

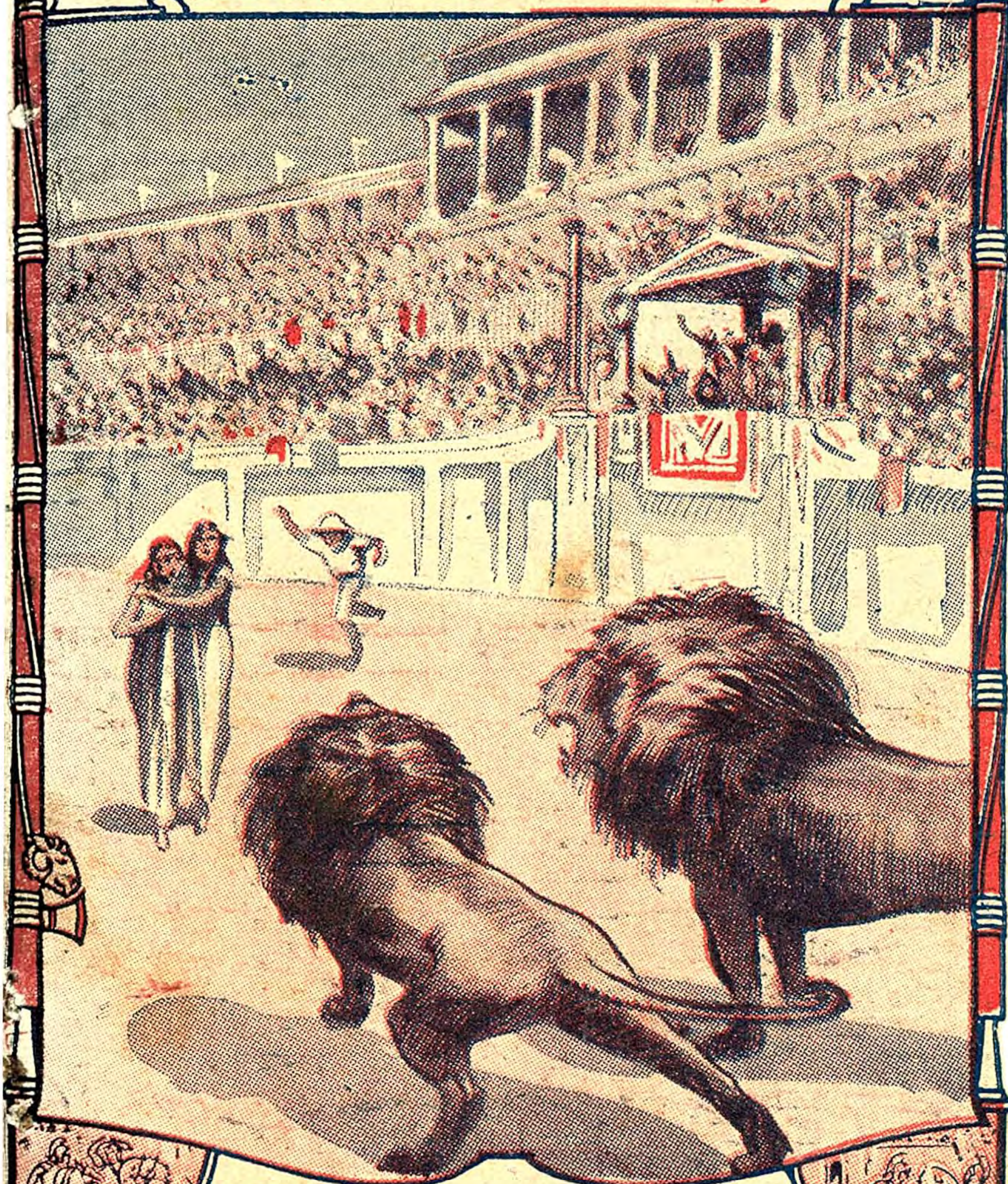
GRAND HOLIDAY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S!

THE

NELSON LEE

2!

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A STIRRING INCIDENT FROM THIS WEEK'S
GREAT STORY:—

CHARIOTS AND GLADIATORS!

No. 480.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

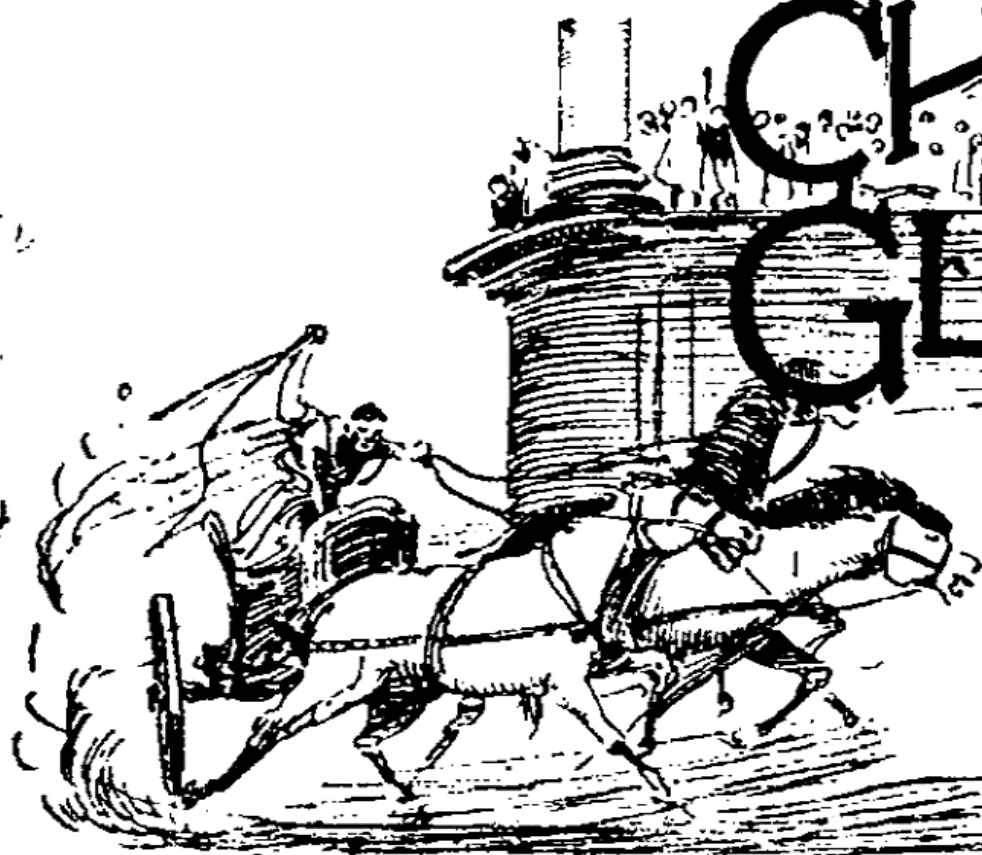
August 16, 1924.



The chariot, hardly built for such drastic treatment, shot over on its side, and hurled Handforth into the air like an arrow from a bow. He executed several swift somersaults, and dived gracefully into the fountain pool.

CHARIOTS and GLADIATORS!

Being the Adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's in a Roman City existing to-day in all its ancient glory in the heart of the Sahara Desert.



Nelson Lee, with the famous Juniors of St. Frank's, have set out in *The Conqueror*, a specially constructed desert liner, in search of Sir Crawford Grey's expedition, which is said to have been captured by a hostile tribe. Eventually, they hit the trail of their missing friends, and this leads them to a large oasis, inhabited by white people who speak the Latin tongue. Evidently they are a long-forgotten branch of the Old Roman Empire, who are carrying on the great traditions of a once-mighty nation. In the midst of this oasis there rises a magnificent city of stone, such as Rome or Carthage must have been in their prime. Here they meet Sir Crawford Grey's expedition, who have been made prisoners by the Emperor Titus, the despotic ruler of these Romans. Now read the adventures of our heroes in this wonderful city.

THE EDITOR.

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

CHAPTER I.

PREPARING FOR THE FEAST.

FATTY LITTLE, of the Remove Form of St. Frank's, leaned over the rail of the *Conqueror*, and clasped his hands in sheer ecstasy.

"Gorgeous!" he murmured dreamily.

"Isn't it?" agreed Cecil De Valerie. "This place was wonderful enough in the day-night, but it's too amazing for words now."

"Place?" repeated Fatty. "Which place?"

"Why, everything!" replied De Valerie, waving his hand. "You just said it was gorgeous——"

"Fathead!" snorted the stout junior. "I was thinking about the feed to-night! Who cares about scenery? The most wonderful picture I could possibly imagine would be——"

"Two dinners on one plate?" sneered De Valerie.

"You've got no soul for grub!" said Fatty sadly. "Everybody thinks I'm a glutton, but I'm not. I'm an epicure—I'm a gourmet."

"That last word was nearly right—you

meant gourmand!" said De Valerie sarcastically. "I've never known such a chap! If you were deprived of your sense of taste, you'd have nothing left on earth to live for!"

Fatty was by no means insulted. Remarks of this nature were commonplace to him, and he loftily ignored them. He leaned on the rail, still contemplating the great feast which was even now being prepared in the palace of the Emperor Titus of Isirium.

In the meantime, all the other juniors were busily putting the final touches to their toilet. All had been dressing, and as they came on deck, in twos and threes, they certainly looked a credit to their host.

All were in evening-dress—but not the usual formal evening-dress of temperate zones. They had had special suits made of black alpaca, and with soft silk shirts they were exceedingly smart and, at the same time, as free and easy as though they were wearing flannels.

And it was necessary to have a costume of this nature in the region of the great Sahara Desert. There was certainly no indi-

cation that they were within a thousand miles of the Sahara at present. But it remained a fact that they were, in truth, in the very centre of the boundless desert.

In one of the luxurious state-rooms below, Archie Glenthorne was eyeing himself somewhat dubiously. Phipps stood by, apparently more pleased with his work than Archie was.

"And do you really mean to assure me, old turnip, that the young master is fit to whizz into the presence of royalty?" inquired Archie doubtfully. "I mean to say, this suit, you know! Somewhat off the line, what? A bit frightful, if you follow me?"

"On the contrary, sir, nothing could be more perfect."

"Oh, come!" protested Archie. "Dash it all, Phipps, you're a valet, you know, and yet you calmly stand there and assure me that alpaca is the correct material for evening-dress! I don't mind admitting that I'm poisonously worried. I feel that I look absolutely foul!"

Phipps remained firm.

"I have never seen you looking more exquisitely dressed, sir," he declared. "I have no desire to flatter, sir, but the delicate nature of the alpaca material reveals your figure to wonderful advantage."

Archie started.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "That's a somewhat terrific shock, Phipps. You've absolutely lowered the old barrage, and the young master is positively shelled! You can't mean to tell me, laddie, that my figure is absolutely worth revealing?"

"Your figure is extremely shapely, sir," said Phipps tactfully; "and were you to wear a correct evening suit, the result would be unfortunate—indeed, disastrous."

"Really?" said Archie. "I mean, absolutely?"

"Positively, sir!" said Phipps firmly. "The evening is decidedly hot, and in less than half an hour your linen would be softened and a mass of rucks, and your personal discomfort would be so great that your clothing would sit upon you in ungainly creases."

"I say, what a perfectly ghastly picture!" said Archie, horrified.

"But your present dress, sir, whilst being eminently suitable to the climate, is neat and exquisite at the same time," said Phipps. "Let me urge you, sir, to let well alone."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie promptly. "Since you put it that way, Phipps, we'll dismiss the old sub, and proceed to trickle forth and join the populace. Good man, Phipps! I've a dashed good mind to give you a tip!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Archie soon lounged forth in all his glory, and he was extremely gratified when he arrived on deck. For the young ladies were there before him, and they promptly complimented him on his appearance.

"Oh, I say, what priceless rot!" protested Archie. "If there's any remarks to pass about appearance—I mean, you girls look absolutely priceless. I'm dashed if I know how you can look so dashed cool on a dashed hot night like this!"

Irene Manners and her girl chums were, indeed, a pleasant picture to look upon. Irene's mother was with them, and she was quite charming, too. They were all dressed in spotless white, and the Conqueror's deck, indeed, was an exceedingly pleasant spectacle.

Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were chatting near the bridge, and Sir Edward Handforth was having a little argument with Mr. Travers Earle and Mr. Hobart Manners. Reggie Pitt was strolling with his father and sister. Further down the deck Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were trying their utmost to ruin their appearance before the party commenced.

They seemed to have an idea that it was an excellent plan to slide down the bridge ladder to the deck in an inverted position, and to pile upon one another at the bottom. They only desisted when Willy received Chubby's boot in his ear, and the incident terminated in a brief, fierce skirmish, which left Handforth minor the victor.

And then came the word that everything was ready for departure. And the entire party formed itself up for the procession.

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY OF WONDERS.



THE CONQUEROR was a dazzling sight.

Mr. Travers Earle's wonderful land yacht—so remarkably like a sea-going vessel—was gay with flags and bunting. Brilliant

electric lights gleamed from every window and porthole.

Her decks were flooded with radiance, and the very incongruity of her appearance was all the more marked by her present situation. She would have looked strange enough in normally civilised surroundings.

But here, in the great central square of the city of Isirium, she was an astonishing sight indeed. But if the Conqueror provided the populace with something to stare at, the city itself was equally fascinating to the yacht's company.

It was only late in the afternoon of this same day that the adventurers had entered the city. They had arrived in time to rescue Lord Dorrimore and his party from the hands of this strange white race which dwelt in the heart of the Sahara.

For many days the chase had developed, but at last the rescue party had been successful,

and now all the friends were re-united, and were one joyful company of holiday makers.

The Conqueror occupied the centre of the great square. On every side were the most stately buildings of the capital, the emperor's palace being the most imposing of all. The architecture was of the style of Ancient Rome—wonderful buildings of pure white stone, with massive colonnades and exquisitely executed carvings and frescoes.

The entire square was stone-paved, with fountains playing, and a wide, perfect sweep of steps led upwards to the beautiful columns of the palace. And the steps themselves were amazingly worked. For they were each inset with mosaic patterns, in all colours. The effect was rather wonderful.

All round were the wide thoroughfares of the city itself, leading off from this central square in every direction. All were thronged with crowds of excited people, and all were lighted brilliantly.

The system of lighting in Isirium puzzled us. We had seen the lamps spring into life, but had been unable to determine how the light was obtained. These direct descendants of the Ancient Romans, whilst standing still through the centuries in most ways, had progressed in others.

The street lamps were massive wrought standards, with brilliantly glowing lights in clusters at the top. And the emperor's palace was a sheer blaze of dazzling radiance.

Upon the first arrival of the Conqueror, the emperor had appeared on the palace steps, and had had the party surrounded. But Nelson Lee had quickly taken the situation in hand, and had pointed out that he and his party were entirely friendly.

And the emperor, after consultation with his advisers, had reversed his entire policy, and the explorers were now his honoured guests—invited to remain in Isirium as long as they pleased, and to regard the city as their own. And all were to be the personal guests of the emperor.

Conversation was simplified by the fact that the Isirium people used a form of Latin. It differed from the dead language known in modern colleges, but only in minor details. In all essentials it was the same as the Ancient Romans had used, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie could understand perfectly, and could converse with ease.

And most of the juniors—and the girls, too—had more than a smattering of Latin. Of all the St. Frank's fellows, Timothy Tucker was perhaps the most lucky—for he was a studious, learned junior, and his Latin was highly advanced. Some of the others were sheer duffers at the language.

Nelson Lee had felt certain that the emperor would make some special display in order to signalise this feast. And he was right. His Imperial Majesty, Titus IV, had been seen at a great disadvantage on that earlier occasion. Indeed, his appearance had

been notable for its lamentable lack of dignity.

Surprised and startled by the Conqueror's abrupt arrival, the emperor had rushed out of his palace on foot, and had given his orders from the mosaic steps. And this, as Lee appreciated, was not the emperor's usual method of appearing in public.

And now, while the guests were ready on the Conqueror's deck, a movement was observed on both sides of the palace. Columns of soldiers marched into view with stately stride. All were arrayed in dazzling tunics of shimmering metal. Their helmets gleamed, and their shields were like mirrors.

And down the wide steps came dozens of trumpeters, the formation and movement being perfect.

And then, at a word of command from the officers, an impressive fanfare was trumpeted forth. The sound was the signal for loud and tumultuous cheering from every part of the city.

The columns of soldiers closed in, slowly and in such splendid unison that they seemed one solid body. And at last there remained a clear avenue of about twenty feet, leading direct from the Conqueror to the very summit of the palace steps.

"By jingo! They know how to do things, anyhow!" I said appreciatively.

"Rather!" agreed Pitt. "What a pity we haven't got a few dozen cinematograph cameras! What a fine film, eh?"

"I'm not sure, but I believe Mr. Earle has got some apparatus on board," I said. "But this is where we enter the presence of his august mightiness, my son. And we must look to our p's and q's."

The procession up the palace-steps was quite a stately affair, for there were a good many of us; and we were all agog with curiosity and interest. There were many surprises in store for us, without doubt. And one of our chief concerns was the contemplation of the feast itself. Some of the fellows, indeed, were rather apprehensive, for there was no knowing what dishes would be set before us.

And we entered the palace bubbling with excitement.

CHAPTER III.

GUESTS OF THE EMPEROR.



NELSON LEE was calm and rather grim.

His interest and curiosity were tempered by a certain uneasiness. And most of the other grown-up members of

the party were in very much the same state of mind.

They had been virtually compelled to attend this feast—it would have been an insult to the emperor's court if they had refused. And it would have been foolish to offend Titus IV, at such an early stage.

The Conqueror had been left outside in the great square. But certain trusted members of the crew were still on board—armed, watchful, and vigilant. At the same time, they were a mere handful, and Nelson Lee would not feel really easy until he and all the others were back.

As for the juniors, they had no thoughts of possible danger, but entered into this novelty with whole-hearted gusto. Irene and Co. were not quite so enthusiastic. They were glad to be in the charge of Mrs. Manners, and to have the gentlemen near them.

For it was certainly an ordeal—this entry into the palace of a monarch whom the world had never heard of.

But even Nelson Lee partially forgot his concern when the palace was entered. For it proved to be a place of almost startling beauty and never-ending surprises.

The beautiful mosaic floors, the marble pillars, the exquisitely carved statues, standing in their niches—the rich, glittering clothing of the endless slaves—all this forced a picture which impressed itself vividly on the minds of the visitors.

It was all so strange—so amazing.

Hardly any word was spoken. In the vast foyer the guests were welcomed by the emperor's courtiers. These gentlemen were for the most part pompous and portly, richly attired, and wearing golden ornaments and gleaming jewels. They all showed every sign of useless, indolent lives, and we were irresistibly reminded of the tales we had read concerning Nero's Court at Rome, in the ancient days.

From the foyer we passed between the great marble pillars into the Hall of Feasting. I don't know whether it was called that officially, but I can't think of any better term.

For the place was a vast, magnificently built reception-hall, and we were dazzled by the sumptuous splendour which unfolded itself before our eyes. We had expected something wonderful—but hardly this.

Great ivory tables, carved with exquisite skill, ran down the length of the hall, the central table being larger and by far the most elaborate of the three. At the head of this sat the emperor, immediately surrounded by his most intimate friends and advisers.

And while the remainder of this central table was empty, both the side tables were crowded with guests. Not only men, but women—these latter being extremely handsome, and richly attired, and all wearing wonderful head-dresses, in which jewels scintillated.

We were apparently the most honoured guests, since we were to sit at the emperor's own table. We did our utmost to appear unconcerned and careless, as though this sort of visit was a mere every-day affair. But it was impossible to conceal our delight and amazement.

The tables were bare of all cloth, but the

marble surfaces were polished to such an extent that they were almost like mirrors. The chairs were of a light-coloured wood which harmonised perfectly. The whole shining vista enchanted us—the marble pillars, the rich, vermilion hangings, the massive vases round the walls, filled with flowers and fruit. And from somewhere came the sound of haunting music.

The air was heavy with the scent of flowers, and some peculiarly pungent odour which appeared to be incense. And the tables themselves were laden with carved bowls and platters, containing foodstuffs of every-imaginable variety.

Fatty Little was probably the most happy fellow in the world at the moment, for this feast was obviously destined to be a feast in every sense of the word. And we seated ourselves, rather relieved. There wasn't such a great deal to be scared about, after all.

And if we were interested in our hosts, there was no question that our hosts were interested in us. There was no needless delay. The emperor waited until we were all at table, and he seized a light wooden hammer and beat it upon a gong at his side.

"Good!" murmured Fatty. "This is where we start, I suppose?"

Scores of richly attired slaves appeared from the serving quarters, bearing metal plates and other eating utensils. And the feast commenced at once.

It proved to be an astounding affair.

Beef, lamb, birds of all kinds, and made dishes in the most bewildering profusion, were placed before us. Vegetables were served with pungent tasting dressings. But for the most part we confined ourselves to the dishes that we easily recognised.

And the feast lingered on for well over a couple of hours—until, indeed, we were rather tired of the whole business. But at last the slaves cleared the great tables, and the emperor rose.

We passed from the Hall of Feasting into another great chamber, which was obviously the Hall of Pleasure. It was something like a theatre, with comfortable chairs arranged in semi-circular fashion. And after we had seated ourselves, dancing girls appeared from behind the sumptuous hangings, and performed to the accompaniment of subdued music.

