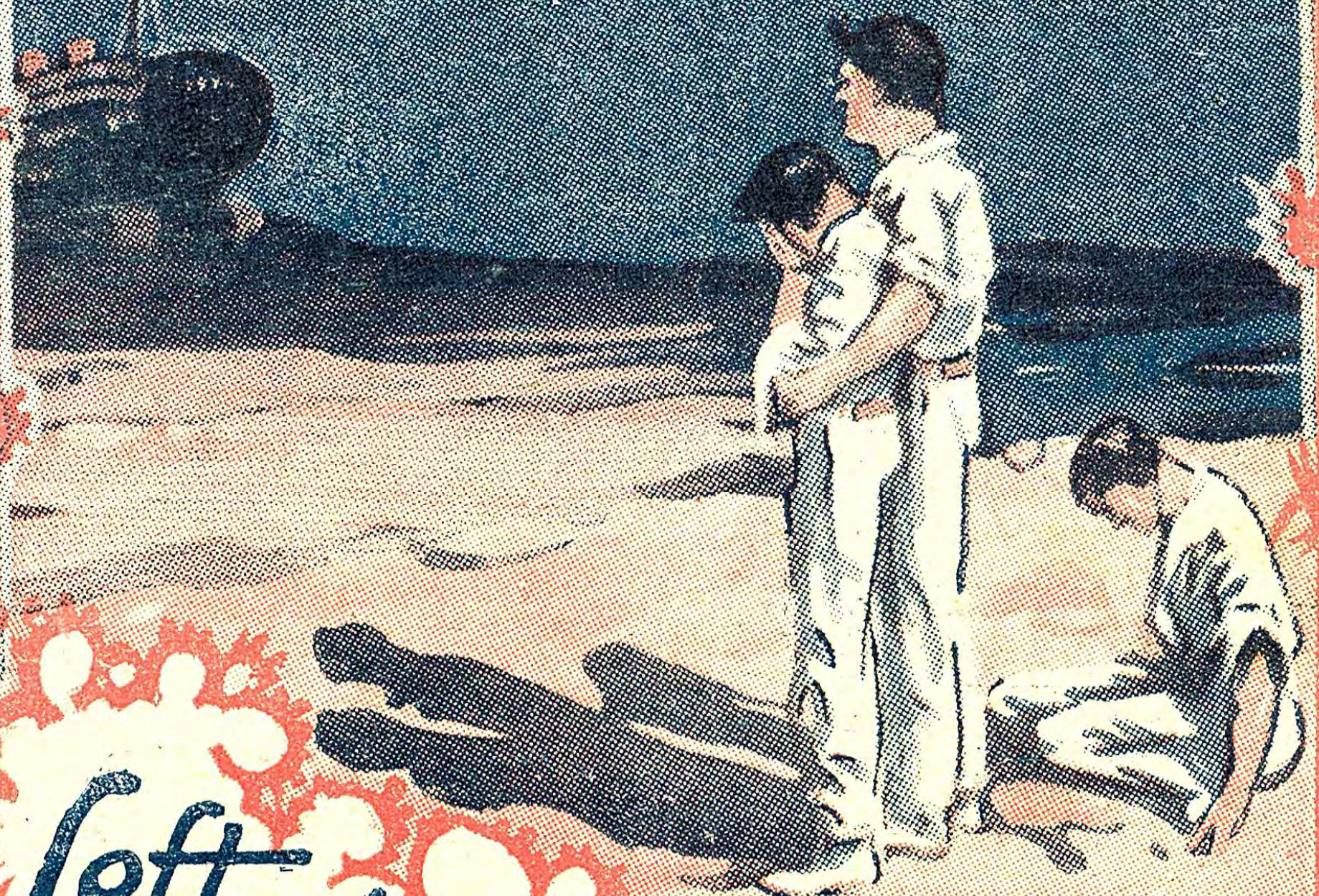


THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S IN THE DESERT!

# THE NELSON LEE

*Library*  
AND ST. FRANK'S  
MAGAZINE

2d



*Left  
in the  
Desert*

As the Conqueror receded,  
Handforth and Co. knew that  
they were doomed to a terrible end.  
(From this week's gripping story.)





From the centre of the great canyon came a blinding flash—an appalling roar—and fragments of rock were hurled in every direction.



# LEFT IN THE DESERT!



*A grand long story of the Boys of St. Frank's in the Sahara Desert, introducing Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and many other popular characters.*

Their work completed, the time has come for our adventurers to make their departure from the strange Roman City of Isirium and return to the 20th century civilization. But their only exit is through the great rocky canyon, above which the deposed Titus is waiting to avenge the loss of his throne by hurling destruction upon the desert ship as it slowly wends its way through the narrow gorge. Later in the narrative you will read how Handforth and his chums become stranded in the pitiless wastes of the Sahara Desert.

THE EDITOR.

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

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ROYAL PROCLAMATION.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE halted, confused.

"I mean to say—what?" he murmured feebly. "Dash it, all—Good gad! I'm absolutely surrounded!"

The elegant St. Frank's junior was looking his best—neat and immaculate from head to foot. His white flannels were a dream; his soft linen was spotless; his straw hat reposed on his head with just that "set" which gladdened the heart of Phipps.

Altogether, Archie was a picture, and he knew it. He also knew that he was surrounded by a bevy of laughing, bright-eyed Isirium maidens, who displayed an intense curiosity in Archie's general appearance.

"The fact is, old things, I don't absolutely get the lingo, if you know what I mean," he said unhappily. "I mean to say, this bally language is rather too much for the good old brain department."

The girls were chattering gaily in Latin, and although Archie protested his ignorance, he understood quite sufficient to know that his clothing was being admired, his monocle was being discussed, and his whole appear-

ance was exciting the young ladies to spirited approval.

The Isirium girls were attired in highly coloured robes of some silky material, with neat headdresses, and many ornaments. They wore their hair loose, in curls or ringlets, and their feet were encased in sandals.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie, as one of the girls actually touched him. "This is getting somewhat frightful, dash it! I mean, I'm absolutely embarrassed, and so forth! Kindly desist, dear old—"

He broke off with a gasp of relief, for Reginald Pitt arrived at this moment, escorting Marjorie Temple and Doris Berkeley. They were all in white, and very good to look upon.

"Hallo! Why the pained look, Archie?" grinned Pitt. "You ought to be pleased! Fancy being admired by so many girls all at once! It must be your fatal beauty!"

"Pray cease this frightful rotting, dash you!" exclaimed Archie. "These young ladies absolutely whizzed round without the slightest warning. I mean to say, they fairly swooped down, and I'm in a most shocking state of nervousness! Be good enough to loosen a charge of advice!"

Reggie grinned.



"The only advice I can give you is to brace yourself up and face the ordeal," he replied. "It's entirely your own fault. You shouldn't come out looking so decorative."

Archie cast a nervous, anxious glance at Marjorie. He was rather fond of Marjorie, and he felt that their friendship might be affected by this unfortunate position. Here he was, surrounded by these Isirium girls, and Marjorie had caught him red-handed!

But the elegant junior need not have worried. Marjorie Temple was a very sensible young lady, and she was smiling broadly at Archie's predicament. Doris was inclined to be humorous.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Archie," she laughed. "You ought to be very flattered, instead of being scared. These girls are just lovely—and as pretty as you like! Why not go for a walk with them?"

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie, scandalised.

"You can't fool me, you know!" went on Doris. "You're not so nervous as all this, really. The fact is, you're just a bit afraid of Marjorie!"

"Doris!" protested Marjorie, blushing.

"I think," said Reggie Pitt diplomatically, "that we ought to be strolling on, girls. We'll leave Archie to his fate. If he's never in a worse position than this, he'll be lucky."

They walked on, smiling. And poor old Archie was at his wits' end. His fair admirers were taking courage—and even seeking to grasp his walking cane, and to pull the monocle from his eye.

Handforth and Co. strolled by a few minutes later, but for some strange reason Edward Oswald was quiet and decorous. His usual boisterous manner was entirely absent. Even Church and McClure were a bit subdued.

Willy was with them, and Willy looked bored stiff—indeed, he remarked quite loudly that he was fed up. Perhaps the explanation of the mystery was the presence of Ena—Handforth's very self-possessed sister. Ena had imperiously commanded Edward Oswald to take her out for a walk. And, of course, Handforth had instantly obeyed. He couldn't do anything else. Ena had a certain way with her that froze the marrow in Handy's bones.

Other St. Frank's juniors were to be seen in the streets—including myself. I was with Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, and this morning we had decided to go on a tour of sight-seeing.

The wonderful Roman-like city was gay with laughter and only half-subdued excitement. For the Isirium people were deliriously happy in their new freedom. The capital was a place of rejoicing and merry-making.

And the same spirit was to be seen throughout the entire land—up and down the length and breadth of this great fertile oasis of the Sahara. On the farms, in the smaller villages—and, in fact, everywhere—

the people were rather intoxicated with the sudden joyous turn of events.

For Titus, the tyrant, had been dethroned and was a fugitive—a craven wretch who was somewhere in hiding, afraid to show himself for fear of being instantly lynched. A day or so ago he had had full power; but now he would be slain as ruthlessly as he had slain countless victims during his tyrannous reign, if he fell into the hands of the mob.

With him were Lars Melos, his chief adviser, and Spurius Gallus, the ex-chief of the Isirium army. The infamous trio had succeeded in fleeing when threatened by death in the great arena. Only by inches had they escaped a terrible end by the lions.

And now Marcus Phillipus was the emperor—and the whole of Isirium was celebrating. For Marcus was a popular hero, a man who could be relied upon to see that justice was done, and who could rule with a firm, but kindly hand.

And as this happy state of affairs had been mainly brought about by Nelson Lee's party, we were all tremendously popular among the people. To-day, in fact, was the first occasion on which we had been able to really move about in perfect safety and freedom.

Many juniors noticed that proclamations were posted up in various parts of the city. They announced that the following day would be a great occasion for public celebration. A magnificent sports programme would be carried out in the amphitheatre, and big preparations were being made.

Upon the whole, it seemed that the morrow was to provide us with plenty of excitement. But some of it was to be of a character that we certainly did not bargain for!

## CHAPTER II.

### PREPARING FOR THE SPORTS.



THE Conqueror was standing in the central square, quiet and stately, her paint-work spotless, and her brass glittering in the sunlight.

Mr. Travers Earle's wonderful land yacht was responsible, of course, for our being in this hitherto unexplored region of the Sahara. Without the Conqueror we could never have penetrated into these unknown wastes.

For, beyond the mountains that encircled Isirium, lay nothing but barren desert, stretching away for hundreds of miles in every direction—desert sands that were incapable of being crossed by the ordinary methods.

And we should soon be starting back—for not only Nelson Lee, but Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Travers Earle had decided that their responsibilities were too great to permit them to linger.

For there was only one exit from this valley—the great canyon which split through the mountains on the western side. If, by



any chance, this canyon became blocked, neither the Conqueror nor any of her company could reach the outer world again.

And Nelson Lee remembered the St. Frank's fellows, and Mrs. Manners, and Irene and Co. For the sake of these young people alone, it was imperative that no unnecessary risks should be taken.

And so the Conqueror was by no means as placid and peaceful as her outer appearance suggested. The crew were making quiet, steady preparations for departure. And on the evening of the following day we should roll majestically along the Isirium highway, and emerge once more upon the desert. This was the settled schedule.

Once clear of the valley we should not return to Kano and Lagos—our outward route—but set off to the northward, and thus cross the Sahara from south to north—in itself a great achievement.

Algiers would be our ultimate goal. And from there, of course, England could be reached after a day or two of ordinary travel. And we should get back in plenty of time for the commencement of the autumn term at St. Frank's.

Naturally, whilst Nelson Lee and the other grown-ups thought of these matters, the juniors themselves did not even consider them. All their thoughts were for the moment. And they were fairly revelling in their surroundings.

Greatly to Archie's joy, he succeeded in giving his fair admirers the slip, and he lost no time in returning to the yacht, where he found Lord Dorrimore sprawling luxuriously in a hammock under the awning. Umlosi was near by, in a deck-chair, with his arm in a sling.

"What's this?" demanded his lordship languidly. "Why the worried frown, old chap? I thought you weren't comin' back till lunch-time—"

"Absolutely," interrupted Archie. "Or, to be exact, absolutely not! What I mean is, I was compelled to flee. A somewhat foul proceeding, and detrimental to the old dig—but it had to be done."

"My brain may be addled," said Dorrie, "but I confess I don't follow."

"Oh, rather not!" agreed Archie. "These young ladies, you know. Gadzooks! They absolutely take all the jolly old prizes for good looks and what not, but when it comes to nerve— Good gad! The old knees go absolutely woozy at the joints when I think about it."

Dorrie laughed heartily while Archie was proceeding to explain. And the elegant junior concluded by firmly declaring that in future he would stay on board, where he was comparatively safe.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said his lordship, sitting up. "Aren't you goin' to take part in the sports?"

"Sports?" repeated Archie.

"Yes—in the arena."

"Oh, but dash it all!" said Archie. "Not

really? I mean, we aren't supposed to do the gladiator stuff, and fight lions, and all that sort of stuff. A trifle too strenuous, what?"

"Well, it's got to be done," said Dorrie, firmly. "Our friend, Marcus, has decreed that sports are to be the order of the day to-morrow. So you fellows have got to buckle to and show these Isirium sportsmen what you can do. How does the idea strike you?"

"Oh, frightfully! I—I mean frightfully topping!" added Archie hastily. "It's all right for such strenuous chappies as Nipper and Handforth and all those muscular lads. Why, they're legging it hither and thither without the slightest trace of fatigue. I mean, they like this sort of thing. But I'm more or less of a bally non-starter, if you get me."

Dorrie shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're a lazy young bounder," he said severely. "An' I think I shall have to make a point of shovin' your name down for the ten-mile race. That'll give you somethin' to restore the old tissues!"

Archie went below, apprehensive and troubled. He nearly looked as miserable as Umlosi—who was suffering torture. For the great Kutana chief was in the depths of despondency because Dorrie had compelled him to wear a sling.

His shoulder was injured—the result of a javelin thrust during the recent fight—and Umlosi was disposed to regard the wound with contempt. But it had taken a bad turn, through inattention while Umlosi had been a prisoner in the hands of Titus. And it was only by Nelson Lee's skilful surgery that Umlosi had been saved from a grave illness which might have meant the loss of his arm.

But now he was recovering rapidly, and in the blackest of black moods because he hated inactivity of any kind.

At lunch time Dorrie announced to all the juniors that the morrow's sports would include the St. Frank's fellows themselves. And everybody was freshly animated and excited.

"What kind of sports, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Oh, all sorts," replied his lordship. "Wrestlin'—runnin'—jumpin', an' things like that. It might be a good idea to pick twelve of you—the best dozen—an' then challenge Marcus to produce twelve Isirium boys to compete. That's my scheme, anyway."

"A fine idea, Dorrie," I said enthusiastically. "Twelve of us against twelve Isirium chaps! And why not a few girls against Miss Irene and the others?"

"Ripping!" said Handforth. "Irene's bound to be the winner."

And the fellows went on talking, eagerly discussing the sports, and preparing the different events. In fact, a committee was formed, and long before the evening we were making full preparations.



CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVES.



THE ruined tower was picturesque and creeper-covered.

A relic of past fighting days, it stood upon a little knoll, half hidden by trees. And the spot was a great many miles from the capital—indeed, not so far distant from the great canyon which pierced the mountains at this side of the valley.

Habitations were few and far between in this remote section of the country. Peaceful farms were dotted about here and there, but otherwise the landscape was bare.

The tower had probably been used, hundreds of years before, during one of the many upheavals which had stirred this tiny kingdom since the Roman ancestors of the present people had settled there.

Three figures moved stealthily and cautiously through the gloom of the evening. For it was nearly dark, and the whole valley was enshrouded in the gathering shadows of night.

A few stars were beginning to twinkle, and the intense heat of the African day was relieved by a cooling breeze from the mountain-tops. The three mysterious figures finally emerged into the open space just in front of the tower—but only for a moment.

They disappeared, and the spot remained as peaceful and quiet as ever. But within the ruins the three prowlers were cautiously peering through every crack and cranny available.

"'Tis well—we have naught to fear," murmured one of them. "Our approach was well timed, and no eyes have watched us. Indeed, there are none to watch in this accursed place of desolation!"

"Methinks it would have been better had we waited until darkness completely fell," growled one of the others. "But thou art always right, Titus—in thine own estimation! 'Tis one of thy failings!"

The ex-Emperor Titus turned scowlingly upon the other.

"Insolent dog!" he said harshly. "Who art thou, Melos, to thus address me? Remember thy station and mine!"

Lars Melos laughed bitterly.

"Ay, 'tis well that I should remember," he replied. "And my station is none lower than thine, my fine Titus. Thou art a fugitive—even as I—even as Gallus, here. We are all as one in this situation. So talk not of stations."

"Am I not your emperor?" demanded Titus furiously.

"Nay, by Mars thou art not!" put in Spurius Gallus. "But two days since thou wert our master—our ruler. But now what art thou? A man who will be slain by the lowest dregs of Isirium if thou art caught. And Melos, too—and I. We are equals at

last, my Titus. So do thou refrain from taking airs unto thyself."

Titus breathed hard, but made no reply for some moments. He was realising that his companions had, indeed, set forth the position with blunt accuracy. They were, indeed, equals.

And they were a sorry trio—torn, foot-sore, haggard with fear and hunger and thirst, and well nigh dropping with exhaustion. Not a wink of sleep had they had since their dramatic escape, and very little food had entered their lips.

And now, at last, they felt comparatively safe. For in this ruined tower, so far from any habitation, there was little chance of their being discovered. And they had brought food with them—food that had been pilfered from a cottage a mile or so away. A woodman had been seen to leave the cottage, and Lars Melos had ventured within, on the off chance.

"Revenge!" muttered Titus. "By all the gods of war! 'Tis revenge I seek now! Not against mine own people, but against these accursed strangers who have brought about the triumph of Marcus!"

"Eat, thou talkative one!" growled Gallus. "Eat while there is yet food—for Melos and I are wasting no time. And talk not of this revenge, since it is beyond accomplishment."

The ex-emperor cast a fierce glance at the others, and eagerly fell upon the plain food—fare such as he had not tasted in all his life. Nevertheless, it was more grateful than the most sumptuous feast.

"Thou art wrong, Gallus, in thinking that our revenge cannot be accomplished," said Titus, at length. "After a brief sleep here, in this tower, we go to the great pass. At dawn we shall arrive, and then our task will be to block up the great canyon—so that these strangers with their great chariot can never emerge into the other world. Such will be our revenge!"

"'Tis a comforting thought," said Lars Melos slowly. "And I, for one, agree that the task should be done. We will— But list! Heard you not a sound?"

They all held still, Titus shivering with fear so violently that his hands were affected as though with the ague. His flabby cheeks had gone livid, and his breathing was forced.

Even his companions were terrified. If they had been traced and tracked down they would meet with short shrift. Perhaps no trial—but just a swift decision and a slaughter.

While they waited in the deep gloom, the door opened slowly. A solitary figure stood outlined against the dull evening sky. Even in this blackness it could be faintly seen that his garb was rough. The man was apparently a country worker of some kind.

"Who skulks within?" asked the stranger cautiously.

The three fugitives held absolutely still.



And the newcomer, after a moment's hesitation, entered. It was now quite clear that he was alone. Possibly he had seen the hunted three entering some time before.

There was a sudden swish, a thud, a groan.

"Die, miserable cur!" grated Titus thickly.

With one fierce swing of his sword, he had run the unfortunate fellow clean through the body!

#### CHAPTER IV. THE DISCOVERY.



"WHAT now? 'Tis late for thee to be abroad, friend Glabrio."

"Ay, Licinius, thy words are true enough."

The two men had met on the paved highway, and the stars were twinkling overhead, and the lights of the capital were twinkling and shining in the far distance. The countryside was quiet, for at this hour the majority of the people were at rest.

Both the men were farm-workers—quiet, honest fellows who had been little affected by the startling changes in the capital.

"What ails thee, Glabrio?" asked Licinius, peering at his friend in the gloom. "'Tis usual for thee to be abed long ere this. I would have been asleep myself, but for the illness of my worthy uncle——"

"I search for my brother," interrupted Glabrio. "At dusk he failed to arrive home, according to his usual custom. And my father becomes anxious, and so I have been searching."

