, and the canoe slid away into the darkness.

I stared after it wonderingly—and with a rather uneasy feeling in my head. Who was this fellow, and why had he come on board in such a stealthy, under-hand fashion? He was evidently not an Indian, and I did not know of any white settlement within dozens of miles. It was indeed a rather startling mystery.

When I told Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore about it, they were rather sceptical, but my own story was fully verified by the man on watch—the man who had been on the bridge. This fellow had seen the stranger dive overboard, too, and he had also seen the canoe making off.

"Well, it's a mystery, Nipper," said Nelson Lee slowly. "Can it be possible that our mysterious enemy is still dogging our path?"

"It seems very peculiar, sir," I agreed. "Before we started from England, an attempt was made to sink the yacht—that was at Tilbury. Then, when we were in mid-Atlantic, we picked up a castaway—and he proved to be an enemy, too. I don't quite like it, sir, and I think we ought to keep a strict watch."

"We shall keep a strict watch!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "There will be nothing left to chance, I can assure you!"

At the same time, the affair was so mysterious and disturbing that the gov'nor was decidedly unsettled. I felt that way, too.

But time would prove whether we had any enemies or not. Personally, I was inclined to think that there was much more in this search for Colonel Kerrigan than most of the fellows believed.

CHAPTER VII.

READY TO VENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN.

FOUR days passed.

Those four days were full up to the brim—from sunset to dawn of each day. The Wanderer was transformed into a busy hive of industry, and everybody was found a job to perform. Even the junior members of the party were given certain work, and they were only too willing to do it.

The airship took shape fairly rapidly. By the end of the fourth day it was completely constructed, and it was not such a small object, after all.

Down on the river, fairly near to The Wanderer, some specially constructed floats had been anchored. They were huge things, and they were so made that the airship could rest upon them and be perfectly safe.

The anchorage selected was near the other shore of the Majarra, and here there would be very little prospect of a sudden storm causing any damage, for the spot was sheltered. And, moreover, the airship itself would be protected by special lines and cables in the event of any sudden squall.

The great gas-bag had been filled before the vessel was taken from the yacht's deck, and, even after the gas was used for that purpose, there still remained an enormous number of cylinders left. So there was an ample supply to allow for wastage and leakage.

It was decided that if the airship was ready in the morning, that several of us would go up on a trial trip—just a little journey round, to see if everything was in perfect order.

Lord Dorrimore, of course, insisted upon going—and he appointed Nelson Lee as chief pilot. This was only natural, since Nelson Lee was an expert airman—he was one of the finest aeroplane pilots in existence, and he was just as capable of managing an airship.

Of course, I'm a certified aeroplane pilot—I've flown many an aeroplane single-handed, and I don't boast about it. There's nothing much in it—just a little nerve to start with, and then it's as easy as winking. Modern aeroplanes are perfectly simple to handle.

Naturally, I felt that it would be only right if I went on that trial trip—since I was an experienced person, too. Nelson Lee saw the reasonableness of this, and

he agreed that I should go. Handforth and the other juniors were nearly green with jealousy.

"You didn't expect anything else, did you?" sneered Fullwood. "There's bound to be favouritism—"

"I should advise you to dry up, my son!" I interrupted grimly.

"I don't see why I should dry up!" said Fullwood. "If it comes to that, I've got just as much right to go on this trial trip as you have—an' I think it's a rotten shame that you should be chosen —"

"Shut up, Fully!"

"If he doesn't stop talking rot, I'll punch his silly nose!" exclaimed Handforth. "It's a good thing he interrupted, in a way, because it's made me realise that it's only right that Nipper should be the one chosen to go on this trial trip. He's more experienced in these things than we are, and if anything happens to go wrong, he'll be there, ready to get busy."

Fullwood, in his attempt to make himself unpleasant, had only caused the other juniors to vote solid that I had a perfect right to go, and that they were not so qualified for the trip.

Anyhow, when the warning came, everything was ready.

The air was perfectly still; hardly a breath of wind stirred—and this was very fortunate. Nelson Lee decided that the conditions were perfect for the trip, and preparations were immediately put in hand. There was no sense whatever in delaying.