These dancing-girls were apparently slaves, for they were of a different type to the Isirium people—darker and slimmer. They were clad in muslin-like draperies, and they danced with an Eastern grace which was fascinating to watch. Irene and Co. were rather charmed, but the bulk of the juniors were bored.

"Pity they haven't got a couple of comedians!" muttered Handforth.

"Why don't you offer to give a turn?" asked Reggie Pitt blandly.

"Fathead! Am I a comedian?" snorted Handforth.

"Ye gods and little tadpoles!" breathed Pitt. "Is he a comedian? And he invented Trackett Grim!"

"Look here——" began Handy.

"Shush!" whispered Pitt. "We're interrupting the show!"

The latter proceeded for only a short time, and after this the emperor gave us to understand that we were all at liberty to roam about the palace at will, to inspect the wonder of it.

And his Majesty settled himself comfortably on a luxurious throne-like lounge, and invited Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore to sit by him. He intimated, in fact, that it was his pleasure to converse.

And so the party broke up a bit—much to our relief.

CHAPTER IV.

ARCHIE SNEELS A RAT.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE adjusted his monocle and nodded.

"Rather priceless, by gad!" he murmured approvingly. "I mean to say, all these marble columns,

and what not! Makes a chappie think of Thebes and Athens, and all that sort of thing."

"Speaking to me, old son?" asked Willy Handforth, strolling up.

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, absolutely not!" replied Archie, gazing at Willy through his monocle with a severe eye. "I'm glad you've come, old chicken, because I wanted a word with you."

They were standing on a wide, imposing terrace which overlooked the great square. Archie had roamed out for a breath of fresh air, feeling heavy after the meal. The other juniors were dotted about in various places, some of them escorting Irene and Co.

"You want a word with me?" said Willy. "What about?"

"I should just like to remark, my lad, that your behaviour at table was distinctly lop-sided!" said Archie. "I mean to say, no really nice cove allows chunks of vegetable to bespatter the old shirt-front!"

"I couldn't help that!" retorted Willy calmly. "Why don't these people use decent knives and forks, instead of spoons and things? But it doesn't matter—I borrowed Ted's handkerchief."

"I must admit that I see no connection between Ted's handkerchief and your frightful behaviour," said Archie. "But we'll let it pass, old dear. I have no desire to argue."

"That's a relief," said Willy. "What do you think of everything? Not such a bad shanty, is it?"

"Shanty?" repeated Archie. "Dash it all, that's a somewhat foul term to use in describing the palace of an emperor——"

"I thought I could hear something grating!" interrupted Edward Oswald Hand-



Can you select the most appropriate wording from the story to go underneath this sketch? See page iii of the cover for a new and fascinating competition.

forth, appearing round a corner. "It was Archie's voice."

"Oh, I say!" objected Archie. "That's a bit ragged, what? I mean, I've always thought that my voice was somewhat melodious, in a way of speaking. However, I have no wish to commence any frightful unpleasantness——"

"Oh, there you are!" interrupted Handforth, glaring at his minor. "Where's my handkerchief?"

"Oh, somewhere about," replied Willy. "I was waving it to one of the chaps on the Conqueror, and it dropped over the edge. But you wouldn't have waated it, because I'd been using it to dust my boots with."

"You young rotter——"

"For goodness sake, don't start any of your silly games here, Ted!" said Willy impatiently. "Don't forget that we're the guests of the emperor, and it wouldn't look nice to start scrapping."

But Handforth held different ideas. He seized Willy, and proceeded to drag him towards the parapet. The terrace was about ten feet from the ground, with well-lined lawns below.

"Now, you young boulder, I'm going to chuck you down!" panted Handforth. "It's about time——"

"Look out!" hissed Willy. "Irene!"

Handforth dropped his minor abruptly, and Willy dodged away, and calmly proceeded to straighten himself out. There was no sign whatever of Miss Irene, although Handforth gazed searchingly up and down the terrace.

"Didn't you say Irene was coming?" he demanded breathlessly.

"You're dreaming!" said Willy. "I just mentioned her name—that's all. Don't be so jolly dense, Ted! I had to do something to get free!"

"What!" howled Handforth.

"And the best way to make you sit up

is to mention Irene's name," added Willy blandly. "Coward! Fancy being afraid of a giddy girl! I'm ashamed of you, Ted. You've got no spirit!"

Willy thought it advisable to beat a hasty retreat after these frank remarks. And Handforth thought it advisable to administer instant punishment. He rushed after Willy like an avalanche. But his minor pulled up short at the end of the terrace.

"Pax!" he gasped. "Irene!"

Handforth gave a sarcastic laugh.

"You young donkey! You can't catch me twice!" he roared. "I'm going to slaughter you!"

"That's enough!" interrupted Irene coldly. "You've been bullying your young brother again! Poor Willy! He's always getting ill-treated!"

Poor Willy sat up indignantly.

"Rats!" he snorted. "Who's ill-treated? Do you think I can't stand up for myself? If Ted gives me any of his rot, I'll soon dot him one! You girls seem to think I'm a giddy infant!"

"Oh, Willy!" protested Irene, shocked.

"And you think that Ted biffed me just now, don't you?" went on Willy sarcastically. "Just like girls—always jumping at conclusions! It's a pity I can't do a bit of

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"I tell you that Irene—" began Willy desperately.

"Take that!" snorted Handforth.

Biff!

Willy reeled back, and sat down with a thud as Irene and Co. came strolling to the corner. They paused, surprised. And Handforth gave a kind of pitiful gulp, and trembled. So Willy had spoken the truth this time!

"Ted!" said Irene suspiciously. "What does this mean?"

"This?" repeated Handforth, in confusion. "Oh, nothing! I—I mean— The fact is, Willy and I— That is, he—he tripped— I—I should say—"

acrobatic work without people thinking there's a fight! Ted and I are the best of pals!"

He got up, grinning cheerfully—although his nose smarted in no uncertain way. Handforth stared at him blankly, and was startled to see Willy give him an elaborate wink.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Ted!" said Irene. "I really thought that you had been hitting your brother. Please forgive me!"

Willy went off, rather pleased with himself. He stored this incident up in his mind, for it might come handy as a reminder the next time Edward Oswald had him in his clutches. For Willy believed in the old adage that one good turn deserves another.

In the meantime, Archie was still lost in wonder at the picturesque scene around him. The Conqueror, in the centre of the great square, looked an incongruous object amid these Rome-like structures, with their white marble colonnades and stately fashionings.

"I can't help thinking that the whole thing's a dashed dream!" murmured Archie. "I mean to say, I shall wake up soon, and find myself having forty of the best in the good old study."

Archie was idly interested in the movement of soldiers on all sides of the square. The fact did not strike him as being significant at first. But he suddenly started.

There were hundreds of men quietly and unobtrusively massing round the Conqueror! And it occurred to Archie that there was something rather sinister about this movement.

What if the Conqueror was seized? Practically everybody was in the palace, and if once the land yacht fell into the hands of the emperor's men, the entire party would be at the mercy of the people of Isirium.

"Good gad!" muttered Archie hoarsely. "Dash it all, I believe it's treachery! This is absolutely where I do a bit of dashing!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TALE OF ISIRIUM.



WHILE these silent preparations were afoot outside, Nelson Lee was with the Emperor Titus. Wine had been brought—a rich, crystal wine of exceptional bouquet—and the guests were pleasantly surprised.

There was quite a little group round the emperor, including Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Sir Edward Handforth. Two of the emperor's own intimates were present, one of them being the Tribune himself—a man of immense size, who was a kind of chief magistrate, or administrator.

"Thou wilt readily understand, my friends, that my interest in thee is abundant," the emperor was saying. "Thou hast journeyed many leagues from the great outer world beyond. And doubtless thou hast a goodly store of information which will be of singular attraction to me."

"Knowest thou, then, of this greater outer world?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Ay, friend, surely," replied Titus. "But not so much that I would not hear more. My people are peaceful and contented. 'Tis not my wish that we of Isirium should mix with the nations beyond the desert."

They were speaking in Latin, and the conversation was hardly as smooth as I am now recording it. There were many words that had completely changed in the Isirium tongue, and occasionally a deadlock was reached. But there's no need for me to record those details.

The emperor was very eager to hear about "the nations beyond the desert." He questioned his guests endlessly, and sat enthralled over what they told him concerning Europe and America and the modern wonders of science. Much of this left him blank, for he could not grasp what it all meant.

Titus was a heavily featured man, with puffy cheeks and loose bags beneath his eyes. His very appearance spoke of long-continued gluttony and idle living. And his little, deep-set eyes gave Lee no sense of security. The detective, indeed, had a suspicion that this conversation was being held for a double purpose. But Lee showed nothing of his suspicions.

"And what of Isirium?" asked Lord Dorrimore at length. "We have told thee much of our own land, my Titus, and it is surely now thy turn to relate the history of thine? We are greatly puzzled."

"There is but a brief amount to tell," replied the emperor. "It is set down in our records—records which go back many centuries—that our ancestors were refugees from the mighty city of Timgad, far across the desert."

"Ah!" nodded Lee. "'Twas as I be-thought me. For, surely, it is not much of a reasoning to guess that thy forefathers travelled hence from the populous city thou hast named."

"It is told that Timgad was threatened with invasion from the sea," continued the emperor. "The enemy was approaching, and all Timgad was panic-stricken at the prospect."

His majesty went on to relate the history of Isirium with much detail. There had been a great movement in Timgad at that remote period. The Tribune was a man of great power and influence, and he had urged the people to follow him into the desert, and thus escape the destruction which seemed inevitable.

Tens of thousands of nobles, fearful for their lives, fled into the Sahara, taking countless slaves with them, and what little of their possessions that could be carried. Animals, too, had formed an important feature of the exodus.

Thousands of vehicles had been commandeered, and water in vast bulk had been carried for the consumption of the refugees. But the story became one of death and torture and horror.

Thousands of the unfortunate Romans perished in the desert, and thousands of slaves were left behind, to die of thirst—since it would have endangered more valuable lives to have retained them in the company.

The nobles themselves, knowing that their lives hung on a thread, turned to the manual work which the slaves had hitherto performed. And it was this feature, indeed, which saved the entire band of pilgrims from destruction.

For the nobles, labouring for the first time in their lives, took the place of the abandoned slaves. And thus the water supply was greatly conserved. But, even so, hundreds died as the march progressed.

And it seemed that the desert would never be crossed. Finally, they had reached an impassable barrier of mountains, without a vestige of vegetation, or a trace of water. And hope had died.

And then a fresh tragedy had occurred—a mere trifle compared to the death and destruction that had reduced the company to a mere tithe of its former strength. The Tribune's baby son, so the Isirium records went, had been carried off by a giant eagle. And, to the horror of all, the infant had been taken to the summit of one of the mountains.

The Tribune himself, too weakened by his privations to act personally, had begged his followers to rescue the child. There had been many volunteers, man after man climbing the crags—all to fail. Some, indeed, lost their lives in the attempt.

But after that a mere youth offered to climb the mountain, and actually succeeded in reaching the eagle's eyrie. And there, according to the legend, he fought a desperate battle with the enormous bird. Wounded and bleeding, he vanished from sight beyond the crags—the baby, too, having disappeared.

And after endless hours of anxiety, the youth had appeared on the desert, bringing the Tribune's child with him. It was like a miracle. But the youth explained that beyond the mountains lay a wonderful valley of amazing verdure, more exquisite than anything he had ever seen.

Any entrance was invisible from the desert, but obvious from the mountain top. And so the remnants of the great exodus from Tim-gad entered the oasis, and throughout the centuries had remained, building in their own fashion, and living a life entirely apart from the world. For the trackless desert lay on all sides, shutting them off.

And they had a tradition in Isirium that if any of their people ventured forth, they would never return. And it was a rigid law that the outer world should be kept in ignorance of this oasis. For this reason a "native" village had been founded outside the pass, the population being the guardians of the tiny kingdom.

In this way chance travellers had never suspected the truth, and so the centuries had gone on, and Isirium had remained a hidden secret. The people were satisfied with their valley, and had no wish to go beyond the desert.

It was with great interest that Nelson Lee and his companions listened to this story. It sounded very feasible. But much, of course, was pure legend, and Lee felt convinced that the true history would never be fully revealed.

At the same time, the discovery of Isirium was undoubtedly one of the most astounding events of modern times.

CHAPTER VI.

TREACHERY BREWING!



"GOOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne pulled up with a startled gasp as he hurried round one of the massive marble columns. Something charged into him at express speed, and nearly bowled him over.

"Sorry!" gasped Willy. "What's the idea of tearing about like that, Archie? You nearly biffed into me!"

"Well, dash it all!" protested Archie. "I like that! I mean, you come skidding along like a bally Marathon racer, charge me in the old equator, and then accuse me of doing the dashing business! I mean, a bit nervy—what?"

"You shouldn't get in the way!" said Willy. "I've just spotted something rummy, and I'm looking for Mr. Lee. For all we know, we might be pounced upon at any minute, and put to the torture!"

"Oddslife!" ejaculated Archie.

"Of course, it'll be a life to have some excitement," went on the fag. "I'm getting fed up with this formal business. The soldiers are massing in scores in the square—and I'll bet they've got designs on the Conqueror!"

Archie seized the fag by the shoulder.

"Good lad!" he said approvingly. "Then I'm not the only one—what? I've spotted absolutely the same thing, old tulip! And, as a matter of fact, I'm looking for Mr. Lee, too. Two minds with but a single thought—what?"

They gave another glance across the square. Most of the brilliant street lights had been extinguished—a significant fact in itself. And the land yacht, brilliant with electricity, gleamed out like a beacon in the middle of the open space.

Movements could be seen on every side, but they were stealthy and silent. Willy and Archie looked at one another.

"No question about it," said the fag grimly. "Look here, you buzz about and find Mr. Lee, and I'll hop down across this lawn, and whizz to the Conqueror. Might as well do all we can."

"A sound scheme!" declared Archie. "In fact, a brainy suggestion, old son! I'll dash hither and thither, and find Mr. Lee at once. It seems to me that this thing requires looking into! I mean, Phipps is on board, and if I lose him, I shall be in a most poisonous hole!"

Archie hurried off, and made for the nearest entrance. He encountered Gay

Pepys just against one of the doorways, making notes in his pocket-book.

"Have you seen Mr. Lee hovering around?" asked Archie briskly.

"I think he's with the emperor—but don't bother me," said Pepys. "I'm making some notes for my diary. Oh, and by the way, if you see Handforth, please remind him that his Trackett Grim story has got to be wirelessed off to-night. Boots will be very annoyed if he doesn't get it."

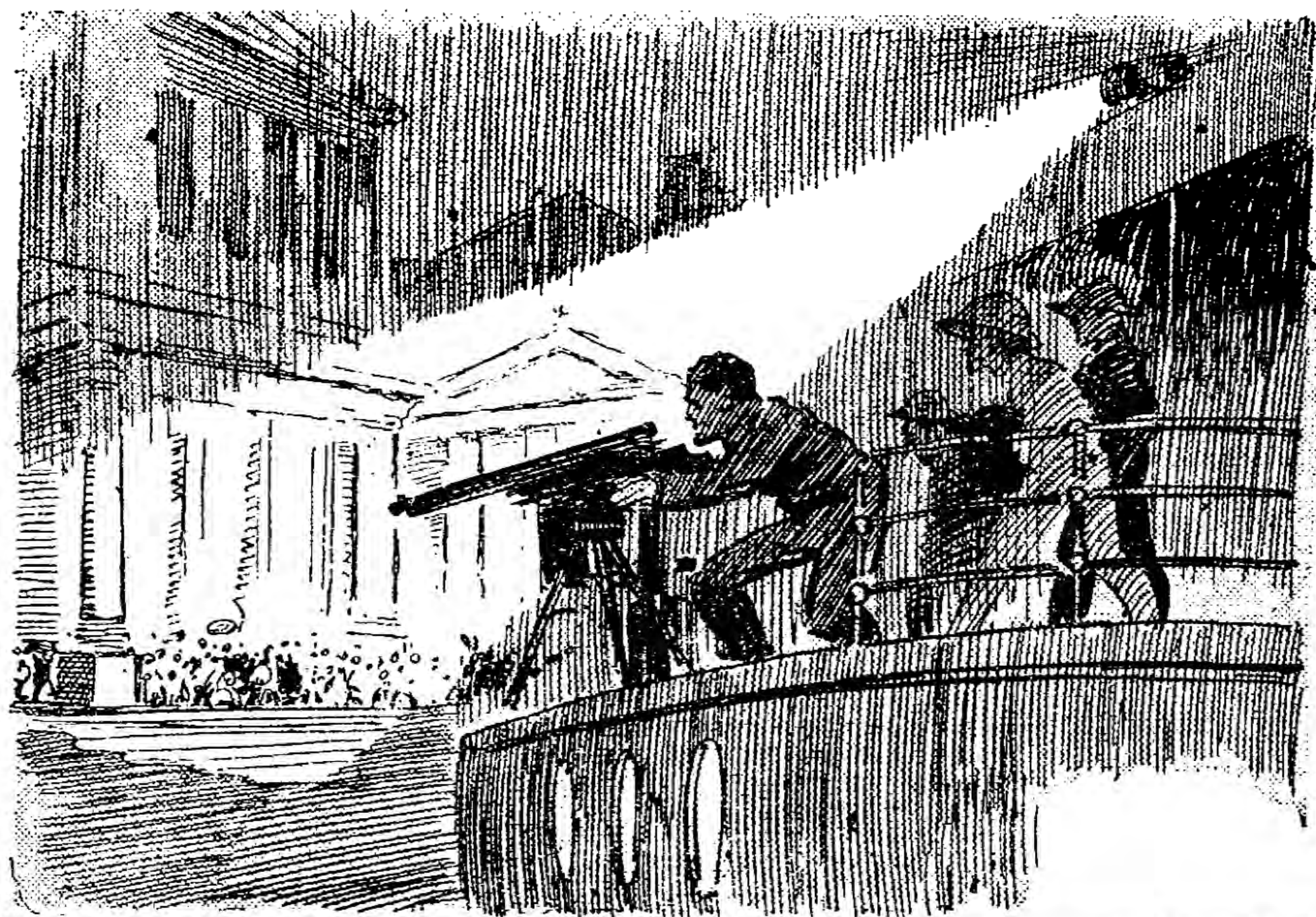
"Bother Boots!" said Archie stiffly. "And, if I may say so, bother Handforth, and bother you, dash it!"

Archie completely forgot Pepys as he hurried into the palace. And he gave a little exclamation of satisfaction as he saw Nelson Lee quite near, chatting with Mr. Earle and Reggie Pitt's father.

"Sorry to dash into the old gathering like this, as it were, but can I have a brace of words with you, sir?" asked Archie, touching Lee's sleeve. "Pray pardon the frightful liberty——"

"What is it, Archie?" smiled Lee.

The elegant junior took Nelson Lee outside, on the terrace, and waved his hand towards the Conqueror.



Simultaneously two enormous searchlights blazed out fore and aft, and the dazzling, pitiless glare from the arcs, magnified a million times by the multi-lenses, swept across the square with relentless penetration.

He marched in, full of wonder that these fellows should be thinking of the school magazine at such a time as this. But it really spoke volumes for the enthusiasm of the youthful contributors. John Busterfield Boots, home in England, was temporarily editing the Magazine—and half his copy was wirelessed from the Conqueror at weekly intervals!

It was, indeed, a revelation of the modern strides of science. Here we were, completely out of the world in this desert oasis, and yet the school magazine was being produced throughout the holidays—complete with many contributions from the schoolboy travellers.

"Kindly observe, sir!" he said quietly. "These Roman chappies are gathering round in swarms, so to speak. It strikes the old gear-box that some pretty foul treachery is blowing up."

Nelson Lee said nothing for a full minute. He gazed searchingly into the shadows of the square. Then he nodded to himself, and laid a hand on Archie's shoulder.

"Thanks for your warning, young 'un," he said. "In a way, I think you are right—but you need not be alarmed. We are quite safe—and so is the Conqueror."

"Well, that's a dashed ripe piece of news!" said Archie comfortably.

Nelson Lee said very little more, but strolled into the palace again, and at the earliest opportunity he informed the emperor that it was time for the party to be returning to the Conqueror.

But Titus waved the suggestion aside with an imperious gesture. His guests must remain in the palace. It was his command! They were to sleep under his imperial roof.

Nelson Lee made no demur. But it seemed evident to him that his suspicions of treachery were proved to the hilt. While the emperor kept his guests in the palace, the Conqueror was to be seized and held!

But Titus IV was apparently a bit of an optimist.

CHAPTER VII.

READY FOR EMERGENCIES.



"DON'T be long now, sir," said Jevons, removing his pipe.

"Yes, they appear to be preparing for something," agreed Mr. Manners grimly. "The infernal curs! Give them half a chance, and they'll murder the whole company of us!"

Mr. Hobart Manners and the petty-officer were leaning over the rail on the Conqueror's bridge. The great land yacht lay beneath them, her decks quiet and apparently deserted.

And all round was the big expanse of the square, empty, save for one or two groups of Isirium soldiery—men who were ostensibly on guard.

But if Willy Handforth and Archie had been keen-eyed, those on board the Conqueror were no less so. The chief engineer had long since observed the steady massing of troops on the outskirts of the square, and he was convinced that these bodies of men were merely awaiting a signal.