The other man looked surprised.

"Has not Julius returned?" he inquired. "Ay, I have seen him, but this was before dark—full four hours since."

"Where didst see my brother?" asked Glabrio eagerly. "Perchance we may find traces if we search. I fear me that Julius has met with some accident in the woods——"

"Nay, I judge not that," interrupted Licinius. "'Twas near the ruined tower that I saw thy brother. Indeed, he was on the point of entering. But I was afar, and thought little of the incident. Shall we to the tower and make search? What sayest thou?"

"I thank thee, Licinius, for thy company," replied Glabrio. "Ay, we will go. Thy words have made me more anxious still, since my brother may be in sore need of assistance."

They hurried across the grass land, and up the sloping glades until they arrived at the ruined, creeper-covered tower. Everything was dark and quiet, and no sign of human presence was to be seen. They approached to the very walls, and saw that the rotted door stood ajar.

"Julius!" exclaimed Glabrio urgently.

"My brother!" came a faint, husky voice from within. "'Tis well thou art come, Glabrio. Quick, that I may grasp thy hand ere I perish! I sink rapidly."

"By Mercury! What is this?" gasped Glabrio hoarsely.

He pushed his way into the tower apprehensively, and nearly stumbled over a form which lay close against the doorway. The starlight penetrated, and faintly revealed the figure of Julius.

"Thou art hurt, my brother!" exclaimed Glabrio urgently. "What ails thee? What accident—— By all the saints! Thou art wounded—bleeding! Thy blood has been flowing away!"

The words were uttered in horror, for Glabrio's hand had encountered an ominous wetness. The unfortunate man was almost at his last gasp, and when he spoke his voice was weak and feeble.

"List, so that you can avenge this deed, my Glabrio!" he breathed. "'Twas Titus who ran his sword through my body—a foul, villainous deed! A coward's blow, delivered in the dark! May all the curses of my fathers be upon his head!"

"Titus!" panted Glabrio. "Art mad? What sayest thou——"

"'Twas Titus, the fugitive traitor!" interrupted Julius. "At dusk I saw three figures enter this tower, and I bethought me the fact was suspicious. But no sooner did I enter than the treacherous dog struck me with his sword. Heed not my condition, Glabrio, for I am past recovery. Speed thou into the city, to carry a message——"

"My brother—my Julius!" shouted Glabrio wildly.

"Too late! 'Tis idle to sorrow now," interrupted the dying man. "These accursed vermin talked while I lay for dead. They have gone to the canyon, to block it, so that the illustrious strangers can never pass through to the outer world in their chariot! Titus and his devils are speeding there even now. To the city, Glabrio—to the good Marcus, to give warning. Travel with all thy fleetness, so that—so that——"

His voice failed him, and trailed away.

"Julius!" muttered his brother feverishly. "Thou art wrong! Thy hurt is but slight, and thou will recover! Quick, Licinius! Help me to carry him outside, so that we may discover what this wound may be!"

The dying man rallied slightly.

"I go, Glabrio!" he whispered. "Lend me thy hand, brother, so that I may seek courage——"

They clasped hands, but no further word was spoken. Glabrio felt a kind of shudder run through his brother's frame. And after that he lay still and limp.

They carried him out into the open. And there, under the full starlight, the terrible truth could no longer be ignored. Julius was dead, and the great, gaping wound in his body was ample evidence of the foul nature of the death-blow. It was a wonder



indeed, that he had not perished within a few minutes.

Glabrio's grief was pitiful to see, and his companion turned away, standing silent and motionless while the stricken man spoke to his dead brother as though expecting him to revive.

But at last Glabrio became calm, and he went to the side of Licinius and grasped his arm.

"I leave thee to guard the remains of my poor brother," he said quietly. "Go to my home, Licinius, and tell my father of this ghastly deed. I will speed to the capital as fleetly as I may—to carry the warning that Julius has given me!"

The Emperor Marcus sat in the royal box, and round him were grouped Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Sir Crawford Grey, and most of the other gentlemen of the Conqueror's party. Mr. and Mrs. Hobart Manners were there, too. And smiles were general.

In the arena, the activities were just beginning.

The St. Frank's juniors had prepared well for the great sporting contest. The first item on the programme was to be a running race—twice round the arena. And six St. Frank's fellows were to pit their prowess against six Isirium boys of similar age.

"You in this event, Handy?" asked

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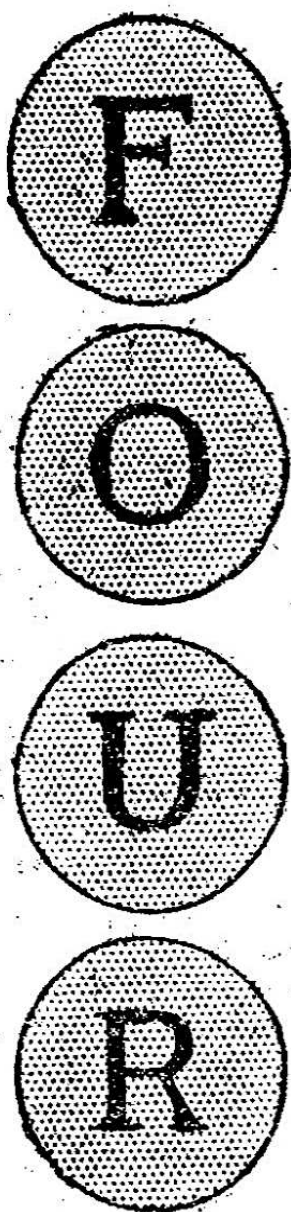
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### CHAPTER V.

#### THE SCHOOLBOY GLADIATORS.



**T**HE Amphitheatre was packed.

It was morning, brilliant and hot. It seemed that over half the capital was on the spot—great cheering throngs of

people packing in the enclosure to the point of suffocation.

Reggie Pitt, as he hustled up. "If so, you'd better be looking smart."

"Of course I'm in it!" said Handforth. "I'm competing in all the events. Naturally, we shall knock these Isirium kids silly, but that's a foregone conclusion."

"Don't you believe it," said Reggie. "They're a hefty lot, and we shall have our work cut out to win equal honours."

All the St. Frank's fellows were attired in the lightest of light clothing—just run-



ning shorts, with bare knees and short socks. And the Isirium boys were clothed in garments which were surprisingly similar.

They were cheerful, happy-looking youngsters. And although conversation between the competitors was somewhat difficult, they managed to talk together quite a lot—signs frequently taking the place of the spoken word.

The first event was an easy win for St. Frank's. At running the Remove fellows were in far better fettle than the native boys, and the crowds were a trifle disappointed.

But in the next event—jumping—the majority of the honours were taken by the home team, so to speak. Some of the Isirium boys jumped in a truly amazing manner, and proved themselves to be superb athletes.

And then, by way of a change, there was a chariot race. This was confined solely to the Remove, for the others were naturally born to the job, and would certainly be the winners if they competed.

It proved to be a race of endless laughter. The chariots were by no means easy to control, and soon after the start the race degenerated into a kind of scramble in every corner of the arena. Handforth got to the winning-post first, and immediately claimed a victory. But as he had taken a short cut half-way across the ring, he was disqualified, much to his disgust.

The audience laughed and cheered, for this kind of performance was altogether new to them. Hitherto, the spectacles in the arena had been grim and terrible—sights that appealed to the basest natures. And nine-tenths of the population were only too glad to see something wholesome.

There was a mock fight, too, the juniors acting as gladiators, and after that Johnny Onions gave a real thrill by performing on the tightrope. A strong wire had been stretched across the entire arena, and Johnny gave one of his most polished displays.

He had lost none of his cunning since departing from his father's circus, and he amazed the crowd with his many tricks—for this sort of acrobatic work was quite new to the people of Isirium.

But the real triumph of the morning went to Tessa Love.

It was only after a great deal of persuasion that she had consented to give her bareback riding performance. For she, too, had been in the famous Onions Circus. Irene and Co. had quickly made a suitable costume, with the help of Mrs. Manners. And one of the native ponies proved quite equal to the occasion.

Naturally, Tessa was unable to give her full programme, for she was handicapped by the untrained nature of her mount. But the pony was a docile, peaceful animal, and she was soon on excellent terms with it.

"My hat! This is a real circus now!"

remarked Tommy Watson, as we stood looking on. "I'm blessed if I can understand it, you know! Tessa hasn't been with that pony more than an hour, and yet she can do wonders with it."

"She's always been like that," said Johnny enthusiastically. "In the old days, when a new horse came to the show, Tessa was able to break it in during the first day. She's got a kind of power over them, and they'll do just whatever she demands."

The girl came in for a great ovation after she had finished. The emperor himself insisted upon her coming to the royal box, so that she could receive his personal congratulations.

And then the sports went on.

There were plenty of events on the programme yet—wrestling, boxing, and so forth. And just when everything was going smoothly, a slave came hurrying into the royal enclosure in an agitated manner.

"Anything wrong, my friend?" asked Lord Dorrimore, who was nearest.

"A man from afar is without, and would speak urgently with the chief of thy party, O master," replied the slave. "The matter is of the utmost import, so I have hastened."

Dorrie turned quickly to Lee.

"I think you're wanted, old man," he said. "As far as I can understand, this fellow says there's a man outside who wants to talk with the leader of our party. That'll be you. Perhaps you'd better have a word with him yourself and get the thing straight."

Nelson Lee lost no time in leaving the enclosure. He had no inkling of the news that this unknown man had brought, but he had an idea that it would prove important.

Below, in one of the marble halls of the big entrance, he found Glabrio. The unhappy man was travel-stained, baggard, and nearly on the point of exhaustion.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WARNING.



**G**LABRIO looked at Nelson Lee eagerly, and there was animation in his expression, in spite of the agony of mind he suffered, and in spite of the effects of his strenuous journey.

"What is it, my friend?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Thou art the chief of the great chariot?" asked Glabrio quickly.

"I am scarcely that, but thy message will be in no better keeping than mine," replied Nelson Lee. "What hast thou to



impart, good friend? But thou art looking weary and nigh unto exhaustion——"

"It matters not!" interrupted Glabrio. "I am come, my master, to warn you of a base act contemplated by Titus, the tyrant. For it chanced that I and my friend, Licinius, had met with this rogue."

Nelson Lee was keen in a moment. Ever since the ex-emperor had escaped, there had been no trace of him. But here was this countryman eager with news—he had brought some valuable information to the capital.

"Speak on, my friend, for thy news may be of even greater urgency than thou art aware," exclaimed Lee. "Tell me, where didst see Titus? And in what circumstances?"

"In circumstances of the most tragic character," replied the other. "My name is Glabrio, and I live with my family in the far country—near the mountains. And this dog, this Titus, hath slain my brother Julius. Ay, slain him in cold blood, with less compunction than a man will slay a toad in his path!"

Glabrio spoke with passionate feeling, and Nelson Lee tried to calm him. But it was some moments before the man was able to speak again.

"What proof have you that this deed was committed by Titus?" asked Lee.

"I have the word of my brother——"

"But didst not say that he is slain?"

"Ay, slain—murderously slain!" replied Glabrio thickly. "But ere he died my brother imparted the news that hath brought me here. For thou art in danger, my master. 'Tis possible that thy great chariot will be condemned for ever to remain in this valley."

Nelson Lee held himself firm.

"What art saying?" he asked quietly.

"Titus and his companions seek to close up the great canyon," replied Glabrio. "'Tis their aim and object—and even now they are engaged upon the great task. I came with all speed, but I fear I am late—too late for thee to act!"

"Thy message is indeed grave, friend Glabrio," said Nelson Lee. "But ere I take action, it would be better for thee to go into fuller details, so that I may know the true position."

Glabrio lost no time in giving the facts exactly as he knew them. He described how he had found his dying brother with the help of Licinius—how the unfortunate Julius had given the warning with his dying breath. And, finally, how he—Glabrio—had sped through the night and the early morning to the capital, travelling on foot the entire distance, without food or scarcely a drink. A poor man, he had been unable to obtain a chariot, and so much valuable time had been lost.

"Thou art to be commended and thanked for thy prompt action, Glabrio," said

Nelson Lee, at last. "Fear not, the emperor will see that thy action is rewarded, and what compensation for the death of thy brother can be made, shall be made. And if there be any justice in the laws of the gods, Titus shall be punished."

Glabrio was led away, and taken to a quiet chamber, where he could rest and sleep. For now that his task was accomplished, he was nearly dropping with exhaustion.

Nelson Lee returned to the enclosure and tapped Lord Dorrimore on the shoulder. He also drew the attention of Mr. Travers, Earle, and Mr. Hobart Manners.

"Just a minute, gentlemen, if you don't mind," said Lee quietly.

There was something in this tone that warned them of urgency, and they were soon together in a quiet spot below the enclosure—a little marble apartment where they had privacy.

"What's the mystery, old man?" asked Dorrie.

"Fortunately, there is no mystery," replied Nelson Lee. "But there is need for instant action, and I shall require you all. In a word, Titus and his henchmen are blocking up the canyon!"

"The infernal scum!" said Dorrie hotly.

"Blocking up the canyon?" repeated Mr. Earle, his voice husky with sudden excitement. "But—but this is dreadful, Mr. Lee! If that path is blocked, there is no way for us to get back into the outer world."

The inventor's leathery face was creased into a thousand wrinkles by reason of his anxiety, and his tall, loose-jointed frame was fixed in an attitude of intense rigidity.

"Well, Mr. Lee warned us of this two days ago," put in Hobart Manners. "He was afraid that we might be bottled up, and he advised instant action. That is why we were intending to leave Isirium tomorrow. Surely it cannot be too late?"

"It will be too late unless we take action without a second's delay," replied Nelson Lee. "In other words, we must hurry to the Conqueror and speed off to the mountain pass this very instant. And it will be better, I think, to make no mention of the journey to the others. We will let the boys carry on with their innocent amusement. They need not be informed of this sudden crisis."

"But they will wonder at the absence of the Conqueror——" began Mr. Earle.

"No, I want Mr. Manners to remain here, so that he can give some sort of an explanation," put in Lee. "You had better tell them, Manners, that we have left the city in order to make a trial run—and that, indeed, is a perfectly true statement. For the Conqueror needs a testing."

"She'll get it, by all appearances," said Lord Dorrimore. "It's goin' to be top speed



all the time, Mr. Earle. If we can only get to the canyon in time—"

"Well, we won't waste time in discussing the matter here," put in Lee crisply. "We shall have plenty of opportunity for conversation once we're on board. Come on, gentlemen — let's hurry!"

Mr. Manners went back to the arena, and continued to watch the laughable events. The juniors had no suspicions whatever that the situation had become so acute that even Lee himself was looking haggard.

For if Titus and his companions were successful, the result would be too appalling for thought. Imprisoned in this valley! Shut off from the rest of the world for ever! It was a grim prospect.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TEN THOUSAND TONS OF ROCK.



THE scene was an impressive one.

Two thousand feet above the valley floor, with jagged masses of rock on every hand. The blue sky overhead, the burning

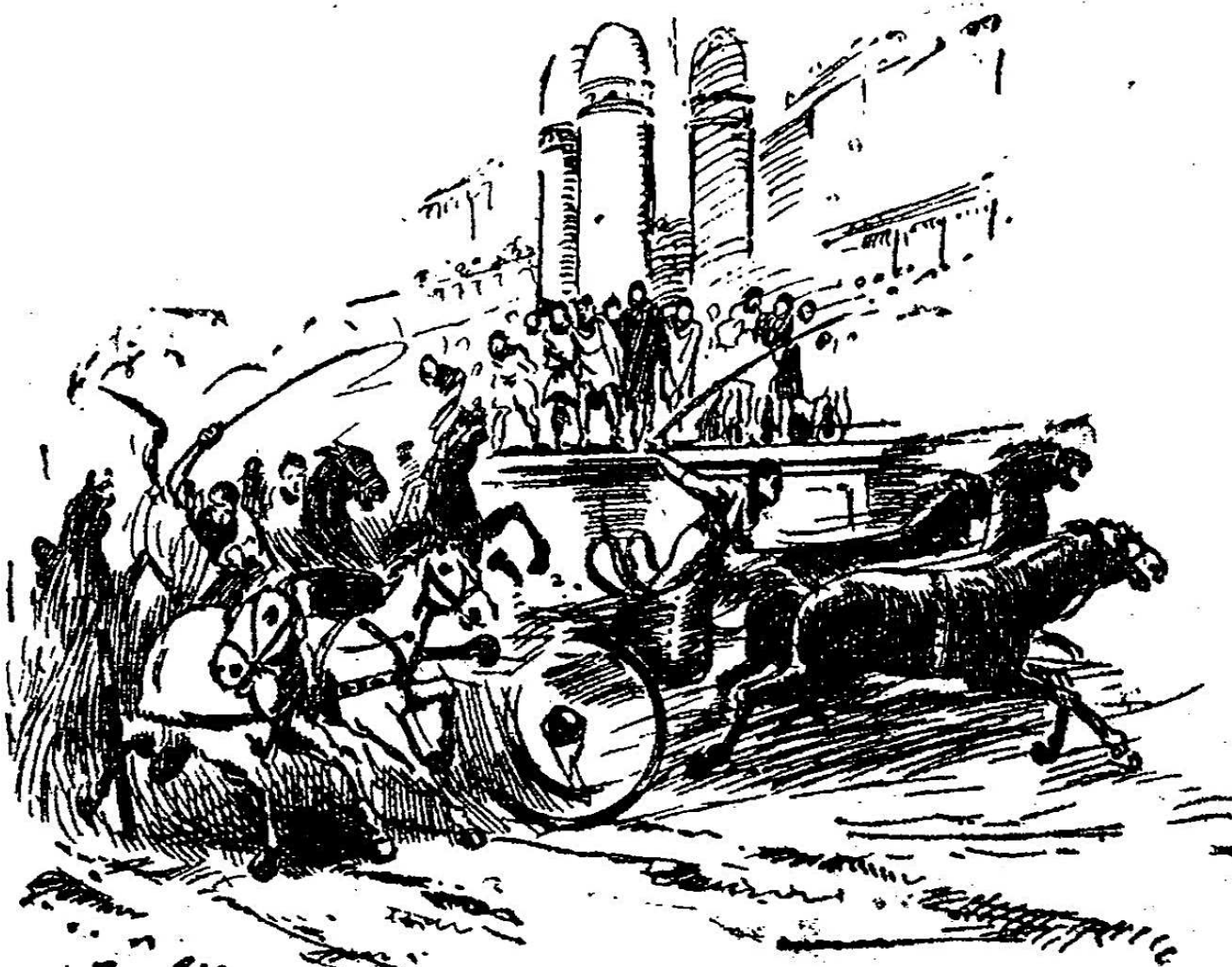
African sun, and the great vista of green valley, stretching far away to the distant mountains on the other side of the oasis.

It was this scene that lay before the eyes of the ex-Emperor Titus, Lars Melos and Spurius Gallus. The three fugitives were comparatively safe—for there was little chance of being caught in this wild spot.

For hours they had been climbing—toiling ever upwards, from crag to crag, and rock to rock. Only the thought of their revenge could have lent them strength and endurance to stick to this task.

Lars Melos had talked of abandoning the climb on several occasions, but Titus had constantly spurred him on. And it was all the more remarkable, since Titus himself was fat, flabby, and in poor physical condition.

But he had a will—a stern, grim determination. And such factors can accomplish wonders, in spite of bodily unfitness. But Titus was exhausted now, and rest was absolutely imperative.



It proved to be a race of endless laughter. The chariots were by no means easy to control, and soon after the start the race deteriorated into a kind of scramble.

"We are at the summit—and the great canyon lies below!" panted Titus, his voice quivering with gloating triumph. "Well, we can rest, my friends. Before we commence on our next task, we will indulge ourselves in a short sleep. 'Tis needless to hurry. These accursed strangers will not come hither in their chariot without our being fully warned."

This was true enough, for the main highway to the capital could be seen stretching away for miles—a white ribbon amid the intense greenness of the valley. The plotters would be warned well in advance if the Conqueror should come.

And so they rested—but Titus grimly warned his companions that one, at least, must keep awake. A watch was essential.

The three were crouching back in a little rocky recess, where the sun's rays did not penetrate. It was fairly cool in there, and after the gruelling climb, this rest spell was welcome.

From their position, they could see almost sheer down into the canyon—for this vantage point was just at the opening of the deep pass. Vast masses of rock jutted about in all directions.

