

TWO GRAND COMPLETE STORIES OF NELSON LEE!

THE **NELSON LEE** **2^D**
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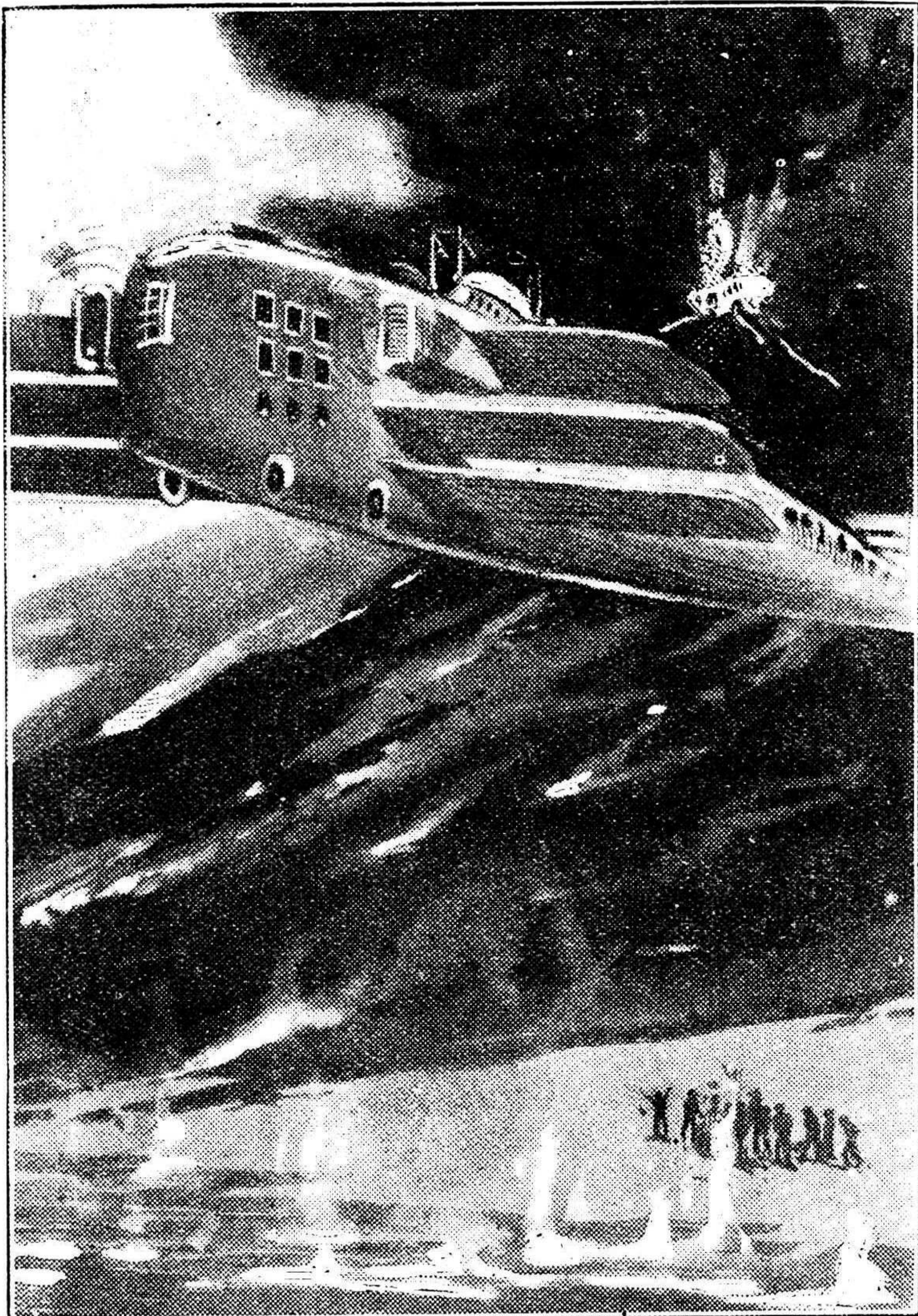
... TWO REAL PHOTOS OF FAMOUS FOOTBALLERS, ...
F. MORRIS AND R. DOWNS,
GIVEN AWAY WITH THIS NUMBER!

These photos are superbly finished art productions, and no collection is complete without them.



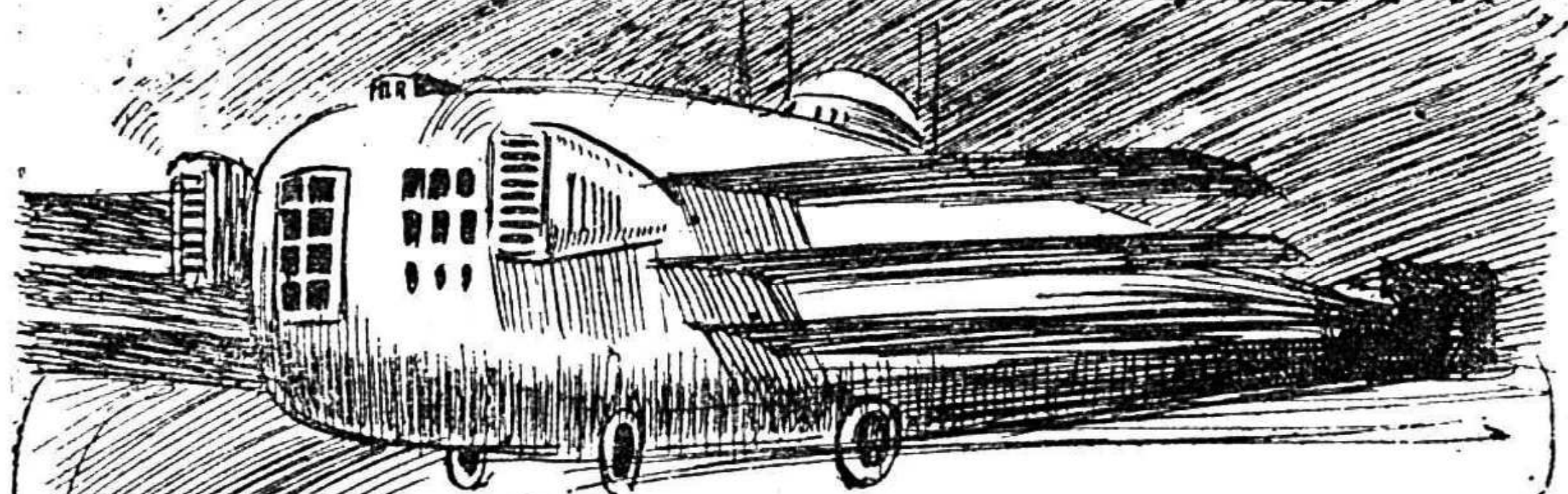
THE WINGED DELIVERER!

A Thrilling Story of Schoolboy Adventure on a South Sea Island, containing a Vivid Description of a Volcanic Eruption.



It was an aeroplane—a vast thing, greater than our imagination could picture. And it was coming down in sweeping, graceful circles.

THE WINGED DELIVERER!



With the tremendous volcanic eruption on Lagoon Island, this week's story is the final phase in the magnificent series of schoolboy adventure on an uncharted island of the Coral Seas. At the same time, "The Winged Deliverer" introduces the reader to another and even more remarkable series of adventure and mystery tales in a newly discovered world under the sea.—THE EDITOR.

(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

THE ISLAND INFERNO!

REGINALD PITT thoughtfully scratched his head.

"I'm a cheerful kind of chap, as a rule, but I don't mind admitting that I'm pretty pessimistic just now," he exclaimed. "Things have gone from bad to worse, and, as far as I can see we're finished."

"It's no good kidding ourselves—we're doomed!" exclaimed Handforth. "Of course, I don't want to make you chaps miserable, but facts are facts. You've got to look 'em in the face. We're doomed."

"Well, there's no need to anticipate trouble!" growled Church. "We've had plenty, and I suppose we shall have plenty more. But it doesn't make it any better to jaw about it."

One or two of the fellows grunted.

"It's—it's awful!" said Fatty Little mournfully. "I haven't minded being on the island until now. There's always been plenty of grub. But now I'm starving! We haven't had anything to eat for ages!"



"We sha'n't come to any harm even if we don't feed for another two days!" I put in grimly. "In fact, it would do some of us a bit of good. That's not the point at all——"

"Not—not the point!" gasped Fatty. "Two days! Great frying bananas! You—you fathead! Why, after twenty-four hours without grub I shall fade away to a shadow, and then peg out!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Dry up about grub! Just think of our position, and get busy planning out some way of escape! I've got two or three jolly good ideas in my head——"

"Keep 'em there!"

"Spare us, Handy!"

"We don't want to hear 'em!"

Edward Oswald Handforth snorted.

"You—you jealous rotters!" he roared.

"Oh, I expected it! You're eaten up with envy because I can think of ideas and you can't! Didn't I find that underground river? Answer me that!"

"Of course you found it!" said Church.

"Well, there you are——"

"By accident!" added Church carelessly.

"By—by accident!" exclaimed Handforth.

"Why, you insulting rotter! I knew there was something queer at the end of the cave, and so I explored! And I found that shaft leading down to the underground stream!"

"Good old Handy!" I grinned. "Always doing something smart!"

But, although I spoke cheerfully I was just as worried as Pitt was. Things had been going rather badly with us, and the outlook was by no means bright. In fact, it was so black that there seemed to be no chance of escape.

There's no need for me to explain much about Lagoon Island—that tropic paradise where we had spent so many happy and exciting weeks. There were twenty St. Frank's fellows in our party, and we had all come on this trip on Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht, the Wanderer.

Nelson Lee was with us, too—to say nothing of Umlosi, the famous Kutana chief, and Phipps, Archie Glenthorne's no less famous valet. So many remarkable things had happened since our first arrival on Lagoon Island that we had almost lost count of time, and had begun to forget normal habits of everyday life.

Fights with cannibals and Chinese pirates had been incidents of everyday occurrence. We had experienced a most terrible cyclone—to say nothing of an occasional earthquake or a volcanic eruption.

For this tropical island was quite volcanic in origin—and one high peak towards the centre of the island was in itself a semi-active volcano. Clouds of steam and yellowish vapour had frequently belched forth from the crater.

Somehow or other we had generally managed to scrape through all the perils without any casualties. Some members of the yacht's crew had been injured at different times, but not fatally.

And now we were a force divided.

Misfortune, in large chunks, had befallen us. And yet, at the same time, the very act of Nature which had placed us in this fearful predicament had also rendered us a great service. That sounds rather contradictory, so I'll just explain matters.

Hours earlier, on this particular day, there had been an earthquake shock—plainly apparent on the island itself—although there could be no doubt that the real seat of the earthquake was a great distance away, and probably at sea.

Anyway, only a short time afterwards a vast and terrible tidal wave had swept upon the island like an all-powerful avalanche. The Wanderer, at this time, was helplessly beached in the lagoon. Repairs had been made, but the engineers had been unable to get the vessel afloat. All their skill was useless. And yet Nature performed the task in a flash.

For this vast tidal wave, surging upon the island, flooded the lagoon to such an extent that the Wanderer was lifted up like a cork and carried across the barrier reef in the tremendous rush of water. This part of the affair was quite excellent—and very satisfactory.

But the other part was a disaster of the first order.

For every St. Frank's fellow with the single exception of Archie Glenthorne had been swept off the yacht in that fearful flood. Not only the St. Frank's fellows, but Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi—and many officers and men of the yacht.

It was rather miraculous that we got safely ashore without serious injury. But we did, and after collecting ourselves together we found that nobody was missing.

And here I'd better say what occurred on the yacht.

Only a comparative few were left on board after the catastrophe, and these had been below at the time. Archie Glenthorne and Phipps, for example, were in their cabin. Captain Bentley was down in the saloon, and the engineers were at work in the lower regions. They were not entirely joyful when they found the yacht afloat—for they believed that all the rest of us had perished in the tidal wave.

And then another danger had arisen.

For the Chinese pirates, in their sinking junk, were swept towards the Wanderer, and they swarmed on board in scores and then turned upon their rescuers. For the Chinese succeeded in capturing the yacht.

And in the meantime we on the island were finding quite enough trouble to keep us very busy. I've already mentioned that we had had battles with cannibals. These murderous blacks were still on the island, for their war canoes had been wrecked by the recent cyclone. And so the cannibals had been compelled to remain inland. They had made no further attacks upon us for we were safe and sound on board the Wanderer.

But this tidal wave had made all the difference. Cast ashore without any weapons,

we were practically at the mercy of any enemy. The cannibals had not been slow to realise this. They had charged to the attack. And we, in desperation sought refuge in a deep cave which the Chinese had used as a hoarding-house for their blood-stained booty.

Here we were safe for the time being.

Umlosi, with his trusty spear—the only effective weapon between the lot of us—had held the murderous blacks at bay while we built up a stone barricade in the cave entrance. And now we were all in this cave—the whole party of us—without food or water, and literally besieged.

And we could not look hopefully to the immediate future.

The blacks were in strong force, and were in front of the cave. It was impossible to leave. Even when darkness came the position would be no better, for these savages had eyes like animals, and it would be impossible to leave our place of refuge for the purpose of obtaining food and drink.

Our only course, therefore, was to remain in hiding, and hope against hope that those on board the yacht would rescue us. But, seeing that they were in the hands of the Chinese, there was not much chance. As a matter of fact, our luck was dead out on every hand.

A ray of hope had come from the fact that Handforth had discovered—quite by accident—a shaft at the rear of the cave. This led down to a black tunnel, along which flowed a shallow stream. It was an underground river, and the very fact that the air was pure proved that there was an outlet at some distant point on the island.

And even now, while the juniors were chatting in one part of the cave, Nelson Lee was holding counsel with Lord Dorrimore and one of the yacht's officers—Mr. Somerfield.

"Yes, without a doubt, our only course is to penetrate this subterranean stream," Nelson Lee was saying. "I have examined a portion of it, and the water appears to be quite shallow. It is possible that this shallowness continues. And if that is really the case we shall be able to wade down stream without difficulty."

"An' chance to luck whether we come out into the open air?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "Well, I'm game, old man—anythin' for a bit of excitement. Not that I'm complainin' of bein' bored. We've had enough thrills to satisfy a cinema audience just lately!"

"Thy words are wise, my father!" said Umlosi, in his rumbling voice. "'Twill be well to pass down this black tunnel—although I like it not. If we can emerge beyond the reach of these black dogs the young white masters will be in no danger. And thou art thinking solely of them."

"Yes, Umlosi, I'm thinking of the boys!" said Nelson Lee quietly. "It would be appalling if any big disaster happened to them. And so we must make every effort to get them out of this predicament. Things may not be quite so bad as they appear at the moment—"

Boom—boom!

Nelson Lee broke off abruptly as two deep, penetrating explosions sounded. The reports were dull and muffled, but the very ground shook. It seemed to quiver and quake beneath our feet, and from close by there were several minor crashes—caused by the falling of rock.

"By gad!" exclaimed Dorrie. "What the deuce was that?"

"Oh! They're shelling the island!"

"Hurrah!"

"They're bombarding the cannibals!"

"No, boys—no!" shouted Nelson Lee. "Those reports were not caused by the yacht's guns. They were too heavy—too thunderous. I believe the explosions came from the volcano."

"Oh my hat!"

"An eruption!"

"It certainly looks like it," I exclaimed. "That volcano has been threatening all sorts of unpleasantness for days. You can never tell with volcanoes. They're always giving false alarms. They'll spurt out fire and cinders for a bit, and then ease off. You think everything's all serene when they suddenly start letting off fireworks in dead earnest."

"I hope the volcano doesn't start while we're in here!" exclaimed Armstrong shakily. "It—it would be awful to be buried in boiling lava!"

"Oh, can't—can't we do something?" panted Griffith. "It—it's all Mr. Lee's fault for letting us come out on this trip—"

"Now then!" I said sharply. "That's not the tone to use, Griffith! We're in a fix, and it's no good snivelling! I thought you were a better chap than that!"

Griffith shivered.

"We're going to be killed!" he moaned.

"Oh, dry up!" growled Handforth. "It's no good meeting trouble half way. There might be some way of escape—goodness knows we've had a few narrow shaves already. So why can't we have another?"

"That's the way to talk!" I exclaimed briskly.

When it came to the point, Handy was always reliable. At the most critical moment of all he would keep his head and remain comparatively calm. It was only when things were unimportant that Handforth got excited.

It seemed that this latest demonstration by the volcano was to be something of a far more serious nature than we had hitherto experienced. The earth quiverings continued, and every moment or two there came a booming report. We felt strangely trapped in this cave.

Many of the fellows wondered what would happen if an extra big shock came. Possibly the whole pirates' cave would collapse over our heads—and that, of course, would mean instant death.

Some of the fellows urged that we should rush out into the open, and chance the cannibals. Surely it would be better than being

crushed to death? But Nelson Lee knew best, and he was in charge.

The shaking of the rock was now almost continuous—a kind of constant quivering, accompanied by booms from far away.

The entire front of the cave was blocked up with great chunks of rock. But here and there crevices existed—and through these apertures it was possible to see out into the open.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie peered out, and could not help being impressed by the changed conditions. The whole atmosphere had become stifling, and a kind of premature darkness was settling over the island—a horrible coppery kind of darkness. Nelson Lee was very grave.

"I can't help thinking, Dorrie, that this eruption is of a very serious nature," he murmured. "It may have the effect of driving the blacks off—but that will be very poor consolation. The blacks, murderous as they are, are preferable to a serious eruption."

"Every time!" agreed Dorrie. "We can fight niggers, but I'm hanged if we can do much against the forces of Nature. By the Lord Harry! Did you see that? A shower of somethin' just came down—somethin' smokin' like thunder!"

Nelson Lee made no reply.

But he became aware of a wild yelling and screaming from outside. Then he caught a glimpse of black figures running madly to and fro. And as they ran they howled with terror.

"We need fear the blacks no longer," Lee said grimly.

"You think they've bunked?"

"They are scattering in all directions—frightened out of their wits by the eruption," replied Nelson Lee. "It is quite evident, Dorrie, that the volcano is giving an exceptionally picturesque display."

"Then we can go outside?" asked Dorrie promptly. "Good! I'm fed up with this business, anyhow. An' we can grab some supplies for the kids—coconuts, if nothin' else."

Nelson Lee nodded. He knew that the majority of the juniors were getting hungry and thirsty. And it was a bit of a relief to know that food—of a kind—could be obtained. But the very fact that the cannibals had forsaken the siege proved that matters were intensely grave.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Somerfield broke down the barricade of rocks, and the weak, coppery daylight streamed into the cave. The juniors crowded round eagerly, but Nelson Lee held up his hand.

"No, boys, you must not come out," he said firmly.

"Are the cannibals still there, sir?"

"Isn't it safe for us to go into the open, sir?"

"The cannibals have gone," said the gov'nor. "But there is another danger—and it may be far worse than anything that we have so far encountered. Dorrie and I will

go out and look about. You must remain under cover."

The fellows were disappointed, but there was nothing else for it. They could not ignore Nelson Lee's command. And so the gov'nor and Dorrie and Umlosi and Mr. Somerfield emerged into the open air.

Dorrie was the first out, and he suddenly pulled up short and caught his breath in.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "The heat's like an oven!"

"Thy words are surely right, O my father!" said Umlosi. "Wau! 'Tis a wondrous sight!"

They stood there looking about them. The lagoon stretched away almost at their feet—for the cave mouth was very near the water. The lagoon lay glassily still now, but its surface was marred here and there by little splashes, where small objects fell. And tiny columns of steam arose.

Umlosi suddenly jumped.

"Wau!" he shouted. "I like it not, my masters! For this is surely magic! Fire descends from the sky and burns my skin! To fight against the black dogs is a glorious thing—but a man cannot fight against the sky!"

Nelson Lee glanced up. Hot cinders were falling—not thickly, but they needed some dodging. Some were mere tiny specks of hot ash, and others were big, glowing cinders. Smoke was rising from all quarters.

"A bit of an inferno," remarked Dorrie. "This beats anythin' I've ever seen, old man! Rather takes the shine out of a Crystal Palace fireworks display—what?"

Nelson Lee did not reply. He had turned, and was gazing up towards the volcano. The spectacle there was grim and terrifyingly grand. The detective stared in silent awe.

Right over the island hung a huge, ever-spreading cloud. It was inky, and almost entirely composed of sulphurous smoke and fumes. And the hot cinders appeared to be falling from this terrible cloud.

The volcano itself was almost invisible in the murk which hung about its summit. But a lurid, flickering glare was apparent—a glare which rose and fell in the dense, coppery atmosphere.

And all the time there came the booms and thuds as the crater hurled up its molten masses of lava and cinders. The volcano was in active eruption, and there was no telling how long the disturbance would last.

