

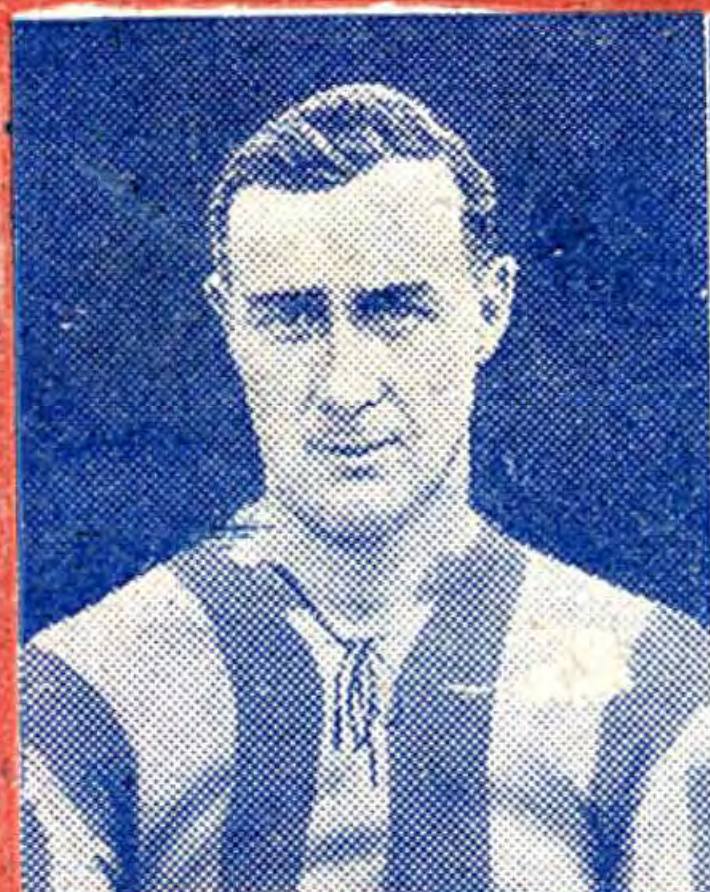
Fine Story of a Terrible Cyclone in the South Seas!

NELSON LEE 2^D

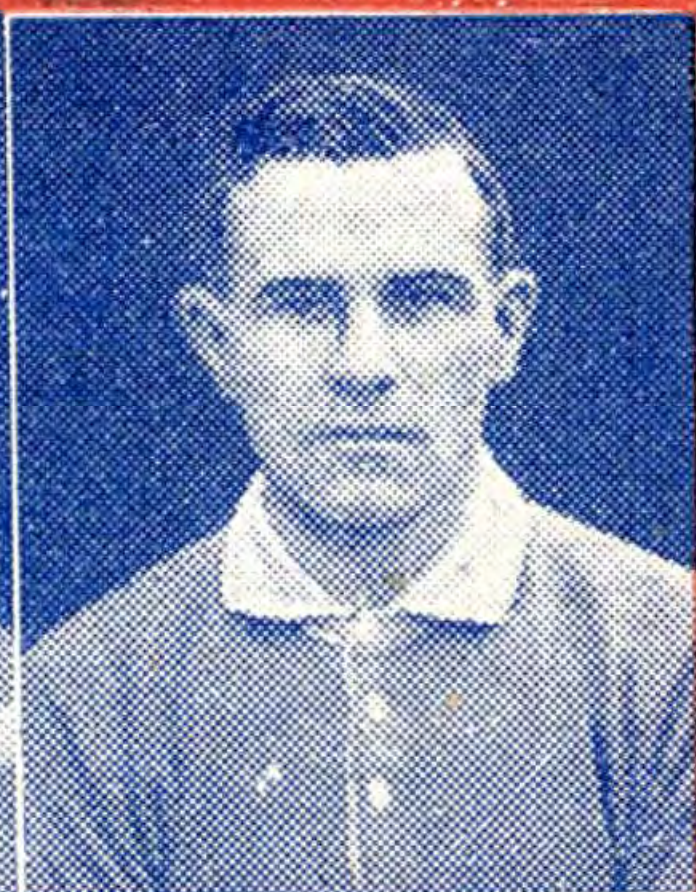
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The Terror from the Sky!



G. UTLEY.



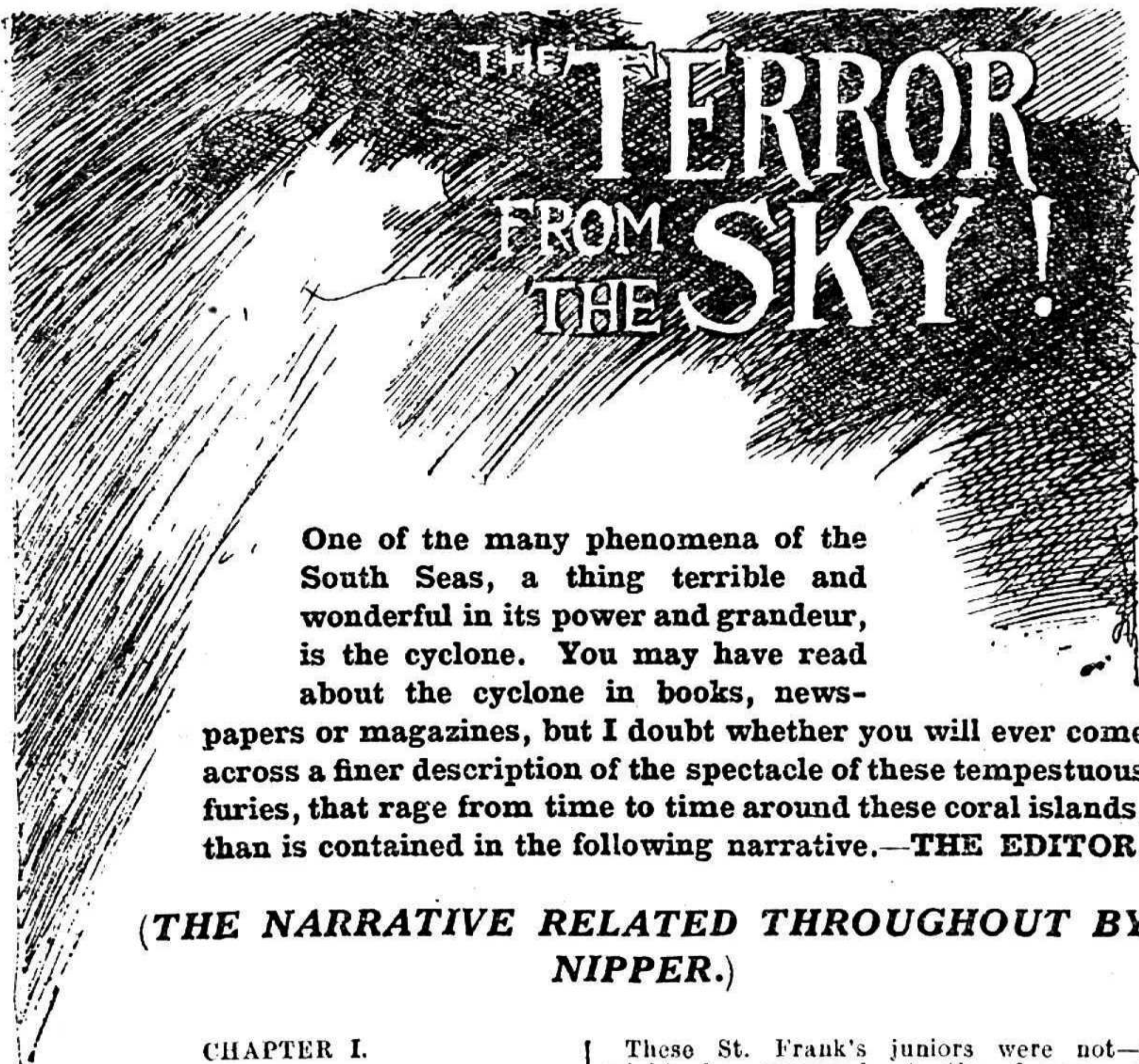
ALAN MORTON.

THESE
TWO
MAGNIFICENT
PHOTOGRAPHS
OF
FAMOUS
FOOTBALLERS!

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK!



The brushwood was already alight, and several of the insane cannibals were dancing in front of Sir Montie's stake in a kind of triumphal caper, accompanied by screams of maniacal fury.



One of the many phenomena of the South Seas, a thing terrible and wonderful in its power and grandeur, is the cyclone. You may have read about the cyclone in books, newspapers or magazines, but I doubt whether you will ever come across a finer description of the spectacle of these tempestuous furies, that rage from time to time around these coral islands, than is contained in the following narrative.—THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

ABSOLUTELY POISONOUS.

FATTY LITTLE, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, emerged from the doorway of the Food Department, and entered the sleeping-quarters. He gave a grunt, and rolled over towards a well-filled hammock.

The hammock contained the elegant form of Archie Glenthorne, and Archie was deep in the land of "the good old dreamless," as he would have termed it. What did he care about coming battles? What did he mind in the least? As long as he could get his usual rest and sleep, he wouldn't have cared if snow had commenced to fall.

These St. Frank's juniors were not—as might be supposed—at the famous old Sussex school. They were, to be quite exact, on a small volcanic island in the South Seas!

Lagoon Island was a place of glory and delight—where brilliant skies were the rule, where the sea was as blue as the purest sapphire, and where the tropical palms and trees and plants grew in bewildering profusion.

And at the present moment Fatty Little and Archie were within the Fort—the sturdy building which the juniors had set up with



their own hands, and without the aid of any modern tools.

Fatty Little gave the hammock a gentle dig on the under portion. Archie opened his eyes, yawned, and then prepared for sleep again.

"Get up, you slacker!" said Fatty Little sharply.

"What? I mean to say, what?" ejaculated Archie, sitting up in the hammock. "Hallo, old scream!"

"I shall be screaming pretty loudly soon, if you don't get up!" said Fatty Little. "You lazy beggar! I want some water!"

"Well, dash it all," said Archie—"that is to say, as it were, what about it? You don't suppose I trickle about with gallons of water tied all round the old person? Pray be sensible, laddie!"

"I want some water!" repeated Fatty. "How the bloaters do you think I can cook properly without water? Buzz along to the river, and fill a couple of pails, will you? Somebody's got to do it—and I can't spare the time. It'll soon be time for tea, and the fish wants boiling."

Archie placed his monocle into his eye.

"I don't want to be most frightfully rude, but you absolutely compel a chappie to produce the old words of wrath!" he observed. "Kindly allow me to tick you off, old melon! What-ho! Pretty good, that! Observing you from afar, as it were, the rotund carcase somewhat resembles the jolly old juicy fruit aforementioned! Absolutely, laddie!"

"We're not talking about melons!" said Fatty. "You don't seem to realise that we're going to be attacked by a horde of cannibals in an hour or two—and we've got to get our tummies full up beforehand. I can't cook without water, and Goodwin and Doyle—my regular assistants—are in the trenches. You're doing nothing, so it's up to you to lend a hand."

"Now, as I might say, the conversation is taking a distinctly lucid turn!" exclaimed Archie. "Every time, old fruit! Absolutely! I mean to say, Archie is ready—positively bursting with eagerness to venture forth in search of the good old sustaining liquid!"

"That's better!" said Fatty. "Get out of that hammock, and come along. I'm absolutely stuck, but I'll have tea in an hour, with luck!"

"I mean to say—poetry, what?" said Archie. "Dashed good, old top! Stuck—luck! There you are—the jolly old rhyme! A chappie must be most dashed clever to reel forth that kind of stuff!"

"I didn't notice any rhyme," said Fatty. "Come on!"

Archie obediently retired from his hammock, and followed Fatty Little out of the sleeping-quarters and into the Food Department. Here large numbers of pots and pans were filled with various kinds of food. It didn't matter to Fatty whether the world

was coming to an end—he simply had to see about feeding.

He knew that the cannibals on the island were preparing to attack the Fort soon after sunset, but this made no difference to him. Whether we were at peace, or whether we were menaced by blacks, we needed food. And it was Fatty's job to provide it.

Since we had been cast upon this desert island we had met with some very remarkable adventures. At first it had been like a glorious holiday, although we had been flung ashore without a stitch of clothing, and without a single article to remind us of civilisation.

That was the time when we imagined Lord Dorrimore and his crew to be at the bottom of the ocean, with the former's steam yacht—the Wanderer. But we had since learned that the Wanderer was very much in evidence. The yacht was, in short, on the other side of the island.

She was beached, it is true, and seriously damaged. But she was still just the same as ever, to all intents and purposes, and her entire crew were alive.

But during those first days there had been twenty juniors absolutely alone, with the exception of Phipps—who, nominally, was Archie's valet. But Phipps had been the big man of the island. He had directed the building of the Fort and a thousand and one other things.

We went about attired only in grass kilts, and most of the fellows fairly revelled in the life. And then, after discovering that Dorrie was all right, we had had fresh excitement. For hordes of cannibals had appeared—savage blacks, who swarmed to Lagoon Island in canoes—and who had now taken possession of a section of country which we had termed Geyser Valley.

They had chosen their landing-place well—for they completely cut off our two camps. Those on the yacht were unable to approach the rest of us in the Fort at Shark Bay. And we, of course, could not reach them.

However, it didn't matter much, since we had arms and ammunition in plenty, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi were with us. Those left on the yacht were Captain Bentley, the engineers, and about half the crew. The other members of the crew were with us—all picked men, who would fight valiantly if necessary.

And it seemed that fighting would soon be very severe.

For our troubles had increased. A pirate junk had appeared—a vessel containing large numbers of cut-throat Chinamen. And they were led by Ho Liang, a cunning rascal, who was well-educated, and who talked English fluently. He was at the bottom of the whole grim business.

It was Ho Liang who had instigated the blacks to attack us. It was Ho Liang who was preparing the onslaught which was due to commence with the coming of dusk. He

had given us until sunset to leave the island—and we had refused.

Therefore, an attack was certain.

It need not be supposed that our defences were primitive and inadequate. Originally, we had only relied upon a stockade, which entirely surrounded the log building which we had called the Fort.

But we knew that it was useless to trust to this frail fence. As a fortification it was of very little real value.

We had machine-guns and rifles, to say nothing of enough ammunition to withstand a siege. At the same time, it was useless having weapons at all if we were not in a position to use them adequately.

Accordingly, deep trenches had been dug—trenches which exactly resembled those of real warfare. The trenches extended all round the Fort, and formed a complete and intricate system.

There were front-line trenches, communication trenches, dug-outs, machine-gun strongholds, and all sorts of other contrivances. And right in front of the trenches—in no-man's land—there were wicked wooden spikes. We had driven these into the sand to take the place of barbed-wire entanglements.

We had a perfect food and water supply, for at the rear of the Fort there were no enemies—the blacks had contented themselves by remaining in the other section of the island.

And the cocoanut palms almost surrounded us. The groves came right down to the beach, and our fortifications were built in the midst of these graceful palms. We had every confidence of being able to withstand the most determined onslaught from the enemy.

After all, they were blacks—uncivilised heathens of the worst type. They were cannibals, and although they carried rifles, they had very little skill in using them.

And they were superstitious to a degree, and we felt that we should be able to hold them at bay for as long a period as necessary. The feeling of confidence within our camp was supreme. Everybody was cheerful—everybody laughed and ridiculed the idea of the enemy gaining the upper hand. Such an idea, indeed, seemed to be utterly absurd.

Umlosi, the great Kutana chief—and the intimate friend of Lord Dorrimore—was totally opposed to this system of trench warfare which seemed to be approaching. Umlosi preferred to fight in the open. He was never better pleased than when wielding his spear against overwhelming odds.

At the same time, he realised that we had adopted the only course. It was necessary to dig ourselves in if we were to get through without casualties. In a battle in Umlosi's own country, it would not matter so much if a certain number of warriors fell. Indeed, it was regarded as a great honour to perish during a grim and blood-thirsty fight.

But the St. Frank's fellows were not particularly anxious to distinguish themselves in this manner. They would much prefer to come out of the ordeal without any serious casualties. And we were all hoping, too, that one day we should be able to return to dear old England and home.

It didn't matter so far—if things went all right, we should still be able to journey back, and arrive at St. Frank's almost in time for the Autumn term. But at present it did not look as though we were going to see England again for some time. We had no prospect of getting off the island—and we certainly did have a prospect of being eaten by cannibals!

We had already experienced one or two sharp brushes with the enemy. But now we were expecting a really determined onslaught—an attack which would spell utter disaster unless we were keenly on the alert. Ho Liang was anxious to subdue us—to kill us, I believe. And he had goaded these blacks on to fight.

Most of the fellows were in the trenches, at their posts. Archie Glenthorne, however, was not regarded as much of a fighter, and so he was allowed to do pretty much as he liked.

He followed Fatty Little outside into the open, and in a few moments he was provided with two large skins, each capable of holding several gallons of water. They had been made by Phipps, and were thoroughly servicable. Fatty always referred to them as "pails," but there were no pails on Lagoon Island.

"Now, here you are, Archie," said Fatty. "You buzz along to the river, and fill these up. Don't half fill 'em, you lazy bounder, or I sha'n't give you any grub for tea!"

"A somewhat frightful threat!" said Archie. "But never fear, old tulip. I shall proceed to fill the merry old water-bags to the brim. Absolutely!"

He placed one over each shoulder, and sallied off. In order to get to the river, he had to cross the elaborate trench system—for this completely encircled the Fort. It would take a very strong force to drive us into surrender. Indeed, we believed ourselves to be safe under any circumstances.

Archie went to the rear of the Fort, where the palm trees encircled the building on nearly three sides. All was delightful shade here, with the green foliage high above, moving gently in the soft breeze.

The trenches on this section were not well filled. It was only necessary to have a fellow on duty here and there—for an attack on this side was very unlikely. When the battle began it would do so in the open.

"Hallo, Archie, what's the idea?" asked Armstrong, as Archie came along a communication-trench.

"Fetching some water, laddie," said Archie.

Armstrong nearly fainted.

"You—fetching water!" he gasped.

"Absolutely!"

"Hold me up, somebody—I feel bad!" said Armstrong weakly.

"I mean to say!" protested Archie. "Kindly explain the joke, my dear old onion. In other words, what's the idea?"

"Why, things must be moving pretty swiftly if you're working!" grinned Armstrong. "Mind you don't do too much, Archie! You're liable to go off like a flickering candle! Too much exertion, and—phut! You'll expire!"

Archie looked rather startled.

"Gadzooks!" he exclaimed. "That's most dashed fearful! I mean to say, I hadn't thought of that you know! But the thing's got to be done! Large quantities of water are ness., old thing! So it's up to me to get on the job!"

"Right-ho! Pass, friend!" said Griffith, with a chuckle.

Archie was allowed to pass out through the trenches, and he soon disappeared among the trees and bushes. He was quite safe here, for none of the blacks were in this part of the palm grove.

Archie proceeded for a short distance until the palm trees thinned somewhat, and he finally came to a peaceful little glade. It was a spot of exquisite beauty, and the very thought of warfare seemed ridiculous.

A tiny stream trickled between grassy banks. Ferns and flowers grew in profusion. Insects hummed, and gorgeously coloured butterflies flitted from flower to flower. Many of these butterflies were of great size and very brilliant.

And there were birds, too—birds of every hue and gorgeous tint. Archie was quite accustomed to these wonders of the tropics, but he was compelled to pause for a moment or two and regard the scene with admiration.

"Dash it all, it makes a chappie feel most frightfully insignif.!" he murmured. "Absolutely topping! Gorgeous, and all that kind of rot!"

He went to the little brook, and proceeded to fill his waterskins. He filled them to the brim, and then heaved one on each shoulder. And a somewhat startled expression came into his eyes.

"My only sainted aunt!" he muttered. "This, as it were, is most foul!"

He was astonished to find the water-bags so heavy. He placed them on the ground again, and came to the conclusion that he would be able to accomplish his task with much greater facility if he partook of a drink first. He discovered that he was thirsty, and the water looked very inviting.

So he lay down in the grass, cupped his hands, and regaled himself with several long draughts.

"What-ho! What-ho!" he observed. "That, so to speak, has made a new chappie out of me. I must remark, however, that the bally water has a most extraord. twang about it. Absolutely! Quite diff. to usual. Probably the old imag. getting to work.

Well, I suppose we've got to stagger forth."