Titus was asleep in two minutes, for he had been even more exhausted than he spoke of. In order to complete the task, heavy physical work was yet entailed, and the ex-emperor was incapable of it.

Lars Melos slept, too—Gallus being on guard.

But Gallus was in little better physical



condition than Titus himself. As chief of the Isirium army, he had spent most of his days in feasting, idleness and hectic living. His appointment had been a mere farce, and he was by no means a soldier.

Consequently, he soon slept, and it was not until two hours had elapsed that Melos opened his eyes, and looked round. For a few moments he lay still, sleepy and comfortable. Then he noticed his two sleeping companions. And in the far distance, right up the valley, something was moving.

Melos took no notice at first. But then, suddenly, the significance of this moving spot struck him with full force. It was something on the main highway—something that came ever onwards towards the mountains.

"By Mars!" ejaculated Melos. "The chariot of the stranger!"

The Conqueror was coming—and coming straight towards the mountain pass! Possibly a warning had been given, and the Conqueror was bent upon making a valiant attempt to escape.

"Awaken!" shouted Lars Melos urgently. "Titus—Gallus! What meaneth this? Who sleeps while a watch should be kept? These accursed strangers are coming in their wondrous vessel."

Titus awoke, and sprang to his feet.

"By all the gods of war!" he roared. "Fools! Blunderers! Perchance we shall be too late, and then what of our revenge? Come! There may yet be time!"

"'Twas thy doing, Gallus!" growled Lars Melos. "Thou didst sleep on duty! By Venus! A wondrous example from such a great soldier as thou art! What hast to say?"

Spurius Gallus scowled.

"Let thy tongue be still——" he began.

"And thine, also!" interrupted Titus harshly. "Wouldst waste time in quarrelling at such a moment as this? Come, thou turkey-cocks, and help me in this enterprise."

They climbed round some of the crags, and at length came within sight of a rather curious looking contrivance. Set into the rocks were several enormous beams—great lengths of wood which had stood the test of time for many years. And they were so placed and so constructed that if enormous pressure was placed upon one of them, the rest would act in unison—forming a terrific leverage which would move thousands of tons of rock.

The contrivance was ingenious in the extreme, and had been built for well over fifty years—by a former emperor of Isirium. At that period the valley had been threatened by a wandering tribe of Arabs, and every precaution had been taken to protect the oasis. But the Arabs had all been killed or captured during a great battle, and the canyon had never been blocked.

But the machinery to accomplish this object was still intact—crude, no doubt, but none the less efficient for that. On the

very edge of the sheer drop stood a vast mass of rock—almost hovering. It had been like this for centuries, and was perfectly safe. But once that leverage was brought into operation, the mass of rock would fall.

And if this happened, there could be only one result.

The lower section of the canyon would be utterly and absolutely blocked. And these beams of wood were placed in such a way—joined together in series so cunningly—that a mere light pressure would produce an effect. But would the strength of these three men be enough to give that mass of rock the final heave necessary to send it hurtling down?

That was the all-important question. And without the loss of a moment the precious trio commenced heaving with all their strength. And after the very first minute the rocks quivered and shook.

"Success!" shouted Titus thickly. "The rocks move!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE SIGNAL.



NELSON LEE was looking very worried as he boarded the Conqueror.

Lord Dorrimore, as usual, seemed perfectly complacent and cheerful. In fact, the more acute the danger, the greater his enjoyment. He was not troubled by any worries concerning the other members of the ship's party.

But both Nelson Lee and Mr. Earle felt the great responsibility, and the possibility of disaster concerned them deeply. They were thinking of the young people rather than of themselves.

"At all costs, we must keep the canyon open," declared Nelson Lee. "We have stayed too long in Isirium already. And now we must rigidly set our faces against sentimental leave-takings, and get out into the open at the earliest possible moment.

Dorrie nodded.

"Just as you say, old man," he agreed. "The youngsters, of course, are fairly revellin' in this place now—they think it's a picnic. But we've got to give 'em a rude shock. Even Umlosi is fed up to his eyebrows with this place. He hankers after cannibals, an' fightin', an' all that sort of thing. But we've had some excitement."

"I fancy we shall have some more yet!" said Lee grimly.

Mr. Travers Earle came hurrying along the deck, his wrinkled face expressive of anxiety.

"Infernal nuisance!" he exclaimed fiercely. "A delay, Mr. Lee! There's a slight defect in one of the engines—just the confounded cussedness of things!"

"I hope it's not serious——"

"Serious—no," interrupted the inventor. "But it makes me angry to think that we've



been standing here idle for all this time—and yet, when an emergency arises, a fault must needs develop! But we shall only be about half an hour. The men are working on it at top speed.”

“It’s a pity Manners is away,” said Lee, compressing his lips. “Can the men get on without the chief Engineer?”

“Oh, yes—the Second is in charge!” said Mr. Earle.

Lee paced up and down the deck with nervous impatience for a few minutes. Dorrie watched him curiously. It wasn’t often the famous detective displayed such emotion. But there was certainly every cause.

Glabrio’s news was vital.

And unless the canyon was reached without unnecessary delay, the exit to the outer world might be blocked. And here lay the Conqueror momentarily disabled.

Nelson Lee suddenly turned on Mr. Earle.

“Are we in full readiness for a long trip?” he asked.

“Why, yes—most of the preliminary preparations have been made.”

“Water-tanks full?”

“To the brim.”

“Then there’s only one course for us,” declared Lee crisply. “My original intention was to dash away without a second’s delay—for even one minute may mean the difference between safety and disaster. But as we are compelled to remain here for half an hour, we will utilise that time to the full.”

“How?” asked Mr. Earle.

“By giving the signal,” replied Lee. “Every member of our company will hear it, and will speed to the Conqueror. They can all reach this spot within the half-hour. Thus we shall start intact—with every precious soul on board.”

“You mean—go for good?” asked Dorrie.

“I mean go for good!” replied Nelson Lee grimly. “We’ve had enough of this uncertainty, and even at the expense of offending our friend Marcus we must get out of the valley.”

Mr. Travers Earle nodded with complete approval.

“A splendid idea!” he declared. “I’ll see about it at once.”

“There’s no question about Marcus bein’ offended,” said Dorrie. “He’s gettin’ up a tremendous fete in honour of our departure. But I suppose it’s better to miss the fete an’ clear out before we suffer another kind of fate. Hallo, there she goes!”

The Conqueror’s powerful syren suddenly awoke the echoes.

There was one long, deafening hoot, so loud and penetrating that Dorrie’s ears felt the shock. And that call could undoubtedly be heard in every corner of the city, and far beyond the outskirts.

It was followed by other prolonged hoots at fixed intervals, for a period of five minutes. And the very sound of it was urgent and compelling. Needless to say, the signal was a prearranged one.

Every member of the Conqueror’s company knew what that sound implied.

It was nothing more nor less than a hurry-call—a grim summons that must be obeyed without the slightest question. Days earlier, Lee had addressed the entire yacht’s complement of crew and passengers.

He had warned everybody that there might come a time when the Conqueror would have to make a break for liberty. If such an occasion arose, the syren would be sounded continuously. And Lee had impressed upon everyone just a single point. No matter what part of the city they were in, no matter what they were doing, absent members of the company must make a bee-line for the yacht at the first sound of that call.

There were no half and half measures about it. If the hooter sounded nothing was to stand in the way of immediate action. Boys, girls, members of the crew—all were alike. All had to race like the wind for the Conqueror.

And the syren had sent forth its signal of urgency.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANSWERING THE CALL.



HANDFORTH’S eyes sparkled.

“An idea!” he exclaimed eagerly.

“By George! A brain-wave!”

Church and McClure looked at him dubiously. They were just in the arena, watching some of the other fellows disporting themselves in the wrestling contests. Handforth had beaten his own opponent at this sport, and was, consequently, in high good humour. But his chums knew what his brain-waves were like, and they were frankly doubtful.

“An idea!” repeated Handforth firmly. “I wonder why I didn’t think of it before?”

“Well, your brain must have rest sometimes, you know,” said Church. “It’s always humming at such express speed that there’s really no time for it to get ideas. I shouldn’t worry about it, old man. Everything seems to be going along smoothly—”

“I don’t care about that—this scheme of mine is a regular snorter,” declared Handforth. “Why shouldn’t we play a game of football?” he added triumphantly.

“Football?” gasped Church.

“Football!” repeated Handforth.

“You’re mad!” said McClure. “How the dickens can we play football in this heat?”



And what about the ground? Whoever heard of football on soft sand? I don't call that idea a brain-wave—it's a misfire!"

Handforth looked thoughtful.

"Well, of course, it is a bit hot," he admitted. "But that's nothing. If we can compete in running races and wrestling matches, we can play football. Just think how the crowds would stare! They'd go mad over Reggie Pitt's forward work, and my goalkeeping——"

"But what about teams?" objected Church. "I suppose you'll suggest that Irene and Co. should play——"

"Not likely!" snorted Handforth. "Girls can play cricket, but not football! I wouldn't allow it! It's too rough a game——"

"Listen!" shouted Church suddenly.

But he needn't have given this instruction to his chums. Clearly and distinctly came the sound of the Conqueror's syren. It was insistent and urgent.

"That's the Conqueror," said Handforth. "Testing the hooter, I suppose."

"You fathead!" yelled McClure. "It's the signal!"

"Signal? Which signal?"

"Didn't Mr. Lee warn us——"

"By George, yes!" said Handforth, with a start. "What rot! Just when we're in the middle of these sports! We can't be interrupted now—not likely! Don't take any notice!"

This advice was ignored, for Church and McClure were taking very full notice. And so were all the others. I came running up with Archie Glenthorne, and at the same moment Pitt and Grey and the rest of the fellows abandoned their various positions.

"It's the signal!" I said grimly. "Something's happened!"

"Looks like it," agreed Pitt. "We've got to scoot! The order is to rush to the Conqueror at full speed. Come on!"

"But we can't go yet!" howled Edward Oswald. "What about the sports?"

"Bother the sports!"

"But we haven't decided——"

"Grab him, you chaps!" implored Church. "He'll argue like this for half an hour if you don't lend a hand! The ass never seems to realise that an order is an order."

Handforth was seized by Pitt and Grey and Christine and a few others, and fairly bundled out of the arena. And by the time he reached the exterior of the amphitheatre, he was convinced that the call was urgent, and that it wouldn't do to dally.

In the enclosures, Mr. and Mrs. Manners were startled. And Irene and Co. were quickly collected together, and a hasty exit was made. In every quarter, in fact, the signal was being answered.

The syren continued its urgent message.

The Emperor Marcus was full of concern when he saw what was taking place. Horatius Placidus was equally worried. But nothing could be done. Nothing could induce the guests to remain.

Mr. Manners was doubly concerned. He was the chief engineer of the Conqueror, and he feared that some disaster had happened. Moreover, he knew that the vessel should be already on its way to the canyon.

Obviously, the programme had been altered, and Mr. Manners was full of impatience to be on board. There was something about that hooting syren that sounded sinister.

Everyone acted individually. That is to say, there was no confusion as to who should go, and who shouldn't. The arrangement was that everyone should act for himself, and choose the quickest and shortest method of reaching the land yacht.

Tommy Watson and I were fortunate enough to get hold of a chariot. At the last minute, Tregellis-West and Glenthorne squeezed in with us, and we went careering off through the city streets—the charioteer being only too willing to reveal his prowess.

We arrived in the central square less than ten minutes after the call had sounded. And there was the Conqueror, fairly humming with bustle and life. She had shifted her position, and was ready for instant departure. Her baby tractors had been hoisted up on to their davits, her main gangway had been pulled in, and a temporary one substituted. And members of the crew were hurrying to and fro with urgent speed.

"Well, thank goodness she's safe!" said Watson. "I thought there was another attack, or something. What's the idea of this bustle?"

"Preparing for departure, by the look of it," I said.

"But, dash it all, that's absolutely ridiculous!" objected Archie. "I mean, the good old emperor is preparing all sorts of priceless festivals, and so forth. We can't whizz off at a moment's notice, and leave the old sparrow flat. That sort of thing isn't done!"

"I think it will be done to-day," I said grimly.

"How absolutely shocking!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean, bally bad form, and so forth, and all that. Good gad! These people will positively write us down as poisonous outsiders!"

Archie was quite concerned, and when he went on board he was full of anxiety for news. Above all else, he didn't want to leave Isirium in such a manner that the people would criticise.

Unfortunately, the position was too acute for any strict adherence to the laws of hospitality. Our one hope of getting back



to the outer world was to make a dash for the canyon.

Within the half-hour, the adjustments to the engine had been made, and every member of the yacht's company was on board.

And then commenced the flight.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HOVERING ROCK.



**O**UR departure was, indeed, a dramatically sudden turn.

We were literally fleeing, and there had been no time to see the emperor and those Isirium nobles who had become our friends. Nelson Lee had left a message of goodwill, but there had been no time for anything else.

And now the Conqueror was well clear of the city, rolling steadily and speedily along the great paved highway. She was traveling at a much higher speed than usual—her engines being called upon to give of their utmost.

Anxiety was clearly evident in the expressions of Mr. Travers Earle and the other gentlemen. Even Nelson Lee was unable to conceal his deep concern. For if Titus and his two scoundrelly companions should have attained their object, the outlook was black.

None of the younger people had been informed of the peril. But they could easily guess that something extra special was in the wind. Otherwise, this precipitate departure would never have been made.

"Oh, of course, Mr. Lee know's what he's doing; but it's awfully disappointing," said Irene regretfully. "We were going to have such a fine time to-night, in the palace—with dancing, and music, and all sorts of things."

Marjorie Temple nodded gloomily.

"Just our luck!" she said. "Look here, Renie, haven't you asked your dad anything. It's so mysterious, this running away—"

"I've asked him, but he won't tell me a thing," interrupted Irene indignantly. "He just says that Mr. Lee thinks it advisable to leave at once. It's a mystery."

"Oh, don't be silly!" put in Doris Berkeley. "They can't kid me! There's no mystery about this, my little innocents! We're scooting off because old Titus is up to mischief!"

"Oh! How do you know that?" asked Marjorie.

"I don't know it; but I'm not quite dotty!" replied Doris calmly. "I'll bet a packet of pins that old Titus is on our track—probably up to some scheme to do the Conqueror in the eye! That's his game! He means to bottle us up, so that we're imprisoned in this valley for life."

"Doris!" protested Irene. "What terrible slang!"

"Rats!" said Doris. "If the boys can use slang, so can I! I say, just imagine being compelled to live in this valley for life! What a prospect! Fancy becoming Mrs. Allectus Claudius, or Mrs. Spurius Glabrio! My only hat!"

"Don't be so silly, Doris!" said Irene severely.

"Not so silly, either," remarked Willy Handforth, joining the girls. "It's quite possible that we shall be hemmed in. Of course, I shall become Prime Minister, or something, and I expect you girls will get married to some of the local big-wigs—"

Willy paused, and considered.

"Of course, there's another possibility," he went on. "There's no telling, but my major might grab you, Miss Irene. And I'll bet anything that Archie Glenthorne takes Miss Marjorie for his trouble and strife! I'm blessed if I know what Ena'll do—be an old maid, I expect."

"Oh, will she?" exclaimed Ena Handforth, who had just arrived. "You little wretch! I've a good mind to spank you!"

"Spank me?" howled Willy.

"He deserves it!" declared Irene, red with confusion and indignation. "Oh, it's too bad! Why don't you hand him over to Ted? It wouldn't take Ted long to punish him."

"Well, of all the nerve!" snorted Willy. "You pretend to get indignant because Ted swipes a chap, and now you want him to swipe me! It only proves that all girls are the same—selfish to the core! Hi! Lemme alone, sis!"

"I wouldn't touch you with a pitchfork!" said Ena tartly. "I'll give you just one minute to get to the other side of the deck—and then stay there! I'll teach you to be cheeky!"

Willy went, inwardly boiling. He couldn't reply as he would have liked, for, after all, he was dealing with girls, and he had a few hazy ideas of chivalry. He marched over to the opposite rail, and found Fatty Little staring gloomily back along the white road.

"Lost something?" growled Willy.

"It's a shame!" said Fatty, in a hollow voice. "We were going to have a feast to-night—a terrific feed in the emperor's palace—and now we're scooting off like this and leaving it all behind! It's nothing more or less than a swindle!"

"Glutton!" said Willy tartly. "Ain't you satisfied with the grub on board? Anybody might think you were half-starved! At least, they might if they were blind; but one look at you would prove that you're a dozen sizes too large, my lad!"

Willy marched off, and joined his chums of the Third, with whom he was on much more comfortable terms. And by this time the Conqueror was getting fairly close to the mountains.



Nelson Lee reckoned that the entrance to the pass would be reached during the next half-hour. Already the aspect of the surrounding country had changed. The wooded sections had been left behind, and very soon there would be nothing but desert sand on either side.

And the crags loomed up ahead, with the entrance to the pass becoming more and more distinct. Nelson Lee was scanning the rocky heights through powerful binoculars.

"See anythin', old man?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"Why, yes—figures against the sky-line," replied Lee grimly. "They're there, Dorrie, but everything seems intact, so far. I don't think— Good heavens! It's moving! That enormous mass of rock is moving!"

Nelson Lee's voice had taken on a startled note.

And not without reason. Through the glasses he could see a gigantic mass of rock perched in a seemingly precarious position at the top of the frowning precipice. If that mass fell, the entrance to the canyon would be undoubtedly blocked for ever.

The mass was tremendous in size, and obviously safe, since it must have remained in this position for centuries. Three figures were to be seen straining and exerting themselves upon some crude-looking machinery.

And the towering mass of rock was actually tottering!

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE ONLY CHANCE.



**W**ITHIN the first thirty seconds Nelson Lee grasped the truth.

Those rocks were balanced—and, left untouched, were perfectly safe. The mightiest tempest that blew could not affect them. But these three men, apparently puny and insect-like compared to the mountain, were able to shift the entire cliff-top.

It was all a matter of leverage, as Lee realised. He had no means of knowing how this leverage had been engineered, and he didn't care. The one fact that filled his mind was the certainty that the rock mass would fall. Moreover, it would fall before the Conqueror could even reach the vicinity of the canyon.

It seemed that all hope was dead.

Indeed, to even attempt the passage would

be sheer madness. For, supposing the rocks remained in position, they might crash down just as the land yacht was entering the canyon. And such a chance could not be taken.

Nelson Lee was pale and haggard with acute worry.

"Moving?" said Lord Dorrimore, staring. "Man alive, what on earth are you talkin' about? You must be seein' double."

"Look for yourself," said Nelson Lee grimly.

Dorrie took the glasses and gazed. And while he was doing so Lee was thinking with a concentration he seldom attained. Idea after idea occurred to him, only to be instantly dismissed. It seemed as though no power on earth could avert this disaster. And yet Nelson Lee was striving to find a solution. Not until it was too late would he finally admit defeat.

"I wonder?" he murmured keenly. "It might be possible, and yet— Yes, the chance is well worth taking."

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie, as he lowered his glasses. "Those men are shiftin' the entire cliff-top! But it's impossible, Lee—they couldn't do it!"

"They are doing it!"

"Absolutely—but how?" demanded his lordship. "In the name of all that's amazing, how? That chunk of rock must weigh thousands an' thousands of tons! It's a human impossibility!"

"Not when you realise that that mass of rock is finely balanced, with a slight surplus towards the safety side," replied Nelson Lee. "And with adequate leverage, the thing becomes a mere matter of energy."

"Mr. Lee! Have you seen?" demanded the Conqueror's owner, as he came hurrying up. "There are men up on the cliff-top—"

"Yes, Mr. Earle, and there is only one possible way of frustrating this attempt to bottle us up. It is a chance in a thousand, but we must take it. Dorrie, will you get half a dozen men, and speed off ahead in one of the tractors?"

"I'm game for anythin'," replied Dorrie promptly.

"Then go—and don't waste a moment," went on Lee crisply. "Take rifles with you, and see if you can pick off those curs on the mountain-top. You will have to go fairly close to be within range—"

"Leave it to me," said Dorrie.

He was off in a moment, glad enough to be doing something active. In the meantime, Nelson Lee had given orders of another character. The land yacht was at a standstill, and half-a-dozen men were busily uncovering a big object in the bows.

It was soon revealed as a gun—a powerful artillery piece—or, rather, a small naval-type gun. The weapon was capable of firing a shell over a wide range, and had

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been provided by the builder for any emergency.

