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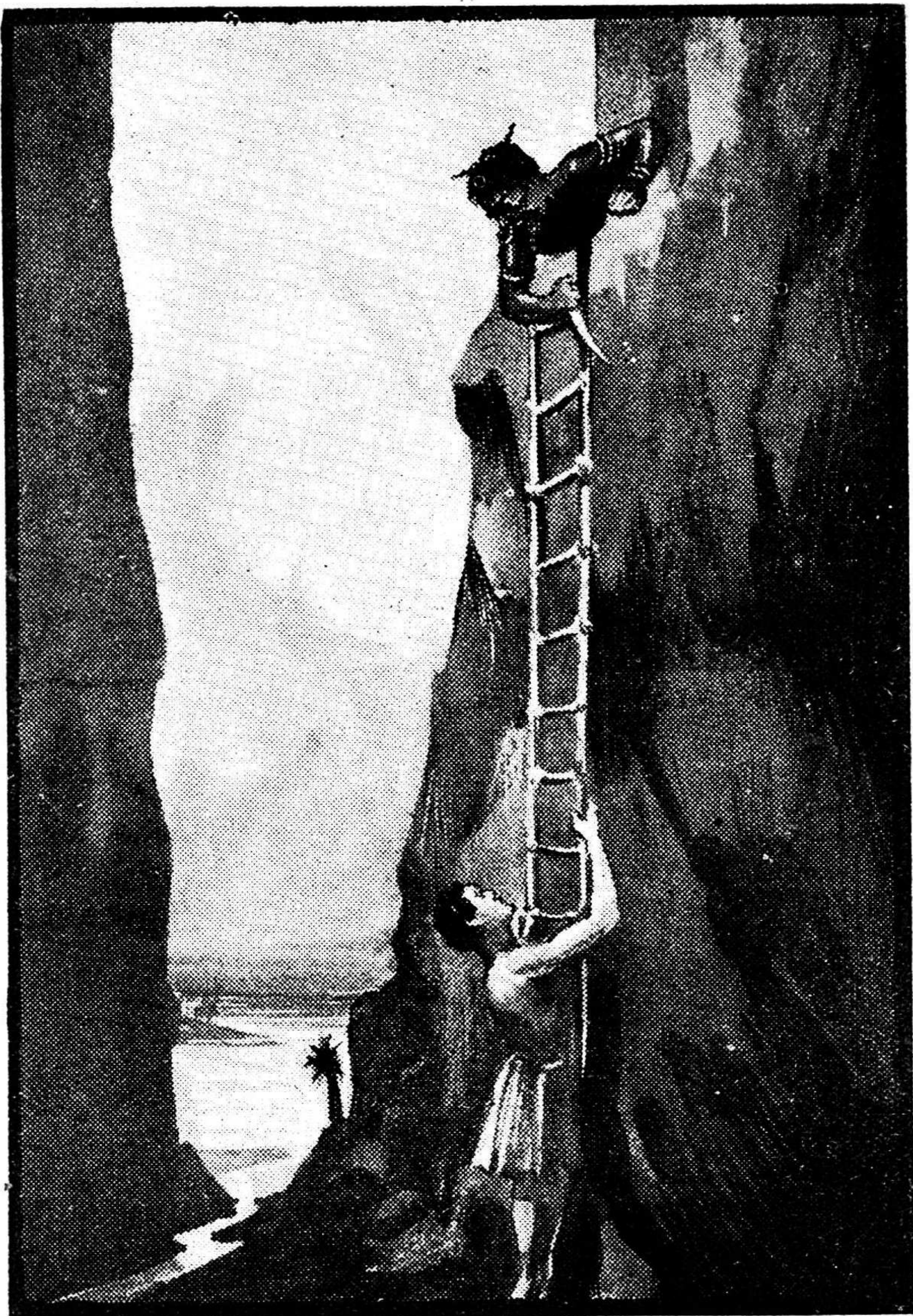
THESE
TWO
MAGNIFICENT
PHOTOGRAPHS
OF
FAMOUS
FOOTBALLERS

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK.



THE
CANNIBAL HORDE!

AN EXCITING STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE
WITH CANNIBALS ON A SOUTH SEA ISLAND!



Already the black's knife had commenced to slash through one side of the ladder. There was a foul-looking grin on the cunning brute's face.



The Cannibal Horde!

These wonderful stories of school-boy adventure in the South Seas have undoubtedly "caught on." Boys everywhere are discussing them with great enthusiasm, and every post brings in numerous letters of praise and congratulations. This week's story, "The Cannibal Horde," does

not exaggerate in the least the awful peril to which the traveller is exposed among these savage islanders. It is a tale full of the enchantment and thrills for which the South Sea Islands are justly renowned.—

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

GETTING READY FOR TROUBLE.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE gazed round languidly. "Dashed priceless morning, what?" he observed, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, vast consignments of sunshine and blue sky, and all that kind of rot! Absolutely!"

The view from where Archie was standing was undoubtedly a perfect one. A scene of tropical beauty and brilliant sunshine, with the pure blue of the sky, the dazzling white of the sands, and the limpid sapphire of the lagoon. Lagoon Island was looking quite at its best.

It was morning, and Archie had only just turned out of his hammock. Most of the other St. Frank's juniors had been out and about for some little time. And breakfast was just upon ready. Archie always managed to "stagger forth" just about in the nick of time.

In front of him lay the beach, with Shark Bay stretching out ahead, the surface of the water slightly disturbed into ripples by



a gentle breeze. And out further lay the coral reef, with the thunderous surf breaking upon its outer edge in masses of foam and spray.

Just at Archie's rear stood the Fort, surrounded by its strongly built stockade. From the rear of the Fort, columns of smoke arose, and there was a decided odour of frying fish in the air. Obviously the Food Department was hard at work—with Fatty Little presiding with all the dignity of his office.

"Hallo, Archie!" exclaimed Reginald Pitt, striding up. "How goes it?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, old tulip, I'm feeling positively in the pink!" replied Archie. "That is to say, absolutely topping, and what not! Kindly observe the tanned condition of the old skin, to say nothing of the frightful girth of the chest. I mean to say, the simple life makes a chappie absolutely bubble with health, don't you know?"

"Rather!" grinned Pitt. "There's nothing like it, old son. Although we've been having a few alarms and excursions lately, I'm enjoying this holiday more than any other."

"Oh, rather," agreed Archie. "Every time, old lad. But what I mean is, as it were, the mind isn't absolutely free from worry, what? The old bean is considerably agitated, and all that kind of thing."

"What about?" asked Reggie.

"Well, dash it all," said Archie. "That is to say, dash it all! In other words, pray get the old gear box into working order, old dear! What about—what? Well, I'm dashed keen on the simple life, but a chappie does not want to become a bally South Sea Islander for the whole span of existence, you know!"

"Don't you worry about that, Archie," said Pitt. "The position may seem rather hopeless now, but trust in Mr. Lee and Lord Dorrimore! If they can't get the Wanderer afloat again, it'll surprise me! In any case, they'll do something to get into communication with the outside world."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie. "But when, laddie? I mean to say, when? That's the frightful point!"

"It doesn't seem very frightful to me," smiled Pitt. "I'm quite content to remain here for months yet. But we sha'n't be allowed to! I'll guarantee that we return to England almost in time to be at St. Frank's for the Autumn term."

"Gadzooks!" ejaculated Archie. "Quite imposs, my dear old sportsman. To be absolutely exact quite imposs! In other words, it couldn't be done. It simply could not be accomplished, old walnut!"

"All right—wait!" said Reggie. "I think it will be accomplished. The only point that really has concerned me is the fact that our people at home are in the dark."

"You mean they think we've pegged out, and so forth?"

"Of course," said Pitt. "After the yacht crashed on to the reef during that

storm we finished all communication with the outside world. And by this time the Wanderer is posted as missing, and all our relatives at home have given up hope of ever seeing us again."

"That's most shockingly fearful!" exclaimed Archie, dropping his monocle. "Do you know, old fruit, that aspect of things hadn't swept across the old plates of memory! I mean to say, what about the pater? The jolly old guv'nor, what? Why, dash it all, he must be tearing out clumps of thatch by the roots, you know!"

"I dare say he's worried, but hardly to that extent!" chuckled Pitt. "Hallo! What welcome sound is this that smites upon my ear? Come, brother! He of the mighty girth would fain welcome our company!"

It was the breakfast bell—or, to be more exact, Fatty Little hammering vigorously upon a piece of sheet iron. It made a tremendous noise,

Juniors appeared from all sides, and hastened into the Fort.

Altogether, there were twenty St. Frank's fellows, including Handforth and Co., Bob Christine and Co., Tommy Watson, Sir Montie Tregellis-West and a few others. I have forgotten to mention, however, that Yung Ching was with us. The little Chinese boy had been with Lord Dorrimore on the Wanderer, but now he formed a member of our own party, and had entered into the primitive life with all his usual imperturbability. He was enjoying himself.

Phipps was with us, too—Phipps, Archie's valet, the ex-Red Cross man, the traveller, the invaluable know-everything. Since being cast upon Lagoon Island Phipps had come into his own. He was somebody of great importance now, and he knew it, too. Nobody denied that Phipps was a wonder.

So capable had he proved himself to be, in fact, that he had been unanimously elected to the Premiership of the Lagoon Island Government. This body took itself seriously, although, as a matter of fact, the Government was a bit of a comic opera affair.

There were five departments, and each Ministry had its own chief. For example, Fatty Little was chief of the Food Ministry, and I was Minister for Defence. Phipps, being the Premier, ruled over all.

We had had some exciting times on Lagoon Island.

At first we believed ourselves to be the only ones saved, but just recently we had found that Lord Dorrimore and Umlösi and the entire yacht's crew had been cast ashore on the other side of the island. We had believed them to be blacks—until we had a bit of a scrap in the dark and then discovered that they were our long lost friends, after all.

But we had had very little respite.

For almost within twenty-four hours of the reunion we found ourselves attacked by

savage blacks who appeared off the island in canoes—who landed, and who attempted to take the Fort by storm.

Needless to say, they were beaten off, after a grim battle, and the island was once more our own.

Nelson Lee, who had met with serious injuries at the time of the wreck, was improving very rapid now. His broken arm was mending so well that he could almost use it. Phipps had set the bones, and he had done his work so excellently that in a few weeks time Nelson Lee would not even show a scar.

While we had been cast ashore on one side of the island, Dorrie and the others, including the yacht itself, had been driven ashore on the other. The Wanderer was now aground on the bed of the lagoon. She was badly holed, and although the engineers were working at full pressure, it was doubtful if the yacht would be refloated. Even if this happy feat was accomplished, it could not be done for at least another month.

So we were destined to remain prisoners on Lagoon Island for this amount of time, at least. Cut off from civilisation, we could do nothing but accept the inevitable.

And so we saw no reason why we should not continue in the same manner as we had begun.

At first, believing the yacht to have sunk with all hands, we were absolutely destitute of every necessity. We even lacked clothing. And so we had attired ourselves in the simplest of garb—merely a grass kilt and nothing else. Our skins were tanned, our feet were tough, and we were becoming regular South Sea Islanders. From a distance the juniors looked like brown-skinned natives.

They had never been as healthy as they were now. We fed on the good things that the island supplied—fish in abundance, birds, small forest animals, breadfruit, coconuts, taro-root, bananas, mangoes—and all manner of other luscious things. The island bore enough food to feed an army.

And we had not been idle during our Robinson Crusoe state. We had built the Fort—a substantial house made from logs and canes and dried grasses. It contained several rooms, was well raised from the ground, and lay snugly in the shade of the palm grove.

And entirely surrounding it there was a high fence with pointed spikes. Within this stockade we were fairly safe in case of an attack by hostile blacks. But during the last battle it had been touch and go for a time.

Accordingly, a different state of affairs now existed.

The juniors had been armed with bows and arrows and clubs. These were excellent weapons in their way, but hardly good enough to ensure absolute security. Now, however, matters were altered.

There were ten members of the yacht's crew with us—strong, belty fellows who had been told off by Dorrie to form an armed guard at our Fort.

For we had decided to remain at Shark Bay, rather than go back to the yacht and live the ordinary civilised life. We were compelled to remain on the island whether we liked it or not. Well, we voted to stay at the Fort, to keep the Government going, and to live the same primitive life. It would be time to return to normal ways when the yacht was once again at sea, and bound for the recognised lines of shipping.

Some of you fellows didn't quite care for the idea of the armed guard arrangement. Handforth, in particular, declared that we were quite capable of looking after ourselves. He regarded the presence of ten men as an insult. But they couldn't help it—they were only acting under orders, and they were thoroughly decent fellows.

There certainly wasn't room for them in the Fort, and so they lost no time in building themselves a kind of bunkhouse nearby—a picturesque hut made from canes and grasses where the armed guard slept and fed. They had brought their own stores with them, and did not interfere in any way with the Fort.

Originally the idea had been for them to erect a couple of tents. But the Lagoon Island Government had held a hurried Cabinet Meeting. And it was unanimously decided that tents were barred—tents would look out of place.

If Nelson Lee and Dorrie had chosen they would have told us to grumble as much as we liked, and they could have given orders for the tents to be erected. But both the gov'nor and Dorrie gravely recognised the decision of the Schoolboy Government—and the log bunkhouse arose in consequence.

These ten men were armed with rifles and revolvers, and also a couple of deadly machine-guns with them. In the event of an attack by blacks there would be very little danger of the Fort being taken. And it could not be denied that the presence of the armed guard gave us all a feeling of security.

And so, on this particular morning, the juniors found themselves with very little to do. Handforth talked, of course. He always talked. It was his favourite occupation.

"I'm against it!" declared Handforth, after breakfast. "In fact, I think it's all rot! Absolute piffle!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church and McClure dutifully.

Handforth glared at them.

"Eh?" he snapped. "What's rot?"

"What you were going to say!" replied Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you rotter—"

"Hold on, Handy!" gasped Church hastily

"I—I meant that I agree that it's all rot."

"If you say a thing's rot, it must be rot!"
 "Of course it must!" said Handforth.
 "I'm talking about the armed guard. What the dickens do we want these chaps dodging about for? Ten blessed sailors who ain't needed! They're intruders! As War Minister, I absolutely jib against the whole idea!"

"But, my dear Handy, it's got to be!" I said gently. "After what happened last time, we can't take any more risks. These blacks may swoop down at any time—within an hour, for all we know."

"Well, what if they did?" asked Handforth. "Couldn't we beat 'em off? Couldn't we work the machine-guns and the rifles—"

"No!" I interrupted. "The gov'nor's dead against that. He won't allow any of the chaps to have rifles or revolvers. He is right, too. If it came to a battle you chaps would be kicking yourselves, instead of firing at the enemy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that's why we've got this armed guard," I continued. "You may not like it, Handy, but it's all for our own benefit. Considering that you're War Minister, you ought to be pleased."

"Do I look pleased?" snapped Handforth. "Hardly!" grinned Pitt. "But look here—I'll tell you what, Handy. Strictly speaking, the War Ministry is an unnecessary office—"

"What?" roared Handforth.

"Of course it is!" said Reggie. "The Defence Ministry, with Nipper at the head, deals with all matters of defence. The War Department was only created just to keep you quiet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The expression on Handy's face was comical.

"You—you fathead!" he howled. "I'll punch—"

"Don't start punching until I've finished!" exclaimed Pitt hastily. "This is the wheeze. A War Minister ought to have an army. Every War Minister controls an army of some kind. Well, what's the matter with turning the armed guard into the Lagoon Island Machine-gun Corps? As chief of the War Department, you'll be at their head, and can issue orders by the dozen!"

Handforth's expression relapsed, and a dreamy look came into his eyes. He sat back on the sand, and the dreamy look became more intent. Finally, his eyes fairly sparkled.

"Well?" asked Reggie.

"Don't bother!" hissed Handforth. "I'm thinking!"

"Hush! Hold your breath!" whispered Pitt. "Don't even breathe! The great man's thinking—although goodness knows what he's thinking with!"

Handforth slapped his thigh vigorously.

"Got it!" he shouted triumphantly.

"Did it sting?" asked Church.

"Eh?"

"I thought you were killing a fly—"

"Ass!" said Handforth briskly. "I've just got an idea. It's absolutely a stunner. It seems that we've got to have this armed guard whether we like it or not. Well, I'm the War Minister, and I mean to turn these sailors into the Lagoon Island Machine-gun Corps! That's my scheme!"

Reggie Pitt seemed to choke.

"Yours—your scheme?" he stuttered.

"Rather!" said Handforth, leaping up. "It's a great idea having those men nearby. What's the good of a War Ministry without an army to order about? It takes me to think of things like this."

Pitt quietly fainted into the arms of Jack Grey and De Valerie. All the others were grinning widely. And the extraordinary part about it was that Handforth seriously believed that the scheme was his own.

"I pity those ten chaps now!" grinned Christine. "With Handy on their track, they'll have no peace from morning till night!"

"Oh, they'll take it all in good part—they've got nothing much to do," I said. "And, thank goodness, it'll keep Handy busy. Now I want two or three fellows to give me a hand with the telephone fittings."

In spite of the primitive nature of our surroundings, and the equally primitive nature of our dwelling, we had the most modern appliances. For example, there was electric light everywhere—a small lighting set being driven by a home-made water motor.

And there was a telephone connecting the Fort with the yacht. This latter was the most recent addition; and communication had only been completed the previous day.

The island was, as far as we could judge, five or six miles long, and three or four miles broad. The yacht lay on the opposite side, just over three miles distant. And, with the aid of the Wanderer's electrician, we had carried a wire right across this stretch—fixing it to tree-tops for the most part. And now it was possible to talk direct to the yacht from the Fort.

The idea had been mine in the first place, and Nelson Lee had agreed to it promptly. For, with this telephone working, we should never be isolated. One party could always communicate with the other in case of a surprise by cannibals.

There were still several fittings to be made secure. And I went into the house for this purpose, accompanied by three fellows of my own department. But we had only just commenced on the work when the bell rang sharply. I at once lifted off the receiver and applied it to my ear.

"Hallo!" I called. "Who's there?"

"That you, Nipper?" came Lord Dorri-more's voice, with surprising distinctness. "I'm on the yacht. Better get ready for a scrap! Enemy in sight!"

"What?" I exclaimed quickly. "Are you kidding me, Dorrie?"

"My dear young idiot, I'm not!" exclaimed

Dorrie cheerfully. "I'm just givin' you the warnin'. Half a dozen fast canoes have appeared on this side, and they're cruisin' about on the outer edge of the reef—flirtin' with the rollers. And what's more, they're making in the direction of your territory. Be ready!"

"My only hat!" I exclaimed. "I thought the blacks would come back, but I hardly expected them as soon as this, Dorrie!"

"You can never tell with blacks!" replied Dorrie. "They're a queer lot. You'd better make everythin' shipshape. An' if these beggars try to land, 'phone through at once. We'll push some help across to you!"

A moment later Dorrie rang off. By the way he spoke one might have thought that the affair was likely to be a picnic. Lord Dorrimore always took things very calmly, and he never hurried himself.

But it was pretty clear that trouble was brewing—as Archie would have said—"in considerable consignments!"

CHAPTER II.

NATURE'S WARNING!



"CANNIBALS—good!" exclaimed Handforth briskly. "So they're coming, are they?"

All right! We'll soon show the rotters what we're made of! As soon as my machine-

gun corps gets to work there'll be a few ructions!"

All the juniors were excited and eager.

I had promptly sent the word round that the enemy had appeared in sight, and that they were making in the direction of Shark Bay. As a consequence, the entire force of fellows gathered on the beach, scanning the sea beyond the reef with intent gaze. The armed guard were on the watch, too—ready for anything. Provided as they were with rifles and machine-guns, they did not fear any number of savages.