"By glory!" said Dorrie. "There they go, the beggars! Scared out of their wits! Well, what do you think of it? I'm hanged if they haven't got a fleet of boats!"

Nelson Lee turned and stared along the beach.

At a point several hundred yards distant, the cannibals were making hasty preparations for departure. In spite of their terror, they had enough sense to make tracks for a different neighbourhood. They were crowding on the beach, carrying some roughly-constructed dug-outs. These latter were long boats, made out of felled trees, hollowed out.

"Now I can understand why the blacks have been comparatively quiet," said Nelson Lee. "They have been employed in making these dug-outs, for the purpose of getting away from the island. I rather fancy there will be a number of casualties."

"Yes, sir—there goes one boat now," said Mr. Somerfield.

The dug-outs were being pushed hurriedly out into the lagoon, each boat filled with savages. And as Nelson Lee and the others watched they saw two of the cannibal craft turn turtle. The blacks struggled in the water, screaming and splashing.

But the majority of the invaders succeeded in getting away—although several dug-outs were swamped in attempting to ride through the surf at the coral reef. Dozens of blacks went to their death.

But after all, Nelson Lee did not concern himself much about these heathen cannibals. He had the juniors to think about. And he was sorely afraid that there was no shadow of hope.

The volcano was belching forth a terrible amount of fire and smoke, and the disturbance seemed to be increasing in power and ferocity. Indeed, the interior of Lagoon Island was apparently on fire, for choking masses of smoke came drifting over the beach—smoke which was filled with acrid, evil-smelling fumes.

"May we come and have a look, sir?" shouted Handforth from the cave.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, but you must not come far!" he replied. "There is danger—"

Even as he spoke there came a thunderous commotion from the volcano, and vast masses of fire were flung up towards the sky. The spectacle was terrifying, and the juniors were just in time to see it as they rushed out.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Begad! It's frightful, dear old boys—it is, really!"

"We shall all be killed!"

The juniors stared up at the discharging volcano with awe and wonder—but not with any particular show of fear. So far, the danger was distant, and it did not seem that there was any peril close here.

All danger from the blacks was now at an end, for they had gone, leaving the island entirely in our possession. But we had a far greater horror to face. The blacks could only attack us, but the volcano could wipe us out, and Lagoon Island as well.

Nelson Lee was looking more grave than I had seen him for many a day. He realised the dreadful peril even if nobody else did. Hot cinders were falling in ever increasing numbers. Indeed, it was risky to remain out in the open. And the air was so stifling that we could hardly breathe. It was like being in a gigantic oven.

And then, suddenly, Dorrie gave a yell as he stared upwards.

"Look out!" he bellowed. "Under cover—quick!"

I glanced up and then saw the reason for

his warning. The whole sky was choked with white hot masses of lava or cinders. They were falling in a terrific shower of fire.

And we ran like mad for the cover of the cave. To be caught in that white hot shower would mean death. We only just reached the cave in time, and pelted in, helter-skelter.

Panting, gasping, I turned. I was among the last to enter, and so I was just near the opening. And I could see the hot shower falling. There were great masses of molten lava striking the ground in all directions. One piece alone would have been enough to kill anybody. And from a thousand points smoke and flames arose. The dried grass and undergrowth caught fire in a flash. And almost before we could realise it this part of the island was a raging, blazing inferno. It was as though a million torches had been set going at the same instant.

A gust of wind came into the cave entrance—and it was like a wave from a blast furnace.

"Good heavens!" I panted. "We shall be choked alive!"

And it really seemed that death—horrible death—was to be our lot.

CHAPTER II.

THE WANDERER ON THE SCENE.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE screwed his monocle more firmly into his eye.

"But, dash it all, I mean to say!" he exclaimed. "This, don't you know, is ghastly, and all that kind of rot! Absolutely! In point of fact, Phipps, the whole bally affair is putrid in the extreme!"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps.

"Here we are, as it were, with absolutely nothing doing," continued Archie. "On board the old yacht, and absolutely helpless. What about the other chappies? What about doing the good old rescue stunt? Somewhat out of the ques., Phipps! In fact, it can't be done!"

"I'm afraid not, sir," agreed Phipps anxiously. "We cannot approach the island owing to the dense showers of hot cinders—and even if we could land, I doubt if it would be much good!"

"You think all the dear fellows are somewhat cold and stiff?" asked Archie. "That is to say, extinct, and so forth? But I mean to say! What a perfectly rotten scheme, Phipps? What a ghastly idea, if you grasp my meaning! Nipper—Mr. Lee—Reggie Pitt, and all the other dear old birds! Gone—what? Flown into the spiritual regions, and all that sort of thing? Bally hard lines, Phipps. In fact, I don't believe it! Absolutely not! The whole gang exists, old tulip—absolutely! Take it from me, they positively exist!"

"I sincerely trust you are right," said Phipps. "But by the appearance of the

island it would seem that they have already perished. It is a terrible thought, but it would be foolish for us not to face the facts."

Archie made no reply. He and Phipps were standing on the promenade deck of the *Wanderer*, leaning against the rail. Lagoon Island lay a fair distance over the sparkling, sunlit ocean, to starboard. And Lord Dorrimore's steam yacht was gliding at about half speed in a southerly direction. Here everything was tropical and glorious. The sun blazed from a clear sky, the air was delightful, and the sea the deepest of deep blue.

But Lagoon Island was almost hidden in a great pall of smoke which hung over it like some menacing thundercloud. And from the centre of the island came great spurts of lurid fire. There could be no doubt that the island was in the rapid process of being destroyed.

Captain Bentley had already attempted to get near, but had been compelled to retreat owing to the dense showers of burning ash and cinders. The skipper had seen, however, that these cinders were being driven by the breeze—and he was now steaming to leeward of the island. Here perhaps, a landing could be effected. But what use would it be?

Captain Bentley knew that Nelson Lee and all the others—if alive—were in the vicinity of the pirates' cave. How could they possibly get to the other side of the island? They had no boats, and so could not get round the lagoon. In any case, the molten shower would prevent them doing any such thing as this. And it was an utter impossibility to cross the centre of the island.

So the skipper regarded it as a mere waste of time to approach the leeward side of the island. However, it was better than nothing. It was simply impossible to sail away without making some attempt to land.

All on board the *Wanderer* were on edge with anxiety and horror. All, that is, with the exception of the Chinese prisoners. These had been flung into the yacht's fore-castle, and were now closely guarded.

But they had been forgotten. In the intense excitement of this greater peril, the Chinese pirates had become a very small consideration. Captain Bentley and the engineers and every other white man on the yacht was solely concerned for the safety of Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the boys—to say nothing of the other members of the yacht's crew.

The *Wanderer* crept round, growing nearer and nearer to the island. Captain Bentley was cautious, and he did not wish to take too many risks. He firmly believed that those on the island had perished, and he did not wish to incur any further loss of life. He knew these tropical islands well, and he knew what terrible disasters may occur. At any moment the volcano might burst into an activity which it had hitherto not displayed. The very island might crumble to pieces, and

cause a whirlpool in the ocean which would inevitably suck the yacht into its vortex.

Accordingly, the skipper took things easily and cautiously. There was no need for hurry, for the ones who had been left on the island were no longer alive. Nevertheless, all on board the *Wanderer* kept a sharp eye on the island shore as they grew nearer.

On this side of the coast there was nothing but rocky islets and barren sands, with a cliff or two here and there and no damage by fire—as yet. The wind was blowing the discharge from the volcano in the opposite direction. And the coast of the island on this side was so far untouched.

And it was possible for the *Wanderer* to creep in nearer and nearer—until she was within a comparatively short distance of the outer reef.

Here Captain Bentley thought it wise to enter. So he brought his vessel to a stop—but everything was in readiness for instant departure, if necessary. Up till now the skipper had not decided whether to send the boat ashore or not. It seemed to him that it would be a useless proceeding to do so.

And he stood on the bridge, examining the coast of the island very closely through his powerful binoculars. Archie had glasses to his eyes, too, and when he put them down he turned to Phipps and shook his head.

"Nothing doing, old dear!" he observed. "Absolutely as barren as a bally plate after Fatty Little's been at it! I mean to say, no sign of the lost ones, and all that kind of thing. Phipps, it's ghastly. In other words, it's positively foul! All those chappies, don't you know!"

"Yes, sir," said Phipps. "I am feeling very depressed."

"Well, dash it all—absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Depressed, what? It's enough to make a chappie feel positively used up, don't you know. To think of it, Phipps makes the old tissues wither. The red fluid in the old veins, so to speak, dries up and what not! To be exact, darling, I'm most shockingly pipped. Absolutely!"

"I do not think it will be of any use remaining in the vicinity of the island, sir," said Phipps. "Indeed, Captain Bentley is ready for departure at any moment, and I do not think that we shall remain here long. We must resign ourselves to the terrible truth."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Phipps," said Archie firmly. "I don't want to call you a dashed pessimist, and all that kind of thing. But I've got an idea—a bally brain wave—that the gang absolutely exists. I've got a rummy kind of feeling waltzing round the old bones. You get me, old scream?"

"Not quite, sir."

"A feeling, as it were, that the lads of the village are hale and hearty!" went on Archie. "Of course, it's priceless rot, but there you are. The old feeling exists. Right in the marrows Phipps! A wave of optimism surges through the bosom of the young master. Absolutely!"

"But consider, sir!" said Phipps gently. "The tidal wave swept them off the yacht's deck—and it is quite possible that they were killed even then. On the top of that disaster comes this volcanic eruption. As you know, they were flung upon the shore on the other side of the island—and that coast is burning and blazing with molten lava and red-hot cinders. No human being could live in such conditions for more than a few minutes."

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "Every time, old lad. But there you are. I mean to say, a chappie can't help large consignments of optimism surging about, can he? The old feeling's there—right in the centre of the breast bone! It's imposs., Phipps—

"I do not think the captain intends sending a boat ashore, sir."

"What!" gasped Archie. "But, dash it! Dash it in several tones! Look here, Phipps—look absolutely here! It's got to be done, you know! We've got to go ashore and proceed with the old search!"

"I really think it would be useless, sir," said Phipps. "They could not have reached this side of the island, and it is just as impossible for us to get to the other coast. It would be a waste of time to send a boat ashore. And the danger would be very considerable——"

"Danger?" repeated Archie. "Piffle, Phipps! It absolutely pains me to say such words—but piffle! All those chappies are



And we ran like mad for the cover of the cave. To be caught in that white hot shower would mean death.

positively unthinkable. All those chappies—dead! Oh, nothing doing! I won't believe it, old walnut!"

Phipps shook his head, and made no reply. Archie's cheerful mood was probably forced—for it was obviously impossible for those on the island to have escaped destruction. It was a sheer waste of time to approach the island at all.

After a few minutes Archie became rather impatient. He had been watching the belching smoke and fire from the volcano, and now he put his glasses down, and tapped his foot impatiently.

"What about it, Phipps?" he asked.

"Pardon, sir?"

"What about the rescue party, and all that?" inquired Archie.

"I fail to understand, sir."

"Dash it all, Phipps!" said Archie. "What about the brain department? Closed up, or what? I mean to say, why doesn't the old skipper get frightfully busy? Boats, and all that sort of thing? Shore parties, and so forth."

being roasted, and it's up to us to yank them out of the raging fire, what?"

Phipps gave it up—he was more grieved than he could say. But it seemed to him that Archie's attitude was absurd. There was no possible chance of doing any good by going ashore. Indeed, the volcano might burst forth with sudden fury and swamp all those who ventured within the lagoon.

But, suddenly, a shout came from one of the men on deck.

"Figures, sir!" he yelled, turning excitedly.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Captain Bentley, from the bridge.

Archie grabbed his binoculars, and levelled them. Finding the beach, he proceeded to examine every yard of it with extreme care. And he became rigid, his gaze fixed upon one spot.

"My only sainted aunt!" he ejaculated. "That is to say, gadzooks and so forth! What did I tell you, Phipps? Figures, don't you know! Chappies on the jolly old shore!"

Phipps hated to disillusion Archie.

"They're probably the figures of cannibals, sir," he suggested.

"Cannibals?" repeated Archie. "What rot! What priceless rot! The first figure is Mr. Lee! Yes, by gad, and Lord Dorrimore! And Mr. Somerfield! And—and cheer, Phipps—proceed to let fly the old vocal chords! The chappies! Positively the dear old lads of the village."

"I fear you are mistaken, sir," said Phipps incredulously.

Archie jammed the binoculars into Phipps' hands.

"Gaze!" he said shortly. "Take several yards of observation!"

Archie was not mistaken. For the far away figures which could be seen with the naked eye jumped into distinct prominence through the binoculars. And Phipps had no difficulty in recognising Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Umlosi, and a crowd of others—including the St. Frank's party.

"This—this is amazing, sir!" gasped Phipps.

"Absolutely!"

"They appear to be all safe, sir," went on Phipps. "It—it is so extraordinary that I cannot credit my own eyes! Oh, how wonderful! I am so delighted that I hardly know what to say, sir."

"Optimism, what?" said Archie calmly. "The fact is, Phipps, you were inclined to think that the young master had gone several degrees off the old rocker. And yet here we are—with the chappies in sight! The old optimism was not misplaced, what?"

"I hardly know what to say, sir," said Phipps huskily.

And then, a few minutes later, there was great activity on board the Wanderer. A boat was quickly lowered overside, and three or four men jumped into it, and seized the oars. Archie insisted upon going, and he insisted with equal determination that Phipps should go, too.

At first Captain Bentley was inclined to disagree. He declared that all the available boat space would be needed. But it was decided that a second boat should be taken ashore, too—and so Archie and Phipps were allowed to go.

Archie was tremendously excited—inwardly. But he managed to maintain his usual air of nonchalance. Only his flushed face and gleaming eyes told of the thrill which was surging through him.

The first boat pulled ashore quickly, and made an easy passage through the surf at one of the numerous breaks in the reef. The boat was pitched into the comparatively smooth water of the lagoon—and after that it was only a matter of minutes before the rescuers were ashore.

As the boat dug its nose into the sandy beach, it was surrounded by a crowd of eager and excited juniors. I was among them.

"Hurrah!"

"We're safe—we can get on board!"

"The yacht's only just outside the reef, you fellows!"

"What-ho! What-ho! So here we are, what?" exclaimed Archie genially. "How goes it, dear old boys? What about coming on board, and all that kind of thing? Everything's absolutely all serene, by the look of it."

"Good old Archie! Rather!"

"Let's clear off this island as soon as possible!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I don't see why we should bunk! The volcano isn't so fierce now, and I suppose the eruption's over. We might just as well stay. I'm not scared, anyway!"

Everybody was talking at once, and Archie found himself surrounded. But it was Phipps who supplied the information.

Phipps told us exactly how Archie had turned the tables on the Chinamen, and how Ho Liang and his rascally yellow pirates were now under lock and key. The juniors heard the story with astonishment.

"And you mean to say that Archie did all this?" asked Pitt wonderingly.

"Yes, Master Pitt," replied Phipps.

"I say, don't you know," protested Archie. "I say! Kindly desist, dear old chappies! I did absolutely nothing. Merely put one across Ho Liang, if you understand. Ho Liang, to be precise, is a most fearful ruffian. I have considered the whole case, and I've come to the conclusion that Ho Liang is what a fellow might called a dashed poisonous growth!"

"Good old Archie!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "That is to say, absolutely not! Pray don't be so ridic.! And I should be frightfully grateful, and all that sort of thing, if some of you bounders described how you got to this side of the island. Something like a miracle—what?"

"By Jove, you're right!" I declared. "It does seem like a miracle—now. We found an underground river, Archie—and the tunnel reaches right across the island, from one side to the other. The water's quite shallow, except in one or two places. And we swam these without any trouble."

Quite a number of fellows went on to describe how we had gone down that shaft in the pirates' cave.

At the foot of the shaft lay a low tunnel, with shallow water flowing evenly along. When the eruption was at its height—and when the air had become almost unbearably hot—we descended into this tunnel, and proceeded to walk along it.

It seemed that we went for miles and miles—twisting, turning, but hoping against hope that this subterranean watercourse would lead us to a safe outlet. In one or two places the water was much deeper, and here we were obliged to swim, and trust to luck that the water would not remain deep for long.

And at last, tired, but eager and anxious, we had seen a gleam of daylight far above, through a break in the tunnel roof.

And we had discovered a deep fissure which ran upwards. The rocks were rough and uneven, and so it was possible—easy, in

fact—for us to climb up to the ground level. And we had found ourselves in a kind of deep canyon near the shore. Rocks surrounded us. But at last, after much effort, we got down to the sands, and then we saw the *Wanderer* out at sea.

The sight of the yacht was the most wonderful thing we could have seen. It filled us all with hope and joy. And then the boats had come ashore, making it absolutely certain that we should be rescued.

And by now it appeared that the volcano had had enough. There were no further booms and explosions. The eruption had settled down to an even discharge of smoke and small cinders—and these were drifting over the other part of the island. That section, by now, was in rapid process of being destroyed—the forests were ablaze, and all the valleys and hollows were a raging mass of flames. But on this side, where we now stood, there was nothing to fear.

But, if we had only known it, the worst peril of all was to come.

CHAPTER III.

THE WORST BLOW OF ALL!



NELSON LEE glanced up at the volcano, and then he turned his attention to the crowd of fellows who were now dotted about on the beach. They were all discussing the

situation with much excitement and delight.

"Well, we must lose no time in getting on board," said Lee. "It seems almost too good to be true to realise that we have come through in safety—and I cannot help thinking that Providence guided us down into that underground tunnel. That it should lead out on this section of the coast is most wonderful."

"It's queer how things always seem to get blacker just when there's every prospect of good times coming," said Lord Dorrimore. "A couple of hours ago it seemed that we were doomed to a somewhat heated end. But now we're as safe as you like—an' everything is all clear for us to sail back to civilisation."

"Yes, it is, indeed, wonderful news to hear that the *Wanderer* is safe and sound, and under the command of Captain Bentley," said Nelson Lee. "We must lose no time in getting on board—although I really think that the fury of the eruption is over. But we can take no chances."

After the turmoil on the other side of the island, the comparative peace of this coast was most marked. The volcano still towered above all else—a menacing monster rearing its ugly head into the cloud of dense smoke and fumes which it had created.

Volumes of smoke were still rising, but there were no further bursts of molten lava or red-hot cinders. The crater, in fact, was

now comparatively quiet, and it seemed that danger was at an end.

Nelson Lee knew, however, that this may only be a comparatively brief lull. At any moment the volcano might burst forth into greater fury than before. So he ordered the boys to get into the boats without any delay.

Two journeys would have to be made, for there were well over thirty of us, including the sailors.

It was impossible for us all to go in these two boats. The *guy'nor*, therefore, decided that the boys were to be transferred to the yacht first. He was more anxious about them than anything else.

The juniors themselves were overjoyed—and so overflowing with high spirits that they were now ready to yell and dance with sheer delight. The prospect of getting on board the *Wanderer*, safe and sound, without any further peril, was almost too wonderful to be true.

And, to be exact, it was too wonderful to be true.

By some strange fatality it seemed that we were destined to encounter set-backs just when we hoped that things would run smoothly. And this set-back now was one which we had not remotely feared.

From across the lagoon came the unexpected sound of shots being fired.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Great Scot!" exclaimed Pitt. "What's that?"

"Sounded like revolver shots!"

"But—but where from?"

"The yacht, of course!"

We all stood on the beach, staring out across the lagoon at the *Wanderer*. Why had those sudden shots been fired? What was the reason for such a thing. It seemed extraordinary, and even Nelson Lee clenched his fists and looked anxious. Shots from the *Wanderer* were significant.

Both Dorrie and the *guy'nor* were without binoculars, but Archie had brought his. Nelson Lee seized them and levelled them upon the yacht. He could now see upon the decks quite distinctly. And he was the witness of a little drama which filled him with inward consternation.

Captain Bentley was on the bridge and he had a revolver in his hand. And on the deck just below, a number of figures were pressing forward—the figures of Chinamen. Two of them fell even as Lee watched, and the skipper jerked his revolver twice.

The sound of the reports reached Nelson Lee's ears an appreciable time later. Two Chinamen fell, but the others surged onwards. Then, in one rush, they reached the bridge, and in a moment Captain Bentley was fighting fiercely. Other figures came from behind, and in a surprisingly short time a fierce battle was in progress on deck.

"The Chinese have broken loose!" muttered Nelson Lee curtly.

"That's cheerful!" said Dorrie. "They're short-handed, too."

"Short-handed!" echoed Lee, frowning. "Why, there's only a handful of men on

board—Bentley and the engineers! And they're mostly below—and they'll be trapped before they can show any resistance!"

"Infernal carelessness of somebody's!" rapped out Dorrie. "It's a pity they could not hold these yellow skunks once they had 'em! There's no tellin' what this will lead to!"

