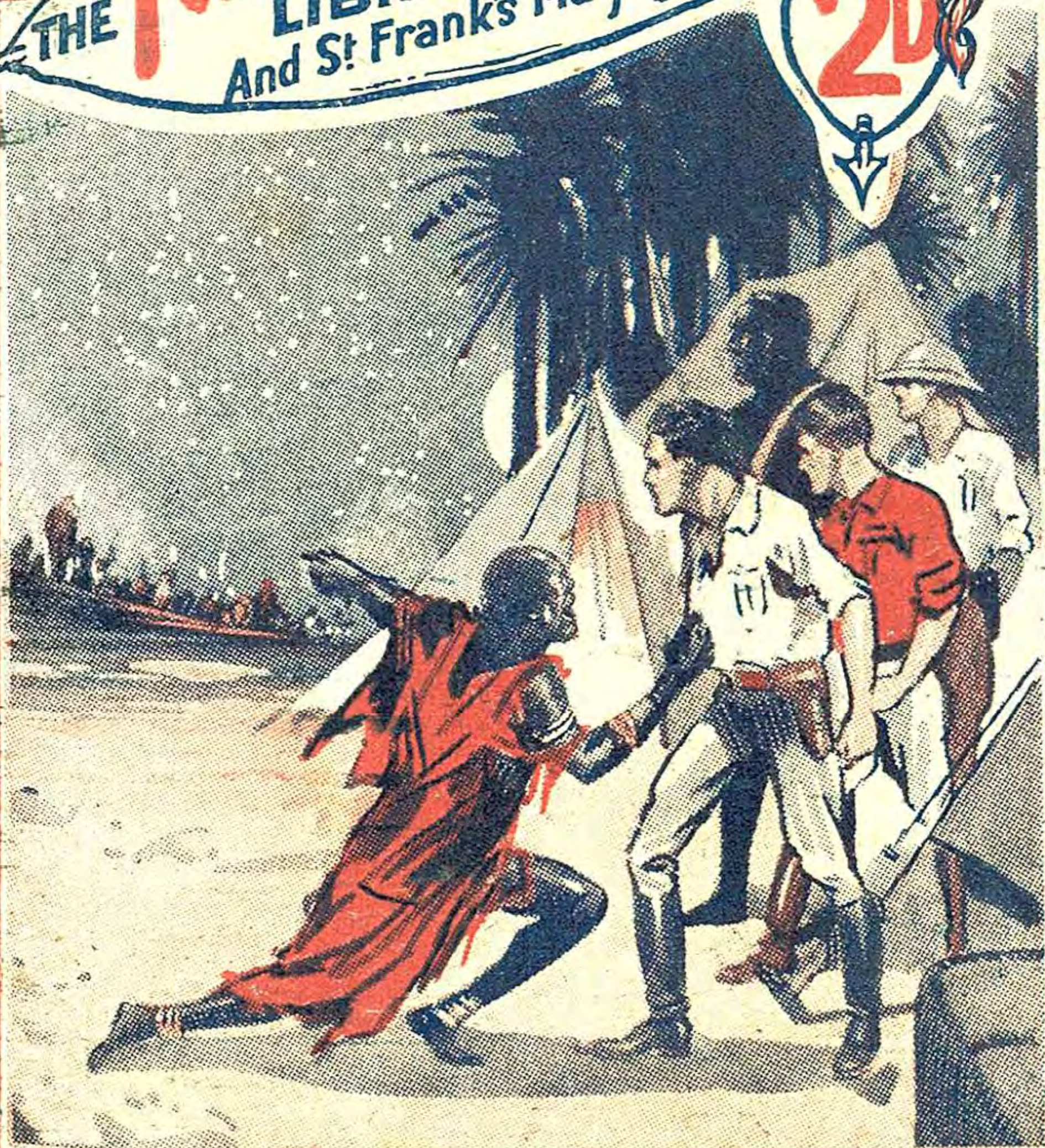


GRAND SUMMER ADVENTURE SERIES BEGINS TO-DAY!

NELSON LEE

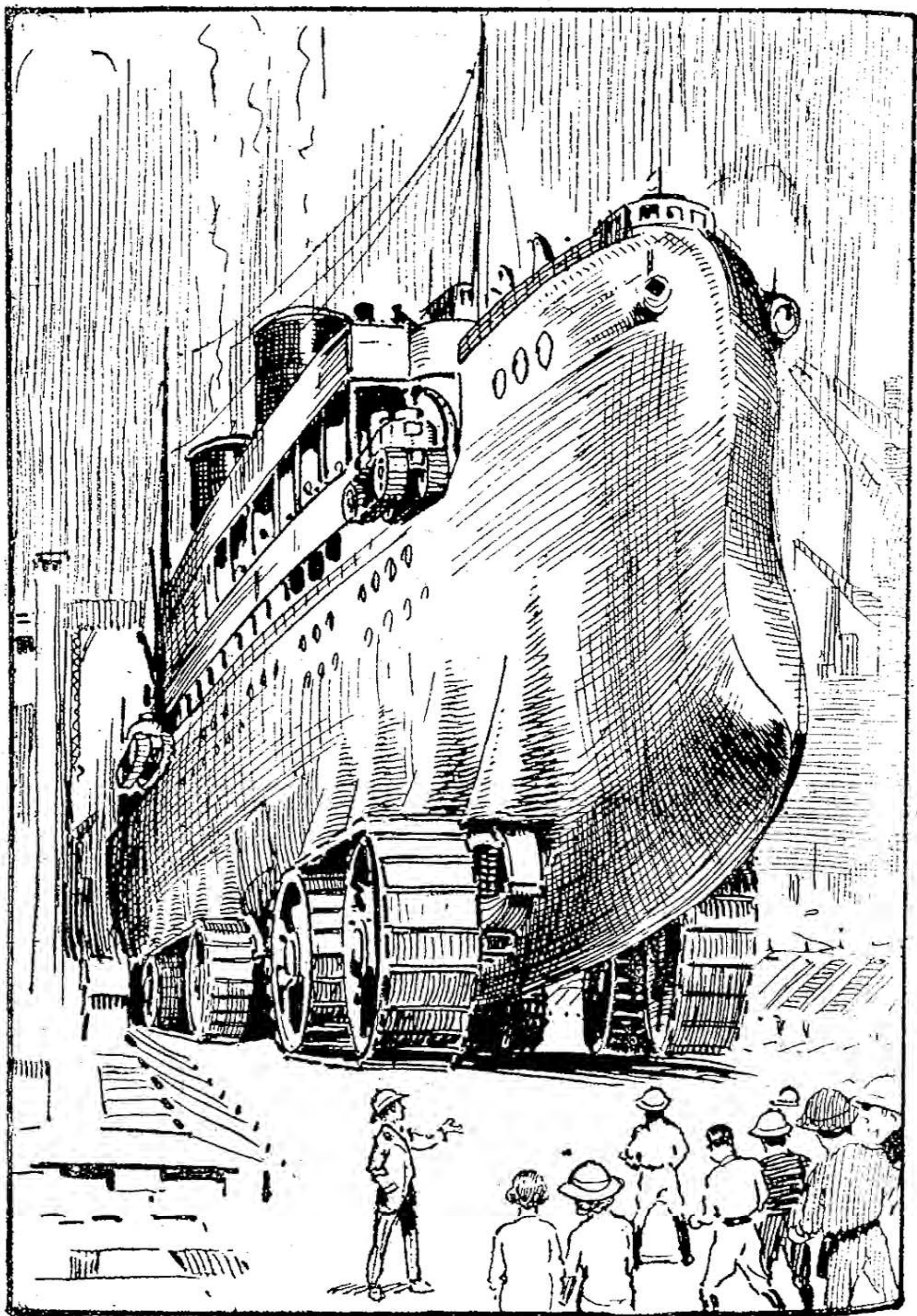
THE LIBRARY
And St. Frank's Magazine.

20



The Camp in The Desert!

They all stood like statues waiting for those sinister forms to swoop down upon them. (A thrilling situation from this week's great story.)



"NELSON LEE" MYSTERY PICTURE.

Can you supply the wording to go underneath this picture? See particulars on Page iii. of cover of a fascinating new competition.

THE CAMP IN THE DESERT!



FIRST STORY OF THE GRAND SUMMER ADVENTURE SERIES.

The great summer adventure series, always a welcome change to readers of this paper during the holiday months, begins with this week's story. A number of the St. Frank's Remove have set out, under the leadership of Nelson Lee, to rescue Sir Crawford Grey and his brave band of followers, who have fallen into the hands of a savage tribe while exploring a remote part of the Sahara Desert. The present story deals with the wonders of the desert ship, and the initial stages of the journey. But in the second or third story, our adventurers make one of the most unexpected and amazing discoveries of modern times. I cannot say any more at present, for it is a secret only known to the author and myself. But I am confident when you have read these stories you will agree with me in saying that they are far ahead of anything yet attempted in The Nelson Lee Library.

THE EDITOR.

Related Throughout by Nipper and Set Down by E. Searles Brooks

THE PROLOGUE.

I.

JACK GREY started suddenly to his feet. "What was that?" he muttered huskily.

"I say, Jack, chuck it!" said Reginald Pitt, laying his pen down and eyeing his chum in an anxious way. "Steady, old man! You're getting nervy, or something!"

"Nothing of the sort—I heard something," muttered Jack.

"One of the camels roaring, or a Hausa boy having a row with a pal," suggested Reggie lightly. "You mustn't exaggerate—"

"Look here, Reggie, it's no good trying to fool yourself—and it's no good trying to fool me!" interrupted Jack Grey. "I didn't hear a camel, or one of the natives

—and you know it. It was something different—a kind of mysterious hoot. We've heard it before, and even Dorrie himself is uneasy. There's something mysterious about this confounded place."

Reggie Pitt nodded slowly.

"Well, yes—in a way," he admitted. "All the same, it's just as well to keep a tight hold on ourselves. It'll be supper-time in a few minutes, so do dry up, old son. I want to finish this letter. Those natives are going back to Kano to-night, and, if possible, I'd like to catch the mail. This stuff is for the 'Magazine,' you know."

Jack Grey said nothing, and sat down again. But he couldn't help thinking that it was a strange place, and a strange time, to be writing an unimportant article for a school magazine.

The two St. Frank's juniors were in a

comfortable tent—small, but quite large enough for their needs. Their sleeping-bags were near by, and Pitt was sitting at a neat folding-table. Light was provided by an excellent lantern, which gleamed cheerfully.

After a few minutes, Jack Grey rose to his feet and went to the exit. He stood looking out over the barren, sandy waste that was dimly visible in the starlight. For it was night-time, and a certain measure of coolness was in the air after the blazing, scorching heat of the day.

A short distance away were other tents, one larger than the rest. Fires were burning, too, and there was a welcome smell of cooking in the air. Jack could distinguish the forms of several Hausas—Nigerian natives—grouped together, talking. There were camels, too, and the whole scene was peaceful and pleasing enough.

Lord Dorrimore appeared out of one of the tents, to be followed by Sir Crawford Grey. They were both talking earnestly. And this, alone, convinced Jack that he was not the only one to be uneasy.

His father was usually most cheerful, and, as for Dorrie—well, the sporting peer almost invariably wore a smile, and he could hardly speak without making some joke or other. But just at the moment both men were grave and serious.

The camp was hundreds of miles from the nearest civilisation—being, in fact, in the Sahara Desert. For days the expedition had been passing over barren, dreary waste land—country that was as dead as the ashes of a fire—a barren landscape that inspired nothing but dread. And during the hours of the day the glaring, pitiless sun beat down.

It was only at night that any relief was obtained. But, fortunately, there was no hurry or urgency about this quest. Sir Crawford Grey was merely on the lookout for specimens—for quaint, unusual types of birds and small mammals.

And, so far, he had met with eminent success, being thoroughly delighted with the various specimens that had been obtained.

Lord Dorrimore was not so keen. He preferred big game any day, and looked upon this adventure with a kind of good-humoured tolerance. He had come because this was a country he hadn't explored before, and anything new was of interest to him. Moreover, there was always the chance that a lion might drop in. And Dorrie was rather keen on lions.

Umlosi, the giant Kutana chieftain, was also a member of the party. And at first Umlosi had been frankly disgusted with the whole project. In his opinion, this search for birds and such-like was not a task for men.

But Umlosi had been changing his opinion. And of late he had declared that some great and dire disaster would befall

the whole party. Umlosi seemed to regard this possibility with relish.

Jack Grey and Reggie Pitt had thoroughly enjoyed themselves, in spite of the minor hardships. It had been a kind of picnic at Lagos, and, later, in Kano. But since setting out into the wilderness of the desert, the hardships of camp life had become apparent.

But the boys enjoyed it all, and, in any case, they knew that they would be returning to the more civilised regions within a week or so. The expedition was not yet in the Unknown Sahara—that vast tract of land, thousands of square miles in extent, which is still unexplored by the white man—and which, indeed, is probably barren of all human life.

Both the boys felt that they were still in touch with the outer world, for several of the Hausa boys were going back into Kano for fresh supplies, and were starting an hour or two before dawn, in order to get well on their way before the sun became too intense.

The main party would then keep in the district until the natives returned. And after that the unknown Sahara would be penetrated. This, in brief, was the programme. But it seemed that some unusual excitement was in store.

The natives were uneasy and rather scared. Strange sounds had been heard for two or three nights now. And not only this, but dim, shadowy, mysterious forms had been observed in the neighbourhood of the camp.

But investigation by daylight had thrown no light upon this mystery, and there was a general feeling of insecurity and uneasiness.

Jack Grey walked forward a few paces, his attention wandering from his father and Dorrie. And he suddenly halted, gazing out beyond a sand dune in the distance.

And he caught his breath in sharply... with a quick hiss.

II.



FIGURES—shadowy, intangible figures!

Jack saw them just for a flash, and he couldn't be quite sure whether it was a freak of imagination, or whether he had actually seen the mysterious forms. In his own mind he was convinced that his fancy had not played him such a trick.

"We're being watched!" he muttered. "I don't care what they say—night after night we're being watched! And yet this is a barren country—without a Hausa village or a Fulani camp for scores of miles. There's something horribly uncanny about it."

And Jack, after all, was right. In this

region it was possible but improbable—to meet with Fulani or Tuareg natives. These gentry, however, were perfectly harmless and friendly, and had no quarrels with the white man, and were certainly not fighters.

As Dorrie himself had declared, there was no earthly reason why the recognised inhabitants of this region should watch the camp in such a way. There was no evidence that natives existed here at all, for the whole desert was barren and empty, without the slightest sign of villages or camps.

Jack felt his heart beating more rapidly, and that sensation of unknown peril was growing stronger. He walked towards his father and Lord Dorrimore, and noted that they stopped talking abruptly as he came up.

"Did you see anything just now, dad?" asked Jack bluntly.

"See anything?" repeated Sir Crawford. "See what?"

"I don't know—some dim figures," replied the boy. "I caught sight of them just beyond that rising sand dune——"

"Nonsense!" broke in Lord Dorrimore briskly. "Imagination, young man! It seems to me we're all getting a bit nervy. Even Umlosi keeps talkin' about his infernal dreams."

"Well, I'm not sure that Umlosi isn't justified," said Jack. "I'm absolutely certain that we're being watched all the time——"

"Not so loud—not so loud!" interrupted Dorrie. "Some of these Hausas can understand English perfectly, and they're nervous enough as it is. We shall have the whole crowd wanting to go back if we're not careful. An' how the deuce should we get on without our camel men?"

"The whole thing is ridiculous," said Sir Crawford gruffly. "I honestly believe there's nothing to alarm a mouse. Talk, imagination, superstition! Just that, and nothing more. Our own common sense tells us that there can be no enemies in this arid waste."

"Well, I'm sendin' those men back to Kano before dawn," said Lord Dorrimore. "Everybody knows they're goin' for more rifles an' ammunition, so we needn't whisper about it. It'll put more heart into the others, an' the sooner they're back the better."

An enormous black figure merged silently out of the shadows, and joined the group.

"Confound you, Umlosi, you gave me a start!" growled his lordship. "Can't you walk about like a respectable human bein', instead of a ghost? An' what's the long face for?"

Umlosi shook his woolly head.

"As always, N'kose, thou art pleased to be facetious," he said gravely. "Methinks

thy light words are but a covering for thy fears. For, truly, a great shadow overhangs us all. Mayhap the enemy will strike ere this night has sped its course!"

"Enemy—what enemy?" demanded Dorrie.

"Much would I give to tell thee, O my father!" replied Umlosi. "But in this strange, uncouth land I am lost. 'Tis vastly different from my own wondrous land, where trees grow in abundance, where rivers flow, and where men can be men."

"Yes, I know all about that—we've heard it before," said Dorrie.

"Ay, and thou wilt hear it again, doubtless," said the black chieftain. "For my spirit is sorely troubled, my master, and to-night I have seen the red mists before mine eyes. There is fighting in the air, N'kose. 'Twill descend upon us without warning."

There was something quite impressive in Umlosi's attitude. He was an enormous man, standing well over six feet in height, with vast, broad shoulders and rippling muscles. His physique, indeed, was truly magnificent for an African native.

He was attired in next to nothing—a mere girdle, and a number of ivory ornaments. There was a necklace round his neck which Dorrie always declared to be made of human teeth—but this was only one of his lordship's jokes.

"Well, there's no need to worry," said Dorrie. "I've got scouts out in every direction, an' if any strangers approach the camp, they'll be spotted in no time. I shan't believe in these mysterious enemies until I see a few of 'em."

"Wau! It would be better did they come!" growled Umlosi, in his deep, rumbling voice. "For then, mayhap, there would be fighting. And my spear is dry and blunt for want of usage."

"I won't argue about the dryness, but you can't kid me that it's blunt, old man," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "You've done nothing else but sharpen that bally spear for the last month! It's a wonder to me there's any of it left! Hallo! Supper, by the look of it."

There were certainly indications that the evening meal was ready. And Jack was about to go back to Reggie Pitt when a dramatic interruption came. A figure came running in from the outer gloom. He was a native—a tall, wiry fellow, now nearly breathless and exhausted from hard running. And the whites of his eyes rolled in a way that spoke of terror.

In short, broken sentences of pigeon English he gasped out that enemies were upon them—hundreds of them! Strange men were creeping up from all directions.

The camp, in fact, was about to be attacked!



III.

LORD DORRIMORE acted promptly. There could be no doubting the word of this scout. There was no imagination about his story. After recovering his breath, he told it more clearly and concisely. Hundreds of figures were approaching across the barren desert—silently, stealthily.

But, so far as could be ascertained, the unknown enemy was coming entirely from the North West. And without hesitation, Dorrie decided to pack off his messengers to Kano while there was still time.

The enemy was still several miles distant, and appeared to be in no hurry to pounce upon the camp. So it was more than probable that the returning party would get away. And Dorrie would now give instructions for a large number of Hausas to come back, bringing a plentiful supply of firearms and ammunition.

Jack Grey hurried into the little tent, where Pitt was still busily writing.

"You've got to chuck that!" exclaimed Jack hurriedly. "Dorrie's sending the men off right away—they're getting the camels ready now, and they'll be gone within ten minutes!"

Reggie looked up in surprise.

"Rats!" he said. "They're not going till four in the morning."

"I tell you they are!" insisted Jack.

He quickly told his chum of the scout's story, and of Lord Dorrimore's decision to send the returning party off at a moment's notice.

"Then it looks as though there's something in this scare, after all," said Reggie slowly.

"It proves it wasn't a scare at all," replied his chum. "I'm certain I saw a figure over one of the sand dunes, not a quarter of an hour ago. He must have been one of the enemy's advance guard. Anyhow, if you want that letter to go, you'd better seal it up."

Reggie knew the urgency, and he just added a few scrawling words, folded the pages, and placed them in an envelope. Then he hurried outside, and gave the letter into the care of the messengers—who promised to see that it was mailed.

And within twenty minutes the little party had gone.

"It seems a rummy idea, sending off some of our men in this way, but I suppose Dorrie knows best," remarked Pitt. "I mean, if there's going to be a scrap, the more of us the merrier."

A fat lot of good those few would be in a fight," said Jack Grey. "After all, they're only camel men, and not trained for scrapping. It's a lot better to get them off while there's time."

This, evidently, was Dorrimore's idea, and as events turned out the move was a wise one—since those men returned to civilisation, and gave warning of the expedition's peril.

In camp, the evening meal was proceeded with as though no alarm had been sounded. Practically nothing could be done in the way of defence, in any case. And it was worse than useless to get into a panic.

Dorrie himself, and Umlosi, were, after all, about the only members of the party who could be relied upon to do any fighting—if it actually came to a battle.