Everybody on board was up, ready to see the start. Although the hour was very early, all the girls turned out in good time, and Aunt Janet was looking very anxious and excited. She knew that much depended upon the success of this trip. If her brother was to be rescued, he could only be rescued by means of the airship; therefore, if this trip was a success, it seemed likely that Colonel Kerrigan might be saved.

By eight o'clock everything was ready.

There were six of us on board—Nelson Lee, Dorrie, two members of the engine-room staff, and myself.

I don't think I have mentioned that the airship was anchored in a very unusual manner. Vessels of this type are generally held down by a few hundred people on the ground; but this is a clumsy method, and it means an enor-

nous amount of labour. Lord Dorri-nore's airship had a device of a far more satisfactory nature.

It was anchored to four separate points, thus making it impossible for any wind to blow it away or to shift it from its moorings. And these cables could be slipped at a moment's notice, without the slightest trouble.

"Well, are we all ready?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, rather, sir," I replied.

"Go ahead, old man," said Dorrie. "I've got plenty of faith in this little craft. I saw it flyin' in England—an' it beats every airship I've ever set eyes on. You'll be positively surprised when you find how she takes to the air. The chap who designed her is going to make a fortune, unless I'm mistaken."

The engines were started, and then they increased their revolutions—a soft, purring noise, accompanied by the swishing of the propellers, as they whizzed through the air. A moment later the cables were cast off, and the airship was free!

We were off!

Rocking slightly, The Adventurer rose swiftly above the trees, Nelson Lee stopping the engines at once, and allowing us to glide up. We went right over the yacht's decks, and I looked down with great interest as we did so.

"Hurrah!"

A cheer came up to us from below. There were many hands waving, and many handkerchiefs, too. Everybody on the yacht seemed to be rather excited—and they had reason to be.

By all appearances, the airship was a great success, for it had started off from the river without a tremor—without a falter. And now, with the engines starting up again, the vessel flew over the forest in a graceful, gliding motion. The propellers whirled, and our speed increased.

"Not so bad, eh?" said Dorrie calmly.

"It's fine, sir," I agreed heartily.

"This is the way to get over the forest

—no trouble, no fever, no wild animals, or anything!"

It was, after all, only a trial trip—a very short affair. But Nelson Lee tested The Adventurer thoroughly. He took her up higher and higher, and the panorama which was spread out for our eyes was positively wonderful.

We could see for hundreds of miles in the clear air of that morning. To north, south, east, and west, we could see the great forest stretching away in one mass of green—here and there broken by silver threads, these latter being rivers and streams and creeks.

And there, clearly visible, lay one very broad river—a huge slash in the forest, as it were.

It was the Amazon—the mighty river, flowing its sedate course down to the Atlantic.

Through the binoculars we could even make out ships here and there—river steamers, small sailing craft in the far distance. But the Majarra was deserted—The Wanderer was the only vessel on its waters.

We were up at a great height—probably ten or twelve thousand feet. We could see over a truly tremendous radius.

The swamp stretched for hundreds of miles—it went right out into the distance, and beyond there was nothing but a hazy mist.

We arrived back at the yacht in perfect safety, and Nelson Lee quickly manipulated the controls, and the airship slowly descended, and found her place on the floats as though she had performed the operation on many occasions.

Very soon the real trip would commence—that trip across the mysterious swamp. What were we destined to find beyond that place of death?

What wonders—what fresh marvels—should we encounter in the great tropical unknown?

Nobody could guess, but we were all thrilled by the very thought of the adventure. The juniors excitedly discussed the possibilities that evening, and everybody was absolutely certain that some amazing adventures were near at hand!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!—Our Adventurers reach the strange country beyond the forest and swamps, which is described in another fine story:

"THE DREAM CITY!"

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS SPLENDID SERIAL TO-DAY!

Three Boys in Canada.



by S. S. Gordon.

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

INTRODUCTION.

Two brothers, Jack and Teddy Royce, with their chum, Gerald Telford, are trying their luck in the wilds of North-West Canada. A plan of a gold mine is stolen from them by ruffians. In the attempt to recover this plan Teddy and Gerald are captured, but eventually rescued from a terrible death by Jack Royce. The lads rejoin the survey party, and hearing that the ruffians who attacked them will be passing through the camp, it is proposed to lay in wait for them.