Again he placed the water-bags on his back, and set off briskly towards the Fort. He was aware of the fact that a curious sensation had appeared at the back of his throat.

His tongue seemed to be burning, too—which was most peculiar, considering that he had only just quenched his thirst. And as he went on his way these symptoms increased. They increased, in fact, with unpleasant rapidity.

Archie's throat felt like a furnace soon, and as he walked he staggered slightly. He found it impossible to keep a straight path. His head, in fact, was swimming, and he felt dazed and bewildered.

"Gadzooks!" he muttered suddenly. "I expect the dear chappie was right, don't you know! The fact is, I'm working too much—the strain is somewhat too severe for the old tissues. Too much exersh, and—zing! The expiring stuff! I bally well feel like kicking the jolly old bucket!"

He came to a halt, and allowed the two water-bags to slide from his shoulders. Then, almost without realising that he had left his precious burden behind, he wandered on. He hardly seemed to know what he was doing, or where he was going. A peculiar glassy expression was in his eyes.

More by accident than anything else he suddenly found himself right in front of the trenches. He swayed from side to side as he walked, as though hopelessly drunk. Then, at last, he swayed, and fell headlong.

"I mean to say—dashed—awk.!" he muttered huskily.

He attempted to rise, but found the task too much for him. And so he lay there, helpless and still. His movements had been watched from the trenches, and Armstrong and Griffith and De Valerie regarded him with surprise. One or two other fellows were equally interested.

"Come on, Archie—don't lay there!" shouted Armstrong.

But Archie didn't move.

"I think there's something wrong!" said De Valerie. "Didn't you notice the way he was swaying as he walked? Besides, he hasn't brought those water-bags back! I believe the chap's come over faint, or something."

Without any further ado, the juniors leapt out of the trench, and hastened forward between the spiked sticks. They bent over Archie, and rolled him over. His face was pale and peculiarly rigid. And although his eyes were wide open, he did not appear to recognise the fellows.

"What's the matter, Archie?" asked De Valerie, in alarm.

"Hallo, old thing!" murmured Archie. "Most—deucedly queer! I—I— Absolutely! Water, old top! Kindly—bring—some—"

His voice trailed away, and he seemed to have some difficulty in moving his jaw. The juniors gazed at one another, and their expressions were startled. There was some-

thing so strange about Archie's behaviour that the boys were a bit scared.

"I—I believe the silly ass has been eating some of those poisonous berries!" exclaimed De Valerie quickly. "Grab him—we'll carry him straight in! One of you others had better go straight to Mr. Lee and bring him here."

"I'll go!" said Griffith quickly.

He dashed off, and a few minutes later returned with Nelson Lee. The famous detective was looking concerned. Then he bent over Archie Glenthorne, and uttered a sharp exclamation. His lips were compressed, and his eyes gleamed.

"What's the matter with him, sir?" asked De Valerie anxiously.

"I'm afraid it is rather serious!" replied Nelson Lee. "Glenthorne is—poisoned!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BOMBARDMENT.



DE VALERIE startled. "Poisoned, sir!" he exclaimed, in horror. "I—I was afraid of that, but I was hoping that I was wrong! He must have been eating some berries—"

"I don't think so!" said Nelson Lee grimly. "But we will soon see."

Other fellows came along, for the news had quickly spread. And in a very short time I came upon the scene, with Pitt and Handforth and Co.

"What's this?" said Handforth. "Archie poisoned! I always knew the fathead would do something silly! This is what comes of leaving him to himself! He's absolutely dotty!"

"Somebody fetch some water!" said Nelson Lee curtly.

"I don't think there's any here, sir," put in Doyle. "Archie went to the stream to fill the bags—and he left them behind."

Two juniors offered to go and get them at once, and they started off. They found the two filled bags among the trees, and they soon came hurrying back with them.

By this time Nelson Lee had taken out his pocket medicine case—he was never without it—and quickly selected some tiny phials from their compartments.

A cocoanut-shell had been brought—a well cut half, which served for a cup. These kind of things were in general use at the Fort, for we had no crockery or earthenware. Doyle and Armstrong poured out a shell-full of water, and handed it to Nelson Lee.

All the fellows were intensely anxious about Archie for he was one of the most popular juniors of all.

"Is he very bad sir?" asked Pitt.

Nelson Lee did not reply. He had taken a sip of the water, and now he set the shell down, and I noticed that his expression was even more grave than before. He

proceeded to treat Archie with great care.

Several of the phials were brought into use. And then, at last, Lee directed us to carry the unfortunate chap into the Fort, and to lay him in his hammock. There was something strange about the whole affair.

"Anything wrong, guv'nor?" I inquired concernedly. "Why didn't you give Archie some water? He asked for it just before he lost consciousness."

"It was the water that caused Archie to become ill."

"What!" I gasped. "You—you mean —"

"I mean, Nipper, that the water itself is poisoned!" replied Nelson Lee grimly. "This can mean only one thing—these infernal Chinese have been up to some of their devilry!"

"They—they've poisoned the stream, sir?" I ejaculated.

"There can be no other explanation," said the guv'nor.

"And what of Archie?" I panted. "Will he die, sir?"

"No; I was in time," replied Lee. "Archie will live—indeed, he will be much better in a very short time—particularly if he can be sick. If things go well, I have every hope that the lad will recover within a few hours."

"Thank goodness for that, sir!" I said, with relief.

"But it was fortunate that I was called so promptly," went on the guv'nor. "If the matter had been left for an hour, no power on earth could have saved Glenthorne from certain death. But the poison has not been able to gain a strong hold. I have nullified the effects by administering an antidote."

"I'm jolly glad to hear that Archie will be all right, sir," I said. "But what about us? What shall we do for water?"

"I don't know," replied Nelson Lee. "No doubt the stream will soon be all right again—this poisoning cannot last for long. At present, however, it is obviously unsafe to touch a drop. These Chinese fiends have deliberately poisoned the water so that we shall drink it and die. It indicates, Nipper, that we must be constantly on the alert."

It was not long before the whole camp knew of this latest act of frightfulness on the part of the enemy. And the consternation was general. Fatty Little, in particular, was at his wits' end.

"We're dished! We shall be driven into surrender by thirst!" declared Pitt. "That'll be the end of it. There's no other stream nearer than a mile—and that's in the enemy country. If we can't get water from our own brook, we shall be done!"

"There's no need to talk like that, Reggie!" I said. "You couldn't have thought much, or you wouldn't say that we shall die of thirst. The enemy poisoned the stream in the hope that we should all drink the water—and die. When those

rotten Chinks find that we're still alive, they'll probably stop the game."

"If we haven't got water, what shall we drink?" asked Griffith.

"Well we happen to have a good few thousand cocoanuts hanging over our heads," I replied. "And each cocoanut contains enough liquid to satisfy anybody's wants. No, they're not trying to drive us into surrender. But the trick has failed. Archie's the only chap who's been poisoned."

"Half an hour later we learned, to our great satisfaction that, under the gov'nor's treatment, Archie had been intensely sick. This was all to the good, for he had got rid of the majority of the poison.

He was much better afterwards, and was now in a deep sleep. We were not allowed to give him much more attention—for other things cropped up.

The afternoon was drawing on, and it would soon be dusk. And we had been given until sunset to leave the island. We had taken no notice of Ho Liang's threat, but had decided to stay. We were not going to be scared by these threats, and we were quite confident, moreover, that we could hold up any attack.

Those defenders who were in the beach trenches became rather excited, and reported that a move was afoot on the part of the enemy. And so, at once, there was a general rush to have a look.

There was nothing particularly exciting to see. Just beyond Shark Bay we could see a portion of the Chinese junk, where it lay at anchor in the lagoon. Beyond lay the barrier reef of coral, with the surf thundering continuously upon it. But there was a way out for the junk—by sailing in the lagoon for a short distance, and then making its way through the first big break.

And now, for some extraordinary reason, the junk was raising its matting sails, and was evidently preparing for sea. We all watched with surprise, and many comments were made.

"But what's the game?" demanded Handforth. "I thought these beggars were going to attack us? Instead of that, they're sneering off!"

"It looks like it, anyhow!"

"No question about it!"

"There you are!" said Handforth. "Didn't I say so?"

"Didn't you say what?"

"Why, that it was all bluff!"

"Bluff!" repeated Church. "I never heard you say anything about bluff!"

"Ass!" snapped Handforth. "I distinctly said that there wouldn't be any attack at all, and that when it came to the point, the Chinks would hop it! And I was right!"

"Marvellous chap—that's what you are!" grunted McClure. "And you've got a marvellous memory, too! Anyhow, you didn't say anything to us about the Chinese bluffing."

"Of course you didn't, Handy!" said

Church. "As far as I can recollect, you threatened to punch my nose when I suggested there might be no attack at all! You said it was bound to come!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy—always knows everything!" grinned Pitt.

"You can cackle all you like!" roared Handforth. "But I know what I said—and you can all go and eat coke! I'm jolly certain that the Chinese are clearing off now, and we shall never see them again!"

"I jolly well hope you're right!" said Bob Christine.

We all watched the progress of the junk with interest.

For this move was so totally unexpected—so different from what he had anticipated. It was extraordinary that Ho Liang and his men should leave the island only a brief hour or so before the threatened attack was due to commence. For the Chinamen would be needed in that attack. There were large numbers of yellow rascals on board the junk, for it was a big vessel.

But there it was—sailing out through the opening in the reef.

There could be no mistake about it—the yellow men were going.

But it puzzled us enormously, and we continually asked one another why Ho Liang and his crowd were leaving the island in the possession of the cannibals—and us. As it happened, it wasn't long before we knew the truth.

Outside the reef, the junk came sailing clumsily round in the direction of Shark Bay—but, of course, at a considerable distance from the shore. For the yellow skipper was not taking any risks. He knew the reef close against the opening into the lagoon—but he was unfamiliar with the reef here.

So the junk kept well out.

And then, as we watched, we suddenly saw a dense puff of smoke on the junk's side. It was followed on the instant by a sharp, booming report. Then, while we were staring at one another, a peculiar screaming noise sounded. It was followed almost immediately by a terrific spurt of water from the lagoon—accompanied by a devastating report.

"Great Scott!" shouted Pitt. "We—we're being shelled!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Shelled!"

"Bombarded!"

"So—so that's why the junk went out into the open sea!" gasped Church. "There you are, Handy! Now what have you got to say?"

Handforth was glaring fiercely over the lagoon.

"The—the beastly rotters!" he shouted. "Shelling us! I jolly well knew it!"

"What?" said McClure feebly.

"Didn't I say so?" snorted Handforth.

"Didn't I tell you that these confounded Chinks would start bombarding us—"

"No you jolly well didn't!" put in Church. "You said that the junk had gone for good, and wouldn't return! So you needn't try any of your blessed spoof business on us!"

"Why, you—you——"

Boooooom!

Another report came from the junk. We had known that it was coming, for we had seen the preliminary puff of smoke. Again we heard the whine as the shell came hurtling through the air. And another great fountain of water shot up from a spot some little distance from the beach.

"There's a rotten aim!" said Handforth contemptuously.

"They haven't got the range yet," I said. "Thank goodness, they're rotten gunners on these Chinese junks—and thank goodness they've got a rotten gun! They may never find the range."

"What if they do?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Well, it'll be pretty bad for us, that's all," I said. "We haven't got the artillery to retaliate with, and it'll be a one-sided business. These shells may be of a poor quality, and the aim of the Chinese gunners may be worse; but if some of those shells do happen to explode here—well, it'll be all up with a few of us."

Boom—zzzing—crash!

This time the explosion was much nearer. For the shell came hurtling over, and instead of falling short, sailed right overhead, and crashed into the trees hundreds of yards behind the Fort. The force of the explosion made the ground quiver.

To say that we were excited would be putting it mildly. We had hardly expected anything of this nature. The Chinese were evidently determined to break our morale before the real attack commenced. If possible, they also wanted to wreck our defences, and make us helpless.

It was a nice little programme but it was not likely to succeed.

The gun kept firing with absolute regularity. So far, no shell had come anywhere near us. They either fell short, or went too far, or very wide. Then we all received a bit of a shock. That whining moan sounded immediately after the report—and then the shell struck the ground only fifteen or twenty yards away from us.

The report was deafening—devastating! Vast spurts of sand went shooting up, and flying particles came over us like rain. But nobody was hurt. The shell had come unpleasantly close.

Nelson Lee came along the trenches briskly—and Lord Dorrimore was doing just the same thing in the other direction.

"Boys, you must not expose yourselves in this way!" exclaimed Lee sharply. "It is all very well to be contemptuous of these shells, but a well-directed shot may be fired at any moment. Into the dug-outs at once!"

"Here, I say, sir!" shouted Handforth. "We're not going to creep away——"

"You will get into the dug-out at once, Handforth," interrupted the guv'nor.

"Yes, sir," said Handy meekly.

He knew what it meant when Nelson Lee spoke in that tone, and he didn't attempt to argue. And Nelson Lee was undoubtedly right. There was danger in remaining under this bombardment. To retire into the Fort would be worse than useless—for a single shell would half wreck it, and kill anybody who happened to be within.

But we had provided our trench system with a number of deep dug-outs—where we should be comparatively safe. And all the juniors—much to the relief of some, and much to the disgust of others—were compelled to retire.

The trenches were manned now by the sailors. They could not be spared—for the cannibal attack might come even while this bombardment was at its height.

And then, suddenly, Pitt grabbed my arm.

"What was that?" he asked keenly.

We had been about to enter a dug-out, but we paused, and looked over the top of the trench across the lagoon. A shell had been fired a minute earlier, and it had exploded harmlessly two or three hundred yards to the left of our camp. Two minutes, at least, would elapse before the next shell came over.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Did you hear something?"

"Yes; I thought there was another report," said Reginald Pitt. "It may have been an echo, but it didn't sound like it."

Boom!

There was a distinct report of a gun being fired—but it did not come from the Chinese junk. The sound seemed to be much further away.

Then, as we stared out to sea, we saw the junk's forward mast shattered to fragments. Debris was thrown in every direction, and a great cloud of smoke arose.

"My hat!" shouted Reggie. "They've had an explosion on board!"

"You ass!" I yelled. "That was a shell!"

"Eh?"

"From the Wanderer!" I exclaimed delightedly. "Don't you understand? Captain Bentley has guessed what the game is, and he's giving the Chinese a taste of their own medicine!"

"He's shelling the junk!" gasped Pitt. "Oh, ripping!"

"Hurrah!"

All the juniors had heard my words, and they came pouring out of the dug-outs into the trenches. They didn't care whether any further shells came or not. They wanted to see what was happening.

Boom!

Another report came, and a column of water shot up just ahead of the junk's stern. Then the junk itself fired, and the shell struck the sand a short distance in front of our trench system—again sending the sand spurting up.

But we could now see that the junk was turning. She had evidently had enough, and was sheering off. Upon finding that she, herself, was in a direct line of fire, she didn't care to remain.

"Hurrah!"

"The rotter's scooting!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

Another report came from the invisible Wanderer, and we watched with intent interest.

Crash!

The shell struck the junk absolutely amidships. A cloud of smoke arose, and although we could not see much damage, there could be little doubt that the shell had wrought havoc on the Chinese ship's deck.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" shouted Handforth. "Our chaps have got a bit better aim than these blessed Chinks! A few more like that, and the junk will be sunk! I knew this would happen!"

"Oh, of course!" said Church. "You mentioned it, didn't you?"

"Did I?" said Handforth. "Oh, yes, I remember!"

"Then your memory must be more marvellous than ever," grinned Church.

The fellows now assumed that the immediate danger was over, and they did not return to the dug-outs. The junk, badly hit, was sailing off round the island—needless to say, in the opposite direction to where the Wanderer lay. All her commander was thinking of now was to get into a place of safety.

"By gad!" exclaimed Lord Dorrimore keenly. "I shall have to give Bentley a clap on the back when I see him next time! I knew he was a smart man, but I didn't think he'd have enough horse sense to start bombarding the junk so quickly. It soon stopped the little game, didn't it?"

"Bentley has proved himself to be a man of action!" said Nelson Lee. "But we needn't think that we are out of the wood, Dorrie. This, after all, was only a preliminary—and it proves conclusively that the big attack will shortly commence. I sincerely hope that everything will be all right."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Of course it will!" he declared. "We're not afraid of these scum!"

"I agree!" said Nelson Lee. "And the boys are behaving with wonderful courage and endurance. I've nothing but praise for them—nothing but admiration. At the same time, it is most appalling that these youngsters should be subjected to dangers of this kind."

"But, my dear man, it can't be avoided," said Dorrie.

"Exactly—that is just the unfortunate part of it," said Nelson Lee. "It can't be avoided, Dorrie. We've got to go through with it—and the boys must take their chances with the rest of us. I wish we

could do without them—but I'm afraid our force is too small."

"My dear old chap, do you think these boys would sit still and do nothing?" asked his lordship. "Why, most of them are fairly burstin' for a scrap, an' would consider themselves swindled if they were kept out of it. They're healthy youngsters, and they love excitement and adventure. It won't do them any harm, either—particularly if they come out of the battle unhurt."

Nelson Lee said no more. It was, in fact, quite pointless to discuss the matter. As Dorrie had said, the majority of the juniors would have been highly indignant if any suggestion had been made that they should keep out of the fighting. They were quite ready to take risks with the rest.

The junk soon disappeared from view, and then complete silence fell upon the scene. For the evening was very still, without a breath of wind. And the air itself was humid and uncomfortably close.

Under ordinary circumstances we should have taken far greater notice of these details—but just now we had so much to occupy our attention that we took very little heed of the weather.

The evening, however, was very different to what we had been accustomed to. The sky was not so blue as usual—it seemed to have taken on a somewhat greyer tint. And there was a haze upon the horizon.

And then, with all the abruptness of the tropics, darkness fell. The short twilight snapped out, and the whole scene was enveloped in the enshrouding gloom of night.

And there was the silence—broken only by the continuous thunder of the surf.

CHAPTER III.

ZERO HOUR!



"ARCHIE'S better!" said Reggie Pitt softly.

He had just come into a front-line trench, and he felt, rather than saw, his way. He touched my arm as

he spoke, and I turned.

"Oh, that's good!" I whispered. "Have you just seen him?"

"Yes—and he's sitting up and smiling!" replied Reggie. "Heaps better, and he wanted to come out here with the rest of us. But Mr. Lee has given orders that he wasn't to be moved. He looks a bit white about the gills, but by to-morrow he'll be himself."

"That's splendid news!" I said. "When I go in I'll look him up. Any other news?"

"No," said Pitt. "What about the enemy?"

"Not a sign," I replied. "For all we can see or hear, there don't appear to be a black man on the whole of the island—

with the exception of Umlosi. I can't make it out. If they're going to attack, why don't they do it, and be done with it?"

We both stared out into the darkness. It was very pitchy, and we could hardly see a couple of yards in front of us. As a general rule the nights on Lagoon Island were clear and brilliant—even when there was no moon. For the stars themselves cast a radiance which no dweller in England can conceive of.

But to-night there appeared to be no stars—the darkness was like ink. And in this mysterious gloom lurked the enemy. It could not have been better from the enemy's point of view. And it was a time of anxiety for us—straining every nerve, and waiting—waiting.

"Then, as Pitt and I stood there together, we caught sight of a blacker patch of the darkness just near the trench and quite near to us. It appeared to be moving in our direction.

"Who's that?" I demanded sharply.

"All right, you ass—don't get the wind up!" came a soft voice. "It's me!"

I recognised the tones of Bob Christine. A moment later he crawled in, and dropped into the trench. He was one of the fellows who had been out on scouting duty. And he appeared to be rather excited.

"You'd better get ready!" he said. "They're coming!"

"What!"

"Swarms of 'em!" said Christine. "I watched the beggars—they're creeping along the sands in dozens—and moving inch by inch. You'd better all get ready for the battle—it'll start in about five minutes."

"You'd better report to the general!" said Pitt.

We had termed Nelson Lee the "general," for he was in command of the whole Defence Force. And Bob Christine hurried off to another part of the trench—where Nelson Lee was waiting, with Dorrie on one side and Umlosi on the other.

Christine soon imparted his news, and Nelson Lee received it quite calmly.

"You were right, old man," said Dorrie softly.

"Yes, so it appears," said Nelson Lee. "Thank you, Christine."

The junior went off to tell some of the other fellows.