So the odds were dead against the party from the start. They had never prepared themselves for any kind of hostilities, being convinced that the Sahara was a friendly country. The wandering tribes, few and far between, had always been known to be friendly.

So this talk of unknown, mysterious enemies was all the more surprising. Even now, Dorrie didn't quite believe the yarn. He had an idea that the "enemy" would turn out to be a harmless band of Fulanis, or other natives.

The evening meal was disposed of in the big tent. Everything in the way of comfort had been provided—everything that could be expected in such a dreary spot. They partook of their food from an excellent board, and the supper itself was appetising and wholesome.

And at the end of the meal Lord Dorrimore lit a cigarette, strolled out, and soon returned. He stood in the entrance to the tent, looking characteristically languid in his scanty tropical costume. For, like the others, he was wearing nothing but a shirt, open at the neck, white drill knickers which ended above the knee, and otherwise bare legs—except, of course, for sound shoes and stockings.

"Another cry of wolf, by the look of it," he remarked easily. "Not a sign of anything except the stars. I think it must be all bunkum, about this infernal enemy."

"That's what I've been saying," exclaimed Reggie. "After all, how can there be any hostile blacks about here? This isn't the country for savages, anyhow. They're all Mahomedans—"

"There might be some wandering Arabs, of course," put in Sir Crawford thoughtfully. "But we're a long way from their usual routes, and there's no earthly reason why they should be hostile."

"Tis well to be prepared, my fathers," rumbled Umlosi, as he lovingly fondled his spear. "Methinks the hour is near."

"Well, just to satisfy you, we'll get out

side, and have our revolvers ready for action," said Lord Dorrimore.

"Wise words, my master," growled Umlosi. "But stay! Do mine ears deceive me, or can I detect sounds? Hush! Remain still, and listen! Methinks the foe is upon us!"

They all stood like statues, and not a sound broke the stillness of the night, except for the movement of the camels on the edge of the camp. But Umlosi nodded.

"Ay, 'tis right," he murmured. "They are here!"

The others could hear nothing, but they were impressed by Umlosi's grave tone. And the events of the next few moments proved how acute was the hearing of this black chieftain.

For, without warning, hundreds of dim, sinister forms swooped down upon the camp—merging out of the surrounding blackness like the fantastic figures of a dream!

END OF PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

PACKING UP!



WILLY HANDFORTH grinned.

"Of course, it's not my business, but may I be allowed to make a remark?" he said cheerfully.

"May I be allowed to point out that you're several kinds of a chump?"

His elder brother glared.

"Who told you to come bothering here?" he snorted.

"That's beside the point," said Willy. "You ought to be thankful I've come. I shall save you heaps of trouble. What's the idea of taking two pairs of dancing shoes and a couple of overcoats?"

He indicated the articles with a jerk of his thumb, and Edward Oswald Handforth looked round. The two brothers were in Handforth major's bedroom, and by the look of things, packing operations were in full swing.

For the apartment was a kind of wreck. Clothing was strewn over every portion of it. A big trunk was standing open, half filled. Suit cases and bags were littered about everywhere. And Handforth was in the midst of it all, in his shirt sleeves—and perspiring freely, for the July morning was bakingly hot—with London sweltering.

"What do you mean—overcoats?" demanded Handforth.

"Those things!" said Willy, pointing.

"Fathead! Think I don't know what overcoats are like?" roared his brother. "I can take them if I like, I suppose?"

"I wouldn't dream of interfering," said

Willy. "But we're not going to Iceland, remember. I don't think I've ever heard of anybody wearing fleece-lined overcoats in the Sahara. But that's your affair."

Handforth scratched his head.

"Now you come to mention it, I don't think I shall need 'em, after all," he remarked. "You young ass! Just as if I was going to take those overcoats! Clear out before you get a thick ear!"

"I've got one now!" said Willy feelingly. "You're too jolly handy with your fists, my son! And what about those dancing pumps?"

You don't think we're going to have fox-trots on the top of a sand dune, do you?"

"You clear off, and mind your own business!" snorted Handforth. "And didn't I tell you to go round to the tailors?"

"You did!" nodded Willy.

"And did you go?"

"I did—not!"

"You disobedient young rotter——"

"Blow you and your giddy tailors!" snapped Willy. "It's like your nerve to turn me into your blessed messenger! And don't be so impatient. Our trunks needn't be packed until to-morrow."

"What about those tropical suits of mine?" demanded Handforth excitedly. "They were promised for yesterday, and I haven't heard a word! If they fail to turn up, I shall be dished!"

Willy shook his head sadly.

"You'll have to fall back on those overcoats," he said. "That'll be a bit tragic, but—— Hallo! Didn't I hear a ring?"

"My suits!" said Handforth joyfully.

He dashed out of the bedroom, and whizzed downstairs by the simple expedient of slithering down the balustrade. Unfortunately, the butler was passing the foot of the stairs at this very moment, and Handforth's feet took the unfortunate gentleman in the middle of the waistcoat.

Crash!

The butler almost turned a somersault, and a tray full of silver and china went ceilingwards, to descend in a kind of solid rain. Handforth picked himself up dazedly, with a couple of spoons sticking out of his collar.

"You careless rotter!" he gasped.

The butler was too far gone to make any adequate reply to this unfair speech. He was well accustomed to Master Edward's little ways, but even Handy didn't make a practice of this sort of thing.

"Well, don't sit there all the giddy morning!" said Handforth callously. "Can't you get up, Parkin?"

"I shall report this to Sir Edward upon his return," ejaculated the butler painfully. "I am sorry, Master Edward, but

this—this is too much! I am injured—I am gravely injured!"

"Don't worry—we shall be gone in a couple days," said Willy cheerfully. "What's that? Did I hear you say 'Thank heaven'? If so, I don't blame you. Ted's too much for any ordinary household. He ought to be kept in a home!"

Further complications were avoided by the arrival of Church and McClure, who had just been admitted by a maidservant. Handforth regarded his chums without any particular affection.

"Was that you ringing the bell just now?" he asked coldly.

CHAPTER II.

THE ECCENTRIC STRANGER.



"**T**HAT'S what you get for riding the high horse!" said Willy, as the door slammed. "Serve you right, my son! I'm jolly glad to see Church and McClure showing a bit of spirit!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"The traitors!" he ejaculated. "They come here, and they haven't even got the decency to stay! And they promised to help me with my packing, too. I'll

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"Yes, of course," said Church.

"Then clear out!"

"What the dickens——"

"I thought you were the chap from the guttlers!" said Handforth indignantly.

"I'm expecting my tropical suits—and instead of getting 'em, I see you two idiots! Buzz off! Who told you to come, anyhow?"

Church and McClure stared.

"Well, there's a nice welcome when we just pop round to say good-morning!" snorted Church warmly. "All right! You can go and eat coke! Blow you! We know when we're not wanted!"

And they marched out in high dudgeon.

slaughter the rotters when I see 'em next time."

Considering that he had told them to clear out, this was rather unfair—and Willy considered it unwise to make any comment. His own packing was done—for Willy was a businesslike, methodical little individual.

Although a mere fag, he always went about everything steadily, methodically, and briskly. Consequently, he got things done. Edward Oswald, on the other hand, went to work in a totally different way. His general idea seemed to be that it was up to him to cause as much commotion as possible, to make confusion supreme, and to do everything three or four times over.

The fact of the matter was, the Handforths were busily packing up for their trip to Africa.

Everything was all settled—the final details fixed.

St. Frank's closed—bare and empty, and destined to be in this peaceful condition for quite a number of weeks. The summer holidays had commenced, and the famous old school would be a barren spot until the autumn term commenced.

Nelson Lee himself was the leader of the expedition to Nigeria and the Sahara desert. There was nothing secret about the adventure. Even the papers were full of it.

Quite a sensation had been caused in the press by the alarming cablegrams from Africa. The public was greatly interested in the fate of Lord Dorrimore, Sir Crawford Grey, and the other members of the specimen-hunting expedition. No news had arrived for several days. The expedition was still missing, and nothing had been heard of it.

And Nelson Lee, in response to an appeal from Reggie Pitt's father, had made all arrangements to take a rescue-party to the desert forthwith. I was going, of course, and quite a number of the St. Frank's juniors had expressed an eager desire to join the party. It smacked of adventure—this sudden rush to the desert, to search for the missing expedition.

Tregellis-West, Watson, Archie Glen-thorne, Handforth and Co., and a number of others were on the list. And everything was bustle and excitement. There were only two or three days left.

For we were booked to start for Africa on the ss. Trojan, from Tilbury—this vessel being a small but speedy liner, which would call at Lagos—our port—on its way south.

Most of the juniors regarded the affair as a summer holiday adventure, and they were all the more enthusiastic because of the hurry. But Reggie Pitt's father was haggard and worn with the anxiety. He could not help fearing that death had overtaken his son in the desert.

And yet there was hope—big hope. Otherwise, Nelson Lee would not have hastened off on this rescue trip. The famous detective was greatly concerned for his old friend, Dorrie. This was no mere impartial rescue-party, but friends going out in search of friends. And this, of course, made it all the more interesting.

Handforth continued his packing alone—for Willy indignantly refused all aid after his major had thrown a jug of water over him. Willy could stand a joke, but, being a Third-Former, he had a great dislike of water.

The bell rang again, and Handforth hurried out to the landing. This time he didn't go down, but leaned over the balustrade. He secretly hoped that Church and McClure had come back. For he was beginning to

realise that his two chums were valuable allies—more valuable, indeed, than he usually gave them credit for.

But a stranger was admitted—and quite a curious stranger.

He was fairly tall, but looked taller on account of his extraordinary thinness. He was wiry, and loose-jointed, his clothing hanging on him—as Handforth afterwards remarked—like wet towels on a clothes-horse. His neck was lean and scraggy, and seemed to stand up from his shoulders in a most comical way.

The stranger was clean-shaven, too, his skin being deeply sunburned and leathery. And he was dressed in a rather disreputable Palm Beach suit and a battered Panama.

Handforth didn't wait to make inquiries—he took it for granted that this gentleman was the messenger from the outfitters. So Edward Oswald hurried downstairs—not so swiftly this time—and confronted the newcomer.

“Haven't you brought my suits?” he demanded warmly.

“I'm afraid—”

“I knew it!” snorted Handy. “What's the good of me ordering clothes if they're not delivered? They were promised last night—and now you've come round to make some excuses, I'll bet!”

“I am indeed sorry that your clothing has failed to show up, young man,” said the stranger pleasantly. “If there is anything I could do, I would gladly assist. But, alas, I am powerless.”

As he spoke, his leathery face wrinkled itself into a thousand creases, and his dark eyes gleamed like points in their deep-set hollows. There was something rather charming about the stranger.

“Powerless?” repeated Handforth, glaring.

“Unfortunately, yes,” said the other softly. “You see, I am not from your outfitters, but desire an interview with Sir Edward Handforth. Allow me to apologise for disappointing you.”

“Oh! You've come to see my pater?”

“Exactly! Mr. Travers Earle—at his service!”

CHAPTER III.

MR. TRAVERS EARLE.



HANDFORTH wasn't particularly impressed.

“Mr. Travers Earle?” he repeated. “Never heard of you!”

“Such,” sighed the other, “is fame! However, no matter. Let it pass—let it pass! And your father? Would you be good enough to acquaint him of my arrival?”

Without waiting for Edward Oswald to reply, Mr. Travers Earle wandered across the hall, and inspected some stuffed stags' heads with interest and a sad shake of his head.

"A pity—a pity!" he murmured. "Not at all what I thought them to be from a distance. Excellent, no doubt, but far from perfect. Yes, far from perfect. Eh? Oh, yes, of course! You will show me to your father, eh?"

Handforth regarded the stranger with astonishment.

"My pater's out, so you can't see him," he said. "I don't know when he'll be back, because he's gone down to Mr. Lee's. And what's the matter with these stags?"

"A trifle—you wouldn't understand," said Mr. Travers Earle, altering his tone, and becoming brisk. "So Sir Edward is out? A pity! Most decidedly a pity! My business with Sir Edward is of the utmost importance. It is imperative that I should see him immediately!"

Mr. Earle became jumpy and excited.

"Why is your father out?" he demanded, before Handforth could make any comment. "Why is he out? I distinctly mentioned in my letter that I would call at this hour! This is most inconvenient—most unfortunate. I must see Sir Edward without any loss of time!"

"Is it so important, then?" asked Handforth.

"It is not merely important—but vital!" said Mr. Travers Earle, standing rigidly still, and fixing Handforth with his piercing eyes. "Vital, my dear lad! Unless I see your father at once——"

"You'd better go round to Gray's Inn Road, if it's so jolly urgent," interrupted Handforth. "It's a cert you'll find the pater there, with Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Ah! Mr. Nelson Lee!" exclaimed Mr. Earle. "It was foolish of me not to make my appointment with Mr. Lee in the first place. I should have done so—as I realised afterwards. But no matter. By hastening to Mr. Lee's address I shall catch them both together. Splendid!"

"Look here, sir—wait a minute!" put in Handforth. "If it's anything to do with business, you'd better not go. My dad's full of this trip to Africa, and he's a bit of a Tartar, you know. He'll go for you bald-headed, and sling you down the stairs, unless you're careful. That's just a friendly tip."

Mr. Travers Earle smiled.

"I appreciate your thoughtfulness, but your concern for my safety is quite unnecessary," He said. "I have no desire to talk business—but quite the contrary. Your father, I believe, is interested in this ex-

pedition to the Sahara, in search of the missing Dorrimore party?"

"Yes—I'm going, too!"

"Then we shall meet again, my young friend," said Mr. Travers Earle. "For, I can assure you, I shall also be a member of the party. I am as essential to it as nourishment is essential to the human frame. Without me, this expedition might just as well remain at home."

He turned, walked across the hall, and opened the front door.

"I say—hold on!" said Handforth. "What do you mean? Why are you essential to the expedition?"

Mr. Travers Earle smiled amiably.

"That," he replied "you will find out later."

He strode out, and walked down the steps—passing Church and McClure, who had just arrived. The eccentric stranger beamed upon them, much to their astonishment, and vanished. Church and McClure looked after him in surprise.

"Queer-looking bird!" remarked McClure.

His comment, although disrespectful, was undoubtedly justified. For Mr. Travers Earle was, indeed, a striking personality. He was a man to look at more than once.

"He looks more like a mummy than anything else," said Church. "And did you notice the way he walked? You might think his giddy knees were fixed together with loose wires! I'll bet he could tie himself into a knot without feeling uncomfortable."

They mounted the steps, and faced their leader—for Handforth was still in the doorway. Church and McClure, as a matter of fact, had been no further than the corner. There they had held a confab, and had decided, after a little argument, to return to their chum.

"You've come back, then?" said Edward Oswald gruffly.

"Look here—don't be an ass!" said Church. "Goodness knows we don't want to squabble! Who was that queer old chap who passed us on the steps just now?"

"Blessed if I know!" replied Handforth. "But come indoors—don't stand here. The man said his name was Mr. Travers Earle, but I don't know any more. He came to see my pater."

"Oh, well, it's none of our business," said McClure. "How are you getting on with your packing?"

"Said that he's coming with us on this expedition," went on Handforth thoughtfully. "That's rot, of course. I can't help thinking he's a bit touched. He spoke like it, anyhow."

In the meantime Mr. Travers Earle was hastening as fast as a taxi could take him to Gray's Inn Road.

CHAPTER IV.

AT NELSON LEE'S CHAMBERS.



NELSON Lee tore open the cablegram with a steady hand.

He read the message, and Mr. Reginald Pitt waited with eager impatience and with acute anxiety.

"I am sorry, Mr. Pitt, but the news is not encouraging," said the famous detective. "No, nothing worse. Don't concern yourself unduly. And, after all, they say that no news is good news."

Mr. Pitt sighed.

that the slightest scrap of information might be gleaned.

"Nothing—absolutely nothing!" said Mr. Pitt wearily. "And the days pass, Mr. Lee, and we are still here in London. Even the ship will take weeks in getting to Lagos—"

"You are naturally impatient; but, as a matter of fact, we have made our arrangements with remarkable speed," said Nelson Lee. "Indeed, it would have been impossible to leave earlier, for there has been no boat."

"I know—I am so worried that I become foolish at times," said Mr. Pitt quietly. "But it makes me feel that it would be better to charter an aeroplane—so that we



"Who told you to come bothering here?" snorted Edward Oswald. "That's beside the point," said Willy. "What's the idea of taking two pairs of dancing shoes and a couple of overcoats?"

"No news may be better than bad news, but the suspense is but little compensation," he said huskily. "I am dreadfully afraid that I shall never see my dear boy again—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lee, with a laugh. "We'll find the missing party—never fear! This cablegram is from Major Townley, in Kano. He has been good enough to travel up country from Lagos, in order to get first-hand information. But read it."

Mr. Pitt did so—but without enthusiasm. The message briefly stated that no news had come to hand of the missing party, but every effort was being made to get in touch with every desert traveller who came in, so

could reach our destination within a few days."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I am afraid aviation has hardly developed to that state of perfection," he said. "A trip to Central Europe—to various parts of Asia—yes. But hardly to Africa, Mr. Pitt. The only safe course is for us to go by boat. And as for an aeroplane in the desert—the idea is utterly impracticable, for a bad landing evitably means death."

"You are right—quite right," said Mr. Pitt. "Perfect as our modern machines have become, an engine is always liable to fail. And once down in the desert with a hopelessly smashed chassis, there is no pros-

pect of rising again. And, as you say, death is inevitable."

"Even a perfect landing might have the same disastrous result," declared Lee. "There are vast areas of the Sahara where the surface is nothing but loose sand. And what chance has any machine of rising from such ground? No, Mr. Pitt, our only way is to use the orthodox, time-honoured method of travel. Steamer to Lagos—railway to Kano—and thence by camel caravan."

Mr. Pitt nodded.

"Slow—but sure," he agreed. "We can only hope that our efforts will be successful."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Sir Edward Handforth. I ushered him into the gov'nor's consulting-room—for we were, of course, in our old chambers at Gray's Inn Road. Sir Edward was as blunt and ram-headed as ever—a fifty-horse-power edition of his son.

"I have finally made up my mind, gentlemen," he declared. "I'm coming! Yes, by George, I'm coming on this trip!"

He looked round triumphantly—as though the very expedition depended upon his presence. I couldn't help grinning. He reminded me irresistibly of Edward Oswald.

"Splendid, Sir Edward!" smiled Nelson Lee. "I thought, somehow, that you would decide in this way. Indeed, I took the liberty of booking a state-room for you on the Trojan."

"That was infernally thoughtful of you, Mr. Lee," said Sir Edward. "Thanks! As a matter of fact, I had an idea you would book my state-room, so I didn't trouble. No further news, eh? I don't like to be pessimistic, but it's my belief the whole party was overtaken by a sandstorm—or, more probably, captured by cannibals and massacred!"

Mr. Pitt winced, and Lee hastily interposed.

"I hardly think there are cannibals in that section of Africa, Sir Edward," he said mildly. "Neither do I think that sandstorms are frequent in the region where the expedition vanished. Indeed, everything points to the one inevitable conclusion—that Lord Dorrimore's party was captured alive, and removed to some unknown destination in the heart of the desert."

"How do you arrive at that?" demanded Handy's pater.

"If the party had died of thirst, or any such disaster, their remains would undoubtedly have been discovered long before this," replied Nelson Lee. "Don't forget that Dorrie sent some of his men back for further supplies. These men returned to the appointed spot, but the camp had gone—showing every sign of hasty removal. It has been definitely established that the camp was moved without any bloodshed having taken place. It is as though the entire party had moved away, only to vanish into thin air."

"They couldn't have been buried alive by an earthquake, or something?" suggested Sir

Edward brilliantly. "By George! That's an idea! An earthquake would have swallowed them up—"

"Unfortunately for your theory—but fortunately for the safety of our friends—the seismograph instruments at all observatories have failed to record any earthquake in the Sahara region for months past," put in Nelson Lee. "And these instruments record the slightest tremor, bear in mind. No, Sir Edward, there is nothing to fear in that direction."

"In any case, the point is unnecessary because if any such catastrophe had occurred, reports would have come in to Kano repeatedly," said Mr. Pitt. "I am inclined to believe that Mr. Lee is right. The whole party was taken prisoner. But why, and by whom? These are the questions that are worrying me so intensely."

The door opened, and Mr. Travers Earle walked in—having somehow gained admittance without being announced. His leathery face broke into an approving smile as he surveyed the occupants of the room.

"Splendid!" he said contentedly. "I have come, gentlemen, to place at your service my wonderful ship, the Conqueror!"