(Now read on.)

Entrapping the Villains!

"WELL, you've got to wait," said Jack sternly. "I'm running this trio of us, remember, and you kids could do with a bit of a rest for a while. Surely you've had enough adventure to last you two or three months?"

"Kids!" Teddy snorted, while Gerald smiled. "All right, you perishin' old woman! Dash it! I do believe, if you hadn't saved my life, I'd—I'd—oh, dash!"

His boyish temper soon expended itself, however, and they started again to discuss the affairs of Gerald.

But as they talked, Jack looked up stream. They had been sitting near the little bivouac shelter Jack had rigged up for himself close by the river.

"There's a canoe coming down, boys," he said quietly. "That'll be Snaith and the Big Swede, for a dollar!"

Teddy and Gerald at once forgot their discussion, and the eyes of both of them became grim. Teddy clenched his fists hard, and started up stream, watching a canoe that came at a fair pace down the stream. All that he and Gerald had suffered at the hands of Snaith and Olesen after their capture by those two blackguards came back to them in a flood of memory.

Jack rose to his feet, and approached a group of idle men who were stretched out, smoking, beneath the shade of trees. This

was an idle day for the surveying party, and men who work as surveyor's chain-men have to work seven days a week, and every hour of daylight there is, are glad to take a holiday on occasion, and know what to do with it when they get it.

Jack picked out three of the youngest and burliest of his men, and jerked his thumb in an up-river direction. He had previously asked these men to help him, and they had promised to do so after having heard all about the brutal treatment of Gerald Telford and Teddy by Snaith and Olesen.

"Comin' down stream, are they?" grinned one young fellow—a lad very much like Jack Royce in manner and physique. "Waal, Jack, they'll have to take their canoe out an' portage it down these falls, so if we wait for 'em at the bottom they'll be all the more surprised."

Jack nodded. "Just what I was thinking," he said. "But mind, you fellows! No gun-play! It won't be necessary, anyhow, for my brother and Telford say they have only one revolver between them and that's generally carried in their blanket-pack."

Jim Talmage, the youngster like Jack, felt his brawny muscles thoughtfully.

"I guess I don't need no gun," he said. "I kinder remember that big Swede, anyhow, as a swine. Just you leave that man to me, boys, and the rest of you can tackle the other one. The Swede's my meat."

There were plenty of them to tackle two men. But Jack considered the more there were the simpler the job of capturing Snaith and Olesen would be.

They looked up-river again, and found that Olesen and Snaith had now got as far downstream as the spot where the Little Snake narrowed and quickened so suddenly as to make almost a mill-race of the approach to the falls.

They had run their canoe ashore, but on the opposite side of the stream from that where the surveying camp was.

"Well, boys," said Jack, "we'll have to paddle across. Just pick up that canoe."

Three of them picked out of the water.

the canoe that Jack had used so pluckily to save his brother and Gerald on the previous night, and walked rapidly down-stream. Their action was not seen by the men on the other side of the river, who, however, were now busily employed in hauling their belongings ashore, and in lifting their frail craft out of the water.

This "portaging" must be done by voyagers who use Canada's big rivers as their means of travelling about the country. For the falls that are constantly being met with are so furious, and full of snags and rocks, that it would be suicide to attempt to shoot over them in their canoes. The only thing to do is to lift the canoe bodily out of the water and carry it down-stream—or up-stream; as the case may be—until level water is reached again.

It was heavy, heart-breaking work, as Gerald and Teddy knew to their bitter cost, for, whilst prisoners in the hands of Snaith and Olesen, these two youths had been compelled to do the heaviest work during the frequent portages.

Jack's party walked with their canoe down to the lower level of the river. As Gerald and Teddy scrambled amongst the rocks of the bank at the side of these falls, as they saw the masses of spuming, roaring water falling to their left hand, they shuddered a little, and again thanked their lucky stars they had had such a brother and friend as Jack Royce the previous night to save them from going over. Had they gone over, nothing could have saved them, and life was very sweet to these healthy-minded youngsters.

