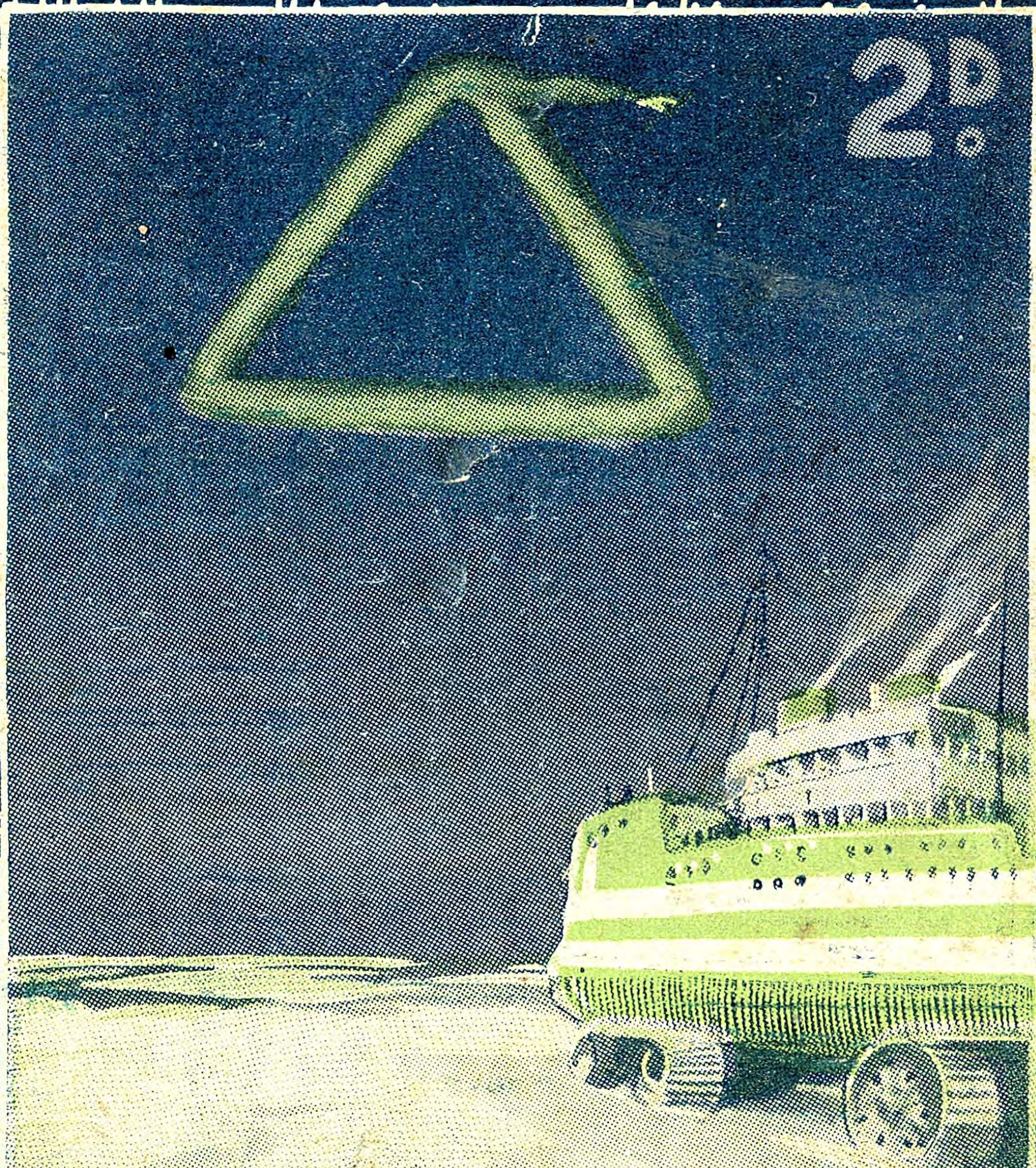


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THE EDITOR.

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

CHAPTER I.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING.

“**W**HAT’S that?” asked Jack Grey excitedly.

He pointed over the desert with a quivering finger.

“Eh? Steady on, old man—”

“Look—over there!” shouted Jack. “Can’t you see something? There’s a black thing in the sand; I can see it. I—I believe it’s only a piece of rock, though,” he added, his voice trailing away.

Reggie Pitt seized his chum by the arm.

“This won’t do, Jack,” he said quietly.

“It’s no good getting nervy, you know. I expect we shall find the poor chaps sooner or later. You’d better go below and—”

“I won’t go below!” interrupted Jack defiantly.

He was shaking a bit, for the tense excitement had affected him. And he was not the only St. Frank’s fellow on the Conqueror who was on his very tiptoes with acute tension.

Tommy Watson and I were almost as bad, and Tregellis-West could do nothing but stare out across the endless waste of sand, striving to catch some sight of the missing.

But the radiating waves of heat from the desert were liable to play tricks with a fellow’s eyesight, and Jack Grey’s was by no means the first false alarm that had been raised during the past hour.

Even Archie Glenthorne was up on deck with us—unusually shrovy and careless in his dress. For once the immaculate Archie cared nothing about his appearance. His only thoughts were for Handforth and Church and McClure, the three members of our party who were missing.

We were all on Mr. Travers Earle’s land yacht, that famous craft which had carried us into the heart of the Sahara desert, where we were now. Our adventures had been many and varied, particularly when we had penetrated the strange land of Isirium.

This present trouble was, in a way, a result of that visit.

For after leaving Isirium we had discovered three of that little country's worst scoundrels—three men who had been condemned to death—skulking in the Conqueror as stowaways.

At least two had been discovered, and were now prisoners on board. There had been a third but he had mysteriously vanished during the previous evening. And Handforth and Co. had disappeared at the same time.

We didn't know it at this precise moment, but the chums of Study D had fallen overboard in a most extraordinary way. Quietly talking in the stern of the Conqueror, they had suddenly been confronted by Titus, the man who had been causing most of our recent troubles.

In his usual impulsive way Handforth had leapt to the attack. And he and his opponent had toppled over the rear rail, to fall headlong down into the loose sand. For at the time the land yacht had been laboriously ploughing its way through a veritable sea of loose, shifting dunes.

Church and McClure, alarmed, had both leaned over the rail. The yacht had given a sudden powerful lurch and they were both pitched over, in spite of all their efforts to save themselves.

In that way the four had vanished—without a soul on board being the wiser.

A pure piece of chance; a caprice of Fate; but the consequences were likely to prove grim and terrible, indeed, tragic. For Titus, at least, had lost his life. The wretched man had gone to his last account in the sands. They had covered him up, and he had never reappeared.

But what of Handforth and Co?

It wasn't until nearly midnight that their disappearance was noted. And then, of course, a search had been made—a search which ultimately led to the discovery that they were no longer on board.

And ever since the Conqueror had been slowly going back on her own tracks, with everybody lining the rails, eager for the first sight of the missing trio. But now it was well on into the forenoon, and the most stout-hearted of us were beginning to fear.

The great vessel, not unlike an ocean-going yacht, was progressing by means of her four enormous caterpillar tractors. By means of these ingenious contrivances she was able to progress over any kind of ground, no matter how rough, no matter how loose or shifting the surface.

And we were northward bound, our intention being to cross the mighty Sahara and arrive at Algiers. It was getting near the time that we should be home, and our thoughts were beginning to turn to St. Frank's once again.

And this appalling affair had been sprung on us like a bombshell.

Handforth and Co. were lost in the desert, and it was no good fooling ourselves. There was more than a possibility that the unfortunate youngsters had perished.

Tragedy was in the air.

Handforth's younger brother and sister stood against the rail, their eyes aching with the intensity of their search. They spoke little, for they were too full of worry for conversation.

And near by was Sir Edward Handforth himself, stern, haggard, his shoulders drooping. Edward Oswald's pater was a noisy, boisterous man as a rule, but for hours he had been dumb.

On the bridge, Nelson Lee was standing beside Mr. Hobart Manners, and Mr. Earle himself was at the wheel.

It was impossible for the Conqueror to travel back in her own tracks, for these were no longer visible. The loose sand left scarcely any impression, and a strong breeze had long since swept the fine particles over the dim traces that actually had remained.

But by compass it was possible to steer an approximate course. Yet, as Nelson Lee knew, this was unreliable. Just the difference of two or three hundred yards might mean tragedy.

And the search went on, with every soul on board thinking of nothing except the succour of those three unfortunates who were somewhere in this vast, treacherous waste.

CHAPTER II.

THIRST.



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH scratched his head.

"Jolly queer!" he said carelessly. "I wonder why the dickens they don't come? It's getting on towards noon, and still no sign! They ought to have a few fireworks let off round 'em!"

Handforth spoke with studied calmness. He was trying to make his chums feel comfortable. Yet his efforts were rather pitiful, when it is realised that Church and McClure were by no means deceived.

"It's no good, Handy," said Church huskily. "We've given up hope; there's nothing to live for now. The Conqueror's gone on. We're left here to die!"

McClure laughed rather hysterically.

"Fancy leaving us like this!" he said shrilly. "The rotters! By the time they find us, we shall be half dead. Or perhaps we shall be really dead. I say, wouldn't that be rummy?"

"Keep your hair on, old man!" growled

Handforth. "We shall be all right. Phew! This heat is a bit thick!"

The heat, in fact, was appalling.

As far as the eye could see there was nothing but desert—a rolling expanse of endless sands. And the sun was beating down out of a cloudless sky, such a sun as only the Sahara knows.

And in addition to the burning, blistering heat of direct sunlight, there were the suffocating waves which arose from the scorched sand—waves like the blast from a furnace.

"Come on, let's be moving again," said Handforth hoarsely.

"Your voice is a bit squiffy," said McClure, with another laugh. "My hat! Your face has all gone mottled! Poor old Handy! You're coming out in blotches! You look fine!"

There was rather a wild look about McClure's eyes, and Handforth and Church were anxious. Their chum, in fact, was getting a trifle delirious. And the wonder of it was that they had all lasted out so long.

They were parched. The thirst which assailed them was so awful that they instinctively knew the end must come soon, one way or the other. Even now their tongues and mouths were swollen considerably, and their whole expressions were unnatural in consequence.

Food didn't worry them; they had no hunger. The thought of food, indeed, was distasteful. All they wanted was water. Instinctively they refrained from mentioning the subject—or they had done until now. But McClure was getting beyond control.

"Why don't they come?" he asked fiercely. "It's cruel! It's rotten to leave us here like this! Oh, my goodness! My throat! I think it's closing up; I'm choking!"

"Don't go on like that, old man——"

"I think I'm going to die!" moaned McClure, almost beyond himself. "Why don't they come? Can't you fellows do something? Don't stand there, staring at me!" he added, his voice rising thickly. "What's the matter? Don't stare, I tell you!"

Handforth seized McClure's arm.

"Come on, old son," he said briskly. "You're getting peevish. The best thing we can do is to move. I think there are some rocks jutting out of the sand about half a mile away. Let's go and see. There might be some shade, and even water——"

"Water!" sobbed McClure. "Give me some!"

"Wouldn't I like to!" groaned Church.

"You mean rotters!" screamed McClure. "Why don't you give me some? You're going to let me die. Do you hear? Give me some water, you beast! Can't you hear me——"

He broke off, and fell to the sand on his knees, almost choking with hysterical sobs. Handforth and Church exchanged glances. They were both haggard and bloodshot. It cut them to the quick to hear McClure going on in this way, and it hurt them ten times as much when he commenced screaming with wild laughter a few minutes later.

"He's—he's going mad!" whispered Church, horrified.

"Rats!" snorted Handforth. "It's nothing! He'll soon be better. What's the idea of all this rot, anyhow? The Conqueror will soon come; you needn't worry. Haven't you got any faith?"

Handforth had practically none himself, for most of his hope was killed. But he spoke scoffingly, and with a careless note in his voice, which did a great deal towards bringing McClure to his senses.

"That's better!" laughed Handforth, as the semi-delirious junior looked up. "Feeling fit now? My dear ass, you're off your rocker. The Conqueror will be here in less than half an hour—you mark my words!"

"Do—do you think so?" breathed McClure.

"Think so!" scoffed Handforth. "It's a cert! Come on, let's get a move on; anything's better than sticking here, in one place!"

Handforth was proving his worth in his own characteristic way. When it came to a crisis, he thought of his chums far more than he thought of himself. These chums he usually knocked about—the fellows he gave black eyes and thick ears to without thought or compunction. And now he was ready to give his own life for their sakes.

"I—I can't walk!" muttered McClure. "Don't let's move from this place; I tell you I can't walk! I'm all dizzy! I'm——"

"That's all right," said Handforth. "I'll give you a hand."

He assisted McClure to his feet, and looked at Church.

"Hoist him on my back!" he muttered. "We've got to find some shade somewhere. He'll go potty if we don't!"

Somehow, McClure was hoisted up, and then Handforth staggered off over the loose sand in the direction of those rocks, which jutted up out of the desert about half a mile distant.

Handforth never knew how he covered the ground. Towards the latter part of the journey, he was walking along in a daze—drunkenly, with a feeling that his legs were losing all their strength.

And McClure had ceased to shift about—his breathing had become regular and faint. The unfortunate junior was, in fact, unconscious. And Church was in a condition almost as bad.

"What's—what's that?" he muttered suddenly.

It seemed to him that a shadow had

fitted by on the ground. And then he glanced up, and a look of horror crept into his eyes.

For in the blue of the heavens some ungainly objects were flapping idly about. Vultures! In some uncanny, unaccountable way, these horrible birds of prey had arrived—scenting victims.

And it was an ominous sign—a sign that caused the juniors to give up the last faint shred of hope.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOVERING SPECKS.



LORD DORRIMORE became rigid.

He had happened to glance at Nelson Lee, as the latter swept his binoculars round the wide expanse of horizon. And Dorrie noticed that Lee's attention had become suddenly fixed.

"Anythin' there, old man?" asked his lordship quickly.

"I'm not sure, but I believe——"

Nelson Lee broke off and turned to Mr. Earle.

"Can you alter the course two or three points to starboard?" he asked tensely. "And increase the speed, too. I may be wrong, but I think there is something far away in that direction."

Lord Dorrimore raised his own binoculars and focussed them.

"You've got better eyesight than mine," he admitted at length.

"You detect nothing?"

"Nothin', except the infernal sand."

"Higher, man—higher," advised Lee.

Dorrie stared for a moment, and then did as he was directed. And he gave an abrupt start as he found the focus once more.

"By the Lord Harry!" he breathed. "You—you mean those specks hoverin' in the sky?"

"I do."

"They're birds," said Dorrie. "Good gad, Lee—vultures! Do you think it possible that——"

The fact that the vultures are still on the wing is hopeful—indeed, a certain sign that something living is below," said Nelson Lee quietly. "But we mustn't be too optimistic. That would never do, Dorrie. This living thing may be some animal of the desert."

But both Dorrie and Lee were very optimistic indeed. And by now the Conqueror was getting nearer and nearer to the spot. The hovering specks were visible to the naked eye, and they had already been seen by the juniors.

"They're vultures!" said Pitt eagerly. "And that means more than some of you chaps think. This is going to be exciting."

My hat! If only we find those poor chaps now, we'll all go dotty with relief."

"But what are the vultures doing there?" asked Tommy Watson. "Why the dickens should they hover about?"

"That's right—show your ignorance!" said Grey. "The vultures are waiting until their victims are dead. And then—Oh, it's too horrible! Let's talk about something else."

Jack had gone pale at the thought which occurred to him. And he gave his full attention to the scene just ahead. There were some rocks there, sticking up out of the sand stumpily and in grotesque disorder.

But Nelson Lee could see nothing through his binoculars—nothing, that is, that resembled a human form. Just the rocks, ugly and sinister, with the vultures hovering significantly overhead.

The Conqueror rolled on, and at length came to a halt within a few yards of the rocks themselves. And still there was no sign—not a sound, except the raucous note of the horrible birds of prey, as they swept round in wide circles, furious at being disturbed.

"We must examine these rocks closely," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Come, Dorrie, we'll go on foot. And bring a flask of water."

Lee's own flask was already full—ready for the first emergency. They didn't wait for the gangway to be lowered, but swarmed down a handy rope.

None of the others asked to go. This situation was too tense for any such request. But the decks were lined with eager, anxious boys and girls. Instinctively, they felt that something would come of this dramatic discovery.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie reached the rocks; and turned the angle of them. And Lee caught his breath in sharply, for there was nothing to be seen but the endless sand.

"What rotten luck!" growled Dorrie. "An' I thought——"

"What's this?" snapped Lee. "By Heaven, Dorrie, we've found them! They're here! Can't you see?"

"By glory!" whispered Lord Dorrimore.

Just round a little crevice in the rocks were three figures—two of them completely shaded from the glaring sun. They were Church and McClure. The other figure was Handforth, and it was partly his body that was shielding the other two from the fierce heat.

"Handforth!" shouted Lee sharply.

To the intense joy of the two men, Handforth stirred, half-turned, and revealed a blackened, awful-looking face. His tongue was lolling out, and so swollen that he couldn't close his mouth.

"Poor boy! This is terrible!" muttered Lee huskily.

In a moment he was on his knees, and

the nearly unconscious Handforth was permitted to sip a few drops of water. He wanted to gulp down the entire contents of the flask, but Lee wouldn't allow it. Such a drastic step might have been fatal. But even this little taster wrought wonderful effect. Handforth had been on the point of unconsciousness, but he partially revived.

"Don't—don't bother about me!" he said hoarsely. "They—they're worse! See after them first!"

Church and McClure were attended to, and Nelson Lee could have shouted for joy when he found them both alive. They were almost in the last stage, and not far from death, but rescue had come in time.

ing a still form between them. All doubt was set at rest. The missing juniors had been found, and a pandemonium of excited cheering broke out.

Sir Edward Handforth sped to the gangway, and his face was alight with relief. Ena and Willy were with him, and they started back in momentary consternation when they saw that the unconscious junior was McClure.

They had not dared to go among the rocks themselves, fearing the worst. And now it seemed that their suspicions were to be confirmed.

"What of my son?" asked Sir Edward steadily. "He is—out there?"

"Have no fear, Sir Edward—your son is

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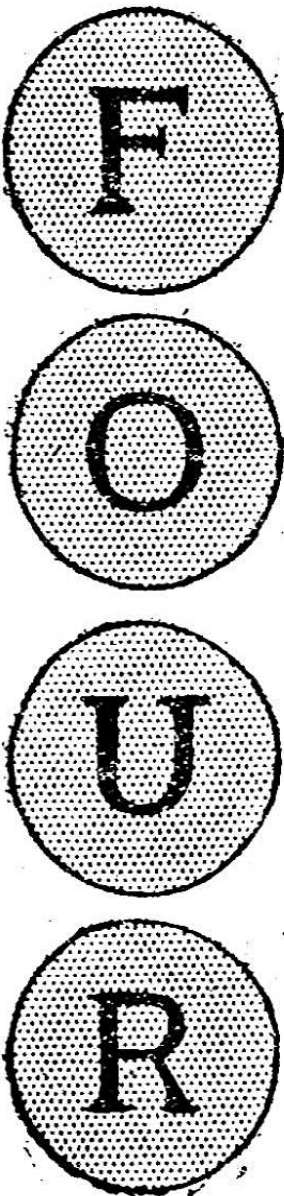
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CHAPTER IV.

THE UNWILLING PATIENTS.



"**H**URRAH!"

"They're saved!"

"Good old Handy!"

Ringin' cheers went up when Nelson Lee and Dorrie came round the rocks, bear-

alive," replied Nelson Lee. "He will be fetched at once. I believe it is due to his care and devotion that these other two boys are still alive."

"Thank God!" muttered Sir Edward huskily.

And soon afterwards Handforth and Church were brought on board. The rest of us refrained from cheering or making any

noise. For the three juniors were in a terrible way. Some of the fellows believed that there was no hope for them.

Their appearance was certainly appalling, and one could be excused for believing that they would never be able to recover.

But a period of twenty-four hours made a staggering difference.

Plenty of water, light food, and complete rest brought about a change which amazed everybody. By the next day, Handforth and Co. were nearly themselves.

Their appearance had become almost normal again, and the chief effects of their terrible adventure were to be seen in their bloodshot eyes, and their shaky limbs. But it was only a question of time before they would be as usual.

The Conqueror was now heading northward again—plodding on steadily and eating up the miles with relentless persistency. The brief sensation was over, for Handforth and Co. had been restored, and were the heroes of the hour.

Again and again they had told the story of their fall from the deck to the listening crowd. And Church and McClure continually incensed their leader by going into all sorts of unnecessary details.

They were on deck, lying full length on comfortable lounges, and they were being fanned by other fellows, and waited upon hand and foot. Irene and Co. were particularly attentive, having, in fact, constituted themselves Handforth and Co.'s nurses.

"It was wonderful!" said Church enthusiastically. "Poor old McClure petered out—absolutely gave way! His legs went all limp, and he started getting delirious! He talked all sorts of rot——"

"So do you!" growled Handforth uncomfortably. "Look here, we don't want to hear any more about this."

"Indeed, we do!" said Irene firmly.

"Carry on, sergeant!" commanded Doris Berkeley.

"That's what I'm doing!" said Church. "McClure went all wonky, and it's a ten to one chance that he would have died out there in the glaring sun. And so Handy actually carried him on his shoulders through that burning heat to the rocks, where we got a bit of shade. I can't remember it much, because I was nearly gone——"

"Are you going to shut up?" snorted Handforth.

Seldom had he felt so uncomfortable. And those among his listeners who did not know his character thoroughly were surprised. When it came to anything really big or noteworthy, Edward Oswald was one of the most modest fellows under the sun.

And yet he was frequently set down as a boaster. But he only boasted unconsciously, and over matters which had no importance.

On the real questions of life he was actually retiring.

And he revolted against being pampered. Church and McClure rather liked it. It was a novelty for them to be waited upon, and to have their every wish granted for the mere expression of it. And they fairly revelled in their convalescence, and inwardly resolved to make it last as long as possible.

On the other hand, Handforth put his foot down.