The present range—from the Conqueror to the canyon entrance—was so short as to make a direct hit a veritable certainty. And Lee himself was at the levers, finding the exact range.

In the meantime, the light tractor had sped away, and all the men with Dorrie were practised sharpshooters. At any moment Lee expected to see that mass of rock fall—a signal that his efforts were too late.

But still it proved obstinate, and still the plotters worked with all the strength of their muscle and sinew. For the Conqueror was within full sight, and Titus could see his scheme on the point of failure.

As for the rest of us, we were watching with intense, acute interest. None of the fellows knew exactly what the scheme was, and there were naturally all sorts of criticisms.

"It's madness!" muttered Jack Grey anxiously. "Surely, they're not going to fire a shell at the cliff-top?"

"Looks like it," said Pitt.

"But it'll wipe those three men out—it'll kill them on the instant—"

"Don't they deserve it?" demanded Handforth gruffly.

"Yes, I know—but what about the cliff?" demanded Grey. "An explosion like that will simply bring those rocks down in thousands of tons—and if that won't block the canyon, what will?"

"Yes, it seems a bit of a dotty idea," agreed Handforth dubiously. "An explosion of that sort will shake the cliff to its foundations, and might even cause a general collapse."

"You needn't be so critical," I exclaimed. "Surely, you can trust the gov'nor not to do anything rash? Leave it to him, and he'll find the best way out of this trouble."

"Yes—if there is a way," said Tommy Watson.

Nelson Lee's plan was not clear to us all—but, as I had pointed out, he could be relied upon to keep his head. It was not like the gov'nor to go into anything rashly or impulsively.

As a matter of fact, the gun was trained on the opening of the pass, and it was Nelson Lee's plan to shatter the great mass of rock if it should chance to fall. It was a desperate scheme—but the need was desperate.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BULL'S-EYE.



LORD DORRIMORE grunted.

"Not much good," he said briefly.

"Doesn't look like it, sir," agreed one of the men.

"We're quite out of range here, and it'll mean a stiff climb if we're



**For the conqueror, on clearing these boulders, would necessarily heave and roll to a dangerous extent.**

to get up these rocks. Why, it'll take us hours."

"That's what I'm thinkin'!" said his lordship gruffly.

The small tractor had reached a spot where the rocks rose up almost sheer. But the sharp-shooting party had taken good care to go well clear of the canyon mouth. For Nelson Lee had warned Dorrie to keep away from that direction. At any moment the mass of rock might fall.

The snipers had lost sight of their quarry, owing to the frowning cliffs. But, somewhere far above, Titus and his two companions were working desperately at the crudely constructed levers.

Even if they had been within sight, the snipers would have done little, for the range was too great. The only chance, it seemed, was to climb the mountain itself.

This was not such a difficult proposition, for the rocks were not sheer, but steeply sloping. And there were crevices by the thousand, in which the climbers could rest their fingers and feet.

But it would necessarily be a long job.

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was at the breech of the gun. His eye was trained on the target, and never for a second did he relax his vigilance. One pull at the cord would send a shell screaming over the intervening space. And if that shell was to be in any way useful, it must score a direct hit. So Lee could not afford to be careless.

It was a tense, anxious ordeal.



It seemed that the rock would never go. It was possible, indeed, that Titus and his men had made a miscalculation. Perhaps they would never be able to shift that enormous mass. It looked dangerous, but this may have been merely an illusion.

However, nothing could be left to chance.

"Why can't something be done?" growled Bob Christine. "Why don't we move on, and make a dash for it? By this time we could have entered the pass, and the danger would have been behind us!"

"That's true enough," admitted Yorke. "I'm blessed if I can understand why we should stick here like this!"

"Fatheads!" said Handforth tartly.

"Eh?"

"Idiots!" said Handforth, with scorn. "What's the good of us going forward at a time like this? You know what fate is! If we stand still, that rock won't shift an inch—but if we make a dash into the canyon, we shall be biffed in about two ticks by a million tons of granite! That's just the luck of things."

"This is no time to be funny!" said Christine coldly.

"Funny?" howled Handforth. "Who's funny? I say it's a mad idea to move from this spot—and if any of you fellows disagree with me, it won't take me long to hand out a few biffs! Well?"

"Steady, old man," whispered Church. "No need to make such a noise now. Mr. Lee mustn't be disturbed—Hullo! That mass of rock seems to be tottering a bit more! It's awful, the way it moves, and yet don't fall! Why don't they get it over and done with?"

"I think it would be better if we let the rotters do their worst," said McClure. "I'm not worrying, anyhow. And by staying here we're certain of safety, at all events."

Handforth sniffed.

"That's all you care about—safety!" he said scornfully. "My hat! This is the first time I knew you were a funk! If I was in command of this ship, we'd be making a terrific dash through the canyon by this time! It's nothing more or less than madness to stay here!"

Reggie Pitt couldn't help grinning.

"Then we're mad, in any case," he remarked drily. "A minute ago you said we should be mad if we moved—so you can't have it both ways. But we know you, old son—and forgive you freely."

"You—you forgive me?" hooted Handforth.

"Without a stain on your character," said Reggie.

"You—you dotty chump!" roared Handforth. "What have I to be forgiven for?"

"There are so many things that I can't waste time in naming them all," replied Pitt. "My goodness, we don't want to start any arguments, do we? The trouble with you, Handy, is that—"

"Look!" gasped Church abruptly. "It's going!"

"Oh!"

Everybody held their breath. Without any question, that enormous cliff-top was really and truly toppling; toppling into space! Thousands of tons of rock, in one solid mass, was heaving slowly and deliberately into space, where it could shoot down to the canyon entrance, and block it hopelessly.

"That," exclaimed Archie Glenthorne, "has somewhat marred the old prospect. I mean to say, Isirium for the rest of our days, what?"

Nobody took any notice—for the whole thing happened while Archie was in the midst of his remark. The cliff-top detached itself from the rest of the mountain, and fell.

Crash!

The Conqueror shook from stem to stern as the gun belched forth a blinding mass of smoke and flame. At the same time there was a veritable shriek as the shell left the muzzle and sped forward on its deadly mission.

Watching, we hardly had time to know what happened.

But from the centre of the great canyon came a blinding flash—an appalling roar—and fragments of rock were hurled in every direction by the million. And Nelson Lee took a deep breath.

"A bull's-eye, Manners," he said quietly.

"By gad, sir, you're right!" gasped the chief engineer.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WAY TO LIBERTY.



IT was a wonderful piece of work.

Wonderful, because of the dead accuracy of Nelson Lee's timing, and wonderful because of the result that was wrought.

That mass of rock, falling in mid-air, had been hit fairly and squarely by the high-explosive shell. Thus, the full shock of the bursting shell was borne by the detached mass of rock. The canyon's sides were scarcely affected. There were thus no further falls of rock.

And the enormous mass that was to have blocked the entrance was shattered to a myriad fragments before it even reached the ground. And the thousands of tons of debris were scattered over a wide area.

"What—what's happened?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"By jingo!" I breathed. "That's about the smartest piece of gunnery I've ever seen. I didn't know the gov'nor was such a wonderful marksman! Don't you understand, you chaps? The obstruction was



shattered even before it reached the ground!"

"Yes, but—but——"

"Instead of falling in one chunk, it arrived in millions of bits," I pointed out. "So it's more than possible that we shall be able to get through, after all. Let's give the gov'nor a cheer."

"Hurrah!"

"That was wonderful, sir!"

"You needn't start cheering yet, boys," called Nelson Lee grimly. "I hope we shall be able to get through, but we're not certain. Let's postpone cheering until we're quite clear of the danger."

Handforth nodded.

"That's what I say," he remarked. "Huh! All this fuss over nothing! I'll admit that hit was pretty smart, but it wasn't even necessary."

"How wasn't it?" asked Church, staring.

"My dear, pitiful ass, must I explain?" asked Edward Oswald witheringly. "It's a good thing I've got a brain in my head, instead of a piece of wet sponge!"

"Wet sponge!" roared Church indignantly.

"Something like that," said Handy. "Don't you understand that the explosion would have been just as effective if Mr. Lee had fired afterwards?"

"Afterwards?" repeated Pitt curiously.

"Of course!" went on Handforth. "Why didn't he wait until the rock fell, and then biff it to pieces with a few well-placed shells?"

"Echo answers why," said Reggie Pitt. "I mean, I can think of about ten reasons why Mr. Lee shouldn't have done it—but one will do. Don't you understand, my dear fathead, that a shell exploding in that canyon would probably bring the whole caboodle down in a hopeless mass?"

Handforth looked blank.

"By George! I'd forgotten that!" he admitted. "At least, I hadn't actually forgotten it," he added hastily. "And I don't believe that the canyon would bust up, either!"

He continued the argument, intending to be in the right. For under no circumstances would Edward Oswald admit himself wrong. But as nobody paid the slightest attention to him, it didn't matter.

In the meantime, Lord Dorrimore and his men were on the level ground again. They had only climbed a short distance when that shattering explosion came, proving that their own work was unnecessary.

Titus and Gallus and Melos were nowhere to be seen. They had not been hurt by the explosion, for the bursting shell had struck the falling rock midway from the canyon top to the ground.

And the three desperate fugitives had made themselves scarce. They knew all the secrets of these cliffs, having lived in the valley throughout their lives. So it was useless to attempt a search.

"They're done for, anyway," declared Dorrie. "There isn't time for them to get up to any other mischief. We'd better shoot back to the ship, an' then we'll get a move on."

This was Nelson Lee's own decision.

When the small tractor had reached the Conqueror, everybody was full of bustle and rush. The tractor was quickly hoisted on to the davits, and the great land yacht was got into motion.

"We cannot afford to waste a second," declared Nelson Lee grimly. "Those scoundrels have probably gone farther along the pass in order to prepare rocks for hurling down. Our only hope is to get out at once—before such preparations can be fully made."

"But supposin' the way is blocked?" asked Dorrie.

"In that case we shall remain here," said Lee. "But I have a shrewd idea that our plan has succeeded."

The Conqueror proceeded cautiously, everybody being on deck, watching closely and with intent eagerness. Even the girls were just as interested as the juniors. And a general excitement prevailed.

"In one way, I'm sorry to leave," said Reggie Pitt. "We've had some good sport here, and there's not much prospect of excitement, once we get out into the desert again. Still, I'm satisfied."

"Same here," agreed Jack Grey. "If any chap wants more excitement than we've had he's a glutton!"

"What rot!" snorted Fatty Little, who had caught the last word as he passed by. "I haven't eaten a thing since breakfast! As a matter of fact, I'm starving! Why can't we have lunch?"

"Who's talking about lunch?" growled Jack Grey. "And I wasn't talking about food, either! It only shows what channels your mind runs in, you greedy rotter! If you're hungry, why don't you dive below and get hold of the steward?"

Fatty Little sniffed.

"Think I haven't tried that?" he asked disdainfully. "I can't even find the chap, and the pantry's locked! If this goes on much longer, I shall simply fade away to a shadow."

"What about heaving him overboard?" demanded Handforth. "We ought to go about ten miles an hour faster if we get rid of this lump!"

Fatty Little moved off hastily, not because he feared being hurled overboard, but because he caught sight of an understeward with a tray. Such a spectacle, to Fatty Little, was a certain magnet.

The canyon mouth was reached, and then all fears were at rest. For even a swift scrutiny satisfied Nelson Lee and Mr. Earle that the Conqueror could negotiate the pass and escape from the valley.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## FAREWELL TO ISIRIUM.



**T**HE Conqueror was at a standstill. Just ahead the way was strewn with massive boulders and tons of rough rocks. By slow progress, it would be possible for the land yacht to climb over these obstructions and reach the smooth way beyond.

But before essaying the task, a few adjustments were necessary. Various objects on deck had to be lashed down, the masts had to be shortened, and the wireless unshipped.

For the Conqueror, in clearing these boulders, would necessarily heave and roll to a dangerous extent. And it would never do to enter upon such an enterprise unprepared.

The men were hard at work in a dozen places. The juniors and the girls were hardly noticed—and they took good care to remain out of the way.

"Hallo! Look what's coming!" exclaimed Grey suddenly.

He pointed down into the great valley. And sure enough, a number of chariots were approaching at the gallop. They had left the paved highway, and were ploughing across the loose sands.

And when the chariots finally drew up, it could be seen that the horses were almost on the point of dropping with exhaustion. They had been driven hard, and the final spurt had almost proved too much.

The newcomers were the Emperor Marcus and his nobles.

Old Flavius Placidus, and his son Horatius, were two of the first to mount the Conqueror's gangway. There were several others, too, and all were looking anxious and concerned.

"What now?" shouted Placidus, in his boisterous way. "Thinkest thou of leaving us in this abrupt fashion, good friends? Nay, but 'tis a poor way of returning our hospitality——"

"Thou art unaware of the circumstances, good Horatius, or thou wouldst not speak thus," exclaimed Nelson Lee, also in Latin. "We fled from the city because news of grave import had come to our ears. Titus, the traitor, had sought to shatter the canyon, so that we should be imprisoned."

"By Mars! Has that serpent not finished yet?" exclaimed Marcus angrily. "When he is captured he will be shown no mercy! Torture will be his fate—ay, and torture for his foul companions!"

"'Tis all they deserve, but I trust thou wilt reconsider thy decision," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Torture, good Marcus, is not looked upon with favour in the great outer world. Spare these men thy wrath, and if thou must kill—kill mercifully."

"A quaint way of thinking, indeed," growled Marcus. "I cannot agree to thy

request, my good friend. We have our ways in Isirium, and thou hast thine in the big world beyond. 'Tis better, perhaps, that we should be different. But talk not of these subjects—they offend me. Wilt not return to the capital, so that thy send-off can be adequate?"

Nelson Lee pointed out as diplomatically as possible that it would be most unwise to return. Indeed, he plainly hinted to Marcus that his very presence was a hindrance.

And the emperor and his cortege were sensible enough to realise that their guests were determined on immediate departure. They made us all a ceremonious farewell, and then took their departure from the Conqueror, returning to their chariots.

Nelson Lee stood by the rail, with Lord Dorrimore on one side, and Mr. Travers Earle on the other. This was probably the last time they would ever set eyes on Isirium or its people, and the moment was impressive.

And then—whiz!

Something came shooting through the air from the rocks, comparatively near by. Nelson Lee was struck forcibly, and he crashed to the deck without a groan. Dorrie, indeed, knew nothing of it until it was over.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Lee! What on earth——"

"Something was thrown—a javelin, by glory!" panted Mr. Earle, dropping to his knees beside the fallen detective. "Quick, Dorrie—help me to lift him! I—I believe he's done for!"

"It can't be!" breathed Dorrie huskily.

But Nelson Lee was silent, and blood was flowing freely from his head. And there, on the deck, lay an ugly-looking, short-handled throwing-spear—a silent indication of the disaster.

Nobody thought of finding out who had committed this foul deed. For several minutes there was nothing but acute confusion. For most of us had seen the gov'nor fall.

I rushed up, pale and shaken, and a number of other juniors came bounding after me. Dorrie, Mr. Manners, and the others were equally alarmed. Even the crew forgot their duties, and crowded round.

"For Heaven's sake, stand clear!" shouted Dorrie. "We must get him below—he's badly hit! An' somebody hustle about with bandages an' water! I hope to goodness he hasn't been——"

Dorrie didn't finish what he was about to say, and Nelson Lee's unconscious form was quickly carried below. Most of the fellows believed that he was dead, and utter consternation reigned.

And while this was going on, three figures crouched against the rocks to the side of the pass, within a few yards of the Con-



queror's side, indeed. And those three figures were the ex-Emperor Titus, Lars Melos, and Spurius Gallus.

By means known only to themselves, they had got down from the summit, and were seeking refuge among the crags—in a kind of recess. But they could proceed no further, for to emerge from this hiding-place would mean discovery. And in a moment of hatred, Titus had hurled the javelin.

Now he was imbued with another great idea.

The decks of the Conqueror were confused—nobody was looking in this direction. And there, quite near by, was the open gangway, leading into the heart of the vessel. It was more than possible that an entry could be made without anybody being the wiser.

"Come!" hissed Titus huskily. "We go within this great chariot!"

"Art mad?" gasped Melos huskily. "'Twill be death——"

"Possibly so—but not torture," replied Titus grimly.

He acted purely on impulse, and his companions were too much under his influence to lag behind. In one rush they reached the great doorway of the Conqueror's side, sped up the short gangway, and were within the vessel!

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE LUST FOR VENGEANCE.



A SECOND later, and the infamous trio might have been seen as they scurried through the opening. It was pure luck that enabled them to get on

board so easily—luck, coupled with the all-important fact that everybody on deck was engaged.

At all events, Titus and his henchmen were on board.

They found themselves in the entrance passage. A doorway loomed open, and they sped through. They were in a passage beyond, and from this they quickly made their way to a little room which stood empty. It was, indeed, a store-room—one which had been exhausted of its contents, and was, naturally, now disused.

Titus closed the door, and darkness resulted.

"'Tis luck!" he panted. "We are safe, my friends—for the moment we have naught to fear. None know that we came on board."

Lars Melos breathed hard.

"'Twas madness itself to come!" he said harshly. "What faces us now but death and torture? 'Tis too late to get away. By all the gods of war! This is indeed the maddest thing thou hast ever done, Titus!"

"Ay, surely!" said the other.

"Mad?" snarled the ex-emperor. "Think you I am to be deprived of my vengeance? If it brings death itself, I am determined to make these accursed strangers suffer! Thou canst talk and grumble, my fine friends! But the die is cast, and we cannot retract!"

But his companions were by no means satisfied.

"Had we remained, 'twas even possible we might have eluded all pursuit," said Melos. "But now 'tis useless. I blame thee not, Titus, but I blame myself. 'Twas the act of a fool for me to follow."

"And thou art a fool, too, Gallus?" sneered Titus.

"Ay! Madness itself did overtake me!" growled Spurius Gallus.

Titus laughed with a harsh note.

"It seemeth thou art both witless!" he snorted. "Long have I suspected that truth, but never before has it been so aptly demonstrated. What remained for us in the valley? What fate was ours, think you? Naught but capture—and death!"

"That is true, without doubt," agreed Melos.

"Ay, and torture likewise!" went on Titus. "Were we to fall into the hands of this cub, Marcus, our fate would be even worse than our wits can imagine. Torn to shreds by lions, burnt at the stake—perchance, something even more foul than either of these."

His companions were silent.

"Thy brains are beginning to work again, eh?" went on Titus sneeringly. "Sooner or later, my friends, capture would have been our lot. But here we are comparatively secure. We have naught to fear from these strangers from the outer world."

"Why thinkest thou that?" asked Melos, with a touch of eagerness in his voice.

"Why?" repeated the other. "By Mercury! Have we not had proof? Did not these fools protest against the pleasures of the arena? 'Tis their creed to look upon torture with horror. And so, even if we are discovered and imprisoned, our fate would be easy."

"'Twill be death—no less!" said Gallus huskily.

"Even that I doubt," replied Titus. "But if death comes it will be swift—merciful. And we people of Isirium, who know death in so many other forms, should be content with such a prospect. But, as I have said, 'tis more like that we shall even escape death. Perchance, we shall get beyond into the great outer world and fulfil an oft-desired wish."

The other two men were getting more and more easy in mind. And there was a great deal of truth in what Titus had said. By remaining in the valley they were doomed to a death by violence.



But by staying on board the Conqueror, and remaining hidden, they had an excellent chance of escaping the horrible fate which was undoubtedly their due. Even in these desperate circumstances, Titus was still as wily and cunning as ever.

"And there is one thing thou hast given no thought to," went on the ex-emperor, his voice quivering. "What of our revenge? What of our sworn decision to make these dogs suffer?"

"'Tis too late to talk thus—"

"Nay, good Gallus—not too late!" interrupted Titus. "Our plan failed, but only because of these wondrous mechanisms that seemeth to spring to life when the fancy taketh their owners. But our time will come! Perchance, one man is already dead. He was struck by my javelin."

And so they went on talking—Melos and Gallus only too pleased to have this breathing spell, and fearful for what might follow. But Titus was different. His fears were completely consumed by his lust for revenge. His one idea in coming on board was to be near, so that these strangers should not escape.

And nobody on the Conqueror knew!

Just that minute of confusion, and the scoundrels were on board. And now they were securely below, skulking in a store room which was disused, and not likely to be visited during the entire trip.

