

GRAND EXTRA LONG HOLIDAY ADVENTURE STORY!

The NELSON LEE

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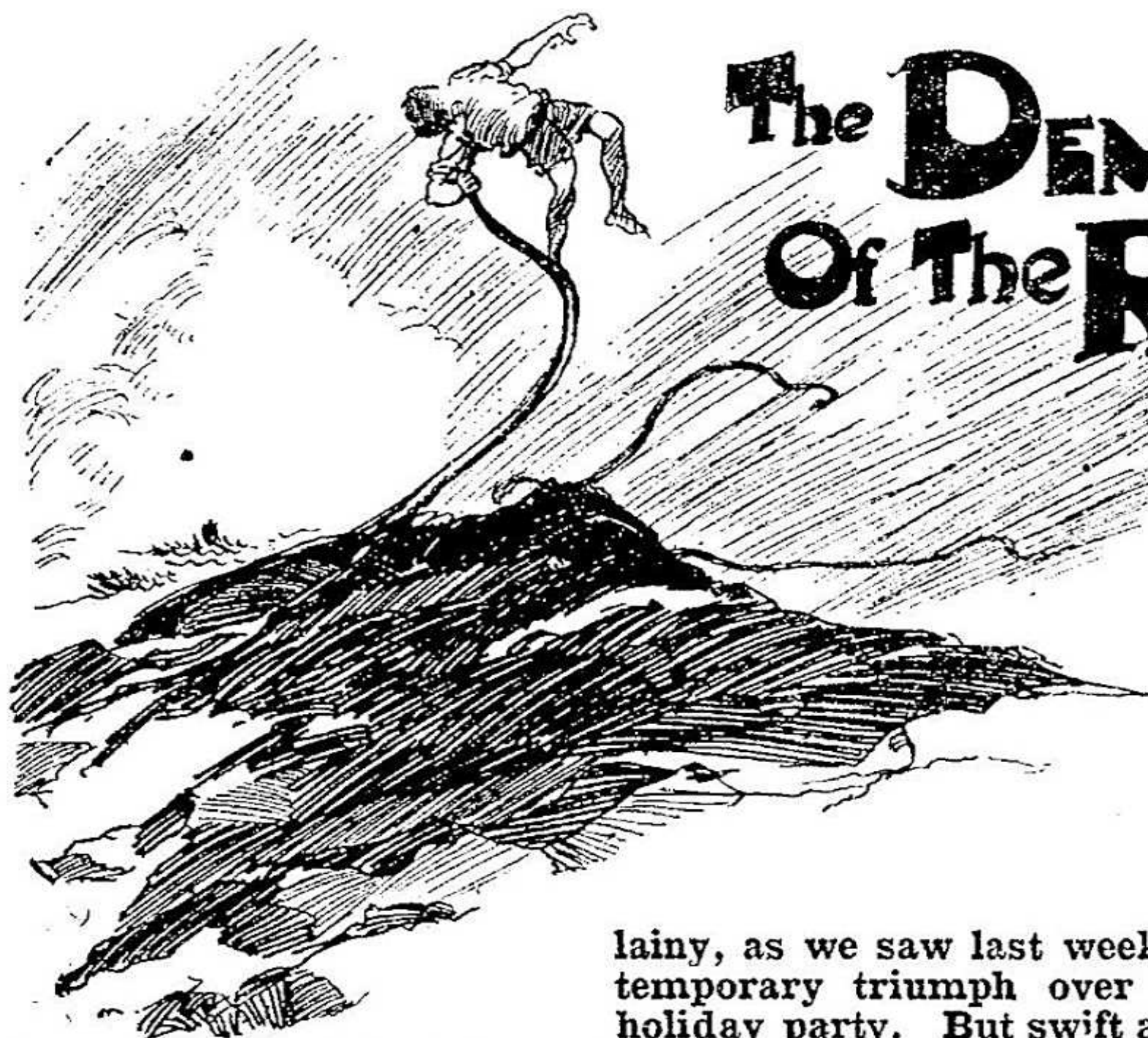
The sea serpent was now revealed stretched out across the reef like some prehistoric monster.

The DEMON of the REEF

A story of wonderful adventure with the Boys of St. Frank's in the South Seas.



The wall of water was close at hand. It towered up incredibly, and Chubby's impression was that the island was about to be completely overwhelmed. There seemed no possibility of escape.



The DEMON Of The REEF!

Paradise Island, with its rich pearl fisheries, is in the hands of Jonathan Prescott, whose vil-

lainy, as we saw last week, has won him a temporary triumph over the St. Frank's holiday party. But swift and certain retribution awaits this nefarious adventurer, and how justice reversed the situation in favour of Prescott's victims, adds yet another enthralling story to the remarkably fine holiday adventure series you have already read.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

A MISSION OF JUSTICE.

LORD DORRIMORE waited a kiss across the stern rail.

"Good-bye, you bally heap of sand!" he said cheerfully. "I don't like to be rude, but I've never seen the last of anything with more joy."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne, of the Fourth Form of St. Frank's. "I mean to say, you must have spent a perfectly frightful time on that dashed dump. Odds whales and sharks! Absolutely!"

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"It wasn't exactly a picnic!" he admitted. "Might have been worse, of course, but, bein' a free-born Briton, I don't exactly hanker after bein' marooned on a Pacific atoll by a 'Frisco crook. What do you say, Phipps?"

"The experience was most distressing, sir," said Phipps.

Archie's valet was standing close to his

young master, and he was looking as calm and unemotional as ever. There was something about Phipps that stood for all that was dignified and calm.

"Dash it all!" protested Archie. "Distressing—what? Your own posish was somewhat foul, Phipps; but what about me? Good gad! Do you realise that I was deprived of your services for two or three dashed days?"

"I am delighted to observe, Master Archie, that you have survived the ordeal satisfactorily," said Phipps gravely. "But there is no further need for worry. By all that I can understand, Mr. Prescott will soon get his deserts."

"He's getting' what's comin' to him all right," agreed Lord Dorrimore grimly. "I've got a wholesome respect for a great many Americans—but Mr. Jonathan Prescott is one of those unscrupulous blighters I'd cheerfully smother. You don't know how I'm lookin' forward to kickin' him in the slacks."

There were other comments of much the same spirit passing between the groups that leaned over the bulwarks of the schooner Clyde. With all sails set, she was skimming over the blue waters of the Pacific, with a steady breeze billowing her canvas. Astern lay a tiny, insignificant coral atoll—a mere speck of sand and coral, with one or two palm trees. It was so low in the water that one wondered how it escaped complete submersion during the rise and fall of the tides.

The schooner was literally crowded.

But there was no lack of good humour. There were smiles on every face, and all eyes were gleaming with the joyous anticipation of what was to come. Lord Dorrimore's holiday party was intact to the last member.

There had been so many adventures and excitements of late that it seemed miraculous that all should be safe and in good health. The party had even been split into two—Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee and many others, including the Moor View School girls, being marooned on the atoll, with the St. Frank's fellows fighting a horde of cannibals on Paradise Island.

That terrible struggle against the blacks had looked like ending in tragedy, until Captain McAndrew and the Clyde had appeared upon the scene. Exhausted, but triumphant, the schoolboy party had come on board. And now the Clyde was off on a mission of justice.

It was setting back for Paradise Island, in fact, in the hope of encountering Mr. Jonathan Prescott and his rascally associates. The San Francisco shipowner was the cause of all the trouble. He had tricked the story of the pearl fishery out of Mr. Warner Russell, and the latter had been stranded.

Thanks to the genial Lord Dorrimore, however, Mr. Russell and his son had arrived on the scene first. The entire St. Frank's party had been coming to the South Seas, in any case, and Dorrie had good-naturedly offered to do Mr. Russell a good turn.

But nobody had guessed that a regular warfare would result.

Prescott had obtained victory after victory—finally marooning his chief enemies on the tiny atoll, in order to get them out of the way while he operated the pearl fishery in the big lagoon. But even this scheme of Prescott's had received something of a jar.

For he had had trouble with the Wanderer's crew—or that portion of the crew which he had kept on board the borrowed yacht. There had been a long delay, during which time the schoolboy camp had been in peril of being wiped out by Solomon Islanders. Indeed, but for the timely arrival of Captain McAndrew, the tale would have had a tragic ending.

The appearance of the Clyde made all the difference.

Not only were the boys rescued, but they were able to give information concerning the

neighbouring island, and the Clyde had set sail forthwith; and now the big party was once again intact, and bent upon the task of dealing out retribution.

"There's no mistake about it, old man; we're in a pretty strong position now," declared Lord Dorrimore, as he chatted with Nelson Lee and Mr. Russell. "Prescott's shot his bolt."

"Don't be too sure," said Nelson Lee slowly. "I'd like to think it, Dorrie, but we mustn't cheer too soon. We've a great deal to be thankful for, and we can never be sufficiently grateful to Captain McAndrew. His arrival not only saved the boys from destruction, but joined us all up again."

"And now we're on the warpath!" said Mr. Russell grimly.

"Unfortunately, the enemy is elusive," said Lee, frowning. "We have no proof that the Wanderer will be at Paradise Island when we arrive. Why was she so long away? Why were the boys left to fight those two hundred savages in such a manner? There is something mysterious about the yacht's disappearance."

"Gad!" ejaculated his lordship. "You don't think they have pinched her?"

"I don't think that," replied Nelson Lee, shaking his head. "Prescott isn't the type of man to abandon a rich pearl lagoon—especially after he has scotched his enemies, as he scotched us. And, remember, he knew nothing whatever about the Clyde, and her arrival was a total surprise."

"What rot!" said Dorrie. "We knew she was comin'—"

"A total surprise to Prescott, I mean," went on Lee. "We knew she was coming, Dorrie, but we kept it secret. It was just blind chance which caused the Clyde to drop anchor in the lagoon while the Wanderer was away. I've got an idea that Pelton and those other engineers made a stand."

"You mean they defied Prescott?" asked Mr. Russell quickly.

"Exactly," nodded Lee. "It was a contingency he hadn't prepared for—but a very possible one. Pelton probably realised his power, and stopped the yacht's engines, refusing to obey orders. It is the only logical explanation of the delay, and it would be interesting to know who won."

"Well, we ought to be within sight of the island soon after midday with this breeze," said Lord Dorrimore. "An' I don't suppose we can make any plans until we have a few more facts. But I'm spoilin' for a fight, an' if the Wanderer hasn't got back I'll absolutely rave."

"You won't do anything of the sort—you'll take it calmly," smiled Nelson Lee. "Our course is quite clear, but our position won't be strong until we feel the decks of the Wanderer beneath us again. If she isn't there when we arrive, we'll wait. If she is there—Well, direct action would be fatal. We shall have to adopt something more subtle, Dorrie."

"You mean we'll trick the beggars?"
 "Something like that," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Mr. Prescott is a past-master of trickery, but we shall have to beat him at his own game."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE CROW'S NEST.



"AND then," said Handforth impressively, "the cannibals charged!"

"Oh!" breathed Irene Manners. "Go on!"

"How much did they charge?" asked Doris innocently.

"Eh? Oh, look here!" protested Edward Oswald Handforth. "Cheese it, Doris! Just when I'm in the middle of an exciting bit, you've got to be funny! Am I going to finish this yarn or not?"

"If I know anything about you, old man, you'll go on for ever—like Lord Tennyson's brook!" said Willy Handforth, grinning. "That's one of your chief faults, Ted—you never know when a story's ended! And the way you exaggerate is disgraceful!"

His major turned red—not on account of Willy's banter, but because several members of his audience gave appreciative chuckles. And when it is known that the audience largely consisted of young ladies, Edward Oswald's discomfort will be appreciated.

The little group was standing against the port rail, amidships. And Handforth was giving Irene & Co. a vivid account of the recent fighting on Paradise Island. His account was so vivid, in fact, that he had been carried away with it.

"It's too bad, Doris!" protested Irene. "Why can't you let him finish? Go on, Ted—the cannibals had just charged."

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth grimly. "The whole force—two hundred strong—"

"I say, wait a minute!" interrupted Doris Berkeley, with a mischievous twinkle in her brown eyes. "Steady, old son! I don't like to criticise, but isn't there a cog missing somewhere? How could the whole force of two hundred strong make a charge when fifty of them were dead?"

"Dead?" said Handforth, starting.

"Five minutes ago you said the ground was littered and strewn with dead and dying," explained Doris. "In fact, I thought the cannibals were all wiped out, by the way you spoke! And now the whole two hundred are charging again!"

"Well, not exactly two hundred," said Handforth gruffly. "You don't expect we counted 'em, I suppose? There was a big horde, anyhow. They swooped down, and we were in the thick of it."

"I think I'll leave you there, old man, and go up to the crow's-nest," said Willy.

"If I spot anything I'll give you a hail."

"Be careful, Willy!" warned Ena Hand-

forth. "It's an awful way up to that mast-head, and if you happened to fall—"

Willy gave his sister a cold look.

"Rats!" he interrupted tartly. "You forget who you're speaking to, sis—I'm not Ted! He couldn't walk up these ratlines and things without slithering off, poor chap! But I'm different."

"Well, be careful, anyhow," said Ena warningly.

Willy departed, and the girls looked at Handforth expectantly. One or two other juniors were already beginning to grin. Edward Oswald's interest in his thrilling narrative was waning.

"The cheeky young rotter!" he growled. "So I can't climb to the crow's-nest, eh? I'll soon show him. . . ."

"Aren't you going to finish your story?" asked Irene.

"Sorry—later on!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "I say, Pitt—you carry on the yarn, there's a good chap! Or you, Browne—you're good at jawing! I've got to attend to that cheeky minor of mine!"

Ena looked round appealingly.

"Hold him!" she urged. "If he goes aloft he'll only fall down. . . ."

But Handforth had already gone, and the other Fourth Formers knew that it was a hopeless proposition to argue with him. It was noticed, however, that Church and McClure followed behind their leader like a pair of shadows.

"Brother Pitt, allow me to carry on the good work," said William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth. "While admitting that your descriptive powers are remarkable, I must, nevertheless, lay claim to Position No. 1 when it comes to a matter of . . ."

"Telling fairy tales?" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Alas! Is my reputation so blistered?" sighed Browne sadly. "Gather round, sisters, and lend me your shell-like ears. Alone and single-handed, I will tell you the story of my life. In due course we shall come to the fight with the cannibals. . . ."

"Thanks all the same, but we don't want to stop here for a week!" interrupted Irene sweetly. "Come on, girls—let's find some of the others."

Browne's audience melted away, and he looked at Stevens, his bosom chum, with a sombre eye.

"You saw, Brother Horace?" he asked mournfully. "You observed? Is there anything in this world so fickle as the feminine fancy? I propose to tell them the story of my life, and they absolutely jib at the starting-post. Alack, it is to be feared that girls are born for frivolity!"

"It strikes me they revealed some sound common sense that time," grinned Stevens. "I'm your pal, and I've got to stand by you, Browne. But there's no earthly reason why those girls should suffer the torture of

your voice—particularly after Handforth's effort."

"All hope is dead!" said Browne wearily. "At one time, Brother Horace, I had hopes for you. I now realise that I was too optimistic. Lead me below, I beg of you, and chain me to a large drink. I have an inclination to dip my head into the lemonade trough."

They went below, and in the meantime Willy Handforth had reached the crow's-nest with just as much agility as his pet monkey. He arrived at the dizzy height, and found a man already there—keenly on the lookout.

"Spotted anything yet?" asked Willy briskly.

"Not yet, young man," grinned the lookout. "I ain't so sure of your being up here—the skipper might cut up rusty—"

"Calm yourself," interrupted Willy smoothly. "Whether the skipper cuts up rusty or not doesn't interest me a jot. I'm here—and all the rustiness in the world won't have any effect. Using that telescope? No? Thanks!"

He calmly took the telescope, levelled it, and made himself thoroughly at home.

CHAPTER III.

NELSON LEE'S STRATEGY.



WILLY satisfied himself that the horizon was quite clear. The blue Pacific shimmered into the distance, where the azure sky met the sun-bathed water.

And not a speck of any kind was revealed.

"No luck yet," he remarked, handing the telescope back.

"You'd best get down, young gent," said the lookout dubiously. "I've got strict orders to keep a sharp watch, and report as soon as ever we make the island. I might get into trouble—"

"Don't worry about that," interrupted Willy calmly. "If you get into trouble, I'll jolly soon get you out of it. That's a bargain. But you needn't think that I'll bother you. I'm quite content to look on."

"If you really think so, sir—"

"It's settled!" said Willy impatiently.

The look-out wasn't at all sure, but he felt himself at a disadvantage. There was something about this calm-eyed youngster which rendered further argument useless. Willy had come up into the crow's-nest, and Willy was determined to stay. He had a way with him.

His major, however, was not so successful. He was not only angry with Willy for his insulting remarks in the presence of the girls, but he was jealous, too. If Willy could go up into the crow's-nest, why shouldn't he go, too? In fact, why hadn't he thought of it himself?

"I'll bet I did think of it—only I didn't allow it to sink in!" he told himself. "Any-

how, I'm blessed if that young bounder is going to swank it over me! I'll show him!"

He looked up, and found himself staring at the sea of billowing canvas—the ropes and lines—the enormous height of the mast. Not being a born sailor, Edward Oswald hesitated for a moment. It was very exasperating. It looked no easy task to climb to the crow's-nest—yet Willy had done it with supreme ease.

"Oh, well," said Handforth. "Here goes!"

"Just a minute, old man."

Handforth turned, and stared. Church and McClure, his faithful chums, were standing by like a couple of prison warders, with stern expressions on their faces. In fact, they were so grim that they hardly looked themselves.

"Buzz off!" said Handforth gruffly. "I'm going aloft!"

"Just one of your little mistakes, Handy—you're staying here!" said Church. "We hate to detain you—"

"Detain me!" roared Handforth.

"Don't yell!" gasped McClure. "Be reasonable, Handy! You're a clumsy beggar, and you'll only kill yourself if you climb up there! A bit of a lurch, and you'll lose your hold, and that'll be the finish! Think of us! What shall we do without you?"

Handforth displayed utter callousness.

"I don't care what you do!" he bellowed. "I'm going up to the crow's-nest, and if you try to stop me I'll smash you! Stand aside, you fatheads! By George! Defiance from the chaps I thought were my own chums!"

Church and McClure closed in.

"Sorry, old man, but we've got to do it," said Church regretfully. "We think too much of your life to allow you to waste it. It's bad enough for Willy to go up there—without you. Be reasonable, and—"

Biff!

