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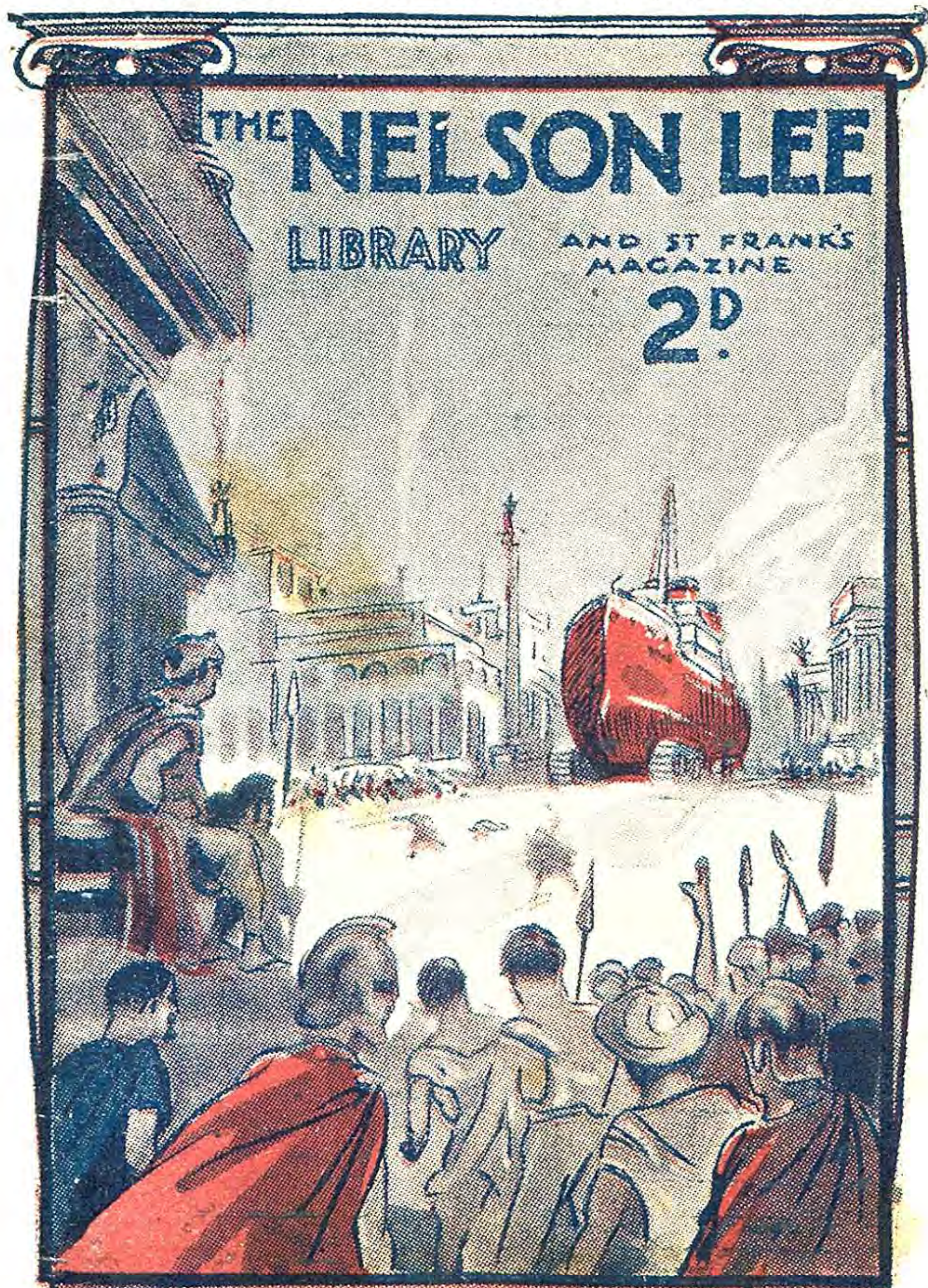
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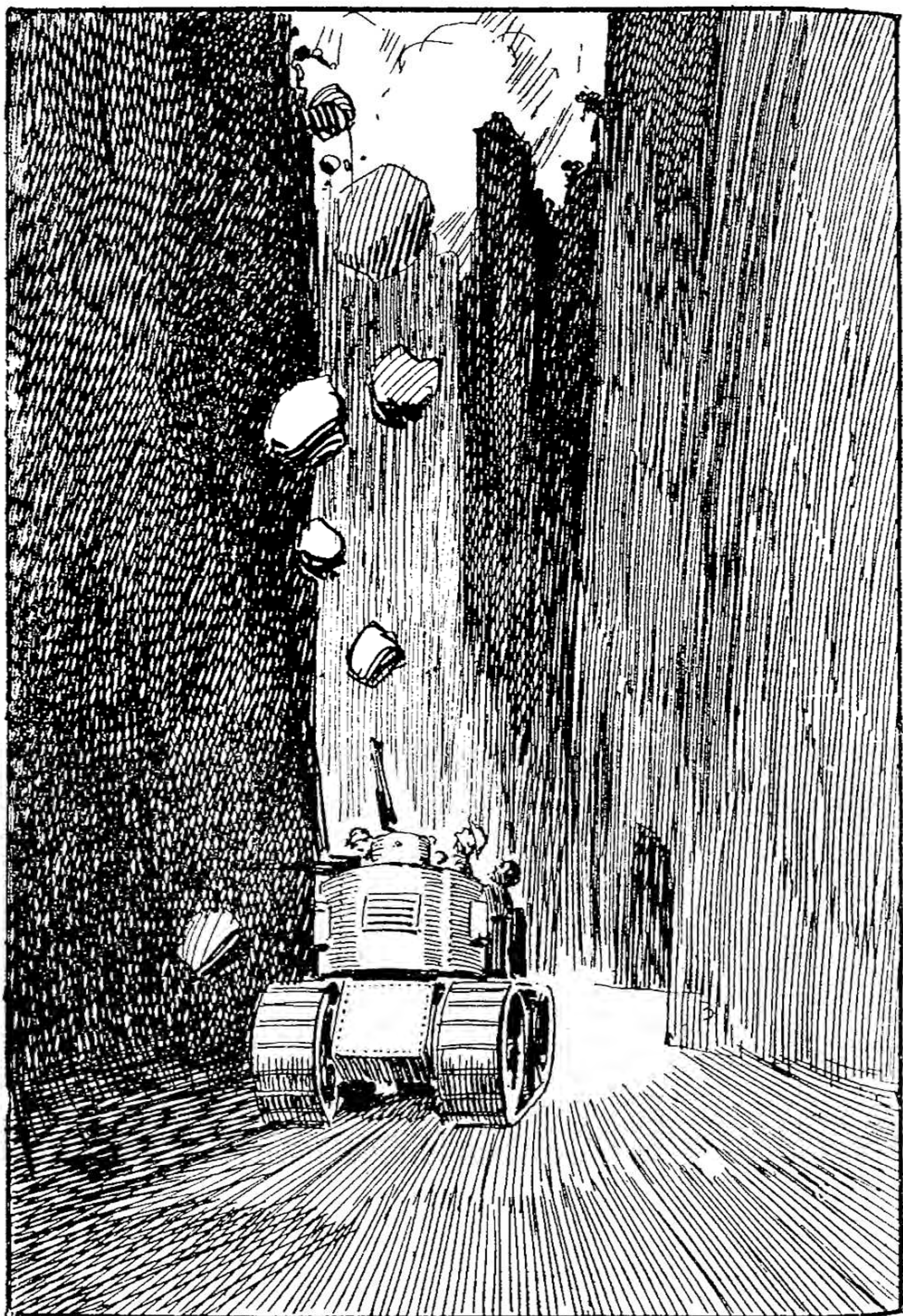
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**TRAPPED IN
THE DESERT.**

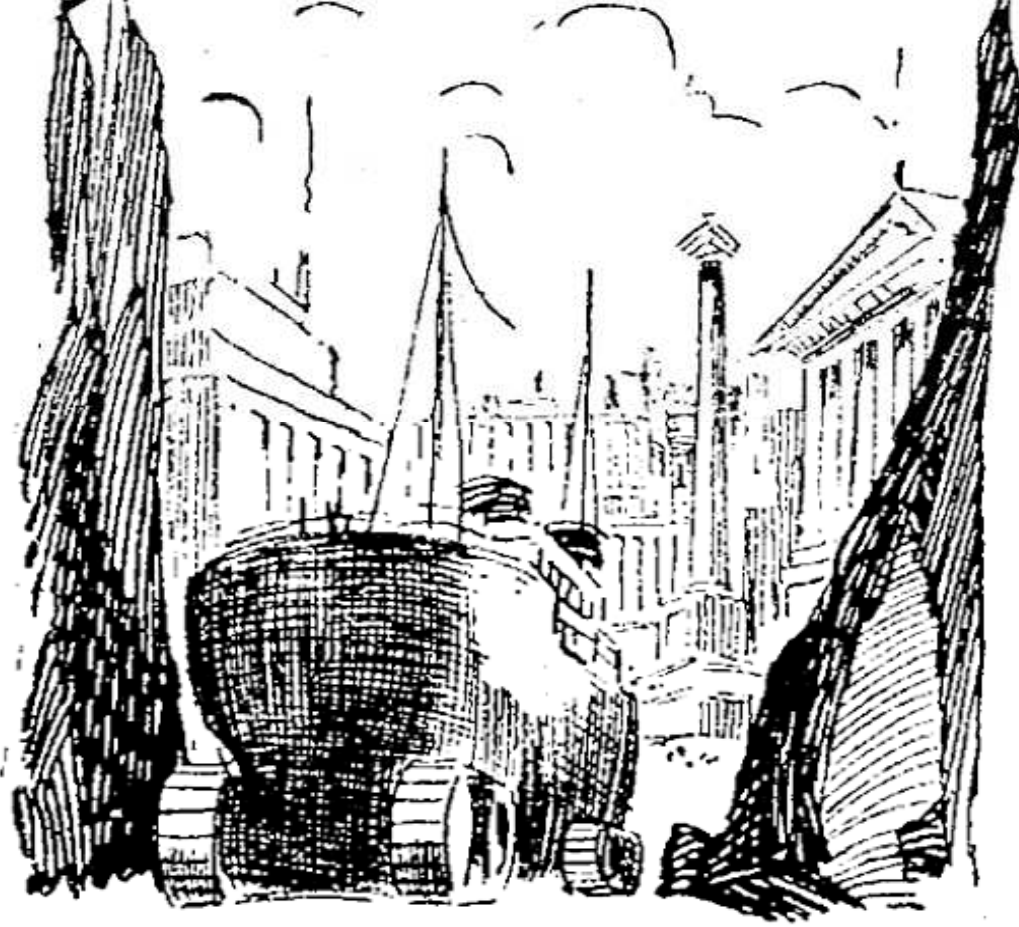
No. 479
August 9th, 1924.

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



Lee's expression was grim. Dropping sheer towards us, came those enormous boulders—rocks weighing over a hundred tons, at least!

TRAPPED IN THE DESERT!



A REMARKABLE STORY OF THE SAHARA'S GREAT SECRET, WHICH HAS LAIN GUARDED BY IMPENETRABLE DESERT SANDS FOR NEARLY TWO THOUSAND YEARS.

Sir Crawford Grey, his son and Reggie Pitt, both members of the St. Frank's Remove, together with Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi have been captured by a mysterious desert tribe while on an exploration expedition in the Sahara. A rescue party, composed of Nelson Lee and a number of St.

Frank's Juniors, are hot on the trail of the unfortunate captives. They have set out on a wonderful desert ship called the Conqueror—a land vessel luxuriously fitted up like an ocean liner. The story opens with the discovery of a strange, new, fertile country in the heart of the wilderness. But an even greater surprise awaits our adventurers. I must leave that, however, to develop with the narrative as related by Nipper.

THE EDITOR.

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

CHAPTER I.

MARCHING INTO THE UNKNOWN.

LIGHTS—twinkling, winking lights in the distance.

Reginald Pitt grabbed hold of Jack Grey's arm as the two juniors looked at that vista of mysterious gloom, with the thousands of lights twinkling from one particular spot.

"Must be a camp!" said Jack Grey, at length. "A camp?" repeated Reggie. "Oh, come off it, old chap! How could there be a camp that size in the desert? And whoever heard of a camp with thousands of lights like a big city?"

"Oh, well—it's no good asking me," said Jack, bewildered. "There's something uncanny about this, Reggie—and I shall be jolly pleased when the daylight comes."

"You won't have to wait long, young 'un," put in Lord Dorrimore, with a glance at the sky. "Dawn's practically here, and we shall have daylight before we know it."

Umlosi, the giant Kutana Chief, grunted. "Wau! Methinks our eyes will dwell upon strange sights, O my father," he

rumbled. "Knowest thou what lays before us? Hast thou penetrated the gloom, N'kose, and marvelled?"

"Not having the eyes of a cat, I can't see in the dark," replied Dorrie. "An' I don't see much to marvel at yet—there's probably a very simple explanation of those lights. They're a long way off, an' lights have a knack of deceivin' people."

"I speak not of the lights, my master," replied Umlosi.

Reggie Pitt wondered what Umlosi meant, for he had vouchsafed no further comment. And the little group was only allowed to stand still for a few seconds longer. Their guards came up, and urged them onwards—plodding steadily and wearily over the desert.

There were about a dozen prisoners, over half of these consisting of the Hausa boys who had formed a part of Lord Dorrimore's party. The others were Dorrie himself, Sir Crawford Grey, Umlosi, and the two juniors.

They formed the centre of a column which had been marching for several hours—marching until they were weary and foot-sore. And they had only just emerged

from a mighty natural canyon, which cut through the unknown mountain range in the very heart of the unexplored Sahara.

This was why they were all so surprised at those twinkling lights. They could not possibly understand how such lights could exist out here, in the barren, parched desert.

Before the prisoners marched a party of their captors, and the rear was brought up by another party. And on either side there were several guards. Any attempt to slip out of the column, therefore, would have been detected at once, and frustrated.

Lord Dorrimore was rather surprised at these precautions. For surely the desert men knew that the captives would never be so insane as to deliberately wander from the column? What chance would any deserter have, out here in the blistering desert?

It was mercifully cool now, but when the sun arose, the glare would beat down mercilessly, and the sand would radiate the burning heat in suffocating, scorching volumes. Indeed, the only hope of retaining life was to cling closely to the complete column.

Dorrie and his unfortunate party were well accustomed to captivity.

For weeks they had been prisoners—marching across the desert, and going onwards—ever onwards, to some mysterious, unknown destination.

Dorrie had an idea that this destination was nearly reached—that it was, indeed, the spot where the twinkling lights gleamed out. Disaster had overtaken the party suddenly and dramatically. They had been the victims of a sudden raid in the desert. And from that moment, deprived of their arms, they had been at the mercy of their strange captors.

The men were Arabs, apparently, but desert dwellers of a type that Lord Dorrimore had never previously encountered. The most curious feature about them was that they never conversed within the hearing of their prisoners—and never, under any circumstances, addressed them.

Lord Dorrimore was thankful, indeed, that Dr. Malcolm Stafford, the famous Headmaster of St. Frank's, had elected to remain in Lagos, on the coast. Dr. Stafford had originally planned to join the expedition, but he had been counselled not to undertake the journey into the desert. He had escaped a terrible ordeal by remaining behind.

On the previous evening the party—an extensive camel caravan—had reached a village of quaint mud hutments, nestling beneath the frowning crags of the mountain range. The inhabitants proved to be powerfully built people, in the customary picturesque costume of the desert dweller—but all wore veils. They were, indeed, slightly similar to the well-known veiled people of the Asben Mountain region.

But Dorrie had an idea that these villagers were of a totally different tribe, for their general physique was of a much higher quality. He was keenly interested, but, being a prisoner, any sort of investigation was out of the question.

The party had only had a brief rest. A few hours of grateful sleep, and then on again, but this time on foot. They had marched for hours through the inky black canyon—emerging, at length, just when dawn was about to break. As they all knew, the everlasting desert lay before them.

For there could be nothing else. They were in the heart of the Sahara, an unknown land of sand and sun and thirst. And it occurred to Dorrie that the lights were those of a big native town.

These strange veiled people apparently had this city of mud and sand in the midst of the desert, and Dorrie was thrilled by the true explorer's love of making a wonderful new discovery. He was particularly puzzled by the lights. For he had never yet seen a native settlement so illuminated.

They marched on, feeling that strange revelations lay ahead.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE DAWN REVEALED.



REGGIE PITT nudged Umlosi as they plodded along.

"What did you mean just now, old coal-box?" he asked.

"A strange term of address, young master, but methinks thou art but facetious," growled Umlosi. "And what meanest thou by thy query?"

"You said something about some strange sights ahead," replied Pitt. "And you also mentioned that you spoke not of the lights."

"Even so, my son," rumbled Umlosi. "I referred to the streams—the woodlands—the great dwellings—"

"Here, steady!" interrupted Pitt. "What are you dreaming about, you chunk of solidified soot? Woodlands—streams? Here, in the Sahara?"

"Even so, my son," repeated Umlosi gravely.

"Yea, verily, my father!" growled Reggie. "Methinks thou hast a bee in thy bonnet, O blatherer. In other words, thou hadst better guess again, perchance."

Umlosi was in no way offended.

"Thou art pleased to mock me, my young master," he said. "But mine eyes are even as those of the lynx. I see things which are hidden from the eyes of the white man. Mayhap thou wilt laugh at what I have said—but the dawn will prove that I am right. I have spoken."

"So I notice," said Pitt. "But that doesn't mean to say you've said anything. I hate being rude, old man, but you don't mind me observing that you're slightly off your rocker, do you? I expect it's the sun. Your gear-box appears to be a little off its axis, to quote one of good old Archie's choice expressions."

"Thou art surely speaking strangely," said Umlosi, shaking his head. "For I fail to grasp thy meaning."

"Well, it doesn't matter—let it drop," said Reggie. "Talking about dropping, that's what I shall be doing soon, unless I have a long drink. I could just do with a whole gallon of iced lemon squash—to say nothing of a dozen bottles of Mrs. Hake's special stone ginger!"

"Dry up, for goodness sake!" said Jack, licking his parched lips.

"How can I dry up when I'm already dried up?" asked Pitt. "Oh, well, it's no good grumbling. We're still alive—and we're within sight of rest and sleep."

They walked on, falling silent—for conversation, after all, was hard to keep up, with their spirits in such a lowered state. Both Dorrie and Sir Crawford constantly marvelled at Reggie Pitt's jocular attitude. Nothing seemed to alter the cheerful junior's disposition.

But Pitt, after all, was acting to a great extent. Nobody but himself knew of the misery that was within him. When silent, and alone with his thoughts, his mind dwelt on the precarious nature of their position.

Not one of them had mentioned it, but they all secretly believed that they would never set eyes on civilisation again. And Reggie felt just a little choky when he thought of his father and mother—and his sister Winnie. It was dreadful to think that he would never see them again.

The prisoners had had a brief period of hope while on the march, for they had seen strange searchlights on the horizon. But, knowing themselves to be nearly a thousand miles from any real civilisation, they reluctantly concluded that they had seen some natural phenomenon—some trick of the sun and the desert which they could not fathom.

"This rock seems to be pretty smooth," said Jack Grey suddenly. "And it's not like any other hard ground we've marched over."

All the other members of the party were thinking in just the same way—but Jack was the first to speak. During the past five minutes they had left the soft sandy surface behind, and were now walking along over a hard, smooth stretch of ground which curiously reminded them of a paved roadway.

"I can't quite get the hang of it, sonny," said Lord Dorrimore, peering ahead intently. "It's getting light now, but everything is

very deceptive. And yet I swear I can see——"

He broke off, uttering a short, impatient laugh. He was angry with himself for allowing such a delusion to take shape in his mind. To voice it would be absurd.

A strange kind of greyness surrounded the marching column. The dawn had come, and the inky blackness of night had been superseded by this deceptive, gloomy half-light, in which all things seemed vague and unreal.