"Unless we're very sharp we can easily guess what the result will be!" exclaimed the gov'nor. "If Ho Liang and his men get hold of the yacht again—as they might—they will leave us here to perish! They'll sail away without caring a thought for our safety!"

"Then what in thunder can we do?"

"I can't let the boys go into any fighting!" replied Lee grimly. "They've escaped enough perils already—without risking more. This is a job for the men! We shall have to remain here, Dorrie, and the sailors must return in the boats."

"I'll take charge of them, sir," offered Mr. Somerfield keenly.

"Good man!" exclaimed Lee. "There may be grave danger, Mr. Somerfield. If these Chinese get the machine-guns going it may be impossible to approach the yacht—but you'll have to risk that."

"Yes, sir—I'll be off at once."

The Wanderer's second officer didn't waste a moment. He dashed down the beach and sang out some sharp, rapid orders. All the sailors who were with us obeyed with alacrity, and almost before we could realise what was taking place the boats had pushed off, and were pulling across the lagoon at express speed. Lord Dorrimore looked after them in dismay.

"Hang it all!" he roared. "I was goin'!"

"Too late, old man."

"Yes, of course—now!" growled Dorrie. "You're so deucedly sudden, Lee! Before a fellow has time to look round you've given your orders and——"

"My dear Dorrie, there's no time to waste when it comes to a matter of this kind," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Even now, Somerfield and his men may be too late. But I am hoping that they will arrive on board in time to quell this unexpected disturbance."

"And what about us?" said Dorrie. "We're marooned again!"

"Of the two dangers it is better to choose the lesser!" said Nelson Lee. "It is unthinkable that the boys should be exposed to a deadly fire from these Chinese. Many of the sailors are armed and can retaliate. Moreover, they are men—and ready to fight. There is no reason to assume that we shall be unsafe here. It will take only a comparatively short time to quell this trouble, and then we shall all go on board. It merely amounts to this—the men have gone first instead of the boys."

Dorrie nodded.

"Yes, you're right," he agreed. "It was the best thing. An' if the volcano starts buzzin' again we can easily nip into the

dug-out until matters calm down a bit. But I don't suppose this part of the island will be affected at all."

The juniors, of course, were excited afresh—and very disappointed. They had been expecting to go out to the Wanderer at once. But now this idea was knocked on the head. The Wanderer was in danger, and the result would be truly appalling if Ho Liang and his men took command again. It would have meant death for all on the island.

Mr. Somerfield, in the leading boat, had borrowed a revolver from one of the men, and he held this in readiness as the yacht was approached. The two boats had made a clean passage through the reef. And after being tossed about by the heavy waves they were now in comparatively smooth water. And the yacht was just ahead. The second officer expected shots to be fired at any moment.

But as he grew nearer and nearer to the yacht he found that the position was not so serious as it had appeared to be. In one portion of the deck twenty or thirty Chinamen were huddled together in a defiant crowd—held there by two of the engineers with rifles. There were other Chinamen in different parts of the deck, however, and these were not held up.

It was quite clear that Ho Liang's men had broken completely loose, and were now over-running the ship. But they were without fire-arms—and it was this fact which saved every white man on board from annihilation. If the yellow pirates had obtained weapons quickly Mr. Somerfield and his men would never have got on board.

As it was, the two boats grazed alongside and were secured. The men swarmed up every available rope. And they poured on to the deck in a stream. Captain Bentley viewed their arrival with intense relief.

"Good!" he roared. "Mr. Somerfield, take ten men and round up those yellow curs for'ard! If they show fight, shoot 'em down! I'm just about sick of these darned Chinks!"

Mr. Somerfield saluted, and hurried forward with a number of men at his heels, and in less than ten minutes Ho Liang's men were bunched together and herded back into the fore-castle. And now every man was put in irons—at least, they were roped up so that they were helpless. There weren't enough handcuffs on board to go round.

Ho Liang himself was badly injured, for he was one of the men who had received a bullet from Captain Bentley's revolver. It was the fall of their leader, in fact, that had caused the rank and file of the yellow pirates to lose heart. If Ho Liang had remained active the yacht might have been seized. In the absence of leadership the Chinese were as helpless as children.

"The infernal scum!" said the skipper furiously, after the prisoners had been locked away. "A good thing you came along, Mr. Somerfield! We had the beggars in hand, but I'm not deying that the position was hot."

"How did they escape, sir?" asked Mr. Somerfield.

"You may well ask that," snapped Captain Bentley. "There were two men on guard—two confounded fellows who will have to answer pretty completely when I question them! Instead of sticking to their posts, they thought it necessary to go to the rail and stare at the island! Probably they thought that that would help matters!"

"And the Chinamen seized their chance, sir?"

"Of course!" replied the skipper. "The cunning devils had been waiting for an opportunity like that, and I suppose they'd been making certain preparations, too. Anyhow, they smashed down the doors, and got out. Why, before we could fire a couple of shots they were all over the deck. If they had had firearms we should have been shot down like so many ninepins."

"It was Mr. Lee's suggestion that I should come straight out with the men, sir."

"I can quite believe that, Mr. Somerfield," said the skipper. "Mr. Lee generally manages to suggest the right thing at the right moment. I'm confoundedly glad to see you again—I thought you were dead!"

The captain, having let off his feelings somewhat, now grasped the second officer's hand, and grasped it warmly.

"And what about the others?" he asked. "How many lost?"

"None at all, sir," said Mr. Somerfield. "One or two slight injuries, but nothing very serious. The boys have come off wonderfully lucky—only two or three of them being scratched."

"Wonderful!" said Captain Bentley, his eyes sparkling. "Best news I've heard for many a day. You'd better get back on the instant, Mr. Somerfield, and bring them all."

The boats were ready again, fully manned, and Mr. Somerfield hurried down to take command. And in a few moments the boats were well on their way towards the opening in the reef. Each boat only contained just sufficient men to control it—for all the available space was needed for the returning passengers.

Boom—boom!

Mr. Somerfield looked up sharply as two terrifying explosions rent the air. An appalling mass of molten fire shot up from the crater of the volcano to a stupendous height.

It was hurled forth with such force that it splayed out and descended in a flood of livid fire. The second officer could see this molten mass striking the hillsides and pouring down in a haze of smoke and fumes.

But, fortunately, most of it was hurtling on the other side of the island—leaving this side clear. On the beach the juniors were staring up with something like terror at the volcano.

Again and again came those terrifying explosions, and it was now evident that the volcano had started afresh.

And this eruption promised to be far more serious than anything that had gone before. For, in addition to the showers of white-

hot cinders, the whole centre of the island was now a boiling mass of fire. Lava was pouring down into the valleys in thousands of tons—like some overflow from the lower regions. These masses of living fire were creeping nearer and nearer to the beach. On the other side of the island probably, the lagoon was already hissing and steaming from the effects of this molten flood.

Mr. Somerfield was looking very serious as the first boat entered the rough water in the break of the reef. It seemed quite an easy matter to cross the lagoon and reach the beach.

But the second officer told himself that he would be very glad when he was once more on board the *Wanderer*. He didn't like the look of the volcano at all. The noise from the island was now stupendous. Great booming explosions were of frequent occurrence. And as the two boats entered the lagoon hot cinders began to fall. They hissed into the water on all sides. And several of the men gave sharp cries as they were burnt.

But this, after all, was only a minor peril, for the hot shower was not a heavy one, and there was no prospect of it increasing. But the boats had hardly entered the lagoon when a number of surging waves came tearing round the island. And these waves were actually steaming!

The first one struck the boats, and they heaved and rocked. Some spray came in-board, and Mr. Somerfield uttered a startled ejaculation.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "The water's hot!"

It was almost unbelievable. But before the two boats had proceeded another twenty feet—and while the shore was still a long distance off—the boats were almost hidden from one another in a thick mass of vapour. The lagoon, in fact, was getting enormously hot. And not only steam arose from its surface, but horrible fumes which set the men choking and gasping.

"We'll never stick it, sir!" panted one.

"We must!" said Mr. Somerfield thickly. "By thunder! It's impossible to leave all those boys on the island to die! And Mr. Lee and his lordship, too! Men, we've got to get to the shore!"

"Aye, we can do it!" gasped one man. "Pull, mates!"

The air was suffocating. The steam and fumes arose in great smothering waves. Already the shore was hidden in the steam, and the reef, behind, was only just visible.

Wave after wave came round, to the accompaniment of fresh outbursts from the volcano. It was a veritable inferno. And now the lagoon was becoming like a gigantic cauldron, and almost on the boil!

The water was almost enclosed by the barrier reef, and it was easy to understand what was happening. The lava was undoubtedly pouring down into the lagoon on the other coast. And the molten mass was causing the water to become hotter and hotter every minute.

The men in the two boats fought on—but they instinctively knew that it was a losing battle. It was impossible to get to the beach. The water was now so hot that every burst of spray was liable to scald the men.

And great bubbles began to appear on the surface—bubbles which emitted clouds of sulphurous fumes. The sailors choked and coughed, and they were nearly blinded by the smarting in their eyes.

"We'll never do it, sir!" gasped one of the men.

Even as he spoke, he collapsed over his oar. Two other men were nearly on the point of suffocation, and Mr. Somerfield himself hardly knew what he was doing. His head was swimming, and he felt that he would choke.

The beach was a long way off—for the boats had made little headway. And the water between the boats and the beach was bubbling and boiling in an alarming manner. The whole lagoon was a mass of scalding steam.

And Mr. Somerfield knew that to go on was to die. It was humanly impossible to reach the shore in safety. It would be useless making the attempt. Such madness would not help the hapless ones on the island, and it would only bring death to others who still had time to escape.

"Back, men—back!" shouted the second officer harshly. "It's our only chance! Unless we get out of this inferno now we shall be killed!"

The men were still in possession of their wits, and they lost no time in turning the boats. Only one or two of the sailors had succumbed. And it spoke well for the discipline of the others, that they had waited for the officer's order before retreating.

Pulling with all their waning strength the men sent the boats out through the reef-opening. It was lucky they located it, what with the steam and the smother. But at last the two little craft were picked up in the roaring surf, and hurled out into the open sea.

It was like coming out of a Turkish bath. Just outside the reef the ocean roared and thundered—and the water, here, was fresh and cool. It was impossible for the molten lava to heat and poison the open sea. Only the enclosed lagoon suffered.

Tossing on the waves, the men paused and gulped in the pure, cool air.

"I thought we was all done for, sir!" said one of them, hoarsely.

Mr. Somerfield pointed.

"We are safe—but the others are doomed!" he exclaimed, his voice hard and strained. "Great heavens! What a ghastly thing! Hemmed in by boiling water with fire and molten death surrounding them! It's—it's too horrible! Those boys and Mr. Lee, and—and Lord Dorrimore! Oh, why are such things allowed to happen?"

"We did our best, sir," muttered one of the sailors.

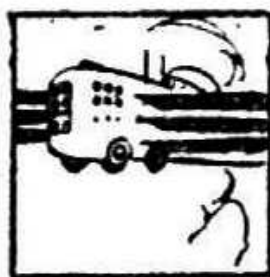
Mr. Somerfield stared dully towards the steam-hidden shore.

"Yes, we did our best!" he repeated hopelessly. "Heaven above! Our best! And those youngsters—I can't—I can't! It makes me go mad to think of it!"

And the second officer sobbed, his words choking in his throat. Tears welled down his weather-stained cheeks, and he was not ashamed for his men to see them. For the horror of this affair was more than he could bear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WINGED DELIVERER!



LORD DORRIMORE gripped Nelson Lee's arm.

"They've turned back!" he said steadily.

"It was inevitable!" declared Lee. "No human beings could live in such heat, Dorrie. Now, indeed, it seems that we are fated to die. Cut off! Marooned on the island, with death at our elbow!"

Lord Dorrimore swore fluently.

"It's not often I let fly, but I can't help it!" he exclaimed, his voice fierce and vibrant. "This is the fault of those accursed Chinks! Yes, old man! It's true. But for that outbreak of firing on the yacht the boys would have been safely on board by now! And, instead, they are here—poor young kids!"

Dorrie gulped, and swallowed hard.

"But this won't do!" he went on, after a moment. "Never say die! We're alive an' kickin'—an' Old Man Volcano can do his worst! We're goin' to snap our fingers at him!"

"We can easily do that," said Nelson Lee grimly. "But it will make no difference, Dorrie. Mind you, I am not despairing. Thank heaven we have that tunnel to get into. There, at least, we shall find coolness and comparatively pure air. And this inferno cannot last for ever. I am hoping that there will soon be another lull—and then the boats will make a dash and take us off!"

They were standing near the beach.

The water was bubbling almost at their feet, and horrible fumes were rising. The water was foul and ghastly choking with noxious gases. The reef was invisible—the Wanderer was no longer to be seen.

A thick cloud of yellowish steam overhung the water. And behind, towards the centre of the island, terrific clouds of smoke arose. The volcano was roaring and belching, and every second or two the ground shook as though with the ague. It was a terrifying experience.

I was with the fellows, and we were all in a big clump some little way up the beach. Umlosi was with us—not the usual Umlosi, but a trembling, scared-looking wreck of his former self.

Umlosi was as brave as a lion—a magnificent fighter when he was opposed to men. But this was beyond his understanding, and

it robbed him of his courage and his wits. In his opinion, the whole business was "tagati"—it was bewitched.

"I—I say, those boats are a long time coming back!" said Griffith, for about the twentieth time.

Until now the other fellows had assured him that the boats could not be long in showing up. But they were beginning to doubt. The clouds of steam hanging over the lagoon told their own story.

"The boats won't come," said Reggie Pitt quietly.

"What!" gasped Griffith. "They—they must come! We can't stay here, you fool! We shall be burnt alive! We shall all be killed! It's horrible—it's horrible—it's horrible——"

"Steady!" I exclaimed sharply. "Don't get hysterical! We've got to face the facts. The boats can't cross the lagoon while it's steaming like this. They'll have to wait until the eruption dies down. It won't be long, you asses! There's no need to get frightened."

"Frightened!" roared Handforth. "Who's frightened?"

"Well, you're not, for one," I replied. "But some of these other chaps have got the wind up pretty steeply. That won't do any good. Things are pretty awful, I'll admit, but we needn't make them worse. There's no reason to suppose that this eruption will wipe us out."

"What about some grub?" asked Fatty Little mournfully. "I've only eaten a few coconuts and a couple of mangoes and a bunch of bananas since this morning! I'm nearly starving, you know——"

"Here's a chap talking about grub while the island's busting to bits!" interrupted Handforth in exasperation. "Great pip! Fancy eating now! I believe Fatty would feed his face if he was sitting on a bomb!"

"Well, a fellow must eat!" growled Fatty.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "But there is a time for everything, old onion. I mean to say, a chappie needs several yards of dashed good nerve to stand this sort of thing. No time for stoking the old inside—what? Gadzooks! What, as it were, is all this?"

Without warning, a number of clouds of fine ash descended—hot, scorching ash, which settled like powder on the ground. And Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore came hurrying towards us.

"Boys, we must get back to the tunnel without delay," said Nelson Lee briskly. "The boats have been delayed owing to this fresh outbreak. Until it dies down we must seek refuge underground. Come!"

The gov'nor spoke cheerfully, but I knew jolly well that he was filled with the most terrible anxiety. The juniors did not argue, but followed Nelson Lee and Dorrie through the rocks and crags until we came upon the deep gully which led to the tunnel entrance.

The fine powder was now swooping down like black fog, and it was so hot that it was



"Back, men—back!" shouted the second officer harshly. "It's our only chance! Unless we get out of this inferno now we shall be killed!"

almost impossible to breathe. The ash filled our nostrils and our throats, and it was only with great difficulty that we could see.

And it made us feel that the whole island was on fire and that we were walking to a certain doom.

Indeed, our position was appalling.

We dare not go towards the beach—for death lay beyond. The lagoon, instead of being a placid stretch of sparkling blue water, was now a boiling, bubbling cauldron of poisonous heat. Nothing human could ever get across. And if it was like this here—where the full fury of the volcano had not descended—what would it be like on the other coast?

The inferno there must have been frightful. But, happily, we would not see it—although our imaginations were busy enough. Then there was the other problem to be faced. As it was impossible to retreat towards the water it was even more impossible to penetrate inland. For up on the hills the lava was flowing in great, death-dealing floods. It was sweeping down, consuming everything that came in its path. And even leaving this lava out of the matter, the hot cinders alone would have been enough to kill anybody.

There was one course—and one course only.

And that was to dive into the underground tunnel. This place had been our salvation once, and so we gave great gulps of relief as we plunged into the dark opening and

thought of the cool stream which lay far underground. The water of that stream was pure. We could wash ourselves—drink copiously—and wait there in the darkness until the turmoil above had settled down.

Nelson Lee's calm manner and cheery smile did much to make the fellows feel confident. Several of them had been inclined to get into a panic. But Nelson Lee and Dorrie made a point of joking together as they led the party. Dorrie roared with laughter now and again. And the juniors gradually regained their feeling of security and self-possession.

"Oh, no need to be scared!" said Tommy Watson. "I thought it was all up at one time, but things must be all serene, or Dorrie wouldn't be cackling like that. We'll soon be out of this mess!"

"Pity we haven't got a camera," said Pitt. "We could have taken some ripping snapshots of the volcano, in spite of the clouds of smoke. I daresay they've been busy on the yacht with their cameras."

"Blow 'em!" gasped Handforth. "Phew! Thank goodness we're out of that awful atmosphere! Great pip! Another five minutes of that and we should all have been choked! I'd give quids for a long drink!"

"You'll get one for nothing if you wait a few minutes," remarked Church. "It won't be long before we're down in the tunnel, and we can——"

"The air doesn't seem to be much better, after all," interrupted Handforth. "I thought it would be cool down here, but it seems to me that it's hotter than ever! And these fumes catch you in the neck horribly!"

Right in advance of the party Nelson Lee and Dorrie were leading the way with an electric torch. It was a somewhat ticklish business getting down the deep crevice into the river tunnel. A deep fissure was formed in the rocks, and the rough sides of this made it possible for any active person to climb down. But we could not help wondering what would happen if an extra severe earthquake shock rocked the island.

Indeed, this place would prove to be a death-trap, for we should be buried alive and crushed out of existence. However, it was no time for hesitation. To remain in the open would mean an hour of life, perhaps, but then the end would inevitably come.

Here we certainly stood a chance.

At least, so we thought. But Nelson Lee and Dorrie, as they led the way, soon began to have very grave doubts. They had only just started the descent of the fissure. When we had come up from the black depths we had left the pure and cold air behind us.

Now, however, it seemed changed. The air was inclined to be poisoned by evil-smelling fumes, and it was by no means cool. Indeed, almost at the very first, Lee felt a suffocating wave of hot air surge upwards.

"I'm afraid the conditions have changed," he murmured.

"Seems like it!" agreed Dorrie. "Never mind—we've got to push on."

But this turned out to be impossible; for, just at that very moment, the light from Nelson Lee's torch revealed a thick cloud of yellowish vapour. It came surging up the fissure like something solid, and it was forestalled by another wave of hot air. Then, before Lee could speak, the yellow cloud enveloped him.

It was like a discharge from a naval gun after a shell has been fired—thick, horrible fumes. But these fumes were heated to such an extent that it almost seemed that Lee's skin was scorched and blistered by that first blast.

He staggered back, choking. And the fumes came thicker and thicker. And down in the fissure there was a dull roar—a significant rushing noise, which could not be mistaken. In a flash Nelson Lee knew the truth—he knew the fearful danger.

The underground tunnel was acting like a chimney—a flue! The lava on the other side of the island had undoubtedly entered the tunnel—and now the fumes and gases from the molten discharge were rushing along the tunnel, driving the pure air before them.

This was only just the beginning. In a few moments the rear fumes would come. And Lee knew that they would be so blindingly hot that one gust would be enough to kill the whole crowd of them. And even if they did not prove to be so dreadfully hot they would be of such a nature that suffocation would follow in a few brief seconds.

In a word, it was impossible to enter the tunnel!

There was only one alternative—to retreat. Retreat to what? Death in another form!

Now, indeed, the position was hopeless. Unable to enter the refuge of this tunnel, unable to cross the lagoon, unable to go inland—what was there left for us? Nothing—except to stand in the comparatively clear space on the low level ground and wait for the slow death which threatened.

This, if anything, was worse than any other death. But there was nothing else for it—we had to retreat.

"Back, boys—back!" shouted Nelson Lee hoarsely. "Run for your lives!"

He thought, at that moment, that he and Dorrie were doomed, and he wished to give the boys a chance to get into the open. Although the surges of air were diabolically hot, the gov'nor and Dorrie were still alive. By holding their breath they were able to stagger away in the rear of the juniors.