"I'm fed up with this!" he said grimly. "If you start fanning me again, Willy, I'll biff you! Take that rotten thing away!"

"But you're ill, you ass!" said Willy kindly.

"I'm not ill!" snorted his major.

"Oh, Ted!" protested Irene. "You mustn't——"

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Irene, but I've had just about enough of this Tommy rot!" said Handforth firmly. "I'm not ill—I don't need all this palaver! And I don't need these sympathetic looks, either!" he added, glaring at the circle of faces.

He got up from his lounge, turned on his heel, and walked away—swaying giddily as he did so. For, in spite of his bold words, he was still decidedly rocky. He felt rather limp as he came face to face with Nelson Lee.

"What is this, young man?" asked Lee. "I'm all right now, sir," said Handforth feebly. "I'm just going below to have a wash, and then I'm going to change into flannels."

"Quite a nice dream, but I'm afraid it won't materialise," said Nelson Lee. "You will please return to your couch, and remain quite still for the rest of the afternoon."

"Not—not really, sir?" asked Handforth miserably.

"Yes—really."

And, much to Handforth's disgust, he was compelled to return to his undesirable couch. And in a few minutes he was again the centre of kindly care and attention.

As a patient, Handforth was a bit of a problem.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.



TWO days later the convalescent ones were restored to full health.

If Handforth was delighted, Church and McClure were rather disappointed. They had been fully prepared to continue the treatment for a whole week. But Handforth firmly set his face against this sort of thing.

"We've had enough idling about," he

said grimly. "What about all my work?"

"Your work?" asked Church.

"Yes; it's got all behind," said Edward Oswald. "I shall have to devote myself to it strenuously now, and make up for lost time. I've got at least two Trackett Grim stories to write——"

"Great Scott! Is that what you call work?" asked McClure, glaring.

"What do you call it?"

"It wouldn't be safe to say!" said McClure.

"My hat!" exclaimed Handforth, rolling up his sleeves. "So you're up to your old games, are you? You've got to come below

ocean. Day after day passed, and the vista remained unaltered.

Handforth was already beginning to think of St. Frank's, and to make all sorts of preparations for the new term. He was particularly anxious to get a few of his famous Trackett Grim stories written, so that they would be ready for immediate publication.

He had even suggested practising football on the Conqueror's deck, explaining that it was now quite seasonable at home, in England. But nobody else saw his point of view, and football was shelved.

Church and McClure were anxious to



"What's—what's that?" muttered Handforth suddenly.

It seemed to him that a shadow had flitted by on the ground. And then he glanced up, and a look of horror crept into his eyes.

and sit in the cabin and take down notes! I'm in the mood for writing! And you chaps have got to be my secretaries!"

The juniors were on deck, and it was evening. The Conqueror was still going northwards, but there was nothing to show that the scene had actually changed. It was just the same waste of sand—the same endless landscape of undulating dunes.

Indeed, the progress of the land yacht across the Sahara was very much the same as the progress of a steamer across the

enjoy the cool of the evening on deck. There was something rather fascinating about these desert nights, with the purple vault of heaven overhead, studded with myriads of stars.

"We don't want to go below now," grumbled Church. "Christine saw a comet half an hour ago, and we're looking for some more——"

"I say, you chaps," called Willy Handforth from the other side of the deck. "what do you make of this?"

"Don't bother now!" said Handforth tartly. "It's a pity you can't be quiet, young Willy! I've had enough of you these last few days, and I don't want any more!"

"There's gratitude!" snorted Willy. "I simply wait on you hand and foot, and you don't give me a word of appreciation! I want you to have a look at this star—Hullo! That's queer!"

Willy's voice took on a strange note, and he stared up into the sky, shadowing his eyes with his hands so that his vision was confined to one spot.

"Anybody got any glasses?" he asked excitedly.

"Not here," I said. "What are you looking at?"

"There's a rummy star up here," said Willy. "Can't you see it? That one with a kind of orange glow? I've never seen one that colour before, and I wanted to draw your attention to it. But it's moving!"

"Moving!" I grinned. "Don't be an ass!"

"But I tell you it is!" insisted Willy. "There you are! It's shifted its position while I've been watching! I've never seen anything quite so rummy before!"

The rest of us took very little notice of Willy's excitement. His statement seemed altogether too ridiculous for serious consideration. But he persisted so much that I scrutinised the starry heavens with care.

"I can't see anything unusual," I said, at length.

Everybody knows how difficult it is to pick out a certain star from among countless others. It may be quite obvious to one onlooker, but undiscoverable by another.

"By jingo! I believe he's right!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt suddenly. "I've got it! It's distinctly moving—slowly and steadily, but the movement is there all right. It's a foot nearer those other constellations already. At least, it seems about a foot from down here."

Pitt was not the only fellow who had seen. There were plenty of others, and the majority of them were getting very excited.

"What can it be?" asked Handforth keenly. "By George! I've got it! An aeroplane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" snorted Handy.

"My dear chap, an aeroplane's about the last thing we should expect to see in the middle of the Sahara," grinned Church. "You'd better guess again, old man. I can't see the star, anyhow."

But I had located it by this time, and I was watching it with intense interest. My heart was pumping a little faster than usual, too. Far up in the sky there was a speck of orange light. It certainly seemed to be a star. But such a thing was quite out of the question, for this light was moving across the sky at quite a steady

pace. And then, to my astonishment, it became fixed in position for a few minutes, and then travelled slowly back on its own invisible tracks.

"What do you make of it, Reggie?" I asked keenly.

"Well, it can't be a comet, and I'm hanged if I can see how an aeroplane could be here. Besides, it couldn't possibly be an aeroplane—it's too high up. It's so remote that it seems to be a distant star."

As we watched, the light became intensely brilliant for a few moments, dwindling suddenly to a mere speck. And just as abruptly it was blotted out—although there was no trace of cloud.

"There's something almost uncanny about this," I said slowly. "It can't be anything human— And yet how can it be anything else? There's not an astronomer in the world who would admit that a star can calmly move across the sky from side to side in this way!"

The sensation, however, died out. For there was no further sign of that queer point of light. What it was, and what it had been caused by, remained a mystery.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISCOVERY IN THE STORE-ROOM.



NELSON LEE looked thoughtful.

"I'm afraid it's going to be a bit of a problem, Dorrie," he said.

"We've got these two men on board as prisoners, and we must decide what to do with them. We certainly cannot take them back to their own strange little land."

"I don't think they would fancy that much, either," smiled his lordship. "They've only got to set foot in Isirium, an' they'll be food for the lions within a couple of hours! Either that, or they'll find a nice little position at the torture-stake."

"Precisely!" nodded Lee. "Common humanity compels us to deal with them justly. Undoubtedly, the pair deserve hanging, but we cannot take the law into our own hands. And yet their crimes do not come under the jurisdiction of any other race. So our dilemma is rather serious."

"Yes, I see the point," said his lordship. "Why not set the beggars down at the first village we come to? We ought to be strikin' the inhabited country before long."

"It seems, indeed, about the only way," said Nelson Lee. "And yet I don't like to plant two such rascals on any unoffending village. The only other alternative is to take them straight through to Algiers, and hand them over to the French authorities."

Strictly speaking, the oasis of Isirium is in the French Soudan."

"Shall we put it to the beggars, and ask them which they would prefer?" suggested Dorrie, grinning. "They may be able to find their way back to their own country if we set them down in the desert—at the first water-hole."

Nelson Lee decided upon this course, and he and Dorrie descended into the yacht and made their way to a lower store-room where Spurius Gallus and Lars Melos were imprisoned.

The captives, of course, were being properly looked after now. They were regularly supplied with ample food and drink, but under no circumstances were they allowed the slightest liberty. They were treacherous to the backbone, and had to be dealt with accordingly.

Lee opened the store-room door, and switched on the electric light. Then he paused. On the other side of the little room two figures were huddled up against the wall. It was the very unnatural attitude of their positions which caused Lee to halt.

"There's something wrong here, Dorrie," he said in a low voice.

"They're asleep, aren't they?" whispered his lordship.

Nelson Lee took two strides into the store-room, and grasped one of the men by the shoulder. That one touch was enough.

"Dorrie," he said quietly, "they're dead!"

"Dead!" gasped Lord Dorrimore, aghast.

"Stone dead!"

"Good heavens! But—but what on earth——"

Dorrie paused, as Nelson Lee made a swift examination. They were shocked, for they had never expected anything of this sort. They both realised, however, that the problem was solved.

"Poison, without a doubt," commented Nelson Lee grimly.

"Not the grub, surely?"

"I hardly think our food is in that condition," retorted Lee. "No, Dorrie, these men have died by their own hand. They must have carried some poison on their persons—a final emergency, I fancy, to save themselves from possible torture. These tyrants were obviously prepared for the worst."

"But, man alive, why commit suicide on this ship?"

"They feared the future," replied Lee. "Their leader was gone, and they probably thought that death awaited them, in any case. So they took the shortest cut out of all their troubles. And I must confess that I am intensely relieved. It sounds a callous thing to say——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Dorrie. "These

infernal brutes are responsible for hundreds of vile deaths—murders! How many people have they sent to the torture in the Isirium arena? How many families have they utterly ruined? No, Lee, I'm not squeamish—I'm downright glad to see these reptiles as they are!"

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, they are dead, and we must deal with the situation as it now stands," he said. "I think it will be inadvisable to say anything to the others. We cannot do better than wait until the small hours of the morning, and give the poor wretches a decent burial. The boys can know afterwards—when everything is over."

And this was the final decision.

It seemed a pity that the party's final association with the interesting Isirium people should end in this fashion. But it was all the better. Such men as these two could have brought nothing but trouble if they had been released among the peaceful natives.

And so, in the grey light of dawn, while everybody slept, Nelson Lee and a picked party of the crew went off the Conqueror, and the bodies were provided with a quiet, impressive funeral.

And afterwards, when the Conqueror resumed her way, the very air of the ship seemed cleaner and sweeter.

"I am glad we are free of that association at last," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I wonder if we shall ever hear anything of the Isirium natives again, Dorrie? It is scarcely possible that the valley will be reached by other exploring parties. And, in any case, I doubt if the people will leave the valley open. They will probably seal themselves up, so that none can enter."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"Well, we're homeward bound, and as far as I can see all the excitements of the trip are over," he remarked. "Let's go to bed, old man. We can do with some sleep after that business."

"Yes," agreed Lee; "and I'm afraid that the boys will have rather a dull time of it for the rest of the trip—at least, dull by comparison with what has already passed."

"Oh, well, they can't grumble; they've had their fill!" yawned his lordship. "An' by the time we get home the holidays will be over, an' then school again."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Yes, school," he said slowly. "Somehow I rather think the boys will get a surprise or two when they return to St. Frank's. There will be one or two changes that will occasion a lot of discussion."

But even Nelson Lee didn't realise how drastic the changes at St. Frank's were to be!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE AIR.



"SOMETHING queer happened in the night," said Handforth mysteriously.

"Something queer?" repeated Church.

"Yes. I happened to wake up, and the Conqueror was at a standstill," said Handforth. "And I looked out of the cabin window, and I'm blessed if Mr. Lee and some of the others weren't out on the sands."

"You must have dreamed it, old man," said McClure.

"Rot! I saw them clearly," insisted Handforth. "They were all digging."

"Digging?"

"Digging!" said Handforth firmly. "And if that wasn't queer, what was? I'm going to ask all about it and find out the truth. It's my opinion they came across some old bones, or something, or perhaps a hidden treasure. There's all sorts of rummy things in the desert."

Handforth was not the only fellow who had noticed the stoppage in the night. And there were several inquiries at breakfast time. And somehow it leaked out that Lars Melos and Spurius Gallus had been found dead in their prison, and had been buried.

The news cast a bit of a gloom over the yacht's party for a time, but by midday we were all in good spirits again. And time hung somewhat heavily on our hands.

For there was now nothing to do. It would be several days before the Conqueror reached the northern edge of the Sahara, and after that the journey would be a mere tourist's trip through Algiers, and then home to England. It was natural, therefore, that discussions concerning St. Frank's should be the order of the day.

"I shan't be sorry to get back," remarked Reggie Pitt. "By jingo, it seems ages since I was in Study E, working away at prep., with T.T. spouting about the Origin of Man. I'm longing to be there again."

"That's what you say now!" growled Handforth. "St. Frank's seems a ripping place—when we're here. But after we've got back to school, we shall be longing for the Sahara again."

"Of course, that's just the way of things," agreed Pitt. "A fellow always wants something that's a long distance off. And when he gets it he finds he doesn't want it at all. For example, Handy's always trying to get a good Trackett Grim plot, and——"

"You leave Trackett Grim alone!" said Handforth darkly.

"Don't worry; I'm not going to interfere——"

"Oh, look!" interrupted Marjorie Temple suddenly. "There's something up in the sky; I distinctly saw a glint just now! There it is again! I'm sure there's something there!"

The girl was standing against the rail, shading her eyes with her hand. And within ten seconds all the juniors on deck were following her example. The sky was intense blue, and rather painful to gaze at. For the sun was blazing down with all the fierce intensity of the African climate.

"I can't see anything," said Irene, shaking her head.

"Imagination, I suppose," remarked Ena. "Marjorie always was a girl like that. She sees things that aren't there. One day she saw a point in one of Ted's jokes!"

"Oh, Ena! I'm sure I saw— There!" cried Marjorie, pointing excitedly. "Didn't you see that peculiar reddish flash?"

"Absolutely!" declared Archie Glen-thorne stoutly. "A red flash, don't you know. A kind of glint, as it were. It seems to me, as it were, that something is absolutely hovering about in the good old heavens."

Lord Dorrimore strolled up, smiling.

"What's all this neck-cranin' about?" he asked amusedly.

"There's something up in the sky, Dorrie," I grinned. "At least, Miss Marjorie says so, and Archie agrees with her."

"Archie would," said Dorrie, nodding.

"Oh, but I say! Dash it!" protested Archie. "You're not absolutely suggesting that I'm agreeing just for the sake of being sporty? I positively saw a red glint."

"I didn't see it, but I believe it," said Willy Handforth stoutly. "What about that star last night?"

"Which star?" demanded his lordship.

"The one that moved, sir."

"By gad! You're not tellin' me that the stars are movin' about at random?" asked Dorrie, in mild surprise. "The fact is, you young people have got frightfully rich imaginations. Here we are, in the middle of the Sahara, an' you talk about red glints in the sky."

"And stars that move about as though they've got no home," chuckled Pitt. "I expect the one we saw had lost its axis, and was looking round for a new orbit, or something."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," agreed Dorrie solemnly.

He shaded his eyes and gazed upwards casually, not because he thought he could see anything, but because he just wanted to be in the swim. And he suddenly started and caught his breath in.

"By the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated. "A red glint, eh? I'm hanged if I didn't see it myself! There you are! The infernal

thing's comin' lower down. What in the name of all that's mysterious——"

He broke off, his voice filled with wonder. And there was every reason for his blank astonishment. Far up in the sky, over to our starboard quarter, the strange red glint was now quite conspicuous.

At first it had been a kind of will-o-the-wisp, appearing now and again at intervals. But now we could see the thing quite distinctly. It was a red spot, which seemed to gleam and shiver in the sunlight.

As far as I could judge the thing was fully twenty-five thousand feet above the ground, and this would have been quite invisible in any atmosphere less transparent than this.

But what was it?

CHAPTER VIII. THE CRIMSON EAGLE.



EXCITEMENT reigned. We had been settling ourselves to a quiet, rather dull time. And this sudden sensation was welcomed with delight by most of the

juniors. The first thought that occurred to us was an obvious one. The red glint was caused by an aeroplane.

But a moment's consideration made me abandon this suggestion. We were over a thousand miles from the nearest outpost of civilisation, and although world flights are becoming quite common these days, no pilot would deliberately venture across the Sahara. Moreover, this red thing hardly suggested an aeroplane, for at times it seemed to remain perfectly still.

But our doubts were soon set at rest.

"It's coming lower!" declared Handforth. "I'll bet I know what it is. A projectile from Mars! By George, that's it! A giddy projectile, filled with Martians!"

Handforth could always be relied upon to supply some such fantastic explanation. He would never think of anything logical or common-place. And the effect was rather spoilt by Willy.

"It's a pity you can't be original!" he said tartly.

"I am original!" snorted Handforth. "And this is a shrewd suggestion, too! Everybody knows that Mars is red—and this thing's red. I tell you I'm right——"

"This is what comes of reading that story I lent you last night," interrupted Willy. "It isn't about Mars, is it? It isn't about a projectile coming down to earth, is it?"

Handforth turned red.

"That story's got nothing to do with my idea!" he roared. "At least, I'd almost forgotten——"

"It's a bird!" yelled Bob Christine.

"Look! Can't you see? It's a tremendous bird! And it must be coming down at about a thousand miles an hour!"

The excitement was growing, and Bob Christine's statement was astonishingly accurate. Nelson Lee, with binoculars to his eyes, had focussed the object and could see it distinctly. And he was amazed to find himself gazing upon a gigantic bird.

The creature was crimson—a dazzling, shimmering red—and of such enormous proportions that it looked fantastic. The wings were outspread, and the bird was swooping down gracefully from the upper heights at a tremendous speed.

The binoculars, indeed, were not even necessary.

We could all see the thing now—an eagle, with a wicked-looking head, gleaming eyes, and cruel beak. But an eagle of giant proportions. From wing-tip to wing-tip it must have measured fifty or sixty feet!

"It can't be a bird; it's an airship!" declared Reggie Pitt. "But where's the propeller? I say, this is a bit rummy! Hallo, the thing's flying now!"

I had begun to suspect the airship idea, too, but my calculations received a rude shock. For the strange creature had descended to about a thousand feet, and was not less than half a mile distant, in plain view. And every inch of it looked alive.

The wings were moving, majestically and gracefully. And the bird soared round, and flapped its way directly over the Conqueror. And when the eagle was immediately overhead, it suddenly swooped down, and came flapping across our bows, after performing a swift circle.

It was gone in a flash, the speed being so tremendous that we were left gasping. And now she was soaring again, climbing with all the movements of an ordinary eagle. But her size staggered us.

"Is it real or it is a fake?" asked Church huskily. "I'm blessed if I can decide which. But it can't be real; there isn't such a bird. Look, she's coming down!"

As the eagle had swept over us I detected the faint hum of machinery, and I was firmly convinced that this was no creature of flesh and blood. With singularly graceful movements the bird flapped nearer and nearer to the ground and alighted on the sand with scarcely a jar. It stood there on its legs, and the wings slowly folded back.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

"What do you make of it, old man?" asked Dorrie, turning to Nelson Lee.

"I must confess that I am totally non-plussed," replied Lee. "Of course, the thing is mechanical; there are men inside. But what a craft! What a marvellous advance on any aerial contrivance yet

invented! This thing is a revolution in flying!"

"Of course, it's not the first flappin' wing aeroplane that has been invented, but I'll bet it's the first that's been successful," said his lordship. "By gad, you're right! They've opened a door!"

A roar went up from the juniors.

"Look, there's a man coming out!"

"Well I'm blessed!"

"Why, it's not a bird after all!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "What did I tell you? I knew it was only a spoof. And even now I'm not convinced that it hasn't come from Mars!"

"It might have come from dad's!" suggested Pitt humorously.

"Fathead!" said Handforth with a withering glare.

The rest of us were at the rail—watching eagerly and excitedly. The Conqueror rolled nearer and nearer, and at last came to a halt only twenty feet distant from the extraordinary Crimson Eagle.

"Ahoy, there!" came a chee-ful voice. "Got any water to spare?"

There was a doorway in the side of the great bird, and a man was standing there easily and carelessly. He was attired in an ordinary lounge suit, and his clean-shaven face was wreathed in smiles.

"Well, he's a cool card, anyhow!" said Tommy Watson. "British, too! This looks like being interesting!"

As I pointed out to Tommy, it was interesting already.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WONDER FLIER.



THERE was something singularly attractive in the situation. Here, in the heart of the Sahara, the most remarkable aircraft in the world was standing side by side with the most remarkable landcraft in the world!

And they were both British. The man in the doorway of the mechanical bird was a typical Briton—fair, cheery and square-shouldered. He jumped lightly to the ground, and strolled over to the Conqueror's side.

"Sorry to trouble you, old beans, but what about a drop of water?" he asked genially. "We've run short—a slight leakage in the tank. I think I have the honour of addressing Mr. Travers Earle?"

"I am Travers Earle, sir," replied the inventor, leaning over the rail.

"Good! Delighted!" said the other. "I'm Major Woodhouse."

He soon came on board, and was greatly interested in the introductions that immediately followed.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, gentle-

men," he said, as he looked round. "Of course, we knew all about this wonderful land ship of yours. There was quite a sensation in the papers when you first started out from Kano. And since then there have been quite a number of interesting reports."

"When were you in London, sir?" asked Pitt eagerly.

"Yesterday," said Major Woodhouse.

"Yesterday!" yelled Handforth. "But—but it's going to take us two or three weeks! Great pip! How fast can that bird fly, sir?"

The airman smiled.

"Well, she can cruise at a comfortable two hundred, but if I happen to be in a hurry, she is easily capable of three hundred," he replied.

"Miles an hour?" asked Dorrie, staring.

"Yes, of course."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said his lordship. "I know we've got some aeroplanes that'll do a hundred and fifty, but this beats everythin'! An' your craft itself is a bit of a surprise-packet, major."

"Like her?" smiled our visitor. "Yes, she's a bit of a change from the ordinary type, eh? Not my design, of course. I'm no inventor. But I'm simply mad about her performance. She's marvellous."

"How many of you on board?" asked Nelson Lee interestedly.

"Three—the mechanic, the relief pilot, and myself," replied Major Woodhouse. "But the Crimson Eagle is capable of holding a dozen, if necessary. She can comfortably carry a load of eight. Anybody care for a trip?"

"By gad, rather!" said Dorrie enthusiastically.

"Good enough!" said the genial major. "Come on board, and we'll soon hoist you up into the high regions. You'll get a bit cooler there, too. Whew! The air's a bit sultry on the ground level!"