"Here they come!"

Pitt shouted the words—which proved that he had very sharp eyesight, for nobody else had spotted the enemy. But a second later there could be no question. We all gazed out across the lagoon with intense interest.

Canoes had appeared—one, two—four—six! They were small, racy-looking craft, and each canoe contained two or three figures. They were very different from the huge war canoes which had appeared off the island on the last occasion. We had captured one of these big craft, and it now lay on the beach.

These fresh arrivals, however, were of a totally different type. They were lighter, speedier, and at the first glance I could see that they were not intended for war purposes. The entire force of blacks beyond the reef did not number more than eighteen.

"They're scouts!" I declared grimly. "Possibly the advance guard of a big army."

Anyhow, there's no need to be alarmed at this lot. They won't dare to venture into the lagoon itself."

The canoes came on, until they were exactly opposite Shark Bay—but, of course, on the outside of the coral reef. And there they bobbed about on the rollers, the blacks resting on their oars, staring towards the island.

After about twenty minutes they crept on, paddling slowly. Then they came back again, slowly, in just the same way as before.

"There's not much doubt that they're making a kind of survey," said Pitt. "Nipper's right about that. You see, when they came before it was moonlight, and they couldn't see much. Now they're having a look at us by daylight—probably to see how many of us there are to fight against. This means trouble later on."

"That's pretty certain," I agreed. "These chaps will go back and report, and then the full force will probably creep up under cover of darkness. So we shall have to be particularly careful at night."

"But where will they go back to?" asked Christine.

"Another island, of course," I said. "We don't know the exact position of this island, and it's quite clear that there are others—much bigger ones, perhaps—within easy canoe distance. There's no telling how many blacks we shall have to contend with."

An hour later the scouting canoes had completely disappeared over the horizon. They went in just the same way as they came. And they had given no sign, and had made no attempt to effect a landing.

So the work of the day was proceeded with.

In order to get to the yacht from our own camp, it was necessary to cross the high, rocky ridge of hills which towered up in the centre of the island. It had really seemed impossible to get over this ridge at first. But a canyon had been discovered, which led straight through the mountains to the other side. And then it was necessary to descend a sheer precipice of great height.

At the present there was a single rope ladder leading downwards from the ledge. This had been constructed in something of a hurry, and was hardly long enough. But now the fellows had built an enormously strong rope ladder, of great width, and capable of accommodating half a dozen people at once. With this massive affair a big party of us set off towards the middle of the morning for the ridge.

Archie and Sir Montie were included in the work, although they didn't exactly care for it. As Archie complained, the whole affair was too bally fagging.

It required a good many of us to carry the heavy rope ladder, and before we had proceeded far we were perspiring freely. We went through the palm groves, and down into the little valleys, and up the grass-grown hillside—where flowers and ferns and

wild fruit-trees grew in countless profusion. And where gaily coloured birds flitted from tree to tree—wondrously beautiful to look at, but voiceless.

We were descending into one of these little valleys towards the approach of the hills, when I paused and stared away to the left. We had been there before—several times—for this was now the recognised route across the island. Somehow, the scene seemed different to me.

"Has that pool of water always been there?" I inquired, pointing.

The others looked in the direction I indicated, and the rope ladder was set down, and we paused for a breather. There was an irregular pool of water about two hundred yards away. I had never seen it before, and I seemed to remember that there had always been a grassy hollow in that spot.

"That's queer, you know," said Christine.

"That pool wasn't there yesterday!"

"Rats! It must have been!" said Handforth, sitting down on a piece of rock.

"There's been no rain— Why, hallo! What the merry dickens——"

He broke off, and jumped up.

"Did you feel that?" he asked, looking startled.

"Feel what?" demanded Pitt.

"Why, the whole earth shivered!" said Handforth. "I sat down on that rock, and I could feel the earth trembling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you were Fatty Little, I shouldn't wonder at it!" grinned De Valerie. "It must have been your fancy, old son. But about that pool. Let's go and have a look at it at close quarters. I'll swear it wasn't there yesterday!"

They went down the hillside, and I accompanied them. Archie came with us. And then the foremost juniors uttered exclamations of surprise, and came to a halt. Their feet had sunk ankle-deep into a kind of ooze. Archie was in almost up to his knees. It was quite extraordinary.

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "This, don't you know, is absolutely poisonous; I mean to say, bogs, and what not!"

"But—but this was all solid ground the last time we came here!" ejaculated De Valerie, as he attempted to free himself. It looks solid enough now! I've never seen anything so bare in all my life!"

Without warning, we had found ourselves in the thick mire—which was hidden by the grass which grew in great clumps. It seemed that the whole bottom of the valley was water-logged, although it was very remarkable how this state of affairs had come about.

Pitt was further ahead than the rest of us, and he suddenly found himself upon more solid ground—just on the edge of the pool.

"It's all right here!" he announced. "The earth's all solid again. I wonder what can be the cause of this?"

Handforth and I gave Archie a hand,

and lugged him out of his deep hole. We found ourselves upon the solid ground, and we were just at the edge of the pool, which stretched away before us to the other side of the hollow. The water was rather thick and muddy.

And now the ground was quite firm under foot. The pool seemed to be surrounded by a ridge of hard ground, and then there was this bog. But we were all quite certain that the whole valley had been solid on the previous day.

"There's only one explanation, of course," I said. "There must have been a disturbance under ground during the night. There was a hidden spring beneath this valley, and it has suddenly found an outlet."

"But, my dear old chappie, this is positively foul!" exclaimed Archie, in dismay. "Dash it all, the thing's frightful! Absolutely! Kindly gaze upon the manly legs, don't you know. Deucedly soiled, what? I mean to say, the old pins are absolutely smothered with ooze, and so forth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie's expression was comical as he gazed down at his legs. Up to his knees he was smothered in clinging mud, and he felt fearfully uncomfortable. Archie was most sensitive regarding his skin, and any trace of dirt upon his person was hateful to him.

"I mean to say, something's got to be done!" exclaimed Archie. "Absolutely! Something must be accomplished, laddies! This is simply ghastly, don't you know! I'm feeling like the chappie who indulged in a mud bath."

"Can't be helped, Archie," said Pitt. "We're all in the same boat!"

"Well, hardly!" said Archie. "I mean to say, you chappies are simply begrimed up to the ankles. But I'm positively smothered, don't you know! I've been fairly wallowing in the old mud stuff. What about it? That is to say, what about a refreshing dip?"

"Dip?" said Handforth. "Where?"

"Dash it all!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, where? But, my dear old tulip, kindly cast the optical department upon the old puddle. Water—what? Plenty to cleanse the old legs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Several yards of cackle!" observed Archie. "But I must admit that I fail to see the joke. The old bean, in fact, positively declines to appreciate the humour of the situash! Absolutely!"

"My dear chap, what on earth's the good of washing yourself?" grinned Pitt.

"Why, I mean to say, to remove the mud——"

"Yes, and as soon as you've removed it you'll go back through the mud!" chuckled Pitt. "So what's the good of washing? The best thing we can do is to get back on to solid ground, and wait until we arrive at the nearest stream. Come on! There's nothing to see here, anyway."

"Wait, old onions—wait!" said Archie. "I insist! That is to say, I positively decline to move a step until the walking

apparatus has been cleansed! Observe! Kindly rally round, old dears, in case of an acc.!"

We grinned, and allowed Archie to have his own way. He plunged into the pool with an expression of resolute determination on his face. The mud had begun to dry on his legs, and the feeling was most uncomfortable. To Archie, it was agony. He absolutely had to clean himself.

"Large and assorted quantities of relief!" he remarked, as he splashed about. "Gadzooks, and what not! This, as it were, is priceless! I mean to say, the old legs are becoming normal once more. Perhaps some of you chappies will be kind enough to carry me across the danger zone——"

"And perhaps we sha'n't!" said De Valerie. "So that was the idea, eh? You wanted to clean yourself now, and make us carry you back? There's nothing doing, Archie. You can't work a dodge like that!"

"But really, old lad——"

"What's that?" asked Tommy Watson abruptly.

"Eh? What——"

We all paused and stared at the pool. Archie had waded more towards the centre, for he was discovering that it was by no means deep. And the water was most refreshing, although it was hardly as clear as it might have been. But a most extraordinary thing was happening.

Giant air bubbles came up from below, and burst upon the surface with loud splashes. Archie stood stock still, and the bubbles came up all round him, increasing in quantity and violence. Within a few seconds the whole centre of the pool seemed to be boiling—and yet the water was cold.

"My only hat!" said Pitt. "What on earth——"

"Come out of it, Archie—quick!" I shouted.

"I—I mean to say!" gasped Archie, staring round. "My only sainted aunt! What—what about it? Dash it all, the old pond is positively bubbling, don't you know. Absolutely! This is most ghastly!"

"Come out of it, you ass!" yelled Handforth.

"What? I mean to say, what?" asked Archie. "Somewhat terse, and all that. What-ho! What-ho! It appears that danger is looming! It's up to me to——"

Archie wasted so much time that he had nobody but himself to blame for what followed. If he had dashed out of the pool at once, all would have been well. I was half-inclined to rush in and drag him out by force.

For the appearance of those bubbles had put a nasty idea into my mind. I was fearing that the pool would suddenly subside—taking Archie with it. He might be sucked down into the ooze, never to be seen again. I did not doubt that this newly formed pool was of some volcanic origin—and you can never tell what tricks such formations will play.



"Loud yells of S.O.S.!" yelled Archie. "Gadzooks! kindly assist me, dear old laddies—Whooooop!"

The exact opposite, however, happened.

Without the slightest warning, the pool gave a sudden bellowing roar. A stream of water came shooting upwards from the very centre. Archie was caught before he could even attempt to get away. The great column of water seized him in a firm grip, and in less than a second he was struggling wildly on the top of the column, four or five feet above the surface of the pool.

"Great goodness!" gasped Archie. "Help!"

"Oh, my only aunt!"

"He'll—he'll be hurt!"

"Loud yells of S.O.S.!" yelled Archie. "Gadzooks! Kindly assist me, dear old laddies— Whoooooooop!"

The last exclamation was quite unintelligible, and it was forced from Archie's lips as he was suddenly shot about ten feet higher. The great column of water gave a roaring spurt, and converted itself into a vast fountain which towered twenty feet into the air, and sent the water spraying down in all directions. We were standing quite near, and we got drenched.

"It's a geyser!" I shouted. "Thank goodness, it's not a boiling spring—like that one in the other valley!"

Nobody took any notice of me. They were all watching the antics of Archie. He was held aloft, on the top of the hissing column of water, and such was the power of the fountain that Archie balanced there—his arms and legs flying wildly, half the breath knocked out of him, and rolling over and over, and from side to side, to the accompaniment of yells and gasps.

The onlookers at last became aware of the humorous side of the picture.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A tremendous laugh broke out—a roar of complete amusement. It was extraordinarily funny to see Archie held on the top of that fountain that the fellows could not contain themselves. The tension was relaxed, for it was now clear that there was no danger.

This fountain was a newly-formed geyser, and perhaps it would prove to be something after the style of Old Faithful in Yellowstone Park, which for many years discharged regularly every hour. But Old Faithful is a real geyser, the water being hot. This spring was totally different.

Strictly speaking, I don't suppose it could be called a geyser at all—I've only used the word to explain what the thing was like. But it was obviously a spring, which, for some unexplained reason gushed forth its flow of water at irregular intervals.

Anyhow, Archie knew all about it. He was balanced on the top of the water pillar very much the same way as a celluloid ball is balanced on a jet of water at a shooting range. One often sees them at a fair.

But there was a human being poised in mid air, and all Archie's efforts to help himself were of no avail. I don't suppose he was held in that helpless position for more than a few seconds, but it seemed quite a long time. Then, with an extra loud yell, he toppled from the column and plunged with a mighty splash into the pool. He almost disappeared in the whirl of spray.

"Come on—lend a hand!" I grinned.

We plunged into the water, and soon yanked Archie out by force. He was like a limp rag, and he staggered out of the pool gasping and spluttering.

"Saved!" he panted. "Thanks in huge quantities, dear old lads! I mean to say, I thought I was going up into the heavens, don't you know! I'm absolutely finished—positively at the last old gasp!"

"You're all right, Archie!" said Pitt, with a chuckle. "It hasn't done you any harm, and you've had your bath, anyway. Why, hallo— Well, I'm blessed! Just look at that!"

As he was speaking the fountain abruptly died away—just as though the water had been cut off at the main. The drenching spray ceased, and the agitated surface of the miniature lake was the only sign of the recent disturbance.

"By George!" said Handforth. "That was great! First shower-bath I've had since we've been on the island!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

We had all rather enjoyed the experience—with the possible exception of Archie. And we gingerly stepped through the boggy ground, and once more regained the solid earth of the hillside. We returned to the

trail, where we had left the rope ladder. Archie was quite unhurt, in spite of his statements to the contrary.

"Really, dear old tins of fruit, I must insist upon returning to the Fort!" he said firmly. "Absolutely! I can't proceed onwards. I mean to say, I'm feeling most dashed used up, don't you know. It is necessary to seek Phipps, and——"

"You don't need Phipps!" interrupted De Valerie.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Phipps is positively a necessity, old walnut! He's a deucedly brainy cove, and he'll know how to pull me round, and so forth! I need large quantities of the old dreamless to restore the tissues!"

"Oh, let him go!" I grinned.

Much to Archie's relief nobody objected, and he was permitted to return to camp. And we continued our task. We lifted the heavy rope ladder, and proceeded on our way towards the canyon. But another startling thing was destined to occur before we arrived at our destination.

"It's a queer thing about that fountain," I said thoughtfully. "Why should it suddenly appear in this way? Do you remember that Handforth said something about an earth tremor? I believe he was right——"

"I jolly well know I was right!" said Handforth firmly. "I felt the whole ground shake and shiver."

"It seems to me that it was a bit of an earthquake," I said. "We all know that this island is volcanic, and it's not at all unlikely that earth tremors are pretty frequent. All volcanic regions are subject to that kind of thing."

"Of course," agreed Pitt. "And there's a volcano on this island, too—a real one. I wonder if it'll ever break into eruption?"

"If it does, it'll be all up with us!" I replied grimly. "There's many a South Sea Island been wiped completely out by a volcanic disturbance. It happens all of a sudden, and the next morning there's no island left! It absolutely vanishes for evermore, with every inhabitant!"

"That'll be rather awkward for us—if we start going up!" said Handforth. "But I'm not scared of volcanoes! If this one starts any of its rot, I'll jolly soon tell it what I think!"

We laughed.

"I'm afraid the volcano won't take much notice, even of you, Handy," said Pitt. "But if islands are swallowed up by a volcano in a single night, islands also form themselves in a single night. There's been a case like that. I was reading all about it once——"

He broke off, for just at that second the very earth beneath our feet seemed to lift itself up. We staggered as we walked. The whole ground trembled as though it had suddenly become jellified.

And, looking across the valley, I saw the ground heaving up, as though it were some gigantic tarpaulin, with the wind billowing

it out from below. But it was only very slight.

"Great Scott!"

"Did—did you feel that?" yelled Handforth. "By George! I—I—"

Crash! Crash!

From the ridge high above us several vast boulders went thundering down with fearful force. Chunks of rock weighing hundreds of tons were dislodged, and they fell down the hillsides with stupendous velocity.

By sheer luck we were not in the direct course of any of these boulders. But we had a clear view of the several avalanches.

It was all over in a couple of seconds.

And then everything was the same as normal, except for loose stones rolling down the hills, and clouds of dust hovering in the sunlit air.

"Great heavens!" I muttered. "That was an earthquake all right—and a serious one, too. Doesn't make much difference on an island like this; but it would have sent houses toppling over! You'd better look out, you chaps; there may be some more shocks before long! They generally come in a series."

All the fellows were looking excited and rather alarmed.

"And earthquake, eh?" said Handforth with relish. "Well, anyway, it's something exciting——"

Another dramatic interruption came at that moment. Right away on our left, towering high above us, reared the great peak which we had already selected as a volcano. On two or three occasions we had seen a thin column of steam rising from the crater. There could be no doubt that the peak was a volcano!

And now there came a booming, thunderous roar, followed by two terrific reports like those of a massive naval gun. The concussion was so terrific that we staggered, and our heads sang. And from that towering crater a vast, billowing cloud of steam rose into the air—a huge volume which formed itself into a great cloud. And there it hovered, slowly dispersing.

Without a doubt, something was doing!

CHAPTER III.

A WAY THROUGH THE CHANNEL.



"GREAT PIP!"

"My goodness!"
"Well, I'll jiggered!"

The juniors made all sorts of exclamations when they found their voices. These disturbances of nature had been so unexpected that we were all taken by surprise.

It sometimes happens that a volcano gives warning of activity before actually commencing. The volumes of steam and fumes would increase day by day. But here there had been no sign whatever. Just that one

terrific roar and the two reports. And the weather conditions on the island were as perfect as they could possibly be.

There had been no haze—no humid oppression. The breeze was delightful, the sunshine was clear and brilliant. Birds fluttered about, and insects hummed. The island paradise was at its best.

And it could not be denied that these warnings of nature made us all feel puny and insignificant. What were we but mere infinitesimal items? One fearful discharge from that volcano, and we should be wiped out, and the great world beyond these waters would carry on in just the same way, knowing nothing whatever about it. Possibly some scientists in various parts of the world would report that an earthquake had taken place in latitude so and so and longitude so and so. People would read in their morning papers, pass a casual remark, and proceed with the day's business. And we should be no more.

I was hoping, however, that events wouldn't turn out in this way!

One thing was certain. We could not escape from the island. We were marooned, and there was no getting away. Certainly, the Wanderer carried a motor-launch, and if the situation became critical, we might be able to embark and cruise into the unknown seas—trusting to luck that we should meet some ship, or find land. But surely there was no need for this.

There was no necessity to be unduly alarmed by this earthquake and by the report from the volcano. No doubt these little affairs happened every two or three weeks, without any serious consequences. At the same time, all the fellows were startled and their feeling of security had been rudely shaken.

"It seems that we're going to have a terrific eruption!" said Handforth. "I shouldn't be surprised if the crater starts spurting forth volumes and volumes of boiling lava, and red fire, and ashes, and all sorts of things! I wish I had a camera! It would be ripping to take a few pictures of a volcano in action."

"They wouldn't be much good to you, Handy," I said grimly. "If this volcano really starts in earnest, it'll be all up with us!"

"What rot!" said Handforth. "Even if the volcano sends out tons of lava and ashes it'll only buzz down the mountainside. We shall be safe enough on the beach. And, in any case, we can always get in the water!"

"My dear chap, you don't seem to understand what a volcano is," I exclaimed. "What happened at Martinique in 1902?"

"How the dickens should I know?" demanded Handforth impatiently. "We're not talking about France, anyhow——"

"France!" I cried. "You ass, Martinique is an island in the Caribbeans, and in 1902 there was an eruption of Mont Pelee. It destroyed St. Pierre completely, and about twenty-five thousand people were killed

Why, the water in the harbour absolutely boiled, and dozens of ships were destroyed. When a volcano really gets busy, it means it! Boiling lava dropping into the lagoon would make it unbearable within half an hour; not that we should be alive to test it!"

Handforth looked rather startled.

"Yes; but this is only a small volcano," he said. "If this blessed thing starts erupting, it'll only send lava down the mountain-side."

"Don't you make any bloomer!" I said. "If the volcano really gets going, there won't be much hope for us. But there's no need to get the wind up over nothing. I don't suppose for a minute that there'll be any eruption at all. A puff of steam like that is simply a trifle. And an earthquake on one of these volcanic islands is as common as a thunderstorm in England in July."