And so, at last, we emerged into the open. The last we had seen of the daylight had been those thick clouds of hot ash descending through the air. And we were, therefore, surprised to find a dull, coppery sunlight streaming down into the gully. The powder-like ash had ceased to fall and the air was comparatively clear again.

We took in great gulps of air and felt better. But conversation was almost impossible, for the volcano was roaring and thundering and bellowing in full fury.

Glancing up, I could see awful masses of molten matter being hurled high into the air.

It was like a discharge from an enormous fountain.

If anything, the crater was now pitching forth more lava than at any previous period. And the hillsides were nothing but livid piles of fire. The flames were roaring up in devastating quantities.

And we could see the lava flowing down slowly and steadily. The atmosphere was so hot that the perspiration ran from us like water. But, fortunately there were no further falls of hot cinders or ash.

At the same time we did not feel much like talking. The fury of the volcano awed us. Looking in the other direction we could now see a remarkable change in the lagoon. The steam had almost vanished. At first I thought that the water had cooled, and that there was just a chance we might get across.

But then I understood.

Far from cooling, the water had actually reached boiling point! This accounted for the absence of steam. Great bubbling bursts occurred all over the surface of the water, and the shore was strewn with dead fish—bloating and distorted out of all natural shape.

Looking across the lagoon we could faintly see the *Wanderer*. She was still comparatively near by—but she quivered and shook like a jelly. Not actually, but she appeared to do so—and this told very significantly of the awful heat which was rising from the water.

"It looks bad, Montie!" I said, grasping Tregellis-West's arm. "In fact, I very much doubt if we shall ever get off this island. We're in for a hot time, old son—that's certain. It's a rotten shame that we sha'n't be able to see St. Frank's again!"

"It is fate!" said Sir Montie quietly. "An' I've always found, dear old boy, that it's no good fighting against fate. We've simply got to take what comes, an' make the best of it. As you say, it's a frightful shame that we sha'n't be able to see the dear old school again. An' I was countin' on causin' a bit of a sensation among the fellows when we got back!"

"No good now!" I said, shaking my head. "It's all very well to be optimistic, Montie. It's all very well to keep smiling. I'm the first one to advocate the principle of keeping a stiff upper lip. But what's the good of ignoring the obvious truth? We're done for—and there's nothing more to be said."

Certainly, there was every reason for my statement. We knew that existence on the island would presently be impossible. Even if the volcano stopped its eruption at once there would be no hope for us. For the molten lava already discharged was quite sufficient to heat the air until we were cooked alive. The atmosphere would gradually become hotter and hotter, until we could no longer breathe. And now we could get no relief from the open sea, since the

heat from the lagoon was wafting over the land in choking waves.

Rescue from the yacht was out of the question—so what was there left? Absolutely nothing at all! To assume, therefore, that all hope was gone, was merely to state a simple fact. No matter what steps we took we could do nothing to improve our position in the slightest degree. Within fifteen minutes the heat would become unbearable—it would become death-dealing. Already we felt weak and choking. Many fellows had collapsed and were flopping on the scorched grass, sobbing for breath.

This very exhaustion prevented the panic which would certainly have started. For, plucky though these juniors were, the knowledge of this frightful death was enough to drive terror into the stoutest heart. And after so many trying adventures the fellows were not at their usual tip-top form.

With my eyes smarting I stared round. The grass and the bushes in the near vicinity were hopelessly withered and drooping. High above forests could be seen smoking and blazing. The hill-tops were hidden in the great pall of vapour. But the sky overhead, and to the east, was clear. The wind was blowing the enormous clouds of smoke in a westerly direction.

And as I looked up it seemed impossible that this lurid sky was the one we had been accustomed to see from Lagoon Island—from the paradise that we had learnt to love. Now it had become a place of horror and death. It was like Hades itself.

I caught a glint of something far up in the air. I lost it. Then again, I saw that glint, and it held my attention. It was as though some sparkling thing was high in the heavens, reflecting the rays of the sun. I was fascinated and filled with wonder and wild curiosity. What could that something be so far up in the sky? Obviously, something which had been discharged from the volcano, and which was—

My thoughts suddenly received a terrific jar. They became chaotic. I wondered if I was going mad, or if my eyesight was playing me false? For, suddenly that glinting thing turned—sharply and unexpectedly. And for a brief flash I had a distinct vision of a shape—a shape like that of an aeroplane! It hovered for a moment, and then again vanished in the rays of the sun. On a very fine day at home one will see an aeroplane in the sky, and then it will become lost in the blue of the heavens. And afterwards it is a most difficult task to pick it up again, and sometimes impossible. It was exactly the same here. I stared into the sky in vain.

Reggie Pitt came up to me, and I glanced at him. He was regarding me curiously—very curiously.

"What's the matter?" he asked, his voice thick and strained.

"I—I don't know!" I panted. "I think I must be going dotty, Reggie! But—but I just saw something up in the sky—"

"Something in the sky?" repeated Pitt. "What do you mean?"

"I suppose I was day dreaming, but— but— Yes—yes!" I shouted wildly. "Look! I just caught sight of it again! An aeroplane—an aeroplane. She's coming down in great wide circles!"

The words came out of my throat in a flood, for I was so excited that I hardly knew what I said or did. I had found that glinting thing again. It was nearer now, and for a brief instant I saw it swooping down in wide circles—I saw the shape—great wings spreading out from a long, tubular body. Then it again became indistinct in the rays of the sun. It must have been twenty or twenty-five thousand feet up.

Some of the other juniors heard me shouting. Nelson Lee and Dorrie heard, too. Instinctively, they all looked up into the sky. But there was nothing to be seen—to them. It is always a very difficult matter to pick out a high-flying aeroplane when it is first mentioned.

"You're mad!" shouted Handforth. "Poor old Nipper's gone off his rocker—"

"That's what I thought!" I yelled. "But it's true—I'll swear to it! I couldn't see visions like that. That's an aeroplane—"

"Hush, my boy—hush!" exclaimed Nelson Lee gently. "Your imagination has got the better of you. No aeroplane could possibly be flying in these regions. Such a thing is absolutely out of the question. It is a mere hallucination, brought on by the terrible strain—"

"Good gad!" shouted Dorrie suddenly.

Like a madman he grabbed Nelson Lee's binoculars.

"Nipper's right!" he roared. "He's right! I've seen the bally thing myself! By the Lord Harry! Deliverance from the sky! It's all right, you chaps—it's all right!"

Dorrie was as excited as any of the school-boys—who were now on their feet, and staring with wild eyes up into the sky. They could see nothing at first—nothing but that patch of dull heavens and the spreading smoke cloud towards the centre of the island.

Nelson Lee started as Dorrie called out. He believed that I had been the victim of a delusion. But it was hardly possible that Dorrie was similarly deluded. And Lee stared up with his frame rigid and tense. And now there was no question whatever. Practically every member of the party caught sight of the thing which was sweeping down out of the upper sky.

They picked it up first, by the glint as the sun caught the wings. And, once picked up, it was possible to follow its movements all the time. It was an aeroplane—a vast thing which was greater than our imagination could picture. And it was coming down in sweeping graceful circles. Already she was only ten thousand feet up, having dropped double that distance during the last five minutes.

The juniors all seemed to take leave of their wits.

They shouted they waved they danced. In fact, they did everything possible to attract the attention of the aircraft. Not that this was at all necessary. Obviously, we had been seen, or the aeroplane would never be coming down—it would never risk the descent in such an inferno.

Either this, or the occupants of the aircraft were keen upon taking a closer look at the volcano. Perhaps they wanted to get some close-up photographs. But this was hardly likely. I felt convinced that we had been seen. In any case, we certainly should be seen now. For we stood there in a big crowd, waving our arms like mad.

"It—it must be one of those giddy world-tour machines!" gasped Pitt. "You know—lots of chaps have planned to fly round the world this summer. She can land here, too—there's a lovely stretch of flat ground!"

"But she can't take all of us off!" said Handforth excitedly.

"Perhaps not—but she can make two or three journeys, and drop us into the sea near the yacht!" exclaimed Church keenly. "And perhaps she's a flying boat— Why, Great Scott! Look at the size. Did you ever see such a terrific aeroplane? It's big enough to carry a hundred!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Begad!"

As the machine swooped lower and lower we could see that she was of a size hitherto unthought-of. I have seen the largest bombing aircraft of the R.A.F., and I have seen huge freak machines which have been built by private enterprise. But this monster of the air was different from anything in my experience. It was an absolute giant.

She came lower and lower—and the fellows ceased their wavings, and forgot to shout. We simply stood there silently watching. We forgot the ghastly heat and the nearness of death. For here, out of the sky, had come a winged deliverer. It was like a fairy tale—and it seemed too impossible to be true. Certainly we were not destined to die! After all the narrow escapes we had had it was becoming clear enough that our numbers had not been booked.

Lower and lower came this strange aircraft. It had no distinguishing numbers or letters on the planes. I wondered if it was English or French or German—it didn't matter really which country it belonged to. The occupants were men—real men—for they were risking an appalling fate to come to our assistance.

But we forgot almost everything in our amazement and admiration. The machine was now only seven or eight hundred feet up, and she seemed to fill the whole sky. We could pick out all the details—the great, graceful body, and the outstretched wings, which seemed as solid as steel. There were wheels fitted, so we knew that the machine could land. In front there were two enormous propellers, and these were lazily ticking round, for the power had been cut off. And the whole machine, from wing-tip to tail seemed to be constructed of glittering

gold! She was gleaming in every inch—a golden bird of stupendous size.

And then, suddenly, both the propellers whirled into life. We heard a deep roar, and the aircraft swooped round like some live thing. My heart jumped into my mouth; for a second I thought that the craft was making off.

But she was only getting into position.

Again the engines were cut off, and it seemed to us that the machine hovered almost still above our heads. The wings looked different now, somehow. At all events the machine came lower and lower and hardly moved forward a couple of yards. She descended as gently as a feather—swooped, and touched the ground a hundred yards from where we stood. She heaved once or twice on the rough ground, and then became still—a veritable mammoth. The wings towered over us like some enormous building. The size of the aeroplane was nearly unbelievable.

We dashed forward like creatures insane.

CHAPTER V.

SNATCHED FROM DEATH!



AS we crowded round the strange aeroplane we felt that it was some visitant from another world. It was so huge—so substantial and solid. Then a door opened near the lower part of the body. A man appeared. He was attired in a light flannel suit, white shoes, and a cigarette was between his lips. He looked so casual that we could only stare in amazement.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated, with a start. "The air's like an oven!"

"He's English!" roared Handforth excitedly. "Hurrah! He's English!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're saved!"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean to say, everything's perfectly priceless, old tulips! Large assortments of cheers!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The fellows crowded round the aeroplane in such excitement that they forgot the awful peril which still existed; They forgot the stifling heat. And those who had been nearly exhausted had regained their strength. The knowledge that rescue had come put new life into them.

At first we had been unable to believe that this towering machine was a reality. Now there was no question about it—and in the general joy and excitement nobody thought of being amazed. The one outstanding fact was that we were saved. There was no room in our thoughts for anything else—now, in this tense minute.

And there was something else—something wonderful. Only three out of the whole crowd of us knew what this wonderful thing was. But Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore

and I stared at the man in the doorway with sheer amazement. I could see the guv'nor's flushed face, and Dorrie's startled look. And even as we recognised our deliverer—he recognised us.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Nelson Lee huskily. "Mr. Raymond Gray!"

"Yes, yes!" I shouted. "It's Mr. Gray!"

"Well I'm hanged!" said Dorrie.

And Mr. Raymond Gray leaned out, the cigarette dropping from his lips.

"Can it be possible!" he said amazedly.

"Mr. Lee! Lord Dorrimore! Nipper! I've never been so astounded in all my life! What can it mean? What in the name of all that's extraordinary are you doing here?"

"We're being nearly roasted alive, old man, an' the sooner you can yank us up into the blue, the better!" said Dorrie. "Well, if this doesn't beat everythin'! It's glorious enough to be rescued—but it's more glorious to meet an old pal."

Mr. Raymond Gray stared up at the volcano.

"It seems that I have come in the nick of time," he said crisply. "All right, Mr. Lee! We will soon have you in safety—and all your companions. We can discuss matters later."

"How many of us can you take?" asked Nelson Lee.

"All of you!"

"In one trip?"

"Yes—and double the number, if necessary," replied the airman calmly. "Good heavens! This heat is horrible! I cannot understand how you are alive! We must not waste a second!"

He turned and in a moment a set of steps slid out from a slot just beneath the door. It touched the ground, and Mr. Gray descended to the ground—to be immediately surrounded by the fellows.

"Hurrah!"

"You've saved our lives, sir!"

"Now boys, steady yourselves!" shouted Nelson Lee. "There is not a moment to be lost, and we must keep calm. This gentleman will tell you what to do. At all costs keep your heads!"

The airman pointed to the ladder.

"Up, you get—one at a time!" he exclaimed briskly. "When you get inside go straight into the saloon. Now then—sharp's the word!"

He was so matter-of-fact that the juniors were completely at ease, in spite of their excitement. And they ran up the steps one at a time, and in a stream. The interior of the great aeroplane was delightfully cool after the stifling, ghastly heat of the island.

I was the last junior to climb up and enter. Immediately behind me came Phipps and then Umlosi and Lord Dorrimore and the guv'nor. Our deliverer was the last to come on board.

I found myself in a gorgeously decorated passage, and glancing back, I saw Mr. Gray closing the door. It slid to silently, and hermetically sealed itself. And then Mr. Gray came brushing past.

"All right, Mac—let her go!" he called out loudly.

A faint voice sounded from somewhere within the great body. Then, while I was still bewildered, the vast machine became alive. A gentle throbbing sounded, and the floor vibrated.

But there was no nerve-shattering roar, as with an ordinary aeroplane. The sensation reminded me more of a powerful sea-going craft. Walking forward, I left the passage and found myself in a surprisingly large apartment.

It was already crowded with juniors. They were talking excitedly—and the expressions of relief on their faces were very clear, and they were filled with wonder, too.

And this was not surprising.

For this saloon was really a magnificent place. It occupied a large portion of the biggest section of the body. And it was a room capable of accommodating twenty or thirty people. There were lounges all round, easy chairs, cosy corners, and tables dotted here and there. A rich carpet lay on the floor, and the walls were panelled, and there were mirrors everywhere—these latter giving the saloon an appearance of much greater size.

At intervals there were windows. When we had gazed at the aeroplane from outside these windows had seemed to be tiny round holes. But at close quarters they proved to be of quite respectable size. And they were like portholes—strongly constructed, and they were absolutely sealed. There was an appearance of stolidity about the whole craft, in fact. It was hardly believable that such a vessel could lift itself into the air.

And the whole experience was so novel that even now we had not recovered our balance. There are some marvellous new aeroplanes being built nowadays—but this vast machine was something like a dream craft—the kind one pictures to oneself when one attempts to gaze into the future.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded Handforth excitedly. "Didn't I tell you what would happen?"

"Yes, you said we should all be burnt up!" remarked Church.

"You—you fathead!" snapped Handforth. "I knew all along that we'd be rescued—I said that an aeroplane might come down out of the sky and pick us up in the nick of time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was just like Handforth to talk in this way, and a yell of laughter went up, not because there was anything to laugh at, but because the juniors were all in a state of great excitement, and their sudden deliverance had made them so light-hearted that they were ready to cackle at anything.

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I mean to say, dashed posh, and what not! Just about the last word in aeroplanes—what?"

"It appears to be a wonderful craft, sir," said Phipps.

"Wonderful!" echoed Archie. "Well,

dash it all! Hardly the word, Phipps! Too bally meagre, if you know what I mean. The thing's positively startling—fairly takes a chappie off his old feet, and all that! What-ho! What-oh! The floor proceeds to heave slightly! Another earthquake—what?"

"I think we are getting off, sir."

"Oh, ah!" said Archie. "Absolutely!"

The floor had suddenly begun to rock. I was flung violently to one side, and I knew that the great aeroplane was just lifting from the ground. Then the motion became smooth and serene.

"We're off the ground!" I shouted.

"Hurrah!"

"Three cheers for our rescuers!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The juniors fairly let themselves go. Their voices were somewhat strained and cracked, and they didn't realise how exhausted they really were. But it was only a kind of forced enthusiasm. For, to tell the truth, nearly all the boys were on the point of collapse.

The terrible heat of the island had been almost more than human flesh and blood could stand. And the juniors had had a trying time for long past—getting through the underground tunnel—on their feet for hours and hours—going without sleep and without food. It was little wonder that several fellows had already fallen on to the chairs and lounges, and were lying like logs.

Just that one last burst of enthusiasm and excitement and then the reaction set in. In two or three minutes they were nearly all quiet—either sound asleep or too fagged out to speak or move.

Curiously enough I wasn't affected so much as this. I don't know that I possess greater stamina, but I felt no inclination to sleep. I was dog-tired, and my head ached, and my throat was parched, and I could taste nothing but sulphur in my mouth. But I didn't think of sleep.

I was greatly thrilled by the whole occurrence—and amazed that we had been rescued from such a terrible death by an old friend like Mr. Raymond Gray. This, indeed, was the most amazing part of the whole business.

And I felt that I could not sleep a wink until I knew the exact truth about this great aircraft.

Archie, of course, was not in need of rest like the other fellows. He had not been on the island long and had suffered little in comparison to the crowd. Nevertheless, he dropped off to sleep among the first. Archie was always ready for "forty of the good old dreamless."

I found myself standing with Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore at the end of the saloon.

"What do you make of it, sir?" I asked wonderingly.

"I hardly know what to say, my lad," replied Nelson Lee. "But Providence did not intend us to be lost—that is certain. It was almost a miracle that this aircraft should come to our rescue when things seemed to

be utterly and absolutely hopeless. And it is a glorious surprise to find that our rescuer is none other than Mr. Raymond Gray."

"It's stunnin'!" declared Lord Dorrimore. "It fairly hits you between the eyes. Personally, I didn't expect to see another white man in the course of my earthly existence—which was liable to be terminated very abruptly. But now the whole position has changed, an' we're O.K.!"

"Why, this means that we've reached the end of our troubles!" I said. "No more danger—no more excitement—no more adventure!"

Dorrie grunted.

"H'm! That's rather a pity," he remarked. "But you're right, Nipper—after this we shall be bored stiff. Ordinary yachting will seem as tame as the deuce after the times we've been through. We shall be shoved on board the old Wanderer, and then full speed for England, home and beauty!"

"Yes, and we shall arrive in plenty of time for the new term at St. Frank's," said Nelson Lee with a smile. "That is really one of the most astonishing facts of the whole case. We shall get back to England just before the holidays are over, and all the boys will be able to start the new term as though nothing had happened. In a few short weeks they have had more adventures than most men meet with in a whole lifetime."

We paused and looked out of the windows. And conversation ceased. We were enthralled by the view. By now the great aircraft had left the ground, and she was soaring over the lagoon at a height of five or six hundred feet. She went round in a sweeping curve and then we obtained a full view of the volcano.

Great masses of flame and fire were shooting out.

The island was being destroyed before our eyes. And then we thought that our eyes were deceiving us. The hills which rose up towards the central ridge heaved and rocked, and they seemed to split in all directions. And at the same moment a mighty booming roar sounded—coming to us distinctly within the aeroplane.

The machine seemed to stagger in its flight. For a moment we could hardly keep our feet. This enormous giant of the air fluttered like a leaf in the breeze, and we knew that she must have been caught in a terrific air gust—which was, no doubt, caused by the commotion on the island.

"My hat!" I gasped. "I thought we were done for!"

"We should have been if we had remained on the island!" said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "By gad! That was a narrow escape!"

We were flying through a kind of smoky haze, and every now and again a great torch of flaming fire would shoot by the window, and once or twice there was a thud as something struck the body of the aeroplane.

Masses of molten matter were descending—after being flung sky-high by the furious



Nelson Lee staggered back, choking. And the fumes came thicker and thicker. And down in the fissure there was a dull roar—a significant rushing noise that could not be mistaken.

crater. The volcano was discharging at a terrific rate, and when we caught a glimpse of the lagoon we could see that it was steaming and smoking and bubbling. The palm groves and all the other trees were flaring up like a million torches. Lagoon Island was being destroyed at an incredible speed.

And then, almost before we knew it, we were in clear air, and the inferno had been left behind. Our new home was shooting along at an extraordinary speed, skimming over the water at a low altitude. We had left the island for good—and only just in the nick of time.

We were still looking out of the windows when Mr. Raymond Gray appeared from the passage. He came forward with extended hand and once again gripped our fists. He was looking concerned.

"You must let me congratulate you upon your extraordinary escape from death," he said. "No living thing could remain on the island now! It is a raging furnace from coast to coast."