Handforth was in no mood for arguing. He landed out with his right, and landed out forcefully. The unfortunate Church received the full force of the punch in the middle of his chest, and he gave one grunt and sat down on the deck. It was his own fault, because he ought to have been prepared.

"Now, you rotters!" panted Handforth. "Just try and stop me—"

"Hallo—hallo! What's wrong here?" asked Mr. Beverley Stokes, strolling up. "Trouble? Who's winning?"

Handforth was startled by the House-master's arrival.

"It's nothing, sir—these fatheads tried to stop me from climbing up to the crow's-nest," he explained gruffly. "I was just pointing out to Church that he's a cheeky ass!"

"Because Church tried to stop you climbing up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you'd better punch me, too, Hand-

forth," chuckled Mr. Stokes. "You're certainly not going up that mast while I'm here. Good heavens! Do you want to kill yourself, you young idiot?"

Handforth nearly exploded.

"It isn't fair, sir!" he hooted. "My minor's up there!"

"Ah, daylight!" grinned Mr. Stokes. "We begin to see the whys and wherefores! You don't really want to go up—but you feel impelled to do so because your minor is there already! You needn't worry, Handforth. Your minor won't be there long—he'll come down at once!"

"The cheeky young sweep!" snorted Handforth. "Like his nerve to go and bother the look-out man——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure burst into a simultaneous roar of laughter, and Church even forgot the ache in his chest. Strangely enough, Handforth couldn't see the joke at all. But his chums thought it distinctly humorous for Handforth to accuse Willy of bothering the look-out man. Exactly what would have happened if Edward Oswald had ever reached the crow's-nest would scarcely bear thinking of.

As it happened, all argument was brought to an end just then. A hail came from above, and it was immediately answered by the skipper.

"Column of smoke dead ahead, sir!" bawled down the look-out. "It's the island, sir!"

"Where's the smoke from?" demanded Captain McAndrew.

"Can't see yet, sir."

"Then use your glass, and report as soon as ye can see!" ordered the skipper, turning to Nelson Lee. "Mebbe the yacht's back in yon lagoon," he added. "I'm thinkin' we'll need tae be careful the noo."

"Yes," agreed Nelson Lee. "Be ready, captain."

Up in the crow's-nest, Willy had seized the telescope again, and was gazing through it. His eyes were even keener than the look-out's.

"I've got it!" he said tensely. "That smoke's coming from the Wanderer's funnel. Quick—look! She's hull-down, and practically out of sight—but I can just spot the mastheads."

The man grabbed the telescope, and stared hard. He drew in his breath. Now that his attention was attracted to the fact, he could see clearly enough. Paradise Island was just coming into sight, and the Wanderer was certainly lying in the lagoon. That column of smoke and the almost invisible masts were proof enough.

"The yacht's there, sir!" roared the look-out. "She's lying at anchor——"

"Now then, skipper—it's up to you!" rapped out Lee crisply.

Captain McAndrew nodded, and thundered out a series of orders. At the same instant he seized the wheel. And, heeling grace-

fully, the Clyde swung round sharply to starboard, and within ten minutes she was practically gliding back on her own track.

Nelson Lee was entirely satisfied. A report came from the crow's-nest that the island had dropped out of sight again, and only that film of hazy smoke on the horizon told the story of the Wanderer's presence.

It was enough. Nelson Lee's strategy had succeeded.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLAN OF ACTION.



LORD DORRIMORE scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I'm frightfully dense, of course, but I'm jiggered if I can understand the dodge," he remarked plaintively. "Be a sport, old man, an' explain things. Why on earth are we lyin' here, idle, when we ought to be goin' into action? The Wanderer's there, with Prescott an' all his gang. Why delay the scrap?"

Ten minutes had elapsed, and everybody on the Clyde knew the truth. There was an air of subdued excitement on the schooner—and not so subdued, either, among the juniors. The Clyde was now practically hove-to.

"In many respects, Dorrie, you remind me of Handforth," said Lee drily.

"Thanks most awfully," grinned his lordship. "But I'm not quite sure whether that's meant as an insult or a compliment."

"I'm afraid you share Handforth's impulsive spirit and his eagerness for running his head into a noose," chuckled Nelson Lee. "My dear man, where's the earthly use of sailing straight for the island?"

"But aren't we goin' to have a scrap with those beggars?" asked Dorrie.

"I believe so—but our methods must be less direct than you seem to imagine," replied Nelson Lee. "This is not an occasion for open warfare, Dorrie. Such a course would be fatal. We've got to adopt something more subtle. That's why we're hove-to now."

"I give it up," said his lordship gruffly.

"We've seen the Wanderer, and know that she's in the lagoon," went on Lee. "But Prescott knows nothing whatever of the Clyde. Remember that. He hasn't the faintest suspicion that any ship is within eight hundred or a thousand miles of the island. Before we do let him know, we've got to hold a confab., and make our plans to the last detail."

"But why not barge straight in, an' get it over?" asked Dorrie. "I'm all for gettin' these things finished as quickly as possible——"

"So am I, but if we barge in as you suggest, it would end up in a very unsatisfactory way for us," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Surely you know your own vessel, Dorrie?"

She's practically a warship! Twelve-pounders fore and aft, machine-guns, rifles--and a crowd of determined men. What have we got against that array?"

"Good glory!" ejaculated Dorrie blankly.

"If we sailed straight in to the attack, Prescott would resist to the last," declared Mr. Russell. "I quite agree with your point, Mr. Lee, and we can't afford to take any chances. I guess Prescott would shoot us all down rather than give in. Either we take him by surprise, or not at all."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"It's the only way," he declared. "Until this hour we couldn't decide upon anything—for we didn't know the Wanderer was in the lagoon. It had been on the cards that we should go straight in, unmolested. But now that we are aware of the Wanderer's presence we can make ready."

Mr. Stokes rubbed his hands together.

"A battle of wits instead of a battle of guns, eh?" he said. "Splendid. We can trust you to scheme out something particularly brilliant, Mr. Lee. You ought to have been a general—or an admiral!"

Nelson Lee smiled at the compliment, and suggested an immediate council below. All the men went, including Captain McAndrew. And for half an hour they talked and planned. Nelson Lee was the chief speaker.

"It is decided, then, that we wait until an hour before sundown, and then go boldly ahead," he said, at last. "To all intents and purposes this will be an ordinary trading schooner, with nobody in view except you, Captain McAndrew, and your officers and crew."

"It's a bonny plan ye're makin'," said the skipper.

"You're all strangers to Prescott and his men," went on Nelson Lee. "They know nothing of you, and will suspect nothing. You have simply been blown out of your course by a recent storm, and have come to the island for water."

"Simple as A B C," remarked Dorrie. "We can take it for granted that Prescott will swallow the yarn, an' he won't raise any objections."

"We've got to go further than that," said Nelson Lee slowly. "In such circumstances as these we must try to put ourselves in Prescott's place, and imagine what he would do. Then we must order our own movements according to the line he will probably take."

"We shall be chancing it, shan't we?" asked Mr. Stokes.

"We've got to chance it," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "We can't know anything for certain—but it is fairly safe to assume that Prescott will look upon the Clyde as a harmless visitor. What else? After a little flutter of perturbation at the schooner's approach, he will probably make swift plans."

"To pretend that everything is open and above board?"

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee grimly. "He'll pose as the owner of the yacht—he'll carefully hide the few real members of the yacht's crew, and make his own rascals masquerade as the true crew. He'll do his utmost to throw dust in Captain McAndrew's eyes in order to get rid of him quickly."

"And Captain McAndrew will swallow everything whole, and suspect nothing," grinned Lord Dorrimore. "It's a great scheme, old man. And while Mac is returnin' the compliment an' doin' a little bluffin' on his own account, we shall all get busy?"

"Exactly—but not until after dark," replied Lee.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGED JONATHAN PRESCOTT.



"IT'S a beauty, Hawke—a real beauty."

Jonathan Prescott stood on the inner beach of Paradise Island, near the shallows, where the great oyster beds were situated. The sun was blazing down, and the scene was a busy one. Some distance out in the water a big raft was moored, and scores of blacks were constantly diving.

Captain Hawke, the leathery old South Sea skipper who had been associated with Prescott from the first, took something into his hand, and turned it over and over. The object was a magnificent white pearl—a huge marble of mysterious radiance, a thing of beauty.

"Gosh! She's the best we've taken yet," he declared. "Say, mister, a few more like this and the game will be worth all the effort we've spent—and compensate for the loss of my ship, too," he added, frowning across the lagoon, to where the charred hulk of the Samoa jutted out from the water.

"Yes," said Prescott indifferently. "But the beds have scarcely been touched yet. We've had nothing but delays ever since we arrived. There's no telling the value of this fishery, Hawke. In my opinion, it's worth a fortune."

Captain Hawke gave his companion a queer look.

"You're sure a changed man, Mister Prescott," he said slowly. "Guess I can't quite get the hang of it. Just when everything's good an' smooth, with a clear course to be steered, you kind of get cold feet. What's wrong, anyway? We've got the island, we've got the oyster beds, an' we've got the yacht. I don't figure we could have done much better."

Jonathan Prescott turned aside, and stared abstractedly across the great lagoon. His face was sombre and haggard. All its

former arrogance and confident expression had gone. He was like a man with a load of sorrow upon his conscience. He seemed to obtain no satisfaction out of the fact that he was the winner.

"Look at those Kanakas," he said abruptly.

Captain Hawke looked. The Solomon Islanders, in charge of Sweeney, Hawke's mate, were carrying on their diving work like a host of happy children. They were splashing about, playfully pushing one another off the raft, and taking their work as simple pleasure.

"What about 'em?" asked the skipper. "A lazy crowd of hoboos, sure enough, but we can't expect nothing better from niggers—"

"Look at them, I say!" interrupted Prescott harshly. "Like children—like harmless kids! Is it possible to believe, Hawke, that these very same men were a howling mob of bloodthirsty savages only a few days ago? Is it possible to believe that a good many of their companions are lying buried along the north-western shore? Gosh, it's horrible!"

Captain Hawke stared.

"Your nerve's gone, mister," he said bluntly.

"It has, Hawke—absolutely gone!" snapped Jonathan Prescott. "I've lost interest in these pearls—I've lost interest in everything! And I'll tell you again—we're quitting! I can't stand this—"

"Doggone it, Mr. Prescott, you've got me to think about in this!" interrupted Hawke viciously. "I guess I'm sorry for your troubles, but I can't help 'em. We're staying right here until these pearls are brought up! I guess your liver's a bit too white!" he added contemptuously.

At any other time Prescott would have answered the insult in no uncertain manner. But now he merely bit his lip, and continued staring across the lagoon.

"I came into this thing with the simple intention of getting the pearls first," he said quietly. "I thought it pretty cute to double-cross Russell, and get away with the loot. That's different now—"

"How different?"

"How?" shouted Prescott. "Look at those Kanakas—they'll tell you! Murderers—cannibals! And, in a way, I'm responsible! Over a score of helpless boys—killed on this island! Like playful children, eh? Yet while we were away, Hawke, they attacked the schoolboys' camp, murdered every mother's son, and there's not a sign left! How in the name of thunder do you think I can carry on? I'm no tough!"

"You sure ain't!" agreed the skipper sourly.

"Murder's a thing I never touch—"

"But it wasn't your fault," snapped Hawke. "Haven't I told you so a dozen times? We didn't know the blacks would run amok—"



And, like a procession, the invaders mounted the ladder and gained the deck.

"All the same, I took the yacht away, and left those boys unguarded," interrupted Prescott huskily. "It's on my conscience, Hawke—I can't help it—may be I'm thin skinned. It wouldn't have been so bad if they'd been men. But boys! A bunch of helpless kids! Gee! I go all hot!"

Prescott turned aside again, and breathed hard. To do the man justice, his crookedness did not extend to killing. He was wracked with emotion at the thought of the dreadful tragedy which had recently made this island paradise a hideous inferno. Unhappily for Mr. Prescott's peace of mind, he was labouring under a complete delusion.

Returning in the Wanderer he had found the island deserted—except for the scattered and thoroughly cowed blacks. Prescott knew nothing of the Clyde's arrival and departure—he hadn't the faintest suspicion that the boys had been rescued intact, and carried away. He fell into the natural error of believing that wholesale murder had occurred.

The blacks themselves offered no explanation—they were silent. Their orgy, their losses in battle, and their final rout after the arrival of the Clyde, had left them stunned. And Jonathan Prescott firmly believed that the St. Frank's fellows had

perished. He believed, indeed, that they had been eaten! The affair was something of a comedy.

Captain Hawke was made of different material to Prescott. He was a hardened old sinner who had seen death in many forms. And the fortune on this island gripped him. To talk about sacrificing it was sheer madness, in his opinion. Tragedy or no tragedy, these pearls were real enough, and they were here for the taking.

Both the men found their attention distracted by the approach of the Wanderer's motor-boat. It was speeding up rapidly, and the man in it started shouting before the little craft grounded.

"Say, cap—there's a sail!" he panted urgently.

Prescott and Hawke started violently.

"A sail?" demanded Mr. Prescott, leaping forward. "You're mad! There can't be! We're out of the track of all shipping—"

"Anyways, there's a sail!" persisted the newcomer, as the motor-boat dug its nose into the white sand. "A schooner, by the look of her rig. She's making straight for the island."

CHAPTER VI.

A GAME FOR TWO



PRESCOTT recovered some of his old self-command. The news changed him in a moment. After the first flush of alarm, his natural wit came to his aid.

"This is unexpected!" he said curtly. "Gee! These things always happen when you don't want 'em to! A trading schooner, sure as a gun! Just like one o' those fellows to butt in at a time like this."

Hawke was thoroughly alarmed.

"Say, if he gets wise to this pearl fishery, he'll tell the world!" he exclaimed tensely. "Mebbe he's got wireless—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted Prescott. "And even if he has got wireless, it'll be no use to him by the time he leaves this lagoon! I'll see to that! We've got to work fast, Hawke."

"But I don't see—"

"We're pleasure trippers—you take me?" interrupted Prescott swiftly. "I'm an American millionaire, cruising on my yacht. A health trip—get me? We've got to do some hard bluffing!"

"What about these Kanakas?"

"They've got to be hidden—there's plenty of room in the woods," said Prescott. "We'll leave a couple of men in charge, and they'll be safe. When that schooner drops anchor in this lagoon, there's got to be no hint of oysters. We're just staying around for our health. We'll need to get aboard, Hawke, and smarten ourselves up some. The men, too. Once we fool these

guys, we can get rid of 'em within twenty-four hours."

"You've sure got the right idea!" agreed Captain Hawke promptly.

Exactly as Nelson Lee had foreseen, the rascals were making their preparations. They couldn't have fallen into the trap better. They were preparing to bluff for all they were worth—little dreaming that Captain McAndrew had come to Paradise Island on the same errand.

An hour wrought a remarkable change.

Except for the anchored yacht, the entire lagoon was deserted. The white shores were innocent of all human presence. The blacks had gone—even their camp had been hastily removed. The pearling raft was hidden.

The Wanderer now flew the stars and stripes, and everything on board was ship-shape. Trim figures in white drill strolled leisurely up and down the decks, and Jonathan Prescott himself lounged over the rail. Near him stood Captain Hawke—shaven, tidy, neat, and thoroughly uncomfortable.

"Canadian!" he grunted, as he lowered his glasses.

Mr. Prescott nodded. The schooner was now close at hand, sailing straight for the break in the reef. She looked graceful and picturesque in the late afternoon sunlight. A few figures could be discerned on her decks, but this was only to be expected.

There was nothing suspicious about the Wanderer. Pelton and the other members of the yacht's original crew were locked below—not only locked, but guarded. If one of these men escaped and revealed the truth, the consequences might be serious. Prescott wouldn't give them a chance.

He made the most of Captain Hawke and his crew. Cleaned up, and smartly dressed, they didn't look so bad. It looked like being a comparatively easy task to bluff the captain and officers of this Canadian schooner.

The Clyde was even more deceptive than the Wanderer. She came gliding into the lagoon, an innocent trader—the replica of hundreds of other schooners that were to be found cruising among the islands. How was Jonathan Prescott to know that below decks she was packed with humanity? How could Prescott guess that his enemies were returning to trick him?

This was a game for two, and the situation was unique. Indeed, the whole affair was resolving itself into an elaborate comedy, and Jonathan Prescott's position was hourly growing more precarious.

"They've swallowed the bait, I'm thinkin'," said Captain McAndrew softly, with infinite relish. "Hoots, we'll have the rascal in his corner before the night's a couple of hours old!"

"Excuse me grinning, sir," chuckled one of the Clyde's officers. "This scheme of Mr. Lee's is just a beaut! We've got everybody on board, and Prescott thinks we're an ordinary trader! And he's coolly flying

the American flag, and pretending for all he's worth!"

"Ay, and we're pretending, too, ye'll remember."

"Yes, but Prescott doesn't know it," grinned the officer. "That's just the point, sir—that's just where we've got him on the coast! He hasn't the faintest idea that we're bluffing, but we know his game in every detail! We've only got to use our opportunities, and we've got the beggar whacked."

The old Scot frowned.

"Nae sae much of the grinning, Mr. Prosser," he said. "I've nae doot they're examining us pretty closely through their glasses. We'll need to be more surprised than amused, ye ken."

"Sorry, sir," said Mr. Prosser promptly. "I won't forget!"

In accordance with the pre-arranged plan the Clyde dropped her anchor at a given spot—a bare two or three hundred yards from the Wanderer, and in a certain exact position. In the meantime many of Hawke's men were leaning over the Wanderer's side, watching with mild interest.

Captain McAndrew lost no time in lowering a boat and putting off. It was better for him to visit the Wanderer than for Prescott to visit the Clyde. But unless a move of some kind was immediately made, Prescott would suspect something.

The boat put off, containing Captain McAndrew, Mr. Prosser, and two members of the crew. In a few minutes it reached the Wanderer's ladder, and the comedy began in real earnest.

CHAPTER VII.

BLUFFERS ALL.



JONATHAN PRESCOTT was feeling relieved. He had taken good stock of the schooner, and had watched the boat put off. He had seen nothing to arouse his suspicions.

Everything was going well. He was confident that he would be able to bluff these simple mariners into a quick departure.

As Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser arrived on the deck, Prescott strode boisterously up and extended his hand. In his spotless white suit, his pith helmet, and with a big cigar sticking out of his mouth, he looked a typical American holiday-maker.