When Jack's canoe was carried down to quieter water it was floated again, and all five got aboard. It was a squeeze to get the three chums and their two voluntary helpers aboard, but nobody would offer to stay this side of the river. Therefore, with the gunnels of their canoe almost awash, they paddled swiftly across the Little Slave, and were on the opposite bank a long while before they saw a sign of Snaith or Olesen coming down on their stiff portage.

There were plenty of boulders strewn about the river banks at the spot Jack chose from which to spring his surprise on the two blackguards. He gave orders, and everybody squatted behind a rock in such a position as to be able to command a good view of the rocks down which Snaith and Olesen would have to clamber with their canoe and their belongings.

They heard the coming of those two before they saw it. It was the bull-like voice of Olesen that sounded in their ears; and Teddy and Gerald, crouched behind the same boulder, hugged each other with anticipation of what was to come.

Indeed, so excited was Teddy, at the prospect of at last being able to get a bit of his own back on the villains who had literally enslaved him and Gerald for three dreadful days and nights, that he could scarcely hold himself in, but had to be held down by the cooler-blooded Gerald.

Olesen was roaring loudly, protesting at the weight he had to carry down the steep, rocky slope, no doubt.

Then they saw an unsteady figure appear on the skyline as they looked upwards. It was a big, bowed figure, which was surmounted by the canoe, which Olesen was carrying on his shoulders, bottom upwards, his head well buried inside it. It was the only way to carry a canoe, but it was a clumsy means of getting it down such a treacherous track as this.

Then came Snaith, carrying bundles of kit on his head. He was shouting insulting remarks at his ox-like companion.

The two came nearer the party that waited for them. They were, of course, quite unconscious of the presence of anybody. It is to be doubted if they even noticed the camp they had passed on the other side of the river.

Soon the watchers could hear what it was that Olesen was saying.

"Oosh!" he said. "Dot vos a hard yob, carryin' dis canoe! Vy not ve keep dem boys for to do our vork—ach!"

"Still thinking of us!" grinned Teddy. "It feels nice to know you're missed!"

"Get on with it, ye six-foot-six o' nothin'!" roared Snaith, who was plainly ill-tempered over this hard work.

"Ach!" puffed the Swede, as he put his foot on a loose stone, and it rolled away from him. "Dot vos a near squeak! Ach! Mid der canoe I vill fall soon!"

"Don't keep so near the edge, or you will!" shouted Snaith warningly.

His words gave Teddy an idea. He chuckled, and nudged Gerald.

Just as that moment the unconscious Swede, his head and shoulders well buried by his burden, came abreast of the rock behind which Teddy and Gerald crouched. Olesen was walking now far too near the water's edge for his own good.

At this point the waters were racing fast, though their turmoil had ceased to a large extent.

All at once, without waiting for Jack's arranged signal, Teddy gave a wild yell, hurried forward on his hands and knees, and got his head and shoulders between the big Swede's legs. Then he braced his strong young body, gave an upward heave, and the Swede, not very safely balanced, lost what equilibrium he had, and, with a wail of anguish, and hampered by the bulky canoe, shot head first into the flood.

Teddy danced a jig at the water's edge, where Hank Olesen disappeared with a loud splash. He waved his hat, and he watched the canoe as it bobbed in the swift water, and the struggling form of Olesen, with great satisfaction.

"That's one to me, you great big flabby boob!" he yelled. "If you'll come out

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again. I'll do it again, and again, and again!"

His coup was quite successful, and it gave him a certain amount of satisfaction.

But it did not suit his brother. Jack Royce came out from the shelter of his own boulder, and was about to make some sharp remark to the younger lad when his attention was drawn to the other loaded figure which, twenty yards behind the big Swede, had been coming down the side of the falls.

Snaith's head was not so completely hidden by his burden as Olesen's had been. He was able to see quickly what had happened. He recognised the dancing form of Teddy Royce at a glance.

For a moment he stared, his jaw dropped. Then he let his burden of kit fall to the ground, and he took a couple of swift leaps forward, his hand at the same time going to his hip.

This was before Jack Royce came out of his hiding. But the next moment not only Jack, Gerald and their two voluntary assistants appeared, and Snaith stopped short; his fingers closed about the butt of the revolver, but not drawing it out.

Contrary to Jack's expectations, Snaith himself was carrying the gun that these two rogues had to share between them, and it was not stowed away in the kit of these men.

