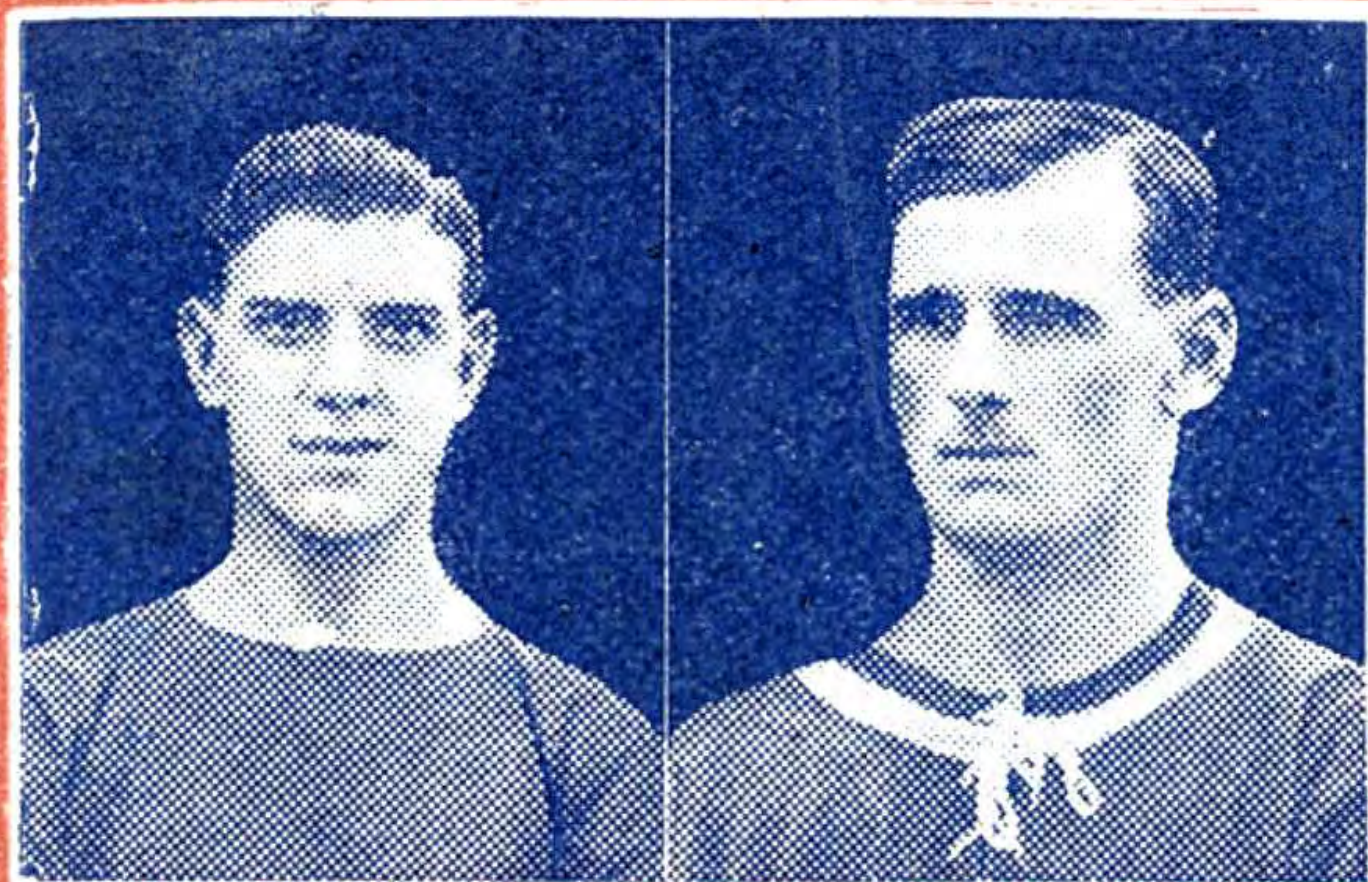


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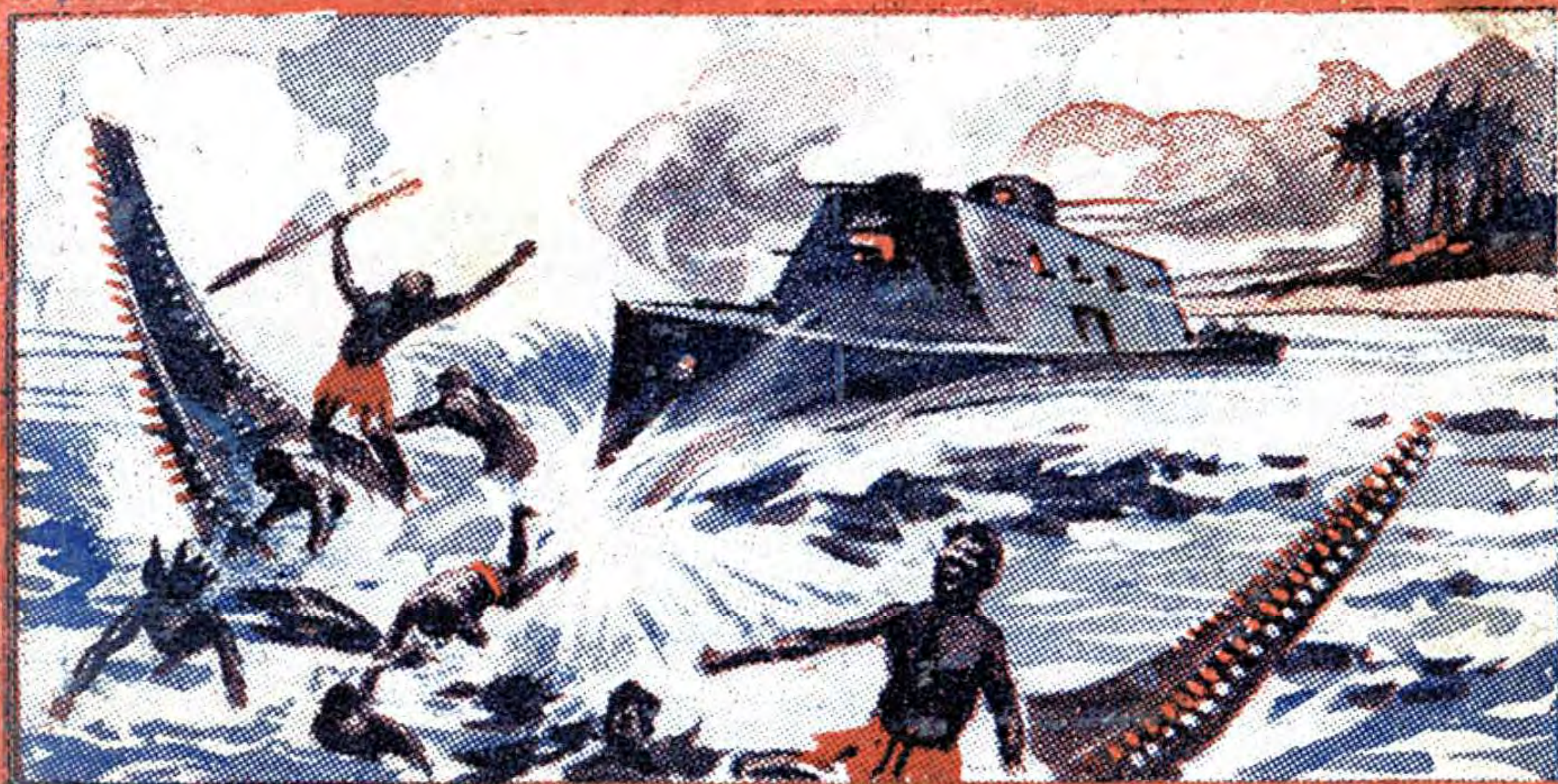


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**TWO
MAGNIFICENT
REAL PHOTOS
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FAMOUS
FOOTBALLERS**

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK!



THE BLACK INVADERS!

**A THRILLING COMPLETE STORY OF SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE
: : AMONG SAVAGE CANNIBALS IN THE SOUTH SEAS. : :**



And out there, beyond the barrier reef, the dim shape of the approaching junk could be seen.



A thrilling narrative from the Grand Holiday Adventure series. The Boys of St. Frank's, with Nelson Lee, the great detective, and Lord Dorrimore, the millionaire sporting nobleman, are stranded on a South Sea island, and are attacked by savage cannibals. The savages are beaten off temporarily, but return in larger numbers. With the commencement of this story a great battle is pending, and the stupendous struggle of a handful of whites against a horde of blacks is wonderfully described in the following pages.—THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

HOLDING THE FORT!

LAGOON ISLAND lay bathed in sunshine.

Overhead the sky was intense blue, and the early morning sun sailed serenely in the heavens, unchallenged by the lightest of clouds. A gentle breeze was blowing, and the cocoanut palms were waving languidly.

The lagoon itself was like a lake of sapphire, with the tiny waves breaking with the sparkle of diamonds upon the salt-white beach. And out beyond the ever-thunderous

roar of the surf pounded upon the barrier reef of coral.

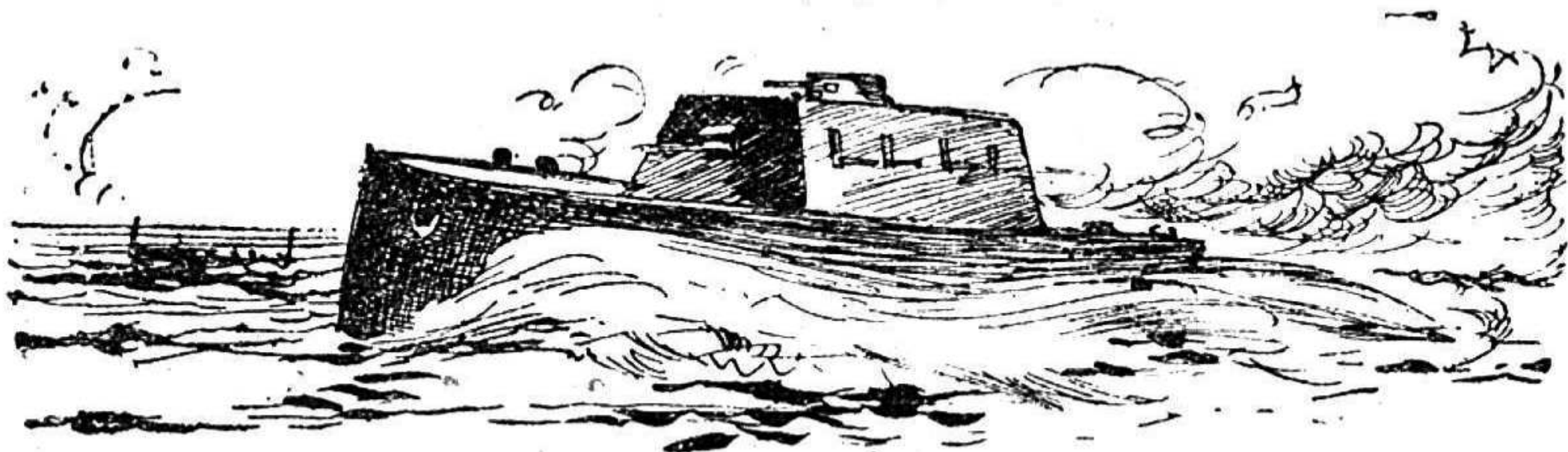
It was a scene of exquisite beauty and charm.

Could any place be such a paradise of peace and quietness and tropical glory? Was there another spot on earth so wonderful?

But appearances are deceptive!

For Lagoon Island was no place of peace! Even now, while everything looked so quiet from afar, a closer inspection would have revealed the fact that feverish activities were afoot.

For this tropic isle was a place of warfare—grim, deadly warfare!



Just back from the beach, in the centre of Shark Bay, lay a building made from logs and canes and dried grasses. It was entirely surrounded by a high-spiked fence. The place, in fact, was a primitive fortress.

And behind that fence figures moved about; figures that were bronzed by the sun; figures that were attired in nothing else but grass kilts. And, amazingly enough, they were the figures of schoolboys—juniors of St. Frank's!

I was one of them, so I knew all about it.

We were working with feverish activity, and during the night we had had very little rest. For the situation was tense, and called for hard work and untiring energy. The fellows were not wanting in this.

There had been stirring times on Lagoon Island.

Since we had been cast ashore on this desert isle, we had had a few excitements; but this was the biggest of them all. For we were menaced by hordes of blacks—savages who would kill us without compunction, and eat us afterwards! They were cannibals, and once they gained the upper hand we should be doomed.

There were some fellows who were quite unaffected by the situation. Fatty Little, for example, disdained to take any notice of the cannibals. He was busy with his cooking, and his sole thoughts were for breakfast. He hadn't got any time to worry his head about savages!

As chief of the Food Department, it was his duty to prepare all the meals, and Fatty fairly revelled in the job. He was never happier than when preparing food, and here he was able to spread himself. He had a free hand, and he took full advantage of his opportunities.

He had two assistants in his department—Goodwin and Doyle. They were both becoming almost as expert as Fatty himself. At first the work had been rather distasteful to them. But now they rather liked it.

Another junior who treated the situation with indifference was Archie Glenthorne. He didn't care what happened, so long as he was allowed to lounge about and take things easily. Archie was a languid youth, with a great dislike for energetic activity.

At the present time, although most of the fellows were hard at work. Archie was reclining dreamily in his hammock, vaguely wondering when breakfast would be ready. He didn't worry himself about the blacks.

The Fort was a very complete institution, considering that it had been built almost entirely by the juniors—and without the aid of civilised tools. The place had been constructed on the most primitive lines, with a log floor, and walls of cane and dried grasses.

It was a mixture of the extreme primitive and the extreme modern.

For, although the furniture was rough and ready, and the beds were merely grass hammocks, there was electric light in every room! And there was a telephone, which communicated with the other side of the island.

The front of the house was shaded by a wide verandah, and all round the palm trees grew in profusion, affording coolness and protection from the dazzling glare of the white sands.

In the rear Fatty Little was extremely busy in the preparation of the morning meal. The other apartments were empty except for the single figure of Archie, reclining in his hammock. Dressing in grass kilts had one advantage. It was easy enough to get to bed and to get up. There was no undressing or dressing to be done!

A figure entered the doorway.

It was dressed in the same primitive fashion as Archie—but it was the figure of a man. In fact, the newcomer was Phipps. Phipps, Archie's valet, and the Prime Minister of the Lagoon Island Government.

Phipps had been elected to this exalted position by the juniors—who formed the other members of the government. It was a bit of a ragtime affair, but the fellows took themselves rather seriously.

And there was not the slightest doubt that Phipps deserved to be Prime Minister. For since our arrival on the island, he had proved himself to be a man of infinite resource and wonderful ingenuity. Phipps was a wonder. He was a walking marvel, and a kind of Admirable Crichton. He had gained the respect of all the juniors, and was no longer Archie's valet. Life on the island did not call for the services of a valet. Phipps was elevated to a more important sphere in life.

Nevertheless, he still attended to the wants of his young master. He never overlooked the fact that he was, strictly speaking, in Archie's employ. If we ever got off the island, Phipps would draw his full wages. So it was just as well to "keep in" with Archie. Phipps did not forget the future.

Being a Prime Minister was all very well, but once returned to civilisation, Phipps would be a valet again—and he had never served under a better master than Archie. The Genial Ass of St. Frank's was easy-going and generous.

As things looked at present, we did not have many prospects of ever getting away from Lagoon Island. But Phipps was just the same as ever—calm, imperturbable, and quiet-voiced. Nothing ever upset Phipps' equanimity.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Phipps.

Archie opened his eyes.

"Eh? I mean to say, what?" he murmured, yawning. "Hallo! Hallo! 'Morning, and all that! Time to trickle forth for the day's doings?"

"You are awake, sir?" asked Phipps, stepping to the side of the hammock.

"Awake, what?" said Archie, sitting up.

"Gadzooks! Do I look asleep, Phipps? Do I appear to be still in the bally old land of dreamless, and what not? How goes it, Phipps? In other words, what about it?"

"I think it is time you turned out, sir."

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Archie. "What-

ho! What-ho! Every time laddie! This is where the young master staggers from his cheery old couch, what? How about it, Phipps? Any news to impart?"

"Yes, sir—serious news?"

"I mean to say!" ejaculated Archie, groping for his precious monocle, and jamming it into his eye. "Serious news? Kindly proceed to break it gently, Phipps. The old nerves are somewhat raw, don't you know. A chappie is never at his absolute best in the early hours."

"The cannibals are on the island, sir," said Phipps. "It is fairly certain that they will make an attack to-day, and it will be hard work to keep them at bay. The young gentlemen are working their hardest at the defences."

"Bally decent of them," said Archie, with approval. "I mean to say, it's dashed good, Phipps. Defences, what? That's the stuff, laddie. Absolutely! We'll show these black chappies something to be going on with, and all that sort of rot! I mean, as it were, large assortments of cheers for the old flag, what?"

"Quite so, sir!" said Phipps. "But you do not appear to realise that the situation is intensely grave——"

"Kindly ring off, Phipps!" interrupted Archie. "In other words, allow the young master to proceed with the conversash! A frightfully serious situation, what? Absolutely! I am aware of it, Phipps. I know that we are liable to be converted into a somewhat juicy meal for an assorted variety of cannibals. In a way, that's dashed awkward, don't you know!"

"Decidedly awkward, sir!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean to say, a cove doesn't quite relish being converted into chops and steaks, what? A poisonous scheme, Phipps. It makes the old tissues creep, and so forth. Kindly change the sub., Phipps. It doesn't appeal to me."

"Breakfast will be ready within a few minutes, sir," said Phipps.

"What-ho! Breakfast!" exclaimed Archie. "Bally good, Phipps! I mean to say, it's up to me to trickle forth and see about the old ablutions, what? A dip in the briny, Phipps. Absolutely the stuff!"

"I was about to suggest the same thing, sir."

"Brainy lad!" said Archie. "Good enough, Phipps!"

He rose from his hammock and strolled leisurely through the doorway and on to the verandah. From here he could obtain a clear view of the stockade and the surrounding fence. He adjusted his monocle and stared.

"I mean to say, what?" he murmured.

He had expected to see signs of activity. But the stockade was empty, and the big gates in the fence stood wide open. He could catch a glimpse of the white beach and the sapphire-blue lagoon.

He walked down from the verandah, and strolled across the stockade.

Then he emerged into the open, and

paused again. For now he could see signs of very considerable activity. The juniors were hard at work—and they were being ably assisted by a number of men from the Wanderer. The sailors were entering into the thing with heart and soul.

"What-ho!" said Archie.

"Lazy bounder!" exclaimed Edward Oswald Handforth looking round. "Just crawled out, I suppose? And we've been working here ever since sunrise! Some chaps are too jolly lazy to live!"

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "I mean to say——"

"What work have you done?" demanded Handforth. "That's what I want to know! Nothing! Absolutely nothing! If you're captured by the cannibals and shoved into the cook-pot you'll only have yourself to blame. I pity the cannibals if they try to eat you! You won't be very tasty!"

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "Really, old tulip! Kindly refrain from being so positively frightful! I am about to wallow in the waves. The carcass requires the stimulation of cold water, what?"

Handforth didn't answer. He had turned to his work again. He hadn't got any more time to spend on Archie. And Handy was certainly working well. He took good care that Church and McClure worked near by and these two juniors had no time for a breather. If Handforth worked, he saw to it that his faithful chums worked just as strenuously.

They were engaged upon the same task as all the rest of us—digging deep trenches all round the stockade. The task was nearing completion. The trenches were exactly the same as those used on the Western Front during the Great War. We were doing everything thoroughly.

For we realised that if we were to keep the cannibals at bay, we should have to rely on something better than the fence which surrounded the Fort. Trenches were absolutely essential.

For the savages were provided with rifles. They had not done much damage with these weapons so far, and only a comparative few of the blacks were thus armed. But bullets could cut through the stockade with the greatest of ease. And more substantial defence works were required.

The invaders numbered several hundred—we could not tell the exact figure—and they had taken possession of Geyser Valley—a glorious hollow just back from the shore and behind the palm groves.

It would, of course, be quite impossible for us to drive these invaders out, since our own forces were insignificant by comparison. We were a mere handful, all told.

The savages had opened their campaign after arriving on the island by making two determined attempts to annihilate us by sheer force of numbers. But by keeping cool, and by using our machine-guns effectively, we had driven the enemy off, with very severe losses.

And so the blacks had planted themselves in the valley, and it was fairly clear that they intended making another attack when the right time came. There was no hurry. They were safe—as they knew. Being the stronger party, they could do very much as they chose.

But the Fort was not exactly in a state of siege. We could move about practically as we liked on this part of the island. We could obtain all the food we needed and all the water. The invaders were content to remain in possession of Geyser Valley.

And we were very thankful for the breather.

For we were able to complete our defences, and make the trenches in a thorough style, so that any further attack would have no chance of success. The war was apparently going to be a grim one and a long one.

We had a number of sailors from Lord Dorrimore's yacht with us, and Mr. Somerfield, the second officer, was in charge of them. Handforth, as War Minister, fondly imagined that he was the chief of affairs. But as this only existed in his imagination, it didn't matter much. Handy, as a leader, was somewhat too impulsive to be a success.

The situation was rather curious.