"Good!" said Handforth briskly. "Dash downstairs, Willy, and get my overcoat! We're going up for a flight—and it'll be freezing ten thousand feet up, so—"

"Just a minute, young man!" smiled Lee. "Who said you were going?"

"Why, didn't Major Woodhouse ask us, sir?" said Handforth blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid the Crimson Eagle is hardly large enough to accommodate a whole crowd," smiled Lee. "No, boys, you'll have to remain behind."

"It's a pity—but I suppose you're right," said the major. "I like to see these boys enthusiastic. The Crimson Eagle is the only craft of her type in the world, and the secrets of her mechanism are carefully locked up."

"They need to be," said Nelson Lee. "A machine of this type is absolutely revolutionary. I must confess I am very eager to go for a flight. Were you looking for the

Conqueror, major, or did you sight us by mere chance?"

"Oh, mere chance," said Major Woodhouse. "As a matter of fact, we've been cruising about the Sahara for some time —"

"That spot of light I saw last night!" exclaimed Willy shrewdly. "What did I tell you? It wasn't my imagination, after all!"

The visitor nodded.

"Yes, we were over this region last night," he agreed. "And we saw the lights of your ship, too. But we didn't want to come down and give you all a scare, so we left it until to-day. This trip of ours is really a test flight, and so far we've been wonderfully successful."

A small party was quickly formed.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie and Mr. Earle elected to go, and in a short time they crossed the stretch of sand from the Conqueror to the Crimson Eagle. At close quarters the aircraft was obviously a man-made contrivance—although she was singularly bird-like at a distance.

It was almost uncanny, the way the aircraft stood there on its feet, just like any living eagle. One by one the visitors entered the body, and were delighted to find a roomy, comfortable cabin.

When the door was closed plenty of light penetrated through a kind of skylight above. There were well-finished lounges, and the whole cabin was panelled in rich mahogany. There was no sign of machinery or instruments.

"This is just the cabin," explained the major. "The engine-room and the pilot-house are further forward. The pilot, in fact, has a little place to himself in the eagle's head."

"No doubt using the eagle's eye's as windows?" smiled Mr. Earle.

"You've hit it exactly," said Major Woodhouse. "A rather neat arrangement, I think. I'm sorry I can't show you over the rest of the ship—but you quite understand, don't you? Can't be too careful, you know. No insinuations against you, gentlemen, but—"

"We understand fully," interrupted Lee. "And I admire you for your frankness, major. It is highly necessary for you to be cautious."

The major nodded, and lifted up a small telephone instrument.

"All right, Hayes—you can let her go!" he said briefly.

The experience was interesting enough for the trio within, but it was no less interesting for all the rest of us on the Conqueror. For the great red bird slowly unfolded its wings, and stretched them majestically.

Then, with a slow, deliberate swishing, the wings beat the air. The extraordinary craft rose vertically, leaving the ground in a birdlike fashion that was uncanny.

As she entered the air the legs and feet automatically folded up into the plumage, and the Crimson Eagle was off.

CHAPTER X.

SPEED!



"W ONDERFUL!" I said, with intense admiration. "By jingo! I've never seen anything so perfectly splendid before!"

And mine was not the only voice that shouted with sheer approval and delight. For there was something beautiful in the way the bird gracefully left the ground and arose majestically into the air.

She swung round with infinite smoothness, her flapping wings increasing their beat. And in a few moments the Crimson Eagle was mounting upwards at an amazing speed.

Within the cabin of the aircraft, Major Woodhouse was watching the expression of his guests. And he was quite amused.

"Not so bad, eh?" he asked casually. "Of course, we're only doing a modest hundred as yet. Hayes will let her out as soon as we've got a bit higher."

And Hayes did.

When the aircraft had reached five thousand feet the Eagle was put through her paces. And there was something exhilarating in the sensation of speed. The craft was doing three hundred miles an hour—a truly appalling rate. But there was scarcely any vibration, and the only noise was that caused by the air hissing past the vessel's body.

"This is the most wonderful advance in aviation that has yet been invented," declared Mr. Earle. "The engine-power is the point which puzzles me most. But I mustn't ask questions, eh?"

"I'd rather you didn't," smiled Major Woodhouse.

Mr. Earle, of course, being a famous engineer, was naturally interested—and very curious. But the major, although very cordial, did not invite his guests out of the central cabin—except to show them a few comfortable, well-arranged sleeping berths.

There was also a little pantry, and food stores, and water supply tanks. It had been merely the major's joke to ask for water, for the Crimson Eagle was well supplied.

Having reached a height of twenty thousand feet, the great bird performed some astounding evolutions. She swung round in short circles at two hundred miles an hour, and there was not even a creak or a groan from the straining wings.

"Of course, this is nothing," said the major. "If you'll just hang on tight, I'll give you a taste of something really thrilling. You've seen a bird stop dead in full flight, haven't you?"

"Yes, but surely this vessel cannot do that?" asked Lee.

"It can!"

"But, man alive, you'll rip her wings completely off!" protested Dorrie.

But the major merely smiled, and gave some fresh instructions to the pilot. He then again advised his guests to hang on. The speed seemed to increase, and then, abruptly, there came a terrific shock—followed by a sense of dropping—sheer, head-long descent.

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Earle.

To the onlookers on the Conqueror the spectacle was awe-inspiring. We saw the Crimson Eagle swooping along at an appalling speed. Then, suddenly, she twisted completely upwards, and her flight was brought to a dead stop. The craft rolled over and dived to the ground like a stone.

"Oh!" panted Irene.

"They're falling — something's gone wrong!" cried Marjorie.

"It looks like it—but I hardly think so!" I said, pretending not to look uneasy.

"But she certainly did give a terrific jolt—Good heavens! She's out of control!"

A wild, frantic alarm seized me. The red bird was still dropping sheer—a head-long dive to apparently certain death. Four thousand feet—three thousand—a mere thousand—seven hundred—

"She'll crash right on the top of us!" yelled Handforth frantically.

But at four hundred feet from the ground—a mere jump—the Crimson Eagle swung round in a sharp circle, descending to a few feet from the ground. Then she roared away again, just as safe and secure as ever.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Handforth. "I thought it was all up! That sort of thing's too risky!"

"It looks like it, but we don't know," I remarked. "This machine is so revolutionary in other ways, that it might be quite safe to perform these tricks. But it doesn't look very healthy."

My heart was still beating with rapid thumps, and I began to feel a longing for the gov'nor to get on solid land again.

In the Eagle's cabin, the three guests were rather pale. For even Lee had felt that destruction was certain.

"Sorry if I put the wind up you at all," grinned Major Woodhouse. "But you wanted some examples of what she could do, didn't you?"

"Good heavens, man, was that absolutely safe?" demanded Dorrie.

"Perfectly safe," replied the major. "The control of this vessel is so accurately fine that we can do exactly as we please. I can tell you, gentlemen, that she's nothing more nor less than a miracle!"

"I believe you!" said Mr. Earle promptly.

Soon afterwards the demonstration was over, and the aircraft alighted on the sand just as serenely as she had done before. Major Woodhouse smilingly opened the door and ushered his visitors out.

"I'd like to come on board with you, but I really ought to give Hayes some relief—he's only the assistant-pilot, you know," said Major Woodhouse. "What do you think of the old bus, Mr. Lee?"

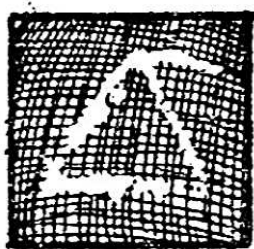
He engaged Nelson Lee in conversation for a few moments, while Mr. Earle and Dorrie stood below on the sand.

"Oh, by the way, I didn't show you our special observation trap in the floor," said the major. "Just have a look at this, Mr. Lee—I think you'll be interested."

Nelson Lee stepped back, and at the same moment Major Woodhouse closed the door. It went to with a solid click, and automatically locked itself.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIGN IN THE SKY!



MAJOR WOODHOUSE grinned.

"Trapped!" he said melodramatically. "Sorry, Mr. Lee, but the fact is, I particularly want to get you alone. I thought you might be interested in the workings of the ship, so if you care to come up again, I'll show you."

"I am interested, certainly, but—" began Lee.

"I don't want to say anything against Mr. Earle, but he's a celebrated engineer, you know," interrupted the major. "And I was rather afraid to take him beyond this cabin. But I know I can rely on your discretion."

Without waiting for Lee to reply, he gave some brisk instructions to the pilot over the telephone, and the Crimson Eagle swept aloft once more, her great wings flapping gracefully.

"Well, that's a dirty trick!" said Dorrie, as he stood watching. "Lee has actually sneaked a second ride!"

"Well, it doesn't matter," smiled Mr. Earle. "We can get back to the ship, and continue our journey. There's no need to remain here. Upon my word! Doesn't she look exquisite? I'm simply dying with curiosity to know the secret of her engine-power."

They went on board again, and I grabbed Dorrie at once.

"Why hasn't the gov'nor come back?" I asked quickly.

"Goodness knows," said Dorrie.

"But it looks so queer!" I protested. "The major practically slammed the door on him and carried him off!"

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"I don't think we need fear any kid-

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nappin' business!" he grinned. "It was just the major's little way—he's a bit of a joker, you know. A fine fellow, too. I'd give a fortune for an aircraft like that—an' by gad, I'll have one, sooner or later."

We watched the soaring eagle curiously.

"I don't like it!" I said bluntly. "Why should Major Woodhouse take the guv'nor off like that? I hope there's nothing wrong! It seems so strange—so ominous."

"I shouldn't worry, if I were you," said Reggie Pitt.

But I did worry. For some reason, a feeling of great uneasiness had assailed me. And I couldn't exactly say why. I only knew that I was tremendously anxious to see the guv'nor safely on the Conqueror again.

Perhaps the previous evolutions of the eagle had alarmed me. I didn't want to see the aircraft perform any similar tricks with Nelson Lee on board. They looked altogether too dangerous. And I knew how easy it was for a recklessly driven 'plane to be sent hurtling to destruction.

The land-yacht soon got under way once more, and I could hardly help smiling. Wonderful as she was, the Conqueror seemed a mere lumbering hulk compared to this monarch of the upper air.

We should be plugging along the desert for days, going constantly onwards. And then we should have to take ship for England. But the Crimson Eagle could be home within half-a-day! There was something startling in the thought. And I had a sudden longing for good old London.

The very knowledge that England could be reached so easily made me want to be there. But, more than anything else, I was anxious to see Nelson Lee safely by my side.

"Still worried?" asked Tommy Watson, as he looked at me.

"Well, I'm anxious, at least," I admitted. "I'm puzzled—I don't know why the guv'nor was carried off like that—for that's what it amounted to. And they're getting higher every minute."

The Crimson Eagle was now fully five thousand feet up, and she was going round in enormous circles—so that we could keep her in view continuously. And after another ten minutes had elapsed the aircraft became very sedate and quiet.

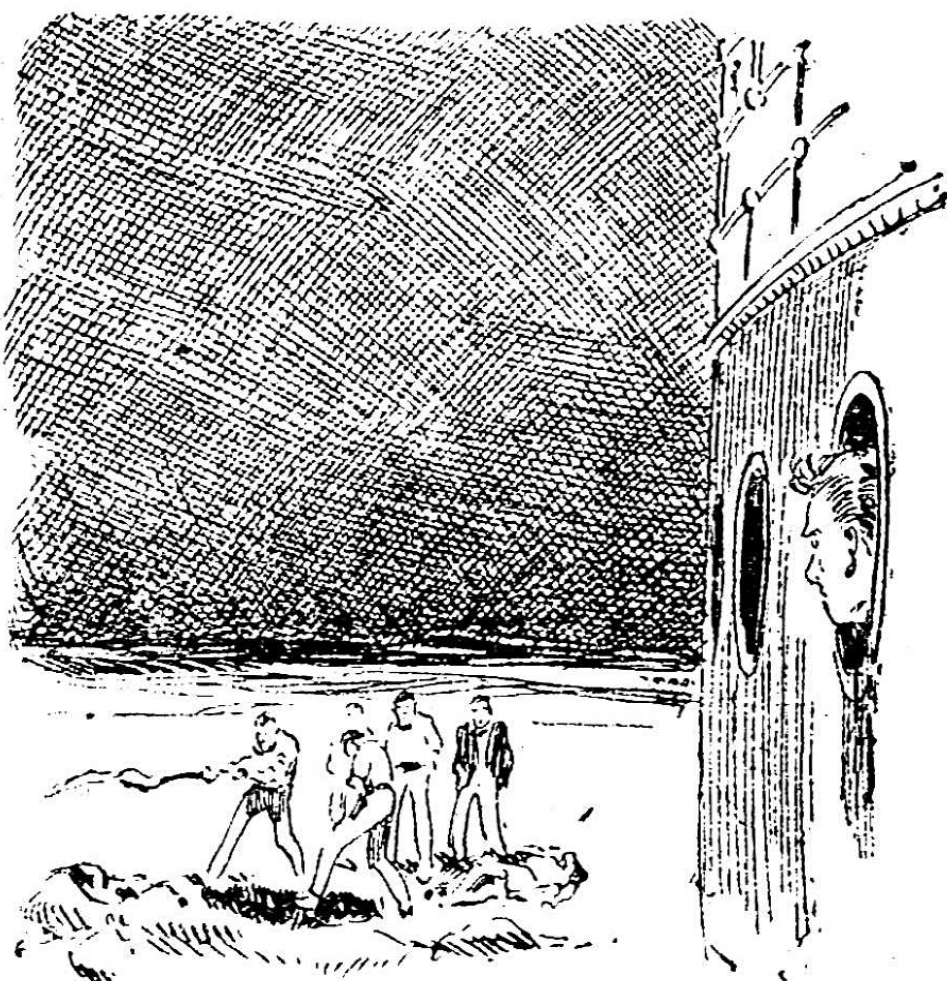
She seemed to be hovering in one spot, her great wings flapping idly.

"She's behaving herself this time," said Irene Manners. "I do hope they won't try any more of those terrible dives. It seems awfully dangerous to me— Oh, look! There's smoke!"

"Yes, and it's green!" exclaimed Willy, rather startled. "It's pale green smoke! And look at the thickness of it, too!"

"Something's happened!" roared Handforth. "They're on fire!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Church. "Who ever heard of an airship going up



"And I looked out of the cabin window," said Handforth, "and I'm blessed if Mr. Lee and some of the others weren't out on the sands digging for something."

in green smoke? I'll tell you what—they're sky-writing!"

"My only hat!"

"That's about the truth of it!"

"Sky-writing, by gad!" exclaimed Archie. "I mean, that's rather topping, what? Good old Oxo, or something like that! But I don't suppose it would be much good advertising out here, you know, he added dubiously.

Everybody watched with increasing interest.

For there was no longer any mystery about that smoke. It was certainly being done with a purpose. And the fact that it was green was perhaps a mere chemical curiosity. Many sky-writers had experimented with different coloured smokes, as I was well aware.

"It's a swindle!" said Handforth, always ready to condemn. "There's no writing at all—it's just a straight line—but perhaps the chap's unpractised, and doesn't know how to make the giddy letters."

The design in the sky was simplicity itself—one straight line, an acute turn, another straight line another acute turn, and a final line to join up with the loose end of the first.

"Why, it's a triangle!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, a green triangle!" I said. "And a beautiful piece of work, too—" I paused, my thoughts suddenly arrested by the significance of that sign.

A green triangle!

It was executed so wonderfully that the smoke hung up there like something solid—

a perfectly regular triangle of green. And I remembered how Nelson Lee had been literally trapped in the Crimson Eagle—and carried off whether he liked it or no.

"A green triangle!" I muttered. "Good Heavens! Can it be possible that— Oh, I'm mad! I'm absolutely mad!"

And yet I had suddenly gone haggard and deathly pale.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STAGGERING TRUTH!



NELSON LEE was getting rather impatient. Major Woodhouse had left him, with an excuse that he would be back in a few moments. But a full ten minutes had elapsed, and the famous detective was still alone.

He believed that the aircraft had been performing some fresh evolutions, but he couldn't be quite sure of this, as none of the observation ports were open.

"Sorry to have been so long, Mr. Lee," said the major, as he came bustling through a small doorway. "There was a slight defect in the engine, and I had to put it right. We're just going for a bit of a speed trial now—a direct flight. Care for a drink?"

"I'll join you, with pleasure," said Nelson Lee.

The major went to a little locker, and produced a decanter and two glasses. They drank, and the Crimson Eagle sped onwards at a tremendous pace—as was made evident by the rush of air.

"I expect you're wondering when I'm going to take you through to the engine department, eh?" asked Nelson Lee's host. "The mechanic will be along in a minute, and then I'll get busy. Hallo! We seem to be slowing up a bit."

The small door opened, and a man appeared, attired in overalls.

"That plug's got loose again, sir," he reported. "I think we'd better land, so we can put it right. It's only a minute's job with the engine stopped, but it'll take us half-an-hour otherwise."

"All right—better land," said the major.

"Yes, sir."

The man saluted, and vanished.

"Of course, this would happen," growled the host. "The first defect we've had since we started, and it's got to occur while you're with us, Mr. Lee. Still, it won't take us long."

The Eagle alighted gently on the sand, and Nelson Lee felt curious.

"Are we anywhere near the Conqueror?" he asked.

"About fifty miles off!" grinned the other. "It only took us ten minutes to do it, but that's the advantage of speed. You needn't worry—we'll find the slow old tub again."

The mechanic again returned, and this time he was followed by a third man—a

fellow of about the major's own age, and similarly attired.

"Good!" said Woodhouse briskly.

The words seemed to be a kind of a signal, for with a concerted movement, the trio whipped out revolvers and pointed them at Nelson Lee's heart. The thing was so abrupt that it was almost amusing.

"Hands up—this instant!" rapped out the major curtly.

"What on earth—"

"Up with 'em!" roared Woodhouse.

Nelson Lee, accustomed to emergencies, was completely taken off his guard for once. In any case, he was unarmed, for he was carrying no weapon in his light twill suit.

"What does this mean, major?" he asked quietly. "I don't quite appreciate your method of joking—"

"Hayes, get round behind him and slip the bracelets over his wrists," ordered Woodhouse steadily. "No, Mr. Lee—please don't move! I don't want to shatter your arm. But I shall do—if you offer the least resistance."

And there was something in his tone that indicated he was in earnest. Hayes quickly got behind Nelson Lee, and the detective's arms were suddenly pulled down, and two swift clicks sounded.

"That's better!" said the major, as he lowered his revolver. "Sorry to be so melodramatic, but I was instructed to take no chances. Your reputation, Lee, is very well known. It is reputed that you are more difficult to catch than a whole army of monkeys. So please excuse these interesting little precautions."

The major was quite smooth-voiced again, but in some subtle way, his whole manner had changed. He was no longer cheery and indolent—but crisp, alert, and businesslike. His eyes glinted with a light that was somewhat evil.

At first glance, Lee had been just a little uncertain of the man—but he had merely dismissed the thought. After all, it was none of his business if this major should be different to what he pretended. Lee had certainly not scented danger.

"May I know the reason for this surprising outrage?" he asked.

"Take a seat, Mr. Lee—make yourself comfortable," said the other. "You can get back now, Hayes—and hoist the old bus into the air. That's the idea! Now, Mr. Lee, we're going to have quite a nice little chat."

"I am still waiting for a reply to my question," retorted Lee.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Woodhouse.

"This outrage, eh? Well, I suppose it is something of an outrage, now you come to put it that way. The fact is, you are now a prisoner in the hands of the League of the Green Triangle!"

Nelson Lee curled his lip.

"This is scarcely the moment for joking, major," he said curtly.

"With which sentiment I heartily agree," nodded Woodhouse. "It happens to be the truth, Lee—and not a joke at all. In case you didn't hear me properly, please let me repeat my remark—you are now a prisoner in the hands of the League of the Green Triangle."

Nelson Lee started, and gazed at Woodhouse intently.

"And what of our old friend, Professor Zingrave?" he asked.

"It was by the professor's orders that I came out on your track," said Woodhouse with a laugh. "You see, Mr. Lee, the Green Triangle is not as dead as you believe. Professor Cyrus Zingrave, in fact, is just on the point of starting the most spectacular campaign of his entire career."

It seemed fantastic—impossible.

But Nelson Lee believed that the man was speaking the truth. And here he was, a prisoner in the hands of the infamous league. The real operations had actually commenced!

CHAPTER XIII.

SPIRITED AWAY.



LORD DORRIMORE frowned.

"It's puzzlin', but you needn't get any wild ideas into your head, young man!" he said gruffly.

"This is all rubbish about the Green Triangle. Don't be such an ass!"

"But wasn't that smoke sign significant?" I demanded.

"Just a coincidence."

"It wasn't, Dorrie—I tell you, it wasn't!" I insisted. "And where's the eagle now, anyhow?"

"How do I know?" grunted Dorrie.

"It's gone—vanished!" I said frantically. "It went straight off after making that sign, and there's not a single trace of it left. It's fishy, Dorrie—I tell you it's horribly fishy!"

I paced up and down the deck, haggard with worry. And I could see that Lord Dorrimore was equally exercised in mind, although he did his utmost to conceal the fact. A little further away, groups of juniors were talking excitedly together, and Irene and Co. were equally animated. Every now and again a few of us would gaze eagerly round the sky.

Half an hour had passed, and the Conqueror was alone on the desert. She still rolled onwards, but there was now no hint or indication of the strange aircraft that had so recently appeared out of the mysterious upper air. She had gone—and

Nelson Lee had been spirited away with her.

"It's no good bein' panicky," argued Dorrie. "That green triangle was just a coincidence. I expect Major Woodhouse has carted Lee off on a speed trial, or somethin'. They'll soon be back—don't you fear. An' then you'll calmly grin, an' call yourself a young idiot."

"I wish you were right, Dorrie," I said huskily.

But I couldn't convince myself that he was. An awful fear gripped me. Well did I remember the gov'nor's earlier struggles against the arch-roguer, Professor Cyrus Zingrave, and the League of the Green Triangle. I had taken part in those adventures myself, and I had plenty of proof that Professor Zingrave was one of the most wily men alive.