"Say, this is sure good!" he exclaimed heartily. "Glad to meet you, folks—whoever you are. I guess you're surprised to see my little craft in these waters?"

Captain McAndrew took the hand warmly.

"Surprised?" he repeated. "Hoots, man, I'm more puzzled than surprised. I didn't hope to see any but heathens on this

isolated atoll. I hope there's naething wrong with the boat?"

"Nothing at all," laughed Prescott. "As a matter of fact, we're just cruising out of the track of things. I guess I took a fancy to butt in on these uncharted atolls. You're a bit out of your course, I take it?"

Captain McAndrew nodded and grunted.

"Ye've said right, sir!" he growled. "Up yonder we met a fairish storm, and ran before it for days. I'm well out of my course, and short of water. I thought maybe I'd find some here."

"Plenty," said Prescott genially. "I'll give your men full directions, and help all I can. Say, you'll honour me at dinner to-night, maybe? You'll not be sailing at once?"

"It's water I came for, and as soon as I've got it I'm off," replied Captain McAndrew shrewdly. "With the dawn I'll be away, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Prescott—Jonathan Prescott, of San Francisco," interrupted the other. "I don't need telling that you're Scotch."

"Ay, McAndrew's my name!" agreed the captain. "Ye've got a bonny shippie here, sir," he added, looking round. "I'll thank ye for the invitation tae dinner. If ye'll name the time——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Prescott. "You'll stay here, Captain McAndrew—there's no need for you to go away. This is one of your officers, I take it," he went on, indicating Mr. Prosser. "Splendid! You'll stay, too, young fellow. Only too pleased to see fresh faces. I guess you can send your boat back right now, captain."

McAndrew nodded, and gave the necessary instructions to Mr. Prosser, who immediately went off and dismissed the waiting boat. Everything was going smoothly and serenely. Jonathan Prescott believed that he had fooled his visitors, and his mistake was excusable, for they had come on board with the express intention of swallowing anything. It was Prescott who was being fooled, although this painful revelation was yet to come.

He had been wise in boldly using his own name. He was a big man in San Francisco, and was known to be a wealthy shipowner. Nothing could have been gained by giving a false name.

He took Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser below and proudly showed them through the saloon and lounges, acting as though he had had this yacht built to his own designs. Prescott, indeed, played his part very well. If his visitors had not been in possession of the full truth, they might easily have been hoodwinked.

Two or three times before dinner Captain McAndrew stressed the point that

he would take his departure with the dawn. He wasn't interested in the island, and wanted to be away on his course with as little delay as possible. The wind was fair, and he wanted to take advantage of it. He gave the impression that he was even reluctant to remain overnight.

"I guess it's all set, Hawke," declared Prescott, when he found an opportunity to slip on deck. "They're a pair of boneheads all right."

"Doggone baobs, I guess," nodded Hawke.

"That blamed old Scotchman wants to quit right now, but it'll look a heap better if we persuade him to stop till the dawn," went on Prescott. "The schooner will go away without a suspicion, and they'll forget about us within a week. That's the chief thing, Hawke—we don't want to let them guess anything."

"You said a faceful!" agreed Captain Hawke, nodding.

It was practically dark by now, and the Wanderer was gleaming with a thousand lights. Far below the dynamos were humming busily, and guards were closely watching over the engineer prisoners. The game of bluff was working well. It was working far better than Prescott supposed, for actually, he was the only one who was being bluffed.

In accordance with Prescott's orders, his men kept up a continuous pretence of bustle. The men were all too few for such a big yacht as the Wanderer, so they were made use of to the full. While Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser were lounging in Prescott's state-room, sailors hurried past the window, stewards dashed to and fro, and now and again there came the sound of a shouted order, and the clatter of gear and the rattle of crockery.

It all seemed so natural that if the visitors had been unaware of the truth they might have been deluded. As it was, they knew perfectly well that Prescott was indulging in a few theatricals for their benefit.

"The lonely place—that's what I like," Prescott was saying. "When I'm home, folks, I guess I'm a busy man. I work for ten months right off, and I work almighty hard—with a heap of fellers around. Womenfolk, too—I'm a man with a family. But when I come on my vacation I like being alone. I want to breathe, and get enough energy stowed up for another ten-month spell. You take me?"

"Man, ye've got sense," nodded Captain McAndrew drily.

And again Prescott was inwardly pleased. In his own opinion he had given a very plausible explanation of his position. Seeing a big yacht people would expect to find a whole party. But Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser were becoming experts in believing everything they were told.

"Gee, what dumb-bells!" concluded Mr. Prescott to himself. "By sun up, I'll have got rid of these guys for good!"

He little knew what lay in store for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THINGS BEGIN TO MOVE.



DINNER was a great success.

It was served with elaborate formality, on purpose to impress these rough sailormen. Two of Hawke's smartest men acted as stewards, and although they made many a blunder, the visitors appeared to notice nothing. To all intents and purposes the dinner was perfectly normal, and Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser showed every sign of being duly awed.

In the meantime, full darkness had shut down over the island. The palm groves and the rising hills were all hidden in a dense gloom. The lagoon was a limpid pool of mysterious water. And overhead the tropic stars were gleaming and twinkling, set in the velvety heavens.

One of Hawke's men had been told off to keep a strict watch on the schooner. There was no possibility of any trouble, but Jonathan Prescott was taking no chances. He had no suspicions about this chance vessel; he fully believed her to be an ordinary training schooner, calling for water supplies.

The man on watch had an easy task.

There was nothing of any consequence to report. One or two lights showed on the schooner, and a figure would occasionally walk up and down the decks. The smell of strong tobacco wafted across the water, intermingled with the heavy natural scents of the island. And at intervals a concertina would play, accompanying a gruffly sung song.

The man on watch could not be blamed for assuming that he was wasting his time. He certainly had no suspicion that figures were moving all unknown to him—figures which slid noiselessly overside, and took their places in a waiting boat. All this was done in the utmost silence, and with complete secrecy.

In fact, events were beginning to move.

Nelson Lee meant to make no mistake in this affair. Lord Dorrmore had placed him in full charge of the campaign, and Lee was setting to work with that cool thoroughness for which he was famous.

On the face of things, it seemed easy enough for him to swoop down with Dorrie and Mr. Russell and Captain Burton and the others, and regain possession of the Wanderer. But it wasn't so easy when the position was analysed. Lee knew well

enough that a watchman had been appointed.

And at the first sign of anything suspicious, this man would give the alarm. Long before the raiders could board the Wanderer the ladder would be guarded. And what was to prevent the yacht slipping her anchor, and making for the open sea?

Nelson Lee knew that the task was a ticklish one. The surprise must come as a bombshell, stunning Prescott and Hawke and their men, so that the whole crowd could be captured at a swoop. One slip and everything would be lost. It was necessary for Lee to act with extreme caution.

It was all part of the programme that Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser should take dinner on the Wanderer. Lee had decided that this was an essential factor, and he had counted upon Prescott issuing the invitation. For it was highly necessary that Prescott and Hawke should be kept below, with their guests. The amusing feature of the whole affair was that Prescott and Hawke were deliberately assisting the enterprise.

Although the watchman saw nothing of the secret movements on the schooner, he saw something else. He saw something, in fact, which brought him out of a gentle doze with a severe jolt.

"Good gosh!" he muttered, staring.

He took a step towards the rail, and stared harder. He was gazing at the coral reef, a few hundred yards from the break, where it was narrow. From the yacht's deck this section of the reef could be seen as a mere ridge, with the white sand of the inner beach, and the broken strand of the outer beach in full view. It was a stretch of rough, exposed coral, over which the waves completely broke during a storm.

The man was quite familiar with that part of the island. He had seen it in daylight, and he had seen it in darkness. At times, it glowed with a kind of elusive phosphorescence. This was one of those times. The whole reef seemed to be alive with some uncanny, weird movement. Not that the watchman took much notice of this; he had seen it so often. It was one of the natural phenomena of a South Sea coral atoll.

It was something else which extracted the exclamation from him.

Further towards the east, the coral rocks rose in serried piles. And slowly creeping round these came a dim, peculiar object, a veritable monster of the deep. It was hazy and indistinct, yet at the same time the outline could be clearly detected. For like the reef itself, the mysterious thing was glowing and living with phosphorescence.

The watchman rubbed his eyes, and stared harder. The thing was mounting up the ridge from the outer beach. Apparently it had floated towards the island, and had been caught on the reef, some strange deep-water monster which was temporarily out of its native element. For this coral island was actually the protruding summit of a great submarine mountain. On all sides and quite close to the island the sea was of untold depth.

"Darn my hide, if it ain't the sea-serpent!" gasped the man.

The sea-serpent! That fabulous deep-water creature which many mariners have spoken of throughout the ages, and the existence of which has never actually been proved! Yet here, in the soft darkness of the tropical night, the extraordinary brute was actually appearing!

The sea-serpent! Without doubt, the man was right. Slowly, deliberately, and with sluggish movements, the creature came into fuller view—and the watchman, with bulging eyes, could detect the strange, horse-like head. Behind trailed the enormous body—winding and twisting, and deliberately hoisting itself on to the reef. There were legs, too—legs all moving in unison! This was no mere figment of the imagination—it was a reality.

"Almighty gee!" gasped the watchman hoarsely.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEMON OF THE REEF.



FOR another fraction of a minute the man stood there, his muscles tense, and his heart beating thumpily. Then he turned, wild and excited, running blindly towards the main stairway.

"Say, cap—quick!" he shouted. "There's something on the reef—some durned fish or other—"

"Stow that, you blamed fool!" hissed Mr. Sweeney, the mate, as he came running up. "What's the big idea? Do you want to get those guys wise to what's doing? We've got orders—"

"Look out there!" shouted the watchman tensely.

He pointed, and Sweeney looked. The mate was a hardened case, and his first thought was that the watchman had been drinking. He took a couple of steps towards the rail, and stared across the lagoon. The reef was nearly half a mile distant, but in that crystal atmosphere it seemed much closer. It was even possible to penetrate the all-pervading gloom.

"For the love of Mike!" ejaculated Sweeney, as he stared. "What do you know about that?"

"It's the sea-serpent!" said the other.

"Gee, I'm darned if you ain't right!" said Sweeney excitedly. "Look at them doggone

legs! And the head! Say, that bird is comin' into the lagoon! Guess I'd best tell the skipper!"

He stood there, apparently half-dazed. By this time the creature had come practically into full view—a veritable demon of the reef. It was still moving, and the head was swaying up and down in an uncertain manner. From head to tail, it could have been nothing less than sixty feet long, and its sinuous body was twisting and undulating uncannily.

The monster was still indistinct—but none the less apparent. It was moving across the reef with all its legs in perfect rhythm with its snake-like body. Sweeney was even more affected than the watchman.

"Say, this is fierce!" he ejaculated. "I guess we're the first real men to see the sea-serpent! Some guys have told yarns about the blamed thing, but they've never brought any proof. We've gotta catch this glorified lobster!"

He rushed for the main staircase and pelted down. The next moment he burst into the saloon, and stood at the door, his face flushed, his eyes glittering with intense excitement. Captain McAndrew and Mr. Prosser leapt to their feet, half-believing that the moment for action had arrived.

"What in blazes——" began Captain Hawke harshly.

"Get out of this!" roared Prescott, his face flushed with fury. "You infernal dog! Who told you to burst in here——"

Sweeney started back.

"Sorry, sir!" he gasped. "I forgot——"

"Forgot nothing!" snarled Prescott. "That excuse is no good with me, you fool! Get to your own quarters, and report to the captain later! I'll have no rough stuff on this ship!"

"But—but I guess you'd like to know, sir," ejaculated Sweeney hoarsely. "Outside—on the reef—the sea-serpent! It's there—in full sight! The sea-serpent, boss!"

Jonathan Prescott fairly boiled.

"You've been drinkin'!" he thundered. "Get out of this!"

"Hold on, sir!" said Mr. Prosser. "The man looks sober enough—and he's pretty excited, too. There's no harm in having a look. It's certain he's seen something to work him up, anyway."

Prescott remembered himself, and grew calm.

"Maybe you're right," he growled. "But I'd like you to know that I don't allow any incivility among my officers. You'd best quit, Sweeney—and report to me later. We'll look into this."

Sweeney vanished, rather scared by Prescott's baleful glare. He had been so excited about the sea-serpent that he had almost forgotten the importance of the occasion. Almost before he reached the deck, Prescott and Captain Hawke were at his heels, with the guests and stewards following behind. Shouts from above were significant. A kind of excitement was pervading the whole deck.

"Good glory!" muttered Mr. Prescott, aghast.

His crew were running about, utterly careless of all his careful instructions. They were so thunderstruck by the sight of that thing on the reef that they had forgotten all orders. And a moment later Mr. Prescott forgot them, too!

"Great Scott!" shouted Mr. Prosser. "Look at that!"

His voice rose as he spoke, and he stood there, pointing. The next minute there was a rush for the rails, and on this side of the ship it was lined by the excited watchers. In all its imposing length, the sea-serpent was now revealed—stretched out across the reef like some prehistoric monster.

"Hoots, man, it's a sair pity it's not daylight!" said Captain McAndrew. "A photograph of this thing would be useful, I'm thinkin', if we ever tell the yarn! In all my born days I never saw the like!"

"The searchlights—quick!" roared Prescott. "Say, we'll catch this blamed thing! We can keep the skin, anyway! It'll be worth millions of dollars! Out with the searchlights! Lower the boats——"

"Better not!" interrupted Mr. Prosser quickly. "I wouldn't monkey with that creature if I were you! If a boat gets near it, or we attempt to approach, it'll probably let fly! It'll be death!"

Prescott took a deep breath.

"Well, I guess we'll take a photograph, anyway," he said with decision. "And maybe we can shoot it, too—we've got guns aboard."

"Ye'll do nae such thing!" snapped Captain McAndrew. "Shootin' would do more harm than good. Better let the crittur come into the lagoon and get trapped. We can wait till daylight then."

"By Jove, that's a good idea!" said Mr. Prosser. "It's crawling into the lagoon now—and once it gets fairly in, there'll be no escape. Look at it! Hang it all, I can't believe it, you know!"

They all continued to stare. As their eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, they would see the monster with greater distinctness. It had spread itself out upon the coral strand, and was now making convulsive movements—writhing, twisting, and lifting its queer, horse-like head as though in defiance.

"There's plenty of life in the thing, I'll tell the world!" exclaimed Mr. Prescott. "It must be over a hundred feet long. One of those deep-water creatures, I guess—pushed up by a submarine upheaval, in all probability. It'll be a darn pity if we don't grab it."

They continued watching, fascinated by the strange, remarkable nature of the sea-snake. In fact, they were so intently interested that not a soul on board the Wanderer gave a thought to the other rail. From Mr. Prescott downwards, the entire enemy

force lined the port rail, staring across the lagoon.

In the meantime, the starboard rail was unguarded. And that was a factor that made an enormous difference in the situation.

CHAPTER X.

THE SURPRISE ATTACK.



NELSON LEE mounted the ladder with the stealth and silence of a Red Indian on the war-path. His movements were absolutely noiseless, and there was something almost ghost-like about his ascent.

Then behind came Lord Dorrimore, and then Umlosi, with Mr. Warner Russell and Mr. Beverley Stokes, and Captain Burton further down. Finally, a large number of the Wanderer's true officers and crew were bringing up the rear. In brief, the yacht was being invaded.

The starboard rail was unguarded and deserted. There were none to watch the silent advance of this determined host—quite a goodly number of grim, fearless men. Even Phipps, Archie Glenthorpe's imperturbable valet, was included among the warlike throng. Phipps was a dark horse, and he had been highly indignant when Dorrie had suggested that he should be left behind. Phipps was as anxious to take his share in the scrap as any member of the ordinary crew. And the Wanderer's full personnel was here—with the exception of the handful of engineers in irons below.

For a full hour the preparations had been going on.

But so silently, so mysteriously, that Jonathan Prescott and his men knew nothing. They were still labouring under the delusion that the Clyde was an innocent trading schooner, and harmless. Yet, during that recent dinner, events of paramount importance had been taking place in the darkness.

The moment for action was at hand.

And the moment could not be more opportune. With Prescott and all the men staring over the port rail—staring at that strange sea monster on the reef—the starboard rail was unguarded. And, like a procession, the invaders mounted the ladder, gained the deck, and prepared themselves.

The last man came up, and the raiding force was at full strength. Nelson Lee was in the lead, and he gave a signal. If possible, he wanted to effect this coup without bloodshed—and everything would depend upon the mode of attack. One mistake, and a desperate fight would result.

As Lee gave the signal, he leapt forward. Lord Dorrimore and the others spread out fanwise, and there was one swift rush from starboard to port. Prescott's men knew nothing until the raiders were upon them.

"Hands up, Mr. Prescott!" shouted Nelson Lee curtly.

"Hands up, everybody!" roared Dorrie.

Prescott turned round, his jaw dropping, his eyes bulging. He was dazed—numbed. The surprise was absolutely complete. The enemy still had the picture of that sea-serpent in their minds, and this dramatic development took them unprepared.

"What in blazes—" began Prescott, reaching for his hip-pocket.

"I shouldn't, Mr. Prescott!" snapped Lee. "Up with them, please!"

Lee accompanied these words by grim action. He thrust the point of his revolver into Prescott's chest, and the feel of that barrel had an instantaneous effect. Prescott's hands flew upwards.

"Double-crossed!" he snarled hoarsely.

A similar scene was being enacted all the way along the rail. Man for man, the raiders outnumbered the enemy. There was no chance to fight—no opportunity to escape. The rascals were utterly helpless.

"Disarm them!" commanded Lee briskly.

Every man knew his job. This whole scene had been rehearsed again and again on the Clyde. Nelson Lee had anticipated exactly what would happen, and now that the supreme moment had arrived, the plan worked like a charm.

Captain Hawke and his ruffians had no chance. They were armed, but to use their weapons was an impossibility. Before they could even draw, the attackers were upon them. And within two or three tense minutes the rout was complete. The whole crowd was rounded up, their weapons seized, and their wrists were bound. So swiftly had it all happened, in fact, that Jonathan Prescott could scarcely believe that he was fully awake.

But how had Nelson Lee known of that diversion—that general rush to the port rail? How had it been possible for him to time his raid so that both events should coincide? It really hinted that the "sea-serpent" wasn't a monster of the vast deep, after all! Was it a part and parcel of the scheme?

To be frank, it was!