There were two camps on Lagoon Island—our own and Lord Dorrimore's. We preferred to remain at the Fort—the primitive structure which we had built with our own hands. Nelson Lee, and Lord Dorrimore, Captain Bentley, and all the rest, had had a greater liking for the stranded yacht. For Dorrie's fine vessel lay aground in the lagoon—badly holed, and under repair. The engineers were working night and day, in order to get the vessel refloated. But even they had no real hopes of achieving their object.

And the cannibals had come and driven a wedge between us.

For that was practically what the matter amounted to. They had come in a great horde, from across the sunlit sea. Their vessels were huge war canoes, each canoe containing between twenty and thirty men—all armed, and every one a picked warrior.

There were hundreds of them still, although many had been killed and wounded.

They had entered the lagoon by one of the openings in the reef, and had taken possession of that part of the shore which was nearest to Geyser Valley. Gazing along the beach we could see the blacks just near Sandy Head—a jutting point of land near the end of Shark Bay. And here, on the beach, the canoes were all drawn up.

Other canoes patrolled about in the lagoon, all of them with savages. They evidently knew that we should attempt to join forces, and they were determined to prevent any such thing happening.

The only way, indeed, to get from our part of the island to Dorrie's was to run the gauntlet. And this would have been an exceedingly perilous undertaking. For not only were the blacks in the lagoon itself, but

there were large numbers on the shore, all armed.

So we had made no attempt at the task, as yet—and it did not seem likely that we should be able to join forces with the governor or Dorrie. Our only course was to make our own position secure, and defy the invaders. And perhaps we should be able to think of some method of driving them out.

I was quite convinced, anyhow, that Nelson Lee, on the other side of the island, was using all his wits in an endeavour to defeat the cannibals. It was impossible to gain victory by sheer force. But force was not required. Our only hope was in strategy.

If the situation was not quite so serious a few of Handforth's suggestions would have caused endless amusement. He was quite convinced, for example, that we could defeat the savages by setting the forest on fire as soon as a favourable wind blew. He further overlooked the fact that the wind might change, and thus cause the fire to recoil on our heads. He further overlooked the still more important fact that there would be nothing easier for the blacks to do than to retreat to higher ground until the fire burnt itself out—even supposing the fire would burn at all—which was doubtful.

Handforth had many other suggestions of a similar nature. He considered that the position of War Minister made it necessary for him to suggest at least one idea every hour.

The lives of Church and McClure at this period were hardly worth living. On two occasions Church was distinctly heard to remark that he would be glad if the cannibals attacked and wiped them all out. Then, at least, there would be some peace. The worst of it was, Church and McClure were compelled to heartily approve of Handforth's suggestions or be punched black and blue.

The result was that Handforth had two staunch supporters—as far as appearances went. Handy had only to mention an idea, and Church and McClure immediately declared it to be absolutely stunning. They were so accustomed to agreeing that they simply did this as a matter of course.

"I call this trench-building a lot of tommy-rot!" said Handforth, pausing for a moment or two. What's the good of it? We're simply digging ourselves in, and once we're in we sha'n't be able to get ourselves out! I've got a scheme that's worth ten of it!"

"Good old Handy!" said Church wearily. "Always full of ideas!"

"Brainy chap," said McClure monotonously.

Handforth regarded them with a thoughtful frown.

"Now, look here!" he said darkly. "Instead of building trenches it would be a lot better to make platforms up in the palm trees. Then, at a signal, we could all vanish."

"Hurrah!" said Church feebly.

"Jolly fine idea!" declared McClure. "Tophole!"

"Fatheads!"

"Eh?"

"I haven't told you what the idea is yet," bawled Handforth.

"Of course you did!" said Church. "You said it would be a good scheme to turn ourselves into monkeys, and live in the tree-tops. Of course, it would suit you all right——"

"What?"

"Being descended from an ape!" went on Church. "You'd like the life——"

"You—you insulting bounder!" hooted Handforth. "I—I'm descended from an ape? Why, you—you——"

"Here, steady on!" said Church hastily. "We all come from apes, don't we? Some clever scientist said so, anyway. Darwin, or somebody."

Handforth sniffed.

"That's right—show your ignorance!" he sneered. "Darwin! You dotty chump! Darwin was the chap who invented the steam-engine! But we won't argue about that, you fatheads! About this idea of mine!"

"Another one?" inquired McClure languidly.

"No, the same one, blockhead!" howled Handforth. "We'll build platforms up in the palm trees, and fix up the machine-guns there, and everything. Then we'll vanish."

"How can we vanish if we go up into the palm trees?"

"We shall vanish from the blacks, I mean, you dense fathead!" snapped Handforth. "They'll think we've cleared off the island, and just as they're congratulating themselves we'll spring on the whole crowd from above! Collar the lot!"

Church fainted in McClure's arms.

"How—how can he think of them?" he asked weakly. "I mean, what kind of a brain must a chap have to suggest an idea of that kind?"

Handforth looked at his chums suspiciously, and slowly and deliberately clenched his fists.



Lee raised the lid and uttered an exclamation. The chest was filled with golden coins and sparkling jewels! "Stolen property!" exclaimed Lee grimly.—See page 20.

CHAPTER II.

A SCOUTING EXPEDITION.



CHURCH and McClure regarded their leader uneasily.

"What's the matter, Handy?" asked McClure.

"What's the matter!" roared Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to stand insults from you rotters? Ain't we the War Ministry? It's up to you to respect me, and——"

"But—but we haven't insulted you," put in Church. "We think you're a marvellous chap. That idea about living in the tree-tops, for example. Wonderful!"

"Amazing!" said McClure.

Handforth unclenched his fists.

"You were saying something about a brain——" he began.

"Exactly!" said Church. "How the dickens can any chap have a brain like it? You seem to have misunderstood, Handy. I meant that a chap with an ordinary brain, couldn't think of a thing like that at all!"

"Never!" agreed Church solemnly. "I've got an ordinary brain, for example, and I couldn't think of it!"

"Oh, all right!" growled Handforth. "I don't want to boast, but everybody knows

that my brain is totally different to any other."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's why they're all jealous!" continued Handforth. "If they'd only agree to this tree-top scheme it would be as right as rain. We should defeat the blacks in a couple of days and kill the whole crowd! Even if they happened to spot us up in the trees we should be all right, because we should simply stick there until they grew tired and gave it up!"

"Of course, we shouldn't get tired, should we?" asked Church. "And what about grub?"

"Cocoanuts!"

"What about water?"

"Milk from the cocoanuts!"

Handforth was always ready for an immediate answer, even though he was convinced that it wasn't satisfactory. He never admitted himself beaten. He remained silent for a short time, and then grunted.

"Of course, every first-class scheme has a few drawbacks. About food and water, for example, I'd overlooked those points. Still, I dare say they could be easily surmounted if we only set our wits to work."

"Well, we don't want to talk about it any longer," said McClure.

"No fear!" agreed Church. "Time for grub!"

Fatty had just made his famous announcement, by hammering with a mallet upon a piece of sheet iron. Everybody knew that this sound meant that food was ready. And without any delay the fellows crowded into the stockade, and then into the house itself. They were all hungry and thirsty and tired.

"Well, we've done pretty well this morning," remarked De Valerie. "Thank goodness the blacks haven't attacked. They're dotty, of course. Allowing us all this time to dig ourselves in! Why, they could have wiped us out long ago if they'd had enough pluck."

"They could!" agreed Reggie Pitt. "But that's just where we're safe. When these blacks get worked up and excited they're plucky enough for anything. But after the excitement has died down they lose their enthusiasm. And they have a tremendously strong desire to live."

"And when they're excited they don't care whether they live or they die," I put in. "We shall soon know when they're going to start business again, because they'll hold war dances and feasting, and all that sort of thing. That'll be our signal. When these savages go into a frenzy it generally means that they're going to start an attack. They'll never advance on us in cold blood."

Dorrie and Nelson Lee and Phipps quite agreed that this was the truth. As long as the invaders confined themselves to hunting and eating and patrolling the lagoon there would not be much danger. At the first feasting orgy, however, followed by frantic and frenzied war-dances, an attack would be absolutely certain.

If the cannibals had only had pluck enough to attack us when they were calm and cool they could have wiped us all out. But they only fought when they were worked up to a certain pitch. And then they were so excited that they simply attacked blindly, and left many loopholes by which we could protect ourselves. Therefore, although the cannibal horde was a formidable one we were by no means pessimistic. The situation was bad, but not hopeless.

As soon as the meal was over I announced my intention of going on a scouting expedition.

"Good!" said Pitt. "I'll come with you."

"Rats!" declared Handforth. "That's my job—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course it is!" went on Handy. "I'm the War Minister, and it's up to me to do any scouting that's got to be done. Besides, I've got a jolly ripping idea—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Handy, but you don't come on in this act at all!" I said gently. "And talking about a War Minister's job, did you ever hear of a War Minister who went scouting into the enemy's lines? What's going to happen to the war if he gets killed?"

"Huh!" grunted Handforth. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"You mustn't take such risks, Handy," said Pitt, solemnly. "You've got to think of us as well as yourself! Just try to imagine what would happen if you went scouting and got shoved into the enemy's cookpot! We should be left at the mercy of these blacks! Without our War Minister where should we be?"

Handforth nodded.

"Well, of course, now you mention it, perhaps you're right," he said. "It would be a bit rotten for you chaps if I was shoved into the cookpot."

"Rotten for the blacks, too!" said De Valerie.

"What?"

"But I dare say they're used to tough meat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was only held back with difficulty, and he certainly didn't go on any scouting expedition. Later on he aired his views to Church and McClure with his customary vehemence.

"I've been thinking things over!" he said. "It's all very well to say that the War Minister mustn't take risks. On principle, the idea's right, but when I happen to be the War Minister, that alters it."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Church.

"Because there's no chance of my getting killed!" continued Handforth. "A clever scout is just as safe in the enemy's lines as he is in his own."

"And do you reckon you'd be safe?" asked McClure.

"Of course," replied Handforth promptly.

"I'm not bragging, but some facts speak for themselves. Now my idea is to penetrate right into the enemy country—steal into their innermost lines!"

"In the middle of the night, I suppose."

"No—in broad daylight!"

"You couldn't steal in broad daylight," said Church, shaking his head.

"Who's talking about stealing?" roared Handforth. "Oh, you mean steal into their lines? Of course I could! I should disguise myself as a cannibal."

"Oh, that would be easy!" remarked McClure.

"But why disguise at all?" asked Church.

"Dash it all, I should have to make my skin black!" said Handforth, who didn't realise the inner meaning of his chum's remarks. "Still, a job like that would be a mere nothing to me. I'd blacken my skin, and make all sorts of ornamentations to my chivvy——"

"My dear chap, there's no need to alter your face!" said Church. "You'd be able to disguise yourself perfectly as a savage. Easy! But I can see one or two drawbacks."

"Oh, can you?" said Handforth, glaring.

"Well, what about grub?"

"Grub?"

"Of course," said Church. "If you went into the enemy's lines as one of themselves you'd have to do as they do. If you refused to eat they might become suspicious, and then it would be all up."

"Well, I could eat, couldn't I?" asked Handforth.

"Naturally, that's your own look out," replied Church. "But I wouldn't care much for a dinner made from one of my best pals who happened to fall in battle!"

Handforth looked startled.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "They're cannibals! I'd forgotten that! Well, I should have to go without eating——"

"But as you're not going at all, what's the good of talking about it!" inquired Church. "Simply a waste of time. 'Let's get on with our work!'" For once Handforth had very little to say, and all the juniors were relieved. His voice was somewhat calculated to get monotonous.

And in the meantime, the two scouts had gone off on their trip.

These two scouts were Reggie Pitt and myself. Our object was to reach high ground at the back of the palm groves, and look down into the enemy valley. We wanted to see what was going on there, and if there was any indication of a coming feast or war-dance. It was very necessary to keep ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the enemy's movements.

Along the shore we could see the cannibals openly, and knew exactly what they were up to. But they intended us to see them. And within their own valley they probably desired to keep their activities to themselves.

"It's quite likely they've got a few sentries out!" I murmured, as we paused for

a brief spell beside a tiny brook, where we quenched our thirsts. "So we've got to keep our eyes skinned, my sons. I'm not particularly anxious to have six inches of spear sticking into me!"

Pitt nodded.

"We're getting nearer now," he whispered. "But if we keep on the alert we shall be all right. You've got a revolver handy, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Lucky beggar!" said Reggie. "You're the only chap who's allowed to carry one. All the rest of us have to be content with bows and arrows!"

"Well, that's because I'm used to a revolver, and the others aren't," I replied. "And if the gov'nor gave permission to one chap to carry a revolver, they'd all want one. I'm different in that respect. Can you imagine Handforth with a revolver?"

"Well, I can imagine it," said Reggie. "The first thing he'd do would be to shoot Church and McClure! He'd get excited, and blaze away at the poor chaps."

"He'd miss 'em!" I chuckled. "He'd hit somebody about a hundred yards off! But it's a good thing I'm armed, although I don't want to use a revolver. Makes too much noise."

We pressed on, and very soon came upon a thick patch of undergrowth where the going was difficult, but quite safe. And we presently found ourselves upon a hillside. Breaking through the bushes we found that we could look right down into Geyser Valley. It was called Geyser Valley because there was a hot water spring with a steaming pool surrounding it. This geyser gushed forth its volume of boiling water with unfailing regularity.

The cannibals took no notice of it, although they were careful to make their camp at the other side of the valley. This seemed to indicate that they had geysers on their own island, which, we assumed, was within a comparatively easy distance by canoe.

"All quiet!" whispered Reggie.

And so it seemed. The blacks had been quite busy since their occupation of the valley. They had built almost a complete village of rudely constructed huts. The roofs were of thin grass, and would not afford much protection in a tropical storm. But the blacks were housed, and the very fact that they had built this village indicated that they were intent upon making a long stay. They had apparently come for good.

"Oh, so that's how the land lies, eh?" I whispered. "The bounders have planted themselves here, and mean to stay! That's awkward."

"Why is it?"

"Because it seems to hint that the rotters won't attack us!"

"Well, there's no need to cry over that!" said Reggie. "I didn't know that you were particularly longing to be attacked."

"My dear chap, you don't understand," I said. "I'm not longing to be attacked. But if these blacks made an assault and finished with it, we should know what we were doing. But we don't want to have these confounded savages upon the island all the time. If they don't begin a battle within a day or two, the gov'nor will take a hand, I'll bet. He'll probably force them to a fight. Our object is to drive them off, and keep them off!"

But a closer inspection of the enemy camp changed our views somewhat.

Although the cannibals were chiefly occupied in building rough houses, there were others who were sharpening spears, and cleaning guns, and making other warlike preparations. This became apparent through binoculars. With the naked eye we had not detected these details.

"Yes, there seems to be something doing, after all," I observed. "Well, there's nothing much to report. But, so far, everything's satisfactory, so we can't grumble. The cannibals mean business—but when?"

"That's the whole question," said Pitt. "When? I wish we knew for certain!"

CHAPTER III.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET!



NELSON LEE paced up and down the deck of the *Wanderer* with short, anxious strides.

He kept his gaze upon the lagoon and the beach. Lord Dorrimore was by his side, and the latter was looking unusually serious. As a rule, it took a great deal to upset his lordship's unruffled calm.

"Things look bad, old man," remarked Dorrie, as he lit a cigarette. "Bally bad, in fact. I hope to goodness those youngsters are all right!"

"Yes, they're all right, so far," said Nelson Lee. "That is one great advantage of having the telephone fitted up. We are completely cut off from the Shark Bay camp, but we can, at least, communicate with them whenever we please. And that, after all, is a very great advantage."

"How long since you rang up?"

"About two hours."

"Time to 'phone through again!" said Dorrie. "If these blacks attack at all, they'll go for the kids. An' I feel like a caged tiger here. Nothin' to do—an' we're cut off from the others. I've a dashed good mind to get up a party, an' make a break for it."

"How?"

"In the motor-boat, through the lagoon," replied his lordship. "We've got that boat goin' now. The engine runs like a dream, and she only skims the water. We can risk touchin' bottom in the shallow parts."

"If I could see any advantage in making such a dash, I would agree," said Nelson

Lee. "But we know that the boys are all right. We are in constant communication with them. No, Dorrie, our best plan is to remain here. And we can utilise our time by planning out some means of driving these black invaders out of our little island."

"Well, you get busy on the thinkin' stunt," said Dorrie. "I'm just about as much good at that job as a chunk of dead meat. When it comes to action, I'm there—I'm on the spot. But brainwork isn't in my line."

Nelson Lee smiled as Dorrie strolled off. For he knew that, although his lordship affected to be something of a dandy, he was, in reality, quite astute—and capable of very intricate thought.

Dorrie went below to the telephone instrument. It was fitted up in the saloon—the wire running straight across from the forward mast to the nearest point of land, and then stretching from tree to tree right across the island. The telephone had been fitted up very painstakingly by the juniors, who had made a thoroughly sound job of it.

Dorrie pressed the bell-push, and placed the receiver to his ear. It was only a private instrument, and quite different from the ordinary telephone. Within a few minutes a voice came clearly across the wires.

"Hallo!"

"Oh, it's Nipper!" said Dorrie. "Well, young 'un, what about it?"

"Nothing much to report, Dorrie," I replied, over the wires. "Pitt and I have just got back from a scouting trip, and we find that the blacks have set up a whole village in Geyser Valley—houses and everything."

"The deuce they have!" exclaimed Dorrie. "So the beggars have had the audacity to squat on our land! What about an attack? Is there any sign of trouble brewin'?"

"Well, one or two signs, but not anything to be alarmed about," I said. "We saw the enemy cleaning rifles, and sharpening spears—"

"H'm! That doesn't look very healthy, to my mind," said Dorrie. "In fact, you can take it from me, my son, that it's a pretty strong sign that things will soon be happening. You don't know these blacks! They're tricky customers."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, they may be tryin' to spoof you," said Dorrie. "While they're buildin' houses, an' all that sort of thing, it's quite likely they'll start a whole bushel of trouble within an hour or two. It's the usual custom to hold war dances, but they do depart from these customs sometimes."

"Well, I think we're pretty safe, so far—"

My voice broke off abruptly, and the line became silent.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Dorrie. "Nipper! You there?"

Silence.

Dorrie hammered the instrument, shouted, but all with no result. The wire had become absolutely dead. And there could be only

one possible explanation of this. The line had been cut!

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered his lordship. "This looks pretty rotten!"

He hurried up on deck and reported to Nelson Lee. The latter took the news calmly, but there was a slight tightening of the famous detective's lips, and his eyes gleamed.

"What does it mean, old man?" asked Dorrie.

"I don't know—we can only guess," replied Nelson Lee. "The wires, of course, have been severed—that is obvious. It is equally clear that they have been severed by the enemy. These blacks are not absolutely primitive, Dorrie. They know how to use rifles—and it is quite likely that they understand what a telephone is."

"An' yet they were scared by that old steam-engine thing last week—durin' the first attack," observed his lordship.

"Quite so!" agreed Lee. "There are some of these islands where private telephones are installed by trading companies, and the blacks know what they mean. Yet they have never seen a steam-engine in all their lives, and would naturally be frightened of it."

"Well, that seems feasible," agreed Dorrie. "An' you think they've cut the wires?"

"My dear fellow, there's hardly any question of it," said Nelson Lee. "And they can only have cut the wires because they want to make an attack. We must go to the assistance of the boys at once."

Dorrie brightened up.

"Good!" he ejaculated. "In the motor-boat?"

"Yes!"

"Good again!" said Dorrie. "I'm just longin' for somethin' to do. We're completely cut off from the boys now, so it's up to us to buzz along an' see what we can do. We'll get the motor-boat out at once."

He walked down the deck, and gave some brisk orders to a petty-officer. And within a few minutes the yacht's motor-boat was lying in readiness at the foot of the accommodation ladder. It was not a large craft, but easily capable of carrying half a dozen men, all fully armed.

Four sailors were chosen—all good shots. And then, with Nelson Lee and Dorrie to make up the six, the boat's engines were started, and they moved off. Nelson Lee entrusted the wheel to Dorrie—for his own left arm was still in a sling, and he wanted his right free for using his revolver, if necessary.

"Somethin' doin' at last," said Lord Dorrimore, with relish. "Good! I've been nearly dead these last few days, with nothin' to do. Let's hope the bally cannibals try to hold us up!"

"Anxious for a scrap?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"Anxious!" echoed Dorrie. "Man alive, I'm bored stiff! My aim must be rotten!"

I haven't fired a gun for goodness knows how long! Still, I dare say I could manage to bore holes through a few carcasses if it came to a pinch!"

The motor-boat was gliding through the water quite moderately, and the soft clug-chug of the exhaust was like music to Dorrie's ears. The craft was not one of those powerful racers which tear across the water like a streak of lightning. It was built for utility, and the engine was reliable.

At the same time, the boat could develop a useful turn of speed, and she answered instantly to every control.

Dorrie opened the throttle wider, and the boat gathered speed at once, and sent two curling waves gracefully on either side of her bows. In the rear there was a long streak of white foam.

Nelson Lee stood gazing ahead with an anxious expression on his face. The sudden cutting of the telephone had worried him more than he cared to say. For it implied that something serious was happening on the other side of the island.