And he was alive. Several times there had been rumours of his death, but both Nelson Lee and I knew them to be false.

I stood there, against the rail, thinking of old times.

We had had many brushes with Professor Zingrave. First with the Green Triangle. It was chiefly owing to Nelson Lee's activities that the powerful organisation had been shattered and destroyed. The police had performed wonders against heavy odds, but they were the first to admit that Nelson Lee had been the real destroyer.

And then, later, the Circle of Terror.

Zingrave, defeated and believed dead, had remained in hiding for months. And then suddenly he had started out again on his old plan of campaign. But this time he had called his gang the Circle of Terror. And again Nelson Lee had been instrumental in killing the poisonous growth.

Was it possible that Professor Zingrave had again started out on his career of crime? Had he formed a new league—this time a revival of the Green Triangle itself?

My thoughts seemed ridiculous—preposterous. And I was half-inclined to believe that my imagination was running riot. But I couldn't help looking at facts in the face.

The curious nature of Nelson Lee's presence on the aircraft, the slammed door, the smoke sign in the sky. A green triangle—clear, distinct, and unmistakable. And then, following this, the swift vanishing of the Crimson Eagle.

It was all very sinister.

I even remembered that the strange aircraft had hovered over the desert during the night. I hadn't thought much of it at the time, but now it struck me as being significant. Without doubt, Major Woodhouse had been waiting—waiting for his moment to pounce. And he had engineered things so cunningly that even the gov'nor

himself could have had no means of suspecting the truth.

And, after all, was my idea so very mad?

As everybody knows, criminals generally work in the same groove. A man will commit a certain crime, and shift to fresh ground. In nine cases out of ten, he will operate in precisely the same way as before. Even if he goes to prison, his first thought, upon regaining his liberty, is to get back into his old rut.

And if with lesser criminals, why not with Professor Cyrus Zingrave?

Twice his organisations had been put out of action by Nelson Lee's grim, relentless fighting. The professor was a stickler. It was quite in harmony with his character for him to break out afresh.

"By jingo!" I muttered. "And about the first thing he's done is to collar the guv'nor! He'll kill him—he'll absolutely——"

"Talking to yourself, old man?" asked Reggie Pitt, strolling up.

"Was I?" I asked dully.

"Well, you were muttering something," said Reggie. "I say, what's wrong? You look absolutely terrible, old son. Don't worry over nothing. Mr. Lee's bound to come back."

"Of course he is," agreed Handforth, joining us. "How the dickens shall we get on at St. Frank's without him next term?"

"You needn't let that worry you!" I growled. "The guv'nor hasn't been any too happy at St. Frank's recently—he's chafed against the inactivity. He wants to get back to the old life. But why discuss this now? St. Frank's will be all right—whether Mr. Lee returns or not. Nobody hardly saw him last term—he wasn't in evidence at all."

"Yes, it was Dr. Stokes who occupied the boards," said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "A thundering fine chap, too! I'm awfully sorry we shan't have him again. Of course, the old Head will be back in harness."

And, automatically, the fellows began discussing St. Frank's.

I drifted away, for I was in no mood to enter into the conversation. But I couldn't help thinking. It was a fact that Nelson Lee had jibbed against retaining his position at St. Frank's. More than once he had hinted to me that he might have to leave.

Of course, I hadn't taken much notice. But now I began to wonder if the guv'nor would leave—whether he wanted to or not. For he had been carried off in this mysterious aircraft, and the conviction was growing stronger and stronger within me that the League of the Green Triangle was again a reality.

My fears were only too well founded!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SWOOP OF THE EAGLE.



"JOLLY queer!" said Handforth curtly.

"Rather!" agreed Church and McClure.

"What's queer?" asked their leader, with a suspicious glance.

"Why, what—what you were going to say," said Church hastily. "I suppose you mean about that aeroplane vanishing with Mr. Lee on board?"

"Of course I meant it," said Handforth tartly. "You fellows have got into a habit of agreeing with everything I say—even before I say it. I mean, you aren't any better than a couple of echoes!"

"We can't help that," said McClure. "We ain't allowed to have opinions of our own. We've only got to open our mouths, and you start biffing us. So we generally take the easiest path."

"Oh, so that's it!" snorted Handforth. "All right, my lads—I shall know in future! Whenever you agree with me, I shall know that you don't mean it. So I shall biff you just the same!"

"Look here, that's a bit too thick!" snorted Church. "I'm going to warn you straight out, Handy, that if you biff either McClure or I again, we'll biff back! In other words, you'll get two biffs for every one you deliver. How's that?"

"Why, you cheeky rotter!" roared Handforth. "You—you silly idiot! I'm going to take you by the neck and shake you until you apologise! I'll show you who's leader!"

Handforth grabbed the unfortunate Church, and then, for some extraordinary reason, he hastily commenced dusting his chum down. Church was so surprised that he forgot to defend himself.

"That's better," gasped Handforth hastily. "This sand's rotten stuff for sticking to a chap's clothes. Hallo, Miss Irene! Taking a stroll round with Ena? That's all right, old man—you're clean now!"

He gave Church a friendly pat, and turned to the girls with such an air of exaggerated carelessness that they could not possibly help suspecting. And McClure's grin was somewhat significant, too.

"What were you doing just now?" demanded Ena coldly.

"Doing?" repeated Handforth.

"With Church," insisted Ena.

"I—I was just dusting him, you know——"

"Is it usual to dust a chap by grabbing him round the neck?" demanded Handy's sister. "And is it necessary to half-choke him, and then suddenly pretend to be brushing off some imaginary specks of sand? It's no good, Ted—you're a bully!"

Handforth was done.

"If we hadn't happened to come along at that minute, Church would have been black and blue in no time," went on Ena. "There's only one thing for it—and I've finally made up my mind!"

"Oh, help!" breathed Handforth feebly.

"I'm coming to St. Frank's," said Ena deliberately.

"You're going to do what?" howled Handforth.

"Next term, I shall be at St. Frank's," said Ena.

"But you can't, you dotty—I mean, you can't!" stammered Handforth. "They don't allow girls there—thank goodness!" he added under his breath.

Ena nodded.

"No, but they allow them at the Moor View School," she replied. "I've spoken to dad about it, and he says it's all serene. In fact, he had to say it. There would have been trouble if he hadn't."

"Oh, Ena, do you really mean this?" asked Irene.

"Yes, rather!"

"That'll be awfully splendid!" said Irene delightedly.

"Oh, delightful!" groaned Handforth. "Look here, Ena, you can't come to that school! It's a terrible place! The Moor View School is one of the rottenest—"

"Ted!" exclaimed Irene in horror.

Handforth gulped—hopelessly confused.

"I—I mean, it's one of the loveliest schools in the world!" he amended, changing his view with startling swiftness. "In fact, it's so lovely that Ena oughtn't to go there. She'll only get sacked—"

"You can talk until you're blue in the face—I'm coming!" said Ena firmly. "And I shall always keep my eye on you, Ted. And I'll take good care that you don't bully these poor chums of yours."

Church and McClure bristled.

"Thanks all the same, Miss Ena, but we can look after ourselves!" said Church gruffly. "If your brother biffs us, we don't mind much—we're used to it. And we can always get our own back if we want to. Handy's one of the best—so don't you run him down!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure stoutly.

For once, Ena was taken aback.

"And that's all I get for being kind and thoughtful!" she said bitterly. "But it doesn't make any difference—I shall be at the Moor View School next term. And, what's more, Winnie's promised to come, too."

"Yes, I know that," said Pitt. "I'm jolly glad, because it's nice to have a sister near at hand—"

"Look, the Eagle's coming back!" shouted one of the other juniors suddenly.

"Where?"

"I can't see it— Oh, yes, there she is!" said Pitt. "Now, Nipper, my son,

what about your wonderful theory? I told you it was all unnecessary worry."

The Crimson Eagle had appeared as though by magic, and she came swooping down gracefully and swiftly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE SKY.



MY relief was great. I told myself that all my fears and suspicions regarding the Green Triangle were groundless. But, at the same time, I knew that I had had plenty of reason to suspect.

"It must have been a practical joke, old man," said Lord Dorrimore, as we stood watching the strange aircraft glide overhead. "Just a coincidence about the smoke sign, I dare say."

"It looks like it," I replied. "Anyhow, they've come back, and the gov'nor will soon— Hallo, they seem to be rising again!"

The Eagle did not mean to land just yet, apparently. Instead of dropping lightly to the ground, she was lazily circling over the Conqueror, flapping her wings just sufficiently to keep her in motion.

Her height was about five hundred feet, and we wondered why Major Woodhouse had taken up this position. The next moment something dropped from the body of the aircraft and fell.

But after descending twenty or thirty feet it checked, and a kind of miniature parachute opened out.

"They've sent us down a message, or something," I exclaimed quickly. "I say, Dorrie, I don't like the look of this! Perhaps my suspicions—"

"Bother your suspicions!" growled his lordship. "Let's keep our eye on this little parachute. Hallo, they're off again, it seems. H'm!"

He gave an expressive grunt, and stood staring up at the Crimson Eagle with a dubious look on his face. For the soarer had suddenly awakened to intense activity.

The wings were beating the air, and the Eagle was speeding away, and gathering pace with extraordinary rapidity. She went up higher and higher, watched by all eyes.

"Dorrie!" I gasped. "Then—then it's true, after all! They've got the gov'nor on there, and—"

"Hang it! That infernal thing's droppin' over to starboard!" interrupted Dorrie. "We shall have to stop, an'— Hi, there, Mr. Earle! Swing round a bit if you can!"

Mr. Earle, at the wheel, had seen the necessity, and the Conqueror was trundled round sharply. The move was successful, for the tiny parachute just landed in the bows. If the Conqueror had kept to her

original course, we should have had to stop completely.

There was a rush for the parachute, but it was rescued by Mr. Manners. Dorrie and I hurried up anxiously.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Looks like a packet of some sort," replied Mr. Manners. "I think you'd better take it, Lord Dorrimore. By Jove, I wonder if Mr. Lee has decided to accompany the Eagle back to London? That would be rather a dirty trick on us, wouldn't it?"

He spoke humorously, for very few of those on board had gathered that there was something highly sinister in Nelson Lee's non-return.

Lord Dorrimore took the package, tore it clear of the parachute, and opened it. It consisted of rough paper, and apparently nothing else—until a crumpled sheet was found within.

"It's a message of some kind," declared Dorrie.

The words were typewritten, and at the top of the paper there was a neatly printed green triangle. My worst suspicions were confirmed on the instant. In my anxiety, I grabbed at the paper, and feverishly read the words:

"Do not expect to see Nelson Lee again. We came out for the one purpose of getting him in our hands, and it will be quite useless to search for him, or to institute any inquiries. From this moment, Mr. Nelson Lee ceases to play an active part in the scheme of things.

"THE GREEN TRIANGLE."

"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore. "But what does it mean?" he added blankly. "I positively won't believe—"

"It's true, Dorrie—this is the proof!" I shouted tensely. "They've got him—they took him away in front of our very eyes! This is terrible—he'll never be seen again!"

Mr. Manners looked bewildered.

"But I can't imagine what you're talking about!" he exclaimed. "The Green Triangle? Why, that was the smoke sign! And it seems familiar—"

"The League of the Green Triangle, sir!" I panted. "Professor Zingrave, you know—the man who tried to beat Scotland Yard! He's started his games again—and the League of the Green Triangle is an active force once more!"

Mr. Manners looked incredulous.

"Absurd!" he said impatiently. "Don't be so ridiculous, Nipper! The idea is absolutely preposterous."

"It isn't!" I shouted. "I tell you, they've got him!"

It exasperated me to see this disbelief. Mr. Manners was not the only one; Sir Edward Handforth, Mr. Pitt, Sir Crawford Grey—they all scoffed at the idea. Even that message from the Green Triangle did not convince them.

But Lord Dorrimore, at least, became very grave.

"There's not a doubt about it!" he said grimly. "Everythin' about this affair smacks of the Green Triangle. Just their methods, an' everythin' else. Don't you remember how they got their infernal campaign goin' on the last occasion?"

"But the Green Triangle is dead—it was killed—"

"Of course it was, Sir Edward!" I broke in. "Mr. Lee killed it. If he hadn't, the Green Triangle would have killed him! But Zingrave has revived the League again—"

"Then it couldn't have been dead!" put in Handforth brilliantly.

"I know that; but, for Heaven's sake, don't joke now!" I pleaded. "What are we going to do?"

"Well, one thing's certain—we can't give chase," said Mr. Earle grimly. "The Crimson Eagle can travel at two hundred and fifty miles an hour, our fastest speed is fifteen! I'm afraid we couldn't overtake them!"

I clenched my fists.

"But the gov'nor!" I shouted. "He's on that ship—helpless in the hands of those rotters! Oh, this is awful! We're stuck here, in the Sahara, and we shan't know anything for weeks!"

Some of the other fellows tried to comfort me, but I wouldn't have it. I walked away, alone, and stood against the rail, staring out dully across the desert.

This blow had come suddenly—dramatically. It's very unexpectedness had taken me unawares. I wouldn't have minded half so much if I had been captured as well. But, no! I was nothing—I was a mere schoolboy! The Green Triangle hadn't even thought it worth while to include me in the capture!

Never before had I felt so utterly helpless and miserable. And my agony of mind was intense.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ANNIHILATOR OF SPACE.



MAJOR WOODHOUSE regarded Nelson Lee amusedly.

"I don't think you take me quite seriously, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I can assure you that I have told you the literal truth. And your friends on the Conqueror are now in possession of the facts."

"Yes, I think I take you seriously, major," said Nelson Lee. "Of course, I am quite at fault in addressing you as 'major.' But we will let that pass. I must congratulate you on your clever acting. I was quite off my guard, and absolutely fooled."

"Very handsomely acknowledged, Mr. Lee," said the other. "And we had to be smart to fool you, too. The professor par-

ticularly warned me to be careful. He told me that you are the one man in the world who possesses the intellect of two."

"With the exception of Zingrave himself!" said Lee drily.

"Oh, of course," agreed Woodhouse. "Zingrave is a remarkable man—and I fancy he is more dangerous than ever before. I enlisted under his banner because—well, there's plenty of excitement in the game, and a man must do something nowadays."

Woodhouse's coolness rather attracted Nelson Lee. He was a rascal right enough, but by no means a repulsive one.

"You haven't been instructed to murder me, by any chance?" asked the detective.

"Good glory, no!" said the major. "That's not in my line at all—I'm just taking you back to England by a short cut. The professor is rather anxious to see you face to face."

"He is very thorough in his methods, at all events," said Lee. "I should have thought it would have been quite a simple matter for you to drop me from, say, twenty thousand feet, and I should trouble neither you nor the Green Triangle again."

"Now you are becoming cynical, Mr. Lee," said the other. "I have no desire to harm you, and my orders are to deliver you intact into the Chief's hands. I can promise you the journey will not be tedious."

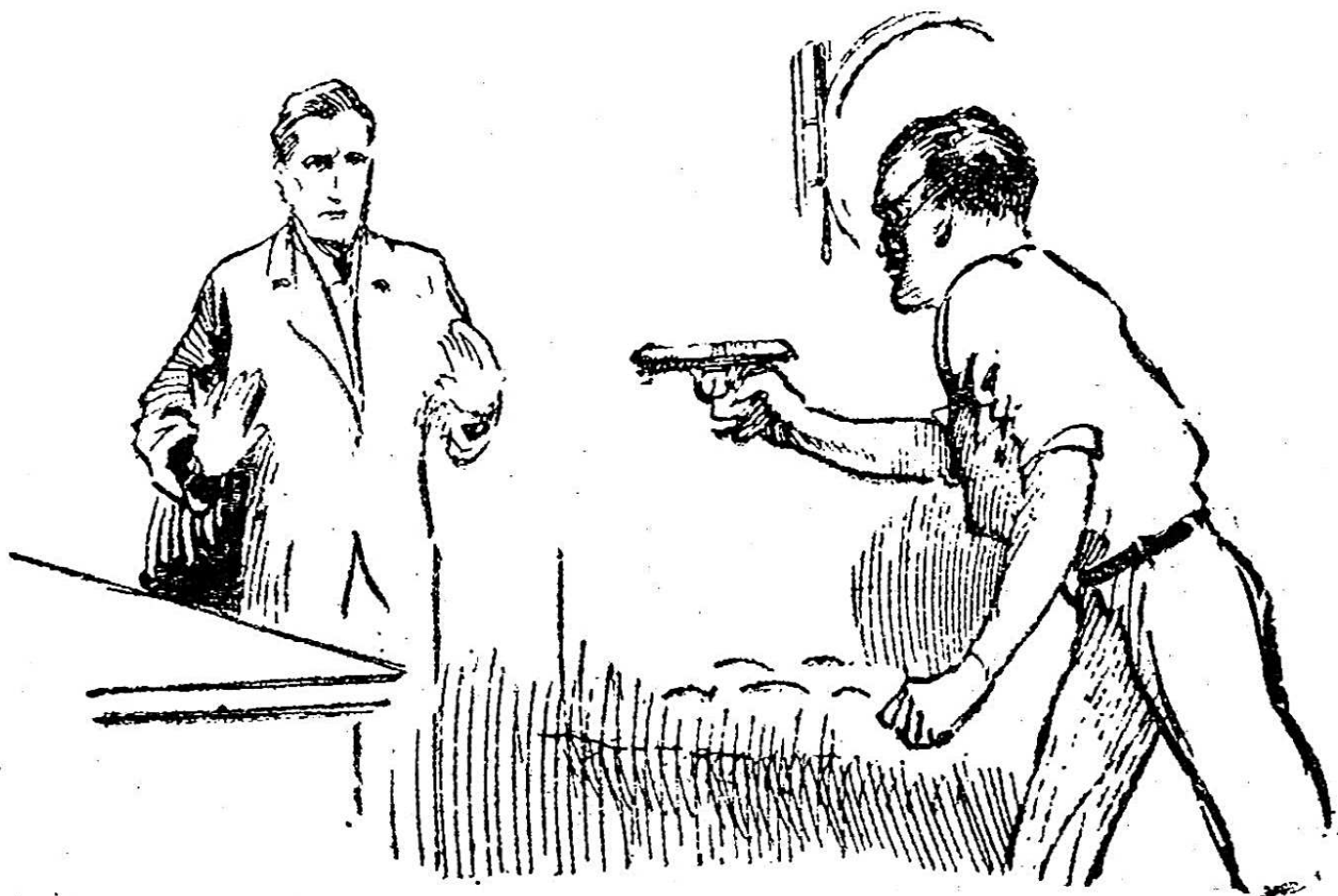
They were sitting in the central cabin of the Eagle, and the astonishing aircraft was literally annihilating space—winging her way northwards at an almost incredible two hundred and fifty miles an hour.

The motion was so steady and smooth that the speed could not be realised. Only the swishing rush of air past the vessel's sides gave a clue to the breakneck pace.

Nelson Lee was quite helpless.

With his hands manacled behind him, he had very little chance of making an attack. He would have been just as secure if he had not been manacled at all. For the detective would never have offered resistance. In these present circumstances, such resistance would have been mere foolhardiness.

"My instructions were quite clear," went on Woodhouse. "I was told to search the Sahara until I had located the Conqueror. I was then to entice you on board, and carry you back to England."



"Hands up—this instant!" rapped out the major curtly.

"What on earth——"

"Up with 'em!" roared Woodhouse.

"You have been remarkably successful," said Lee.

"Yes, I think I've every reason to congratulate myself," said the other modestly. "If you would care for a snack, please tell me, Mr. Lee. But the journey will not be long. We shall reach England by the evening."

"Is it possible?"

"Quite," said the major. "Roughly, I reckon the trip will occupy between six and seven hours. We shall continue at full speed, and you will be thus in the professor's own keeping soon after nightfall. I hate to inconvenience you in this way, but orders are orders; and if I fail to carry them out, it means—— Well, I don't want to die just yet!" he added significantly.

The man was not exaggerating. As Nelson Lee knew, Professor Zingrave was a hard master to serve. He paid well, and he richly rewarded the loyal services of his helpers. But the disobedience of orders meant sudden death for the delinquent.

"In a way, I suppose I must feel myself flattered," said Nelson Lee grimly. "It is indeed gratifying to know that the professor cannot rest until I am safely out of harm's way."

Woodhouse nodded.

"You've put your finger on the exact spot, Mr. Lee," he agreed. "The Green Triangle is about to burst forth into a new campaign—not immediately, but in a few weeks' time. Everything is in training for the great day. But Zingrave made up his mind that he wouldn't lift a finger until you were drastically dealt with."

"And so you came to the Sahara to fetch me?"

"Precisely. As you are aware, you have always been a decidedly prickly thorn in the Chief's side. So this time he's taking no chances—he's not going to let you have a look in. That's the position, Mr. Lee, and, in a way, it is rather entertaining."

Nelson Lee was forced to agree. He found very little entertainment, it is true, but he could not help admiring the man behind this affair. And it really seemed that the League of the Green Triangle was to be revived in earnest. All the famous detective's old fire came into his eyes, only to die away again.

For he was fettered before the fight began!

This time the wily Professor Cyrus Zingrave had taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, and had left no crevice in his armour. Indeed, Nelson Lee anticipated nothing but death, after he had been brought face to face with his old enemy.

And while he sat in that cabin the Crimson Eagle sped ever northward—eating up the miles with such amazing rapidity that evening found them far above France, within an hour or so of their destination.

The ground was invisible, for the Eagle was flying at an altitude of twenty thousand feet, and there were clouds beneath.

She sped on through the gathering shadows of night.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GREEN TRIANGLE'S LAIR.



NELSON LEE was by no means resigned to his fate.

He knew well enough that all the odds were against him, and that his chances of escape were extremely slim.

Indeed, there was no hope at all of escaping at once.

And if Professor Zingrave decreed that he was to die, there was no hope whatever. For the job would be executed swiftly and quietly; and Lee would thus drop out of the fight at the outset.