"By heck!" Snaith yelled. "It's that Royce kid again, and—and Telford, too!"

He broke out into a torrent of blasphemy, while Jack Royce, his face as grim as stone, strode quickly towards him.

Snaith let him come to within half a dozen yards; then, snarling like a trapped wild beast, he whipped the revolver out and fired point-blank at his enemy.

Jack was totally unprepared for the shot. It certainly would have taken fatal effect; but somebody else had seen the quick drawing of the weapon, and had acted with marvellous speed.

Gerald Telford stooped and picked up a rock weighing about ten pounds, and hurled it with deadly precision right at Snaith. It caught the blackguard on the pistol wrist. The shot which had been aimed by a qualified gunman right at Jack's heart missed its objective by feet, and, with a howl of pain, Snaith gripped his damaged arm and turned as though to run.

But Jack Royce was too quick for him. He gave a wonderful leap, and was upon the blackguard. His brawny hands seized Snaith by the throat, his leg hooked itself behind Snaith's knees, and the pair of them came to the ground with a crash, Jack uppermost.

"Waal, say," grumbled Jim Talmage, "you didn't seem to need us much, after all, you fellows!"

"Help that big fat Swede out!" said Teddy, pointing to where Hank Olesen was floundering about in the water like a walrus.

"He's not worth saving, but we oughtn't to let him drown, I suppose!"

"No," said Talmage; "I guess I want a word or two with the big Swede myself before he turns his goldarned toes up! Hoi! Just come ashore, ducky, will you?"

Puffing and blowing and gasping—for he was a poor swimmer even without his clothes—Olesen came to the river's edge with an effort. Jim Talmage stooped, seized him, and helped him ashore. Before the giant Swede had rightly realised what had happened to him, Teddy Royce, flaming at the recollection of all he had gone through at the hands of this big, soft, cowardly ruffian, was taking quick upward leaps at him, his fists stabbing sharply at the fellow's yellow-bearded face. He looked for all the world like a mosquito attacking a bull; and Olesen was soon roaring like the bull.

But Jim Talmage laid a restraining hand on the hot-blooded youngster's shoulder, the while he gripped Olesen by the shirt collar. The big Canadian grinned.

"Leave me a little bit to wallop, sonny," he said good-naturedly. "Don't eat him right up!"

Hank Olesen at length managed to recognise Teddy. He stared at the boy, his mouth dropping open; then he went white in the face. He put his hands before his eyes.

"Ein ghost!" he roared. "Mein Gott! Ein ghost—ya!" And, giving a wrench at his shirt collar, he tore himself free again, and began blindly to run.

He did not run far, however; indeed, he only went about three paces, and then into the swiftly running river he soused again.

Teddy grinned.

"He's recognised me!" he said.

Talmage followed the man as he floated downstream.

"Best come ashore, Hank!" he said. "We're not comin' in after you! Come on, man! You'll only drown there!"

Olesen trod water clumsily, and stared shorewards. That he was unable to understand this sudden turn in his fortunes was evident. He stared shorewards in a stupid, stubborn fashion. He saw that Jack Royce was now sitting comfortably astride his companion in crime—Snaith. He also saw that there were plenty of men and boys handy to make the chance of his escape look slim. He had the sense not to try to swim across the river. At length, he came ashore, dripping like a great Newfoundland dog.

"Vell!" he gasped. "Dot's foony!"

"Not half so funny as you'll look in the dock!" said Teddy. "Oh, I'm not dead, nor is Gerald!"

"But—but Yohnson said you would be!" wailed the great coward. "Yohnson told lies!"

"How wicked of Johnson!" grinned Teddy.

(To be continued.)

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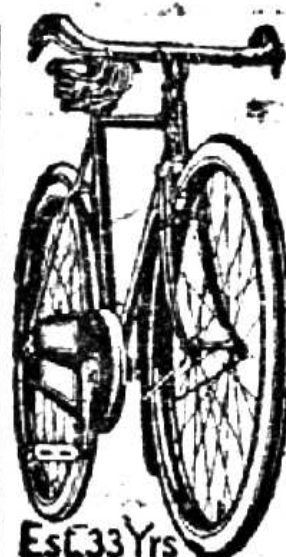


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