So the chances were that the three would be undetected—unless they deliberately gave themselves away.

Even the new emperor, Marcus, knew nothing. He and his nobles were not even aware that Nelson Lee had fallen. They went on their way in their chariots, returning to the wonderful city of marble halls and imposing colonnades. They were returning to their capital, leaving us to emerge from the canyon into the outer desert.

We believed that our associations with Isirium and all its inhabitants were at an end? But were they?

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THROUGH THE CANYON.



"WELL, Dorrie?" I asked breathlessly. For fully ten minutes I had been standing near the door of Nelson Lee's state-room. The guv'nor himself was lying on the bed, quiet and still. Round him were gathered Lord Dorrimore, Mr. and Mrs. Manners, and Sir Edward Handforth.

Sir Crawford Grey and Mr. Pitt and I were waiting, nearly distracted with anxiety. And I blurted out my question tensely as Lord Dorrimore turned, a finger to his lips.

"It's all right!" he whispered. "It's not so bad as we first thought—an infernally nasty knock, but I think he'll be all right soon. That's one benefit of havin' a thick skull!"

"He's—he's not dying?" I asked quickly.

"Dyin'?" repeated Dorrie. "Good gad, no! A couple of inches lower, an' it might have been all up. But the javelin caught him a glancin' blow across the temple, an' although the scalp wound is an ugly one, there's nothin' grave about it. He ought to recover consciousness any minute."

"Thank Heaven!" I said fervently.

"He's already recovered, thanks, Dorrie," came Nelson Lee's voice from the bed. "What's all the excitement about? It's only a slight knock!"

I rushed to the bed, and looked at the guv'nor with eager anxiety, intermingled with thankfulness. He was bandaged up, but there was a smile on his face.

"Oh, guv'nor, I thought they'd got you!" I said huskily.

"That's not the point, young 'un," said Lee. "Have you got them?"

"Them?" I repeated vaguely.

"The kindly gentleman who presented me with this trade-mark," replied Nelson Lee calmly. "I suspect that our old friend Titus knows something about it."

"As far as I know, nobody knows where the spear came from, or who threw it," said Sir Edward. "But I shall make it my business to find out, Mr. Lee. Leave it in my hands, and there's no doubt that the miscreant will be captured, and made to pay the penalty!"

"That is very nice of you, Sir Edward," murmured Lee.

I was more than delighted to see the guv'nor so cheerful, and I suspected that he would be up on deck within an hour. It is always so easy to form a wrong impression when a man is struck down, senseless and bleeding.

During those first tense moments I had thought that Nelson Lee was fatally hit. But the bleeding, as we had seen, proved to be deceptive. The wound was a mere gash on the scalp, with the skull bruised below. Unconsciousness had only been brief.

I hastened out of the cabin, joyful and jubilant. Our other troubles seemed insignificant now that the guv'nor was safe. Just at the top of the staircase I ran into Handforth and Co., and a crowd of other fellows.

"There you are! I knew it!" said Handforth gloomily. "He's dead! Didn't I say that poor old Mr. Lee was dead? But I'm blessed if I can understand why this rotter's smiling!" he said fiercely.

"I'm smiling because the guv'nor's safe!" I replied.

"Safe?"

"He's recovered consciousness, and the wound isn't at all serious," I said to the general satisfaction of my audience. "Just



a scalp wound, and I bet we shall see the guy'nor on deck before long."

"Hurrah!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" snorted Handforth.

"It's a swindle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you want Mr. Lee to die, then?" demanded Pitt.

"Well, not exactly, but why the dickens does he fall over like that, if he isn't really hurt?" growled Handforth. "Of course, I knew he was only just knocked a bit sideways. I've been telling everybody that Mr. Lee was safe——"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Church. "Safe for the next world, according to your statements. But let's forget it. Everything's all serene, so we can be jolly thankful that all ends well."

"Yes, but what about some lunch?" asked Fatty Little plaintively.

His appetite was not decreasing, and still there was no prospect of food. Indeed, Fatty Little was about the only person on board who thought about eating.

One excitement had followed the other so swiftly that there was really no time for such trivialities. And even now there was the canyon to be conquered. And no further time could be lost, for there was always the chance that more trickery would be attempted.

For, of course, nobody knew that the tricksters were on board. The audacity of it was rather startling—and yet the soundness of Titus' reasoning was perfectly understandable.

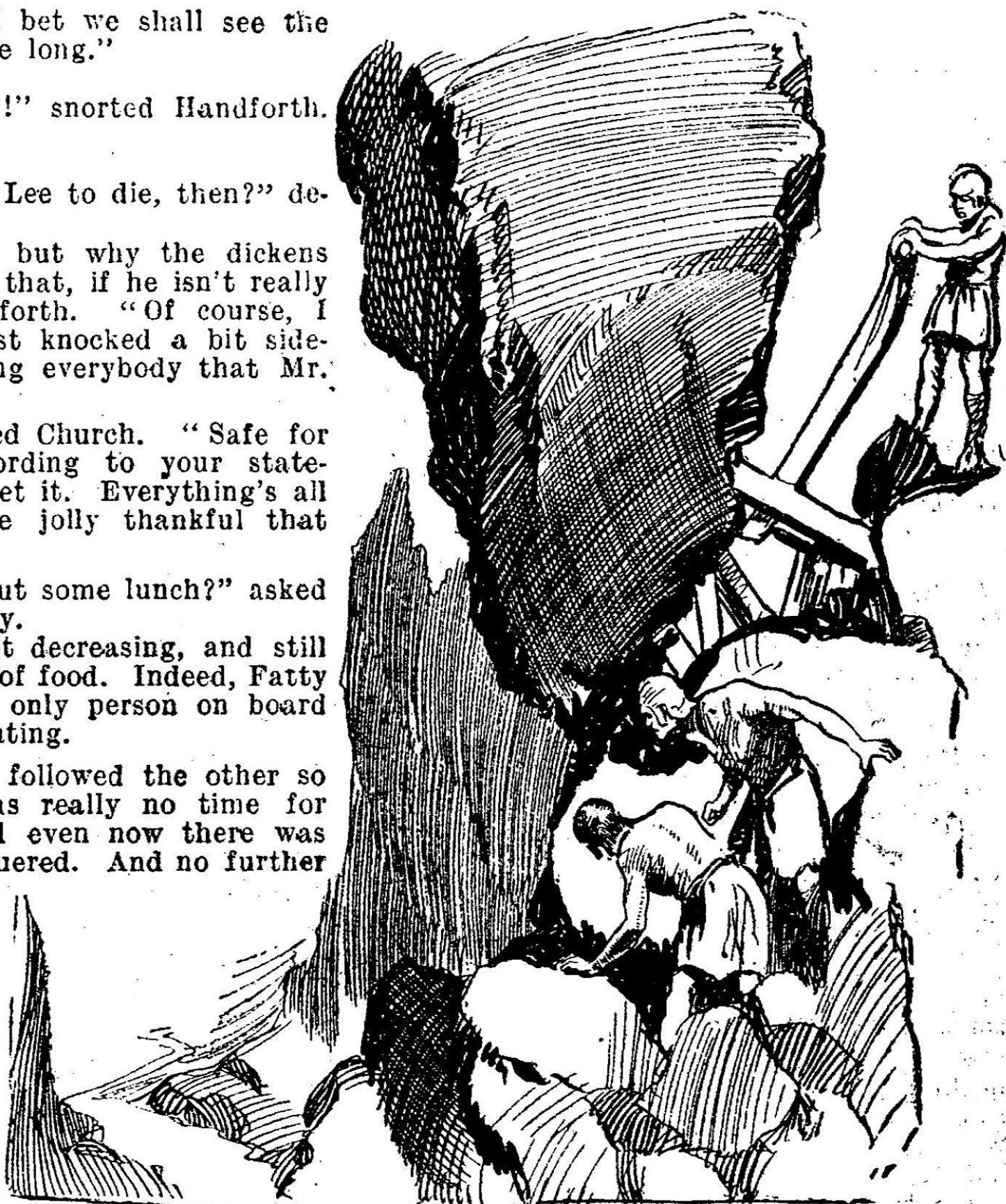
The Conqueror commenced her journey.

Slowly, laboriously, she mounted the rough masses of rock, and climbed over them steadily, with a purposeful movement that could not be mistaken. Foot by foot, and yard by yard, she progressed.

Mr. Earle himself was at the wheel, and under his expert guidance the wonderful land yacht cleared the great obstruction. The littered mass of rock was finally left behind. But more than once the Conqueror had tilted alarmingly, apparently on the point of capsizing.

But now the peril was past, and all the machinations of Titus and his henchmen had been in vain. The journey through the canyon was interesting, but scarcely exciting; for, although a strict, careful watch was kept, no sign of a human being was seen.

"Let's hope they've given up the idea,"



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

said Mr. Manners, as he stood on the bridge. "Only a short distance more now, anyhow, and then we shall be on the desert."

"I won't be sorry to see it!" growled the inventor. "By glory, this valley may be wonderful, but it has its drawbacks. "I don't object to a strenuous life as a rule, but the past week has been rather too hectic for my complete comfort."

"Yes, it'll be a relief to see the desert," agreed Mr. Manners; "and I'm particularly pleased, because we've managed to bring all the young people out in perfect safety——"

"Hurrah! We're through!"

A shout rang out from many of the juniors. For the great cleft in the mountain had been safely negotiated, and the open desert beyond could now be seen. And I think we all heaved a sigh of complete relief when the Conqueror plunged out from the semi-darkness into the full glare of the Sahara sun.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## NORTHWARD HO!



"HURRAH!"

"The good old desert, what?" said Archie Glen-thorne. "I mean, here we are, whizzing about over the old sand again. I'll admit

these Isirium chappies are dashed interesting, but give me the Sahara!"

"You're welcome to it!" growled Fatty. "Give me some grub!"

"This chap's like a gramophone!" snorted Handforth. "Every time he talks, he dithers about grub! It's about the only word he knows! As a matter of fact, I'm hungry, but do I make a fuss?"

"You haven't got an appetite like mine," said Fatty Little plaintively.

"Haven't I?" snorted Handforth. "Now I come to think of it, I'm starving! Somebody ought to be spoken to! It's a bit thick, leaving us without any food all these hours. What about lunch? I've never heard of such rank carelessness!"

"I thought you never grumbled?" grinned Church.

"I'm not grumbling!" roared Handforth. "I'm just saying that lunch ought to be ready——"

Clang! Clang!

"Great bloaters! The gong!" shouted Fatty frantically.

He scudded along the deck with the most amazing agility, and shot below with such speed that he nearly caused a riot on the staircase. And most of the other juniors were almost as eager to get into the dining-saloon—where the air was deliciously cooled.

The Conqueror was rolling steadily on over the desert.

The mountains were being left behind, and the remarkable country of Isirium was a mere memory. We had left the valley hurriedly, precipitately, but we were, at least, safe. And we all felt that we were pretty lucky.

And there was a kind of reaction, too.

Nelson Lee appeared on deck after lunch, bound up, pale of face, but quite cheerful. He reclined in a deck-chair, and it was surprising how many others indulged in the same pastime.

Even Umlosi had no life in him, and he was longing to get back to something more strenuous. And yet he hadn't done so badly in Isirium. He had been in several fights, and had acquitted himself well.

But the reaction, as I stated, was very obvious.

Now that the excitement was over, and we were quite safe, everybody wanted to take things easily. Consequently, the Conqueror was a very quiet ship, indeed, for two days following our departure from Isirium.

But by the end of this time the juniors were just beginning to wake up again. Some, indeed, were beginning to grumble

about the inactivity and lack of excitement. They were not likely to get much of the latter, for we were northward bound, and it would be three or four days before we hit any remote outpost of civilisation.

During the evening of the third day out, Handforth and Co. were squatting comfortably under a small awning on the after deck. Dinner was over, and most of the fellows were below, reading in the lounge, or enjoying themselves in some other sedate fashion.

"Things are jolly slow!" said Handforth thoughtfully. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to start something."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "Let's have some peace!"

"We've had nothing but peace since we left the valley," retorted Handforth. "Now, what about a little theatrical performance? Just we three, I mean. Supposing we get up a play?"

"Where's the play?" asked Church, without enthusiasm.

"Oh, that's nothing—I'll write one in half an hour," said Handforth carelessly. "After all, these plays are only a lot of piffle. I've got a good idea for a Trackett Grim adventure. I'll be Trackett Grim, and you chaps'll be the villains!"

"Thanks awfully!" said McClure tartly.

He and Church did their utmost to dissuade their leader—and they ought to have known better. For this was the most certain way of making him carry on. And it wasn't long before the argument became rather heated.

And while the discussion waxed hotter, three people in the heart of the vessel were by no means happy. These three, needless to say, were Titus and his two henchmen.

They were in a pitiable plight.

For three days they had been without a morsel of food—for three days they had touched no drop of water. True, the interior of the Conqueror was cool and the air was refreshingly pure. But the ordeal had been a ghastly one for the prisoners.

On several occasions they had attempted to obtain supplies—but had always been compelled to abandon the project. And on three occasions either Lars Melos or Spurius Gallus had sworn to give the game away. Anything was better than this self-imposed torture.

"Be silent, thou craven fools!" exclaimed Titus harshly. "A brief wait, and all will be well. Have I not suffered also? And yet I grumble not. When there is neither food nor drink, we must needs do without. But I go now to seek afresh."

As a matter of fact, the rascals were absolutely desperate. Titus himself was just as desperate as the others, but he kept his feelings more to himself. Now, however, he could wait no longer.

And he resolved that should he fail in this attempt, he would boldly make known his presence, and the presence of his companions. He even smiled when he thought



of the shock that he would give to Nelson Lee.

Titus crept out of the store-room, passed along the passages, and was lucky enough to meet no one. In vain he attempted to enter some of the other store-rooms, but all were locked. He proceeded towards the rear of the ship, and found a small hatchway above him.

And the ex-emperor took a firm grip on himself, and cautiously mounted the stairs. He emerged into the open—and came face to face with Handforth and Co.!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE DISASTER.



**T**ITUS swayed on his feet, for the Conqueror was lurching rather badly—having struck a wide expanse of loose sand dunes, where the surface was undulating and rather treacherous. Her giant caterpillar tractors were swishing and grinding and whirring—with quite an unusual amount of noise.

“My only hat!” ejaculated Handforth blankly.

“It’s—it’s Titus!” panted Church. “Quick, call Mr. Lee—”

“Not likely—we’ll collar him ourselves!” said Handforth excitedly.

In the same second he flung himself forward, and grappled with this apparition. And Handforth proved himself to be a fellow of action. In an instant it occurred to him that Titus was bent upon murder, and the only safe way was to render him helpless.

But Titus was not so weak as one might have imagined.

He was parched and famished, but there was still a fair amount of strength in his big frame. He met that onslaught squarely, and the pair lurched against the rail with tremendous force.

Church and McClure threw themselves forward to help, but before they could even touch the pair, the thing happened.

Handforth and Titus, locked together, toppled over the rail, and plunged down upon the loose sands. They fell without a sound—and Church and McClure instinctively gasped.

“Quick! Shout for somebody to stop the yacht!” panted Church. “I can’t see them! I believe they’re buried in the sand—”

“Yes, look there!” gasped McClure, leaning over the rail.

Church joined him, and by some capricious trick of fate, the Conqueror at that moment gave a tremendous lurching heave. Church and McClure were shot upwards, and both fell like stones. They clutched at the rail in vain, and one of them sent out a despairing shout.

But the sound was drowned in the roar of the tractors.

Church found himself fighting for his life. He had fallen deep into an enormous pile of loose, shifting sand. It enveloped him—it came over him like a flood, until his very lungs seemed to be on the point of bursting.

Madly, he fought for life.

And at length, to his infinite joy, he gulped in a breath of air. His head was above the sea of sand, and he managed to scramble out—gasping, spluttering, and nearly blinded.

Movements near him attracted his attention. He opened his eyes, but could see little.

“Clurey!” he spluttered. “Is—is that —”

“Oh, my hat!” came McClure’s voice. “What happened!”

“Somebody pushed us over the rail!”

“I don’t think so,” muttered McClure. “The ship gave a lurch, and we lost our balance. But where’s Handy? That fiend will be killing him! Handy! Handy!”

It was a despairing cry, for there was no sign of Handforth. But the leader of Study D was not so very far off. He, too, had fallen into the same loose sand—but a little further back. Titus had been below, and so Edward Oswald partially escaped being buried.

But, even so, he was half choked with sand, and when he finally scrambled to his feet there was no sign whatever of the other. The ex-Emperor Titus had vanished—had failed to come up from these deadly sands.

“Oh, my goodness!” muttered Handforth, in horror.

Much as he loathed and detested the scoundrel, he commenced fighting desperately—thinking of nothing else but this man’s life. With both his hands he scrambled the sand away as fast as he could manage it. His one thought was to bring Titus to the surface.

And in the meantime, not a soul on board the Conqueror knew what had happened.

Handforth and Co. had been in the stern, quietly sitting under the awning, while the rest of us were below. There was no look-out at the end of the ship—for a look-out was unnecessary.

In the bows, of course, a man was stationed, and two powerful searchlights were sending their beams across the endless sands—lighting up the vista ahead as though it were daylight.

But astern, all was black and mysterious.

Even the officer on the bridge knew nothing. Owing to the treacherously loose nature of the surface, the Conqueror was making less speed than usual—indeed, travelling no faster than eight miles an hour.

And the noise of the sand was continuous—a swishing, rushing sound from all the tractors. To those below, it sounded soothing and comforting intermingled with the gentle throb of the engines.

But it had had one fatal effect.



The faint cries of Church and McClure had been unheard, and so there was nobody to tell what had happened in the stern, while the stately vessel continued her peaceful course northwards. And once again it was Titus, the treacherous ex-emperor, who had caused the disaster. Even now, so many miles from Isirium, the brute was making himself felt.

Handforth was utterly terrified.

He seemed to make no impression on the sand whatever. The more he dug and scrambled the more the sand fell back. And Titus remained hidden—he had gone down into the Sahara sand, never to appear again. Death had overtaken him at last—a fitting reward for all his sins.

"Handy!" panted Church desperately.

He and McClure had just come up, scrambling over the loose sand in sheer horror. And they found their leader on his knees, panting fiercely, with eyes that plainly told of his state of mind. The junior was haggard.

"Quick!" shouted Church thickly. "The Conqueror's going—"

"He's dead—he's buried in the sand!" muttered Handforth faintly. "Don't you understand? Titus fell down with me, and he must have got buried—"

"But—but we shall be left here to die in the desert!" shouted McClure. "The Conqueror's going on! They don't know we've been left behind!"

"Look!" muttered Church, with a sob.

He pointed, and they all stared.

The Conqueror was ploughing her way steadily onwards, growing further and further distant with every minute that passed.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### LEFT IN THE DESERT.



**H**ANDFORTH suddenly scrambled to his feet.

"Left behind!" he said dazedly. "But—but—Quick—run—run for your lives! If we're left here—"

He didn't finish his sentence, but ran madly forwards—only to pitch head-first over. He had forgotten the loose nature of the sand, and his feet clogged in the shifting surface.

The Conqueror was not very far off, rolling along comparatively near by, the throbbing of her engines clear and distinct on the night air. Her gleaming lights looked attractive and comforting. Even the steadily moving tractors could be seen in the reflection from the searchlight.

Handforth scrambled up and took a grip on himself.

"It's all right—we'll do it!" he said steadily. "No need to get into a panic. They're not far off."

Even now the juniors were not absolutely in full realisation of the situation. The Conqueror seemed so near that it appeared

ridiculous to suppose there was any possibility of being left behind for good.

The very fact that she was keeping to her course proved that nobody had witnessed the disaster. Titus was forgotten—the luckless man was left to his fate. Indeed, it was almost certain that he had perished within a minute, suffocated by the deadly sand.

"Come on; we'll do it!" repeated Handforth huskily.

They set off, chasing the Conqueror, but their efforts were pitiful. In that loose sand they could make no progress. Panting, gasping, and becoming more horrified every second, they fought on.

But in spite of all their efforts, they could attain no greater speed than four miles an hour. It was a constant fight against the sand. And the Conqueror was plugging along at over double this pace. The result, of course, was inevitable.

The land yacht drew further and further away.

"We can't do it!" sobbed Church. "Oh, we can't do it!"

"We must—we must!" shouted Handforth.