The detective felt convinced that Zingrave only wanted to see him, so that he could be satisfied that his victim was actually in his power. It would not please the professor's astute mind to know that he had been killed. He was determined to see his victim in the flesh, and to deal with him personally.

Only in this way could he be positively certain the task was accomplished. Too many times in the past had Zingrave left such all-important work to underlings—with disastrous results.

And so Nelson Lee felt that a chance might come to him even yet. But only if his life was spared. And he firmly determined to fight grimly before he surrendered his existence.

Lee could feel the Eagle dropping; not swiftly, but with a smooth, easy, gliding motion. But in this little cabin it was impossible to see anything of what was going on.

Outside, the night was dark, and the rain clouds were scurrying across the sky. It was a chilly autumn evening, and the English countryside was damp and gloomy.

The Eagle dropped lightly through the clouds, and at no great distance below lay a dense forest. The county was Hampshire, and the twinkling lights of a town could be seen over to the north. But the country below, and for a considerable distance round, was pitchy black.

Yard by yard, the Eagle dropped, her wings flapping gently, and almost noiselessly. Her control was so perfect that the aircraft could be swung round exactly according to the pilot's wish. And when she was only a hundred feet above the trees, she hung there, her wings beating the air, hovering.

Below, a little distance to the left, lay a clearing, almost invisible in the darkness. It was just a narrow glade in the dense heart of the forest. No aeroplane could have found a landing in such a spot on the finest, sunniest day.

And yet the Crimson Eagle hovered overhead, choosing her exact landing place with perfect serenity. And in the clearing below there were one or dim figures, waiting.

To them the experience was rather weird.

That great flapping monster overhead was like some visitor from the prehistoric ages—a gigantic bird, flapping slowly and deliberately to the ground.

Without doubt this aircraft was the most astonishing advance in aviation that had ever been contrived. And the secret was in the hands of the League of the Green Triangle!

At last the Eagle alighted—gently, almost fastidiously. There was scarcely a jar as the great claws of the feet landed in the grass. And the Eagle stood there, her wings slowly folding back.

Major Woodhouse appeared from a little doorway which led from the pilot house.

"Well, Mr. Lee, we've landed, and I must now trouble you once again," he said genially. "You are to be taken straight before the chief, and it is rather necessary that you should be provided with no clue as to your whereabouts."

"What does it matter if I am to die?" asked Lee grimly.

"We cannot be too sure, and there is many a slip, you know," replied Woodhouse. "If you don't mind, I shall place this neat little contrivance over your head. It will be just the same if you do mind, but I love to be polite."

The other two men had appeared—a necessary precaution. For if there was any moment that Lee might make a break for

liberty it was this. But he was not allowed the opportunity.

A curious bag was placed over his head, a close-fitting helmet-like affair, which completely blinded him. Ventilation was provided for breathing purposes, but as for seeing or hearing, Lee might as well have been blind and deaf.

For the contrivance completely deadened sound, and once it was fixed he could hear absolutely nothing. Woodhouse was talking in an ordinary voice near by, but Lee was quite unaware of it.

And in this helpless predicament he was led to the door of the cabin, and a few moments later he could feel himself being pushed through coarse grass and bracken. He only knew that he was on the ground. He had seen nothing of the wood; of the clearing. And he could only judge that he was somewhere in the open country.

But any clue as to his exact whereabouts was out of the question. He might have been in Essex or Cornwall or Cumberland or County Antrim. One was just as likely as the other. His confusion was complete.

The walk was only a brief one. He felt the grass give place to rough cobbles, and soon afterwards he brushed against narrow walls, proving that he was being propelled down a passage of some kind.

Even at such an acute moment as this Nelson Lee marvelled at the wonder of science that had made this thing possible. In the afternoon he had been in the Sahara, cut off from the world in the great wastes of sand.

And now, comparatively early in the evening, he was in a rural district of England with the chill of autumn in the air. It certainly was something to ponder over.

The passage came to an end, and Lee was left standing alone. He wondered if Zingrave was there, or whether he was to be imprisoned in some dark room or other.

Then he felt his hands being fastened to an iron ring in the wall. The handcuffs, in fact, were secured to that ring. Escape therefore was rendered impracticable.

Fingers fumbled at his neck. The heavy bag-like contrivance was removed, and he found himself face to face with Professor Cyrus Zingrave.

"Your simile is probably significant," replied Nelson Lee quietly.

"Not at all; a mere figure of speech, and a somewhat unhappy one," declared Professor Zingrave. "By no means a slaughter-house, Mr. Lee. I am progressing with the times, and my policy is change."

It was a considerable time since Nelson Lee had been face to face with his old enemy, but there was practically no difference in the professor's appearance. His clean-shaven, learned face, his bushy eyebrows, his domed forehead, his expression of benevolent geniality. All were exactly the same as of old. Time had left few marks.

Lee gave one glance round the apartment. It afforded him little satisfaction, and no clue. It was a stone room, without windows, and the only door was a heavy oaken affair which told of age. It was guarded by the complacent Woodhouse, who was now wearing a thick overcoat.

There were no other persons in the apartment. It was hardly what Lee had expected. He remembered the council chamber of the former Green Triangle, the luxurious equipment and furnishings. This barren ruin of a place was very different by contrast.

"So you fell a victim to my little trick, eh?" said the professor, rubbing his hands gently together. "My dear Mr. Lee," he added, with mock surprise, "what has become of your famous astuteness? I am afraid your schoolmaster days have blunted your wits."

"It is hardly necessary for me to explain that the odds were entirely on your side, professor," replied Nelson Lee. "Were we now on equal terms, I do not think you would find my wits any duller than usual. Not knowing that you were even alive I could scarcely guard against the subterfuge which delivered me into your hands."

"True enough, Mr. Lee. I grant you that I had the advantage," admitted Professor Zingrave. "But do not imagine that I have brought you here to indulge in some fantastic torture, or to put you to the death. My enmity is not as severe as all that. Indeed, I find it possible to admire you intensely, for you are the one enemy I have every reason to fear."

"I can hardly imagine that you brought me this distance for the mere pleasure of a chat," said Lee. "If you are determined to murder me, Zingrave, get the infernal business over, and cease this foolery."

"Tut, tut! You mustn't lose your temper," said Zingrave silkily. "That won't do at all. No, my dear Lee; I have already told you that my policy is change. Punishment by death is no longer a rule of the League. In my Circle of Terror campaign I conclusively proved that drastic killing is a mistake. My present war will be conducted on different lines. There will be no

CHAPTER XVIII.

PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE'S PLAN.



"A MOMENTOUS meeting, my dear Mr. Nelson Lee," said the professor, in his smooth, silky voice. "I regret that I should find it necessary to tether you like a bullock in a slaughter-house, but these precautions are essential."

killings, and I fancy that the profits of the League will be all the greater. We shall conduct our coups swiftly, methodically, aided by every marvel known to science. But murder will not be one of our weapons. And I shall certainly not commence by killing you."

Lee could not be sure whether the professor was bantering, or whether he was telling the actual truth. He rather fancied the latter. But Lee made no comment.

"I am not quite ready for my campaign yet, but when the day arrives England will be provided with something of a sensation," continued Zingrave. "My organisation is comparatively small, but efficient. The League's membership is insignificant compared to what it was in the old days. But that is a great improvement, for there is less likelihood of treachery and leakage."

"I am afraid you are boring me, professor," said Nelson Lee drily.

"That's a pity—a great pity," said Zingrave. "But if you are bored, Lee, I am quite entertained. Just a different point of view, eh? I had you brought here to-day because it was so easy to seize you in the Sahara. I grasped the opportunity while it lasted. And from this minute I am afraid you will cease to take a part in the world's doings."

"So Woodhouse was good enough to inform me."

"A capable fellow, Woodhouse," said the professor, nodding. "Well, Lee, my little plan is this. You are to be kept a prisoner, and you may be quite sure there will be no hope of escape. You would be safer dead, I have no doubt, but I am rather vain. I want you to watch the Green Triangle's progress, to learn of its successes, and to see our organisation grow and grow in power, until finally the whole of Great Britain is at my feet. An ambitious programme, eh? It is, but I mean to carry it through."

Zingrave suddenly changed his tone.

"And you, my friend, shall live to see this progress," he went on fiercely. "In the past you have been opposed to me, fighting against me. And you have always won. But this time you shall be a spectator, and I can promise you some wonderful entertainment."

The professor waved his hand.

"Away with him!" he said curtly.

Nelson Lee made no comment. He didn't fool himself. He was intensely relieved to find that his life was spared; but he suffered no delusions. There would be no escape for him.

Taken out of the Sahara so dramatically he had been brought to England and landed in a hidden spot. No outsiders could possibly have the slightest clue as to his whereabouts. The police force of the whole country might search in vain.

As for his own activities they would be

nil. Without question, he would be kept so guarded that liberty would be as remote as the stars from the earth. A dungeon prisoner in the hands of the Spanish Inquisition had more chance of escape than Nelson Lee would now have.

The covering was again placed over his head; he was unchained, and led away. And from that moment Nelson Lee, the famous detective, vanished completely from the face of the everyday world.

CHAPTER XIX.

DAYS OF ANXIETY.



"IT'S a mystery, that's what it is!" said Handforth. "It's the biggest mystery that ever happened! And as soon as we arrive in England I'm going to set my wits to

work!"

"Better not interfere, old man," said Church, shaking his head. "Poor old Nipper's worried enough as it is. I've never seen a chap change so much in such a short time."

Handforth nodded.

"Yes, I'm a bit anxious about him, too," he growled. "What on earth's the good of mooning about and worrying? It can't do any good. I've tried to buck him up three or four times, but it's hopeless."

The famous chums were sitting in three deck chairs on the windward side of a passenger steamer which slowly cut through the waters of the Mediterranean. A keen breeze was blowing, and the sea was choppy. Handforth and Co. were well wrapped up, for after their experience under the blazing African skies they felt the cold.

"Hallo! You chaps are looking pretty grave!" said Reggie Pitt cheerily, as he hove into sight with Jack Grey and De Valerie. "Why don't you come for a stroll round?"

"We're talking about Nipper," grunted Handforth.

Reggie's face became grave.

"Poor old Nipper!" he said softly. "He's like a ghost these days. Can't get a word out of him, either. He just mooches about doing nothing, and won't say a word to anybody."

"He's gone haggard, too, and his face is a lot thinner," declared Grey. "Thank goodness we're within a few days of England. Once we're home, he'll buck up a bit. But he'll be a queer kind of skipper for the Remove this next term."

Handforth nodded.

"In my opinion, he won't be much good for anything," he said firmly. "Mr. Lee's disappearance has acted on him like a disease. He's another chap altogether. If you speak to him he only snaps you up.

Only this morning I asked him a question and he just glared and walked away."

"Don't be hard on him," said Pitt. "He's nearly out of his mind with misery. Look at him now, leaning against the rail with a face as long as a fiddle. It wouldn't surprise me if he jumped overboard."

The group of juniors gazed across the deck at the spot where I was standing. And there was every reason for their comments. I was, indeed, in a state of desperate misery.

Days had passed—long, anxious, agonising days of uncertainty and blankness. And not a single item of news had arrived about the gov'nor.

Since he had been carried off in the *Crimson Eagle*, we had seen nothing, heard nothing, and for all we knew he was dead. And what was ten times more galling, we were looked upon as madmen for making a thousand-and-one inquiries by wireless and cable.

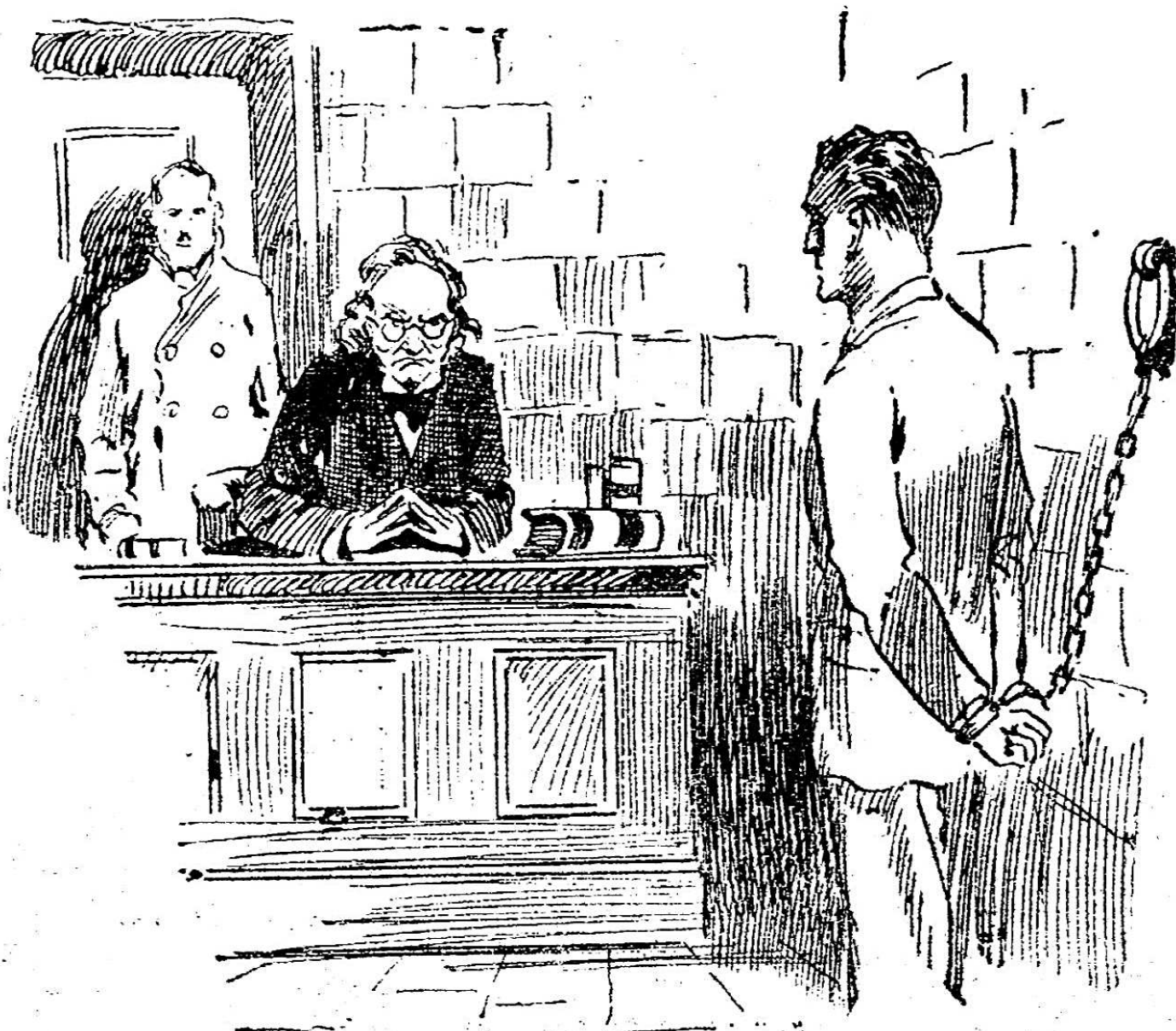
I don't seem to remember much about the rest of the trip on the *Conqueror*.

We arrived at Algiers after what seemed a dreadful age—but which was, in fact, only a period of a few days. During that time our wireless had been at work constantly. But not one inquiry had borne fruit.

In Algiers we had parted company with Mr. Travers Earle and his wonderful land yacht. And while the fellows and Irene and Co. enjoyed themselves in the picturesque old town, I spent feverish hours at the cable offices, with Lord Dorrimore for company. For Dorrie himself was almost as anxious as I was. He had gone quite seedy with worry.

We had cabled to Scotland Yard, not once, but a hundred times. And every reply was the same. Nothing had been heard of the *Green Triangle*, and Professor Zingrave was reported dead. There had been no special criminal activities at home, and nothing that could be traced to any organisation.

An aircraft answering to the description of the *Crimson Eagle* had never been seen, heard of, or even discussed. We were



"A momentous meeting, my dear Mr. Nelson Lee," said the professor, in his smooth, silky voice. "I regret that I should find it necessary to tether you like a bullock in a slaughter-house, but these precautions are essential."

frankly looked upon as dreamers for even suggesting such a vessel.

Indeed, in Algiers the juniors had grown tired of being laughed at when they told of the *Eagle*, and some of them were even wondering if they had imagined it all. For every listener was sceptical. Nobody took the story seriously.

Even Scotland Yard hinted that we were trying to fool them, and that the story was mere bunkum. In short, Dorrie spent hundreds of pounds on these cable inquiries, and not a single grain of information resulted. It was just as though we had passed through a dream, and as though Nelson Lee had been blotted from existence, without leaving a trace.

Imagine the effect upon myself.

At first I was exasperated. Then I was madly furious. And finally a dull, listless sense of hopeless misery descended over me. It all seemed so useless—so absolutely futile. And what could I do when we got back to England? How could I exist at St. Frank's—with the gov'nor still missing?

The suspense was ghastly, and the very thought of being in the noisy Remove at St. Frank's horrified me. My one desire was to search for Nelson Lee—to search and search until I found him, or until I revealed the secret of his fate.

It was with such thoughts as these that I spent the days on that trip to England. More than once I half made up my mind to speak with Reggie Pitt and the other fellows, but I didn't feel up to it. All I could do was to wait—to long for the time when we should get to London. Once there, perhaps, I might pick up some slim shred of information which would throw some light upon this appalling mystery.

Time after time I fell to wondering if the gov'nor's disappearance was not the result of some cruel practical joke. Perhaps that was the reason for all this unfathomable silence. Or did the Green Triangle really exist?

I had little faith in the denials that Scotland Yard sent. If Professor Zingrave had not yet started his campaign, the police would naturally be in complete ignorance of everything connected with him.

As for the police searching for Nelson Lee, they didn't even offer to do so. And who could blame them? The gov'nor had disappeared in the heart of the Sahara. What reason was there to suspect that he was being kept a prisoner in some unknown, hidden corner of Great Britain?

Was the Green Triangle a myth or a fact?

CHAPTER XX.

THE DAY OF FATE.



LONDON!

London at last—after seemingly endless days of travel. And on this bright September afternoon the sky was crystal clear, the sun was beaming, and the great metropolis looked wonderfully lovable.

"Back at last! Back again in dear old London town!" said Handforth enthusiastically, as he tore out of Charing Cross Station and stood there in the entrance yard, looking at the red 'buses passing to and fro. "My hat! What a sight for sore eyes!"

"A bit different to the Sahara!" said Church breathlessly.

"Blow the Sahara!" snorted Handforth. "There's nothing to beat England, when you come to think of it—but you don't realise it until you've been away and get back!"

"And St. Frank's in less than a week!" said Reginald Pitt briskly.

"Don't make us miserable at a moment like this!" snorted Grey.

"Miserable?" repeated Pitt. "My dear chap, I'm looking forward to it enormously. What about the football—sports on the river—tea in our studies—and all the other joys? Lessons are a nuisance, of course, but there's even an attraction in them!"

"I couldn't find it with a microscope!"

said Handforth tartly. "You'll be saying that exams. are heavenly next!"

Most of the juniors stood in the yard, having a good look round before seeking taxis. But Lord Dorrimore was busy on that job, in any case—for his lordship intended taking everybody straight to his big town mansion, where parents and other relatives would be waiting.

I didn't join the other fellows. I had emerged from the station, and I stood there looking at the busy Strand with a kind of lump in my throat. Without Nelson Lee everything seemed blank and dull.

And there was still a total absence of news. And now that I had actually arrived in London, I realised my helplessness. What could I do? Which way could I turn? Looking for a needle in a haystack was a simple task compared with the one that confronted me. And it suddenly came over me, with overwhelming force, that I was up against a blank wall.

"Hallo, young 'un! By thunder! Well met!"

A hand clapped on my shoulder, and I swung round to find myself face to face with the burly figure of Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard, of the C.I.D. I had grabbed his hand with real pleasure.

"Why, hallo, inspector!" I said breathlessly. "Any news?"

That was the first thought that sprang to my mind. News! I was starving for news.

"News!" repeated the chief inspector. "What kind of news? I am glad to see you back, after that long trip. The place is swarming with your friends, I see," he added, as he glanced round. "You don't seem to have felt much benefit, young man. You look ill!"

"Ill!" I repeated bitterly. "I'm not ill, Mr. Lennard; I'm nearly crazy with worry. Haven't you found out anything about the gov'nor?"

The Scotland Yard man became grave.

"What's all this infernal stuff about Mr. Lee?" he asked gruffly. "What's the meaning of all those cablegrams? And that rubbish about the Green Triangle?"

"Haven't I told you?" I asked patiently. "Hasn't Lord Dorrimore spent a small fortune on cablegrams—"

"Yes, I know that, but it's perfectly preposterous," said the chief inspector. "The League of the Green Triangle's dead—has been dead for an age! And as for that fantastic aeroplane you spoke of, such a craft isn't even thought of, let alone built!"

"Oh, it's no good!" I said miserably. "I might as well give up the whole game—But I won't!" I added fiercely. "I tell you, I won't! The Green Triangle's a fact, and that aeroplane is a fact!"

Lennard patted me on the shoulder.

"If I ever see that Eagle affair flying

overhead—well, then I'll believe in the revival of the Green Triangle," he said soothingly. "But until then—Good mother of Moses!" he shouted blankly.

I saw him staring fixedly over towards Trafalgar Square, where Nelson could be seen standing majestically on his column. But the inspector was staring beyond.

And then I gave a leap.

"The Crimson Eagle!" I shouted madly.

It was uncanny; it was like some stroke of Fate. High up in the sky, and flapping her wings serenely, the Crimson Eagle was heading straight for Trafalgar Square. We watched, fascinated.

Everybody was watching; even the traffic had come to a standstill. For the sudden dramatic appearance of this extraordinary aircraft had hit London like a blow.

And then the green smoke began pouring forth from the Eagle, and high above us appeared that sign in the sky—a green triangle of smoke!

Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard uttered a hoarse cry.

"Can it be true?" he muttered, gripping my arm.