"It'll be a pity if we have to fight!" muttered Irene's father. "Bloodshed is the last thing we desire, Jevons. It would be tragic—indeed, ghastly. With these boys in the party—my only daughter, too, and those other girls—"

"I don't think there's much need to worry, sir," put in Jevons.

"Perhaps not, but it is very disturbing," said the chief engineer. "If we can avoid a fight, it will be a relief. I have no doubt that the emperor greatly resents our presence in his domain. And in a way we are intruders—for we invaded this territory without invitation. But we are peaceful, and the emperor should see that."

A movement on the bridge ladder attracted his attention, and a moment later the muscular bulk of Umlosi heaved itself on to the bridge. The great Kutana Chief was in no happy mood.

"I am restless, O master of the great engines," he growled. "N'kose, my father, is absent for long, and even Umtagati him-

self fails to return. Methinks some great trouble has arisen."

"I hardly agree with you, Umlosi," said Mr. Manners. "There may be some trouble soon, but nothing has happened yet."

Umlosi gripped his mighty spear fiercely.

"Wau! 'Tis time the battle was joined!" he exclaimed. "I am sore tired of this inactivity. A fight, my master! A fight is what I need to make my blood flow smoothly, and to give my sinews their customary suppleness! It is time for the blood to flow, and the cries of battle to arise!"

Umlosi was a born warrior, and he had disdained to join the feasting party. Nelson Lee was pleased because of this, for Umlosi's presence at the emperor's table might have offended his Imperial Majesty. And it was better for Umlosi to remain on board, in any case.

The Conqueror was not quite so unprepared for battle as many of the juniors believed. She was certainly not an unprotected hulk, ready to be pounced upon and seized according to the emperor's whim.

But Mr. Manners sincerely hoped that Umlosi would be disappointed. The full crew of the land yacht was alert and ready. Men were concealed on the decks—fully armed with rifles, to say nothing of machine guns.

If an attack came, these Isirium soldiers, for all their splendour, would find that their task was a heavy one.

"There may be a fight, Umlosi, but it would be a grave pity, indeed," said Mr. Manners. "But it is comforting to know that we have such mighty warriors as you."

Umlosi grunted.

"Of what use to be a fighter when one's prowess is unwanted?" he growled. "'Tis not for me to dictate, but methinks 'twould be better if we waited not, but attacked these dogs forthwith."

Mr. Manners shook his head.

"That would indeed be a mistake," he said. "We must avoid provocative action at all costs—What's that, Jevons?"

"One of the young gents, I believe, sir," said the petty officer, pointing into the gloom with the stem of his pipe.

Mr. Manners peered keenly over the yacht's side. There was plenty of light immediately round the vessel, but beyond there lay a space of intense blackness. The extinguishing of the street lamps was responsible for this.

"Who's that down there?" shouted Mr. Manners sharply.

A small figure came running up into the lights from the yacht.

"What's the good of me trying to steal up like a giddy shadow when you give the game away, sir?" demanded Willy indignantly. "I'm just coming to warn you that we're surrounded by billions of soldiers!"

"Good heavens! As many as that?" said Mr. Manners drily. "You'd better come on board, young man. And you needn't worry

—we know all about the concentration of troops.”

“Well I’m blessed!” said Willy disgustedly. “All this trouble for nothing!”

He reached the deck by the simple process of swarming up a rope, and he hopped up on to the bridge like a monkey.

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Willy, but we’re not quite so blind as you seem to imagine,” smiled the chief engineer. “Perhaps you can tell us some news of the main party?”

“Oh, they’re all messing about, doing nothing,” said Willy tartly. “Fatty Little’s guzzling all the time, and I expect we shall have to carry him on board in the end. Ted’s either biffing somebody, or else chasing Irene—”

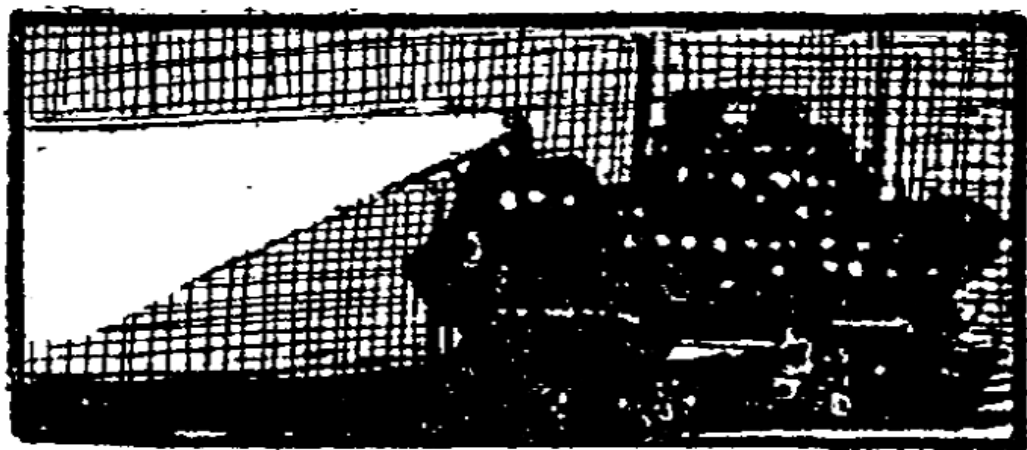
“Indeed?” said Irene’s father, with a chuckle.

“Not really, of course,” said Willy. “Ted thinks an awful lot of your daughter, sir. As for the other chaps, Archie’s looking a bit peevish, and Timothy Tucker’s talking like a professor in Latin. That chap isn’t such a giddy duffer, after all! Mr. Lee and my pater are gassing with the old josser in the bath robe—”

“Good gracious!” said Mr. Manners. “And who may he be?”

“Oh, him?” said Willy. “Only the emperor. If you ask me, sir, he’s a bit of a bad lot. My hat! You ought to have seen him pushing grub into himself! It’s a wonder he didn’t have a couple of slaves on either side of him with shovels! He’d have kept ’em both busy!”

CHAPTER VIII. THE ATTACK!



MR. MANNERS smiled as he lit a cigar.

“I’m afraid your description of the emperor is scarcely flattering, young man,” he said drily. “It is rather fortunate that these people cannot understand English—if it were otherwise, I could see you being carried off to jail, and put to the torture.”

Willy sniffed.

“They’d have their work cut out to torture me!” he replied. “If the Romans were just like these people, then we’ve been swindled! We’ve always been led to believe that the Romans were marvellous chaps. As far as I can see, they’re only

dressed-up gluttons! Anyhow, we’ll show ’em a thing or two if they start any of their old buck with us!”

“I really believe we shall,” said Mr. Manners.

“Well, I’ll be going,” said Willy carelessly.

“Hold on! Where are you off to?”

“Oh, nowhere,” replied the fag. “As a matter of fact, I thought about buzzing off down the High Street. There might be a few shops open, and I’m rather anxious to see what kind of toffee they’ve got in this giddy town. I’ll bet it’s rotten!”

“I’m afraid you are a little too optimistic, Master Willy,” said the chief engineer. “We can’t allow you to roam off like this. I’m glad you stated your intention so frankly. You’ll have to wait for your toffee till to-morrow.”

“Oh, come off it, sir!” protested Willy. “I shan’t be long. Besides, I want to get the lie of the land, so that I can have the laugh over Ted. And there’s just a chance I shall run across a few beetles.”

“Beetles?”

“Those things that crawl,” said Willy obligingly. “You know, sir. Black things, with a lot of legs—”

“Confound your impudence!” growled Mr. Manners. “Do you think I don’t know what a beetle is?”

“Well, you asked, sir, and I was only just explaining,” replied Willy, with perfect innocence. “I’m a very obliging chap, and I’m always ready to help anybody if he’s a bit ignorant. In these hot climates, you know, beetles crawl about everywhere—particularly at night. It’s just my time. I might be able to get a few snakes, too,” he added thoughtfully. “It would be rather ripping to shove one in Ted’s bed to-night.”

“I’m sorry, but you must leave these pleasant little pastimes for another occasion,” said Mr. Manners firmly. “Heaven knows why you require beetles—”

“I’m a collector, sir,” said Willy. “Downstairs, I’ve got eighty-three beetles, four hundred and twenty-four butterflies, nineteen lizards, ten snakes—”

“Good heavens! I hope they’re dead?” ejaculated Mr. Manners.

“Most of ’em,” said Willy comfortably. “Now and again the beetles escape, but it doesn’t matter much. I’ve only got Chubby and Juicy in my cabin, and if they start kicking, I biff ’em. After all, it doesn’t hurt a chap to wake up in the night and find himself smothered in beetles. It makes a change.”

But at this point Handforth minor’s somewhat crawly discourse was brought to an end, for a glittering Isirium officer approached the yacht, and held up his hand. He was accompanied by three other officers of minor rank.

"A centurion and his lieutenants," murmured Mr. Manners.

"He doesn't look a hundred years old!" said Willy doubtfully.

"I said centurion—not centenarian," said Mr. Manners. "A centurion, Willy, is a Roman—an officer in charge of a hundred men, as the name itself implies."

"Well, I knew it was something to do with a hundred," said Willy triumphantly.

The gorgeous officer was apparently desirous of speaking.

"Hail!" called the chief engineer, in his best Latin. "You would speak?"

"We desire a friendly word with thee," replied the centurion. "The emperor himself hath commanded me to come with his message. Wilt descend, so that we may speak with due dignity?"

Mr. Manners signalled his acquiescence, but turned to Jevons as he was about to descend the ladder.

"Hold yourself ready in case of emergencies," he murmured.

"Count on me, sir," replied the petty officer quietly.

"It's all right—we'll look after the ship!" said Willy. "No need to worry, Mr. Manners. If any of these beggars try to rush us, we'll twist their giddy tails! Trust the Third!"

Considering that Willy was the sole representative of the Third, this statement was somewhat bombastic. Not that Willy meant it to be so. His sublime confidence in the powers of the St. Frank's junior school was touching.

Mr. Manners reached the ground, and the centurion and his officers gravely saluted. They approached him, and at the same moment the Chief Engineer was swiftly and deftly seized.

"Keep silent, or your moments will be brief!" hissed the centurion.

"You infernal rogue!" roared Mr. Manners furiously. "So this is your game, eh?"

The moment had arrived unexpectedly, and it did not find Mr. Manners unprepared. Indeed, his hand had been on his revolver the whole time. And now, in a flash, he whipped it out and fired.

Crack!

The muzzle of the weapon spouted a lurid flame, and the bullet seared through the centurion's arm, and he reeled back with a cry of pain and fear and blank amazement.

At the same instant, Mr. Manners backed away, grim and determined. He had been released as though he were an evil spirit. And a shrill whistle blast sounded from the bridge.

As it pierced through the still air, there came the ringing shouts and cries from a thousand throats. And from every side of the square masses of Isirium troops surged forward in attack.

CHAPTER IX.

NELSON LEE'S STERN WARNING.



WILLY HANDFORTH gave a whoop.

"My hat! They're coming!" he yelled. "Here, gimme a rifle, or something! I'm in this fight, remember!"

"Better get below, young man, and lie quiet!" advised Jevons grimly. "This is going to be no children's party."

Willy refused to answer this deadly insult, but clung to the bridge rail, watching the approach of the Isirium troops with lively interest. He was also surprised by the abrupt transformation of the Conqueror.

A moment before the vessel had been apparently dead.

But now she sprang into life on the instant. That shrill blast from the whistle had been a signal—carrying its message to every quarter of the deck. Men appeared behind the machine-guns, others sprang up, and lined the rail.

Simultaneously, two enormous search-lights blazed out fore and aft, and the dazzling, pitiless glare from the arcs, magnified a million times by the multi-lenses, swept across the square with relentless penetration.

The soldiers were revealed clearly in all their masses, and they were completely taken aback. Such a light as this was new to them, and they were obviously uneasy. There were signs of disorder among the ranks.

Mr. Manners came rushing on deck, his revolver still gripped in his hand. He leaned over the rail, and pointed to the injured centurion.

"Go, and tell thy chief officer that it will go ill with thy soldiers if this madness is continued!" he shouted. "We have refrained from killing as yet, but we are ready to destroy your men in their hundreds if this folly is persisted in. Go, thou treacherous dog, and deliver my message!"

The centurion backed away, thoroughly frightened.

And he was startled even more immediately afterwards, for there came a low, droning hum from the interior of the Conqueror. And the giant land yacht slowly moved forward, her caterpillar tractors clicking down on the stone paving with musical precision.

"Hurrah! We're off!" yelled Willy. "Charge the beggars!"

Mr. Manners was in no need of Willy's advice. It had been Jevons who had signalled to the engine-room, but it was the Chief engineer himself who seized the wheel and took command.

"By heaven, we'll show these fools something!" he rapped out. "It's no good

doing things by halves, Jevons—we'll go the whole hog!"

"Nothing like it, sir," said Jevons evenly.

Willy looked on, gloating. He thanked his stars that he was in the midst of this action—although so far it had been disappointing in so far as actual fighting went. Willy was as warlike as his brother, and would have cheerfully entered into a hand-to-hand contest with the Isirium troops.

Those warriors who had approached the bows of the Conqueror fell back in complete confusion and disorder as the land yacht rolled majestically towards them. Her very bulk was staggering.

A few of the soldiers hurled their short-handled javelins, but in their haste the spears fell short. And the Conqueror moved onwards like some unconquerable monster of destruction.

Immediately opposite the palace steps, the vessel performed a strange movement. She swung round, travelling at full speed. The result was impressive. With a shrieking protest from her tractors, the Conqueror slewed round on the stone paving—and she calmly commenced to mount the mosaic steps of the palace!

These steps were extremely shallow, leading upwards in a great, wide flight which was really more of a slope than a genuine ascent. The hundreds of great steps had been provided more for effect than actual necessity.

The result of this move was patent in a moment.

The Isirium soldiers were helpless—not merely because of their impotence against such a monstrous engine of war, but because they were scared out of their wits by this menace against the emperor's palace.

Higher and higher mounted the Conqueror, but she was in not the slightest danger, for the angle was no steeper than many sand dunes she had surmounted in the desert, and her tractors found a perfect grip on the shallow steps.

"A word, my friends!" shouted Mr. Manners. "Withdraw thy troops and the palace shall be saved. Fail to obey my orders and ghastly destruction shall descend upon thy wondrous buildings!"

There was no doubt as to whether his words had been understood. The gorgeously attired officers roared with the full power of their lungs, bugles sounded, and as though by magic the Isirium soldiery melted out of the great square and disappeared from sight.

"That's better!" said Mr. Manners grimly.

He touched the telegraph and the Conqueror came to a standstill. Nelson Lee came down the Palace steps and looked on with approval.

"That was rather neatly done, Manners," he called. "Any casualties?"

"None whatever," said the Chief Engineer. "But I don't mind admitting that I

was rather anxious for a few minutes. An infernally treacherous attack, Lee."

"Yes!" agreed Nelson Lee grimly. "And it shall not occur again—I'll see to that!"

There was a hard glint in the famous detective's eyes as he swung round on his heel and passed between the great marble columns into the palace. The action had been brief—indeed, it had scarcely amounted to an action, for no fighting had actually resulted. But had the Conqueror been unprepared, disaster would have been inevitable.

Nelson Lee went straight to the emperor, and curtly demanded an explanation. Titus was clearly taken aback, but he blustered.

"Thou art mistaken, friend," he declared. "If there has been an unprovoked attack on your great chariot by my soldiers my regrets are sincere. 'Twas done without my knowledge. Think not that I would countenance such deeds."

"Thou wilt look into this matter and discover the responsibility?"

"Ay, that I will!" replied the emperor fiercely. "And the dog who ordered the attack shall be flung to the lions! By Mars! Am I the emperor in my land, or am I not? Have no fear, friend—I wish thee well."

"Thou hast spoken nobly, your majesty," said Nelson Lee. "It will be as well, I deem it, to inform your military chiefs that henceforth our great chariot will be guarded day and night—constantly, and by willing, watchful protectors. And if aught happens to any single soul of our party, this great war chariot will forthwith spread death and destruction throughout the city."

The emperor's eyes glinted.

"Enough!" he said shortly. "I will remember."

CHAPTER X.

GUESTS OF HONOUR.



NELSON LEE had put it to the emperor straight from the shoulder.

Not much had been spoken, but no amount of words could have made the position clearer.

In a nutshell, Titus understood that so long as his guests were unharmed and unmolested, the Conqueror would remain passive. But if a single hair of any guest was harmed, the retribution would be swift and disastrous. The Conqueror, in fact, was the party's safeguard.

It was rather a pity that this attitude should be necessary—for, after all, the land yacht's company were visitors in this strange valley. But the emperor himself had made the precaution necessary, so he could not grumble.

It was understood that the guests should

remain in the palace—using the sumptuous building as their own home, with slaves to wait upon them and obey their every whim.

This was all right for the juniors—for there was little danger of any disaster overtaking them. But Mrs. Manners was absolutely firm in her decision that her daughter and all the other girls should remain on board the yacht, except for occasional jaunts. And this decision was thoroughly endorsed by Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and the other gentlemen.

The Remove fellows feared, at first, that they would be compelled to return to the yacht, too. They didn't want to. They regarded the whole adventure as a glorious spree, and were keenly looking forward to spending the night in the emperor's palace.

And as the emperor himself insisted that his youthful guests should remain, Nelson Lee did not demur. He was satisfied that no harm could overtake the juniors. After his warning, Titus would be very careful. For he was awed and startled by the Conqueror's powers of destruction.

"Well, that's all right, then!" declared Handforth, with satisfaction, when the word got round. "We're staying for the night. Good egg! I'm rather keen on seeing what kind of sleeping quarters they've got."

Most of the juniors were lounging about in the great foyer. The little spell of excitement was over, and the Conqueror had returned to her former resting place, and everything was normal.

"I wonder who these merchants are?" asked Reggie Pitt curiously.

Numbers of richly-robed slaves had appeared in the foyer, and they were acting in a rather a curious way. Handforth found one of the slaves standing rigidly at attention beside him. Another slave attached himself to me. Another singled out Reggie Pitt—and so on. Within a few minutes every junior was shadowed by a close attendant.

"Queer!" I remarked. "What's the idea of this?"

"Goodness knows," said Tommy Watson. Handforth was walking up and down thoughtfully, and a few moments passed before he realised that the slave was keeping close behind him. But Edward Oswald grew alive to the fact at last, and he abruptly halted.

"Clear off, blow you!" he said gruffly. "It's like your blessed check to follow me about! Well, I'm jiggered! Everybody's got one of the slaves! I say, we're being watched, or something!"

Handforth's slave bowed before him. "Thy servant!" he said in Latin.

"Eh?" said Handforth.

"His Honour, the Chief of His Majesty's Household, has appointed me thy body servant," went on the slave imperturbably. "Thy commands shall be obeyed, O master."

"I don't know what the dickens you're jabbering about, so it's no good standing there!" snorted Handforth. "You may be a good chap, but I don't like your face! Buzz off!"

I grinned.

"It's all right, Handy," I explained. "These chaps are slaves—they have been given to us by the emperor. It's bed-time, I expect, and we've all got our own private body servants."

"A dashed good idea, too," declared Archie approvingly.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I've never heard of such piffle!"

He found it impossible, however, to rid himself of his own particular slave. The man clung to him like a shadow. And it was just the same with the other juniors. And, presently, when we all passed up the great marble stairs, our slaves came behind us.

It was somewhat embarrassing at first, but we soon got used to it.

"Better not make any objections," I warned the others. "Perhaps this is one of the emperor's compliments—and it would never do to offend him. And these chaps might be useful."

"They can act as guides, anyhow," said Pitt. "Somehow I shall feel a lot more comfortable after we've inspected our bedrooms. For all we know these Isirium merchants may have a cheerful habit of sleeping on marble slabs, or something!"

"In that case, we'll jolly soon buzz on board the Conqueror!" said Bob Christine promptly. "You won't get me to sleep on a marble slab—emperor or no emperor! Hallo! This looks like something!"

At the top of the stairs we had passed along a wide, exquisitely decorated hall, and now our guides were making for a number of arched dorways. Our sleeping quarters were evidently here.

Handforth was the first junior to pass within. He paused just in the entrance, and his jaw dropped.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated blankly.

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE MISTAKE SOMEWHERE.



H ANDFORTH'S surprise was perfectly natural.

For the interior of the great apartment was very different from anything he had expected. There were rich hangings round the walls, brilliant lights gleamed

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in a dozen places, and the floor was strewn with brightly coloured rugs.

The room itself was peculiarly shaped, being a kind of enormous semi-circle. And ranged round this quaint sleeping chamber were no fewer than two dozen beds, all the lower ends of the beds converging together.

And these beds were wonderful creations of metal—glittering and shimmering in the light, and revealing extraordinary skill of design. To our great satisfaction, we observed that they were provided with comfortable-looking mattresses, and rich silkified overlays. Blankets, of course, were quite unnecessary in such a climate.