CHAPTER V.

AN EXTRAORDINARY OFFER.



MR. TRAVERS EARLE beamed round at us in his genial, kindly way.

"Forgive me for entering in this informal fashion—but we are all informal people. I think?" he went on. "My name is Mr. Travers Earle, and I am entirely at your service."

Nelson Lee looked at him keenly.

"Not Mr. Travers Earle—of Canada?" he asked.

"At your service!" repeated Mr. Earle, bowing.

"I am pleased to meet you, sir—although I hardly expected such a very informal introduction," smiled Nelson Lee, as he shook hands. "I must confess that I am at a loss to understand your meaning."

Lee, in fact, was just a little suspicious. He had a doubt in his own mind whether this curious-looking individual was the genuine Mr. Travers Earle, of Canada. If so, he was a multi-millionaire, and one of the greatest engineers the Dominion had ever produced. Frankly, he didn't look the part in the least.

But Nelson Lee solemnly introduced Mr. Reginald Pitt and Sir Edward Handforth, M.P., and Mr. Earle shook hands all round. Then he got to business without delay.

"Naturally I have seen the sensational reports in all the newspapers of late," he said. "And the Sahara, gentlemen, interests me exceedingly—since I have been making

plans for a desert expedition for the past two or three years. Moreover, it may interest you to learn that I have only recently arrived from Kano—and intend returning at once."

"By what boat, may I ask?" demanded Sir Edward.

"A reasonable question, sir—a most reasonable question," said Mr. Travers Earle. "I am returning on the Trojan, sailing from Tilbury on Friday."

"The deuce you are!" said Sir Edward. "That's the boat we're travelling on. But didn't you say something about a ship of your own? The Conqueror, or something?"

"I did," replied Mr. Earle. "I am intensely interested in this matter. And let me tell you, gentlemen, that Lord Dorrimore's party will never be rescued by the ordinary methods—by camel caravan, and so forth. The difficulties of such a trip would be insuperable."

Nelson Lee looked at him keenly.

"Insuperable?" he repeated.

"It is not my wish to be unduly pessimistic, but I am well acquainted with the country north of Kano," said Mr. Travers Earle. "It is a country, gentlemen, that is fraught with every conceivable kind of obstacle. Beyond Zinder the difficulties increase, and from thence towards Agades and the Asben Mountains caravan travel becomes a sheer fight for existence against dreadful heat, drought, and——"

"Are you suggesting, sir, that our expedition in search of the missing party is doomed to failure?" broke in Mr. Pitt anxiously.

The visitor nodded.

"Well, we may put it that way if we like," he replied. "It is possible, of course, that success may crown your efforts—but it is a hundred chances to one against Lord Dorrimore's party being located. For, as I have pointed out, the transport difficulties are appalling."

Nelson Lee looked at the man with greater interest. For Lee knew well enough that he was speaking the absolute truth. Mr. Travers Earle obviously knew his subject. He was familiar with the intricacies and uncertainties of Sahara travel.

"In a way, sir, you are perfectly correct," said Nelson Lee. "But is anything to be gained by this conversation? Are you proposing any alternative scheme?"

"I am—and that is my reason for being here," replied Mr. Earle. "I am in a unique position to offer you my services, and those of my ship, the Conqueror. For it is only by means of such a vessel that the desert can be really mastered."

"The desert, sir?" broke in Sir Edward impatiently. "What infernal nonsense are you talking? A ship is no good nearly a thousand miles inland! You are merely wasting our time——"

"I trust not," smiled Mr. Travers Earle.

"Indeed, I am sure not. You are merely labouring under a misapprehension. My vessel is not an ocean-going craft, as you assume—but a ship of the desert."

"A camel?" asked Sir Edward sarcastically.

Mr. Earle remained perfectly agreeable.

"The camel is, of course, the traditional ship of the desert," he agreed. "But my ship is rather more imposing than a camel. It is a land cruiser—not merely suitable for desert work, but capable of penetrating into any jungle or forest, and emerging triumphant. In a word, the Conqueror is a leviathan of the land—but a ship in every sense of the word."

The others looked at him strangely.

"And you are seriously offering us your—er—vessel for our present expedition?" asked Nelson Lee.

"I am."

"Good gracious, Mr. Lee, you don't credit this extraordinary statement?" demanded Sir Edward gruffly. "You don't believe that this—this gentleman has really got a ship that travels on land? Huh! The very idea of it is preposterous!"

"Your candour, sir, is refreshing," said Mr. Travers Earle mildly.

"I am sorry if I offend you, sir—but this story of yours is rather too much for any sensible man," snorted Sir Edward. "Allow me to inform you, sir, that we have no time to waste on idle dreams!"

Nelson Lee was rather concerned. Handforth's pater had an unfortunate habit of exceedingly blunt speech. It was easy to see where Edward Oswald got his characteristics from. But the leathery stranger appeared to be in no wise disturbed.

"It may occur to you that I am a mere opportunist—an adventurer seeking some victims, in order to fleece them," he observed. "Please let me make it quite clear that my ship is at your disposal from the minute you arrive in Kano. And I will gladly bear the entire expense of the trip, even if it amounts to tens of thousands. Money is of no importance."



CHAPTER VI.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!

"OF course, I realise that my present statements are received with complete scepticism," went on Mr. Earle, before anybody could speak. "I am here to startle you—to amaze you. Therefore, I am not in the least offended by your obvious disbelief!"

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Earle," said Nelson Lee drily. "For, candidly, you must forgive me if I remark that your ship strikes me as being more of an ideal than a reality."

"Fantastic nightmare, sir!" grunted Sir Edward, pulling out his watch and glaring at it. "Huh! Time's getting on! And we've got a lot of details to discuss, Lee."

He turned his glare upon Mr. Travers Earle—and it was not merely a hint, but a plain indication that it was high time for the visitor to go. Mr. Earle, however, merely smiled.

"I should prefer to go into a few more details before receiving my final dismissal, gentlemen," he said. "If you will give me, say, five minutes? Let me tell you what the Conqueror is—what she is capable of doing. Let me explain why I am so interested in this project."

"Go ahead, Mr. Earle," said Nelson Lee briskly.

Sir Edward Handforth snorted, and fiercely lit a cigar. I couldn't help grinning. And I suspected that the gov'nor was merely using a little tact in order to get rid of this eccentric visitor as early as possible.

"In the first place, the Conqueror is a ship—in all essentials, a well-appointed private yacht," said Mr. Earle. "She is driven by a powerful type of engine—something entirely new, embodying hitherto unknown power with insignificant fuel consumption. The design, I may add, is one of my own."

"Oh! Then you are an inventor, sir?" sneered Sir Edward.

"In my modest way, yes," replied Mr. Earle calmly.

If, indeed, he was the great Canadian engineer, this was no idle boast. But was he? I was more than ever convinced that our leathery friend was a stray lunatic.

"The Conqueror is equipped as magnificently as modern science can provide for," continued Mr. Earle. "I have spared no expense in making my desert cruiser a haven of comfort. The saloons are perfection itself; the cabins are roomy, comfortable, and lavishly furnished. And it is scarcely necessary for me to add that electric light is provided throughout."

"Wonderful!" said Sir Edward, with sarcasm.

"In some respects the Conqueror closely resembles a sea-going yacht," said Mr. Travers Earle. "She has decks, a piloting bridge, and other familiar characteristics of her sea-going sister. In fact, the crew and passengers of the Conqueror will be able to undertake prolonged desert journeys in complete comfort."

"With iced drinks, no doubt?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir! With iced drinks!" replied Mr. Earle promptly. "The catering department of the yacht is fitted with

every modern device. Stores can be carried for a prolonged voyage, and there will never be the slightest fear of running short of water. Ice can be made daily, for the needs of the entire ship's company.

"The vessel is admirably suited for desert travelling, although not confined to this work in the least. With the Conqueror it will be possible to penetrate the deepest forest, and the most tangled jungles. For my vessel is a literal juggernaut, capable of devouring everything in its path. Briefly, I can liken her to a super tank."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Pitt.

"You all know the war tanks—those remarkable engineering wonders which did so much on the battle fronts?" proceeded Mr. Earle. "The Conqueror is a direct development of those tanks. You may remember that the larger tanks were capable of felling trees with ease. Try and picture, gentlemen, a tank fifty times larger than any war creation that was ever built. And imagine the possibilities!"

"They are enormous," agreed Nelson Lee gravely.

I detected a change in the attitude of the listeners. Mr. Pitt was keenly interested; Nelson Lee was now paying careful attention, and even Sir Edward had lost his impatient frown. As for myself, I drank in Mr. Travers Earle's words with ever-growing excitement. For if his ship should be a reality and not a dream the possibilities were indeed stupendous. But it seemed too good to be true.

"The Conqueror has a cruising radius of three thousand miles," said Mr. Earle, startling us afresh. "You appear surprised? But yet there is nothing remarkable in that statement. Any well-equipped ocean-going yacht will travel three thousand miles in comfort. But the Conqueror is a great advance on her sister. In addition to her crew of twenty, she can comfortably accommodate fifty or sixty passengers, with food in plenty for all. Electric light, ice-cooled saloons, and other comforts altogether too numerous to mention now. That, gentlemen, is my proposition."

Mr. Earle had talked very glibly of these extraordinary things, and he was now beaming upon us good naturedly.

"I desire to place the Conqueror at your disposal, gentlemen," he concluded. "With my land-yacht in your hands, this search for Lord Dorrimore's missing party will be rendered not only simple, but there will be a distinct hope of success. My object is simple. I want my ship to be of service in a sound, humane cause. You have but to say the word, and I will make full arrangements."

By this time even Nelson Lee was of the same opinion as myself. Mr. Travers Earle's story was so remarkable that it could be nothing but a fantasy of his own imagination.

CHAPTER VII.

A DREAM—OR REALITY?



NELSON LEE rose to his feet. "Your offer is a most generous one, Mr. Earle," he said gravely. "Please let me thank you heartily for your thoughtfulness and consideration. But I am afraid your project is impracticable."

Mr. Travers Earle lost his smile. "Impracticable?" he repeated. "How so—how so? In what way is it impracticable?"

Nelson Lee cleared his throat. I could see that he was bent upon using a little tact, in order to humour this eccentric dreamer. And it was a rather difficult matter.

"I fear we cannot avail ourselves of your generosity, because this expedition must start at once," said the gov'nor.

"Admitted—we sail on the Trojan, on Friday."

"Yes, but upon arrival in Lagos, we shall travel forthwith to Kano, and there set out by camel caravan," said Nelson Lee. "I am telegraphing full instructions to have this caravan in full readiness upon our arrival, so that there shall be no delay."

Mr. Earle smiled again, with real amusement.

"And do you prefer camels to the Conqueror?" he asked.

"The camels are ready to depart upon our arrival, whilst the Conqueror, I am afraid, is a mere dream-vessel that has yet to be built," replied Nelson Lee bluntly. "Is that not so, Mr. Earle?"

"If it were so, gentlemen, I should hardly be here on this project," he replied coolly. "As a matter of fact, the Conqueror is not a dream, but is actually built, and ready for any journey that I choose to send her on. She is at Kano, complete to the last coat of paint—complete to the final turn of a spanner."

This was the last straw. There could be no longer any doubt regarding Mr. Travers Earle's sanity. He went on, unperturbed, but waxing warmly to his subject.

"I have been living near Kano for nearly a year past," he declared. "Kano, as you are aware, is a big native city, mainly populated by Hausas, in Northern Nigeria. It is the extremity of the Nigeria Railway, and I accordingly made it my headquarters. Just outside the city I have a great walled enclosure, containing my construction works."

"You are surely not serious, sir?" snorted Sir Edward.

"There is no reason why I should be otherwise," replied Mr. Earle. "During the past months, the parts of my vessel have been arriving in sections—in great

packing-cases, in every shape and form. The Conqueror was designed and manufactured in England, but built just outside Kano, and she has cost me considerably over half a million sterling."

"Phew!" I whistled.

"A big sum of money, but trifling to me," smiled Mr. Travers Earle. "Exploration, gentleman, is my hobby. I have not been in England long, for I left Kano as the final construction work was being completed, in charge of my chief engineer, Mr. Hobart Manners."

"Of Wells, Kirby and Manners, Limited?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir—yes, sir!" replied our visitor. "Mr. Manners, I may add, has been in full charge of this work from the outset—his firm having undertaken the entire contract."

I could see that the gov'nor was more interested; he was taking Mr. Earle more seriously. Impossible as this thing seemed, it was apparently developing into something rational. Mr. Earle was perfectly frank with his information.

As we all knew, Messrs. Wells, Kirby and Manners, Limited was one of the most famous constructional engineering firms in the country. And, according to our strange companion, Mr. Manners himself was now in Kano.

"I have been personally supervising the dispatch of all the necessary stores, fuel, and so forth," said Mr. Earle. "By this time, the last batch has been sent away. My headquarters at Kano will become, in fact, a regular supply station. I am expecting Mr. Manners home, for his agreement ceases upon completion of the work, and after full tests have been made."

"But what was your object in building this strange craft?" asked Nelson Lee curiously.

"A whim, Mr. Lee," said the other, with perfect frankness. "The whim of a rich man who could afford to indulge his fancy. The Sahara has always fascinated me—and so, for that matter, have the great forests of Africa. I constructed the Conqueror for the purpose of exploring the wild spots of the Dark Continent in perfect comfort. And I am placing the Conqueror at your disposal unconditionally."

Nelson Lee was still a little dubious, but he made an appointment with Mr. Travers Earle for the evening, intending, in the meantime, to make a few judicious inquiries. Mr. Earle, it seemed, was staying at the Ritz, and this certainly looked business-like.

"A crank—a sheer madman!" declared Sir Edward Handforth, as soon as the visitor had gone. "There's no such ship as he mentions, and there couldn't be one, either! It's an absolute impossibility!"

"And yet Mr. Earle was very convincing," said Mr. Pitt. "It seems a pity to dis-

miss him as a harmless crank, but I am afraid we must do so."

Nelson Lee scarcely made any comment, but discussed a few more details of our immediate plans, and Sir Edward Handforth and Mr. Pitt departed.

"What's your opinion, gov'nor?" I asked, as soon as we were alone.

"Of Mr. Travers Earle, I presume you mean?" asked Nelson Lee. "Well, young 'un, I have an idea that the gentleman is thoroughly genuine."

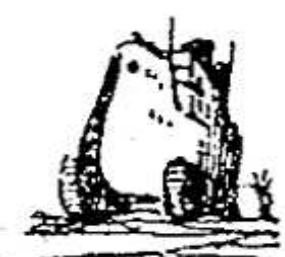
"And his land cruiser—The Conqueror?" I gasped.

"As genuine as Mr. Earle himself," replied Lee calmly. "If I am any judge of character at all, Nipper, our loose-jointed friend is no more a lunatic than I am—"

At this point an interruption came, for a fresh visitor was announced. And we were somewhat startled to learn that his name was Mr. Hobart Manners, of Wells, Kirby and Manners, Ltd.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FINAL PROOF.



MR. HOBART MANNERS proved to be a big, bronzed gentleman in the prime of life—clean-shaven, with hair slightly turning grey at the temples, and a breezy, hearty manner that had a curious appeal.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Lee—and you, too, young man!" he exclaimed briskly. "I've often heard of you, of course—but this is the first time I have had the pleasure of knowing you. Well, I only arrived in England this morning, and I am here on behalf of Mr. Travers Earle."

"You have lost no time," smiled Nelson Lee.

"No. I arrived at Marseilles the day before yesterday—took the train for Paris—and left Paris early this morning by aeroplane," replied Mr. Manners. "And immediately upon meeting Mr. Earle, he dispatched me post-haste here to discuss business."

"Then—then it's true?" I asked breathlessly. "It's true about the Conqueror?"

"Why—who has suggested that it's not true?"

"Well, it seems too—too fantastic—"

"Possibly it does—to you, sitting here in this prosaic apartment," agreed Mr. Manners. "But I've only just returned from Nigeria, and I can tell you frankly that the

Conqueror is the most astounding vessel that has ever been constructed."

"It is all that Mr. Earle claims?" asked Lee.

"More—far more," replied Mr. Manners enthusiastically. "Without any exaggeration, I can tell you that the Conqueror is the most staggering thing under the sun. When I first saw the plans, I laughed at them—I was sceptical—I thought this project to be a wild waste of money. But I have seen the Conqueror as a completed job, and I have put her through every imaginable test. And the result, Mr. Lee, is startling beyond all words. This vessel is destined to create the biggest sensation in modern times."

So it was true, after all!

I had had a feeling within me that Mr. Travers Earle was genuine—but this striking corroboration was rather wonderful, coming so unexpectedly.

"And do you think, Mr. Manners, that this extraordinary craft will be of genuine use in our search for the missing expedition?" asked Nelson Lee. "I should be glad of a perfectly frank, unprejudiced answer."

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Lee, you have a right to expect one," replied our visitor. "You are setting out upon a journey to locate and rescue Lord Dorrimore and his party. Therefore, it would be baseness itself on my part to deceive you regarding the Conqueror. My advice to you is—accept Mr. Earle's offer and use the Conqueror for your hunt."

"You are of opinion that the vessel is—reliable?"

"Absolutely so," said Mr. Manners. "Remember, I have only just returned from Kano, where I personally supervised the construction of the Conqueror. With her duplicate engines, her immense storage compartments, her marvellous system of suspension, I cannot conceive of disaster. Everything humanly possible has been done to make the Conqueror an unqualified success."

"Your enthusiasm is most convincing, Mr. Manners," smiled Lee.

"I want it to be—for if any project deserved enthusiasm, this one does," said the other. "The ordinary mode of desert travel—by camel train—is obsolete compared to the Conqueror. Would you think of crossing the Atlantic in an oar-driven galley? No—you would prefer a modern liner. Well, the oar-driven galley is the equivalent of the time-honoured camel caravan—and the Conqueror the equivalent of the ocean liner."

"It's wonderful, sir!" I burst out. "And after all, why not? There's nothing startling about it, when you come down to rock-bottom fact. Modern science and engineering can produce enormous battle-ships—so why not a great land cruiser?"

"Why not?" said Mr. Manners. "The only reason such a vessel has not been pro-

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duced hitherto is that a land cruiser has no commercial value. But Mr. Travers Earle is many times a millionaire, and can indulge his whims. He has retired from active work, but cannot be idle. And he is turning his dreams of earlier years into realities—as many of us would like to do, but as the majority of us can never do. The Conqueror is the outcome of years of careful thought and skill. Believe me, Mr. Lee, the brain that conceived the Conqueror is no disordered brain—but one of the keenest, most brilliant, I have ever encountered. Mr. Earle is an eccentric man in many ways, but his engineering ability amounts to sheer genius."

By this time, Mr. Manners had dispelled the last doubt that might have lingered. His enthusiasm was, indeed, so infectious that I felt all worked up with excitement.

And that very evening Nelson Lee had a long talk with Mr. Travers Earle and Mr. Hobart Manners—Sir Edward Handforth and Mr. Pitt being also present. And all details were fixed up—much to the keen delight of the millionaire, who was as anxious a schoolboy to set off on this adventurous quest.

"There is only one point that worries me," he confessed. "I should like you to return with us, Manners—in fact, I offer you the position now, on the spot. I want you to be the chief engineer of the Conqueror."

Mr. Manners shook his head dubiously.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Earle, but you may remember that I have only just returned to England—"

"A mere trifle," interrupted Mr. Earle. "If I had thought of it, I would have told you to remain out in Kano until my arrival. But it is only a detail—you can come back with us."

"If I was entirely alone in the matter, I would instantly agree," smiled Mr. Manners. "But, you see, there are others—my wife and daughter, to be exact. I have been away for a long time, and I cannot face the added long separation that—"

"Is that all that's worrying you?" interrupted Mr. Travers Earle genially. "We will soon adjust that, Manners. You must bring your wife and daughter with you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE.

NELSON LEE looked rather dubious.

"Are you not too optimistic, Mr. Earle?" he asked slowly.

"The Sahara Desert is hardly the spot for ladies."

I do not think it would be advisable to urge Mr. Manners in this way."

The millionaire inventor chuckled.

"Would I advise ladies to cross the



Crash! The butler almost turned a somersault, and a tray full of silver and china went ceilingwards, to descend in a kind of solid rain.

Atlantic in a fishing smack?" he asked. "No, certainly not! But ladies can cross the Atlantic on the Mauretania or the Olympic, can they not?"

"That's a good argument, I'll admit," said Mr. Manners, stroking his chin. "In fact, I used very much the same simile with Mr. Lee this afternoon."