"What did you say, inspector?" I asked grimly. "What did you tell me five minutes ago?"

"By ginger, yes!" ejaculated the inspector. "And I do believe in the revival of the Green Triangle! It's a fact, young 'un. And what's more, the entire brain-power of Scotland Yard will soon be at work, rooting this mystery to its source!"

"The guv'nor?" I asked tensely. "What about the guv'nor, Mr. Lennard? He was carried off by that Eagle——"

"You can kick me for scoffing at you!" interrupted the Yard man. "You can take my word for it, Nipper, that we shall lose no time in making a grim search for Mr. Nelson Lee!"

"And I'll help you!" I said, my eyes gleaming.

"But what about your school——"

"I'll help you!" I repeated intensely. "What does school matter to me now, with the Green Triangle to fight, and the dear old guv'nor to find?"

CHAPTER XXI.

RELINQUISHING THE REINS.



ONLY one thought was in my mind as we drove to Dorrie's house.

The incident of the Crimson Eagle was over. She had just performed that triangular evolution in smoke, and had then winged her way into the upper air, to leave London gasping and gossiping.

And I was filled with a new resolve—a grim purpose which thrilled me to the very marrow. And the other fellows noticed the

change in me at once. They commented on it after we had arrived.

"You look almost yourself again, old man," said Tommy Watson heartily. "That's the style! But I can't quite understand——"

"Listen, you fellows! I've got something to say!" I interrupted quietly. "I'm glad we're alone for a bit—we don't want any of the older folks with us at a time like this."

There were most of the Remove fellows in the big lobby, and they all looked at me curiously.

"What's the mystery, dear fellow?" asked Tregellis-West.

"I'm going to fight!" I replied fiercely. "I'm going to stay in London, and work night and day until I can find some trace of Nelson Lee. And I'm going to help in this great battle against the Green Triangle."

"But—but what about coming back to St. Frank's?" demanded Handforth.

"I'm not coming" I replied steadily.

"Not coming?" gasped Watson.

"How can I come?" I said passionately. "How do you suppose I can settle myself to lessons, and to football, and to the trivial events of school life, when the guv'nor's missing—a prisoner in the hands of the league?"

"But—but——"

"He's right!" said Reginald Pitt, nodding. "I've been thinking the same thing myself. I'm not a bit surprised, Nipper—I half expected it. There's one plain duty in front of you, and that is to use every fibre of your muscle and sinew to find Mr. Lee."

"Thanks, Reggie!" I said gratefully.

"He's your guardian, and if there's one fellow in the world who ought to engage in this fight, that fellow is you!" went on Pitt. "Of course, we shall hate to lose you, and we shall count the days until you come back to us."

"And that reminds me!" exclaimed Handforth. "Who's going to be Housemaster of the Ancient House?"

"Dr. Beverley Stokes, I think," I replied. "Dorrie had a long letter from the Head, and poor old Dr. Stafford is terribly worried about Nelson Lee's disappearance. He mentioned that Stokes will probably be the substitute."

"The finest man we could have!" said Reggie enthusiastically. "Good old Barry Stokes!"

"But look here—what about the captaincy?" demanded Handforth.

"Here's the new skipper," I replied, thumping Reggie Pitt on the back. "You don't need an election. I hereby appoint Reggie Pitt as captain of the Remove—and also as editor of the magazine."

Pitt flushed.

"Thanks awfully, Nipper," he said quietly. "I'm glad you've got such confidence in

me. But remember, I'm only keeping the place warm for you. As soon as you come back——"

"I may never come!" I interrupted thoughtfully. "You'd better go straight ahead as though I shall never return. It's the best way. But you can bet I'll keep in constant touch with you."

"But what about us?" asked Tommy Watson plaintively.

"Dear old boy, how shall we get on?" added Sir Montie.

I looked at my chums affectionately.

"It'll be a bit of a wrench for all of us, I think," I said softly. "But I shan't be so very far off—and we can write, can't we? I've got to do this thing, you fellows; it's as important to me as life itself. If I came back to St. Frank's now, I should be nothing better than a coward."

Handforth gave a roar of approval.

"He's right!" he declared. "We don't want to go back to St. Frank's without him, but we shall be a lot more comfortable if he isn't there. That's not exactly what I meant to say, but——"

"But we all understand," said Reggie. "Well, let's hope that you find Mr. Lee in double quick time, Nipper. And don't forget your old pals in the Remove."

"Forget!" I repeated, with rather a lump in my throat. "Never! But the guv'nor comes first, and from this minute onwards I shall forget St. Frank's, and forget everything else except my one determination to fight the League of the Green Triangle, and to discover what has happened to Nelson Lee."

I turned away, unable to say anything more.

And thus the die was cast.

THE END.

By Your Editor:



My dear Readers,

Those of you who remember the thrilling stories of a few years ago featuring the exploits of Nelson Lee against Professor Zingrave, the Green Triangle, the Circle of Terror, etc., will relish with keen delight the revival of those stirring days of the great detective in the Gray's Inn Road.

"THE GREEN TRIANGLE'S PRISONER!"

For a long time past I have received numerous requests from my old readers to resume the Green Triangle stories. Now that I have decided to introduce them again in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, beginning next week with a complete story entitled: "THE GREEN TRIANGLE'S PRISONER!" I shall naturally look forward to a big jump in the circulation, because I know that my grateful readers will not forget to boom these stories among their friends. In fact, whether I intend to continue them or not will depend on the reception they receive.

CONGRATS. TO OUR AUTHOR!

The new Green Triangle stories are by the same author who wrote them before, and who has been writing for the Old Paper ever since. Having read them in advance, I can tell you that they are even finer than his earlier stories. Mr. Brooks, indeed, is to be congratulated on his versatility in being able to write with equal facility the most

thrilling detective stories and the liveliest school yarns possessing a remarkable sense of humour and characterisation.

A COMPLETE LIST OF THE REMOVE.

One cannot help but marvel at the extraordinary number of distinct characters he has created in the St. Frank's stories during the last few years. You will appreciate this next week when you examine the complete list of the Remove Juniors appearing in the Mag.

NEXT WEEK'S ST. FRANK'S STORY.

The St. Frank's stories will continue as usual next week, when an absorbing new series will commence, with Reggie Pitt as Skipper of the Remove, and the popular Dr. Beverley Stokes as Housemaster in place of Nelson Lee. There will be many other changes in the school, which will be described in the story: "THE SCANDAL AT ST. FRANK'S!"

MR. BROOK'S PORTRAIT.

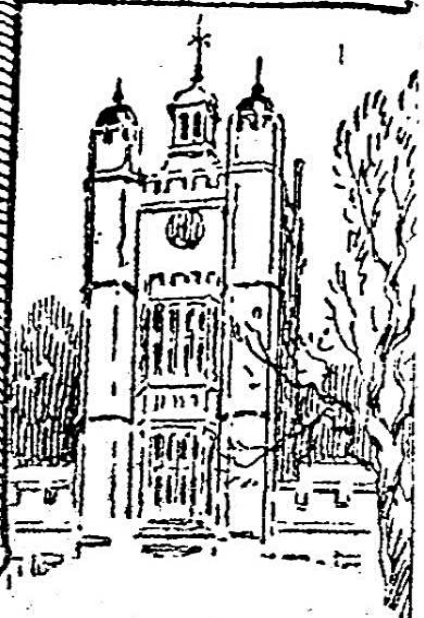
I hope to publish the author's portrait and an interview with him in next week's issue, provided, of course, there is space. The block of the photograph is already made. If I cannot get it in the paper next week, I will try my best to publish it the following week.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

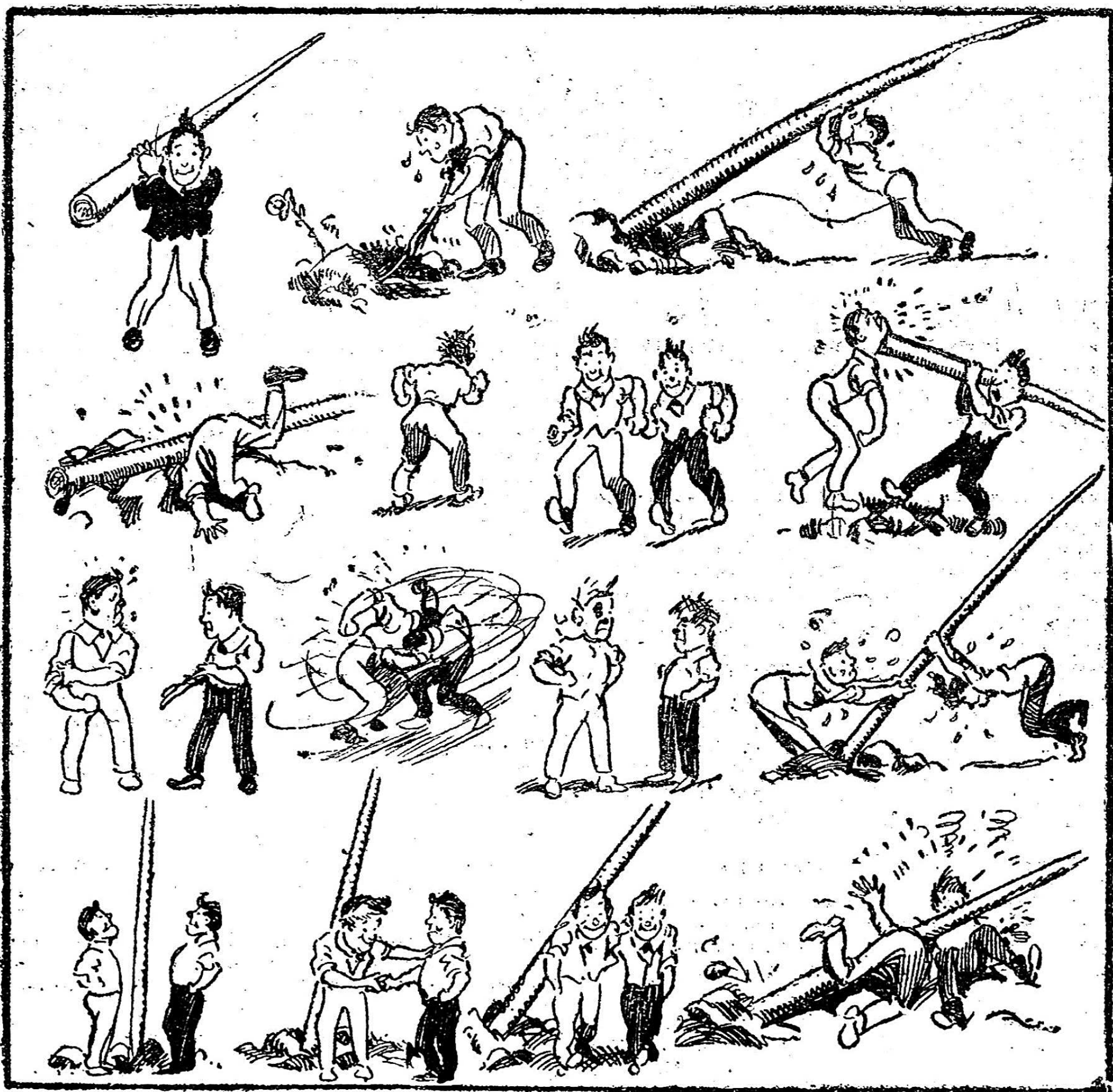


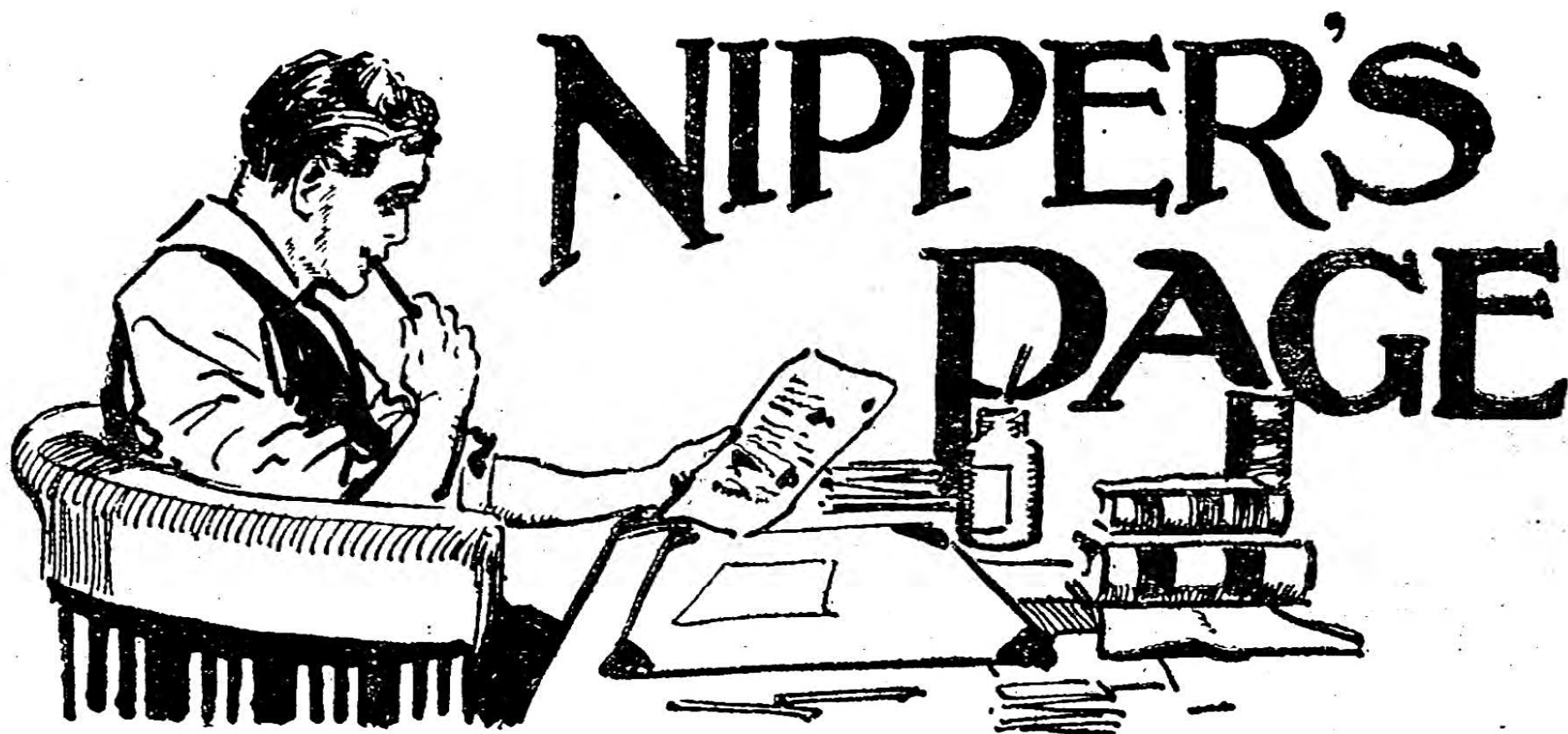
St. Frank's Magazine



ADVENTURES OF E.O. AND WILLY HANDFORTH ERECTING AN AERIAL—No. 1.

A Story Without Words.





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

My dear Chums,

This has been a week of surprises as well as rejoicing. Only a week ago we were mourning the loss of Handforth and Co., and despairing of ever seeing this worthy trio at St. Frank's again. Now, I am glad to record that Study D will not be vacant, Uncle Edward will not cease to dry up, the Trackett Grim stories will not be concluded in this number, and St. Frank's will not be less exciting than in the past. For when all hope had been given up, the stray sheep were gathered back into the fold. That is to say, Handy and Co. were rescued from a sandy grave.

NELSON LEE'S DISAPPEARANCE.

The homeward journey of the Wanderer has not been without the most startling and unexpected happenings. No sooner was the good news received of Handy's rescue than we hear the disquieting report that Nelson Lee has been kidnapped before the eyes of everyone on the Conqueror. At first some of the party thought it was a practical joke. The sinister appearance of the Green Triangle written in the sky by the mysterious aeroplane made it clear, however, that Nelson Lee is at last a prisoner in the clutches of no less a person than Professor Zingrave. For years these two men have kept each other at bay. Nelson Lee has always stood in the way of the professor, and the professor, with all his network of spies and hirelings, has tried in vain to rid himself of the master criminal hunter, whom we all know so well as the genial housemaster of St. Frank's.

CHARACTERISTIC OF ZINGRAVE.

It looks very much as though the Professor had caught Nelson Lee napping for

once. If this be so, the wily rogue must be gloating over his capture and means to close every loophole of escape to his victim. The whole scheme, brazen and dramatic in its execution, is characteristic of Zingrave's conceit. It was not enough that he should entrap the great detective. He wanted the whole world to know how he had successfully fooled and humiliated the one man in the world he had most feared.

YOUR NEW EDITOR.

As you know, this is my last week as Acting-Editor, and next week Nipper would in the ordinary event resume control of the Mag. But in view of the present circumstances, it is unlikely that Nipper will return to St. Frank's for some weeks. He has tendered his resignation as Captain of the Remove, and I understand that Pitt will be nominated in his stead, and has consented to take over the Mag. I shall be glad personally to be relieved of the responsibility.

A LIST OF STUDIES NEXT WEEK!

Don't forget that a complete list of the Remove and their studies will appear in the Mag. next week. Every reader should have this list for future reference. So make sure of your copy by ordering in advance.

BACK TO GRAY'S INN ROAD.

We shall all miss Nelson Lee and Nipper at St. Frank's, but we hope that their absence will be only temporary, and that Nipper will be successful in getting on the track of the great detective. Nipper, I understand, is going straight to London and will make his headquarters at the old address in Gray's Inn Road. He has promised to keep in touch with his old friends of the Remove, who wish him a safe return from his perilous quest.

THE EDITOR.

The Adventures of TRACKETT GRIM



FEARSOME FRED, THE FALSE TEETH FIEND!

Being the amazing adventures of Trackett Grim and his Brilliant Assistant, Splinter.

By

E. O. HANDFORTH

TRACKETT GRIM started like a 1914 Ford.

With one hand he wrenched at the steering-wheel, and with the other he trod on both the brakes with all his force. The powerful racing car came to a dead halt.

"That man," said Trackett Grim curtly, "is waving to us."

"A client, sir!" gasped Splinter joyously.

The notorious incriminator and his assistant were speeding down Park Lane, dashing to the rescue of a man who had lost the family heirlooms. But he could wait. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush—and this waving client was on the spot. The eternal problem of to-morrow's dinner appeared to be near the point of solving.

Trackett Grim leaped out of his car before it stopped, and Splinter fell off the back. And together they raced up the garden path, and saw who would be first to reach the front door. Trackett Grim won by a short head, and jabbed the bell-push so violently that he pushed it inside out.

The doors were opened by a portly gentleman in one slipper, an evening dress shirt, and a moustache. His face was a strange one. At first Trackett Grim and Splinter could only see a huge gap, which turned out to be a client's mouth.

"Here we are, then!" said Trackett Grim dramatically. "I observe, sir, that you have lost your right slipper. Say no more! I will recover it with all the speed—"

"Rats to my right slipper!" shouted the client, in a voice that sounded exactly like a ship's hooter. "My name is Sir Clackson Horne!"

"Ah! The celebrated loud-speaker!" rapped out Trackett Grim.

"Great pip! You know me?" panted Sir Clackson.

"I heard you once from the top of Hampstead Heath," replied the detective carelessly. "You were speaking in Bermondsey,

and the fogwaves carried your voice clearly to Hampstead. But enough of this trifling discussion. Tell me your case, and I will dash to the rescue."

Sir Clackson Horne led his two visitors to the top of the house, and they soon found themselves in a bed-room. The apartment was in a condition of amazing disorder. The dressing-table was a wreck, drawers were lying all over the floor, wardrobes were turned upside down. It was exactly as though a couple of Third-Formers had paid an evening call.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Trackett Grim, as he whipped out his magnifying-glass. "This is appalling! You have been robbed. No, don't tell me—I can see at a glance. You have been rifled!"

"Impossible, sir!" said Splinter keenly. Trackett Grim turned his eyes on Splinter like a couple of gimlets.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sternly.

"There's a rifle in the corner, sir," replied Splinter. "And two revolvers on the mantelpiece. You might think we were in Ireland!"

Sir Clackson Horne sounded his hooter. In other words, he spoke, and it amounted to the same thing.

"Mr. Grim, I thought you were a detective!" he snapped. "I saw you whizzing by, like a plumber going to work, and here you are, wasting my time like a fat-head! I've lost my false teeth—"

"No!" gasped Trackett Grim, horrified.

"But I say yes!" hooted Sir Clackson. "Do you think I don't know? Haven't I been trying to eat a walnut for five minutes? My false teeth have gone—they were snatched from the dressing-table by some dastardly miscreant who whizzed up the verandah."

"They were snatched?" repeated the incriminator huskily.

"Snatched!" declared Sir Clackson toothlessly.

A sudden light burst upon Trackett Grim like a flood from a hosepipe. It struck him sideways, and he was forced to turn round again. There was a look of dazed horror in his eyes.

"This is the work of Fearsome Fred!" he muttered. "Fearsome Fred, the False Teeth Fiend! In some circles he is known as the Dentists' Friend! It is even rumoured that certain unscrupulous dental merchants retain him at a large fee. False teeth snatching is his sole and only hobby.

"You amaze me!" said Sir Clackson.

"I shall amaze you more in two jiffs of a donkey's tail!" said Trackett Grim curtly. "Your teeth, sir, were set in platinum with diamond-studded ball-bearings. Am I right?"

"Absolutely!" said the client. "This is marvellous!"

"Fearsome Fred only snatches platinum and diamonds," said the detective. "Have no fear, Sir Clackson—I will get on the track at once. If you will tell me exactly where Fearsome Fred has gone to, I will follow him—"

"Impossible!" broke in Sir Clackson. "I didn't see him go."

"A great drawback of course," muttered Grim perplexedly. "How do you expect me

to track this crook without any clues? But no matter! I am Trackett Grim—and I can do anything! You shall have your teeth within the hour!"