And it had worked so beautifully that the raiders had met with complete triumph. As a piece of strategy, as compared with direct warfare, it would have been hard to beat. And what of the St. Frank's fellows? So far, all the Fourth-Formers, Willy & Co., Browne and the others, had not openly appeared. But it was hard to imagine them idle at such a critical moment.

As a matter of fact, the St. Frank's boys had been the very first to appear—and were in full sight now. It won't be revealing much of a secret to bluntly state that the sea-serpent was nothing more nor less than a cleverly-contrived fake.

It certainly possessed between forty and fifty legs—but these happened to be the legs of Handforth & Co., Nipper, Bob Christine, William Napoleon Browne, Edgar Fenton, and all the others. The sea-serpent was nothing more nor less than a long string

of boys, all attired in bathing-costumes, bent double, and holding one another.

A simple expedient—but how effective!

Nipper himself had fashioned the creature's head—a light construction of wood and canvas. It was so made that the leader of the procession could wear it with ease and comfort. The rest of the "monster" had been hinted at rather than actually contrived. A kind of luminous paint had been used—something that Nelson Lee had concocted from some of the Clyde's stores. Each fellow had been daubed here and there.

Individually, they were nothing, and a simpleton would not have been deceived. But on that reef, half a mile away, all joined up into one continuous line, with the faked head in front, the effect was startlingly realistic. In daylight, of course, the trick would have been obvious. It would have been obvious even in moonlight. But with only the stars gleaming overhead, and the reef enshrouded in gloom, this monster looked fearsome and thoroughly real.

Unseen, and unheard, the boys had slipped overside into a waiting whale-boat, and this had been silently rowed across to the inner beach. Wearing cloaks, they had been unseen in the darkness. But once behind the cover of the coral rocks, the cloaks had been discarded—and the demon of the reef had slowly and majestically emerged into view.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TABLES TURNED.



THEY'RE taking their giddy time!" said Handforth impatiently.

"Give 'em a chance!" growled McClure. "We can't expect anything to

happen yet. We're doing our bit, anyway!"

"Our bit!" snorted Handforth, in disgust.

"A fat lot of excitement in this—I don't think! Didn't I ask Mr. Lee to take me with him on the raid? Didn't I demand to go?"

"And didn't he squash you?" asked Church, grinning.

"He'll regret it!" said Handforth darkly. "Just you wait, my cons—he'll regret it! Well, I warned him—I told him what would happen if I didn't take part in the attack! The whole thing's going to be messed up. In fact, I believe it's messed up already! I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Lee and all the others are prisoners!"

"That's better than being killed, Handy," chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Perhaps they're killed!" said Handforth gloomily. "They need a born fighter with 'em—and here I am, stuck here, just two giddy legs of a sea-serpent! It's nothing more nor less than disgraceful!"

The rest of the sea-serpent chuckled. Handforth & Co. were in about the middle—this factor accounting for the curious contortions occasionally to be observed in that section of the sea monster. Nipper had thought it a wise move to put Handforth in a safe place. Pitt had pointed out that there was a danger of the sea-serpent coming in half, but Nipper risked it.

Fenton was the "head," and he had acted his part well, manipulating the canvas contrivance with skill—the head moving up and down and from side to side, with lifelike reality. At the moment, the fellows were strung across the reef, and they were still picking their way over the coral in a sinuous line—in order to give the appearance of squirming movement.

"Hallo! That looks like something!" said Nipper keenly.

He was looking at the Wanderer, and the rest of the sea-serpent was every bit as interested. Fresh lights had sprung into being—and they were now added to. The graceful yacht, in fact, was springing into fresh life. Every port-hole gleamed, and the decks were ablaze. And then, to add to the growing excitement of the boys, the siren emitted a series of triumphant hoots.

"What—what's that?" asked Tommy Watson breathlessly.

"The hooter, you ass!" said Jack Grey. "We've won!"

"I know it's the hooter, you fathead!" growled Watson. "But what are they making that din for? Does it mean our side's won, or has Prescott beaten 'em? Why the dickens can't they let us know?"

"Steady, old man!" said Nipper. "The gov'nor arranged to give a signal—"

"Begad, yes!" interrupted Tregellis-West. "A rocket! If a rocket goes up we shall know that everythin' is all serene. It'll be the signal for us to go back—an' it'll mean that the Wanderer is ours again."

Zzzzzzz!

Even as Sir Montie was speaking, a trail of fire hissed upwards into the heavens. It curved round, there was a soft, muffled report, and the rocket burst into a thousand glittering stars.

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth excitedly. "The signal! We've won! St. Frank's for ever! I knew we'd do the giddy trick! What did I tell you?" he demanded, grabbing Church and McClure. "Didn't I say—"

"Blow what you said!" gasped Church. "The battle's over, and the day is ours! And there wasn't a single shot fired, either! My hat, how ripping! Mr. Lee wanted to do the trick without any bloodshed.

By this time the sea-serpent had disin-

ANSWERS

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egrated into twenty or more different sections. There was no longer any necessity for the deception. Consequently the fellows jerked themselves upright—only too glad to get the relief. And they were all strung out on the coral, gazing at the Wanderer.

If there had been any question of the victory before, there was none now.

Cheers were rising from the yacht—the lusty, happy cheers of the Wanderer's British crew. And an echo came from the Clyde—where the girls, released at last, were free to show themselves. They were celebrating as joyfully as any of the others.

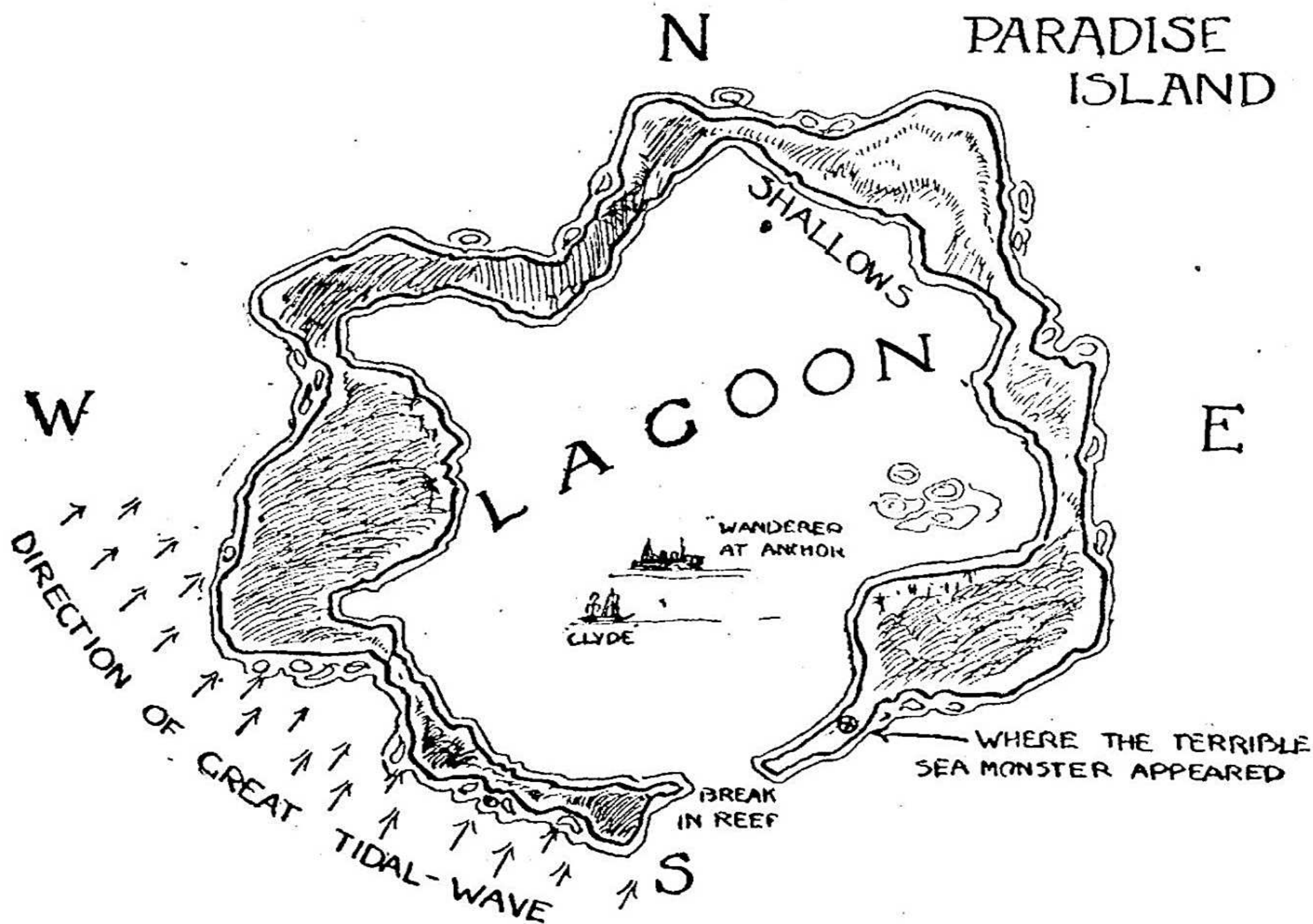
For this was indeed a tremendous occasion. The whole of Dorrie's party was not only

any number of Jonathan Prescotts. Nothing could be more peaceful than that lagoon—nothing more innocent than that quiet coral reef.

And yet, at the same time, nothing could be more utterly deadly!

The boys had played their part well, and they had no thought of danger. Indeed, in their opinion, all danger was over. By their efforts, they had drawn the attention of the enemy while the raiders had boarded the Wanderer. There was no question of their success—for the yacht was won.

So there was nothing to worry about now. They had acted the part of the sea-serpent with all honours, and their next move was



intact and unharmed, but the Wanderer was regained, and the enemy was beaten. It was the end of all the troubles!

"Come on, let's get that giddy boat and go aboard!" shouted Pitt crisply.

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "We'll swim for it."

"You fathead!" gasped Church. "What about the sharks?"

"Eh? Sharks?" said Handforth, with a start. "Oh, well—All right, get the boat down, you chaps. There's no sense in us sticking here any longer. We want to join the spree."

"Hear, hear!"

And it was at this moment of triumph that something fresh happened—something which even Nelson Lee had not foreseen. And it only went to prove that the sea and its denizens were more to be dreaded than

to get to the Wanderer, and join in the general celebrations.

The whole outlook was changed. The island seemed better and sweeter now—the lagoon was more inviting. Jonathan Prescott and his crowd of rascals were helpless—their teeth had been drawn. From now onwards this South Sea adventure would proceed along its normal course. There had been a tremendous amount of excitement and trouble, but it was now a mere memory. Danger was a thing of the past.

Most of the fellows were busy with the whale-boat. It had been pulled up on to the sand, and half-hidden behind the coral. Handforth & Co. and Nipper and Pitt were in the forefront of the work. Archie Glen-thorne was standing alone, watching the proceedings with a benevolent smile on his face.

Behind him, where the surf came boiling

in over the coral, something seemed to heave and roll in the darkness. It was as though a large section of the reef had sprung into sluggish life. A kind of wire rope came twisting and twining over the coral in Archie's direction.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HORROR FROM THE DEEP.



"GOOD gad!"

Archie Glenthorne started as though he had been stung.

The genial smile left his face, and a pained, startled expression entered his eyes. In

a moment he was transformed.

"Anything wrong, Archie?" asked Bob Christine, turning.

"Absolutely!" said Archie dazedly. "The good old gear-box has just got into action again. I mean to say, Phipps, you know! I've just remembered Phipps!"

"You've just remembered Phipps?" grinned Christine. "I thought you'd been stung by a jellyfish! Why should the thought of Phipps give you such pain?"

"Laddie, I shall be in a state of frightful torment until the good old boat reaches the Wanderer," declared Archie anxiously. "I mean, there's been scrapping and all that sort of rot. Phipps absolutely insisted upon dashing into the fray. The priceless merchant might have got winged!"

"Judging by the absence of any rumpus, I think the victory was a pretty tame one," replied Bob. "I shouldn't worry about Phipps if I were you, Archie. Far better come down the sand and lend a hand with the boat."

"Oh, rather," agreed the swell of the Fourth.

But he made no movement. He remained there, isolated from all the other fellows. The possibility of Phipps being hors-de-combat made Archie quiver from head to foot. He was strongly attached to his valet, and without Phipps' services he would be like a lost sheep.

"Odds rogues and vagabonds!" he murmured. "I trust nothing poisonous has happened to the good old bird! I mean to say, if Phipps fails to rally round, the young master will positively wilt away—What-ho! Desist, dash you! What's the bally idea?"

He looked down, frowning. Then he started. He could have sworn that some playful joker had gripped him round the ankle. It occurred to him that one of the fellows had crept up behind, his exuberance leading him to play a little joke. But there wasn't a soul near by. Bob Christine had joined the others, and Archie stood alone.

"That's frightfully rummy!" murmured Archie, shifting his position. "I mean to say, the old ankle nerves absolutely felt what might be termed a vice-like grip—

Odds pincers and pliers! There it is again, dash it!"

This time Archie felt fairly scared. He wasn't afraid of anything tangible, but there was something uncanny about this unseen grip. He was standing alone on the coral, isolated from the rest by many yards. They were busy with the whale-boat, getting it afloat. The cheers and uproarious noise from the Wanderer continued.

But Archie, standing there, felt a painful grip upon his right ankle. He stared down, and saw nothing. The grip slowly relaxed, and it seemed to Archie that something crept up his leg. And now he felt the grip tightening round his knee. At the same time, something touched him lightly round the shoulders. And he was standing absolutely alone.

"Gadzooks!" he gasped. "Help, laddies! Spooks, and what not! Fourth to the rescue, and all that sort of thing!"

It wasn't usual for any kind of panic to seize Archie. He was generally cool and collected, even under the most trying circumstances. But panic seized him now. He made a dash for the beach. At least, he meant to make a dash. But that unseen something gripped him harder than ever, and he tripped, and fell sprawling on the jagged coral.

"Good gad!" he muttered huskily.

His face was now screwed up in agony, for the grip round his knee was painful. He came to the conclusion that it wasn't a grip at all—it was just a muscular pain! Perhaps he had been seized by some tropical fever or disease! He had heard that people sometimes have these attacks without a minute's warning.

As he scrambled to his feet, he felt round his knee, and his fingers came in contact with a kind of wet rope—cold, slimy, and as taut as a steel wire. It gave Archie a further shock.

"Odds sea-serpents!" he gasped. "A dashed octopus!"

But in a flash he knew that he was wrong. There was no octopus near him. He knew the appearance of such creatures, and it was impossible that one could be near him. For he was high and dry on the ridge. The surf was crashing upon the coral over thirty feet away. And the inner side of the reef was even further distant, with the boys collected round the boat.

It was a weird, startling adventure. And it was all the more mysterious because there was no visible sign of the thing that gripped him. That steel rope was real enough—

Archie started violently.

In the act of rising he could see the foaming surf, some distance away. The tide was coming in, and the Pacific rollers were booming noisily. At such close quarters the very air was filled with the sound, and the spray converted the air into a kind of mist. Through it he saw something, indis-

inct and vague—something that almost caused his heart to stop beating.

There, amid the surf, was a great heap of something—a formless mass which heaved and rolled uncannily. And as Archie looked, the thing extended itself. A head made its appearance out of the general mound of living horror—a head which was like nothing on earth.

Through the mist, Archie could see lights—glaring, baleful eyes which resembled a pair of ghostly head-lamps. And he caught a glimpse of writhing serpents. Feelers—black, sinuous, wire-like feelers! It may have been his imagination, or it may have been real, but those eyes seemed as though they were a foot broad. He saw a beak—two beaks—horrifying, ghastly, and nauseating. A tongue came out of that head—a fearsome tongue, armed with teeth!

And the grip on him was tightening.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REAL DEMON OF THE REEF.



ONE thing Archie knew for certain, and while it brought him a certain measure of relief, it filled him with a fresh fear.

He was not the victim of a sudden seizure; and the Thing on the reef was not a spectral presence—but something tangible and solid. Indeed, Archie was convinced that it must be of appalling, incredible size, tons and tons in weight. He hadn't the faintest idea what it was, except the bare knowledge that the awful creature was a monster of the deep.

"Help!" he shouted desperately. "Rescue, St. Frank's!"

It was no half-hearted cry this time. It was a loud, vigorous shout for assistance. And Archie's tone was vibrant with urgency. His cry pierced the air and reached the ears of his companions.

"What's that?" asked Nipper sharply.

"Only one of those fatheads—" began Handforth.

"Quiet!" shouted Nipper. "Listen!"

"Help—help!" came Archie's voice, rising to a scream.

"Good heavens!" panted Church. "It's Archie! Something must have bitten him—"

"Rats! There's nothing near him!" exclaimed McClure.

They all stood there, staring. Their eyes accustomed to the gloom, they could just see Archie's figure on the ridge, fifty or sixty feet away. He was attempting to rise, and was making convulsive movements. There was something dramatic about his very appearance—and those urgent cries of his had caused every heart to throb.

"Let us dash to the rescue, brothers!"

said Browne swiftly. "This is no time for chat—but an occasion for action. Allow me to lead the way, and all will be well!"

He dashed off with his long legs, and the others followed. It occurred to Nipper that Archie might have slipped, and hurt himself badly on the jagged coral. But, in his heart, Nipper knew that this could not be so. Archie Glenthorne was full of pluck, and he would never scream like that for such a reason. There was something else—something they were still unaware of. Nipper had been to the South Seas before, and he knew that these peaceful coral atolls were sometimes the haunt of things unimaginable.

And a second later, his fear was justified.

Before any of the juniors could reach Archie's side, a staggering thing happened. The elegant junior was lifted clean off the reef. He rose high—his arms and legs writhing, his cries becoming more urgent. And all those fellows stopped, utterly scared.

For there seemed to be no explanation. Archie was simply hovering in the air, without any visible support. He rose higher, and then came the climax. He was suddenly whisked downwards at fearful speed, and the juniors held their breath. They expected to see Archie dashed to pulp upon the coral.

But at the last second he was swung round and raised again—twenty or thirty feet into the air. Then the invisible something which gripped him released its hold. Like a stone from a catapult he was flung shooting through the air. Right over the heads of the horrified juniors he went, and mercifully plunged into the placid waters of the lagoon. A yard or two short, and he would have thudded upon the sands, to receive horrible injuries.

"Good heavens!" shouted Christine huskily.

"Archie—Archie!" panted a dozen voices.