At the same time, the fellows didn't want to continue the work on hand. They all decided to hurry straight back to the Fort, to see if anything untoward had happened there. The fixing of a rope ladder was forgotten. Besides, it was too risky.

"We don't want to go up into the hills just yet," said Pitt. "As likely as not that blessed canyon will collapse over our heads. We'd better wait until things quieten down."

The others all agreed, and so we left the rope ladder just where it was, and then hurried off at a run down the valley, on route for the palm groves and the beach.

We were very anxious.

And if this was the case, the juniors who had been left at the Fort were even more anxious. For they had heard the report from the volcano as distinctly as we had, and they believed us to be up at the canyon. And we should have been there, too, except for the fact that we delayed at the newly made fountain. Possibly we owed our lives to that little incident.

The juniors and all the members of the armed guard were in a fine state of worry. It was decided that a party should be formed at once to go towards the ridge in search of our remains.

But there was quite a lot of delay before the party was ready to make a move. And when the rescuers were on the point of sending out, we buzzed through the palm grove and arrived on the scene.

"Here they are!"

"Oh, thank goodness!"

"All safe and sound, too!"

The fellows rushed up, and we were surrounded. Handforth told them not to make silly asses of themselves, and laughed in his usual superior manner when somebody suggested that he might have been killed.

"Ass!" said Handy. "It'll take more than a rotten earthquake shock to kill us. I never saw such a crowd of scared fatheads! Why, I've half a mind to take a trip up to the crater—just to have a look inside."

"It'll be the last thing you'll ever do, Handy!" I said. "But we sha'n't be foolish enough to let you go. There don't seem to be any further shocks, so perhaps the fireworks are over!"

We explained all about our little adventure in the hills—how Archie had been lifted to the top of the water column, and how we had seen the boulders crashing down the hillsides.

"Things have happened here, too!" said Armstrong. "There's been all sorts of commotion in the lagoon!"

"Sharks?" said Handforth.

"Don't be an ass!" went on Armstrong. "Do you think I don't know the difference between a commotion caused by sharks and a terrific upheaval? I don't mean here—in the bay; but further along."

"What happened?" I inquired.

"That's what we'd all like to know," put in Griffith. "We heard those terrific bangs, and we rushed out, and then we saw a great column of water shooting up out of the lagoon. It was round the bend of the bay, and just beyond Palm Tree Island, so we couldn't exactly tell what really occurred."

"How do you mean—a column of water?" I asked.

"Why, we could see it over the tree tops; and we saw the effects of it here, too," said Armstrong. "There was a sudden roar of water, and the spray went dashing up to a tremendous height. Then a number of tremendous waves broke on the shore here, taking us by surprise."

"They were caused by the commotion beyond the point," I said. "You see, the disturbance was located in one spot, but it completely upset the surface of the water all along. We'd better go round now, and have a look."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's buzz off at once!"

"Good egg!"

"We should have gone before, only we were worried about you fellows," said Griffiths. "Thank goodness you're all right! It would have been horrible if you chaps had got wiped out in the earthquake."

We set off at once, and went along the beach to Coral Point. Round this headland there was another bay, with Palm Island just in the middle of the lagoon. We had several times attempted to go round the lagoon in the dug-out, only to find that there was a great bar here, just under the water. The lagoon was so shallow, in fact, that it was unsafe for any boat to attempt the journey.

For the coral rocks were as sharp as needles, and absolutely treacherous to any light craft. One touch, and the bottom would be ripped out of the boat, and the occupants would be precipitated upon the spiky coral. And without any clothing on, the prospect was not at all pleasant.

In fact, we had found no way round the lagoon to the other side—or we should have

been in constant communication with the yacht by boat—instead of taking the laborious journey across the ridge.

But we had never found a clear passage through the coral bars. Shark Bay was deep, and neither the dugout, nor the canoe could be easily managed. There were sharks there, too—a clear indication of the water's depth.

The cannibals who had visited the island, however, had experienced no difficulty in getting through with their war canoes. This clearly proved that they knew their ground. They had been here before, and had learned the various channels by heart. But we were inexperienced, and had yet to find a safe way through.

Rounding this bend of Coral Point, we came within sight of the next bay. Everything was just the same as usual. There was no difference at all—at first sight. But after walking along for two or three hundred yards, I went to the water's edge, and stared out across the lagoon.

The water itself was not quite so clear as usual—proof of a recent disturbance. And I noticed that Palm Island looked somewhat smaller. It had apparently sunken into the lagoon four or five feet. For the two palm trees in the centre were now only surrounded by a tiny circle of sand. Previously the island had been quite a respectable little patch.

"This is something to do with the earthquake," I remarked. "By what I can see, the whole floor of the lagoon has sunk a bit. An earthquake causes all sorts of queer things, you know. By Jove!" I added suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"Why, the water may be deeper now!" I exclaimed. "If the bed of the lagoon has sunk, it's quite likely that we shall find a way through. Anyhow, I vote we hurry back, and get the big canoe out. We'll go out and investigate."

"Good wheeze!"

"Just what I was going to suggest!" said Handforth.

We hurried back along the beach, and when we got back to the Fort we found that Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee had been ringing up, asking if we were all safe and sound. They were greatly relieved to learn that everything was all right. It seemed that no untoward incident had taken place on the other side of the island—although Dorrie had reported a commotion in the lagoon at some distant point.

The big war canoe was soon hauled down the beach, and we embarked. There were twelve of us altogether, and I took the paddle in the bows. I was accustomed to paddling, and considered myself a bit of an expert. Pitt and De Valerie and one or two others, were also quite good at the job. The rest could manage a paddle fairly well.

This big war canoe was really an excellent craft—and it was a trophy of battle. Handforth had captured it during our fight with

the cannibals—and Handy seemed to imagine that it was entirely his own. It was the most important vessel of the Lagoon Island Navy.

We couldn't go without Handforth, of course—although he was not particularly brilliant with a paddle. However, there was no likelihood of him causing an upset, for the canoe was strong and stable.

We shot out into the bay, and then I directed the craft towards Coral Point.

"When I sing out for you chaps to stop paddling, you've got to stop!" I called. "We don't want to tear the bottom of the boat out on the coral. Once we get round the point we shall have to crawl at a snail's pace."

"Right-ho, cap'n—go ahead!" said Pitt.

We made good speed as far as the point of the bay. And after that we slowed down to a mere crawl. And as we progressed I kept my gaze keenly downwards. The water was still quite clear enough for me to see the lagoon bed. Here it was deep down, and there was sufficient water to float a schooner.

We continued and progressed yard by yard. And I was greatly astonished to find that the water still remained deep. And I could swear that at this very spot the coral had previously been only six or seven inches below the surface.

On we went, and all the fellows were talking about this extraordinary state of affairs.

"Why, the water's as deep as anything now!" exclaimed De Valerie. "What's happened? When we tried to get through here before we couldn't move a yard."

"It was the earthquake," I declared. "It's altered the whole formation of the coral. There's a way through the channel now—and I believe we shall get right through to the deep water on the other side!"

"Good!"

"Let's try it!"

I had already decided on this course. But it was still necessary to go with extreme caution. We had forgotten all about the dangers of a volcanic eruption by now. The day was still perfect, and it seemed impossible that there could be any peril.

Foot by foot we glided along the surface of the water. The water was so deep that there was never the slightest danger of us touching the bottom. Yet, in places, we could distinctly see the coral under the water rising until it was only a few inches below the surface.

But there was a channel—and that was the main thing.

And then we finally shot out beyond the next point, and entered upon a section of the lagoon which we knew to be deep and safe. Indeed, from this point we could paddle with perfect security right round to the spot where the Wanderer lay aground.

"Hurrah!"

"We're through!"

"Rather!" I exclaimed heartily. "I say, you chaps, this is gorgeous! We can use

this channel always now; there's no need to go over the ridge at all! It won't take us half the time to buzz round in the canoe!"

"Let's go and give Dorrie a surprise!" said Tommy Watson.

"Rather!"

"Not likely!" exclaimed Handforth. "What's the good of that? I vote we make straight for one of the openings in the reef, and have a cruise round the island in the open water! That's the best wheeze! We've never seen what the island's like from out there—and it'll be ripping buzzing through the surf!"

I was a bit doubtful.

"Surf-riding is jolly fine, but I don't know whether this'll be safe," I objected. "I think we ought to have Umlosi with us; he's a master-hand with the paddle, and could control us with ease!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Pitt. "You're a master-hand, too—and I'm willing to trust myself to your tender mercy, anyhow."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's go through the reef!"

All the fellows displayed such confidence in my ability that I agreed. And, after all, there could not be much danger. The blacks had taken war canoes exactly similar to this one through the reef—which proved that the water was deep and safe.

I knew the opening that the blacks had used, and I steered the canoe straight for it. The surf did not worry me, for these canoes were made to weather such seas. And the prospect of taking a trip on the open sea was very alluring. We made all haste to carry out the plan.

On this side of the island the reef was not in one unbroken line as it was opposite Shark Bay. The coral lay in patches, with deep channels, many of them quite wide enough to accommodate a big steamer. And the sea came roaring through these openings with a great fuss, and with masses of foam and spray.

Anybody who has ridden the surf in the South Seas will appreciate the sensation of exhilaration which thrilled us now. There's nothing absolutely like it. It is wonderful, and a sheer joy.

The water was now no longer smooth and calm. The canoe was beginning to rock, and the water hissed past, and broke upon our bows, sending showers of spray hissing over us.

"By jingo, this is ripping!" shouted Pitt. "Let her go!"

"That's it!" I yelled. "Paddle for all you're worth. If we don't buzz quickly now we shall never get through!"

"Let her go!"

All the fellows wielded their paddles with tremendous energy. The nose of the canoe was pointed straight at the deep channel, where the ocean rollers were pouring in with steady, tremendous force.

The first one of these big rollers hit us just as we got to the reef. Up went the nose of the canoe—up—up! Then the roaring,

foaming wave thundered past, and we assumed an even keel once more.

"Hurrah!"

Again and again we heaved up, but there was not the slightest danger—unless, of course, we allowed the canoe to get broadside on to the waves. In that case we should have been capsized in about ten seconds, or less.

And then, at last, soaked and gasping and triumphant, we found ourselves well out beyond the reef on the deep waters of the ocean, where the swell was heavy and distinct, and where the water sparkled and glistened in the sunlight like diamonds. There was something about this experience which made us all feel more alive. It was invigorating.

And I really enjoyed it all the more because I knew that Nelson Lee would not have approved. And, somehow, one always obtains more pleasure out of a forbidden act.

But we were safe enough, and having accomplished the feat once, we should always be able to do it in future. And this knowledge of the outer reef would probably come in very handy in the event of another cannibal attack.

"I say, this is first-class!" exclaimed Reggie, as he dashed the salt spray from his eyes. "I vote we cruise about now for a bit, and see what the island looks like from this point of view."

"Good egg!"

The fellows were quite agreeable. And having paddled a good distance out from the reef, we turned broadside on to the shore, and slowly continued our progress. And from here we could see the island in quite a different way.

There was the reef with the surf thundering upon it. But we could not see the lagoon, owing to our low position on the water. The haze from the spray on the reef concealed the inner belt of water.

But there was the beach, with the trees going back in regiments towards the hills in the centre of the island. And, above all, there loomed up the black, sinister crater of the volcano. A thin wreath of steam was rising from it now; but that was the only sign of possible activity.

We were going in the direction of the Wanderer, and, rounding a headland, we now came within full sight of the grounded yacht. She looked quite imposing as she lay there, slightly heeling over to starboard. In that clear atmosphere we could even see figures moving about on deck.

With one accord, we raised our paddles, and gave a salute. And after a short time we saw the figures on deck waving in return.

"I expect they took us for cannibals at first!" I grinned. "But then they must have seen our sweet faces through a telescope. I'll bet we've given them a bit of a surprise."

"By jingo, rather!" said Handforth.

"What's that queer thing over there?"

asked Tommy Watson, as we all rested on our paddles. "There seems to be something floating——"

He broke off, and uttered a startled gasp, and I turned my gaze in the same direction. My breath seemed to stop, and my eyes bulged.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEA MONSTER.



"**W**HAT—what is it?" gasped Reggie Pitt hoarsely.

He had seen the thing, too, and a swift glance at him told me that he was looking rather pale and

shaken. And I was feeling in a bit of a turmoil within me. All the other fellows were startled and scared.

And what was the cause of this sudden change?

It could not be a shark, for a shark seldom shows itself upon the surface—a mere fin, perhaps, but little else. And, in any case, we had no reason to fear sharks. They would not attack us in the canoe.

This something which had caused such a stir in the canoe was unlike anything we had ever seen in our lives before. And for a moment I felt like rubbing my eyes to see if they were playing a trick.

But this was impossible, since the other fellows could see the thing, too. And so I stared at it, fascinated.

I even feared to make any attempt to describe this incident, for I have an idea that it would be sent down as a piece of sheer imagination—and not an actual occurrence. For it was so extraordinary—so amazing! Even now I find myself wondering if it can really be true.

For there, about half a mile distant, was the strangest monster of the deep that I had ever set eyes upon. It was swimming swiftly—and appeared to be coming straight towards our canoe. But we were so fascinated during those first few moments that we did not even think of escape.

We could see it distinctly, and every fellow watched with bated breath. The head of the monster was carried five or six feet above the surface of the water—a vast head, which could have been nothing under fifteen feet in length. To think of a head of that size almost makes the mind reel. But there it was—a vast thing rearing above the water, with a jaw which seemed to jut out, although we could not make out any close details. There appeared to be two massive eyes, set close together like those of a snake, and high in the head. And, in the rear, there was a vast scaly body, long and serpent-like. There were fins, too—great ribs



Without warning a tiny monkey had settled fairly and squarely on the top of Handforth's head. See page 24.

along the back of the thing. I judged its length to be not an inch less than a hundred and fifty feet!

"Good heavens!"

The exclamation burst from Reginald Pitt's lips involuntarily.

And that one voice awoke the rest into life.

"Oh, my goodness!" panted Handforth. "What is it? Did—did you ever see anything so awful?"

"What is it?" I snapped grimly. "It's a sea-serpent!"

"A what!"

"A sea-serpent!"

"But sea-serpents are all a myth!" gasped Tommy Watson.

"That doesn't look like a myth!" I snapped. "Great Scott! Hundreds of sailors swear that they've seen sea-serpents; and I shall never disbelieve the yarn again! This thing absolutely staggers me!"

"I remember reading that a sea-serpent was found dead on the coast of Florida only just over a year ago!" shouted Pitt. "They brought its head in, and it weighed three

tons! That's an absolute fact!* But this seems to be a lot larger!"

"Miles larger!" said Handforth.

"Quick! We'd better get into the lagoon!" I shouted.

We awoke into activity, and seized our paddles firmly, and began plying them with feverish energy. We felt trapped—and we realised that if this gigantic monster of the deep came anywhere near, we should be lost. One flick of its body, and the canoe would be smashed to smithereens.

And we had come away from the opening! There was the reef between us and the lagoon, and in order to get into the secure waters of the lagoon we should have to race parallel with the reef for several yards, and then dash through among the breakers.

And the sea-serpent was coming towards us at an appalling speed!

"Paddle for your lives!" I shouted hoarsely.

There was no doubt that the monster had seen us, and was coming to investigate. All sorts of thoughts chased themselves through my mind. I could only conclude that this terrible thing had been thrown up from the sea-bed—which was probably its natural haunt—by an echo of the volcanic disturbance which had been apparent on the island. An upheaval below—thousands of fathoms deep—had sent this sea-serpent to the surface. Once there, it had decided to have a look round.

Paddling with all our strength, we could see that it would be a terrifically close race. Nearer and nearer came that vast monster. And now we could make out the details more distinctly. We could see the head of the thing—with the lower jaw protruding, and with moisture dripping from the corners of its mouth.

We could see teeth, too, and there appeared to be vast, curving tusks. The mouth itself was red, and those great saucer eyes were red, too. And they glowed with a baleful, horrible light. The scales were like armour; and it seemed to us that the body of the thing was the colour of bronze, shading down to dull green towards the tail.

And it was so huge that we felt appalled.

It would be idle to deny that we were scared stiff. Or, to be more exact, we were scared to such an extent that we paddled as we had never paddled before. It would have been all up with us if we had really become stiff.

For this was a time for lightning action.

* AUTHOR'S NOTE.—A sea monster, measuring over eighty feet in length, was found dead and being eaten by sharks in Soldiers' Bay, on the coast of Florida, in February, 1921. The head was cut off and towed into Miami, where it was photographed. It was fifteen feet long, seven feet wide, and weighed three tons. There can be no doubt whatever that the sea-serpent is far from being a myth, as some would have us believe.

As we paddled we kept glancing at the sea-serpent. It was getting so near that we almost gave up hope. Indeed, had the monster chosen it could have demolished us on the spot.

But I suppose it was rather uncertain. We were a novelty to this creature of the deep. It did not care to attack us on the instant, and was just giving us a bit of an inspection.

"Oh, goodness!" panted De Valerie. "We shall never do it!"

"We must—we must!" I shouted.

Even exerting themselves as they were, the fellows were pale and shaky. The menace of this ocean horror robbed the juniors of their colour, and they were feeling weak and faint.

It was only the sheer desperation of the affair which caused them to keep going. Even now the chances of escape were remote. At any second we might find ourselves being battered to pulp.

I have seen sharks and whales at close quarters, and have been startled. But sharks and whales were like herrings compared to this Leviathan of the unknown deep.

"Faster—faster!" I urged. "Paddle like mad, boys!"

"Go it!" shouted Handforth huskily.

By this time the sea-serpent was only twenty or thirty yards distant. We could see every detail of its awful shape. And while the head was near us, with those horrible eyes glaring, the tail was remote. The long sinuous body was just under the surface, humped up here and there as the creature swam.

The horny scales seemed to be like armour plate. I don't think a six-inch shell would have had much effect. In that terrible time of doubt and horror, the fact which struck me most was that we did not seem to be moving.

We were paddling with all our strength. Yet the opening of the reef appeared to be farther off than ever, and we were in a nightmare. We were trying to gain our objective, but could not do so.

And the sea-serpent remained near, ready to strike and kill us, but hesitating to do so. I have not the slightest doubt that the awful thing was just a bit scared on its own account.

Small as our canoe was, it was something new to this sea demon. And it did not care to touch us. Within another minute or two it would probably have done so. But this delay was the means of saving our lives.

There was no question or doubt regarding the reality of the sea-serpent. Sailors for centuries past have told of the sea-serpent, but a great many of the yarns have been vague and indefinite. The sea serpent has been seen at night, or at a great distance.

Here it was just alongside of us—swimming parallel to our canoe. And we were aware of a horrible fishy smell in the air, overpoweringly strong and disgusting. But in our extremity we took no notice.

And then hope dawned afresh.

Looking up from my paddle I saw the opening of the reef. We were upon it, although it had been unattainable. The surf was roaring, and the breakers were crashing upon the coral with a thunderous din.

"Hurrah!" I yelled. "We've done it!"

"Thank Heaven!"

"Round, you chaps—round!"

"Now then, all together!"

They shouted for the sake of relieving their overcharged breasts. And the canoe heeled over dangerously as it swung round. The sea-serpent was still near by—intent upon our movements.

We swung into the rollers, and the next moment we were lifted high upon the crest of a gigantic wave. Then, with a forward plunge we went racing through the surf opening.

Amid a smother of foam and spray and spume we shot through the surging waters into the lagoon. The sea-serpent was behind us now, and we could not look round. But I had a ghastly feeling that the monster was following—that it was coming into the lagoon in chase of us.