"I would prefer them within my mouth!" said Sir Clackson huskily. "The time is now six—and at seven I am booked to deliver a speech at the Alfred Hall. Without my teeth I am lost! I tried it once, but the audience mistook my mouth for a wireless loud-speaker, and walked out."

Trackett Grim turned to the door.

"Come, Splinter!" he cried. "We will away! At seven, Sir Clackson, I shall arrive at the Alfred Hall, and if I don't bring your teeth with me, my name is not what it was before it became what it is!"

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Grim!" sobbed Sir Clackson fervently. "If you succeed, I will reward you beyond all your dreams of wealth!"

Trackett Grim and Splinter dashed out on the verandah, and slid neatly down the off-side pillar to the ground. In a trice they were in the road, and within a thrice Trackett Grim was pointing to some significant clues which lay littered about the ground. No ordinary person would have recognised them as clues. But Trackett Grim's marvellous brain was like radium. His gaze was as penetrating as a death-ray.

"Oil!" snapped the incriminator. "Spots of oil and some nuts!"

"And two bolts, sir!" panted Splinter. "To say nothing of a washer!"

"What does that suggest to you, my lad?" breathed Grim.

"An ironmonger's shop, sir," replied Splinter brilliantly.

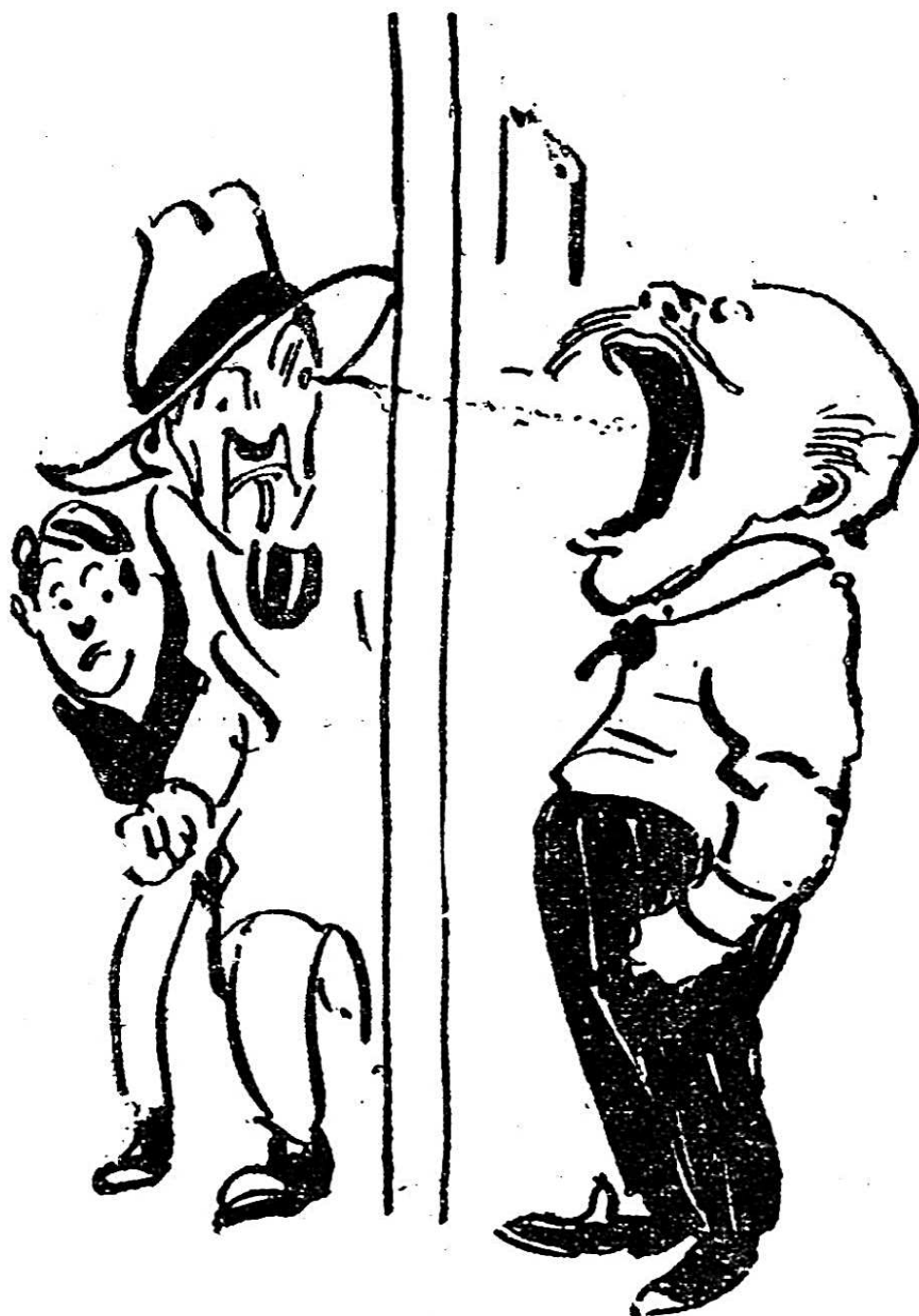
"Piffle!" snorted the detective. "A Ford car has been standing here. See! There are more nuts up the road. No, not those two standing at the corner, or those being consumed by the urchin in the park. I am referring to the Ford parts which have been carelessly left behind."

With one movement Trackett Grim leapt into the driving-seat of his car. He started the engine so quickly that Splinter was compelled to hang on to the exhaust-pipe, and work his way along it until he reached his seat. And then the famous pair tracked down Fearsome Fred.

It was a grim chase, beset with difficulties. With supreme ease they followed the oil trail, and the little of nuts and washers and sparking-plugs, to Houndsditch. And there stood the old Ford, shaking with the ague. At first Trackett Grim thought there was an earthquake, but it was only the Ford engine ticking over.

They dashed into an alley, and at that very moment a man emerged from a doorway. There was a flash of steel, and Fearsome Fred was arrested. His pockets were bulging with false teeth, and as Trackett Grim emptied them he was badly bitten several times.

"Take him away, Splinter!" ordered the incriminator curtly. "Drive him to the



At first Trackett Grim and Splinter could only see a huge gap, which turned out to be the client's mouth.

police-station in his own Ford."

Fearsome Fred turned pale as he heard this dread sentence, but Trackett Grim was in a mood for no nonsense. He turned, and dived into Fearsome Fred's lair. And then he staggered back like a startled gazelle.

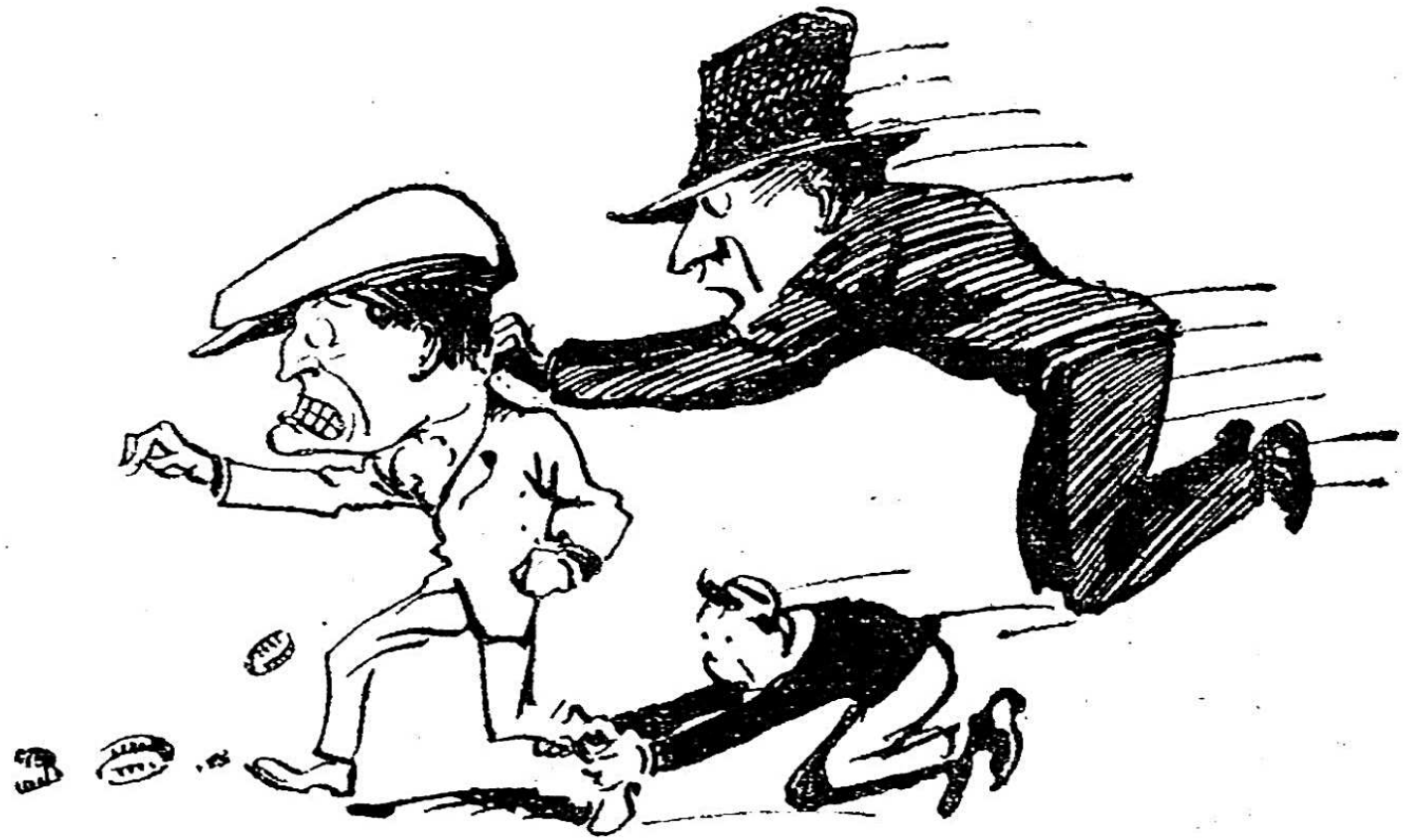
"Great jumping orange - pips!" he gasped blankly.

The lair was absolutely filled with false teeth! They were everywhere — on the shelves, on the table, and on the floor! Trackett Grim quickly counted them, and found five hundred and fifty complete sets. And he had omitted to ask Sir Clackson Horne the identification number!

The problem was apparently insurmountable.

But Trackett Grim was no ordinary man. In a flash he knew what to do. Taking armful after armful, he carried out the teeth to his car, taking no notice of the enormous crowd that gathered round to watch him. He absolutely filled his car with false teeth, and people thought that he was an American dentist moving out to new premises. Apparently, he had been making false teeth by the mass production system.

But, true to his word, he arrived at the Alfred Hall on the stroke of seven. Sir Clackson gave one yell of joy, and dived into the sea of teeth, obtaining several nasty nibbles in the process. Then he gave another yell of joy, and raked out his own teeth from the bottom of the pile. In a trice they were clapped into his mouth, and he looked almost human again.



There was a flash of steel, and Fearsome Fred was arrested.

"Mr. Grim, my gratitude is overwhelming!" he said brokenly. "What can I do to reward you?"

Trackett Grim bowed.

"You are aware of the perils I have faced in order to serve you, Sir Clackson," he replied. "I will leave the reward to your own judgment and generosity. A cheque will do, but five bob on account in cash will be welcome."

Sir Clackson Horne laughed like a motor-hooter.

"I have it!" he said triumphantly. "No reward could be greater or more fitting than this!"

And he whisked from his pocket an important-looking paper, and thrust it into Trackett Grim's hands. It turned out to be a copy of his latest speech, which had worn threadbare, and was therefore of no further use.

Trackett Grim was so overcome that he swooned on the spot.

THE END.

TRAVEL TALES

(Continued from page 10.)

soon strangle and swallow those leaves, and that all that will be left of the once noble palm will be a long hollow pipe. The devouring, destructive matepalo conquers every time. Happily it usually attacks only trees which are small and comparatively valueless.

The bark of this tree-killer is smooth and has a certain attractiveness, even fascination, and yet at the same time it inspired in me a feeling of horror and loathing. The sensation can hardly be described. Anyone who has seen a pitcher plant capture insects and digest them will realise what I mean. So one feels, as I said before, in watching this uncanny matepalo, that there may, after all, be some truth in those weird stories of devil-trees which throw out a horrid tendril, capture a man, and then slowly suck his blood and devour his flesh.

CARTHAGE

By J. BUSTERFIELD BOOTS.

CARTHAGE was founded by the Phoenicians about 822 B.C., and its name means in Phoenician "New City." It had a very troubled history. Its first serious conflict was with the Greeks, and it was over a boundary question which was hotly disputed between the people who had settled in Carthage and the Greeks of Cyrene. In the sixth century B.C. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Tyre, and Carthage took its place as mistress of the Mediterranean. Those were Carthage's palmy days. Phoenician colonies had been founded by Tyre and Sidon in Spain and Sicily, and these were threatened by the Greeks. They sought help from Carthage, and Punic supremacy—i.e., the supremacy of the Pœni, or Phoenicians—in the Mediterranean was established.

War broke out between Greece and Carthage in 550 B.C., and the Carthaginians conquered Sicily and expelled the Greeks. In 536 they won great victories in Corsica. The first treaty between Carthage and Rome was made in 509. It assigned Italy to the Romans, and the African waters to Carthage. In 280 Carthage offered resistance to Rome. The Punic wars, or wars between Rome and Carthage began in 268, the Romans being the aggressors, and the first Punic war, which lasted 27 years (268 to 241), was won by Carthage. When it ended Carthage undertook to conquer Spain, and a nine years' war resulted. Then there was the second Punic war with Rome, Hannibal being the Carthaginian leader. This was disastrous to Carthage, which lost its fleet and all its possessions except those in Africa.

It was the beginning of the end, though for a time Carthage again enjoyed great prosperity, and even formed some sort of alliance with Rome. The third Punic war, waged by Rome in order to destroy Carthage, her rival, succeeded in that purpose, and in 146 Carthage fell. The Roman troops were let loose upon the city, and they plundered and outraged and burned to their hearts' content. A bed of cinders, ashes, stones, glass, metal and bones fifteen feet thick exists to-day where Carthage once stood, a grim witness to its horrible fate.

Not content with this, a Roman commission which visited the city decided that the city, its dwellings, temples, fortifications, etc., should be razed to the ground. The site was dedicated with curses to the infernal gods, and all human habitation was forbidden throughout the vast ruined area.

Carthage was subsequently rebuilt by the Romans. Eight centuries later it finally disappeared from history, having been totally destroyed by the Arabs in A.D. 698.

SHEIKS

By AUGUSTUS HART.

SHEIK—pronounced as if spelt Shake—is an Arabic term, and is simply a title of respect. Strictly, it means a venerable man of over fifty, and therefore it is usually applied to heads of religious orders, chiefs of tribes, and headmen of villages. Every village has its sheik, and a town may have several—one for each separate quarter—and in each case he possesses large powers of executive government.

The power of a sheik and his duties have never been closely and clearly defined, even by the Koran—the sole authority in such matters—and therefore a great deal is left to the discretion of the individual, and much depends upon his character. A village sheik is chief of police and head magistrate in one, and it is easy to see how an unscrupulous man may oppress the people and fill his own pockets.

Perhaps the greatest of all sheiks is the Sheik-ul-Islam, who is virtually the ecclesiastical head of the State. That is to say, he is practically supreme in all matters appertaining to the Church. This official, the Chief Mufti, as he is sometimes called, was created by Sultan Mahommed II, in 1453, after the capture of Constantinople. How great his power is (or was, for it is now crumbling) may be judged from the following facts.

The Sultan of Turkey, as Caliph, appointed, and could dismiss the Sheik-ul-Islam, and the power exercised by the latter was delegated to him by the Sultan. Nevertheless, the Sheik was independent and absolute so far as his power to issue fetwas—or decrees—was concerned. If the Sultan suspected that the Sheik was about to issue a fetwa of which he disapproved he might depose the Sheik before he could issue it. But if the Sheik did issue it the Sultan was bound to obey it, even if it meant his own deposition. That notorious but very capable Sultan, Abdul Hamid, great tyrant as he was, was deprived of his throne and authority by a fetwa of the Sheik-ul-Islam.

Things can no longer be done quite in the same way, but it will be a long time before sheiks can be stripped of their power. And, human nature being what it is, as a matter of course every petty sheik considers himself a Sheik-ul-Islam in little.

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.)

F.W.I. (Stockwell): I wouldn't say that the Trackett Grim is the only really good item in the Mag. I give credit to the other contributions. What about "In Reply to Yours?" Clarence still makes rhymes—he can't help it. I'll try and get Nipper to publish some more of his drivel. So don't blame me if it happens.

DOUGLAS TWIN (Alberton, Transvaal): Does Willy take after me? He ought to, considering my fine example; but the young boulder insists upon going his own sweet way. I have washed my hands of him completely. No, I wasn't surprised to get your letter from the Transvaal. It isn't the first one I've had from Australia. I even get letters from the wild interior of Ireland. Yes, I ride a motor-bike, but I don't go in for racing, because it might make all the other chaps jealous. Why are you interested in the South African riders in the Isle of Man when you live in Australia?

CLEEVE SCULTHORPE (Errington, Canada): I don't believe you're a lord at all. In fact, judging by your letter, I think you must belong to the nearest lunatic asylum. Still, thanks, all the same. If I knew your full address, I'd send you one of my spare spelling-books.

LILLIAN AND ETHEL (Toronto, Canada): I can easily see that Ethel wrote the letter, and Lillian added the postscript. If I'm not right, I'll give up writing about Trackett Grim. Glad you like the old paper so much, and I hope you'll continue to like it for good. Yes, rather! I'd like to hear from you again, please.

THE TWO BOBS (Southport): You're just trying to pull my leg. You say that you are two girls! I never knew that "Bob" was a girl's name, so you can't spoof me. Lemme see! What's that question you ask? Am I really a boy at St. Frank's? Judging by the clever way your letter is written, I should think you ought to know! As for my age, if I grew a lot older I'd soon be out of St. Frank's—and then the stories would fall to pieces because there wouldn't be anything to write about!

C. L. (Pudsey): Archie hasn't told me if he's got a sister, but he may have a dozen knocking about somewhere.

W. J. WILMSHURST (Manor Park, E.12): Too much fag to write to me, eh? Well, I like that! You ought to see some of the letters I get from the girls! It's never a fag for me to read your letters, anyhow. I can give you my word I never use them to light the fire with—although Church and McClure are a bit careless now and again. So you've got no brothers, but two sisters? You have my sympathy!

K., DAWN D.: Your letter is so personal that I shan't answer it. It's an absolute whopper to say that Irene blushes when the other girls talk about me. I'm in a hurry, too. So I'll get on with the other replies.

ANXIOUS (Hull): Have a look at that notice at the top of these pages, old son.

AMY (Huddersfield): Thanks awfully. I quite agree that my Trackett Grim stories aren't long enough. Glad you support me. I wanted to fill up the whole Mag. with my stuff, but the Editor's short-sighted. Yes, St. Frank's is quite near the Downs—just grassy hills, you know. Tell that friend of yours that I think fighting is quite wrong. I don't believe in scrapping at all. I only biff a chap when he absolutely asks for it.

R. GLENDINNING (Leeds): I'm only giving you a reply because you say you want to see your name in print. Well, there it is. A jolly good name, too. The next time you write, give me something to answer.

DORIS TEMPLEWOOD (Bromley): I say, cheese it. Fancy starting your letter "My Darlin' Little Edward"! I'm not

a giddy infant! And I'm not a nice little boy, either. I really haven't got space here to give the names of all the inmates of the studies—but if you'll be a little patient, your wish will be granted. Full list of studies will be published in another part of the Mag.

HAROLD GRANT (Leeds): The best way to keep a cricket bat in good order is to always have it in constant use. You needn't trouble to biff Nipper—I've decided to do it unless he agrees to "In Quest of Gold" being continued.

BEN WORMALD (Leeds): This time you've pinched so much of Charlie's paper that he hardly had any left for himself! It's a wonder he didn't biff you, you young bounder! Still, you're a brick—the way you praise the Trackett Grim stories proves that you've got plenty of sense. As for your father's toe, I expect it's well by this time, so I needn't give any remedy. Besides, I'm not a doctor.

JACK RICKETT (Hayle, Cornwall): Good old Jack! Glad you like the Trackett Grim yarns so much still. I say, what's the matter with your dictionary? Timothy Tucker may be an ass, but when it comes to long words he's a terror. And all the words he uses are real dictionary words, and apply in their proper sense. So don't blame T. T. I don't think Fullwood and Co. have got any cigarette-cards—although they've got plenty of cigarettes. So pleased you like Dorrie's little articles. I haven't told Irene and Co what you said about them marrying St. Frank's chaps, because they might feel a bit shy. Still, I agree with what you say. Yes, Nipper's address is the same as mine.

F. H. (Devizes): That question you ask isn't a joke at all, old man. Which would weigh the heavier, a pound of lead or a pound of feathers? Why, the lead, of course—because by the time you got the feathers out, half of them would have blown away.

"ONE WHO LIVES AT CLAPHAM": It takes more than red ink to put the wind up me, you dotty lunatic! And if you think you could make me as tame as a lamb, you'd better think again. The next time I'm in Clapham I'll track you down and make you eat your words—including the red ink and the post-card.

ROBERT P. (Worcester): Ventriloquism is very difficult, but, as you say, it comes quite easy to me. Miss Irene doesn't take an interest in me because I'm good-looking. I think she'd like me just as much if I was plain. If I got a job on a newspaper as a journalist, you could bet the newspaper would create a sensation. Sexton Blake hasn't retired, you ass! He's a real man, and Trackett Grim is only the creation of my own brain.

"A LOVER OF BOYS' BOOKS" (Leicester): The Old Paper has been on sale since June 12th, 1915, and the first story about St. Frank's appeared in the issue for July 28th, 1917. Thanks for your nice letter, and I hope you'll continue reading the Old Paper indefinitely. By the way, I only biff Church and McClure when they deserve it. It's not my fault if they ask for trouble every two or three hours, is it?