"It is the only simile possible," retorted Mr. Earle. "Ladies cannot venture into the Sahara on camels—but on board the Conqueror they will be as safe and as secure and as comfortable as though they were in this very Ritz Hotel. Come, Manners—you won't desert me? I urgently need you for this expedition."

"I must see what my wife has to say about it," laughed Mr. Manners. "My daughter, I am sure, will be enthusiastic. But she's young—a mere schoolgirl—and would naturally be romantic. But it might

be rather awkward for just two ladies on board—"

"Two?" interrupted the millionaire. "Rubbish! I should like a dozen to come—the more the merrier! And they can bring their own maids, and I'll instantly engage some stewardesses, too! You seem to forget, gentlemen, that the passengers on the Conqueror will be living in constant civilisation—in just the same way as passengers on a modern liner. And the Conqueror, of course, will always be in wireless touch with the outer world."

"By George! You're right, sir!" declared Sir Edward Handforth. "If these boys can go on the trip, why not girls, eh? A confoundedly fine holiday—that's what it'll be!"

"I am convinced that Irene will jump for joy when she hears my news," smiled Mr. Manners. "By the way, Mr. Lee, I think you know her?"

"Why, yes," replied the gov'nor. "I think I ought to—considering that her school is only a stone's throw from St. Frank's."

I gave a gasp.

"Irene!" I ejaculated. "Well, my hat! Of course! Irene Manners! I never thought of connecting your name with Miss Irene, sir. We all know her at St. Frank's."

"And all like her, I hope?" smiled Mr. Manners.

"Rather, sir! She's the most popular girl in the Moor View School," I replied enthusiastically. "Old Handy will go absolutely dotty when he hears this—because he's got a particular soft spot for Miss Irene."

"Splendid!" chuckled Mr. Manners.

"Old Handy?" said Sir Edward, frowning at me. "Is it possible that you are referring to my son, Edward?"

"Why, yes, sir! Sorry!" I grinned.

"Huh! I'm glad to hear this—infernally glad!" grunted Sir Edward. "So the young rascal has a soft spot for Miss Irene, has he? By George! It's like him, though—and it'll be all the better for the whole party if we have some ladies on board."

"I'll tell you what!" I exclaimed. "Why shouldn't Miss Irene ask her schoolgirl friends to come—Marjorie Temple and Tessa Love and Doris Berkeley, and a few more? Our crowd would be overjoyed—and think what a merry party we should be."

I never expected for a moment that this suggestion would be entertained. But Mr. Travers Earle hailed it with approval, and assured me that no time would be lost in settling the details.

And no time was lost.

While the gov'nor was busily arranging a hundred and one details connected with the voyage, Mrs. Manners was fixing everything up concerning the feminine element of the party.

For Mrs. Manners was an astonishingly successful hostess, and readily agreed to

chaperone any number of girls who cared to come on the trip. Irene, of course, was thrilled at the very idea.

As for Handforth, he nearly went dotty with happiness when he heard the glad tidings. Willy, on the other hand, was quite disdainful. And, indeed, disgusted.

He bluntly declared that the whole trip would be spoilt, and that girls hadn't any right to butt in on an affair of this kind. This frank criticism earned his major's stern censure, and the unfortunate Willy was reduced to such a state of wreckage that he could only crawl away, and refrain from any further comments.

The other juniors were equally delighted when they heard that the Moor View School girls were to be included in the party. And, altogether, it seemed that this journey to the Sahara was to be a very different affair to what we had at first anticipated.

Thanks to Mr. Travers Earle, a gruelling, arduous duty was to be transformed into a delightful pleasure trip. At least, so we thought at the moment. Little did we realise what awaited us in the far off sandy wastes of the Sahara!

"There's no need to go into any details about our last day or two in London. It was a period of feverish bustle and activity—a time of hectic buying and packing and rushing about.

We hardly knew how we got through everything. At one time, it seemed impossible that we could be all ready for departure on the Trojan. But ready we were, and when that small, but comfortable liner left Tilbury, she contained a far greater party than we had ever anticipated.

And the unique trip commenced!

CHAPTER X.

A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE.



"THIS," observed Archie languidly, "is somewhat priceless."

He stretched himself with lazy indolence, and adjusted the cushion a trifle more to his liking. The air was warm and pleasant, and overhead was stretched the big canvas awning, upon which the sun blazed down.

Archie was reclining in a hammock, and this particular part of the promenade-deck was quiet and peaceful. Most of the passengers were copying Archie's example, and indulging in an afternoon siesta.

"What about some exercise, Archie?" inquired Willy Handforth, appearing before Archie's vision like a disturbing torturer. "It isn't good for the health to lounge about like this."

"I have no wish to quarrel, dear old sunbeam, but kindly remove yourself into the middle distance!" said Archie severely.

"I mean to say, whenever you come near me, I go all dashed hot and quivery."

Willy Handforth grinned.

"That's a sign of a guilty conscience," he declared. "I'll admit the weather's a bit hot, but you needn't slack about like this all the time. It doesn't look well! The people are talking."

"Talking?" repeated Archie vaguely.

"Especially the girls," said Willy.

"Good gad! The girls?"

"Rather!" said the fag. "But there, I won't bother you—"

"What-ho! This, dash it, needs probing!" said Archie, raising himself on his elbow, and gazing at Willy with acute concentration. "Did I understand you to say, dear old disturber, that the girls are talking?"

"Girls do nothing else!" replied Willy promptly.

"Oh, I say! But, really!" protested Archie. "You can't mean to say they're absolutely indulging in this old chin-wag stuff about me! They're not absolutely chatting about Archie!"

"It wouldn't matter if it was only chatting," said Willy sadly. "But Miss Irene and her chums—they're disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"In you," nodded Willy.

"In me? Oddslife!" gasped Archie, sitting up abruptly.

"Particularly Miss Marjorie."

"Gadzooks!" panted Archie, leaping out of the hammock with extraordinary agility, considering the fact that he was hot and quivery.

To hear that Marjorie Temple was disappointed in him was, indeed, a shock. For Archie was extremely keen to shine in Miss Marjorie's eyes. He didn't mind so much about Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and the other young ladies. But for Marjorie to talk about him was nothing less than a calamity.

The Trojan was progressing well on her journey to West Africa, and for days the weather had held gloriously fine—growing hotter and hotter as the liner progressed southward.

The party, as a whole, was a merry one. The St. Frank's fellows had been having the time of their lives, and were looking forward to the journey through Nigeria with eager anticipation. Altogether, there were two dozen juniors in the party, including three fags. St. Frank's was very well represented—as all the passengers on board were ready to admit.

The feminine members of our party had also enjoyed themselves. They consisted of Mrs. Hobart Manners, her daughter Irene, Marjorie, Doris, Tessa Love, and Reggie Pitt's sister, Winnie. And then, of course, there were one or two maid-servants—Mrs. Manners having insisted

upon bringing them along, assuming they would be needed.

The voyage had been nothing but enjoyment so far—games on deck, dances in the evening, and numerous other shipboard pleasures. And this was only just the beginning of the adventure.

Archie Glenthorne was startled to hear that he was being talked about. He demanded many more details.

"Details?" repeated Willy carelessly. "What's the need, old man? Thanks for getting out of the hammock—it's all I wanted!"

Willy calmly spread himself in the hammock, and composed himself for sleep. For a few moments Archie failed to grasp the full significance of the fag's action.

"Here, I say!" he gasped at last.

"Hallo, still there?" murmured Willy, lazily opening one eye. "Don't bother, old man—buzz off!"

"By gad!" ejaculated Archie indignantly. "Do you mean to tell me, you frightful young imp, that you told me a dashed string of whoppers in order to get me out of the hammock?"

"Not at all," retorted Willy, with a touch of irritability. "Don't be an ass! I just said the girls are talking about you—and so they are. And I know for a fact that Miss Marjorie's disappointed in you. She was hoping you'd play a game of quoits this afternoon, and you failed to turn up."

Archie adjusted his monocle.

"You fearful young bounder!" he declared. "You got me out of the hammock by a trick, dash it, and you know jolly well I haven't got enough energy to pitch you out."

"That," said Willy, "was just the idea."

"But I shall now proceed to prove, you little box of tricks, that Archie is not so dashed helpless, after all!" went on the genial ass of St. Frank's. "Kindly remove yourself within ten seconds, or I shall be obliged to spill you out with considerable vim."

Willy looked astonished.

"Well, I never gave you credit for so much pep," he said frankly. "But what about Miss Marjorie? She's playing quoits, don't forget, and I don't think she enjoys herself half so much without you, Archie. In fact, I heard her saying so."

"Good gad! Really?" said Archie eagerly.

"Honest injun!" insisted Willy. "She was talking to Irene, and she said the game wouldn't be half so good without you, and she was disappointed. Said there wouldn't be any fun unless you came blundering in with your usual comicalities. So you'd better buzz off, old lad."

Willy reclined in the hammock, leaving Archie in a condition of much doubt. He was anxious to go and join the girls, but Willy's final words of explanation had been somewhat disturbing.

CHAPTER XI.

HANDFORTH PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN.



IRENE MANNERS stamped her foot with vexation.

"Bother!" she exclaimed. "They won't go right at all!"

"Oh, that's because the quoits are rottenly made!" declared Edward Oswald Handforth promptly. "Even I can't throw 'em straight!"

"I'm afraid it's we who are at fault, Ted," smiled Irene. "It's your turn, Marjorie. Let's see what you can do."

There were nearly a dozen of us on the after-deck, and the picture was not without its charm. All the juniors were attired in white flannels, and the girls were in white muslin, or silk. And, without question, Irene and Co. were looking prettier than ever. Attractive girls at all times, they now looked very charming indeed.

Archie came lounging up, still frowning.

"Oh, here you are!" said Marjorie severely. "Why didn't you come before, lazybones?"

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Archie. "Are you referring to me, dear old girl? I mean—lazybones! Somewhat caustic, and all that."

"You deserve it!" said Marjorie, giving him a stern flash of her dark eyes. "Fancy! Going to sleep in a hammock, instead of joining us out here. Exercise is good for you, Archie."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Archie hastily. "The fact is, Willy whizzed along out of the offing, and gave me the good old tip. In fact, dash it, the young bouncer positively tricked me out of the good old hammock! And I'm dashed if he hasn't gone to sleep in it himself!"

The girls laughed heartily at the joke—a joke, however, which Archie quite failed to appreciate. And even Handforth refrained from grinning.

"What's that?" he asked. "My minor asleep—in a hammock?"

"Absolutely!"

"Oh, let him remain there!" said Marjorie. "Come on—whose turn? We mustn't let things slow down!"

Now that Archie was thoroughly aroused, he was keen enough to join in—particularly as Marjorie Temple was playing. Marjorie was every bit as attractive as Irene, but in a different way. She was dark, with brown eyes, small and dainty, and altogether charming. Archie always regarded her with a kind of personal interest.

He joined in the game, and failed to observe that Handforth had vanished. As a matter of fact, the leader of Study D was striding away with a grim expression on his rugged face.

"Asleep—in a hammock!" he muttered wrathfully. "And I told the young rotter

to work all the afternoon on my fancy-dress costume! I'll teach him to ignore my orders!"

The previous day Handforth had been struck by one of his usual brilliant ideas. He had decided to make a fancy-dress costume out of flags of the British Empire, and he had calmly instructed Church and McClure to get busy without delay. This was his idea of making his own costume.

But Church and McClure had a little more spirit than usual, and they not only point-blank refused, but also instructed Handforth to make the blessed thing himself. As a result, a coolness had sprung up between the famous trio—and Willy was instructed to proceed with the work. But Willy apparently had his own ideas on the subject, too.

Handforth arrived under the awning, gave one wrathful glare at his minor, and acted. The fag was lying full length in the hammock, in a condition of beautiful repose. He was fast asleep, with one leg dangling over the edge, and the other mysteriously tucked beneath him. His mouth was wide open, and there was an expression of peaceful happiness on his freckled face.

"Now then—out of it!" roared Handforth violently.

Willy, in the midst of a dream, thought that the ship had suddenly struck a floating mine. Handforth's method of awakening his minor was simple. He had seized the edge of the hammock, and, with one heave, Willy was tipped headlong on to the deck.

He struck the planks face foremost, turned a kind of somersault, and sat up.

"Which way to the lifeboats?" he gasped faintly.

"Blow the lifeboats—and blow you!" roared Handforth. "That's the way I treat slackers! That's the way I treat fatheads who disobey my orders!"

Willy rubbed his nose tenderly.

"Oh, so it's you!" he said, rising to his feet. "I might have known it! I thought it was an explosion at first—but you're just as bad! You bully! Hit one your own size!"

"I didn't touch you!" stormed Handforth. "What about my costume?"

"Your which?"

"My fancy-dress!"

"Oh, that?" said Willy carelessly. "It's finished!"

"Finished?"

"Rather!" said Willy. "Finished beyond repair!"

"What?"

Handforth nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"Of course, you'll blame me, I suppose?" asked Willy indignantly. "What do I know about fancy-dress costumes? Why couldn't you ask some of the girls to make it for you?"

"Because I wanted to spring it as a surprise!" retorted Handforth grimly. "What's happened to it?"

"Well, roughly, about everything that possibly could happen to a fancy-dress costume," replied Willy calmly. "It seemed to be going all right at first, but I must have made a miscalculation, because when I started using the scissors—"

"Scissors!" gasped Handforth faintly. "But I'd cut it all out! I told you just to sew it up!"

"I tried to sew it, but I'm no good with a needle," replied Willy, "so I did the next best thing and used glue."

"Glue!" howled Handforth.

"Why not? Glue sticks things together!" said Willy casually. "It stuck your costume together all right! So I started cutting it up again, and somehow it's made a mess of things. In fact, the whole thing looked so horrible that I chucked it overboard!"

CHAPTER XII.

THREE OF A KIND!



EDWARD OSWALD went slightly pale.

"You—you threw it overboard?" he repeated hoarsely.

"The whole job lot!" replied Willy. "What was the good of keeping a lot of junk like that? Mind you, I did my best—I used three tubes of glue, and accidentally sat on one. But it didn't matter, because it was tucked under a fold of your blazer."

"My blazer!" said Handforth faintly.

"Yes; that one with the red stripes," replied Willy. "I thought I'd glued my giddy bags, but I was lucky. Of course, your blazer's in a bit of a mess, and a few blobs of glue happened to fall in your dancing-pumps. But that's an advantage—they were always a bit loose."

Handforth eyed his mirror murderously.

"You—you destructive young rotter!" he said thickly.

"That's right—go on!" said Willy.

"Blame me! And you know jolly well it's your own fault!"

"My fault!" hooted Handforth wildly.

"Of course! I warned you from the first—I told you not to start that fatheaded costume—"

"But I didn't tell you to use glue!" raved Handforth, gnashing his teeth. "By George! I'm going to slaughter you for this! By the time I've done, you'll wish you went overboard with the ruins of my costume! I'm going to smash you into smithereens!"

Willy dodged with the adroitness of long practice. But for once in his career he made a miscalculation, and failed to elude the clutching fingers of his major. The next second he was struggling fiercely, but silently. Willy never called for help under any circumstances.

"Now, then—take that!" gasped Handforth fiercely.

Biff!

Willy took it—a neat jab on the right ear. It was very seldom that Handforth actually struck his minor, but in the present instance any impartial judge would have decided that he was justified.

"Ted! What are you doing?"

Edward Oswald froze stiff. His fury faded on the instant, and his fingers became limp. Willy was released, and Handforth stood back, breathing hard and looking sheepish.

"Oh, can't you keep out of it?" he growled sulkily.

"I caught you red-handed!" said the newcomer acidly. "I'm ashamed of you—knocking poor Willy about like that! Go away at once—go away and be a good boy!"

The newcomer was a girl—a small, sturdily built young person of about fourteen. She was dainty in a vigorous, robust kind of way, with a round face and a head of straight bobbed hair. Her face was not exactly pretty, but there was something very attractive about it, nevertheless. And she looked the most self-possessed of mortals—as, indeed, she was.

"Oh, don't butt in, sis!" growled Willy.

"I don't want any argument!" said the young lady firmly. "No, not a word! I won't stand Ted's bullying!"

Handforth seemed to swallow something, and he shifted his feet. This diminutive maiden hardly came any higher than his shoulder, but she apparently possessed a remarkable authority over him.

She was, of course, Handforth's sister, and she had been included in the holiday party at the last moment. Her name was Ena, and she possessed most of the celebrated Handforth characteristics. Yet, at the same time, she was totally different from either Edward Oswald or Willy.

The majority of the St. Frank's fellows had received Ena with surprise—for they hadn't known that Handy had a sister at all. As he explained, she was only a kid, and he had never even bothered about her. And she was generally away at boarding-school, and until recently had been in the Midlands.

And Ena wasn't mentioned in the holiday party list, because I thought it would be rather good to spring a little surprise. And Handforth's sister was a surprise in herself.

"Didn't you hear me?" she asked severely.

"All right, sis!" growled Handforth.

"I'm going."

He turned on his heel and vanished. Extraordinarily enough, this little maid had an uncanny power over her big brother. Handy could hit Willy, and could order Willy about. But as soon as ever Ena arrived, his powers of action and speech deserted him. She had that effect.

"Just like you to butt in, of course!" said Willy bitterly. "My hat! It's a pity you can't leave Ted alone!"

Ena Handforth regarded him coldly.

"And that's all the thanks I get for saving you!" she exclaimed. "You ungrateful little wretch! You needn't think I stopped Ted because I felt sorry for you—because you probably deserved all you got."

"Then what was the idea of pushing in?"

"I did it as a matter of principle," said Ena firmly. "Ted's too fond of using his weight, and if I don't keep him in order, who will? Now run along, Willy, and play!"

Willy gave her one withering look, which had absolutely no effect, and then strode off. He always had a feeling in her presence that he was handicapped.

Ena smiled quietly to herself, and felt

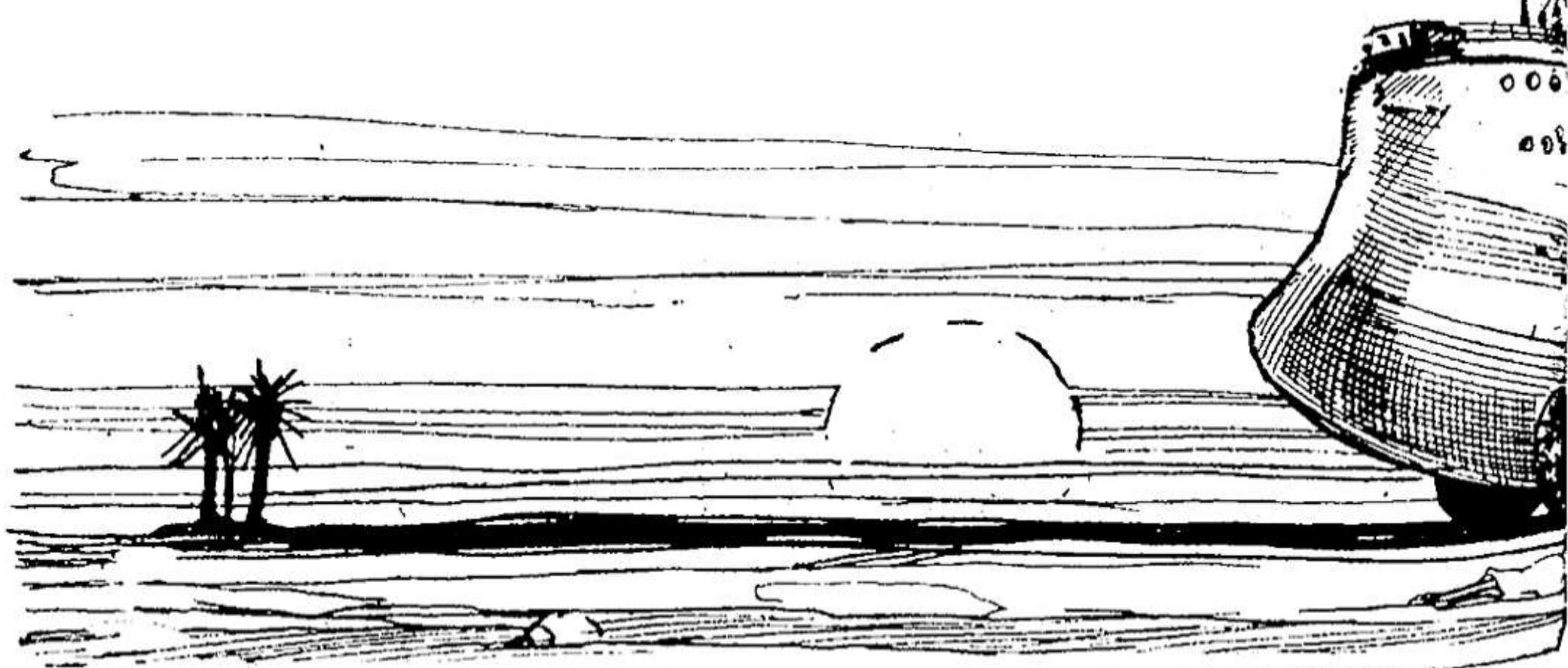
three of them on his hands he was constantly worried one way or another. Secretly, Sir Edward was heartily pleased that Lady Handforth had decided to spend the summer with her sister in Scotland. Lady Handforth was a good wife and a splendid mother, but was rather liable to hold the reins. So Sir Edward was enjoying an unwonted freedom.