I realised that such a thing was highly improbable, but the feeling was there. The sea-serpent was not likely to brave the perils of the reef and the roaring surf. For its very size was a drawback here. Once stranded in shallow water, such a gigantic creature would never get afloat again.

At last we were out of the foam, and riding in the calm waters of the lagoon. And we were able to rest on our paddles for an instant, and to glance back. We did so with apprehensive eyes.

"Thank goodness!" I said hoarsely.

"Has—has it stayed behind?" breathed Tommy Watson.

"Yes; the beast is still out there, on the other side of the reef!" said Reginald Pitt.

"Hurrah!"

"We're safe!"

"I thought it was going to follow us!" exclaimed Handforth. "By George! Did you ever see such an awful thing in all your life? I've had nightmares, and I've seen pictures of prehistoric monsters, but this blessed thing fairly takes the cake! Pity we couldn't photograph it!"

"Couldn't we?" exclaimed Jack Grey, with a look of satisfaction. "I snapped the giddy thing six times!"

"What?"

"I used a whole roll of film!"

"You—you photographed it?" yelled Handforth.

"Yes!" said Grey. "I brought my camera along, to take a few snapshots of the reef. But I hadn't used any of the films, and so managed to get these photographs of the sea-serpent. Jolly good, eh?"

"Rather!"

"Good man!"

The fellows were very delighted. And it

proved Jack Grey's coolness and presence of mind. Several of the fellows had obtained their cameras from the Wanderer, and all sorts of snapshots had been taken. We still lived the primitive life at the Fort, but that was no reason why we shouldn't indulge in modern magic now and again. And photos of the island would be interesting to take back.

Grey had taken his snapshots while we were racing against the sea-serpent. There were one or two fellows in the canoe who did not have paddles, and Jack was one of them. So he had been a mere spectator. He had made good use of his time.

And now, as we glided through the calm waters of the lagoon, we looked back at the reef, and could still see the sea-serpent on the other side. It was lashing about wildly—dashing this way and that. And when its tail flicked the sea a great column of water arose, as though a shell had exploded.

"My only hat!"

"Why, that tail could sink a battleship!"

"Pretty nearly!"

It was fairly clear that the sea-serpent was furious, and it was showing its fury by this method. It could easily have got into the lagoon had it chosen, for the channel which we had followed was deep and broad. But, fortunately for us, the creature jibbed on the outside of the reef.

And we were now fairly close to the Wanderer. It was only necessary to go round a short headland, and we should be there. So, picking up our paddles again, we got to work.

"There's no sense in staying here!" I declared. "The thing might change its mind all of a sudden, and whizz through at us. We should be smashed to bits in one second. Even now we're not absolutely safe!"

"Great Scott! Paddle away!"

The juniors suddenly became alarmed again at the thought which my words conjured up. And they plied their paddles with feverish energy.

We shot round the bend, and came within sight of the Wanderer.

Safety was within reach—we had beaten the sea-serpent!

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.



BOOM—boom!
I looked up sharply as that report thundered out, instantly followed by the echo from the hills.

A big puff of smoke was apparent on the Wanderer's forward deck. It drifted slowly away on the breeze. It was only a small gun, but quite capable of sending out death dealing shells.

Boom—boom!

Another report, and another whining sound as the shell whistled on its way over the reef.

We were now quite close to the Wanderer, and the reports nearly deafened us. The fellows were all excited at once.

"They're shelling the sea-serpent!"

"Hurrah!"

"They're trying to kill it!"

"Good!"

"They'll get him, too!"

We shot alongside the yacht's accommodation ladder, and grabbed hold. A moment or two later we all went climbing up the stairs two at a time to the deck. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were on the bridge, staring out over the lagoon through binoculars. Round about the gun, which was mounted on the forward peak, there were two or three figures clad in blue overalls.

"Just a little lower!" sang out Dorrie. "By gad! The brute's got the wind up, I believe! He's creatin' somethin' like a whirlpool out there. Go on—let her fly!"

"Boom—boom!"

From the deck I could see the result of the firing. The other juniors all crowded round the rail, and stared across the reef. The sea-serpent was still there—whirling and twisting about with almost inconceivable speed. It was sending columns of water high into the air, and its tail was lashing about with terrific fury. And that last shell struck the water within a few feet of the creature's head.

I really thought it was killed. In that immediate vicinity the water boiled and foamed until it was churned up into a white mass. The spray hissed out in every direction, until it was impossible to see clearly what would happen. Then, out of the smother a greenish-brown mountain appeared.

The sea-serpent reared itself high into the air—twenty feet—thirty feet! It towered up in an amazing way. Then with a lightning-like movement of the body it twisted to seaward and settled down in the water again. And that vast monster absolutely streaked towards the horizon.

The speed of it was staggering. It was there—there was just a kind of flash of greeny-brown; and the thing had gone. Five or six hundred yards from the reef it submerged, diving straight down into the depths, and we saw no more of it. The sea became calm and placid once more.

But there, only within a short distance of the reef, the sea was still showing traces of white foam. The acrid smell from the gun drifted over the yacht's deck, and the affair was over.

"Well, I reckon we ought to be jolly pleased with ourselves!" I said. "We're lucky to escape alive!"

"I should think we are!" said Pitt. "I never thought we should do it!"

Nelson Lee and Dorrie came down from the bridge, and regarded us all with a somewhat grim countenances.

"Oh, so you've had the nerve to come on board have you?" said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "You reckless young rascals! Goin' out an' fightin' sea-serpents! It's a wonder you weren't all eaten up!"

"Oh, dry up, Dorrie!" I said. "We didn't know the thing was there until it was too late. I think we did jolly well to get back!"

Dorrie nodded.

"So you did!" he agreed. "Thunderin' well, in fact. But you've got to thank the sea-serpent for that. He could have knocked you sideways at any moment if he'd liked. By the Lord Harry! Did you ever see anythin' to compare with it?"

"A most remarkable experience," said Nelson Lee. "I'm very thankful, boys, that you have returned safely. At one time I gave up hope. I expected to see you killed with one blow of that creature's body."

"We were all expecting it, sir," said Pitt.

"But what were you doing outside the reef?" asked Lee. "And how on earth did you manage to get through the channel?"

We quickly explained how we had discovered a clear passage through that part of the lagoon which had hitherto been impassable. Both Nelson Lee and Dorrie were greatly pleased to learn of this phenomenon.

"That is certainly very excellent!" declared Nelson Lee. "It will make it unnecessary for us to take the laborious overland route. And I am not so sure that it will be safe to go up into the hills. If these volcanic disturbances are of frequent occurrence, it will be a perilous business."

"So it will!" said Dorrie. "In fact, it's quite likely that that canyon is blocked up already. Somebody will have to go up there an' have a look—just to make sure. We can't leave a thing like that in doubt."

"But what do you think of that sea-serpent, sir?" asked De Valerie.

"I think it is the most extraordinary monster that human eyes have ever gazed upon," replied Nelson Lee. "But I'm afraid the general public will scoff if we tell the story when we return to civilisation. By the vast majority of people the sea-serpent is regarded as a myth—as an old sailor's yarn."

"And yet plenty of ships have reported seeing great sea monsters, sir!" said Pitt. "In my opinion, there's tons of evidence that such things really exist. We don't want any more proof, anyhow!"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Seein' is believin'!" he remarked. "But the stay-at-home folks won't be able to see—so they won't believe. We managed to take a few snapshots from the deck, but I doubt if the sea-serpent will appear in them at all! You see, we were such a long way away here—"

"Grey's got some close snapshots, sir!" said Tommy Watson.

"What!"

Jack Grey held out his camera, and explained how he had taken several exposures during our race with the sea-serpent. Both

Nelson Lee and Dorrie were greatly interested. The gov'nor knew that Jack was a good amateur photographer, and there was not much doubt that the negative would be excellent.

"This is far better than I had hoped for, boys," said Nelson Lee. "But even if the photographs are reproduced in print, the general public of the whole world will assume that the snapshots are faked. It is quite remarkable how some folks refuse to believe the truth when it is put before their eyes."

We continued talking about the sea-serpent for some little time. It was, in fact, destined to be a chief topic of conversation for the rest of the day. One doesn't often see a sea-serpent, and it would have been very strange if we had dismissed the subject after a brief chat.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore went down into the cabin after a while, and Nelson Lee had taken charge of Jack Grey's camera—promising to develop the films during the day.

I went down below with the pair, leaving the rest of the fellows on deck.

"I don't suppose it would be fair to scold you, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "But it was very risky for you to take the canoe through the reef. You must consider yourselves very lucky that you got through the surf in safety."

"Here, steady on, sir!" I protested. "There was no danger in the surf. We handled the canoe all right. But how were we to know that we should meet a nightmare outside?"

"No, that was certainly unexpected," agreed Nelson Lee. "Well, Nipper, I suppose you will be returning to the Fort in your canoe?"

"Yes; I'm going with the fellows now." "I shall possibly pay you a visit later on in the day," said the gov'nor. "We will get out the yacht's motor-boat, and see if she can take this trip through the lagoon channel."

"Why not come at once, sir?" "For one reason, the boat is not ready, and just at present I am rather keen upon going for a walk along the beach," said Nelson Lee. "You will come with me, Dorrie?"

"Of course, old man," said his lordship. "I'm lookin' after you these days. You're a patient remember, an' you're just recuperating. You mustn't miss your daily constitutional for worlds!"

Since being convalescent, it was Nelson Lee's custom to go for a walk along the sands, and as he was gaining strength daily, his walks grew longer and longer. Just because of a few volcanic disturbances, and a stray sea-serpent, the gov'nor wasn't going to alter his habits.

"Well, I'll be getting along," I said. "So-long, gov'nor!"

But while I had been below with Nelson Lee and Dorrie, a little diversion had been

taking place on deck. It is hardly necessary to add that Handforth was the cause of this.

"Come on! We'll buzz back to the Fort!" said Handy. "There's nothing to be done here, so we might as well be the first to tell the other chaps all about our scrap with the giddy sea-serpent!"

"Scrap!" repeated Pitt. "Rather!" said Handforth. "How we battled with the frightful thing, and kept it at bay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You—you funny ass!" exclaimed Handforth sourly. "Just because you didn't do anything, you're jealous! Just because I drove the sea-serpent off—"

"What!" gasped the others. "Just because I drove the sea-serpent off—"

"You—you drove it off?" repeated Jack Grey faintly. "My only hat! What—what made you get that idea, Handy?"

"Isn't it the truth?" roared Handforth, glaring.

"Well, yes, I suppose it is!" said Pitt thoughtfully. "Upon considering the matter, I've come to the conclusion that we've got to thank Handforth for our lives! He saved us, you chaps."

"Glad you admit it!" said Handforth.

"Why, you—you dotty chump!" said Grey, glaring at Reggie. "How do you make out that Handy saved us?"

"His face," said Pitt gravely.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"My face?" said Handforth.

"Of course," said Reggie calmly. "If it hadn't been for your face, we should have been dead by now. Don't you remember? You gave the sea-serpent one look, straight in the eye—and the giddy thing was so scared that it didn't dare to attack us! One look at your face is enough to scare anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors howled with mirth, and several sailors who were listening grinned delightedly. And at last Handforth realised that his leg was being pulled. He went purple, and clenched his fists.

"You—you insulting rotter!" he bellowed.

"Eh?" said Pitt. "My dear chap, you saved our lives——"

"Are you trying to make out that my face is so awful that it frightened the sea-serpent?" bawled Handforth.

"Haven't you ever looked at yourself in the mirror?" asked Reggie. "As a matter of fact, I suppose you haven't. Some things are too risky!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Biff! Handforth lunged out at Pitt, but the latter dodged nimbly, and Handforth, plunging forward, collided violently with Church, and they both crashed to the deck. Church gave a frightful howl. It wasn't the fall which hurt him so much, but he certainly

objected to having Handforth's foot in his mouth.

"Yow—yaroooh!" hooted Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They sorted themselves out, and Handforth suddenly became very calm. He curled his lips as he glared round.

"What's the good?" he asked bitterly.

"You're all jealous of me! Just because I'm the War Minister—the most important job on the island—you turn green with envy! Do you think I care? Rats to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're going!" went on Handforth. "Understand? We're going back to the Fort, and I'm going to tell the others how I scared off the sea-serpent—"

"Good old Handy!" chuckled Pitt. "Modest, as usual!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Half a minute!" said De Valerie. "What about Nipper—"

"Blow Nipper!" snapped Handforth. "He's staying here, with Mr. Lee, I expect. We don't want to worry about him. Come on!"

"Yes, we might as well be going," said Jack Grey. "Nipper said something about developing those films of mine. I expect he'll be a long time. He'll come back in the launch, and act as guide."

So they all went in the canoe, Pitt taking the forward paddle. And when I came on deck I was just in time to see the canoe disappearing round the rugged headland. I stared across the lagoon rather indignantly.

"Well, of all the nerve!" I exclaimed. "They've gone without me!"

"The young gents thought as you was comin' on later, sir, with Mr. Lee," put in one of the sailors.

"Oh, so that was the idea!" I said. "All right! It doesn't matter."

I went below again, and found the gov'nor and Dorrie about to come up. I told them that the other fellows had left me stranded, and announced my intention of accompanying the pair on their walk.

"Just as you like, Nipper," said Nelson Lee, smiling.

I was rather glad, in fact, to go with the gov'nor. What with all the work at the Fort, and the excitements, and all the rest of it, I had not been able to have much time with Nelson Lee. He was improving so rapidly that he was getting more and more like his old self. His cheeks were filling, his colour was coming back, and his hurts were healing wonderfully.

And we started off along the beach, going for a ramble among the caves and beautiful rock formations. This part of the coast was a revelation to me. It was absolutely different from the other side of the island.

On our side—we always called Shark Bay "our side"—the coast was fairly even, with gentle bays, and silvery sands with the palm trees growing down to the water's edge.

Here it was quite different.

There were the sands, but hardly any palm trees. Cliffs and caves were everywhere, with jutting masses of rock, and the sea splashing against them with plenty of spray. Owing to the breaks in the reef, the waves came in fairly large, and the coast was more like an English one. But the air was hot, the water like blue crystal, and palms were always within sight in the distance. It was impossible to mistake the spot for anything but a tropic isle.

And we found dozens of interesting things on the way. Crabs, and rock pools, which were filled with wondrous, tiny fishes of gorgeous colouring. These pools had been left by the receding tide, and every one was a miniature aquarium of marvels.

We had walked some distance, and the Wanderer had been left far behind, and out of sight, when we came upon a bigger pool than usual. The rocks surrounded it, and it was deep, and alive with fish.

I was so fascinated that I remained behind, allowing Dorrie and Nelson Lee to stroll on, chatting. I knew that I could catch them up very soon. I wanted to watch the brilliantly coloured fish.

Just round the rocks Nelson Lee and Dorrie came to a rocky inlet, which led directly up to a big, gaping hole in the cliff—a cave entrance, which was bigger than all the others.

The lagoon here was rather narrower than usual, and there was a wide opening in the reef exactly opposite. By the strength of the waves it seemed that the channel was deep.

"There's enough water here to allow a fairly big ship to come through," remarked Nelson Lee. "And this cave looks interesting, Dorrie. We will stroll up and examine it at closer quarters."

"Anythin' you like old man," said Dorrie. "I'm not particular."

They walked between the rocks, but had not proceeded far before Nelson Lee came to a sudden halt. He was staring at a big slab of smooth rock, near to the cave entrance.

Glancing up, I could just see them in the distance, and I decided to stay a little longer by the pool. The two figures in white drill and pith helmets looked very picturesque against the background of rocks, with the white sand, and the little clumps of seaweed.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Nelson Lee softly.

"Eh?" said Dorrie, tossing a cigarette-end away.

"Look here, Dorrie!" exclaimed Lee. "Rather remarkable—eh?"

Lord Dorrmore fastened his attention upon the smooth rock face, and he suddenly started. Then he went closer, and bent down.

"Chinese!" he said amazedly.

"Undoubtedly!" agreed Lee.

"But—but, man alive, what does it mean?"

"I am quite as puzzled as you are," said the detective. "Chinese characters scratched upon the face of a rock on a deserted tropic isle! Exceedingly curious, Dorrie—and suggestive."

They gazed searchingly at the rock face.

There were many roughly scratched Chinese characters there. Crude, but unmistakable. Both Lee and Dorrimore knew something of Chinese, and they could not possibly be in error here.

"They appear to be names," said Nelson Lee. "I can only imagine that a Chinese ship came in here at some time or other—possibly for water—and the men amused themselves by carving their names upon the rock. They seem to be fairly recent, too."

"Well, that's rather hopeful," said Dorrie. "Perhaps the ship will come again—an' then we shall be able to get back to civilisation. By the way, where are we? What part of the world is this?"

"We know fairly well where we are," replied Lee. "But there is no means of telling the exact position. I should suggest that we are within the region of the East Indian Archipelago. That would account for this Chinese vessel coming in. I believe this sea to be the Indian Ocean—although it may be the Pacific. That storm drove us so far out of our course that we lost all reckoning."

I came up just then, wondering why they were looking at the rock so steadily. I soon discovered the truth.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I said, as I saw the Chinese characters.

"Yes, they're rather queer, young man!" exclaimed Dorrie. "Do they mean anythin', or not? Is there some mysterious hocuspocus behind these signs? It's up to you to tell us."

"I'd rather trust to the guv'nor," I replied. "It's no good asking me what the signs mean, Dorrie. But it's pretty clear that some Chinks have been here. I wonder if there's anything in the cave?"

"I was thinking in the same way," said Lee. "We will look."

But when we got to the cave we found that it was deep and dark, penetrating right back into the heart of the cliff. After



"Now, thou black scum!" Umlosi bel-
lowed. "If thou want-
est a fight, I am ready!
Wau! thou art naught
but dogs! I treat thee
in this manner!"

the first few yards we found ourselves in complete darkness.

"This won't do," said Nelson Lee, pausing. "In this blackness we might stumble down a treacherous hole. We must examine this cave another time—when we are provided with adequate lights."

"Haven't you got any matches, sir?"

"I have," said the guv'nor. "But exploring an unknown cave by the light of matches is not exactly a sensible procedure, Nipper. We require better means of illumination."

However, he did strike two or three matches—and almost at once we found marks on the sandy floor.

"By gad!" said Dorrie. "Footprints!"

There was no doubt about it. There were footprints in the sand—indistinctly marked, but footprints, all the same. But they were not the marks of bare feet, neither were they caused by European boots.

"Chinese again," said Nelson Lee. "And that, after all, is not at all strange. But why did the Chinamen come into this cave? We shall certainly have to explore it thoroughly at the first opportunity."

We came out into the blazing sunlight, and paused for some time, having another look at marks on the rock. Then, vaguely wondering what these signs portended, we retraced our steps to the yacht. Nelson Lee announced his intention of exploring the cave on the morrow. And I announced my intention of being there with him.

Did these Chinese characters have any significance?

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK SPY.



NELSON LEE advised me not to say anything to the other fellows about the Chinese signs. It would only cause a lot of talk, and give rise to hope that might never materialise. It would be better to say nothing.

"Of course," I agreed. "I'll keep mum, sir. And to-morrow we'll explore. I'd like to have a look into that cave this afternoon."

"We must make careful preparations, Nipper," said Nelson Lee.

When we got to the yacht the first thing I did was to ring up the Fort. I was soon chatting to Reggie Pitt, who assured me that he and the others had got back without incident. Handforth was now telling the story of the sea-serpent to those unfortunate fellows who had not seen it.

"Right-ho," I said. "I'm coming straight away, Reggie."

"How?" he asked.

"Over the ridge," I replied. "I'm not going to wait for the motor-launch. It might be hours before it's ready. Besides, I want to see if that earthquake did any damage to the canyon. The way might be blocked for all I know. It's best to make sure."