"I thought I was not mistaken," exclaimed Nelson Lee, lowering a pair of night-glasses. "Yes, Dorrie, we shall soon be in the thick of battle. It will start with one fearful commotion. Deep as the silence is now, the pandemonium will be frightful—if I know anything of these savages."

Umlosi grunted.

"I am eager to be at work, my master!" he rumbled. "Wau! My arm is aching to be wielding my spear and to thrust it home into the accursed vitals of these dogs!"

"Yes, you always were a chap who loved digging a spear into somebody's interior!" said Dorrie. "Don't you worry—your arm



Then, as we stared out to sea, we saw the junk's forward mast shattered to fragments.

will ache enough before you've finished. There's going to be an unholy shindy in a minute."

"May it come soon, N'kose," whispered Umlosi.

His lordship tried vainly to pierce the gloom.

"Just our luck to have a pitchy night like this!" he growled. "Ever since we've been on this infernal island the nights have been brilliant. And the first time we really need some light we get this!"

"It may be all the better," said Nelson Lee. "The enemy probably believes—hopes, at all events—that we shall be taken by surprise. They are relying upon this night attack to win through. They will be rudely awakened."

"Yes, we shall probably have some lightning soon," said Lord Dorrimore. "I've got a kind of feeling that we're in for a storm. I know what this absolute calm means, and the haze, too. We shall soon be——"

Dorrie broke off, for at that moment there came a curious sound from out of the blackness. It was like a wailing cry. And then, abruptly, the very air became filled with a series of wild and startling yells.

"Here they come!" yelled Handforth's voice.

"Let 'em have it, you chaps!"

As Nelson Lee had said, pandemonium reigned within a second. The wild yells of the cannibals filled the air. And spears came hurtling over the trenches in whizzing flights.

The sailors with their rifles and machine-guns, lost no time.

The machine-guns, with their rattling roar, got to work. The blackness of the night was pierced by the lurid flashes from the fire-arms. And the yells of battle were intermingled with the shrieks of wounded.

And then came another sound.

From several quarters of the trenches there came a hissing, roaring sound, as though somebody had suddenly started off some fireworks. And, indeed, this was practically the truth.

From about three different quarters at once a hissing shower of sparks rose into the air. Then there were three shattering reports high above—and the blackness became turned into brilliant light.

The rockets were a type of star shell, and the brilliant lights gleamed in the sky and shed down a white illumination which lit up the whole scene. After the inky blackness, the effect was rather startling.

"There they are!"

"Hundreds of them!"

The juniors shouted excitedly as they saw the enemy. In this new light, the blacks were revealed with great distinctness against the white sands. They were crouching low, and all of them were transfixed for the moment. They had believed themselves to be safe in the darkness.

But now they were terrified for the first few moments.

Zurrrrh!

The machine-guns renewed their shattering din, and now that the star shells were lighting up the field of battle, the gunners could see what they were doing. They were not merely firing into the darkness at random.

The result was rather terrible.

All the cannibals in the forefront of the attack simply crumpled up as they stood. One had the impression that they were nine-pins, and that they had been suddenly blown over by a gust of wind.

One or two screamed wildly, and others wriggled. But the majority lay perfectly still—riddled with bullets.

And then came shouting orders from the rear. And, suddenly, a vast horde of the blacks came sweeping up from the distance. It seemed that this first party was only the vanguard. The main force was now arriving.

Other star shells hissed up into the sky, and Phipps afterwards said that the scene reminded him of many a night scrap on the Western Front. It was like a miniature big push.

We, in our trenches, were feeling confident and absolutely safe. It was nothing but slaughter—mowing down these blacks in this way. But it was either our lives or theirs—and we could do nothing else but shoot them down. Once in their hands we should probably be burnt alive.

And we noticed that intermixed with the blacks there were a good few Chinese. And they were crouching low and firing their

rifles in continuous volleys. But this was not of much avail.

We were secure in cover. It was only a stray shot that could do any damage. The enemy, on the other hand, was fully exposed in the open—and they did not have the cover of darkness, as they had expected.

But at one period it seemed as though things would go badly with us.

I believe that Ho Liang himself was directing the operations, for the blacks would never have had the ingenuity to make the move which immediately followed. While the machine-guns were busy keeping this big horde in check, we suddenly became aware of a terrific commotion on the left.

The trenches, in that section, were thinly manned. Five or six of the Wanderer's crew were on duty there, and so far they had had very little to do. There were some juniors, too.

And they were rather startled to see a force of between fifty and sixty cannibals come rushing up from the cover of the palm grove. They were upon the trench almost before the sailors could fire.

Many of the savages were impaled upon the deadly spikes, but they didn't seem to care. They were mad with the lust of battle and came dashing on, shrieking and yelling and making the night hideous.

And if the star shells helped us, they also helped the enemy.

For the spiked sticks could be seen and avoided. In a series of gigantic leaps the savages cleared the obstructions. And, out of the whole force, about twenty or thirty got through.

They crowded into the trench, with their spears ready.

The sailors, firing desperately, retreated. To have remained would have meant nothing but annihilation. And as they retreated, they fired continuously. A few blacks fell, but the majority came on.

And then Umlosi scented what was happening.

Umlosi was rather disgusted with the whole fight. But for Nelson Lee, he would have dashed out into the open. He considered that trench warfare was absurd. He loved a straight battle in the open.

So far he had not lifted his spear once. But now his chance had come. He heard the shouts of the enemy, and he turned in this direction. As he did so a form came dashing up, hot and breathless. It was Jack Grey.

"They've broken through!" gasped Grey. "Dozens of 'em! They're in the front trench now, and—"

Umlosi didn't wait to hear any more. Gripping his famous spear, he tore down the trench and in less than five seconds he was in the thick of the fight. The only way into the communication trenches lay in this direction—and the cannibals were swarming along with the intention of killing all they came across.

But Umlosi barred the way.

"Come, thou ugly rats!" he boomed. "Thinkest thou I will let thee pass? Thou art but accursed dogs with no more fight in thy bodies than the foulest mongrel! Wau! Thou canst take that, thou pretty one!"

He drove his spear home with absolute relish, and one of the cannibals fell grunting to the bottom of the trench. And then Umlosi fairly let himself go. He seemed to go mad for a time.

His spear flashed this way and that, and every thrust felled one of the enemy. But Umlosi himself did not escape unscratched. Spears were thrust at him constantly, and it was only by his amazing skill that he turned the points aside in time. Now and again he was a fraction of a second too late—with the result that his arms and body were showing deep and painful cuts.

The great Kutana chief was bleeding from a dozen wounds—wounds which any ordinary man would have called serious. But he hardly noticed them. He didn't seem to care what pain he suffered.

In the intensity of the battle he simply fought on madly.

And he stopped the gap in that trench.

The blacks were unable to get through. And those in the rear, seeing the fate of their comrades, began to believe that Umlosi was possessed of some evil spirit. They fell back wailing, and fled.

And by this time other sailors had rushed up with rifles, and the firing commenced in earnest in this quarter. Umlosi leaned back against the trench, and gazed round with pride. A dozen men lay dead—every one of them killed by that magic spear.

"Thou art surely but the foulest of scum!" exclaimed Umlosi contemptuously. "'Tis not a real fight, methinks! One needs to battle against a real man to feel the true spirit of battle!"

"Well done, old man!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, hurrying up. "You have saved the situation. If those blacks had got through we should have been in a serious predicament."

"Fear not, Umtagati," said Umlosi. "These wretches are not fighters—they are but worms that crawl in the earth!"

"Yes, but they can be dangerous," said Nelson Lee. "Thank Heaven, we have suffered no fatal casualties so far—although Simpson, one of the sailors, is pretty badly speared. We have carried him into the house for attention."

"'Tis well!" said Umlosi. "And my young white masters?"

"So far they are unharmed."

"Thou are pleasing me greatly with thy news, O my master," said Umlosi. "But be not deluded into thinking that the danger has passed. The red mists still appear before mine eyes. There will be much danger yet!"

"I can quite believe that," said Lee. "But we have beaten off the main attack — Why, good heavens! Man alive,

you're gashed in the most terrible manner. I didn't notice it at first——"

"'Tis but a few scratches, my father," growled Umlosi. "Mayhap thou wilt be able to apply a bandage later, when there is time. And methinks that events will not go smoothly with us. I have strange visions of some disaster!"

"Never mind your visions just now, Umlosi," said Nelson Lee. "You've got to go straight into the house, and have those wounds attended to. You'll find Phipps there, with bandages and lint and everything necessary."

"'Twill do later——"

"No, old friend, you must go now," interrupted Lee firmly.

Umlosi did not argue, but went. It was highly necessary, for he was bleeding profusely from his numerous flesh-wounds. Under the care of Phipps, however, he was very soon feeling a great deal better.

Phipps, with much surgical skill, washed the wounds, and applied bandages. And then Umlosi, instead of resting, emerged forth once more to see how the battle was going.

Compared to the first onslaught, things were now quiet.

The enemy had retreated, finding it impossible to force a way through the defences. And, from the cover of the palm-groves, a continuous fire was sent in—the bullets hissing harmlessly over the trench tops.

But, although this lull had now occurred, there was no indication that the battle was over. It was, indeed, only just beginning.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE THICK OF BATTLE.



NO time was lost in distributing the defenders along the trenches. The position which had been weak previously was now strengthened.

Nelson Lee was really sorry that we only had two machine-guns. We could have done with half a dozen. Indeed, with such a number, there would have been no danger whatever. We could have held a thousand at bay.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Pitt, as we collected in a knot in one of the rear trenches—for the fellows were not allowed to be in the front line now.

"Think of it?" said De Valerie. "Why, we've got the rotters beaten!"

This was the general opinion. That first onslaught had been beaten back so drastically that it seemed that no fresh attempts could meet with better success. There was no cessation of firing, for the blacks were still keeping in the cover of the palm-trees, loosing off their rifles as fast as they could

reload. But they were merely wasting their bullets.

"The thing's a swindle!" said Handforth contemptuously. "I thought it was going to be a battle—and I'm blessed if there's been a single nigger within a dozen yards of me! What's the good of a chap working himself up to fight if he doesn't get the chance?"

"Hard lines, Handy!" said Pitt drily.

Handforth raised his heavy wooden club suggestively.

"I've been waiting for half an hour to give one of those rotters a slosh with this!" he said. "If I don't get a chance soon, I shall jolly well go out and—"

"No, you won't!" interrupted De Valerie. "We had enough trouble rescuing you the last time you got collared! You're a reckless ass, and you'll stay here!"

"Are you ordering me about?" snapped Handforth. "Don't forget that I'm the War Minister, and I can jolly well do as I like!"

"That rot's finished with now, Handy," said Church. "Nobody minded you being War Minister when there wasn't a war on. But you can't expect the chaps to take you seriously in the midst of a battle!"

"Oh, can't I?" snorted Handforth. "If it wasn't for jealousy, I should be in command of these operations. I don't want to boast, but I could easily have had every one of the enemy killed or taken prisoner by this time! I should have surrounded the rotters!"

"Oh, that would be easy!" said Church. "How the dickens are you going to surround a scattered force of a couple of hundred men with about thirty? I reckon you're a bit of a joke as a War Minister!"

Biff!

Handforth's left fist shot out, and Church only just dodged in time. Handforth's fist thudded into the side of the trench, and nearly caused it to cave in. He was instantly seized by three or four juniors.

"Now then—no fighting among ourselves!" said Pitt. "We've got quite enough to do with the enemy! There's no need to—"

Pitt broke off suddenly, for a junior was just coming along the trench, and Pitt was astonished to see that he was Archie Glen-thorne. Star-shells were still being sent up regularly, and it was quite brilliant in the trenches.

"Hallo, old things!" said Archie genially.

"What the dickens are you doing here?" demanded Handforth. "You're dying!"

"Really, laddie, kindly allow me to differ!" said Archie. "A short while ago I was feeling most frightfully pipped. The good old tissues, as it were, were at a dashed low ebb. Absolutely!"

"You look a lot better now, Archie," said Pitt.

"Well, I mean to say, Phipps!" said Archie. "Phipps, don't you know. The man's positively a genius! That is to say,

he's hardly human! He just does a few bally things, and there you are! A chappie is able to rise from his old bed of sickness and proceed with the biz! A deucedly brainy cove—that's Phipps!"

"He seems to have worked wonders with you, anyway," said De Valerie. "Only a few hours ago you were poisoned—"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "My dear old sportsman, it was positively foul! I mean to say, it's somewhat dashed rotten, and so forth. When a chappie has to deliver up about twenty recent meals, he naturally feels dashed empty! There's a most frightful void hovering underneath the old belt, don't you know!"

"Well, you ought to be thankful you've pulled through," said Handforth. "Of course, there's no telling even now. I don't want to be a wet blanket, but you're liable to pop off at any minute!"

"What?" said Archie. "What? That is to say, as it were, pop off?"

"Of course!" said Handforth. "You've got the poison in your system. You naturally feel a bit better now. But after a bit you'll go all funny, and then it'll be weeks and weeks before you're able to crawl about again."

"That's most fearfully rotten!" said Archie, with a start. "Weeks, don't you know! Phipps distinctly ladled out the information that I was practically the old self again. Somewhat thin and emaciated, but the same old chappie, nevertheless. I just trickled forth to gaze upon the populace, and see what was doing. What about the battle? Somewhat remote, by all appearances!"

"It wasn't remote twenty minutes ago!" said Pitt. "My hat! That doesn't seem very remote, either."

With startling abruptness an explosion had taken place—a sharp, shattering roar in the front line trench just ahead—a roar, accompanied by a blinding flash of light.

A moment later there came three other explosions. Confusion seemed to reign at first, and then the machine guns recommenced their shattering bark.

"What's happening?" yelled Handforth.

"Goodness knows!"

But it was not long before we found out. A large number of blacks were creeping up, taking advantage of every scrap of cover they could find, and they were now armed with bombs—which exploded upon contact with the ground.

One of these failed to go off, and we examined it. It proved to be a very crudely made affair, out of a tin box, and filled with high explosive. We did not doubt that the Chinese had provided the cannibals with these deadly things—which were just as liable to injure the throwers.

But they did some damage.

One of the bombs exploded, and two sailors were rather severely hurt. They were carried into the Fort—one with a badly

wounded arm, and the other with a shattered leg.

And we soon found that another type of bomb was being used, too. This second type was larger, and more deadly. But it was provided with a fuse, and did not explode upon contact.

Two of them fell right into the trenches, and it was very fortunate that no sailors were in the immediate vicinity when they went off. For they exploded with such terrific force that the sides of the trench caved in, and nothing but wreckage remained.

And while these bomb-throwers were getting to work, another force of shock troops, so to speak, was preparing for a rush. They came at last—at least fifty powerful blacks.

But long before they got near the front-line trenches they wavered, broke, and fled. For these cannibals had now discovered the deadly nature of the machine-guns, and they did not possess the pluck to face the devastating fire.

The juniors remained in the rear trenches, only able to listen. They had been strictly ordered by Nelson Lee to keep their heads down. For a rash move might easily mean death.

Archie was still talking with two or three juniors, when there came a blinding flash and a big report close by. The fellows stared in the direction of this commotion.

And then, at that very moment, a heavy thud sounded immediately behind Archie. He gave a gasp as something scorched his ankle. Gazing down, he saw a series of sparks shooting out from a fuse. And there was a large metal box attached—and Archie knew the truth.

"Gadzooks!" he muttered blankly.

The thing was a bomb—and it was capable of blowing them all to smithereens. The fuse, too, was practically at an end. Archie acted on the instant, and with considerable bravery.

He dived down, grabbed the bomb, and hurled it with all his force into the air.

Boom!

The thing exploded less than two seconds after it had left Archie's hand. At the same second he ducked, and yelled out a warning. The other fellows had no time to duck, and they were flung in all directions.

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"Help!"

The fellows picked themselves up, breathless but unhurt. Their ears were ringing, and lights danced before their eyes. And Archie bobbed up, and looked round.

"I mean to say, that was somewhat swift!" he observed. "What about it, laddies? Any frightful casualties?"

"Who—who did that?" demanded Handforth warmly.

"I did, old top!" said Archie.

"You did!" howled Handforth.

"Absolutely!"

"You threw that bomb?"

"Absolutely twice!" said Archie. "In other words, old darling, I positively had to do it. That is to say, I didn't quite fancy being carved up into about five hundred and sixty-three pieces!"

"His mind must be affected," said Handforth bluntly. "Of course, he's always been wandering, more or less, but I never thought he was as bad as this."

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "Kindly refrain from being so fearfully insulting, laddie. You see, the bally bomb dropped just at the old feet, and commenced spurt-ing several yards of fire over the ankle department. I simply had to do something, you know. So I seized the thing firmly and delivered it elsewhere!"

And then, at last, the juniors realised what Archie had done.

"Well I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Christine. "Don't you understand, you chaps? While we were looking in the opposite direction, Archie picked up that bomb and saved all our lives! Good man! He's as plucky as they make 'em!"

"Rather!" said Pitt. "Archie, you deserve the V.C.!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That, of course, is to say absolutely not! Pray don't be so frightfully ridic. and so forth! The V.C., what? Dash it all, there was nothing in it, old tulip! The explosion mixture was on the ground, and I couldn't let it stay there, could I? And remember that I was thinking about my own carcase, too!"

"At the same time, if it hadn't been for your quick action we should have been blown to bits," said Christine quietly. "We're not so very safe here, after all. This bomb throwing business is more than we bargained for."

But, after all, very little damage was done by the bombs. Just at the outset the ruse was successful, but after more star shells had been sent up, snipers got to work, and the approaching bomb-throwers were picked out and shot before they could hurl their deadly missiles.

And no further general attacks were made. The enemy, in fact, had at last realised that we had dug ourselves in so securely that they couldn't shift us. They had already suffered very severe losses—and they had gained absolutely nothing.

The blacks themselves would not have attacked in this way. It was quite obvious that they had been led by the Chinese—who took very good care to remain in the background.

After an hour had elapsed even the fitful rifle-fire had died down, and complete silence reigned. The air was still hot and humid, and there seemed to be every indication of a storm of some kind.

"Well, we seem to have settled the beggars for a bit," said Lord Dorrimore, as he came round the trenches. "It's my belief they've had enough of it, and they're

sick of the whole business. We sha'n't have any more fighting to-night."

"Let us hope you are right," said Nelson Lee.

They came across a group of juniors a few moments later. The fellows were yawning, and they looked very tired.

"I think you had better get to your hammocks, my boys," said Lee. "There's really no reason why you should remain awake. The battle seems to be over, and you might just as well get some sleep."

"Right you are, sir!"

They were only too glad to take the hint, and they went off into the Fort, and in a very short time were sound asleep—as though no peril existed. And it really seemed now that the danger was over. The blacks had retired completely, and they had apparently gone back to their own camp.

It was very unlikely that they would attempt any further onslaughts now, for dawn was near at hand. And the enemy had suffered such losses that they would have no relish for further fighting.

I had not gone to bed yet. I was talking with Reginald Pitt and Tommy Watson and Sir Montie. They all declared that they didn't want to sleep, and so we decided to wait until dawn. It wouldn't be long, anyhow.

"Might as well see it through now," said Tommy Watson, yawning. "Thank goodness we've come through safely!"

"I expect it's a bit of a shock for that Chinese rotter!" said Reggie. "He told Mr. Lee that if we hadn't cleared off the island by sundown last night, we should all be killed. But it wasn't such an easy matter to kill us!"

"What price a dip in the lagoon?" I suggested. "Everything's quiet now, and as we're all dusty and dirty, it would freshen us up, and cool us down. The air's fearfully close!"

"Good wheeze!" said Dorrie. "But will your guv'nor allow it?"

"We sha'n't ask permission!" I replied. "That'll be the safest way. We needn't make any noise. Just a dip, you know."

The others all agreed and so we stole quietly down the trenches, and told the two or three sailors who were in charge that we were going for a bathe. The men allowed us to go out without objecting. For there had been no sign of the enemy for over an hour past.

We reckoned that dawn would come in about another hour, but possibly we were wrong in this—it was more like two hours. And I had an idea that the moon was due to rise soon. It had been getting later and later every night, and now the moon was a kind of ghost of its former self.

I was down at the water first, and, somehow, I instantly became aware that the lagoon was not the same as usual. We had not given it much attention from the trenches. At that distance the water looked

very much the same—what we could see of it.