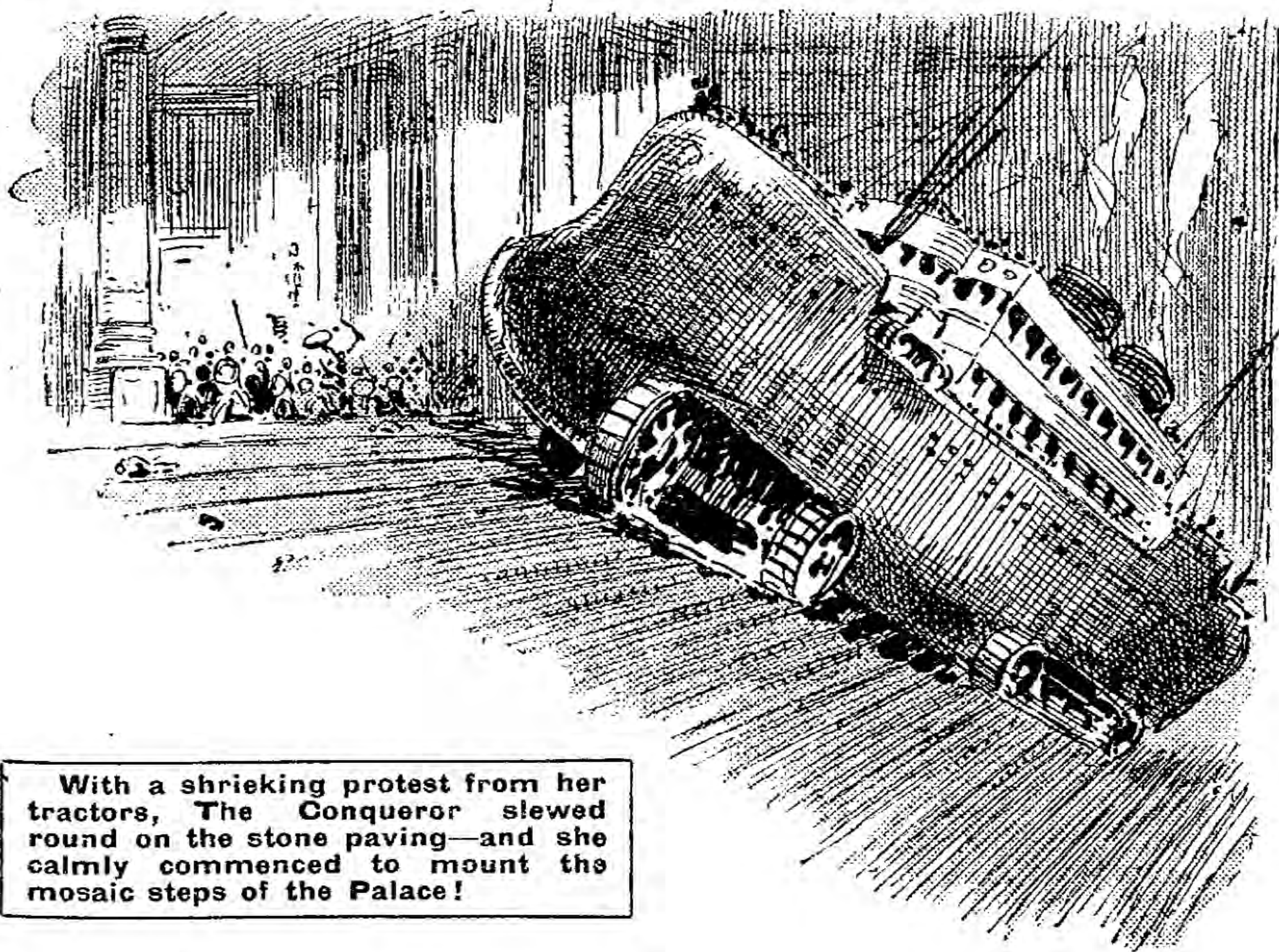
"Well, this looks good enough, anyhow!"

"It is the emperor's wish that thou shouldst all sleep in peace and much comfort," said the official, speaking slowly in Latin. "My words are understood? Art thou quite pleased?"

"What's he jabbering about?" asked Handforth.

"He's asking if we are satisfied," I said, turning to the official. "All is well, and many thanks." I went on, speaking laboriously in my best Latin. "Whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"By Mercury! Thou hast a ready wit and a keen understanding of the Isirium language!" exclaimed the other, clapping me on the shoulder. "Excellent! Know that I am Horatius Placidus—the chief of



With a shrieking protest from her tractors, The Conqueror slewed round on the stone paving—and she calmly commenced to mount the mosaic steps of the Palace!

remarked Willy Handforth condescendingly. "Reminds me of a giddy dormitory!"

"Considering it is one, your powers of deduction aren't exactly staggering, my lad," I grinned. "There are twenty-four of us—and twenty-four beds. This chamber is no coincidence. It was specially prepared, of course."

"Good old Titus!" said Reggie Pitt. "And there, by the look of it, stands the genie who worked the miracle."

He indicated a tall, elaborately attired palace official, who was looking on with a broad smile. This gentleman was somewhat portly, too, and I took rather a fancy to him.

the emperor's household. And know you also that I am a man of mighty importance."

"And do we thank thee for these honours, O great Placidus?" I asked, indicating the sumptuous beds and the waiting slaves.

"Ay, 'twas a pretty idea of my own," replied Placidus, grinning with keen enjoyment. "Thy orders are to be obeyed, and 'tis well that at least one of thy number speaketh our tongue intelligibly."

"Look here, what the dickens are you jawing about?" demanded Handforth. "It's a pity you can't speak Latin instead of

Italian! My Latin's highly polished, and I can speak the language like a native!"

"Then you'd better have a go at our friend here—Mr. Horatius Placidus," I chuckled. "He's just told me that any orders we like to give will be obeyed—"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne abruptly.

"What's wrong with you, you ass?"

"Oddslife and gadzooks!" said Archie, horrified.

He looked round at us with an expression of alarm and even misery in his eyes.

"Dash it all, I've just remembered!" he panted. "My dear old chappies, we're undone! Absolutely and positively undone!"

"Not yet," said Pitt. "Nobody's loosened a button so far."

"Pray refrain from these untimely jokes, old gargoyle!" exclaimed Archie, in distress. "Have you realised—have you grasped the poisonous fact—that we are absolutely standing here in evening dress?"

"Marvellous!" said Handforth, with heavy sarcasm. "Did you find that out all by yourself, Archie?"

"In evening dress!" repeated Archie firmly. "And I positively refuse to wear evening dress in the morning, dash it! I mean, we haven't brought a fresh supply of the old carcass coverings! Flannels, tennis shoes, silk shirts, and all that sort of thing! Somebody, in fact, has got to rally round like anything and get dashed busy!"

"Archie's right," I said, turning to the others. "We can't possibly appear in these clothes to-morrow. But don't worry—I'll have a word with our friend, Mr. Placidus. He'll see to this little detail. He seems quite a cheery, good-natured chap."

"But, pray consider, old darling!" said Archie anxiously. "This is absolutely where Phipps has got to slither into the picture. I mean—"

"Don't bother about Phipps, old son," I interrupted. "If I give a message to friend Placidus, he'll have it delivered on board, and when we wake up in the morning our clothing will be all ready for us. You can trust Phipps to prepare some suitable attire for you, Archie."

"Laddie, such brain power overwhelms me!" said Archie admiringly.

I turned to the chief of the emperor's household and explained the situation in the most fluent Latin I could command. And Horatius Placidus listened smilingly and patiently—indeed, as placidly as his name implied. And when I had finished he nodded in complete agreement.

"Thy wishes shall have my full attention," he declared obligingly. "Fear not, young friend, but retire with thy mind at rest. Ere morning comes, the clothing shall be ready and waiting."

And so we all went to bed cheerfully. Our numerous slaves wanted to assist us in disrobing, but we soon made it clear that

we could dispense with this little courtesy. And we suddenly discovered that we were very tired. Once on those soft, luxurious couches, we slept with supreme ease.

Most of the other juniors were in sound slumber before I dropped off. And I just remember the lights dimming low, and then I slept, too. It seemed only a short time later I was awakened by the sound of a musical gong.

But when I sat up, a little bewildered, I saw that the sunlight was streaming into that curious apartment. It was full day, and we had all slumbered soundly and dreamlessly.

Everything came back to me in a flash, and I was rather pleased that we were quite alone. There were no slaves hanging about to embarrass us. Some of the other fellows were sitting up, stretching themselves.

"What the—how the— Well, mother will be pleased!" said Reginald Pitt calmly. "I'm not sure, but I've got an idea that somebody's going to kick!"

Reggie was standing beside his bed, grinning cheerfully, and closely examining a neat pile of clothing which lay near by. But the clothing wasn't at all like our own flannels.

"By Jove!" I ejaculated. "Isirium costume!"

One glance assured me that we were all provided for in the same manner. Apparently, our good friend, Horatius Placidus, had misunderstood me. Instead of bringing us our own clothing from the yacht, he had supplied us with Roman toga out of the imperial wardrobe!

CHAPTER XII.

SURPRISING THE NATIVES.



REGGIE PITT burst into a roar of laughter.

"I say, this is rather rich!" he chuckled. "Just imagine Handy in these! I rather think that Archie will howl for Phipps! Is this one of your little jokes, Nipper?"

"Jokes?" I repeated. "Is this what you call a joke?"

"Well, you gave the directions, I believe—"

"My dear ass, you don't think I asked for these freak things?" I interrupted indignantly. "I told the fat idiot that we wanted flannels and things from the Conqueror. Either he misunderstood, or this is an Isirium joke!"

"It's far more likely that your Latin was so rotten that the poor beggar had to guess three-parts of it," said Pitt candidly. "I don't like to offend you, old man, but your idea of making yourself clear seems humorous."

that had such a devastating effect upon the Isirium maidens.

And Edward Oswald was completely at their mercy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO SLAVE GIRLS.



"WELL, it's a wonderful place," I said joyfully. "Considering that these people have lived completely out of the world for centuries, the civilisation in this little valley is staggering."

"Of course, it's really the old Roman civilisation—just kept alive in this one spot," remarked Bob Christine. "These people haven't had any other patterns to work on, and so they've kept to the same style."

"All the same, it's wonderful," I said. "Some chaps might say that it's queer that the Isirium people haven't progressed on their own. But I don't think so. As you say, Bob, they've had no other patterns to copy. Buried here, in the middle of the Sahara, life has gone on slowly and monotonously. And there's only one thing that'll wipe out the whole race."

"And what's that?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Contact with the outer world," I replied. "If these people adopt ordinary European methods and habits and customs they won't last a great many years. Half the population will clear out, and spread itself over the world. And fortune-seeking business men will come here from Europe or America to start up new commercial activity. And that would be a pity. The only way to preserve this little country intact is to leave it alone."

We were standing in the square, just beyond the fountains, with the Conqueror standing majestically in our rear. We were greatly interested in our surroundings, and particularly in the people.

Everything was so quaint and unconventional. It was different from anything we had ever seen before. And somehow we couldn't help feeling that we were intruders. The Conqueror herself was just a monstrosity amid these stately, imposing surroundings.

"There seems to be some excitement up the road," said Watson, shading his eyes with his hand. "Why, what's this? They seem to be chasing somebody! My only hat! I believe it's Handy!"

We watched with growing interest. A few other St. Frank's fellows also paused to look on at this new excitement. Willy Handforth uttered one of his characteristic sniffs.

"My major again!" he said tartly. "I've never known such a chap for getting into trouble. And this time he seems to have aroused the whole giddy feminine population. He's actually been chased!"

And this, indeed, was the actual truth.

Handforth came flying along at full speed, with well over a dozen Isirium girls in his rear. They were apparently enjoying the joke, and everybody else paused to look on, and appreciate it.

Handforth didn't pull up until he was right in our midst.

"Help!" he gasped. "They—they won't let me alone! I had to bunk for it in the end!"

"This is the worst of being so terribly handsome, old man," I said. "Can you wonder at the young ladies going dotty? It's your fatal beauty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think we'd all better scoot," said Tommy Watson nervously. "I don't like offending a young lady, but these girls seem a bit too energetic. Let's buzz on board while we're safe!"

The idea was adopted at once, and, laughing heartily, we hurried to the Conqueror and mounted the gangway. The Isirium girls were beaten. They were afraid to follow us on to the land yacht.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Handforth fervently. "You wouldn't believe it. They absolutely collared me, and tried to spirit me away. It was only by sheer force that I escaped."

"Let this be a lesson, old man," I said severely. "Never go out again without an escort. We mustn't roam about singly—"

"That reminds me," interrupted Handforth. "Church and McClure were with me, and the rotters left me in the lurch. I'm going to smash them to pulp as soon as I can lay my fingers on 'em!"

"Well, I like that!" said Church indignantly.

"Oh, here you are!" roared Handforth. "Here! Leggo—"

"No fighting on deck, old son," said Pitt firmly.

"Handy's mad!" snorted Church. "We wanted to stay with him, but he told us to clear off. And now he's grumbling. He wanted to be alone, so that the girls should see him in all his glory."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was chipped until he went crimson, and there might have been serious trouble but for the fact that Irene and Co. appeared. And Edward Oswald dived below in confusion.

It was just about breakfast-time, and so we remained on board. For Nelson Lee had decided that we should take all our meals in the Conqueror's saloon, as usual.

During breakfast we heard all sorts of news. In honour of our visit the emperor had proclaimed a public holiday, as we already knew. But it seemed that there were to be games and chariot racing and other excitements in the arena.

"Arena, eh?" said Jack Grey. "That sounds truly Roman!"

"My dear kid, they've got an amphitheatre here that knocks the old Roman circuses to fits," said Lord Dorrimore. "I've even heard that they use lions, but that may be a rumour. But it's quite possible that they've got lions in this valley. Just the climate for them, anyhow."

Umlosi gave a grunt, but said nothing.

"What's wrong, old friend?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"My heart is sad, O Umtagati," replied the Kutana chief. "Last night it seemed that fighting would be with us, but now all is peace. I am of heavy heart, my master. What evil fancy brought us to this place of quietness? 'Tis not as I had hoped."

"You bloodthirsty old rogue!" chuckled Dorrie. "We only brought you in case of emergencies. Things may be peaceful now, but there's no tellin'. An' when the right time comes, you'll be ready enough."

"Wise words, my father," rumbled Umlosi. "And may the hour be soon!"

As soon as breakfast was over we went on deck again, and found that the sun was beating down with fierce heat. Our old friend, Horatius Placidus, had arrived, and was on deck, looking round with great interest.

He had taken a fancy to escort a party through the city, to point out the various places of interest. Quite a number of fellows entered into the idea with enthusiasm.

And Placidus, who was as good-natured as ever, set off from the central square, surrounded by more than a dozen of us. We were beginning to like him immensely, for he was jolly and breezy.

"And there, on my right, stands the great prison of Isirium," he said, as we were passing an unusually severe-looking building. "Have a care that thou remaineth on the outside, for 'tis far more pleasant than the interior. And once within, by Mars, 'tis precious little hope thou wilt have of witnessing the rise of another moon!"

We passed quite close by the prison. Indeed, we could even see into the windows—all of which were protected by great metal bars. And while we were looking into one of these apertures we caught sight of two slim figures.

They were both young girls, clinging to one another, and weeping piteously. From their simple garb, we judged them to be slaves, and wondered what crime they had committed to suffer this imprisonment.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHARIOT CHAMPION.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE allowed his monocle to drop abruptly.

"I say, dash it all!" he protested. "This is a bit thick, what? I mean, shoving these priceless damsels into the old prison, and all that sort of thing! It seems to me there's something absolutely wrong!"

"We can't interfere, Archie," I said. "And perhaps they're not as innocent as they look."

At the same time, I couldn't help feeling sorry for the two girls. They were both quite young, not older than sixteen or seventeen. And they were refined in appearance and quite good-looking. With their hair lying in masses over their shoulders, they looked almost like children. And they gazed out at us with mute appeal in their eyes.

"I wonder what they've done?" said Handforth doubtfully.

I asked our guide, in my best Latin.

"A sad case," replied Placidus, his usual smile vanishing. "I sorrow for the unhappy twain. It is said they were caught in the act of pilfering from their master."

"Naught else but pilfering?" I asked in surprise.

"A trivial offence, as thou dost hint," agreed Placidus, nodding. "But it happeneth that their master be no less than Lars Melos—and he the emperor's chief adviser."

"And doth this man, Melos, allow such harshness?" I inquired.

Placidus looked round in a mysterious kind of way, his fat figure bending towards me. And when he spoke his voice was in a lower key.

"'Tis not for me to speak of these things, but know thee that Melos is a man of brutal cruelty and passion," he murmured. "My heart bleeds for these girls, for 'tis certain they are innocent of any real wrong-doing. But they are here by the orders of Melos himself, and their presence in this chamber is vastly significant."

"Significant of what?"

"It meaneth that they are marked down for punishment to-day," replied Placidus sadly. "And it meaneth, also, that the punishment shall be in the great arena. Indeed, thou wilt witness the thing with thine own eyes, since thou art to be present, at the emperor's command."

"But what will befall these maidens?" I asked curiously.

"Question me not further, for, by Mercury, it paineth me to dwell on this subject," growled my portly informant. "I fear me I have a soft heart, and no stomach for this base travesty of justice. Speak not of the matter. Lars Melos is nigh as powerful as the emperor himself, and naught can be done."

Placidus would say no more, and we passed on. The other fellows had only caught a word here and there—their knowledge of Latin being strictly of a Remove quality. Mine was somewhat better, and, naturally, we were all improving by leaps and bounds in our grasp of the language.

"It's a rotten shame!" declared Handforth, after I had explained. "Pilfering, eh? I'll bet the girls didn't do a thing! I expect they were housemaids in this rotter's palace, and they wouldn't let him kiss them, or something! If those girls are ill-treated in the arena while I'm there I'll jolly soon take a hand!"

"Better not interfere, old man," said Church anxiously.

"Why, you callous fathead—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Church. "I'm just as sorry for the girls as you are; but you might make things worse by butting in. After all, these people have their own laws, and they are naturally different to ours."

The subject was dismissed, but the majority of us, I think, keenly retained the memory of those two sweet girls, crying so piteously in one another's arms. And we all harboured a hatred against the unknown Lars Melos. Handforth, indeed, was longing to meet the fellow.

I wasn't a bit surprised when Reggie Pitt announced, some little time later, that the chums of Study D were missing from the party. Handforth and Co. had dropped behind for some reason.

"I hope to goodness he hasn't gone back to that prison," I said anxiously. "He'll only stir up trouble if he starts anything like that."

As it happened, my surmise was wrong. Handforth had merely evinced a great interest in a wonderful chariot which had drawn up outside one of the mansions of the nobles. It was in charge of a gaily attired slave, who seemed greatly proud of his position.

The chariot was a magnificent car, mounted on two wheels, and the woodwork was highly polished, and beautifully inlaid with gold and ivory. The wheels were wonders in themselves, being carved in patterns all over the spokes, and the axles and the pole were ornamented by carved figures.

There were four horses attached to the chariot—harnessed abreast, in the true Roman style. The animals were rather small and stunted, but lively and graceful, nevertheless. Apparently there was a great shortage of horses in Isirium, for very few were to be seen.

"Jolly good!" said Handforth critically. "Of course, they make a lot of fuss about these chariots, but they're simple enough to drive, really. And why can't they put the horses in a sensible way—in pairs?"

"It's the usual thing to harness chariot horses like this," said Church.

"And they're not so simple, either," added McClure. "I mean, we couldn't drive a chariot without heaps of practice."



And Phipps was a transformed Phipps. He was dressed in the full glory of rich Isirium costume—complete with sandals, toga, glittering decorations, and helmet-like head-gear.

"You mean you couldn't," interrupted Handforth tartly. "I could!"

"Rats!"

"By George, I'll soon show you, my lad!" exclaimed Handforth, in a grim voice. "And I'll make you realise that I'm a giddy champion at this job. Huh! There's nothing in it!"

"Look here, Handy, you're not going to try—" began Church, in alarm.

"Leggo! I'm going to drive this chariot!" said Handforth curtly, wrenching himself away from his chums. "And you fellows are going to see something startling!"

Church and McClure believed it.

CHAPTER XVI.

HANDFORTH TAKES A BATH.



HANDFORTH was quite firm in his determination.

McClure had been unwise enough to make a tactless remark. And Edward Oswald, with characteristic speed and impulsiveness, had determined to show precisely what he could do. He marched up to the chariot, walked round it with an air of great importance, and nodded to the charioteer.

"Get out of that!" he said briskly. "I'm going to have a drive."

The charioteer smiled with polite cheerfulness. But, having no knowledge of the English language, he remained still.

"Understand?" went on Handforth, glaring. "It's no good pretending, my son. You're only a slave, and you've got to obey orders— Eh? What's that? Don't bother now, Walter Church—"

"Fathead! He can't understand you!" said Church.

"Why not? Is he deaf?"

"My dear idiot, he only understands Latin—"

"I'm not your dear idiot, or anybody else's idiot, and it's like this chap's nerve to know nothing else but Latin!" roared Handforth, with a fine disregard of reason. "Of all the cheek! A blessed slave—and I've got to go to the bother of talking to him in Latin!"

"Disgraceful!" said Church indignantly.

"You ought to write to the papers about it!" exclaimed McClure.

"They haven't got any papers here, ass!" retorted Handforth. "And why should I go to the trouble of talking Latin?"

"Why?" echoed Church.

"Because he can't talk Latin!" murmured McClure.

"What's that?" asked Edward Oswald suspiciously. "By George, are you starting your old habit of muttering? It's a pity I brought you chaps along—you're only a nuisance!" He turned to the charioteer. "Now, then—get a move on, my lad!" he added sharply.

The charioteer smiled more broadly than ever, and Handforth was quite exasperated. He leapt into the chariot with such unexpected violence that the vehicle reared up; and the four spirited horses, startled, leapt away.