Nelson Lee lost no time in interviewing Major Townley, the good-natured Army officer who had sent letters and cablegrams to England concerning the missing adventurers.

Major Townley had nothing further to add. No news had come down concerning Dorrie and his party, and the major was quite frank in his opinion that the expedition had perished in the desert.

"As far as I can see, there is no other way of looking at it, Mr. Lee," he declared

The Conqueror, a towering triumph of engineering skill, was now in readiness for the great adventure into the unknown that was about to commence.



that the honours of the occasion were entirely with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

'NEATH AFRICAN SKIES.



LAGOS was reached in due course, and without any untoward adventure.

The whole holiday party was in the best of spirits, and the St. Frank's fellows and Irene and Co. were very keen to do all the sightseeing they possibly could.

The more important matters of arranging for the long up-country railway journey were left to Nelson Lee, and Mr. Hobart Manners, and the other adults of the party.

Sir Edward Handforth had as much as he could do to look after his family, for with

blantly. "I don't want you to think you've come out here for nothing, and I'm the last fellow in the world to be pessimistic. But I know this country, and I know the desert. It exacts a terrible penalty on humanity. The total absence of news is black—very black."

"And yet they say that no news is good news," observed Sir Edward brilliantly.

"In this case, I think it hardly applies," replied the major, shaking his head. "When one gets no news from the desert, invariably means that the desert has gained another victory. However, there's a chance—I'm not denying it. And it would be foolish in the extreme if you didn't go north to cover the ground for yourselves."

And so arrangements were made for the whole party to travel up-country on the Nigeria railway. Time was of value, and so none was lost. It was fixed that we

should all travel by the train that left Lagos on the following morning. In the meantime, the party remained on board, the liner's accommodation being better than anything on shore.

The town proved of great interest to the party. The St. Frank's fellows went ashore, sightseeing, and Mrs. Manners personally conducted the girls. And most of us received a surprise.

From the lagoon, it had seemed that Lagos was a European city. But it was only necessary to go ashore to discover that the greater part of the town was purely native, and consequently of much greater interest.

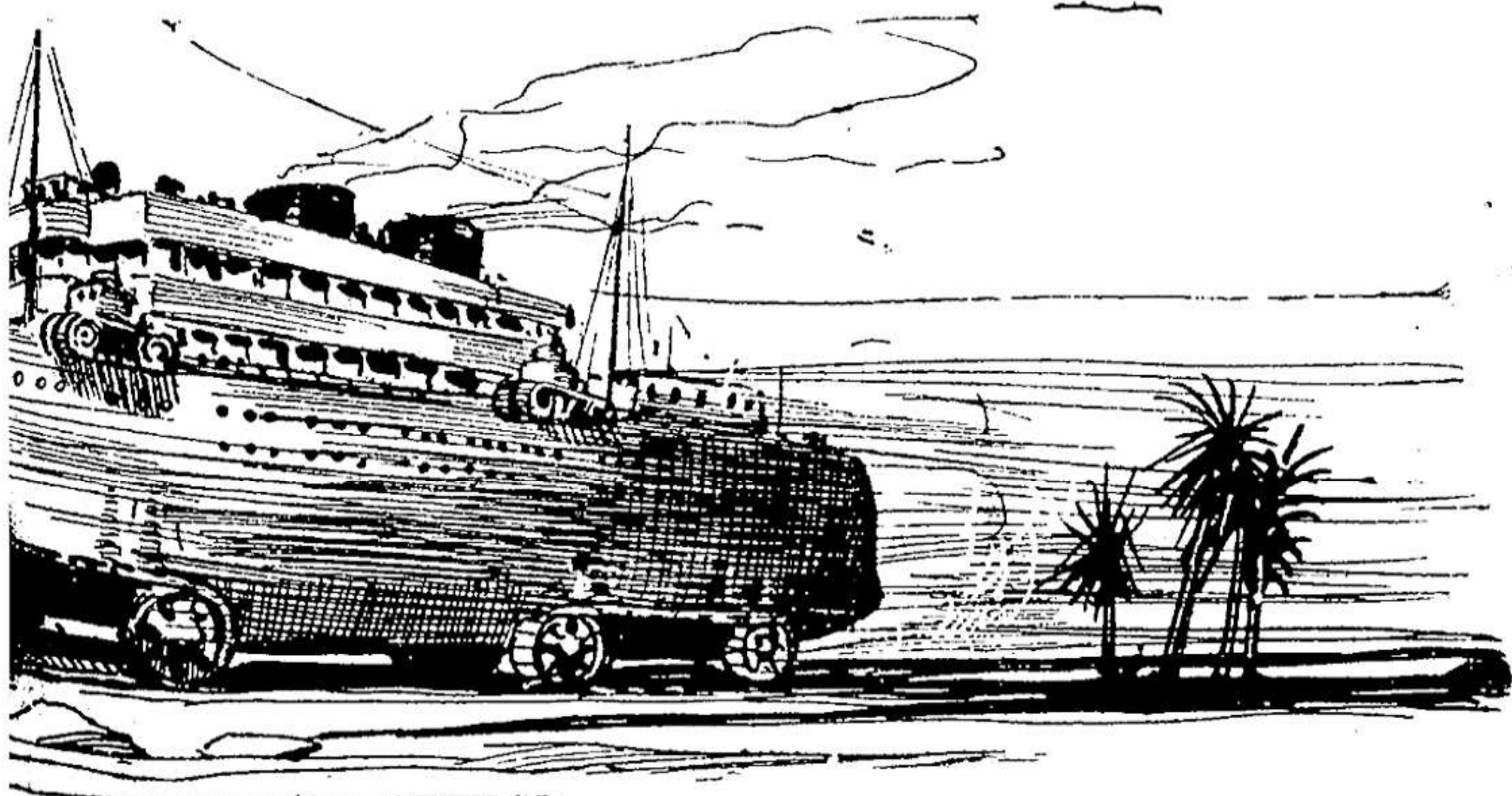
The reason for this false impression was that the European section ran in a line along the long shores of the lagoon—a kind of barrier between the sea and the

And the natives were of all kinds—Hausa, Arab, Kroo, Yoruba, and many other tribes that I couldn't place.

Everything, indeed, was extremely picturesque, and if I had space enough, I would go into all sorts of details regarding the Oriental colourings of the scenes, the perfect physique of the natives, the brilliant bazaars, and the charming native pictures that one could see at almost every twist or turn of the disreputable streets.

But I'm afraid the stuff wouldn't be interesting enough, for, after all, this is not a guide book, but a record of our extraordinary adventures in the desert. So the sooner we hurry on the better.

Naturally, Handforth got into trouble. We should all have been surprised if he hadn't. He not only quarrelled with half a dozen, native shopkeepers, but he wanted



enormous native city which lay hidden beyond.

Handforth was rather disgusted.

"Why, the town's nothing but a blessed rubbish heap!" he declared scathingly. "Nothing but huts made of mud, with old soap boxes and sacks and every sort of junk piled on the roofs! I never saw such a collection of litter in all my life!"

In a way, Handy was quite correct. Deprived of its humanity, Lagos would certainly have been a miserable place. But it was the people themselves who converted it into a city of never-ceasing interest.

In the hot, dusty, crowded streets there was always something pleasing to the eye—the throngs of West Coast natives in their brilliant cotton clothing, and everybody eagerly and industriously selling or buying. As far as I could see, the place was an absolute hive of industry.

to fight three of them on the spot, and it was only by sheer force that we dragged him back to the European quarter, and then bundled him back on the liner.

"And you're jolly well going to stay here, my son, until the train starts in the morning!" I declared firmly. "If you go ashore again you'll be shoved in prison for causing a race riot!"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to get his sister here!" suggested Church. "We'll ask her to keep a watch on him—"

"If you do that, I'll never speak to you again!" said Handforth frantically. "Ena's all right, but I'm helpless when she starts interfering. She's a girl, so I can't bill her! That's where she always scores over me!" he added bitterly. "Blessed if I know why she wanted to come on this trip! I told the pater—"

What Handforth had told his pater was not revealed, for Ena hove in sight at that moment, and Handforth fled.



CHAPTER XIV.

KANO, THE MYSTERIOUS.

THE sun blazed down with pitiless, relentless intensity.

The very air quivered with the heat, and the dryness of the atmosphere was incredible. We were in Kano—that strange, mysterious native city situated seven hundred miles from Lagos, in Northern Nigeria.

We were far up country—at the edge of civilisation. For the railway went no further than this wonderful Mud City, and beyond lay the unknown wilderness of the Sahara.

The railway trip had taken us three days—a long time, considering the distance, but not altogether without comfort. We had travelled on a “train de luxe”—and had been pleasantly surprised to find that the corridor coaches were almost luxurious—with electric lighting, bath-rooms, a wonderful dining-car service, and surprisingly good sleeping berths.

But we were thankful to find ourselves on solid ground again, where we could stretch our legs, and obtain some exercise.

Our arrival caused something of a sensation—which was only natural. For such a big party to turn up was an unusual event, and over half the European colony greeted us at the busy, teeming station.

Mr. Travers Earle was welcomed by all, and he had many friends. And Mr. Manners, too, was equally popular. We were all taken without delay to the European segregation—which lay outside the walls of the city.

And to our delight, we found that tremendous preparations had been made. Mr. Travers Earle's bungalow was a wonderful building—a modern palace set here on this dry, desert-like land. And during our journey from England, Mr. Earle's staff had erected a temporary bungalow next to it, so that we should all find ample accommodation.

The first thing we wanted was rest, and we got it. But early the following day, some of the fellows suggested a trip into Kano city, and it was eagerly adopted. We were all keenly anxious to have a look at this strange town at close quarters.

Somehow, Kano was different to anything we had expected to see—and, more than

anything else, it impressed us with its aspect of age. There was something grim and mysterious about this powerful city which stood at the edge of civilisation—a frontier city of the desert.

It was so totally different from everything else we had seen in Nigeria, and even in these modern days, it remains almost completely native—a powerful stronghold of the Hausa people and of Islam.

The population of Kano is enormous for a native city, being anything between sixty thousand and a hundred thousand—for the population fluctuates according to the season.

Very impressive are the enormous ramparts which entirely surround the city—great walls which speak of warlike days in the past, and which still stand as impressive as ever. These walls are of mud, like everything else in Kano—sun-baked until they are of the hardness of concrete.

The walls themselves tower above all else, and we were filled with amazement when we looked at them. Thousands upon thousands of natives must have engaged in the task of building these ramparts in the past. For the walls are forty feet wide at the base, and rise to a height of over thirty feet, tapering to about six feet at the top.

The parapet has regular openings—which were formerly used by warriors, armed with bows and arrows, to protect the city in case of siege. And in thirteen different spots there are entrances—tunnel-like and gloomy—the gates which lead into Kano city.

We experienced quite a thrill as we passed through, to find ourselves in this strange town of mud huts. For that is what it is. All the dwellings are built of the clay soil, and sun-baked to the hardness of rock. And such dwellings as these, although primitive in the extreme, have the one great advantage of being cool.

We were startled by the formation of the streets, and it was hardly surprising that many of our party lost themselves. For the streets are merely lanes, zig-zagging and twisting and turning in the most bewildering fashion. In fact, the city is nothing more nor less than a maze.

In every odd corner there are the little native mud dwellings, most of them surrounded by a ten-foot wall—for they all have their compounds, or yards. And the huts are low, windowless, and primitive. The natives are surprisingly proud of their highly coloured cotton clothing, but care nothing about their dwellings.

The market attracted us greatly. For it is here, after the heat of the day, that all the business is done. And Kano market is a humming centre of industry. Heavily laden donkeys, camels, and even oxen, all tramp into the market, carrying their wares.

The market itself consists of long streets

of low, roofed-in stalls, with the Hausa merchants ever ready to do business.

Some of the merchants are Arabs, and in the cattle market the natives are Fulani or Beri-Beri, and the live stock offered for sale consists of cattle, sheep, goats, and camels—to say nothing of splendid looking Arab horses.

"Well, my hat—just look at this!" exclaimed Handforth, as he paused before one of the stalls. "I'm blessed if they haven't got Gold Flake cigarettes here! And Sheffield knives! And all sorts of other English things, too!"

It was true enough, and we found that quite a number of British goods were for sale—although the great majority of the wares were purely native.

Naturally, Handforth got lost again. He didn't repeat his performance in Lagos, and quarrel with the natives, but he led Church and McClure down the maze-like lanes, firmly declaring that he knew the way.

In the end, the chums of Study D got quite exhausted and scared, finding it impossible to discover any outlet, and failing to make themselves understood.

It was by pure luck that they fell in with a grinning native, who spoke pidgin English. And this coloured gentleman, with much cheerfulness, escorted the juniors to one of the city gates, and directed them to the European colony.

But Handforth and Co. had had enough of Kano.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONQUEROR.



MR. TRAVERS EARLE rose briskly.

"Well, Mr. Lee, we'll go straight along to the works," he said.

"Mr. Manners reports that the Conqueror is ready for the final trial—complete in every detail for the start of the trip."

The millionaire was alert and active, his thin, loose-limbed frame encased in neat white drill. Nelson Lee and Sir Edward were similarly attired, and they were standing on the shady veranda of their host's bungalow.

"And when do we make the start, Mr. Earle?" asked Handy's pater. "I mean—the real start."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't leave this very day, if everybody is agreeable," replied Mr. Earle. "The Conqueror is fully provisioned, her water tanks are filled, and she is ready for any journey."

"The sooner we start, the better," said Nelson Lee. "But so far Mr. Earle, the Conqueror is still a myth to us. We have

heard a great deal about her, but we have never seen her."

The inventor smiled.

"That's a detail that will soon be remedied," he declared. "We'll go off at once, gentlemen. I waited until to-day, because I wanted the vessel to be complete in every item."

"Can we come along, pater?" asked Handforth hopefully.

"No, you may not!" replied his father, with firmness.

"Come, come!" laughed Mr. Earle. "Why debar the boys from this pleasure, Sir Edward? I'll warrant they are all a-quiver with eagerness to see our future home. And the young ladies, too! I shall be only too pleased if the party is a live one."

"Oh, good egg!"

"We'll all go, what?" said Archie Glen-thorne. "A frightful fag, no doubt, but I must confess that I'm dashed curious. I mean to say, I'd like to get Phipps busy unpacking the old wardrobe, and so forth. I'm afraid my best suits are frightfully rumpled after all this journey."

"Blow your best suits!" said Handforth. "What do you want any suits at all for? Anything's good enough for the desert."

Archie refrained from making any reply, holding the view that no reply could possibly be adequate. And the news soon went round that we were all going to Mr. Earle's construction works, to view the Conqueror.

There had been a lot of secrecy, and one or two of the fellows had been hinting that there wasn't any Conqueror at all, and that Mr. Earle was as mad as a hatter. And, certainly, it was an undoubted fact that the vessel was no more than an imaginary craft to us. We had all pictured it in our minds, and we were enormously anxious to see it in the reality—rather fearful lest we should be disappointed.

This was our second day in Kano, and it was only now that we were going to see the Conqueror. But Mr. Travers Earle's attitude was easily understandable.

For the best part of a year he had been building his vessel in secret—hidden from all eyes save those of his workpeople—and these were mainly British, many of them being booked for positions as members of the crew.

And Mr. Earle had not wanted us to see his wonderful ship until it was complete to the last detail—ready for our instant occupation. His idea, in fact, was to invite us on board, not merely to inspect the ship, but to remain.

And during our brief time in Kano, our host had been a great deal busier than we had believed. He had appointed the stewards, he had taken Mr. and Mrs. Manners on board the Conqueror, and the state-rooms for the entire party had been allotted.



Handforth's method of awakening his minor was simple. He had seized the edge of the hammock, and with one heave Willy was tipped headlong on to the deck.

It was a wise plan, for when we went aboard, we should be escorted to our own cabins, in just the same way as passengers on a liner are shown to their quarters. And all our trunks and baggage would be in our own state rooms, waiting for us.

We should go on board in the forenoon—and luncheon would be served at mid-day, in the big saloon—everything being arranged to the last detail. Mr. Earle desired no confusion.

The construction works were situated only a short distance from the bungalow—in full view. But we could see nothing but a vast walled enclosure. These walls were of the usual reddish clay, so common in the neighbourhood. They towered high on all sides, enclosing the works beyond all possibility of spying eyes. The gates themselves were double, so that idlers outside could not glimpse within. From first to last, the millionaire had maintained complete secrecy.

We experienced a big thrill, therefore, when we arrived at the gates, and waited for them to be opened. There were any amount of us—nearly all the St. Frank's juniors, and all the girls. These latter, attired in white muslin, gave a singularly charming aspect to the scene. And Irene and Co. were every bit as inwardly excited as the boys.

"I do hope we shan't be dreadfully disappointed," whispered Irene.

"Eh? Oh! Rather not!" said Handforth

hastily, becoming confused when he found that Irene was addressing him. "Of course we shan't be disappointed, Miss Irene. Hasn't your pater told us that the Conqueror is the most wonderful thing in the world?"

"Yes, but dad's an engineer," said Irene wisely. "Perhaps he looks at these things differently. The Conqueror may be wonderful from his point of view, but not from ours."

"Well, anyway, we'll soon see," put in Doris Berkeley. "Look out! The gates are open. Now for the shock!"

Doris spoke lightly—but never were truer words uttered than hers. For when we passed into that great walled enclosure we did, indeed, receive a shock.

The Conqueror stood before us, and most of the juniors fairly shouted with amazement and wonder. For the great, glittering monster which stood revealed before our eyes was, without question, the most staggering thing we had ever seen.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHIP OF A THOUSAND WONDERS

"GOOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne uttered that ejaculation, and it was all he could say for a full minute. He stood staring, like the rest of us, and he was so thunderstruck that he quite forgot to his famous monocle.

"Oh!" said Irene breathlessly. "Oh, Ted! Isn't it just too lovely for words?"

Handforth gave a kind of gulp.

"It—it can't be real!" he muttered.

We were all standing within the enclosure—gazing at the Conqueror, as she stood there in all her new glory. I don't quite know what the majority of us expected, but the reality was without question far more stupendous.

Personally, I had been imagining a vast kind of super tank—a great, ungainly thing of dull steel, something like the celebrated war tanks, only much exaggerated in size.

But my mental picture was a mere travesty of the noble craft which now stood before us. The most startling feature about

the Conqueror was her enormous size. Not one of us had ever dreamed that she would be so stupendous.

The Conqueror was roughly a hundred feet long, and fully fifty feet wide—this great breadth, in proportion to her length, being obviously designed to give her steadiness and stability.

From the ground to the promenade-deck the distance was no less than twenty-five feet, this great hull being occupied with engine-rooms, storage compartments, water-tanks, oil-tanks, accommodation for the crew, and many of the passenger state-rooms.

And above the main-deck rose the superstructure, in almost identically the same fashion as a true sea-going yacht. There were other state-rooms, the saloon, smoking-room, lounges, to say nothing of the broad, imposing navigation-bridge, with a pilot-house in the centre.

Amidships there were two graceful funnels—enormous funnels, like those of Lord Dorrimore's private yacht, the Wanderer. A slight haze of filmy smoke was rising lazily from them.

And fore and aft there were masts of the ordinary, conventional type. Stretched between them was the aerial for the wireless. The whole vessel was amazingly like a sea-going private yacht.

She was spotlessly white, with her name emblazoned on the bows in great gilt letters. And above, her brasswork glittered and glowed in the sunshine, and there were numerous shady awnings of white canvas.

But where she differed absolutely from her ocean-going sister, was in her method of propulsion. For the Conqueror was provided with gigantic caterpillar contrivances.

These were eight in number, four on either side, the hull apparently suspended between them, in the same manner as a Pullman coach is swung on the bogies. And the suspension was apparently enormously elastic, to judge by the extraordinarily complicated springing apparatus.