We only knew that it was very still and quiet, as though it had become something solid. But now that I was right close up I was rather startled. For the lagoon was absolutely alight! The effect was stunning when seen for the first time.

The whole stretch of water was burning with phosphoric fire—right down into the very depths. And as I stood there at the very water's edge, I could see the coral on the lagoon bed—and every scrap of coral was like a torch, burning and glowing. Now and again a fish would come into view, and it flashed by like an electric light.

"Well, I'm blessed!" I muttered.

The surface of the lagoon was moving, owing to the tide—which, I believed, was just about coming in at this time. And, as far as I could see, the whole bed of that stretch of water was glittering.

I put one foot into the water, and then half turned, waiting for the other fellows to come along. As I did so I removed my foot. Pitt and Watson and Sir Montie arrived just then, and they stared at me in amazement.

"Look at your foot!" gasped Tommy.

"Begad!" said Sir Montie.

I looked down. And then I saw that my foot and ankle were covered as though by some glowing sock. It was just as though the foot was on fire. It was really extraordinary.

"What—what does it mean?" asked Watson.

"It's the phosphorescence of the water," I explained. "We've seen it before, but never like this. I've never seen anything so marvellous in all my life."

Pitt plunged into the water, and dived under. Then he came out and stood up. We looked at him in greater amazement than before.

He glowed from head to foot, glittering and shimmering in the most weird fashion. What could it mean?

CHAPTER V.

DISASTER!



REGINALD PITT grinned down at himself as he saw how the water was glowing.

"Jolly queer!" he remarked. "I seem to be all alight, and yet I'm only

wet!"

"But what's the cause of it, dear old boys?" asked Sir Montie. "It's absolutely amazin'—it is, really!"

"I don't know the exact cause, but I think it must have something to do with the atmospheric conditions," I said. "All this silvery glow is somehow connected with the air. I'd like to go out in the

canoe, but that's impossible. Let's be content with having a dip."

It was a remarkable experience, bathing in that luminous water. We went right in up to our necks, and then stood still, watching. Fish passed to and fro, and as they did so they left a trail of fire behind them, as though they were comets. And every clump of coral within view gleamed and glittered.

Over towards the reef we could just see the surf and the foam. It looked like a burning mass of fire.

And then, while we were still marvelling at the peculiar spectacle, an astonishing thing took place. Suddenly—just as though somebody had touched a magic switch—the phosphorescent glow flickered. We looked round, and then caught in our breath.

The lagoon was black and watery—the silvery glow had completely vanished.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Pitt wonderingly.

"Why—why did it go out like that?" asked Watson.

I pointed.

"I think that's the reason," I replied.

The moon had just appeared above the sea. And on the horizon there lay a hazy belt. The moon did not look the same as usual, but was almost red, and had a fiery, sinister aspect.

"There's something going to happen before long!" I declared. "I've seen these signs before, and they don't look healthy. Unless I'm very much mistaken, we're in for some rough weather."

"Well, we can't grumble," said Pitt. "We've had sunny skies and gentle breezes ever since we've been here—except for an occasional shower. But I can't get over that glow in the water, and the way it flickered out."

We had finished our bathe, and now we stole silently up the beach, and returned to the trenches. Everything was still and utterly silent. We were more than ever convinced that the blacks would not come back again that night.

And so, instead of remaining awake, we went to our hammocks, and were soon in the land of dreams. But it was only a short spell—for we were awakened after about four hours.

Dawn had broken long since, and Fatty Little was now bustling about with food and hot drink. And in the daylight we were examining our defences, and Phipps and several of the sailors were out among the still forms on the sands. If there were any injured they would be brought in and cared for.

I noticed one thing at once. Although it was well past dawn, the sun was not shining, and, indeed, the morning was strangely gloomy. I went outside into the stockade, and gazed upwards.

The sky was not visible. Overhead lay a massive roof of solid clouds. They lay in a leaden, impenetrable mass. I had never



Archie dived down, grabbed the bomb and hurled it with all his force into the air,

seen any clouds quite so solid and even before.

"We're going to have something pretty big soon, sir," I said, as Nelson Lee approached.

"I'm afraid you're right, Nipper," said the gov'nor. "I don't like the look of the sky at all. And do you notice the peculiar behaviour of the birds? They know what is coming even better than we do."

I looked round.

The birds were flying about wildly, as though absolutely agitated and ill-at-ease. And they seemed to avoid the woods.

And, instead of the day growing lighter, as it should have done normally, the gloom increased. And there was an awful feeling in the air. Somehow, we seemed impelled to speak in whispers, as though in accord with the general hush. It was most remarkable.

I told Nelson Lee about the glow in the lagoon, and he nodded.

"I have seen something of the same kind before young 'un," he said. "You boys had better all prepare yourselves for something which might be even worse than last night's battle. For when Nature lets itself loose in this part of the world, it does so with a vengeance."

I've seen a few tropical storms, too. But I never remembered anything quite like this before. The very appearance of Nature told me that this coming storm was to be something of a vast character—something which would be deadly and terrible.

But it was probably a long way off yet—it might not break upon the island for hours. It might, indeed, miss us altogether. I hoped it would, although many of the other juniors were looking forward to witnessing the fury of the elements. This was

because they didn't know what they were in for.

And, as it happened, we were not allowed to think much on the subject of storms just then. For something occurred which altered the whole aspect of the situation—something which struck us like a blow between the eyes. We had defeated the enemy all along the line. And yet now, unexpectedly and dramatically, our whole security was to be shattered and wrecked.

All the juniors were feeling bright and cheerful. Both Nelson Lee and Dorrie were confident and pleased. And the sailors from the *Wanderer* were satisfied that they had given a good account of themselves. And we all had the same supreme belief that we had the enemy beaten.

And then, just after Fatty Little had announced that food was ready, we saw a group of figures approaching along the sands. This was the first sign of the enemy that had been seen since daylight. After that final attempt to dislodge us—the blacks had mysteriously vanished. But now a party of them were returning. And they were accompanied by several Chinamen.

One of these yellow rascals walked in advance, carrying a long stick with a white rag tied to the end of it. All thoughts of food were put aside. All discussion about the weather conditions was shelved, and practically the whole party of us collected in the front-line trenches to see what was coming.

There were about twenty or thirty blacks coming along behind the Chinaman, and they seemed to be moving in a curiously-formed clump. And it was not until they were practically upon us that we became aware of the truth. The white flag, evidently, was used so that we should not fire on them.

Suddenly one of the fellows gave a gasp, and pointed. He was Doyle, and his eyes were staring. He looked absolutely staggered.

"Look, you chaps!" he gasped. "It—it's Mr. Wilson!"

"What!"

"Mr. Wilson—where?"

We thought that Doyle had gone off his head for the moment. Mr. Wilson was the chief engineer of the *Wanderer*. And before Doyle could reply we became aware of the staggering truth for ourselves.

In the midst of the clump of savages there were four figures—and we could now see them clearly and distinctly. One was Mr. Wilson, the yacht's chief engineer, and the other three were petty officers!

They were prisoners in the hands of the enemy!

"Good heavens!" I muttered.

For, in a flash, I could see awful possibilities here. Four members of our own party had been captured. And this was the very disaster of all disasters that we had hoped to avoid. For with prisoners in their

hands, the blacks would have a weapon which could destroy us utterly.

I glanced along the trench at Nelson Lee, and I could see that his lips were compressed, and his cheeks had become slightly paler. For the gov'nor knew what this would probably mean. And he was sick with fear for what might happen to the juniors.

He jumped out of the trench, and went forward to meet the enemy. Dorrie accompanied him, and so did Mr. Somerfield, and one or two of the others. Mr. Somerfield was the yacht's second officer, and he had been with us all the time—in charge of the machine-gun party.

"Well," demanded Lee curtly, "what do you want?"

"This is terrible, Mr. Lee!" called out the chief engineer from the centre of the blacks. "Don't let these infernal hounds influence you, sir! We're prisoners, and we'll suffer any consequences. Don't do anything—"

He was suddenly silenced by a brutal blow from one of the blacks. I saw Umlosi grip his spear harder, and it was only by a strong effort of self-restraint that he controlled himself. It was impossible to strike these men while they held the white flag.

"What do you want?" repeated Nelson Lee sharply.

And then, for the first time, I noticed that the leading Chinaman was Ho Liang himself. I had been looking at the four luckless prisoners, and had given very little attention to the yellow men.

"I think, gentlemen, that I now hold the trump card!" exclaimed Ho Liang softly, and with that gentle purr in his voice. "I will admit that you gained a complete victory during the night. But now, my friends, it is my turn."

"I do not understand you!" said Nelson Lee.

"No?" said the Chinaman. "I really think you do—only you do not like to admit it. You must allow me to compliment you on the adequate nature of your defences. You held us at bay—"

"Really, Mr. Liang, I am not anxious to receive compliments from you!" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "You inflamed these savages to attack us—and that attack failed. What plan have you in mind now?"

"It is quite simple!" replied Ho Liang. "A large force of my men attacked the yacht during the night. They were ready for us, I will admit, and twenty of my men were killed in the ensuing battle. A very heavy loss—but I think the prize was worth it."

He indicated the four prisoners with a wave of his hand.

"My men had precise instructions to capture not less than two members of your party," went on the Chinaman. "Fortunately, four were obtained, as you can see. I call upon you now to surrender unconditionally."

"Indeed!" said Nelson Lee. "You are somewhat optimistic!"

"And not without reason!" said Ho Liang gently. "It is not my habit to beat about the bush, gentlemen. I am a man of action—and I am not delicate in my methods. I have made up my mind to force you to submission—and I shall be successful. If you will have these four men live, you will surrender!"

"And what if we refuse?" put in Lord Dorrimore.

"I can hardly imagine that you would be so rash," purred Ho Liang. But I will tell you. If you refuse, these four men will be put to death ruthlessly and in front of your very eyes. It will be for you to give a signal of surrender at any moment you choose."

"Go!" exclaimed Lee angrily. "I will not bargain with you!"

Without a word Ho Liang turned. He gave some quick orders in Chinese, and almost at once the four prisoners were turned about and marched away. Mr. Wilson turned his head and raised a hand.

"Don't surrender, sir!" he shouted. "Leave us to our fate! You mustn't let the boys fall into the hands—"

Again he was silenced—but he was a man of courage and indomitable pluck. He was ready to die a ghastly death in order to save the rest of us. And his companions were with him.

The enemy force did not retreat far. They went along the beach, and then came to a halt about four hundred yards distant. And Nelson Lee stood looking at Lord Dorrimore with a light of agony in his eyes.

"This is terrible, old man," he muttered. "I could not think of anything more appalling."

"It certainly seems to be pretty stiff!" agreed Dorrie. "Do you think these demons mean it?"

"I know they mean it!" replied Lee. "There is only one thing to be done, Dorrie. It is unthinkable to leave those four men at the mercy of the blacks. In order to save them we must surrender."

"An' then we shall all be massacred!" said his lordship.

"I do not think so. But in any case we must risk it," said Nelson Lee. "There is time yet, and so we must watch and wait. But I do not think there can be any doubt as to the ultimate result."

The fellows were all talking among themselves. This new situation had cropped up so unexpectedly that they were all taken by surprise. And many of the juniors could not quite realise the possibilities.

"If they think we're going to surrender, they've made a bloomer!" said Handforth. "After holding out against all their attacks, it's likely we should cave in, ain't it?"

"Of course we sha'n't cave in!" said Armstrong. "We won't take any notice of their fatheaded threats. But it's a bit rotten for Mr. Wilson and those others. They're properly in the cart!"

"Rather!"

"They'll get it in the neck, too!"

"But I don't believe they'll be killed!" said Armstrong. "That's simply a piece of bluff."

I made very few remarks. I was watching the enemy out on the sands. In the deep gloom of this strangely oppressive morning the whole scene looked even more sinister than it actually was.

The blacks were working feverishly. A number of them hurried off into the woods, and soon returned carrying massive logs. And these, one by one, were thrust into the sand and strongly fixed in. As they were fixed, a prisoner was tied to the rough stake.

And in less than half an hour Mr. Wilson and the three petty officers were all in a row, tied firmly and cruelly to those stakes. They were in full view of us. And now, although we would not admit it to ourselves, we knew what these brutes were preparing.

For there could be no mistaking the signs. Great loads of dried grasses and twigs were brought, and this inflammable stuff was piled up round the feet of each man. In short, they were to be burnt at the stake—burnt alive!

It was so ghastly that we felt almost faint.

"Guv'nor, you can't let them torture Mr. Wilson and those chaps like that! We've got to surrender—we've got to!"

Nelson Lee seemed to swallow something.

"Yes, there is no other course!" he muttered.

And then even the guv'nor's self-control gave way. His eyes blazed, his face flushed with fearful fury, he shook his clenched fist in the air.

"The infernal devils!" he thundered. "By James! They hold the trump card now—and we must give in! But although we shall surrender, we are not beaten! We shall have our turn!"

Then, just as abruptly, he pulled himself up.

"But I am talking idly!" he said bitterly. "This is the end, Nipper. We are in the most frightful predicament imaginable. If we refuse Ho Liang's demand we shall see these four men tortured in the most ghastly manner possible. And if we surrender we shall place ourselves entirely at the mercy of these curs!"

"We must surrender, old man," said Dorrie. "There's no two ways of thinkin'. I've got an idea that Ho Liang is bluffing—but we can't risk it. I don't suppose he'll indulge in wholesale slaughter after we've surrendered. And we can't let those men be burnt at the stake!"

"Give the signal, sir!" shouted Church.

"Look—they're lighting a torch!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

The fellows watched with bated breath.

"It's all rot—absolute rot," growled Handforth. "We've got to cave in, of

course—but it's all bluff! Even these rotters wouldn't dare to commit a foul murder of this kind! By George! As soon as ever I get close to Ho Liang I'm going to punch his nose into the middle of his face!"

I was watching the Chinaman while Handforth was speaking. And at that very moment Ho Liang was grasping a flaming torch. He waved it in the air, and then held it down towards the brushwood which surrounded Mr. Wilson. In the same second Nelson Lee raised his hand aloft and waved a handkerchief.

It was the signal for surrender.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BLACK FIENDS!



HO LIANG dashed the torch to the ground and stamped it out.

Then he approached, accompanied by a dozen other Chinamen. There was a smile of gloating satisfaction on Ho Liang's face. He had gained the upper hand—as he knew he would do from the very start.

"I thought you would be sensible, gentlemen," he said calmly. "Will you surrender up your arms voluntarily, or must my men take them by force?"

"We are your prisoners, Mr. Liang," said Nelson Lee quietly. "You have forced this position upon us, and we had no alternative. We could not allow our fellow-countrymen to die at your hands."

"So I imagined," said the Chinaman. "And you must not think, my dear sir, that I was bluffing you. Had you maintained your refusal, the prisoners would have died. I am not the man to bluff!"

The juniors were silent and sullen. There is never much satisfaction in submitting tamely to a victorious enemy. First of all the sailors were ordered to emerge in single file. They were compelled to carry their arms with them and to place them in a heap as they filed past. Then came Mr. Somerville and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Phipps, and, finally the juniors. Their arms merely consisted of clubs, but even these had to be surrendered. And when we were thus rendered helpless, we were ordered within the stockade. Ho Liang followed.

"It is not my intention to be harsh!" he said. "You are my prisoners—but I shall deal with you quite fairly. You have surrendered, and that is sufficient. No harm will come to you—nobody will be hurt in the slightest way. I am glad that the battle is over, and that bloodshed is at an end. You may proceed to act just as you think fit. But you will please understand that nobody will be allowed beyond the bounds of these trenches. Any attempt to get away will be rewarded by swift death."

He was still talking with us when Mr. Wilson and the three petty officers were brought in. And now we became aware of something else, too. Scores and scores of blacks were appearing. And they formed a complete circle round the fortifications. They were excited and fierce, and jabbered to one another in their own peculiar tongue—glaring at us occasionally with fierce eyes. Ho Liang was not taking any chances. Entirely encircled by these blacks there would be utterly no chance of our making a break for liberty. For now we had no arms. We were helpless. If these cannibals chose, they could slaughter the whole crowd of us in cold blood.

Ho Liang and his men, having seen that the blacks were all in position, retired down the beach. And at last we had an opportunity of discussing this terrible situation. Mr. Wilson was so filled with emotion that he could hardly speak. There were, indeed, tears in his eyes.

"This is our fault, my lord!" he said, addressing Dorrie. "We have brought this ghastly misfortune upon you. I wish to Heaven you had let us die! It would have been better than submitting to this—"

"Nonsense, Wilson," interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "And there is no need for you to blame yourself for what has happened. We must bow to the fortunes of war. I'll admit the whole thing's pretty putrid, but it's no good kicking up a fuss."

"I'm thinking of the boys, my lord!" said the chief engineer. "Heaven only knows what may happen to them now."

"We simply could not let you die before our eyes, Wilson," said Nelson Lee. "Tell us how you came to fall into the enemy's hands?"

"It was absolutely unavoidable, sir," said Mr. Wilson. "I'm not trying to excuse myself in any way, but I'll just give you the plain facts, and let you judge for yourself. The skipper had given strict orders that a constant watch must be kept. There were five or six of us on deck during the blackest part of the night. We were listening to the distant sounds of firing, and we were wondering what was happening to you over on this side."

"There had been no attack on the yacht?" asked Lee.

"Not until then, sir," replied the chief engineer. "As a matter of fact, some of us had been wondering if there was any possibility of rushing help across to you. And I was talking about this with one of the men when a look-out yelled that we were being surrounded by canoes."

"Well?" asked Dorrie.

"We got the searchlight going at once," said Mr. Wilson. "But it was too late. These infernal niggers had crept up like shadows. And as soon as the searchlight got going we found that swarms of them were already on deck. There were a few dozen Chinks, too—the slimy scum. Fellows

with knives about a yard long, whose sole purpose was murder—as we thought. But we mopped up a dozen or two of them before they finally overwhelmed us. They came in such numbers though, that we couldn't hold them back."

"And, to your surprise, they made no attempt to kill you?" asked Lee.

"No, sir—they simply laid hands on the first four they could grab, and roped us up. Then we were lowered into one of the canoes, and brought along the lagoon and landed. And there we were kept until daylight came. And, leaving the subject, sir, I think we're in for something about as fearful as you can imagine!"

Mr. Wilson indicated the sky, and Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, there's no doubt that the storm will be a severe one," he said. "However, it seems to me a trifle compared to our present predicament. So far as I can see, we can do nothing but wait until this Chinaman gives his orders."

"There's just a possibility that the skipper might try something, sir," said one of the other men hopefully. "He knows what's happened, of course, and you can bet he'll do everything he can to square things."

Mr. Wilson was looking rather bitter.

"And this is what happens just when we are approaching success!" he exclaimed, clenching his fist and shaking it at the surrounding cannibals. "We've got the old Wanderer nearly fit again. The plates are repaired, and the water's pumped out. She's sound—but it's very doubtful if we can get her afloat. Not that it matters much now," he added.

The juniors did not talk much—they felt depressed and rather scared. The situation had changed so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that they were almost taken off their feet.

The only fellow who carried on in just the same way as usual was Fatty Little.

"Well, a chap's got to eat!" he said. "It doesn't matter whether he's a prisoner or not. Grub's essential—a fellow can't live without grub! So I vote we help ourselves to all the stuff I've prepared. No sense in letting it all go to waste."

But not many fellows were hungry. The shock of surrendering, accompanied by the strange depression of the morning, had a most marked effect upon them.

"Oh, what's the good?" growled Handforth. "We do every blessed thing—we beat these niggers and the Chinks—and then this is the result! Prisoners—surrounded by a crowd of stinking cannibals."

"It's a bit thick!" admitted Pitt. "And I don't like the look of the beggars, either. They seem to be getting more excited every minute. They're increasing in numbers, too—about two dozen have arrived during the last five minutes."

This was quite true.

The savages were collecting rapidly, many newcomers supplementing the force which

Ho Liang had placed round the trenches to guard us. Indeed, in a very short space of time all the blacks on the island were congregated in a wide circle round us. That they were excited was obvious.

We could see them in little groups, executing war dances, and shouting and yelling without any particular reason. And, instead of calming down, this noisiness increased.

And then, finally, the blacks fairly let themselves go.