Pitt, for example, thought he saw a forest looming near, over to the left. He had an idea that he was walking on a paved road, with walls on either side, and with great cultivated fields stretching away into the distance. But, of course, this was sheer imagination. His eyes were deceiving him——

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie abruptly.

"Is it possible?" muttered Sir Crawford hoarsely. "Are we all mad, Dorrie, or is this really a road? I've had the impression for some time, but it was too absurdly fantastic to speak of——"

"Fantastic or not, Sir Crawford, it's a fact!" interrupted Dorrie, his voice expressing his amazement. "This is a real road, an', what's more, I can see stone walls, an' cultivated fields——"

"Then—then I haven't got 'em, after all?" gasped Pitt.

"And there's a wood over there!" shouted Jack Grey excitedly, pointing with a shaky finger. "Can't you see it? Look! Trees—big, stately trees! And isn't that a great stone bridge?" he added incredulously.

"Oh, there's no question about it—we're all ready for the lunatic asylum!" growled Lord Dorrimore. "It can't be—it's impossible! Here, in the middle of the Sahara—paved roads, an' cultivated fields, an' trees, an' bridges——"

"Did I not hint at what thou wouldst see?" asked Umlosi calmly.

CHAPTER III.

THE WORLD OF UNREALITY.



DAYLIGHT—strengthening every moment.

And the weary prisoners, marching along that broad, paved road, never gave a single thought to their weariness. They were, indeed, lifted out of all

physical discomforts in their amazement of mind.

For, now that the full light of day had arrived they could see that their eyes were not deceiving them. It was no fantastic dream. Impossible as it seemed, this thing was a reality.

There was no question that they were in the very heart of the Sahara—where, indeed, white explorers had never before penetrated. And yet there was not the slightest indication of the endless, unalterable desert.

Behind them towered the crags of the mountain range they had passed through. To left and to right, and in the far distance ahead, the mountains were also visible. They were surrounded by the peaks.

But within this magic circle of mountain ranges lay a country that they had not dreamed possible. The road led onwards as straight as a die—broad, imposing, and superbly made.

But it was obviously a road of great antiquity—indeed, hundreds and hundreds of years old, as the bordering walls clearly testified. But it was kept in a state of perfect repair.

And on either side lay fields—wonderful, cultivated fields, amazingly and incredibly green. In spite of the Sahara sun, there was little sign of scorching or withering. And this was no doubt due to the fact that the whole valley was cunningly and cleverly irrigated.

Every field was surrounded by streams or canals, these waterways being obviously fed from the great stream which flowed sedately in the centre of the valley.

And here and there fine, imposing bridges crossed this wide stream. These bridges were of stone—and, somehow, they were curiously familiar in appearance. Their architecture was reminiscent.

“Just like the work of the old Romans!” exclaimed Dorrie huskily. “But how in the name of all that’s miraculous—”

“And look at the town in the distance!” broke in Sir Crawford. “It appears to be made of white stone. I can see columns—massive buildings, and everything is Roman in appearance. What can it mean, Dorrie? What can be the explanation of this astounding business?”

“Goodness knows!” replied Dorrie. “I’m floored!”

And so were all the others. All their former ideas were shattered. And it was the overwhelming abruptness of this revelation which took them off their feet, and left them well-nigh speechless. It was something that had never entered into their wildest calculations.

After leaving that forbidding gorge through the mountains they had naturally assumed that the desert lay ahead. There was no reason why they should think otherwise. They had certainly been puzzled by the mass of twinkling lights, but even this

phenomenon had not associated itself with any city of stone architecture.

They simply thought there was a big camp of Tuareg natives, or some such desert tribe. They couldn’t believe that anything but the desert lay here, in the great Sahara.

And yet the truth was obvious.

These mountain peaks extended in a vast circle, enclosing a hitherto unknown oasis—an amazing valley of cultivated, fertile country and woodland. Such a green spot as this had been hitherto unsuspected in this Sahara wilderness.

The oasis alone was startling—but the paved roads, the bridges, and the great city of white stone were a thousand times more startling. There was not the slightest question that everything was Roman in style.

Lord Dorrmore was no ignoramus when it came to Roman relics. He had not only explored many spots in Italy, but he had spent days of fascinating research in the ancient Roman city of Timgad.

And Timgad, as Dorrie was aware, is the most wonderful existing monument of Empire by ancient Rome. It is a vast city of the past, cold and dead, situated upon a high tableland in North Africa—indeed, on the very edge of the Sahara desert itself.

And Dorrie was thinking of this as he marched.

“By gad!” he muttered. “If Timgad were possible—why not this? The Romans were famous colonists, as everybody knows. They built Timgad, and it was a thriving populous city at one time.”

His thoughts were becoming rather startling.

“Those Roman fellows were a clever crowd,” he told himself. “There is no reason why an odd twenty thousand or so shouldn’t have crossed the desert from Timgad, and established this colony, here. An’ I suppose some of these infernal desert tribes have calmly taken possession of the ruins and turned them into a modern city.”

This, indeed, seemed a logical explanation of the extraordinary spectacle. The Romans came to Africa—they built many cities in Africa—they penetrated to the Sahara. There was nothing incredible in finding Roman remains here—even so far into the great desert.

The oasis itself was understandable. Situated in these mountains, it could easily be appreciated how it had escaped discovery by outsiders. But it was certainly astounding that this relic of Rome’s former might should bear every evidence of being warm with life, and not cold and silent, in common with all other Roman relics.

However, the prisoners were not allowed to think much, or even to discuss the strange situation.

For they were presently brought to a halt outside a round stone tower—a curious

building which reminded Dorrie of a similar tower he had seen in the ancient city of York.

Without ceremony, the prisoners were bundled through a low stone doorway. Only the white members of the party were dealt with in this way. Umlosi was hustled off with the Hausas, and pushed into another doorway at the rear of the tower.

Dorrie and his companions found themselves in total darkness. For the heavy door was closed, excluding all light. And now, indeed, they were actual prisoners—since they were confined within the walls of a cell.

“A mirage!” scoffed Handforth. “What is a mirage? A swindle! A beastly trick—that’s what a mirage is! It fools a chap into believing that he sees something, and he doesn’t see anything at all!”

“Yes he does—he sees the mirage,” said McClure.

“Don’t quibble!” snapped Handforth sternly. “Can’t you chaps do anything better than argue every minute? I’m keeping my eye open for that mirage again, and if we see it I’m going to take a snapshot. It won’t trick me twice! Once I’ve got it photographed it can’t escape!”

The celebrated leader of Study D was quite indignant.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE CONQUEROR.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH lowered his binoculars with a grunt.

“Sand!” he said disgustedly.

“Nothing else but sand and mountains! I never knew

such a swindle in my life!”

“No need to make a song about it, Handy,” remarked Church, as he leaned against the rail. “We all thought there was a green valley, but it was only a mirage.”

An hour or so earlier a wonderful, astonishingly realistic mirage had been seen in the distance. There had been green fields visible, streams, woods—a city! But the mirage had faded almost before the on-lookers could realise that it was a mere reflection, and as unsubstantial as a summer mist.

But most of the St. Frank’s juniors were keenly on the look-out for a repetition of the phenomenon. Not that they were likely to be gratified. It was hardly feasible that the same atmospheric conditions would prevail.

Handforth was leaning against the deck-

rail, looking idly at the desert as the stately vessel rolled smoothly and glidingly onwards—a motion that was uncannily similar to that of an ocean-going vessel.

And the Conqueror was, indeed, very comparable to a steam yacht. She had the same graceful lines, the same funnels and masts and superstructure in general. And she was enormous in size.

And yet, in reality, this vessel was a gigantic caterpillar tractor. And she was progressing steadily onwards at the average speed of ten miles per hour.

Slow enough, no doubt, but over the virgin desert excessive speed was impossible. And even at such a moderate rate as ten miles an hour the Conqueror could annihilate nearly two hundred and fifty miles in the course of a day and night.

For like her sister of the ocean, this remarkable land yacht kept ceaselessly going, even through the darkness of the night. She was the invention of Mr. Travers Earle, the millionaire, and he, of course, was the sole owner.

The Conqueror had come out into the desert with the express object of finding the lost party. And there were many indications that the chase was nearing its close.

Nelson Lee was nominally in charge of the schoolboy passengers, and there was quite a large number of these. Most of them were Remove fellows, but Willy and Co., of the Third, were also in the party.

And then, of course, Irene Manners and her girl chums of the Moor View School were in great evidence. The party would not have seemed complete without the young ladies. Irene's mother was on board, acting, indeed, as hostess. For her husband, Mr. Robert Manners, was the Conqueror's chief engineer.

And the vessel itself was a modern miracle.

She was replete with every comfort that the human mind could engineer. Below, she was constantly ice-cooled, and refreshingly free from stifling heat. Her cooling apparatus rendered her saloons and cabins as comfortable and enjoyable as could well be imagined.

But the majority of the boys preferred the deck, in spite of the heat, so that they could watch the landscape, and note every changing phase of scenery.

"Anything fresh?" asked Bob Christine, as he joined Handforth and Co.

"No more mirages," said Church. "And I don't suppose we shall have the same luck again, either. But there ought to be some excitement when we get into the mountains."

"Yes, we ought to be almost up to them by to-night," said Pepys, who had accompanied Christine. "I'm afraid there'll be a difficulty, if we try to cross that ugly-looking range."

"Cross it?" said Handforth. "Of course

we shall cross it. This ship can do anything. Isn't she built like a tank? She can climb the face of a cliff, practically."

"I hope she doesn't do anything like that while we're having dinner," said Pepys. "It would be rather awkward during the soup course."

"You'd better go below and make up your diary," said Handforth tartly. "It's no good being funny up here. Take my advice, my lad, and buzz off. You worry me."

Guy Pepys, of the Remove, was a peaceful junior, and he went his way, although he didn't follow Handforth's advice and go below. He joined Winnie Pitt and Tessa Love, who were sitting in deck chairs.

"Blessed if I know why that chap came!" growled Handforth, glaring at Pepys, as he sat down between the two girls. "He seems to think he's got a right to monopolise these girls as much as he likes. He'd better speak to Irene, that's all!"

"And what would happen?" asked Christine, with interest.

"He'd go overboard—quick!" said Handforth darkly.

"There's no need to be jealous——" began Church.

He paused, for it so happened that Irene Manners and Marjorie Temple appeared on deck at that moment with Archie Glen-thorne between them. Handforth nearly choked.

"My only hat!" he said thickly. "There's Archie now! I've been looking for Irene all the afternoon, and——"

"And now she's talking to Pepys," grinned Christine, as Archie and the girls joined the other group. "Good! We're waiting to see you chuck the poor chap overboard!"

Handforth gave a sickly smile.

"I can't do it in front of the girls, can I?" he snorted. "They don't understand these things—I've only got to touch a chap and they call me a bully. I've only got to biff a fellow on the nose and they accuse me of brutality!"

Christine nodded.

"These girls are jolly sensible," he said. "They're blunt, and to the point, and that's just why they're such ripping sports. They've got a way of calling a spade a spade."

CHAPTER V.

WILLY'S LITTLE MISTAKE.



"WHO'S talking about spades?" demanded Handforth, who always took everything literally. "And what do you mean, anyhow? Are you trying to suggest that when the girls call me a bully, I am one?"

"Sounded like it, didn't it?" grinned McClure.

"Who asked you to speak?" roared Edward Oswald. "By George! I'm getting fed up with some of you fellows—"

"And I shouldn't be a bit surprised if some of the fellows are getting fed up with you, old son," put in Handforth minor. "I wonder why you always will argue, Ted?"

Handforth turned to his young brother with deadly calmness.

"I didn't ask you to interfere, and I'd better warn you that one more word will be just enough," he said significantly. "If you don't clear off, you little rotter, I'll slaughter you!"

Willy Handforth grinned.

"I'm safe!" he said calmly.

"Oh, are you—"

"As safe as houses," said Willy. "Irene's looking!"

Handforth gulped, and he wasn't at all delighted when he realised that his minor was perfectly correct. Irene certainly was looking, and he only had to biff his minor as he desired and the fair-haired damsel would jump on him like a ton of bricks.

"You wait!" he breathed hoarsely. "You wait till I get you alone!"

Willy grinned again.

"Poor old Ted!" he said calmly. "You've got your fist clenched, my nose is within easy reach, and yet you can't touch me. I'm better protected than if I wore armour!"

"You—you—"

"Shush! Not so loud; she'll hear!" whispered Willy tantalisingly. "I'd better get between you and her, so that she can't see your angelic expression. It's the first time I knew that girls could be really useful."

Church and McClure were looking on with keen enjoyment. Handforth was almost on the point of an apoplectic fit. For the most exasperating feature of the whole situation was that Willy was perfectly correct. Much as he desired to punish his minor, he daren't do it.

"The fact is, Ted, I'm doing you a good turn," said Willy generously. "You may not know it, but I am. I'm making you practice the art of self-restraint. You're simply dying to biff me, but you daren't!"

"You—you little worm!" hissed Handforth. "I'll pay you out for this; I'll make you smart—"

"I'm smart enough already, thanks," interrupted Willy coolly. "Anyhow, it would take somebody better than you to make me smarter. You can't sharpen a knife with a piece of rotten wood."

"Are you calling me a piece of rotten wood?" breathed Handforth.

"Just as you like; we won't argue about it," said Willy, casually leaning against the rail and enjoying his security. "Now,



The prisoners were rather astonished by the individual who stood at the door. They had naturally expected to see one of their former captors—a man dressed in the usual garb of the desert.

Ted, I'm going to give you some good advice. I think you need it."

"Oh, do you?" said Handforth, with strange calmness.

As a matter of fact, Willy had his back to the girls, and Handforth could see that Irene and Co. had just gone for a stroll forward. They were, indeed, already beyond the bridge, and out of sight.

"Exactly," said Willy, sublimely unconscious of his perilous position. "I want to tell you that your conceit is stupendous. Surely you don't believe that Irene thinks a snap about you? What are you, after all? Haven't you ever cracked a mirror in your room?"

"Look here! I'm going to—"

"I don't mean that your reflection is so powerful that it's likely to split a looking-glass," explained Willy. "But whenever I see a horrible sight, I always want to biff it. Don't you ever want to punch your reflection? The fact is— Hi! What's the idea? Leggo—"

"Now, you little rotter, I'm going to smash you up!" exclaimed Handforth thickly. "I've stood enough of your cheek! By the time I've finished with you, you won't know yourself from a pound of sausage-meat! Take that—to begin with!"

"Ooooooh!" gasped Willy painfully.

He gazed round wildly, and was really and truly startled when he saw that the

girls had gone. And he understood his peril. For once he had blundered! But it was too late to repair the damage.

"All right! Go it!" he panted. "I asked for it—so I won't grumble! But don't be surprised if you get a few choice ones! Now about this, to start with?"

"Yarrah!" howled Handforth more surprised than hurt.

Like a flash Willy had jabbed him on the tender part of his arm muscle, but the fag really had no chance. He was booked for an extremely painful two minutes, and he was resigned.

But Handforth's luck was dead out.

He was just getting well into his stride when he seemed to freeze. His sister appeared, and she gave him one fixed glance. Edward Oswald stood stock still, gulping.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VILLAGE OF THE VEILED PEOPLE.



WILLY wiped a red smear from his left cheek.

"What's this—half-time?" he asked breathlessly. "You haven't finished, surely? I can still stand! I'm not even dizzy yet! Why the dickens don't you finish the job?"

But Willy, in spite of his words, was in no way anxious to sample any more of his major's treatment. He wriggled himself free like an eel, and grinned with extreme delight as he saw Ena.

"Hallo, sis!" he said calmly. "So this is it! I wondered why Ted turned off the fluence! I suppose you gave him one of your fifty horse-power looks? Here, steady! Don't turn it on me!"

"Go to your cabin at once!" said Ena firmly.

"Eh? Oh, look here——"

"This instant!" exclaimed his sister imperiously. "You're too disgraceful to be seen! Your collar's undone—your shirt is torn, and your face is a mass of terrible wounds!"

"Rot!" said Willy. "It's only my nose. Ted gave it a tap, and the gore proceeded to flow. All right—I'll shoot downstairs and have a wash. Anything to please you, sis—I love you so much! And thanks awfully for butting in. You needn't attend to the funeral now!"

Willy scooted below, and Ena turned to her other brother.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she asked sternly.

Handforth snorted. He looked his sister up and down with a kind of nervous expression on his rugged face. She was quite small, and if she had been a little less robust, her appearance would have been

dainty. She had a round face, and straight, bobbed hair. She was a year younger than Edward Oswald, but she was remarkably self-possessed. Nobody had ever known her to get excited.

"Oh, look here, Ena——" began Handy.

"I don't want to hear any excuses—I saw quite enough!" interrupted Ena coldly. "Haven't I told you before that I won't let you knock Willy about? I'm surprised at you!"

Handforth shuffled his feet.

"The young tadpole's cheeked me," he growled.

"That's no excuse—and don't let me hear you calling Willy a tadpole again!" said Ena curtly. "You're getting beyond all——"

"Here—quick!" shouted Church suddenly. "There's something in sight!"

Ena looked round, intending to reprimand Church severely for interrupting her. But her glance wandered out over the desert for a moment or two, and she forgot what she had been about to say.

"We seem to have arrived somewhere," she said casually.

"My hat! Houses—at least, huts!" shouted De Valerie, with a pair of binoculars to his eyes. "It's a village, you chaps! Hurrah! We've got to some kind of inhabited region at last!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's have a look through those glasses!"

There was general excitement on deck, and it spread rapidly throughout the entire vessel. Fellows came hurrying up from below. Sir Edward Handforth appeared, and so did Nelson Lee and practically all the other passengers.

During the afternoon the Conqueror had plodded on with her usual steady progress—slowly enough, by all appearances, but the miles were deliberately and relentlessly consumed.

And ever since lunch time those mountain peaks had been getting nearer and nearer. They were now right close by—towering up into the sky, barren, rugged, and menacing. In every other direction lay the hot, arid desert.

The Conqueror had climbed to the top of a gradual rise, and was now dipping down into the next shallow depression. But in the distance, not more than two or three miles away, a village could be seen—a collection of uninviting-looking huts, but no trace of vegetation or water.

There were figures, too—men and women moving about as though in disorder—hurrying, scurrying in a kind of panic. And small wonder! These people must have received a terrible shock at the sight of this great leviathan of the land progressing so majestically over the desert.

We all lined the deck rails, looking on eagerly.

"They're only ordinary natives!" said Handforth disdainfully, as he lowered his

bifoculars. "Dark-skinned chaps. I believe—some of those Tuaregs, I suppose. Poor beggars! Fancy being compelled to live in a fearful hole like this!"

"They've never seen anything else, so why should they worry?" asked Bob Christine. "What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve about, you know. They're content with the desert, because it's their own country. Take 'em to London, and they'll be miserable."

Nelson Lee, on the bridge, was gazing into the village through a powerful telescope. He could see that the inhabitants were well built, and of sturdy proportions. But their faces were veiled, so that it was impossible to see anything of the actual features.

And all the inhabitants of the village were terrified.

This was plainly obvious. For as the Conqueror approached nearer and nearer the signs of panic increased. The inhabitants flocked out of their huts, and after one look at the approaching monster, they fled.

The entire population of the village deserted their dwellings, and made off, helter-skelter towards the frowning cliffs. And by the time the Conqueror rolled sedately into the desert town, not a living soul remained.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW INVESTIGATIONS.



MR. TRAVERS EARLE touched the engine-room telegraph, and the Conqueror slowly came to a standstill. Under her owner's guidance, she had penetrated into the heart of the village.

And now she was halted there—a great, towering monster in the midst of these modest hutmen's of the terror-stricken desert-dwellers. From the deck we looked down upon the roofs of the huts.