Handforth obtained his wish—but only by accident.

For the charioteer, thrown off his balance, pitched out of the car before he could recover himself, leaving Handforth in full possession. But things were not quite as Handforth had pictured.

In the first place, instead of standing majestically in the chariot, a fine figure for all to see, he was sitting in the bottom, with his headdress pushed over his face; and the rattling and bumping was so severe that he could hardly catch his breath.

In the meantime, Church and McClure were racing after the runaway chariot in a state of immense alarm.

"He'll kill himself—that's what he'll do!" panted Church.

"Oh, the ass—the reckless idiot!" snorted McClure.

Handforth managed somehow to get to his feet and seize the reins. He hauled on to these vigorously, taking good care to hang on to an ornamental knob with his other hand.

"Whoa!" he panted breathlessly. "Steady on! Not so fast, my beauties!"

The four steeds appeared to think they were being urged on, or perhaps Handforth's methods were rather too brusque. At all events, the horses plunged on recklessly without making the slightest attempt to pull up.

The chariot swerved into one of the main thoroughfares, where pedestrians were busily passing to and fro about their business, and where other chariots and vehicles were moving up and down—the majority being drawn by slaves.

Shouts went up on all sides, and the people scattered madly.

More by luck than anything else, disaster was avoided during those first tense moments. Handforth certainly did nothing to bring his mad career to an end. His efforts, indeed, only seemed to frighten his steeds the more.

"My hat! They're running away!" gasped Handforth in alarm.

The very thing which had been obvious from the first moment had only just dawned on him. And now it was too late to regain control. The leader of Study D simply clung to the chariot for dear life. He certainly didn't appear as a hero in the eyes of the populace.

And worse was to come.

For just near the great central square Ena Handforth and Tessa Love and several of the other girls were strolling, accompanied by Archie Glenthorne and several more Remove juniors; and Irene was a member of the party.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne, suddenly coming to a halt. "What, if I may ask the question, is this? Dash it all, these chariot chappies are frightfully reckless, you know! I mean to say, this whizzing about business— Oddslife! It appears to be Handy!"

"It is Handy!" said Willy calmly. "Good! Did you ever see such beautiful driving? If we watch closely, we shall probably see him do some nice fancy work at this corner! But it'll be a pity to knock some of these buildings over!"

"Oh! There's going to be an accident!" exclaimed Irene breathlessly.

"Of course there is," agreed Handforth minor. "Isn't there always an accident when Ted breaks away? Whoa! Look out, there— Hi! Steer clear, you reckless fathead!"

Willy gave a leap for life, and everybody else scattered, too. For, reaching the open square, the four startled chariot horses swerved abruptly. For several seconds the chariot careered along gracefully on one wheel.

And then, with one accord, the four horses swung completely round, rearing up madly on their haunches. They had suddenly caught sight of the conqueror, and this unfamiliar object scared them.

The chariot, hardly built for such drastic treatment, shot over on its side and hurled Handforth into the air like an arrow from a

By this time the rest of the juniors had grasped the position.

"I'm not going to wear these!" snorted Handforth warmly. "Great pip! Sandals! A giddy toga, or whatever silly name they call it! And what the dickens is this supposed to be?" he added, as he held up another garment.

"Looks like a bathing suit!" said Church. "I say, why not dress up in these togs?" grinned McClure. "It's rather exciting, you know. After all, it would only be a compliment to these people."

"While we're in Rome we must do as Rome does, eh?" grinned Reggie Pitt. "I'm game enough. What do you chaps say? And these togs look pretty cool and airy. It's bound to be blazing hot to-day."

The majority of the fellows entered into the spirit of the affair with gusto. Obviously, Horatius Placidus had made a little mistake—or, at least, had misunderstood me. He had taken it for granted that we wanted Isirium clothing.

We really had no alternative, since every vestige of our own things had vanished. And while some of the juniors were trying to get into their strange attire, our army of slaves glided in.

After that it was comparatively simple, for these slaves, although understanding little of our Latin—for only a few of the juniors could speak it with any fluency—found it easy to assist us in dressing.

There were, of course, one or two objectors—Edward Oswald Handforth and Archie Glenthorne being the two most vigorous.

"Not likely!" snorted Handforth. "I'm not going to make an ass of myself by getting into these fatheaded things! I should look a freak!"

"Rats!" said Church. "You'd be a perfect picture, old man. With your magnificent form, this clothing would be displayed to wonderful advantage. In fact you'd show these Isirium people how their giddy togs really should be worn."

"Rather!" agreed McClure heartily.

Handforth looked doubtful.

"Oh, well, of course, there's that about it!" he admitted. "I mean, my figure. It wouldn't take me long to put these natives in the shade. But I shan't wear the rotten things on principle!"

"You don't need to wear them on principle—they go on your back!" said Pitt.

"And Church is absolutely right, old son. In that toga, and head-dress, and sandals—Why, the result would be staggering!"

"You bet it would!" said McClure, nodding.

"And what's more, I strongly advise you to insist upon your own flannels being fetched," went on Reggie Pitt firmly.

"Eh?"

"My dear chap, you'll cause a riot if you wear these things!" said Reggie, with

perfect gravity. "You can't expect these Isirium people to gaze upon so much beauty of figure without wilting. On all grounds, I think it's better for you to remain quite firm."

Handforth glared.

"Then you can go and eat coke!" he snorted. "I'll do as I please, you ass! And it pleases me to get dressed up in these freak things!"

And Handforth commenced attiring himself—failing to observe that Reggie Pitt winked at the rest of us with much enjoyment. He had only proffered his advice for the one object of making Handforth dress.

Archie was not so violent, but he was firm.

"No, laddies—nothing doing!" he declared. "I mean to say, it's absolutely beyond the good old dig. of a Glenthorne to waltz about in such frightful garb! Pray go ahead, old companions—and leave Archie to linger on the old couch until Phipps proceeds to roll up."

"Lazy bounder!" said Alf Brent severely.

"Oh, come!" protested Archie. "I mean to say, old bath-bun, come! I positively cannot lift a finger until Phipps materialises. Do you realise, dash it, that Phipps would expire on the spot if he saw me in such a get-up? Why, the poor old cove would absolutely shrivel up. He's most awfully strict about clobber, don't you know?"

"Well, here he is—as large as life, but rather unearthly," chuckled Pitt.

Phipps, indeed, had just appeared from between the folds of the rich curtains. And Phipps was a transformed Phipps. He was dressed in the full glory of rich Isirium costume—complete with sandals, togs, glittering decorations, and helmet-like headgear.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie, startled.

"I trust, sir, that I have not unduly shocked you?" said Phipps, gravely. "But it appears that the emperor looks upon these matters with rather a strict eye. He desires that we should all honour him by donning the national costume."

"Oh, well, in that case—I mean, what? Perhaps it would be just as well, if you absolutely think so, Phipps," said Archie dubiously. "At the same time, old scout, I'm most frightfully dithery about it all."

But with the assistance of Phipps, Archie dressed. In the meantime the other juniors were practically ready. And we all found that the Roman-like costume, although strange, was undoubtedly cool and comfortable.

And very soon afterwards we were out in the big square, causing considerable surprise and comment among the inhabitants of the capital. Fortunately nobody saw us from the Conqueror, except one or two members of the crew, who grinned with full appreciation.

"Shall we go on board, or try a little stroll?" suggested De Valerie.

"Well, nobody seems to be up yet, so perhaps we'd better have a constitutional down one of the main thoroughfares," I said. "And we're all keen upon having a look round, aren't we?"

"Rather!" declared a dozen voices.

So we wandered out into the city streets.

CHAPTER XIII.

HANDFORTH'S FATAL BEAUTY.



ARCHIE GLENTHORNE looked quite pleased with himself.

"I must remark, dear old chappies, that everything is somewhat ripe and fruity," he observed. "I mean to say, the old knees may be somewhat bare, but what matters? It seems to me that every dashed chappie has got bare knees in this town. So we're in the good old fashion, what!"

"That's the way to look at it," said Pitt. "There's nothing like being broadminded. But I hardly think the eyeglass is necessary, Archie. It looks a bit out of place, you know."

Many of the juniors were grinning at Archie. He insisted upon wearing his monocle, and its appearance on his face was incongruous. But nothing would make him remove it.

Handforth had made up his mind to go off alone; he didn't want to be bothered with the rest of the fellows. But Church and McClure were determined to accompany him. Not that they really wanted to do so. Their one object was to keep their impulsive leader out of mischief. They were convinced that he would soon stir up some trouble if he went off on his own.

"I didn't ask you fellows to come!" said Handforth tartly.

"Oh, well, might as well be together!" said Church, with a careless air.

"Rot! Clear off!"

Church and McClure, for the sake of peace, dropped behind a bit. And Handforth stalked on alone, in all his majesty. He had adopted a quite unusual strut—the result, probably, of his unfamiliar clothing. But McClure held a different view.

"This is what comes of Pitt's silly spoofing!" he growled. "He's made Handy think that he's a kind of Greek god, or something! And you had something to do with it, too, old man."

"Well, I like that——"

"You started pulling his leg in the first place——"

"And you agreed with me!" interrupted Church tartly. "Not that it matters. If Handy's by himself, he can't get up to any mischief. We'd better stick behind here, and just keep him in sight."

This plan was altogether agreeable to them. For it enabled them to watch Handforth's progress, and to see the sights at the same time. And there were certainly plenty of scenes to interest them in the Isirium streets.

It was a novel experience.

The smoothly paved roadway, the delightful side-walks, and the magnificent buildings interested the juniors intensely. These buildings were not all stately mansions with massive colonnades.

In many places the most exquisite shops were to be seen, not shops of the European kind, but great open emporiums, where goods of every description were to be seen, artistically displayed.

And the people themselves were attractive.

Most of these Roman-like inhabitants were tall and well-built, with clear complexions, and well-formed features. There seemed to be no poverty in the place, for everybody was well-dressed and finely nourished. And the people seemed to take great pride in their personal appearance.

Chariots were constantly passing up and down the roads, many of these vehicles being beautifully decorated, and driven by slaves. And while some of them were drawn by horses, the majority relied upon man-power for their locomotion.

Everybody gazed at the St. Frank's fellows with unfeigned interest. The ladies, in particular, were much attracted. And Handforth, walking along in isolated dignity, began to find this somewhat embarrassing.

He didn't mind the men so much and he didn't mind the elderly ladies. In fact, he rather liked their curiosity and keen scrutiny. But when it came to the younger members of the gentle sex, he began to wish that he had stayed with the crowd.

For the young ladies of Isirium were far from shy.

Two or three of them gathered round Handforth, laughing, clapping their hands with delight, and speaking to him in low-pitched, gentle voices. And it wasn't long before half a dozen others joined the group.

"My goodness!" muttered Handforth, horrified.

His way of escape was closed. Even if he made up his mind to bolt, it would be useless, for these laughing damsels completely surrounded him. They were extraordinarily interested in his general appearance, and discussed him with shouts of glee.

"Good!" said Church callously. "The fathead asked for it, and now he's got it. I only hope that Irene comes along. We'll chip him to death about it later on."

"Rather!" grinned McClure.

They hung back at a safe distance, glancing round apprehensively from time to time, in case they were made the object of a similar demonstration. But it was apparently only Handforth's fatal beauty

bow. He executed several swift somersaults, and dived gracefully into the fountain pool.

"Jolly good!" said Willy approvingly.

CHAPTER XVII.

OFF TO THE SPORTS.



FORTUNATELY, the four chariot horses were seized by a number of slaves on the other side of the square, and no further damage was done.

Handforth rose out of the fountain pool, drenched and forlorn.

"He looks like the Old Man of the Sea!" said his minor critically. "I admire him for choosing a soft spot like that, but what about his wonderful dignity?"

"You be quiet, Willy!" exclaimed his sister. "I'm going to inquire into this affair, and—"

"In that case, sis I'm off!" interrupted Willy briskly. "I can always find plenty of trouble, without deliberately holding out my hand for it. Good-bye-ee—and may the saints preserve poor old Ted!"

"Wretch!" said Ena indignantly.

Handforth was assisted out of the pool by several of the juniors—who now regarded the affair as rather a good joke. For some reason Handforth didn't quite see the point of it.

"You're jolly lucky!" declared Bob Christine. "Why, you might have been killed! And what were you doing in that chariot, anyhow? Who told you to drive it?"

"By Jove," said Reggie Pitt, in surprise. "Was he?"

"Was he what?"

"Driving it?" said Reggie blandly. "I had a sort of hazy idea that the giddy thing was running away with him. But, of course, we all make mistakes. Come on, Handy, tell us all about it."

"I'm afraid you're too optimistic, Reggie," laughed Doris Berkeley. "If I were Handy, I'd keep mum! The least said the better! Surely, he knows that he's made a fearful ass of himself? Just fancy! Trying to drive a chariot like that! He absolutely asked for trouble."

Doris was just about right. Edward Oswald had no desire to go into any details. His wish for chariot riding was dead—he had no desire whatever to see a chariot again, in all his life. He regarded them with complete contempt.

"Chariots?" he snorted. "My only hat! It's about time these people woke up! Of all the rotten, antediluvian objects, a chariot is the worst!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't wish to be personal, but you're just as mad as ever, Ted!" said his sister firmly. "Haven't you got more sense than to drive a chariot at that speed?"

"Look here, sis—"

"I don't want to hear any excuses," interrupted Ena. "Go on board at once, and change your clothes."

"But—but—"

"This instant!" said Ena, pointing a firm finger.

"I tell you—"

"Are you going, or are you not?" asked Miss Handforth, with a kind of ominous quietness. "My patience is nearly over, Ted, and I'm not going to be flouted—"

Handforth uttered a groan, and fled. Anything, in fact, was better than standing here to listen to his sister's caustic comments. Ena had a way of making him feel several feet smaller than his natural height.

After Handforth had changed—this time into his own familiar flannels—he got so much better that his chariot ride had taken on a new aspect. He seemed to imagine that he had done something wonderful, and even boasted about it.

Possibly he would have been chipped unmercifully but for the fact that a special messenger arrived from the Imperial Palace with a request from the emperor that his guests should prepare themselves for the entertainment in the great Amphitheatre.

And so, after an early lunch, a start was made.

The affair was rather impressive.

A long procession of sumptuous, glittering chariots drew up in the square opposite the Conqueror. There were enough vehicles for us all. And, having taken our places, the drive to the great Amphitheatre commenced.

It was an interesting time, for we went straight out through one of the main arteries of the city to the further outskirts—to a part of Isirium that we had not previously seen.

We passed many interesting buildings on the way—not private mansions, or such like edifices, but the great baths, manufacturing centres, and a kind of great covered wholesale market that was a centre of thriving activity.

And just beyond lay the great, imposing colonnades of the Amphitheatre. It reminded us irresistibly of the ruins we had seen in more civilised parts of the world.

But this Amphitheatre, instead of being a ruin—a dead relic—was in a superb state of preservation, and throbbing with the life of this small, but virile nation.

"A pretty big place, by the look of it," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "We ought to see some good sport this afternoon, Lee. If these people are anythin' like their celebrated ancestors, we shall witness a thunderin' good show."

Nelson Lee didn't seem very enthusiastic.

"A good show—from their own point of view, perhaps," he agreed. "But, frankly, old man, I have my doubts. If I am any judge of character, the Emperor Titus IV. is a man who delights in brutal, degrading exhibitions. I am not altogether sure that

the sport will be suitable for our own party."

"Well, we shall have to chance it," said his lordship.

The Amphitheatre was gay with highly coloured bunting—flags and pennants floating out in the vivid sunshine in a perfect riot of profusion and colour. And I wondered what the afternoon's sport would consist of.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GLADIATORS.



THOUSANDS of voices arose on the hot air, making a general, confused outcry that impressed us strangely.

We were sitting in the emperor's own enclosure, and before us stretched the great circus, with the sand-covered arena immediately below.

The great tiers of stone seats were packed to suffocation, and half Isirium seemed to be present. The picture was one of such novelty that we had no time for any sustained conversation. Handforth was about the only fellow who made comments.

"Reminds me of the giddy Stadium at Wembley when there's a Cup Final on the bill!" he remarked. "Blessed if I can see anything to go dotty about!"

"I didn't know anybody was going dotty!" said Church. "Hallo! What's this? By jingo! Don't they look fine?"

He was referring to the gaily attired arena attendants, who had already made their appearance immediately below. Some of the juniors were sitting at the extreme front of the enclosure, with nothing but a low parapet between them and the arena—although it was a considerable drop into the arena itself.

In the time of the Ancient Romans it was, of course, the customary thing to pit gladiators against one another—to fight a desperate battle to the death, for the brutal edification of the onlookers. But it was hardly possible that these modern descendants of the race indulged in similar spectacles.

We all felt glad that great canvas awnings were stretched over the emperor's enclosure, so that we were protected from the fierce glare of the Sahara sun. Titus IV. himself sat in isolated magnificence on a lofty throne, some little distance above us. His garments were of rich colouring, and he seemed to take everything as a matter of course. There was no sparkle of interest in his eyes—but rather one of bored lassitude.

Suddenly a great peal of trumpets blared forth, accompanied by the impressive clashing of cymbals. We all sat up, and felt certain that the programme was on the point of commencing.

"What ho!" murmured Archie, adjusting his monocle. "This, I take it, is where the

band begins to play, so to speak. Oddslife! Who are the priceless gentlemen in the jazz costumes, as it were?"

"Gladiators!" said Brent breathlessly.

A roar went up from the crowd, and from beneath the great marble archway—a noble-looking structure, supported by marble pillars—double doors had been flung wide open.

And then, two by two, and with a slow marching step, the gladiators came into view. There were forty or fifty of them, at least. All were picked men—fellows of magnificent physique and great strength. We could easily see that they were highly trained.

They marched completely round the arena, the crowds cheering them throughout the circuit. And then, when they had completed the march, they turned towards the emperor's enclosure and drew up into a well-formed double line.

The emperor made a sign, and the gladiators raised their arms, displaying their glittering weapons.

"Ave, Titus!" they shouted triumphantly.

It was evidently the signal for events to commence. And we were certainly provided with some thrilling fare. The first event on the programme was a wonderful display of skill on the part of a dozen gladiators.

These men did the most amazing things acrobatically, and Johnny Onions was probably the most interested person among the visitors. Being an acrobat himself, he could appreciate the superb skill displayed by these men of Isirium.

Gymnastics of the most elaborate nature were performed, and it seemed to us that the crowd treated these events with singular coolness. For there were hardly any indications of applause—except from the Conqueror's party. Lord Derrimore, the St. Frank's juniors, and all the rest clapped and cheered with so much enthusiasm that the emperor was rather amused.

And then came the chariot racing—a truly impressive event.

At first there were just two rows of chariots, and the way they tore round the sand-covered arena was a revelation. Their drivers controlled their teams with astounding skill.

But this was nothing compared to the big chariot race which followed.

There were no less than twelve competitors, and the dozen chariots looked magnificent as they were all lined up, waiting for the word to start. It was with difficulty that the charioteers kept their steeds in order.

"Isn't it just wonderful?" asked Irene, with sparkling eyes.

"Yes, rather!" said Doris. "I say, I rather fancy that young fellow at the extreme end—the one with wavy, fair hair! I'll bet he'll win! Which one do you like, Marjorie?"

"Oh, I don't know—they're all splendid!" said Marjorie.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a football match," said Handforth thoughtfully. "It would make these people sit up, you know! Chario racing is all very well, but—"

"Rats!" said Church. "Can't play football in this heat!"

"Well, cricket, then," said Handforth accommodatingly.

"Cricket? In loose sand?"

"Of course, you'd naturally make all the objections you could!" said Handforth tartly. "If it comes to that, we could sweep the sand away, and then—"

"They're off!" roared Willy excitedly.

Even Handforth stopped talking now. The chariot race was a wonderful, inspiring spectacle. To see those twelve cars careering round the arena was more exciting than any sports event of the normal type.

Only by superb skill could the charioteers keep their vehicles from colliding. At times they would be racing along abreast, with only a few bare inches separating the madly careering cars.

But at last it was over, with the spectators rather breathless with the excitement of it all.

"Jolly good!" declared Reggie Pitt. "If the rest of the programme is as exciting, we shan't have much to grumble at."

As it happened, the rest of the programme was to be not only exciting, but absolutely packed with thrills.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SLAVE GIRLS' PERIL.



NELSON LEE was looking pleased and relieved.

"Perhaps I was misjudging our hosts, Dorrie," he remarked, during the lull. "There had certainly been nothing objection-

able so far. On the contrary, the programme has been inspiring in every way. A most excellent afternoon of sport."

"These chaps know how to amuse themselves—what?" smiled his lordship. "The more I think of it, Lee, the more I am startled. To think that these people have retained all the old customs and games! And yet it's not so queer, when you come to think of it sensibly. Life must have been slow and steady in this valley during the last seven or eight hundred years."

"Progress has naturally been retarded enormously," agreed Nelson Lee. "Cut off from the rest of the world, these descendants of the Romans have just gone on peacefully and— Just a moment, old man!"

Lee broke off as a big, richly attired Isirium noble came swaggering up, with the obvious intention of conversing. We had seen him with the emperor on many occasions, and cared little for him.

He was a man with a brutal cast of countenance—a heavy jowl, a coarse, cruel



Handforth delivered one of his famous rights—a terrific swinging blow, straight from the shoulder. It landed fairly and squarely on the lion's nose, and the beast gave one roar of pain, and bolted.

mouth, and with great bags beneath his drink-sodden eyes. There was nothing very attractive about this member of the emperor's court.