It seemed to be like some infectious disease. First a few commenced the wild dancing—an isolated group here and there. Then others joined in, and as though by magic the whole ugly crowd commenced dancing round, and kicking up the most appalling din one could imagine.

Nelson Lee regarded the blacks uneasily more than once.

"I don't like it, Dorrie," he muttered—"the signs are bad!"

"You needn't tell me, old man," said Dorrie. "These wretches are about to get busy on something—an' you can take it from me that it won't be somethin' pleasant!"

Dorrie was right.

Less than five minutes later the cannibals seemed to go mad all at once. They broke up out of the circular formation, and ran about the beach like a lot of gigantic ants—aimlessly, and without any set purpose.

But then they gathered their wits together somewhat. And about twenty of them raced forward, right in the midst of us.

The blacks were powerful fellows, painted and decorated, with nose rings and necklets, and all manner of barbarous ornamentations. Their hair was plastered and shaped in all sorts of weird designs, and their features were the ugliest I have ever set eyes on.

We had absolutely no time to escape—even if such a thing were possible. The blacks were right in among us. But they made no attempt to murder us in cold blood—as most of the fellows had believed they would. They had one object in view.

And this was to seize one junior. As it happened, Sir Montie Tregellis-West was the unfortunate victim. He was hauled out by sheer force and whirled aloft. Then he was swiftly carried away.

"Stop them!" roared Tommy Watson desperately. "Montie—Montie—"

"Good-bye, dear old boys!" came a faint shout from Tregellis-West.

"Good heavens!" I shouted, rushing forward. "They've taken Montie away! What shall we do? Oh, the brutes—the horrible heathens!"

"What shall we do?" bellowed Handforth. "Why, we'll chase them, of course, and get Montie back by sheer force."

"That is impossible," interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "If you do anything of that kind it will provoke the blacks to a general massacre. We are unarmed—we are helpless! To rescue the unfortunate boy is impossible!"

"Oh, it's awful!"

"Poor old Montie!"

"What—what can we do?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" I said tensely. "Poor old Montie! I'm afraid it's the last of him, you chaps!"

Handforth shook his fists in the air.

"The demons!" he bellowed. "It's no good going on like this! We've got to do something! We've got to, I tell you! Look here, you chaps—who's willing to rally round and help me—"

"Handy, Handy!" I said sharply. "It's no good talking like that! What can we do against these cannibals? How do you suppose we can get Montie out of their hands? They've got spears and rifles by the score. And we've got nothing! We've got to stand by and watch—just watch!"

My voice nearly broke as I spoke, and I felt as though my head was bursting. But Handforth was pulled up short by my words. He stood there, and his arms dropped limply to his sides and he groaned.

"No, it's no good!" he muttered thickly. "It's—no—good!"

We stared miserably and hopelessly across the sands; Sir Montie had vanished among the crowd of blacks. We couldn't tell what was happening to him. But the thoughts which were in our minds were absolutely ghastly.

We knew that these blacks were in the habit of eating human flesh. And Montie had been captured—he had been dragged away! And it mustn't be supposed that all the cannibals had deserted us. Large numbers of them still circled about, so that we could not escape. Any such attempt, indeed, would have met with disaster. Our only course was to stay where we were.

And Montie was to be the first victim of their heathen devilry!

Most of us felt like sobbing out of sheer misery and sorrow. But we couldn't do it—we were too horrified and appalled to do anything except stare in the direction where Montie had been taken.

And then, after a while, we began to understand what the plan was.

The blacks, in fact, were taking a leaf out of Ho Liang's book. Having seen the Chinaman's plan with regard to Mr. Wilson and the other three men, the cannibals were intent upon exactly the same idea.

They bound Sir Montie tightly to one of those great stakes which had been driven into the ground. We could see the unfortunate Tregellis-West as he faced us—helpless, bound so that he could not move an inch.

And his fate was so obvious that we did not even dare to breathe it. We all knew what was in store for the swell of the Remove. We all knew that there was only one chance in a million of him escaping from this ghastly fate.

The prospect of help coming from the yacht was remote. Captain Bentley and those few sailors who were left on board

would have all their work cut out to defend themselves and to save the yacht from falling into the hands of Ho Liang.

But, suddenly, we received a little hope.

For a number of Chinamen moved towards the blacks. Two of these Chinamen went right in amongst the cannibals, and we could see that they were giving orders and pointing to Sir Montie.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tommy Watson. "Ho Liang has sent instructions for Montie to be released! You can see it as easy as anything! He said that we shouldn't be harmed, and those Chinamen are telling the blacks to bring Montie back."

"Looks like it!" agreed Church.

"Does it?" yelled Handforth. "Look—look at that!"

But we had seen. Even as we watched the two Chinamen were fallen upon. They were beaten to the ground, and spears were thrust again and again into their bodies. The blacks were out of hand—they were beyond control! Until now they had obeyed all orders from these yellow men. But now they had revolted. In their frenzy they cared nothing.

Two of the other Chinamen who had approached were chased. They vainly tried to escape—but spears were cast accurately, and they fell lifeless to the sands. Although it seemed harsh, I could not help a feeling of satisfaction glowing through me.

"That's something like poetic justice!" I exclaimed. "It was the Chinamen who set the cannibals on to this thing—and now the Chinks are getting it in the neck themselves. They deserve it!"

But our momentary spasm of hope had now vanished. Montie was tied to that stake, and the blacks were feverishly piling brushwood and dried grass against his feet. Poor old Montie was about to be burnt at the stake. It was too awful to contemplate.

I raised my eyes to the sky, and muttered a silent prayer. And as I did so, I noticed that another change had come about in the heavens. The clouds overhead were now darker than ever. And a breeze had sprung up—unnoticed by us in the excitement. But I could feel it, and the leaves of the palm trees and the bread-fruits were shivering and shaking as though with fear. The breeze increased, but not in any alarming way.

And as I watched the preparations for Montie's terrible fate, I became subconsciously aware of a most peculiar sound. I couldn't tell where it came from—I only knew that it was somewhere in the distance—somewhere far off. But now, with all my attention upon Sir Montie, I didn't care a jot what the sound was caused by. I only knew that it was there.

It seemed to be the murmuring and shouting of a vast throng in the far distance. And it only came when the breeze strengthened somewhat. It was borne to our ears by the wind itself.

And then the wind increased in violence, and it came with absolute steadiness. It was blowing fiercely and powerfully and rushed along the beach with a steady, even pressure. The palm trees bent under the strain, and the lagoon was chopped up into impatient little waves. Upon the reef outside the foam roared in unusually large masses.

But, as I have said, I hardly noticed these things at once—for Montie was tied to the stake, and Montie was about to perish in the most diabolical way a human mind could conceive of.

The thing which I had noticed so particularly about the sky was that the clouds were no longer still and leaden, as they had been at first. On the contrary, the

the cocoanut palms answered every mood of the wind.

It is astonishing what the cocoa-nut palms show in their very attitude under the stress of a tropical storm.

I don't know whether the other fellows noticed it or not, for they were gazing intently and feverishly upon the scene by the stake. But that thundering roll in the distance was growing louder and louder—and so rapidly that it was like some awful sound in a nightmare.

And then I became rigid—my eyes bulged from my head.

Several of the insane cannibals were dancing round Sir Montie's stake in a kind of triumphal caper. They were all carrying flaring torches. And at last, with screams



In the midst of the clump of savages were four prisoners. One was Mr Wilson, the yacht's chief engineer, and the other three were petty officers!

clouds were moving rapidly, and appeared to be in an extraordinary hurry to get to their destination. And to my ears came that same vague sound—so vague that it might have been fancy.

As though in keeping with the ghastly business on the beach, every atom of beauty had vanished from the island. No longer was the vision of glorious blue and delicate greens. No longer was it possible to stand there and admire the view—to marvel at the wondrous blue of the lagoon, and the glories of the tropic skies. The place had become a picture of horror.

Not only there, on the beach, where Sir Montie was about to meet with such a terrible end, but everywhere. The greens and the blues had gone. Everything seemed to be of the same shade—a dull, ghastly lead. It was drab and colourless, and there was something about it which filled me with awe.

The cocoanut palms were flinging themselves about in a frenzy. The wind was now coming in mighty blasts—no longer a steady rush. It was fitful and fierce. And

of absolute maniacal fury, they thrust their lighted torches into the heart of the brush-wood.

The flames licked up, and Sir Montie was enveloped!

CHAPTER VII.

THE TERROR FROM THE SKY!



MIRACLES, they say, no longer happen in these days.

Be that as it may, it seemed to me that an absolute miracle took place now that Sir Montie's fate appeared to be sealed. The flames were roaring up round him, and death would be certain within a minute or so—to be preceded by horrible and ghastly agony.

I closed my eyes, shuddering.

Pitt, Jack Grey, Armstrong, Watson, Church, and two or three of the others were sobbing like babies. Tears were streaming down their cheeks, and they flung them-

selves upon the sands in paroxysms of semi-hysterical grief and horror.

All this had taken less than a second.

And then came—the miracle.

There was a shattering, devastating crash—a roar like the report of fifty naval guns fired at the same second. It was such a crash, that I was stunned and blinded and deafened.

The skies were split asunder from east to west by that one mighty crash of thunder. The clouds simply opened out. And down came the rain—but what rain!

It was like one solid, slanting wave of water. It fell in such quantities that we were beaten to the sands as though in a flood. It roared down—and in less than two seconds every trace of the fire round Sir Montie's feet was washed out. And this is what a tropical storm can do!

I am not exaggerating. I saw the thing with my own eyes; and others who have experienced these terrible cyclones can tell the same tale. But never did I imagine that a fearful storm of this nature could bring life with it—or, rather, that it could preserve life. For the history of cyclones is one that is dark and sinister. Death follows in the wake of these amazing atmospheric disturbances.

Trying to get to my feet I at length staggered up—and saw that the cannibals were running wildly in all directions. The

storm had broken so suddenly that they were frightened out of their lives—although, no doubt they had experienced such storms before.

"Quick, you chaps!" I bellowed. "Let's go and get Montie!"

We couldn't see him, for the rain was like a solid wall between us. The sands were streaming with water, and for a yard the air was filled with grit and spray. The whole landscape had vanished. The lagoon could no longer be seen. The palm groves and the hills beyond were simply no more. This devastating downpour of rain blotted out everything.

Under ordinary circumstances, I don't suppose we could have fought against the elements. But we wanted to bring Montie back to us—to bring him back from the dead!

Tommy Watson was the one who answered my call.

Whether the others heard or not, I couldn't say—they didn't respond. But Tommy did. Montie was our own chum—and it was only right that we should be the ones to go to his aid. Staggering drunkenly in the rush of the wind and rain, we took no heed of the blinding lightning and the crashing thunder. Our wits were numbed and dulled. We could

(Continued on next page.)

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feel the very earth shaking beneath our feet as the thunder split the heavens.

We staggered on blindly. And then, almost before we knew it, we saw those stark poles sticking up out of the sands. And there was Sir Montie tied securely to one of them. The blacks had gone—they had fled in every direction.

"Montie!" I shouted feverishly.

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "Dear old boys, I am frightfully glad to see you—I am, really!"

"Are—are you all right?" roared Watson.

"I'm shockin'ly wet!" said Tregellis-West.

"An' that's fortunate, too. Because if the rain hadn't come I should have been cooked by this time, dear fellows! Begad! What an appallin' storm!"

We slashed through Sir Montie's bonds, and freed him. I noticed that he had a number of ugly blisters on his calves and thighs—but they were, after all, comparatively slight.

"It's nothin' much, dear boy!" he said, as he saw me looking at his legs. "Just a little scorchin', you know. The rain came down with such frightful suddenness that it put the fire out before I was properly touched. But I'm feelin' frightfully weak and used up."

It was very wonderful that Montie was conscious or sane. Such an ordeal would have driven many a man out of his mind. Tregellis-West was pale, and his cheeks were drawn. There was a strangely bright light in his eyes. But, thank goodness, he was himself in the main.

"Come on!" I shouted. "We'll get back to the others!"

We staggered on through the smother of rain and wind and sand. It was the most difficult going I had ever experienced. And yet we dare not pause, for there was no telling what was to follow, and we didn't want to be separated from the others.

We found them at last—and they were now moving towards the Fort. The coconut palms were waving madly. Great leaves were whirling about the sands, and now and again a huge branch would come hurtling along. It was, indeed, dangerous to be in the open.

I've experienced a few thunderstorms in different parts of the world, but this seemed to be the worst of any.

As soon as the other fellows saw us they crowded round. And they yelled with joy and relief as they found Montie with us. They grabbed him—they shook his hand—they pulled him about in every direction—they nearly went mad over him.

And Nelson Lee and Dorrie were there, too, and they could hardly contain themselves.

It had seemed that Montie had passed into the next life—and yet he had returned.

"Boys, we can celebrate this wonderful thing later!" shouted Nelson Lee. "At present we must not remain here—for it might mean death. Thank Heaven, we have

the trenches and the dug-outs! Our only safety is to gain shelter."

"Why not get into the house, sir?" asked Handforth.

"The house may be standing now, Handforth, but before this cyclone is over it will be nothing but a few fragments of match-wood!" shouted the gov'nor. "Come, boys—we must find shelter!"

It seemed that the storm would never be over.

It crashed and roared continuously. And we were down in the trenches now—almost happy once more. We hadn't got any weapons, but this terror from the sky had come to our assistance. It had driven the cannibals off, and we were one party intact again. Somehow, I felt that this was to be the turning point. We had suffered the worst. And now it would be our turn to laugh.

Not that there was any laughing just yet.

It seemed to us that the storm was increasing instead of abating. And then, in that curious way which is common to tropical hurricanes, the wind dropped, and the rain ceased. The inky blackness altered, and there came down from the heavens a pale kind of spectral light.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth. "The storm's passed!"

"Hurrah!"

"It's all over, you chaps!"

"Good!"

"Wait, boys—wait!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Don't dare to venture forth! Get into the dug-out, and remain there! Heavens above, do you realise that this is the worst of all? The real cyclone has yet to come!"

"But—but we've had it, sir."

"The centre of the cyclone is approaching!" exclaimed Lee grimly. "Listen!"

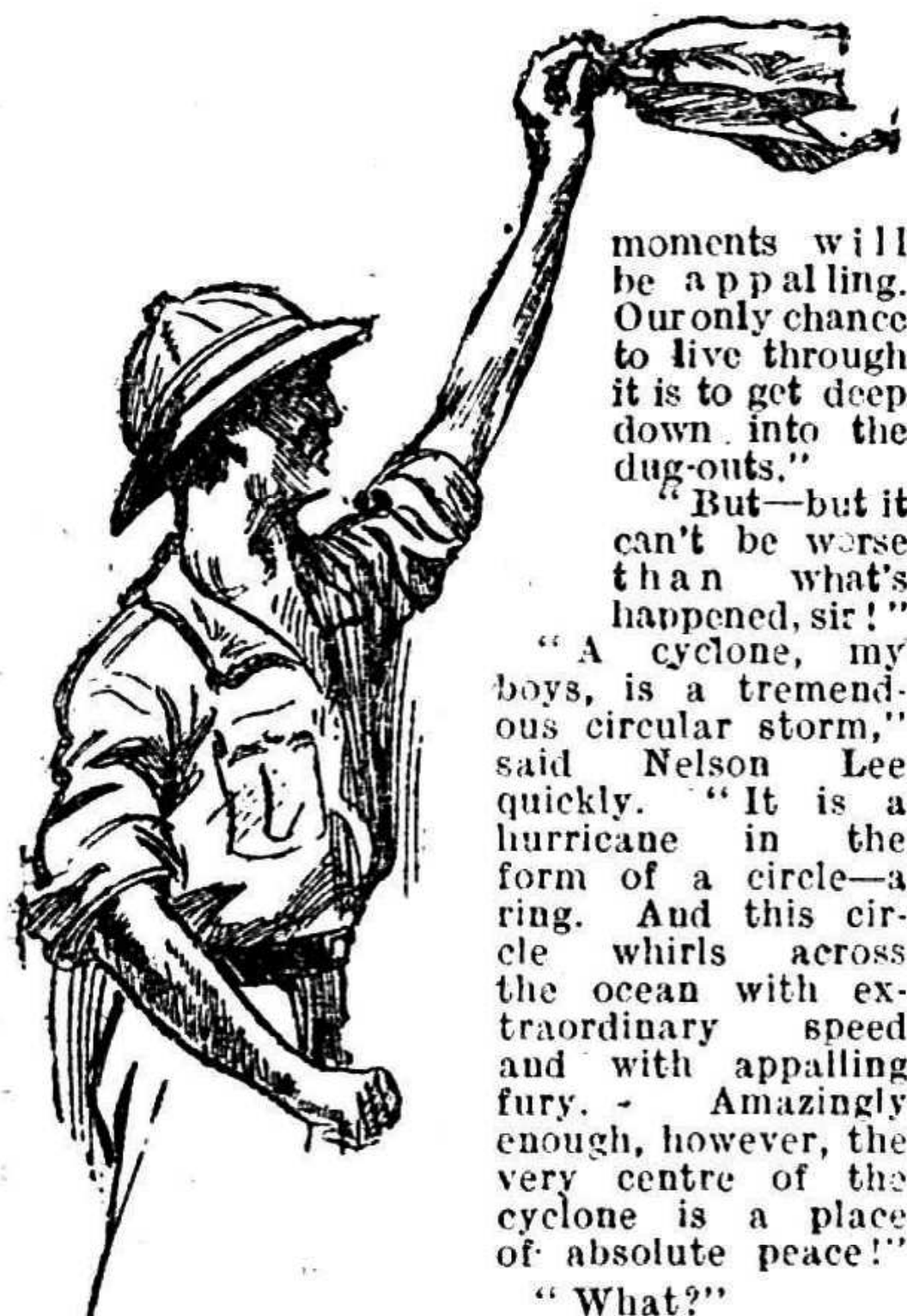
We all stood perfectly still. After the fearful uproar that had been raging, everything seemed to be silent. Once again we could see the lagoon—tossing about agitatedly—and we could see the palms and the surf battering upon the reef and the sandy beach. There were no signs whatever of the blacks or of the Chinese. But I'm wrong. The junk was there—within the lagoon, having evidently come through the reef for shelter. In the lagoon there was protection.

We heard something coming out of the silence—something that made us stare at one another. It was like the humming of some enormous piece of machinery—it was like the droning of a hundred aeroplane engines. It was like all sorts of other things that I could name—but never did we dream its actual cause.

"Do you hear, boys?" demanded Lee.

"Yes, sir—yes!"

"That sound is caused by the very centre of the cyclone," said the detective. "I have experienced one of these violent storms before—but this, I think, is far worse. The devastation that will occur in a few



In the same second Nelson Lee raised his hand aloft, and waved a handkerchief. It was a signal for surrender.

son Lee. "Boys, if we are safe after the onslaught you will see something that will fill you all with amazement. Down—down into cover!"

The fellows didn't like going—many of them wanted to remain behind and see the cyclone for themselves. They could not possibly believe that the worst was to come.

If they had remained in the open they would have understood.

The noise of the storm centre came nearer and nearer. Even below in the dug-outs the sound struck our ears with such sharpness that it hurt us. And from a distance we could hear strange crashings and roarings.

This was caused by the trail of the cyclone as it crossed the island.

And then, like a million demons, the cyclone broke.

It was like the crashing of a world falling asunder. If anybody had been out there in the midst of it, the very noise would probably have deafened him for weeks. Even to us, down in the security of the dug-outs, it was terrible. Later we found that the ears of some of the fellows were bleeding.

moments will be appalling. Our only chance to live through it is to get deep down into the dug-outs."

"But—but it can't be worse than what's happened, sir!"

"A cyclone, my boys, is a tremendous circular storm," said Nelson Lee quickly. "It is a hurricane in the form of a circle—a ring. And this circle whirls across the ocean with extraordinary speed and with appalling fury. — Amazingly enough, however, the very centre of the cyclone is a place of absolute peace!"

"What?"

"Peace, sir?"

"But—but you said that the worst was to come."

"Exactly — and then we shall get the centre—the very centre," replied Nelson Lee.

The sudden devastation in Shark Bay was frightful.

Palm trees were torn up as though they had been mere weeds. The Fort, and the house which we had spent so much time in building was lifted up as though by a giant hand and torn to tiny shreds. It was battered and smashed to smithereens. And it was strewn to the heavens.