The nearest fellows ran back, and swept over the beach. To their infinite relief, Archie had appeared again, and was swimming in. He dragged himself up the beach, and fell.

"Phipps!" he moaned. "Laddies, kindly prepare a few wreaths! See that the good old hearse is ready! This is where I whisper the last dashed good-byes!"

"He's all right—hardly hurt!" gasped Church. "My only hat! What was it? How was he flung up like that? I've never seen anything—"

A screaming cry came as an interruption. Archie was forgotten, and Church and the others rushed up the beach again. What had happened? What fresh mystery was this?

Most of the juniors had incautiously advanced, intent upon finding out the cause of Archie's strange adventure. And almost

at the same time, half the fellows caught sight of that heaving mass amid the surf. They saw the lamp-like eyes—the beaks—the toothed tongue.

Panic seized them, and they bolted. This was no sea monster—it was some ghastly visitant from the pit itself! Clive Russell was among that curious throng, and as he ran, he tripped. Then one of those ropes wrapped itself round his leg, and he was held. It was too much to believe that a second victim would escape as Archie had escaped.

"Oh, quick!" gasped Clive. "Something's got me——"

"Eh? Come on, you idiot! Don't sprawl there——"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood paused. By curious chance, he was the only fellow who heard Russell's urgent cry. The cad of the Fourth half-turned, staring with wild eyes. There was no doubt that Clive was in the grip of this demoniac visitant. He strove to rise, but failed.

"Help!" he panted. "It's got me, I tell you."

"All right—keep your pecker up!" said Fullwood thickly.

Just for an instant he was prepared to flee—his terror nearly getting the better of him. But even as he was moving off, a picture flashed into his mind. It was a picture which was indelibly impressed upon his memory. The placid lagoon—the brilliant sunlight—a shark cutting its way through the blue water—and Clive Russell rescuing another from certain death.

That other had been Fullwood, and for once in his life Ralph Leslie was proving that he was not incapable of gratitude. During his stay on Paradise Island he had subtly changed, and although his companions had noticed nothing in particular, he was now giving concrete evidence of his metamorphosis—his transformation.

He turned back when he might have fled into safety. Bending over Clive Russell, he gripped him, and pulled. But in this tug-of-war, Fullwood was like an ant compared to an elephant. He might as well have attempted to free Clive from the grip of a steel hawser.

But his efforts had one result.

Two twining ropes came out of the blackness, and seized him round the middle. With a shriek of horror, Fullwood was dragged away. And the ghastly monster was evidently attracted towards its new victim, for Clive Russell felt himself being released.

With a sudden, swift effort, he jerked himself free. Something lashed near by, and caught him a blow which nearly broke his leg. He staggered away, dazed with pain, and numbed with horror.

But Fullwood was in deadly peril.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEARCHLIGHT.



IN the meantime, other events were taking place.

General excitement prevailed, but Nipper kept his head. A few others, too, managed to remain fairly cool, but the majority gave way to their swift panic. The terror of this unknown thing had gripped them.

And the irony of it! These boys had come on the reef for the deliberate purpose of simulating a fearsome monster of the deep—and now they were in peril from the genuine article! It was as though Nature had risen up against this mockery, and had decided to teach these fakers a lesson.

She was giving them the real thing! What the monster was, none of the juniors knew. But that it was deadly dangerous, none doubted. Archie Glenthorne was alive only by a miracle. And it was obvious that any attempt to battle with the creature would be fatal.

"Come on!" roared Handforth. "We can't stay here like this! Where's Russell? Where's Fullwood? By George! I believe they've both been caught! Look over there——"

"Hold on, Handy!" interrupted Nipper. "It's no good getting panicky——"

"Who's in a panic?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

"Cool down——"

"I'm cool enough!" roared Handforth. "But if you're going to leave those chaps to their fate——"

"Don't be an ass!" snapped Nipper. "What can we do? We haven't got a weapon between us, and this monster must be tons in weight. Whatever we do, we are helpless. Get into that boat—a dozen of you! Race to the Wanderer, and give the alarm. Come back in the launch—bring guns and revolvers. Better still—rockets! Fireworks will have more effect on this deep-sea monster than any bullets. We can't kill it, but we might scare it away."

"Jove, that's an idea!" said Reggie Pitt promptly.

The boat was soon off, and the boys pulled at the oars with a will. In the meantime, Clive had stumbled up—still dazed and numbed. Nipper and Tommy Watson grasped him as he staggered over the sands.

"Steady, old man," said Nipper. "You're safe enough——"

"Fullwood!" panted Clive. "That thing's got him——"

He paused, and suddenly gulped.

"He went to my help, and I deserted him!" he blurted out, his wits beginning to function again. Quick! I've got to go back! I—I hardly realised what had happened. Fullwood's in danger——"

His words trailed away, and he fell. That

blow on the leg had hurt him more than he realised, and it was more than he could do to stand. He collapsed, his expression full of agony. At the same instant, there came a desperate cry from the top of the ridge.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood was in the grip of those rope-like tentacles. So far, he was only bruised. The monster was playing with him—pulling him here and there, and obtaining a firmer grip. One tentacle was round his waist, and another gripped his feet. He was being twisted and turned without any apparent effort on the part of the creature.

"What—what can we do?" muttered Watson huskily.

He and Nipper ran up to the ridge, and stood there looking. They could see Fullwood indistinctly. Both of them realised that Clive Russell had staggered away blindly. He had not deliberately deserted his partner in distress. At the moment, he hadn't realised that Fullwood was still in peril.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nipper.

"Help!" choked Fullwood. "Quick, you fellows—help!"

Nipper was in an agony of mind. Watson pulled at him desperately.

"Come on—we can't stand here like this!" he muttered. "We've got to do something—"

"It's no good," interrupted Nipper harshly. "Stay where you are, Tommy—don't move! It's death to go near that thing! We can no more help Fullwood than we can fly to the moon. To go near him might only make things worse. It would enrage this brute into further activity—"

"Look there!" ejaculated Watson.

A writhing tentacle had come sweeping over the coral, and the two juniors only just backed away in time. The thing lashed down with fearful force. One blow of it would have killed a human being on the spot.

Fullwood's life, in fact, hung in the balance. At any second this sea reptile might make up its evil mind to kill him. Nothing could be done. Nipper realised, too, that all would be over long before the whaleboat could reach the Wanderer. It wasn't half-way across that stretch of water yet—and it would never be in time.

On board the yacht all was gaiety. By this time Prescott and Hawke and the rest had been packed away below, secure prisoners. In a miraculously short space the Wanderer's true crew got back to their normal duties. It was like being home again.

The engine-room quarters were invaded by the engineers, the sailors and deckhands gathered in the forecastle, the cooks and stewards returned to the domestic quarters of the vessel. And Lord Dorrimore and

Nelson Lee and the others walked about on deck, congratulating one another.

Already some boats were coming across from the Clyde, carrying Irene & Co. The Wanderer's party would soon be intact again. Lee was expecting the boys to show up. In fact, their non-arrival struck him as being curious.

"We gave the rocket signal, so they ought to be here," he remarked, standing against the rail and looking towards the reef. "Yes, the boat's coming now. But I can't quite understand it, either," he went on, frowning. "Some of the youngsters are still on the reef—"

"I'll tell you what," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "Let's turn the searchlight on an' spot their little game."

Without waiting for Nelson Lee to comment upon this plan, Dorrie ran lightly to the bridge, roping in one of the officers on the way. And two minutes later the searchlight blazed into life. A shaft of powerful brilliance swept across the lagoon, swung round the island, and concentrated itself upon the reef.

And it revealed something which chilled Dorrie's very blood.

CHAPTER XV.

FULLWOOD'S DEADLY PERIL.



PROVIDENCE surely had directed Lord Dorrimore's movements during the last minute. All unconsciously, his action in turning on the searchlight had

an entirely unlooked-for effect. Dorrie had used the thing in a rather boyish spirit, as an outlet for his joyous exuberance. He wanted to show the fellows that everything was all serene.

The whaleboat was now drawing nearer to the yacht, and on the reef the remaining juniors were on the point of witnessing a terrible tragedy. For Ralph Leslie Fullwood had been suddenly lifted high in the air. Just as Archie had been lifted, Fullwood was now high up. At any second he would come hurtling down. One whirl of those tentacles and he would be dashed to death.

And at that crucial moment the searchlight beam hit the reef.

The effect was instantaneous. Fullwood was being swung up and down, a mere preliminary before the final vicious death stroke. The unfortunate junior was illuminated in the concentrated beam. And he was held there, rigid and still.

The enormous creature was obviously fascinated by this sudden light, probably attracted by it in some way. And Full-

wood hung there, still. And for the first time the watching juniors saw the deadly monster.

It was incredibly large—a black, heaving mass upon the reef. There was the ghastly head, the awful eyes, and the appalling tentacles. There must have been ten of these latter, and two of them were over forty feet in length. It seemed impossible, and yet it was a fact.

"Good glory!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore hoarsely.

Even at that distance—half a mile or more—the monstrous thing could be clearly seen. It lay on the reef like a black mass of hideousness, and even now a portion of it was submerged in the surf. It had probably been cast up from its native element in some way, and the tide had caused it to drift upon the island. For it was obviously a deep-sea creature, one of the unknown horrors that usually roamed the depths.

The searchlight made all the difference.

Foot by foot Fullwood was lowered. The thing had apparently lost its desire to kill its victim. Fullwood was dropped down until he reached the coral once more. One of those long tentacles had gripped him, and he was over thirty feet from the monster itself. And it lay dormant now, inert, fascinated by the glaring eye of the searchlight.

For the moment Fullwood was safe, but he wasn't free. The grip relaxed, but not sufficient for him to escape. Nauseated with horror, he tried to tear that slimy coil away. But as he exerted his strength so the tentacle tightened.

"Help!" he muttered weakly. "Help!"

Several of the juniors started forward, unable to stand this strain. But Nipper commanded them back.

"It's no good!" he insisted. "You'll only make things worse. That beast is watching all the time; it'll whisk Fullwood away if we go near, and probably kill him with one stroke. We can't fight this devil. It's as strong as a prehistoric Brontosaurus—and bigger!"

"But—but it's too awful——" began Tommy Watson.

"Keep quiet!" insisted Nipper. "Don't you understand? That searchlight's doing the trick. The grip may relax, and then Fullwood can escape."

On the yacht a sudden consternation had broken out. Dorrie's shout had attracted others, and Nelson Lee was haggard with anxiety. In a moment he realised the truth; he could see what was happening.

"It's got one of the boys!" panted Dorrie. "What in the name of wonder can we do, Lee? I'm afraid the poor kid's done

for. By the Lord Harry. Of all the loathsome monstrosities——"

"It's some unusual visitant!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "I've never seen one in my life, but I'd wager my income that we're looking at a giant decapod. I've always doubted the existence of such monsters. It's the most terrible of all the things in the sea!"

"Isn't there somethin' we can do?" asked his lordship tensely.

Nelson Lee didn't reply direct. He swung round upon one of the officers, his eyes gleaming.

"Is there a megaphone here?" he snapped.

"Why, yes——"

"Get it!" ordered Nelson Lee swiftly. "Then prepare the rocket apparatus. We daren't fire a shell at the thing for fear of injuring the boy. But a firework might do the trick just as effectively."

"Gad, that's a good idea!" shouted Dorrie. "Look alive, you fellows!"

A dozen men dashed to work. Every second was of value. Nelson Lee seized the megaphone, and put it to his mouth. An officer and a number of men were feverishly preparing the rocket apparatus.

"Stand clear, boys—stand clear!" roared Lee, through the megaphone. "We're firing a rocket, and it may fall short. We've got to get the range. If you can understand what I'm saying, wave!"

The words carried across the lagoon with crystal clarity, and all the fellows on the reef responded on the instant. They made a rush towards the broad belt of woodland, to the east. Here they would be safe from any chance rocket, and they could watch the whole drama.

"It's awful, leaving Fully like that!" exclaimed Bob Christine. "He's always been a bit of a cad, but I don't like to see him——"

"It's no good talking," interrupted Nipper curtly. "If we numbered a hundred strong, we couldn't fight that horror, even if we all had hatchets. You don't realise the appalling strength of it!"

Nipper's statement was no exaggeration. To fight a giant decapod was a superhuman task. This creature could have wrecked many a ship. Its strength was untold, and its tenacity beyond belief.

Mercifully it remained fascinated by the searchlight. Slowly, silently, but with a deliberate intent which was awful to watch, it dragged itself further on to the reef—a shiny, heaving mass of black bulk. The juniors could only guess at its true size.

There came a hissing roar from the Wanderer, and the first rocket was winging its way upwards and outwards.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END OF THE NIGHTMARE.



WITH a thud and a myriad sparks, the rocket struck the inner shore of the reef and hissed away its life. It had fallen short by fifty or sixty feet. But the direc-

tion was accurate.

"Why don't they buck up?" asked Watson anxiously. "Look! Fullwood's being dragged along now. Oh, my goodness! That foul thing is pulling him into the

the contorting body. For an instant Fullwood was dragged further, but this new enemy attracted the decapod more. Fullwood felt the tentacle release its grip, and he was free. The terrible feeler lashed up and down near him, and at any moment he expected to be struck. One glancing blow would have been enough to kill him.

"He's free—he's free!" yelled one of the juniors. "Come on, Fully!"

Fullwood needed no urging. He was half-fainting with agony and with sickness. The stench of this creature was overpowering. It filled the air with a nauseating foulness.



The tremendous creature heaved itself up, its tentacles writhing madly—whirling and twisting to the accompaniment of the contorting body.

surf! It's too late; they can't do anything—"

Zizzz!

Another rocket came hurtling across. This time it was aimed higher, and the juniors watched the trail of lurid sparks with bated breath. The rocket completed its arc and fell—deadly true on its mark.

Thud! It struck the decapod near the head, and with a fearsome hissing, emitted sparks and fire. The result was appalling to watch, but there was one happy result.

The tremendous creature heaved itself up, and its tentacles writhed madly, whirling and twisting to the accompaniment of

Foot by foot Fullwood managed to get further away. It was a fearful ordeal, one that was liable to leave its mark for life. At any moment he expected to feel that tentacle grip him again, to drag him back, to subject him to further ghastly torture. Even in that tense moment Fullwood realised that he was in the position of a mouse, but the decapod was comparable more with a tiger than a cat.

A mouse pursued by a tiger, that was how Fullwood felt. It said much for his nerve that he was able to move at all. Many fellows would have fainted under the awful strain. He was hurt, too, grazed

and bleeding where he had been dragged across the rough coral, and his body was bruised and crushed by the force of the decapod's grip.

Another rocket came, and this one found its mark, too. It seemed as though the whole reef came into life. It was incredible that the monster could cover such a large space. Its size was more than the human eye could credit. All the mystery of darkness had vanished, and the horror was revealed in all its naked hideousness by the white glare of the searchlight.

"Now's our chance!" muttered Nipper suddenly.

He leapt forward, and there were none to hold back in that moment of emergency. All the juniors raced across the rough coral. Fullwood had at last reached a spot where the tentacles could not extend. But if the decapod only shifted its position it would be as perilous as ever. And although the brute's movements had been sluggish so far nobody doubted that it could move swiftly if it desired.

In a swarm the fellows surrounded Fullwood. They seized him, lifted him up, and bore him away. And on the yacht a breath of relief went up. Even with the naked eye the watchers had seen that the game was won.

Straight for the wooded belt the juniors dashed, only too glad to get out of sight of that monster. They were all pale and shaky, and that terrible head, with its foot-wide eyes had a kind of hypnotic influence. The boys could hardly refrain from staring at it.

It was a relief to be among the palms, deep in the grove. Here at least there was comparative peace and safety, for the decapod could never penetrate as far as this. Fullwood was laid down, and the crowd gathered round.

"He's unconscious, I believe," muttered Watson. "Isn't there any water—"

"You cads!" said Fullwood hoarsely. "I'm all right; I'm better now—"

"What's he calling us cads for?" asked Christine.

"Don't take any notice of him—he's raving," said Nipper. "I don't wonder, either. That adventure was enough to turn his hair grey—"

"I'm not raving—I mean it!" panted Fullwood. "Why couldn't you come and help me before? You saw me lyin' there, in the grip of that thing—"

"If we could have helped you, Fullwood, we should have come," replied Nipper quietly. "You don't seem to realise that our approach would probably have meant your instant death. We did the only thing possible. I don't think you can accuse any of us of being funky."

"All right—perhaps you're right," admitted Fullwood feebly. "Where are

we? Can't we get on board? I'm all bleedin'; I'm dyin', I believe. Lemme have some water—"

"Hark!" gasped Tregellis-West. "Begad, it's comin'!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The very earth shook. A series of violent, thudding blows sounded in the night. There was a tremendous swishing of water and the air was filled with sound. Half the fellows rushed out of the grove.

They saw something which held them in check—which caused them to stand still and stare. The battle was indeed over. The giant decapod was venting its fury upon the reef—since there was nothing else to vent it upon.

It heaved and thundered amid the surf, sending the spray mountains high by reason of its movement. The tentacles lashed, and the foul head was extended. And then, by chance, a rocket fell with a blinding, roaring hiss into one of those ghastly eyes.

The result was appalling. With a heave which lifted the creature high into the air—like a part of the island rearing itself up—the decapod gave eloquent proof of its blind fury. Three more lurches, and it wallowed out amid the waves. The surf boiled, the breakers were smashed and disordered. And then, gradually, the sea assumed its normal appearance.

The horror had gone—the nightmare was over.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ORDER OF THE BOOT.



"INCREDIBLE!" observed Professor Sylvester Tucker mildly. "I cannot imagine that any such event actually occurred on that calm and peaceful reef. And it is quite beyond me that I knew nothing of the affair at the time."

The science master was standing against the port rail, accompanied by Mr. Beverley Stokes and Mrs. Stokes. It was the following morning, and the sun was gleaming with all its tropical brilliance. The wide canvas awning, however, protected the little group.

"It seems almost too terrible to be believed," agreed Mrs. Stokes. "There's nothing there now—nothing left as evidence. It's merciful that none of the boys were killed."

"It's more like a miracle, my dear," said Mr. Stokes grimly. "I'm hanged if I can understand it. Three or four of them must have been within an inch of death. It's amazing how many narrow escapes we've had on this infernal trip."

"You're using a strong term, Barry," protested his wife.

"Hang it all, I feel strongly," growled the housemaster. "Paradise Island, eh? It may be paradise to look at, but these

South Sea Islands are a bit deceptive. I don't mind telling you frankly that I shall be jolly glad to get back to peaceful England—and St. Frank's."