"All right—mind you don't get caught in another 'quake," said Pitt. "We don't want the job of digging you out of a few hundred tons of rock."

"I wouldn't like you to have a job of that sort," I replied. "It would be rough on you; but it wouldn't suit me at all. I don't think there'll be any more disturbances, old son. Well, so long. See you later."

I hung up the receiver, and went on deck. I found Umlosi there with a huge pack upon his broad black shoulders. He grinned amiably as I approached, and raised one huge paw.

"Thou hast come, my young master," he said. "It is well, for I await thy departure. I come with thee, O Manzie!"

"Oh, good!" I exclaimed heartily. "All the way?"

"Even as thou sayest," replied Umlosi. "I would prefer to live with thee and thy young companions. For the life is better suited to me, my young master. I like not the floating kraal, but would prefer the forest and the sea beach."

"That's all the thanks I get," remarked Dorrie. "After keeping the old ruffian in a state of luxury, all he can do is to run off, and live like a bally Hottentot! The floatin' kraal isn't good enough! Not that it's really floatin'. I wish it was!"

"Thou knowest my meaning, my father," rumbled Umlosi. "I leave thee with sorrow, but thou wilt be near, methinks. And

it is well that I should be with the young white masters. In case of need, my trusty spear will be of great value. And I have seen the red mists. I fear that blood will flow."

"Always thinkin' about blood!" said Dorrie. "I never knew such a chap for gore! Does this mean that we're goin' to have a battle with the cannibals, Coalbox? Are the blighters goin' to show up again?"

"Thy words are strange, N'kose, but I gather thy meaning," said Umlosi. "Even as thou sayest, the black scum will reappear. Ere long they will swarm upon the island in great numbers. And there will be much spilling of blood."

"As long as it isn't our blood it won't matter much," said Dorrie lightly. "Personally, I haven't got any to spare. And, as a matter of principle, I have rooted objections to spillin' such a valuable liquid."

"Thou are pleased to be of light mood, my father," smiled Umlosi. "But there will be dark days, as thou wilt surely discover. Come, Manzie. We will go on our journey across the island. There will be no dangers yet."

We were soon off, and Umlosi kept me amused on the way. He was a delightful companion at any time. The great Kutama chief was full of humour, and he had a wonderful respect for the gov'nor and Dorrie and me.

I was very pleased that he was coming to live with us on the other side of the island. We should feel more secure with this famous warrior by our side. Umlosi was a fighter of the finest order.

After mounting the hills near the coast, we at length came to the high cliff where the ledge high above led through the canyon. Here there was a roughly constructed rope ladder hanging down. We had been about to substitute the new ladder for this smaller one when the earthquake had happened.

"Do thou mount first, O nimble one!" said Umlosi, as we paused beneath the trees. "I will await below until thou givest the signal that thou hast reached the summit. Get thee on thy way, Manzie."

"Right-ho, old son," I replied. "I'll soon be up."

The rope ladder did not reach to the ground. We had made it in a hurry, and without taking any particular measurements. And it fell short, making it necessary to climb into a high tree and work my way upwards.

The whole aspect of the country here was rugged and wild.

Right across the island ran the high range of volcanic hills—many of them rising to the elevation of mountains, their summits being rocky and treacherous and jagged. And just here the scene was more rugged than at any other spot.

For the hills seemed to come to an abrupt end, and there was nothing but a blank, sheer precipice, reaching straight upwards for hundreds and hundreds of feet. At the

foot of this precipice the forest trees grew in profusion—right to the very base of the rocks.

To anybody who was unfamiliar with the ground it would seem impossible to climb the mountain. From this side of the island, indeed, one glance would be enough to convince anybody that no further progress could be made.

But we had discovered this path from the other side of the island. Half way up the great cliff, and quite unseen from down below there was a deep canyon, cutting diagonally across the mountain and the cliff, as though some giant with a huge knife had sliced a wedge completely out.

This canyon was narrow at the base, and not much broader at the summit. It was, therefore, like walking between two frowning cliffs to be within that strange gully. At the very end there was a smooth rock ledge. And this rock ledge overlooked the forest and the verdant valleys.

From this ledge hung the rope ladder which I have already referred to. One could see the ledge from below, from almost any clearing. But the canyon was not visible, owing to the peculiar shaping of the rock. And it seemed quite useless to climb to this ledge, since it was only half way up the cliff, and seemed to lead to nowhere, for the ledge itself petered out on either side after clinging to the cliff face for thirty or forty feet.

It was just possible that the recent earthquake had caused the canyon to collapse. It seemed so easy for the sides to totter and meet, thus obliterating all sign of the path which we had followed on two or three occasions.

But I did not anticipate this.

For when it came to cold reasoning, it was pretty obvious that earthquakes of a similar nature must have occurred at fairly frequent intervals. These volcanic islands were always suffering from such shocks. And the canyon would have collapsed long since if there was danger of any such thing.

And so I mounted the ladder. It was strong enough, it is true, but was so roughly constructed that climbing was rather difficult. And no more than one person could use it at the same time. The new ladder was ten times as strong, and a great deal larger.

I was quite cheerful as I neared the ledge. I had not the slightest idea or suspicion that I was, actually, very near to death! At the moment the possibility of danger did not occur to me.

But when I was about eight feet from the ledge I happened to glance upwards—directly upwards. And then I seemed to freeze on the ladder. My limbs became rigid, and I clung there, holding my breath.

For I saw something that fairly turned my blood cold.

A face was gazing down upon me, and an arm was outstretched reaching over space.

The face itself was the ugliest I had ever set eyes upon.

A man was lying full length on the ledge—a savage!

And he was watching me as I mounted, and his hands gripped round the haft of a villainous-looking knife. The keen blade hovered motionless in the air, directly over my head.

The situation was tense.

I clung there staring upwards—fascinated. This was the last thing in the world I had been looking for, and it came to me as a terrible shock. The face which gazed upon me was horrible enough to send a shiver down the strongest spine. I don't mind admitting that I was scared stiff for a second.

The savage was a horrible-looking brute, with his hair fashioned into the most extraordinary style, and fixed with some kind of gummy substance. His face was painted and tattooed, and "decorated" by means of deep indentations, which had been cut, probably, when he was quite a youngster. Among this brute's tribe, these ghastly-looking scars were probably a mark of beauty.

His nose was flat and broad, and contained an immense nose-ring of brass. And there were other rings fitted into the lobes of his ears, which were so long that they hung down for three or four inches. His eyes were set close together, and were as black as ink.

As I stared up into them I shivered. I couldn't help it. Those eyes were like the eyes of a snake. They appeared to have no pupils, and were too horrible for words.

A thousand thoughts chased themselves through my mind; but I was compelled to come back to one conclusion.

This brute was one of the cannibals we had recently fought near Shark Bay. We had not driven all the blacks off, as we had believed. This man had either been left behind by accident, or had been deliberately hiding, for the purpose of spying upon our movements.

I was convinced that the fellow was a spy. He had been left here with a set purpose. And this thought brought the added one that the cannibals themselves were destined to return, probably in much greater numbers. The spy had been left to make observations, and to report upon the arrival of his tribe.

It's rather queer how a fellow can think so much when the situation is desperate, and when his life hangs by a thread, or, to be more exact, by a rope ladder.

For, instinctively, I knew that something very unpleasant was about to happen. In that second I gave up all hope of ever seeing my chums again. In fact, I came to the conclusion that this was the finish of all earthly things as far as I was concerned.

I expected that the knife would be flung downwards upon me with unerring aim—that it would either cleave me to the heart,

or smash my skull. I was absolutely at the savage's mercy. If I attempted to retreat down the ladder he could throw the knife at me. If I tried to mount, with the hopeless purpose of grappling with him, I should be stabbed before I got over the ledge.

And I had no weapon. I had never felt so horribly helpless in my life before. And there was Umlosi, below, calmly and serenely waiting for me to give the signal that I had stepped upon the ledge. He knew nothing of this dreadful situation. And probably the first knowledge would come to him by the crashing down of my lifeless body.

But I had my voice, and I wasn't going to die without making some little attempt to save myself. I knew that it was hopeless, I never dreamed for a moment that any good would result. But when a chap is on the point of dying, he clutches at a mere straw.

"Umlosi!" I roared, at the top of my voice. "Quick!"

"What is it thou sayest, my Manzie?" came Umlosi's voice.

"Stand back into a clearing, and look up!" I yelled. "There's a savage up here, and—"

I broke off, for the cannibal uttered a growling, animal-like snarl and raised his knife higher. I believed that my last second had come, and I instinctively closed my eyes, wondering what the momentary sensation would be as the blade buried itself within my flesh.

But no blow came, and I opened my eyes.

I did so because I had felt the rope ladder give a kind of shiver. For one second I thought that Umlosi was mounting, and this, as I knew, was a perfectly futile proceeding.

But as soon as my eyes were open I knew the truth.

The black, instead of killing me by means of his dagger, was determined to send me hurtling down to certain death upon the tree branches and the hard ground beneath. He was cutting the ladder through.

Already his knife had commenced to slash through one side of the ladder. And, the cunning brute, he was doing the job slowly!

There was a foul-looking grin on his face—a grin of demoniacal hatred. He was making my agony more intense.

Then, from below, there came a powerful, throaty roar.

Instinctively, I crouched against the cliff face.

And the savage paused in his diabolical work and stared down the cliff upon the tree-tops. At almost the same second I heard something hiss past my left ear, and caught a momentary glimpse of a kind of thin shadow.

And from above there came a grunting, gasping sound.

Absolute silence followed.

It all happened in a flash, and I hardly had time to draw a breath. I took a glance upwards, wondering why the savage had spared me so long. And I could not understand why he had uttered that grunt.

And as I looked up I felt nauseated, and I shook in every limb.

Over the ledge, and trickling down the rock face, came a steady flow of red blood.

And the savage himself was lying sprawled out, with his head hanging down. A long shaft stuck up at an acute angle, from the region of his neck. I nearly fell off the rope ladder with excitement.

For I recognised the long shaft as Umlosi's spear!

But it seemed incredible—impossible!

How could any man, however strong, hurl a spear upwards, absolutely against gravity, with such deadly accuracy as to strike this savage down in one swift blow? I marvelled at Umlosi's astounding skill.

For that, in short, was what he had done.

Stepping back into a clearing, where he could gaze upwards through the tree-tops, he had seen me clinging there. He had seen the cannibal just over me with his knife upraised.

And although there was practically no mark for him, and although I was dangerously near by, Umlosi had hurled his spear upwards with every ounce of his strength, and with every shred of his astonishing skill.

As true as a die the spear had hurtled upwards through the air. It had struck the savage squarely in the centre of the neck, killing him instantly. In a flash, the man had died, his jugular vein severed.

It was the most wonderful thing I had ever known.

And I clung there, shaking and trembling, the reaction being almost as bad as the original scare. As nearly as possible I fell off the ladder of my own accord. But, pulling myself together, I mounted.

Two seconds later I had scrambled over the savage's prostrate body, and was safe on the ledge. I had seen that the rope ladder was still quite intact enough to bear the weight of Umlosi.

A voice came up to me from below.

"Art thou safe, my young master?" it shouted anxiously.

"Yes—yes!" I yelled, my voice cracking. "Oh, Umlosi! You're a marvel! Come up here. Come up here!"

Umlosi needed no second bidding. He commenced climbing the ladder, and was soon by my side. He hardly gave one glance at the dead savage. His attention was all for me, and he was full of concern.

"Wau! This dog has received what he deserved!" he exclaimed. "Art thou feeling all right, Manzie?"

"Yes, thanks—you're a wonder, Umlosi!" I exclaimed. "How in the world did you manage to throw that spear so accurately? I would never have believed it possible—never!"

"A simple matter, my young master!"

exclaimed Umlosi, with a wave of the hand. "Is not my eye true? Is not my arm strong? Wau! Was it not a mere nothing to spear a cur of this nature?"

"A mere nothing!" I echoed. It was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen, Umlosi. I thought I was dead and done for. But thanks to you, old friend, I'm alive and well!"

"Nay, thy words are false, O Manzie," said Umlosi. "Thy life was saved by thine own action. But for that call thou gavest me I would not have known thy peril. It is well. Such scum as this deserves no better fate."

Umlosi turned his attention to the savage. And with a disgusted grunt he yanked his spear free and gazed with joy upon the bloodstained blade.

"Wau! Was I not right?" he asked softly. "Did I not tell the great N.Kose that blood would surely flow? When I see the red mists, my young master, I know that there is to be the shedding of blood! And this is but a beginning—this is but a mere commencement of the battle!"

"Well, let's hope we don't get any more just now," I said. "I'm not feeling very fit at the moment."

"Small wonder, my young master," said Umlosi. "For thou didst have a severe shock. Thy courage is great, as well I know. For hast thou not faced death with a brave heart and a cheerful smile? To be caught in such a trap as this, was indeed enough to turn the blood of a brave man like unto water. Thou art indeed a courageous youth, and thou wilt become a mighty warrior!"

"Let's hope so!" I said, feeling better. "Well, what do you think of it, Umlosi? What on earth was this chap doing here, on the ledge?"

"Methinks the dog must have been spying!"

"That's my idea, too."

"Thy mind and my mind thinkest the same," declared Umlosi. "Surely, then, the truth must be as we say? There can be no question that this jackal was left behind when the cannibals attacked the Fort. So! They would spy out what we do. It means, Manzie, that the black trash are coming back—ay, and in vast numbers! There are some exciting times ahead!"

"We don't want much more excitement than this, anyhow," I declared. "I wonder what we shall be doing next? Let's hope we don't have any further adventures of this nature. I don't mind a straight fight, but I strongly object to this kind of thing."

"Thou art indeed wise in thy remarks. O Manzie," said Umlosi. "It is well that we should proceed on our way. As for this worthless worm, this is suitable for him!"

He gave the black a heave, and sent him hurtling over the edge of the cliff. The body crashed down through the tree-tops,

and was lost to view. The only sign of him now was that trail of blood on the ledge.

"Do you think there'll be any more?" I asked. "I mean, is it likely that there will be any other spies on the island?"

"I think not," said Umlosi. "But, in any case, we must be well on our guard. For it would be foolish to ignore such a warning as this."

And we walked through the canyon—which was quite intact—and eventually emerged into the brilliant sunlight on the other side of the ridge. Then we made our way down the hillsides towards Shark Bay.

I had an uneasy feeling that trouble was brewing.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CANNIBAL HORDE!



EXCITEMENT ran high in camp when I arrived with Umlosi.

All the fellows were exceedingly glad that the Kutana chief had come to live with us. The excitement,

however was occasioned by our story of the encounter with the black spy.

"All the better!" declared Handforth. "It shows that the cannibals are coming again! Good! I'm jolly well longing to have a good scrap with the rotters! And this time we'll wipe 'em up!"

"If we couldn't do it last time, it's pretty certain we sha'n't be able to do it this time!" exclaimed Pitt. "We beat them off, I know, but we didn't wipe them up. And now they'll come in much greater force."

"Do you think I care?" said Handforth loftily. "I'm the War Minister—and I'm confident. I'm making big plans for the defence of the Fort. We've got machine-guns, don't forget, and we shall be as safe as houses."

The knowledge that the machine-guns were there certainly gave us a feeling of security and confidence. But, as I pointed out, if the force of the enemy was sufficiently large, no amount of machine-guns would succeed in driving them off. And machine-guns could be avoided, too.

It was afternoon now, and a sharp lookout was being kept on both sides of the island for any sign of the cannibal war canoes. So far there had not been the slightest indication.

Handforth was collecting cocoanuts, and now that the brief excitement of my arrival had died down, he proceeded with his task. He was certainly rather incensed because he hadn't been on the ledge to see the affair. As War Minister, he declared, it was only right that he should take part in any fight. I apologised humbly for not fetching Handforth to the scene in time.

Handy didn't see the joke, and growled

as he climbed the next cocoanut palm. He had forsaken his original method of swarming up the tree. It was too laborious, and rather expensive to his skin.

So he had adopted the usual method. It was quite simple. He got a loop of rope, and passed this round the tree and himself. And it was a comparatively easy matter to work himself upwards, his feet braced against the tree, and his weight supported by the rope.

With a little practice, it was possible to reach the top of the highest palm with surprising speed. Handforth now went to the top in a series of clumsy jerks. He had already fallen from the top of one tree—owing to the rope breaking. Strictly speaking, he ought to have been dead, but nothing seemed to hurt the famous leader of Study D.

He reached the top of this particular palm, and squatting there, he reached out for the various nuts which were within his grasp. These he proceeded to hurl to the ground, absolutely regardless of anybody who happened to be underneath. When Handforth was chasing cocoanuts, it was a perilous time for anybody in the immediate vicinity.

Quite suddenly there was a chattering and jabbering within a few inches of Handforth's head. He stared upwards warmly, with a glare.

"Come out of it, you little fatheads!" he roared.

He knew that the chattering had been caused by monkeys. There were generally a good few of these little creatures to be found in the cocoanut palms. They were very interesting to watch, with their laughable antics. They were quite harmless, and, indeed, were becoming almost tame—owing to our constant presence. Some of the fellows were doing their best to make pets of some of these monkeys.

Handy, however, received a bit of a shock.

The jabbering increased, and was followed by a shrill squeal. The next second something descended upon Handforth's head with a thud. He gave a gasp, and sat there, looking bewildered.

Church and McClure were below, with a number of other juniors. And, looking up, they suddenly burst into roars of merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth.

He had every reason to be somewhat startled. Without warning, a tiny monkey had fallen out of the big leaves, and it settled fairly and squarely upon the top of Handforth's head!

And there it sat, clutching desperately at Handy's curly locks, and holding on for dear life. The expression of blank dismay on Handforth's face nearly sent the fellows into a state of hysterics.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy—always in trouble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Punch his nose, Handy!" grinned Pitt. "Slosh him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth would probably have done some fearful things to the monkey, but the monkey thought it far wiser to leave beforehand. It suddenly gave a leap, clutched at a branch, and swung itself into safety. Handforth glared after it in the most wrathful fashion.

"Come back!" he howled. "I'm going to slaughter you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the monkey had no desire to be slaughtered, and it vanished into the next palm tree. Handforth, of course, was quite unhurt, and his dignity had been ruffled. As he said afterwards, it was a bit thick for a War Minister to have a monkey squatting on his head, clutching his hair!

After that things were quiet for a bit, and when evening came I was rather disappointed. For Nelson Lee had telephoned to say that he couldn't come over in the launch, as he had planned. The engine, from long disuse, was slightly out of gear, and required some attention. So the trip was delayed until the morrow.

The gov'nor was greatly relieved to hear that I had come to no harm over my adventure with the savage. And he warned us to keep a strict watch on our side of the island, as it was quite likely that the cannibals would return during the night.

The Defence Department, therefore, got busy.

Sentries were posted at various parts of the island. One, for example, patrolled from the centre of Shark Bay. That is, from the centre of the beach—to Coral Point. Another sentry had to patrol from Coral Point as far as the watercourse opposite Palm Island. Still another sentry patrolled the other half of the bay as far as Sandy Head.

In this way the whole section of coast in our vicinity was under constant observation. These sentries would be changed at intervals, and would remain on duty throughout the night. We were taking no chances.

The full moon was still with us, and so, soon after darkness had settled down the moon rose and converted the night into a first-class imitation of day. For the tropical moon is a glory of radiance.

It was wonderful on the beach in the moonlight. Many of the fellows enjoyed the night far better than they enjoyed the day, and there was no lack of volunteers for the sentry duty.

The hours passed, and it was getting rather late, when Tommy Watson came rushing towards the Fort at full tilt. He sounded the alarm, and in less than two minutes we were all out on the beach.