Where the Fort had stood there now only remained a few sticks—a jumble of tattered remains—fallen palm trees, hundreds of cocoanuts, and masses of smashed leaves and branches.

It was a hopeless confusion.

Even greater damage was wrought in the interior of the island.

Whole forest glades were laid flat, as though some enormous steam-roller had passed over the spot. And the horror of this thing continued. It thundered and boomed and crashed. To anybody who has never experienced a cyclone the thing is utterly inconceivable.

Then, just as suddenly as the Satanic commotion had begun, so it ceased.

Peace came—utter peace.

It was so abrupt that we hardly realised it. Then there was a rush for the open. We scrambled out of the dug-outs—where we had been safe and snug, although the very ground itself shivered and shook. More than once we had expected the walls of the dug-out to cave in and bury us.

Out in the open air, we gazed round in bewilderment.

The island was changed—it was another place altogether.

Where there had been peace and beauty, there was now nothing but havoc and wreckage. The whole stretch of beach was one conglomerated mass of debris—branches, twigs, leaves, whole trees, and a hundred and one other things. There were great gaps in the palm trees, too. But we did not pay much attention to this at the moment, for there was something else which claimed our interest.

"Look—look!" yelled De Valerie in amazement.

He pointed straight upwards—right into the sky.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"I—I mean to say, what!"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

The juniors fairly shouted in their astonishment. For one of the most extraordinary sights imaginable was there. The whole air was filled with butterflies, insects and birds. Every kind and every species. And they were all journeying in the very heart of the storm—under its protection.

For now we were in the exact centre of the cyclone. Here was peace. The devastating commotion raged all around us. Like a whirlwind it raced in the manner of a top. And we were in the very middle. And here the air was absolutely still. There was not a trace of wind—not a breath.

But from every point—from every side, came the fearful, horrifying screech of the hurricane.

We could hardly hear ourselves talk, the noise was so tremendous. The storm was raging in the most stupendous manner. It was like a yell of fury—it was like that roar of a million giants. And yet, amazingly enough, there was not a breath of wind—only peace!

And that's what the centre of a cyclone is like—where insects and birds travel in safety, and where an aeroplane could have flown without a tremor, providing it kept within that central space. Once on the margin, however, it would have been smashed to insignificant atoms in one second.

We had time to think—we had time to realise this marvel of nature. For, indeed, it was one of the most startling things a human being could see or hear. Only a very few people in this world have such an experience in a lifetime. And I'm not so sure that they are fortunate.

When a fellow is in an ordinary storm, or even an extraordinary storm—he is half-blinded by the rain and the roar and the commotion. He hasn't got his full wits about him, because there isn't time.

But here we were in the dead centre of the cyclone, and the raging commotion was on every side. We had time to listen to every movement of the storm, to hear its gargantuan voice blaring forth its shocking ferocity.

And we took interest in the insects and the birds, too. There were gulls, of course, and almost every other kind of bird one could think of. And they seemed to travel almost as though they were dead, and in a dazed kind of way. And then we were obliged to seek cover.

Nelson Lee made violent signals, and shouted at the top of his voice. And even then he only just succeeded in getting the fellows down to the dug-outs in time. For as the last junior dropped into safety, the other edge of the cyclone crashed upon the island in one prodigious, shattering roar. And again the whole commotion reigned—again the frightful damage was caused. So it can easily be imagined what the whole affair was actually like.

The cyclone had passed now—and we were being treated to its wake. For hours the wind howled and the rain fell. But at last the fierce fury of the storm subsided, and we were able to emerge.

And we came out to gaze upon even worse havoc than before. The wisdom of getting into the dug-outs was apparent at once. The trenches were battered and smashed in. Palm trees lay across every trench. And if we had crouched there we should surely have been badly injured, if not killed. Indeed, some of the fellows were nearly imprisoned in the dug-outs.

But we all emerged. The sky was wan, the air was fresh, and there was a sharp

tang in it. And the trees were waving wildly in the high wind.

And we were appalled by the great difference that lay before us.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAVED BY THE ELEMENTS!



"ISN'T it awful?" exclaimed Pitt, in a hushed voice.

"Terrible!"

"Shockin', dear old boys!"

"Absolutely poisonous!"

We gazed round as we stood on the beach. The destruction among the palm groves and other trees was almost tragic. Gazing at the woods, we could see vast gaps here and there. It was not until these gaps were examined at close quarters, however, that the true nature of the destruction was apparent.

Cocoanut palms lay smashed down as though they were mere sticks—great trees which seemed strong enough to withstand the greatest hurricane that Heaven could create. Yet they had been felled with one swift blow. And all round lay nuts—nuts of every size and condition. For on one cocoanut tree you will find nuts in every stage of development.

In places it seemed as though a fleet of tanks—tanks of gigantic proportions—had crashed through, clearing a path. This had been caused by the main centre of the cyclone. In other parts of the woods there were smaller paths, caused by the subsidiary whirlwinds of the storm.

But the most pitiful feature of all, perhaps, was the extraordinary number of dead insects and birds. You would come across a few feathers here and there—the torn and battered wings of butterflies, the smashed bodies of other insects. A cyclone is a wonderful thing. It is powerful enough to wreck a forest. And yet, at the same time, it will rip a tiny leaf in half.

But we did not examine these things now.

There were other things to claim our attention. We were gazing mostly out into the lagoon. The whole surface of the water was scattered with wreckage—not merely the wreckage from the island, but the wreckage of the cannibal canoes. They had been picked up and smashed to smithereens. There was not a canoe left in one whole piece. The blacks had left them on the beach, drawn up in apparent safety. And the storm had broken with such swiftness that there had been no time to do anything.

The canoes must have been lifted in that first devastating blast and ripped to shreds. There was not a trace of one left. Hand-forth's famous dug-out was intact. This was another trick of the cyclone. The clumsy craft had heeled over, having been partially in the water. And there it lay, in about five feet of water, soaked, but whole.

And the motor-boat had come through equally safe. She had been jammed straight into the sands. Possibly the armour-plating which had been fixed on her deck made her heavy enough to withstand the storm. We could never tell why it escaped. It was providential, at all events. For it was the only craft we had left that would be serviceable.

"But what are the blacks going to do now?" asked Handforth. "They can't get away—they're bound to remain here with us!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, and they'll jolly soon be on our track again!" said Pitt. "We haven't got a gun between us, and we shall be at their mercy!"

"We must never let that happen, boys!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "We're free now—and our object is to get straight to the Wanderer."

"Hurrah!"

"That's the ticket, old man!" said Dorrie. "Once we get to the Wanderer, we shall be as safe as a bank! Do you think we shall be able to do it before these blacks recover from the shock?"

"I do!" replied Lee. "They must be utterly demoralised—if, indeed, any of them escaped. For they were out in the open, and received the full fury of the cyclone. But we will not search—we will get the motor-boat going and transport all the boys to the yacht at once. Then we will come back for the others."

"Hurrah!"

"But what about the Fort?" asked Handforth. "We can't leave that——"

"Where is it?" asked De Valerie, pointing. Handforth turned round and gaped.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he panted. "The—the giddy place has gone!"

The house, the stockade—everything, in fact, had vanished. The storm had lifted it and scattered it to the four quarters of heaven. Our only course, therefore, was to get to the yacht.

There was not a sign of any black. We didn't seem to care about them, for we were practically convinced that no danger lay in that direction now. The cannibals, even if they were still alive, would not have the nerve to attack us even if they were close by.

We set out in the motor-boat, after the engine had been started. Dorrie was in charge, and the interior was crowded to the utmost. Ten juniors went—and even this was a very tight squeeze.

We smashed our way through the wreck-

age of many canoes. And in two places we came upon ghastly objects—the floating bodies of natives. But we forgot these as soon as we had rounded Sandy Head.

For we now came within sight of something which we had not expected to see.

The Chinese junk!

There it lay—a wreck!

"Great Scott!" shouted one of the fellows. "The junk's on the rocks—busted up! It jolly well serves 'em right!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Retribution!"

I was on the launch, and I stared out across the lagoon, and there I could see the Chinese junk. The big vessel was lying with a heavy list to starboard. She had crashed upon the coral reef, and her bows were stove in. There were no masts left standing, and the decks were a litter of debris.

Figures could be seen moving about on the deck, but it was quite clear that the Chinese pirates had suffered many casualties in the storm. Then we progressed on our way, and came within sight of the Wanderer.

We had been rather anxious about the yacht.

And it delighted us to see her lying there, sturdy, and looking just as intact as ever. But this was only a view from afar. When we actually got on the Wanderer's deck, we found that things were different.

The damage was enormous.

Masts were down, deckhouses had been ripped to atoms, and hundreds of glass windows were broken. Everything of a loose nature had been lifted from the yacht's deck and whirled away.

Fortunately, nobody had been killed, although two sailors were rather severely hurt. Captain Bentley was overjoyed to see us, and to learn that we were all safe and sound.

There was much rejoicing, in fact.

Soon after we had boarded the vessel, the motor-boat put back, and ultimately returned with another batch of juniors. These came on board, too, and again the motor-boat went off.

"Well, we're all together now!" remarked Handforth, with satisfaction. "Of course, I sha'n't feel satisfied until the rest of the crowd comes on board. There's no telling what these cannibal rotters will get up to!"

"Oh, everything will be all right," said Church. "Don't you worry!"

"It's bound to be all right!" said Pitt. "After all these things have happened, I can't believe that we're going to have any more disasters. Why, it's absolutely amazing, when you come to think of it."

"Rather!" said Handforth. "We were in a hopeless position. We should have all been burnt at the stake in the end, but then

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that cyclone comes along and puts everything O.K."

"Yes, and it makes the Chinese and the niggers prisoners like ourselves!" put in De Valerie. "We can't get away from the island, because the Wanderer is aground. The Chinese can't get away because the junk is a wreck. And the blacks can't shift because all their canoes were busted up."

"Phew!" whistled Pitt. "The position seems to be a bit warm, you know. We're all compelled to stay here now—and it'll be a queer thing if we don't have some ructions. But still, I reckon we're safe enough now."

"On the yacht, you mean?"

"Rather!" declared Pitt. "Safe as eggs! The blacks wouldn't stand an earthly if they tried to attack us here. We've got plenty of machine guns, plenty of rifles, and plenty of everything. You can take it from me, my lads, that we're the top dogs now!"

"Every time!" said Handforth. "If those rotters come nosing about the Wanderer, we'll jolly soon smash 'em up! Of course, I knew all along that this was going to happen—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Didn't I say that there'd be a whacking great storm?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"Did you?" grinned Pitt.

"Of course I did!" roared Handy. "It only shows that I'm a bit of a prophet. Directly I spotted the sky I knew that a storm was coming—"

"Wonderful chap!" I chuckled, coming up. "A kid of six could have told that! There are certain signs that can't be mistaken. But we don't want to discuss that now. I want to know if you fellows are going to get decked out in white flannels, or whether you'll still wear these grass kilts."

"Let's wear flannels!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Just for once, anyway!"

After all our excitements on the other side of the island, we were only too glad to have a change. And so, by the time all the other members of our party had been brought from Shark Bay, we were looking spick and span in cricket shirts, and white flannels trousers, and white shoes.

Archie was in his full glory.

Downstairs in his cabin, he was talking to Phipps.

"This, as you might say, is positively the stuff to supply them with!" he observed. "What-ho, Phipps! Back to the civilisation stuff, and what not! I think we'll wear the flannels, what?"

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Phipps.

"And we'll come out looking spick and span!" went on Archie, with relish. "The fact is, laddie, I'm just about fed-up with kilts, and all that kind of rot! There's

nothing like the real goods, if you grasp my meaning."

"No, sir!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "And I don't think we'll do any more work, Phipps. Work, don't you know, is most dashed exhausting. It doesn't agree with me. It wouldn't be a bad idea to indulge in forty of the best, what?"

"You mean a little sleep, sir?"

"Absolutely!"

"Just as you wish, sir," said Phipps. "By the way, I trust you are feeling a great deal better now?"

"Better?" repeated Archie. "Why, my dear old scream, I'm positively in the pink! I am, as it were, rolling in several yards of the best quality robust! The old tissues have recovered their full vitality. The eye has regained its old gleam—the fiery optic, what?"

"Exactly, sir!"

"I mean to say, observe the lung department!" went on Archie, expanding his chest. "Absolutely disgusting, Phipps! I shall positively burst a large assortment of buttons, don't you know! This is what comes of living the bally old simple life. It makes a chappie so bally healthy, and so forth. Well, old onion, kindly trot! In other words, reel forth into the offing, and leave the young master to waltz off into the dreamless condition!"

"Very good, sir," said Phipps. "When shall I call you, sir?"

"Oh, ah!" said Archie. "When shall you call me, what? Well, what about dinner-time? Allow me about a couple of hours for dressing purposes, and I shall be absolutely all serene."

"Dinner will be ready, sir, within two hours, I should say."

"But, dash it all, what about the old nap?" asked Archie, in dismay. "Somewhat kyboshed, to use a fearful term! However, Phipps, perhaps we can do the titivating business in one hour, and that leaves me time to pay a visit to the slumber section!"

Archie lay down on the soft lounge and dozed off.

By the time he was awakened by Phipps, it was evening, and everybody was on board the Wanderer. But there had been no cessation of effort. Just because we were safely in this haven of refuge, it did not mean to say that we were free from all peril.

For all we knew, considerable hordes of the blacks were skulking in the woods—waiting for an opportunity to attack us afresh. It was quite certain that the cannibals would be more fiercely opposed to us than ever before.

There could be no doubt about this, for we had killed many of their numbers, and

they had received no satisfaction. And so all the members of the yacht's crew were set to work.

Machine-guns were placed on every deck, so that every portion of the surrounding lagoon could be swept by continuous fire. Ammunition was stored handy, and dozens of other precautionary measures were taken.

For we had not only to guard against the blacks, but Ho Liang and his men, too. They were safe, at all events. The junk, although partially wrecked, was not at the bottom. And Ho Liang was a cold, calculating villain. Out of sheer revenge, he would

do his utmost to bring dire destruction upon us.

And we were all compelled to share this one island!

Fate had played us a strange trick, indeed. We were safe—we were all together, and intact. But we could not leave Lagoon Island, and we were still menaced by unknown dangers. At the same time, we believed that the worst of our perils were over.

If we could only have peeped into the future, we should have received a pretty severe shock!

THE END.



Editorial Announcement.

IMPORTANT.—All correspondence relating to "The Nelson Lee Library" should be addressed to The Editor, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

MY DEAR READERS,—As I look back on the splendid stories which comprise this unique holiday adventure series, I find it difficult to pick out what I consider to be the best yarn up to the present. Each is excellent in its own way, though different from the others. The most impressive, to my mind, is this week's story. Perhaps some of you, dear readers, do not agree with me. That is why I am inviting you to drop me a line—a postcard will do—giving me your opinions.

About Our New Feature.

Our new short complete detective stories of Nelson Lee and Nipper should be warmly received by all old admirers of the famous detective and his brilliant young assistant. These stories are being specially written for THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY in response to numerous requests by old readers for more adventures of Nelson Lee as a crime investigator at Gray's Inn Road. As to whether I shall continue publishing these short complete detective adventures of Nelson Lee, that is a matter for you to decide,

my chums, and I would like to hear from you about this as early as possible.

Approaching the Grand Climax.

With regard to the forthcoming adventures on Lagoon Island, the final story of this wonderful series is close at hand. Don't be alarmed, my chums, for it will not be the end of the holiday adventures. There is much more to come, only it will be in another part of the world, a part of the world as yet unexplored by man. Since it would not be fair to spoil your interest in the present stories by peeping too far into the future, I must refrain from saying any more on this subject for the present.

Next Week!

Next week's long complete story will be entitled "The Secret of the Pirates' Cave!" There will be another thrilling story of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

Also, two handsome photos of famous footballers will be GIVEN AWAY!

Your sincere friend,
THE EDITOR.

Nipper's Magazine

No. 35.

EDITED BY NIPPER.

July 22, 1922.

Editorial Office,
Cabin C,
The Wanderer.

My Dear Readers,—It is sad to think that the Fort, upon which we expended so much labour, is now completely obliterated as if it had never existed. Now we know what a cyclone can do in these parts. In the article given below some explanation of this wonderful phenomenon should prove of exceptional interest.

Your old pal,
NIPPER (The Editor).

THE CYCLONE.

WHAT IT IS.

A cyclone is really a moving whirl of air like the whirlpool of the ocean or the eddy of the river. It travels over the earth, spinning in a spiral formation, and is the harbinger of bad weather, varying in degree according to the rate it is travelling. A typhoon, a hurricane, a whirlwind, a simoon or tornado are all various forms of cyclones.

HOW IT IS CAUSED.

The cause of a cyclone, as with any other variations of the regular trade and anti-trade winds, is the disturbance produced in the air by the meeting of cool and hot currents of air. These inequalities of heat in the air are due to the great irregularities of land and water comprising the earth's surface, and that while water retains heat longer than land, land becomes heated more quickly by the action of the sun than water. Thus the air above land varies in temperature with the air above the sea.

A SIMPLE ILLUSTRATION.

The tendency of air, as with all conductors of heat, is to equalise its temperature, and in its endeavour to do so it produces a wind. The sea breeze at the seaside is merely air equalising its temperature between land and sea. If you open a window top and bottom of a heated room, what happens? The hot expanded air rushes out at the top, and the cool,

denser air enters in at the bottom. A draught is created until the room becomes the same temperature as the air outside. This simple illustration is a miniature cyclone in principle, and on a much larger scale, the wind produced results in a gale or a hurricane.

ITS SPIRAL FORMATION.

To sum up, then, the inward flow of air towards a centre of low local pressure results in a cyclone, or cyclonic movement, and an outward flow of air from a centre of high pressure forms an anti-cyclone. In both cases the air does not pour straight in or straight out, but moves in a spiral course. This spiral motion is caused by the earth's motion, and varies in direction
AN ANTI-CYCLONE.

An anti-cyclone is the opposite to a cyclone. It is a stationary eddy, and is usually associated with fine weather. In the northern hemisphere an anti-cyclone spins in the same direction as the hands of a watch, but in the southern hemisphere the reverse is the case. A cyclone, of course, spins in an opposite direction to an anti-cyclone of the same hemisphere.

WHY VIOLENT CYCLONES ARE COMMON IN THE TROPICS.

It is not often we experience in the British Isles very destructive forms of cyclones. That is because we live in a temperate climate. The extremes of heat which occur in the tropics bring about the most devastating whirlwinds. Such violent whirls are always caused by the rapid local heating of the lower layers of air, so that a column of hot air rushes up like the hot air that rushes up a furnace chimney.

MINIATURE CYCLONES.

Miniature tornadoes are often seen whirling about on hot deserts, or even on hot roads, raising little fountains of dust as they whirl, and in our own country they are seldom seen except in such miniature form. In South Africa they are often strong enough to lift a man bodily in the air, should he be unlucky enough to be caught in the vortex of one of these miniature whirls.

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."

ALAN MORTON.

G. UTLEY.

SCOTLAND has produced many outstanding players since the war, and Alan H. Morton, the nippy little winger who runs about on the extreme edge of the Rangers left attacking flank, is one of them.

Morton was born at Glasgow and his first big league club was Queen's Park, which he joined in 1913, and in whose amateur ranks he played until 1919 before turning pro. and being transferred to the Glasgow Rangers.

During his career he has left many milestones of success behind him. After the war he struck the best vein of his form and helped his club to win many matches, besides playing for his country in several representative games. He is a clever dribbler with an amazing turn of speed, and has a repertoire of unorthodox little tricks that often baffle the opposing defence. He can score goals, too, when occasion arises, as witness his successful record during the last two seasons.

There is not a great deal of Morton, but what there is a mixture of football science and ingenuity which makes opponents swear, and earns for Alan many plaudits from the home supporters of the Ibrox Park ground. His speciality is a high dropping cross shot—an invaluable medium to his centre for goalsecoring and a shot which has often beaten opposing custodians. He and Cunningham are a pair which make the Rangers left flank the most dangerous in all Scotland.

Height 5 ft. 5 ins. ; weight 10 st. 2 lb.

GEORGE UTLEY, the stalwart stay of the Sheffield United half-back line, is one of those lucky footballers who have earned practically every honour that the game has to give. Up to date he is the possessor of two international caps, two Cup winners' medals, league and international trial match distinctions, and also holds the honour of being the United's captain.