On both sides of the land yacht davits were fitted, and swinging from these were the vessels "lifeboats." In reality, they were tiny whippet tanks—neat little tractors. There were also four light motor-cars, swung on davits in the same way.

The object of these auxiliary craft was obvious. In case the Conqueror came to grief in the desert, the tractors and the cars would enable the entire ship's company to escape into civilisation. The tractors and cars would also be enormously useful for scouting purposes.

"Well?" smiled Mr. Travers Earle at length. "How does my freak ship impress you, gentlemen?"

"Well, upon my soul, I must confess that I am rather startled," said Nelson Lee frankly. "I had certainly not pictured such a remarkable vessel as this, Mr. Earle. 'The Conqueror' is indeed a vessel of a thousand wonders."

"I think you will have more reason to say that after we have escorted you round, Mr. Lee," put in Mr. Manners. "I think you know something of engineering, eh? Well, if you don't admit that this is the most wonderful engineering job in existence, I shall be surprised."

"By George!" ejaculated Sir Edward Handforth. "But you can't mean to assure me, sir, that this—this remarkable craft will actually travel? It seems too enormous to move."

"And yet she is capable of a speed of fifteen miles an hour on level ground," smiled Mr. Earle. "Her cruising speed is less, of course, and on very rough ground she is naturally obliged to proceed with great caution. But come on board, gentlemen. You, too, youngsters."

We went on board eagerly and excitedly. I had not failed to observe that the bows of the Conqueror were designed like a huge battering-ram—sharp, cruel, and businesslike—but, nevertheless, graceful.

We went on board by means of a great gangway amidships—between the central caterpillars. A steel doorway opened in the centre of the hull, admitting us into a wide, lofty, sumptuously appointed lounge, where electric lights glowed in profusion.

And we crowded into the vessel with a kind of awe. We were on board at last.

And the greatest surprises were yet to come.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARVEL UPON MARVEL.



MARJORIE TEMPLE clasped her hands in sheer ecstasy.

"It's too wonderful to be real!" she said breathlessly. "Oh, Irene! Did you ever see anything so perfectly

beautiful?"

"Never!" said Irene.

They were standing in the main saloon of the Conqueror, where the rest of us had gathered, too. It was a luxurious lounge, and there was every indication that the builder of this vessel was a millionaire and an idealist—a man who had spent money like water on this whim.

The Conqueror was his toy—his hobby. And, being a man of immense wealth, he had indulged his fancy to the utmost. The great saloon was exquisite to the last degree, decorated and furnished in the most charming taste imaginable.

Overhead there was a great domed skylight, through which the light of day streamed plentifully.

From the saloon we went along richly carpeted corridors to the smoking-lounge, the reading-room, the dining-saloon, and other apartments too numerous to mention.

The state-rooms proved to be ideal.

They were sumptuously furnished, and provided with real beds, soft lounges, and roomy wardrobes. And there were more than enough to accommodate the entire party.

We found that the juniors would be divided into threes—thus, Handforth and Co. would share one state-room, Tregellis-West and Watson and I another, and so forth. Nothing could have pleased us better.

The ladies' quarters, in another corridor, were just as perfect—indeed, even more so! For Mr. Earle had allotted the best cabins of all to his fair guests.

"And to think that we can go into the desert on this wonderful ship!" said Irene. "It's even more astonishing than the first steamer! Just imagine travelling into the Sahara on camels!"

"Camels are obsolete after this," declared Ena Handforth. "I can't understand why a land yacht has never been thought of before."

"I expect it has," said Marjorie; "but just think of the expense! This yacht must have cost hundreds of thousands—and it would never have been built if Mr. Earle hadn't been a kind of overgrown boy. I expect he's always dreamed of a wonder-ship like this, and now that he's rich, and retired, he decided to build it!"

"Oh, I do hope we're successful!" exclaimed Winifred Pitt, her troubled eyes showing no sign of the delight that animated the others. "If only we can find Lord Dorrimore—and Reggie! Dad's all impatient for us to start, and so am I! Won't it be wonderful if we succeed?"

Ena Handforth sniffed.

"If?" she repeated scornfully. "There's no 'if' about it! We're bound to succeed! And don't you believe that nonsense about your brother being dead. We shall find him!"

"I really believe we shall!" said Winnie breathlessly.

Ena, it seemed was a confirmed optimist, and, when things were blackest, it was her usual custom to be excessively cheerful. In the same way as her elder brother, she always dismissed the odds with scorn.

The girls soon went on deck, and found most of the juniors there already.

The main-deck was almost identical with that of a sea-going yacht. But when one leaned over the rail it was the ground below, not the sea. One gazed down upon the great caterpillars, and the intricate suspension devices. The only doubt in our minds was whether the Conqueror would ever move.

She seemed so vast and cumbersome that no amount of engine power would get her to shift. And a visit to the engine-room had not given us a very great deal of confidence.

For the engines seemed ridiculously small. They were of a type which Mr. Travers Earle had designed and invented himself. Oil-consuming, and of the internal combustion variety, they seemed rather inadequate to the demand which would be made upon them.

But Mr. Manners was full of enthusiasm. As chief engineer of the yacht—and as superintendent of the whole building operations, which had extended over nearly a year—he declared that the engines were more than adequate; and he added that he would soon prove it.

Nelson Lee was thoroughly convinced that he had been wise indeed in accepting the millionaire's offer. With a vessel like this under his feet, the exploration of the unknown Sahara would become a sheer pleasure, instead of a gruelling, arduous agony.

"So far, Mr. Earle, I have nothing but praise," he declared. "Indeed, I am rather at a loss for words. But I will be frank. I am consumed with impatience to see your vessel in motion—to be present during an actual demonstration."

"Your impatience need not increase, Mr. Lee, for we are going on a trial at once," replied Mr. Earle crisply. "If you care to come on the navigation bridge, I will show you how easily the yacht can be piloted—in spite of her unwieldy appearance."

Not only Nelson Lee accompanied the inventor, but Sir Edward Handforth and Mr. Pitt as well. And the rest of us gathered round the rails, eager and excited. We were too busy to complain of the burning sun, which poured down upon our heads, too interested to worry about the heat.

"I must be allowed to remark, dear old chappies, that it seems somewhat thick," said Archie. "Not only thick, dash it, but positively turgid! I mean to say, you can't tell me that this bally ship will actually whizz forth into the old wilderness— Good gad!"

"Listen!" breathed Alf Brent excitedly.

"That," said Archie, "is what I am doing."

From below, deep down in the ship, came a faint, purring hum. And the decks quivered and vibrated, but so slightly that the motion would not have been noticed if the juniors had not been on the alert for it.

"Look!" yelled Handforth suddenly.

He pointed to the nearest great wall of the enclosure—and it seemed to be moving. But it wasn't. The Conqueror herself was gliding smoothly and almost noiselessly forward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TRAVERS EARLE'S TRIUMPH.



"EXTRAORDINARY!" said Mr. Pitt huskily.

"That is the only word, sir—the only word!" declared Sir Edward. "Why, by George, this is staggering; nothing more or less than staggering!"

Without their knowing it, the Conqueror had commenced moving. In just the same

way as the juniors, they had received their first intimation that the yacht was moving by catching sight of the great wall.

There had been no jerk—no grinding of machinery—no cumbersome, lumbering lurch of the great caterpillars.

Instead, the land yacht had slid forward smoothly and quietly. And nothing but a low purr could be heard—so soft as to be almost inaudible. And now that the vessel was in motion, every trace of vibration had ceased.

“Hurrah!”

On deck, the juniors gave vent to their excitement by cheering vigorously. But they would have something worth cheering at in a few minutes. For the Conqueror was gaining speed.

The enclosure was extensive, being over a quarter of a mile in length, a good proportion of this space being occupied by engineering shops and storehouses. But there was plenty of empty space.

And presently the land yacht was moving along at over ten miles an hour—smoothly, glidingly, without a trace of jerkiness or bumping. The ground was hard, sun-baked clay, and quite smooth. But just ahead lay a great patch of broken ground, with boulders and several severe depressions. And Mr. Travers Earle was steering the Conqueror direct to this spot.

“Look out! We’re going to get a fearful jar in a minute!” yelled Bob Christine. “Hang on tight, everybody!”

We all thought that the great vessel would lurch and stagger—but we were soon disillusioned. The Conqueror reached the boulders and the uneven ground, and simply walked over it in her stride.

The big hull, suspended between those enormous caterpillar tractors, gently swung to and fro with an easy, elastic motion. And this was the only indication we received of the rough ground we had passed over.

“It’s—it’s marvellous!” I said, in wonder.

“Oh, I know I shall wake up!” growled Tommy Watson.

But he didn’t. The Conqueror swung round smoothly, and went back on her own tracks. And then, running dead slow, she proceeded to perform an act which scared some of the fellows.

For Mr. Earle steered his vessel clean into the wall, the battering-ram pressing firmly and strenuously against the great mud

structure. He touched the engine-room telegraph, and the Conqueror pressed forward with startling force.

Crash!

The wall went to pieces before our eyes—crumbling up, and breaking away as though it had been made of cardboard. And the great tractor tilted her bow upwards, mounted the debris of the wall with ease, and cleared it with only one or two swaying lurches.

This demonstration proved, indeed, that the ship was capable of travelling over almost any type of rough country. And most of us on board were altogether too startled to make any adequate comment.

We only knew that the Conqueror gathered speed as she rolled gracefully over the ground towards the bungalows—which she could have demolished in her stride with the utmost ease.

But the land yacht came to a halt in front of the low buildings, and Mr. Earle announced that she was ready to commence her voyage as soon as ever we were ready. And there the Conqueror stood—a towering triumph of engineering skill which completely dwarfed the bungalows.

Everything was in readiness—and the great adventure into the Unknown was about to commence.

Somewhere out in the scorching, blazing wastes of the Unknown Sahara a small party of prisoners were toiling laboriously over the endless sands. They were Lord Dorrimore, Sir Crawford Grey, Jack Grey, Reggie Pitt, and Umlosi. They formed part of a camel train which went endlessly onwards.

They were captives in the hands of strange foes.

All were in the best of health, and their spirits were still high. But they knew nothing of their destination, and why they had been captured. Still less did they dream of the rescue-party that was about to set out to their aid.

But one thing was certain.

Before so very long adventures and excitements of the most startling character were to befall both prisoners and rescuers! The immediate future held a maze of mystery for the St. Frank’s holiday party!

For the unexplored Sahara was soon to yield up an amazing secret of a thousand years’ standing!

THE END.

Further amazing adventures with The Conqueror in the Sahara
will be told next week in another enthralling story:—

“TRAPPED IN THE DESERT!”



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

By the Author of our St. Frank's Stories.



No. 34. ENTERING LOS ANGELES.

OUR train, the California Limited, was nearly at the end of its long journey from Chicago to Los Angeles. I had started out on the Sunday evening, and now it was Wednesday morning—the last day of the trip.

These long distance railway journeys in America are equivalent to ocean voyages—with the exception they lack the comfort that one obtains on ship-board. For, after all, one is extremely limited on a train, and exercise of any sort is practically out of the question.

So I was heartily glad to be within a few hours of my destination. I was in California at last—but, as I mentioned in my last article, I had seen little of the glorious scenery that I had always associated with that Far Western State.

Since leaving Barstow, the heavy train had pulled along through the desert, and about the only interesting sights were provided by the weird, grotesque formations of cactus which grew in countless profusion on every side.

But after a while the scenery began to change, and the train was finally making its way through the last range of mountains before dropping down into the great valley beyond.

And here, at last, after looking for it for days, I found some real scenery. The great mountain peaks, dense valleys, and awesome gorges—with the train twisting and winding about in a way that not only seemed bewildering, but positively dangerous.

But it was all wild, and although majestic enough, quite different from what I had anticipated. And then, swinging round a gorge of rocks, the train was suddenly thundering through a totally unexpected glade—which struck the note I had long hoped for.

These little scenes were very interesting. Trees—big, green, welcome trees, looking very much like those of the English countryside. And occasionally, there would be palms—and I was rather thrilled. To see these palms, picturesque and graceful, was exceedingly welcome.

And then, almost before we knew it, the train would be among the rocks and the

craggs again, labouring up some curving grade, or roaring down a sharp declivity. And all the time the sky was stormy overhead, with occasional bursts of rain—much to the confusion of the native Californians, who still maintained that Los Angeles would be a glory of sunshine.

The final sweep out of the mountains, and our train pulled up at San Bernardino—quite a large town standing on the edge of the desert. Beyond this lay the fertile fields and valleys—the orange groves, and the famous vine lands where they produce the celebrated Sunmaid Raisins.

Having left San Bernardino, the train gathered speed, for from here to Pasadena—the next stop—the track was practically level. And most of the passengers were engaged in packing up their belongings, and making the final preparations for alighting.

But I had plenty of opportunities of watching the landscape, and it was a glorious sight to see the green fields and meadows, the well-made concrete roads, and the picturesque bungalows. After the dreary sights of Kansas and New Mexico, and the beginning of California, this scenery was like a cool draught to a parched man.

I could see the mountains all round—great peaks raising their summits to the stormy heavens. For the clouds were still thick and threatening, and I couldn't help being slightly amused when the train pulled up at Pasadena. For a tremendous thunderstorm was raging, and rain was descending in torrents. Pasadena is more or less a part of Los Angeles, being within easy reach by automobile or street car.

It was still raining when the train drew out, and almost before we knew it we were passing through the suburbs of Los Angeles—with the prophets completely confounded. For everything was wet and dripping, and the streets were covered with puddles and mud.

And we drew up in Los Angeles station with the rain still descending, and with the thunder rolling overhead. My entry into the great Western metropolis was scarcely alluring.

NEXT WEEK: "The City of Palms."



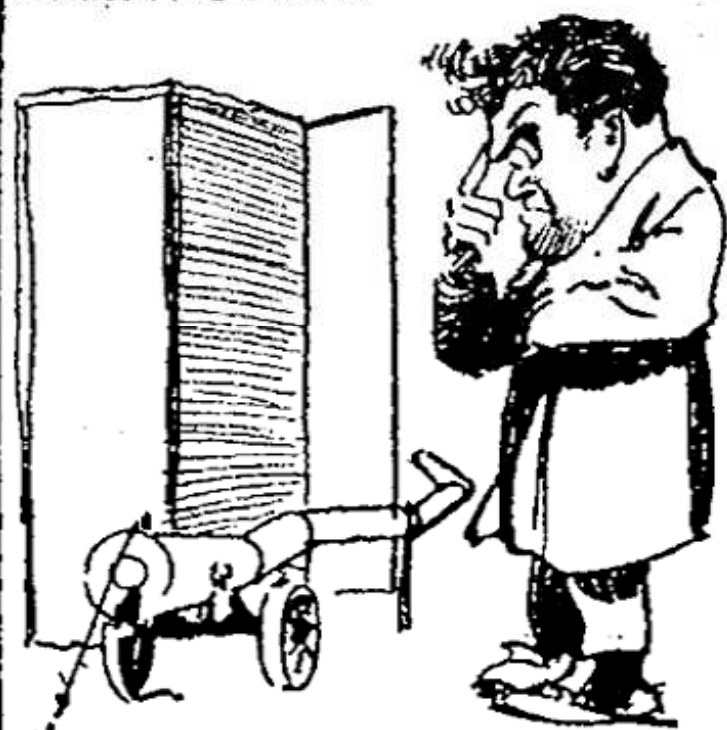
St. Frank's Magazine



CAREERS IN CARICATURE.

No. 6. WILLY HANDFORTH

HIS GENIUS AS AN INVENTOR MAY RESULT IN HIS REVOLUTIONISING MODERN WARFARE BY PRODUCING A GUN THAT WILL FIRE AROUND CORNERS. WE DREAD TO THINK WHAT WOULD HAPPEN WHEN IT IS FIRED



AS AN ADVENTURER, NOTHING WOULD PROVE TOO THRILLING FOR HIS TASTES



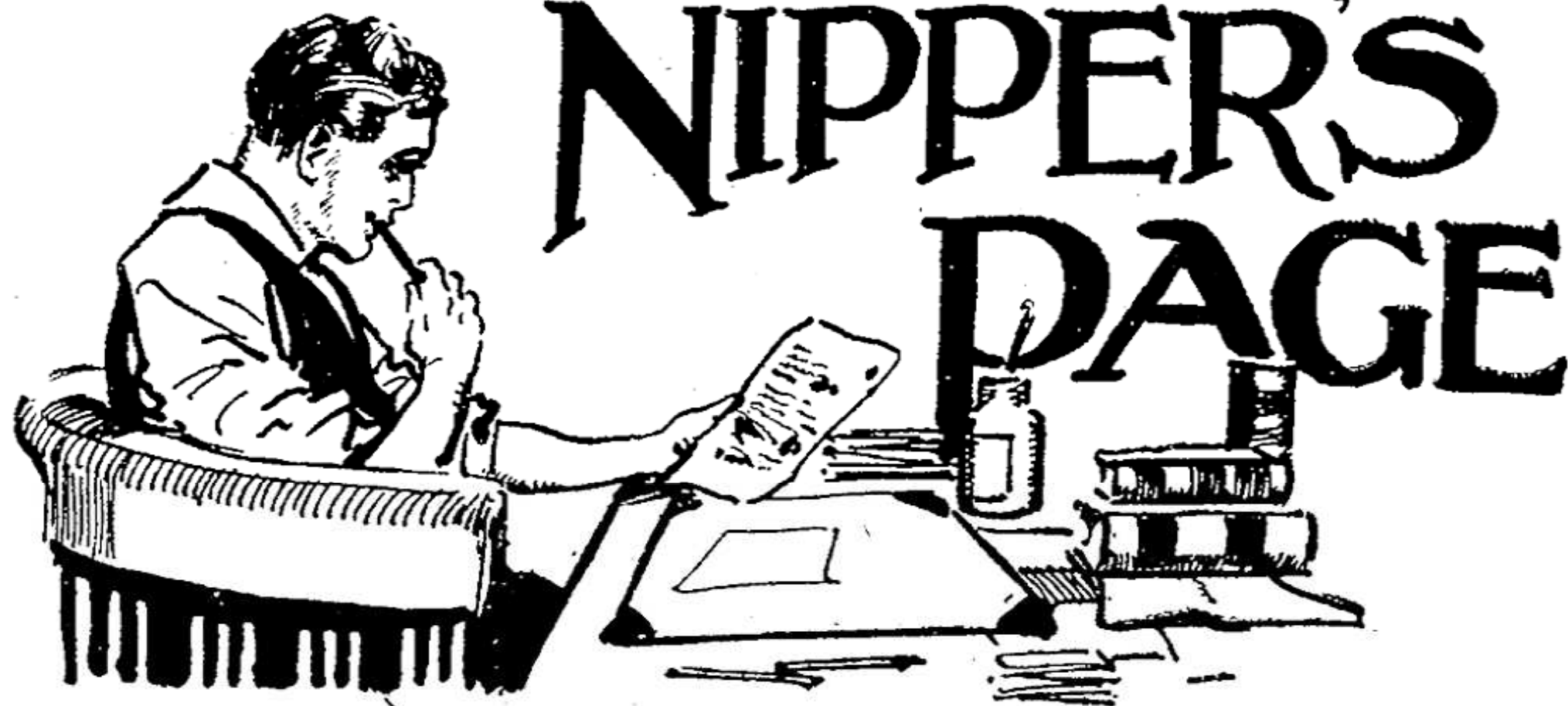
HIS GIFT OF THE CAB WOULD MAKE HIM A POPULAR FIGURE AT AUCTION SALES



HAVING ATTAINED SUCCESS IN ANY WALK OF LIFE HE MAY ADOPT, HERE WE FIND HIM IN PEACEFUL RETIREMENT AS MAYOR OF BANNINGTON



The artist tells us that Willy was the most difficult of the series to do, because there are so many careers at which he would win success.—THE EDITOR.



Editorial Office,
Study C,
St. Frank's.

My dear Readers,

Two days ago St. Frank's broke up for the summer holidays amid scenes of great excitement and jubilation. The fellows seemed to lose complete control of themselves, and, from Dr. Stokes downwards, the masters found it impossible to maintain order on that last memorable day of term. But somehow I think they entered into the spirit of light-heartedness, and purposely lay low.

A GREAT SEND-OFF.

The noisiest section of the school was the Remove, many of whom were lucky enough to be able to join Nelson Lee on the great rescue expedition to the Sahara, where Pitt and Grey, Sir Crawford Grey, Lord Dorri-more, and Umlosi are reported prisoners in the hands of a roving desert tribe. When the expedition party left, amid tumultuous scenes of well-wishers, the whole school turned out to do them honour, and gave them a hearty send-off. I shall never forget how they marched down to the station, cheering and singing all the way. It roused all the inhabitants of Bellton, who joined in the happy throng of schoolfellows, for they had heard about the rescue party in the papers. Never before in the living history of St. Frank's, so Mr. Binks tells me, had he seen such goings-on.