And there was no certainty that this journey would ever be completed.

Just round the next headland there were large numbers of savages—not merely on the island, but scattered about the lagoon in canoes. They were powerful men, and all fully-armed. They would bring the motor-boat's progress to a standstill if they possibly could.

One of the main objects of the invaders in taking possession of this part of the coast had been to separate the two parties. So it was quite obvious that the blacks would risk much to prevent the motor-boat getting through.

"Better go easy, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "If we have to make a dash, it would be far better to put on speed at the last moment. Until we see what the actual danger is, we must not be rash."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Trust me!" he said briefly.

It was quite like him to open the throttle still wider after Nelson Lee had given such advice. And the motor-boat, with the engines roaring, spun round the rocky headland at a high speed. It was rather risky, too, for this was the portion of the lagoon which was unfamiliar.

However, the water was quite deep enough to allow the boat to pass. Glancing over-side, Lee could see through the clear water—he could see the coral bed, deep down. Then his attention was diverted.

Now that the headland had been negotiated, an almost clear view could be obtained of the enemy camp. The invaders had planted themselves upon this section of the coast in great force.

There was the village just inland beyond the palm groves, and a strong force of blacks here, on the shore. And quite a large number patrolled the lagoon in canoes. These canoes were now in sight.

There were a dozen of them, at least, all

filled with armed cannibals. And they were so placed that the motor-boat would be compelled to dash through them. One glance was sufficient to tell Nelson Lee that the project was hopeless.

He could tell exactly what would happen. Against such numbers the motor-boat would progress for a certain distance, and then would be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. With dozens of rifles firing at once, it was absolutely impossible for Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the others to escape. No matter how bad the aim of the natives, they could not miss at such close quarters.

"We can't do it, Dorrie!" said Lee sharply.

"Eh?"

"It's too risky—it's simply asking for trouble!" went on Lee. "Slow down, and then turn. We've got to go back."

Lord Dorrimore looked up defiantly.

"Oh, have we?" he exclaimed. "Well, look here, old man, I'm in charge of this outfit, an' I'm not goin' to retreat—"

"Hang it all, Dorrie, don't be foolish!" insisted Lee. "Now that we can see the force we are up against, it would be sheer insanity to go on. I've got an idea—but I can't detail it to you now, unless you are sensible. And I am quite certain that you are anxious to live. If we go on, you'll die!"

Dorrie throttled down.

"Well, I can't say that I'm burstin' with anxiety to peg out just now!" he observed, as he swung the motor-boat round. "I've got a few things to accomplish in life yet. An' your advice is always good, professor, so we'll show a bit of the white feather, an' retreat!"

As the motor-boat turned and went back towards the headland, a series of wild yells came from the cannibal canoes. Dorrie clenched his right fist, and shook it.

"All right, you beauties—wait a bit!" he growled. "You won't crow like that for long? Now Lee, what's the idea? Why couldn't we chance it?"

"Because we should never have got through," replied Nelson Lee. "That's why, Dorrie. There's only one thing to be done—and that's to take the boat back to the Wanderer, and get the engineers busy on it."

"The engineers?"

"Yes—she's got to be armoured!"

"By gad!" said Dorrimore. "Armoured! Now, that's a deucedly good suggestion! Sheets of steel, an' all that kind of thing? We'll convert the old tub into a kind of destroyer—eh?"

"Something like that," agreed Nelson Lee. "But, with the deck armoured, we shall, at least, have a good chance of getting through. And I think it would be a wise precaution to fit up a machine-gun in the bows."

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "We'll make the engineers work like the dickens!"

As soon as the motor-boat was back at the yacht, Dorrimore sent for the chief engineer, and pointed to the small vessel alongside.

"You see that?" he asked. "Well, you've got to get all your men to work, an' shove a few yards of armour-plating on deck. Make it protected all over, so that a hundred or so bullets won't do any harm. I'll give you two hours!"

"Two hours, my lord!" echoed the chief-engineer. "I don't think it can be managed in that time—"

"Well, get busy, an' see what you can do," interrupted Dorrie. "An' hustle! It's a matter of life or death, an' we can't waste time."

Not only the engineers, but a good number of other men, got to work. Sheet steel was produced from below. It had not been originally intended for use as armour-plating, but it served the purpose very well. And very soon the little bay was resounding with the clattering of hammers, as rivets were driven home—as bolts were drawn tight. And with extraordinary speed the whole appearance of the motor-boat was changed.

Dorrie had said that it didn't matter tuppence what the thing looked like, so long as it was serviceable. But the engineers had managed to make the motor-boat look very warlike and neat. The entire centre section of the deck was covered over with armour-plating.

Fore and aft this armour-plating came to a neat point. There were observation-holes in many parts and right in the bows the wicked-looking muzzle of a machine-gun protruded.

And in the very centre a kind of turret arose. This was for the steersman. It would be quite possible to control the motor-boat with perfect ease.

More than two hours had elapsed—well over three in fact. And both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were very anxious by this time. Cut off from all communication from the other camp, they were in a fever of worry as to what was taking place. They believed that an attack had been made on the Fort.

But even Dorrie, impulsive as he was, realised the necessity for this delay. To have attempted to dash through the enemy lines in the unprotected motor-boat would have been madness.

Now, however, there was a distinct chance of success.

"Good!" exclaimed Dorrie, when word came to him that the boat was ready. "We'll start off at once, Lee—can't wait any longer. The finishin' touches can be put on to-morrow, or at any old time."

The work was necessarily rough and ready—but this didn't matter. The chief thing was to be off without any further delay.

And within five minutes the engine was humming, and the little craft sped across the lagoon on its journey. Owing to the weight of the plating, she now ran somewhat sluggishly, but this was only to be expected.

She certainly looked rather wicked, with

her turret and with the machine-gun projecting from the bows. She was, indeed, a real vessel of war. Within the craft the heat was almost overpowering, for the sun shone down upon the metalwork with fierce intensity.

"Phew!" exclaimed Dorrie, the perspiration streaming down his face. "I shouldn't care to stay in here for long, Lee. But we can defy those confounded blacks now. An' we shall soon be in the other camp."

"With reasonable luck, yes," agreed Nelson Lee. "And the best thing we can do is to put on all speed and make a clean dash through."

"I shall have to tip those fellows pretty liberally for bein' so smart on the work," said Dorrie. "They slaved like niggers to get this armour on, and, by gad, they pretty well made a record of it! Good thing they weren't workin' under trade union rules."

By this time the motor-boat—which Dorrie had christened *Hornet*—was spinning round the headland at a fair turn of speed, her engine running all out. And now, leaving a creamy wake behind her, she made straight for the war-canoes of the enemy—which were still drawn up in the lagoon, apparently waiting for any move on the part of the whites.

And almost at once it could be seen that a commotion was caused. The canoes moved about, and the blacks were waving to one another, and making other signals. Lord Dorrimore grinned as he observed them through his opening.

"Yes, that's made you think a bit, hasn't it?" he exclaimed grimly. "We're not turnin' back this time, my lads! An' a few of you had better say your prayers—not that you're in the habit of doin' anythin' like that!"

The canoes were lining up in such a way that the *Hornet* would be compelled to pass between them. And in this way the savages would be able to pour a devastating fire at close range into the motor-boat.

Without the armour-plating, no living soul could have existed for more than a few seconds. The blacks had a bad aim, it is true, but with so many concentrating their fire upon the motor-boat's decks, life would have been impossible. But now there was a fair certainty of getting through.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A shattering volley of rifle-fire broke out, and the occupants of the *Hornet* were startled by the fearful din within their cover-like enclosure. For the bullets striking the armour-plating created a most appalling noise.

"That's the stuff!" roared Dorrie. "Now then, boys, let 'em have it!"

The machine-gun commenced spitting out fire and bullets. And from the various other holes in the plating rifles were projected, and they got to work in earnest. A dozen cannibals fell screaming out of the canoes.



There, right in the centre of Archie's manly bosom lay a snake! It was not a particularly large one, but it looked deadly.—See page 23.

But there was really no time for much bloodshed.

The motor-boat was right in amongst the enemy within a few seconds. The blacks were startled and terrified—more particularly because their continuous hail of bullets seemed to have no effect.

"Look out!" shouted Nelson Lee abruptly.

But there was no time for Dorrie to alter the *Hornet's* course. A canoe, either by accident or design, swung clean across the motor-boat's path. It lay broadside on, and a collision was inevitable.

Crash!

The strong bows of the *Hornet* struck the canoe fairly and squarely amidships. The cannibal craft was of the lightest construction, and it crumpled up like paper. The blacks were hurled into the water in every direction.

And the *Hornet* went straight on, without even a pause. There had been just a slight shiver at the moment of impact, but nothing more. And this disaster to the enemy forces demoralised them.

The other canoes scattered in all directions. The rifle-fire ceased, and the motor-boat was through! She had come out of the ordeal practically unscratched, and nobody was hurt.

"Splendid!" said Dorrie. "And, thank goodness, we shall soon be able to get out of this oven! My skin's absolutely blistering! In fact, I believe I'm about three-parts cooked, and ready for the table!"

The heat was certainly overpowering—but this was soon remedied. For the motor-boat grounded on the beach within a reasonable distance of the Fort. Dorrie pushed open the roughly constructed steel door and climbed out into the open. The hot air of the afternoon was positively cool in comparison to the intense heat within.

"Well, we've done it!" said Dorrie, with satisfaction. "And now we'll see what's been happening to the youngsters!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHINESE JUNK.



HANDFORTHII stared.
 "What the blazes!"
 he began.

Then he paused, and his eyes opened wider. He had been working in the deep trench which surrounded the stockade. And, hearing a most unusual noise, he looked over the top of the trench, and out across the lagoon. Then he turned back, his face flushing with excitement.

"Here, you chaps!" he roared. "Look! Quick!"

Church and McClure, and a number of other juniors, jumped up like Jack-in-the-boxes. And then they all leapt out of the trench, and raced along the beach. There was no danger in this, for the enemy was at a safe distance.

"It's an armoured boat!"

"My hat, yes! But who's in it?"

"Dorrie, I'll bet!"

I had come on the scene now—for I had been within the building, and had heard the shattering buzz of machine-gun fire, and the sharp crack of rifles. At first I had believed that the blacks had begun their attack. But a second's reflection told me that the firing was too far distant for that.

And once out in the open, I could see the cause.

The armoured motor-boat was just clearing the enemy waters, so to speak. We could see the smashed canoe lying in fragments, and its late occupants making frantic efforts to reach the shore in double-quick time. They were evidently aware of the presence of sharks.

"Hurrah! They're through!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, jamming his monocle into his eye, and regarding the scene with interest. "I mean to say, large quantities of excitement, what? Running the gauntlet, and all that kind of stuff!"

"So it appears, sir," said Phipps, who was near by.

"What-ho!" said Archie. "So you're there, and all that? Absolutely! I mean to say, the whole thing is somewhat dashed rotten, if you know what I mean!"

"I don't quite follow, sir," said Phipps.

"Well, dash it all!" protested Archie. "The old brains are deucedly sluggish this afternoon, what? Cobwebs in the attic, Phipp! In other words, old lad, you're getting rusty!"

"I trust not, sir!"

"Absolutely!" Archie insisted. "The thinking department, as it were, is somewhat out of gear. Here we have a priceless afternoon, Phipps. Gentle breezes, and quantities of sunshine, and what not! Just the absolute conditions for a spell of the good old dreamless! I mean to say, the young master was just partaking of the good old forty winks, when this poisonous din comes into the offing!"

"Oh, I grasp your meaning!" said Phipps. "In other words, the advent of the armoured motor-boat has rather disturbed your nap?"

"That, as it were, is precisely it," agreed Archie. "As you might say, in the old nutshell, what? However, these are times of stress and warfare, Phipps. A chappie mustn't grumble over the loss of a few winks, what? Well, old onion, what about it? Shall we stagger forth and extend the glad hand?"

"I think it would be as well, sir," said Phipps.

"Good man!" said Archie languidly.

He strolled forward, and found that the motor-boat was well beached, and its late occupants were standing on the white sand, surrounded by a crowd of fellows. And Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, streaming with perspiration, were explaining matters. Dorrie, in fact, was inclined to be somewhat indignant.

"The whole thing's a bally fraud!" he declared.

"How do you mean, Dorrie?" I asked, grinning. "We thought you were out for a bit of sport——"

"Sport!" echoed Dorrie. "Why, you young ass, we risked our limbs and our lives for the sole purpose of rescuing you from frightful danger. We understood that you were in the throes of battle!"

"Why, we haven't fired a shot all day!" I said.

"Absolutely not!" put in Archie. "Peace and so forth has reigned supreme, as you might say. In other words, the lads of the village have been dashed bored."

"That's why I say it's a fraud!" said Lord Dorrimore. "What about the telephone wire? Who cut it?"

"We are just as puzzled as you are!" I replied. "Now I understand. You thought that the cannibals had cut the telephone-wire and were starting an attack? Well, as it happens, everything's all right. We haven't seen the slightest sign of an attack."

"I can gather that for myself," said Nelson Lee, looking round. "Well, boys, I'm greatly relieved. At the same time, it was just as well that we should come. For we have now proved that we can defy these blacks—thanks to the armour-plating which has been fitted to the motor-boat."

"It may be easy enough to get through the lagoon, sir, but the main enemy forces are inland," I said.

"Quite so," agreed Nelson Lee. "And for that reason it is essential that every precaution should be taken. Vigilance must not be relaxed, for even an instant. And we must be particularly careful after dark."

Nelson Lee and Dorrie came with us towards our fortifications, four sailors being left in charge of the armoured boat. The gov'nor had expected to find everything well prepared for an attack, but he admitted that he was rather surprised at the complete nature of our preparations.

The entire Fort was surrounded by deep,

well-made trenches. There were front-line trenches, and communication-trenches, and machine-gun pits, and dug-outs. And a considerable portion of the open beach was covered with an excellent substitute for barbed-wire entanglements.

We had driven sharply-pointed stakes in the sand—rows and rows of them—and fixed in such a way that the wicked points leaned away from the trenches. And enemy forces making a rush would find themselves up against this perilous barrier.

Within the trenches themselves we had stocks of ammunition, and, in fact, nothing had been forgotten. A very deep trench communicated with the Fort itself—a part of it being a tunnel which passed right beneath the outer fence of the stockade. In the event of an overwhelming attack, we should still be able to retreat into the Fort.

"Why, dash it all, the place seems to be impregnable!" exclaimed Dorrimore, after the inspection. "You could defy thousands in this place! No matter how strong the blacks are, they couldn't possibly get through these defences! Your trenches are a kind of improvement on the old Hindenburg line!"

"Well, we've done it pretty thoroughly," I admitted. "But we should have been rather lost without Phipps. It was Phipps who designed all these fortifications, and mapped the whole thing out."

"Phipps again!" smiled Nelson Lee. "A wonderful man!"

Phipps blushed modestly.

"Not at all, sir," he said. "I have merely copied the system of fortifications which I saw in many sections of the front during war."

"Yes, and added a few ideas of your own, eh?" I said. "Anyhow, we've carried out Phipps's orders to the letter, and this is the result. I don't think there's much need for us to worry, sir."

"Why, you're as safe as houses here!" declared Dorrie. "What's more, I think we'll stay until to-morrow. They're safe enough on the yacht—the blacks wouldn't dare to make an attack in that direction, and Captain Bentley can easily do without assistance."

The guv'nor agreed, and by the time the armoured motor-boat was drawn snugly up on the beach, Fatty Little announced that the evening meal was ready. Fatty was quite unconcerned. He carried on with the food department as though nothing out of the usual was taking place.

We couldn't all feed at once, of course, for certain fellows had to be on duty. We always had sentries on the watch. But there appeared to be no indication of the blacks making a move just yet.

Night came down with the usual abruptness of the tropics, and very soon the stars were gleaming and glittering like points of fire out of the velvet heavens. And now the trenches were fully manned. Every fellow was at his post. One or two scouts were prowling about in the palm groves,

ready to give the warning if there was any indication of a move by the enemy.

Although we did not expect an attack, there was nevertheless a feeling of tension in the air. But none of the juniors were scared or excited, as they had been at first.

Complete confidence was in everybody's breast. Our defence works were so complete that we were certain that we should be able to break up any attack that was made. But it could not be denied that our greatest danger was at night. A swift, sudden attack by the enemy was more likely to succeed in the darkness than in the daylight.

It was getting on towards eleven o'clock, and a third of the fellows were asleep, we had arranged to take our sleep in relays, when one of the beach look-outs came hurrying in. It was De Valerie, and he was rather excited.

"Where's the officer in command?" he demanded, as he dropped into the front line trench.

"Nipper's in command here!" replied Armstrong. "Oh, here he is."

I came up at that moment.

"There's a ship coming straight towards the island!" reported De Valerie tensely. "She's got all sails set, and is making for the first opening in the reef. What are we to do?"

"A ship?" I echoed, staring. "What do you mean—a big canoe?"

"No, a ship, a real sailing ship," interrupted De Valerie. "I think it must be that Chinese junk that appeared the other night. You remember? She came just near the island, and then sheered off. I believe this is the same vessel!"

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Armstrong excitedly. "We'd better light bonfires and attract attention! Chinese! They'll be friends, and we shall all be able to get off the island, and the Chinks can land us at Hong Kong or somewhere."

"Don't you be too sure!" I said grimly. "I was talking to the guv'nor about that Chinese junk, and he says it's quite likely that they're pirates."

"Pirates!"

"Yes!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Armstrong. "This is the twentieth century, not the seventeenth or eighteenth! There aren't any pirates in these days——"

"You'd better think again!" I interrupted. "These pirate junks go about now just the same as they did hundreds of years ago! They lie in wait, and then make signals of distress as soon as they spot a ship. Then, when their victims come up they go on board and hold up the whole crowd. They pinch all they can lay hands on, and sheer off. The guv'nor's got an idea that this island might be a base for a crowd of these cut-throat Chinamen. And they wouldn't be particularly friendly towards us."

"Well, they'd be more friendly with us than with the blacks!"

"That's just where you're wrong!" I said. "These yellow rotters are probably hand in glove with the blacks. They trade with one another, I expect, and I'll bet a penny to a pound the cannibals obtained their rifles from the Chinese pirates. It suits the yellow blighters to be on good terms with the blacks."

"My hat!" said Armstrong. "Then what shall we do?"

"You'd better buzz along to the guv'nor and report at once," I said. "I can't leave my post just now. Tell Mr. Lee and Dorrie about this junk, and they'll probably reel out some good advice."

Armstrong hurried off, De Valerie accompanying him—for, after all, it was De Valerie's job to impart the information. Nelson Lee showed no great surprise when he heard the news.

"You had better return at once, De Valerie, and warn all the boys to keep quiet," he said briskly. "I've every reason to believe that these Chinamen are enemies. At any rate, we shall know sooner or later. We don't want to give them any help—so we'll keep quiet!"

A few minutes afterwards Nelson Lee and Dorrie passed down the beach well beyond the trench systems, and gazed out across the lagoon in the starlight. The water lay at their feet, slightly phosphorescent, and very peaceful and beautiful. And out there, beyond the barrier reef, the dim shape of the approaching junk could be seen.

"What about it, old man?" asked Dorrie softly.

"It doesn't look healthy," replied Nelson Lee.

"You mean—they'll join the nigs against us?"

"I do!" said Nelson Lee. "It won't be long before these savages approach the Chinamen and acquaint them with the situation. And after that we can be fairly certain that the yellow men will throw in their lot with the blacks. That will make the situation far more serious."

"Why?"

"Because this junk is probably provided with guns," said Nelson Lee tensely. "And a few well directed shells would utterly destroy the trenches and the Fort, too! And we shouldn't be able to retaliate, Dorrie. That's the truth about it. But we won't be pessimistic."

"Of course not," said Dorrie. "In any case, a Chinaman couldn't hit the island, let alone the Fort! They've got no sort of aim, an' I expect their guns are about ten thousand years old! Personally, I'm not worryin' about their ordnance department at all!"

Nelson Lee had been peering down the beach, he suddenly uttered a murmur of satisfaction.

"Good," he said. "The dug-out is just along the sands, Dorrie, and we'll slip in it and steal off across the lagoon. If possi-

ble, I want to get away without the boys noticing."

"Why, what's the game?" asked Dorrie. "I'm ready for anythin', but I'd like to know what the scheme is first."

"You remember that cave we discovered, with the Chinese signs on the rock?" asked Nelson Lee. "I believe that place is a kind of store chamber where these pirates stow away their loot. We'll get there in advance, conceal ourselves behind the rocks, and watch. It might be interesting."

"Good enough!" said his lordship. "We'll buzz along."

They soon pulled the dug-out down to the lagoon, and got on board. This was the craft which Handforth and Co. had made a week or so earlier. It was much smaller than the canoe, and more easily manageable for two. Dorrie took the bows, and Nelson Lee remained amidships. He could only use one paddle, owing to his injured arm, which was still in a sling.

They stole silently down the lagoon, and wondered if there would be any attempt on the part of the blacks to stop them. But the cave which Nelson Lee had referred to was in the opposite direction to the cannibal force. And Lee and Dorrie were not interfered with as they glided along.

By the time they arrived at their destination the Chinese Junk had sailed right through the opening in the reef and was now in the lagoon itself. Lee and Dorrie could hear the rattle and clatter of the chain as it was lowered. And the voices of the Chinamen came across the water with wonderful distinctness.