He first saw the light of day at Elsecar, and as a youth he played for the junior football club of that name, and a club called Wentworth. It was whilst playing for the latter club that Sheffield Wednesday, seeing in him a star of the future, retrieved him and persuaded him to throw in his lot with them, George signed forms as an amateur. but he never played for the Wednesday, for shortly after his entry into the Wednesday's ranks he met with a bad accident which kept him out of football for the best part of a year. Upon his recovery he severed his connection with the Wednesday, and took the plunge into professionalism with the Barnsley club, whence he won his first English Cup medal. After playing with much distinction for Barnsley, he became attached to Sheffield United, and it was with this club, in 1913, that he won his second Cup medal. Though he is now getting towards the veteran stage as footballers go, he is still a sturdy player, and it will be many years yet ere the football world will lose sight of his familiar form on the United's ground.

Height 5 ft. 10 ins. ; weight 12 st. 8 lb.

The Tyneside Mystery.

A Stirring Complete Story of Newcastle, and the famous detective, Nelson Lee, and his clever assistant, Nipper.

CHAPTER I.

Newcastle—What Happened on the Tyneside.

NIGHT had fallen over Newcastle, that populous, thriving city of the Tyne. Away in the congested heart of the town, the several church clocks were proclaiming that it was the half-hour after eleven. Yet, giant furnaces still lit up the sky, and would go on doing so until dawn came, and hosts of workers once again toiled in their lurid glare. For Newcastle never actually sleeps.

Picture iron works, ship-building yards, timber yards, chemical works, and mile upon mile of wharves and warehouses, the number and size of which exceed over and over again those of London's Thames banks. Imagine this scene, and you will have some slight idea of Riverside Newcastle, and the immense part it takes in the commerce, not only of Great Britain, but the world.

All was quiet by Hexham's Engineering Works, situated at no great distance from the Side.

At first glance, a passer-by might have thought that the great building was deserted, yet such was not the case; for, in his office on the ground floor, Tom Barton, the night watchman, was enjoying a surreptitious pipe; whilst, up in his private room above, John Hexham, the aged head of the firm, sat at his roller-desk, penning a letter.

"I can't understand t' guv'nor lately," muttered honest Tom Barton, who was a grizzled man of fifty or so, and who had been employed by the firm for many years. "He's for ever stuck in his office, working late, and turning night into day. Well, well, t' business is his life, so to speak, I suppose, and he knows his own affairs best. But, give me t' chance, an' I'd be tucked oop in bed an' asleep by this time."

Laying aside his pipe, the night watchman sat pondering upon the vagaries of his employer.

It was true what he had said. Just recently old John Hexham had seemed unable to tear himself from his business, and for the past month, on and off, he had remained in his private office, steadily toiling until eleven and twelve o'clock at night.

Half an hour passed, and Tom Barton rose to his feet to go upon one of the rounds he was accustomed to make at intervals during the long night.

Carrying a lantern, he reached the foot of the staircase leading up to the offices, which were situated on the first floor. Then suddenly he started and stood rigid, listening.

"Help! Help!"

Again there floated to him the cry he had thought he had heard. He had wondered at first if his ears had played him a trick, but there was no doubt in his mind now.

The distressed cries were real enough, and they could come from no one save his employer.

"Help!"

For the third time John Hexham's voice rang out, rising to a scream. Thoroughly alarmed, the watchman stood his lantern upon the stairs, then rushed up them and sprang into a corridor running past both the now unoccupied general offices and the works-owner's private sanctum.

Through a glass partition, which extended for their whole length, it was possible to look into the offices from the corridor. The watchman hurried to where a glimmer of light marked the position of the private room, and he uttered a gasp of dismay as he peered through one of the panes.

By the faint illumination of a desk light, Tom Barton saw his employer, John Hexham, a somewhat feeble, white-haired man of sixty or thereabouts, lying back in his chair, and over him bent a second figure—that of a man who was seizing the works-owner by the collar of his jacket with one hand and brutally dashing the knuckles of the other into his upturned face.

Barton leapt to the office door, but, as

he seized the handle and turned it, it was only to find that the door was locked.

It was also fitted with a glass panel, and, without hesitation, the watchman attempted to break it with his clenched fist. But it was plate glass, and resisted his efforts, and even as he drew back to fling himself bodily at the door, he witnessed a sight which filled him with a mad indignation and chilled his blood with horror.

Lifting John Hexham, who now lay quite limp and seemed to be unconscious, the intruder, whom the watchman could glimpse had a heavy, reddish beard, bore the old man towards the window.

It stood wide, and a frantic cry burst from Tom Barton's lips, as the red-bearded man heaved the body of his victim through it into the night.

For on that side the office was out-jutting and rested upon piles, and the swiftly flowing Tyne lay beneath.

With all his strength, Tom Barton thudded his shoulder against the door. On this occasion the glass panel was shattered, and the watchman thrust through his arm to turn the key, which had been left in the lock on the opposite side.

His fingers found and gripped it, but, at the same time, the brutal attacker of John Hexham darted a glance his way, and, uttering an alarmed ejaculation, he flung a leg out of the window. As the watchman dashed open the door and rushed into the office, the man was seated upon the sill, and before Tom Barton could clutch at him he had taken a quick, desperate leap.

There was a loud splash as his body struck the water below. The night was very dark, and Tom Barton could see nothing as he craned over the sill. The next moment he heard the splutter of a motor-boat's engine being started, and then the steady "chug-chug" as the small craft shot away from the building.

Determined that the man responsible for the outrage should not escape if he could prevent it, the watchman drew in his head, spun round on his heels, and ran back to the corridor.

He clattered down the stairs, bent on raising a hue and cry after the burglar, for he presumed him to be that. In a matter of seconds, he was in the street outside the works, and shouting energetically for help and the police.

Two figures loomed out of the darkness. They belonged to a tall, athletic-looking man, with a clean-shaved face and keen and steady eyes, and a bright-faced lad.

"What's wrong?" asked the first, as he pulled up before the watchman.

"Murder, or somethin' very near it, sir," Barton answered hoarsely; and then quickly he told what had happened.

The tall man gave a low whistle of excitement.

"Never mind the police just yet," he said crisply. "I happen to be Nelson Lee."

"The great detective!" Barton cried involuntarily.

"I have been called that," Nelson Lee admitted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Quick—which is the way to the river?"

CHAPTER II.

The Fruitless Search—Nelson Lee Investigates.

BARTON had led the way down an alley which led to a wharf connected with the works, and Nipper—the lad with the famous detective was, of course, he—had secured a boat.

Nelson Lee joined him, as Nipper brought it alongside.

"Now you had better fetch the police," he said to Barton. "We will see if there is any chance of rescuing your employer, though I am afraid that, if he was unconscious, as you think, when he was flung into the water, we are too late."

With a nod, the nightwatchman turned and disappeared into the clinging darkness, and, as Nelson Lee produced a pocket-torch, Nipper pulled round to the piles beneath the office window.

With the detective flashing the white beam of light upon the dark waters, they made a thorough search. But there was no sign of the unfortunate works-owner, and it seemed that he must either have sunk, or been carried away by the tide. Reluctantly Nelson Lee abandoned the search, and returned to the wharf.

He and Nipper discovered the police in possession of the private office when they found their way to it. A constable, who stood by the door, saluted, and moved on one side, as the detective and Nipper approached along the corridor.

A sergeant was within the office, talking to Barton, whose story he had jotted down in his official-looking notebook, and all the lights had been switched on.

"Hallo, Mr. Chambers!" exclaimed Nipper, as the sergeant turned upon their entry. "So we meet again, as they say in the story-books."

"Yes, Nipper," the official agreed, his face grim. "This is a bad business apparently. You did not find him, of course?"

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper shook their heads. They had come to Newcastle to look into a certain case in which they had co-operated with this self-same sergeant and other members of the Newcastle police. Having completed it, they had spent the evening rambling about the riverside, which both had found interesting, and they had been about to return to the County Hotel, where they were staying, when they had been arrested by Barton's cries.

"Robbery was the motive, I suppose?" Nelson Lee said, as he glanced sharply about the office and noticed that the door of a safe stood wide.

"Yes, that's fairly obvious," Sergeant

Chambers nodded. "The burglar doubtless knew that Mr. Hexham has of late been accustomed to work up here alone to a late hour. There's only a hundred or so in the safe, but he probably counted upon more, and meant to silence the poor old chap before he could raise an alarm. As it was, Mr. Hexham was able to bring the watchman up from below, and the criminal had to cut and run and got nothing. It may have been he who locked the door after entering by the window. He could have reached that by means of a telescopic stick and a rope-ladder fitted with hooks that would grip the sill."

Nelson Lee turned to Barton.

"Was your employer accustomed to work with the door of his office locked?" he inquired.

"That I can't say, sir. He has never called me to him, and I have not had any reason to come up to his office whilst he has been here."

"Humph! It's a small point, but one I should have liked to settle for certain," the detective murmured. "I should say that Mr. Hexham locked the door. Surely the burglar would have taken steps to render him silent before he troubled to cross the office and turn the key."

Nelson Lee walked over to the roller-desk, by which the works-owner had been seated when Barton had seen the unknown intruder attacking him.

He bent his gaze upon an unfinished business letter, which lay upon the blotting-pad.

"So Mr. Hexman was left-handed," he commented.

"I had never noticed, sir," said Barton, shaking his head.

"Well, he was," Nelson Lee returned, with conviction. "The writing here tells me that. We can take it, I suppose, that he was writing this letter when the burglar entered and attacked him, and—"

Nelson Lee stopped abruptly. As he had been speaking, he had taken up the pen Mr. Hexham had been using. His brows were drawn together, and a puzzled light had crept into his keen eyes as he inspected it.

"Strange—very strange!" he muttered, half to himself, as he laid the pen down.

"Hallo! What have we here?"

As he spoke, Nelson Lee's hand had darted to two objects which lay at one side of the desk. They were a bar tie-pin and a small stud, such as is used to fasten one's collar at the back. Again the detective wheeled, and addressed Barton.

"Can you tell me whether your employer wore soft or starched collars?" he asked, his eyes a little narrowed.

"Starched ones, sir. I am almost sure I have never seen him wear any other kind," was the watchman's reply; and Nelson Lee pursed his lips, and regarded the tie-pin thoughtfully.

"Then, supposing this belonged to him, as seems fairly certain, it must have been

used to secure his tie at the bottom," he said. "I wonder why he removed it? The stud, of course, might be a spare one, though, in that case, one might have expected it to have been dropped into one of the drawers of the desk. There are many points of interest in this affair, sergeant, if one takes the trouble to look for them."

The sergeant nodded wisely, though, if the truth be told, he failed to see where any particular interest came in. The case appeared to him quite a usual and sordid one—just the usual episode of a brutal criminal being disturbed in the act of his crime, and venting his spite on an almost helpless victim ere he fled. But then he had failed to see much that Nelson Lee's keen eyes had shown him, and was looking at the affair from a very different point of view.

Nelson Lee began to make a general examination of the office and its contents. From the roller-desk he turned his attention to the safe, pausing to pull out the drawers and to glance within. After this, he turned over the pages of a shipping guide he found lying on the top of the desk, and then examined some cigarette-ends lying in an ash-tray.

Next he came to a cupboard, which proved to be locked, though a key had been left in the door. Nelson Lee turned the key, and opened it, and again his eyes narrowed, as he made rather a curious discovery.

The cupboard was empty and devoid of shelves, though on either side were battens where shelves had originally existed.

"Do you happen to know, Barton, when the shelves were taken from this cupboard?" he asked, pointing into it.

"As it happens, I do, sir—for my son, being a carpenter, came an' took them down for Mr. Hexham. It was six or seven weeks ago that he had this done, though what his idea was I can't say."

Nelson Lee gave a rather abstracted nod. He looked down at the floor of the cupboard and saw that a good deal of dust had accumulated there. Producing his powerful pocket-lens, he dropped to one knee and inspected it through the magnifying-glass.

"Come here, Nipper!" he said, turning his head and beckoning his assistant. "Look through my lens, and tell me what you see."

Nipper came forward and took the glass. As Nelson Lee rose and moved on one side, the younger detective inspected the floor of the cupboard through the lens, as his master had done before him.

"Well?" Nelson Lee queried, as Nipper glanced up.

"There are marks in the dust like small footprints, guv'nor," Nipper said. "They might have been caused by a very small man, or woman, or a child, who has stood in the cupboard; but, more likely, the impressions have been made by a small pair of boots or shoes having been left there. For there is hardly any dust beneath where

they have stood, and as the dust about them must have taken weeks, I should say, to accumulate, no living person could have remained there all that time."

Nelson Lee smiled in approval.

"Good lad!" he exclaimed. "You reason just as I reasoned. Suppose we assume, then, just for the moment, that the marks were left, as you suggest, Nipper, by a pair of small shoes or boots—probably a child's, seeing that the shape of the impressions is very indefinite—having remained standing there for some while. The next question we must ask ourselves is, to whom did they belong? Did Mr. Hexham have any children, Barton?"

"No, sir—at least, not young children," replied the watchman, shaking his head. "He has one son, Mr. Jasper, but he is twenty-five or more, and just now he is away in Paris, I think, studying."

"Studying?" Nelson Lee raised his brows inquiringly.

"Yes, sir—studying how to paint pictures, and do sculpturing, an' that sort of thing, so I've heard."

"Ah!" Nelson Lee murmured; and he went down on his knees again, and contemplated with great interest two faint, parallel lines, or scratches, which were visible upon the surface of the lino bordering the cupboard. "Now"—as he arose, and going to the chair by the desk, seated himself in it—"I want you to reconstruct just what you saw, Barton, when you looked through the glass panel of the door. Imagine that I am Mr. Hexham and you are the red-bearded man who attacked him."

"But I'd have to lay hands on you, sir, to do that," the watchman protested, hesitating.

"Never mind," Nelson Lee answered, with the ghost of a smile quivering about the corners of his mobile lips. "Hold me just as you say the man was holding your employer—but leave out the actual punching part of the business."

Rather sheepishly, Tom Barton stepped up to the chair, and, stooping, seized Nelson Lee by the collar of his jacket, at the same time clenching his other hand and raising it. Then he shifted his position, as he realised that it had been on the other side of his employer that the red-bearded burglar had been standing; and to do this it was necessary for him to reverse his hands.

"Thank you! That's all that is necessary. Barton!" the detective snapped; and as the watchman stepped back, and he came to his feet, Nelson Lee's eyes were glinting with excitement and his nostrils quivering like those of a highly-trained hound on a strong scent.

Nipper, who had seen these signs many times before, knew that his friend had made some highly important deduction, and he was a-thrill with excitement and curiosity, as, having finished his investigations, Nelson Lee presently left the works.

"What have you found out, guv'nor?" he asked eagerly. "You have discovered something that both the police and yours truly have been blind to. I feel sure of that!"

"You are right, Nipper," Nelson Lee agreed, as they walked towards the Side, en route for Neville Street and their hotel. "But, though I am almost certain I am on the right track, and that a startling surprise awaits everyone connected with the case, so far, I am in only the theorising stage, and I prefer to keep my own counsel for the present. There might be work for you to do in the morning, lad. In Grey Street, near the Monument, there is a large marine-store and mercantile outfitters. I may want you to go there, and, in my name, purchase a diving suit, if they have one."

At the moment, they were passing beneath a street lamp, and Nipper turned his head and stared at his friend in blank amazement.

"A diving-suit, guv'nor?" he gasped. "What on earth for?"

Nelson Lee shook his head at him and smiled. He was plainly in one of his mysterious moods.

"I will tell you, if it is necessary to buy it, Nipper," he said; and, though utterly puzzled, with this the young detective had to be content.

CHAPTER III.

The Truth—Nelson Lee Explains.

ATTIRED in a well-cut, grey lounge-suit, Nelson Lee quitted the County Hotel soon after nine o'clock the next morning.

He had left Nipper, who had been a trifle late in rising, discussing ham and eggs and coffee in the large and well-equipped dining-room, giving the lad instructions to remain in the hotel, in case he wished to communicate with him by telephone.

The County Hotel stands on the corner of Neville Street, where is situated the Central Station, and populous Grainger Street, which is made up of handsome shops and business offices.

As Nelson Lee turned into the latter thoroughfare, he saw a bare-footed news-boy with a placard fluttering before his knees, reading:

"STARTLING OUTRAGE IN NEWCASTLE. POLICE BAFFLED!"

and, with a rather curious little smile curling his lips, the detective beckoned the urchin, and bought a paper.

He had not troubled to read an account of the affair of the preceding night whilst breakfasting in the hotel, and even now he merely glanced at the paragraph which stated that, so far, the red-bearded man who had attacked Mr. Hexham had not been caught, but that the police were energetically searching for him.

"I fancy that he never will be caught," Nelson Lee murmured to himself, as he folded the paper and walked on; and again he seemed inclined to smile mysteriously. "Now, let me see, my first call had better be at Hemmingway's branch here."

Hemmingway's are a well-known firm of business inquiry agents, with branches in nearly every part of the United Kingdom. For quite a nominal yearly subscription, business men can go to them at any time and make inquiries as to the financial standing of other firms, or individuals, with whom they propose to trade, in order that they may know what credit it is advisable to allow, and the like.

Nelson Lee was a subscriber, and he spent some half an hour in the firm's Newcastle office, which was situated midway down Grainger Street. His eyes were very hard and bright when he at length emerged; and after he had spent the rest of the morning calling upon certain business houses and making a number of discreet inquiries, he went into a public call-office and rang up Nipper.

"Hallo! That you, my lad?" he said, as he was presently connected. "You may go along and hire or buy that diving-suit I spoke of. When you have it, take someone from the police with you, and try to arrange to descend at the spot where Mr. Hexham's body fell into the Tyne. It will not be the first occasion on which you have dived, so I can leave this to you with every confidence. You will, of course, try to obtain a suit fitted with a compressed-air equipment, to save the bother and delay of having an air-pump brought to the riverside and fixed up."

"I'll do what you want, guv'nor," Nipper's voice answered. "But I'll never find Mr. Hexham's body, if that's what you are thinking. You forget that the tide will by this time have carried it for miles—into the sea probably."

"I forget nothing Nipper," Nelson Lee retorted, a trifle curtly. "Please arrange to do as I ask."

He rang off, and quitting the booth, made his way to the police-station, where he found Sergeant Chambers. Owing to having the important case of the previous night in hand, the latter had not gone off duty.

"I want you to come with me to the Quayside, Chambers," Nelson Lee said. "The Tyne and Tees boat, bound for London, is due to leave within the hour, and I have reasons for thinking it might be to our advantage to watch it."

"It is already being watched by one of our plain-clothes men, Mr. Lee," Chambers answered. "If the red-bearded merchant tries to leave Newcastle by that, he'll be nabbed for a certainty."

"Nevertheless, I should like you to come there with me," Nelson Lee persisted. "I think you will find that your time has not been wasted."

Something in the detective's voice caused

the sergeant to glance at him sharply, and to rise and pick up his peaked cap without further protest.

The two men left the station, and made their way down to the river. They proceeded along by the waterside until they came in sight of the Tyne and Tees steamer, which was being made ready to depart.

An almost imperceptible wink was exchanged between the sergeant and a quietly dressed man who stood near the already lowered gangway. Then the latter, who was the plain-clothes detective, took no further notice of Chambers and his companion, and, as the first of the intending passengers by the steamer began to arrive, they might have been total strangers.

Nelson Lee stood with the sergeant, keenly studying all the passengers as they mounted the gangway and passed on board. But no one with a red beard, or, for that matter, hair of that description, made their appearance, and as, with steam fully up, there was a general scurry and bustle aboard, and the time drew near when the boat would cast her moorings, the sergeant began to think that Nelson Lee had wasted his time, after all.

Then there tottered towards the gangway an apparently very old man. A long, white beard fell almost to his waist, he was bent and palsied, and his sight appeared to be affected, for dark-tinted spectacles protected his eyes.

Nelson Lee gave him an all-embracing glance, then paid particular attention to his beard.

Next moment, to the surprise of Chambers, the private detective took a bound which carried him to the side of the elderly passenger, as he was about to step upon the gangway. Lee's hand flashed out, grasped the stranger's beard, and, with a sharp tug, he dragged it from his face, proving it to be false.