"We have to thank you for our deliverance, Mr. Gray," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I have not yet recovered from my astonishment. You are the last man in the world I expected to see in our extremity."

"Under ordinary circumstances, we should have known nothing," said Mr. Gray. "We were flying at twenty-five thousand feet and we were attracted by the enormous amount of smoke. It was only natural, therefore, that we should take careful observation of the island through our telescopes. It was John who first distinguished human figures."

"John?" repeated Dorrie inquiringly.

"My nephew, Major Barrance—who is second in command."

"By Jove!" said Nelson Lee. "Better and better! Another old friend! So Major Barance is on board?"

"At the moment he is piloting our craft," smiled Mr. Gray. "We could not be in better hands, I can assure you. Having seen that there were human figures on the island we came down to get a closer view—and you can easily imagine our amazement when we discovered that the party was white. We had expected to find a scared collection of savage islanders. Of course, we landed, and now I should be very greatly interested to discover how you got into such a plight."

"It will be a somewhat thrilling story," said Nelson Lee.

"I can quite imagine so," replied Mr. Gray. "If you are astounded to see me, Mr. Lee, you can be fully sure that I am even more astounded to see you. For I scarcely believed it possible for one of England's foremost citizens to be marooned on a volcanic island."

"Yes, I suppose it does seem very remarkable," smiled Nelson Lee. "No doubt you have seen a yacht somewhere in the vicinity?"

"My nephew is shaping a course towards the vessel even now," replied the other. "We gathered, of course, that it was your ship—and then we recognised her as the good old Wanderer."

"By gad, yes!" said Dorrie. "You know the Wanderer, don't you? Remember how we went to the South Pole together?"

Mr. Raymond Gray's eyes sparkled.

"Do I remember!" he echoed. "It will be impossible to forget such an experience, Lord Dorrimore. And to think that we should meet in this way—old comrades—even when I am hurrying south on another trip! I cannot help thinking that this meeting was ordained. It had to be, and I can tell you that I shall be more than delighted if you honour me with your company."

"It seems to me that we have matters to discuss," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "But perhaps it would be as well to leave them for a short while, Mr. Gray. We are descending, and we must communicate with Captain Bentley."

Somehow, I was strangely thrilled. I don't know why, but I had an idea that this meeting with Mr. Gray was to lead to some wonderful adventures. I could not regard it as a mere incident. In any case, there was no time for further discussion just then.

For the aeroplane was slipping down with the grace of a bird. In spite of her enormous size she could be handled with supreme ease, and when she touched the water she did so with hardly a jar. For this craft was an amphibian—that is, she could alight with equal facility on land and water.

"Please come on deck, gentlemen," said Mr. Gray.

He led the way into the passage, turned to the right, and up some steps. When near the top he touched a button and a slide

went noiselessly back, allowing the full sunlight to flood down upon us. We passed up and then found ourselves upon the very top of the giant craft.

Here there was a deck which resembled that of a submarine. There was a rail all round, and we were quite a long way from the sea. For the machine was so huge that she rose in the water like a liner.

Near by the Wanderer could be seen—her rails lined with excited sailors and officers. Captain Bentley was on the bridge, and he was shouting.

For, of course, he, and everybody else on board the yacht had given us up for lost. And the skipper was tremendously anxious to send this aeroplane to the island to rescue us all. He didn't know that we were on board. The aeroplane had suddenly appeared out of the haze—unexpectedly and without warning. And Captain Bentley saw a possible chance of effecting a rescue.

But as soon as he saw Nelson Lee and Dorrie and I come up on deck he knew that we were safe. The others, no doubt, were below. And the skipper's relief was heart-felt in the extreme.

Mr. Somerfield, with the two boats, had returned to the yacht only a few minutes earlier—having come to the conclusion that no power on earth could save us from destruction. And to see us calmly on the deck of this strange air monster was certainly a big shock.

"It would not be advisable to transfer the boys now, Mr. Lee," said Mr. Raymond Gray. "They are asleep—exhausted—and we must allow them several hours of rest. In the meantime, I should like you to come below, and we will chat. I have much to tell you. Accordingly, I should suggest that you instruct your captain to stand by, and we will do the same. You can go on board the yacht later."

Both Nelson Lee and Dorrie were only too glad to act in this way. The gov'nor, therefore, shouted to Captain Bentley that we were all safe, and advised him to remain close at hand.

Glancing back we could see nothing of Lagoon Island from here—only a black pall of smoke in the distance—a huge column which rose to the sky and drifted with the wind. Here, where the air was clear, the sun shone with full tropical brilliance, and the day was perfect.

There was one alteration. Captain Bentley was instructed to steam at full speed, and to make for civilised regions. There was really no reason why the yacht should remain at a standstill.

For we could ascend into the upper air whenever we liked, and overtake the Wanderer in a comparatively short time. We were safe—and that was the main thing. And now we only had to rest and talk. And I had an idea that the coming discussion would be of the greatest interest.

Little did I imagine what it was to lead to.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLDEN ROVER'S QUEST!



MR. RAYMOND GRAY led the way down into the interior of the vessel from the deck. The Wanderer had already started off, and we had seen her steaming away, her sailors cheering, and everybody on board being in the highest spirits. Our adventures in the South Seas were over—and nobody could deny that we had had some extraordinary experiences.

It was a terrible pity that our beautiful island should be destroyed. But we did not care much now. For we had grown to look upon the place as a spot of horror. And now the whole adventure seemed more like a nightmare than anything else.

"We will not make a move just yet," said Mr. Gray. "I should like my nephew to be with us during our chat, and we may as well float here at peace. And I must show you all round my ship, gentlemen."

"I'm simply dyin' to examine her," said Dorrie eagerly.

"But first of all, we will see about the young gentlemen in the saloon," went on Mr. Gray. "They are asleep, I think, but I will send Snowball with refreshing drinks, and anything else the youngsters may require."

"Snowball?" I repeated wonderingly.

Our host smiled.

"As a matter of fact his real name is George Washington Lincoln, and he is a negro from Alabam," he exclaimed. "But we always call him Snowball on board. He is the cook and steward, and I can assure you that Snowball is the cheeriest soul in the whole world."

We now found ourselves in one of the most comfortable cabins I have ever entered. It was much smaller than the saloon, and was Mr. Gray's private room—an apartment with soft easy chairs, and every comfort imaginable. We sat down, and Mr. Gray touched a bell. Then he proffered his cigarette case.

"Just what I was dyin' for," said Dorrie. "Good man! I'm saved!"

They lit up, and then a tap sounded on the door, and a man entered. He was quite small for a negro, and he was attired in spotless white, with a flat cook's cap on his woolly head.

"Yass, sah!" he said cheerfully. "Yo' rang, sah?"

I couldn't help grinning as I looked at him. Snowball was one of those individuals who fairly ooze cheeriness out of their pores. He wore a smile that wouldn't come off, and his pearly white teeth showed in an even double line. His eyes twinkled, and he regarded us all with much approval.

"Yes Snowball, I did ring," said Mr. Gray. "Go into the saloon, and see if the young gentlemen are comfortable. If any of them are awake, inquire as to their re-

quirements, and serve food and refreshment."

"Guess dat's good as done, sah," said Snowball. "I'll sure look after dem young massas like I wus dere long-lost brudder. Golly! Ain't we sure having plenty 'cite-ment!"

"Quite a lot, Snowball," smiled Mr. Gray. "When you have finished in the saloon, serve hot coffee here, with sandwiches."

"Sure, sah!" said the cook. "Yo' won't hab time to say t'ree words befo' I'se right back!"

He grinned wider than ever, and retired.

"He doesn't seem to have many troubles," chuckled Nelson Lee.

"Snowball is always lighthearted," said Mr. Gray. "He is a splendid worker, and as faithful as a dog. By the way we number five altogether on board—Major Barrance, two engineers, the cook, and myself."

"And yet you have room for another two dozen!" exclaimed the guv'nor. "Yes, twenty-four exactly, counting Phipps and Umlosi. This vessel is the most marvellous craft I have ever seen, Mr. Gray."

Our host flushed with pleasure.

"The Golden Rover has far exceeded all my hopes," he said. "That is what I call her, gentlemen—the Golden Rover. She is capable of flying at normal speed with fifty passengers on board. She is fitted with cabins and sleeping accommodation for thirty—so you need have no fear that you are overcrowding us."

"She's a bally liner," declared Dorrie.

"No doubt you will wonder why I made my ship so large," went on Mr. Gray. "And why there are only five of us on board instead of thirty. I will tell you. Major Barrance and myself are on a trip to the Antarctic—an exploration trip to the scenes of that adventure which you will all remember so well."

"Rather!" I exclaimed heartily. "That warm river, and the underground world, and the swamp men and the prehistoric animals! That was a marvellous trip of discovery, if you like"

Mr. Gray nodded.

"You may or may not be aware of it," he said but after my return to England I gave several lectures to scientific societies. At first I was received with open disbelief. But, later, I convinced many influential people that these wonders really existed in the Antarctic. And I was urged to fit out another expedition with as little delay as possible."

"Quite so!" said Nelson Lee. "I attended several of your lectures Mr. Gray, and so did Dorrie."

"As a matter of fact you both gave lectures of you own," smiled Mr. Gray. "But, that, as you know, was well over a year ago—getting on for two years. It was not until this summer that I had my new aeroplane ready for the trip. I had been working in secret for a very long time—making all preparations, being fully convinced that a big

party of scientists and explorers would come out with us."

"And they disappointed you?" asked Lee.

Mr. Gray frowned.

"They not only disappointed me, but they openly discredited my statements regarding the strange world which we discovered in the Antarctic," he replied. "I had definitely arranged for fully thirty people to go on this trip. But at a meeting held in London many members of this society expressed doubts as to the genuineness of my statements. No doubt I could have convinced them—but I did not care to do so. I was furious, Mr. Lee. And I determined, then and there, to go on this trip without a single one of them. Thus there are only five of us on board—my nephew and myself and three employees. Yet this craft was built with accommodation for at least forty with comfort. I resolved to wash my hands of the whole pack of them. And I would use the extra space on board for the purpose of bringing back a thousand and one specimens. But that, after all, is not really necessary. So you see, the sudden arrival of your party does not put me out in the least."

"But my dear Mr. Gray, we have no intention of remaining with you," smiled Nelson Lee. "For a few hours, perhaps—and maybe for a day or two—but we must get back to England. The boys have got to return to school."

"Quite so," said Mr. Gray, "quite so. That may seem quite an important matter to you, Mr. Lee, but it seems very trifling to me. After all, you are fully capable of keeping them up-to-date with their lessons wherever they may be. It is not as though the boys were alone. And I was hoping that after this happy reunion you might decide to come with me."

"A thunderin' good idea," said Dorrie with enthusiasm. "Thanks, Mr. Gray. I'm game for any old trip that's goin'. I was just beginnin' to think that life was gettin' dull!"

Mr. Gray chuckled.

"Judging by appearances when I found you on the island life was particularly adventurous," he said. "By the way, you surely know, gentlemen, that the greater part of my amazement was caused by the fact that you are alive? I was convinced that you were all dead."

"I suppose the world thinks so, too?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Exactly," said Mr. Gray. "England has been ringing with the story for quite a time, and there was a sensation when the truth first came out—that is, the apparent truth. At first the newspapers were full of the fact that the *Wanderer* was missing. And then all sorts of sensational stories got about. I was gravely concerned, because you are old friends of mine. I might also add that I wanted you to come on this exploration trip with me from the outset. I was very disappointed to learn that you had left British shores in the *Wanderer*. Then came the news that the yacht was missing."

"I suppose it staggered the population?" asked Dorrie.

"It did!" agreed Mr. Gray. "The newspapers were full of the story—how you had set off with a large number of St. Frank's schoolboys. Anxious inquiries were made, but all to no purpose. After a fortnight all hope was given up—and now you are looked upon as lost for ever."

"That will soon be altered," said Nelson Lee. "As soon as we meet with another ship we shall send wireless messages broadcast—"

"Why wait?" smiled Mr. Gray. "We have wireless here."

"Splendid!" said the gov'nor. "The matter shall receive attention when we have finished our little chat, Mr. Gray. And now, I think, it would be advisable for us to tell you our story."

"I shall be delighted to hear," said Mr. Gray.

Nelson Lee proceeded to give a full account of our numerous adventures—how we had been driven on to the island during a cyclone, how we had been menaced by savages and Chinese pirates—and how, finally, the volcanic eruption had come to wipe us all out. But for the dramatic appearance of the aeroplane we should now be burnt to cinders.

"It seems that I could not have appeared at a more opportune time, gentlemen," said Mr. Gray, at length. "I need not tell you how happy I am to have been of such signal service. Splendid! And now that we are together again, I should dearly love to have you with me on this trip of exploration."

"But what about the boys?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"They can come too!" said Mr. Gray promptly.

"Hear, hear!" I said, with hearty approval.

"No, no! It is quite impossible!" said the gov'nor, shaking his head. "Why, good gracious! They would not return to St. Frank's until the autumn term was over—and thus they would lose—"

"Nothing!" interrupted Mr. Gray keenly. "They would lose nothing whatever, my dear sir. On the contrary, they would gain knowledge to an enormous extent. You are a schoolmaster, and there will be plenty of opportunities to keep the boys well brushed up. They need not get rusty at all. In addition, they will have this great experience—an experience which few people in the world will enjoy. Consider, Mr. Lee! I am perfectly prepared to take all your party—nothing would delight me more. Will you come?"

"Much as I should like to agree, I cannot see my way clear to accept your very kind proposal," said the gov'nor shaking his head. "The boys must return to England, Mr. Gray—"

"Then you will come yourself?" persisted our host. "You are free, surely? The boys can be sent back in charge of Captain Bentley, and you will come to the Antarctic, accompanied by Lord Dorrimore and Nipper."

We shall have our original party, then. Think of it, my friends! Would it not be ideal?"

"Absolutely!" said Dorrie. "Come on, professor—you've jolly well got to agree, or I'll never speak to you again!"

Nelson Lee chuckled.

"That, of course, is a different matter," he said. "I think it could be arranged—and I do not deny that the prospect is very alluring. I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Gray, for proposing such a scheme."

"It'll be glorious!" I breathed tensely.

I sat there in my chair, thinking deeply. My memory went back over many months—over nearly two years, in fact, and I recalled those startling adventures we had had together with Mr. Raymond Gray and Major John Barrance, V.C., D.S.O.

Mr. Gray was the inventor of a most wonderful aeroplane which he had called the Flying Fish. It was an apt name, for this craft could fly through the air, and could descend with equal ease beneath the ocean. It was a submarine aeroplane. And in this craft we had gone forth on a Great Venture.

Sailing towards the South Pole in the good old Wanderer we had reached the most southern point available for shipping, and the yacht had been our base. Then we had flown South in the Flying Fish—bent on discovering a wondrous hot river. I'm afraid it would be rather tiring to go into all the details—tiring for me as well as for you!

It was Major Barrance who had discovered this hot river. He had gone on a foolhardy trip to the South Pole, using an ordinary aeroplane. He had seen a flowing river in the midst of the frozen ice—an amazing thing. And he had descended on apparently solid ground only to find that it was hummocky. His machine had been wrecked and he was cut off from the world.

But he had managed to send up some little balloons—which he had carried in his aeroplane for emergencies. These he had sent off in the breeze—and out of ten starters only one, so to speak, found a place. This was picked up by an old tramp steamer, and the letter attached to it was delivered to Mr. Raymond Gray.

And so the inventor had set off with us to rescue his nephew, and to discover this wonderful river. All the thrilling adventures came back to me vividly as I sank back in a deep reverie.

We had discovered the river—we had rescued John Barrance. And then we had gone further, and established the fact that this warm river penetrated in a great tunnel right under the ice cliffs.

And there, beyond, lay a stupendous cavern—a cavern such as humanity had never before heard of. For it extended for many, many miles, its domed roof reaching up thousands of feet.

This cavern contained forests, rivers, vegetation of every kind. It contained animal life—insects—and, most extraordinary of all,

human beings. But these latter were of a semi-animal type. The atmosphere in this cavern was humid and warm, and the place was provided with illumination by some natural cause which we had been unable to fully discover.

And then, just as we were beginning to learn things, we had been compelled to flee. There had been enemies against us—none other than Professor Zingrave the infamous leader of the League of the Green Triangle. But after we had gone Mr. Gray had resolved to return. And he would go back with bigger supplies, and was convinced that he would meet with complete success. And now he was ready—and he was actually on his way to this Antarctic wonderland.

The meeting, really, was somewhat providential. For we had half promised to go back with Mr. Gray and his nephew. But we had never really hoped that we should be able to do so.

I was brought to myself by the sudden arrival of Snowball. He entered with a huge tray, containing piles of sandwiches, and delicious hot coffee. Snowball was smiling all over his black face.

"De young massas is all sleepin' like dey wus in heben, sah!" said the cook cheerfully. "I sure neber done see de like ob it. I guess dey'se all most a'mighty tired, sah!"

"I don't doubt it, Snowball," said Mr. Gray. "It is quite likely that these gentlemen will accompany us on our trip—so you must be prepared to work harder in future—there will be more mouths to feed."

Snowball grinned more widely than ever.

"Golly! Dat's sure good, boss!" he exclaimed. "I guess I'se been so doggone slack dat I'se got lazy! Yass, sah, sure! I'se done be real happy, I reckon! Hard work sure does de world ob good to 'most ebbery kind ob folk!"

He retired, and Mr. Gray served the coffee and sandwiches.

"When you have had this little snack, I shall insist upon your sleeping for at least three or four hours," he said firmly. "You are all very tired and exhausted, and you need sleep badly. Afterwards I will show you round the Golden Rover and then demonstrate her capabilities. But at present you are not quite fit for further energy."

He was quite right. Although we didn't like to admit it, we were nearly done.

Even Dorrie, who was usually as hard as nails, was looking utterly fagged. The gov'nor had not yet recovered his full health and strength—after his trying experiences on the island at the beginning of our adventures.

And so, fifteen minutes later Mr. Gray escorted us down another passage, and ushered us into a state-room. It was just like being on a private yacht. The room was perfect in every way—exquisite furniture, cosy, comfortable beds, electric light, and everything that could be desired.

And in less than five minutes we were all sound asleep. A vast change had come about in our fortunes—but although I had a few startling dreams they were mild and milky compared to the events which were soon destined to come our way!

CHAPTER VII.

OFF ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE!



DORRIE shook my shoulder about five minutes later.

"Come on, young 'un!" he said briskly. "We're goin' round."

"Going round?" I repeated, sitting up and blinking.

"Mr. Gray's goin' to take us over the bally ship!"

"But—but hang it all!" I protested. "We were going to have three hours' sleep, Dorrie! It's a bit thick to yank me out after five minutes!"

His lordship grinned.

"Lazy young rascal!" he said severely. "You've been sleepin' like a log for nearly five hours—an' so have we, if it comes to it. Out you come—or I'll empty the water jug over your head!"

I was very surprised. It really seemed that I had only just closed my eyes. And yet, according to Dorrie, I had been slumbering for five hours. After I'd had a wash, however, I was feeling quite bright and active.

Nelson Lee, Dorrie and I passed out of the state-room, and then went back to Mr. Gray's cabin. At least, this is what we thought, but we found ourselves in the saloon.

The apartment was empty—all the fellows having been carried off to proper beds. Most of them knew nothing about it, for they had been sound asleep all the time. Those who still slumbered included Phipps and Umiosi—and all the boys. Out of our whole party only the guv'nor and Dorrie and I were awake.

Our host came to us in the saloon.

"I don't think we'll awaken the others just yet," he said. "I should like to take you round by yourselves, gentlemen. I am justly proud of my craft, for she has achieved even greater triumphs than I ever dared imagine."

I could not help marvelling at the saloon. It seemed impossible that such a huge apartment could be contained in an aeroplane. It was more like the saloon of a private yacht. Mr. Gray pointed to the far end, where the walls became slightly narrower.

"This, of course, is the main body of the aeroplane," he said. "I am now pointing to the tail. Beyond the end of the saloon there are numerous store-rooms to say nothing of Snowball's complete quarters. We might as well have a look at them to start with."

We passed through the saloon and found a

glass topped door at the other end. Mr. Gray paused to inform us that all the glass in the aircraft was of a patent manufacture, and absolutely unbreakable. It was as strong as metal. Passing through the doorway we found ourselves in a narrow passage. On either side there were doors, and the whole atmosphere was filled with a most appetising odour of cooking.

We were very greatly interested. The apartments grew smaller towards the end of the passage—for at the extreme end there was the tail of the machine, where the body narrowed down.