"It proves that these men have been here before, and frequently," whispered Nelson Lee. "They came through the opening without taking any soundings, and made straight for the anchorage. That proves that they know these waters by heart."

The pair were soon concealed among the rocks, and in such a position that they could easily see the entrance to the cave. They had hidden the dugout effectively. It was by no means certain that the Chinamen would come to the cave, but Nelson Lee thought it just possible, and he wanted to be on the safe side.

And, crouching there in hiding, they waited.

CHAPTER V.

THE YELLOW PIRATES.



DIM figures came up the beach towards the cave entrance.

Nelson Lee's assumption was turning out to be correct. Only a brief half-hour had elapsed, and the concealed watchers had seen a small boat put off from the anchored junk. It had crossed the lagoon somewhat heavily,

and from it half a dozen figures came up the sands, all of them heavily laden.

On the junk a good many lights were showing. The Chinamen had made no attempt to conceal their movements. And they must have known that the island was occupied, for fires were burning in the cannibal village, and there was a lurid glare reflected from them down in the valley.

Lord Dorrimore was rather astonished that the Chinamen were coming to the cave laden with boxes and bales. He marvelled at Nelson Lee's reasoning, which had turned out to be so accurate. In every detail the detective was correct.

"Astondin'—that's what it is!" said Dorrie. "I'm blessed if I know how you know these things, old man."

"Hush!" whispered Lee. "We shall be heard."

"I'm not afraid of these yellow curs!"

At the same time, Dorrie realised that it was better to remain quiet. And he and Lee crouched there and watched. The Chinamen came comparatively close. They talked together now and again in low tones. And each man was carrying a heavy load. They disappeared, one after the other, into the cave.

And then, after only a comparatively short interval, they emerged empty handed. They used no lights, which indicated that they knew their own ground very thoroughly. And they set off back for their boat.

"Goin' to fetch another load, I suppose?" remarked Dorrie softly. "Whew! I'm gettin' stiff!"

It was unfortunate that he should choose this precise moment to shift his position. For he happened to stand upon a loose rock. And the next moment it went clammering down, causing a noise which seemed to be tremendous.

"By gad!" muttered Dorrie blankly.

A sharp exclamation came from one of the Chinamen. Then this man and his companions hurried quickly in among the rocks. They talked together rapidly.

There was no way of escape for Nelson Lee and Dorrie. In their rear lay the cliff, and in order to escape they would have to negotiate a high pile of rocks to their left. But before they could even get near them the Chinamen would be on them. Lee whipped out his revolver.

"It's got to be a fight, Dorrie!" he said grimly.

Crash!

The detective uttered a sharp hiss of agony, and his revolver clattered to the ground. A heavy piece of rock had come hurtling through the air, and it had struck his injured arm. The agony was so great that Lee felt sick and giddy for a moment, and he reeled.

And the next second he was seized by strong, rough hands. Dorrimore blazed away twice with his revolver. A squeal of pain

followed, and one of the the Chinamen fell shrieking to the ground, his leg shattered. But Dorrie could do no further damage. He was held by three powerful Chinamen, and forced to the ground.

Five minutes later both Lee and Dorrie were roped up. They had not been able to withstand the onslaught. The numbers had been too great for them. And now they were prisoners! They were helpless!

"I'm sorry, old man!" muttered Dorrie, between his teeth. "I'm the cause of this infernal mess-up! I always was a careless idiot!"

"Never mind, Dorrie," said Lee. "It couldn't be helped."

But Lord Dorrimore was furious with himself. He knew that this situation could have been avoided. He had dislodged that rock by a sheer act of rashness. And the resulting capture had been unavoidable. The Chinamen had sprung upon their victims with really surprising alacrity. Even Nelson Lee had not expected them to show such pluck.

But the fact remained that they were prisoners.

And without any delay they were carried down the beach, and dumped into the waiting boat. The injured Chinaman was left lying on the beach, moaning. His companions seemed to be quite indifferent to his sufferings.

The boat set off across the lagoon, and, arriving at the junk, Lee and Dorrie were hauled up by means of ropes, and dumped on the deck. Although bound and helpless, Nelson Lee took an active interest in his surroundings.

The vessel was a typical Chinese craft, and of considerable size. It was even larger than he had supposed, and he judged its tonnage to be nothing less than seven or eight hundred tons. For a sailing vessel of this type it was very big.

The masts were bare at present, but when under way, the clumsy square sails of matting would be all set. There was the curiously high forecastle and poop—a characteristic of the true Chinese junk.

But Lee and Dorrie were not allowed to take too much stock of the vessel. They could see that the deck was untidy and littered. And there was a distinctly unpleasant smell pervading the whole atmosphere. Chinese junks are not renowned for their cleanliness.

The unpleasant odour was ten times intensified below.

The two prisoners were taken down some black stairs almost at once, and then into a filthy, stuffy cabin. The reek was so fearful that Dorrie fairly gasped for breath.

"By the Lord Harry!" he muttered. "I've been in the native quarter of Cairo—I've been in the worst sections of Port Said. I've been in a hundred and one smelly places, in fact, but this niff fairly beats the lot! Poison gas is sweet scent compared

to it! Five minutes of this, an' I shall expire!"

The cabin was not only filthy, but indescribably untidy. A dirty oil lamp was hanging from a hook on a beam. Lee and Dorrie were placed on a kind of bench. Here they were compelled to sit.

"You wait here!" said one of the Chinamen. "Me blingee claptain!"

"By gad! So you speak English, do you?" said Dorrie gruffly.

"Me spik Ingleesh heap plenty good!" said the Chinaman, his features never relaxing a muscle. "You notee in danger if you keepee quiet. Him claptain a nicee man."

The Chinaman disappeared, leaving the two prisoners alone with three other yellow ruffians who remained on guard, and who were apparently unacquainted with the English language. Dorrie addressed them, but got no reply.

There was a short delay, and then voices sounded outside in the little passage. Two men entered, the first being an elderly Chinaman with a wizened face and little eyes which were deeply set in his sunken cheeks. He was somewhat better dressed than the others, and was probably the captain.

Behind him the second man was in striking contrast. He was a Chinaman, too, but his attire was refined and costly. His features were well cut, and Nelson Lee recognised him at the first moment.

"Ho Liang!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "At your service, gentlemen," said the Chinaman softly, and in perfect English. "Something of a surprise, I believe? I do not think you had any anticipation of this little pleasure, eh?"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Dorrie. "You're that smooth-tongued rascal of the Lotus Lily! The man who kidnapped Yung Ching!"

"Exactly!" agreed Ho Liang. "I am the man who kidnapped the little Chinese boy who was sent to St. Frank's college. Yung Ching would have been in China by now if you had not interfered with my plans."

"How did you know that we were here?" demanded his lordship.

"I did not know, it was a pure piece of luck, as you English say," replied Ho Liang smoothly. "I have not been idle—I have been watching and waiting. News was brought to me that certain white men and boys were upon this island. I came to investigate, although I must confess that this vessel is not to my liking. Fortune has been good, since it has delivered you into my hands."

Both Lee and Dorrie were astounded. Ho Liang was the last man they had expected to see. It was now pretty evident that this Chinaman, a powerful agent of a big Chinese secret society, had been scouring the seas for the Wanderer. As he had said,

it was mainly by luck that he had located his quarry.

The secret society he represented had caused a great deal of trouble by kidnapping Yung Ching, the little Chinese boy. It was astonishing that the quest had not been forsaken.

"It is not my way to waste words," said Ho Liang. "You're in my hands, and I can profit by that fact. We will strike a bargain, gentlemen. If you will give Yung Ching into my care I will send all these black men away from the island. Do you agree?"

"Yung Ching remains in our care," replied Lee briefly.

"That is a pity," purred the Chinaman. "There will be much trouble, much shedding of blood. Surely we can avoid that?"

Lee looked at the man steadily. During the last few moments the whole aspect of things had changed. And Nelson Lee was beginning to suspect that Ho Liang had been at the bottom of this business from the very start.

At the same time, it was very puzzling. Had Ho Liang negotiated with these cannibalistic savages? Had he directed them to invade Lagoon Island and attack the white party? It seemed very much as though this was the case. For, obviously, Ho Liang had power over the blacks. He would send them away if Lee agreed to hand Yung Ching over!

This positively proved that the Chinaman was in control to some extent. But not for a second would Nelson Lee agree to any of Ho Liang's suggestions. The rascal could not be trusted an inch. Even if Yung Ching was handed over, which was unthinkable—Ho Liang would probably betray his part of the bargain.

"Well?" asked the Chinaman, after a pause. "You will agree?"

"You have my answer!" said Nelson Lee.

"It is a pity," murmured Ho Liang. "These natives are a savage tribe. They practice cannibalism, and you will certainly be killed and eaten. It is a terrible prospect. You will reconsider? You will hand me Yung Ching?"

"No, we will not!" said Nelson Lee sharply.

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry," he purred. "You are bringing this trouble on your own heads. The way is so easy if you choose. So! It shall be as you say. Afterwards, I shall get the boy into my hands. It will be easy!"

He turned to the junk's skipper, and gave some rapid orders in Chinese. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore were seized, and roughly carried up to the deck. They were glad to be in the open air once more.

Three minutes later they were being lowered into the waiting boat.

They were to be handed over to the cannibals!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT IN THE LAGOON.



REGINALD PITT looked at me curiously.

"You think there's something fishy going on?" he asked.

"I do!" I said grimly.

"And, what's more, I mean to have a look into it. We'll get some of the other fellows, too. And we won't waste any time."

I was off duty, and ought to have been sleeping. Pitt was off duty, too. But instead of being in our hammocks, we were standing on the beach just beyond the Fort, and quite by ourselves.

The trenches were quiet. Scouts had reported that the blacks were all quiet—the native village was asleep. And for some time I had been paying a great deal of attention to the lagoon.

Dimly, I could see the Chinese junk, anchored a good distance away. And, what was more, I had seen the guv'nor and Dorrie steal away in Handy's dug-out. I had not seen any sign of their return.

A short while before, however, I had distinctly heard a shot. It was muffled, and seemed to come from a good distance. But there was no mistaking the sound. Then there had been activity on the junk.

"I don't like it," I said, frowning. "I've been waiting all this time for the guv'nor to return, and now I'm going to take action. I've got an idea, Reggie, that something's gone wrong."

"With Mr. Lee and Dorrie?"

"Yes," I replied. "Come on—we won't hang about any longer."

There was every ground for my suspicions. That solitary revolver shot had been significant. I was just about to move towards the Fort, with the idea of collecting one or two fellows, when a dark form loomed up.

"What's that?" I whispered sharply.

"Be not alarmed, Manzie," came a low voice. "It is merely I."

"Oh, Umlosi!" I said. "I thought you were asleep!"

"Nay, my young master," said Umlosi. "I am uneasy. Methinks there have been evil doings. I am fearful for the safety of N'Kose, my master. Methinks Umtagati has sore trouble. I could sleep not, O Manzie."

"That's settled it!" I exclaimed. "You're a wonderful chap, Umlosi. You generally know by instinct if things are going wrong. We're just going out in the canoe, and you'd better come with us."

"Thou art wise, O my young warrior," said Umlosi. "Wau! I can tell that there will be battle ere long!"

"Well, we don't know," I said. "But if the guv'nor and Dorrie are in a hole, it's up to us to get them out of it. That revolver



Handforth gave a wild gulp as the spears came hurtling through the air in his direction.—(See p. 25.)

shot a short time back didn't strike me as being healthy."

"Thou art referring to a crack of the firegun?" asked the Kutana chief. "'Tis well that we should be on the alert, my Manzie."

In a very short time I had obtained three other fellows—De Valerie, Jack Grey, and Tommy Watson. This made six of us altogether, including Umlosi. I had a revolver, to say nothing of a heavy club at my waist. All the other juniors were armed with clubs, whilst Umlosi clung to his trusty spear. He wanted nothing else but this weapon.

We got into the canoe, and pushed off silently into the lagoon. All was dark and quiet, and I only had a vague idea as to what we should do. Somewhere in the dim darkness Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrmore had gone out in the frail dug-out. They had not returned.

And I feared that some disaster had overtaken them. The events of the night, taking them all round, had been rather mysterious. The arrival of the Chinese junk, the secret trip of Nelson Lee and Dorrie. And the inactivity of the blacks. What did all this portend?

At all events, we at the Fort were absolutely on the alert. Our trenches were manned, and we were ready for action at the slightest hint of alarm. We even had numbers of rockets all in readiness—star-

shells in fact, to send up in case the cannibals came into battle during the hours of darkness.

But, as I have said, there was no hint of alarm.

My whole attention was centred upon the Chinese junk and the lagoon.

I could not help feeling that any trouble had come from this direction. Quite possibly I was wrong, quite possibly the gov'nor was safe and sound. He and Dorrie were, no doubt, perfectly safe.

But I wanted to be sure of this.

And so, like a shadow, we nosed out over the lagoon, keeping as near to the shore as possible. Here the palms cast a dense black shadow, and there was not the slightest possibility of our movements being detected.

Although the night was dim, stars were shining, and out on the main body of the lagoon we should have been seen. But by hugging the beach, and keeping in the shadow of the palms, we rendered ourselves invisible.

"What's the programme?" whispered Watson. "Shall we keep straight on—"

"Hush!" I whispered. "Don't talk."

"We can't be heard—"

"We might be!" I interrupted. "This water is nearly still, and the human voice carries with astonishing ease. Better not talk at all."

So we progressed like a part of the darkness itself, our paddles making absolutely no noise as we dipped them into transparent waters of the lagoon. A faint phosphorescence hung upon the paddle blades as they dipped in and out of the water, and the effect was most beautiful.

But we had no eye for anything of that sort just now.

Suddenly Tommy Watson clutched at my arm. He was next to me. He did not speak, but pointed out across the lagoon in the direction of the junk. Not that I had needed any touch of that kind.

For I could see that a boat was just putting away from the mysterious Chinese vessel. In the starlight we could see the boat distinctly. It had left the junk's side, and was going towards the land.

Umlosi paddled rather more swiftly, and we shot forward. We were now in such a position that the boat would come comparatively near by before grounding on the beach.

Umlosi shipped his paddle, and stood crouching in the bows, bending forward, and his whole attitude full of expectancy and alertness.

We all remained the same—like shadows.

And from across the still lagoon came the chug of the boat's oars, and the creaking of the rowlocks. The night was so quiet that we could hear every little sound. A chain was moved on the junk's deck, and the clank sounded as though it had occurred only a few yards away.

Now and again we heard voices, too.

Little scraps of conversation between the Chinese. From the island came the occasional cry of some wild thing. And the whole atmosphere seemed to be mysterious and charged with danger.

And then, suddenly, Umlosi grew more rigid.

"Hist, my young master!" he breathed. "Let thine ears be acute!"

We remained more still than ever. And we heard voices coming across the lagoon—softly, mysteriously. And the point which filled us with excitement and amazement was the fact that these voices were talking in English. They were, indeed, the voices of Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore.

"Don't like . . . grumble," came Dorrie's tones. "Seems . . . all up, old man. We shall provide . . . eh? Nice, juicy steaks!"

"Don't joke about it, Dorrie!" came Nelson Lee's voice, more distinctly. "This matter is serious. We are to be handed over to the cannibals. Don't see how we can avoid it . . . End, I'm afraid!"

"Looks like it!"

"We could shout, of course," said Lee. "The boys might hear. But no time to come to our assistance. No hope!"

Umlosi turned his head.

"Didst hear, O Manzie?" he breathed.

"I caught a few words!" I replied tensely.

"I could hear the gov'nor and Dorrie talking. But where are they?"

"Wau! Are thine ears so poor as all that?" whispered Umlosi. "My masters are within the boat. They are captured by these pigs of yellow men—and they are to be delivered unto the hands of the cannibal curs!"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"There is but one thing to do!" exclaimed Umlosi. "Come! It is battle!"

As he spoke he dipped his paddle deep into the water, and thrust forward—caring not whether the movement was heard or not. Indeed, all secrecy was at an end. During the next moment Umlosi let out a wild war-cry—a deep, throaty roar, which echoed and re-echoed over the lagoon, and among the rocks on the shore.

Crash!

We struck the bows of the Chinese boat with full force. The frail craft rocked about and nearly upset. Our own canoe, too, was strained, and beginning to leak slightly—although not seriously.

"Be of brave heart, my masters!" roared Umlosi. "We are here to lend thee aid!"

"Umlosi!" gasped Dorrie. "Oh, good man!"

"Splendid!" said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps—"

It was impossible to hear further, for the noise was tremendous. The Chinamen were shouting, and they had produced weapons. Revolvers were fired wildly, without any particular aim being taken.

I heard a bullet humming past my left ear.

But this shooting was impossible for any period. At such close quarters we could not hope to use firearms—neither could the Chinese. Pitt and De Valerie and I were using our clubs with good effect.

We struck out fiercely, and with determination.

Our blows did not hit many of the enemy, but they struck the Chinese boat—and did a good deal of harm. Umlosi was not content with this. With one leap he jumped clean out of the canoe into the enemy craft.

"Now, thou insects!" he yelled. "Thou wouldst interfere with the mighty N'Kose! Thou wouldst take Umtagati a prisoner! Wau! Do thou take this—and this—and this!"

Again and again his spear flashed up.

Screaming and gasping, the Chinamen were beaten. Umlosi's spear did not make any mistake. It plunged into the hearts of three Chinamen in succession. Two other yellow men jumped overboard into the water.

And then, suddenly, there came a wild, horrible cry.

I did not see much in the gloom—just a luminous gleam on the surface of the water. I thought I saw a fin. And then came a deadly, ghastly crunch. There was a swirl in the water, a brief bubble of foam, and then—silence!

"My goodness!" I gasped. "A—a shark!"

There was no question about it. One of the Chinamen who had jumped overside had been killed instantly by a shark. Involuntarily I shivered. That fearful sea monster was even now hovering in the vicinity. Perhaps its mate was close by, too, waiting for a meal.

But there was no time to be scared. The Chinamen had abandoned their craft—with the exception of two men who lay moaning in the bottom of the boat. So great was their fright that they could do absolutely nothing.

And Umlosi lifted Lord Dorrimore bodily, and gently placed him in our arms. We had pulled the canoe close alongside, and the task of transferring the gov'nor and Dorrie was an easy one.

Nelson Lee followed immediately afterwards, and then we paddled away—leaving the enemy to fend for themselves. I believe that one other man climbed back into the boat, and thus saved himself from the sharks. But the Chinese had met with several casualties in the fight. Umlosi had enjoyed himself immensely. He was a warrior, and never happier than when wielding his mighty spear.

It did not take me long to slash through the bonds which bound the two prisoners. I always carry a knife at my belt, and I soon had the blade at work. Dorrie and the gov'nor sat up, free.

"Jolly good!" exclaimed his lordship.

"My sons, you deserve several yards of medals!"

"It was Umlosi who saved you——"

"Nay, thou art wrong, Manzie," interrupted Umlosi. "The idea was thine in the first place. I am glad that thou didst come on this trip. For have we not saved N'Kose from being delivered into the hands of the cannibal scum? Have we not saved the wondrous Umtagati from a similar fate?"

"We have!" I agreed. "It was a piece of luck!"

"I hardly think so, Nipper," said Nelson Lee quietly. "By what I can understand, it was brought about by astuteness on your part. There is a great deal more in this matter than we originally imagined. For the prime mover in the game is no less a person than Ho Liang."

"What!" I ejaculated. "That secret society rotter who tried to kidnap Yung Ching at St. Frank's—and then——"

"Yes!" interrupted Dorrie. "This chap offered to set us free if we handed Yung Ching over to him. But as there was nothing doing in that line, he was shippin' us to the cannibal camp as a kind of breakfast gift. Things would have been rather lively if you hadn't butted in."

Both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were very relieved. They did not say much, but it was plain that their gratitude was great. Without our intervention they would have been given into the hands of the blacks.

Before we reached the Fort, we became aware of movements from the junk.

And, gazing across the lagoon, we saw that the vessel was moving. She was, in fact, turning and heading for the opening in the reef. Half an hour later the clumsy vessel was out in the open sea—and sailing away from the island. We could not understand the meaning of this move.

But we were fairly certain that we had not seen the last of the Chinamen.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE WHITE FLAG!



NELSON LEE did not immediately retire to rest.

"I mean to have a look in that cave!" he declared. "Therefore we will manufacture some rough torches and go along at once. I have a mind to see what the Chinamen concealed within those rocky walls."

"Can we come sir?" I asked.

"Certainly if you wish!"

We did wish and waited eagerly for the start. Umlosi prepared the torches, for he was an expert in this kind of thing. The gov'nor had told us exactly what had occurred—how he and Dorrie had crouched among the rocks, and how they had seen the Chinamen enter the cave carrying

bundles and boxes. And Nelson Lee wanted to discover the nature of these packages.

"For all we know, they may be stores for the blacks," he said. "I do not think so, but we must be certain. But, supposing these boxes to contain ammunition, it would be madness on our part to leave them there."

The torches were ready, and we took our places in the canoe. The latter had been examined, and it was found that the damage was very slight. We set off down the lagoon once more. The fellows in the trenches knew nothing whatever of these happenings, and probably believed us to be asleep.