They slithered and stumbled up the side of a great rising dune, the Conqueror now completely invisible. Again and again the desperate juniors fell, rolling to the foot of that sandhill.

And when at last they conquered it they were all well-nigh exhausted with their strenuous exertions. And the Conqueror was right away in the far distance, churning along as steadily as ever, her lights now a mere blur.

Handforth fell limply to his knees, his heart throbbing painfully.

"What's the good?" he muttered. "We might as well chase the moon! We can't do it—this sand's too much for us!"

"But we shall be left to die here—in the desert!" screamed McClure.

"Steady, old man; don't do that!" whispered Church. "It's no good getting into hysterics! I expect they'll miss us in a few minutes, and come back. They're bound to!"

Handforth gave a curious laugh.

"What absolute asses!" he said huskily. "Of course they'll miss us! And then they'll search the yacht, and find that we're not there. They'll come back after that—"

"Look! She's stopping!" shouted McClure gladly.

His chums gazed at the Conqueror with leaping hope—but she was progressing onwards just the same as ever.

"Not this time, old man," said Handforth. "Give her a chance, you know. The best thing we can do is to squat here until they come back for us. If we rush on again we shall only exhaust ourselves."

And so they waited.

But although they kept outwardly calm, they were almost in a state of sheer panic



within. For the Conqueror continued on her course—continued, indeed, until she finally vanished from sight.

A full hour must have passed. Handforth & Co. sat there, on top of the sand dune, too dazed with misery and trouble to realise the passage of time. They had watched the Conqueror's lights dwindle and dwindle, and now there was nothing—nothing but the desert.

On every side stretched the desolate sands, with the blackness of night merging with the dreary landscape. Above, the stars twinkled down, and, mercifully, a cool breeze blew.

"What are we going to do?" asked Church dully.

"I don't know; better sleep," muttered McClure. "I feel awfully tired; and we might as well sleep until they come back for us."

Handforth said nothing.

His thoughts were busy, however. Would they come back? Obviously, no alarm had been sounded so far. Ultimately, the missing juniors would be searched for. Their absence from the yacht would be found out.

But when?

And supposing the Conqueror was unable to return on her own tracks? It was possible—probable, even—that the three juniors would be left to perish in the desert. They didn't think of thirst yet. That would come, perhaps, when the sun rose—when the fierce, blinding African sun blazed down relentlessly on the suffocating sands. Night was mercifully on the desert, and Handforth and Co. did not suffer.

At the moment, they were totally unable to appreciate the full extent of their dire peril. They just knew that the Conqueror had gone, and that they were left alone under the stars.

They had a feeling all the time that the lights of the land yacht would loom in sight again, and then would follow a little excitement, and bed—with peaceful rest.

It was so sudden—so unexpected. Handforth tried to make himself grasp the actual reality of the situation, but he gave it up. He told himself that he was only wasting his time.

And he and his chums continued to scan the horizon.

But nothing could be seen except the darkness—no lights, no movements. Handforth and Co. were alone.

They were left behind!

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE DISCOVERY.

"SEEN my major anywhere about?"

Willy Handforth buttonholed Archie Glenthorpe and Alf Brent in the corridor, just off the saloon. It was nearly bed-



Handforth and Titus, locked together, toppled over the rail, and plunged down upon the loose sands.



time, and some of the fellows had, indeed, already retired.

"As a matter of fact, laddie, absolutely not," said Archie. "Frightfully sorry, and all that sort of thing, but I don't appear to have glimpsed the dear old soul. Possibly he's already dozing slightly."

"He isn't—this vibration is caused by the engines," replied Willy. "I can quite understand your mistaking it for his snoring, but in this case you're wrong. I wouldn't mind betting the ass is up to some mischief."

"Not really?" exclaimed Archie, adjusting his monocle. "I mean to say, hardly at this hour of the old night, dear old twinkler. Even Handforth has a certain period when the good old energy ebbs to a certain degree."

"Oh, well, if you haven't seen him, I'll pass on," said Willy. "If I stay here talking to you I shall waste the whole night! Talk about an old fish-wife!"

Willy passed down the passage, and Archie looked thoughtful.

"Now, I wonder, dash it, what he meant," he observed. "I mean to say—fish-wife! The old brain may be lack-lustre, but it isn't absolutely motionless. I do believe the young bounder was absolutely ticking me off!"

"He was," grinned Alf. "He thinks you talk too much."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "How absolutely frightful!"

They went on towards their state-room, where Archie gave himself up to the care of Phipps. And Willy was wandering about from cabin to cabin, making endless inquiries.

Indeed, he got forcibly ejected from several. On one occasion he was booted out with no little force, and came face to face with me.

"Hallo! Not in bed yet!" I said severely. "It's time for all little children to be asleep!"

Willy gave me a cold look.

"I'm not asking you anything about little children!" he said tartly. "I want to know if you've seen my major."

I turned to Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey.

"Have we seen his major?" I asked.

"Many a time!" replied Reggie promptly.

"Look here, don't be funny!" roared Willy. "This is serious! Ted's vanished! And, what's more, Church and McClure have vanished with him!"

"Then we shall have some peace on board at last!" said Pitt. "Now I come to think of it, the evening has been rather quiet and peaceful during the last two or three hours. Have you looked on deck?"

"Everywhere," said Willy. "I'm fed up with looking."

I detected an anxious expression in his face, and became instantly serious.

"You're not fooling us?" I asked. "Can't you really find your major?"

"I've been looking for nearly an hour," said Willy gruffly. "Blessed if I can understand what's happened! I can tell you, I'm getting the wind up! How do we know? The fathead may have fallen overboard."

"Rats!" I said promptly. "I could understand Handy falling overboard, but I couldn't swallow Church and McClure going with him! Come on! We'll help you to search. We'll soon locate the precious fatheads!"

But we didn't. At first we commenced the search in a spirit of fun. Then other fellows were brought in, and after a full half-hour we were beginning to get vaguely uncomfortable.

It was an amazing thing, but true—Handforth and Co. were missing!

Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Earle noticed us at last, wandering about all over the deck, and exploring the corridors. Two or three of the fellows were even chased up from the engine-room.

"Missin'?" repeated Lord Dorrimore, when I told him. "Rubbish, my lad! I'll bet they're asleep somewhere."

"They're not—I tell you it's serious!" I insisted. "We've looked everywhere, sir—and Willy is at his wits' end. We're beginning to think all sorts of horrible things."

"Come, come!" laughed his lordship. "They must be somewhere."

He joined in the search next; but it wasn't until another half-hour had elapsed that the affair became officially serious. Thus a full half-hour had passed since Willy had first approached Brent and Glen-thorne. And Willy had been searching for a long time before that.

And the Conqueror was ploughing on steadily throughout the whole period—and now making much better progress.

Quite a number of fellows were recalling, with a few starts, that Handforth and Co. had not been in evidence since shortly after dinner. Four hours, at least, had elapsed. And it began to strike us rather forcibly that something really was the matter.

For Handforth and Co. were generally very conspicuous by their presence. Handforth wasn't the kind of junior to hide his light under a bushel. And yet nobody had seen him for over four hours!

Finally, the alarm became acute.

Not only all the juniors engaged in the search, but Nelson Lee himself took it in hand. He organised it thoroughly, instructing various members of the crew to take different sections of the yacht. In this way a perfectly close search was made in every inch of the Conqueror. The comb-out was so fine that the missing juniors could not possibly slip through the meshes.

But not a single trace of them was found! And the alarm and anxiety increased by leaps and bounds. And then, in one of the empty store-rooms below, two crouching, cowering figures were located.

They were hauled out, and Nelson Lee compressed his lips.



"Lars Melos and Spurius Gallus!" he exclaimed grimly. "By Heaven! Are we never to be rid of these reptiles?"

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE ALARM.



"WHERE'S Titus?" shouted Willy huskily.

The first blank amazement was over, and the two prisoners had been thrust back into the store-room—to be questioned later, when this present anxiety concerning Handforth and Co. was over.

"Titus?" repeated Lee. "Apparently he didn't succeed in getting on board. These brutes must have slipped on during the slight confusion after I was hit by that javelin. By James! I wonder——"

"You—you mean about my major, sir?" asked Willy keenly. "Titus is responsible! I'll bet he's murdered poor old Ted—and Church and McClure, too! They've been chucked overboard!"

"Impossible, my boy!" exclaimed Lee, but without conviction. "The youngsters would have given the alarm—they would have shouted——"

"But they've been missing for hours, sir," I interrupted. "And at that time we were going through that loose sand. You remember? Good heavens! I wonder if they fell overboard, and got buried——"

"We must finish the search at once!" broke in Nelson Lee harshly.

I knew well enough that his tone was caused through anxiety. And there was plenty of reason for worry a short time later. For a second comb-out proved as fruitless as the first.

Staggering as it seemed, Handforth and Co. were not on board!

At some moment during the evening they had quietly and mysteriously vanished. It was almost uncanny. It was as though they had been spirited away by some evil genius of the surrounding gloom.

But we all suspected Titus.

The Conqueror was instantly brought to a standstill, and then swung round on her own tracks. And now she proceeded slowly and deliberately, every searchlight blazing to the full. And with dozens of keen eyes watching from every quarter of the decks.

And at regular intervals the great syren boomed forth its message of hope—in case the missing ones should be within ear-shot. But we all realised that it was a desperate situation.

Nobody slept—those who had retired caught the fever of alarm, and came on deck. Willy Handforth and his sister were about the quietest pair on board. They had nothing to say. All they did was to stare endlessly over the desert, straining their eyes for the first sign of the missing ones.

And by this time Gallus and Melos had been questioned. They had been given drink and food, and they had admitted that Titus had been with them from the start. He had crept out some hours earlier to look for water—but had failed to return. They little thought that Titus was gone for ever!

Nelson Lee's anxiety was trebly increased, for there was not the slightest doubt that the three juniors had disappeared in connection with the vindictive Titus. In some way the villainous ex-emperor had brought about the disaster.

And while all on board the Conqueror were watching, the first faint signs of dawn appeared in the sky.

Somewhere on the desert, Handforth and Co. saw the grey flush in the Eastern sky. Sleep had not come to them, to relieve their anxiety. They were weary, they were utterly sick at heart, but so far they had successfully managed to fight against panic.

"I'd give anything for a lemon-squash now!" growled Handforth, as he stood up and scanned the desert. "This blessed sand is half choking me. I've still got lots of it in my mouth. Blow the stuff!"

"It'll be daylight soon," said Church dully. "I'm jolly glad, too—we shall be able to see better. I hope the Conqueror won't be long in showing up. I'm getting peckish."

"And I want to get to bed," muttered McClure.

There was something rather pathetic in the way the three juniors blindly made themselves believe that the Conqueror would return. They didn't admit of any other possibility.

And the daylight strengthened, and then, at length, the sun came up over the distant sand dunes—red, majestic, and dazzling. Before long the heat would be oppressive. But even Handforth and Co. did not realise the dreadful, devastating power of the sun's unprotected rays.

Higher and higher rose the great sphere of heat. As yet there was not much power, but Handforth and Co. were feeling the effects acutely. And now that the broad light of day was with them, they could see their own faces—and they could read the expressions of haggard hopelessness in one another's eyes.

And the Conqueror was searching—sweeping along to the rescue!

THE END.

Grand concluding story of this magnificent series will appear  
NEXT WEEK in

**"THE CRIMSON EAGLE;  
Or, The Sign in the Sky!"**





# MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



## No. 40.—THROUGH THE FAMOUS PLAYERS—LASKY STUDIOS.

**T**HE Famous Players'—Lasky Corporation had been always known to me only by the magnificence of its film productions. It was with great anticipation that I visited Hollywood for the purpose of entering the Lasky Studios, and going through them in person. I was, of course, armed with an introduction—for without this I could never have gained admittance.

My first impression upon arriving at the studio was one of surprise. Indeed, I was disappointed. I had been picturing to myself a vast, magnificent, palace-like edifice in keeping with the firm's great name.

Instead, I beheld a low, straggling, wooden building, or series of buildings, that came up flush to the pavement. A tiny board hanging over the sidewalk announced that this insignificant place was the home of the Famous Players—Lasky productions.

I gained admittance through a cheap-looking lobby, and was ushered into the presence of one of the "big men." He was cordiality itself, and immediately placed his secretary at my disposal for as long as I wished to stay. Then I started my tour of inspection.

In case anybody has gained the impression that the Famous Players'—Lasky Studios are small, let me destroy this impression at once. I was startled by the enormous size and amazing complexity of the whole organisation. Once fairly within the place, I was able to form a true judgment.

There was nothing pretentious or imposing about the place. Everything was made for use, and not for ornament. In one of the biggest studios several "sets" were being utilised at one and the same time. I happened to butt in while Mr. James Cruze was directing a scene for a big super-production called "Hollywood"—which has already been shown extensively in this country. I was an interested spectator whilst several "shots" were being taken of the biggest spectacle in the entire production.

There were hundreds of people in this great set. Entirely under glass, the scenery was constructed to represent a forest glade—with grass, trees, waterfall, and crystal lake. In the film itself (which I have seen) the glade appears to be the genuine thing, in the open air. But, having penetrated the mysteries of these productions, I know better. But, without inside information, one could never detect the deception.

Not far from this big scene, with all its noise and bustle, a quiet-looking actress was methodically rehearsing an episode in one of the smaller sets. A director and one or two assistants were quietly going about their business, and I felt almost like an intruder as my guide edged me nearer. I then recognised the lady artist as Miss Gloria Swanson, and I watched with interest as she went through the whole business of sitting at a desk and writing a letter, and then repeating this process time after time.

The chief things which struck me about Miss Swanson was her indefatigable patience and thoroughness. And I realised how terribly tedious the work must be. The same little trifling incident over and over again. I do not wonder that the majority of cinema artists are highly strung. The very nature of the work itself is a constant, nerve-racking strain.

I had been expecting to find myself dazzled by the powerful lighting effects used in the studios. I was, therefore, astonished to find that the lights were not dazzling in the least. Even when fully turned on, they merely diffused a quiet, bluish radiance over the scene. Possibly there is some harmful ray in this type of light, but it is certainly not apparent to the casual observer.

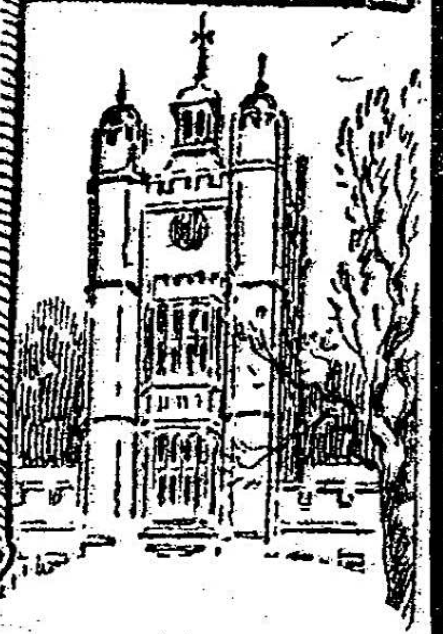
I had intended going into a few more descriptive details of this visit, but I find that my space is nearly at an end. So I shall be compelled to leave my further remarks until next week's article.

NEXT WEEK: "How They Make the Films."





# St. Frank's Magazine



## ADVENTURES OF E. O. HANDFORTH

### A WIRELESS ENTANGLEMENT

*A Story Without Words.*





# OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 43.—KINGSWOOD SCHOOL, BATH.



Kingswood School was founded in 1748 by the Rev. John Wesley at Kingswood, Bristol, but was afterwards removed to Bath, where it is now situated.

The school is divided into four houses, known as the "Upper," "Lower," "Middle," and "School. Each of these houses is under the supervision of a resident house-master.

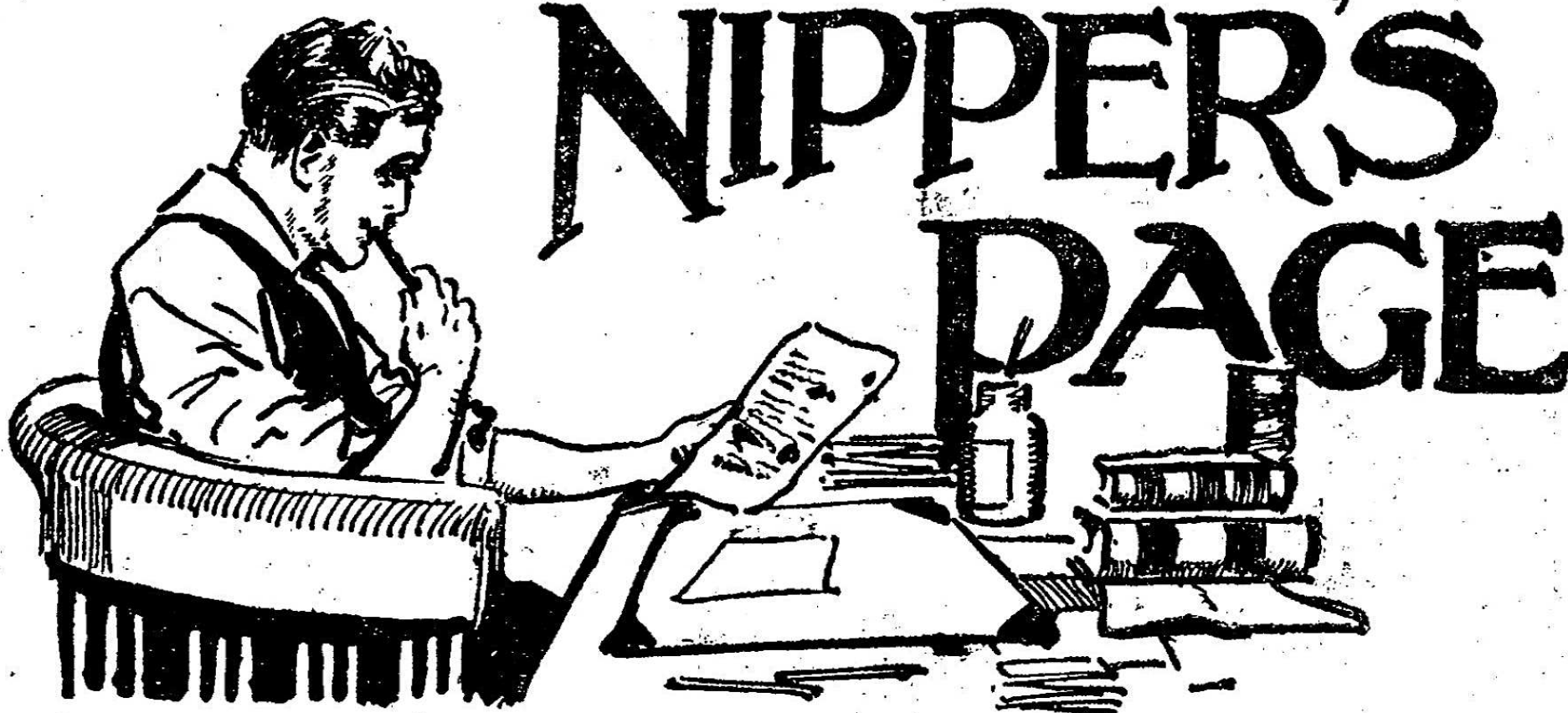
The buildings include the dining-hall, dormitories, big school-room, and class-

rooms. There are besides, a gymnasium, swimming baths, workshop, library and sanatorium.

The number of boys at present is about 200.

I am indebted to a reader for the above particulars, and I am accordingly sending him the original drawing by Mr. Briscoe. Readers are cordially invited to send along photo, badge and history of their school, if it has not already appeared in this series.





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

My dear Chums,

The good ship of the desert, the Conqueror, is at this moment ploughing its way across the Sahara towards Algeria, for the Remove, headed by Nelson Lee and Dorrimore, are homeward bound. It will not be long now before they will be back at St. Frank's.

## THE TRAGEDY OF HANDFORTH AND CO.

The glad news, unfortunately, is marred by what, it is to be feared may prove a tragedy over which St. Frank's will mourn for many a day. I can hardly believe it is true, yet sooner or later I was afraid something would happen to poor old Handy. His reckless indifference to danger has nearly cost him his life and the lives of his chums so often in the past that I am not altogether surprised to hear that he, Church and McClure have mysteriously vanished from the Conqueror.

## A TERRIBLE END.

If, as it is assumed, Handy and Co. have fallen overboard into the devouring sands of the desert, their chances of surviving a single day exposed to the intense heat without protection from the sun, and without food and water, is very remote. It is a terrible end for these poor fellows, and though I have my doubts whether we shall ever see them again at St. Frank's, we can but hope for the best.