"Ho! The games pleaseth my friends?" he exclaimed boisterously, as he faced Lee and the other members of the group. "Is it that thou art satisfied?"

"Ay, truly!" replied Nelson Lee. "It is, indeed, my wish to congratulate thee—"

"Congratulate me?" laughed the other. "What have I, Lars Melos, done to earn thy congratulations? 'Tis for thee to pay thy tribute to the emperor himself. I care not for these paltry trifles."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"What wouldst have, my friend?" he asked.

"Thou wilt see—and soon," replied the other. "For now commenceth the one event that will truly be worth the trouble of watching. Thou wilt see the machinery of justice at work."

"Justice?" repeated Lee sharply.

"Ay, 'twas the word I used," laughed Lars Melos. "It is a fad of his Imperial Majesty's to witness these events in public. And right well shalt thou see how we punish offenders in our domain."

The noble said no more, but, with a wave of his hand, he went back to his own seat. But I was sitting quite close by, and I gathered the purport of his words.

"Lars Melos!" I murmured to my chums. "He is the bounder who caused those two slave girls to be thrown in prison. Oh, by

the way, those girls are going to be dealt with in the arena, aren't they?"

"So Placidus told us," replied Watson.

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie. "An' there they are, dear fellows!"

Two slim, graceful figures had been thrust forward from the arena entrance, and we looked down with great interest. For the figures were those of the two slave maidens—both apparently in the last stages of terror.

One of them shrieked as she stumbled and fell in the sand. The other girl clung to her, apparently trying to console her. They were both now attired in rough, canvas-like gowns, which were possibly a mark of humiliation—a sign that they were convicted felons.

"Dorrie, I don't like the look of this," muttered Nelson Lee grimly. "There's something infernally sinister here! But, by heaven! If this brute of an emperor makes a public display of cruelty——"

"By the Lord Harry!" roared Dorrie. "Let me see a sign of it, an' I'll wring the hound's neck! Cruelty of any sort is bad enough—but to make two helpless girls the butt of his savage lust is past all bearing!"

Both Lee and Dorrie stood up, anxious and unhurt. But they were half-way up the enclosure—and not in the front position, as were Handforth and many of the other juniors. We were all feeling uncomfortable.

"I say, what's the idea of this?" muttered Church. "What are those girls doing in the ring? It's a bit thick——"

"Look!" gasped McClure, horrified.

He went as pale as a sheet, and his voice was hoarse with concern. And he was not the only one who lost colour. For we all saw the cause of his sudden alarm.

On the other side of the arena a sliding stone panel had been pulled aside, laying bare an oblong black cavity in the arena wall. And from this cavity came two objects—two sleek, tawny creatures, who emerged cautiously, as though afraid.

"Great pip!" breathed Handforth. "Lions!"

"Lions!" gasped Archie. "Good gad!"

The full horror of it did not strike the fellows until the first two seconds had passed. Lions—in the arena! This was indeed the real Roman stuff! But it seemed incredible—it seemed too horrible for serious thought.

But there they were—genuine lions, without a doubt.

After a moment or two they raised their shaggy manes, and emitted a number of terrifying roars. One of them came bounding across the arena. And the unfortunate slave girls broke away from one another, and ran wildly, hysterically in circles—too deadly frightened to know what they were doing. In any case there was no escape—for every exit was closed.

A section of the crowd broke forth into wild cheering; but I noticed that these inhuman wretches were mainly clustered

around the emperor. Titus IV, himself was bending forward with eager interest.

"The cur—the inhuman beast!" I panted. "This is what he enjoys—to see his victims torn to shreds before his eyes! We can't stand this, you chaps, we can't——"

"Remove to the rescue!" roared Handforth violently.

With one bound, he reached the top of the stone parapet, and leapt straight down into the arena—into that sand-covered enclosure from which there was no escape.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FURY OF THE EMPEROR.



IRENE MANNERS clutched at Doris and Marjorie with sudden terror.

"Oh! He'll—he'll be killed!" she cried in horror.

"Keep your seats, boys—every one of you!" thundered

Nelson Lee from the rear. "For heaven's sake, keep your seats!"

"But Handforth's gone, sir—he expects us to back him up——"

"Keep your seats!" shouted Lee, more vigorously than ever.

And not a single junior dared to disobey—for there was something in his tone that carried sufficient warning. The gov'nor, no doubt, was not anxious to see a number of fellows go to their death. It would be serious enough to lose Handforth—And then my thoughts in this direction were shattered, for some action of Nelson Lee's told me the truth.

In the meantime, Handforth was racing across the sand to the accompaniment of wild, excited shouting from the greater masses of the audience. The emperor was on his feet, angry and alarmed.

"Hi! This way!" shouted Handforth desperately.

The slave girls took no notice of him—their terror was too great. The next moment Edward Oswald reached the first victim, and picked her up in his arms as though she were a feather-weight.

"Hurrah!"

A roar of cheering broke out from the juniors as Handforth came staggering back, carrying the girl. But the roar changed to a sudden gasp of fear as one of the lions changed his direction, and came bounding down upon the courageous junior with a mighty roar.

"Oh, Ted—Ted!" breathed Ena faintly.

"It's all right, sis—he'll pull through!" muttered Willy unsteadily.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Three times, in rapid succession, Nelson Lee's revolver spurted fire. Simultaneously the lion—now within ten feet of the racing Handforth—stumbled in his tracks, turned over and over in the most grotesque fashion.

and subsided into a quivering, convulsively distorted mass.

"Hurrah! He's dead—he's killed!"

Handforth half turned, saw the fall of the lion, and he bundled his fair charge down into the sand. For something had caught his eye which made his heart leap within him.

The second lion was making straight for the other girl. No doubt these beasts had been kept without food for days, and were in a savage, violent mood.

"Shoot, sir!" yelled a dozen voices.

"I can't! The girl is in the line of fire!" replied Lee hoarsely.

Handforth started, and then rushed back across the sand towards the second girl. All this was happening in a very brief space, but it seemed to take ages. These tense moments were long ones.

To make matters worse, Handforth himself got between the lion and Nelson Lee's line of fire. But now another figure was leaping down into the arena—and this time it was Umlosi, armed with his faithful spear.

"Wau! A fight!" he shouted triumphantly.

"Oh! Look at Handy—it's all up with him!" panted McClure.

And, indeed, it seemed that such was the case. For Edward Oswald, giving no thought whatever to the odds, rushed full tilt at the lion as though he were in no danger whatever. And the savage beast turned his attention from the fainting girl, and faced this newcomer.

"Clear off, you rotter!" roared Handforth fiercely.

He didn't wait for the lion to attack him. Indeed, he was so excited that he probably didn't realise his peril. And he performed an action that startled the onlookers—and fairly amazed the lion.

Crash!

Handforth delivered one of his famous rights—a terrific, swinging blow, straight from the shoulder. It landed fairly and squarely on the lion's nose, and the beast gave one roar of pain and bolted.

"My goodness!" said Handforth faintly.

It wasn't until that moment that he realised the narrowness of his escape. If he had realised it earlier, he would probably have gone to his death. But his bold, fearless attack had put a wholesome fear into the lion.

And even now the animal's troubles were not over.

For Umlosi was near, and he hurled his spear with unerring aim—the weapon burying itself in the brute's side. Not that the lion was vanquished. He turned upon his attacker with a snarl of maddened fury.

But, quick as thought, Umlosi leapt aside, and grabbed the shaft of the spear as the lion shot by. And then the beast sprang at him with gaping jaws and bared teeth.

One thrust—one lightning-like dodge—and the fight was over.

"Hurrah! They're saved!" thundered the juniors.

The girls were cheering and clapping, too. And, strangely enough, nine-tenths of the audience joined in the shouts of approval—cheer after cheer rising on the air in ever-growing volume. The amphitheatre had been provided with a thrill that it seldom enjoyed.

But the emperor and his nobles were thunderstruck. Titus IV., in truth, was raving with an almost uncontrollable rage. Again and again he shouted that he would have these "accursed invaders" put to the death.

Before his eyes they had ruined the one tit-bit of the afternoon that he had been eagerly looking forward to. And Lars Melos was no less enraged. His own chagrin was great. His slave girls had been rescued, and both the lions were dead. And lions were all too scarce.

"What wilt thou do, sire?" fumed Melos thickly.

"Wait. 'Tis best to be calm," replied the emperor curtly. "But, by Mars! There shall be a reckoning for this day's work, my Melos. There shall be a reckoning!"

The emperor watched sullenly as Handforth and Umlosi raised the two slave girls up the wall of the arena, where they were grasped by Nelson Lee and many of the juniors who were eagerly helping. The peril was over, and Handforth was the hero of the hour.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE IDOL OF THE POPULACE.



"HURRAH!"

"Three cheers for Handy!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Everybody cheered with enthusiasm, for Edward Oswald had, indeed, covered himself with glory.

"Oh, chuck it!" he growled uncomfortably. "What's all the fuss about? Stop that beastly din, you asses!"

It was quite characteristic of Handforth to look upon his feat with careless indifference. He was always the same. A genuine, unadulterated act of bravery he would perform, and think nothing of it, and would, indeed, resent the acclamation of his friends. But if he indulged in some trifling act of recklessness which provoked a mere laugh, he would calmly expect everybody to cheer.

"Good old Handy! Always modest when it comes to the real thing," said Reggie Pitt heartily. "It's all right, old man—we know you!"

"Then don't make such a song over nothing!" growled Handforth. "I say, you girls, I've got an idea! Why don't you

take these poor things to the Conqueror and give 'em a good time? In fact, it would be a good idea to take them in as your slaves."

Handforth was referring to the Isirium girls who were now only just recovering from the terrifying ordeal. And Irene and Co. entered into the suggestion with hearty approval.

"Oh, Ted, that's a fine idea!" declared Irene. "But we can't take the two girls as our slaves; we don't believe in slaves. But we'll look after them, and try to help them in their troubles."

"Good egg!" said Handforth delightedly.

In the meantime Nelson Lee was talking seriously with the emperor. And not merely Lee alone, but Lord Dorrimore, Sir Crawford Grey, Mr. Pitt, and Sir Edward Handforth. They formed a kind of stern committee, with Nelson Lee as the spokesman.

"Perchance we have offended your Majesty's ideas of hospitality?" Nelson Lee was saying. "But we could not stand by and see those helpless victims at the mercy of the lions."

"They were slaves, condemned to death in the arena!" stormed Titus.

"But was it in good taste to feast our eyes upon such a sorry spectacle?" asked Nelson Lee. "'Tis not out of place to criticise and to bear thee ill-will, good Titus. But in our great countries beyond the desert such acts are no longer permitted. For 'tis a sign of barbarity and brutal cruelty to treat slaves in such manner. Our ways are not thy ways. And so we could do naught but slay the lions."

The emperor waved his hand.

"Enough!" he grunted. "'Tis too late to speak. The lions are dead. They cannot be brought to life."

But Nelson Lee insisted upon talking. He explained how horrifying it was to civilised eyes to see such deeds committed. But it is probable that the emperor failed to understand. He offered no objection when Nelson Lee declared that the two rescued girls would be removed to the Conqueror.

"Well, it's one for old Melox, anyhow," said Handforth grimly.

"Melox?" repeated Church. "I suppose you mean Melos?"

"I like Melox better, it reminds me of dogs," said Handforth brilliantly. "And if that rotter isn't a dog, who is?"

On the way back to the Conqueror, in the chariots, the streets were lined with shouting, gesticulating crowds. And it was Handforth they wanted—Handforth and Umlosi—but mainly the former.

In the course of a single hour, Edward Oswald had become the idol of the populace. He was cheered to the echo. Isirium girls surrounded the chariot which Handforth rode in, all of them attempting to touch him, and to gain a smile from him.

"I say, this is getting a bit thick!" grinned Pitt. "We shall have Handy losing his head one of these days. He can't stand very much of this sort of thing, you know!"

"Rats! He deserves it!" declared Jack Grey.

"Squashed!" grinned Reggie. "But you're right, old son!"

Even when we arrived on the Conqueror the demonstration did not cease. And, as I pointed out to the other fellows, there was something very significant about it.

For it proved that the great majority of the Isirium public were opposed to the emperor's cruelties in the arena. Handforth had saved those two young lives, and he was a hero. Nelson Lee's part in the rescue was ignored, although, strictly speaking, Lee had done as much as the others. But his part had not been spectacular.

If the populace had been eager to see that terrible act of bestial cruelty, Handforth would have received nothing but condemnation. It was only the emperor's group of powerful supporters that regarded the afternoon's work with anger.

Nine-tenths of the public were overjoyed, and we all felt that we had consolidated our position in the strange desert valley. At the same time, we felt that trouble of some kind was brewing.

And our feelings were by no means at fault!

THE END.

The further adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's in the Roman City of the Sahara will be told next week in another superb story:—

**"BY THE EMPEROR'S COMMAND;
OR, ST. FRANK'S AMONG THE ROMANS!"**

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MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



No. 37. THE CITY OF COUNTLESS MOTOR CARS.

WE are seeing an unusually large number of motor-cars on our roads this summer. But if some people believe that our main highways are congested with automobile traffic, they ought to go and have a look at Los Angeles.

In that great metropolis of California the motor-cars are more numerous than in any other city of the world. Los Angeles, indeed, boasts of this fact. Personally, I can't quite see that it is a matter to brag about—for with cars so plentiful, motoring ceases to be a pleasure, and becomes an exceedingly tiresome business.

I have never seen so many automobiles in all my life. Between the hours of five and seven o'clock in the evening, the cars, entering and leaving Los Angeles by every main thoroughfare, form continuous streams—endless processions so great in numbers that speed is quite out of the question.

The motorists simply crawl along one behind the other, with just an occasional burst over two or three hundred yards when an opening happens to appear.

It is one of the traffic regulations in Los Angeles that whenever a tramcar stops to discharge or receive passengers, all other road traffic shall stop, also. This is a very comfortable arrangement for the users of the street cars. But for motorists it is a veritable bugbear.

A whole procession of cars will come to a standstill when a tram stops. The tram will restart, and the cars start also—the foremost making valiant attempts to overtake the tram before the next stopping-place is reached. Perhaps one or two succeed, but there is not sufficient time for others. The tram again halts, and once more the procession pulls up. And so it goes on.

And as every main artery in and out of Los Angeles is served by street cars, the result can be imagined. And perhaps the discomfort of motoring may be realised even more when I explain that the Ameri-

can trams stop at practically every street corner.

At home here a motorist can leave any big city and go for a quiet run in the country. Even on our main roads one can find solitude. But all the main roads round Los Angeles are well populated with traffic. No motorist need fear being stranded. Every principal highway has its two processions of automobiles, and on Saturday or Sunday these processions are continuous for scores and hundreds of miles. Speeding can be indulged in at times, but only at great risk, for there are so many cars on the road that motoring becomes perilous.

The statistics of automobile accidents in Los Angeles and district are rather staggering to the British mind. Every week there are many deaths, and scores of grave injuries. Fatal motor crashes are so common that the public takes scarcely any notice of them.

The majority of these appalling accidents occur at the level crossings—or grade crossings, as they are called in America. The railways cut across the main roads at countless points, and there are no protective gates. The crossings are just bare and open, and every week of the year some rash motorist will be cut to atoms and his car shattered to scrap iron by getting into an argument with a speeding train.

There are certainly warning devices. At each crossing a bell is provided, which clangs loudly as a train approaches. They also have electrically operated signals, which swing to and fro, for every motorist to see. But the absence of gates leaves the way clear for any daring driver to "take a chance." He thinks he can do it—but his judgment is at fault. Result—another ghastly tragedy.

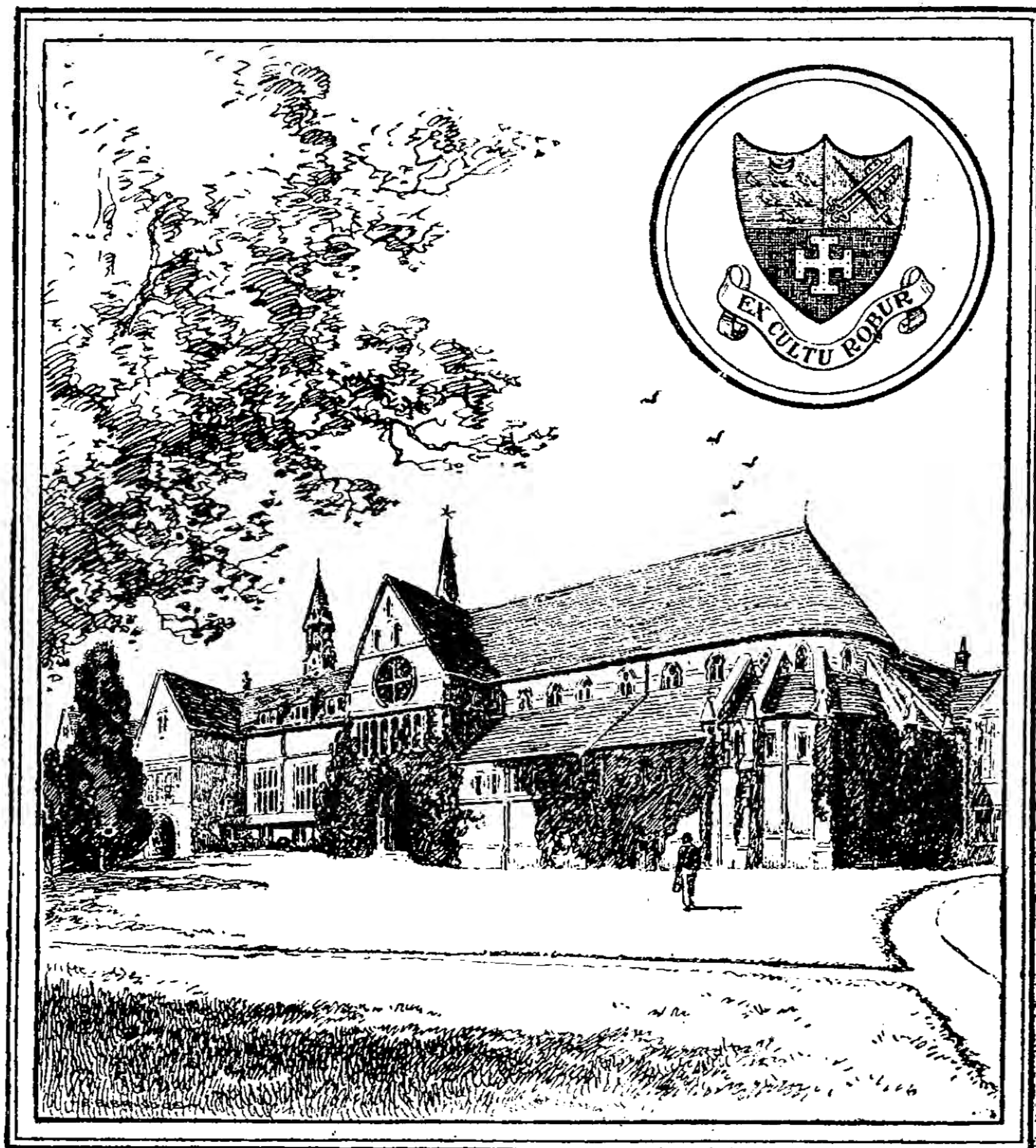
Los Angeles boasts of its countless motor-cars. But I shall hate to see the day when our own cities follow their example!

NEXT WEEK "A TRIP TO HOLLYWOOD."

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 40.—CRANLEIGH SCHOOL.



Cranleigh School was founded in 1863 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1898. Its fine and imposing buildings were erected by public subscriptions from many of the inhabitants of Surrey. The school is situated near Guildford in one of the most beautiful parts of Surrey, on a site presented by Lord Ashcombe. Its object is to provide a sound and liberal education according to Church of England principles. The Senior

School, comprising about 350 boys, is divided into six houses on the hostel system, and possesses a magnificent chapel, dining-hall, library, etc. The Preparatory School, numbering about 60 boys under 13, was opened in 1913. The cricket and football fields are extensive, amounting to over 40 acres. The school supplies a contingent of the O.T.C., to which all boys in the Senior School belong.