Arriving opposite the cave entrance, the canoe was drawn up on the beach, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore went forward. They said it was unnecessary for us all to go in—and risky, too.

It was far better for the bulk of us to remain outside in the open. And so Nelson Lee and Dorrie took the torches, and entered the cave. It was not until they had penetrated some distance into the inky blackness that they struck matches and lit the torches.

They did not want the glare to be reflected—and here, within the cave, it was quite safe to light the flares. They burned brightly, casting flickering shadows in all directions.

"Rummy sort of place," remarked Dorrie, as he gazed round.

The cave penetrated right back, with uneven rock sides, and with a fairly low roof. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee, in their white drill suits, and pith helmets, looked rather picturesque amid these surroundings.

Penetrating deeply into the cavern, they found themselves among heaps of bales and boxes, and all sorts of similar articles. There was a metal-bound chest, the lid of which was secured down by two clamps.

Lee did not have much difficulty in prising these clamps open. He raised the lid, and uttered an exclamation. But Dorrie bent down close. The chest was filled with golden coins and sparkling jewels!

"Treasure, by gad!" said his lordship.

"Stolen property!" exclaimed Lee grimly.

"That's what this represents, Dorrie. Stolen goods from many a helpless ship. That Chinese junk is a pirate, and these boxes and bales represent the booty which has been collected over a period of months."

"Why, this hoard must be worth tens of thousands!" exclaimed Dorrie. "What's the idea of dumpin' it on this island?"

Obviously, because the Chinese pirates are afraid of being searched," replied Nelson Lee. "They dare not take the stuff direct to China. I have no doubt, in fact, that it is the practice for another junk to collect the loot at a later date—a junk which is above suspicion. A very cunning scheme."

"So it appears," said Dorrie. "We seem to have hit upon somethin' rather

excitin'. An' there doesn't seem much hope of bein' rescued by these chinks. We know their secret, an' I dare say they'd give quite a lot to see us all dead an' buried. To be exact, old man, the position is gettin' worse. Because we've got these Chinks up against us now."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee.

A minute or two later I penetrated into the cave with Reggie Pitt. I didn't see any reason why we should be left out of it. We were astounded when we saw the treasure which lay hidden here, in these deep recesses of the cavern.

And we soon emerged once more into the starlight, talking with animation. It was not necessary to tell us that we should probably be in for some grave dangers in the very near future.

Returning to the Fort, we lost no time in getting into our hammocks, and snatching what little sleep we could before dawn.

When it was daylight, I turned out. I felt a bit heavy, but this soon worked off. Most of the other fellows were up and about. At a time of this sort, we could not expect to have our full dose of sleep. And with so many excitements going on, we really didn't need the sleep.

The Chinese junk was returning!

This was the first item of news I received, and I wasn't at all surprised. Why the vessel had left her anchorage at all puzzled me. But I could not help feeling that there was something significant in the fact.

Quite possibly, she had to journey to a neighbouring island—the one occupied by these savages. And either she had brought another force of the enemy with her, or had arranged for a number of men to follow. There could be no doubt that Ho Liang was determined to wipe us out.

The situation was quite changed now. Instead of fighting against a mob of blacks without any leader, we were up against a cunning clever rogue who was thoroughly educated in Western ideas, who talked English fluently, and who had already proved himself to be a formidable foe.

It was Ho Liang who was directing these blacks. And he would undoubtedly use all his skill and cunning to defeat us.

The junk sailed right into the lagoon, and anchored as before. Seen in the full daylight, the vessel appeared much larger than we had imagined. She was quite a big ship, as Chinese junks go, and appeared to be swarming with yellow men. There were large numbers in excess of her necessary complement. This was another proof that the vessel was a pirate.

Nothing happened for some little time.

We still kept strict watch, and the fellows in the trenches were relieved at intervals. We partook of breakfast just as we could get it. Some of the juniors were satisfied to take their rations on duty. Fatty seemed to regard the warfare as a kind of side line, and openly sniffed at it.

He went on with his work just as though things were normal. But there was no doubt that he provided all the food necessary, and he did it well.

When the sun had climbed further into the blue sky we saw several boats leaving the junk's side. They came across the sparkling waters of the lagoon, and went ashore in the cannibal camp. The Chinamen mixed with the blacks and finally they all disappeared in the direction of the enemy valley.

"Now we'd better look out for squalls!" observed Pitt.

"You think there's an attack coming?" asked Jack Grey.

"Well, it's been delayed a long time now, and I don't suppose it'll be delayed much longer. We must be ready."

But an hour passed and Lagoon Island remained as peaceful as ever. Then, some distance down the beach, two painted and decorated savages appeared. One of them was carrying a piece of stick. Tied to the end of this stick was a ragged piece of white material. The man proceeded to wag this improvised flag with much vigour. We looked on with interest.

"What, are they surrendering?" asked Armstrong in surprise.

"By George! The white flag!" said Handforth. "That's it! The rotters have surrendered! I knew we should win—"

"Steady on, Handy!" I interrupted. "That's not a signal of surrender. These chaps merely want a parley, by the look of it. I expect they're going to offer terms, or something like that. We shall have to be wary. They're quite capable of treachery."

Nelson Lee and Dorrie were soon acquainted with the facts, and they came forward and left the trenches. They stood waiting upon a bare strip of beach, with the waving palms on one hand, and the sapphire lagoon on the other.

The two natives approached. They came right up close, and they turned out to be fearfully ugly, and decorated in the most barbarous manner, with gigantic head-dresses and bands of brass round their ankles and wrists. They were carrying no weapons of any sort.

"Well?" said Dorrie. "What's the idea?"

The silence having been broken, the two blacks commenced jabbering. They talked at great length, but it was quite impossible to understand what they were saying, or what they were driving at. Their language was quite unfamiliar to Nelson Lee.

He held up his hand at last, and shook his head. One of the blacks turned, and waved a hand. And immediately afterwards a Chinaman came out of the undergrowth and approached.

He was a villainous-looking fellow in native clothing, and he was indescribably dirty. He came up close, bowed low, and then stood perfectly still, his face utterly immobile.

"Me wantee talkee talkee," he said.

"Go ahead!" said Nelson Lee grimly.

"You no wantee fight?" asked the Chinaman.

"We are quite prepared to fight, if necessary!" replied Nelson Lee. "You need not imagine, my friend, that we are afraid of you and your savage horde. If you attempt to attack us you will regret it."

"Big talkee!" said the Chinaman. "You handful—you notee last long. We sendee black man forward in huddleds, and you be wipee out. No needee for this. You gettee off island and allee light."

"Does this mean that you are telling us to quit?" put in Dorrie.

"Allee samee, yes," said the Chinaman. "You quit. You gettee off island to-day. You intruders and must leave. You goes in canoes. We givee you many you wantee. You go before sunset."

"Do we?" asked Nelson Lee. "I am afraid you are mistaken."

"You notee alee?"

"No!"

"You velly silly!" said the Chinaman calmly. "You blingee much kill. If you notee gone by sunset you allee die. Smallee boy die, too—everyone. We attack, and killee evely one of you. Muchee bad. Not necessaly. You go, and allee well. Savvy?"

"We savvy perfectly," said Nelson Lee. "But you can go back and tell your chief that we do not agree. We shall remain on the island, and if you attack us you must take the consequences. We are fully armed, we are ready for battle, and it will mean bloodshed on your side if you make any attack."

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you lefuse to go?" he asked.

"We refuse!"

Again the Chinaman shrugged and turned. He went back to the enemy lines, accompanied by the two cannibals. And Nelson Lee went back to the trenches, looking serious. Crowds of fellows collected round him.

"There will be an attack this evening—that much is certain!" he declared. "We have got until sunset to clear off the island. I don't know that it would not be better to go—"

"Never, sir!"

"We'll fight the rotters!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We mustn't surrender, sir!"

"We're willing to fight like the dickens, sir!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I quite understand, boys, that you are reluctant to give in to these black wretches," he said. "If I had any assurance that we should be safe in clearing off the island, I would adopt such a course. For, although you are willing to fight, I would not like to risk any of your lives."

"We sha'n't come to any harm, sir," said Handforth.

"I hope not, my boy," said Nelson Lee. "But I am fairly certain that it would be a fatal move to leave the island. Our best course, I imagine, is to forsake the Fort, and to get to the yacht. There we shall all be comparatively safe. If we leave the island in canoes we shall be followed, and in the ensuing fight we should have no chance."

The juniors did not like the idea of forsaking the Fort, and protested strongly. They pointed out that after all our preparations it would be a great pity to leave. And, indeed, we were far safer in these fortifications than we should be on the Wanderer.

Probably the gov'nor would have insisted upon us shifting to the yacht, but this could not be done, as we soon saw. For the blacks were in much greater numbers now in the lagoon. We were cut off from the Wanderer. The motor-boat could have got through, armoured as it was, but for the whole crowd of us to go was out of the question.

Our only course was to remain, and await events.

But I noticed that Nelson Lee's eyes were gleaming, and there was a curious little smile about the corners of his mouth. And I knew that he had an idea. I knew that things were not quite so bad as they appeared to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

HANDFORTH IN TROUBLE.



HANDFORTH looked round, and nodded with satisfaction.

"We're off duty, and our time's our own for at least three hours," he said. "Now, I'm going to do some big things in that time!"

Church and McClure were not impressed.

"You can do as you like," said Church. "I'm going to bed."

"Same here!" agreed McClure.

"You—you lazy slackers!" said Handforth, glaring. "Bed! Going to bed in the middle of the day! Why you rotters—"

"We didn't have much sleep during the night, and there's no telling when we shall get another chance," said Church. "The most sensible thing is for us to do the same as the other chaps. We'll get some sleep while we can."

This advice was very sound, but Handforth rejected it.

"I'm going to do some scouting!" he announced. "I'm War Minister, and I'm not satisfied with the way things have been going on. Therefore, we've got to make an alteration. I'm going into the enemy lines, and I'm going to find out exactly what the rotters are up to."

"I wish you luck!" said Church. "McClure and I will buzz indoors and get some sleep."

"Oh, will you?" snapped Handforth. "You—you traitors!"

"What?"

"Willing to desert your chief just when he needs you most!" went on Handforth bitterly. "But, of course, I might have expected it! A couple of miserable rotters like you ain't fit to be in the War Ministry! I suppose every Chief of a Department has to suffer from wishy-washy subordinates!"

"It's generally the other way about!" said McClure tartly.

"Well, I'm not going to argue!" declared Handforth. "And you needn't think that you'll be allowed to sneak off to bed. We're going straight off at once, and you fellows will remain on watch while I penetrate into the enemy's lines. I'm going to nose out all their secrets."

Church and McClure hardly knew what to say.

They tried their utmost to dissuade Handforth from his purpose, but they might just as well have tried to influence a brick wall. Handy had made up his mind, and there was an end of it.

Of course, his chums could have defied him had they wanted to. They weren't afraid of Handforth, for all his threats. As a matter of fact, they were very fond of him, for at heart Edward Oswald was one of the very best.

And it was this very affection which compelled Church and McClure to go on the scouting expedition. It would be fatal to let Handforth go by himself. He would only get killed, or captured, or something equally disastrous. Church and McClure simply had to go to look after him. They didn't go because they were scared of their leader.

"But look here, Handy," said Church, in one last effort. "You don't seem to realise that it's too risky—"

"Risky!" echoed Handforth. "Why, are you afraid?"

"No, I'm not!" roared Church warmly. "But you're the War Minister, and what would happen to all the rest of us if you got killed or captured? You've got to think of that—you can't be selfish! It's not the War Minister's job to do scouting work!"

"I don't care," said Handforth. "The other scouts made a mess of things, so it's up to me to do their work. I'll do it thoroughly, and I'll come back with enough information to make us as safe as houses!"

"Houses aren't always safe!" growled McClure.

But it was useless, as they could see, and a few minutes later the three juniors strolled away around the rear of the Fort, and Handforth airily announced to the juniors in the trenches on this side that he was about to look for a few bananas close by.

Handforth had an idea that if he stated his real intention he would be held back by force. And he made quite certain that

Church and McClure said nothing. He hurried them through the palm grove at a rapid speed.

Once through the palms, they emerged upon a sunlit little valley, where ferns grew in profusion, and where orchids and other glorious flowers gave splashes of delightful colour to the scene. A little stream trickled musically between grassy banks. It was a very peaceful spot.

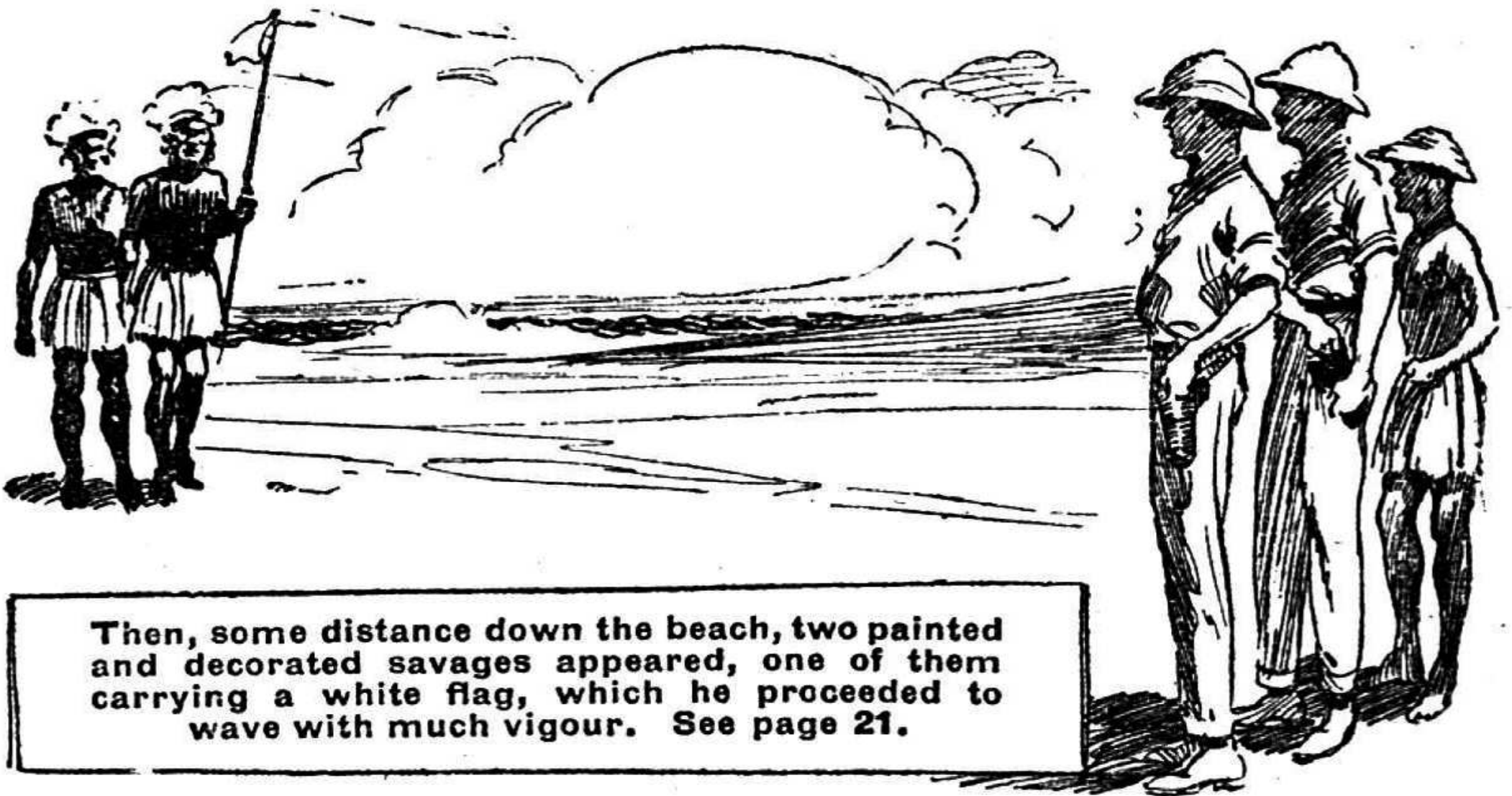
There was not much danger of any blacks being here, for it was far removed from Geyser Valley—the latter being at least a mile distant. The blacks had never shown any disposition to leave the valley.

"Now we've got to cut across here, push through the cane brake on the other side,

particularly startling in this—for it was quite a habit of Archie's to sneak off occasionally and have "a few yards of the old dreamless" on the quiet.

He could not have chosen a better spot than this. But the fact which startled Church so much was connected with an object which lay upon Archie's chest. Obviously Archie knew nothing about it.

But there, right in the centre of Archie's manly bosom lay a snake! It was not a particularly large one, but it looked deadly. The colouring and marking was gorgeous, but Handforth and Co. didn't take much attention to this at the moment. The snake's head was upraised, and it was even then in the act of drawing itself back! The



Then, some distance down the beach, two painted and decorated savages appeared, one of them carrying a white flag, which he proceeded to wave with much vigour. See page 21.

and then we shall be able to see where we are," said Handforth. "I'd better lead the way, and you chaps can follow—"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Church abruptly.

"What's up with you?"

"Quick! Look over there!" gasped Church. "Oh, my goodness!"

He pointed with a shaking finger. Both Handforth and McClure were rather startled, for there was no doubt about Church's agitation. He had even gone somewhat pale, and his eyes were gleaming with a scared kind of light.

And then Handforth and McClure understood.

For only a few yards away a figure lay under a shady bush, in a sheltered little nook near the stream. The figure was that of Archie Glenthorne, and he was lying fast asleep on his back in the midst of some tropic ferns.

Archie had his hands clasped on his head, and there was a smile of serene contentment upon his face. There was nothing

reptile was about to strike at Archie's face!

"Great pip!" panted Handforth huskily. For once Handforth made no blunder. This was, in fact, a matter of life or death. A moment's delay, and Archie would be bitten—probably with fatal results. And Handforth knew this.

He bent down like lightning, and grabbed up a piece of rock about the size of a cocoanut. It was jagged and weighty. Handforth threw his arm back, and Church and McClure held their breath.

It was terribly risky.

One fraction of misjudgment on Handforth's part would be awful. If that jagged piece of rock hit Archie in the face it would injure him in a ghastly way. But it was either this, or death. For once the snake had its fangs in Archie's flesh, there would be no further hope for him.

Whizz!

Handforth hurled the rock with all his strength. It shot through the air, and caught the snake just below the head—

knocking the reptile completely from Archie's chest, and sending it wriggling and quirming among the fern. Archie sat up, looking rather dazed.

"What-ho!" he muttered. "I mean to say, dash it all——"

"Jump for your life!" roared Handforth.

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Archie. "What—what——"

Then he gave a leap into the air, which surprised the juniors; they had not thought Archie capable of such energy.

But Archie had just caught sight of the snake—squirming in its death agony. In fact, when Handforth and Co. rushed to the spot the snake was merely quivering. The rock had done its work thoroughly. The reptile's head was nearly severed from the rest of its body.

"You—you reckless fathead!" roared Handforth, gazing at Archie fiercely. "You idiot. It's a jolly queer thing you weren't killed!"

"But, my dear old fruit, kindly refrain from such bally insulting remarks!" said Archie severely. "I mean to say——"

"That blessed snake was sitting on your chest, and in another minute it would have bitten you!" interrupted Handforth. "This is what comes of going to sleep in a place like this! It's a wonder you're not dead!"

"Gadzooks!" gasped Archie. "Pray allow me to collect up the old wits! I am somewhat scattered, if you grasp my meaning. The snake, what? Sitting on my chest? I mean to say, that was rather poisonous!"

"The snake was poisonous!" said Church, taking a deep breath. "If Handforth hadn't killed the thing, it would have been all up with you. You were lying fast asleep, and knew nothing about it. Handy grabbed up a stone, and chucked it at the snake and killed it! I've never seen such a marvellous aim!"

"Oh, it was nothing!" said Handforth carelessly. "Nothing to me, anyhow!"

"Well, dash it all, it seems that I've had a bally narrow escape, what?" said Archie, with a shudder. "It sort of makes a chappie go goosey, don't you know. The old flesh creeps, and the outer covering contracts, as it were. Pray allow me to deliver a large consignment of gratitude!"

"Oh, that's all right!" growled Handforth.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "The fact is, laddie, you're a deucedly brainy cove. That is, you rose like a hero to the occasion and charged into battle,

and what not! In other words, you arrived on the scene like a fierce, rushing wind, and proceeded to put it across the snake in large quantities!"

"Yes, that was the idea!" said McClure. "I never thought Handy was smart enough for anything like that——"

"Oh, didn't you?" snapped Handforth. "Well, I'm capable of any dodge of that kind. You don't think I'm going to let this ass be bitten, do you? The best thing he can do is to buzz back to camp at once."

Archie nodded.

"Absolutely!" he agreed. "The sylvan glade has lost its attraction, you know. I mean to say, a chappie has rooted objections to being sat on by a bally snake. Thanks most frightfully, old tulips! I will proceed to trickle back to the fold. And what will you do?"

"I'm going scouting!" replied Handforth. "I've got to find out what the blacks are up to, and so I'm going to penetrate into the enemy's lines. You can tell the other chaps that I shall be back in about a couple of hours—or less. These fellows will be with me. We'll bring back some important news."