It was a rather exciting moment. For it must be remembered that we had travelled for practically a week without a sign of any living habitation. In just the same way as a ship at sea steams for days without sighting land, so the Conqueror had ploughed the desert, and nothing but sand and rock had been encountered.

So this village provided a distinct thrill. Handforth thought it was rather a swindle, because the inhabitants had fled, and there would be no fight. Edward Oswald seemed to have the idea that fighting was a necessary part of the programme.

The village was in no way novel. It corresponded to many of the deserted desert towns which are to be encountered in the Asben Mountains—and which silently tell of a former thriving population.

The huts, as we could now see at close quarters, were not built of mud, but of stone

—rough, primitive affairs, without windows, and doorways which were merely covered by rags of nondescript cloth.

On the outskirts, a number of camels were unconsciously eyeing us, and their presence was rather significant. Nelson Lee did not fail to appreciate the point.

"It seems fairly obvious that these camels have not been here long—they are undoubtedly visitors, since there is no adequate provision for them," he remarked. "We are on the right trail, Mr. Earle. It will be very gratifying if we rescue Lord Dorrimore's party within a few hours."

"It seems too good to be true," said Mr. Earle, shaking his head. "But I have no doubt your optimism is justified, Mr. Lee. Hadn't we better make a thorough examination of the village?"

"That is what I was about to suggest," replied Lee. "And you had better send some of your men out, too, Mr. Earle—to make a search for water. There is bound to be a spring near by."

Within five minutes active preparations were afoot.

"Can we come off, too, sir?" shouted Handforth, as Nelson Lee left the bridge. "we want to stretch our legs —"

"Sorry, boys, but I'm afraid you'll have to wait," replied Lee. "I don't think I can give you permission to come off yet. There is a possibility that the inhabitants will return—and that may mean a fight."

"That's just why we want to come, sir," retorted Handforth.

But Nelson Lee would not alter his decision, and the party that went "ashore" was a comparatively small one—merely comprising Nelson Lee, Mr. Earle, and a couple of petty officers. All were thoroughly armed. Lee and the inventor with revolvers and the petty officers with rifles. Other men were posted on deck, with arms ready at hand.

An examination of the village proved enlightening, but by no means exciting. As far as Lee could discover, the inhabitants were a simple, primitive people, very similar to other desert tribes who lived nearer to civilisation. The huts themselves were, however, spotlessly clean.

In this respect they differed from many other native dwellings. Everything was scrupulously tidy and sweet. And the explorers were more than a little astonished to find a leg of mutton ready cooked, and obviously abandoned at the point of being eaten.

"Mutton!" said Mr. Earle curiously. "H'm! What do you make of it, Mr. Lee?"

"It is puzzling, certainly," said Lee. "I had no idea there were sheep in this region. There is certainly no grazing ground for beasts of the field—unless these mountains hide an unsuspected pasture land. And that's somewhat fantastic."

"I am wondering about those people, too," said Mr. Earle. "They fled towards the

cliffs. And yet there's no sign of an opening. It's my belief they're hiding among the rocks."

"We shall have to make closer investigations," said Nelson Lee. "In fact, I think the only way will be to get the whippets down, so that we can explore in comfort."

"An excellent idea—there's certainly little enough to be seen here," agreed Mr. Earle. "Eh? Oh! So you've found something?" he added, as one of the Conqueror's crew came hurrying up.

"Yes, sir—a water-hole, just below the dip, at the end of the village," replied the man. "But Mr. Jevons is doubtful as to whether we shall fill up. The water looks none too pure."

"Well, he'd better have one tank filled up, to be on the safe side," said Mr. Earle. "If we find better water further on, the tank can be emptied. Personally, I think we shall have no difficulty. There's bound to be numerous springs in these mountains. And I should imagine that they have quite a fair rainfall in this region in the wet season. Mountains make a good deal of difference to the atmospheric conditions."

They walked back to the Conqueror, and went on board. Nelson Lee was not in the best of spirits. He had hoped to find some definite sign of Dorrie and Co. But there had been nothing.

The next thing, therefore, was to examine that great, frowning cliff which loomed so near. It seemed a vast, impassable barrier. But the mysterious disappearance of the villagers hinted that these rocks held a surprise.

And Lee was determined to find out—at once!

CHAPTER VIII.

INTO THE MIGHTY CANYON!



WHIRRRR!

The davit pulleys whirred musically, and one of the smaller tractors went gently to the ground. It was a kind of whippet tank in appearance but much less armoured than the whippet of warfare. This little car was really a tiny caterpillar tractor, capable of accommodating a driver and three or four passengers.

"I say, guv'nor, I'm coming on this trip!" I said firmly. "The other chaps won't be jealous and I don't care if they are! You're not going to dish me out of it!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Indeed!" he said. "And how long is it since you decided to lay down the law in this fashion, Nipper?"

"Oh, come off it, guv'nor!" I protested. "I went with you on the other trip, remember—and I can drive the car, if you like. Anyhow, I'm not going to be left behind!"

"In that case, there's nothing more to be said," remarked Lee drily. "Well, I suppose I must risk it. I'm afraid your chums will be dreadfully envious, young 'un, but no matter. Come straight along now."

"Thanks, guv'nor!" I said eagerly.

I hurried across the deck to go below—for the way off the Conqueror was through a big steel doorway far down in the ship—quite near the ground. Handforth and a number of other fellows barred my progress.

"Are you going off on that whippet?" demanded Handforth.

"Yes. Don't delay me——"

"Well, of all the nerve!" snorted Handforth. "Are you going to allow it, you chaps? We're left behind, and this fathead thinks he's going! Absolute favouritism—that's what it is!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If Nipper goes, we go!" declared Bob Christine. "And if we don't go, Nipper doesn't go! That's final!"

I glared at them impatiently.

"You rotters!" I snorted. "You're jealous—that's all!"

"Of course we're jealous!" said De Valerie. "We're all keen on a bit of exploring, and I don't see why three or four of these whippets shouldn't go. We're going to keep you prisoner until we've got permission!"

"Don't be a set of kids!" I snapped. "This is a serious business. The guv'nor can't be bothered by a crowd of light-headed idiots——"

"That's done it!" roared Handforth. "I was thinking of relenting, but I'm blowed if I will now! Grab him!"

"Ted, what ever are you doing?" asked Irene, in surprise, from the other side of the deck. "Why don't you let Nipper pass? Mr. Lee's waiting for him!"

Handforth looked rather sheepish.

"I—er—the fact is—— Oh, rather!" he said feebly. "So you want to go, Nipper? Good! Make way, you chaps! Miss Irene wants Nipper to go!"

I gave Irene a grateful glance, and the crowd of juniors were dismayed. They couldn't very well lay violent hands upon me now. They rather liked the girls being on board, but in some ways the feminine element was a serious disadvantage.

I had no difficulty in getting off the Conqueror, and found that Nelson Lee was already at the steering-wheel. Mr. Earle was with him, and I quickly hopped in.

The little tractor glided forward smoothly. And Nelson Lee steered it straight towards the frowning cliffs. The mountains did not rise gradually at this point, but abruptly, towering overhead in solemn, stately masses of rock. They were forbidding in their immensity.

And, although we searched the cliffs with our eyes, we could detect no opening until we had got within a hundred yards of the cliff itself. And then, as though by magic,

we saw a twist among the rocks—a cleft which was absolutely invisible until one reached close quarters.

Even at two hundred yards distance the opening was invisible, for the formation of the rocks was such that they were strangely deceptive to the eye. It was as though they had been deliberately camouflaged. But now that we were close up, we could see that it was a purely natural effect.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" I exclaimed. "There's a gorge here, sir—a great cut right through the cliff!"

"I suspected something of the sort," nodded Nelson Lee. "And now we can understand what happened to our unfortunate friends. They fled into this gorge. I am rather sorry for them. We certainly had no desire to drive them panic-stricken from their homes."

"I have no doubt we shall establish friendly relations after they have got over their fright," said Mr. Earle. "But the main thing is to find out where this gorge leads. By glory! What a magnificent canyon! What a stupendous freak of nature! I have never seen anything quite so remarkable!"

We had entered the gorge itself, and now we could see the extraordinary character of this strange gash that cut into the heart of the mountain range.

Those on the Conqueror, watching keenly as the whippet went towards the cliff, rubbed their eyes in astonishment when the nimble little tractor suddenly vanished. It was as though the car had plunged headlong into the cliff itself, to be swallowed up.

For, from the deck of the Conqueror, no sign of the canyon was visible. So cunningly had Nature done its work that these cliffs appeared to rise unbroken. And but for the precipitate flight of the villagers, we should have had no clue to indicate the opening to us.

We were in the gorge, with the sheer walls of rock rising to thousands of feet on either side of us. The canyon was like an even slit in the mountains—the rock walls being incredibly parallel as they rose to the summit of the peaks.

And we progressed cautiously.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAP.



"AMAZING—quite amazing!"

Mr. Travers Earle was leaning out of his seat, his loose-jointed frame tense and alert with the excitement that surged within him. He was a born explorer by nature, and this remarkable freak of mother earth held him entranced.

His wrinkled, leathery face was animated by his active interest, and his eyes were gleaming in their deep sockets. And both Nelson Lee and I were equally thrilled.

By this time the whippet had penetrated far into the canyon, and although the daylight was still strong—although the sun blazed down relentlessly upon the desert—we were in a kind of perpetual, uncanny gloom.

And the coolness of the air was startling, particularly so after the scorching heat we had been so long accustomed to. Lee was driving the tractor very slowly.

"The most surprising thing of all is the smooth, trodden appearance of this surface," he said thoughtfully. "Not a stone—not a boulder. The rock is smooth as a paved roadway. I cannot help thinking that it has been worn smooth by countless ages of usage."

"Looks like it, guv'nor," I agreed. "But I hadn't noticed it before, to tell the truth. I'm too surprised by these walls. Just look how they tower up—it must be thousands of feet to the top! And there isn't a yard of difference anywhere—they just go up sheer, like the skyscrapers on both sides of Broadway, in New York."

My simile wasn't such a bad one. The only difference was that these walls were continuous, and not broken up into business blocks. We were progressing along a dark lane, with black rock walls on either side, divided by a distance of about a hundred feet.

In places the walls were curiously hewn, deep cavities being provided, like safety refuges in a railway tunnel. At first I believed these cavities to be natural, but the guv'nor demurred.

"I don't think so, Nipper," he said. "They're too even, and show clear evidence of the hand of man. But they were hewn out of the rock ages ago. Astonishing as it may seem, this quarrying must have been done at a period when English history was in its infancy!"

"But what were the alcoves for?" said Mr. Earle curiously.

"I can only assume that they were provided for the purpose of concealing small detachments of defenders," replied Lee. "Ages ago this part of the Sahara may have been thickly populated. We don't know what lies beyond this mountain range, remember."

"The desert, surely," I said.

"Probably—but not surely," said Lee. "There is no certainty of anything, Nipper. I rather fancy that we shall discover a kind of small oasis. But it is no use theorising. If we continue our exploration, we shall soon know for certain."

"This canyon seems to be endless," I remarked.

"It must not be imagined that we shall get through it within five minutes, young man," declared Mr. Earle. "I shouldn't be surprised if the canyon continues for two or three miles."

Every now and again we would take a turn, for the pass was not a direct cut through. It twisted and dodged about in a rather bewildering fashion. But the walls were always the same distance apart. Nature is responsible for many freakish tricks, but this was surely one of its most fantastic.

I continually glanced upwards, gazing at the thin ribbon of sky far above. And during one of these glances, I suddenly caught my breath in. And I clutched at Nelson Lee's arm.

"Hold on, sir!" I shouted. "There's somebody up there!"

"What on earth— Oh!" exclaimed Lee. "This doesn't look healthy, Nipper! I have been half-expecting—"

Even while he was speaking, he reduced the speed of the whippet. Both Mr. Earle and I were peering upwards. We could see figures—tiny specks against the sky-line.

And then suddenly a dark patch appeared. And to our ears came a curious booming, crashing sound. I realised the truth at exactly the same second as Lee.

"Good heavens!" I yelled. "They've hurled some boulders down!"

Lee made no reply. His expression was grim, and there was a desperate look in his eyes. Dropping sheer towards us came those enormous boulders—rocks weighing over a hundred tons at least!

And within a few bare seconds this enormous mass of stone would wipe us out of existence! Those villagers had not been so innocent and harmless, after all!

And the very fact that this pass was so closely guarded hinted at something strange and unusual beyond. But we had no time to think of such matters now.

And but for Nelson Lee's presence of mind, we should certainly have been wiped out. Quick as thought the guv'nor whirled the whippet round, and sent her plunging headlong into one of those deep cavities in the rock wall.

The tractor crashed to a standstill, battered, but still serviceable. And we were flung in a heap.

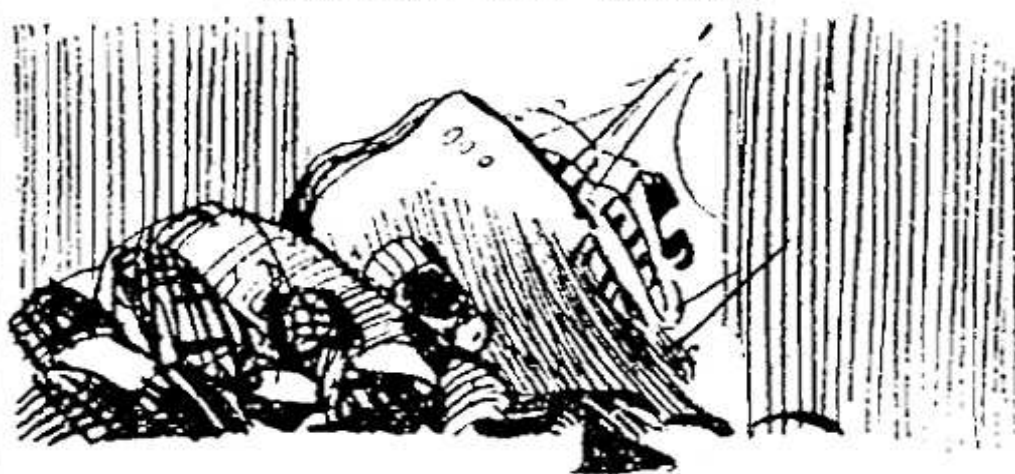
"Down—down for your lives!" roared Nelson Lee.

We crouched low in the car, and at the same second there came a noise like thunder—a noise like the end of the world. Fragments of rock hissed over our heads, rattling against the metalwork of the tractor.

And the air was so filled with dust that we choked and gasped. And then came silence—and we were still alive.

CHAPTER X.

CLIMBING THE BARRIER.



"**P**HEW! That was a bit warm, guv'nor!" I panted chokingly. "Yes, and we've got to be thankful that we're still alive!" exclaimed the guv'nor, as he slowly climbed out of the tractor. "H'm! I'm afraid any further progress is out of the question."

The air had cleared, and we could now see precisely what we had escaped. The whole pass, just ahead, was choked with jagged masses of rock. An enormous pile of it filled the floor of the canyon from wall to wall.

The unknown enemy had timed the trap well.

If the whippet had kept on, it would have been battered to fragments beneath this tremendous mass of rock. But by turning into that hewn-out cavity, Lee had saved our lives.

"It's no good attempting to climb this little heap!" said Mr. Earle grimly. "These small whippets are capable of negotiating rough ground, but this climb is too steep. The car would overturn."

We could see that he was right. The obstruction was an effective one—a barrier that would take an age to remove, even with the assistance of modern machinery.

"Well, there's a swindle!" I said gruffly. "Just as we were hoping to see the end of this gorge, too! What's to be done, guv'nor?"

"There is only one course—we must return to the Conqueror," replied Lee. "And the sooner the better—until we have satisfied ourselves that the enemy is quiet. We want no repetition of this affair. We are not likely to escape a second time."

The tractor was backed out of the alcove, with her bow badly bent and twisted, but otherwise unharmed. Climbing in, we were soon speeding back through the gorge towards the open desert.

We had entered slowly and cautiously—we left precipitately. But we saw no further sign of those figures against the sky-line. Indeed, Nelson Lee held the view that there was no further danger.

"It is most improbable that there are further boulders to be hurled down into the pass," he declared. "These people would naturally rely upon that one enormous avalanche. The very size of it indicates this."

"I am inclined to agree with you, Mr.

Lee," said the inventor. "I am certainly inclined to agree with you. And that's put an idea into my head. Quite a good idea, too, I imagine. You don't think there's any danger of a further trap?"

"There is a danger, but a remote one."

"Good! Then you're prepared to take a chance?" asked Mr. Earle keenly.

"Any chance you like!" smiled Lee. "But what are you suggesting, Mr. Earle?"

"Simply that we take the Conqueror through this gulch," replied the inventor. "She'll be able to climb that barrier, I have no doubt. A ticklish piece of work, but—"

"I am doubtful about the advisability of such a course," interrupted Nelson Lee gravely. "Remember, we have many precious souls on board, Mr. Earle. Remember, also, that the Conqueror is our only link with civilisation. We must be very cautious."

"I agree to that, but, at the same time, our finest chance of getting through the canyon is to act at once," replied Mr. Earle. "We want to move before these people can prepare a further avalanche. Personally, I think the risk is insignificant."

"So do I, sir," I agreed promptly.

It was, indeed, the only reasonable point of view. If that fall of rock had been slight, we might have assumed that there would be further traps laid at intervals. But it was fairly clear that these people had relied solely upon that one tremendous downpour of rock.

In any case, the chance was taken.

Whether it was wise could be judged by the result. But Nelson Lee was not the kind of man to risk the lives of anybody in his care. He would sooner abandon the whole project.

We reached the Conqueror, and the very instant I got aboard I was surrounded by eager, excited juniors. And the girls were no less keen. I was plied with endless questions.

And when I explained what had happened, they were all thrilled. And there was a general expression of approval when it was learned that the Conqueror was to proceed at once.

Not a minute's time was lost.

The great land yacht, with every man aboard on the alert for action, entered the mighty gorge. And we progressed slowly and smoothly along the floor of the canyon.

"Oh, we shall never do it!" exclaimed Marjorie Temple, as she caught sight of the rock barrier ahead. "Why, it's impossible! If we try to climb over that the ship will capsize!"

"Rats!" said Handforth excitedly.

"What did you say, Ted?" asked Marjorie, shocked.

"Oh, sorry!" gasped Handforth. "I—I thought it was one of the fellows speak-

ing! But you're wrong, Miss Marjorie. We'll be able to get over that ant-hill as easy as winking!"

"I hope so!" said Marjorie doubtfully.

"You can trust Mr. Lee to see everything all right," remarked Willy. "The very fact that we're here proves there's no danger. Mr. Lee thinks we're all made of china, you know. And he won't take us anywhere unless it's safe."

"You ought to be very thankful that Mr. Lee is so careful," said Irene. "Oh! I wonder if we shall be successful?"

The Conqueror had practically reached the great mass of rock, and the situation was ticklish. Mr. Earle was at the wheel, and the vessel's rate of progress was dead slow.

A sharp look-out was kept by many watchful eyes—eyes that were directed upwards, to give an instant warning in case there were further masses of rock being hurled down. For the mother ship could not dodge into a recess as the whippet had done.

But there was no real danger. Now that we were prepared for such activity on the enemy's part, it was possible to anticipate any peril by moving rapidly backwards in case of emergency. Being forewarned was being forearmed.

The Conqueror commenced mounting the obstruction deliberately and with almost uncanny precision

CHAPTER XI.

INTO THE UNKNOWN.



SLOWLY, gradually, the bows of the land yacht raised themselves upwards, and the decks assumed a heavy list. We all stood watching, breathless and inwardly excited.

It must be remembered that the Conqueror was like a ship in a narrow canal, with enormous banks on either side of it. A heavy list to starboard or port would result in the masts fouling the rock walls. And it was necessary, too, to avoid any possibility of getting stuck.

For that would be a calamity indeed.

But Mr. Earle himself was at the wheel, and he knew what his vessel was capable of. The great tractors revolved slowly, carrying the vessel onwards and upwards inch by inch. We had never before realised the wonderful delicacy of the mechanism which drove the Conqueror.