St. Frank's Magazine

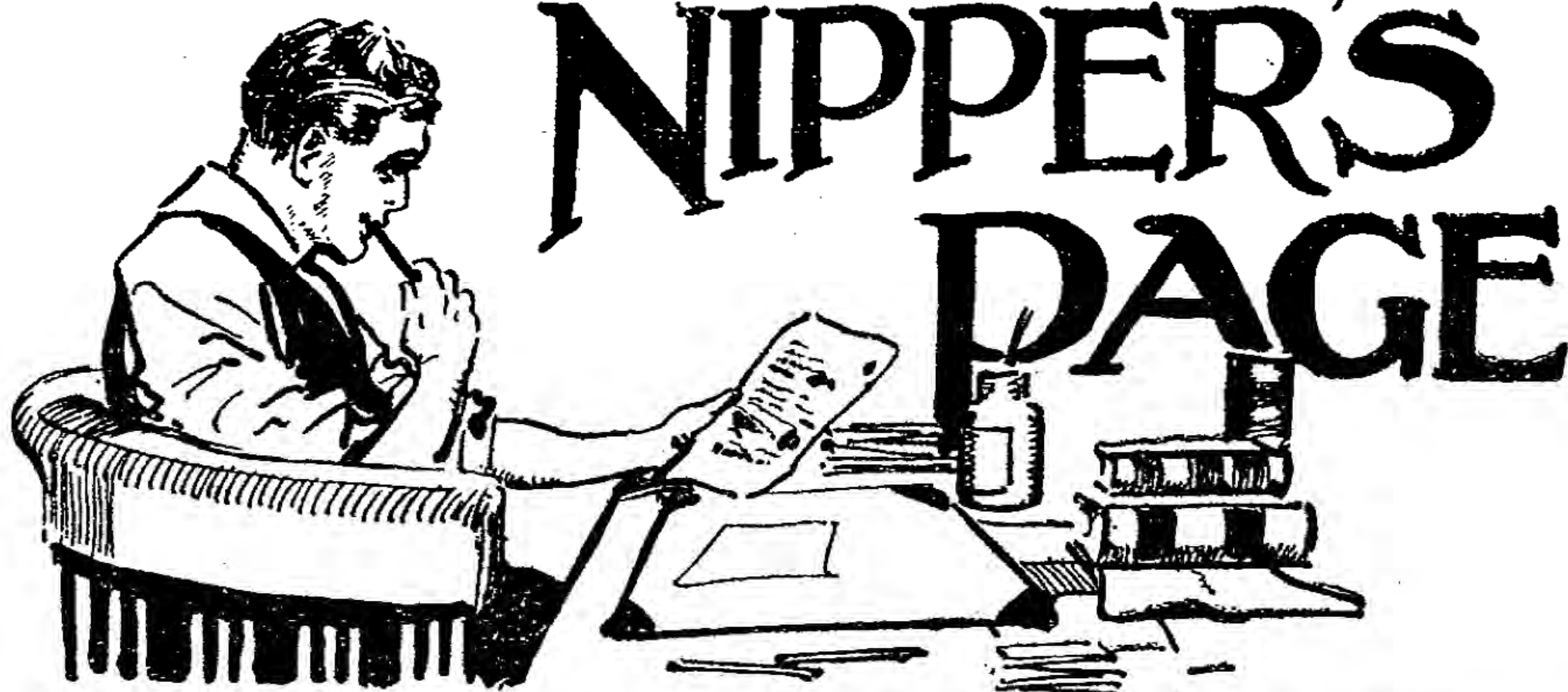


ADVENTURES OF HANDY

PAPERING THE WALLS OF STUDY D.

A Story Without Words.





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

My Dear Chums,—

Once more the time has come round for me to write my weekly letter, and my thoughts turn to the chaps who are away on their adventurous tour. By now we all know of their marvellous discovery in the heart of the Sahara. The first part of their quest is now achieved, for they have rescued Sir Crawford Grey and his exploration party.

But in doing so they have achieved much more than even this. They have actually discovered a Roman city peopled by the descendants of the old Romans, and apparently run on the same lines as in ancient days! This seems impossible to believe. But, nevertheless, it is the fact. It quite takes your breath away even to think of it. But to be actually there—well, it's no use sighing!

We don't all get the luck we deserve!

EXPERT LATIN SCHOLARS.

The idea of coming across people who speak in the Latin tongue opens a large field of possibilities. Of course, Handy is certain to air his limited knowledge of the language, but it is very unlikely he will ever become very expert. Handy's language is not so much a matter of words as a matter of deeds. And his deeds are usually translated into the action of his fists!

But some of the others may pick up an excellent first-hand knowledge of the so-called dead language. And I can see some fine times coming when the Remove arrive back at St. Frank's. Mr. Crowell will get a bit of a shock when Pitt starts spouting words that the Form-master has never heard!

And perhaps the chaps will get quite used to conversing in Latin, so that reading Cæsar and other Latin authors will become

child's play to them! It'll be rather odd to see half a dozen fellows getting top marks every time—and that without taking any particular trouble!

They'll be able to cut down their time for prep. all right!

T. G. and S!

You will see that Clarence Fellowe has broken his long silence at last, and written a bit of verse about our famous sleuths. Whether the piece is an epic, an ode, a sonnet, a lyric, or merely a piece of impertinence, I cannot say. Perhaps Handy will oblige with the correct answer when he sees it.

At any rate, here is the stuff, and I will leave you to judge! I only hope no one sends in a bit of Latin verse. The people who print the "Mag." would come out on strike if that happened, I think!

What do you think of our little competition? As far as I know it is quite a new and original idea. And that is saying quite a lot, because new ideas for competitions are not so easy to find as some people may imagine.

TOO MUCH PEACE!

I often used to think how nice it would be to be at a school where you could do just as you like from morning till night.

I thought it would be much better without a lot of chaps to rag you or want you to do things you didn't want to do. A school where there was no Handy continually wanting to fight, and no Archie cheerfully chipping you when you felt blue, and no other fellows going about japing and organising footer and cricket. I thought such a school would be top-hole!

I don't now! I find peace and quiet are absolutely rotten! I only wish someone would come dashing along the Remove passage and biff me on the jaw!

With every good wish,

BUSTER (Acting-Editor)

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



THE BLACKMAILED BARONET!

An Exciting Detective Romance of Intrigue, Villainy and Double-dealing, introducing Trackett Grim and Splinter.

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

RINGGGGGGGGGG!

Nothing but the clear note of a bell disturbed the quiet that prevailed in the sanctum of Trackett Grim.

The world-famous incriminator and his boy assistant Splinter were sitting in the sanctum having their after-dinner nap. Grim was smoking a huge calabash, and Splinter had a chocolate cigarette glued on to his lower lip.

Yet neither stirred as the long note of the telephone shook the room.

Zingggggggggggggggggggggg!

It was the 'phone again, and the two woke suddenly from their slumbers.

Grim's calabash fell with a crash to the floor, and Splinter's cigarette wilted.

"It's a bell," said the brainy lad. "Guv'nor, it must be the 'phone!"

"Quite correct," Grim agreed, stooping to pick up his pipe. "In a moment you will have answered it!"

Scarcely pausing to gasp in astonishment at Grim's marvellous acumen, the lad rushed across to where the 'phone hung on the wall.

"Hello! Hallo! Hullo!" he cried into the receiver.

Then he repeated the word into the mouth-piece. And a voice replied. Not a bit upset, Splinter listened to the words which issued from the receiver.

"Is that Trackett Grim, the world-famous incriminator of the Baker's Inn Road?" asked the voice.

"No," returned Splinter firmly. "It is his clever boy assistant. If you will hold on a few minutes or so, I will tell the guv'nor."

Without waiting to receive a reply, Splinter threw the receiver across to Grim, who was now all attention.

"Someone to speak to you," he said.

"It is as I thought," Grim replied, listening intently. "Hello?"

"Is that Grim?" went on the unknown voice. "Good. I am Sir Gasper Crane, and I wish to consult you."

"Quite correct," Grim said, with an invisible nod. "And I am the world-famous incriminator, Trackett Grim. How do you do? Good afternoon! Pleased to meet you, I'm sure."

At his words the electric current began to buzz with excitement. And when Sir Gasper spoke again it was with baited breath.

"Twenty years ago," he said, with intense emotion in his voice, "I was young and happy. Now what do you see?"

"I don't see anything," Grim returned smoothly. "I am looking into the receiver, and everything is dark."

"Twenty years ago," went on Sir Gasper hoarsely, "I committed a foul wrong!"

"What!" gasped Grim. "You kept a chicken run? That was indeed terrible!"

"You misunderstand me," said the baronet. "But—"

"It is the state of the telephone service," Grim explained. "The wires are very indistinct."

"Then I suggest you come to see me," said Sir Gasper. "And I will explain all. I need your help. Heaven knows I need it!"

Overcome with emotion, the baronet burst into tears, and they trickled along the wires. In a moment Grim's receiver was flooded out. He hastily emptied the contents on the floor and returned it to his ear.

"I will come and help you," he said. "Where do you live?"

"My address is No. 22a, Mount Street Avenue Mansions, W.," came the response in a grateful tone of voice. "Then I shall expect you immediately."

"Yes," grated Grim, slamming back the receiver.

He turned to Splinter.

"Put on your travelling clothes, lad," he said. "We are going on a long journey to the West End. There is work for us."

Without waiting to reply, Splinter dashed off to the bedroom he shared with Grim. And a few minutes later he returned, garbed in

his gent.'s sports suiting. He also carried a little bag, in which were Grim's dickey and detachable cuffs. He found his master completely disguised.

"I thought you might want your evening dress," explained the clever lad.

Without even waiting to flash him a smile, Grim hurried down the stairs five at a time. Splinter followed six at a time, and overtook his master in the hall.

In the street Grim called a taxi. When it arrived he dismissed it with a wave of his hand. It was one of Grim's favourite tricks. He did it partly to put crooks off the scent and partly because taxi fares were so expensive.

The two then broke into a smart trot, and within half an hour they reached their destination. Sir Gasper Crane himself opened the door of his magnificent residence to them. The baronet was a well-preserved man of forty-nine, and he clasped them warmly by the hand.

Then he led them into his well-stocked library, which contained several fine shelves, on which a number of volumes lay. In one shelf Grim noticed no less than three.

"Let me tell you the story of my life," the baronet said, when they were locked in the library. "I was born forty-nine years ago, which makes me just fifty next birthday. I was a mere child when my birth took place—"

"Exactly," Grim put in, his keen face alert with enthusiasm. "And for a good many years after you were a boy. After that you became a young man."

"Quite correct," the baronet agreed, nonplussed at the incriminator's shrewdness. "And it was when I was twenty-five that I committed a foul wrong. Oh, my dear 'tec, would that it had never happened! I have been bled white for all these years. Why did I commit this terrible wrong?"

"I will tell you that later," Grim said smoothly. "But first tell me what the wrong was."

The baronet hung his head. And when he lifted his eyes they were heavy with sadness. Grim was afraid he would drop them. But Sir Gasper was able to fit them back in their sockets without any accident. Then he squared his shoulders and took a grip on himself.

"I will tell you all," he said. "But first read this."

He took from his pocket a piece of crumpled paper. On it was written:

"Shall expect usual at ten p.m. to-morrow. Do not fail. At your peril."

"M. U. M."

Grim looked at the message and shivered slightly through his disguise.

"It is a threat, or something of that nature," he said. "I see it is sent from your mother. But that very likely is a trap."

"Indeed it is," the baronet went on. "And I can explain it. But let me tell you of my terrible wrong. Twenty years ago I was a fine, handsome young fellow, facing the world in the face. I was honoured or respected. And then I fell."

"Fell!" repeated Grim. "Great pip! You fell down and broke your neck?"

"No, no," said the other. "I was tempted, and I became a thief! I stole! I robbed! And now I am an outlaw from justice!"

"My poor baronet!" said Grim. "But what did you steal?"

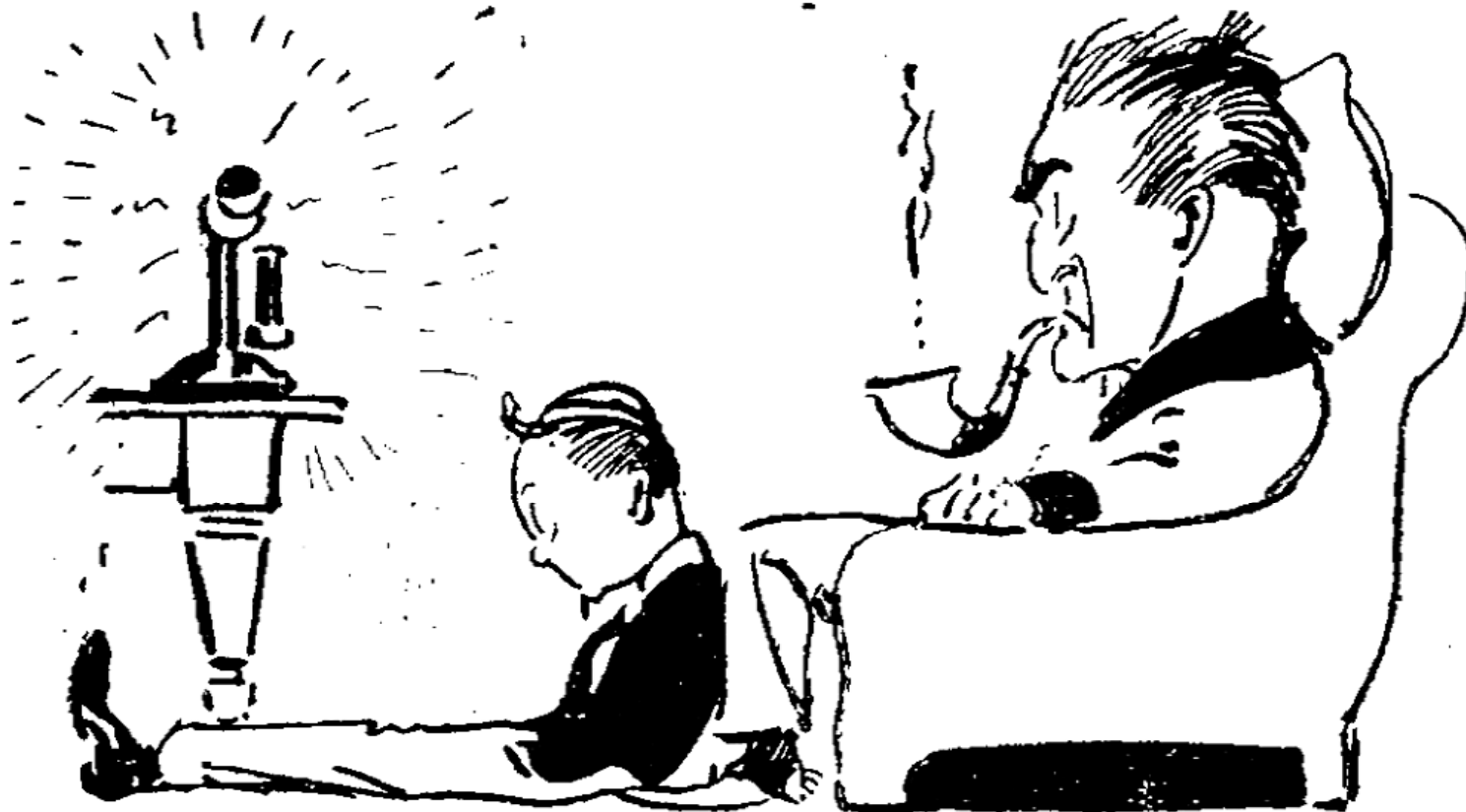
"A ticket," sighed Sir Gasper. "I was travelling from Waterloo to Clapham Junction, and I had bought no ticket. On the carriage floor I saw one lying. And in a sudden fit of temptation I picked it up. When I arrived at the June. I presented it at the barrier, and then— Oh, it was terrible! The ticket-clipper spotted that it had been stolen."

"He sent you to prison?" queried Grim.

"Worse than that!" the baronet explained. "Ever since he has been blackmailing me. Every year he has his holidays in July, and he calls on me to extort money from me. I have paid for his holiday for nearly twenty years. Do you wonder I am half crazed?"

"The dastardly brute!" Grim muttered.

"You mean to say he calls for money, and



Nothing but the clear note of a bell disturbed the quiet that prevailed in the Sanctum of Trackett Grim!

you have to take him to the sea-side for a holiday?"

"No," the other continued.

"He writes me a note. You have just read the one he sent me this year. I have to put the money in an envelope and take it to Hyde Park. There I lay it on a seat under a tree. He will not allow me to go in person, otherwise he says he will hand me over to justice. But I suppose he collects the money at about ten p.m."

"That is clear," Grim said astutely. "I see it all. He has merely to find the seat and pick up the envelope. Well, my dear baronet, this must stop. And I will stop it."

"But how can you?" asked Sir Gasper. "I must put the money there by to-morrow evening. And I have no money. If this comes to the ears of the police I shall be ruined."

"I have thought of that," Grim said. "You must put an envelope on the seat as usual. But—it will be empty!"

"Marvellous!" the baronet shouted, leaping to his feet. "I never thought of that. When the villain opens the envelope there will be nothing in it?"

"Precisely! In other words, he will get nothing!"

Sir Gasper's spirits rose at Grim's words. But the incriminator was not finished yet. He went to a side table and wrote on a slip of paper:

"Rats to you! Yah! Done again!"

"We will insert this message into the envelope," he explained. "Nor is that all. For I intend to capture the heartless rogue. I will put the envelope on the seat myself, and to-morrow I will take up my position behind the tree. I shall disguise me as you."

"It is terribly perilous," said Sir Gasper. "The man will stop at nothing. I can't allow you to face this danger."

"You can't stop me!" Grim returned bravely. "I care not for danger. In all modesty, I can say I fear nothing in the world."

Grim would argue no longer, and, taking Splinter by the hand, he left the baronet's house and tramped to Hyde Park.

It was two seconds to ten to-morrow night!

On a seat under a tree in Hyde Park lay an envelope. And behind the tree stood a dark figure. It was Grim disguised as Sir Gasper Crane! His disguise was so perfect that it was difficult to tell which was the incriminator and which was the tree. The only difference was in the branches



"Twenty years ago," said the baronet, "I was a fine, handsome young fellow, facing the world in the face!"

Footsteps were arriving!

On they came, one at a time, as though they were almost human. Grim stood behind the tree alone and unarmed. He had no weapons at all, except a long stiletto, a couple of revolvers, a water pistol, and a jack-knife with half a blade.

The footsteps continued to come one at a time. Grim was certain a man was walking on top of them! He was right. For suddenly into the gloom of the evening came the figure of a man dressed as a railwayman. And Grim could hear the merciless clicking of ticket-nippers.

As he reached the seat the man bent down and picked something off it.

"He's taken the envelope!" Grim hissed half aloud.

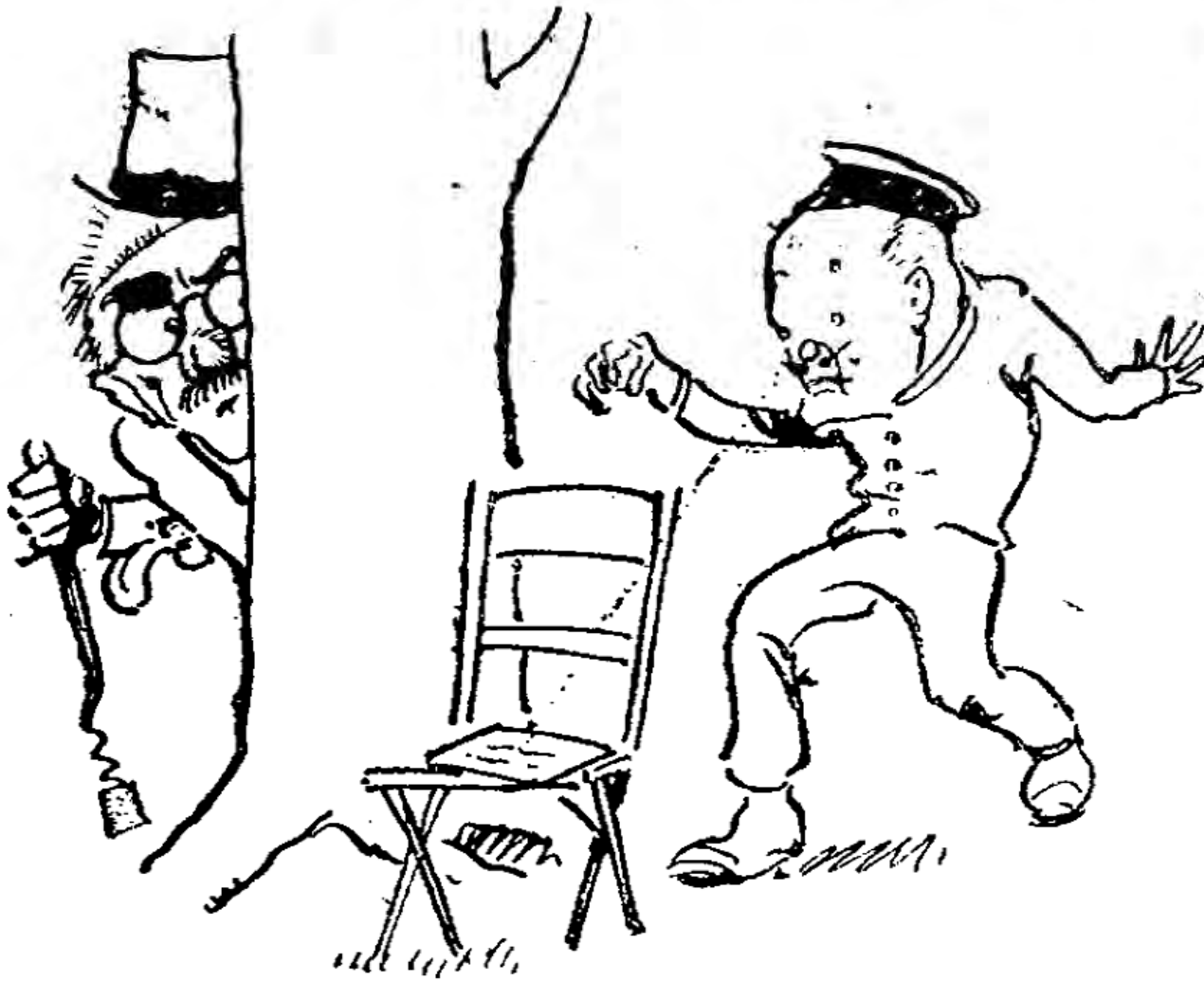
The man spun round—as if he had been shot.