"Right-ho, laddie—right-ho!" said Archie. "Leave it to me!"

He went off, looking a bit shaky—for it had been something of a shock to know that he had been so near to death's door. Archie inwardly decided that when he had another nap he would take it in his hammock.

"Now he's gone, we can get along!" said Handforth. "Come on!"

They pushed across the glade, passed through the cane brake, and then found themselves almost overlooking the enemy village. The cannibals had set up numbers of roughly made huts.

And, through the trees, a glimpse of these huts could be seen, with blacks moving about freely. Handforth looked very satisfied, and he turned to his two chums—with the intention of telling them to remain on this spot.

But the words didn't come.

As he looked round his eyes opened wide. An evil face was regarding him from the bushes. Two yards away there was another! Two yards in the opposite direction still another face looked out. And then Handforth became aware of the fact that these black faces were staring from every quarter—fully a dozen of them.

"My only Aunt Jane!" gasped Handforth faintly.

The words acted as a signal, for the next moment the air was rent by a chorus of wild and horrible yells. Handforth expected to find a spear slicing through him. But this fearful event did not take place.

A dozen black forms leapt out from the undergrowth. Handforth and Church and McClure were seized. Before they could even attempt to fight, they were grabbed

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and rendered helpless. In the hands of four powerful savages even Handy could do nothing.

"You—you smelly rotters!" he gasped. "Lemme go!"

But they didn't let him go. They forced him forward, and Church and McClure were forced in a similar way. And the three luckless prisoners were taken straight into the enemy village.

Crowds of blacks gathered round them, and the jabbering was tremendous. Handforth was furious and indignant, but Church and McClure did not mind admitting that they were scared. Owing to their leader's recklessness they were prisoners in the hands of the enemy. And they expected to be brutally slaughtered at any moment. The situation was grave.

But, to the surprise of Church and McClure they were roughly thrust into one of the huts. Four men went in with them, and the two juniors were compelled to squat down in the midst of their captors.

In the meantime, Handforth was subjected to a rather deadly ordeal.

With the blacks jabbering and dancing all round him, he was taken to a rough fence. And here he was tied securely to the wooden bars, and in such a position that he was spreadeagled out, with his arms and legs outstretched. He could not move an inch.

Then the savages, taking their spears, retreated to a good distance, and hurled their spears at their victim!

Handforth gave a wild gulp as the spears came hurtling through the air in his direction. He expected to die then, for there seemed no hope.

But the spears, in some miraculous way, struck the fence all round him—some above his arms, some below, some just on the right side of his face, and others on the left!

And as each spear struck the fence the wood splintered and cracked. But Handforth himself was untouched! And now he was beginning to regain his composure somewhat. He realised that these blacks were testing their skill! At any moment one spear might go wrong and strike him dead—but it was fairly obvious that the cannibals had no deliberate intention of killing him yet.

But the position was terrible.

CHAPTER IX.

TO THE RESCUE!



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE hurried into camp.

A number of juniors who were about stared. They stared because it was most unusual for Archie to hurry at all, and

the very fact that he was dashing about in this way proved that something unusual

was afoot. I approached Archie at once, and I could see that he was not in his usual state of serene composure.

"Anything wrong, Archie?" I asked sharply.

"Well, the fact is, old parsnip, I'm most dashed worried!" said Archie. "I mean to say, it's enough to make a chappie go somewhat pale when a snake starts sitting on his manly chest, what?"

"Snake!" I echoed. "What do you mean?"

Archie told me what had happened, and several other fellows heard the yarn, too. There was no doubt that Archie was telling the truth.

"But that's not the point, old dears," he went on. "I'm all right. Absolutely fit, as it were. The snake didn't even take a bally nibble! I'm worrying about Handforth and those other two chappies. They're frightfully reckless bounders, don't you know, and they've staggered forth into the enemy's domain! As a matter of absolute fact, they're probably waltzing around the old offing by this time!"

I clenched my fist.

"Handy again!" I snapped. "The rash idiot! He's the last chap I'd trust on a scouting expedition. A jolly fine fighter, and brave enough for anything—but he's too clumsy to be a scout! Look here, we shall have to do something."

"Better go and see what's become of the asses!" said De Valerie.

"Yes," I agreed. "You'll do De Valerie. We'll go at once."

A number of others wanted to accompany us, but I wouldn't agree. It was quite sufficient for two scouts to go on this trip. And so without delay we started off, and went through the little glade and the cane brake, and then, at last, we got to a high point where we could look down upon the enemy village.

We did not follow the same route as Handforth and Co.—for it was a very unwise thing to take such a route, where there was every possibility of being surrounded without knowing the fact until too late.

We had chosen a course where we could see all round us all the time. And now we stood upon this high piece of ground, and gazed down right into the heart of the cannibal camp.

We were aware at once that something unusual was afoot. For large numbers of the blacks were dancing about, and capering and yelling. Then I suddenly grasped De Valerie's arm.

"Good Heavens!" I muttered. "They've got 'em, old man!"

"Got 'em?" repeated De Valerie.

"Can't you see Handforth there—tied to that fence?" I asked, pointing. "I don't know about Church and McClure—perhaps they're dead, although it's more likely that they're prisoners—awaiting their turn."

De Valerie stared, his face paling.

"Why, they—they've killed him!" he ejaculated huskily.

"I don't think so!" I said. "They've got him fixed to that fence, and they're throwing their spears all round him. It's a kind of torture, they may not finish him off for hours!"

De Valerie looked more keenly.

"Yes, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Handy's alive all right—listen!"

By straining our ears, we could just hear a bellow from below. There was a note of defiance in it, and we recognised the voice of Handforth. The leader of Study D was evidently as vigorous as ever.

"It's no good us standing here and watching!" I said crisply. "We can't rescue him single-handed, so the only thing is to go back to the Fort. Something's got to be done at once."

"You mean we'll attack the enemy?"

I was silent. Even if we took all our forces, we should stand no chance in the enemy camp. They were overwhelmingly strong against us, and we should simply go to our death.

But Handforth and Co. had to be rescued somehow.

Then I suddenly remembered something. Acting upon Phipps' advice, a number of fellows had been armouring the famous steam-engine. Phipps had got his idea from the armoured motor-boat. He realised that the steam-engine was not much good as it stood—but, armouring it might prove to be a very useful weapon of offence. In fact, a kind of tank.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed abruptly. "That's it!"

"Eh?" gasped De Valerie, as we ran.

"The old steam-engine!" I exclaimed. "It's been armouring with logs and bits of iron and all sorts of things! We'll get up steam, and make a dash right through the enemy lines! It's a forlorn hope, but the only thing we can do. I'm game to drive the blessed thing!"

"Good!" said De Valerie. "I'll come with you."

Soon afterwards we raced into the camp. In less than five minutes everybody knew of the plight of Handforth and Co. Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Somerfield were very concerned, and they almost gave up hope of rescuing the three missing juniors. Nelson Lee listened while I told him of my scheme.

"It is the best thing to do in the circumstances," he agreed. "To make a combined attack is impossible, we should never succeed, for there are not only these blacks, but numbers of Chinese. By dashing through in that steam-engine, however, you might scare the blacks for a sufficient length of time to succeed in the plan. At all events, you can but try."

"I'll take the wheel!" said Dorrie promptly

"No fear!" I said. "They're our chaps, and we're going to rescue them! You've never driven this steam-engine, Dorrie—and it's tricky! I'm accustomed to it. You've got to let us go on this trip."

"Nipper's right," said Nelson Lee quietly.

Lord Dorrimore didn't argue. He always accepted Nelson Lee's decision without a word. And, with feverish haste, we got steam up in the engine. It was called the Rocket 2, and it was a weird-looking contrivance.

The engine itself was a kind of donkey-engine, and it was mounted on a chassis of logs, with the boiler set at the rear, a great square tank. The driver was in front, in very much the style of an ancient motor-car. And the wheels were great thick things made from logs. How the engine ever moved at all was somewhat remarkable, but, as a matter of fact, it had quite a decent turn of speed.

Steam was soon up, and valves were hissing and roaring and steam was pouring out of the cylinders. We decided to take the most direct course, straight along the beach and then across a fairly level stretch of ground right into Geyser Valley.

The front portion of the Rocket had been armoured—after a fashion. Logs and steel plating had been fixed up so that the driver and his companion were completely enclosed. This afforded protection against flying bullets. But the space within was very cramped, and no more than three or four fellows could be accommodated with comfort.

"Now look here, only four of us must go," said Pitt. "The thing won't hold more—"

"Only two!" I broke in. "In fact, it ought to be confined to one, strictly speaking. I ought to do it alone!"

"You ass!"

"What about Handforth and Co?" I demanded. "How are they going to squash in if four of us occupy the thing already?"

"By Jingo, I'd forgotten that!" said Pitt. "You're right!"

There was no time to waste, and we didn't argue. However, De Valerie came with me, as he had first offered. It was really necessary that I should have somebody to assist me at the last moment, in case of trouble. And we both realised that we were probably going straight to our death.

But in the excitement we didn't give the matter a thought. Just that one possibility crossed our minds, and then we dismissed it.

And the Rocket, hissing and roaring, started off and gathered speed. She went rumbling across the sands in the direction of the enemy forces. I didn't particularly care what happened, just so long as we got there.

I opened the throttle to the widest extent, and clung like mad to the steering-lever. Several days of disuse seemed to have given the steam-engine added power. For the thing fairly romped along, and almost before

we knew it we were riding amongst the cannibals.

A few of the blacks shot at us with their rifles, and a few arrows and spears came hurtling in our direction. But the majority of the enemy scattered and fled. They rushed off into the bush and sought cover. For they could not get over their superstitious fear of this snorting monster.

How on earth we ever got to the valley at all is a mystery. We rocked along, nearly overturning as we went into dips and charged against bumps in the ground. But, somehow or other, we clung to our levers. And, although the Rocket was creaking and groaning at every fresh jolt, it hung together.

And at last we charged full tilt into the very heart of the cannibal village.

The blacks scattered like leaves before a hurricane. They dashed off in every direction, and there, still tied to the fence, was Edward Oswald Handforth, yelling at the top of his voice with sheer excitement.

"Hurroo!" he roared. "Rescue, St. Frank's!"

It was as much as we could do to pull the steam-engine up in time. It had no brakes, and all I could do was to send the thing charging into one of the roughly-built huts, feeling sure that the impact would act as a brake. It did.

The steam-engine jammed and tore the whole structure down, and then came to a halt. De Valerie leapt out, and I followed him.

Crack! Crack!

A number of bullets came flying through the air in our direction, but we were not hit. Rifle shots sounded from the surrounding bushes and undergrowth. But we didn't care. We had come to rescue Handforth and Co., and we meant to do it.

I dashed at the fence, pulling out my knife as I did so. It was only the work of a few seconds to slash through Handforth's bonds. He was free—stiff and aching, but unharmed. He could hardly walk, or even stand.

"What about Church and McClure?" I demanded sharply.

"In—in there!" panted Handforth, pointing.

"All right—you get into the engine!" I shouted. "We'll soon have the others!"

De Valerie and I dashed into the hut which Handforth had indicated. As we did so three enormous blacks came charging out.

We were bowled over and sent flying—and the cannibals rushed off, scared out of their wits. It was rather curious that one of them should fall, groaning, after a few yards. He had been struck by a bullet which had been intended for us.

Inside the hut we found Church and McClure lying on the floor, and just in the act of picking themselves up. It was fairly clear that they had been flung aside only a moment or two earlier. They stared at us in amazement.

"Nipper!" gasped Church. "What—the dickens—"

"Can't talk now!" I snapped. "Come on!"

They needed no second bidding, but dashed out of the hut with us. The situation was now getting very hot. Bullets were flying in all directions, to say nothing of spears. But the blacks themselves dared not come out into the open. By a miracle, it seemed, we escaped and got into the waiting engine.

I found a graze on my arm shortly afterwards, and knew that a bullet must have struck me—although I had not known it at the time. And I caught a glimpse of a crowd of Chinese rushing up. They did not suffer from the superstitious fears of the blacks. But they were too late!

The Rocket was soaring once more, and she started off on the return journey, snorting and hissing.

I don't exactly know how we got back. The Chinese used every effort to stop us, but they failed. The blacks themselves had vanished into the surrounding trees, and did not show up at all. But at last we found ourselves upon the open beach, and charged triumphantly into our own domain.

We had won—we had rescued the three prisoners.

It had been a hot time, but we were all very satisfied because nobody had come to any harm, and Handforth and Church and McClure were with us again. Big preparations were being made now, for at sunset the attack would come. And it was up to us to defend ourselves with all our strength.

What would be the exact nature of the attack? How would the Chinamen and the blacks commence their campaign?

We didn't know, but sunset was approaching, and there was not the slightest doubt that the most severe test of all was to come!

THE END.

NEXT WEEK:

THE TERROR FROM THE SKY!

Another exciting story of adventure with cannibals, with a splendid description of a real tropical cyclone.

Two more fine photos of famous Footballers GIVEN AWAY!

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Editorial Office,
The Fort,
Lagoon Island.

My Dear Readers,—The apparition of some evil spirit could hardly have been more uncanny than the appearance of Ho Liang on this island. He evidently did not expect to find us here or he would not have chosen this particular island whereon to hide his ill-gotten spoils. Now that we know he is a pirate and thus liable to be handed over to the executioner in his own country, our acquaintanceship is not likely to improve.

What with this new danger, the cannibals and Umlosi's red visions, war is certainly in the offing, and in publishing Handy's article below, I hope that I may be forgiven, since it has the merit, at least, of being topical.

Your old pal,

NIPPER (The Editor).

HOW TO BE A WAR MINISTER.

By E. O. HANDFORTH.

OF course, everybody knows that I'm the War Minister of the Lagoon Island Government. And everybody knows, too, that the War Ministry is the most important office in the whole Government. That goes without saying. War's a jolly serious business, and it requires a stern, firm, capable chap to be Chief of the War Department.

That's why I was chosen for the job. I'm the last fellow in the world to boast—I hate a swanker. But it's an absolute fact that if I wasn't in the Government, the whole Cabinet would collapse. Phipps is the Prime Minister, and, to give him his due, he's a smart fellow. But I'm always giving advice, and if I happened to be of a jealous disposition, I should grumble because I'm not Prime Minister, as I ought to be. I'm naturally a leader, and I think it's a shame that I should be shoved aside in favour of a chap who used to be a valet. It's not only a shame, but an outrageous state of affairs. But I wouldn't breathe a word of complaint. I hope I've got better manners.

Being a War Minister is a responsible thing. First of all, there's got to be a war. If there doesn't happen to be a war on when you're appointed to the office, the first thing is to

make one. It's no good being a War Minister unless you've got something to do.

As it happens there's a big war on here. The cannibals have invaded Lagoon Island, and we're having the very dickens of a time keeping the beggars at bay. If it wasn't for me we should have been murdered and eaten long ago.

I invented the navy, and converted the armed guard into the standing army of Lagoon Island. In fact, I've had all sorts of marvellous ideas, but the Cabinet has turned them down. That's the rotten part of being anything but the Prime Minister. All my prize ideas are squashed. It's sickening to a fellow who is simply bursting with ripping schemes.

For example, I suggested that we should make a fleet of tanks. They're just the things we need for fighting these blacks. With a dozen tanks we could wipe out the whole crowd in two minutes. But this fine idea is ridiculed and cast aside! It is rejected by the whole Cabinet!

And why?

Goodness only knows—I don't! Nipper and Pitt and Phipps and the others started all sorts of objections. How could we make tanks? Where should we get the engines? What about the wheels? And the armour plating and the guns? Think of it! Quibbling about mere details when there's a war on!

Then I had another scheme. I suggested that we should make a night attack. The plan was to surround the enemy, and build bonfires in a complete circle. In this way they would be roasted until they yelled surrender. When the air got too hot they would cave in. Then we should put out the fire in one place, and let the cannibals rush out through the opening—capturing every one as he came out.

Even this suggestion was turned down by the Cabinet! Pitt said that we should be caught before we could light the fires. What rot! It only needs careful arranging. These blacks are cowards anyhow.

I've come to the conclusion that the only way to be a War Minister is to do things in secret. It's no good giving your ideas to the Cabinet. So in future I mean to think of things, and do 'em myself—without telling a soul. For example, I'm going to raid the enemy single-handed, and send them all into fits of fright. (If Handy does that we shall need a new War Minister! Ed.)

I'd like to see the Cabinet abolished, and all the other Ministers, too. Then I should be in complete command. These other Departmental Chiefs have a lot too much to say. What has it got to do with them, anyhow? It's a pity if a War Minister can't conduct a war in his own way!

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."

J. SILCOCK.

T. J. MATTHIAS.

THERE is no doubt that in John Silcock, Manchester United, despite their lack of success in the League last season, have one of the safest defenders playing in English football to-day. For Silcock has all the attributes of a really great player, being a man who believes in using brains as well as feet.

Silcock was born at New Springs, near Wigan, twenty-five years ago, and it was as a member of a Lancashire Combination team that the late manager of the United club found him during the war when on a talent-hunting expedition in Atherton. Recognising in the youngster ability out of the ordinary, he immediately took steps to sign him on for his club, and the result has been happiness ever since. For Silcock, besides rendering yeoman service to the United, has also earned distinction in playing in representative games.

By trade, John is a miner, and as a youngster he played for his colliery team. He was shy at taking the plunge into professional football, I am told, and he insisted that his parents be interviewed before he did anything decisive. His parents, however, put all doubts at rest. Evidently they knew their son's prowess with the big ball, and made no bones at all about allowing Silcock to go to the United.

A clean sportsman and a thorough gentleman sums up his character in a few words. Silcock, as I have said, has a good many International honours in his bag already, but unless my judgment is at fault, there are many more to come. Height 5 ft. 10 ins.; weight 11 st. 10 lb.

ONE of the most brilliant stars of the Welsh football firmament in recent years is T. J. Matthias, the magnificent International right half-back—the man who helped his side to success last season, and who, for the last two seasons, has played in every International game for his country.

What Matthias does not know about the art of position play is not worth knowing. When in action it is a pleasure to behold him for he does all sorts of unorthodox things and does them as coolly and as level headedly as you please. It is easy to see that in Matthias Wales has a player of more than the average brains, as well as all the qualities that go to make a brilliant footballer.

With his head, or his feet, in the van of the attack, on the defence in front of the posts in his own area of the field, Matthias is equally at home. He never seems to get worried or flustered, never loses his head, and his passes, even when most hardly pressed, are invariably dead true, placed to a nicety. He has won many games for his club by his masterly tactics and expert football generalship.

Matthias is still young, but he has made a reputation that will live long in the annals of Welsh football, and if he goes on as he has begun, he bids fair to rival the colossal International record of Billy Meredith, to whom he has succeeded in the captaincy of Wales. He is a true son of the land of the leek, having been born and bred across the little border in the town of Brynteg.

Is not over-big as defenders go, but he has proved, many times, that his size is in no way a handicap to him.

Height 5 ft. 6½ ins.; weight 11 st.

ON THE NINTH GREEN!



**A STORY OF CRIME AND DETECTION
UPON A TYNESIDE GOLF COURSE.**

**Introducing the famous sleuth, Nelson Lee, and his clever
assistant, Nipper.**

AS Nipper often said, fate seemed to have a down upon Nelson Lee's holidays. No sooner did the famous detective determine to set business aside and take a week's relaxation, than some complicated puzzle of cause and effect would draw him once again into the whirlpool.

So it was at Low Fell, in the county of Durham.

The detectives had disposed of a minor case, to the great relief of a native of that not unbeautiful suburb; and, having nothing pressing to recall them to town, had accepted his urgent and genial hospitality for the week-end.

It was when they had finished a round of golf, and were enjoying a smoke, preparatory to leaving the club-house, that the case was thrust upon the notice of Nelson Lee.

As they sat there, overlooking the broken ground which forms part of the golf-course, they became aware of a disturbance within the forecourt beneath their feet. A small, grey-haired woman, with a man's cap upon her head, and a black shawl around her narrow shoulders, was making an attempt to enter the club-house, and a member of the club was making kindly but determined efforts to restrain her.

"Aa wull see the cap'n!" she was saying. "Aa wull see the cap'n! Ower Johnnie didna dee it! Eh, whey, mon, ye knaa yoursel' ower Johnnie didna dee it! Aa wull see the cap'n!"

The captain himself, who happened to be standing immediately behind the detectives, certainly had no desire to interview the old lady. He stepped back to a point where she could not see him; and, when his friend was successful in getting her to give up her intention, he heaved an audible sigh of relief.

"It's Mrs. Robson," he explained,—"mother of the lad who committed the murder I was telling you about, away yonder on the tenth hole. She tries to see

me almost every night; but, what's the use? The poor lad's guilty. I can do nothing."

Nelson Lee smoked in silence. His acquaintance with the seamy side of life was already too deep for his liking. He had no curiosity for the details of what was probably a sordid and elementary crime.

But, as they waited for a tram beside the stone-quarry, on the Wreckenton Road, they again saw the mother of Johnnie Robson, and this time she was being questioned somewhat roughly by a big man, whose blue serge, bowler-hat, and ammunition boots, labelled him as belonging to the police.

The man was asking her, again and again, what her son would do with anything that he wanted to hide, and she was replying with the repeated assertion that her son did not commit the crime of which he was accused.