She seemed almost alive in the manner she felt her way over these rough, jagged rocks. It was her tank-like construction which enabled her to climb this seemingly insurmountable barrier.

"We're up—we're on the top!" shouted somebody.

"Hurrah!"

"We've done it—we're nearly over!"

The juniors shouted triumphantly, and Mr. Travers Earle himself permitted his features



But it was the last straw when Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey recognised the crowds of Remove juniors.

"Hurrah! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

The Remove gave voice in one earsplitting roar.

And now the Conqueror was well over the worst.

Having reached the summit of the great obstruction, she edged her way down to the level rock surface beyond. And at last, amid general cheering, the ship was on her level "keel" again.

"Do you think you could launch two or three of the whippets?" asked Nelson Lee briskly. "The space is limited, but I fancy it could be done, Mr. Earle."

"Certainly!" said the inventor. "An excellent idea, too—in fact, a most necessary precaution. It shall be done, Mr. Lee."

Three of the small tractors were gently lowered. And

then, with several men in each, they proceeded as a kind of advance guard—scouts, finding out the lie of the land, and on the alert for possible trouble.

But there was none.

We saw no sign whatever of a living soul. I remained on the deck with the other fellows, for I had now no desire to go scouting. The Conqueror herself was advancing through the defile, and every minute was of interest.

We seemed to go on endlessly, and still there was no indication that the open country would be reached.

"I don't think there's much danger of another little surprise packet dropping on us," I said, as I glanced casually upwards. "Hallo! Birds, by jove! That's pretty queer."

"What's queer?" asked Handforth.

"Birds."

"It's the first time I knew that it was queer for birds to fly!" said Edward Oswald sarcastically. "What the dickens are you getting at, you chump? Haven't you seen birds before?"

"My dear, ignorant ass!" I said patiently. "I've seen birds many a time, and I've always had an idea that vultures and such-like creatures roamed the desert. But I certainly didn't know that tiny woodland birds lived in these parts."

"Phew!" whistled Tommy Watson. "I hadn't thought of that! I say, this is a bit staggering."

to relax into a wrinkled smile. His confidence was justified. The land yacht had surmounted the obstacle, and had proved herself to be a conqueror, in very truth.

There had been one or two anxious moments, particularly when the vessel heeled over giddily as the tractors ploughed down the loose, shifting boulders.

On one or two occasions, too, the land yacht's superstructure had come within a bare yard or two of the rock walls. But Mr. Earle had manœuvred her by mere inches, and so exact was the control, he could ease her up by a touch, and correct the tendency to collide.

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"That's what I thought," I nodded. "I've got an idea we shall have the surprise of our lives when we get out of this canyon."

"Absolutely, old chirper!" agreed Archie Glenthorne. "It's rather rummy, but there's a feeling in the old bones that somewhat fearful sights await our good old gaze, if you know what I mean. That is to say, we are absolutely in for a shock."

"It won't do to take anything for granted," I pointed out. "If we imagine all sorts of things, we shall only be disappointed when we find the barren desert in front of us. There may be a natural explanation for these birds, but——"

"Look! The canyon is widening!" shouted Church.

"Begad! So it is!" ejaculated Tregellis-West.

The Conqueror was moving at a greater speed now, for she had more room, and there was no peril of colliding with the great walls. And a slight turn in the pass had revealed the widening gorge.

At this point the canyon opened right out, and we could see the whippets moving along like crawling insects—stretched out in a line in front of us, as though they were destroyers escorting a battleship.

On the bridge Nelson Lee had a clearer view than the juniors on deck. And, in the act of turning to Mr. Earle, the detective paused. He stared ahead, and caught his breath in.

And there was an expression of utter amazement in his eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT LAY BEYOND THE CANYON.



"MR. EARLE! What do you make of it?" asked Nelson Lee steadily.

He had some difficulty in controlling his voice, for he was inwardly in a turmoil.

And Mr. Earle apparently did not hear. For the inventor gave no answer.

He, too, was gazing ahead—out through the frowning walls of the canyon. He could see beyond, into the country that lay past the mountain range. And Mr. Earle almost forgot that he was piloting the Conqueror.

"I think it must be our imagination, Lee!" he muttered at last. "Man alive! This can't be real—it's impossible! A mirage, perhaps—similar to the one we saw at mid-day——"

"This is no mirage, Mr. Earle," interrupted Lee quietly.

He clung to the bridge rail, staring out ahead.

A wide vista of green, cultivated country had come into view—with wooded slopes beyond. There were roads, too—paved roads, which gleamed like ribbons among the green meadows.

Seen at any ordinary time this picture would have been pleasant enough, but to the adventurers on board the Conqueror the sight was absolutely startling.

For this vision of green was a sheer paradise after the drab, endless desert. For many days the land yacht had encountered no vestige of green—not a tree—not a blade of grass. But now, in passing out from this rocky defile, a veritable dream country lay in view.

It was hardly surprising that even Nelson Lee himself—hardened to control his emotions—broke out into expressions of almost stupefied astonishment. And when the others saw that scene they nearly went mad.

For after the Conqueror had progressed a further two hundred yards everybody on deck could see that scene. Members of the crew were crowding up, amazed and excited.

Stewards, stewardesses, members of the engine-room staff, and others crowded up in order to have a glimpse. Duty was forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

Mrs. Manners was on deck, surrounded by Irene and Co. They were all spellbound.

But the juniors were by no means tongue-tied. They simply yelled with the excitement of the occasion, and were at no pains to conceal their emotions.

"But—where's the desert?" gasped Church. "We were in the middle of the Sahara when we came into this canyon—but now we're passing out into a land of green fields and forests!"

"It's absolutely staggering, old boys!" declared Archie. "I mean to say, the old bones were right—what? They had a somewhat rummy feeling, but I'm dashed if I expected such a dashed shock as this!"

"But it isn't like Africa a bit!" I protested. "Look at those fields—look at the roads! Whoever heard of stone-paved roads in the heart of Africa? And I can see a bridge, too——"

"A bridge?"

"Yes!" I shouted. "Over there—look! It's a great stone bridge, just like you see in Italy—a kind of Roman style about it——"

"Rats! You must be mistaken!" said Handforth. "How can there be a stone bridge out here—— By George, you're right, though! There it is! Well, I'm jiggered! This beats the band!"

If we had been surprised before, we were literally dumbfounded now. We were, indeed, undergoing just the same stupendous astonishment that had overtaken Dorrie and Co. only a few hours earlier. For our missing friends had seen this remarkable scene for the first time in the grey light of this same day's dawn.

The Conqueror emerged from the canyon, and the whole great vista lay before us. Mr. Travers Earle brought the yacht to a standstill in his sheer amazement. The whippets, too, had also stopped.

And for a time we gripped the rails, staring—feasting our eyes upon this totally unex-

pected dreamland. A gradual slope lay in front of us, stretching down for miles into the gentle, undulating valley.

For about the first mile the surface was rocky and sandy, with scarcely a trace of vegetation—indeed, it was pure desert. But after this mile the appearance of the land rapidly underwent a change, becoming wooded and grass-grown. And there were fields, too—neatly cultivated fields, marked off with hedges or stone walls.

But, most astounding of all, we could see another spectacle in the distance. We could see something which lay in the very centre of the great valley. A town of white buildings—a city of stone!

And at different spots there were other white patches—villages, it seemed. And all this was so startling that we were left breathless.

But, in spite of my amazement, I realised that there was no miracle about this, but a perfectly logical fact. We had entered a great oasis—a fertile area of land, which had apparently escaped discovery by earlier explorers of the desert.

Hidden by these mountain peaks, this gem of wonderful freshness had not even been suspected. We had half believed that a journey through the canyon would lead to a surprise—but never to such a one as this.

"I expect lots of people used to live here," remarked Handforth, recovering slightly. "It may have been the home of big tribes, and there's no telling what kind of people there were—"

"But people live here now!" interrupted Church.

"Rot! There's not a soul in sight!" said Handforth. "We've come into a deserted land—the remnants of a dead and forgotten people."

"It's the first time I knew that dead and forgotten people cultivated the fields!" said McClure sarcastically. "Can't you see all the meadows? Can't you see how the roads are perfectly kept? This country isn't dead at all, Handy—there must be a big population."

And the rest of us were rapidly coming to the same conclusion.

But even now, after all these surprises, there were plenty more in store!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT.



REGGIE PITT stretched himself luxuriously.

"Hullo! Still dark!" he mumbled sleepily. "I wonder—"

What on earth—I don't quite seem to remember—"

Still bemused with sleep, Reggie sat up, trying hard to gather his thoughts. He

only knew that he had awakened feeling singularly refreshed. He hadn't felt so brisk

for many a day. The total darkness puzzled him, and he was still mystified.

"Now, lemme see," he murmured. "I ought to be on the desert—but the air's too cool here. And I can't see any stars—I can't hear any camels roaring. Hang it, there's something wrong—"

"Anythin' wrong with you, young man?" came a soft voice out of the blackness.

"Oh! That you, Dorrie?" asked Pitt, startled.

"You bet it's me," said his lordship. "I thought you were havin' a nightmare, or something. By the way you were mumblin', anybody might think your supper had disagreed with you."

"Supper?" said Reggie dreamily. "What a word! I don't seem to remember eating for years! But I say, Dorrie, where are we? And why is it so dark? I can't get the hang of things at all."

He felt about him, and his hand encountered a soft, yielding substance which moved under his touch, and which made strange sounds. Reggie realised that it was a face.

"Sorry!" he ejaculated hurriedly.

"When you've done pushing me in the eye, I shall be obliged!" growled Jack Grey. "And you awoke me out of a beautiful dream, too. I was back at St. Frank's, and Nipper and Handy, and all the rest were gathered round, asking questions. And we were—"

"Don't!" interrupted Pitt. "Cease, foolish one! Isn't it bad enough to be imprisoned in a giddy catacomb, without making it seem worse—Hullo! What's this?"

A scraping noise had sounded in his rear, and the next moment a door rolled open, admitting a flood of daylight into the prison. It was so sudden that the captives were blinded for the first few moments.

Dorrie didn't know how many hours had elapsed, but he was quite certain that they had all slept for a considerable time. They had been thrust into that prison soon after dawn. But now the sun was getting low. They had slumbered throughout the day.

Sir Crawford had said very little, for he was not in the best of health. The grim period of captivity had told upon him, and although Dorrie cheered him up, the sporting peer felt no little anxiety on Sir Crawford's behalf.

The prisoners were rather astonished by the individual who stood at the door. They had naturally expected to see one of their former captors—a man dressed in the usual garb of the desert.

But this new arrival was a surprise.

The most extraordinary feature about him was that he was no dark-skinned native. His complexion was deeply bronzed, it is true, but his features and his colouring clearly indicated that he was of white blood.

And he was dressed remarkably. Upon his feet were leather shoes which more closely resembled sandals, the straps criss-crossing over his ankles and shins, and fastening just below the knee.

He wore an embroidered tunic—a loose, curiously-designed garment, rich with colour. And upon his head there was an imposing helmet—a headgear of light construction, but exceedingly impressive. The front was of some bright metal, and burnished to a high gloss.

"Well I'm hanged!" said Dorrie bluntly. "He looks like a character out a play!" murmured Pitt. "This is getting more and more rummy! Hadn't you better speak to him, Dorrie? Ask him where we are, and who he is—"

But Lord Dorrimore was already addressing the strangely attired individual. The man was by no means self-possessed. He was eyeing the prisoners with unfeigned astonishment.

In the meantime, they had moved out of the stone tower, and were now standing on the wide, paved road in front. A little distance apart, Umlosi was standing in a group with the Hausas—an indignity which hurt him deeply. He did not like to be roughly herded with the native carriers.

"Greetings, N'Kose!" he shouted. "And thou, my friends! I am glad to see thee well and alive. I have spoken to these strange dogs, but they ignore me."

"That's nothin' new," said his lordship. "They all seem to be dumb."

There were other men standing on the road, dressed very similarly to the tall, bronzed individual in the burnished helmet. Their attire was similar, but less imposing.

"They look like Roman soldiers!" whispered Jack Grey. "And this chap with the helmet is the captain. I say, Reggie, it's like a blessed dream, you know! I'm all worked up!"

"Hallo! Look at Dorrie!" murmured Pitt.

Lord Dorrimore had walked sharply across to Umlosi. He shook the black giant by the hand, and made signs that they were friends. And he drew Umlosi away from the scared looking Hausas, and took him back to Sir Crawford and the boys.

"This man is my friend!" explained Dorrie gruffly.

The captain—for such he appeared to be—seemed to understand. But it was clear that the English words meant nothing to him. He turned abruptly on his heel, and addressed his men.

The words came out crisply and fluently. And Dorrie caught his breath in with a sharp hiss of surprise.

"By gad!" he exclaimed. "Then I was right! These chaps speak Latin! It's staggerin'—but there you are! Latin! By the Lord Harry! We've suddenly got into the midst of the Roman Empire!"

CHAPTR XIV.

INTO THE ROMAN CITY.



LORD DORRIMORE'S remark, so breathlessly uttered, caused Jack Grey and Reggie Pitt to stare at one another with sudden enlightenment.

"There you are!" said Grey. "What did I tell you? Didn't I say these chaps looked like Roman soldiers?"

Reggie nodded.

"You did," he agreed. "And Dorrie evidently thinks the same! And did you happen to understand what the gladiator said?"

"Understand?" repeated Grey. "How the dickens could I?"

"Is your Latin so rusty?" grinned Pitt. "A fat lot of good teaching us languages in the Remove! I'll admit I didn't understand everything the chap said, but I believe he gave an order for us to be surrounded."

Lord Dorrimore patted Reggie on the back.

"Good man!" he said heartily. "You've hit it! Wait a minute, and you youngsters will hear me havin' a chat with our pal with the sandals. It's a great comfort to know that my Latin is only a bit shop-soiled. It'll soon flow easily with use."

Dorrie, in fact, was delighted.

He was past being further surprised. There had been so many shocks during the past twenty-four hours that it wouldn't have astonished him a bit if a steam engine had suddenly come into view.

And his lordship was in a good humour. Both the boys could see this. For well over two weeks, Dorrie had kept up a pretence of light-hearted cheerfulness—but it had been nothing more than pretence. His grin was now genuine. His high spirits were contagious.

And Dorrie was cheerful for excellent reasons.

He had just risen from a sound, refreshing sleep—the first he had enjoyed for longer than he cared to remember. And he was consequently as fit as a fiddle, hungry, and full of robust health and high spirits. The weary, exhausting journey across the desert had ended at last.

And it had ended in a way that gave Dorrie a real "kick." There was nothing tame about this extraordinary discovery. He and his party had not been merely brought into a squalid native village.

And all Dorrie's instincts as an explorer came to the surface, and he was keen to penetrate further into this valley and investigate its wonders. And there was also the prospect of a good meal. Green vegetation hinted at such unheard of luxuries as potatoes, cabbages, or similar delights. And one has only to travel for

endless days on the desert to realise the unadulterated joy of such a prospect.

"You seem quite bucked, Dorrie," exclaimed Pitt curiously.

"Bucked?" said his lordship. "You bet I'm bucked! I'm so pleased to be out of that infernal desert that I don't care what happens! I wouldn't swear to it, but I'd wager a level fiver that I can see apples growing on a tree over there!" he added, pointing.

"Good gracious!" murmured Sir Crawford. "They certainly look like apples!"

"Hallo! We're bein' surrounded!" murmured Dorrie. "A foolish idea, because there's no danger of us scootin'. Now, let's see how my Latin pans out. It'll be a bit creaky, but it might pass muster!"

He turned and spoke again, this time in the Latin tongue.*

"A word in thy ear, friend!" he said cheerfully. "What meanest thou by placing us under this indignity? Why are we prisoners? Hast no courtesy to bestow upon strangers?"

The captain started as though he had been hit, and stared with widely opening eyes.

"Thou canst speak my tongue?" he asked blankly.

"Ay, and why not?" laughed Dorrie. "Perchance thou wilt have difficulty in understanding some words, but that is a matter of no import. Tell me, who art thou, and what is this wondrous land?"

He waved his hand towards the landscape, and the man partially recovered from his surprise. He was frowning now, puzzled, but it was clear that he partially understood. Dorrie's pronunciation was probably faulty.

Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, listening intently, could understand most of the words. And they felt rather grateful to the far-distant Mr. Crowell for having been so rigidly strict with Latin. The Remove Form-master had always taken particular pains in that lesson.

And Pitt and Grey were greatly excited. It was wonderful enough to be able to converse with these people. They had almost forgotten to be astounded that a dead language should be spoken in the heart of the Sahara.

"I am the Fourth Lieutenant of the Western Forces," he exclaimed proudly. "Thou art speaking to Cassius Allectus. Thou art my prisoners, and my orders are to convey thee hence into the Capital."

"It is well, my Cassius," said Dorrie easily. "Since thou hast orders, it is for thee to carry them out. We will go without demur. And thou wilt pardon my curiosity."

*For the purpose of simplicity, and to avoid all confusion to the reader, all conversation spoken in Latin will be rendered into English whenever such passages occur.

The man was obviously startled, more amazed than he could express to find that these new arrivals should speak his own tongue. But the prisoners were no less amazed that Cassius should speak Latin.

"Roman language—Roman clothes—Roman roads—and even Roman names!" said Pitt. "I've never known anything so startling in all my born days! If the world ever gets to know anything about this, it'll be the sensation of the century!"

And Lord Dorrimore and Sir Crawford Grey were equally convinced. For they were now beginning to realise that this remarkable oasis, hidden by these mountains of the Sahara, sheltered an unknown, forgotten tribe which was unquestionably descended from ancient Roman stock.

In some way that Dorrie could not even imagine, this tribe must have lived through the centuries in this hidden, forgotten corner of the world. Buried in the heart of the Sahara, the descendants of Ancient Rome must have lived their simple lives with little or no outward change.

But although this seemed a possible explanation, it was nevertheless startling. Dorrie would have been glad to question the lieutenant more, but at this moment a new incident occurred.

There was a rattle of wheels upon the stone-paved road, and a curious vehicle appeared—a four-wheeled waggon, of quaint design, and brightly decorated. It was drawn by a dozen men—harnessed in just the same way as horses. And at the driving seat sat a soldier, armed with a long, cruel whip.

Without further ceremony, the prisoners were bundled into the wagon, and a few minutes later they were speeding along the smooth road towards the Capital.

They were about to enter the Roman City!

CHAPTER XV.

THE EMPEROR TITUS.



THE prisoners were greatly interested in the progress of the wagon. In fact, everything connected with their novel surroundings attracted them. Even Sir Crawford was feeling almost himself again.

The wagon was a heavy vehicle, but superbly made. The workmanship, indeed, was remarkable. And the twelve "steeds" pulled at their harness in a manner which indicated their practice in such labour.

They were, indeed, almost like animals. They had apparently been broken in for so long that they had almost ceased to remain human beings. Uncomplaining, obedient, and mute, they pulled the wagon with an ease and grace that was rather fascinating to watch.

The whole twelve, running in even step, swayed from side to side like a well-oiled machine in action. The driver had no occasion to use the whip, for these animal-like humans pulled at their harness with a willing, eager devotion to duty.

Dorrie and the others watched them with interest.

"Tuaregs — Hausas — Fulani!" murmured his lordship. "They're all sorts. I can even spot a couple of Arabs. Poor beggars! They must have been doing this sort of work for years, until they've lost all human sensations, and have become hardened to the toil."

Dorrie was reminded of the galley slaves of old. These unfortunate wretches were chained to the oars of their vessel. A large percentage died miserable deaths, but those who survived became as strong as oxen, and could work with almost equal strength.

It seemed to be very much the same with these slaves in harness. The men were barefooted, and their feet were large and as hard as leather. For the rest, they were practically unclothed, save for a loin cloth of coarse, reddish material. Without question, they were slaves, and treated with no more consideration than beasts.