"Are they coming?" demanded Pitt quickly.

"No—not the cannibals!" gasped Watson. "There's a ship!"

"A ship!"

A dozen voices yelled the words.

"Yes—right out to sea!"

We raced to the highest point on the beach, and stared out into the moonlit ocean. And, sure enough, at a considerable distance there was a sailing ship! It appeared to be making straight for the island.

The excitement was intense. A telephone message came through that Nelson Lee and the others on the yacht had seen the sailing ship too. The gov'nor declared that it had the lines of a Chinese junk! This piece of news had no special significance to most of the fellows. But I remembered those Chinese signs scratched on the rock. Wasn't it curious that a Chinese vessel

There had been no alarm—no sign of cannibals.

But we were not to be left long in peace.

For the morning had only half advanced when a telephone message came through that we must be on the alert. Canoes had been sighted—a great fleet of war canoes were coming up from the south. The time of tension was over. The cannibal horde was about to fling itself upon us.

Many of the fellows looked a bit pale, but they were not at all scared. If anything, they were rather relieved, for it is always better to get a thing over and done with. We should know very shortly what our fate was to be.

Active preparations were made without



"Chinese characters scratched upon the face of a rock on a deserted tropic isle!" remarked Lee. "Exceedingly curious, Dorrie—and suggestive."

should come into sight within twelve hours of that discovery?

Yung Ching, the little Chinese, was very excited about it, and he jabbered animatedly. He wondered if these Chinamen would rescue us. It did not seem to strike him that they might be enemies.

But then, just as the excitement was at its height, it died down.

For the Chinese junk sheered off—and left the island completely. It was watched through binoculars until hull down. Finally, the vessel vanished. And we had nothing to do but to talk about it.

What did it mean? Why had this ship come so close—and why had she vanished, after giving us every indication that she meant to anchor off the island?

It was quite mysterious—and that proved to be the sole excitement of the night. The morning dawned, brilliant and cloudless.

delay. The machine-guns were placed within the Fort, and the armed guard got ready with rifles, and plenty of ammunition. The juniors themselves saw to their bows and arrows.

And when the preparations were at their height there came the dull booming of gunfire. We rushed out, wondering what it could mean.

And then we discovered that the yacht's guns were getting to work. It was Nelson Lee's plan to scare these blacks off, if possible, to drive them away before they could effect a landing. And so a hail of shells was sent hurtling into the middle of the fleet of canoes.

The effect was instantaneous. The canoes broke up into scattered remnants. Many of the light craft were blown out of the water. But, once scattered, they were comparatively safe.

The blacks, instead of retreating, merely put on full speed and came shooting round towards our side of the island, where they were safely out of range of the Wanderer's guns.

The fact that the blacks were not frightened off seemed to indicate that they were accustomed to gunfire. It was not new to them. And this made the situation all the more desperate.

Very shortly we caught sight of the enemy fleet ourselves.

It came sweeping round the outer reef opposite Sandy Head—a vast, scattered collection of war-canoes. Each craft contained between twenty and thirty men. And there were scores and scores of these canoes. The whole fighting force of the enemy ran into many hundreds. This cannibal army was at least four times as large as the one which had come previously.

And we were rather dismayed.

We had hardly expected that such a great number would attack us. But we did not despair. We were quite confident that we should be able to drive these savages away from our domain.

There was no hesitation about the beginning of the battle.

In a long line, and with extraordinary

generalship, the canoes entered the lagoon through the nearest opening in the reef. They came in orderly fashion—canoe after canoe, one following the other at exactly the same distance, and all the blacks paddling with machine-like precision.

The sight, indeed, was absolutely impressive, and could not fail to have a certain effect. It made us realise that these cannibals were not merely a disorderly mob. They were well-trained warriors. And it stood to reason that they would fight with absolutely grim determination.

That earlier battle had fired these blacks into a state of fury, which they revelled in. For years, possibly, they had been longing for a real battle. For these cannibal islanders of the South Seas enter into battle with sheer joy. They're always fighting—whenever they get the opportunity. I don't mean in such places as Samoa or Hawaii, but in the more remote islands of the Solomons and the New Hebrides, where the natives are as savage now as they were hundreds of years ago.

And these, apparently, were of a similar class.

The canoes came sweeping round the lagoon. And now the battle was on the point of commencing.

(Continued on next page.)

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE OF SHARK BAY.



Machine Gun Corps.

MR. SOMERFIELD, the second officer of the *Wanderer*, was in charge of the sailors who formed the armed guard—or, as Handforth insisted, the Lagoon Island

Machine Gun Corps. Mr. Somerfield saw how things were going, and without delay he ordered the machine-guns out on the beach. And as the canoes came within range, the deadly weapons commenced their rolling, shattering back. Hails of bullets were sent sweeping out over the placid lagoon.

And the men in the leading canoes were mown down like hay before the scythe. Four canoes were rendered unmanageable in less than a minute.

But other canoes came sweeping on, crashing into those which contained the dead and dying. And so great was the force of the attack that even the machine guns were unable to stem the tide.

While Mr. Somerfield and his men were concentrating on one part of the beach, canoe-load after canoe-load of blacks poured on to the sands higher up. And now the blacks themselves opened fire! They were provided with rifles! This was a bit of a shock to us, for we had not expected such a state of affairs.

True, only a small percentage of the cannibals had rifles, and these fellows were so unskilled in their use, that the bullets, for the most part, flew harmlessly overhead.

However, our only course was to retreat. It would have been madness to remain in the open under such circumstances as these.

But Umlosi was not to be denied.

During the last battle he had had no opportunity of using his mighty spear. He was not going to be swindled on this occasion! And, even while Mr. Somerfield and his men were retreating and the juniors were feverishly at work within the stockade, Umlosi gave a mighty roar and charged.

"Now, thou black scum!" he bellowed. "If thou wantest a fight, I am ready! Wau! Thou art naught but dogs! I treat thee in this manner!"

Like a tornado he rushed in amongst the savages. His great spear was aloft, and he towered high above the painted decorated cannibals. They were in their full war-paint and impedimenta, and really looked imposing.

But Umlosi cared nothing. He simply went into the battle caring not whether he lived or died. His only thought was for the fight itself.

Soon he was surrounded. At least six of the enemy used their spears against Umlosi. But he didn't care. Yelling, laughing, he struck down man after man. With extra-

ordinary skill—reminiscent of a Douglas Fairbanks film, he plied his spear in all directions at once.

It seemed certain that he must go down, but his life was charmed. His spear-head was dripping with blood, and all round him men lay dead and dying. And so far Umlosi himself was not even scratched.

On he fought, striking here and striking there. And at last the blacks retreated, just when they could have surrounded and hacked him to pieces. They fell back, leaving Umlosi standing there surrounded by his victims.

"Wau!" he thundered. "Hast thou had enough?"

Mr. Somerfield, watching, took a deep breath.

"Well, I never expected him to last as long as this!" he exclaimed. "But I think he's safe now. These savages are frightfully superstitious, and they probably look upon Umlosi as bewitched. He can't be killed! And any man who attempts to strike him will die, that's how they look at it. They'll shun him in future as a cat shuns water!"

And Mr. Somerfield was right. Not a shot was fired at Umlosi, not a spear was hurled in his direction. And he came swaggering back to the stockade, proudly eyeing his stained spear.

But as soon as he got within the gates they were slammed, and once again the machine-guns commenced their deadly rattle. It had been impossible to use them while Umlosi had been out in the open.

"Wau! That, indeed, was a fight!" rumbled the Kutana Chief.

"Yes; that's all very well, Umlosi, but we're not all like you!" I said. "You reckless ass! I thought you were going to be killed every minute!"

"Thinkest thou these dogs could harm me?" said Umlosi contemptuously. "Pah! They possess not the courage of rabbits!"

He was only sorry that he couldn't have another bout. But it was impossible for him to venture out now. The whole space round the stockade was being swept with constant fire from the machine-guns and the rifles. And into the lagoon the cannibal-canoes kept pouring in a never ending stream. Shark Bay was black with canoes.

It was with grave faces that we regarded the scene.

For it seemed only obvious that we could not last. One determined rush by these blacks and we should be wiped out. Once they overcame the machine-gun fire they would be upon us, and, at close quarters we were helpless against such numbers. Two determined attacks were made, one closely following the other. But scores of the blacks were mown down, the machine-guns pouring in a deadly, devastating fire. And even the savage excitement of these blacks could not stand against it.

They wavered, broke, and fled. This happened twice, and after the second defeat the

cannibals collected in a vast throng near Sandy Head and jabbered together and created general pandemonium.

And then a strange thing happened.

The savages began to melt away! At first we were puzzled, for they did not return to their canoes. They went inland—through the palm groves. By tens and twenties they vanished, until, at length, only a comparatively small number remained on the beach. And these, it was fairly evident, were left to guard the canoes.

What had happened to the others?

"I'll bet they're going across the island to attack the yacht!" said Armstrong.

"Never!" I said. "If they wanted to attack the yacht they'd go by canoe. There's something behind this, my sons."

An hour passed—two hours.

But there was no sign of any revival of the battle. Mr. Somerfield believed that the invaders were attempting to trick us. He expected them to make a sudden rush from the rear, from the heart of the palm grove.

And at last I grew so impatient that I decided to do a bit of scouting. Reggie Pitt agreed to come with me. And so, like two shadows, we crept through the under-

growth knowing full well that we might soon meet with death.

But we didn't.

We made a discovery which somewhat staggered us.

Arriving on the brim of Geyser Valley we gazed down upon a scene of feverish activity. In short, the savages had taken complete possession of the valley, and were making a great village!

It simply meant that the cannibals had not merely come to attack us. They were invaders in every sense of the word, and had planted themselves upon Lagoon Island. It was a big shock to us.

And, owing to these blacks we were cut off from the yacht, and the yacht was cut off from us!

The situation was far more serious than we believed.

No longer were we the owners of Lagoon Island. These savage blacks had come to dispute our ownership. And we could see that it was to be a grim and desperate fight for the mastery.

The excitement had hardly begun! The times which were passed had been strenuous, but those which lay ahead promised to be a hundred times more so!

THE END.

Editorial Announcement.

My Dear Readers,

From time to time I have had many requests for complete stories of Nelson Lee and Nipper in their original rôles as detective and assistant at Gray's Inn Road. It is a difficult matter to please everyone, but I can, at least, endeavour to satisfy as many of you as possible. I think I shall be doing this by including every week, beginning with this number, a short, complete detective story of Nelson Lee and Nipper. In order to make this possible, you will notice a few slight changes in the paper, changes for the better, I am sure you will agree. I shall be glad if you will write to me and let me know what you think about it.

A state of war now exists between the cannibals and the marooned Holiday Party. Handforth, of course, is delighted, for, being War Minister, he now thinks he is the most important person on the island. There will be another great battle with the blacks on a much bigger scale than before, and this will be described in next week's story, "THE BLACK INVADERS!"

You must not miss next week's short, complete detective yarn, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper. It will be entitled, "ON THE NINTH GREEN!" Also, do not forget that Two more Magnificent Photos of Famous Footballers are being GIVEN AWAY!

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 33,

EDITED BY NIPPER.

July 8, 1922.

Editorial Office,
The Fort,
Lagoon Island.

My Dear Readers,—Owing to the cannibal invasion, my usual contributors, with the exception of Pitt, have been much too excited to do anything for the Mag. Whatever happens, Pitt means to write up his diary. Extraordinary fellow, Pitt! Nothing seems to daunt him or dry up his sense of humour.

Life on a South Sea island, up to now, is anything but monotonous, and from what I can see of it, we shall never die of boredom if we live here for the rest of our lives. What with being preyed upon by savage cannibals and living in close proximity to an active volcano, I don't think, in any case, we shall remain here very long.

Your sincere friend,
NIPPER. (The Editor.)

EXTRACTS FROM MY DIARY. By REGINALD PITT.

YESTERDAY we noticed thousands of fat green caterpillars in the thick vegetation near Geyser Valley. They were simply swarming, and Fatty Little mentioned that he'd heard that the blacks in Africa and other tropical parts eat the things. We threatened to stuff a dozen down his throat if he referred to the subject again.

And to-day Fatty gave us a special dish. They were rissoles, greenish in colour, and all fried to a turn and smoking hot. The fellows voted them to be delicious and they were. Handy asked Fatty what they were made of, but Fatty wouldn't say. Then somebody remembered the caterpillars!

Great Scott! It was amazing. About fifteen chaps rushed away, and were fearfully sick. Then, when they were better, they came back and grabbed Fatty and wanted to throw him to the sharks. Handforth said that a chap who made rissoles out of squashed caterpillars ought to be eaten alive. Then it came out that the giddy rissoles were made from fish and bread-fruit and an edible kind of nettle which Phipps had advised Fatty to use!

They were, in fact, wholesome and perfectly good in every way. It just shows what the imagination can do! The fellows thought they'd eaten caterpillars and were sick!

Archie is on the sick list just now. The fathead had no better sense than to go to sleep under a huge cocoanut palm. We've all been warned against this. A breeze came along, and a cocoanut whizzed down and hit Archie fairly and squarely in the face. His nose is about twice its usual size now, and he's got an awful black eye. He says he feels absolutely foul. Anyhow, he looks most frightfully pipped.

According to all the laws of nature, Handforth ought to be dead. He climbed a palm to-day, using a piece of rope to support himself. Of course, the rope slipped just when he had got to the top. It would, Handy generally manages to do things like this. He came down like a stone, and we thought he'd broken every bone in his body. But he jumped up and proceeded to punch McClure's nose, because he thought that McClure had grinned!

I sha'n't laugh any more when I hear yarns about the sea serpent. I've seen one, and I know that they exist. It seems like a nightmare now, when I think of it. I've seen a few awful things in my life, but the sea serpent beats everything. We think it must have been driven up from the sea-bed by some volcanic action far below the surface. Let's hope we don't get any more earthquakes! One sea serpent is enough in a lifetime!

We had some rain early this morning. About five millions tons to the acre, I imagine. Great goodness! I've never seen such rain. It simply came down in masses, beating the grass and undergrowth flat. We were nearly drenched, even inside the Fort. The rain came through the roof like a sieve—and we thought it was weather-proof! But we didn't bargain for rain like this! We're going to make the roof stronger and thicker to-day. The water-motor for the electric light was smashed to bits. Another job for some of us. The little rivers are like raging torrents now. When it rains out here, it rains with a capital "P." It feels like being under a waterfall. If we ever happen to get hail, it'll be worse than a barrage from six-inch guns!

Brief Notes about Our "FOOTBALLERS"

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

T. McINALLY.

J. TORRANCE.

OF the men who have done so much to raise the Celtic Park Club to their proud position in Scottish football to-day, surely not one has done more than Thomas McNally, their brilliant centre forward and champion goalscorer.

McNally was born in Glasgow, and as a youth of that city he learned his football, playing with various junior organisations. He joined the Celtic Park Club a little over three seasons ago, was given an opportunity to show what he could do when he had been with the club a very short time, and straightway jumped into favour, appearing regularly in every match, except when injured or indisposed, ever since.

To-day he is among the foremost centres in Scotland, and were it not for the continued brilliance of Andrew Wilson, it is almost certain that he would have found his way into an international side ere this. But the best of McNally's career still lays before him, and it might well happen yet that he will go down to football posterity as a famous Scottish international.

In the January of this year, when it was announced that Thomas desired to leave the Celtic, there was quite a rush of managers anxious to obtain his signature, but McNally, though sorely tempted, remained loyal to his old club, and seems likely to stay there for some years to come.

A good-natured, unassuming fellow off the field, a deadly menace to opposition when he is on it, Thomas to-day is one of the most popular players on the Celts' books.

Height, 5 ft. 8 ins.; weight, 11 st. 2lb.

PERHAPS the most idolised player in the Cottagers' eleven is James Torrance who, for the past twelve years has done his manful bit in various positions for the side, and who has built up for himself a reputation as a clean sportsman and a gentleman.

Torrance is a Scotsman by birth, having been born at Coatbridge in 1890. He commenced his footballing career as a lad in knickers with a team of juniors called Coatbridge Rob Roy, whence, when he had grown to learn some of the finer points of the game he migrated to the Ashfield Club of Glasgow, for which he played as a centre-forward. It was there, in 1910, that Mr. Phil Kelso, manager of Fulham, discovered him, and recognising in him talent far above the ordinary, took immediate steps to sign him on. Thus it was that Torrance came South to play for the one and only league club of his career.

Originally Torrance was played in his old position of centre-forward, but he was not allowed long to remain in this berth, for in his second league match with the team we find him playing at inside-left. Subsequently, he has ornamented every position on the side—even that of goalkeeper—and he has shown himself remarkably at home in each. His greatest success, however, has come to him as centre half-back, and it is in that position now that he plays regularly for his side. Torrance was made captain of the cottagers in 1914, and until the beginning of last season, when Andy Ducat was transferred from Aston Villa, had held the honour continuously. His favourite sport, apart from football, is golf.

Height, 5 ft. 9½ ins.; weight, 12st.

THE IVORY HAND.

A Thrilling Complete Detective Story, featuring the great detective, Nelson Lee, and his clever assistant, Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

THE M.C.C. had just beaten one of the minor counties by ten wickets, and from the gateway of Lord's the handful of spectators who had patronised the concluding stage of the match were emerging into the St. John's Wood Road. Among them were Nelson Lee and myself.

"Not four o'clock yet," Lee was remarking. "We seem to be unlucky in our 'days off,' young 'un! I was hoping we should see a full afternoon's play."

"So was I, guv'nor. Who'd have thought Leamshire would crumple up like that? Think of it! Lunch-time score, 146 for two—and then to be all out for 170! What a collapse!"

"The glorious uncertainty of cricket, my boy! Well, we must make up for it by putting in a whole day at the next Middlesex home match—if we can manage it."

"Glad you said 'if'!" I rejoined. "I expect, as per usual, we shall be up to our necks in work when the Middlesex match is on. Going to walk home, guv'nor?"

"Yes, we may as well. I told Mrs. Jones we shouldn't be home before six, so there's no hurry."

They crossed the road, intending to make their way home to Gray's Inn Road, via a network of by-streets leading into the Marylebone Road and Tottenham Court Road.

"Ex-cuse me, sare, but could you tell me where is—where is—"

The speaker—a short, thick-set, dusky-skinned gentleman—broke off, fumbled in his pocket, drew out a slip of paper, and held it towards Lee.

On the slip was pencilled an address—"No. 19, Trehearne Place, St. John's Wood."

His knowledge of London being "extensive and peculiar," Lee had no difficulty in directing the man how to get to Trehearne Place.

"Thank you, sare! I am vair much

obliged!" And, with a bow and a smile, which disclosed to view a set of, very white teeth, the dusky-skinned gentleman moved away.

"An Indian gent—eh, guv'nor?" I observed.

"No, I don't think so," answered Nelson Lee. "Rather too flat-featured and sturdy for a Hindoo. More of the Burmese type, I fancy."

"Well, Hindoo or Burman, he beats a Frenchie for politeness! Notice how he bowed? And, my word, what a smile! Showed all his teeth like a picture-postcard gal!"

"Yes," said Lee; "I noticed his smile. It was perfectly mechanical—simply an affair of the facial muscles. In the fellow's eyes there was no smile; they remained steely and absolutely expressionless. Nipper, old chap, your man of the East isn't to be read at a glance. He doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve. He's deep, my boy, deep—deeper than the European can fathom!"

"That chap we saw just now didn't strike me as being a particularly deep 'un, guv'nor. Seemed to me quite simple, and mild as milk."

"Did he? Well, he didn't strike me that way at all. Of course, in those well-cut, light tweed English clothes he looked very gentlemanly and highly-civilised. But clothes and polished manners are very often merely a veneer on these educated Easterns. Scratch the brown, black, or yellow skin, and underneath you'll find the barbarian."