"We shall have to be going soon, anyway," said Mrs. Stokes, smiling. "If we don't, we shall never be in time for the re-opening of the school."

"Nothing to worry about there," said her husband. "The term will start two or three weeks later than usual, because of the alterations and rebuilding. Dorrie's keeping his eye on the dates. We can rely on him to get us back in time. There's some talk of starting within a day or two."

"The sooner the better," declared Professor Tucker firmly. "I must confess I am rather disappointed. I have not had the opportunities for astronomical research that I had hoped for. There have been too many diversions—far too many alarms and excursions."

"Such as scrapping with cannibals, eh?" chuckled Mr. Stokes. "Yes, I'm afraid you've had an upsetting time, professor. It's a pity you didn't see that little affair last night, though."

"It is a complete mystery," declared the professor. "I was merely in the saloon—glad enough to be back amid civilised surroundings. And you tell me this monster of the sea actually appeared upon the reef? Astonishing! I shall never forgive myself for dropping into a doze."

The professor was truly upset, and he gazed across at the reef, as though hoping to see the decapod reappear.

"Come along, Joyce—we will go and have a look at the patients," said Mr. Stokes, taking his wife's arm. "They're going on nicely, I understand."

Mrs. Stokes was looking prettier and daintier than ever in her light, gaily-coloured chiffon frock. Further down the deck, groups of St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls were collected round the patients. Archie Glenthorne was in his element. He could now lounge at his ease with perfect composure and it pleased him enormously to have Phipps hovering round, waiting upon him.

Ralph Leslie Fullwood and Clive Russell chafed a little. They didn't care so much for all this attention. But, by Nelson Lee's orders, they were confined to their lounge-chairs. All three were more or less bruised, but Fullwood was the worst sufferer. He was patched up in several places, and his whole body was covered with black and blue discolorations.

"We're lucky to be alive—so we mustn't grumble," said Clive Russell. "I can't remember much, you know—it's all like a nightmare, I guess. I've got to thank Fullwood for being alive at all."

"Give it a rest, for goodness' sake!" growled Fullwood uncomfortably.

"Rot!" said Handforth. "You did jolly well, Fully—better than I ever expected of

you! It's pretty staggering, but I'm blessed if you're not turning decent!"

"Thanks!" sneered Fullwood. "Praise from you is praise indeed! At the same time, you can go and eat coke!"

"That's all I get for being polite!" said Handforth, appealing to Church and McClure. "I don't believe he's turning decent, after all! If he wasn't crooked, I'd jolly well knock him down!"

Church and McClure took their leader's arms, and led him away.

"If they held an examination for tactfulness you wouldn't get one mark," said Church tartly. "You dithering fathead!"

"Who's a dithering fathead?"

"You are!"

"Look here, you funny ass——"

"What was the idea of making a tactless remark like that, in front of all the chaps and girls?" demanded Church. "You simply asked Fullwood to tell you to go and eat coke. But let's forget it. How about going ashore, and having a look at our old haunts?"

Handforth snorted.

"Can't do it!" he growled. "Nobody's allowed ashore yet."

This order had been given by Nelson Lee earlier. Now that everything was in order again, Lee had no intention of taking any further chances. There was one important thing to be accomplished—and at the present moment Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Russell were discussing the subject, below.

Life on the *Wanderer* was going on now as though there had been no interruption. The crew had got back to normal in next to no time. The guests were again in possession of their old state-rooms, and they could hardly believe that they had ever been forced out of them. Their imprisonment on the neighbouring atoll now seemed more like a dream than reality.

Even the dramatic events of the previous evening appeared grotesque now, in the full sunlight. The giant decapod, the fight on the reef, the capture of the *Wanderer*. All these things were mere memories.

But Jonathan Prescott and his gang were something solid—a problem that had to be dealt with. They were below, prisoners. And it was quite out of the question to keep them as prisoners.

"Something's got to be done—and at once," Nelson Lee was saying. "This is more your affair than mine, Dorrie——"

"Rubbish!" interrupted his lordship. "It's Russell's affair. I advise him to kick the whole crowd out—to give them the order of the boot. We can't be bothered with scum like that. Even if we carry 'em back to civilisation, there'll be an infernal fuss. The best thing is to get rid of 'em at once."

"But how?" asked Mr. Russell worriedly.

"Simple enough," replied Dorrie. "Pack the whole boilin' on the Clyde, throw the blacks in free, an' send 'em off. In that way, we shall be rid of 'em for good an' all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD RUBBISH.



CAPTAIN MCANDREW, who had been sitting in the state-room, listening to the discussion, was on his feet in a moment, his rugged old face suffused with amazement and indignation.

"The Clyde?" he repeated. "Man, are ye daft? Ye're suggestin' tae pit that rubbish on my shippie? Ye'll need tae think of anither scheme, I'm tellin' ye——"

"Steady, Mac!" said Mr. Russell, smiling. "You needn't get excited——"

"Ay, but man! Listen to yon suggestion——"

"It's all right, Captain McAndrew," chuckled Lord Dorrimore. "It's only natural that you should be scandalised at the thought of givin' the Clyde to that crooked crowd. But what else can we do? We've got to face the situation, an' act in the safest way. My idea is to get shot of the whole business as quickly as we can——an' you can't think of a speedier scheme."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Much as I hate giving the rascals a fine schooner like the Clyde, I should certainly do so were it my own vessel," he said. "It is simple, and it solves the whole problem. We can't pack them off in their own ship, because it's a sunken wreck."

"I'm inclined to agree, Mac," said Mr. Russell slowly. "I've got a half-share in the Clyde, you know, and my say is as good as yours, I guess. They've been doing a good lot of pearling, and we'll demand all the pearls they've taken in payment for the ship."

"Hoots, man, they're ours in any case," protested the Scots skipper.

"They're ours in the sense that I was the first man to discover the island," replied Mr. Russell. "But, if it comes to that, the island is anybody's property. We were here first, and so we have the first right. But Prescott took the trouble to get these pearls up—and bore the expense, too. So in one way they're his. If we demand them in exchange for the Clyde, there can't be any argument."

"And we're in a position to demand, too," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "Gentlemen, I think it will be a perfectly fair arrangement. We've got to look at the other picture, too. What if we don't sacrifice the Clyde? I'm afraid we shall have a lot of trouble with the brutes."

"Trouble?" said Dorrie. "Don't mention it! There's not only Prescott himself, but Captain Hawke's crowd, an' over a hundred an' fifty Kanakas. Think of the attention they'll need if we keep them prisoners on board the yacht!"

"And it'll be a week or two before we can land them in any port," declared Nelson Lee. "There'll be inquiries——there'll be

inquisitive Government officials putting their noses into the whole business. And it's quite on the cards that we ourselves will get into hot water for daring to touch the island at all! I'm not suggesting that we should connive at a wrong, but it is far better to get rid of our prisoners at once—and justice will be served."

"Every time," agreed Lord Dorrimore promptly. "Goodness knows, I don't want any fuss an' trouble. We've got the better of Prescott in the long run, an' it'll be British to give him another chance. The only way we can do that is to trade him the Clyde, an' tell him to quit this hemisphere."

From every point of view, this plan was the best. As Nelson Lee had said, it was simple. All inquiries would be avoided, and there would be nothing to stop further operations. To give Prescott his freedom now would be a generous act, and he would never dare to renew the hostilities. Indeed, he wouldn't be in a position to do so.

So it was decided.

Jonathan Prescott was fetched from his temporary prison, and brought before the committee. He was looking sullen and morose. His defeat had hit him hard—and he had discovered that all the St. Frank's fellows were alive and well. It enraged him to think that he had almost worried himself thin over the "fate" of the St. Frank's fellows.

"We haven't got much to say, Prescott," said Lord Dorrimore curtly. "You played dirty with us, an' if we were men of your kidney we'd play dirty with you. But we're not goin' to. Our plan is to let you go."

Prescott stared.

"What's the big idea?" he growled. "You don't expect me to believe that? I'm beat all right—I've got to admit it. But where do you get that stuff about letting me go? You're telling me to walk back to 'Frisco, I take it?" he added sneeringly.

"Not at all," said Dorrie, keeping his temper. "I'm suggestin' that you shall clear off in the Clyde. She's lying near by, an', providin' you hand over your take of pearls, you can have her."

Prescott's expression changed rapidly.

"Say, are you bluffing?" he asked sharply. "Gosh, you played an almighty fine game of bluff last night! I've got to hand it to you Britishers that you came across with the goods all right! But what's this yarn about the Clyde?"

"No yarn at all," said Mr. Russell. "To be perfectly frank, Prescott, we want to get rid of you—you've done more than enough damage. We're not vindictive, but we want to see your smoke. You can take the Clyde, pack her with your cut-throat gang, includin' that bunch of Kanakas, and quit. But we want all your pearls in payment."

"Say, is this on the level?" demanded Prescott with a gulp.

"It is—although I'm not surprised you

can't believe it," said Lord Dorrimore drily. "A bit above your mark, eh, Prescott? You expected us to give you what you deserve?"

Prescott was really flabbergasted. He had never expected such treatment as this. He hadn't slept a wink all night—brooding over the result of his greed. He had pictured himself being conveyed to San Francisco. He had imagined the disgrace, the ruin, the probable imprisonment. To escape scot-free like this was almost too good to be believed.

But he was soon convinced that the offer was genuine. Eagerly, he handed over every pearl he possessed—knowing full well that they would be taken if he didn't. Even Captain Hawke was obliged to disgorge a number of pearls he had secretly hidden away.

The rest was easy.

By dawn of the following day the Clyde was ready, and the prisoners were escorted on board.

CHAPTER XIX.

THOUGHTS OF HOME.



"DISGUSTING, I call it," said Handforth tartly. "Fancy letting 'em go like that! I'll bet they'll come back, and attack us again—just mark my words!"

"Don't you believe it, old man," said Church. "Prescott's had one taste, and he won't want any more. He's only too glad to clear off with his tail between his legs."

A number of juniors were standing against the rail, watching the departing schooner. She looked graceful and elegant with the sun on her widespread sails. The vivid green of the island was in marked contrast.

Most of the fellows had breathed a sigh of relief.

The enemy had gone for good. Of that there wasn't the faintest doubt. Jonathan Prescott would get as far away from Paradise Island as he possibly could. He didn't stand one chance in a thousand of gaining success again. And if he tried any more tricks, there would be no mercy for him.

The Clyde, of course, was fully manned. Captain Hawke had all his officers and crew with him—and the Clyde, in any case, was a far better schooner than the old Samoa. The Kanakas were merely passengers, and would probably be shot ashore at the first island the Clyde struck.

"Upon the whole, we've got nothing to grumble at, Mac," said Mr. Russell, as he stood with Captain McAndrew. "We've got a nice bag of pearls—worth forty or fifty thousand, according to Mr. Lee. They're ours, in any case—and I'll warrant Prescott has gone off with ten or twenty thousands' worth concealed somewhere.

Well, let him have them—it's better than making a fuss."

"May be ye're right, Mr. Russell!" said old McAndrew gruffly. "But I'm tellin' ye it gives me a sair pain tae see the guid old Clyde in the hands of those infairnal rascals."

The Scotsman was greatly upset by the loss of his ship—but he had to admit that it was the best way out. And he had the consolation of knowing that after a welcome holiday he would be put in command of a much finer ship than the Clyde—for after this pearl fishery had been exhausted, he and Mr. Russell intended going into the trading business in real earnest—on a big scale.

The pearling was already in full swing again.

The divers were at work, and the shallows, towards the north-east of the island, were alive with keen activity. The juniors were again allowed ashore, and they revelled in their regained freedom.

The girls, too, were just as enthusiastic. They wanted to see the ruins of the bamboo house—they wanted to hear how the blacks had attacked the schoolboy camp.

And the juniors devoted most of that morning to a tour—taking the girls round, and showing them how they had fought their desperate battle against the blacks.

There was something else, too. The fellows hadn't forgotten a discovery they had made in the lagoon. Just at the point where the wreck of the Samoa jutted out of the water, there was something of unusual interest.

Right down on the lagoon bed, through the crystal water, could be seen an extraordinary formation of coral. Every colour of the rainbow, with the brilliant fish darting to and fro in between, could be seen as one gazed down upon this coral. It was a strange sight.

Handforth & Co. took one of the boats out, with Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple. And when they reached the spot, they bade the girls look over into the depths.

"Take a good look," said Handforth. "You'll be surprised."

The three girls leaned overside, curiously. "Why, it seems to be a ship!" exclaimed Doris suddenly. "Look, Renie! It's all of coral, too—everything! But how can it be a ship?" she added, looking up. "I suppose it's just the strange nature of the formation?"

"No fear!" said Handforth. "It's an old Spanish galleon—we discovered it while you were all away on the other atoll. I'm going to ask Dorrie to lend us a diving suit. Then I'm going down."

Irene smiled.

"I think it's quite likely that Dorrie will lend you a diving suit—but he'll lend you a diver with it," she chuckled. "But is it really possible that this is a ship—an old

Spanish galleon? How can it be? It's coral—I can see all the crusted formations—"

"It must have been down there for hundreds of years," put in Church. "Instead of rotting, it's become caked with coral. These coral polyps, or whatever they call them, have been pretty busy."

"Blow the coral polyps!" said Handforth. "We're going to explore that old galleon, and I'll bet we shall find heaps of doubloons and pieces of eight. Spanish treasure, by George! Think of it!"

"Thinking of it will be about as far as we shall get," chuckled Doris.

"I'm not so sure about that," said Hand-

Now! Have you ever known me to delay? I'm a chap who believes in getting things done!"

"Good old Ted!" chuckled Irene. "You're all right in the main, but you always seem to be tremendously busy at something, and you're always bustling about, but you never seem to accomplish much."

Handforth turned a delicate pink. Church and McClure listened with pure joy. If they had made such a remark, they would have gone backwards out of the boat, tipped over by one of their leader's famous punches. But Edward Oswald couldn't very well indulge in such tactics with a girl.

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forth. "I expect the galleon was sunk by pirates, and it's quite possible that we shall find caskets of emeralds and rubies. You know what those giddy Spaniards were!"

"They weren't smugglers, by any chance?" chuckled McClure.

Handforth glared.

"I don't want any cheek from you!" he said darkly.

"Cheek?" repeated McClure. "I was only suggesting smugglers because I know you're so jolly fond of them. But we won't argue. The only way to settle the question is to send a diver down."

"Yes, and we'll see about it at once," declared Handforth. "My motto is—Do It

"Oh, rather!" he said feebly. "But you mustn't judge by appearances, Irene. Just wait until I do this diving stuff!"

-CHAPTER XX.

THE CORAL SHIP.



THE news soon got round.

Most of the fellows had forgotten all about the coral ship, but interest in it was revived when the story got abroad that Handforth was about to descend in

a diving suit. Boats and canoes collected round, and there was quite a throng on the spot to witness the activities.

Even the seniors were present. They were as lighthearted and joyous as any of the juniors—for their freshly gained freedom was a sheer delight. The glorious weather, the peaceful island, the knowledge that they would soon be on the move again—all contributed to their general good humour.

"I fear, Brother Stevens, that we have been drawn hither on a fool's errand," said William Napoleon Browne sadly. "I observe a concourse of humanity, but what of the diver?"

"He's probably coming along now—in the launch," replied Stevens.

"But Brother Handforth is with us——"

"You ass!" grinned Stevens. "They'll never let Handforth go down! I expect Mr. Lee is sending one of the Wanderer's men—a proper diver. A job of this sort needs careful handling."

Browne shook his head.

"Then we shall have no alternative but to demand our money back," he declared. "Without wishing to use any terse expressions, Brother Horace, I cannot help remarking that we have been swindled. One can see an ordinary diver at any time. But how often can one enjoy the spectacle of Brother Handforth juggling with the various apparatus?"

Brother Handforth himself was quite disgusted. He had set his heart on this diving stunt. He wanted to do a little showing off in the presence of the girls—although it is only fair to add that he was far more interested in exploring the coral ship. He was as keen as mustard upon going down, and penetrating the inner recesses of that extraordinary hulk.

But Nelson Lee had put the veto on such a scheme.

The schoolmaster-detective himself came along in the launch, with all the necessary apparatus. Handforth's eyes gleamed as he caught sight of the cumbersome diving dress, the air pump, and the lines.

"Shall I come on board at once, sir?" he asked, as Church and McClure paddled their canoe alongside. "We don't want any delay——"

"You had far better stay in your canoe, Handforth," replied Nelson Lee.

"But I can't put that heavy dress on in the canoe!" protested Handforth. "It's risky to stand up—and these chaps aren't any too steady——"

"Why should you stand up, Handforth?"

"To put that suit on, of course," said Handforth, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody else roared at the joke.

"I'm sorry, young 'un, but you'll have to be a spectator," smiled Nelson Lee.

"Your life is far too precious to be risked on such a mission as this. We've had quite

enough narrow escapes on this island, without inviting any more."

Handforth snorted.

"Then I'm not going down, sir?" he asked disgustedly.

"You are not," replied Lee. "And let me tell you another piece of news—all of you. To-day is Tuesday—and on Thursday the Wanderer will sail out of this lagoon, and make tracks for England."

"Hurrah!" roared the juniors

"You don't seem particularly disappointed," smiled Lee. "Is it possible that the South Seas have begun to lose their grip?"

"They're jolly fine for a change, sir, and we can't deny we've had plenty of excitement," said Reggie Pitt. "But one never knows what's going to happen next. There's a feeling of uncertainty—and the sooner we're off for England, the better."

"Hear, hear!"

"There's St. Frank's, too," went on Reggie, with sparkling eyes. "I'm as keen as mustard to see the school again, sir—with the new Houses. Football, by Jove! The very thought makes me homesick!"

"Handy in goal, punching out!" said Church dreamily.

"Letting shots go by him," murmured McClure. "That's what I can see——"

"Then you can see double!" roared Handforth tartly. "I've made up my mind that not a single goal is going to be scored against the St. Frank's Junior Eleven this season!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I appreciate your eagerness, boys, but this is hardly the time or place to discuss football," chuckled Nelson Lee. "You wanted this old galleon explored, so I am sending a diver down—just to satisfy you. I'll admit, however, that I am full of curiosity on my own account."

The boats collected round with interest as the operations were started. Nelson Lee was looking rather thoughtful. He was far away for the moment, too. The eagerness of the boys to get back home was welcome. Nelson Lee would be heartily glad to leave this scorching clime, and return to the temperate zone of England. After all, the South Seas mission had been accomplished, and there was no real reason for a further stoppage.