KEEPING THE OLD MAG. GOING.

With most of the fellows away, St. Frank's is as quiet and peaceful as a country churchyard. There are only a few of us staying at the school, and as we can do very much as we like, it won't be so bad. Nipper has

handed the Mag. over to me to look after during his absence. This will give me something to do in the evenings. Of course I would much rather have taken part in the African Expedition. But, as luck would have it, my people have gone for a trip round the world, and arranged for me to stay at St. Frank's months ago. As I was unable to get in touch with them, not knowing whether they were in China, Burma, or Japan at the time, I could not get their permission to go to the Sahara with Nelson Lee. Rough luck, wasn't it? Still, it's no use bemoaning what might have been. So I have made up my mind to make the best of it, to keep the old Mag. going, and to have a top-hole time.

NO CHANGE OF POLICY.

As regards the Mag., I find that Nipper very wisely kept a good stock of articles and stories in hand. He has given me access to his study, and I shall continue to use it the Editorial Office for the sake of convenience. There will be no change in the policy of the Mag., as both Nipper and I are in entire agreement as to its present policy. We both believe in trying to improve it week by week, adding a new feature every now and then, while keeping on the old favourites. As I am not the real Editor, but only acting for Nipper, I shall still call this Nipper's Page.

OUR BEST WISHES.

I hope to keep in touch with our chums in the Sahara, as we shall all follow their adventures with the keenest interest, wishing them a safe return to St. Frank's in the autumn.

Yours very sincerely,

BUSTER.

CASUAL CONVERSATIONS

Imagined by Charlie Talmadge

No. 2.—The Pictures

1.—IN MR. CROWELL'S STUDY.

MR. PAGETT: Hope I'm not disturbing you, old man? Good! I wanted to borrow that novel you recommended yesterday. I'm going into Bannington this evening, and I always like to take a book—

MR. CROWELL: Oh, by the way, for Heaven's sake don't go into the picture theatre, Mr. Pagett! The programme is terribly poor this week.

MR. PAGETT: That's queer! I was going to warn you of the same thing. I foolishly went to the pictures last night, and I endorse your opinion. Wasn't that cowboy picture atrocious?

MR. CROWELL: Appalling! No sense or reason, and absolutely no connected story. A hotch-potch, Mr. Pagett.

MR. PAGETT: An insult to the intelligence! The only item on the programme worth seeing was that wonderful Nature picture, showing how the cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other birds, and how these pirates ultimately triumph.

MR. CROWELL: Yes, indeed! A wonderful little picture, Mr. Pagett. The topical was good, and I must confess I was somewhat tickled by those ridiculous cartoons of Felix the Cat.

MR. PAGETT (coldly): Really? Personally, I think them not only unfunny, but an appalling indication of the average intelligence. The way people laugh at these absurdities fairly sickens me.

MR. CROWELL: Quite so. Well, Mr. Pagett, there's work to do, and I must be getting on with mine. I am sorry, I cannot lay my hands on the novel you want just now. (Mr. Pagett goes). Confound him! He can say what he likes, but Felix is undoubtedly most laughable!

2.—IN STUDY D.

CHURCH: Not bad. Of course, these cowboy pictures are getting a bit stale, now, you know. I think the producers must be hard up for stunts. Mind you, the way Six-Shooter Sam leapt over that canyon was nothing short of marvellous.

MCCLURE: Faked, my son!

CHURCH: I don't care whether it was faked or not—it was jolly good! I was a bit disappointed in the end, and the picture was rather slow all through. I shouldn't advise anybody to go.

MCCLURE: Just what I think. That picture about the cuckoo was a bit of a dud, but I dare say it's very wonderful. That sort of stuff doesn't appeal to me.

CHURCH: Oh, I don't know! You can learn a lot from these Nature pictures. I think they ought to provide a special cinema in the school here. Not for amusement, you know, but for instruction.

MCCLURE: Great idea! Imagine pulling down the blinds in the middle of morning lessons and switching on the pictures! I'll bet there wouldn't be any chaps asleep then!

CHURCH: Rather not! What did you think of Felix?

MCCLURE: Not so good this week, but pretty funny, all the same. The chap who draws all those pictures is a hero! It must be a terrible job, faking it all up so that it looks natural.

CHURCH: Rather: I expect he—
Handforth bursts in, so the discussion ceases.

3.—IN THE BOOT-ROOM.

TUBBS: Been to the pictures this week, Mary Jane?

MARY JANE: Yes—went last night. Wasn't they lovely? That cowboy picture was fair awful! I mean, the way they go dashin' about, chasin' them robbers. Fair took my breath away!

TUBBS: Loveliest picture I ever see! I just sat in my seat, an' couldn't do a thing 'cept stare. As long as they give us gorgeous pictures like that, life's worth livin'—that's what I say.

MARY JANE: But they spoils it with them silly bird pictures.

TUBBS: I should say they does! I got fed-up. Who wants to know anythin' about cuckoos? But Felix! Lummy! 'E's a caution! Laugh? I thought I should bust!



IN REPLY to YOURS

Correspondence Answered
by **UNCLE EDWARD**

(NOTE.—Readers of The NELSON LEE Library can write to me, and I will reply on this page. But don't expect a reply for three weeks or a month. Address your letters or postcards to **UNCLE EDWARD**, c/o The Editor, The NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4. **UNCLE EDWARD**).

- A. R. TINGEY (Leytonstone): I gave you a bit of space last week, but now for a proper reply. It's taken me a week to get my second wind. My hat! Are you always so inquisitive as your letter indicates? But I don't mind, really, because you've proved that you're a loyal reader and a good chap. Now for it. Your list of names is pretty well correct—except that Kingswood belongs to the River House School, sharing Study No. 2 with Norton and Robinson. None of the fellows have left St. Frank's, and you are quite right in remarking the Remove's too large. Mr. Crowell has got a handful. Perhaps they'll make an alteration next term. I've already heard a hint of it, anyhow. I don't know about republishing those early adventures. It's not my line, but I'll put it to Nipper. No, we've got no matches arranged against St. Jim's or Rookwood or Greyfriars. It's a good idea to publish a map, as you suggest, and perhaps there'll be one before long. I suggested drawing it, but Nipper turned down the idea. Goodness knows why. I offered to spend a whole hour over it. Glad you think the old paper is improving weekly, and your congratulations have been passed on and distributed in the right quarters. No, there have not been two No. 1's, so anybody possessing the Old Paper from No. 1 to 476 has got the lot.
- J. H. (Southampton): Sorry, old man, but I'm afraid there isn't room in the Mag. for a weekly short story dealing with

the early St. Frank's adventures. But it's quite likely, of course, that they may be republished in some other form. Thanks for your nice remarks about the way I answer my correspondents. I agree that if Handforth was on the job he would give himself away; he's so open and honest, and can't bear deception. But I'm safe—nobody can see through me. Even my minor, Willy, doesn't know that I write all these replies every week.

WILLIAM L. HOPE (Falkirk): A column for jokes, eh? Not a bad idea; but jokes want a lot of writing. I did a page of them last week for Nipper, and he didn't laugh once. So what's the good? After all the trouble I spent, my jokes were burnt. I'm afraid there's nothing doing, old son. If my jokes aren't good enough, who else is there to write them?

R. M. F. (Sevenoaks): No, I haven't asked Nelson Lee if he wants another assistant, and I'm not going to. When I leave St. Frank's I shall start as a detective myself—and be his rival. With regard to your last question, I certainly do think you're personal, and I decline to answer. When I meet Irene, or say good-bye to her, I only shake hands. Sorry, I haven't got a photograph of Tessa Love.

E. E. WARD (Clubmoor, Liverpool): Thanks for your nice typed letter. As a matter of fact, I didn't give the Editor all the new ideas, so I must correct you. I'm a modest chap, and don't want praise when it isn't earned. I gave Nipper some much better ideas, however, that he wouldn't accept. So you've never read anything like my detective stories? Good! Glad to hear it. Your limericks are pretty good, but I could knock them sideways if I tried. About your hair; the best way to keep it brushed back is to buy a bottle of brilliantine, and squeeze a tube of liquid glue into it. You'll find that this will set your hair perfectly without being sticky—because the glue dries.

PETER COLLINS (West Hampstead): Of course the Sixth has got a master—Mr. Langton. I don't know about a Stamp Chat; I don't think it would be very popular with non-collectors. We're not all dotty about stamps, you know.

D. H. R. (Mountain Ash): Yes, it's a bit wonderful for anybody to wake up at any hour they please. There's no doubt about it being possible, because Nipper can do it. But it doesn't rely upon will-power, as you suggest, because I've tried again and again, and can't manage it.

J. STEVENS (Highgate): You are right about the Onions Circus—we enjoyed ourselves tremendously while we were running it. No, I don't think Nipper encourages general readers to write for the Mag. You see, it's just a school publication. That suggestion of yours is pretty good, but it's too late now, anyhow.

OLIVE WARD (Scunthorpe, Lines.): I'm glad that you appreciate my powers as a detective, but I doubt if Church and McClure are proud of being my assistants. Somehow, they always seem to dislike the job. It's a mystery to me. Archie isn't in love with Doris at all; he's dotty about Marjorie Temple. I can never understand why these chaps fall in love with girls. Of course, I like Irene, but that's different. Somehow, I think you must be a very nice, pretty, attractive girl. So you like me best of all the St. Frank's chaps? Thanks awfully, too, for agreeing that my policy of biffing is a good one. But I only biff when the biffing is deserved. By the way, how many runs did you score in that game of cricket you referred to?

J. B. CROSS (Kirkpatrick, Durham): My goodness! You're another ass who thinks the Trackett Grim stories are a joke. What's the matter with you all? As for controlling my temper, I hardly ever have one. The best way to repair a worn free-wheel is to throw it away and get a new one. I'm sorry I can't answer your question about the magneto. If your machine had been any other make but a Harley-Davidson, I could have answered it; but this is about the only motor-bike that I'm not familiar with. Sorry, old man.

HUGH BARRIE (Poplar): My Trackett Grim stories are serious, as you say, but not too serious to understand—unless, of course, you're a rank fathead. There's no telling. As for your questions, Helmford is the nearest large town to St. Frank's—twenty miles away. From Bannington to London, the distance is about sixty miles. Both Nipper and Pitt are just over fifteen, and Willy is thirteen and a quarter.

CHARLES PRICE (Leeds): I'm not Captain of the Remove because there's no such thing as justice in the world. Don't tell fibs! You don't know Nipper—you've never met him! Yes, you're right—I've got the nerve of a lion. As for making a wireless crystal set, all you need is a

chunk of crystal and a wooden box. But I don't think it'll be much good, because you must have wires. But you asked about a wireless one, so this is the best I can suggest.

WALTER WAINWRIGHT (Leeds): Thrifty chap! Using the back of Charlie's letter—and his stamp, too! You ought to save money like that. But with only a tanner a week, it must be a bit of a job. How do they get music out of a gramophone record? According to the gramophones we have at St. Frank's, the best music a record can make is when it crunches up under somebody's foot. And then, of course, somebody else gets the needle.

MAG MAD (Upper Holloway): Nipper has handed me your letter, and I feel slighted. I say, you might have waited a bit longer! As for that criticism of yours, you forget that this is the day of fast aeroplanes. Lord Dorrimore was with Sir Crawford Grey's party in Lagos at the time you mention—so you are quite right. But as urgent business suddenly arose in London, Dorrie took advantage of a chance to fly back to England. That's why he was at Colonel Glenthorne's party. The next day he flew back, and Sir Crawford hardly noticed he had been away. That's what these modern aeroplanes can do—if a fellow has enough money! And Dorrie's a millionaire.

T. WILKINS (Bristol): Like your nerve to call me a sparrow! But I forgive you freely, and if I don't edit the Mag again soon, there'll be trouble! In fact, trouble whether I edit it or not. Your watch isn't broken at all. You say the hands go round when you wind it up. What more do you want?

C. D. S. (Risca): You are so insulting about my Trackett Grim stories that I won't answer your question about the population of St. Frank's. Not likely! You can't use me as a doormat, my lad.

IDA, R. M. (Somerset): Thanks for thinking I'm a "nice fellow," but I don't know what you mean by accusing me of boasting. That's the one thing I hate. If ever I hear a chap boasting, I biff him. My views on this matter are absolutely perfect. Nobody dares to question them. When I make up my mind on anything, I'm right. In fact, I can't be wrong. Willy doesn't take advantage of my generosity a bit. It's just my weakness. I let the young ass wheedle round me. But I'm always firm with him—I never give him his own way. If I start telling you the attractions of Irene Manners, I shan't have any room left for any other replies. But why should I be interested in Irene? You know I don't care a straw about girls.

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



DASHED TO DESTRUCTION

*Or the East Coast Mystery.
A Marvellous Story of
Trackett Grim and his
Young Assistant, Splinter*

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

IT was lunch-time in London.

Trackett Grim, the world-famous incriminator, sat at lunch with his young assistant Splinter, in the big dining-room in the Baker's Inn Road. Only a few moments ago Mrs. Bones, the detective's housekeeper, had brought in the lunch.

And as he consumed the meal Grim scanned the paper it had been wrapped up in.

The paper was a fragment of that day's Daily Hoax. As Grim poked a bit of cold sausage in his mouth his eyes suddenly glittered. Then they became steely blue. After that they became hard and cold. It was wonderful.

"Great haddocks!" he cried, springing up from his armchair. "Splinter, lad, listen!"

The intelligent lad pricked up his ears like a dog, and almost swallowed the crust of bread the incriminator had given him.

"Why, guv'nor," he hissed, "you are reading a bit of newspaper!"

"Hush, lad!" Trackett Grim returned. "It is more serious than that!"

And while the clever boy listened spell-bound, Grim read out the following article that had attracted his alert attention:

"EAST COAST MYSTERY.

CAR DASHES OVER CLIFF. DRIVER DISAPPEARS.

"Yesterday morning at about six o'clock in the afternoon, a most amazing happening occurred on the East Coast. A car, driven by a man in City clothes, was seen to dash along the road leading to the cliff. It did not stop, but went headlong over to fall with a crash on the seashore. When the police investigated, it was found smashed to atoms. But the driver was not to be seen. The police are said to have a clue, but——"

no more of the paragraph was capable of being read. But that did not deter the master sleuth.

"Splinter," he cried, "we must investigate. I see that there is a first-class mystery here. The police of every continent have been baffled. It is up to me to solve it. Splinter, there has been a terrible accident!"

"How can you tell, guv'nor?" gasped Splinter.

"It is quite simple," Grim replied. "It is obvious to me that the car must have been out of control. The fact that it reached the cliff edge suggests that owing to the sudden termination of the road thereabouts it was unable to proceed along a level surface. In other words, there was a sudden drop, and naturally the car pitched over on to the beach beneath."

"Wonderful!" cried Splinter. "But what has happened to the driver?"

"That is the mysterious part," Grim said. "I cannot say yet, though I have a shrewd and very clever theory. But we must find out. We must go off to the East Coast at once!"

Without even waiting to swallow the remains of his sausage, Grim grabbed a cap from the sideboard and tossed Splinter a straw hat. Then the two dashed down the stairs and into the street.

Grim hailed the first 'bus that passed the door, and breathlessly held out three-pence to the conductor.

"Two to the East Coast!" he ordered hoarsely.

"Sorry, sir," observed the conductor, "but that isn't on our route. We only go to the Elephant."

"What!" groaned Grim. "Do you mean to say you are going to the Zoo?"

"No," replied the man with a ghastly smile. "I mean the Elephant and Castle."

Grim saw that the case was indeed bad. There was only one thing to do. He hastily

The scrap of paper was torn here, and

drew the conductor aside, and took off his cap. In the lining was a queer badge. He showed this to the conductor, and the man immediately comprehended. His face went pale, and he pulled the bell cord so violently that it snapped in two!

"All change here!" he shouted, and the passengers had to alight.

Grim had shown the conductor the most secret badge in the world which was a free pass to anywhere. On it were worked the letters B. B. A. A. S. S. W. W. The letters were so secret that even Grim himself only half-understood what they were meant for.

After this it was a simple matter. The 'bus freed of its heavy load, rattled along the road. And two hours later the East Coast was reached, and the 'bus pulled up just in time to prevent it being shot into the sea.

The first thing Grim did was to call at the local police-station.

"I wish to see the inspector," he demanded, and again showed his badge.

A man with red whiskers and a corporal's stripes appeared from inside a glass box. He hastily removed a pen from behind his ear and faced Grim.

"Are you in charge of this case?" snapped the incriminator, handing over the newspaper which he had brought.

The inspector nodded.

"Then I will solve it for you," Grim went on calmly. "I have come down here on purpose, and I am the most famous incriminator in the world."

For some reason that only Grim knew, the inspector did not seem pleased. His face went purple, and his red hair turned blue. But Grim did not care. It was the time for stern methods. He suddenly blew a cloud of cigar smoke into the man's face, and the inspector collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Come, lad!" said Grim. "We must investigate. There may yet be time to save an innocent man's life!"

He caught hold of Splinter's hand, and the two ran out of the police-station, and



The paper was a fragment of that day's "Daily Hoax." As Grim poked a piece of sausage in his mouth, his eyes suddenly glittered.

a few minutes later reached the top of the cliff.

A small crowd of men and boys had gathered here. And in the background an old man was weeping into a pocket handkerchief. Grim's sharp eyes spotted him immediately, and he at once approached him. He deduced that if the old chap was crying, something must have made him sad.

"Tell me all about it, gaffer," said Grim, laying a hand tenderly on the old man's shoulder. "I deduce that you are upset about this accident."

"It wasn't oi who be opset," the rustie answered. "It be moi son who be in 'er!" And he pointed over the cliff, and Grim looked over.

"You mean it was your son who owned the car, and drove over the cliff before mysteriously disappearing?" Grim hinted.

The old man nodded. And a gleam of excitement shone behind his tears. He saw that he was dealing with a wonderful personality—a man who could almost divine the thoughts of others.

The crowd also understood. They left off talking and watched the great incriminator in amazement.

Grim said no more at the moment, but walked to the very edge of the cliff. He

"Oh, guv'nor, not that!" wailed the lad in alarm. "It must mean certain death! Think of the terrible drop—more than three feet! No man could jump it and live!"



stood a moment gazing down towards the beach. Down below he could see the car lying in a crumpled heap.

The drop was tremendous. Grim could not measure it with his eye. He took from his pocket a tape measure and knelt on the cliff top. Bending, he uncoiled the tape and laid it against the cliff face. Then he straightened up and read the marking.

The drop was more than three feet!

It was three feet two and a half inches! Grim put the tape measure back in his pocket and faced the old man again.

"Before examining the remains of the car," he said, "I want to ask you a question or two. First, was your son dressed in a suit when he—he met with his disappearance?"

"Indeed, yes!" the rustic said. "He was dressed in a suit of City clothes. He also wore a hat. And on his feet were socks and shoes."

"Indeed!" Grim said slowly. "Then the case is even more difficult than I supposed. But I will solve his disappearance for you."

So saying, he turned to Splinter and wrung the lad's hand.

"There is only one thing to be done, lad," he said. "I must jump over the cliff myself. That is the only way to find out what could have happened to the unfortunate driver of this car."

"Oh, guv'nor, not that!" wailed the lad in alarm. "It must mean certain death if not severe injuries for life. Think of the terrible drop—more than three feet! No man could jump it and live!"

"I am no ordinary man!" Grim responded. "It is my duty to take the terrible risk!"

And almost before the lad and the others realised it, he had stepped to the edge of the cliff and taken the awful leap into space.

The little group craned their heads to see what happened. They expected to see Grim dashed to pieces on the grass and flowers growing on the slope. But not. The incriminating alighted on his feet, and a cheer rang out as he was seen to pick himself up and stand quite unhurt to the remains of the car.

Very carefully Grim began to examine the car. He thought it might be possible to get some clue of the missing driver. He looked in the seats and under them. He

unscrewed the wheels, and felt between the spokes. He even took off the bonnet and crawled inside the engine. But all no purpose.

At once his sharp eyes fell on a little heap of clothes that were hidden by the rock. They were City clothes, complete with shoes and socks.

"Great pip!" almost shouted Grim. "A clue!"

Scarcely had he uttered the words than a figure, dripping with water, came tearing out of the sea, which at this point came right up to the beach. The figure rushed up to Grim and would have seized him. But Grim was too quick.