"AN ADMIRER OF MY FEATURES." (Hull): If Hull was a bit nearer, I'm blessed if I wouldn't take a trip there and trace you to your lair. I don't mind you calling me a fathead so much, but why underline it? It's nothing else but adding insult to injury—especially when you underline it twice. I'll admit that a lot of things in the "Mag." are bosh, as you say, and I'll agree that it's time I was put in the 1st. But at St. Frank's the 1st is always called the 6th.

NELLIE (Birmingham): Awfully sorry to hear about the sad loss of your step-mother. Rough luck about the competition coupons. I hope you'll have better good fortune this time. I've given that message of yours to the Editor about those lost English people, but I don't think we shall be visiting that strange country again. I'd like to as much as you would, because we had some ripping adventures there. I'll see what can be done about Archie writing for the "Mag."—but he's such a languid ass that it takes weeks to get a contribution from him. You mustn't take my quarrels with Church and McClure so seriously. They're not quarrels at all, really. We're great pals, and a few biffs now and again make things all the more chummy. I give up that riddle of yours about grandpa. Let's know the answer, will you?

WALTER GARNER (Highbury): I don't think you're quite right about that portrait—it doesn't look like me a bit. It's a funny thing you couldn't find Baker's Inn Road on that map of London. It's somewhere between Baker Street and Gray's Inn Road. I should have thought you would have known that!

EILEEN (Balham): I've given Nipper your love, and he didn't seem to appreciate it a bit. He just grinned. And I've told Willy that you'd like him for a cousin. He doesn't seem to care—but you're welcome to him, as far as I'm concerned. Irene is certainly a sport, but you needn't worry about all you girls writing to me. You don't write to me at all, strictly speaking—you only

write to Uncle Edward. Nobody is supposed to know that I'm anybody else. You may be Irish, but I'll bet you're not green.

DAVE MILLER (Everton): Don't be silly! Archie may be chummy with Irene, but he likes Marjorie better. He's polite and chatty with all girls, if it comes to that. I'm glad my Trackett Grim stories take your breath away. That's what they're meant to do. I always make them so thrilling that even Church and McClure feel faint when they read them. I've given them your sympathy, as you asked, but I can't understand why you asked me to do it.

PEG (Shropshire): Thanks for your nice little letter. I'd better tell you that I never get swelled head, and never show off, and I can't imagine what put such ideas into your head. I've told Willy that you'd like to hug him, and he says that he's not taking any risks. He says he only wants to be hugged by extra nice girls. So I told him that you're one, and he says he's willing to take a chance. I've given your love to Archie and Nipper, but they didn't seem very excited about it.

E. FRANCHEL (Kilburn): You must have quite a nice time, working at the British Empire Exhibition. The next time I'm there I'll adopt your suggestion and bring some gloves with me, and we can have some boxing. But I warn you, you'll get floored in the first round.

ROSIE, M. M. S. (Ilford): I wonder why all you girls ask me if I mind being called Ted? Why the dickens should I mind? Isn't it my own name? Thanks for your sympathy regarding Willy. My hat! You haven't any idea what I have to put up with from that young sweep. Still, he's my brother, and I suppose I've got to bear my own troubles.

J. W. B. G. A. F. W. (Wantage): Are you trying to be funny, or have you really got all those initials? So you are sorry to tell me that I am an absolute idiot? By George! You'd be a lot sorrier if I was with you now! And if you think it's a simple matter to pull my leg, you'd better think again! And what do you mean by saying that I should get a shock if I heard Irene's real honest opinion about me? Of course I can tell you the Seven Wonders of the World—but after you calling me an idiot, I won't. Not likely!

H. W. (Liverpool): Very nice of you to be so disappointed because there was no Trackett Grim story in the Mag. the week you wrote. But don't sob about it—I shall keep them up indefinitely. Fatty Little doesn't write much for the Mag. because he's always in the tuck

shop, and hasn't got time for anything else. The best swimmer in the Remove is Tom Burton.

FELIX (Ireland): Who's been calling me foolish and dunder-headed? Of course it's only foolish, as you say—but I'd like you to give the names of the offenders. So my stories are only rubbish? I don't believe you're Irish at all! If you were, you wouldn't talk such rot.

A REGULAR READER (Edinburgh): So you've been reading the Old Paper for five years? You're the kind of chap I admire—especially when you say that you want the Trackett Grim stories to be a permanent feature. I am glad you liked the Dr. Karnak stories, but it isn't really a question for Nipper to decide whether we shall have some more on this style. Yes, lessons are forgotten until the holidays are over, thank goodness. I've given your kind regards to everybody in the Remove, and I hope you'll continue to follow our adventures for years to come. As for shifting Archie into the Remove dormitory, I think he's better where he is. He'd give us the pip with his fussy methods. But he's not such a soft chap as you seem to imagine. When it comes to a pinch, Archie always turns up trumps.

GEORGE TINDALL (Kensington): The champion fighting man in the Remove is Ernest Lawrence. At least, he's supposed to be. One of these days I shall have to challenge him, and then you'll know the real truth. Among the seniors, Edgar Fenton is the best all-round athlete. Thanks awfully for your nice remarks about Trackett Grim. You're one of the few sensible chaps who agree with me that my stories are thrilling, and who appreciate the plots at their true value. Your desire for another Competition is now fulfilled, I think, and I wish you the best of luck. I like your letter very much, and I shall be quite pleased to hear from you again. I have given your message to Nipper.

IAN MAC (Wishaw): I've always said that the Scotch people are brilliantly clever, and now I know it. You prove your smartness by describing my Trackett Grim stories as masterpieces. As you say, only a chap with a brain like mine could fathom out the intricate plots. In fact, sometimes they are so deep that I can't even discover the solution myself! And if the author can't elucidate his own mysteries, they must be pretty smart, eh? There's a piece in your letter that I can't understand. You refer to Irene Manners' future husband. Who is he? I should like you to tell me the name of this chap, because I'm interested. Irene hasn't said a word to me about it, and I don't believe she's

even thinking of getting engaged. She's only fifteen, and too young. Now for your questions. The best footballer is Reggie Pitt. The best runner is Nipper. I told some other chap that Teddy Long was, but that was only my fun. The best high jumper is Johnny Onions, and the best swimmer Tom Burton. The best writer is myself. You didn't ask this last question, but I thought you'd be interested. The Trotwood twins are still at St. Frank's, and you're bound to read something about them sooner or later.

IRENE (Ireland): I don't know whether Ireland is your name, or whether you live there—but as your letter came from Greenwich there's something suspicious about this. Still, it's only a detail. What does it matter where a letter comes from as long as I get it? But now I come to read your letter again, I've changed my mind. I didn't want your letter at all! You think the Trackett Grim stories spoil the Mag.! You call me a great bully! You don't believe a word about Irene Manners! You don't think she's got any good looks! By George! If you weren't a girl I'd call you a silly idiot! And I don't believe your name is Irene at all. No girl with a name like Irene could write such piffle. And don't bother about loving Willy—he doesn't want it. And after writing all these insults, you calmly ask me for a "lovely long answer." Well, you won't get one. I made up my mind that I'd only give you a single line—so you see what you get for being saucy!

ANXIOUS (Moreton, Cheshire): I've handed that suggestion of yours to the Editor of the Old Paper, and now it's up to him.

"POTHY" (Stretford): Thanks for admiring my hair so much. As a matter of fact, I don't use any preparation on it at all. The gloss on it is quite natural, and the curls are all my own. So it's no wonder that chemist friend of yours couldn't answer your questions. Give my regards to your pater, and the next time you write be careful to choose a longer sheet of paper, so that you don't get to the bottom so quickly.

W. GERALD D. (Weston-super-Mare): I liked your letter immensely, particularly your remarks about me being gentle and tender-hearted. I'm glad that some chaps appreciate me at my full worth.

EVERYBODY ELSE (Everywhere): I've got all your letters, boys and girls, but there's no more space this week, so I shall have to leave my replies until next week. But don't worry. I always reply to everybody, and I get my answers in as quickly as I possibly can.

UNCLE EDWARD.



By An Old Boy

(Lord Dorrimore's Weekly Trifle)

No. 15.—A CANNIBAL TREE.

ONE has read of trees which devour insects, birds and even human beings, as if they possessed animal propensities and appetites, but for the most part these stories are fabulous and fictitious. Anyone, however, who has stood before a matepalo, a tree which grows in Nicaragua, and watched it, will have no difficulty in believing that there may be plants which capture and slay animals. That, at any rate, is my opinion.

A sinister plant is the matepalo—sometimes also called the amate. Its very name—matepalo—means tree killer, or timber destroyer, and amate is interpreted by some as meaning, "I love thee."

It begins as a slight, weak creeper, apparently feeling round for something that it can lean on for support. But woe be to the unfortunate tree which allows it to get a hold, however feeble, for that tree is surely doomed. Unlike ordinary creepers, or lianas, the matepalo is not content with mere support, and to remain outside the tree it rests on, though at first it seems to have an almost tender regard for its friendly supporter, and to disclaim any desire to harm it. But at a certain stage it begins to wind round and round the tree's branches, in the end swallowing them up, until nothing is left but the tree trunk dead in the embrace of the amate, whose clinging "love" is fatal.

Strange thoughts and emotions have affected me as I have stood before a still living and flourishing palm which is covered and crushed with the parasitic growths of the amate—looking like a great cable formed of many strands, as though they were serpents intertwined—buried in these, so to speak, all except the palm's top or crown of leaves. One knows that the climber will

(Continued on page 5)



MY AMERICAN NOTE-BOOK

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



No. 41.—HOW THEY MAKE THE FILMS

WHILE being escorted over the Famous Players-Lasky Studios in Hollywood, I was struck by the vastness of the whole industry. In this one organisation alone there is employment for every type of labour.

The studios cover a vast area, and passing through them they seem to be never-ending. From the exterior they are nothing much to look at; and even inside the great buildings are bare and barren, with scenery and effects standing in every position conceivable.

Armies of men are constantly at work constructing new sets, and manufacturing scenery of every description. In the heart of the studios I was startled to suddenly walk into a picturesque old-world garden.

In the film this would no doubt be an outdoor scene. It is surprising to find, therefore, that such pictures are made entirely under cover, and by means of artificial lighting. I walked on to the lawn, only to find that the grass was artificial. The flower-beds, the flowers, the bushes, the trees—everything, in fact, was a mere simulation of the real article.

Somehow, I felt depressed. Everything I saw was so obviously faked. In the film itself all these scenes are surprisingly natural, for everything foreign to the actual set is excluded. When you see this same scene in the studio, you also see the crude properties, the falseness, the rough edges which are carefully screened out. Every bit of the romance is killed by a careful tour through the studios.

You see the industry as it actually is—a busy, grinding, hustling hive of work, prosaic and unromantic, with the one object of financial gain at the end of it all.

Everything at the studios is plain and businesslike. The illusion is completely lost. A blinding storm, such as one often sees on the "movies," becomes a very unrealistic affair when you see it being done.

For the rain is caused by hose-pipes from the main, and the terrific gale is generally created by numbers of aeroplane propellers. If it is a night scene, there are countless arc-lights. It is fascinating to watch such pictures being "shot," but it can scarcely be said that they look real in the making. It is surprising, indeed, that they look real even in the finished production.

To the casual observer the interior of a great studio is something akin to Bedlam—chaos everywhere, crowds moving about apparently at random, and workmen engaged in a hundred different jobs.

If I had been "crazy to go on the films," I think this one visit to Hollywood would have killed all such ambition. For when I went home to my hotel in Los Angeles I was a much wiser man. I enjoy watching pictures, but only when they are shown on the screen. I cannot imagine anything more tedious than viewing the actual production work.

I do not propose to go into any detailed account of my journey back across the United States to New York, and thence to England. And with this present article I shall close the series.

However, I visited several places of interest that I should like to describe, such as the Great Salt Lake in Utah, Chicago, Niagara Falls, etc. When I have a little spare time, I shall take great pleasure in setting down my impressions. These little articles will probably be published later on, at intervals.

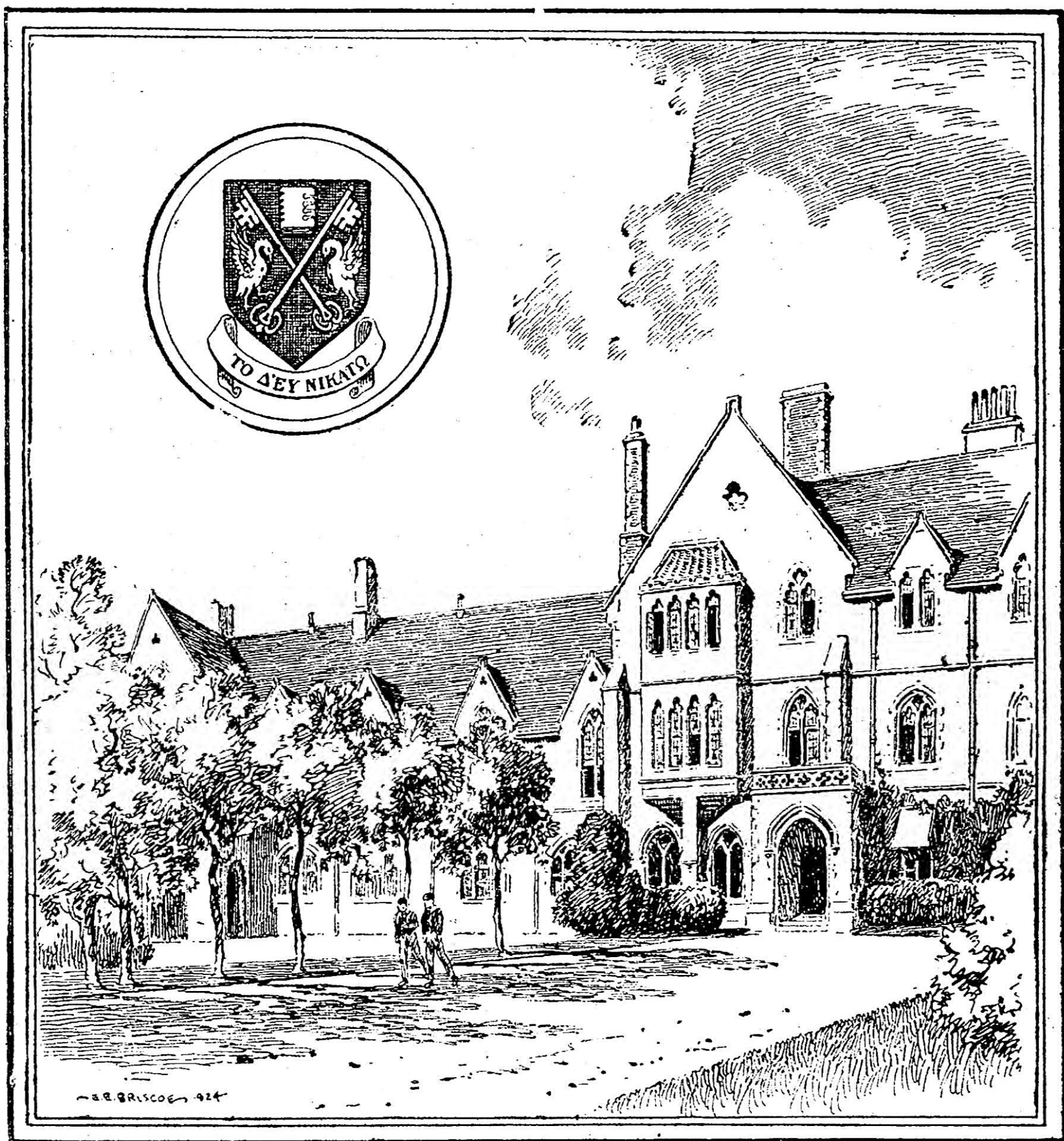
OUR AUTHOR'S PORTRAIT, *with a Special*

Interview by Our Special Representative, will appear next week in place of this article, which concludes The American Note-book Series.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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

No. 44.—BRIGHTON COLLEGE.



Brighton College was established in 1845 as a public school. Its handsome buildings include the chapel, school hall (measuring 140 feet by 50 feet), six boarding-houses, nineteen class-rooms, library, gymnasium, science laboratories, workshops and sanatorium. In 1907-8 Mr. Fenwick Richards, a governor of the school, built a new wing. The Lord Winterstoke Memorial Wing was added in 1914, comprising laboratories, art-room, and class-rooms. This wing was completed at the cost of Miss Stancomb Wills. The school stands in ten acres of grounds.

A permanent pavilion has been erected in the playing-fields by subscriptions from old boys. A further twelve and a half acres of playing-fields on a fine site near the school has been presented, together with a pavilion, by Mr. Meville Wills. The number of boys is about 420, of which 336 are boarders. The school is divided into classical and modern sides. In addition to the college library, each house has a separate library. There is a photographic society, debating and literary societies, and each term is published the "Brighton College Magazine."

"NELSON LEE" MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION.

----- *

Boys! Here's the splendid little competition which you can all enter. It need only cost you the stamp for a postcard or letter, and you will find that it is quite a novel idea we have hit upon.

On Page ii of the cover you will find a picture drawn to illustrate a certain part of this week's great story, "The Crimson Eagle," 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. 8,"

C/o "Nelson Lee Library,"

Gough House, Gough Square, E.C.4.

The Closing Date will be Tuesday, September 16th. The Editor's decision is final.

"MYSTERY PICTURE" COMPETITION

No. 8.—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 16th.

Inscription to Mystery Picture (see Page ii of cover).

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NELSON LEE LIBRARY MYSTERY PICTURE COMPETITION No. 3.

In this competition the First Prize of £1 1s. for the best inscription to the picture has been divided among the following fourteen competitors—:

Miss F. Axe, 5, Council Terrace, West Coker, Yeovil.

S. Benardoit, 16, Chertsey Buildings, Shoreditch, E.2.

Phyllis Castle, Hillside Cottage, Shabington Lane, Long Crendon, Thame, Oxon.

W. H. Dumble, 3, Bindon Cottage, Bryan's Lane, Wyke Regis, Dorset.

J. M. Evans, 79, Thurlestone Road, West Norwood, S.E.27.

Miss Fox, 36, Cristowe Road, Hurlingham, S.W.

S. Hornans, North Crawley, Newport Pagnell, Bucks.

Kathleen Ibbotson, 11, Thornsett Road, Sharrow, Sheffield.

F. G. Last, Potash Farm, Crowfield, Ipswich.

Jas. Mooney, 28, Meadowbank Place, Belfast.

Felix Ryan, 13, Rosna Railway Station House, Offaly, Ireland.

H. Sharp, 55, Aireworth Street, Keighley.

Renie Stevens, 41, Navarino Mansions, Dalton Lane, E.8.

B. Wring, Assembly Rooms, 2, Prince Street, Bristol,

for the following:—

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

The twelve consolation prizes have been awarded to the following:—

R. S. Anslow, "Redcott," 86, Chaplin Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.

Harold Back, 12, Westmount Terrace, Priory Hill, Dover.

S. A. Botelle, 16, Southdown Road, Wimbledon, S.W.19.

F. Grainger, Massey Hall, Thelwall, Cheshire.

Nelly Jaques, 13, Denmark Road, Rushden, Northants.

James Lacy, Lower New Inn, Nr. Pontypool, Mon.

H. C. M. Mason, 32, Brooke Road, Grays, Essex.

John Meritt, Bangor Road, Holywood, Co. Down, Ulster.

W. Palethorpe, 236, Albert Road, North Woolwich, E.16.

Miss E. Sykes, Wilberlee, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield.

Leonard Webster, 44, Bramerton Street, Chelsea.

A. Whitford, 11, Rydon Crescent, Rosebery Avenue, E.C.1.

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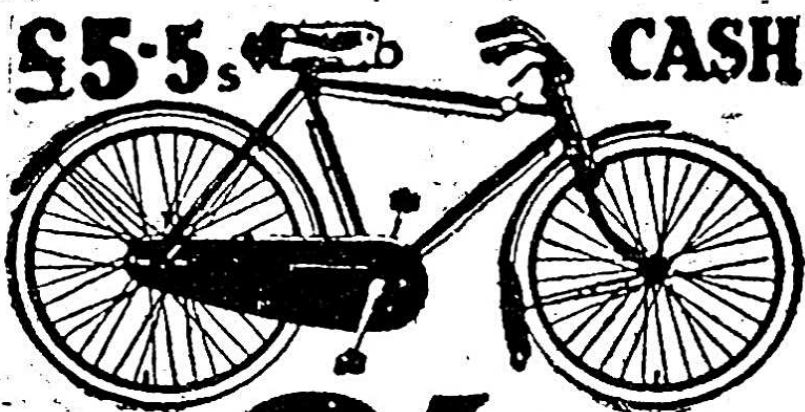
Yes, that's an accurate description of this week's "**BOYS' REALM**," Out on Wednesday, which contains the opening chapters of no less than

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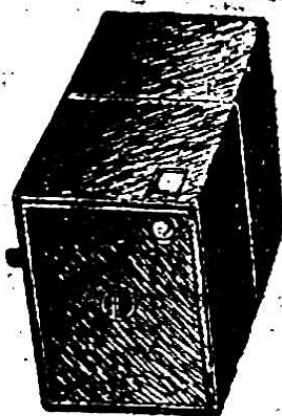
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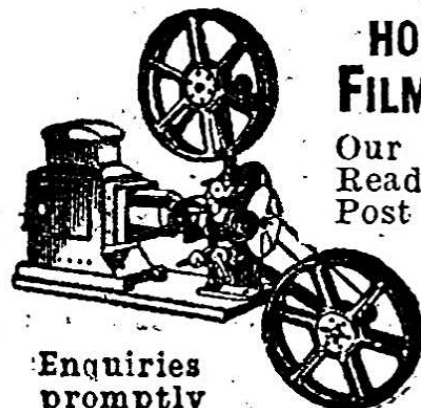
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