Another abrupt movement and the man's spectacles had been whisked from his nose, and undisguised he staggered back, with a startled cry, his face a dirty grey with fear.

The sergeant stared at him as though he could not credit the evidence of his eyes.

"Good heavens, Mr. Lee, this is the man we thought murdered—Mr. John Hexham!" he cried. "What does it all mean?"

"Look out—catch him! He's going to faint!" Nelson Lee exclaimed; and the half-dazed police official was only just in time to slip an arm about the man. Nelson Lee had unmasked, as he swayed and sagged forward.

The sergeant still continued to gaze blankly at him, as he lay limply in his arms. For he was indeed the works-owner whom the watchman, Barton, had seen—or thought he had seen—pitched into the river, the man whom everyone in Newcastle—save, perhaps, Nelson Lee—had believed drowned!

It was only a few moments later that the sergeant and Nelson Lee had got the swooning man out of the crowd that had

begun to collect. They half-supported him, half-carried him to a cab, where the plain-clothes detective from the station took charge of him.

"Keep a sharp eye upon him," Nelson Lee said grimly. "You will want him on a charge of attempted fraud. Now, sergeant, if you will return to the riverside with me, I think I can give you another surprise, and after that I will explain."

It was to the wharf connected with the Hexham Engineering Works that Nelson Lee conducted the bewildered Chambers. They were just in time to see Nipper, garbed in the grotesque helmet and rubber suit of a diving outfit, being helped on to the landing-stage by a couple of constables, whilst an inspector stood near, looking on.

In the young detective's arms was a sodden figure which Chambers and the other members of the police at first took to be that of a man. Then, as Nipper tossed it rather unceremoniously on to the wharf, exclamations of surprise broke from them. For the "body" Nipper had retrieved from the depths of the Tyne was composed of wax—a waxen effigy, with a lined, drawn countenance, and rather long white hair, which, in spite of the hours it had been submerged, still bore a striking resemblance to the man Nelson Lee had just enabled the police to arrest—John Hexham!

It was dressed in clothes which the watchman, Barton, would have recognised, had he been present, as those his employer had been wearing when he had settled down to work late on the preceding night.

"My aunt, guv'nor, wasn't the plaguey thing heavy?" Nipper gasped, as the helmet was removed.

"Naturally," Nelson Lee agreed drily. "When he sank his double, John Hexham tried to make sure that it would never rise again, and I expect, if you look, you will find a good many pounds of lead in the pockets of its clothes."

"I, of course, entered upon the case with the belief that it was one of attempted robbery with violence," Nelson Lee said, when, some half an hour later, he was seated with the inspector and sergeant in the police-station, to where John Hexham's waxen replica had followed him. "But when I began to look into matters, I came upon certain facts that soon caused me to grow suspicious that all was not as it seemed."

"Had Mr. Hexham been in the middle of the letter which was found upon his desk, unfinished, when a burglar entered through the window, he might reasonably have been expected to drop his pen and spring to his feet. Now I noticed when I examined the nib that it had been carefully wiped. This struck me as exceedingly strange. Though it might be a man's habit to wipe his pen when laying it aside—and it was undoubtedly a custom of John Hexham's—he would hardly pause to do this when on the

point of being attacked by a desperate man who had broken into his office. So much for point number one.

"Next, there were that tie-pin and back-stud, which I found lying upon his desk. They suggested that at some time before he was attacked and flung from the window he had removed his collar and tie. Why? Point number two.

"I examined the interior of the cupboard in his office, and was at once struck by the strangeness of the whim—if mere whim it was—that had prompted him to have the several shelves removed, especially as the cupboard was empty and nothing was kept there. Then I asked myself the question—but had it always been empty? And when I examined the dust that had accumulated on the floor, I found what I first took to be either the footprints of some diminutive man, or woman, or a child. But, as you heard Nipper reason, sergeant, no living person could have stood there long enough for the dust to gather about their feet. What, then, had caused the impressions? A pair of children's shoes, perhaps? It was scarcely feasible, as Mr. Hexham had no young children, though he possessed a son, who is said to be in Paris, studying the arts of painting and sculpture—sculpture, mark you, gentlemen! What, then, had stood in that dismantled cupboard? I found marks of two objects of some kind having been dragged from the cupboard across the linoleum, and a glimmering of the truth began to steal into my mind.

"John Hexham's writing had told me he was left-handed. I asked the watchman to reconstruct what he had seen, and to take the part of Mr. Hexham's attacker. At first he gripped my collar with his left hand, and made an action as though to strike me with his right. Then, though you may not have noticed, he realised that the burglar had been on the other side of Mr. Hexham's chair, and, shifting his position, he seized my coat collar with his right hand and raised and clenched his left.

"It was enough! It showed me that the burglar, as well as Mr. Hexham, had been left-handed, which was point number three in the startling theory I was beginning to form. And as I remembered that John Hexham's son had studied the art of modelling, I became next to sure that I was on the right track.

"For some reason best known to himself, John Hexham had staged a very pretty "frame-up" with a waxen figure—doubtless made by his sculptor son—with the face modelled to duplicate his features, which for some weeks he had kept in that empty cupboard.

"It was the figure, dressed in John Hexham's clothes and linen, which Barton had seen 'attacked' and flung from the window, and John Hexham himself, attired in a different suit and a false red wig and beard, had been the 'desperate burglar.' The

marks left in the dust in the cupboard were where the small, shapeless feet of the dummy had stood—the lines on the oil-cloth caused by those self-same feet, as John Hexham had dragged out his double to carry out his scheme."

"But what was his motive?" asked Sergeant Chambers, who was still puzzled and very much in the dark.

"That I had little difficulty in discovering this morning," Nelson Lee answered, as he carefully lit a cigar. "Inquiries proved that the firm he controls is insolvent, and that a crash is imminent. Knowing that ruin and poverty lay before him, if he remained openly alive, Hexham planned to 'die,' and begin life again in some country on the other side of the world with his fortunes restored."

"My investigations in the city this morning also disclosed to me that his life was insured for fifty thousand pounds."

"The son, at present in Paris, was as deep as his father in the plot. When the elder man's death was presumed, in due course, the son would have claimed the insurance money, quietly slipped out of the country, and joined his father."

"By jove, guv'nor, you have nipped in the bud one of the most clever swindles ever attempted!" exclaimed Nipper; and,

if a little grudgingly, the police nodded their agreement. "But what made you so sure Hexham would attempt to leave by the Tyne and Tees boat?"

"John Hexham made several small slips, as do all criminals, however clever they may be, Nipper," Nelson Lee answered, as he flicked the ash from his cigar, and examined its glowing end to make certain it was burning evenly. "He was, apparently, an inveterate cigarette smoker, and in a shipping guide, which lay on the top of his desk, he dropped some ash. It was rather unfortunate for him that this happened, and that it was left in that part of the book which showed the dates of sailing of the Tyne and Tees steamers."

He laughed softly.

"Then again, what better means of leaving Newcastle could he find than on a vessel where he could keep, if he will, to his cabin during the whole journey? If you had committed an offence against the law, and were aiming at leaving a certain city in disguise, how would you like to take the risk of sitting opposite to someone in a railway carriage who knew you? Always place yourself in the shoes of the man you are hunting, lad. It is usually an excellent plan, I assure you!"

THE END.

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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. Considerable interest is aroused at the visit of Mr. Chopps' uncle to the school.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XIV.

A Weird Midnight Adventure.

UNCLE JOSIAH was pacing up and down the corridor, and as Tom ascended he had his back to him.

"Ahem!" coughed Tom.

It was only the slightest possible movement on the part of Uncle Josiah, the tenth part of a turn, but it was a movement, and Tom's face flushed with the light of a sudden discovery.

He bounded into the dormitory, and sank down upon the side of his bed.

"He heard me!" he muttered, "and is no more deaf than I am. Whew! What does that mean?"

He had no time to reflect upon it just then, so, having found his book, Tom left the dormitory.

In the corridor he again encountered Uncle Josiah, this time face to face.

Through the dense blue spectacles Tom could just see two eyes fixed upon him. They were dark and piercing he was sure.

"Nice morning, sir!" said Tom.

"It's no use talking to me," replied Uncle Josiah, shaking his head. "I'm nearly stone deaf; it's a horrible affliction."

Tom put on a lugubrious expression of face, and with a nod of sympathy disappeared downstairs.

It was an unusual thing for Tom to do

any shamming, but he descended to it on this occasion, as he did not want Uncle Josiah to know that he had found him out.

"But I don't believe he is as old as he pretends to be," thought Tom, as he re-entered the school. "I wonder how old he would look with his hair cut, or all of it off?"

He resumed his seat without looking at Mr. Chopps, although he felt that the eyes of the tutor were upon him.

Uncle Josiah did not reappear that day.

He kept to his nephew's room, and Perks waited on him.

Perks was getting very thin and worn about the face.

The strange boy was burdened with something a little too heavy for him, which he dare not, for some reason or other, reveal to anyone.

The next day, Uncle Josiah went out in the morning for a walk, and he did not return until it was getting dark.

He went straight up to his nephew's room, shutting the door with a bang.

No wonder everybody in the house thought him an odd old fellow, or that the boys freely discussed him in their moments of leisure.

Tom saw no reason to hide what he had discovered, and the general opinion was that the uncle was a "fraud."

"But why does he come here masquerading?" asked George Hammerton.

"That is what we have to find out," replied Tom. "Now, Sam, Johnny, Lawrence, all of you, put your wits to work, and see if you can help me. I am going to get behind the blue spectacles of Uncle Josiah!"

Perks had never been a plump boy since he came to Wrasper's school, but for some time he had been getting thinner and thinner.

His face, at no time very youthful in its

appearance, was getting the look of a haggard old man.

Everybody noticed it, and as the story of his precocious love for Jane had become known the boys put it down to that.

The idea of Perks wasting away from a broken heart was not without its humorous side.

Uncle Josiah showed no signs of terminating what was to have been only a few days' visit. He stayed on at the school, and, as a recognition of the hospitality he was receiving, presented Mr. Wrasper with a box of choice cigars, and Mrs. Wrasper with a valuable bracelet. Also he tipped Wooden Jerry and Jane, the housemaid, liberally, and ordered some huge cakes and boxes of sweets from town for the boys.

It was evident that Uncle Josiah wished to make a good impression, and to a certain extent he succeeded.

But whenever he chanced to meet Tom he frowned and looked uncomfortable, and got out of the way as quickly as possible.

The old fellow was, it appeared, very fond of walking, and in the evenings he and Achilles Chopps went out for long strolls together.

One night, at bed-time, as Tom ascended the stairs in company with George Hamerton, he saw Uncle Josiah going on just before him.

The corridor was lighted up, and as the boys reached the top stair, Tom said:

"Good-night, sir!"

Again there was that half turn on the part of the old man, and from his lips escaped what may be called the fragment of a word.

But he checked himself again with a hurried, angry movement, turned the handle of the door, and entered his nephew's room.

"Did you see that, George?" whispered Tom.

"I did, old fellow."

"And what do you think?"

"As you do—that he's no more deaf than we are."

The other boys were coming up in batches, and soon the dormitory had its full complement of occupants, pulling off their attire, and piling it on the chairs by the side of their respective beds.

"It's a fine night," said Willie Grey; "draw up the blind, and let us have the moonlight in."

Cautious Johnny, who was nearest, complied with his request.

"Hallo!" he cried, peeping through the window. "Somebody's gone out of the gate."

"Who is it?" asked Tom.

"I don't know," replied Johnny. "It looks like Perks; but I am not sure."

"He's gone to recite his love-sick verses to the moon," said Sam Smith. "Good-night, you chaps! I'm sleepy."

They chorused "Good-night" to each other, and in a few minutes oblivion came over them all, even Tom, who was too tired to think out this problem of Perks

having to go out after midnight on some mysterious errand for Mr. Chopps.

On the night following Tom had provided for him food for surprise.

He reckoned it was about midnight when he suddenly awoke from a sound sleep.

It was just as if somebody had silently aroused him, but nobody as far as he knew had spoken or laid a hand upon him.

He was completely wide awake on the instant.

The sound of a slight movement in the corridor fell upon his ears.

In a moment he was out of bed and groping for the handle of the door in the darkness.

Cautiously he opened the door and put his head out. He could see nothing, however, except the dim outline of the stained-glass window at the end of the passage.

But on the stairs there was a sound of movement—a faint shuffling of stockinged or bare feet.

Tom stood there a moment, then went out upon the landing, and felt his way to the head of the stairs.

There he stopped and listened.

A sound of whispering voices came up from the hall. But so soft and low were the whispers, that Tom could not properly catch a single word.

The whispering ceased, and was followed by other sounds. Stealthy footsteps, and a cautious drawing back of bolts and bars.

"They're opening the front door," thought Tom. "Wonder if it's Chopps and Uncle Josiah? I must find out."

He darted back to his cubicle, slipped on his clothes and boots, and hurried downstairs. The front door was closed, but he opened it and stepped outside.

The night was dark, but not quite so dark as it seemed to be within, for there was a moon behind some dense, black clouds.

In a minute or so his eyes became used to the gloom, and he could see across the playground with sufficient clearness to make sure that nobody was moving there.

Whoever had left the house had gone clean away.

"I don't see what good I can do now," said Tom; "but I'll just have a look up and down the road. I might see something."

Swiftly Tom crossed the ground, intending to go out by the gate; but as he neared it he distinctly heard voices and footsteps not far away.

He cast a backward glance at the house.

All quiet and dark there.

Then he stepped up to the wall to a spot where a foothold had long ago been made in the brickwork for the purpose of climbing up and peeping over.

Of this youthful bit of work he now availed himself.

He knew the spot so exactly that he was not likely to make a mistake. One sweeping movement of his hand and he had found the foothold.

Just as he put the toe of his boot into

it the light of the moon began to assert itself.

There was a single rent in the vast dark canopy above and through this came a flood of light.

The moon appeared.

Tom knew he ran a risk in peeping over now but the voices had ceased, and all he could hear was a faint shuffling of feet.

He popped his head over the wall, and for a moment looked upon a scene that fairly astounded him.

Instead of seeing, as he expected, Uncle Josiah and Achilles Chopps, he saw the latter and Perks in company.

But this was not all.

Perks was wheeling a barrow laden with boxes, and Achilles Chopps staggering along under the weight of a large bundle.

But the greatest marvel of all was the silence of their movements.

Neither was speaking, the barrow did not creak, and their very footfalls had ceased to give out any sound.

The whole thing was ghost-like and unnatural, and Tom only looked upon it for a moment, for surprise relaxed his hold and he dropped to the ground.

The noise of his falling sounded distinct and clear in the silence of the night.

At the same moment the moon was hidden again by the murky clouds.

Tom not only dropped upon his feet, but fell into a sitting position.

He was on his feet again in a moment, and fancied as he arose that he heard a scampering down the road.

He ran to the gate and, opening it, looked out.

Nobody or anything living was in sight.

It is true he could not see very far, but it certainly seemed impossible for Perks and Chopps to have vanished so quickly.

Whither had they gone?

Tom waited a few minutes, in the hope of seeing or hearing something.

But nothing happened; so he hastened back to the house, undressed, and got into bed again.

Between the sheets he lay, thinking the matter over. Nothing could he make of it, however. The whole thing was a mystery. He sought to unravel it in vain, and then fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

Mystery on Mystery!

NEXT morning, before breakfast, Tom called his chums together, and told them of this latest midnight mystery.

Needless to say, they listened with the utmost amazement, and then proceeded to discuss the affair among themselves.

What was the cherubic Mr. Chopps up to that he must needs select the darkest hours of the night for his work? And why should the huge-nosed Perks have been

selected as the tutor's confidant and assistant?

No answer had they found to these questions when the bell summoned them to breakfast.

Achilles Chopps sat the head of the table, looking fresh, ruddy, and cheerful.

He did not in the least look as if he had been out all night.

In a careless way, he said to Tom:

"You do not look quite so well as usual this morning, Tartar."

"I am very well, sir," replied Tom.

"It seems to me that you have slept too soundly," said Mr. Chopps. "Do you ever have the nightmare?"

"No," replied Tom.

"Ah, it is a good thing. When I was your age I often had ugly dreams."

He turned away and talked a little to George Hammerton, and did not so much as look at Tom again.

Perks waited at the table with an inscrutable face.

As usual, he was very attentive to Mr. Chopps, and took up his position behind his chair when he had nothing to do.

In Perks' eyes there was just a suspicion of heaviness, and once Tom caught him in the act of yawning.

Wooden Jerry was the servant who brought in the hot water and extra supplies of bread-and-butter, and so on.

At first he did it in his accustomed dogged manner, but ere the meal was over he exhibited signs of excitement.

He looked like a man who had something to tell, but needed permission to open his mouth.

"Is there anything the matter with you?" asked Mr. Chopps, who had glanced two or three times at the agitated Jerry.

"Another rum job, sir," replied Jerry.

"What do you mean by rum job?" demanded Mr. Chopps.

"Another mystery, sir," replied Jerry—"a cart broke down in the village."

"That is a terrible mystery," said Mr. Chopps, with a short laugh. "Don't talk nonsense, man!"

"But nobody knows the cart, sir," said Jerry; "and it's got a wheel off."

"Well, where is the driver?"

"Nobody's seen him."

"And the horse?"

"Horse, harness—everything is gone, and nobody has even so much as set eyes on that cart afore."

"Pooh—rubbish!" said Mr. Chopps. "Have you finished, boys?"

They had finished; and the tutor rose from the table.

He took no further notice of Jerry and his wonderful report of a strange cart left broken down in the village.

Tom, however, wanted to know more about it.

He did not question Jerry, but left the
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(Continued from page 40.)

matter until morning school was over, and then slipped off to the village.

There he found the broken cart.

It lay on one side of the road, with a broken axle-tree, surrounded by a few curious observers.

Baynes, the carpenter, was among them, and to him Tom addressed himself.

"Have you found out whose cart it is?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Baynes; "and not likely to. It ain't one that's been made in three parts, or been seen afore. There's something wrong about that cart, and I should advise everybody to leave it alone."

"Oh, it isn't a ghost cart!" said Tom, laughing.

"I don't say that," returned Baynes; "but I say there's something wrong in it. Look at the felloes of the wheel—did you ever see the like? Was they made for common wear an' tear? An' what's it got a false bottom for?"

"Has it one?" asked Tom.

"Look for yourself!" said Baynes. "See the thickness of the bottom! D'ye think that's all solid wood? No, young gent: there's a bottom six inches deep right throughout—and I'll bet there's summat in it as oughtn't to be!"

"But what should there be?" asked Tom.

"That's what the police are goin' to find

out. We're expectin' the inspector along every minute."

Tom looked at the vehicle with interest. Outwardly it had the appearance of a farmer's rough cart, but it was finished off much better than those vehicles usually are. Every bit of it was oak, save the axle, which was of willow. A natural flaw in it had caused it to snap in two.

(To be continued.)

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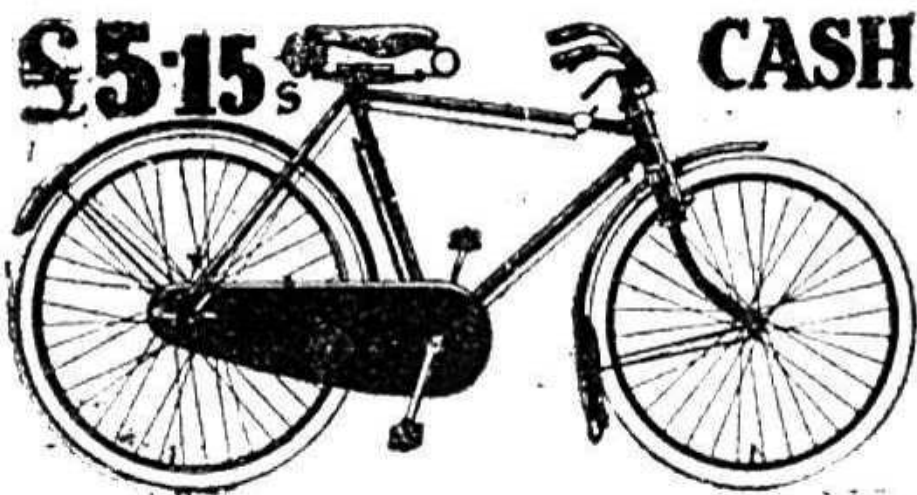
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