## THE STOWAWAYS.

It is rather significant that Lars Melos and Spurius Gallus should have been discovered on board. Undoubtedly, Titus, the ex-Emperor of Isirium, had stolen unobserved, with his two lieutenants, on to the Conqueror, and the fact that Titus is now missing seems to indicate that he has had

something to do with the disappearance of the chums of Study D.

## THE IRONY OF FATE.

Considering the many stirring times through which the Holiday Party have passed in Isirium, we must be thankful that fatalities have been so few. In fact, up to the last moment, when the Conqueror had safely negotiated the great canyon and had already started on the homeward journey, every member of the party was safe and rejoicing at their good fortune. It is thus all the more cruel that Handforth, Church and McClure should meet with such a tragic end within a week or two of returning to St. Frank's.

## AWAITING YOUR EDITOR'S APPROVAL.

Unless anything unforeseen happens, Nipper should be here next week, and then my job as deputy-editor will automatically terminate. All those suggestions from my readers will be put before your real editor, who will decide whether or not to adopt them during the new term.

## A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

With regard to the Portrait Gallery, Who's Who, and a new map of St. Frank's, I am practically sure Nipper will accede to these requests. It is quite a long time since we published these interesting particulars about our associates at St. Frank's and the school. So much has happened in the last two years, during which time many newcomers have arrived, that a new Portrait Gallery and an up-to-date Who's Who are an absolute necessity. Every reader should make sure of procuring the coming numbers of the Mag. containing these important facts about the school, for it may be some time before they will be repeated.

Your old pal,

BUSTER (Acting Editor).



## CASUAL CONVERSATIONS

Imagined by Charlie Talmadge.

No. 3.—GIRLS.

I.

### In the Smoking-Room.

**LORD DORRIE:** You can't get away from the fact that girls are a boon and a blessing! Just look at the way they've livened things up on this trip. We can't get on without the ladies.

**MR. MANNERS:** I'm inclined to agree. My daughter and her friends are not only enjoying the adventures tremendously, but their very presence increases the enjoyment of others.

**SIR EDWARD:** Fiddlesticks, sir! Girls are more bother than they're worth! Just look at my daughter, for instance. All she can do is to create mischief and talk scandal! And all girls are the same

—good for nothing! Give me boys every time!

**MR. MANNERS:** I'm afraid you're unduly prejudiced, Sir Edward. Personally, I like Ena immensely. She's a fine girl—a daughter to be proud of. And I repeat that this holiday would have been drab and dull without the presence of the ladies.

**LORD DORRIE:** Hear, hear! An' don't forget the way they keep the boys in order. Girls may be a bit frivolous, but we need 'em. Life wouldn't be much of a game without the fair sex.

II.

### In the Saloon.

**REGGIE PITT:** Blessed if I know how they do it! The hotter the weather is, the cooler they look! Only this morning Irene and Co. were out on deck in the glaring sun, and didn't turn a hair. These girls are pretty wonderful, you know.

**HANDFORTH:** Especially Irene!

**ARCHIE:** Oh, I say! What priceless rot! How about Miss Marjorie, old companion? It's absolutely topping, the way Miss Marjorie whizzes hither and thither, looking like a dashed fairy!

**REGGIE PITT:** Give me Doris every time! No nonsense about her! I like a girl to be free and easy, without any simpering or giggling. Still, taking them as a whole, girls help to make life worth

living. What should I do without my sister?

**FATTY:** You're all mad! Girls don't know anything—they can't even eat properly! It takes a chap to show what can be done with some really good grub!

**HANDFORTH:** Look out! Here come Tessa and Ena and Irene! Pull yourselves together, you fellows! By George! Don't they look ripping? And I'm blessed if Irene doesn't get prettier every day!

**FATTY:** Rats! I'd rather see a plate of doughnuts!

**ARCHIE:** How absolutely frightful! I'm afraid you've got no soul for beauty, you fearful chunk of unnecessary tissue! It's the girls who keep us up to the scratch, by gad!

III.

### On Deck.

**WILLY:** Thank goodness! We've dodged 'em!

**CHUBBY:** Who, those girls? I wish they were all a thousand miles away! What's the good of girls, anyhow?

**JUICY:** No good at all! All they can do is to interfere, and jabber, and cause mischief, and make a chap's life a misery!

**WILLY:** Expensive luxuries—that's what girls are! I've heard my pater say so, and he knows what he's talking about! I wouldn't give a fig for a hundred! And here's Ted going dotty over Irene! It's a pity he hasn't got more sense!

**CHUBBY:** They've spoilt the whole trip! We can't call our souls our own with all these girls about! It'll be an absolute relief when we get back to St. Frank's.

**JUICY:** And even then we shan't be free of 'em! I think we ought to get up a petition to have the Moor View School shifted out of the neighbourhood altogether.

**WILLY:** It's a good idea—but what's the good of fighting against an overwhelming force? It's a horrible humiliation, but these giddy girls have got ten times the power we have! It's a mystery to me, and always will be!



# The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



## THE AFFAIR OF THE MISSING ATHLETE

A Wonderful Detective Story,  
introducing Trackett Grim  
and Splinter.

By

**E. O. HANDFORTH**

**“W**ONDERFUL!” commented Trackett Grim through his clenched teeth. “Why, these runners get over the ground ever so much faster than if they were catching a train.

“Just what I noticed, guv’nor,” agreed Splinter, Grim’s marvellous boy assistant.

Trackett Grim, the world-famous incriminator and his assistant were on their summer holiday. They had left all the cares and worries of their arduous career behind them.

Already they had been away from the Baker’s Inn Road for more than a day, and if Grim could afford it they would remain away another day. So they had come to spend their holiday at Mudsea-on-the-Mud, a most up-to-date holiday resort on the South Coast, with a fine service of week-end trains on the Outer Circle Railway.

And here they had been rustivating, spending money like water. They had ridden on donkeys, bought shrimps for tea, and paddled in the water absolutely regardless of expense.

And now to crown it all Grim had bought two tickets in the Grand Stand to watch the Mudsea Athletic Harriers hold their Annual Regatta and Marathon. The Regatta was already over, as the boat sank the day before. But now the Marathon was in progress.

The grand stand was just big enough to hold Grim and Splinter, and the two stood side by side, straining their eyes to see the runners. They had already started, and all three were now passing the stand.

The race took place in a huge field which was crammed to the full with spectators. There were no less than ten along the side by the hedge, and half a dozen more were waiting outside the gates.

The runners flashed past led by a youth with red hair whose name was Speedy. He was a fine set up young fellow, and looked every inch an athlete. Round and round spun the runners. The distance to be

covered was six laps, and the finish took place at the gates.

“Last lap!” Grim muttered, nearly falling off the stand in his excitement. “I have been counting them.”

Splinter was too thrilled to reply. He stood watching the runners who had now reached the straight and were making for the winning-post.

“Speedy wins!” yelled the vast crowd like one man.

“Time!” shouted the referee, and the linesmen waved their flags. It was the most wonderful finish ever seen in any Marathon. For all three dead-headed!

But just as the spectators were about to cheer, a most startling development occurred. For Speedy, racing twenty feet ahead of the others forgot to stop! Instead, he went running on and in a second disappeared into the lane that ran outside the gates!

Needless to say, Trackett Grim was the first to see this extraordinary occurrence. Without a moment’s hesitation he rushed up to the referee, Splinter at his heels.

“Sir,” he cried. “I have made a most remarkable discovery, Speedy has not pulled up at the finish!”

The referee looked at him in amazement. “That—that is quite true,” he faltered. “But what manner of man are you who can tell such things?”

“I am the world-famous incriminator,” Grim replied simply.

“You must be a wizard,” the other returned. “But if what you say is true you are surely Trackett Grim of whom we have all heard.”

“I am he,” Grim said, raising his hat in a courtly manner. “Perhaps you would like me to solve this mystery for you.”

“Mystery?” gasped the other. “What mystery is that?”

“Ha!” Grim replied carefully replacing his hat. “I thought that would startle you. The mystery I refer to is that of the missing



athlete. For Speedy has completely disappeared! He never stopped at the winning-post and is now still running ahead."

"It's amazing!" the referee shouted.

He could scarcely believe that such a thing was possible. Yet now that Grim had explained it in a simple manner, he was bound to agree that there must be a mystery.

"Then will you take the case up?" he begged Grim, going down on his knees on the grass.

"I will," the incriminator answered simply. "But I am afraid it is a very easy case for me and I shall not be able to charge much. It is just a matter of getting on Speedy's trail and running him down. If—"

As he spoke one of the other runners came rushing up, his face pale and scared.

"I've lost all my valuables," he cried, facing the referee. "I have been foully robbed."

At once Grim's clean-shaven mouth tightened. At the first mention of the word robbed he sensed that something had been stolen. Thrusting the referee aside he caught hold of the runner by his shoulder.

"Tell me," he hissed. "Have your valuables been stolen?"

"Yes," returned the other, glancing at the sleuth in amaze. "My pocket is now completely empty. I left it hanging up in my coat when I changed for the race. And now look."

As he spoke he held out his pocket and Grim saw it was quite empty.

"I take it there was something in it before it was emptied," Grim queried shrewdly.

"Yes, all my valuables. My silver-knobbed indelible pencil that was given to me by an invalid aunt six weeks ago. Oh, sir," he went on, his voice breaking, "get it back for me. It is all I have in the world!"

Strong man though he was, Grim's heart was melted at this pitiable story. If, as

seemed likely, this silver-knobbed indelible pencil had been stolen, where was he to turn to find the thief?

Who could say? After a minute's deep thought Grim lit his pipe and began to question the runner.

"Did you leave your coat hanging up when you ran?"

"Yes!"

"Did you see any suspicious character putting his hand into your coat pocket after you had taken it off?"

The other suddenly started.

"Why yes!" he cried. "I saw Speedy put his hand in my coat pocket now you come to mention it."

"Ah," said Grim with a nod. "Ah!"

Though he said so little, Grim in reality was doing some hard thinking. If Speedy had put his hand into this man's coat pocket, what was to prevent him taking the pencil out? And if he had taken the pencil what was more likely than he had stolen it?

"I see it all," he said suddenly. "Speedy is a thief!"

"What!" gasped the others.

"I repeat. Speedy is a thief. The fact that he stole the silver-knobbed pencil proves that. And, furthermore, I believe he has run away to escape being caught. Or, perhaps it is to get rid of the booty. I will tell you which after I have caught and questioned him."

"Then you will catch him?" begged the others.

"I will," Grim said with a nod. "Splinter, lad," he went on. "Our great powers are needed. We must get on Speedy's trail at once. I have not the least doubt that when we catch him we shall find the missing property upon him. Come!"

Grim was a man who never wasted time. He pulled out a pair of pocket binoculars and scanned the countryside intently. There was no sign of Speedy.

Then he bent the glasses to the ground, and a cry escaped him. In the dust he saw the imprint of a rubber sole.

"That was made by a human foot," he explained breathlessly. "And I expect that foot was Speedy's. At any rate I shall trail these footsteps till I run the culprit to earth."

Then with a wave of his hand Grim set off at a run with Splinter at his side. They were on the trail!

For over two hours they followed it steadily. But even Grim's iron strength began to tire.

"We must get a conveyance," he said.

And at that moment an old man rode slowly past on a tricycle. Grim caught hold of the saddle.

"Sir," he said. "I must trouble you for the loan of your vehicle. In the name of the law hand it over."

The old man climbed off.

"But I can't afford another," he said.



The grand-stand was just big enough to hold Grim and Splinter, and the two stood side by side straining their eyes to see the runners.



"This tricycle is worth over a hundred pounds. It is an heirloom, and was built in the sixteenth century."

"Here is your hundred pounds," Grim answered, taking out his cheque-book.

He quickly drew out the cheque and gave it to the old man. Then he leapt into the saddle and rode off at a desperate pace. Splinter had jumped up behind, and once more they were on the trail.

Hour after hour they travelled, passing through most of the chief towns in England. The trail still lay thick upon the dust, for it had not rained. And through his powerful binoculars, which Grim had fastened to the handlebars, he could see the marks of the rubber shoes.

When night fell he lit his lamp, and the two went on through the darkness, which Grim knew would pass with the coming of dawn.

And when the sun rose Grim was proved right again, for the night ceased as if by magic. And now, straight ahead, they caught sight of a running figure dressed in white! The same thought entered both their heads.

It was Speedy!

Grim pedalled like mad—and splinter clung on for dear life. The road was perfectly straight, and they gained on the fugitive with every revolution of the pedals.

"Now we've got him," Grim hissed.

But a second later he gave vent to a cry of disappointment. For immediately ahead appeared a level crossing!

"It must be a railway line!" Grim gasped.

He was right. There were a pair of gates. And even now Speedy was running through them. As his figure passed through, the gates began to shut, and in the distance there came an earth-shaking roar.

"It's the Royal Mail," groaned Grim, who knew all about trains. "We have lost our man!"

Even as he spoke, the gates clanged to with a clang, and Grim pedalled towards them. Then out of a cutting came the Mail, travelling at ninety-one miles an hour, by Grim's stop-watch.

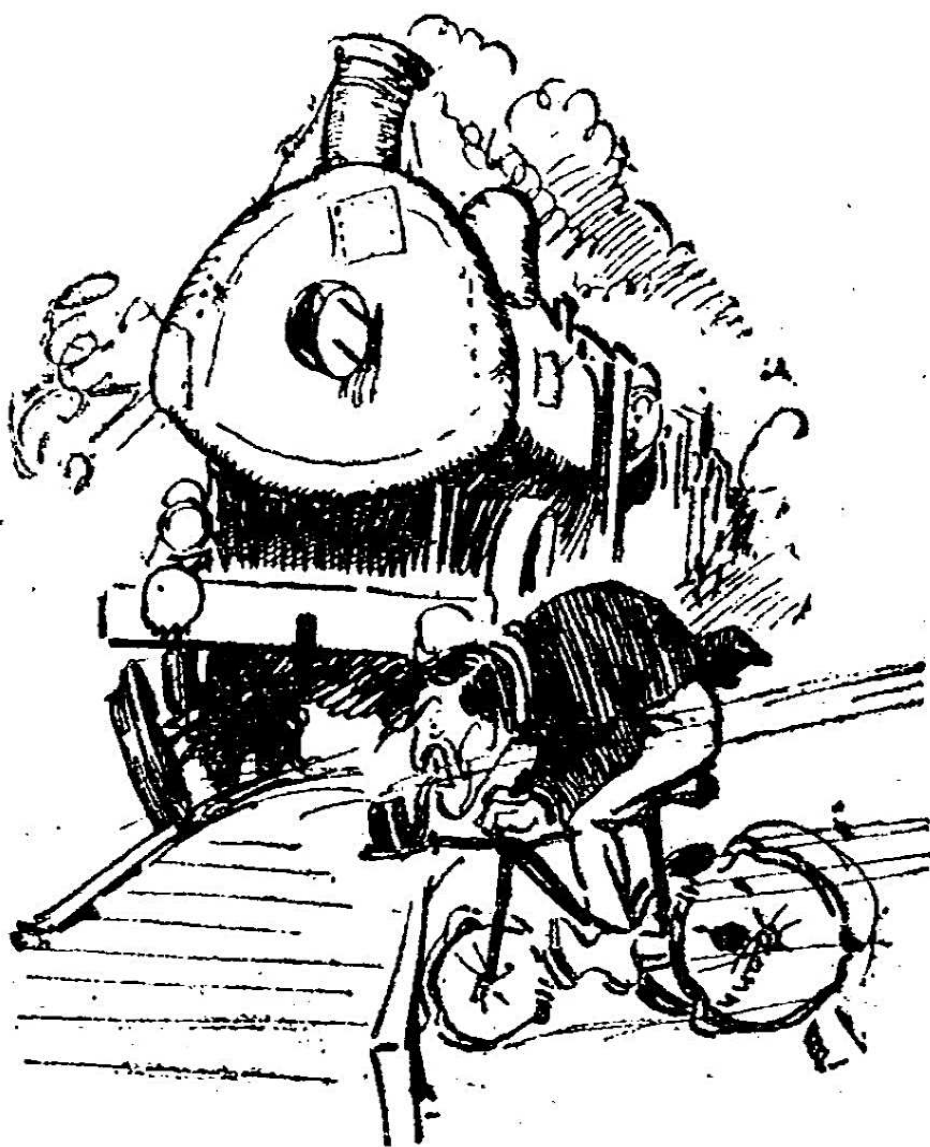
What could Grim do?

It was a baffling problem, and the incriminator screwed his brows in deep thought. He saw that as the gates were shut he could not get through. There seemed no way out.

Yet he did not give up. And as he reached the gates Grim suddenly saw a way out, for there was no hedge bordering the line. A few yards from the gates the railway passed across a field. At once Grim saw that if he could get ahead of the train he could pass in front of it.

"Splinter, lad," he cried, "you must jump off! I can never do it with your added weight. I am going to cut across in front of the Mail!"

Without a word, Splinter jumped off, and the tricycle, freed from the lad's weight,



**In ten seconds Grim had reached the side of the line.**

fairly rushed through the air. In ten seconds Grim had reached the side of the line, and a moment later he crossed it—barely three inches in front of the engine!

With a sigh of relief, the incriminator filled another pipe and waited for Splinter to rejoin him. This the lad could not do, of course, till the Mail had passed by and the gates were open again.

Then the clever lad got on the back of the tricycle, and the chase was resumed.

Speedy was now running much slower. But, even so, it was not till dark had fallen that the incriminator came within twenty yards of him, and by this time they were in a flourishing town.

"We must have reached Wigan," the incriminator remarked; "or it may be Crewe."

"Well, are you going to arrest Speedy now?" asked Splinter.

Grim shook his head.

"That would be too risky," he said in an earnest voice. "Were I to arrest him, I am afraid it would warn him that we are on his track. No, lad, I intend to trail him to the house where he lives."

In accordance with this plan Grim followed the man at a slower pace. Speedy soon dropped to a walking pace, and it was clear he thought he had completely outdistanced his pursuers.

But this was not the case, as Grim and Splinter were only a few yards behind. They had to stop once to mend a puncture, and later on the handle-bars fell with a clatter into the road.





**Swissssshhhhh! A flood of inky water gushed out from the hole and took Grim in the eye.**

Speedy turned at the sound, but with his habitual presence of mind Grim suddenly wheeled the machine so that it faced in the other direction. And, apparently satisfied that the two were journeying away from him, Speedy continued his walk.

It was ten o'clock when he reached his destination, a small house in a side street facing a brick wall.

He opened the door and went inside.

"Now are you going to arrest him?" breathed Splinter, in great excitement.

But Grim shook his head again.

"The time is not yet ripe," he replied. "I intend to watch the house during the night, and if, as I suspect, Speedy is still inside, I shall make an entry to-morrow."

Grim had by now got all his plans cut and dried. So during the hours of darkness he and Splinter leant against the brick wall, carefully hiding the tricycle behind a lamp-post, in case it might give their presence away.

The hours passed at the usual rate, and at six o'clock Grim determined to make his final move.

"I am going into the house," he told Splinter, "and you must wait here. If I do not come back you will know things have not gone right. After that you will have to get the police. But I shall not fail!"

"I hope not, gov'nor," said the lad, in a choking voice.

He felt that he might never see Grim again, for the incriminator was about to put his head in the lion's den.

And a moment later Grim crept up to the front door and put his eye to the keyhole.

Swissssshhhhh!

A flood of inky water gushed out from the hole and took Grim in the eye!

Splinter gave a shriek of terror as the ghastly fluid covered his master from head to foot. Then, with the utmost bravery, he ran to Grim's assistance.

He took out his handkerchief and began to plug up the keyhole. Not till this was done did he say a word. Then he turned to Grim.

"So you have failed?" he said mournfully.

"I am afraid so," Grim admitted. "Yet there is one more chance. I intend to try the window!"

With his penetrating sight Grim had noticed that to the side of the door was a window such as are used to give light and air to rooms. At once an idea flashed into his alert mind. If he climbed through the window he would be able to enter the house!

With Grim, to think was to act! He smashed the glass of the window and climbed inside. As he had surmised, he found himself in a room, and in one corner was a door. He leapt through it, and he was in a passage or hall such as can be found in many houses all over the country.