We looked into a splendidly stocked pantry, where china and glass and crockery stood glittering on shelves—all fitted into special contrivances so that no amount of jerking would dislodge them. We invaded Snowball's kitchen, where he was busy at work. It was a wonderful place. Everything that modern ingenuity could devise had been included. There was a sink with hot and cold water on tap—the hot water being supplied from an electric geyser. And all the cooking appliances were electric—ovens—grillers—toasters, and everything of that nature. And the whole place was spotlessly white and clean and glittering with polished aluminium ware. For such a kitchen to exist on an aeroplane was astounding.

Two other apartments were Snowball's quarters—a cosy little sittingroom and a bedroom. There were numerous storerooms, too—all stocked to the limit with tinned goods of every description.

And at the very far end there was a tiny manhole which could be opened. We passed through, and found ourselves standing upon a little platform, in the open air. We were, in fact, standing on the tail of the aeroplane, with the sea just lapping idly near by. The whole ocean was devoid of any sail, for the Wanderer had long since departed on her journey. It was getting on towards evening, and the tropic day was blazingly hot—yet we had not realised it for everything was delightfully cool within the aeroplane.

"You see, I thought it as well to make an entrance to the body here!" explained Mr. Gray. "Even when the machine is a thousand feet in the air, it is quite easy to come out upon this platform—providing you are prepared to stand a severe draught. And adjustments can be made to the various controls if necessary."

"Wonderful!" said Nelson Lee. "But the most astounding fact of all is that you can get such a leviathan to rise into the air at all."

"And yet it is quite simple," said Mr. Raymond Gray. "This craft is immensely strong, as you can see for yourselves. To look at, one would imagine that it is enormously heavy. In comparison with engine-power, the weight is not disproportionate. And this metal is really a form of aluminium—much lighter, in fact, but it has aluminium as its basis. The gold colour is

merely caused by chemical process, and is quite untarnishable."

"It looks as solid as brass!" I declared.

"The weight of this metal is negligible compared to the weight of brass," smiled Mr. Gray. "It is also much tougher and stronger. I can assure you, gentlemen, that a machine of this size made of wood and canvas would be altogether more cumbersome and heavy—although it would look much lighter. I had to find a substance which would be strong enough to build a submarine capable of descending in deep water—and which, at the same time, would be light enough to allow the ship to rise in the air. I succeeded."

"In a most wonderful way," agreed Nelson Lee.

We returned through the manhole, closed it tightly, and then passed through Snowball's quarters to the saloon. On the other side of the saloon Mr. Gray paused in the passage.

"Here we get to the larger section of the body," he said. "It is so large, in fact, that we are enabled to have two floors. There are state-rooms and cabins here in plenty—all furnished and ready for use. There is even a splendidly equipped bath-room—which, no doubt, you will be eager to use before long."

"Thanks!" said Dorrie. "I didn't know we looked so grimy as all that!"

We all laughed, and were greatly interested as Mr. Gray took us over the state-rooms. But we were looking forward eagerly to the most attractive part of the inspection. We wanted to see the pilot's compartment—the engine-room—and the navigating quarters.

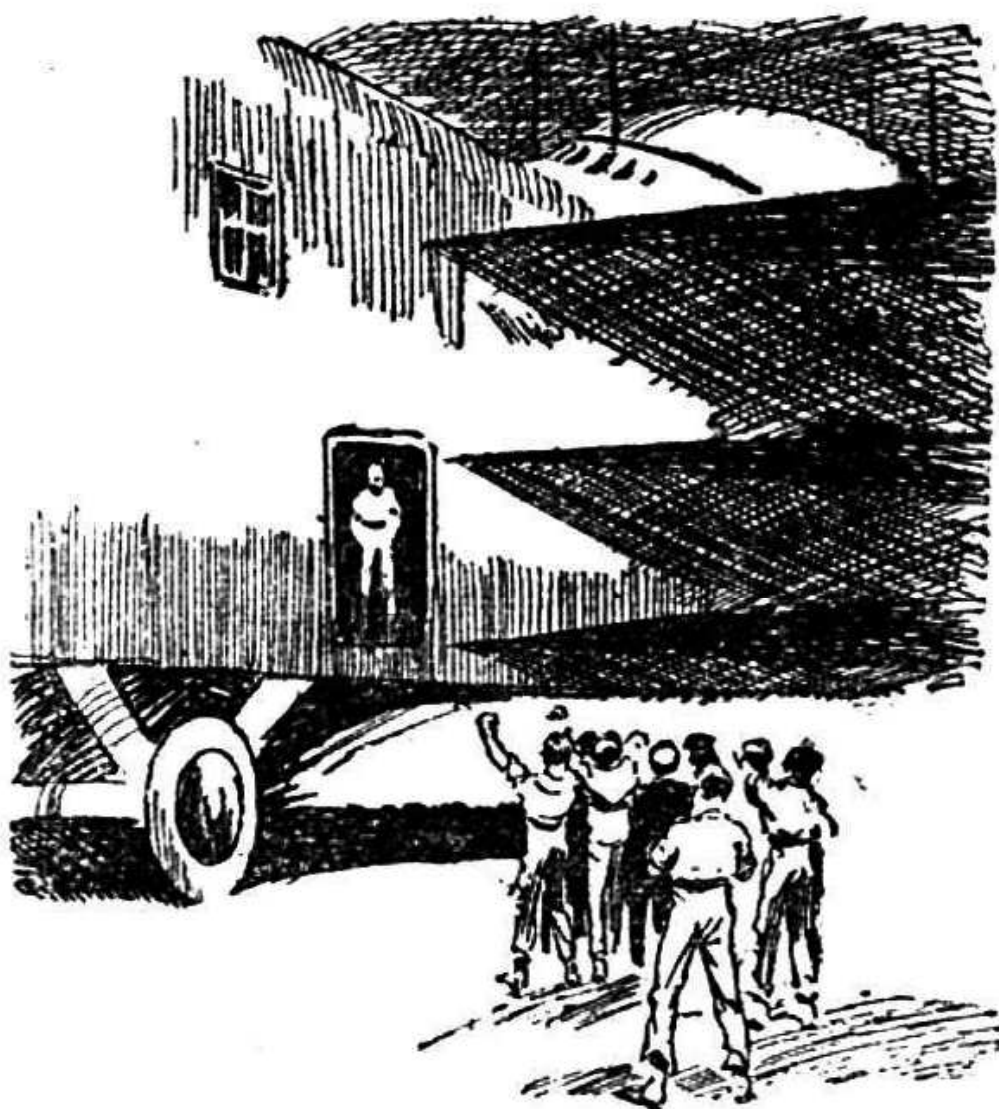
"You see, this machine is a triplane," exclaimed Mr. Gray. "There are six wings—three stretching out from either side of the body. They taper towards the wing-tips—but near the central section they are enormously thick—and, of course, hollow. The engines are housed near the wings themselves. Thus entirely eliminating the necessity for separate engine-houses. These rooms can be entered with ease—although, of course, one is somewhat cramped."

"And what about the engineer?" asked Dorrie. "Is the poor chap obliged to live in these compartments?"

"Not at all!" smiled Mr. Gray. "The control-room is situated in the nose of the aeroplane—the lower section. The upper section is the pilot's cabin. But I will show you exactly."

We went straight forward, and then came upon a heavy metal door. This was opened, and we found ourselves in a roomy apartment. A big window in the very front gave illumination to the whole place. It was a maze of dials and levers and intricate controls. There was a slight oily smell in the air. But no dirt or rubbish lay around. Neatness was evident everywhere.

"Allow me to introduce you to Mr. Jock McGregor and Hawkins, the mechanic, said our host.



As we crowded round the strange aeroplane we felt that it was some strange visitant from another world. It was so huge, so substantial and solid.

There were two occupants of the engine-room. One was a lean Scotchman, attired in a blue overall suit and a peaked cap. He was a dour-looking specimen, grizzled, and evidently as hard as nails. The other man was an undersized little fellow with a perky kind of countenance. I set him down as a Londoner, a real Cockney, and I wasn't mistaken. He was a mechanic, and he grinned cheerfully as he looked at us.

"Crikey. An' we ain't cleared up, Chief!" he said. "If we'd knowed the visitors was coming we'd 'ave made the blinkin' place tidy like. Still it don't look so bad. Welcome, gents!"

"Thanks awfully, old man," said Dorrie.

"Don't mensh, sir!" grinned Hawkins. "I 'opes as ow you'll come along wiv us. A chap's likely to get lonely dahn by the bloomin' Sahth Pole! I'm 'Orace 'Awkins, sir, at your service!"

"Mon, ye like a parrot!" snapped Mr. McGregor curtly. "Stop ye blather! Hoots, but I'll hae ye ken ye voice is no musical!"

"Orl right, Chief, keep yer 'air on!" grinned 'Orace.

The engineer said no more. He had not even addressed us. But this, as Mr. Gray afterwards explained, was simply his manner. Jock was a man of very few words, and when he did speak it was generally to chide his mechanic for chattering.

We were informed that from the engine-room the gigantic motors were completely controlled. They ran so perfectly that they rarely needed attention. But at any time they could be reached and adjusted. Each

engine was a five thousand horse power—nominally. But, actually, they developed a great deal more power than this.

We ascended a metal staircase to the navigation chamber. And here we found Major John Barrance. He had been anxious to meet us, but had not left his duty. It was advisable to be at the controls all the time, although the vessel was stationary.

"By glory, this is great!" he exclaimed heartily. "How goes it, Mr. Lee? How the deuce are you, Lord Dorrimore? And Nipper, too! Good man! Now you're on the spot you'll have to stop!"

Major Barrance was a fresh, clean-limbed Englishman—a typical R.A.F. officer of the best type. He was wearing flannel trousers and a tennis shirt.

We were delighted with the navigation chamber. The entire roof was a great dome of glass, and the apartment was filled with sunlight. Here there were more dials and instruments. To the average individual they were a sheer maze, but we knew a good deal about flying, and were able to take an intelligent interest in everything we saw.

"Well, shall we start her up and do a few stunts?" asked Major Barrance. "Oh, yes! She can do stunts, Mr. Lee! I haven't tried her at looping, but I bet she could equal any fighting scout in existence, in spite of her size."

The major seized the engine-room telegraph, and pulled it over. Less than a minute later the great aircraft throbbed with life. And, gazing through the front window, I could see that we were ploughing through the waves, or, to put it more aptly, we were skimming over them.

Again Major Barrance touched the telegraph. And now the engines went all out. Jock McGregor, below, responded to the signals on the instant.

It was so totally different to ordinary flying that I stood there, fascinated. The major was merely lounging about as though he were on the bridge of a ship. He carelessly laid his hand upon a glittering lever, and pulled it slightly. And then, a moment later, we floated up into the air like a feather, and the sea appeared to drop rapidly beneath us. Major Barrance had one hand on a big wheel, and he leisurely gave it a slight turn. The great airship banked over with supreme grace, and we were now climbing rapidly into the sky, executing wide circles.

"Upon my soul!" said the guv'nor. "You have certainly achieved an amazing triumph, Mr. Gray. I congratulate you heartily."

Before fifteen minutes had elapsed we were five thousand feet up, and shooting through the air at a speed of two hundred

(Continued on next page.)

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and fifty miles an hour. And so steadily did the craft fly that within the body of the ship we had scarcely any sense of motion. She merely quivered slightly in the manner of a steam yacht. And all the time there was a low droning hum in the air; but so subdued that it did not effect conversation.

Mr. Raymond Gray had been looking thoughtful and abstracted for some minutes, and he informed us that he wanted to speak to us in his own cabin—on a very important subject.

I wondered what was in the wind, but our host would say nothing until we had accompanied him into his private cabin. He closed the door, and offered Nelson Lee and Dorrie a whisky and soda.

"To prepare us for the coming shock?" asked Dorrie.

"In a way, yes," replied Mr. Gray steadily. "In a short time, gentlemen, I shall descend to the sea, and take a trip under water—to demonstrate to you what my craft can do. After that we shall ascend once more and sail south—at full speed."

"The Wanderer lies towards the west," remarked the gov'nor.

"Exactly," said our host calmly.

Nelson Lee set his glass down, and looked at Mr. Gray sharply.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well, I suppose I'd better be quite frank," smiled the inventor. "Will you please understand, gentlemen, that you are in my hands? In other words, I have kidnapped the whole crowd of you, including the boys!"

"What!" I yelled.

"Look here, Mr. Gray, this is absurd——"

"Wait, Mr. Lee!" interrupted Mr. Raymond Gray. "I see no earthly reason why these boys should not benefit by this experience. You will not give your consent for them to come. Very well—I shall take them without your consent! I trust you will not be angry."

Dorrie broke into a roar of laughter.

"By the Lord Harry!" he gurgled. "That's toppin'! You're done, Lee, old man—absolutely dished! Good for you, Mr. Gray—I didn't give you credit for such a really stunnin' wheeze."

Nelson Lee smiled and shook his head.

"This is merely one of your little jokes, Mr. Gray," he exclaimed. "You would not force——"

"I hate to disappoint you, Mr. Lee, but I am quite firm," interrupted our host. "I am not the kind of man who is swayed by conventions. Goodness gracious! What loss will these boys suffer by being a week or two late for school? Is St. Frank's absolutely necessary? You are here, you can keep them up to the mark in their lessons! And the idea of taking this representative throng of British boys on such a trip

thrills me. They will grow up better men for the experience!"

"But they must return to their homes!" protested Lee. "I am sure their parents would never agree——"

"Their parents will not have the chance of agreeing or refusing," smiled Mr. Gray. "I shall broadcast the news at once that all the boys are safe, that they are well, and that they are accompanying me on my Antarctic trip. I give you my word that they will not be subjected to any dangers. And if it will please you, I will allow the boys to make their own choice. Those who care to return home on the yacht will be allowed to go."

I grinned.

"There won't be any takers!" I chuckled. "I'll bet a penny to a pair of boots that the whole crowd votes solid for going on the trip. Why, they wouldn't miss an opportunity like this for a giddy fortune!"

"There is something else that I must inform you of," went on Mr. Gray. "I dare not waste any time. I must be off as rapidly as possible, for this warm river in the Antarctic is liable to become choked with a particularly tough kind of sea-weed, and we must get there while the channel is still clear."

But this excuse, of course, was somewhat hollow. After all, it would not take long to transfer the whole crowd of us on to the Wanderer. But Mr. Gray had settled the thing in his own mind, and Nelson Lee was helpless. If our host had decided to take us all, we could do nothing but go.

He was actuated by the best of motives. He considered that the boys would gain valuable experience, for adventure is like food to the young. This trip would do them far more good than a whole year at St. Frank's.

And those at home would not need to worry, for the news of our safety would be sent out broadcast by the Golden Rover's wireless. It simply remained to discover how many juniors wanted to come.

When they were awakened, and after they had partaken of a hearty meal, they felt almost themselves. And they were all agog with excitement and wonder. They gazed out of the windows at the panorama of sea.

Mr. Gray gained their attention, and asked them if they would like to come on the trip to the Antarctic wonderland. He promised the boys that they would be transferred to the Wanderer at once, if they so desired.

"Rather not, sir!" shouted Handforth. "We'll go to the giddy South Pole!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely, and all that sort of thing!"

"Hurrah!"

There were no dissentient voices. One and all eagerly voted for going on the Antarctic adventure. Mr. Gray smiled.

"I should have been disappointed if you had voted otherwise, boys," he said cheerfully. "Good! We will start off as soon as possible, and I can promise you that we shall have plenty of excitement and adventure."

"Hurrah!"

And so it was settled.

The fellows were almost dotty with excitement. They had never hoped for anything as glorious as this. Nelson Lee took the matter quite agreeably, and smiled. In any case, he could have done nothing. Mr.

Raymond Gray had us on board, and we were in his hands.

But I was quite sure that the gov'nor really approved of the scheme. He, himself, wanted to take the fellows on the trip. It was only in his schoolmaster character that he disagreed. Well, it was rather good that he was compelled to be himself, and nothing but himself.

And we started off for fresh fields of adventure.

What new experiences were we to encounter?

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,—Lagoon Island is now no more than a slag heap of lava and cinders, disfigured beyond recognition of its former splendour. Nothing else remains to remind the actors in that drama of struggle and triumph against adversity, save what is indelibly printed in their memories and faithfully recorded by Nipper in this book. Not one member of the party was sorry to leave behind him the charnel remains of what he was once wont to regard as an earthly paradise.

When the chances of ever seeing home and civilisation again seemed dimly remote, those youthful adventurers were all agog to get back. Now that a kindly Fate has brought this desire within the bounds of practical certainty, are they

satisfied? Not a bit of it! Boys are only human, after all. To return home before their scheduled time was bad enough. It was unthinkable when there was a chance of sailing in a magnificent airship to a strange, new country hidden among those mysterious seas associated with the glorious names of Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton. The glamour of this new expedition awakened new thoughts of conquest and adventure, and that they were not to be disappointed, you, my dear readers, will have an opportunity of judging for yourselves in next week's story: "The Golden Rover!"

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

N.B.—Two more fine photos of famous footballers will be given away next week!

Nipper's Magazine

No. 37,

EDITED BY NIPPER.

August 5, 1922.

The Golden Rover.

My Dear Readers,—After what we have all been through, it is a wonder we are not all nervous wrecks. But the sight of this marvellous aeroplane, specially fitted up for a trip to the Antarctic regions, has put new life into us, has made us forget our recent trials and imbued in us a fresh spirit of adventure.

In view of our extraordinary experiences in the great volcanic outburst on Lagoon Island, I am giving you this week an interesting article on "Volcanoes."

Your sincere pal,
NIPPER (The Editor).

Volcanoes.

Some Great Eruptions of the Past.

VESUVIUS.

THE most famous volcanic eruption historically was that of Vesuvius in 79 A.D., when the two great, ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried sixty or seventy feet deep in molten lava. The story of that terrible catastrophe was revealed for the first time in all its tragic reality when Pompeii was excavated in comparatively recent times. Two great eruptions of Vesuvius in our own era occurred in 1872 and 1906. The 1872 eruption sent up vapour to a height of 20,000 feet, and masses of soft lava were hurled over 4,000 feet up. In 1906 much more sand and dust was discharged than in the previous eruption.

A VOLCANO THAT WAS QUIET FOR 1,000 YEARS.

When the volcano of Bandaisan, in Japan, awoke in 1888, after slumbering for a thousand years, it devastated an area of 27 square miles with mud, earth and rocks, and destroyed several villages.

THE GREATEST RECORDED ERUPTION.

Probably the greatest eruption ever recorded was that of Krakatoa in 1883. Krakatoa is on an island lying in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java. The eruption began with violent explosions, which were heard a hundred miles away, white dust fell over the whole

island, and vapour rose 10,000 feet. This continued for three months, and then the great catastrophe took place. So violent were the explosions that they were heard three thousand miles away. Windows were broken and articles were scattered about even a hundred miles away; air vibrations travelled several times round the globe.

WHAT A SPECTATOR SAW.

An eye-witness of the eruption of Krakatoa describes the sky as presenting "a most terrible appearance," and that the cloud above the mountain resembled an immense pine tree, with the stem and branches formed of volcanic lightning. After sunset the cloud looked like a "blood-red curtain with edges of all shades of yellow," and lightning zigzagged through it. Another spectator tells of chains of fire that ascended into the sky and of "balls of white fire" which continually rolled down the mountain.

THE TIDAL WAVE PRODUCED BY KRAKATOA.

The enormous quantity of mountainous material that fell into the sea during the eruption of Krakatoa produced a tremendous tidal wave that rushed on to the land at 400 miles an hour, sweeping away two lighthouses, towns and villages, and resulting in over 36,000 people being drowned. A steamer was deposited high and dry inland by this mammoth wave.

THE TRAGEDY OF MONT PELEE.

Another notable disaster was the eruption of Mont Pelee, in 1902. Mont Pelee is situated on the island of Martinique, which was one of the most beautiful of the West Indian islands, and its chief town, St. Pierre, was one of the most charming of West Indian cities set amid a tropical paradise. Shortly after the deafening explosion of the mountain, a black cloud rolled down upon St. Pierre, and a few moments later the city and its 30,000 inhabitants were destroyed, with the exception of one man, and he was a Negro convict imprisoned in the city dungeon. Twelve days afterwards another violent eruption converted this beautiful island into a desert waste of ashen grey.

OTHER NOTABLE VOLCANOES.

Of the eruptions of Mauna Loa, in 'Hawaii, which has earned for itself the title of "The King of Volcanoes," the outbursts of Etna, Stromboli and Vulcano, in the Mediterranean, and of many other volcanoes, unfortunately there is not space to write in this short article.

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."

F. MORRIS.

R. DOWNS.

ONE of the men to whom West Bromwich Albion owe a great measure of their success in recent years is Fred Morris, their wonderful goal-scoring inside-left, who probably did more towards assisting the team to win the League Championship in the season of 1919-20 than any other player on the side. Of the century of goals that were registered by the club during that term, no less than 37 fell to his credit—only one below Freeman's record for a season up to that time.