"Ain't you just a trifle prejudiced against men of colour, sir?" I asked mischievously.

"Not at all, my boy! I'm only telling you the result of experience. 'East is East, and West is West,' you know. However, it's much too warm to discuss that old topic to-day. Let's drop the subject, and talk cricket."

So chatting over the prospects of the leading counties for the championship, Nelson Lee and I slowly made our way homewards through the sunny streets.

Little did we imagine what was to be the upshot of that chance encounter with the brown-skinned gentleman in St. John's Wood Road!

CHAPTER II.

MY prediction that we would be up to our necks in work when the next Middlesex home match came round, proved correct. For on the very day following our visit to Lord's, an intricate case was put into Nelson Lee's hands for investigation, and for the next fortnight there was not an hour's leisure for the famous detective. From morn till night throughout that fortnight he and I were kept hard at it.

At length, however, the case having been satisfactorily completed, we once more found ourselves able to linger luxuriously over breakfast, and to do more than glance at the headings in the newspapers.

"Hallo!" suddenly I exclaimed. "I see they've adjourned the inquest on that St. John's Wood affair. Wonder what for? There didn't seem any doubt about it being a case of suicide."

Lee looked up from his own newspaper.

"What affair are you referring to?" he asked.

"Why, didn't you read about it, guv'nor? Happened three or four days ago. Gentleman named Gregory Deane found dead in bed, with revolver clasped in his hand."

"I missed it, then," answered Lee. "I'm afraid I've had to miss a lot of things in the papers lately. Happened in St. John's Wood, you say?"

"Yes—Trehearne Place."

"Just look up the first report, will you? I'd like to see it."

I went to a file of daily papers, and quickly found the required item in the issue of three days previously.

"Here it is," I said. "Shall I read it out?"

Lee nodded, and I forthwith read aloud the following paragraph:

"TRAGIC END OF AN EX-GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL."

"A tragic discovery was made yesterday morning by a woman-servant employed at No. 19, Trehearne Place, St. John's Wood, the residence of Mr. Gregory Deane, a retired Government official. As Mr. Deane did not come downstairs at his usual time, the servant knocked at his bedroom door. Receiving no answer, she became alarmed, and finally entered the room. There a terrible sight met her gaze. Mr. Deane was lying dead in his bed. There was a bullet-hole in his forehead, and in his right hand was clutched a revolver. The body was quite cold, and the tragedy had evidently been enacted many hours before the discovery was made. The deceased gentleman was about 50 years of age. For

26 years he held various official posts in the northern provinces of India and in Burma. On retiring through ill-health barely two years ago, he came to England with his family, and took up his residence at St. John's Wood. Six months ago, his wife died, and since then his sister has kept house for him. Early last week the sister went away to Bournemouth for a fortnight's holiday, taking with her Mr. Deane's three children, the eldest of whom is fifteen. With the exception of the servant, therefore, the deceased was alone in the house.

The police have the matter in hand, and an inquest will be held in due course. From the fact, however, that there were no signs of a struggle in the bedroom, and that a revolver was found in Mr. Deane's hand, little doubt is entertained that the unfortunate gentleman took his own life."

Lee nodded as I finished reading.

"It certainly looks like suicide," he commented; "and yet—and yet it doesn't do to be too sure."

"But he was in bed, guv'nor, and he was holding the revolver."

"Yes, yes, I know; and in all probability it was suicide. Still, I repeat, it doesn't do to be too sure."

Lee rose from his chair, and, with his hands clasped behind his back, began to pace up and down the room, as if deep in thought. Suddenly he spoke again.

"Nipper," he said, "d'you remember that afternoon at Lord's?"

"Rather!" I replied. "I sha'n't forget in a hurry how those eight Leamshire wickets went down in about as many overs!"

"And d'you remember that little incident after the match—when we crossed the St. John's Wood Road?"

For a moment I felt puzzled. But only for a moment. Then my eyes lit up, and I nodded eagerly.

"You mean that dusky chap in the light tweed suit, who asked you the way somewhere?"

"That's what I mean, my boy. He asked me the way to—"

"To Trehearne Place!" I broke in.

"Exactly! And I'm almost positive the number written on that bit of paper he showed me was—nineteen!"

"In that case he was going to call on Gregory Deane!"

"It's pretty obvious, isn't it? I told you then I thought the chap was a Burman. Well, according to the report you've just read out, Mr. Gregory Deane was for many years a Government official in Burma. The question is: Were the two on good terms or bad?"

"Oh, come, guv'nor! You don't mean to insinuate that the Burman—if he is a Burman—is in any way mixed up with the death of Gregory Deane?"

"I'm not insinuating anything yet," replied Lee. "I'm simply weighing possibilities."

I smothered a groan.

"Oh, lor', guv'nor, you aren't thinking of taking this case up, are you?" I asked. "Don't you think you've earned a rest?"

"This is a matter of public duty, Nipper, and I'm bound to do anything I can to assist the coroner and his jury in arriving at the truth. The inquest has been adjourned; so that, after all, despite appearances, there would appear to be some element of doubt about the case. I'll just have my after-breakfast pipe, and then we'll take a stroll to St. John's Wood."

It was not quite eleven o'clock when Nelson Lee and I arrived at Trehearne Place, a short, old-world-looking thoroughfare of quaintly designed stucco-fronted houses.

Halting at the door of No. 19, Lee gave the bell a gentle tug. Almost instantly the door was opened, not by a servant, but by a plump, pleasant-faced gentleman of middle-age. He greeted Lee with a courteous "Good-morning, sir! You wish to see me?"

"Well," replied Lee, "I really called with the object of speaking to Miss Laura Deane. Is she at home? I am sorry to intrude at such a time, but it is just possible I can be of some slight assistance. My name is Lee—Nelson Lee."

The plump gentleman gave a start of surprise on hearing the name; then impulsively he shook the detective's hand, and almost dragged him into the house.

"Come in—come in!" he exclaimed. "And you also, young sir"—this last to me. "Oh, Mr. Lee, pray Heaven you can help us in this awful business! Miss Laura is at home, poor lady! She returned from Bournemouth on Tuesday, and has been confined to her room ever since. The shock of her brother's death has been a terrible one for her!"

"In that case," said Lee, "perhaps I had better not worry her just now. May I ask if you are a relative of the deceased gentleman?"

"Not a relative, Mr. Lee; but I was poor Deane's closest friend, and, as his sole executor, it will be my sad duty to settle his affairs."

"Then I need not intrude on Miss Deane's grief at all," said Lee. "You will do equally well, sir—better, in fact."

The plump gentleman—whose name, it appeared, was Peter Mortimer—led the way to a cosy little room leading out of the hall.

Having placed chairs for the guv'nor and myself, he remarked, with almost startling abruptness:

"It wasn't suicide, Mr. Lee! My poor friend was murdered—foully murdered!"

"What are your reasons for thinking so?"

"I've only one reason, but it is quite sufficient for me!"

"And that is?"

"My dead friend's absolute horror and loathing of the crime of self-destruction! That horror and loathing he expressed to me on several occasions. Gregory Deane was a brave man, and he had the brave man's contempt for cowardice. Suicide he regarded as a cowardly method of ending one's troubles."

"I gather that he gave up his post in Burma through ill-health. Did his health improve after taking up his residence in England?"

"Very little, I am sorry to say. Periodically he had bouts of excruciating pain, but he always bore his sufferings like the brave fellow he was. Had his tortures been increased tenfold, I am absolutely sure Gregory Deane would not have ended them by his own hand. And even had he not held the strong ideas he did about suicide, there was another thing which would have acted as an effective deterrent."

"Indeed! What was that?"

"Why, the fact that his suicide would mean poverty and privation for those he loved best in all the world—his sister and his three young children."

"Insurance—eh?" asked Lee.

Peter Mortimer nodded.

"A five thousand pounds policy!" he said sadly. "If the jury bring in a verdict of 'Suicide,' it means that the policy will be forfeited. The insurance company will decline to pay out the money; and Miss Laura Deane and her brother's orphans will be almost penniless! You see, poor Gregory lost nearly all his savings through the failure of a company he had invested in, and, of course, his pension ceased with his death."

"Perhaps the jury will return an open verdict, and in that case the insurance policy will be paid. The fact that the inquest is adjourned certainly affords some grounds for hope."

"Not very strong grounds, I fear," replied Peter Mortimer, with a sigh. "It wasn't the coroner's, or the jury's wish to adjourn. It was I myself who asked for an adjournment—and I assure you I had to plead very hard to obtain it."

"I see," said Lee sympathetically. "You thought you might be able to find fresh evidence?"

"Yes—although where it was to come from I hadn't the faintest idea. It's a terrible affair, Mr. Lee—terrible! It was bad enough that the poor lady upstairs should lose her brother, and that those three children should be orphaned; but that they should now be threatened with destitution makes matters infinitely worse!"

"It does, indeed! Well, Mr. Mortimer, there's only one way of securing payment of that five thousand pounds insurance policy. You have got to convince the coroner's jury that Gregory Deane did not take his own life. If I can help you to do that I shall be only too delighted."

"It is good of you, Mr. Lee," said Peter Mortimer, a trifle huskily. "I was almost despairing. You have given me new hope."

"Don't build too much on me," warned the detective. "It is more than likely that I shall be of no use whatever."

"But you have formed some theory or other, Mr. Lee. I feel sure of it; otherwise you would not have come here like this."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I have formed no theory," he answered gravely. "And the incident which led me to make this call may have not the slightest bearing whatever on the case. The newspaper reports of this affair have been very meagre. They merely state that Mr. Gregory Deane was a retired Government official. Do you happen to know exactly what position Mr. Deane held in Burma?"

"I do, Mr. Lee. Nearly the whole of the period he was in that country he acted as deputy-commissioner in one of the Shan states. I need not tell you that it was a post of great responsibility. His duties were partly political, partly military, and partly judicial."

"Was he popular with the natives, do you know?"

"Yes, I believe so. He ruled them with a firm hand, but was always just. Of course, during his long residence in the country it was inevitable that he should have at times to quell risings and disaffection among certain turbulent tribes. You ought to read his book, Mr. Lee. It gives a most vivid picture of an official's life."

"Oh! Mr. Deane wrote a book on the subject, did he?"

"Yes. It was published about nine months ago, under the title of 'My Fifteen Years in Burma.' I will lend you my presentation copy, if you would care to have it."

"Thank you, Mr. Mortimer! I may avail myself of your kind offer. And now for the question which was the principal object of my visit. Can you tell me whether, since his arrival in England, Mr. Deane was at any time called upon by a Burman or a Hindoo?"

"I only know of one such caller. He was a Burman, named Hirajhee, and he first called on poor Deane about a fortnight ago."

"Ah! Then it must have been the same man I saw." And Lee briefly related how, just after leaving Lord's, he had been accosted by the brown-skinned man.

"I've not the slightest doubt it was the same," agreed Mr. Mortimer. "I have never seen him myself, but Deane described

him to me as a short, rather thick-set man, of between thirty-five and forty."

"What was his business with Mr. Deane?"

"Oh, he said he had been in England for some time, studying law; had read Deane's book, and had been so much interested by it, that he felt he would like to meet its author and have a chat about Burma and the native problem. Deane took quite a liking to the man, and invited him to call here whenever he felt inclined."

"And did he call again?"

"Yes; on one or two occasions."

"When was the last occasion—do you know?"

"It was one afternoon, three days before Deane's death. I happened to drop in on the evening of the same day, and Deane then told me that Hirajhee had been in to say good-bye."

"Was Hirajhee going away from London then?"

"Yes; he was leaving England—was sailing for Rangoon on the following day."

"You don't, of course, know whether he did sail?"

"No; but I should think he must have; otherwise he would have come here, on reading of the murder."

"You firmly believe it was murder?"

"I do, Mr. Lee!"

"But where's the motive?"

"Ah, if I only knew!" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer fervently.

"The motive wasn't robbery, at all events?"

"No, it certainly wasn't, seeing that nothing was missing—nothing, that is, except a curio of very little value. Even that may have been mislaid somewhere, and I may come across it on making a further search."

"A curio—eh? What sort of curio?"

"A piece of ivory, crudely carved to resemble a clenched hand. Deane used it as a paper-weight."

"Any history connected with the thing?"

"Yes, rather an interesting history. It was the right hand of a Burmese idol, and it came from a pagoda, which Deane, in his capacity of deputy-commissioner, found it necessary to destroy. The whole affair is described at length in Deane's book."

Lee sprang to his feet.

"Can I see that book?" he asked eagerly. "Is there a copy in the house?"

Mr. Mortimer nodded, hurried into an adjoining room, and returned with a copy of "My Fifteen Years in Burma." He quickly found the chapter in which the destruction of the pagoda was described, and handed the open volume to Lee.

The gist of the story therein related was this:

In the early years of Gregory Deane's deputy-commissionership, he had discovered that a certain sect of Shans were practising abominable deeds to propitiate the god they worshipped. They even went so far as to offer up human sacrifices.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2s

Gregory Deane repeatedly warned their priests that the barbarous rites must cease. His warnings being ignored, he had resorted to extreme measures.

With a troop of native police, he had one day ridden up to the Shans' pagoda, and, after clearing it of the fanatical worshippers, had blown the temple up with dynamite.

Strangely enough, the hideous idol on the altar had sustained little damage. Only its right hand had been blown off by the explosion; the rest of the idol was intact.

Noticing the ivory hand lying among the debris, Gregory Deane had picked it up and kept it as a memento of the affair.

There was a strange light in Nelson Lee's eyes as he reached the end of the chapter, and closed the book.

"Mr. Mortimer," he said quietly, "I want you to try to remember when you last saw the ivory hand. Was it before or after Hirajhee's good-bye visit?"

"Oh, after! The thing was on Deane's writing-table when I was with him that evening, and it was still there on Sunday evening, which was the last time I saw my poor friend alive. On Monday night, or in the early hours of Tuesday morning, he was murdered."

"Do you know where Hirajhee lived when he was in London?"

"I'm sorry to say I don't, Mr. Lee. At a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, I believe, but in what particular street I can't tell you."

"Well, I must find out somehow," said Lee, taking up his hat, and preparing to depart. If Hirajhee sailed for Burma three days before Mr. Deane's death, he can't, of course, have been implicated. If, however, Hirajhee was in London on Monday night, or Tuesday morning, it will be worth while finding out whether the ivory hand is in his possession, and how it got there!"

CHAPTER III.

A FEW minutes later, the gov'nor and I were on our way to the City in a taxicab.

The first thing to ascertain was whether Hirajhee had sailed for Rangoon on the preceding Saturday. According to Mr. Mortimer, the Burman had called upon Gregory Deane on the Friday, and had said he was leaving England on the following day. If he had not sailed—if, in fact, it had not really been his intention to do so, the circumstance would be highly significant.

"I may be doing him an injustice," remarked Lee; "but, somehow, the chap impressed me most unfavourably that afternoon near Lord's. He was smooth and polite enough, but to me there seemed something snake-like about him."

"Yes," I replied; "I remember you didn't much like his looks."

Arrived in Leadenhall Street, we alighted from the cab and entered the offices of a large shipbroking firm, one of the partners in which was an old friend of Lee's. With this gentleman's assistance the gov'nor soon ascertained that no passenger named Hirajhee, nor anybody answering to his description, was aboard the ss. Mogul—the only Rangoon-bound vessel that had sailed on the Saturday.

"What's the next move, gov'nor?" I inquired, as Lee, having parted from his shipbroker friend at the corner of Bishopsgate Street, hailed another taxi.

"I must try the various inns of court," was the reply. "If Hirajhee really did come to England for the purpose of studying law, he'll be on the register of one or other of the inns, and maybe they can supply his London address."

Lee first made inquiries at the Temple. The officials there, however, had no record of Hirajhee. At Lincoln's Inn the gov'nor again drew a blank; but at Gray's Inn he was more successful.

A Burman, named Hirajhee, had been a student of that inn for three terms, but had recently resigned without having passed his final examination. His private address appeared in the register as "No. 73, Garnett Street, Bloomsbury."

Within ten minutes of receiving this information, the gov'nor and I were at 73, Garnett Street. It proved to be a boarding-house, with a very cosmopolitan clientele.

In answer to Lee's inquiry, the proprietress of the establishment informed him that one of her boarders was a Burmese gentleman, named Hirajhee. He would, however, not be with her very much longer, for he was returning to Burma in a few days' time.

"Is he in now?" Lee asked.

"No, sir. He went out about two hours ago, but said he would be back for tea. Shall I give him any message when—Why, good gracious me, here comes Mr. Hirajhee himself!"

The gov'nor half-turned his head from the doorway, and glanced along the street.

There, sure enough, walking quickly towards the house, was the unmistakable figure of the brown-skinned man, who had asked the way to Trehearne Place a fortnight before. He was clad in the same light-grey suit as before, and his small feet were encased in very high-heeled patent-leather boots.

Reaching the door of No. 73, he raised his hat politely to the landlady, and favoured her with a smile which disclosed his dazzling white teeth. The gov'nor and I he ignored entirely. It was quite evident he had no recollection of having seen us before.

"One moment, please!" said Lee, as the Burman was about to pass through the doorway into the house. "I have called here on purpose to see you."

Hirajhee swung round. His dusky face was perfectly impassive as he looked at Lee.

"You have the advantage of me," he said. "I do not know you, sare."

"Probably not," answered the gov'nor quietly; "and yet we have met before, and spoken to each other."

"I do not recall the occasion, sare."

"I will recall it to you presently, Mr. Hirajhee. But the matter which I and my young friend have come about is not one to be discussed on the doorstep. Cannot we converse somewhere in private?"

"Certainly, sare, if you desire it!" answered the Burman. "Please come upstairs to my room."

He led the way to an apartment on the second floor. It was a comfortably furnished bed-sitting-room, and in one corner was a pile of corded and labelled luggage.

"Ah, you are going away, I see, Mr. Hirajhee," remarked Lee, with a wave of the hand towards the luggage.

"Yes, sare," replied the Burman, with a teeth-displaying smile. "I am leaving England in a few days. Everything is packed in readiness. I wait only for the ship which is to carry me to my native land."

"H'm! So everything is packed, eh? What a pity! I particularly wished to see a certain very interesting relic which is in your possession."

"I do not understand you, sare. What relic is it of which you speak?"

"It is a hand, Mr. Hirajhee—an ivory hand!"

A curious sharp cry escaped the Burman's lips; while into his hitherto expressionless eyes leapt a look of fear.

That cry and that look were sufficient for Lee. His ruse had succeeded! By taking Hirajhee completely by surprise, he had caused him to betray his guilt.

"You stole the ivory hand!" went on Lee, absolutely sure of his ground now. "And not only did you steal it, but you murdered its rightful owner."

"That is untrue!" gasped Hirajhee. "I know nothing of it! Who—who are you that says such things?"

"Never mind who I am. It is sufficient that I know you for the treacherous miscreant you are! I told you we had met before and spoken to one another. It happened one afternoon, about a fortnight ago. You stopped me, and asked me to direct you to Trehearne Place. I did so, and we parted. You went on to Trehearne Place—to Number seventeen—and called on Mr. Gregory Deane. He received you courteously, and invited you to call again. You did so—twice."

"On the last occasion you pretended you were sailing for Burma on the following day. But you did not sail. You remained in London, and late on the Monday night, knowing Mr. Deane was quite alone, except for a deaf servant, you broke into his house, shot him through the brain, as he lay in bed, and placed the revolver in his hand, to make it appear that he had taken his

own life. Having done that, you left the house, taking with you the ivory hand. And now you will pay the penalty for your dastardly crime by—"

"Look out, gov'nor! He's going to shoot!"