At the same instant Grim's water pistol spat viciously, and his stiletto flashed through the air. His jack-knife hurtled at the man, and both revolvers barked loudly. Then Grim flung himself at the rogue!

But the villain was not done yet. He was as tough as oak. With a snort of rage he flung his ticket-nippers at Grim's head, and dashed towards the park gate.

The nippers hit Grim full on the eyebrows, and it was a second before he could drag them off. Then he was after the man, not even waiting to pick up his stiletto, which had missed its victim by nearly six feet.

Once on the run, Grim rapidly overhauled the railwayman. But once the park was left behind Grim had to go warily. Master of trailing as he was, Grim knew he must not



The footsteps continued to come one at a time. Grim was certain a man was walking on the top of them.

make too much noise. He carefully removed his boots and followed the man on tip-toe.

The blackmailer went along at a fast pace. He passed along the West End of London and came to Charing Cross. There he stood a moment at the entrance to a subway which goes beneath the road. Grim was only a few inches behind him.

The incriminator held his breath. But the man never suspected he was being followed. Grim stretched out a hand to capture him. But at that very moment the man vanished down the steps to the subway!

Grim could have laughed aloud! It was just the thing he had wanted to happen! The fellow was now completely trapped in the bowels of the earth. Grim had only to wait at the top, and want of food would bring him up the steps again.

Grim's marvellous powers of deduction were hard at work, and he realised all he had to do was to wait by the steps and he could bring off his capture with ease.

So the famous incriminator sat on the top step and waited. Midnight struck! Then one by one the other hours struck! Dawn came, and after that the sun rose. In a few more hours it was breakfast-time!

And then Grim moved. He would wait no longer. Though he had now no weapon, he meant to go down those steps into the unknown underground and trail his man!

The only article that would be of use to him, if it came to a fight, was a silver-plated cigar-cutter, which was luckily in his waistcoat pocket.

Undaunted, Grim carefully descended the stone steps! He cast glances in every direction. But not a sign of the man could he see. He cast more glances in every other

direction, but still there was no sign. The rogue had completely disappeared!

Grim could not imagine how he had got away.

Rack his great brain as he might, there seemed no answer. Suddenly out of the underground came a dull roar. In a flash Grim had solved the problem.

"Great pip!" he gasped. "I see it all! There are trains down here! He has boarded a train!"

Quick as thought, he dashed to one of the booking-offices which his keen eyes noticed.

"I am after a thief," he said to the man in charge. "He has taken one of the trains from this station—"

"Impossible!" gasped the man. "They weigh many tons. No thief could get away with one!"

For a moment Grim was baffled. This had not occurred to him! Was he to be defeated in

the moment of victory? Was he to give in after his endless vigil? No! But—

"Guv'nor, come quickly," came a sudden voice.

Grim turned at the voice, and his keen instinct told him that he was face to face with Splinter. The lad was still dressed in his gents-sports suiting, and he carried a cricket bat. But his appearance suggested to Grim that he had had some kind of fight or accident. His sleeves and trouser legs were torn, his collar and tie were missing. And there was a terrible jagged rent in the bat.

"What is it, lad?" asked Grim. "I have been most unfortunate. By an extraordinary accident my man has given me the slip!"

"I have given him worse than that," returned the bright young lad. "I did not go to bed as you told me. I followed you to the park. And after that I tracked you both here. Then I followed the railwayman to his house in Tooting! I had a scrap with him there, but now he is laid out. It spoilt the bat rather."

"My wonderful lad!" Grim cried. "You ought to be knighted. But we must go to Tooting at once!"

They took the next train, and soon arrived at their destination. On the floor of his house they found the villain completely knocked out, and on him was the bogus letter Grim had written. It was a clear case of blackmail, and Grim was able to send his man to prison.

But in his modest way he always says a little of the credit was due to Splinter. For had he not followed up the trail, it might have proved very hard for Grim to have succeeded.

TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 11. FLEEING FROM A COBRA

STROLLING through a tea plantation in Ceylon, the property of a friend of mine with whom I was staying, my thoughts away in dear old England, my stick struck something hard, which I thought might be a root. But looking down I found myself gazing into the eyes of a cobra, who was just spreading his hood. He only does that when he's in a temper, and means to strike. The blow from my stick had offended his majesty.

Here was a predicament. I had no revolver with me, and a cobra can keep up with a fleet horse galloping his best. So how could I hope to out-distance him?

On a straight road I should have no chance at all. My only hope was to strike out across the plantation through and over the tea plants. The roots of these are very thick and tangled, and there was a possibility that the cobra might get tied up in them. Anyhow, he would have to go round them, and that would take time, and every moment was precious to me.

I started off, the cobra after me, having dodged his fangs as he struck. The bungalow was half a mile away, and it was all up hill. Over the stunted trees I leapt, and soon my limbs began to ache and my head to throb. When I landed on the ground after a jump a fiery dagger seemed to pierce my brain. My veins swelled and my mouth was hot and parched. I was in good physical condition, but there were ninety degrees of heat, and the ordeal was almost too much for me. Every now and then I glanced back, and got a glimpse of the wicked grey hood, coming relentlessly on.

As I neared the bungalow, in a last effort, one of the boys, seeing my exhausted condition, jumped to the truth. He ran for the only gun kept on the premises—an old muzzle loader. Coming back, he let fly, and the next instant the cobra's head was blown off. My leg was riddled by nails, buttons, bullets, etc. The "boy" was lying flat on his back, having been knocked head over heels by the "kick." It's a wonder he wasn't killed, and perhaps a bigger wonder that the old gun went off at all. If it hadn't, where should I have been? It was only just in the nick of time.

That cobra's skin hangs in my hall. Without the head, it's a good five feet long.

ARENA means sand. They wanted plenty of sand in the Roman arena, because there was so much bloodshed, and the blood didn't show so

much when mixed with sand. They were a bloodthirsty lot, those ancient Romans.

But they had great spectacles in the arena.

Imagine Cæsar sitting in state on a lofty throne, from which he has a good view of the people and of everything that goes on. It is a thrilling moment when the trumpets peal and the cymbals clash, and four hundred gladiators—the pick of the world for physical strength and beauty, every one carrying the arm of his deadly trade—march, with heads erect and eyes flashing, and with proud defiance in their bearing, once round the arena.

Picture them ranging themselves in line before the throne on which the emperor is seated. For a few seconds they stand like statues, and then as one man they spring into life, brandishing their weapons, and chanting the solemn and terrible chant.

THE HORRORS OF THE ROMAN ARENA

:: By Walter Church ::

First softly, then fiercer and louder, triumph and despair mingled in its tones: "Ave Cæsar? Morituri te salutant!" That means: "Hail, Cæsar! Those who are about to die salute thee!"

"About to die!" A certain number of them are doomed to death, and they know it.

The most gruesome spectacles of the arena were those which took place when Christians were thrown to the lions. It seems incredible that people like the Romans, conquerors of the world, with leaders rich and intelligent, could have found pleasure in watching the tortures of women and children being devoured by wild beasts. It only shows what sport may degenerate into. For at first the arena was used for real sports.

But these were soon voted too tame, and new sensations were always being called for. The climax was reached when they made Christians into living torches and threw them to the wild beasts. The Roman Empire didn't last long after that. And a jolly good thing, too!

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**.)

OLIVE, (London, E.C.): That question of yours is a bit difficult. So I'll answer it by asking another. How would you like Church and McClure and Pitt and the rest of us in the Sixth? On the whole, I think you'd prefer us a lot better as we are. Sorry, but I don't want to give you the date of my birthday, as if I make it public I might get all sorts of presents—and that would be horribly embarrassing. We keep late hours, eh? I like that! We've got to go to bed at nine-thirty. The First and Second Forms are never mentioned because the kids in them are too insignificant for words, and there are quite enough of us without bothering about infants.

"MAG MAD" (Upper Holloway): Phew! Four big pages this time! I've had to chuck Church and McClure out of the study in order to give your letter my full attention. The fatheads started chipping me, you know. You're quite right about that picture of me. It certainly is dreadful, and it's an outrage. But don't worry—it's supposed to be funny, and so I don't make a fuss. That guess of yours about us joining Reggie Pitt in Africa has turned out right, as you'll know long before this appears. About Willy. Yes, you did tell me how much you liked him, and I've got to admit that I'm puzzled. As for that hugging business—I say, shove the brakes on a bit! Jolly nice of you, and all that, but Church and McClure rag me like the dickens. When I said that Miss Irene is one of the

best girls under the sun, and under the moon, I was only speaking broadly. You really mustn't jump to conclusions! I shall have to be jolly careful what I say to you girls! I think the pictures of Irene and Co. are a bit better now. Our artist is really a wonderfully clever man, and most of his work is tip-top. I am sorry I can't give you a full page reply, but what about the others? I expect I shall get chipped to death, even as it is. But your letter was so nice that I really had to give you a nice big space.

IRENE II (Chiswick): That rumour you heard is sheer piffle. Church and McClure are decent-looking chaps, but no better than the average—just plain, straight-forward fellows. You're wrong about Willy. He isn't a bother about money. It's his beastly nerve I don't like. He's too blessed cheeky!

LESLIE R. HILL (Highbury): As I told you once before, those heights and ages will all be published in the near future, when we start a Portrait Gallery and a Who's Who. I've told Miss Tessa what you say, and she thanks you very much for your interest in her. My favourite bowler in County Cricket is Parkin, of Lancashire. He's a corker, isn't he? And I think I like Hobbs, of Surrey, best of all the batsmen. Who are your favourites? That word "Tympanum" means your ear-drum. You can't floor me with simple words like that! I say, Leslie, old man! I've got quite enough Latin to do in class, without telling you the meanings of those school badges! My time is valuable, my lad!

P. T. O. (Manchester): I'm only answering you because I always keep my word! I've promised everybody that they'll get replies if they write to me, but you wouldn't get one otherwise. What do you mean by referring to my Trackett Grim stories as "rubbish"? Of all the giddy nerve! Still, you say that my detective yarns can't be spared from the "Mag," so I forgive you. You can get all those back numbers from the publisher, if you write to him.

"CAUTIOUS INQUIRER" (Hayle, Cornwall): You can't diddle me with that nom de plume, Jack Ricketts! You seem

to forget I'm full of detective ability! Those pictures you sent may be funny, but I can't see what they've got to do with me. Don't worry—I shan't come over to Cornwall especially to biff you. You're lucky to be so far away.

DOROTHY (Edinburgh): Thanks for your nice little letter. Yes, I'm quite keen on Miss Irene. She's a real sport, you know, and we're great friends. But I wish you wouldn't all think such silly things! Being friendly isn't being in love! Be reasonable! I'm still in the Fourth.

"LONELY LILLIAN" (Birmingham): For downright common-sense your letter would be hard to beat. I always admire anybody who writes a nice letter like yours. No nonsense about it. I'm awfully pleased you like the characters so much, and I wish I could do something to make you less lonely. But it's a lot better to be quiet than to mix with boys and girls you don't like. Of course you may write to me again! Everybody may—as often as they like! The more the merrier! If you want to write to Nipper, address your letter just the same as you would to me, and I'll give it to him.

ROLLO WARD (Hornsey): You fathead! I'm never unkind to Willy—in fact, I never thrash him half as much as he deserves! Can I beat Buster Boots at boxing? My poor, pitiful ass! Can I breathe?

J. FARR (Leeds): I have made so many runs this season that I've lost count of them—and I can't be bothered to look up the records. I'm always willing to answer reasonable questions, but some of you chaps come it a bit too thick. And Miss Irene doesn't need bucking up at all, you rotter. Regarding Buster Boots, see the reply immediately above this.

GORDON (Tring): Miss Irene Manners is no relation whatever to Harry Manners of St. Jim's. Nipper couldn't knock me out in one round, and he couldn't knock me out in a dozen! In fact, it's quite possible that I should whack him.

R. RUEGG (Westminster): The best boxer in the Remove is Ernest Lawrence, the best swimmer is Tom Burton, the best cricketer is Jerry Dodd, the best footballer is Reggie Pitt. I'm not sure who's the best runner, but I think Teddy Long is, judging by the way he bunks when he's chased. You see, he's always practising. Of course, I'm good at all these sports—that's why I'm not first in any of them.

LILLIAN (Clitheroe): Yes, certainly. I'll give you a description of Miss Irene with pleasure. She's just about fifteen, slim, dainty, and unusually pretty. She's got fair hair—bobbed, of course—

and deep blue eyes. Her complexion is like strawberries and cream, and she's a thorough sport all round. All right—I'll do some more Trackett Grim stories, as everybody is so pressing. As a matter of fact, I should have done them whether you were pressing or not. I'm not going to be pushed out of the "Mag." I can tell you!

MOLLIE MAKIN (Wigan): Who gave you the idea that Church and McClure are always in danger in Study D? As for getting killed, they're just as safe there as anywhere else. You want to know who's the best boxer, the best cricketer, and the most handsome boy in the Remove? I can't answer this question, because you would accuse me of being conceited, so I shall have to let you guess it. I've told Willy that you admire him, and all he said was "Wow, wow!" I don't know why you should think my Trackett Grim stories are far-fetched. They can't be—I get all my ideas here, and don't fetch them from anywhere. I don't know much about face-powder, but I believe it's made of French chalk with a little scent sprayed over it.

"INQUIRER" (Portsmouth): Of course St. Frank's is real—just as real as I am, anyhow. I think it's jolly nice of you and your sister to read the Old Paper to your mother. For one thing, it shows that you've got the right spirit, and, for another thing, it shows that your mother knows what's good. Do I know anything about motor-bikes? My dear ass, they're as simple as ABC to me. What's more, I think the Douglas is a ripping machine, as you suggest. As for fighting Ernest Lawrence, I wouldn't do anything so silly—I'm not the kind of fellow to ask for trouble. Tommy Watson doesn't dislike girls, as you suggest. Hasn't he got a ripping sister? The fact is, he's a bit of a slow chump, and he's shy. You're quite right about girls; they're funny creatures to get on with—one minute as sweet as honey, and the next jumping down your giddy throat. Still, the world would be a dreary sort of place without 'em, wouldn't it?

"NEMO" (Ireland): It's a good thing, my son, that the sea divides us. I don't think the "Mag." is better without my Trackett Grim stories, as you suggest, and it's like your nerve to say such a thing. And you're talking out of your hat when you say that the Moor View girls can beat us into a cocked hat at sports and lessons. Irene and Co. only whacked us at cricket because we were off our guard. Church and McClure are never injured by my punches.

UNCLE EDWARD.

Timgad : The Wonder City

By Reginald Pitt

YOU never heard of Timgad! Neither had I before we set out on this trip. And I don't suppose many other folks had either. Because Timgad, or rather its ruins, was discovered only about fifty years ago. But it's an old city, for it was built in the reign of the Emperor Trajan, B.C. 100. It was a fine city, too, planned as skilfully as any city of modern times, with long, wide streets, very much after the block system of New York. And it consisted mainly of palaces, mansions, libraries, magnificent public buildings, monuments, markets, baths, etc., many of them built of marble. The ruins of Timgad are among the finest in the world.

The Romans called it Thamugadi—or Thamugas. It lies on the edge of the Sahara, on the spurs of the Aures Mountains, three thousand feet above sea level. And it had a population of hundreds of thousands of Romans, besides their slaves. To walk along its now silent streets, and inspect its library, its forum, its basilica, its baths, its flower market; to sit on a stone bench in its old theatre, and look over the city; to wander through the Cardo North, paved with marble, with broken columns every few yards, and behind the columns ruins of palaces and mansions; to gaze upon the noble Trajan Arch, the Capitol, the column of the temple, and other columns—thousands and thousands of them, some of them forty-five feet high! All this is a strange experience.

The theatre, which would hold about four thousand people, is so perfect that a performance might be given in it just as it is. Yet Timgad was a buried city. How it fell and decayed nobody knows. The Romans left it—were perhaps driven from it by vandals and barbarians—and it fell into neglect. Then Nature, with her winds and sandstorms, covered it up as if in pity, and covered it remained for hundreds of years. It was given over to wild animals.

Then hunters came and chased the animals. And some of them found the tops of some of the columns showing just above the ground. The French Government, on learning this, sent explorers and investigators. Spade and pickaxe were got to work, and Timgad was again brought into the light, wonderfully complete. But though it bore many traces of its former magnificence, its chief glories, could, of course, never be restored.

T. G. and S.!

By
Clarence Fellowe

Have you got a mystery
That worries you a lot?
Do you suspect conspiracy,
Or any sort of plot?
Oh! If you should be worried
You'll be all right, I guess,
If you try the famous detectives,
T. G. and his brave lad S.!

Are you pursued by bandits?
Or have you lost a will?
Are you aroused from slumber
By burglars at the till?
Oh! If you want your freedom
From any kind of mess,
Take your problems along to the experts,
T. G. and clever young S.!

Who was it discovered water
Was largely composed of rain?
Who was it found that Wembley
Could be reached by bus and train?
Who was it could read in the papers
What was printed in the Press?
Why, the sleuth and his young assistant,
T. G. and the youthful S.!

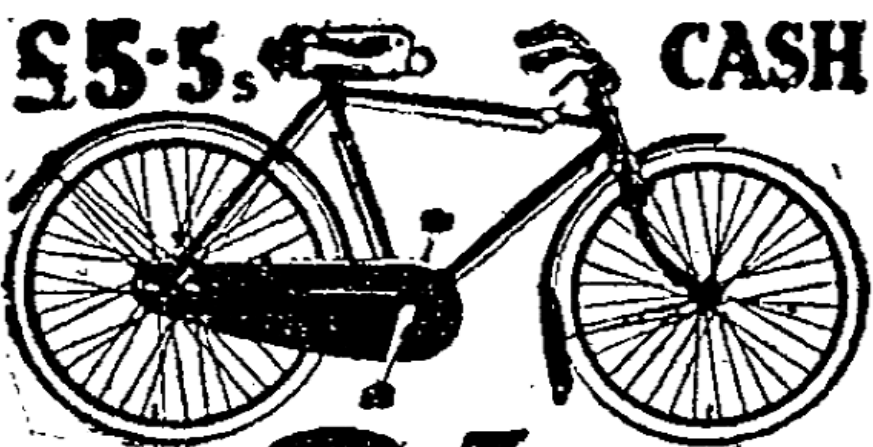
Who was it found out that fishes
Could live beneath the seas?
And that gooseberries grew on bushes,
While apples grew on trees?
Who was it found that chickens
Could lay eggs with great success?
Why, the famous couple of trackers,
T. G. and his bright boy S.!

Who was it discovered that houses
Are often made of bricks?
That words can be formed of letters,
And that twice three make six?
That people put on their garments
Whenever they want to dress?
Why, the peerless investigators,
T. G. and his helpmate S.!

Who was it deduced that on fine days
The sky would often be blue?
That the Army was full of soldiers,
And lions lived in the Zoo?
Who held that if rogues were all collared
Crimes would surely be less?
Why, the human hounds of Justice,
T. G. and astute young S.!

The Editor's decision is final.

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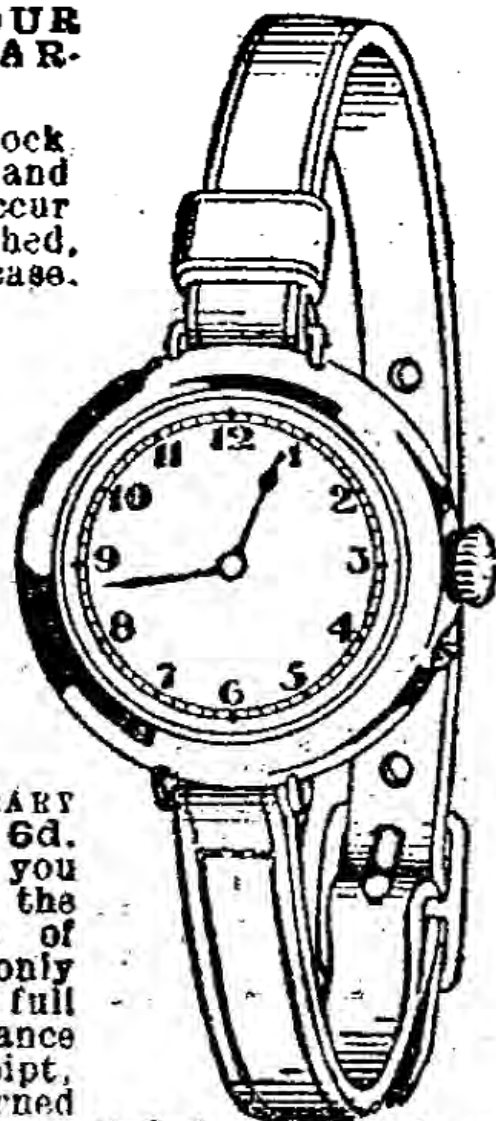
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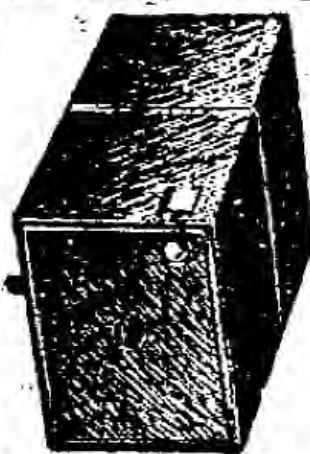
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