And he found something else! Kneeling at the door was a figure of a man in running vest and shorts! It was Speedy! In his hand was a garden hose. At once Grim realised that it was he who had squirted the water at him.

"So my deductions were absolutely right!" Grim shouted in a ringing voice. "I arrest you for stealing a silver-knobbed indelible pencil!"

Speedy turned with a snarl, and his pale face went ashen. His red hair turned a dull grey, and he snarled like a dog. But it was useless. In a second Grim had seized a small object that was in the rascal's hand. It was the pencil!

After that it was useless to deny his guilt, and Speedy confessed how he had yielded to temptation. He explained that he had intended to sell the pencil and on the proceeds he was going to emigrate to the Colonies.

This was just what Grim had suspected, so he showed no trace of surprise, and ten minutes later Speedy was handed over to the police, who sentenced him to ten years for "burglary with intent to defraud."

As for Grim and Splinter, they returned to the Baker's Inn Road, and it will be long before they forget their memorable summer holiday.



## 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.)

**J. RUSHDEN (Bow):** You're off your rocker. What rot! Can I fight Teddy Long! I could lick him bound, gagged, and blindfold.

**BETTY (Gravesend):** Jolly nice of you, Betty, to say you like me the best of the bunch. I don't like to agree with you that Church and McClure are lucky to have me as a leader, but we can't get away from the truth, can we? Don't worry—I expect we shall get back from Africa O.K. I like Church and McClure both the same—they're fine chums. Write again soon, won't you?

**CLARENCE (Louth, Lines):** Hallo, Clarence, old fellow! (I don't mean Clarence Fellowe, you know.) My pocket-money doesn't last at all—somehow or other, it vanishes like lightning. If they held a beauty competition at the Moor View School the prize-winner would certainly be Miss Irene. I'm not prejudiced a bit—everybody admits that Miss Irene is lovely. Willy is bad enough as a brother—my sister Ena is quite enough for me in the feminine line. Willy's a terror, but Ena is the only person who can scare me stiff.

**N. PANTER (Lavendon):** Come on! You say you'll come to St. Frank's and wipe up the floor with me if I talk about punching your nose. Come and try it, you cheeky rotter! You'd better bring an ambulance with you, so that you can be taken away in comfort.

**SIDNEY NISKIN (London, W.):** I'd like to edit the Mag. again, but the chaps are so jealous that there'd only be a row if I insist. Besides, Nipper might cut up rusty.

**MAY (Basingstoke):** You've got a wrong idea, Miss May. I don't hit Willy at all—I'm not a bully. Now and again I might lick him for being cheeky, but that's different. I've told Nipper you like him, and he's as pleased as Punch. I haven't kissed Willy, as you request. I don't want to be ill.

**GEORGE (Clapham):** So you think Miss Irene is stuck up, my Trackett Grim stories are daft, and I'm daft? And then you say, "No offence, of course." Not at all! I simply love being called daft! But if you stray away from Clapham and shove your nose near me, you'll suddenly find it missing. I shall squash it straight into your face with one swipe.

**REGGEG FADFREN (Warwick):** You can't diddle me, George! I won't give your surname because you might want to keep it private. Yes, I'm one of those strong, silent chaps—glad you know it. I've told Archie what you say, and he'll probably write some more stuff for the Mag. when he wakes up. If you want Warwick School to be published in the Old Paper, why don't you send along a photograph and particulars to the Editor? He'll do the rest.

**A. WILLIAMS (Peckham):** Some of you chaps do ask dotty questions! Can I box? You might as well ask me if I can breathe!

**S. J. WARD (Bluntisham, Hunts):** It wasn't my fault I put Hants last time—you should write more clearly. And I can't keep the name of every town and village in my head, can I? The Portrait Gallery and Who's Who are due for publication in the autumn. Thanks for getting a new reader. Good man!

**GGOREE HRRPUA (Bluntisham, Hunts):** This wheeze of mixing up names seems to be catching among the Georges. You're the second one—George Harrup. I'll bet I've got it right!

**F. DYER (Arnold, Notts):** Too late to give cricket articles now, I'm afraid. We shall have football on us in next to no time. I don't think much of your taste in liking Willy. Still, he's my minor, so there must be something attractive about him. The oldest boy in the Remove doesn't want me to give his name. He's an awful dunce, you know.

**LESLIE HOBAN (Liverpool):** The fellows you mention are all here, and you'll have



all particulars in the forthcoming Who's Who. Yes, Boz is still alive. That list you want will come along later.

**RALPH TINKER** (Huddersfield): Dr. Stafford has been our Head for ages. Josh Cuttle came here as porter when old Warren went abroad, or retired, or something. Snipe's still here, but we keep him well muzzled. He's a bit of a rotter, you know. Miss Irene's birthday is November 24th.

**TOM HASKETT** (Peckham): Have a look at my reply to S. J. Ward, above. Yes, of course I can fight Nipper. I could fight Jack Dempsey, you ass. But this doesn't say that I should win. Trackett Grim doesn't really exist. He's the great detective of fiction.

**GERALD K. LLOYD** (Streatly-on-Thames): Splinter's name is Splinter. He's a chip of the old block. Fullwood was Remove skipper before Nipper arrived, but he soon got knocked off his perch. Our adventures were first recorded in No. 112 of the Old Paper, and the story was called "Nipper at St. Frank's." I can't enlighten you about the back numbers. Write to the Publisher, and I expect he'll be able to let you have some at the ordinary price.

**ALAN MARSHALL** (Sydenham): I admire your judgment. Yes, of course the Mag. would completely fizzle out if my Trackett Grim stories were stopped. I have given your best wishes to Miss Irene, but it's like your sauce to include your love. Why, you chump, you don't even know her!

**JOHN A.** (Walworth): My goodness! You must have a time of it with eight brothers! Aren't you always fighting? As for climbing to the top of St. Frank's and doing ten somersaults, I wouldn't attempt anything so silly.

**BRENDA** (West Bromwich): Some of you girls fairly take the cake! Just fancy you liking Willy better than anybody else! What about Nipper, and Pitt? And where do I come in? Your questions will be answered in the Portrait Gallery and Who's Who. Thanks for your nice letter.

**LEIGH H. REYNOLDS** (Cheltenham): Thanks your your chatty letter. All right, I'll forgive the writing this time, but don't do it again. If Mr. Crowell saw your fist, he'd go off the deep end. And no wonder!

**L. BROOKER** (St. Neots, Hunts): Archie doesn't really require Phipps at all. When Archie likes, he can be as brisk as anybody. Do I sometimes get fed up with Tucker's rot? My dear chap, I'm always fed up with it. The best fighter at St. Frank's is Ernest Lawrence.

**C. H. S. J.** (Lambeth): You dotty lunatic! What do you mean by asking such silly questions? Why don't I write a detective story in the Mag.!!! What about my Trackett Grim yarns? As for your

writing, it's a lot worse than that Cheltenham chap's. I believe some of you do it on purpose!

**EVERLYN** (Lancs): Facts and figures about the Remove will be given very soon now. So please be on the look-out. The reason why Church and McClure don't write for the Mag. much is because they're such duffers at writing. It takes them a month to think of an article, and another to write it. Hope I'll be able to give you a longer reply to your next letter.

**DORIS CLEVELAND** (Huddersfield): Please look at the reply immediately above this. I say, it's a bit steep to call me a bully, isn't it? And you're all at sea in describing Miss Irene as stern and prim and strict. And when you say that I copy my Trackett Grim yarns from a book, I feel like biffing you.

**DAVID STONE** (Liverpool): I don't ever fight Nipper because we're firm friends, and, besides, he's a tough nut to crack. Even I would have my hands full.

**W. DUMBRECK** (Linlithgow). Hear, hear! You are quite right. Sir A. Conan Doyle never wrote anything like my Trackett Grim stories. I quite agree, old son. I don't think we can allow readers to contribute to the Mag., as this is really a School paper, and we run it ourselves.

**HELEN PRICE** (Birmingham): I hope you'll continue to be a reader for a long time to come. I think your name is jolly nice. I am sorry I haven't got a photograph that I can send you. But look out for me in the forthcoming Portrait Gallery. I expect I shall be among the first. Anyhow, if I'm not, there's going to be a lot of trouble for somebody.

**TYKE OF HALIFAX**: I expect you're a bit of a gay dog, with a name like that. All the ages and particulars you ask for will be contained in the Who's Who, which is now being prepared.

**GWENDOLINE** (Wisbech): As you requested, I have biffed Fullwood and Co. for you. Anything to oblige a lady. Of course, I should have biffed them in any case I do it regularly, as a kind of exercise. And I know that the cads always deserve four times more than they get.

**E.O.H.** (Sheffield): I was at St. Frank's before Nipper came. If you'll get No. 112 of the Old Paper, you'll read all about it. Rummy, your name being so much like mine.

**JOHN HALLEY** (Walthamstow): You're asking for trouble, Johnny. But you only call me a bully and a tyrant and boast about how you could biff me because you know you'll never get the chance of trying. And when you say that my Trackett Grim yarns spoil the Mag. I can see you are only trying to be funny.



A.B.P. (Simonstone, Lanes): How can I tell Handforth he's a silly ass? Do you expect me to call myself names, you rotter?

W. J. WHITE (Islington): Yes, all the photographs of the Remove chaps will be published in due course. There are twenty-six numbers of the Magazine to a volume. Thanks for your nicely written letter.

CHARLES PRICE (Leeds): Rats! What's the idea of pulling my leg, Charlie? It's like your cheek to say that you and Ben and Walter are coming to St. Frank's after the holidays. A red-letter day means a very special occasion.

FRED STOTT (Bacup): Great Scott! What's the matter with your spelling? It's a good thing you ask for it to be excused. But I think you did it on purpose, because no chap could really spell so badly.

W. H. EDMUNDS (Seven Kings): You must be a lanky sort of chap—under twelve years of age, and five foot five in height! I wonder what the dickens you'll be when you grow up? You'll look like a human skyscraper. Fenton of the Sixth is seventeen years and nine months old. I haven't troubled to count those dots at the bottom of your page. Don't you think my time's more valuable than that?

WALTER HANCOCK (Snodland): Archie Glenthorne is a lazy bounder, but when he really lets himself go, he can box like the dickens. You'll hear all about the different studies and their occupants in the Who's Who.

UNCLE EDWARD'S ADMIRER (Bristol): You're a nice chap, I must say! Dropping me a line, hoping I'm ill! And on the top of that you call me a silly jossler! And then you say my Trackett Grim stories are rotten! And you've got the nerve to sign yourself "Uncle Edward's Admirer!" You're asking for trouble, my lad—that's what you're doing!

EILEEN ALANNAH (East Dulwich): You didn't need to pluck up your courage to write to me. There was nothing to be afraid of, you fathead—I mean, sorry! Forgot you were a girl for the moment. I'll shake Clarence up, and ask him to write some more of his rotten parodies. You ask for a long reply—most of the girls do—but this time, I'm afraid I shall have to cut it short. Better luck next, I hope.

DAVID H. ROBERTS (Mountain Ash): Fullwood was Remove skipper when Nipper first arrived, and Nipper had to fight like the dickens to smash Fullwood's power. If you want those early numbers, I'm afraid you'll have to advertise for them, because they're out of print. Archie Glenthorne's soft spot is

for Marjorie Temple—not for Doris. You've got it wrong, David.

W. L. HOPE (Falkirk): Don't you get enough laughs out of the Mag. without a page of jokes? Most of these jokes are chestnuts, at the best. I'll try to answer some of your other questions later, when I've got more space.

SPLINTER II. (Somewhere in Nottingham): The Who's Who you want will soon be appearing now, so don't be impatient. Your description of me is pretty good, but you're a bit off-side when you say that I've got big feet. I'll admit there are a few mistakes in your letter, but not five hundred million, as you suggest. You'll get the replies to your other questions in the Who's Who.

REGGIE (Gateshead): It's a good thing you didn't write on a sheet of foolscap. With tiny writing like yours you would have kept me busy for an hour. My Trackett Grim stories are not supposed to be dramatic. They are dramatic. The Moor View School is about half a mile from St. Frank's. The Ancient House caps are blue and gold, and the College House green and yellow. The best fighter in the Remove is Ernest Lawrence. The best footballer is Reggie Pitt. And Nipper is a fine skipper. I'd like to describe Miss Irene to you, but I haven't got the space—it would take a whole page.

RENA F. CHESTER: There's nothing funny in your reading a boys' paper. We've got hundreds of girl readers, so you're in good company. Hundreds? I should have said thousands. Yes, the Portrait Gallery is a cert. now, and you won't have to wait long.

## SPECIAL NOTE.

Lots of readers write for particulars about the colour of my hair and eyes, and so forth. Sometimes they want to know the same details about the other chaps. In two or three weeks' time the Editor is beginning a Portrait Gallery and Who's Who? and all these facts about eyes and hair and ages and heights will be given then. Of course, it's all a lot of rot, but we're out to please everybody, so there you are. In my brief replies next week I shan't answer any questions of the above nature. Don't be disappointed. You'll know why. I'm a patient chap, but I can't spare the time or space to answer all these inquiries singly, and keep repeating them. You'll have all the full information in due course, in weekly spasms.

UNCLE EDWARD.



## TRAVEL TALES.



By An Old Boy  
(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 14.—AN ALLURING VOLCANO.

**F**EW people have heard of Coseguina. Yet it is one of the most impressive volcanoes in the world. I have called it alluring because it had that sort of effect upon me; it drew me, and impressed me, to a far greater extent than ever Teneriffe, Etna and Vesuvius did.

Yet it is but small, perhaps 4,000 feet high, and looks smaller than that in the presence of its towering neighbours Momotombo, San Miguel, and El Viejo, but its name exerts a spell, strikes a terror, which theirs cannot. For in the early days of January, 1835, Coseguina, which had been sleeping as quietly and peacefully as usual all through the Christmas season, suddenly awoke, and burst into dreadful activity. The explosion which occurred was heard in Jamaica, 800

miles away; and yet in the neighbouring town of Chinandega, some 50 miles off, nothing was heard at all, though it was overwhelmed with midnight darkness.

What the natives call a "poloacion," a terrific shower of burning ashes, followed, and covered the earth for hundreds of miles around, in some places twenty-one feet deep. Men who went to bed rich in land and cattle on the eve of the eruption lost everything in less than a week, and were left penniless. Yet what seemed to be a curse turned out to be a blessing, for the fertility of the land was increased enormously, and in a year or two the people were back on their ranches, and on the way to become as rich as before, or richer. No trace of the devastation now remains. Even the forests have renewed themselves in less than a hundred years, and giant cedars and caobas wave in the breeze.

It takes three hours' hard riding to reach the lonely jutting rock on which Coseguina's crater may be viewed, but it's worth all the effort. I was entreated not to go too close when we reached the crater's rim, but although the ground was cracked it seemed solid, and I went to the very edge and looked down. The crater is just over a mile across, while that of Teneriffe is twelve miles across, and yet Coseguina was the more impressive. Sheer down 2,000 feet, a perpendicular wall, and at the bottom a peaceful lake, about 200 acres in extent, shining and glistening as the sunlight touched it. Beautiful, majestic, still; a silence that could be felt.

As one looked, and thought, and wondered, there was always the underlying idea that this gentle and harmless Coseguina might again awake like a giant, speak with its dreadful voice, and spread fire and desolation o'er the land. That idea affected and coloured all one's thoughts.

## Modern Aqueducts

By DICK HAMILTON.

**T**HESE are of two types: (1) Constructed of masonry, concrete or brickwork; (2) Iron or steel piping (chiefly cast iron), though these may be lined with masonry. The former are expensive, and also more difficult to manage in working, through permeation, leakage, etc., and consequently they are only used nowadays for short lengths, though the ancients had to rely upon them chiefly. But labour was cheap in their time, and building materials plentiful, besides which the manufacture of cast-iron pipes was almost unknown to them.

Modern aqueducts are mostly covered, thus involving much tunnelling, whilst those of the ancients were generally raised above the ground, and carried on arches and

bridges. We have many fine aqueducts in this country, all built within the last fifty years. The Thirlmere aqueduct, which supplies Manchester with 50,000,000 gallons of water a day, is ninety-six miles long, and consists chiefly of cast-iron pipes. It has a man-hole every quarter of a mile.

Birmingham has a similar aqueduct of seventy-four miles long, which supplies it with 75,000,000 gallons a day, drawn from Radnorshire. Liverpool's aqueduct is sixty-eight miles long, and conveys 40,000,000 gallons a day from the River Vyrnwy, in North Wales. Derby, Sheffield, Nottingham and Leicester have an aqueduct between them which is fed from the headwaters of the River Derwent, in Derbyshire, and in the case of Leicester the water has to be conveyed 60 miles.

Wooden aqueducts are common in America, where timber is plentiful, and permanency in construction is not so much valued as it is here. But wooden aqueducts are said to last quite as long as those made of cast iron.



# "NELSON LEE" MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION.

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Boys! Here's the splendid little competition which you can all enter. It need only cost you the stamp for a postcard or letter, and you will find that it is quite a novel idea we have hit upon.

On Page 21 of this issue you will find a picture drawn to illustrate a certain part of this week's great story, "Left in the Desert," as you will see when you read the yarn.

Now you know that under our pictures we always have a line or two describing the incident shown. Well, this time we want you to find the best wording to be put underneath this picture.

A Prize of £1 1s. will be awarded to the reader who sends what, in the Editor's opinion, is the best inscription for the picture, and Twelve Consolation Prizes will go to the readers whose efforts are next best.

All inscriptions must be taken from the actual text of the story, and they must not exceed 25 words in length. Each inscription must be written on one of these coupons, which must be posted to:

"MYSTERY PICTURE No. 7,"

C/o "Nelson Lee Library,"

Gough House, Gough Square, E.C.4.

The Closing Date will be Tuesday, September 9th. The Editor's decision is final.

## "MYSTERY PICTURE" COMPETITION

No. 7.—I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final and binding.

Name and Address.....

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"Nelson Lee Library."—Closing date, Tuesday, September 1.

Inscription to Mystery Picture (see Page 21).

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# PRIZE WINNERS OF NELSON LEE LIBRARY MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION No. 2.

In this competition the First Prize of £1/1/0 for the best inscription to the picture has been awarded to:

MISS G. KERR,  
279, Seven Sisters Road,  
Finsbury Park, N.4

for the following:

Had the sky been clouded, the searchlights would have shown up prominently. But in this clear, crystal air the beams were almost lost.

The twelve consolation prizes have been awarded to the following:

A. Bacchus, 22, William Morris Close, Walthamstow, E.17.

S. Brown, 9, Hawkstone Road, Rotherhithe, S.E.16.

E. A. J. Crook, West Street, Banwell, Somerset.

H. Davies, 1, Lee Street, Swansea.

G. Eldridge, 42, Kingsley Road, Preston Park, Brighton.

Frank Sheath, 15, Sussex Square, Kemp Town, Brighton.

Vera Silver, 44, Richmond Row, Liverpool.

N. J. Skipp, 105, Little Heath Road, Foleshill, Coventry.

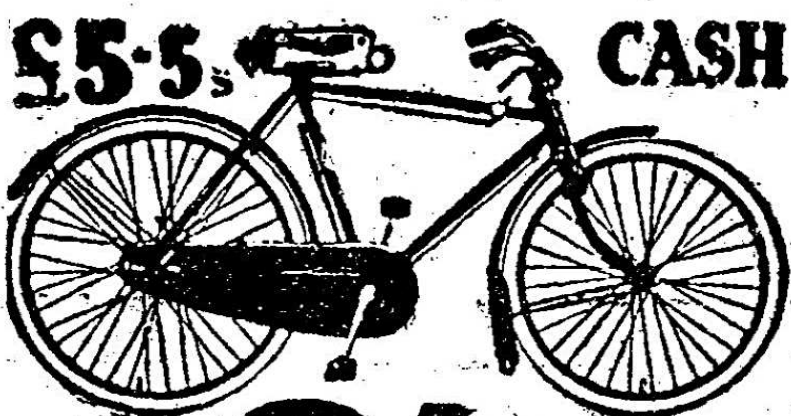
F. H. Trist, 47, Heston Terrace, Porthill, Staffs.

J. A. Courts, 2, Elvan Terrace, Ibrox, Glasgow.

V. Ward, Oaklands Bungalow, Dinas Powis, Glam.

J. Wilcock, 21, Parsonage Street, Bury, Lanes.





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D/R

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