"H'm!" commented Nelson Lee. "I gather that the police evidence is not complete. The woman," he went on, "does not look like the mother of a murderer, either."

He watched for some moments; and then, moved by the suffering in the woman's face, stepped across, and offered her questioner his card.

"Ah, Mr. Nelson Lee!" said the man. "I've heard of you, Mr. Lee. Very interesting. I'm Inspector Anderson, of the Durham County police."

Then, realising that his interrogation of the unhappy Mrs. Robson must have been observed by the private detectives, he explained:

"Just squaring up the little affair that the papers are calling 'The Links Murder.' This is the mother of the accused. Our trouble is that we haven't traced the valuables which were stolen from the murdered man. I was just—er—making a few inquiries from her."

"So I observed," said Nelson Lee, rather dryly.

Inspector Anderson instantly became defensive.

"Anyway," he said, "there's nothing in this for you. The whole case is cut and dried."

Nelson Lee nodded indifferently.

"I am quite prepared to believe it."

"But," he added suavely, "if you could spare the time to give me the outline of the case, I should be much interested to hear it."

His request was dictated by pity for the poor woman, who, as he had said, did not look like the mother of a murderer.

Inspector Anderson agreed, because, firstly, he liked hearing the sound of his own voice; secondly, he was anxious to demonstrate to the famous private detective that the police force in general, and himself in particular, were pretty good at criminal investigation; and thirdly, because he liked a good cigar, and Nelson Lee was proffering a case which obviously contained something extra good in the way of cigars.

With a word of apology from Lee to his host, and a curt dismissal of Mother Robson by the inspector, they strolled along to the Wreckenton terminus, and found a quiet corner in the buffet of a public-house.

As soon as they were supplied with refreshment, and the cigars were burning satisfactorily, the inspector delivered himself of the full story of the Links Murder.

"It's not a long yarn," he said, "and I don't know as how it'll interest you, Mr. Lee, after the big cases you've been in touch with."

"The victim was a chap named Willis, a doubtful character in some ways. He was a bookie by trade; and, I dare say, he was too fond of—well, you know, crooking his elbow. Anyway, a good many said he deserved all he got."

"I dare say he'd had threats enough, in his time; but the funny thing is that he copped out in a quarrel with a half-witted lad, who used to caddie on these links at Wreckenton."

"He came up to the club-house one night when everybody else was thinking of going home, and wanted a match."

"Seeing that he'd had a drop too much, they all refused to play with him—and, anyway, it was too dark to see the ball."

"He was very obstinate, however, and went out by himself, carrying his own clubs."

"That was the last time he was seen alive."

"Next morning, a couple of chaps from Birtley Ironworks, crossing the links on their way to work, found him spread-eagled on the ground, between the ninth green and the tenth tee. He was quite dead, had been dead for ten hours, and his pockets had been cleared of all valuables."

"That looked like the end of it. And then a young couple, who live at Gateshead came forward to say that they had

seen the dead man playing the eighth hole, and heard him abusing his caddy for not watching his ball. He was still intoxicated, and was using abominable language, to which the caddy replied in kind."

"This interested us in the force, because, when Willis started out, he did not have a caddy. We made inquiries, and identified the caddy as the son of this woman you saw me talking to just now."

"We questioned this lad, and he deposed that he was hired by Willis somewhere on the second fairway. He admitted that he had what amounted to a quarrel with the dead man, and that, when Willis had holed out on the eighth green, he threw down the clubs and refused to carry any further."

"After that, according to him—and this is where his story is very weak—the lad sat on the bank brooding for a few minutes, after which he went for a long ramble by himself. He half-expected to be discharged for insolence in the morning, so he says, and was wondering how to break the news to his mother."

"Asked why he did not come forward earlier, he replied that he was afraid he might be accused of the crime if he did, and so kept silence. A pretty weak reply."

"On the other hand, I don't mind admitting that the evidence against young Robson, the caddy, was not such as a jury would convict on."

"But this is where the county police came in. Willis had been murdered by a blow from a niblick—the heaviest tool in the golfers' outfit, and we pointed out that, since Willis would need to use a niblick for his approach shot, it is highly probable that that very tool would be in his caddy's hands when he finished holing out. It was this bit of reasoning which convinced the coroner's jury, and caused them to bring in a verdict of murder against Robson."

The inspector emptied his glass, and exhaled a cloud of perfumed cigar-smoke. "Pretty good, eh?" he finished.

"Yes," agreed the private detective; "but that isn't the end of the story."

"Eh? Oh, I see, it's the money you're thinking of. Well, no, we haven't succeeded in finding old Willis's valuables. They say he had fifty pounds or more in his pockets, and he certainly wore a gold watch. But we can only suppose that Robson hid these in some patch of gorse, intending to let them remain there until the excitement had died down. I don't see that it's important, anyway. We've got enough evidence to hang the chap, and that's what matters."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"In the first place," he said, "I don't think you have got enough evidence to hang the lad; and, in the second, if you did, I fancy you might be hanging an innocent person."

This was sheer intuition on the part of the private detective; and the inspector resented it as such.

"Look here, Mr. Lee!" he said, getting up. "I should advise you not to try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs. If you think the man we've got is not guilty, I advise you to look round and tell me who is. I'm satisfied. That's all I've got to say to you. Good-night, Mr. Nelson Lee!"

And the angry inspector flung himself out of the buffet.

Lee smiled at the man's bad temper. Then, seated beside his young assistant, he relapsed into a brown study. After all, the anger of the police-officer was probably justified. He—Nelson Lee—had no evidence behind his statement that the police might be making a mistake. On the contrary, their case was very logical. He imagined, as if he was actually witnessing the occurrence, the progress of Willis and his caddy towards the ninth green. Heard the insulting words which the half-intoxicated Willis directed at the lad who was carrying his bag of clubs; saw the book-maker loft his ball on to the green with his niblick, hand the heavy tool to his caddy, and proceed to hole out with his putter.

In his mind's eye, he saw the man and the lad begin to walk towards the tenth tee, through the lush grass of the low ground. The man was carrying the putter, which he had last used, the lad held the niblick, which, in the intensity of his emo-

tion, he had omitted to replace in the bag. Then, as Lee imagined, the man's evil star sent something unforgivable into his head. He spoke it. The lad turned, and blindly slashed at him with the niblick.

Yes, Lee could imagine all this with the truth of actual vision. But could he imagine the lad stooping now, and rifling the pockets of the dead? No, he could not. Somehow that picture refused to take shape. He could imagine murder in a fit of rage. He could imagine murder for gain—more's the pity. But he could not imagine that a lad who had been driven by rage to a dreadful deed could immediately turn to a second crime of different nature to the first.

He sketched these conclusions for the benefit of Nipper, and was pleased to find that the lad agreed with him. He had great faith in the judgment of his assistant.

They were discussing the case in low voices, when a man came into the bar, and took his seat at the table opposite their own.

"Here, Nellie," he called to the girl who was attending to their wants, "bring me a Scotch, there's a good girl!"

The girl stopped, and then walked across to where he sat.

"Can't be done, Mr. Dudfield," she told

(Continued on next page.)

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him. "You know the boss said you weren't to be served until—"

"That's all right," he interrupted. "You get my drink. I've paid the boss every penny I owed him."

"What—and the five pounds you lost over—"

"Yes, and that as well. Now you get my drink, and don't talk so much."

"Cut grass on his boot," murmured Lee, "a bulge like a golf-ball in his coat pocket, his right shoulder worn nearly through by carrying garden tools. This man works on a golf-course somewhere. We might get some information."

He caught the stranger's eye, and nodded affably.

"It's a nice evening," he said.

The man grunted some reply, and opened the evening edition of the sporting "Newcastle Chronicle."

"It's a good rag, that," commented Lee. "What do you fancy for the Northumberland Plate?"

The man replied with a show of interest. Evidently, racing was the thing he lived for.

Soon he and Nelson Lee were talking "form" as if they had known each other for years; and, great as was the stranger's acquaintance with the subject, Nelson Lee's was greater.

Once again was Nipper astonished at his employer's knowledge. He had reason to believe that Lee seldom or never backed a horse; yet, now that occasion demanded it, the private detective could talk to a racing man on more than equal terms. It was a remarkable feat of memory.

At length he was interested to observe that Lee was promising a certain winner for the Newcastle Plate, and at long odds, if he could have the money right there. The man at first declared that he was absolutely penniless, and then let drop that, if he could have until the morning, he could "get some from a friend."

The detectives took leave of their new acquaintance after a second and third drink had disappeared; and, to Nipper's surprise, Nelson Lee turned again towards the Wreckenton Links.

There were still one or two members in the club-house, and Lee button-holed one of these gentlemen with the question:

"Do you know anything about a man named Dudfield?"



The match flickered out and the man cursed in disappointment; but its light enabled Nipper to recognise the man named Dudfield.

"Yes," Nipper heard the reply; "he's a greenkeeper on this course. A bad lot, really. Too fond of gee-gees and Scotch whisky. The committee were thinking of getting rid of him, as a matter of fact."

"H'm! Now I want you to take me to the store where you keep brooms, rakes, and the like. After which, I must see the chief groundman."

By the light of a pocket-torch, which Nipper always carried, and the aid of a pocket-lens, Nelson Lee scrutinised every one of the implements in the tool-shed. Then, instructing Nipper to telephone Inspector Anderson, he departed in search of the chief groundman.

"Tell Anderson," he said, "that if he will come up to the club-house now, without making a fuss about it, I will find not only the Links murderer, but also the missing money—or part of it—before the night is out."

Nipper hesitated. Had Nelson Lee taken leave of his senses?

"Can you do this, guv'nor?" he stammered.

Lee laughed at the lad's expression.

"Most certainly I can. I could find 'em now, so far as that goes. A little luck, my lad, and, yes, a little aptitude for putting two and two together, has simplified this case until the conclusion positively shouts at one. It is as clear as large type. Carry on, my lad. I'm enjoying this little holiday immensely!"

Nipper turned to obey; but he did not share his employer's optimism. Surely he had heard everything that Lee had heard, seen everything that Lee had seen; and

he had no reason to suspect anybody but the lad Robson. And Robson was already under lock and key.

Inspector Anderson arrived in a mood of sardonic scepticism.

That the private detective from Gray's Inn Road should achieve in two hours what the skilled detectives of the county police had not managed in as many weeks, was so impossible—to his mind—that he could hardly keep from laughing whenever he thought of it.

"Well, Mr. Lee," he said, "I'm here, and I'm ready to arrest the guilty man. Lead me to him."

"All in good time," replied the imperturbable private detective. "I only promised, you know, that you should have your man before the night was out. The night has hardly begun; but I think it will be fine. In the meantime, perhaps you would honour me by accepting another of these cigars, which you were good enough to commend an hour or two ago."

By the time Anderson's cigar was smoked, the club-house was empty, except for themselves, and the night was blue and starry.

"Now," said Nelson Lee to the inspector, "if you are agreeable, you and I and my assistant will go for a little stroll."

He led the way across the road, and began to climb the hill opposite the club-house. Having crossed the first portion of the links, he led the small party along a country road. Then, warning them to make no avoidable sound, he caused them to cross a low rubble wall and walk downhill to what Nipper recognised as the ninth green.

There they crouched behind a bunker, and waited.

"How long have we got to stick this?" asked the inspector.

"I cannot say," answered Lee. "I think not more than an hour; but I am not sure."

"Until then," he went on, "I must ask you not to talk."

The stars shone like jewels in the moonless sky. The sweet smell of new-mown grass was borne on the night-wind. A car droned along the road and went its way, the lurid white light of its headlamps giving them a weird and sudden glimpse of one another's faces, tense and expectant.

A pair of tired working-men dragged their heavy feet along the road, on their way for a drink before turning in. A night-bird called from the branches of the oak-tree beside the Wreken Dyke.

And then—silence, long, unbroken.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Nelson Lee made signs to his companions that the moment for which they had waited was approaching. Nipper judged, from his employer's bearing, that he was about to take some forcible action; but what it was the lad had no idea.

The truth is that the private detective had a big advantage over his companions in knowing what to listen for.

Presently he raised himself slowly until he could look over the top of the bunker; and, when Nipper and the inspector followed his example, they could see a solitary man crawling about on all fours on the putting green.

The man was searching for something—something which was hard to find, for after a moment he carefully struck a match, sheltering the flame with his hand, and striving to direct the feeble light downwards at the short-cropped grass.

The match flickered out, and the man cursed in disappointment; but its light had enabled Nipper to recognise the man named Dudfield.

Nelson Lee made no sign, and the search went on.

Presently, as they judged, the man had found what he sought. He marked the spot upon the green with the burnt-out match, and walked away.

Still the private detective made no sign.

After a moment, Dudfield returned. This time he carried an implement, similar to the long-handled key which a turn-cock uses, and thrust it into the ground.

"Now!" shouted Lee. And, vaulting over the bunker, he made a fierce rush at the man upon the green.

Nipper and the inspector were not far behind him; but Dudfield put up a desperate resistance. It was not until Lee had graced him with a beautiful right that the detectives were able to resume the conversation which had brought them thither.

"That is your man," said Lee, "and you would do well to fix him up before he gets his senses again."

The inspector obeyed grumblingly.

"Afraid you are leading me up a lane," he complained. "Where's your proofs, anyway?"

"Here," said Lee, touching the iron implement. "This is the key to the mystery." Then, in response to the inspector's continued expression of doubt, he went on:

"This man came into the public-house immediately after you left this evening. I deduced that he worked upon the golf-course, and I overheard a conversation which informed me that he had recently paid his debts. This combination of circumstances made me suspicious. I found out that this chap worked for the Wreken-ton Golf Club, and that he was in the habit of working at night, being a late riser, and a frequenter of public-houses when they were open. I found out from the groundman, that, at the time of Willis's death, the ninth green was under repair, and concluded that, if this man Dudfield had been anywhere on the course on the

fatal night, he would have been there, or thereabouts.

"I had a look at the tools used in tending the greens, and, just at the top of the cup which terminates this instrument here"—he again indicated the iron key which remained sticking upright in the green—"I found a brown stain, which might have been blood."

"These discoveries led me to form a theory. I thought it probable that Dudfield was the criminal. I had filled him with a very keen desire to find some money during the course of the present night, and I knew that if my theory was justified he would come here to get more of the money which had belonged to the murdered man. He has done so, and, in doing so, he has proved himself guilty. You can let Robson go."

"I admit that's very interesting, Mr. Lee"—Inspector Anderson was much more respectful, but he was not yet convinced—"but it is even more in the air than my case against Robson. Where's the stolen property? That's the question."

"Exactly!" said Lee. "I quite agree with you; and, in order to find the property for which the crime was committed, I will ask you to suppose for a moment that my theory is correct—that this man, and not Robson, is guilty."

"Imagine that it is the night of the crime. This man is working on the green here where he now lies a prisoner. He may or may not have had a drink or two. However, that may be, he is very worried about money. His credit is gone, and he owes debts of honour."

"While he is working, Willis comes along. He stands aside to let Willis hole out. Possibly Willis is one of those to whom he owes money, there may even have been a moment's unpleasant conversation on the subject."

"He sees that Willis is intoxicated, and alone. He knows that Willis will be carrying a large sum of money. It is dusk. A slight mist hides him from the road. He raises the heavy tool which he holds and crashes it down upon Willis's head."

"A moment later, he stands there, with the dead man's valuables in his hands, and a terrible fear of discovery in his heart."

"What should he do? He dare not carry them in his pockets; somewhere, soon, he has got to find a hiding-place—one to which he could easily return when the trouble has blown over. He knew better than to hide it among the gorse, with the constant danger of a searcher for lost balls turning it out. Yet it had to be hidden, and quickly."

Something in Lee's attitude was a challenge to the inspector. With all his faults, he was not the man to ignore a challenge of any sort. Besides, he had an idea.

"Lend me your torch, youngster," he requested; and, taking the torch with which

Nipper had assisted at the tying-up of Dudfield, he strode over to the sandbox upon the tenth tee.

"If it's anywhere," he said, "it's here."

By an effort, he up-ended the heavy iron box, and let the sand stream out upon the tee.

"No," said the private detective, "that is a good idea, but just short of correct. I think the true hiding-place is much nearer."

He placed his hands upon the iron appliance which was thrust into the green, gave it a turn or two, and lifted out the sod which it contained.

A circular hole, the hole which—in the ordinary way—would contain the "tin," was left where the appliance had been.

Nelson Lee thrust his hand into this cavity, and brought to the light of Nipper's electric torch, first, a wallet full of treasury notes, then a gold hunter and chain.

"These," he said, "are, I take it, the property of the murdered man."

Inspector Anderson took up the wallet and inspected it closely.

"You needn't trouble," said their prisoner coolly. "They're Willis's all right. The whole thing happened exactly as he said."

And the man pointed towards Nelson Lee.

Within Nelson Lee's chambers at Gray's Inn Road, hangs a small line engraving, not very well executed, and framed in a cheap surround of German gold.

When his visitors comment on the incongruity of this picture among the almost priceless examples which it has amused Lee to collect, he explains that it was a present, and has associations.

Only Nipper knows that the picture in question was presented to Nelson Lee by an old woman in a black shawl; and that it was a thank-offering—the only object of value that she possessed in the world, and given with tears of gratitude in her eyes—for the life of her only son.

The old woman was Mrs. Robson, and—thanks to the influence of the famous detective—her son is now a greenkeeper upon the Wreckenton Golf Course. Her gratitude was the only fee or fame which Nelson Lee obtained for his work on the case of the Links Murder; but he considered himself well paid.

As the train carried himself and Nipper out of Newcastle-on-Tyne station, a day or two later, he summed the matter up with the characteristic remark:

"This has been an enjoyable holiday, my lad. And now to work."

"Holiday!" chuckled the lad. "We've settled two first-class cases in seven days, and you call it a holiday. I must tell Tinker of that. He'll enjoy the joke."

And there is no doubt that Tinker did.

THE END.

The NEW USHER

BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF Tom Tartar at School

EVERY BOY SHOULD READ
THIS ABSORBING STORY OF
SCHOOL LIFE, WHICH HAS ONLY
JUST STARTED!



FIRST CHAPTERS.

Mr. Achilles Chopps, the new tutor, arrives at Wrasper's School. There is something mysterious about him, for he will allow no one to enter his room, where he plays sweet music at night on a kind of harmonium. Since the new usher's arrival there have been strange appearances of a phantom hearse.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XI.

Tom Settles Accounts with Hautleboy Snacks.

TOM was still awaiting his opportunity to settle accounts with Hautleboy Snacks for his theft of the girls' letters from Widow Blake's shop.

Snacks, however, had proved himself to be a very elusive youth. He lived the life of one who knows that a remorseless foe is on his trail.

On three separate occasions he had been seen flying through the village, with Tom in hot pursuit, and on each occasion he had managed to reach the gate of Bouncer's Academy, and dash through to safety ere Tom could overtake him.

But Tom's day of vengeance arrived at last, and it happened in this wise.

Mr. Bartholomew Bouncer was in his front garden just after dinner one afternoon, and several of his pupils were airing their graceful forms in the road, not far from the gate.

Among them were Snacks, Winks, and Raddles, and the subject of their talk was Tom Tartar.

"What's the use of bragging?" Winks was saying. "Raddles and I know very well that you're afraid of the fellow. You bolt for your life whenever you see him—doesn't he, Raddles?"

"I don't!" growled Snacks. "I'd be only

too jolly glad to fight Tartar or any other beastly cad in Wrasper's School.

"Crumbs!" interrupted Raddles. "Here comes the chap himself!"

And, sure enough, Tom at that very moment had hove into view round a bend in the road, not a dozen yards from where Snacks and his two cronies were standing.

At sight of him, Hautleboy Snacks went ghastly pale, and, for all his valiant boasting, made a dash for cover.

But Tom was after him like a shot, and in a few strides overtook the lanky youth and grabbed him by the arm.

"Got you at last!" exclaimed Tom, in triumph. "I'll teach you to steal other people's letters, you mean skunk! Put up your fists! I'm going to fight you!"

Snacks wrenched himself free, and, with terror writ large on his countenance, aimed a wild blow at Tom.

Dodging the blow with the greatest of ease, Tom shot out his left fist.

Smack!

It was a clean, straightforward hit from the shoulder, and it caught Snacks full on the nose.

With a yell which might have been heard half a mile away, Snacks dropped to the ground.

"Get up!" commanded Tom. "I haven't finished with you yet! Get up and——"

He did not finish his sentence; for suddenly Winks and Raddles had sprung at him from behind, and were endeavouring to pin his arms to his sides.

A brief struggle resulted in Winks being hurled in one direction, and Raddles in the other. In the meantime, however, Snacks had risen to his feet and retreated a few yards. Then he stooped, picked up a large stone which lay in the road, and let fly.

The stone came whizzing within an inch of Tom's ear, and Snacks took to his heels.

Infuriated by the cowardly act of his opponent, Tom started off in chase of him.

Snacks was a very fair runner, for he was endowed with considerable length of limb, and, inspired by fear, he put the pace on.

So did Tom.

He was quite fifty yards in the rear when they started, and that is a lot of ground to make up.

Snacks bounded along the road, but not being in such good condition as Tom, he soon began to blow.

The cottage once occupied by Powner, the poacher, came in sight.