The warning cry came from me only just in time. Hirajhee, who had suddenly drawn a revolver from his pocket, was in the very act of levelling it at the gov'nor, when he struck up the Burman's arm with such force that the weapon went hurtling to the other end of the room.

The next moment Hirajhee was lying flat on his back, and the moment after that his wrists were encircled by a pair of steel bracelets.

The Burman looked up at his captor with eyes which literally blazed with hate.

"I curse you!" he snarled. "I curse all of your race! Yes, it was I who shot the dog who defiled and destroyed the pagoda in which my kinsmen had worshipped for countless years! Darsumi, the high priest, had promised great wealth and power to whosoever should slay the Sahib Deane and restore the sacred one's lost right hand. I slew the dog in the manner you have described, and but for you I would have restored the ivory hand to Darsumi! I curse you ten thousand times!"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Do so, by all means," he rejoined, "if it affords you any satisfaction." Then, turning to me, he said: "Go out and fetch a constable, young 'un. The sooner this fellow is under lock and key the better."

It only remains to be added that Hirajhee cheated the gallows, after all, by swallowing some pellets of poison, which, unknown to his gaolers, he had concealed about his person.

At the adjourned inquest on Gregory Deane, a verdict of "wilful murder" was returned against the Burman. As a result of that verdict the insurance company, of course, paid out the £5,000 due on the unfortunate gentleman's policy.

The ivory hand was found packed away at the bottom of one of Hirajhee's trunks, and as neither Miss Laura Deane, nor Mr. Peter Mortimer, had any desire to retain a curio with such tragic associations, it passed into the possession of the gov'nor.

THE END.

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(Now read on.)

CHAPTER VIII.

The Explosion.

TOM was confident now that it was nothing visionary at all, but of solid, earthy substance, and, turning his head, he called the others on.

"The hearse has broken down," he cried.

"Look there!" cried George Hammerton, pointing ahead.

Tom looked in that direction, and saw two men on horseback galloping furiously in the direction the coach had taken.

Tom pulled up, and it was well he did so, as he afterwards discovered.

For, a moment later, a terrific explosion ahead took place.

It seemed as if the earth were rent in twain, and they were all thrown heavily to the ground.

The shock was very considerable, and many contusions were received.

Tom lay half-stunned upon the ground for a minute; then slowly he got up and carefully felt his limbs to see if any bones were broken.

His companions were occupied in the same way, not without stifled moans and expressions of dismay.

"What was it?"

That was the general question, but none could answer it.

Tom raised his eyes and looked towards the clump of trees.

The clump had disappeared!

That is, only here and there was a jagged stump to be seen, and, scattered like ashes

from a fire of paper, the trunks of the trees—split into scores of pieces—lay around. Some here—some there, and two ugly pieces had fallen near where the boys were standing.

Is it a wonder that none of them had the nerve to go on?

Not even Tom could remain near the spot without a tremor, for they all had been standing on the brink of death.

Had they gone on, instead of pulling up, not one would have now been left alive.

"Let us get back," they all said.

With bated breath they talked of what they had seen, and, without meeting anyone, returned to the baronet's house.

The startling story was quickly told by Tom.

That the hearse was a spectral thing nobody now believed.

"Whatever it was," said Sir Claude Freshly, "it has been blown to pieces to hide or rather scatter some secret. It is hardly likely a vestige of it will be found."

"The explosive power must have been dynamite," said Mr. Wrasper; "but we can make sure of that by going to the spot. Gunpowder takes an upward direction in the disposal of its power—dynamite has a downward one."

Sir Claude, after a consultation with the police, ordered his carriage out to go to the spot. Mr. Wrasper was to accompany him, and the boys were told to go into the hall, have some supper, and then return to the school.

After supper Tom and the others started off, and arrived at the school just after ten o'clock.

Perks and Wooden Jerry were awaiting them in a state of intense excitement.

They had heard from passing villagers all sorts of stories about the explosion, and were burning to get at the facts.

"It shook the house, gentlemen," said Wooden Jerry, "and the old chimney of the work-shed is down. Jane and Peggy have been in hysterics ever since."

"What's that?" asked a sharp voice behind him.

It was Jane, who was making preparations to pinch his ear when he bawled out:

"Perks said so, anyways, but I didn't believe it."

Jane looked at Perks in a way that sent a dart to his love-lorn heart, but said nothing.

"Where's Mr. Chopps?" asked Tom.

"He's been in his room all the evening," replied Perks; "playing music to drive his headache away."

"Not even the explosion stopped him," said Wooden Jerry.

"I'll run up and tell him all about it," said Tom.

And bounding upstairs, he reached the tutor's door.

The music had ceased.

After listening for a moment Tom knocked.

"Who's there?" asked Mr. Chopps from within.

"Tartar, sir."

"Come in! The door is not fastened."

Tom turned the handle, and, opening the door, went in.

Mr. Chopps was seated in his armchair. He looked pale, and really seemed to be ill.

"I thought you would like to hear about the explosion," said Tom.

"What explosion?" asked Mr. Chopps.

"I heard a noise like the breaking-down of a cart, but really my head has been so bad that I could hardly take notice of anything."

"Perhaps I had better not trouble you with it," suggested Tom.

"Oh, do! Sit down; and excuse me if I listen with my eyes closed. I have been wondering what the noise meant."

So Tom told the story, and Mr. Achilles Chopps listened to him with closed, or half-closed, eyes.

He spoke no word until Tom had finished. Then he said:

"It is really very remarkable! What does everybody make of it?"

"Nothing," replied Tom. "It's a mystery."

"It certainly is odd," said Mr. Chopps, yawning; "but, perhaps, it is, after all, only some practical joke."

"I think," said Tom, "that is was something more than that. We might have been blown into fragments."

"Well," smiled Mr. Chopps, "some people would consider even that a joke! Thank you very much, Tartar, for telling me all about it. I think I will go to bed now. My head still aches rather badly. Good-night, Tartar!"

He shook hands with Tom, and thanked him again for telling him "all about it."

Then Tom departed, feeling not a little puzzled.

Mr. Achilles Chopps was becoming a bit of an enigma to him.

Mr. Wrasper came in as Tom descended to the hall.

"There is no doubt about the nature of the explosive that was employed," he said. "A great hole has been made in the road. Dynamite caused that. The whole affair is most mysterious."

They discussed the occurrence for a few minutes, and then Tom went up to his dormitory, whither the rest of the boys had already preceded him.

Very soon, thoroughly tired out after the events of the day, Tom was sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER IX.

Something on Perks's Mind.

NEXT morning Mr. Chopps had lost his headache, and was as cheerful as ever. He greatly interested the boys with a little lecture concerning explosives.

"The first great dynamite explosion in England," he concluded, "was not unlike last night's occurrence, although, of course, it was on a larger scale."

"It happened on a quiet country road, many years ago. Several carts laden with dynamite were being driven along the road, when suddenly an explosion took place, and drivers, horses, and vehicles were blown to atoms so small as to render identification of any particular man, beast, or cart, impossible."

"That will show the terrific power of the explosive," added Mr. Chopps. "What an agent for the concealment of a crime! Far better blow up the evidences of crime with dynamite than bury them under the sea!"

After dinner that day Tom and Sam Smith sauntered into the village in the hope of encountering Hautleboy Snacks and calling him to account for having purloined the letters left in the biscuit-tin by Lottie Fenn, Dolly Siffkins, and Winnie Brown.

Those letters to their three youthful admirers had not, fortunately, contained matter of much importance; but all the same, Snacks would have to be punished for his impudent trick.

No sign of any of the Bouncer Academy boys was, however, to be seen; nor had Snacks visited Widow Blake's shop since he had carried off the letters.

Sam Smith was for breaking into the Bouncer Academy grounds and demanding an interview with Hautleboy Snacks. Tom, however, counselled prudence and patience.

"We shall run against the young lout in good time," he said, "and then let him look out for himself!"

They returned to the school, and in the hall encountered Perks, looking very lugubrious.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Tom.

"Not much, sir," replied Perks; "a slight disappointment in life."

"Have you asked for a rise of wages, and been refused?" said Sam.

"My wages are fair," said Perks. "In the matter of money I am not so badly off, but for all that I am not happy."

"Why not?" asked Tom.

Perks sighed.

"I am troubled here," he said, placing his hand upon his heart; "and here," thumping his breast, "lies a secret as heavy as lead."

"Then let it out," said Tom.

"I cannot—I dare not," groaned Perks. Then, with a wild motion of his arm he cried: "Can I forget my oath?"

"You're quite melodramatic!" laughed Tom. "Thinking about going on the stage—eh, Perky?"

"Sir," replied Perks, with a stiffening of his back, "I am not playing a part. Do not laugh at me, please. I suffer."

"Can't you tell us your secret?" inquired Tom.

Perks shook his head.

"Not now, if ever," he said.

"All right," replied Tom calmly. "We're not curious. Only, if ever you feel that it will relieve you, come to me and out with it."

"Thank you, sir," said Perks, with a tragic sigh.

They left him with his woes, and walked into the hall where Jane was busy.

"Jane," said Tom, "I wonder you can walk about and look as happy as you do."

"Why shouldn't I do so, Master Tartar?" asked Jane.

"You are killing Perks by inches," said Tom.

"He may see this term out, but he will never look upon another," added Sam. "He will pine away and die!"

"I do wish the ridiculous boy would go away," said Jane. "If I knew where to find his mother I would write to her."

"What! Telling her that Perks is in love with you?"

"Oh!" said Jane; "that nonsense I should never mind for a moment. It's something more serious. The boy has really something on his mind!"

"Really!"

"Really and truly. He goes about in a state of mind that I've never seen but once before, and that was in my brother Dan, who got afraid of a ghost that was seen near our home."

"But is Perks afraid of ghosts?" asked Tom.

"He says he isn't," said Jane; "but afraid he is of something, and what it is I don't know any more than the man in the moon."

Jane walked away, and Tom and his friends, having no more time to discuss Perks, turned into the schoolroom.

CHAPTER X.

A Grim Discovery at the Quarry.

WHATEVER subject Mr. Chopps might be taking in class, was generally rendered more interesting than it might otherwise have been by his habit of straying from the main theme into some attractive by-path. That was what happened when, during a lesson on the mineral resources of Great Britain, the tin mines of Cornwall were mentioned.

"The county of Cornwall," said Mr. Chopps, "was once the abode of wreckers and smugglers. Whole villages lived by one or the other of these pursuits; and so cunning and daring were the people that they were virtually impregnable. But all that is now changed, and what changed it?"

"Better laws and a stronger government," replied George Hammerton.

"No," said Chopps, "neither law nor government had much to do with it. While the people held together they were assailed in vain, but when traitors grew up in their midst, the confederation of—well, say crime—crumbled to pieces—not, however, before many a desperate scene had been enacted, and many a traitor discovered and punished."

He became quite eloquent on the theme, and showed a very extensive knowledge on the subject—in fact, he fairly rambled out of the usual paths taken by a teacher, and related story after story of the old Cornish smugglers and wreckers.

Quite abruptly, however, he pulled himself up, and remarked, with some faint show of confusion:

"It is—er—well to know these things, in order to—er—better appreciate what blessings we enjoy nowadays in the absolute observance of the law by all classes."

"Are there no wreckers now, sir?" asked Willie Gray.

"No," replied Mr. Chopps—"not of the old class, at least."

"Or smugglers?" asked Tom Tartar.

"Smugglers," replied Mr. Chopps, laughing, "have come down to a very sorry level. The firemen and lower officers of ships are the chief offenders. They smuggle a pound or two of tobacco, and get found out now and then, so that the fines absorb the profits of the former ventures. Smuggling in these times is now of the most pettifogging description."

That was all he said on the subject that day, but it gave the boys food for reflection.

They enjoyed it very much, and that evening the talk was of pirates and wreckers, and smugglers, and other daring, desperate men who have furnished the wild romance of the sea.

Tom related the story of a smuggler of whom he had often heard his father speak, concerned the contraband exploits of a certain wealthy City magnate, who was supposed to have made his money honestly in

Mincing Lane, but who had really done so by smuggling on a mammoth scale.

"What did he smuggle?" asked Willie Gray.

"Lace," replied Tom. "There was a heavy duty on it at the time. He used to get it over in hollowed logs of wood and plaster images. It was the breaking of one of the latter that let the cat out of the bag. The Mincing Lane merchant was prosecuted, found guilty, and fined eighty thousand pounds. But that didn't worry him much, for it was estimated that he had made close on half a million out of smuggled stuff."

So they talked on till supper-time, having a most enjoyable chat.

Mr. Chopps sat at the head of the supper-table—quieter than usual. He was meditating, and only exchanged a few words with those who sat near him.

Perks waited at table, and when he had nothing to do he went and stood behind the tutor's chair, keeping his eyes upon him ready to obey his least word or action.

"Just as if he were under a spell," Sam Smith said.

Everybody in the room marked it, save the tutor, who certainly took no pains to bring Perks to this state of subjection—for he never once looked at him, and only gave him the most commonplace orders.

As soon as supper was over Mr. Chopps quietly left the room, and went upstairs.

"We shall have some music to-night," Sam said.

But they were doomed to be disappointed. There was no music, but as they were going up to bed they heard Mr. Chopps moving about the heavier portions of the furniture of the room as if rearranging it.

Long after the boys were in bed, and asleep, Mr. Achilles Chopps was busy with his room, only working quieter so as not to disturb anyone.

Whatever he was doing took him far into the night to accomplish, and when it was done he did not go to bed, but with his little apparatus made himself a cup of coffee.

With that by his side and a cigar between his lips he sat till dawn, thinking, thinking, and scarcely moving in his chair.

The morning came, and soon after daylight he heard the servants stirring.

Then he rose up, and, having washed, put on a cap, and left his room.

"I am going for a walk," he said to Jane, whom he encountered on the stairs. "What is the time?"

"Half-past six, sir," she replied.

"What time do they go to work at the quarry?"

"At seven o'clock, I think, sir."

"Oh, then I shall be just in time to see them begin!" he said. "I am interested in that sort of thing."

He left the house, passing through the quiet village, walking quickly.

On he went along the hard high-road to-

wards the quarry, to presently see Noddy Berrill and two other boys, all wild-eyed, running towards him.

"Oh, sir," cried Noddy, as he pulled up short in front of the tutor, "such a horrible thing!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Chopps.

"We've just seen a dead man lying in the quarry," gasped Noddy.

"A murdered man?"

"We don't know whether he has been murdered or not."

"Are you sure he is dead?" asked Mr. Chopps.

"He looked as if he was," replied Noddy.

"Perhaps it is some poor wretch who has committed suicide," said Mr. Chopps.

"Come back with me. Stay! One of you had better go for help. Call in on the police, and ask for some sort of stretcher to be brought along."

One of the boys started off on his errand, and the others, with Noddy and Mr. Chopps, made for the quarry.

Two or three men who lived on the other side of the hills, were hurrying in to work.

On hearing of the discovery, they accompanied Noddy and the tutor to the spot.

Close under the lee of the precipice, over which Posh Powner had leapt with Foster Moore, a man lay—dead.

There was no doubt of it.

A glance sufficed to acquaint Mr. Chopps with the fact that life had been extinct for many hours.

It was the body of a man of about thirty, swarthy, with small gold rings in his ears, and attired in seafaring clothes—a mixture of fisherman and sailor.

Placid as a sleeping child he lay, a good-looking fellow enough, and evidently a foreigner.

"Stand back, boys, a minute," said Mr. Chopps.

Noddy saw that the sight of the man deeply affected him, and that he fairly shook as he bent over the body.

Sinking on one knee he raised one of the arms and let it fall again.

"Poor fellow!" he said softly. "He must have been wandering along the cliff and fallen over in the darkness."

Mr. Chopps overhauled the dead man's pockets. In one of them he found a handful of money, which he put back. In another he discovered a small strip of paper, which, after glancing at, he crumpled in the palm of his hand, and held there until an opportunity came for thrusting it, unperceived by the others, into his own pocket.

By this time, quite a dozen quarrymen had arrived at the tragic spot.

"Do any of you know this man?" asked Mr. Chopps.

"Never seen him before," was the general reply.

"You may see scores like him in the great seaport towns," said Mr. Chopps. "But

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

what could he have been doing so far inland?"

Nobody ventured to offer a suggestion, and, as he did not make one himself, nothing more was said on the subject until the police officer, with the village doctor, arrived.

There was no doubt about the cause of the unknown's death. He had a broken arm and leg, and some terrific bruises on his body. These things, combined with the fact that a long woollen red cap, such as foreign sailors often wear, lay on the ledge of rock above, pointed to his having fallen over the cliff.

"Mightn't he ha' been pushed over?" suggested one of the quarrymen.

"Yes, he might have been, of course," replied Mr. Chopps. "But who would do it, and what would be the motive? Not robbery, at any rate, for there is money in the poor fellow's pocket."

Further debate was useless. The body was taken to the inn, the quarrymen dispersed to their work, and Mr. Chopps went back to the school.

He found Mr. Wrasper and the boys just finishing breakfast, and greatly astonished were they when the assistant-master explained what had detained him.

"I suppose," concluded Mr. Chopps, "none of you boys have encountered a seafaring man of foreign appearance in the neighbourhood during the past few days?"

Nobody present had seen such a man.

"Judging from the poor fellow's attire," said Mr. Chopps. "I should say he was a Neapolitan sailor. He must have been wandering about in the darkness, and fallen over the edge of the cliff. But what brought him so far inland is something of a mystery."

And a mystery it looked like remaining; for not the slightest information as to the dead man's identity could be discovered, and at the inquest there was no alternative but to return an open verdict.

Meanwhile no small fuss had been going on over the explosion on the heath.

Police, scientific men, experts in explosive matters had come to look at the hollow made by the dynamite explosion, speculated upon it, and gone away again.

There were thousands of chips of wood lying about, some with paint upon them, but too minute to give any clue to the nature of the vehicle that had been blown to pieces.

The general idea was that the whole thing was a big, practical joke.

But if so, who was the joker?

Eventually, nothing was made of either of the two mysteries, and the village, having had a surfeit of excitement during the past year, settled down again to its usual humdrum existence.

(To be continued.)

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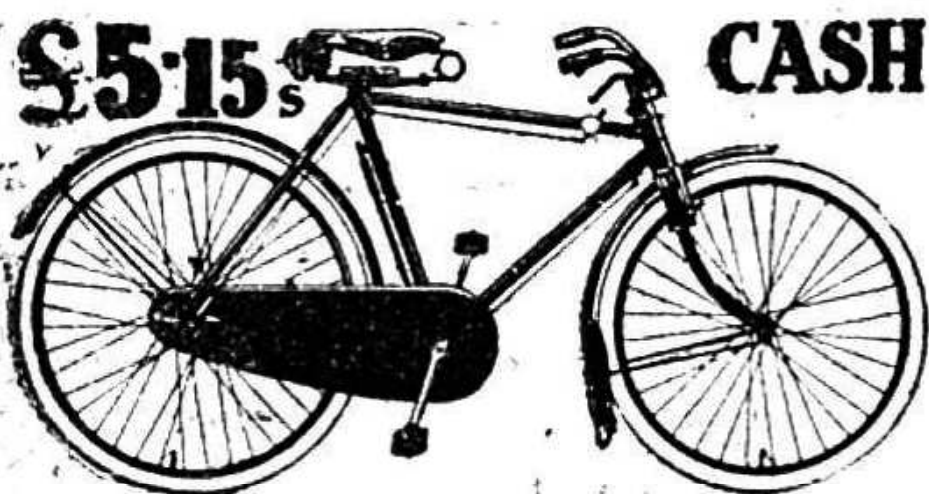
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