Since that time, however, Morris has not been able to reproduce his goal-scoring form to the same extent, though he is still one of the most consistent net finders in the Albion ranks, and one of the most valuable players on the club's books. Originally he played in the centre-forward berth, but it is as an inside man that he has earned most of his goals and made his name.

Morris was born at Tipton, and was signed on by the Albion before the war. During the conflict he served with the Air Force, and whilst in London played on several occasions for Fulham as a centre-forward in London Combination games. He was demobilised upon the conclusion of hostilities, and rejoining his old team, he was capped for England against Scotland in 1920, and also gained an inter-league medal by representing the Football League as inside-left against the Scottish League. In 1921 he added another to this list of honours, playing in England's international match against Ireland.

Height, 5 ft. 8 ins. Weight, 11st. 9 lb.

A DIEHARD favourite wherever football is played is Dicky Downs, the Everton full-back, who has again signed for the club this season. Perhaps "Dicky," as he is affectionately known, is past his best these days, but it was not so many years ago that he was regarded by many people as the greatest full-back of the generation.

Downs was born at Middridge, and he discovered his football boots when a youth whilst playing for Shildon Athletic, whence, in 1908, he went to Barnsley, who subsequently brought out all the good there was in him.

In 1912 he won an English Cup winner's medal while figuring in the victorious Barnsley team that vanquished West Bromwich Albion in the replayed final at Bramall Lane, and from then until the season of 1919-20—the years of war omitted, of course—he played consistently good football for the club. It was hoped, after the conclusion of hostilities, that Downs would be able to finish his career with Barnsley but domestic affairs, which necessitated his removal from the town intruded, and he was allowed to go to Everton for £2,500.

Years ago, when Dicky was at the top of his form, he would probably have been capped several times over had not Bob Crompton been in existence. But Bob then was playing at his very best, and that was the reason why Dicky never got his cap earlier. Three seasons ago, however, he realised one of the dearest wishes of his life in being picked to play for his country against Ireland.

Height, 5 ft. 6½ ins. Weight, 12 st.

The Bank Car Puzzle

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

CHAPTER I.

BIRMINGHAM—AN AMAZING OUTRAGE!

THE gloom of the summer storm that was gathering was making Corporation Street, Birmingham, dark and dreary-looking, as a tall, clean-shaven man and a bright-faced lad turned into it from New Street.

"Phew! One can't hardly draw breath!" exclaimed Nipper, who was the tall man's companion. "It is going to rain like cats and dogs before the day's out, guv'nor. It's fortunate we have only to step out of our hotel on to the station when we hie ourselves back to London this evening."

"You are always grumbling, Nipper," laughed his friend and master, Nelson Lee, the famous London detective of Gray's Inn Road. "If it were actually raining you would be grouching because you were getting wet. Hurry up, or we shall have the bank closed for the day."

Along Corporation Street Nelson Lee and Nipper hurried.

The detective and the lad had been in the well-known Midland town for upwards of three weeks, investigating a case of blackmail. Earlier that afternoon, the police, acting under Lee's guidance, had made an arrest, and the case was now ended. But it had occupied almost double the time the detective had calculated for, and the supply of money he had brought with him from London was almost exhausted.

The detective and his assistant entered the London, Birmingham and Northern Bank, and Nelson Lee sent in his card to the manager of the branch—a Mr. Highams, who was an acquaintance, and who had recently been transferred here from the London head office, where Nelson Lee banked.

"My dear fellow, I had no idea you were in Birmingham," said the manager, after Nelson Lee and Nipper had been ushered into his office, and he shook hands with each in turn. "Some case here, eh?"

"Yes, Highams, but it is finished," Nelson

Lee answered. "We have been staying at the Queen's Hotel, and are on the point of returning to London. I wonder if you would oblige me by cashing a cheque? Both Nipper and I have allowed our funds to run low."

"Certainly," agreed the bank manager. "Make your cheque out to me personally, if you like, and I will pay it into my own account."

The transaction was speedily concluded. Nelson Lee penned a cheque for twenty pounds and the manager brought him Treasury notes to that amount. They chatted for a few moments, then the detective and his assistant made to take their departure.

As they passed through the long public office they saw a somewhat dapper little man standing at the counter. Two others were bringing through the swing-doors canvas bags, which looked to be heavy, and which Nelson Lee thought probably contained silver.

The dapper man seemed to be checking the bags as they were passed over the counter to a cashier, who looked a little grumpy, as it was time for the bank to close.

As Nelson Lee and Nipper gained the street they saw, standing outside in the kerb, a closed motor car. On it appeared the legend: "The Birmingham Omnibus and Charabanc Company," and they realised that the takings of the concern for probably the past few days were being banked.

"I'll bet that motor is chock full of silver and Treasury notes, guv'nor," Nipper remarked, as he and Nelson Lee strode away in the direction of their hotel in New Street. "Wolverhampton races have been on for the last two days, and the company's charabancs made a rich harvest, I expect."

"Yes," Nelson Lee replied, but it was rather abstractedly, for he was thinking of an important case which awaited him in London.

How little the detective guessed, then, what was to happen within the next couple of minutes.

Only the first of the silver had been carried into the bank. The man who waited within was the charabanc company's chief cashier, and the two carrying in the bags, his assistants. Near the car was the driver, who was in livery. He had lit a cigarette and, just as Nelson Lee and Nipper turned into New Street and disappeared, a man of the artisan class asked the chauffeur for a light.

The latter had been listening to a street organ, which had a moment before began to strike up a popular air. The organ stood upon the corner of a turning known as Castle Street, about thirty or forty yards distant, and the driver, who had sharp eyes, had noticed that the man in charge of it had a clubbed foot.

As it happened, this part of Corporation Street was unusually deserted. The driver moved round towards the back of the car and proffered his cigarette to the artisan.

The latter placed the end of his cigarette to the glowing tip and began to pull at it. Then, there happened a surprising thing.

The two cashier's assistants had, at the moment, disappeared into the bank, carrying between them a heavy bag of silver. A quietly-dressed man suddenly appeared as if from nowhere and darted to the car of money.

A lithe spring carried him to the driving-seat and, coolly pressing the self-starter, he sent the car shooting away from the kerb. As the chauffeur turned with a startled gasp, it was to see the vehicle speeding up Corporation Street, and he was so amazed that, for a few seconds, he could only stare after it, open-mouthed.

By the time he had recovered himself the car had swung round into the side street, where the club-footed man, who looked like an Italian, ground at the organ. And the artisan had made himself scarce.

"Help! Help!" the driver yelled frantically. Then, as the cashier and his two subordinates came running excitedly down the steps of the bank—"The—the car! A fellow's pinched it!"

The cashier and his assistants stared at him aghast.

The bank cashier had come to the swing-doors, and now he was joined by the manager, Mr. Highams, and both ran down the steps.

"What has happened?" cried the bank manager.

"The car—our car! It has been stolen!" said the charabanc company's cashier, gulping. He seized the driver and shook him. "Pull yourself together, you fool!" he blazed angrily. "Which way did they go?"

"Round there—round the corner, where the organ is playing," the chauffeur answered, pointing. And, in a body, all six men rushed in that direction.

They pulled up a little hopelessly as they reached the side street. Some fifty yards up it took a sharp curve and, apart from the organ grinder, who still listlessly plied the handle of his instrument, the only thing or

persons in view were a large pantechicon, bearing the name of a well-known firm of Birmingham removal contractors, and a trio of men in green-baize aprons, who were in charge of it.

A young man in a light summer suit, coming from the main thoroughfare, turned the corner and strode past the little group of concerned and excited pursuers. Just as he drew abreast of the removal van, two large dogs of the mongrel type, came tearing round the corner.

The more weighty of the pair was pursuing his late opponent, and growling and snarling formidably. The young man in the light clothes skipped nervously to one side as he heard the dogs at his heels. He collided with the van at a spot where the telephone number of the firm appeared and, as the dogs shot past, to finish their combat elsewhere, and as he regained his balance he uttered an angry imprecation. For, there was some black paint on his sleeve, left there by the painted telephone number, which must have been recently sign-written, as it could not have been quite dry.

He began to grumble at the removal men, who seemed just to have finished a job, as they had closed the van and were stacking on to the tail-board some articles of furniture which had been standing upon the pavement.

"What the deuce does your firm mean by sending out a van in this condition?" the young man in the summer suit demanded.

"You'd better arsk 'em, mate," grunted one of the removal men. "It ain't no concern of ours what they do. But a drop of turps will get that off easily enough."

"Turps be hanged! I'll have compensation, see if I don't!" the aggrieved individual snapped. Then, as he glanced at the van and read the name—"Jones, Howard and Company," he looked relieved.

For the firm was old-established, and one of the richest in the Midlands, and would hardly quibble over a few pounds, so that he stood a good chance of gaining a new suit out of the accident.

This had all happened in far less time than it takes to write, and now the cashier of the charabanc company almost hurled the young man aside, as, with his companions at his heels, he thrust his way forward.

"Did you notice a closed motor car drive past you?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, I saw it, guv'ner," answered one of the men, looking curious as he noted the cashier's excitement.

"It went right on up the street?" the cashier asked; for, although there were no branch thoroughfares in view, this was a business part of the town and there were several yards and garages into which the car might have gone.

"Yes, guv'ner, it went right on an' round the bend," the removal man replied. "I noticed it particular like. I 'appened to be in the road an' it almost knocked me over. It came round the corner like mad."

Without waiting for further parley the charabanc cashier swung round and went racing on along the street. The driver of the stolen car, the two clerks, Mr. Highams, and the cashier from the bank, ran after him. But there was no sign of the car as they rounded the curve and came in view of the end of the street, where a policeman was standing.

They hastened up to him and asked him which way the car had turned, for here branch roads ran in either direction. But the constable shook his head.

"There's been no car come this way, gentlemen—at least not for the last quarter of an hour," he said with conviction. "I've been here for that time and should have noticed it if there had."

"Then it must have been run into some yard or garage," Mr. Highams exclaimed. "A serious robbery has occurred," he said to the constable, and hurriedly explained the circumstances. "Something must be done at once to endeavour to get on the track of the thieves."

"By heavens, yes!" agreed the cashier of the charabanc company. "We had only taken some of the silver into the bank, and there was nearly two thousand pounds in money and Treasury notes in the car when the villain, whoever he was, drove off with it."

With all possible haste the constable reported the matter to the station.

Soon other police officers, in charge of an inspector and a sergeant, were on the spot. Enquiries were made at the various garages and yards into which the car might have been run.

But a complete blank was drawn. Though they made investigations at every possible place in the street that might be hiding the car the police failed to bring it to light. When they finished their search some twenty minutes later, the face of the inspector, whose name was Robinson, wore a worried and puzzled expression.

For it was like black magic. The car had apparently vanished into thin air.

In no case had the police met with hindrance. Everywhere they had been helped and freely allowed to look in yard or garage as the case might be, and that it was not hidden in Castle Street was certain. Yet it was equally certain that, after dashing into this turning, it had not emerged at the other end.

Mr. Highams had remained at the bank and, after receiving, in his private room, the report of Inspector Robinson, he stretched out his hand for the receiver of his desk telephone.

"There's only one man who can solve this mystery, if it is to be cleared up at all," he said.

"Who's that, sir?" Inspector Robinson asked.

"Nelson Lee," was the bank manager's reply. "He was at the Queen's Hotel in New Street. If he is still there I mean to ask him to step round."

CHAPTER II.

NELSON LEE AT WORK—ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.

NELSON LEE had been about to quit the Queen's Hotel, which adjoins the station at New Street, when Mr. Highams' telephonic communication was received by him. Putting off his departure he hurried round to the bank with Nipper.

He stood now in the manager's sanctum, interrogating the driver of the bank car, the charabanc company's cashier and his assistants. A partner of the charabanc company, who had been communicated with, Mr. Highams, and Inspector Robinson stood in the background, with Nipper, listening.

"The crooks, for it's plain more than one were concerned, may have been planning this business for weeks, as you say it is customary for the car to drive up to the bank on Wednesday and Saturday mornings for the takings to be paid in," the detective was saying. "But they struck to-day because they calculated that quite a haul would have been made by the company out of their trips to Wolverhampton races, and that there would be far more in the car than usual. The artisan who asked for a light was, without much doubt, one of them. His aim was to divert your attention, my man, whilst his confederate darted to the car and sprang into it."

The driver nodded gloomily. He felt that he had been careless, and that for him the affair would end in the loss of his situation.

"Tell me," Nelson Lee requested, "just what happened, however, in your own way."

"An Italian chap with an organ came and stood on the corner of Castle Street," the chauffeur answered. "I noticed him, sir, because he played a song I heard at a music-hall a few days ago, which had stuck in my memory. I was looking towards him, and it was then the workman asked me for a light for his cigarette."

"Ah! So that happened almost immediately the Italian began to turn the organ," Nelson Lee rapped, a gleam of excitement leaping into his keen eyes. "Did you chance to notice the fellow particularly. I mean so that you could describe him?"

"Well, sir, he looked much as other Italians, an' I don't think there was anything very striking about him," returned the driver. "Yet, stay though! He had a clubbed boot. I remember that."

"That's enough, and it's fortunate, for it means that he could hardly move as fast

as most people," Nelson Lee commented. "His organ was probably hired. Do you chance to know, inspector, if there is any place in Birmingham that makes a business of hiring out street organs, such as there are in London?"

"Yes, there is, Mr. Lee. It's in rather a slum quarter down beyond the Bull Ring. It's run by a man named Luigi Divianni, and it's just along Vigo Street. It's only a private house, but it can hardly be missed, as there is always an organ or two standing outside."

"You hear, Nipper?" Nelson Lee said quickly. "Cut off there just as fast as you can go. There's a chance you may be in time to see the fellow with the clubbed foot returning his organ. If you do, cling to him and get a message to me at the Queen's as to where he goes."

Nipper looked a trifle puzzled. But, he was accustomed to act without asking questions when Nelson Lee gave orders in his present tone. With a "Right-ho, guv'nor!" he prepared to quit the bank, and Mr. Highams let him out by a side door.

Nelson Lee glanced at the driver.

"There is not much more to tell, sir," the latter said, with a helpless shrug of his shoulders. "As the workman began to take a light from my cigarette, I heard the car begin to move. As I turned round it was dashing away up Corporation Street, and it turned into the street where the Italian was playing the organ. When Mr. Wheeler here, our cashier, myself and the others rushed in to Castle Street after it, we saw nothing."

"Nothing?" Nelson Lee repeated, with an elevation of his brows.

"Well, sir, I mean the car had vanished like. There were some men finishing a moving job round the corner. They were just packing some furniture on to the tail-board of the pantechmicon they had with them and seemed on the point of moving off. We asked them if they had seen the car, after they had a palaver with a young chap who ran into the van and got some paint on his clothes."

"Paint! Was the van freshly painted, then?"

"The lettering on it was, seemingly, sir," nodded the driver. "It was one of Jones, Howard and Co's vans, and I suppose it had just been done up."

"Jones, Howard? A well-known firm, perhaps?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee," put in Inspector Robinson. "They do half the removal work in

Birmingham and the district. Their vans are always about. They must own dozens of them."

"What did the removal men say? Had they seen the motor?"

"Yes, sir," the charabanc company's driver replied. "One of them said, it had almost run him down, as it came flying round the corner, and he looked after it and saw it disappear round the curve which lies half-way up the street."

"Yet, though it was not hidden in Castle Street, the policeman who had been standing there since before the robbery took place, did not see it come out at the other end," Nelson Lee commented. He smiled grimly. "I should like to use your telephone, Mr. Highams, with your permission."

The bank manager nodded in assent and Nelson Lee seated himself at the roller-desk and drew the instrument towards him. He looked up the number in the telephone directory, and, when he was connected and began to speak, his listeners realised that it was to the removal contractors, Jones, Howard and Co, he was communicating.

"You did a job in Castle Street, Corporation Street, to-day, I believe," he asked. Then, after he had listened for a few moments to what was being said at the opposite end of the live wire, he quietly murmured a "Thank you" and rang off, and his smile was a little more pronounced.

"How do you propose to act, Mr. Lee?" asked Mr. Highams, as the detective rose to his feet.

"I propose to wait for Nipper's report," returned Nelson Lee. "I hope he was not too late to pick up the trail of the club-footed Italian, for he, I am almost sure, is our one connecting-link with the whereabouts of the motor-car and the stolen money. We ought to hear from Nipper at almost any moment."

But, for once in a way, Nelson Lee was wrong.

Inspector Robinson, who accompanied Nelson Lee back to his hotel, waited with the detective in his sitting-room for nearly two hours; but no word came from the young detective. And, when the police official had taken his departure and nearly another hour had elapsed, Nelson Lee began to grow slightly uneasy.

"What can have happened to the lad?" he muttered, as he arose and began to pace the room; and, as night fell and hour succeeded hour, and there was neither message nor sign from Nipper, Nelson Lee's uneasiness developed into something like alarm.

His assistant seemed to have disappeared as completely as the bank car. It was hardly reasonable to think that, even supposing he was hot on the Italian's heels, he had found no chance in all these hours to send some word or to telephone.

There came a hurried knock on the door,

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

and Inspector Robinson entered sharply, a hint of excitement displayed in his bearded face.

He held out to Nelson Lee a pocket wallet.

"Is this yours Mr. Lee?" he asked.

"There are several of your cards in it and three pounds in notes."

"No, it is Nipper's; he always carries a few of my visiting-cards," the detective answered, with a sharp indrawing of his breath. "Where did it come from?"

"It has just been brought to the police-station," Robinson replied. "It was found in Renter's Mews, just off the Bull Ring, by a grocer's boy as he was going home from his work. He took the mews as a quick cut and saw the wallet lying in the light of the solitary lamp which lights the place."

"This means that the gang have got Nipper!" Nelson Lee said, through his teeth. "Depend upon it, Robinson, he was set upon in the mews and purposely dropped his wallet as a slender chance that it would find its way into my hands and enable me to trace him."

He snatched up his hat and huddled on a mackintosh. For the storm that had been threatening through the afternoon and evening had now broken and rain was descending in positive sheets. "You had best come with me, Robinson, and bring a strong party of men," Nelson Lee rapped, as both moved towards the door. "We cannot be sure how many men we may have to tackle, and we must not risk their escaping!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ROUND-UP—THE END.

NELSON LEE halted in the light of the one lamp illuminating Renter's Mews, disregarding the rain that was pelt-ing down upon him.

His eyes were fixed upon a pair of tall wooden doors let into the high wall of what appeared to be a spacious yard.

"What is this place?" he whispered to Inspector Robinson, who was with him, as he noted a weather-beaten "To Let" board on one of the doors.

"Years ago, it used to be a depot for horse-omnibuses," Robinson answered. "It has been to let since the army authorities abandoned it after the war."

"I think we have reached our goal," Nelson Lee said grimly. "Tell some of your men to post themselves round in the street at the front of the buildings and bring the others here. In the meantime, I'll be attending to the padlock on these gates," he added, producing from his pocket a small tapering steel instrument, the end of which could be adjusted to any desired angle by means of a thumb screw.

The inspector nodded and moved off

through the rain. When he returned with a couple of constables and four other burly men in mufti, Nelson Lee had the gates opened, and silently they stole into the yard beyond.

Nelson Lee approached the doors of one of the larger of the stables. There were other similar doors, but on examination they all proved to be unfastened and failed to interest the detective.

Again Nelson Lee's lock-picking instrument was brought into play. He inserted its end in the keyhole of a padlock which held the doors secured and gently levered it. The lock clicked and shot back. The detective removed the padlock and dragged the doors open, and, as the inspector and his men flashed the rays of several pocket-torches into the commodious but long untenanted stable, cries of amazement broke from them.

Just inside lay Nipper, who was bound hand and foot and gagged. But after the first glance it was not at the lad that the police looked, but at a large pantechicon, and that which stood inside it.

Through its wide doors was visible a small, closed motor-car. Inspector Robinson and his men stared at it in wide-eyed wonder, and, after removing the gag, cutting through Nipper's bonds and helping the lad to his feet, Nelson Lee laughed softly.

"The bank car; that was how it was done," he said quietly. "I deduced that even before I rang up Jones, Howard and Co., and learned from them that they had done no job in Castle Street to-day. The organ-grinder, the men with the pantechicon, were all in the swim. The Italian commenced to grind his organ as a signal that Castle Street was for the moment deserted of all save his confederates. The man was waiting near the motor, as it stood outside the bank, sprang into it and drove it round the corner and up the lowered tail-board and into the removal van. His accomplices slammed the doors upon him and the stolen car, then began to pile on to the tail-board the few articles of furniture they had standing on the pavement as a 'blind.'"