But, somehow, Dorrie and his party felt no pity. They couldn't. These slaves looked so unemotional—so completely in keeping with the whole picture. They apparently didn't need pity, for they were as strong as lions, and performed their work with delightful, amazing precision.

The prisoners, however, were intensely interested in their surroundings as they progressed. They could see the country on both sides, and the character of it changed gradually as they went steadily onwards.

The stone road was by no means level or straight. At times it curved sharply, passing through woods, and leading across well-constructed, high-humped bridges. And hills were encountered—short, sharp hills, with steep dips into corresponding valleys.

And at times there were dwellings to be seen—stone houses, neatly built, with people moving about leisurely at various agricultural pursuits. And all these people were of the same fine physique as the soldiers—all were of the same white stock.

They were attired in loose garments that were admirably suited to the hot climate. Children were seen—and women, too. And these latter were generally of striking beauty.

"Cattle, by jingo!" murmured Jack, pointing to a field of cows. "And sheep over there, look!"

"To say nothing of goats galore," remarked Pitt. "And can't I see a clump of chickens in that meadow? I say, this is getting better and better! What price mutton cutlets for supper?"

In fact, all the evidence clearly proved that this great oasis was populated extensively, and cultivated to a high degree. Great fields of growing corn and vegetables

were passed, and in many of them the workers were busy with the harvest.

But as the wagon went onwards, getting nearer and nearer to the City, the character of the land changed. The houses grew more frequent, and the farms were less in evidence. Instead of these latter, there were great, imposing mansions to be seen—wonderfully built houses of dazzling white stone, surrounded by exquisite gardens. There were carpet-like lawns, flowers in profusion, and clear, crystal pools where daintily attired children either bathed, or disported themselves round the banks.

And very soon the actual streets of the city were being traversed.

They were wide, imposing thoroughfares, with a smooth, paved road, and wide sidewalk. The people were all attired in the Roman fashion, and yet differently. It was as though they had taken the ancient Roman style as a type, and had gradually changed it.

And all the populace paused to gaze upon these strange newcomers as they passed. And as the heart of the city was reached, other traffic was encountered. There were even chariot-like vehicles, gorgeously decorated, and drawn by teams of slaves.

And at length a wide, imposing square was reached, and the waggon came to a standstill before the steps of the finest building the adventurers had yet seen—a veritable palace.

And as they pulled up, a man in glistening robes descended the steps, preceded by others. This individual was apparently a man of great importance. For all the soldiers under Lieutenant Cassius Allectus stood rigidly at attention, saluting in a quaint manner.

"Behold the Emperor!" exclaimed Cassius impressively.

"The Emperor!" repeated Dorrie.

"Even so!" replied the lieutenant. "His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Titus of Isirium!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVADERS.



PURRRRH! The Conqueror's caterpillar tractors hummed busily as the great land yacht progressed along a wide, paved road. The sound was quite

distinctive, after the dull, muffled sound she had made on the desert.

After a short consultation, Mr. Travers Earle and Nelson Lee had decided to penetrate into the heart of the valley at once. There was nothing to be gained by remaining at a standstill.

The canyon was conquered, and this strange new land lay at their feet. Needless to say, the St. Frank's fellows and all

the other members of the yacht's company were agog with excitement.

Mr. Manners had suggested there might be danger for the party. He was not concerned on his own account, but was possibly thinking of his wife and daughter.

"Set your fears at rest, my dear fellow—there is no danger whatever," declared Mr. Earle. "You seem to forget that the Conqueror is impregnable. We should be safe, even if we faced a modern army. There is certainly no peril to be feared here."

"You think the inhabitants of this valley will be peaceful?"

The inventor allowed his leathery face to crease up into a smile.

"After our delightful adventure in the canyon I can hardly think that," he replied drily. "But what if we meet with enemies? We are armed; we have guns, even some pieces of light artillery. And the Conqueror can fight against a thousand, with ease. Don't forget, Manners, that I built her for fighting purposes."

And this was true. The inventor had intended penetrating into the heart of the great forests of Africa, and had designed the vessel for every kind of emergency. If it actually did come to a fight, the Conqueror could more than hold her own.

And now she was rolling steadily along that great highway. Mr. Earle was glad that the road builders had designed so wide a thoroughfare, for his great ship had no difficulty in keeping to it. But it would be a poor lookout for any other traffic that was encountered.

"I'm so excited I hardly know what I'm doing!" exclaimed Irene breathlessly. "I wonder if we shall encounter any of the people?"

"Sure to—if there are any," said Doris.

"There's no question about there being any; I spotted some figures over on one of the hills not five minutes ago," put in Handforth. "I shouldn't be surprised if there's a battle before long. These natives are sure to jib against this invasion."

"Oh, but why should they?" asked Irene.

"These natives always fight," replied Handforth. "Not that I care. In fact, it'll be all the better if we have a scrap. I shall be glad of something to liven things up."

"Oh, Ted!" protested Irene. "How can you?"

"I—I mean——"

"Besides, why should these people try to fight with us?" went on the girl. "We've come here peacefully, and I'm sure Mr. Lee wouldn't have allowed us to journey onwards unless he was satisfied that everything was all right."

"I say—quick!" yelled Willy. "Cows! Look! Sheep and goats, too! You can't kid me that this place is populated by

Arabs. I believe there's a civilised race here!"

"Don't you call Arabs civilised?" demanded his major.

"Blow the Arabs!" retorted Willy.

He was clinging to the rail, gazing at a peaceful-looking farm building that had just come into sight. Although Dorrie and Co. had seen a good deal of this country and its people, we on the Conqueror were only just obtaining our first glimpse.

And we were enchanted, enthralled.

Nobody thought of food. It was past teatime, but no tea had been served. It would soon be the dinner hour, for the sun was getting low, but no thoughts of dinner entered our heads.

Not a single member of the holiday party would have gone below for a ransom just at this period. Our eyes were far too busy feeding on the novel scenery.

At intervals we came across side roads, not so wide or imposing as this main highway, but well-kept and neat in appearance. And along one of these side roads we caught sight of a laden wagon—a vehicle piled up with greenstuff, which looked like vegetable produce.

"By George! Look at that!" roared Handforth.

His voice was indignant, and the reason for this was obvious. The wagon was being pulled by a team of lightly-clad slaves. But they had abandoned their task now, and were tearing madly and frantically at their harness. All they wanted was to get free, for they were panic-stricken at the sight of the Conqueror.

This was by no means surprising, for the enormous land yacht must have seemed a veritable juggernaut to these simple people.

And they were not the only ones to flee in terror.

As we progressed we came upon other inhabitants, and our amazement was unabated when we saw how closely they resembled the ancient Romans. A body of men who looked like soldiers, in flashing helmets, turned tail and bolted in disorder at the sight of the Conqueror.

And by this time we were getting past further surprises. For we fully realised that we were in the midst of the most amazing discovery of modern history.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONDEMNED TO SLAVERY.



LORD DORRIMORE gave a rueful grunt. "Just our luck, of course!" he remarked, with a glance at Sir Crawford. "They're just goin' to introduce us to the bally emperor, an' we look like a set of confounded scarecrows!"

"It was very thoughtful of them," said Sir Crawford drily. "They might have given us an opportunity to make ourselves presentable before springing this honour."

The prisoners were standing in two groups, having been ordered out of the wagon. Lord Dorrimore, Sir Crawford, Jack and Reggie and Umlosi were in one group, and the Hausa carriers in the other.

And there was certainly a good reason for Dorrie's complaint.

He looked more like a tramp than a peer of the realm. His clothes were in tatters, his shoes were worn to shreds, his chin was covered with a villainous-looking growth, and his hair was long and unkempt.

Sir Crawford was in no better case, and the two boys were only saved from precisely similar unkemptness by their smooth chins. But they felt sorry enough, anyhow.

"Can't be helped!" said Pitt philosophically. "If the emperor doesn't like us, he'll have to lump us! It's his own fault for inspecting us before we can tidy ourselves up."

"We're a sinister-looking crowd," said Dorrie, shaking his head. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if old Titus gives us one look and then orders our heads to be lopped off."

The prisoners were accepting the new conditions with astonishing sang-froid. And this was easily understandable. They had received so many shocks that they were now thoroughly immune.

It didn't even strike them as incongruous that there should be an emperor, and that his name should be Titus. Both facts were in complete harmony with the rest of the adventure.

And they waited for the next move.

The tall, imposing man in the rich robes had paused on the wide steps. The prisoners regarded him with interest. He was wearing a kind of toga, with a magnificent head-dress adorning his face. His features were rather coarse and heavy, and his eyes deeply set, and surprisingly small.

The sunlight shone upon him slantingly, and his head-dress and his robes shimmered and scintillated dazingly, telling of countless jewels. He was, indeed, bedecked with many precious stones.

"I'm sorry, but I don't like the cut of his Majesty's jib!" murmured Dorrie. "He'd look more fittin' in a bally jersey, sittin' at the tiller of a Thames barge!"

"My hat! He does look like a bargee, now you come to mention it," grinned Pitt. "But we can't always judge by appearances, Dorrie."

Lieutenant Cassius turned to them stiffly.

"Thou wilt advance, strangers," he exclaimed in Latin; "and let me warn thee to behave well before his Imperial Majesty. Thy end will be swift if thou art insolent."

Dorrie and the other advanced, mounting the wide steps slowly. The Emperor Titus was surrounded by many richly clothed



Can you discover the correct wording to go underneath this picture? Particulars on Page iii of the cover of a novel and fascinating competition.

figures, apparently members of his royal household.

"Hail, O King!" exclaimed Dorrie boldly.

"Who art thou, and whence camest thou?" demanded the emperor, his voice harsh and cold. "I am informed that thou art prisoners, brought hither by my worthy slaves. But what of thy country? And how cometh it that thou canst speak my language?"

"Thy language is dead in the great world outside," replied Dorrie. "But it is still spoken, although not used. Perchance my words will be awkward in thine ears, but my meaning will be plain to thee. Why hast thou brought us here in such sorry plight, O king?"

"'Tis not for thee to ask questions," replied the Emperor Titus. "For ever my soldiers are scanning the desert and bringing fresh slaves into my land, so that there will be no shortage of labour. But I am interested in thee, and in those with thee. For thou art different to aught I have seen previously."

"Hast thou never met with men of white blood before?"

"My own people are white, as thou wilt understand," replied the emperor grimly. "But every slave that has been brought into this valley hitherto has been black or brown. I have come to see thee, since thou art a strange and wondrous sight to our eyes."

"I can quite believe it," said Dorrie, in English. "We are a wondrous sight in anybody's eyes. If we appeared in Trafalgar Square like this we should be promptly arrested."

The emperor frowned darkly.

"What sayest thou in thine own accursed tongue?" he demanded, his eyes glinting with rage. "Art issuing insulting words, dog? Thou wilt be trained for mine own household, as will thy white companions. It is my fancy to train thee as mine own body servants."

"What's he saying?" asked Jack, in a whisper. "I'm blessed if I can understand; my Latin's horribly wonky! Did I understand him to say that we're going to be slaves?"

"Something like that," said Reggie. "It strikes me we were only out of the frying-pan into the giddy fire! But nothing could be worse than that awful trip across the desert."

"Thou art surely jesting, serene Majesty?" asked Lord Dorrimore, in surprise, as he turned to the emperor again. "We are men of rank, even as thine own most exalted nobles. 'Tis not fit that we should be enslaved, as thou hast hinted—"

"Enough!" interrupted Titus harshly. "Thou art insolent, and 'twill go ill with thee if—"

He paused, frowning heavily, as a great

commotion sounded far down the wide, imposing roadway. And he was perplexed when he beheld great numbers of citizens rushing helter-skelter towards the palace.

One man was in advance of the others—a soldier, apparently, by his dress. He was hot, dusty, and wild-eyed. Lieutenant Cassius turned with fierce anger to this interrupter.

"Halt, thou pig of insolence!" he shouted. "For this thou shalt be cast into the arena—"

"The monster—the monster!" panted the man faintly. "A great and terrible monster cometh upon us, O lieutenant! 'Tis a chariot of vast proportions—"

"What madness is this?" shouted the emperor. "Bring that dog hither—"

But he paused again, for the commotion beyond the square was now even more tumultuous. Staring in that direction, the Emperor Titus suddenly started back, and his face paled.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOUND AT LAST!



THE Conqueror rolled on relentlessly.

She had already reached the outskirts of the town, and was now making her way towards the centre. Nelson Lee had suggested a halt near the outer walls, but Mr. Earle had demurred.

"No! We'll go straight on," he declared. "I think it will be far better to impress these people with our great might. If we halted on the outskirts it might be thought we were afraid."

"There is something in what you say," admitted Lee. "But I should like to avoid creating a panic, Mr. Earle."

The inventor shrugged his loose shoulders.

"I'm afraid we have created that already, so a little more of it won't make much difference," he smiled. "And what does it matter? We shall soon prove our friendliness."

So the Conqueror was proceeding straight onwards.

If the inhabitants of this remarkable city of Isirium were startled by the land yacht, the occupants of the land yacht were startled by Isirium. They had never seen anything so strange or remarkable in their lives.

These stone houses, all dazzlingly white, were most noteworthy for their decidedly Roman design. All were magnificent examples of architecture. I thought of Kano, the mud city of Northern Nigeria and could not help smiling.

We had thought Kano wonderful, and no doubt it is wonderful, considering that the buildings are made of sundried clay, by

primitive native hands. But Isirium was a city of amazing craftsmanship.

The mansions, the public buildings, and other structures of importance, were all erected on imposing lines, with stately colonnades and exquisite carvings. It was a picture that impressed us deeply.

To describe this city would be almost impossible. One has frequently seen photographs of Roman ruins—as, for example, that wonderful city of Timgad, where the remains of stately old Roman buildings are to be seen in a fine state of preservation. And from these remains one has been able to reconstruct a picture of the original scene.

Isirium was just such a scene.

It insistently reminded us of Rome in the time of Nero and the Cæsars. The unreality of such a place existing to-day had ceased to concern us. We were here—we were in the midst of this astounding adventure—and already the desert seemed remote and forgotten.

Mr. Earle was giving his undivided attention to the control of the ship. The boys and girls were gazing at the passing panorama with ever-constant delight.

But Nelson Lee was rather more practical.

He was talking earnestly to Mr. Hobart Manners.

"I think we ought to be on our guard against any eventuality," Nelson Lee was saying. "And I want you, Manners, to have machine-guns fixed fore and aft—and manned."

"But you don't expect trouble—surely?" asked Irene's father.

"I don't expect it—but if it comes, we ought to be prepared," replied Lee quietly. "It's no good thinking of these things afterwards, is it? Will you get this done, Manners?"

"I will—at once."

"The sooner the better," went on Lee. "And I think it would be just as well to distribute revolvers to every man who can handle them. Our only safety lies in maintaining our complete mastery. These people may be absolutely friendly—I sincerely hope so. But they may be bitterly angry with us for invading their territory, which has hitherto remained undiscovered, and even unsuspected."

Nelson Lee's advice was sound, as Mr. Manners soon realised. And as he was about to hurry away, the Conqueror swept majestically out of the main thoroughfare into a wide, beautiful square.

In the centre there was a tasteful garden, with an ornamental fountain playing into the surrounding basin. But there was plenty of room for the Conqueror to pass, for the paved roadway was wide and spacious.

Not a soul on the Conqueror had any thought of Lord Derrimore's party in mind. The startling nature of this strange city had

driven the remembrance of their original quest out of their heads.

And so it came as a greater shock when Willy Handforth suddenly gave vent to an ear-splitting yell.

"There's Reggie Pitt!" he roared, his voice cracking with excitement. "Look! And Jack Grey, too! Hurrah! Can't you see 'em? There—over there! Standing against those two scarecrows!"

I turned to Willy in astonishment—indeed, everybody was looking his way. For it was a most unusual thing for the leader of the Third to show any excitement at all. He was generally as cool as ice.

"Have you gone mad, you young ass?" roared his major.

"It's Reggie, I tell you!" bellowed Willy.

And then a perfect yell of joy went up.

"He's right!" shouted Tommy Watson. "We've found 'em! It's Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey!"

"Hurrah!"

As for the prisoners on the great stone steps, they were all standing there, as though turning to stone themselves. They had been incredibly startled at the sight of the Conqueror.

This extraordinary land-ship was nearly as staggering to them as it was to the natives. It was something they had never imagined in their wildest moments.

Civilisation had apparently come in one flash! The caterpillar tractors, the crowded decks, the graceful funnels, the uniformed figures of the officers and crew. All this formed a picture of things they knew—of scenes they had left behind, apparently for good.

But it was the last straw when Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey recognised the crowds of Remove juniors—and Nelson Lee—and Irene and Co. It seemed, indeed, that this whole affair must be an impossible dream.

CHAPTER XIX.

RE-UNITED!



"HURRAH!"

The Remove gave voice in one ear-splitting roar.

"St. Frank's to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

Reggie Pitt raced forward madly, with Jack Grey at his heels. The soldiers made no attempt to detain them, for all was confusion following the arrival of this gigantic leviathan.

"Hallo, up there!" yelled Pitt, waving his hand. "How's things?"

"Good old Reggie!"

The Remove nearly leapt overboard in its excitement, and Handforth, indeed, was only saved from toppling over the rail by

the presence of mind of Church and McClure.

"It's all right, my sons!" roared Handforth. "We've found you!"

"Rather!" replied Pitt cheerily. "How goes it? Same old Handy! I say, this is a bit of a staggerer! How in the name of all that's wonderful did you know we were here? And where did you find this freak of a ship! It must have escaped out of the Atlantic!"

"There's Dorrie!" I shouted. "Good old Dorrie!"

By this time the Remove was not to be frustrated any longer. Several fellows had found ropes, and before Nelson Lee could make any attempt to stop them, they were swarming down the ropes to the ground.

And then the lost adventurers were surrounded by an excited mob, who insisted on shaking hands, and knocking Pitt and Grey about until they were nearly exhausted. Dorrie and Umlosi and Sir Crawford Grey were treated with just the same impartial violence.

And in the excitement His Majesty the Emperor was completely overlooked. Nobody, in fact, gave a thought to Isirium and the remarkable inhabitants of this desert oasis.

But King Titus was rapidly losing patience. He wasn't accustomed to being treated with this off-handed indifference. His amazement had been tempered with fear upon the arrival of the Conqueror. But as there were no warlike overtures, his fears subsided.

And while the St. Frank's juniors were getting over their madness, the emperor had given sharp, imperious orders to Lieutenant Cassius and other members of his retinue. The whole square, in fact, had become filled with helmeted soldiers.

These men were keeping back the eager, excited populace, and it was evident that the Isirium soldiers were astonishingly well trained.

Seeing that nothing would drag the boys back on board, Nelson Lee swarmed to the ground himself, and in a moment he was wringing Lord Dorrimore's hand. They said little, these two. But there was a wealth of meaning in that fierce hand-clasp.

"By gad, professor, I'm glad to see you!" said Dorrie simply.

"No less than I am to see you, old man," replied Nelson Lee, with a husky note in his voice. "Frankly, I hardly expected to see you alive again. This is a wonderful moment, Dorrie."

"And you've got ladies on board, I see," said his lordship. "Infernally embarrassing, Lee! I'm looking like a coal-heaver! Ye gods and little fishes! Your clothes fit me! The first thing I do is to have a bath, a shave, and a change!"

"That can wait, Dorrie," said Lee, turning, and finding Umlosi by his side. "Ah, old friend, so we meet again!"

"Wau! Did I not know thou wouldst come, O worker of magical things?" rumbled Umlosi, his eyes glinting with delight. "'Tis well, Umtagati! We are united again! As for these strange people, they are fighters! Maybe we shall have a wondrous battle, even yet!"