It had not been occupied since the decease of that tenant of evil repute.

Snacks darted into the garden and ran round to the back of the cottage, bent on dodging Tom. But Tom, after a couple of trots round the house, compelled him to take to the open again.

He ran across the garden sideways with his terrified eyes on his pursuer.

"You let me alone!" he cried.

"Yes, I'll let you alone, you miserable hound!" replied Tom.

Snacks was going for the old dry well, and neither of them saw it.

One was blind with fear, and the other with rage.

But at the last moment Tom saw the peril of his enemy, and pulled up.

"Stop!" he cried; "you will break your neck!"

The warning came too late.

Snacks did indeed just see the well in time to turn a somersault over its low brick circular side, and down he went.

Tom felt pretty sure that he was killed outright, and a very natural reaction set in within him.

Walking up to the well with knees that were a bit shaky, he tried to see to the bottom, but could not.

After that affair with Foster Moore recorded in the previous part of Tom's school adventures, it had been cleaned out, and was several feet deeper than when Tom went down it.

He could not see so far as the bottom.

"Snacks!" he said.

There was no answer; not a movement, not even a moan.

"He's broken his neck!" exclaimed Tom, aghast.

What was to be done?

Tom felt very queer, as well he might do, but he had no idea of shirking the responsibility.

"I did not do it," he said. "I was only running after him, but——"

The possibility of his being accused of having thrown Snacks down the well flashed upon him.

For some time past he had been uttering threats against the goggle-eyed youth, and

had he not furthermore been seen chasing him with no very amiable intentions?

Anyway, it would look mighty suspicious.

Of course, none of his friends would think him guilty of such a thing; but unhappily, he would have to deal with some who were not very kindly disposed towards him.

He had another look down the well, but with no better result.

It was all as dark as pitch at the bottom, to his eyesight at least.

"Snacks," he called, "are you hurt much?"

There was no answer, and, sick at heart, he turned away.

"I must go and make a clean breast of it," he said.

Back he went at a trot, and passing through the village, he saw by the old church clock that afternoon school had begun, and he intended to consult Mr. Wrasper.

Well, he must do it, and a few minutes later he presented a white face to his school-fellows, who wondered what on earth was the matter with him.

"Tartar!" said Mr. Wrasper, sternly, "you are late. Where have you been?"

Tom walked up to the schoolmaster's desk, and speaking low, said:

"I think I have killed somebody. It was an accident. Will you please come out of the room and speak to me?"

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Mr. Wrasper; who is it? What new horror is this?"

"It's Snacks," said Tom, "Bouncer's big boy. He shied a stone at me, and I chased him to Powner's old cottage, where he blundered into the well."

"And then?"

"I—I think he broke his neck, sir!"

Tom's voice quivered, and a bitter feeling of remorse was upon him. He wished he had forgone his vengeance on a foe who, in many respects, was simply contemptible.

Mr. Achilles Chopps did not exhibit any curiosity, but was on the tenter-hooks of desire to know what was the matter; and need it be said that all the boys were in a similar condition?

But they were unrelieved at the time, and had to suffer all the agonies of unsatisfied curiosity.

Mr. Wrasper and Tom left the room, the latter without so much as turning his face towards his chums.

He felt, indeed, as if he were leaving the old school-room and all that was dear to him for ever.

Mr. Wrasper took him into his study, and there Tom told all, without any addition of reservation.

The schoolmaster looked very grave.

"Tartar," he said, "this is a very serious matter, and you were wrong in not seeking help at once. Possibly Snacks was insensible, and he may have died for want of timely help. The bottom of a well is rather a chilly place for an injured boy to lie in."

We must acquaint Mr. Bouncer with what has happened.

No more uncongenial task ever fell to the lot of Mr. Wrasper.

Bouncer was a man whom he despised, and here was an untoward accident that would give him a power of retaliation for the coldness with which he had been received in Peddleton.

That Bouncer was a man who would only be too glad to make a sensation, if only as means of advertisement, Mr. Wrasper very well knew. What a tremendous weapon this catastrophe placed in his hands to be sure.

On entering the village, Mr. Wrasper went straight to Baynes, the carpenter, and bade him hurry to the well with a stout ladder.

"Take one of your men with you," he said, "and on the way inform the doctor that a boy has fallen into the well."

"A boy in the well?" said Baynes. "Then he's drowned!"

"No; it is a dry well," replied Mr. Wrasper, hurriedly.

"Then he has broke his back," said Baynes, positively.

"Now we must go and inform Mr. Bouncer," said Mr. Wrasper. "And, Tartar," he added, in a low voice, "let me give you a bit of advice."

"I'll do exactly as you tell me, sir," said Tom dismally.

"Well, then, my advice is this: do not commit yourself in any way in dealing with Mr. Bouncer. Let me do all the talking that is necessary."

"I'll be only too glad if you will, sir," replied Tom.

CHAPTER XII.

Down the Old Well.

THEY came upon Bartholomew Bouncer at his gate, evidently looking out for the absent Snacks.

As Mr. Wrasper and Tom approached, he simulated the abstracted air of a man who means to look through somebody he knows, in short, to cut him dead, to ignore his presence entirely.

But Mr. Wrasper had no intention of being ignored.

"Good afternoon, sir," he began politely.

Mr. Bouncer brought his fishy eyes to bear upon the speaker with a cold, haughty, inquiring expression. He did not return the greeting.

"May I have a few words with you?" went on Mr. Wrasper.

"If it is necessary, sir, I suppose you may," was the frigid reply.

"An accident has happened to one of your pupils," said Mr. Wrasper.

Bartholomew Bouncer could not repress a start.

"Not—not Snacks?" he gasped out.

"Yes, I understand that is the unfortu-

nate boy's name. He has, I regret to inform you, fallen down a well!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Bouncer wildly. "What well? Which well? Where?"

"Calm yourself, I beg," said Mr. Wrasper soothingly.

"Calm myself!" cried Bouncer. "It is easy to say 'calm yourself!' How can I calm myself under such circumstances? Snacks is the most promising scholar of my academy—the flower of my flock!"

"But listen to me, sir," urged Mr. Wrasper. "It is possible that no great harm has befallen the lad. You see, the well is a dry one, and——"

"Where is the well?" interrupted Bouncer.

"It is in the garden of the old cottage where Powner, the poacher used to live."

"Who saw Snacks fall in?"

"My pupil here—Thomas Tartar."

"Anybody else?"

"No!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Bouncer. "Then it was your precious pupil, Thomas Tartar, who pushed Snacks in! I am sure of it, absolutely sure! There can be no doubt about it! I happen to know that Tartar hated Snacks with a deadly hatred. There has long been a feud between them. Undoubtedly, Tartar has murdered him!"

"Don't be ridiculous, sir!" said Mr. Wrasper warmly.

"And don't you be insolent, sir!" retorted Mr. Bouncer. "Your pupil Tartar is a murderer, and I shall give him in charge without delay! He has maliciously slain the chief corner-stone of my high-class establishment for the sons of the nobility and gentry!"

Even in his then chaotic state of mind, Bartholomew Bouncer could not refrain from quoting his flowery prospectus.

Mr. Wrasper shrugged his shoulders. It was waste of time to argue with his scholastic rival.

"I am going on to the well, Mr. Bouncer," he said. "I have already sent Baynes, the carpenter to get Snacks out of his unpleasant plight. The doctor may be there, too, in case the boy needs medical aid."

And, with Tom by his side, Mr. Wrasper strode away towards Powner's cottage. Bartholomew Bouncer went indoors for his hat and umbrella—he never stirred abroad without his umbrella, whatever the weather—and followed them.

Turning into a field-path, they overtook Baynes and half a dozen villagers, bearing a ladder. The doctor, it appeared, was away from home; so it was to be hoped that his services would not be required.

On reaching the poacher's garden, all the company clustered round the well.

"That's right," said Baynes, "get in the way. Open out, and let me get the ladder down."

"Mind how you lower it," said Mr.

Wrasper. "It would certainly not do to put it on the poor boy."

"I'll be careful, sir," said Baynes. "If there's one thing my family's allus been celebrated for more'n another it's the care with which they does things. Now I'll show you how to lower this ere ladder. Keep your eyes on me."

He lowered the ladder by sliding it down the brickwork of the well, which, of course, exhibited a high order of ingenuity.

"Now we'll see if it's on terror-firmer," he said, as he lifted the ladder a few inches and gently dropped it again. "Mud," he said; "and now who goes down?"

"I will," replied Tom.

"No, you won't," said Baynes; "that's my job. Stand clear there."

"Hurry up," said Mr. Wrasper; "every moment is precious."

Baynes stepped on the side of the well and put his foot on one of the staves of the ladder.

"Easy does it," he said. "I'm nigh on fourteen stone. Go slow and sure."

Baynes drew his other leg over and let go to moisten the palms of his hands.

While in the act of doing so the stave of the ladder gave way and Baynes shot out of sight.

He uttered one howl as he went down, and then he was heard to strike something soft below.

"He's fallen on that poor boy," said Mr. Wrasper aghast. "What chance he had of escape is now extinguished. Baynes!"

"Ow—ow!" groaned Baynes below.

"Baynes, will you tell me——"

"It's all over with me," moaned Baynes.

"But, Baynes," cried Mr. Wrasper, "what about the poor boy?"

"Oh, my back—it's broke in three places!" came up from Baynes.

"But the boy—the boy?" urged Mr. Wrasper.

"Boy, sir?"

"Yes—young Snacks," said Mr. Wrasper. No reply.

"Baynes!"

"Ow!"

"Don't groan, man! Is the boy alive?"

"Ow—ow!"

"Here, let somebody of light weight go down," said Mr. Wrasper; "the ladder is old and rotten. Baynes had no right to bring such a thing with him."

"I'll go, sir," cried Tom.

He stepped upon the ladder, and holding on with a firm grip, and with a light step descended to the music of Baynes' unceasing groans.

A silence fell upon the company.

They heard Tom speak to Baynes, and Baynes roar something in reply. Then there was a stillness below, and after a brief delay somebody was heard carefully and slowly ascending again.

"It is either Baynes," thought Mr. Wrasper, "or Tom with a heavy burden."

And for a moment he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again Tom's head reappearing above the brickwork of the well.

Higher and higher he came, until his head and shoulders were out of the well.

Then all could see his face.

It had upon it a strange, mixed expression of laughter and vexation, with perhaps just a tinge of sheepishness.

"What of my boy?" wailed Bouncer—"the pearl, the jewel of my high-class educational establishment!"

Everybody else was silent; every eye was on Tom.

"There's quite a foot of black mud at the bottom of the well," he said.

"Then he is smothered," roared Bouncer.

"Oh! Snacks—Snacks! shall I ever look upon thy like again?"

"Why don't you keep quiet?" said Mr. Wrasper. "Now, Tartar, you were saying——"

"Another ladder must be got," said Tom.

"This thing is rotten. I have had to crawl up it. It would never bear Baynes."

"But my boy—my Snacks?" cried Bouncer.

"As for Snacks," said Tom, "he isn't there!"

If Tom had suddenly introduced a bomb-shell into the thick of the party, he could not have created more surprise.

They fell back in several directions, and stared at him with wild, open eyes.

"Not there?" cried Mr. Wrasper.

Tom shook his head.

"Are you sure that he ever was there?" asked Mr. Wrasper.

"I saw him fall in," replied Tom.

"Then he is under the mud! Hasten and get spades, and dig him out."

"Stop a minute!" said Tom. "Snacks is safe enough somewhere or other. He got out of the well!"

"But how could he get out?"

"Quite easily. You see," explained Tom, "when the workmen were clearing out the well, I suppose a ladder could not be used, so they drove in some pieces of iron, shaped like the three sides of a square, to climb up and down by. Snacks must have climbed out, for the irons have marks of muddy hands on them."

A roar of laughter followed this announcement. Everybody, save one, roared until their sides ached.

Mr. Bouncer alone maintained his gravity. It was about the only thing he could maintain.

"I don't believe it," he said.

"You may do as you please about that," said Tom, as he threw his legs over the side of the well, and stepped on to the ground. "We must get Baynes up now, sir," he went on, turning to Mr. Wrasper.

"Yes," agreed the latter. "If a rope were placed under his armpits, it would relieve the ladder of some of his weight. Is there a rope available?"

"There may be one in the outhouse yonder," said Tom; and, accompanied by the policemen, he ran to the shed and pushed back the door.

It opened a little way, and then was closed again by some force applied on the other side.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom. "There seems to be somebody here!"

"We'll soon have him out, then!" said the constable grimly; and, stepping back a pace or two, charged at the door.

It flew open, Tom and the policeman darted into the shed, and confronted—Snacks!

He was plastered with mud from head to foot, and as he glared at the intruders angrily, his face presented a most ludicrous appearance.

"What do you want?" he demanded sulkily. "Go away! I don't want you here!"

"Come out of it!" replied the policeman. "What d'ye mean by skulkin' here, and lettin' folk grope in a muddy well for you? Come out of it, I say!"

And he lugged Snacks out into the open, and across to the well.

At sight of him, a howl of laughter went up. But Mr. Bouncer did not laugh. He raised his huge umbrella—which resembled in shape an overgrown cabbage-lettuce, tied loosely round the middle—and smote Snacks a mighty smite!

"Wh-what's that for?" howled Snacks. "For causing me unnecessary anguish!" replied Bouncer. "Come home with me, boy, and wash yourself! You are in a filthy condition!"

And followed by the snuffling Snacks, Mr. Bouncer strode haughtily away.

The rescue of Baynes was now proceeded with. Inside the shed were an old cord and hook, originally used to suspend slaughtered pigs on, and with the aid of this contrivance Baynes was assisted out of the well.

To say that Baynes was muddy is but to mildly describe his state. From the crown of his head to the soles of his boots he was enveloped in sticky slime of a greenish-black hue.

Everybody pitied him and tried not to laugh, but it was difficult to keep a grave countenance under such circumstances.

As for Baynes himself, on being restored to the open air, he quickly recovered his accustomed good humour.

"It might ha' been worse," he said philosophically, "for I fell a whopper, and 'twas the mud saved me breakin' me bones. 'Owsomever, all's well as ends well!"

They scraped Baynes down as well as they could, and Mr. Wrasper promised to compensate him for his spoiled clothes; then all returned to the village.

"A most ridiculous affair, Tartar!" commented Mr. Wrasper.

"Yes, sir," said Tom demurely.

"You were certainly scared, Tartar."

"I admit it, sir. I'm no friend of Snacks,

but I certainly had no wish to find him with a broken neck!"

"No, I suppose not!" laughed Mr. Wrasper.

And there the affair ended.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Uncle Josiah" Arrives.

ON the following day, Tom by chance encountered Achilles Chopps in the hall. Both were there on the same errand—to see whether the mid-day post had brought them anything.

There were two letters now on the hall table—one for Tom and the other for the tutor.

What others may have arrived had been taken possession of by their respective owners.

Tom's letter was from his mother, enclosing a maternal offering in the form of a postal order.

As usual, there was a lot of good advice to "her darling boy," which Tom dutifully read, also many details concerning family matters which would not interest the reader.

Mr. Achilles Chopps' letter was short but not so entirely satisfactory as it might have been, if a slightly knitted brow goes for anything.

After a third perusal of it, he looked up and saw Tom's eyes fixed upon him. He smiled.

"What a thing it is," he said, "to be bored to death by uncles."

Tom looked as if he did not quite comprehend him.

Mr. Chopps explained.

"Two have died and left me, as you know, sundry small mementoes, and now I have a third who is coming to see me."

"I should take it as kind of him," said Tom.

"So I do," replied Mr. Chopps; "but my uncles are such quaint fellows. You boys will laugh at Uncle Josiah, I am sure. Well, it can't be helped. He's as deaf as a post and as dogged as a donkey; but a good fellow in the main."

Tom did not quite see why Mr. Chopps should favour him with these details about his uncle, and but for them would not have thought much about the visit of such a personage.

As it was, his curiosity was a little excited.

The more he saw of Mr. Chopps the less he felt he knew of him, and that was sufficient for him to desire to know more about him.

The uncle of Mr. Chopps arrived the next day shortly after morning studies.

He certainly was a most extraordinary-looking old man.

In height he was about the same as Chopps, but was stouter.

He was attired in a frock-coat, affected blue spectacles, and his hair, long and white, hung down to his shoulders.

(Continued on page lii of cover.)

(Continued from page 40.)

That he was deaf was illustrated by his first appearance at the school.

When the boys were turning out they saw him talking to Wooden Jerry, who wanted to get at who he was.

"What name shall I say, sir?" roared Jerry.

"Of course it's all the same," replied Uncle Josiah. "Tell my nephew I am here."

"Who's your neevy?" asked Jerry. "What young gentleman, sir?"

"Yes, I can wait if you like," replied Uncle Josiah; "but don't keep me waiting too long."

Wooden Jerry was taking in a breath for a voice of double extra power, which might have done something towards bringing the house down; but, luckily, Mr. Chopps appeared and spared him the effort.

Rushing up to the old gentleman, the tutor seized both his hands and shook them warmly.

The old gentleman seemed also delighted to see him.

"You don't keep good servants here," said Uncle Josiah. "That man"—pointing at Wooden Jerry—"is a fool."

"Never mind, sir," cried Mr. Chopps: "come up to my room."

"Oh, he's only a groom, is he?" exclaimed the old gentleman. "I thought there was nothing of the indoor servant in him."

Muttering to himself, he followed his nephew upstairs, followed by the malevolent glances of Wooden Jerry.

"A fool, am I?" he said. "Not such a fool as somebody I could name."

It was presently known that Uncle Josiah was going to stay for two or three days, and as the village inn was not a very palatial affair, Mr. Wrasper had invited him to stay in the school-house.

He accepted the invitation, and expressed a desire to have his meals in his nephew's private room. "His affliction made him poor company," he said.

That night there was music in the tutor's chamber. The boys heard it as they sat in the schoolroom conning the lessons for to-morrow.

It was playing when they went to bed, and, as far as they knew, long afterwards, for they fell asleep with it in their ears.

"It can't have been done to please his uncle," thought Tom, "as he is stone deaf."

Truly the Chopps family were inclined to be eccentric!

Now it so happened that Tom that morning left his Latin-grammar in the dormitory, and did not make the discovery until morning studies had begun.

Having asked for and obtained leave to fetch the book, he went out and bounded up the stairs.

(To be continued.)

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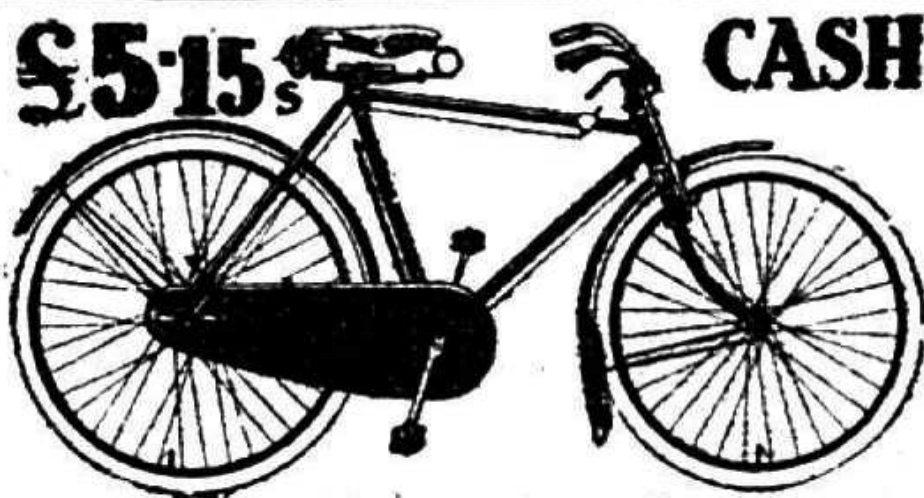
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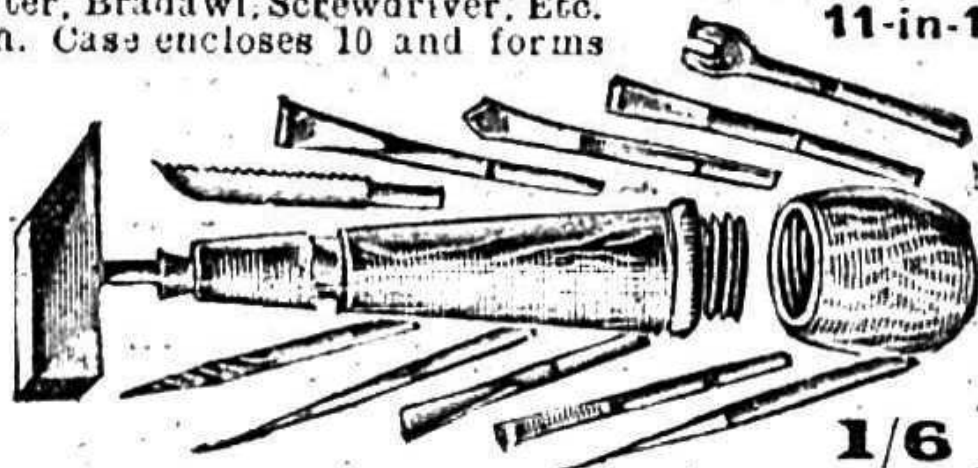
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