"They were a little too clever in painting up the pantechicon with the well-known name of Birmingham's chief removal contractors. When I heard about the sign-writing on the van being hardly dry, I began to suspect the truth. For, was it likely that a firm such as Jones, Howard and Co. who have plenty of vans at their disposal, would send one out in that condition? Now, Nipper, what happened to you?"

"I could kick myself, gov'nor," Nipper said ruefully. "I was caught napping this time with a vengeance. I was just in time to see the Italian with the clubbed foot leaving Divianni's place, after returning the organ, and I shadowed him here. I thought he had no suspicions that I was following him, but I was wrong. He must

have seen me. When I made to pass through the mews to have a look at this place, which I had spotted him enter, he and several more men rushed out upon me. All I could do was to drop my wallet as I struggled in the midst of 'em, in the hopes they wouldn't notice it, that someone else would find it and that, if it reached you, you'd understand."

"It was a slender chance, but it materialised, luckily for you, my lad," Nelson Lee said. "Come! Let us see if our men are still in the house belonging to these stables."

Walking on tiptoe, Nelson Lee and his companions approached a tumble-down building standing against one of the farther walls of the yard. It looked as though at one time it might have been the residence of some employee, probably a horse-keeper and caretaker.

A gleam of triumph crept into Nelson Lee's eyes, as through the rotting shutters of one of the windows he espied a chink of light. It seemed that they were not too late.

The detective stole forward and applied his eye to an aperture between the shutters. He drew back, with a grim little smile playing about his lips and signalled for Robinson to look. As the inspector complied, he drew a sharp breath of excitement at what he saw.

The Treasury notes and silver which had been taken from the motor-car had been turned out upon the top of a large packing-case, and the half-dozen men who were in the room were busy putting the money into innocent-looking hand-bags. The crooks were plainly preparing to slip away with their spoils.

Nelson Lee got his hands beneath the shutters, as the inspector stepped back.

"Be ready to break in the door yonder,"

he whispered. Then, with a quick, sharp wrench, he snapped the rotting fastenings of the shutters and dragged them open. There was a crash, as Nelson Lee smashed one of the windows with the butt of his revolver, and as the criminals wheeled about, they found that self-same weapon thrust through the window and steadily covering them.

"If a man of you moves, I'll drop him!" Nelson Lee said curtly. His eyes travelled from the Italian with the clubbed foot to a tall, rather well-dressed man, who was staring at him with his face contorted with bitter hatred. "Hallo Flash Peters!" said Nelson Lee pleasantly. "So it was your work, was it? I am afraid you will have to go back to Dartmoor, my friend. No!"—sharply. "Don't touch that pocket, unless you want a bullet through your arm."

The police had battered down the door, and now, headed by Inspector Robinson, they dashed into the room.

Covered by Nelson Lee's revolver, the crooks, who included a clever bank thief and ex-convict in the man Nelson Lee had called flash Peters, could offer little resistance, and they were speedily hand-cuffed and made secure.

"It was you I had to thank for being sent to penal servitude before and now you're sending me there again," Flash Peters hissed, as a little later he was led out to the cabs the police had fetched, en route for the police station. "But I'll get you when I come out, Nelson Lee—I swear it!"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders, as he coolly tapped a cigarette upon his neat, gold case.

"I am afraid it will be a very long while before we meet again, my dear Peters," he said meaningly. "And, anyway, threatened men usually live long, you know."

THE END.

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(Now read on.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

Tom Makes a New Enemy.

MR. CHOPPS did not look as if he really expected any response to his offer; but, for all that, he cast more than one furtive glance at Tom during the progress of the meal.

No secret was made of the loss, and it was soon known all over the school. Uncle Josiah was seen in the hall with a handkerchief, surmounted by a velvet skull-cap, about his head.

Mr. Chopps was not quite so amiable as usual during afternoon school. In fact, he was very much down on some of the boys. Several were ordered to stop in and remedy their lax studies.

Among them was Sam Smith.

Tom escaped all penalties; for he was very quick, and generally a few glances sufficed for him to get a lesson by heart.

Mr. Chopps did his best to get him into trouble, but failed.

There was no mistake about it now—Tom had gained an enemy in Chopps.

But he did not care.

He was bent on knowing more about the mystery which surrounded Uncle Josiah, with his sham deafness and wig.

Why did the man linger in that house?

What was there in the school to detain him?

As Tom had confided so far in Mr. Ralston, he thought he had better go and tell him about the wig.

Accordingly, after school, he slipped off, and went down to Ralston's lodgings.

Ralston was much interested in the story, and he entirely commended Tom for the course he had taken.

"Whether there is anything in it or not," he said, "keep the wig, now you have gone so far. If you can get a chance of seeing Uncle Josiah with a bald head, and tell me what he looks like then. Also, don't forget to examine the entrance to the solitary chamber, and find out whether it is screwed up or not."

As soon as he returned to the school, Tom made straight for the lumber-room. The door was closed, but not locked, and, entering, he came upon Perks, who, to hide his confusion, began to make a great show of shifting some of the empty boxes.

"Perks," said Tom quietly, "you seem to spend a lot of your time here."

"Meaning no offence, Master Tarter," answered Perks, "but we seems to come here together—one after the other like. Not as I'm insinuat' as you follows me."

He dropped his eyes before Tom's sharp glance, and turned away for a moment, looking more confused than ever.

Tom utilised that moment to have a look at the secret panel.

What he saw was sufficient.

On the top side of the panel a nail or screw-head was just visible—fixed there, without a doubt, to keep the spring from acting!

Without another word, Tom turned and left the lumber-room, leaving Perks to himself once more.

In a few days' time another wig arrived by

post for Uncle Josiah. But it wasn't a success; for, not having been made to measure, it fitted very badly.

Now, an ill-fitting wig is a source of much discomfort and humiliation to its wearer. This particular wig made Uncle Josiah look positively hideous. The whole aspect of the man seem changed.

Previously there had been nothing offensive in his looks. He had appeared to be a harmless, inoffensive old gentleman. But in his new wig he looked neither young nor old, while his facial expression was ill-tempered and shift.

"Who would think the loss of a wig could make such a difference!" commented Mrs. Wrasper.

"He certainly does seem changed—for the worse," answered her husband. "As a matter of fact, my dear, I don't think I quite like the man, and I almost wish we had not accepted his presents."

The truth was, Mr. Wrasper was beginning to think that Uncle Josiah's stay at the house was being unduly prolonged.

"He surely doesn't intend to stay much longer," said Mrs. Wrasper.

"I trust not, my love," returned her spouse. "I think I will sound Chopps on the matter."

Accordingly, Mr. Wrasper, at the first opportunity, ventured to ask Mr. Chopps if his uncle thought of remaining there much longer.

It was an unmistakable hint, and the tutor

took it in his accustomed light and air manner.

"He will be going in a few days," he replied. "I have given him two or three nudges on the subject but these obstinate old men are hard to move when they are made so very comfortable."

The change in Uncle Josiah had an effect on all beholders.

Even Perks, who had been very deferential to him, threw off some of his subservience, and the boys could not look at Uncle Josiah without smiling.

Then he would frown, and that would turn their smiles to broad grins.

These matters had gone on for several days when Tom, going upstairs at noon to get something from his box, found Mr. Chopps standing at the door of his room.

"Come in here a moment, Tartar," he said.

His manner was not so mild as usual, but rather peremptory than otherwise.

Tom did not exactly like it, but he entered the room as requested.

Uncle Josiah was standing on the hearth-rug with his hands behind his back.

He took no notice of Tom, however.

Mr. Chopps closed the door with a jerk, and, turning to Tom, said:

"It is needless for me to beat about the bush with you. Where is my uncle's wig?"

"I decline to answer that question," replied Tom, coolly.

(Continued on next page.)

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"But you shall answer it!"

"I shall not!" said Tom.

For a moment or two they stood looking at each other, and the brow of the tutor grew dark. Tom remained unruffled.

He felt he had the upper hand of these two men, and really had no cause for fear.

"Come, Tartar," said Chopps, with an effort, "give the wig up."

"No—I will not," replied Tom.

"What has made you my enemy?" asked Chopps. "Have I ever done anything to harm you?"

"I don't know," replied Tom, "but whether you have or not, I don't think you ought to remain here."

"What!"

"Mr. Chopps, I don't know exactly what game you are playing, but your being tutor here is a sham. You are here for some other purpose."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Chopps, with a quick flash of the eye; "and what may that purpose be?"

"I don't know exactly," said Tom, "but I think I shall find out one day."

"Confound you!" said Mr. Chopps, springing suddenly upon him, "we will see about that."

He had Tom by the throat, and pinned him against the door. Uncle Josiah came forward with an alarmed face.

"Hold on, Chopps!" he said, "that won't do."

Mr. Chopps recovered himself almost as quickly as he had lost his head. He let go of Tom and drew back—pale, but very quiet.

"Tartar," he said, "I forgot myself for the moment. I ought not to have been violent, but you are very exasperating. I will apologise if you wish it."

"I don't wish it!" replied Tom. Then, pointing at Uncle Josiah, he added:

"That man is not much older than you are, and he is no more deaf than I am!"

Mr. Chopps' anger instantly flamed up again.

"Be careful of what you are saying!" he exclaimed. "Do not go too far with me, or you may regret it!"

"What have I to fear?" retorted Tom, with spirit. "Why have you come here to play the part of assistant-master, and why is this man"—again pointing to Uncle Josiah—"disguised, and pretending to be deaf?"

Achilles Chopps made no reply. It was Uncle Josiah who broke the silence by asking suddenly:

"Can't we square him, Choppy?"

The tone, the manner of the man were so different from what they usually were, that Tom looked at him in astonishment.

"Oh, now you've done it!" said Chopps, and with a gesture of despair he dropped into a seat.

"Not at all," said Uncle Josiah. "Young Tartar is not a bad sort, if you only treat him fairly. When he finds there is nothing wrong in what we're doing, he will be our friend."

"Hold your tongue!" said Chopps.

"I won't, Choppy," was the reply. "Here I've been playing this deaf game until I'm nearly off my head. Talk of being at the stake, what's that to what I've endured? I say, Tartar, you listen to me."

"Keep quiet, will you?" cried Chopps.

"No, I won't," said Uncle Josiah; "the quiet game hasn't paid, and now I'm going to try the talking one. I say, Tartar."

Tom stood quite still, without uttering a word, wondering what new thing in the way of surprise was in store for him.

"You can keep a secret, I suppose?" said Uncle Josiah.

"If it ought to be kept," replied Tom.

"Well, our secret is one you may keep," said Uncle Josiah.

He had now drawn up nearer to Tom, and was talking to him in a confidential, not to say chummy, way.

"The truth is," he said, "I'm after a bit of land here that's to be got cheap, if the people who want to sell it do not find out its value. I think there is copper ore to be found in it, and to make sure I have to experiment in a quiet sort of way. You understand?"

"I understand what you say," replied Tom.

"That's all I want," said Uncle Josiah.

"Now you can see the need for me to be very careful. I am here as the would-be purchaser, and so I came down here in disguise. You see?"

"Oh, yes, I see!" said Tom drily.

"Well, that makes things all right," said Uncle Josiah. "Now, I hope to complete the purchase in three or four days, and if I do I shall be very pleased to make you a present of a ten-pound note; but I shall not do it if you go and blow upon this wig business. Because, if the owner of the land finds out who I really am, it will spoil the deal. Now, just go away and think it over. Ten pounds is a useful sum for a boy to have, and that amount will be yours if you keep quiet for three or four days."

"I'll think it over," said Tom, and, without another word, left the room.

As soon as the two men were alone together, Mr. Chopps shook his fist threateningly in the face of his companion.

"You fool!" he hissed.

"What's the matter?" demanded the other.

"You ass! You dolt!" thundered Chopps. "You'd much better have told him the real truth!"

"Not a bit of it! I've blinded the kid all right, Choppy."

Blinded him! Bah! You've done nothing of the sort! Young Tartar's cute, and could see that you were lying. A baby could have seen it! The game's as good as finished now! Oh, you fool!"

"Enough of that, Choppy! You're boss, I know, and we all give way to you—but draw it mild with calling me names! I won't stand it—see!"

Chopps picked up his hat, and rammed it angrily upon his head.

"You've proved yourself a fool!" he said. "Buy a bit of land! Bah! What land? Is there any land for sale about here? Doesn't it all belong to Sir Claude Freshly, and is he likely to sell a single acre of it? Oh, you idiot!"

And Achilles Chopps flung himself out of the room, and went for a stroll, in the hope of soothing his discomposed nerves.

CHAPTER XIX.

Noddy Berrill Brings Strange News.

"TOM," said Sam, opening the school-room door, "Noddy Berrill is outside. He wants to see you."

Tom closed his books, which he had been giving a little extra attention to, and joined Sam. The two went out to the road.

It was the evening of the day of the events narrated in the previous chapter. The sky was covered with flying clouds, driven by a north-east wind.

It was cold and dark, and there was every prospect of a very rough night.

"How are you, Noddy?" greeted Tom.

"Oh, well, as usual; nothing ever ails me!" replied Noddy. "I hope I haven't bothered you by calling you out?"

"Not at all," said Tom. "Anything up?"

"I think so," said Noddy; "but I thought I would come and ask your advice before talking about it. There's strangers hanging round the quarries."

"What sort of strangers?" asked Tom.

"Very much like that poor fellow who was found dead there a few weeks ago," said Noddy. "Foreign seamen, I should say."

"Well, Noddy, I suppose your foreman will keep his eye on them?"

"When he knows it; but he doesn't yet. I found it out this evening. They are hiding in one of those little caves. I fancied I heard voices as I was picking up a few odd tools after work was over, so I crept up and listened, and I heard some talking in a foreign lingo."

"I don't know what to make of that," said Tom, thoughtfully. "What can they be doing there?"

"I thought I would see," said Noddy; "so I got up as close as I dare, and presently one of them struck a match to light his pipe. It gave me just light enough to see that the men had their luggage with them."

"Their what?" exclaimed Sam and Tom together.

"Luggage—boxes and bags," said Noddy, "and plenty of them. I saw only four men, and I should think there were traps enough for a dozen."

"Sam," said Tom, "we had better go and see Mr. Ralston. He will be able to tell us what to do."

"You think it is a thing that ought to be looked into?" asked Noddy.

"Rather," replied Tom. "I believe you have made a great discovery."

"I don't see much in it," said Noddy; "but I thought I would tell you of it before speaking to the foreman."

"I wonder if they will miss us for half an hour?" said Tom, looking back at the school.

"Suppose they do—the punishment isn't very severe," said Sam.

"It isn't that," returned Tom. "But I don't want Chopps to have an inkling of where we have gone."

"You and Noddy go," said Sam. "They're not so likely to miss one as two. I'll stay and keep an eye on Chopps and his uncle. I shall at least be able to let you know if Chopps has discovered your absence."

Tom and Noddy set off at once for Mr. Ralston's lodgings, but received a bit of a blow on finding he was not at home.

His landlady did not know where he had gone or when to expect his return.

"He went out about two o'clock without saying anything," she said, "and he hasn't been back, or sent word, nor anything. He might come in at any minute, or he might be hours."

Tom turned away disappointed, and, accompanied by Noddy, walked up the village street.

As they drew near the inn, the door opened to let some customers out, and for a moment a bright light was thrown across the road.

To Tom's great astonishment that ray of light revealed a group of seven or eight men, walking slowly along, and among them he recognised Ralston.

Tom hurried forward to greet him. Ralston, judging by his voice—it was difficult to see his face—was slightly disconcerted by Tom's unexpected appearance.

"The other men, so far as Tom could see, were strangers."

"I've just been down to your place, Mr. Ralston," explained Tom, "and was told you were out. I've got something rather important to tell you."

"Won't some other time do?" asked Ralston. "The fact is, I've a lot of my old business friends come down unexpectedly to see me, and we are now going to spend the evening together."

"It won't take long to tell," said Tom earnestly. "You've heard me speak of Noddy Berrill—haven't you?"

Ralston nodded.

"Well," said Tom, "this is Noddy, and to-night he has seen some foreign seamen, with bags and boxes, skulking in the quarries."

"By jove—has he though? That certainly is important! You'd both better come along to my rooms."

He turned to his "business friends," and said something to them in an undertone; after which they all proceeded to Ralston's lodgings.

Tom, as soon as they got into the sitting-

(Continued on page iii of cover)

(Continued from page 40.)

room, and the lamp had been turned up, took a good look at Ralston's friends, and thought he had never seen finer or more determined-looking men.

They did not take off their overcoats, nor did Ralston suggest it, and they all sat quiet while Noddy Berrill repeated his story.

But they listened as if they were keenly concerned in it, and frequently exchanged glances of interest.

"Now, you boys," said Ralston, when Noddy had finished, "I know you well enough to feel sure that you won't chatter about this if I ask you not to. I may say, Berrill, that this discovery of yours is of some importance, and may bring you a greater reward than you dream of now. Tom, you will not be forgotten either when the time comes."

Tom said something about not wanting any reward, but Ralston told him not to be quixotic in these matters. If there were rewards about he had his right to a share in them.

Tom did not see exactly where rewards would come in, but he felt he had better not inquire too closely into matters at present.

He and Noddy had a glass of wine and a piece of cake and then, after a final word of warning to be silent, went away.

CHAPTER XX.

The Mysterious Music.

"COULD you make out what he was drivin' at?" asked Noddy as they walked along.

"Yes, but not so clearly as I should like," replied Tom. "And it is no use surmising, is it?"

"No, not a bit," returned Noddy.

They shook hands and parted.

Noddy went off to ruminate by his cottage fire, and Tom returned to the school.

Sam Smith reported that, so far as he could discover, Tom had not been missed, but Perks had been very restless, and in and out the lumber-room a great deal.

"Which reminds me," said Tom, "that I have to see why Solitary was screwed or nailed up. I wonder if we could get a bit of candle from anywhere?"

"I might requisition Wooden Jerry's bedroom candle," said Sam.

Jerry kept his candle in his room, and, as he was not there, Sam easily appropriated it; then he and Tom, after reconnoitring, went to the lumber-room.

All things seemed unchanged there until Tom stooped to examine the secret entrance to Solitary; then he found that the screw or nail had disappeared.

He touched the spring and the panel slid up in the old way.

"Give me the light, Sam," he said.

Holding the candle before him, Tom crept into Solitary.

At first it appeared to be quite empty, but on inspection Tom found a few pieces of paper which had been wrapped round small boxes, and a few inches of lace, such as he had seen women wearing on their cuffs and round their necks.

It was not much, but Tom put the odds and ends together, and brought them out.

"There have been packages of some sort concealed there," he said. "Sam, we are too late, as we have been before, but I think we shall soon get to the bottom of the mystery. I shouldn't be surprised if we heard the music playing to-night. If so, I mean to try and find out what it is."

Tom was right. As the boys were going to bed that night, they heard the sweet strains of music proceeding from the usher's room. Tom, as he came abreast of the door, cautiously tried the handle, and found that the door was unlocked. He pushed it open an inch or two and peered in.

"You fellows go on to the dormitory," he whispered. "The music is playing, but Chopps isn't there, and the room is quite in darkness. Leave the candle with me. I'll soon join you in the dormitory."

In less than five minutes Tom rejoined his anxiously-waiting chums, and by his manner it appeared that he had solved the mystery of Chopps' innocent music.

(To be continued.)

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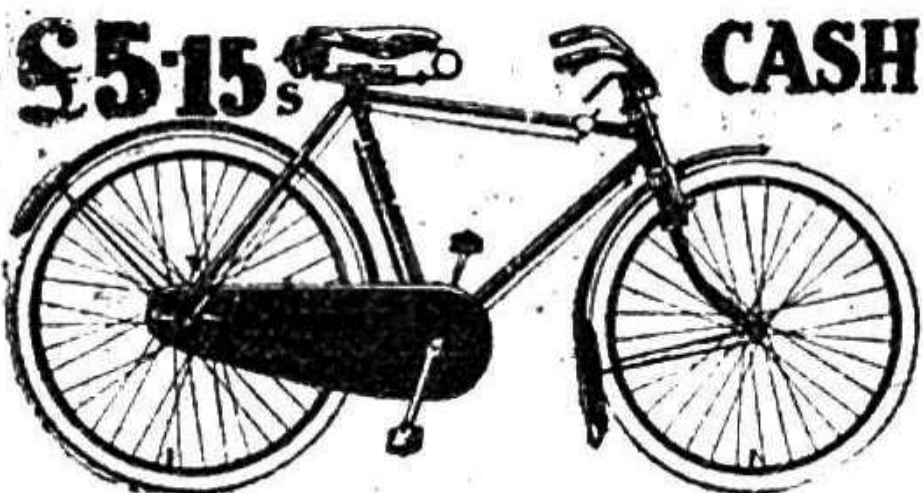
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