Lee was chafing to get back into harness, too. And it afforded him great pleasure to observe the general eagerness of the boys. Nobody would be sorry when the Wanderer turned her bows homewards.

The diver was soon ready, and he climbed clumsily over the side of the launch, and prepared to descend the long ladder, which was already trailing down into the transparent water.

Although the launch was equipped with the ordinary diving apparatus—pumps, air-pipes, etc.—the diver chose to wear one of the self-contained suits. His air supply was

carried on his back, and he was not encumbered by any lines or air-pipes.

He slowly descended, and vanished beneath the surface.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EARTHQUAKE.



"ISN'T it wonderful?" asked Irene, as she leaned over the side of the boat. "Look at him! You can see every movement! It must be glorious to go down like that!"

"It's a swindle—I ought to have been there!" said Handforth, with a sniff. "I'm blessed if I can understand some people! Where's the danger? I'll bet I could do the job as good as that chap!"

It was fascinating to watch. The water of the lagoon was so amazingly clear that the floor of the sea was spread out beneath them like a great, multi-coloured carpet. The diver's movements were clear-cut and well-defined. Only the constant succession of escaping bubbles blurred the water.

The old galleon was in full sight, and was truly an extraordinary example of preservation. Encrusted with coral from stem to stern, she seemed to be as intact as on the day she sank. Only her masts were snapped off. The hulk showed no gash or wreckage.

The diver, far below, was having an interesting time.

He was one of the men who had been doing the pearling, and this exploration work came as a change. Being free to move where he willed, he had no difficulty in walking upon the ancient deck. The daylight penetrated so clearly that he could see every yard before him with perfect clearness. The sunlight even came right through the water, and shadows were cast just the same as on the surface.

An open doorway invited him, and he moved lumberingly forward. But he held a knife in readiness. A hulk such as this was a likely retreat for an octopus, or some other tropic monster. Nelson Lee had had a very good reason for keeping Handforth on the surface.

"He's gone!" said Reggie Pitt suddenly.

"By George, he's found his way inside!" breathed Handforth. "If he doesn't come out within three minutes, I shall dive down to his rescue!"

The diver, however, was in no danger. Inside the galleon he made a brief survey. Before long he was in a big cabin, and he was amazed at the strange sight. The table and lockers were still just the same, but everything was thickly encrusted with coral.

The diver slowly went round. There was nothing of any particular significance. A half-open door led into an inner cabin, but the door was as solid as a rock. Indeed, the whole ship was a kind of rock now—petrified into absolute solidity by the action of the coral polyps, and the passage of time.

With an effort the diver managed to squeeze through. Beyond, all was gloom—a dim, greenish twilight. The stern windows of the galleon were on the opposite side of the cabin, and they were so encrusted with coral that they were scarcely more than slits.

The diver was soon relieved. There was nothing here except a school of tiny fish of a brilliant reddish hue. They swept out through the openings like a streak of crimson. The very twilight flashed with their reflected colour.

There were two skeletons here—clumsy, grotesque things, and hardly recognisable as human remains. Everything was covered with the all-conquering coral. The diver's eyes caught sight of a long sea-chest against one of the walls. He felt his way across to it.

Several blows of his hatchet had due effect. The chipped coral fell away, and the wood-work was revealed. Five minutes of steady effort, and the encrusted lid was forced open.

The diver was now thoroughly excited. Perhaps there was something in that school-boy story of treasure, after all! He knelt down and examined the sea-chest with eager interest.

He was rather disappointed. There were numbers of ornaments and heavy metal articles—black and tarnished. They seemed to be of little or no value, and there was no sign of coins.

The diver laughed in his helmet, and selected one of the metal objects. He might as well take it up to show what he had found. He had already decided that the chest was valueless. And it was getting time for him to return to the surface, too. His air supply was limited, and he could already tell that his oxygen was running short.

Above, the watchers were becoming anxious. Even Nelson Lee was rather concerned—although that continuous series of bubbles told its own story.

"I wish he'd come up!" muttered Church. "I believe he's got caught by something. He may be having a struggle with a shark——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "I expect he's having a look at the treasure—getting it all ready to be brought to the surface. We found this galleon, you know, so we go shares in the loot. I'm going to buy a motor-bike with my share!"

Nipper grinned.

"Your chickens aren't hatched yet, old man," he chuckled. "If I were you, I shouldn't count 'em——"

"What was that?" interrupted Irene sharply.

"Eh? What was what?"

"I thought I felt something," said the girl, flushing. "My fancy, I suppose. But it seemed that a kind of tremor passed through the air. I heard something, too—a low rumble——"

"Great Scott!" gasped Pitt abruptly. Before anybody could wonder what was happening, the very island seemed to heave. The boats rocked, and the whole air was full of a curious, indefinable sound. Within the space of one second, the placid serenity had vanished. It may have been imagination, but Nipper could have sworn that the wooded groves rose and fell.

It lasted for twenty or thirty seconds—although the period seemed a great deal longer. Every boat quivered, and the lagoon shook and quivered in a most remarkable way. And then, as the fellows gazed at one another in startled surprise, the whole lagoon rose like an angry sea.

The thing was staggering. One second before, that water had been as calm and placid as a pond. Now a number of enormous waves arose. They swept across, lifting the boats and canoes, but causing no damage. The waves crashed upon the beaches with a thunder of foam and smother. Even the Wanderer rolled visibly at her anchorage.

"What—what was it?" panted Irene. "What's happened?"

"An earthquake!" said Nipper tensely. "That's what it was, all right. Look out—here comes another wave!"

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT WILLY HANDFORTH SAW.



THREE minutes later not a sign was left.

As though by magic the lagoon had returned to its former state, the groves bent to the breeze, and the sun continued

to shine down from a cloudless sky. The launch, the boats, and the canoes were all safe.

"I say, what about the diver?" asked Pitt. "I hope we don't get any more earthquakes like that! It doesn't seem to have done any damage; but you never know! Look at the pearling-camp! There's some excitement over there!"

Far away, on the north-eastern shore, figures could be seen running about. On land, the shock had probably been felt severely. Indeed, the reef had cracked open in several places, and many trees were felled. But the damage, taking it all round, was trivial.

The diver, much to everybody's relief, rose slowly to the surface. But there was obviously something wrong. He seemed to be inert, and he was dragged on to the launch, and his helmet was jerked off.

"Unconscious!" snapped Lee. "I was afraid of it!"

The boats collected round the launch eagerly. It was five minutes before the diver fully recovered. He couldn't tell much. The shock had come just as he was making his exit, and some unknown force had seemed to stun him. He only knew



Several blows of his hatchet had due effect. The chipped coral fell away, and the woodwork was revealed.

that he had got free, and had cast his weights from him.

He still clutched the metal object he had taken from the sea-chest. And the next thing was to examine it—although Nelson Lee did not do so. He was rather anxious about that earthquake. It had only been a slight shock, as earthquake shocks go, but such phenomena generally come in series.

"There's nothing to worry about, boys," said Nelson Lee reassuringly. "Most of these South Sea Islands are subject to earthquake shocks. It's rather a wonder we haven't had one before. Don't worry about it."

"That wasn't a shock, sir," said Handforth. "I was expecting something interesting to happen—and, instead of that, nothing came along! If you ask me, it was a swindle!"

"The right kind of swindle, Handforth," retorted Lee. "We don't want any more of those uncomfortable experiences."

Mentally, Nelson Lee decided that the preparations for departure should be hurried on. There seemed to be something unlucky about this island. As soon as one peril was mastered, another immediately came along. There was a feeling of uncertainty in the very air of the place.

At last Nelson Lee turned his attention to

the relic from the galleon. It was a heavy metal table ornament, exquisitely wrought and fashioned. And one scrape with his pen-knife assured Nelson Lee that it was of solid gold. He was very interested.

"Was this the only thing you found, Spencer?" he asked, turning to the diver.

"Why, no, sir," replied Spencer. "There's a good few of those old things in the chest—and lots of smaller fry, too. No value, is it, sir?"

"I think it is very valuable indeed," replied Nelson Lee. "Not merely on account of the actual weight, but from the point of view of antiquity. Such articles as these ought to fetch a very high price. You'll have to go down again and make a clean sweep of the lot."

The diver's eyes sparkled.

"Then it's a real find, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"Undoubtedly," replied Nelson Lee, nodding. "You'll get your share, Spencer—don't worry about that. But, strictly speaking, the boys made the find, and most of the proceeds should go to them——"

"Hear that?" roared Handforth triumphantly. "Treasure! Didn't I say so? We shall all be millionaires——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, Ted!" grinned Willy. "If we get ten quid each all round we shall do jolly well. I shall buy some new houses for my pets. The pater's jolly stingy when I speak to him on the subject. Blessed if I can understand why."

"Ten pounds each?" scoffed Handforth. "I don't like to say it about my own brother, but you're soppy! And where do you come in, anyway? You young fathead, you won't get a share at all!"

"Who said so?" asked Willy.

"I said so!"

"That's nothing—it's just as though it hadn't been said!" said Willy blandly. "We'll all share in this treasure, Ted, and don't you forget it. I'm surprised at you for being so mean!"

"Mean?" gasped Handforth. "Why, you young rotter, who spotted the galleon first? I did! Who thought of the treasure? I did!"

"Who killed Cock Robin?" grinned Willy.

"I did!" bellowed Handforth. "I—I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You babbling young ass!" hooted Handforth, turning crimson. "What the dickens do you mean by bringing Cock Robin in? We were talking about that galleon, and I was the first chap to spot it!"

"I don't want to argue, Handy, but my memory's as good as yours, and it was Church who first made the discovery," said McClure gently. "You scoffed at him, and now you've got the nerve to——"

"Oh, fight it out between yourselves!" interrupted Willy. "Where's that paddle, Juicy? Let's get away from this spot. In

another minute there'll be a general fight, or something, and we shall go under in the thick of it!"

Willy's canoe contained Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon in addition to himself. The fags managed to squeeze their craft out of the general crush, and shot out into the open part of the lagoon.

"It's like one of the giddy locks at Henley," grunted Willy tartly. "What's the idea of clustering round the launch like that? Ah, me!" he sighed. "It's a terrible thing—the greed of gold!"

"I say, shall we really touch some of that money?" asked Juicy keenly.

"I hope so!" said Chubby Heath, with gleaming eyes.

Willy frowned.

"It's even spread to you, fathead!" he said severely. "Always remember, my sons, that gold is a curse! The less you have of it, the happier you are!"

"Who cares about gold?" said Chubby. "Currency notes will suit me!"

"If you think that's funny, my lad, you'd better try another joke!" said Willy scornfully. "Put all thoughts of treasure out of your heads. If we have a share of the booty, all well and good. If we don't, I daresay life will still go on in the same old way, so why worry?"

But Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were not made of such calm stuff as their leader. As they paddled their canoe across the lagoon, they indulged in vivid pictures of what they were going to do with their share of the treasure. Chubby Heath conceived the remarkable idea of building his own motor bicycle. He declared that he could get all the parts cheap, and fix them together himself. Juicy Lemon was more in favour of laying in a huge stock of canned goods.

He went into ecstasies as he pointed out how glorious it would be to fill a huge cupboard with sardines, salmon, peaches, pears, and every other kind of canned delicacy.

"That's what I call spending treasure in a sensible way," he declared. "If you make a motor bike, Chubby, you'll kill yourself on the first day, and smash the bike up so nobody else could use it. My idea's a lot better. We shall always have a storehouse to go through the whole term——"

"Don't be a young ass!" interrupted Willy. "Do you think you could withstand the temptation? During the first week you'd open one of every tin, get thoroughly ill, and spend the term in the sanny! You fellows had better forget about that treasure——Ye gods and little tadpoles!"

He broke off with that remarkable exclamation, and gave such a start that he nearly upset the canoe. He was staring straight out to sea—staring through the break in the reef over the calm Pacific.

And there was something in his eyes which was seldom seen there—fear!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TIDAL WAVE.



"WHAT'S the matter with you, Willy, you ass?" asked Chubby, staring.

"Look—look there!" gasped Handforth minor, his voice rising shrilly. "Quick!

Give the alarm! Good heavens!"

He couldn't say anything further—words failed him. He and the others had totally forgotten the earthquake by this time. It had been such a slight affair that nobody on the island gave a second thought to it. Such earthquake tremors, in fact, were only to be expected.

But Willy saw something very different—something which even filled his staunch heart with dread. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon followed the direction of his pointing finger, and they gulped. They, too, realised the peril in a flash.

Out beyond the reef, the sea was perfectly calm—even more calm than usual. There was practically no wind, and the Pacific rollers were long, slow and oily. The sun gleamed down on the water with an overpowering glare.

But there was something else. Midway between the island and the horizon, but still a mile or two distant, an absolute wall of water was rushing onwards towards the atoll.

It was a spectacle that overpowered the juniors by its suggestion of uncontrollable force. They had never seen anything like it before. The wall of water was a tremendous height—a great ridge, extended each side as far as the eye could see, and sweeping onwards at appalling speed.

It was a tidal wave!

The crest was a mass of curling foam, and as it approached, it seemed to gather force, and grow higher and higher. Even during those few seconds, the stupendous wall lessened the distance between itself and the island by half. The speed of it was unbelievable.

"What—what is it?" gasped Chubby faintly.

"A tidal wave!" roared Willy.

"Listen!"

They could hear it now—a low, vibrating roar which filled the very air. It seemed to come all of a sudden, swelling into an absolute pandemonium of sound. Those in the launch and canoes turned their heads, and stared. On the yacht, sailors ran to the rail. Over at the pearl fishery, work was stopped.

"Hi!" yelled Willy, desperately, waving towards the other boats. "Quick—run for it! Get ashore! We shall all be swamped!"

As he spoke, he dipped his own paddle in, and his chums followed his example. They

made a bee-line for the nearest beach. Instinctively, Willy knew that nothing on earth could save the lagoon from being utterly flooded by that tremendous wave. It would sweep upon the island, surge on its way, and leave a trail of destruction in its wake.

As for the cause of the tidal wave, Willy gave no thought to it. Yet, at the same time, he instinctively felt that it was connected with the recent earthquake. It had come so close upon the heels of the tremor that this conclusion was obvious.

The roar was now so loud that every other sound was obliterated. It was terrifying—stupefying to the very senses. Chubby glanced round, and his face went chalky, in spite of the heat. Perspiration was pouring down him, but every drop of blood had fled from his cheeks.

"It's no good! We're done!" he choked.

He saw the wall of water close at hand—just about to break upon the reef. It towered up incredibly, and Chubby's impression was that the island was about to be completely overwhelmed. There seemed no possibility of escape.

Crash! Boom! Crash!

No words can describe the awful, terrifying pandemonium that followed. It was a stupendous rush of a thousand sounds. Confusion followed. Paradise Island became an inferno of foaming water.

The very unexpectedness of this disaster was appalling. Nobody had known of the coming tidal wave. It was upon the island before any preparations could be made. And the spectacle was grand in its awful might.

With a booming thunder of water, the wave struck the reef, swept over the southern part of the island, and smashed itself up, in a brief second, the wall of water was split and disintegrated. It passed on its way on both sides of the island—majestic, awe-inspiring and terrifying.

In one second the thing had happened.

Billions of tons of water crashed over the reef, and into the lagoon. The coral had destroyed the deadly power of that wave, but the result was disastrous enough in any case. The south-eastern woods were swept clean in the first blow—not a tree was left standing—not a stump in the ground.

The lagoon became a raging, storm-swept whirlpool. The waves rose in foaming masses. The canoes, the boats, and the launch, were flung high, and tossed hither and thither, and sent hurtling across to the northern shore.

The Wanderer herself heeled right over until she seemed on the point of turning turtle. With a grinding, shrieking of metal, her cables and chains gave way. She broke loose, and swept over towards the shallows, smothered and battered from stem to stern.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANDED.



FIVE minutes had passed—just, five short minutes.

The lagoon was comparatively quiet again, although the surface was much higher than formerly.

Cascades of water were shooting over the reef in every direction, as the surplus flood made its escape.

The island was absolutely changed.

The dense tropical woods were destroyed. Nothing but destruction lay on every hand. Worst of all, the *Wanderer* had been flung on to the shallows, and she was aground—stranded! No power on earth could have averted this disaster. The wonder of it was that the yacht retained an even keel. It was only by a miracle that she wasn't now a foundered wreck.

But what of the precious human lives? Gradually, a little order was being restored. Willy & Co. had been carried far to the north, their canoe smashing its way into a mass of battered trees. They were safe.

The launch was aground near by, a wreck, but with Nelson Lee and the other men unharmed. And all round were the remains of the other boats and canoes. Most of them had been swamped at the first onrush. Their occupants had been tossed about in the foaming water.

They all owed their lives to the fact that a clear two miles of lagoon had been ahead of them. Thus, they had been swept on, and the full force of the shock had spent itself before they were flung ashore. Had the tidal wave come from the west, they would all have been killed.

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth, as he stood on the debris-strewn beach, with Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley. "Look at it! It's a wonder we're alive! The lagoon's still flooded—and the *Wanderer's* aground!"

"I—I can't believe it!" murmured Irene dazedly. "It was only a minute ago that everything was all right! Is everybody safe?"

"I don't know—we can only hope so!" breathed Doris. "It'll take over an hour to find out, I expect. Thank goodness, the sea's calm again. We simply go from one peril to another in this part of the world! It's about time we set off home!"

"But how can we?" asked Irene, her eyes suddenly widening. "Look at the *Wanderer*—she's aground! And Lord Dorrimore let that schooner go off. We've only got the *Wanderer* to rely upon now, and she's useless!"

"Cheer up," growled Handforth. "The position may not be as bad as it seems. The first thing is to find out if everybody's safe."

Within half an hour the happy truth was known.

All along the beach, figures were standing or lying on the wet sand. The only people in danger had been the boys and girls in the boats. And these, mercifully, were all sound, except for a number of minor bruises and cuts. Two juniors had nearly drowned, and were now half-unconscious—but there was no doubt that they would soon come round.

The *Wanderer* had had no casualties. Several of the men had experienced narrow escapes, but the very bulk of the vessel had protected them. And at the pearl fishery, the workers had sufficient warning to race to the high ground, near Signal Hill.

But if the human lives were intact, the island wasn't.

Two hours after the disaster the lagoon had resumed its former level, and everybody was on board the *Wanderer*. From her decks, the desolation could be seen with stark clearness.