"If you don't mind, Umlosi, we can well dispense with the wondrous battle," replied Nelson Lee drily. "Hallo, Sir Crawford! I'm afraid I can't say much to express—"

"Words are inadequate, Mr Lee," interrupted Sir Crawford Grey. "You have come—and in the most wonderful manner possible. What more is to be said? Our troubles are over."

"I hope so," said Nelson Lee fervently.

But he was by no means sure of it. He had not failed to observe the ominous signs. During the past five minutes the entire square had become grimly organised. The St. Frank's juniors and all the rest were surrounded by solid columns of soldiery—all of whom were carrying burnished metal shields and unsheathed swords.

But even these signs meant nothing to the juniors.

"Hallo, girls!" shouted Reggie, when he found himself free for a moment. "This is more wonderful than anything else—to see your bright faces up there! By jingo! You all look ripping, too!"

Irene and Co. were leaning over the rail, very fair to look upon in their white frocks. And there was one girl that Reggie Pitt singled out with a sudden start—a sudden paling of his tanned cheeks.

"Winnie!" he shouted hoarsely.

In a moment he was swarming up one of the trailing ropes. And in another moment he was embracing his sister, and kissing her tear-stained cheeks. For the girl was crying for sheer joy. And then Pitt turned to find his father there.

"Dad!" he muttered, with a catch in his throat.

"My boy!" said Mr. Pitt simply.

"I—I didn't know you were here, dad—or you, Sis!" said Pitt, his eyes shining with joy. "Oh, this is too good to be true! How did you get here? And how did—"

"This is hardly the time for explanations, my dear lad," interrupted his father. "For the moment let it be sufficient that we are together again. And your mother shall know the glad news as quickly as possible."

"But how? Is mother—"

"The wireless!" said Mr. Pitt, indicating the Conqueror's aerial, far above the deck. "We are in communication with civilisation all the time, Reggie, and—"

He broke off, for a sound from the ground had attracted his attention. There came a great clashing of swords upon metal shields—an ominous clang which told its own story.

And Mr. Pitt caught his breath in as he saw the Roman-like warriors closing in on the entire party.

CHAPTER XX.

TOUCH AND GO



NELSON LEE looked at Dorrie sharply. "Things are looking serious, old man," he said. "These extraordinary natives are not as peaceful as I would like."

Who is the man on the steps? He seems to be giving orders—"

"He is Titus," said Dorrie.

"Titus?"

"The Emperor!" explained his lordship calmly. "An' the fellow who marched us into this town was Lieut. Cassius Allectus. No, we're not in ancient Rome—but it seems like it!"

"What a startling adventure!" muttered Lee. "It is, in fact, so extremely remarkable that one is left immune to all further surprises. But we must act quickly, Dorrie."

"Wau! Wondrous words, O, Umtagati!" exclaimed Umlosi, who was near by. "But for these dogs of dogs, I would attack them now! But they have seized my trusty spear, and I am unhappy."

Nelson Lee felt that it was rather a good thing that Umlosi was weaponless, or the black giant might have started a conflagration which would have been difficult to subdue. This situation needed tact—not force.

"Better leave this to me," said Dorrie crisply. "These beggars speak Latin, you know. I'll have a jaw with the emperor—or there may be bloodshed."

"My own Latin is quite passable, I believe," said Lee.

"Oh, sorry," said his lordship. "I forgot you were a schoolmaster, old man! I expect your Latin is about four times as good as mine—because mine creaks somewhat rustily."

The converging movement of the surrounding warriors had ceased, and it was clear that no attack was to be made. The idea, no doubt, was to impress the invaders with the might of this warlike array, and to make any kind of escape impossible.

Lee was rather amused inwardly. Once he could get the boys on board, there would be little or no danger. For the Conqueror could advance against any possible defence or attack. For she was a super-tank in construction, and the whole army corps could not put her out of action. Only a direct hit from a heavy piece of ordnance would have done that.

But Lee was anxious, nevertheless.

More than anything else, he desired to be on friendly, amiable terms with these remarkable people. It would be a terrible pity to signalise this peaceful invasion by an act of bloodshed. And he was anxious to make the chief clearly understand that they were friendly.

"A word, friend!" exclaimed Lee, in Latin. "Thou canst mark my speech and understand my words?"



"Thou hast forced thy way into this land with thy strange and wondrous chariot!" exclaimed the emperor. "What explanation hast thou to offer for the act of deliberate provocation?"

He addressed one of the emperor's officers, and the man started. He was richly robed, and pompous in aspect.

"Ay, I understand thy speech well enough," he replied, drawing himself up. "Thou art addressing Clitus Lartius, and it will go ill with thee if thou art insolent."

"Thou art mistaken in my intentions, my good Lartius," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "I would have speech with thy emperor. I am thy friend and his friend, and these warlike preparations displease me," he added, indicating the massed soldiery with a wave of his hand.

Clitus Lartius sneered pompously.

"Thou art ready of tongue, thou intruder!" he exclaimed curtly. "But the emperor may have speech with thee. I will approach his Imperial Majesty, and ascertain if thou canst reach his ear."

He turned and went to the emperor's side, speaking with him for some moments in low tones. They were both highly excited and confused, although they pretended to maintain their dignity. This evening's strange events were probably the most remarkable that had happened in the whole history of Isium. And it was hardly surprising that these gentlemen were unprepared.

The Emperor Titus waved his hand imperiously, and Nelson Lee understood that he was being indicated. He mounted the steps to the emperor's side, bowing low.

"I bring thee greetings from the great world beyond the desert, your Majesty," said Nelson Lee gravely. "And I would have

thee remember that we are friendly, with no thoughts of battle."

The emperor gazed at Lee with suspicion.

"Thou hast forced thy way into this land with thy strange and wondrous chariot!" he exclaimed. "What explanation hast thou to offer for that act of deliberate provocation?"

"Hast thou overlooked our friends—those whom we came to seek?" replied Lee. "They were captured in the desert, and forced to enter this land against their will. Was that no act of provocation, O Emperor? Did not thy agents wickedly and basely seize these innocent and harmless travelers?"

The emperor scowled.

"Thou art glib of tongue, my friend," he exclaimed roughly. "My soldiers go whither I command them—that is enough!"

"Nay, I must disagree, your Majesty," said Nelson Lee. "And we have entered thy land in order to release our friends from the hands of thy henchmen. It will go ill with thee and thine if blood is shed."

"So! Who art thou to dictate to me—Titus, the Emperor?"

"Let me impress upon thee that I am not dictating," said Nelson Lee gently. "I am urging friendship, O Titus! We would stay a while in thy wondrous land, and then depart in peace. Our one desire is to please thee."

The emperor considered for a moment.

"I will consult with my advisers," he said shortly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HONOURED GUESTS.



FOR the moment there was a truce.

Nelson Lee retired, to talk with Dorrie and Umlosi. And the emperor entered into a deep discussion with his advisers. He held a hurried council on the palace steps.

And Nelson Lee noted that several of the gorgeously attired army officers were included in the confab. And they constantly turned and stared at the Conqueror, taking note of her immense size, and her impressive array of armed defenders.

For Mr. Earle had not failed to grasp his opportunity. The machine-guns were in position, and every available member of the crew now lined the deck-rail—each man armed with a rifle.

The emperor was not long in deciding.

"His Majesty would speak with thee, stranger," exclaimed the pompous Clitus Lartius, coming over and addressing Nelson Lee. "'Tis well that wert submissive upon thy first interview."

Nelson Lee made no comment, but followed Clitus to his monarch's side. The emperor was looking cordial, his face

panding into a smile. But Lee thought he detected a wily glint in his eyes.

"Thou hast decided, O Titus?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Ay, and I have realised that 'tis better to be friendly than warlike," replied the emperor. "I greet thee as my friend, O stranger. A proclamation shall be sent forth to my people, welcoming thee and thy companions into my land. Thou shalt be honoured by all."

Nelson Lee bowed.

"Thy decision is wise and generous, and worthy of a great ruler," he said gravely. "I thank thee, Majesty, for thine expressions of welcome. And I give thee full assurance that our visit shall be peaceful."

The emperor waved his hand.

"'Tis well!" he said. "A great feast shall be prepared in thy honour, and a public holiday shall be proclaimed for the morrow. I desire thee all to be my guests, and my servants shall be thy servants. My house shall be thy house. I, Emperor Titus, have said it!"

He turned, and gave orders for the soldiers to be dispersed at once. And shout after shout rang out, passing from company to company. The warriors retreated, leaving the Conqueror unmenaced. And all the St. Frank's fellows gathered round Nelson Lee, asking for information.

"We couldn't understand all you were saying, sir," exclaimed Handforth. "My Latin is first-rate, of course, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Possibly your Latin will be greatly improved after a few days among these people, Handforth," smiled Nelson Lee. "But at the moment I am afraid it is sadly stale."

"Anyhow, I can understand a few words, sir," retorted Handforth.

"But you can understand English better, so please make haste, and get back to the decks of the Conqueror at once," said Nelson Lee crisply. "And this applies to all of you, boys."

"We're not going back to the desert, are we, sir?" yelled Christine.

"No; we are guests in this wonderful land of Isirium," replied Nelson Lee. "The emperor has invited us to be his honoured visitors, and a great feast is being prepared in our benefit."

"Hurrah!"

"A feast!" gasped Fatty Little. "Great pancakes! I've just remembered! We haven't had dinner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm starving!" roared Fatty indignantly. "My only hat! I'd completely forgotten about feeding!"

"Anybody got a bit of chalk?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "The one and only Fatty forgot to feed himself. I can survive these Romans, and all the other marvels, but Fatty leaves me weak and feeble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bally good!" said Archie Glenthorne approvingly. "So it appears that the good old strife will fail to materialise, as it were? I mean to say, that's dashed topping, when you come to think of it."

Everybody was in the best of spirits. Nelson Lee's news had come pleasantly—breaking the tension that had gripped the entire party. And in a very short time we were all back on board.

But the crew still lined the decks, on guard.

Below, Lord Dorrimore, Pitt, and the other rescued prisoners were rapidly transforming themselves into their old, well-known personalities. A bath, a trim, and a change of clothes worked wonders.

As I had a wash and changed into another suit, I thought over the strange

events of this crowded day. Here we were, in this unknown, unsuspected country of Isirium, surrounded by men and women who were startlingly like the Ancient Romans.

And we were here as guests, and the prospect was not without its keen delight. For there would be many entrancing things to see and do on the morrow. So far, we had hardly glimpsed at this remarkable city. It had yet many wonders to reveal. But Nelson Lee was not quite so comfortable as the juniors. He was slightly suspicious of the emperor's good faith. It was a disturbing thought, but he was already on his guard against treachery.

But the Remove fellows, the girls, and many others of the party were so enraptured by their novel surroundings that they had no thoughts or suspicions of danger!

THE END.

CHARIOTS AND GLADIATORS

is the title of next week's magnificent long complete yarn. It details the further amazing adventures of the St. Frank's holiday party. The Emperor asks them to a great feast, followed by an entertainment. And while they are feasting and enjoying themselves inside—something is happening! What that is you will find in

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MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



No. 36. CHARLIE CHAPLIN AT WORK.

DURING my first few days in Los Angeles I was lucky enough to see Charlie Chaplin directing one or two scenes of "A Woman of Paris," the film which has been such a big success over here this season.

I had had no time to go over to Hollywood, although it was certainly on my programme to visit the famous film city. Eventually I went all through the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation's enormous studios, and will write of this in a later article.

I had been rather surprised because I had seen no sign of film-making in Los Angeles. And I had always been told that film players were to be seen at work in Los Angeles, dotted about here and there in some profusion. And yet I had seen nothing at all! It didn't take me long to discover, of course, that Los Angeles itself is a big winter pleasure resort, a great manufacturing centre, and the metropolis of Southern California. The film city is Hollywood—quite a few miles from Los Angeles proper.

Well, I had left my flat, and was strolling near Westlake Park when I happened to notice a small crowd of people gazing up a narrow side turning. As I approached I became aware of a little newspaper kiosk which seemed very unfamiliar. It was typically Continental—more especially so as all the periodicals displayed were French.

And when I further observed a tall old-fashioned lamp-post which had absolutely no business in Los Angeles, I came to the conclusion that these incongruous objects were merely "props."

Arriving at the corner, I joined the little crowd, and watched with interest. A picture was being made. I idly wondered which star I should catch sight of, and told myself that this was probably an unimportant "two-reeler" and that there would be nobody of prominence on the spot.

There were several big motor-cars, several energetic young men with cameras, and a number of others. A scene was just being "shot."

A ragged old man, a woman, and three or four urchins were crossing the street from pavement to pavement, and the cameras clicked busily. There were several of these latter, taking the scene from various angles.

There seemed nothing in the incident to me. And yet it failed to please the director, for he shook his head, and made the performers do the whole thing again. And again after that—and still again.

I was quite interested in this director—a rather smallish man, clean-shaven, bronzed, slightly grey at the temples, and wearing a brown tweed suit, soft collar, and a tweed cap. I didn't recognise him. He was literally afire with boundless energy and vitality. Yet there seemed something reminiscent about him. And quite suddenly I placed him. He was the great Mr. Charles Chaplin himself. I walked a little closer to the scene of operations—until I was standing within a couple of yards of him. And then, of course, the recognition was complete.

But how different to the familiar Charlie of the screen! This man was serious, his mind entirely on his work, and literally a human bunch of electricity. He didn't keep still a moment, and he smoked cigarettes incessantly.

Time after time Charlie acted the scene for his performers, going through every movement and action that he desired to be recorded on the film. And at last, after endless attempts, the scene was filmed to his satisfaction.

After that Edna Purviance appeared in two or three scenes, and she had the same experience—again and again she acted and re-acted the scenes. I was impressed by the calm, deliberate, painstaking efforts of Chaplin—and I concluded even then that he would prove to be a master director. As everybody knows, "A Woman of Paris" turned out to be a sensational film—one of the most wonderfully directed pictures ever produced.

Next Week: The City of Countless Motor Cars.

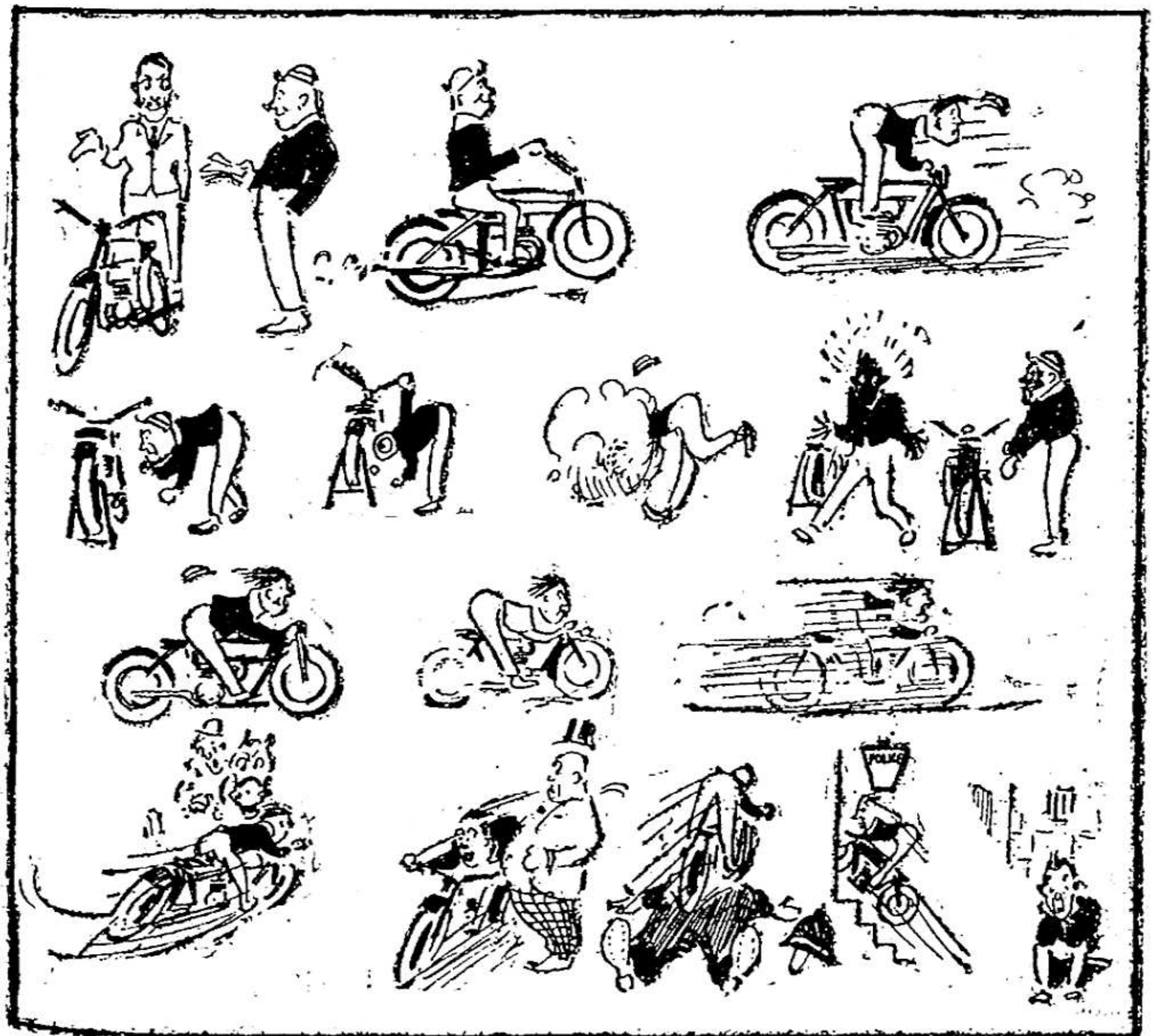


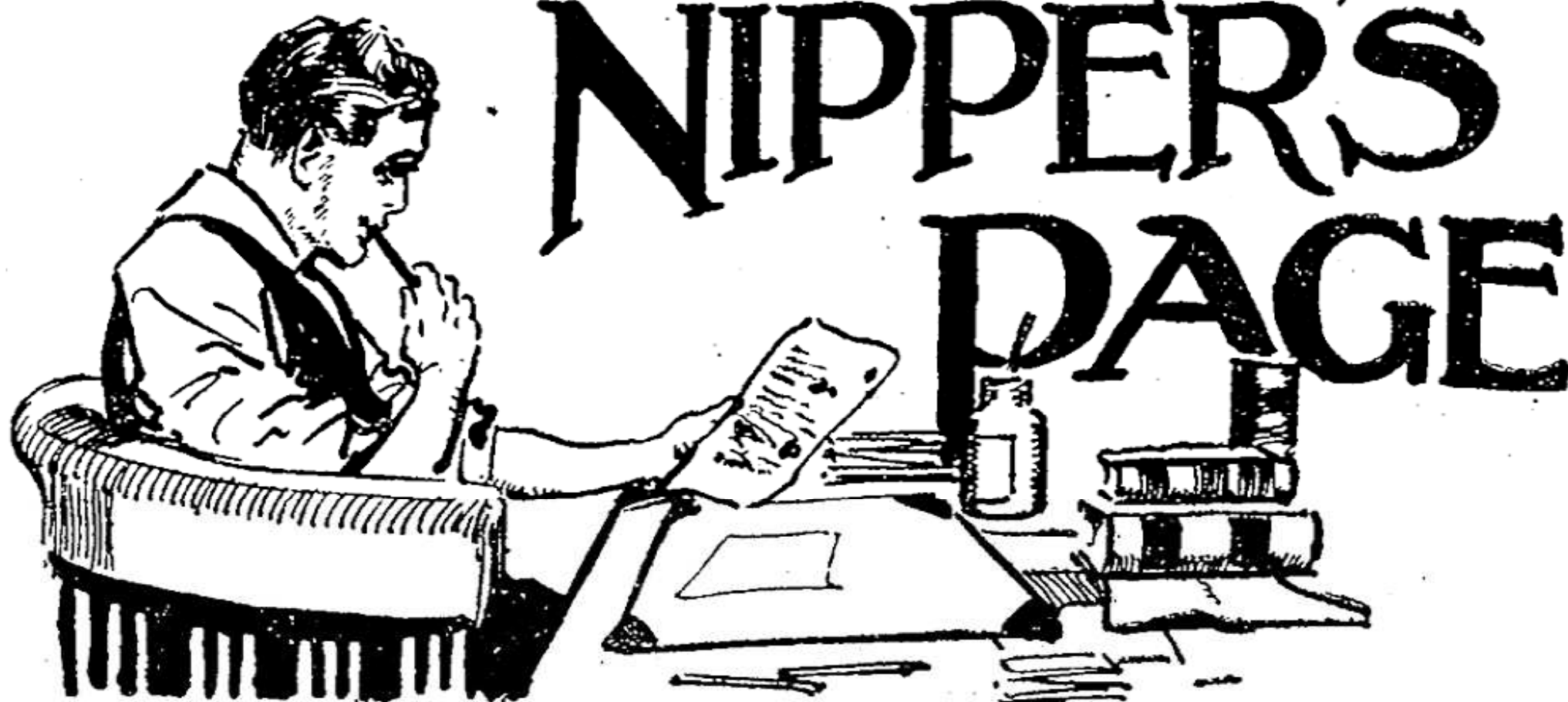
St. Frank's Magazine



HANDY AND A MOTOR-BIKE

A Complete Story Without Words.