"These are your clothes?" he said. "I have found them. And I have also found you. You are the missing driver of this car."

"You were not killed," Grim went on, "after you dashed over the cliff. And you thought a swim would do you good. Therefore, you undressed and entered the sea. You have now returned for your clothes and car."

"Every word is true!" gasped the man. "How can I ever repay you for what you have done?"

Ten minutes later Grim drove the car up the cliff with the missing man at his side. There is no space to record the gratitude of the old man when once more he clasped his son in his arms.

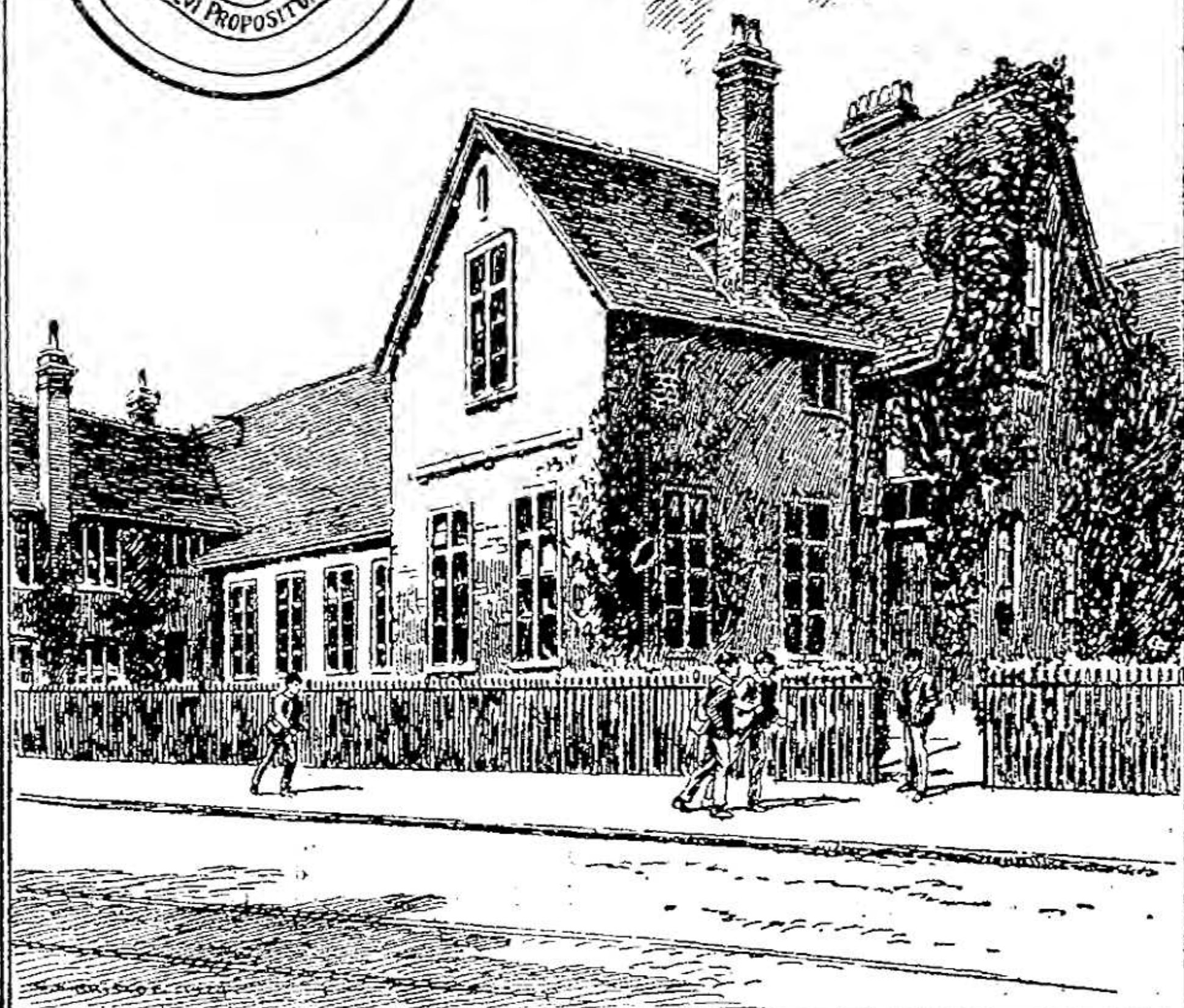
"Let us go now!" Grim whispered. "They would rather be alone!"

The two therefore returned to their bus, and with the cheers of the spectators ringing in their ears, went back to London.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

SPECIAL SERIES OF ART SKETCHES BY MR. E. E. BRISCOE.

No. 37.—SOHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL.



Soham Grammar School was founded in 1699. In its early days, when the school numbered from forty to fifty boys, admission was only granted to boys who were able to read the New Testament. Compared with the present day, the curriculum was very simple, and consisted only of instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, commonly known as the three R's.

At the present time there are 106 boys

at the school, and they are divided into two sections, the Big School and the Preparatory School. The school has every modern requirement, including a finely equipped science laboratory and woodwork shop.

The Latin motto under the badge means: "May he conquer who holds fortune."

I am obliged to a reader for the above information, and accordingly present him with the original sketch by Mr. Briscoe.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old
Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's
Weekly Trifle)

No. 7.—RIDING
A CROCODILE.

Poor old De Rougemont caused a sensation many years ago by declaring that he had ridden turtles. Nobody believed him. Yet it has been proved since that riding turtles is quite a common thing.

But what about riding a crocodile? I have done that, and probably I am the only man who ever did it. Perhaps I shan't be believed, either.

It was in British Guiana, that wonderful country, where crocodiles are called caymans—as they are all over South America. I wanted to secure a good specimen, and

had travelled three hundred miles for the purpose. My Indians hooked a fine fellow, ten and a half feet long, by a kind of barb which he had swallowed with the bait. The problem was how to get him out of the water without injuring his hide.

I told my six Indians to haul on the rope and drag him out of the water, while I stationed myself about twelve feet from the bank, armed with the slim mast of a canoe, round which I had bound a sail. This I meant to thrust into the cayman's mouth and down his throat, if he came at me open-mouthed.

However, when they had pulled him within six feet I saw that he was in a state of fright, and dropping my mast, I sprang up, ran two or three feet, and then jumped on his back. In the act of doing so, I turned round, and so landed in the correct position. Seizing the brute's forelegs, I twisted them on to his back, and used them as a bridle. He began to plunge and beat the sand with his tail. I yelled to the Indians, who were roaring with laughter, to haul on the rope. They dragged us about forty yards. I tied the forefeet in the position in which I had been holding them, roped up his jaws, and then threw myself on his tail—a powerful weapon, with which he can play havoc. In the end, we got him to the canoe, and he was a perfect specimen.

Talk about riding bucking horses at the Rodeo! I reckon that's fool riding compared with sticking on the back of a plunging cayman. But then, you see, I am an old rider to fox-hounds, and that gives a fellow a seat.

SANDS AND SANDSTORMS

By Nicodemus Trotwood

SANDSTORMS are among the most mysterious and terrible of natural phenomena. Sand is a peculiar substance altogether. But it is very useful in a thousand ways. In the home and the factory, the builder's yard, and the iron foundry, sand is in constant demand.

Desert travellers dread sandstorms, which may arise suddenly and exert terrific force. They blot out the sun, seem to extract the air from the atmosphere, and induce a sense of suffocation. The high and fierce winds whip and lash, lift and carry, the fine sands about in most extraordinary ways. The tent or hut may be buried in a very short time, and the face of a locality so changed that those most familiar with it are lost. Both man and beast are helpless against a real sandstorm, and the only thing they can do is to flee—to keep moving, ever moving.

In parts of South America, Peru especially, there are sands which are always in motion, almost as if they were alive, continually taking new formations, and assuming weird and comical shapes. These districts are, of course, difficult and dangerous for travellers.

A considerable portion of the earth's surface is covered by sands, and unless they are fixed, stabilised, by vegetation, their tendency is towards constant movement, and they become a danger to the adjoining cultivated land, which they may swallow up. This process is now going on in the Sahara and other deserts, which are constantly enlarging themselves at the expense of the oases in or near them.

The terrible fate of many a traveller, many a caravan, who have started out and never been heard of more, may be told in one word—sandstorms. Buried alive!



E. SOPP'S FABLES

By EDGAR SOPP, of the Fifth.

No. 33. THE FABLE OF THE SCHOLAR
AND THE BOOK.

NOW it came to pass that one of the Scholars at St. Frank's, feeling Disinclined for Swotting at his prep—a Mood not uncommon among Schoolboys—did conceive a Brilliant Idea. For the purpose of his Studies a certain Text Book was indispensable, this same Text Book being that fearsome atrocity Known and Shied at by all and sundry as a Greek Lexicon. And if for any reason this Greek Lexicon could not be found, a satisfactory Excuse would be forthcoming for the Neglecting of the work. Thereupon the said Shirking Scholar—Nicodemus Trotwood, to wit—did dexterously slide the Lexicon into his pocket and

WANDER FORTH INTO THE SCHOOL HALL.

And, behold, he did appear to be Eagerly Interested in one of the Radiators, which he looked up and down with Close Scrutiny, although, forsooth, it was but a Poor Object. And then, at a moment when None was Nigh, he did drop the Unwanted Abomination behind the Radiator. Immediately thereafter he did Stroll Away with an Unconcerned Air, his hands thrust deep into his Pockets, whistling the while a Gay Tune. And he did Comfort Himself with the thought that Swotting and Grinding at lessons could be Safely Forgotten for a while. Now it chanced that Another Scholar, a Fag—Willy Handforth, to wit—passed along the Corridor

PLAYING WITH A BALL.

And in the course of his Play, in striving to Catch the Ball—which, incidentally, was no more his than the Moon belongs to me—he did Miss It, and cause it to Drop Behind the Radiator. Thereupon he did

make Divers Efforts to recover the Tennis Requisite, and he did chance upon the Hated Product of Ancient Greece. And Willy did perceive in the Volume the name of Nicodemus Trotwood, and did think it Very Strange that the Book should be in so Queer a place. And with the Thought that he would be doing Trotwood a Kindness, he did Seek him out, and Return him the Book that he might Pursue his Lessons. But, behold, Trotwood did

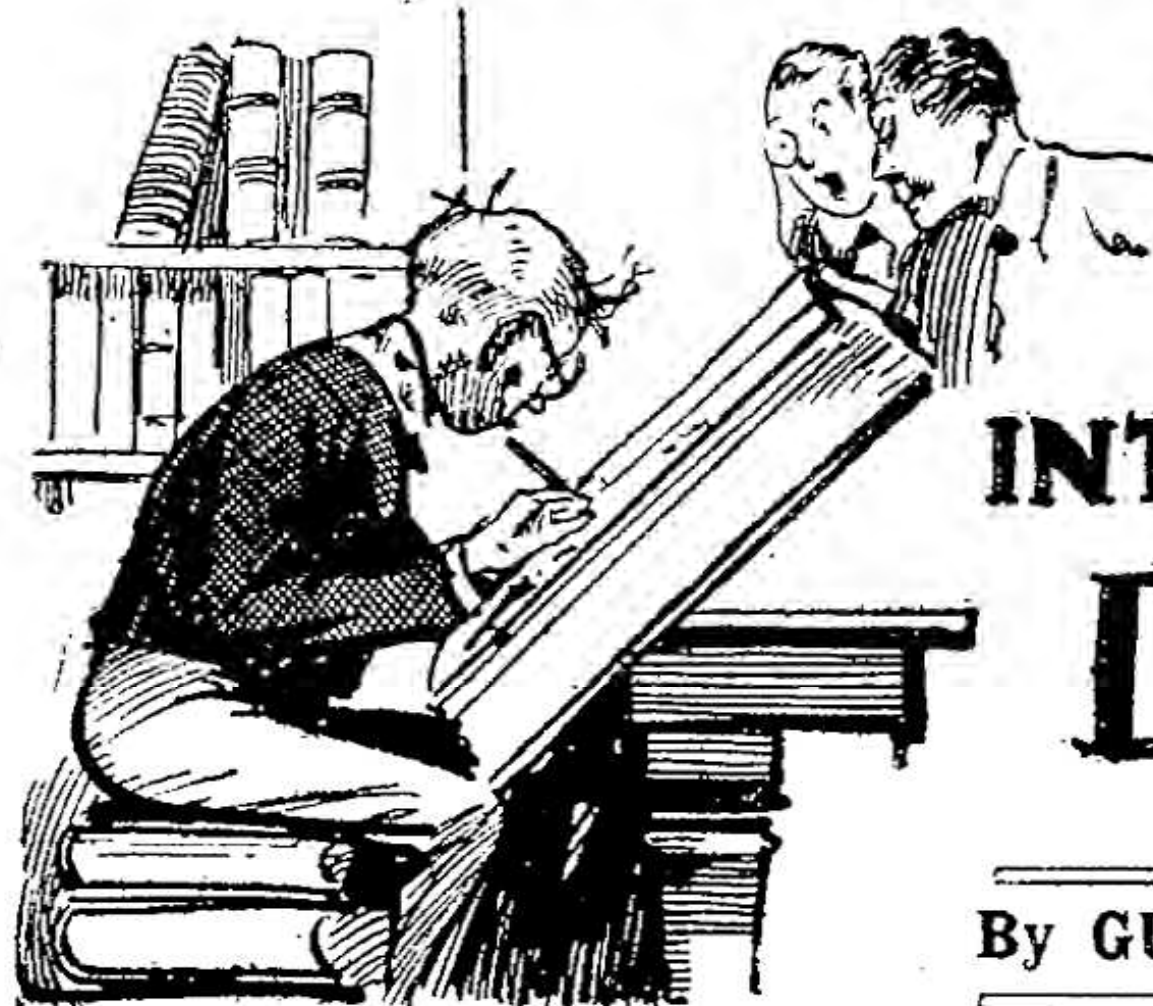
OFFER HIM NO THANKS.

And he did, instead, Chide him as an Interfering Young Chump, and did threaten him with Chastisement for meddling in matters in which he had No Concern. Indeed, Trotwood did grow so Angry and Violent that Willy stood in a little Affright, not knowing that Nicodemus was Angry with Himself for having overlooked the fact of his Name being inscribed in the Book. Yet Willy the Fag, as quick at putting Two and Two together as most fellows, did Soon Perceive how the land lay, and did Upbraid Trotwood as an Idle Schemer, a Dodger of Lessons, and a Prince of Slackers, who did lose books "Accidentally" on Purpose, so that he might have Plausible

EXCUSE FOR SHIRKING WORK.

And, lo, a quarrel ensued, which might have ended in Willy departing On His Neck had not Cornelius Trotwood timely appeared on the Scene. Thereupon Willy left in Triumph, and Nicodemus had to Settle Down to his prep., in spite of all his Wiles.

MORAL: DON'T FIND THINGS BEFORE THEY ARE LOST IF YOU WOULD GAIN THE THANKS OF THE LOSERS.



PEEPS INTO PEPYS' DIARY.

By GUY PEPYS of the Remove.

MONDAY.—Started out on the summer holiday with great expectations, for I do hear that marvellous things are in prospect. Yet have I some misgivings on the matter, for in truth the business hath taken on a shape that pleaseth me not, and hath grown to an unwieldly size. Mayhap the more the merrier. Yet would I have chosen the party to be smaller. For, in truth, I like not the idea of a number of females, mostly schoolgirls, being members of the company, since what can they do but hamper our movements? The lovely creatures have their place, no doubt. But with us in the Sahara! What use can they serve but to disturb and distract?

TUESDAY.—Getting out to sea. Signs and commotions within suggest that I am not of those who enjoy ocean travel. The sea hath lost all the charms which it first had, and I long not to see it, nor to tread the deck. Comrades would have lugged me out of the cabin. But I preferred to keep to its sheltering privacy. Times there be when it is good for one to be alone, and to indulge in quiet meditation.

WEDNESDAY.—Much advice pressed upon me by well-meaning sympathisers, and I doubt not from the best of motives. Yet did it drive me well-nigh distracted. One did say that 'twas the finest thing in the world to have a good meal. Another to eat not at all. Lying flat on the back was by some commended, while others urged me to pace the deck. Patent specifics against seasickness were urged on me. Again, I was assured that to take nothing, and do nothing, were the height of wisdom. Among them they did well-nigh drive me distracted, and beget in me the

thought that the best ending might be to drop me overboard.

THURSDAY.—All continued as yesterday, but more so—and worse. I to languish in my cabin, with no stomach for writing—and, as I do believe, with no stomach of any sort.

FRIDAY.—Yanked out of my cabin, and upon deck, almost before I did know it, by Handforth and some others, who declared that I was but shamming, and that all I needed was a good shaking up. 'Twas, methought at first, rough and cruel treatment. But in a while I did secretly bless them. For, to my great surprise and content, I did begin to mend straightway. Truly, I do think that one may court the cloistered cabin too much under these circumstances.

SATURDAY.—Did get my sea-legs, and did walk the decks with a bounce and a swagger, and with challenging air. A notable experience. What a change! Instead of abject misery, and a feeling that one would like to be cast into the sea, one exults in a new giant strength, and can shout and sing. Daring adventure doth appeal to one powerfully, and a buccaneer's life seemeth to be a rosy ideal. And appetite! All the week a loathing for food hath possessed me. And yet did I envy the fellows who could eat anything, anywhere, and at any time. And now, forsooth, I was become like them, until there was no satisfying my internal cravings. Verily, I bethought me that Fatty Little would have to look to his laurels as champion trencherman. 'Twas but a passing sensation, and, while it lasted, it was good. Henceforth the voyage did become one long thrill of pleasure. Mal de mer, as a spoiler of life, holds first place.

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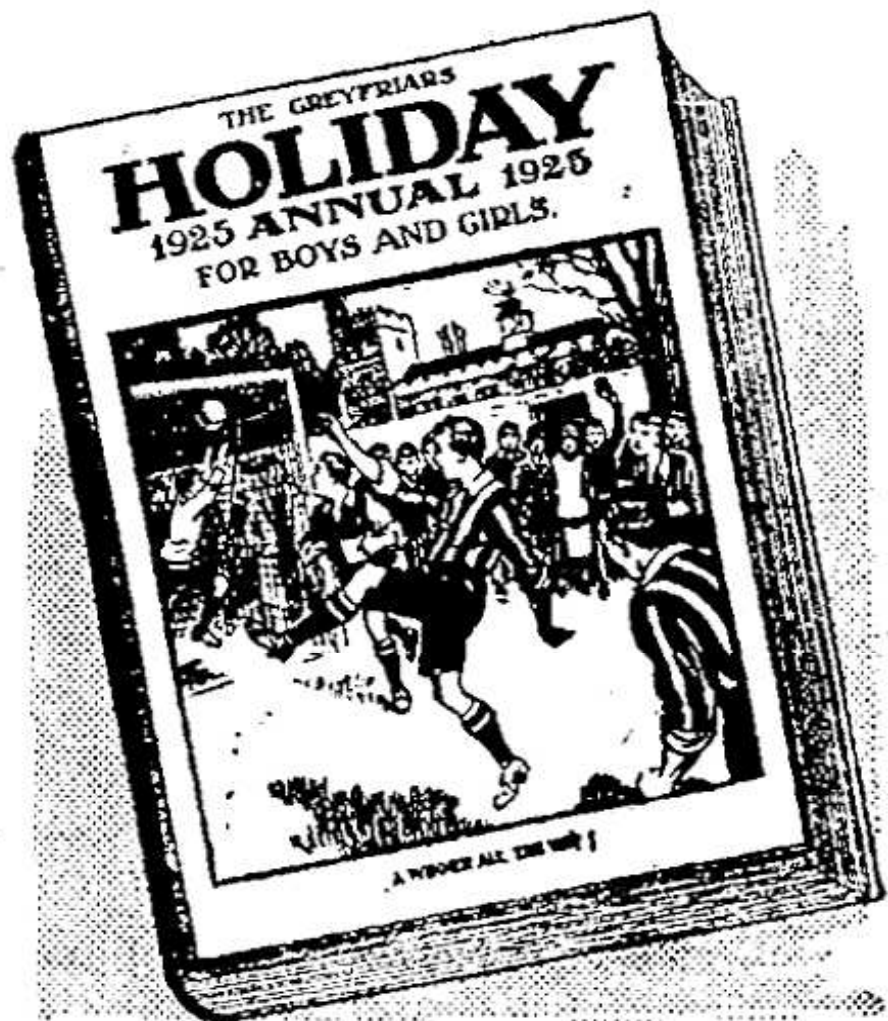
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