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

My Dear Readers,

Well, what's the verdict about our holiday party's adventures? Pretty good going, I should call it. They seem to be having a tophole time, and it makes one's mouth water to think of it. It's quite good fun running the Mag., of course. But I'd rather be with the other chaps than running twenty Mags. Still, there are a few compensations. One of these is the peace and quiet that prevails in the Remove passage.

Study D is as peaceful as a village street. I have not looked in there for some time, but I should quite expect to see moss all over the floor, and little ferns and bunches of grass growing out of the walls. Very likely a bird or two have built their nests in the fireplace, and I should not even be surprised to see a party of field mice fast asleep in Handy's own chair!

WHERE GIRLS BEAT BOYS.

As to the Mag. itself, so far, I haven't received any complaints about its change of editorship. Not that I should particularly mind if I were to receive any. I should simply put the letters in a heap and keep them till Nipper comes back.

There is one point, however, that occurs to me. How is it that the great majority of letters to Uncle Ted are from girls? Why are the boys hanging back? Is it because girls have more time to write letters? Or because they like writing them more than boys, or simply because they are keener on Uncle Edward than are the boys?

I don't know. But whatever the reason is, it ought to be altered. Poor old Ted is having his head completely turned by the flattering remarks of the fairer sex. It really must be stopped. So come along, you boys, and let's have your letters. You needn't be ashamed of your handwriting.

Some of these young ladies can't write for toff—I mean, some of them must have been in a very great hurry when they sat down to pen their epistles.

TRACKETT GRIM AND SPLINTER.

Talking of Handy—were we? Well, anyway, I feel I should like to say a few words about his famous characters, Trackett Grim and Splinter. Nearly every correspondent remarks about them. The remarks vary a little, but they have one thing in common. They are all intensely personal!

Some of them are quite kindly—most of them, in fact. And the others are, I am sure, written in a spirit of kindness. But I don't know what Handy thinks of the letters. If there is one thing he hates it is not being treated seriously. And nearly every correspondent suggests that there is something very humorous about them. I have read a good many of them myself, and I certainly did chuckle once or twice—but not so that he could hear.

And what do you think of his adventures, as carefully drawn by our artist? I daren't think what Handy will say when he sees them! But we have insured our artist's life pretty heavily—against all risks.

TOO HOT FOR POETRY!

Several readers have asked what has become of our poet, Clarence Fellowe, or rather, what has become of his parodies. That is a rather difficult question to answer.

Clarence, for instance, told me he couldn't write great poetry in the summer. I asked when he could write it. He said in the spring. So I asked him why he had never done it, then. That was good, eh?

Our poet is quite well. He has also bought a guitar, and he warbles sweetly while the shadows of twilight fall, or whatever these poet jossers call the evening.

With every good wish,

Your old chum,

BUSTER (Acting-Editor).

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



THE CASE OF THE BURGLED BASEMENT;

Or, the Case without a Clue.

Trackett Grim and his Young
Assistant, Splinter, solve
another Baffling Problem.

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

TING-ALING-A-LING!

Trackett Grim, the world-famous
incriminator, sat up in his armchair
with a start.

"It's the front door bell," he remarked,
all his wonderful sagacity rising to the sur-
face in this moment of peril.

Without a moment's hesitation he produced
his pocket disguise set, and began to paint
a false beard and eyebrows on his clean-
shaven head. Then he added a soft hat,
and Splinter, his clever young assistant,
gaped in surprise. For the incriminator had
vanished. In his place was an elderly farmer
in horn-rimmed spectacles!

It was amazing! It was preposterous!

"Put on your Thursday disguise, lad," the
incriminator said kindly, throwing the small
set across to Splinter, who sat at a desk
doing a little indexing and filing.

The lad obeyed smartly. And before Mrs.
Bones, the landlady, announced their visitor,
he was perfectly disguised as a wealthy
young scholar from a big public school.

"Come in," said Grim, as Mrs. Bones
opened the door and ushered in a small, fat
man in glasses.

"Mr. Cyrus V. Blonk," she announced.

Then she withdrew to the lower regions
and left her master to the momentous inter-
view.

"Yep, I am a millionaire," the visitor
announced, squaring his padded shoulders.

"I sure am. Yep."

Grim smiled.

"You come from U.S.A.," he remarked
slowly. "Your home town is New York City,
and you are very rich."

At these words Cyrus V. Blonk leaped eight
feet into the air and came to rest again on
the settee where he had settled.

"You're sure the goods," he exclaimed in
amaze. "You sure hand out the straight
talk. Put it there, pard. You and me are
going to be real friendly."

"Not at all," Grim replied politely.

"This is purely a business visit. I can

deduce that you have come to see me about
a case you wish me to take up."

"Say, bo," the millionaire answered, "you
can sure hand out a line of talk! And then
some! But see here, I'll converse with you
in English. It's less of a strain."

As he spoke he was watching Grim's face.
But the incriminator's eyes did not move a
muscle. They did not even flicker. They
were set in a rigid line straight across the
middle of his face.

"You're smart, you snappy guy," went
on Cyrus V. "Waal, I won't het you any,
and then some. Watch your step, Sammy,
and I'll put a dollar into your belt. I've
been robbed!"

At the dreadful words Grim's face
whitened. He hastily added a little rouge
from his set of disguise and nodded slowly.

"Something has been taken from you,"
he choked.

"It sure has," the millionaire agreed.
"Slip along, Sambo, but you hand out the
heavy stuff like nobody can. I've been
burgulated! Clean robbed! And I'll not be
merry till the mutt who did it has got broad
arrows that big that he just can't sit down
without they bore holes through him!"

"So, you are annoyed?" Grim went on
imperturbably.

"Say, can that stuff," Cyrus V. inter-
rupted. "You ain't no boob. Jest you lay
your mitts on the guy who's played it across
me, and I'll whistle up my dollars so they
lie six deep on your desk top."

At Cyrus V.'s terrible words a shudder
passed across Grim's manly frame, but he
did not even shake. He stretched out his
hand till it met that of the American. They
gripped.

"That's real good," Cyrus went on. "And
I'll put you wise to what's happened. I'm
renting a li'l ole place called Mayfair Man-
sion, Park Lane, W. Waal, there's bin
crooks there last night. They've eat up all
my food."

"How appalling!" Grim muttered. "Then

you are starving! No wonder you have come to seek my aid. But, tell me, what did they take?"

"They entered the kitchen in the basement," Cyrus V. explained. "And they took all my eats. Five dozen cheeses and six loaves of bread."

"The dastardly villains!" Grim shouted, almost choking as the full significance of the terrible deed overcame him. "By gosh! I will make them pay!"

"That is not all, you doggone boob!" Cyrus continued, hitting the incriminator over the solar plexus in his excitement. "They have not only robbed me of my eats, but they have left no clue!"

It was the last straw! Overcome as he had been by the harrowing story of his visitor, Grim now burst into a flood of weeping. Great tears welled in his manly eyes.

Then they welled over, and splashed like hailstones on to the expensive carpet. Full of sympathy, Splinter fetched a pail and stood in front of his master catching the salt tears.

In ten minutes the fit of grief had passed and Grim dried his eyes. He smiled bravely through his tears, and once more held out his hand, though this time it was the other one.

Cyrus V. shook it again till it was numb. Then Grim stood up.

"I will come at once and investigate," he announced, and his voice was as hard as a railway-station bun. "Lead on and I will follow. Fall in in the rear, Splinter."

In this formation Cyrus led them outside to where his car was waiting. It was a magnificent car, with a double lever action, solid mahogany frame, jewelled in six places, complete with half a dozen records and four new Everlasting blades.

Cyrus leapt in and seized the handle. Grim leaped after him and seized the wheel. Splinter leapt in last, and accidentally trod on the self-starter. A minute later they were whirling along the Baker's Inn Road, narrowly avoiding accidents at every corner.

But luckily there were no corners in the road, as it was constructed in a circle.

By this time Grim had taken command, and the gold-studded tyres and silver-mounted brakes were running smoothly. The engine back-fired once, and then settled into a steady sixteen knots.

It was only a five minutes' run before they alighted opposite a magnificent mansion in Park Lane.

Cyrus V. led them inside and sent a servant to garage the car. Then he opened a door in the hall and took them downstairs into the basement.

"The eats were taken from this doggone cupboard," he announced, pointing out a large pantry. "And there's no goldarned clue as to who took them or how the pie-faced crook cleaned us out."

"Exactly," agreed Grim. "If you will leave me here for a few minutes I will set my trained brain to work. Afterwards I will tell you my deductions."

"Good enough, bo," replied the kind-hearted American, and dashed upstairs for a tankard of ice-water, the American national beverage.

Left alone, Grim set about looking for clues. And Splinter followed him, though it was hard to recognise his master in his strange disguise. Nevertheless, his wonderful training enabled Splinter to follow Grim as though he had lived with him in his present clothes all his life!

Even when Grim disappeared under the kitchen table the clever lad still was able to track him, and when he dived under a chair Splinter followed him underneath like a trained sleuth.

At the end of ten minutes Grim grunted. He had not found a single clue! He was utterly baffled. The terrible crook was as far off being captured as ever. Only a few slight signs were visible, pointing out the awful outrage that had happened.

A pane of the window was broken and the catch had been broken. There were five large markings on the floor which did not evade Grim's trained eye. He got out his pocket tape-measure and carefully took their length. They were shaped like foot-prints.

But after measuring them Grim threw back his head with a sigh.

"No good!" he whispered.

Splinter, who had been looking on, gave vent to a long-drawn howl.

"Surely, guv'nor," he said, "those are prints made by a human foot?"

"Unfortunately, no,"



"Yep, I am a millionaire!" the visitor announced, squaring his padded shoulders. "I sure am, yep!"

Grim returned grimly. "They only measure eleven and three-quarters of an inch each."

It was a bitter stroke of disappointment to Grim, but he did not give up. He went looking in every corner and under every chair in the pantry, but not a single clue could he find.

He suspected that all the clues had been thrown in the fire and burnt. But he did not tell Splinter so. After half an hour in the basement, he crawled out of the window into the area. There were no clues here either! It was the most extraordinary case the sleuth had ever had to undertake!

On the steps Grim noticed another marking shaped like a human boot. And in the street he saw wheel impressions which extended all down the road. But otherwise there were no clues except several bread-crumbs and some bits of cheese rind, which had evidently been thrown in the gutter.

Following the ruts, Grim saw they led to a large yard at the bottom of the road. But here again there were no clues. For the wheel-marks led straight under a pair of large green gates.

Grim mopped his brow and almost confessed himself beaten. But before he had made the terrible confession he decided at once on another line of action. He hastily ran back to the house and asked for Cyrus V. As soon as the millionaire appeared Grim strode up to him.

"I can find no clue," he said, "but I have my suspicions. I believe it is one of your staff who has robbed you!"

Cyrus V. fell back in utter astonishment. His voice, as he replied, was thick and unsteady. Perhaps that was the result of all the ice-water he had consumed.

"Say, you hoodoo," he mouthed, "you're sure plumb crazy! I have no staff, only three butlers, a waiter, and a cook."

"Fetch them up," commanded Grim. "I wish to examine them."

In a minute the whole staff were lined up in front of Grim, with the chief butler at the head. Grim stood in front firing short questions at them. He meant to extract a confession from one, or even all of them.



Full of sympathy, Splinter fetched a pail and stood in front of his master catching the salt tears.

"Butler," he said, "did you steal the cheese?"

"No, sir," replied the man.

"You are lying!" Grim hissed, and bashed the fellow over the head with his wrist-watch. "Now then, next man!"

One at a time he examined them, and, as he was convinced they were lying, he knocked them down. For it was no time for false chivalry. He even hit the cook over the head with his fountain-pen.

When the staff were all knocked out Grim heaved a sigh. He had expected the truth to be revealed. He had thought he would find some clue. But he had failed. It was then Splinter had his great brain-wave.

"Guv'nor," he shouted, "I believe there is a clue."

"What?" gasped Grim.

"Those cheese rinds," returned the lad. "The rinds we found in the road! Supposing they came off the stolen cheeses. The thief might have dropped them on his way back."

"Incredible!" Grim said.

But, all the same, he determined to follow up the possible clue.

Therefore he and the lad once more set off up the street, crawling on their hands and knees, Splinter cleverly barking like a dog.

They followed the trail to the green gates. And there they were again foiled, for the gates were shut. Splinter had another brain-wave.



In his hand was a plate. And on the plate was a pile of bread and cheese!
"Woffoo wot?" he asked in a muffled voice.

"Let's ring the bell," he suggested. "Perhaps they will open to us, and then we can run in and capture them red-handed."

"A clever idea," Grim admitted. "I should have thought of it myself. But I am unused to cases where there are no clues."

He rang the bell, and a minute later the door opened.

It was opened by a man. In his hand was a plate. And on the plate was a pile of bread and cheese.

"Woffoo wot?" he asked, in a muffled voice.

As his thick voice spoke a couple of crumbs slipped from his mouth on to the floor. Swift as lightning, Grim bent down and picked them up. He placed them carefully in an inside pocket. He was sure he had at last found a clue.

His wonderful brain told him that most likely these crumbs had been formed by bits of broken bread. And that very bread was possibly taken from a loaf. But there was need for haste.

"It's no use arguing," Grim said. "You cannot deceive me. I know you are speaking in a false voice. Take it off!"

The man seemed to swallow hard. His face reddened suspiciously, and he coughed loudly. Then, overcome, he fell to the floor, spilling the plate with a clatter.

Grim pounced on the plate. And as he did so there came a shout from Splinter, who had been walking round the yard.

"Hoy, guv'nor!" he shouted. "I've found the spoil. Here are three loaves and five cheeses stacked up in the corner."

In a flash Grim turned. And he saw the clever lad had spoken the truth.

At once the explanation of the mystery was clear to him! He hastily took out the crumbs from his pocket. Then he took up the piece of bread from the plate.

With trembling fingers he began to fit the crumbs into the slice of bread. They fitted exactly!

"Hoo - jolly - ray!" shouted Grim, throwing his hat into the air. "I have caught the dastardly villain at last. We must take him to the station."

In five minutes the police were rung up, and the man was

sent off for ten years' imprisonment, which he richly deserved. It was never discovered why he had stolen all the food, but Grim shrewdly deducted that he had hoped by this means to allay the pangs of hunger.

As for Cyrus V., he was so pleased that he immediately invited the incriminator and the lad to dinner. It was a great meal, consisting of candy and chewing-gum.

Afterwards Cyrus V. made out a liberal postal order, which insured that Grim would not have to worry about money for many long hours to come.

But what pleased Grim mostly was the fact that he had cleared up a mystery in which there had been absolutely not a single clue!

Even for him it was a record. And it is never likely to be broken.

TRACKETT GRIM and SPLINTER

Clear up Another Baffling Mystery
next week when they take up the
case of

THE
**BLACKMAILED
BARONET**



E. SOPP'S FABLES

By **EDGAR SOPP**, of the Fifth.

**NO. 35. THE FABLE OF THE ROBBER AND
THE CRAVEN.**

NOW it chanced that upon a certain day Two Students of St. Frank's, Guy Pepys and Teddy Long to wit, were travelling along the road together, when a tramp of Ugly Mien did accost them, at first in very suave and smooth tones, and did request them to Hand Over to him what Money they had. To which Cool Request they did Reply Sharply that they would see him Sunk in the Stowe first. Whereupon he did Inform them that he would not now be Content with their Money, but that he

MUST HAVE THEIR WATCHES AS WELL.

And Pepys did Wax Wrath and spake up to the Tramp, saying that he should have nothing, and that he was a Scurvy Rogue, and a Burgling Rotter to boot, for molesting two Peaceful Schoolboys. At the which he did Laugh Evilly, and did say that he chose Scholboys because they were Easier to deal with than Grown Men. And he did again demand, this time more Loudly and Fiercely than ever, that they should Transfer their Money and Watches to him. And Teddy Long proceeded to Laugh Aloud, bravely declaring that if the Beast touched him he would Smash him to Pulp. The Young Bounder, forsooth, spake bravely and boldly, until he did Nearly Succeed in making the Tramp

GET THE WIND UP.

And it came to pass that the Grubby One resolved on a Bold Move, and he did seize Teddy Long with Much Violence. But that Slippery Youth did slide out of his hands with a Yelp, and did then Run Away to a Safe Distance, from whence he was a Spectator of the Further Proceedings. And

when the Tramp did discover that he had Lost one of his Intended victims he was the more Set on robbing the other. But Pepys, though a Gentle Youth and no lover of Fighting, being Roused to Wrath by the fellow's Insolence, did defend himself against attack Right Manfully. So that when the Tramp would have seized him as he seized Long, Pepys did make at him a Mighty Spring, and

GRAB HIS AMPLE BEARD.

And so fiercely did he Grip that the Wretch wailed aloud. And Pepys did but Twist and Tug the more until he had the fellow on the ground, and did Biff and Belabour him till he vowed that he would go Peacefully on his Way. The which he did. Then, behold, Teddy Long did come forward with Brave Words and valiant offers of Help. But, lo, Pepys did turn upon Long in anger, and did Denounce him as a Funk and a Coward, who did Run Away when Danger Threatened, and did Skulk Back that he might get some Credit after

VICTORY HAD BEEN GAINED.

And Teddy became greatly Indignant, vowing that he had Spoken Boldly, thus scaring the would-be Robber, and making him an Easy Victim for Pepys. Not that this Idle Boast carried weight, and Pepys did continue the Good Work. In other words, being in the Mood for Biffing, he thereupon proceeded to Trounce his Craven Companion right mightily. For, in all truth, Teddy Long had but shown himself to be a Giant in Words, but a Dwarf in Action.

**MORAL: AN OUNCE OF PLUCK IS
WORTH A POUND OF BLUSTER.**



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 four or five weeks. 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**).

SPECIAL NOTICE!

Several readers have accused me of favouring girl readers more than boy readers. They say I answer more girls than boys. Of course I do! And why? Because the girls aren't so lazy, and they take an interest in writing me letters. I'll bet there are tons more boys read the Old Paper than girls, and yet I get all these letters from the ladies. It's not my fault if most of my columns are filled with replies to the fair sex. There's an easy remedy, you chaps. Don't be so blessed backward. Don't be such slackers. If you write I'll guarantee to reply. So it's up to you, my lads. Get busy and write, and show the girls that you can easily beat 'em at their own game.

UNCLE EDWARD.

A GIRL READER (Wellingborough): Let's see, I replied to you last week, didn't I? But you wrote such a long letter that I've got to have two goes at it. No, I don't punch a fellow's nose without reason. There's always a good cause for any biff that I may happen to deliver. But naturally what I consider a good cause may not strike you as being the same. You girls are so jolly fussy about giving a chap a black eye. As for Church and McClure tolerating me, they couldn't jolly well get on without me. And if it comes to that, I couldn't get on without them. We're always having rows, but we're the best of pals. It's a pity if a chap can't

fight his own chums. By the way, don't take any notice of that drawing of me at the top of this page—it's supposed to be comic, but in my opinion it's painful. No. I'm not sixteen, only just turned fifteen. The Ancient House colours are blue and gold, and the College House colours are olive and yellow. Glad you like that drawing of Wellingborough School—the chap who draws these pictures is awfully clever at that kind of work. You ask what is life like at college? Well, I don't know about other colleges, but the stories themselves give a pretty good idea of what life is like at St. Frank's. If Archie Glenthorne dispensed with Phipps I think he'd pine away. He's not really shy, you know; he goes hot and bothered over anything. Well, that's about all, Phyllis, and now I'll get on with some of the other replies.

NIPPER II. (Tottenham): Good for you, old man! Quite right! My talents certainly are wasted at St. Frank's, as you say; but it's all rot to say that my yarns send people into fits. I don't know about a history of St. Frank's. It might be done in a condensed form, but not just yet. About football. As you know, we favour Soccer at St. Frank's rather than Rugger. The best way to find St. Frank's is to get to Bannington and then take the first turning on the left. The school is hundreds of years old. Centuries ago it used to be a monastery, but now it's divided into three sections—the Head's House, the Ancient House, and a Monkey House. Of course it's an advantage to go to a public school, rather! And I get lots of letters from public school chaps. That piece of poetry you wrote is certainly ripping. In fact, it's a bit torn, as Archie might say.

SYBIL R. (Ashton-under-Lyne): Bravo! You haven't missed a single number for nearly six years, eh? Jolly good! Are there any more at home like you? Now about your questions. Yes, my ability for writing detective stories is every bit as good as my ventriloquism, if not better. Here, I say! I've just glanced at your letter again, and I can tell you I'm pretty wild. Am I as hideous and

unintellectual as ever? Well, of all the nerve! Just for that I won't answer any more questions at all!

S.W.F. (Bristol): Hallo, Sid! How's Bristol! You ought to be proud to live in such a fine old town. Anyhow, I'm proud of you—we want chaps of your sort at St. Frank's. By the way, you needn't waste any sympathy on Church and McClure. The latter is of Scotch extraction, but he hasn't got the accent. If you want to know my age look at my reply to "A Girl Reader." Sorry we didn't say much about Bristol when we went through it on that motor tour, but we liked the old town tremendously. I hope you'll be as everlasting as you mention. Are you tired of chocolate?

A. LINNELL (March): Got your postcard, thanks. The Ancient House wouldn't collapse if I became captain; it would be gingered up tremendously.

B. BEERS (Monkstown, Co. Dublin): Ass! How can I become sane when I'm already the sanest chap in the Remove? I don't like any masters at all, but some are a lot better than others.

ROBERT SHEPHERD (Stoke Newington): Another Old Timer. Good luck, Bob! Thanks for your nice typewritten letter. Why congratulate me on having Willy for a brother? My dear fathead, I need your sympathy. You are wrong about the Trackett Grim stories. These yarns are purely dramatic, without any humour whatever. Still, I'm glad you like 'em. Thanks muchly for your very nice wishes, and as you're a shepherd, I hope you'll gather a nice flock of constant readers.

WILLY HANDFORTH (Sheffield): You can't spoof me, you chump! You're not my minor at all. Do you think I don't know his rotten handwriting?

AN IRISH COLLEEN (Stamford Hill): Look here! I say, you know, cheese it! Jolly nice of you to be so affectionate, but your letter absolutely made me go all hot. I mean, calling me "Teddy darling." And it's all rot to say that you love me, and that we'd make a wonderful pair. Why, we haven't even met! Besides, what would the pater say?

LEONARD CLAYTON (Bold, Widnes): Yes, Dr. Stokes is a sportsman—one of the best. You must have a fine old time, having six brothers and sisters, and living in the country. Which do I like best—football or cricket? Well, they're both jolly fine, in their seasons. Yes, my lad, I can certainly fight Buster Boots, and whack him, too. As for that puzzle of yours, I got the answer in no time. If a brick weighs a pound and a half a brick—well, of course, a brick weighs two pounds. Church got the answer too, but

the ass thinks he beat me, because he happened to mention it first.

C. KEABLE (Beccles): I'll excuse the pencil, but don't let it happen again. And it's like your sister's nerve to hide your pen. Next time you'll be accusing somebody of sneaking the ink. Glad you think I ought to be Remove skipper. I think so, too, but I can't get anybody else to agree with me. As for beating Lawrence at boxing—well, I can't give you any more space, as I've got so many other letters to answer.

GABRIELLE KERR (Finsbury Park): Thanks for your nice appreciation. Look out for an announcement regarding that photograph you mention. As for my own picture, I shall have to see about this. You mustn't take any notice of that horrible comic drawing of me above. It's not like me at all. Can I tell fortunes by handwriting? What a question! Of course I can!

HYLDA (Treacle Town): Jolly nice of you to think my brain is so wonderful. Of course, those Trackett Grim stories are very trying to a chap's mental powers. As you say, they just put the finishing touch to the Mag. As you'll know by this time, Irene and Co. are with us on our travels. So you want a good recipe for whitening hands? You can't beat rubbing them all over with chalk. I should say those two girls you mention are nothing more nor less than angels.

J. STACK (Balham): You needn't be so impatient, old man. I replied to your first letter directly I got it, as you'll know by this time. I never under any circumstances throw letters into the waste-paper basket without replying to them. I feel like doing it sometimes, but I've got wonderful control. Sorry you don't like the girls much, but you're quite wrong about the majority of boy readers agreeing with you. The policy hasn't been changed—boy stories for boy readers to read. But we can't help it if girls like reading about us, too, can we? They've got as much right as anybody.

CHARLES PRICE (Leeds): Hallo, Charlie! Here we are again! If you want to know my age, ask Rosy and Ada—you all seem to be in the same club. Or is it a secret society? My minor came to the school a long time ago—the first story about him appeared in the issue for October 28th, 1922. All right—I'll bliff him. Only too pleased to! You make French treacle toffee just the same as the English, but it isn't worth the trouble. It's a silly idea to go all the way to France to get your treacle! And French treacle's no better than English.

ALICE B. (Willenhall): I hope you'll keep that wish of yours and read the "Big Little Paper," as SYBIL R. calls it, bless her, for years and years. If you like to send me a letter to Irene, I'll give it to her.

LILLY (Willenhall): I wonder why you like my name so much? It's not so bad, but there's nothing to go dotty about in it. Yes, Dr. Stokes is a sportsman, and we all hope that he'll stay at St. Frank's permanently. When I grow up I shall probably be a great detective, and then the crooks had better look out. Yes, Irene is the prettiest girl in the Moor View School, as you say. But I had better not agree too heartily, or I shall be chipped by the other fellows. So you're another one who likes Willy. You'd change your opinion about him not being cheeky if you knew him better. I can give you my honest word, he's a little terror. Clarence Fellowe says he's going to be a poet when he grows up. In fact, he thinks he's one now. My sister goes to a school in London, thank goodness. If she ever came to the Moor View School, as you suggest, life wouldn't be worth living. Willy's a terror, but she's worse. I told Archie that you think he looks like a giddy ass, and he nearly woke up. As for Teddy Long, he gets a thrashing about twice a day, on the average. I expect you and Alice are chums, eh? Do you talk to each other about us over the garden wall?

WILLIAM SALTER (Bristol): When I first opened your letter I thought it was printed. I say, how many prizes have you taken for your handwriting? Honestly, I've never seen anything so perfect before. It's even better than mine. I don't usually admit these things, but this time I've got to. In fact, I've had your letter framed, and it's hanging up in the study. And everybody comes in, looks at it, and stands rooted to the spot with awe. Thanks awfully for your nice remarks about my Trackett Grim stories. I quite agree that the chaps who think my stories are rotten are off their rockers. As you say, it's just jealousy. I hope you'll punch the nose of the first idiot who runs down Trackett Grim. As for Willy being a chap after your own heart, I'm a bit surprised that you should say this. It merely proves that you don't know what the dickens you're talking about. We don't break much crockery every week in Study D, at least, not of our own. Sometimes a borrowed cup or plate gets a bit bent or twisted, but we never worry over such trifles. When Tucker starts lecturing in Study E, Pitt and Grey just open the door and shoot him out.

I like Miss Violet Watson all right, but Miss Irene— Well, what's the good of making comparisons? Can the juniors beat the seniors at cricket? Well, there's a dotty question! Beat 'em? We can swallow them up!

JOYCE (Bermondsey): Sorry you don't like the Mag. so much now, but I think your opinion is a bit isolated, as it were. I mean, there aren't many who'll agree with you. As for that piece of wedding-cake you refer to, I don't understand what you mean. No, I never biff Miss Irene on the nose. Just as if I'd do a thing like that! I wouldn't even biff my own sister, although I often feel like it. Thanks for your suggestions—I've passed them on to the Editor.

FRANK PIESSE (Bellingham): Your post-card bucked me up wonderfully. I'm glad there are a few sensible people, anyhow, who take my Trackett Grim stories seriously. Go up four!

W. D. CRITICISER (Polesworth): I can't answer your letter properly because I've torn it to bits and ground the fragments to dust under my heel. You insulting rotter! What do you mean by saying my Trackett Grim stories are a rotten farce? What do you mean by saying that Willy could give me lessons in detective work? What do you mean by saying that I'm just like that rotten drawing at the top of my page? And if you came to St. Frank's, my lad, you wouldn't give me a hiding—I'd give you one. And it wouldn't be for fun, either. If Polesworth wasn't so far off, I'd ride over there on my bike and slaughter you.

JULIET (Rio De Janeiro): So you've been a reader for seven years, and still going strong? That's jolly good. In fact, I don't think it's been beaten by anybody. I'm sorry you think my Trackett Grim stories are funny, but girls always get strange ideas into their heads. Nipper doesn't write much for the Mag. because he's too modest; he likes to give the space to other chaps. Archie isn't half so lazy as you think. He's among the first ten at the top of the Form, and when he likes he can make things buzz. Jarrow writes for the Mag. now and again, and you'll probably see some more of his stuff at different times. As for Church and McClure writing anything—I put my foot down on that long ago, because they tried to pinch some of my Trackett Grim space. Fancy you living in Spain! Church said that Rio de Janeiro is in South America—Brazil, or some dotty place like that, but I biffed him for his ignorance. The name alone is Spanish, so I know you live in Spain. They think I don't know geography!

CYRIL MUNCKTON (Finsbury Park): I've never measured Clarence, but he must be nearly six feet high. There's been such a lot of other stuff in the Mag. recently that the Editor hasn't had any room for parodies. Yes, Irene is certainly wonderful. You didn't think she could play cricket, did you? I've asked the Editor about that portrait gallery, and I can promise you it's coming along in due course. Sorry I can't give you a longer reply, but I've got heaps of other letters to answer. I'll try next time.

BLUEBELL (Bradford): You wrote your letter just a day or two too soon, because it arrived shortly before my reply to your first inquiry was published. So you needn't have worried. I don't think you'd like to hug Willy really. He's as full of tricks as a monkey. If you hugged him he'd probably hate you for the rest of his life. Those portraits you ask about are coming along. Your sketches of Irene are jolly good, but they don't do her justice. She's a lot prettier than you seem to think. That bit you wrote in French was topping. I only had to look at the dictionary four times to understand it. I'd reply in French, only nobody else would understand it.

DOREEN MAISON (Shipley): When I first opened your letter I thought you'd written to me in Russian! A jolly clever wheeze, Miss Doreen. But it didn't take me long to solve the puzzle. Not more than an hour, anyhow, although I pondered over it pretty deeply. Then Church suggested holding the letter up to the light—and I thought of the same dodge at the same moment. So, you see, I soon did the trick. Oh, about the Onions brothers! They haven't vanished at all—they're with us in the Remove. I'm sure you'll like Dr. Stokes very much by this time. He's a brick!

GREAT SCOTT! I've just discovered that I've got a whole pile of other letters to answer, and I've taken up more than my usual space already. I shall have to leave them till next week. Some of these letters are from OLIVE, MAG. MAD, IRENE H, LILLIAN, LESLIE R. HILL, LONELY LILLIAN (I'll try and cheer you up next week, L.L.), P.T.O., CAUTIOUS INQUIRER, DOROTHY, ROLLO WARD, J. FARR, GORDON, R. RUEGG, MOLLIE MAKIN, INQUIRER, NEMO, PEG, E. FRANCHEL, ROSIE M.M.S. Of course, I've got a lot more from other readers, but I haven't got any more space to give the names. Anyhow, I'll answer all of you next week.

UNCLE EDWARD.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 10.—A TWENTY-FOOT SEA MONSTER.

EVER had a scrap with a sea monster? I have—and it was a bit exciting, I can assure you. The adventure happened in the Caribbean. The fish I'm talking about is a kind of giant skate, measuring anything from twelve to twenty feet across from the tips of its fins, which are huge things. There are also two stubby little horn-like fins in front. It has a short, whip-like tail, and a huge mouth, with gill clefts underneath on each side, as if a knife had slit them half across. It belongs partly to the shark tribe, and partly to the skate and ray tribe.

They're not dangerous in the sense that they will attack men. But fishermen dread them because they are so big and unwieldy and powerful. They believe that they smash cables, and lift a ship's anchor and drag the vessel for miles. Divers believe that fish of this sort hover over them, cover them like a blanket, and smother and drown them. But these are fairy tales—though a big fish of this sort, going full tilt, would break almost anything, of course accidentally.

When we came upon ours he was swimming lazily on the surface, flapping his fins. He wasn't afraid of us. In fact, he seemed to despise us. A harpoon woke him up, and he dived. He simply towed us where he liked. I held the harpoon line, and half a dozen men rowed their hardest against the fish. All their efforts were useless. As soon as they got a little pull on it, the beggar put forth another effort, and away we went. We tried to beach it, but we couldn't.

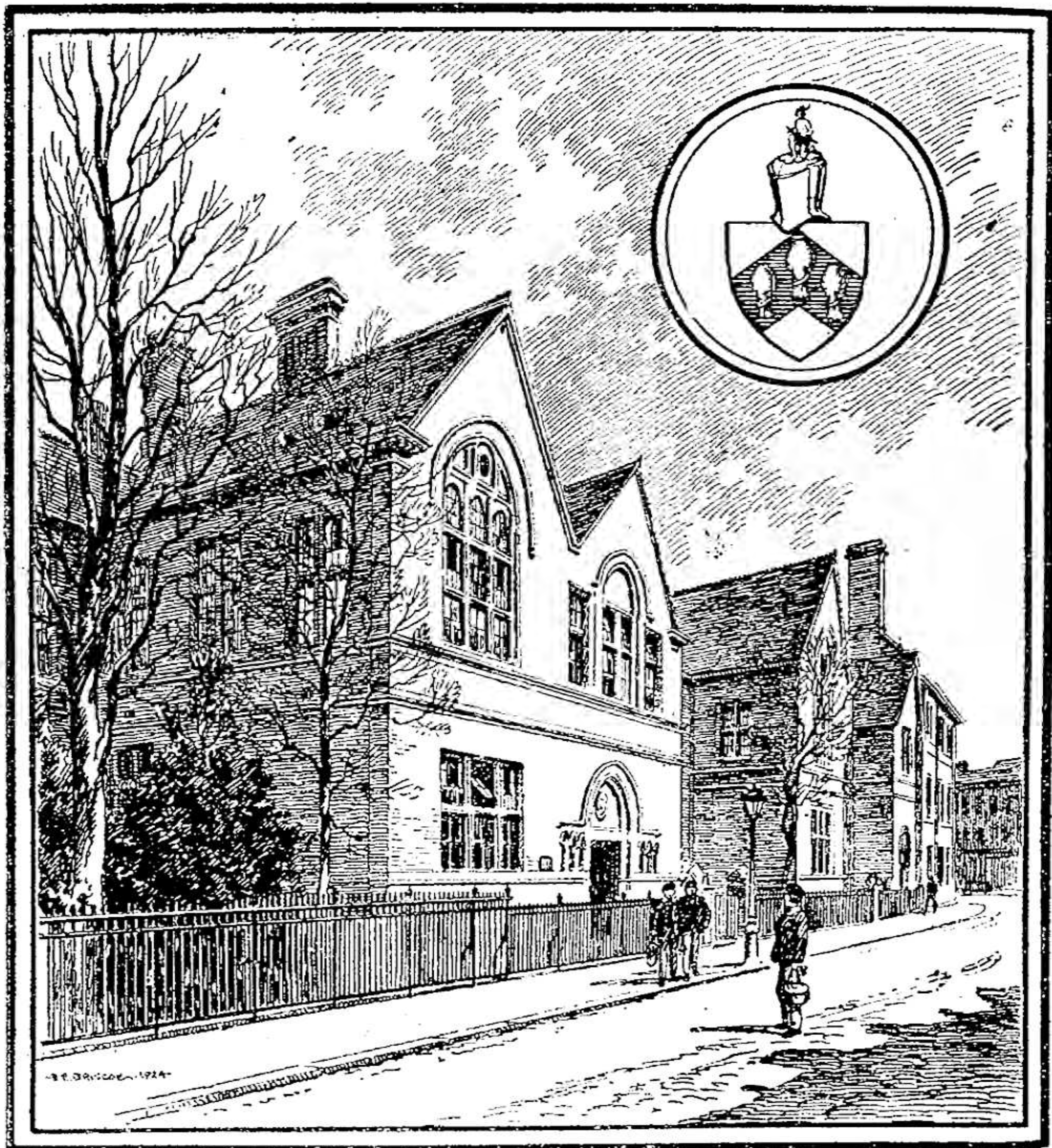
In the end, we had to summon another boat, and more sailors, before we could land him.

The danger arises when they leap out of the water, as they sometimes do, and fall flat across the boat.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 39.—ALDERMAN NEWTON'S BOYS' SCHOOL, LEICESTER.



Alderman Newton's School was founded in 1769 by Alderman Gabriel Newton, a much respected citizen of Leicester. It began with a modest thirty scholars, who were called "greencoats" on account of the dress worn. This consisted of a green coat, corduroy trousers and a tam-o'-shanter. In the last century and a half the school has grown considerably, and contains to-day 520 boys. Situated in the centre of the town of Leicester, the main building is

large and commodious, possessing a large hall, science laboratories and a gymnasium. The school is divided into five houses—West-coates, County, Victoria, Highfield and Belvoir. Every year shields are presented to the house which excels in football, cricket, and athletics. In addition to a very strong football eleven, there is a debating society, a chess club, sketch club and camera club. I am indebted to a reader for the above, and have accordingly presented him with the original sketch of his school.

"NELSON LEE" MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION.

***** *

Boys! Here's the splendid little competition which you can all enter. It need only cost you the stamp for a postcard or letter, and you will find that it is quite a novel idea we have hit upon.

On Page 21 of this issue you will find a picture drawn to illustrate a certain part of this week's great story, "Trapped in the Desert," as you will see when you read the yarn.

Now you know that under our pictures we always have a line or two describing the incident shown. Well, this time we want you to find the best wording to be put underneath this picture.

A Prize of £1 1s. will be awarded to the reader who sends what, in the Editor's opinion, is the best inscription for the picture, and Twelve Consolation Prizes will go to the readers whose efforts are next best.

All inscriptions must be taken from the actual text of the story, and they must not exceed 25 WORDS in length. Each inscription must be written on one of these coupons, which must be posted to:

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Gough House, Gough Square, E.C.4.

The Closing Date will be Tuesday, August 12th.

The Editor's decision is final.

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I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final and binding.

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"Nelson Lee Library."—Closing date,
Tuesday, August 12th.

Inscription to Mystery Picture (see
Page 21).



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JUNO

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