Except for the island, everything was the same—the sea, the sky, and the lagoon. But the reef, and the woods had altered their character. Where there had formerly been glorious glades, and grotto-like forests, there now existed nothing but a shattered mass of tangled vegetation. Everything was battered to a pulp. It was a pitiful sight.

The *Wanderer* was listing slightly, but divers had quickly ascertained that her plates were still sound. She had fortunately driven on to soft sand, and only her bows were aground. But all the efforts of her engines were of no avail. She was caught hard and fast on the shallows.

"What's goin' to be done now?" asked Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "Excuse me smilin', Lee, but I can't help it. As soon as one danger goes, we're in the midst of another. A bit uncanny, by gad!"

"And yet the explanation is perfectly natural," replied Nelson Lee. "Of course, Dorrie, you understand what happened? You realised the cause of that tremendous wave?"

"I'm hanged if I do!"

"You felt the earthquake, didn't you?"

"A bit—it was nothin' to speak of."

"You're quite right—it was nothing to speak of here," said Lee grimly. "But at no very distant spot, the earthquake was a terrific affair—one of the worst shocks I'll warrant, that any scientific instruments have ever recorded. The seismographs of the world have been severely tested to-day."

"Never mind the seismographs, Mr. Lee," said Mr. Stokes. "We've been severely tested enough in all conscience."

"Without question, there was an appalling submarine upheaval," went on Lee. "The shock took place at the same time as we felt the tremor. The tidal wave was a natural consequence. Taking every-

thing into consideration, we are very lucky. There's nothing outrageously unusual in the earthquake—they are always happening in the Pacific. It's just our luck to be on this island at the moment—that's all?"

"Luck, eh?" growled Dorrie. "There's two kinds of luck, old man. We've had a bad spell of the worst sort. If you can tell me how we're goin' to heave the Wanderer off this sand, I'll be obliged."

"What are the reports?" asked Nelson Lee.

"She's hard an' fast!" said Dorrie.

"H'm! It looks serious."

"Man, it is serious!" declared Captain McAndrew. "I'm no' much of a steamship expert, but there's a verra slim chance of gettin' this shippie afloat again. I'm tellin' ye, we're in a bad fix."

Nelson Lee looked thoughtful.

"The tide is practically at the ebb," he said slowly. "That's all in our favour. At the flood, we may stand a chance. In any case, the next few hours will tell."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ANXIOUS WAIT.



AN hour later the decks were filled with anxious groups. A meal had been served—a haphazard sort of affair, at best. Everything was upside down during this time of

anxiety.

Two or three of the boys were in their bunks, rather bad; and a couple of sailors were hors-de-combat, too. But all the injuries were trivial, and there was no cause for worry in this direction.

But the Wanderer's plight was serious indeed!

She was of no more use than the island itself, as long as she remained aground. The holiday party, in fact, was in an exceedingly serious predicament. They had no means of communicating with the outer world.

Certainly, the yacht had wireless, but it was doubtful if her range was of any avail. There were not likely to be any ships within four or five hundred miles—and these, in any case, were mostly trading schooners, which carried no wireless apparatus whatever.

The nearest well-equipped ship would probably be a thousand miles off, and the Wanderer stood very little chance of getting into communication at such a range. The Clyde had gone, and Jonathan Prescott was undoubtedly making tracks for San Francisco with as much sail as Captain Hawke could spread.

Dorrie's holiday party was isolated.

Everything depended upon the next few hours. If she was lifted off the shallows, all well and good. No harm had been done, and she would be able to sail off home according to the original programme. But if not—

The pearling was practically forgotten.

In such a crisis as this, the pearls became an insignificant matter. Of what use were they if the yacht was doomed to stay here to rot?

"It doesn't seem much of a task to me," remarked Tommy Watson, as he leaned over the side. "The water's pretty deep here—she's only touching at the bows. Can't they rig up something?"

Nipper shook his head.

"It's not a question of rigging up anything, old man," he replied. "If there were piles of rocks near by, they might bend the hawsers round them, and attempt to force the Wanderer out into deep water by a kind of leverage. But that's impossible here. We're surrounded by these shallows. She can only hope to get off by her own power."

"And she's hard in the sand," said Tom Burton gruffly. "Swab my decks, this is more serious than we realised, shipmates! It looks nothing to a landsman, but a sailor knows different."

"Perhaps we shan't be able to get out, even if we do float her," suggested Handforth.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when that wave came, it probably choked up the channel," replied Edward Oswald. "I've heard of such things. I shouldn't be at all surprised if the break in the reef is choked up with chunks of coral."

Willy gave him a withering glance.

"This is our little optimist!" he said tartly. "It isn't enough for the Wanderer to be aground—he wants us to be bottled up!"

"No sauce from you, my lad!" said Handforth, frowning. "I can't understand why you're alive, if it comes to that. You and your other fags were full in the path of that wave, and yet you came out of it without a scratch!"

"That's because we knew how to handle our canoe," replied Willy promptly. "There was only one thing that worried me—the safety of old Marmaduke. Thank goodness, he's alive! I found him clinging to one of the trees, shivering."

"We're not interested in your monkey!" said McClure. "Look over there—the tide's coming in already. We ought to know the best—or the worst—within an hour or two now."

The tide was certainly coming in now.

As luck would have it it seemed more sluggish than usual. The sea was dead, and that great tidal wave probably had something to do with the unusual conditions. There was no sign of any change in the weather. The glass was high, the sky cloudless. This was a disadvantage.

"What we need is a blow," declared Captain Burton. "If only we had a strong storm from the south, the water might pile itself in the lagoon, and then we should have plenty of depth. But with the wind in the west I haven't got many hopes. It's only a breath, at the best."

The time passed, and the tide rose.

And when it was at the full the *Wanderer* got to work.

Her enormously powerful engines were ready. A full head of steam was gathered, and at the right moment the order was given. When the water was at its deepest, the propellers churned. With every plate straining, with every bolt groaning under the torture, the great vessel tried to escape.

The juniors lined the rails, anxious and eager.

"She's shifting!" gasped Jack Grey suddenly.

"Hold on—don't crow too soon!" said Nipper. "She hasn't moved an inch, you asses! But something ought to happen at this rate! By jingo, she's exerting every ounce of her power."

On the bridge, Captain Burton was more anxious than ever. Men were in the bows, staring overside, and making observations. They would report at the very first sign of movement.

But no report came.

The *Wanderer* remained stuck—as Captain Burton had believed she would remain. As an experienced seaman, a single glance had told him that the effort was hopeless. In spite of all her power, in spite of the thrust of her great propellers, the yacht remained hard and fast.

The test had been made—and had failed!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A RAY OF HOPE.



"IT'S a pity we didn't sail for home this morning," said Nipper gravely. "As far as

I can see, there's practically no chance now. The tide's going down again, and, according to all reports, the lagoon is losing water all the time. That tidal wave must have shaken the island up badly, and the water level is gradually going down."

This was the strict truth. And it was a fact which filled the entire party with dismay and consternation. They could understand now why the vessel had been unable to break free at high tide. The water level was getting lower! And if it continued, the lagoon would drain itself completely, and become nothing but a dry basin!

This possibility was a startling one. But Nelson Lee did not dismiss the fear. He knew well enough that such changes are fairly common among the atolls of the Pacific. One day an island will be in full evidence, and the next day it will have vanished beneath the sea.

In just the same way, an island will sometimes appear where there had previously been nothing but deep water. In some uncanny, mysterious way, these submarine upheavals take place, and change the face of an ocean.

It would be by no means a novelty for the lagoon to run dry. Such things had happened before—and always after a serious earth-

quake or a tidal wave. The sea only tends to add to the severity of these phenomena. An earthquake on land is serious enough, but on sea it is sometimes worse.

Far, far below the surface, a crack will appear, and millions of tons of water will rush in—causing a deadly whirlpool. The effect of this spreads for thousands of miles. Islands are affected within the entire range.

And it was beyond all doubt that Paradise Island was comparatively near to the centre of this present disturbance. It would have been strange indeed if no serious consequence had resulted.

Long before sundown the lagoon had changed again.

It was emptying—gradually, but certainly. Inch by inch, the level of the water was going down—although it should have been at approximately the same level. In some way, the water was being sucked away.

"Well, this is about the finish!" said Reggie Pitt, with a long face. "The last hope's gone, and we're properly dished. Unless a miracle happens, we're booked to spend the rest of our days on this giddy atoll!"

"And our days look like being numbered, I guess," said Clive Russell. "The most likely thing is for another earthquake to happen. That's what dad says, anyhow. And a second shock might take us all beneath the sea!"

"The island, you mean?"

"Yes," said Clive gloomily.

"Nothing to worry about there," grunted Handforth. "If the island's sucked under the sea, it'll mean that the *Wanderer* floats. Then we shall be all serene. I hope there is another giddy earthquake!"

Clive shook his head.

"If the island's pulled under, we'll be pulled under with it," he declared. "I guess there'll be no escape—we shall be caught in the vortex. But it's no good getting all sorts of wild ideas, we can only wait and see, and hope for the best."

The general anxiety was something to be felt. There was scarcely a smile on any face. The passengers, the crew—everybody, in fact—felt the impending dread. Eyes could not be taken off the lagoon. The juniors watched it fascinatedly—and they were subject to all sorts of fancies.

Sometimes they declared that the water was rising, and then they would maintain that it was steadily and rapidly draining away. And yet, as a matter of fact, the level remained at almost the same point for an hour on end. If there was any loss of water at all, it was almost imperceptible.

The short tropic twilight was close at hand when the expected happened. Everybody had been anticipating it, but the excitement was nevertheless acute. The *Wanderer* quivered from stem to stern without any warning. The water of the lagoon shook, and the effect was curious. The great stretch of placid water resembled a shaken jelly for a moment.

"It's an earthquake!" yelled a dozen voices.

It was—but nothing like so severe as the previous one. Just a slight tremor, followed by two weaker ones. Then everything became normal again. The excitement died down.

"That wasn't any good!" grunted Handforth. "We're always being swindled!"

"Wait!" said Nipper grimly. "Don't forget what happened before. There might be another tidal wave—it's the natural consequence of a shock."

"A fat lot of good that would do!" said Tommy Watson. "It would only shove us further on the shallows."

"That's true enough," admitted Nipper, frowning.

"Why not get Umlosi to dive down and lift the giddy yacht off the sand?" suggested Pitt facetiously. "He's got the strength of a steam-train!"

Somehow, the joke was not appreciated. Nobody was feeling inclined to laugh just then. The tension was becoming painful. Everybody was expecting something to happen, but nothing did happen.

The sun sank into the water like a golden ball—a huge circle of fire which set the Pacific aglow like a vast sea of molten metal. A more perfect sunset could not have been imagined—a sunset giving the promise of a glorious morrow. But what was there in the morrow for the holiday party to look forward to?

"It'll be dark in a minute now," said Nipper soberly. "I suppose we shall have to go on as usual—have dinner and then go to bed—"

"Hallo! Look out there!" interrupted Bob Christine, pointing.

Nobody took much notice of him. These sudden requests to look somewhere were common—they generally led to nothing. But this occasion was different. Christine was pointing to the reef. For some reason the incoming rollers had greatly increased, and the surf was thundering on the coral with treble its usual noise.

"By jingo!" ejaculated Nipper. "That earthquake! There's been another upheaval of the sea-bed, and this is the result!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

LUCK AT LAST.



EXCITEMENT grew rapidly.

Obviously, the submarine upheaval had been quite small this time—insufficient to cause another tidal wave. At the same time

the effect was being felt by the gradual increase of the waves—just as a stone thrown into a pond causes ripples to spread to every bank.

As the boys and girls watched, clinging feverishly to the rail, the last rays of daylight faded out. The waves were certainly getting larger and larger. And yet the sea

looked even calmer than before. There was some vast swell under the surface that was responsible for these waves.

The lagoon itself soon felt the change.

The placidity vanished, and a series of undulations appeared upon the surface. The stern of the Wanderer rose and fell to the motion of the water. And once again the bridge became active—once again steam roared noisily from the exhaust-pipes.

"They're going to make another attempt!" said Nipper, his heart thumping. "It's a chance in a thousand! This sea won't last long—it'll soon die down again. But if only the depth increases—"

"Look down there!" said Tommy Watson, pointing.

"It's seaweed," said Nipper.

"I know; but there hasn't been any seaweed," declared Watson. "We've hardly seen a scrap of it, except the feathery stuff on the bed of the lagoon. This is coarse and huge."

The tension was at its height. There was more chance now than ever before. For every lift of the waves lightened the Wanderer's task. If one lifted her sufficiently she might pull free on the following downward dip. There was a possibility that she would slip off the sandbank, urged by her own power.

Again and again she rose, and the propellers struggled at their tremendous task. Everybody waited in a fever of anxiety, and suddenly, without warning, there was a lurch.

"What the dickens—!" began Handforth dazedly.

"Hurrah!"

"We're free!"

"They've done the trick, you chaps!" howled Handforth. "We're off the sandbank! Everything's O.K. now!"

"Hurrah!"

Most of the fellows simply went off their heads with joy and excitement. It was a natural consequence of the previous tension.

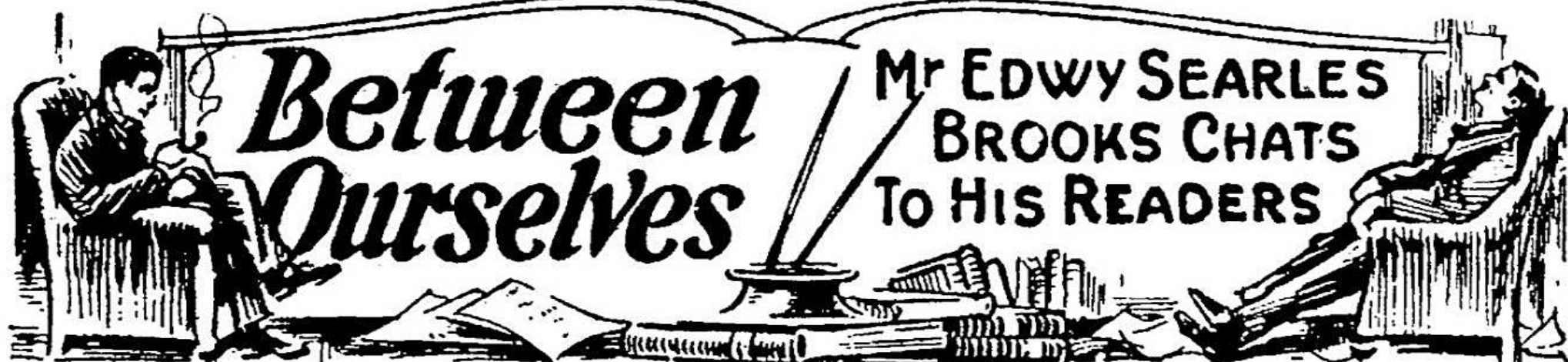
And even Mr. Russell was in perfect agreement. The pearls weren't worth the dangers. It was decided, then and there, to sail for safety with the first streak of the morrow's dawn.

How were the adventurers to know that Nature was again conspiring to trap them? How could they know that this fresh trap would be the most appalling of all?

THE END.

THE LAST AND MOST THRILLING ADVENTURES OF THE HOLIDAY PARTY OCCUR IN NEXT WEEK'S SPLENDID STORY OF THIS SERIES:—

"THE TERROR OF THE PACIFIC!"



(NOTE.—If any readers write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks likely to interest the majority. If you have any suggestions, send them along. If you have any grumbles, make them to me. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY—"The St. Frank's Weekly," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter acknowledged below has been personally read by me, and I thank each writer most heartily. But, though ALL letters are equally welcomed, I am reluctantly compelled to confine my individual replies, under this heading, to whatever points of widespread appeal may have been raised in them.—E.S.B.)

In my last chat to you, I promised to give you, in my next chat, a few quotations from the letters which I then acknowledged, for some of you young enthusiasts to show to doubting parents. Here they are.

"The St. Frank's stories are not only interesting, but educative as well. Never a thing is out of place, but correct always in every detail. I wonder at those who, not having read a story of yours, tell their friends it is a 'dreadful,' as they so call it. Kindly allow me to contradict all these false statements concerning Our Paper. I have taken it in for a good number of months now, and can find nothing 'dreadful' about it, except that the stories are dreadfully short compared to what I would like them to be. A paper for young and old, male and female, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY reigns far above all other school-boy papers. And then there's The St. Frank's League, which will bind the entire universe together in one great bond of friendship. Truly there is not a greater book in circulation to-day than THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

"I told my 11-year-old son, Donald, that the St. Frank's boys were maybe taken from life, like Charles Dickens' characters, and that that is why I enjoyed them myself. You make them live, like Dickens did, and I follow their fortunes as if they were ones I knew."

"I have come to the conclusion that the

charm of your stories lies in the fact that whatever one's age one can still read and enjoy them."

"The reason why THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is regarded as a 'blood and thunder' is its size. Several publications, not fit to disgrace a fire with, are put up in the same shape as Our Paper, and the result is that they are all tarred with the same brush. People are quicker to condemn than they are to praise."

"I wish to congratulate you upon the excellent yarns with which you have supplied Our Paper for the last few years. I read with surprise the opinions of some of the parents of our readers concerning the stories. I for one have a very high opinion of Our Paper. And I am in very good company. For the Principal of the school I attended some years back recommended Our Paper to the boys of the class. He happened to find a copy of it under my desk, and he took it away from me. The next morning he made the announcement that all the boys of the class should read Our Paper to improve their English. For we were in the habit of speaking Afrikaans, and naturally we made many blunders in our English. The class as a whole took his advice, and started reading Our Paper, every one of them remarking that it was 'Este Klaas.' The teacher, by the way, was a M.A. Although I am now nineteen years of age, I am still a staunch supporter of Our Paper, and will continue to be."

There are many, many other quotations which I could give, in the same strain. But I don't want to bore you. These five, coming, as they do, from such far apart regions as Gateshead-on-Tyne, Australia, and South Africa (two from each of the latter countries), should provide sufficient immediate dynamite to throw into the camps of the doubters. And they'll serve a double purpose. They'll not only help to convince those who now look down upon Our Paper of their unjust prejudice, but will also tend to hearten those who may have a haunting suspicion that they have got beyond the age limit when it is sensible to read my stories. I know there are many of the latter. Let them banish their fears. There is no age or sex limit for readers of the St. Frank's stories. Although they are, of course, primarily designed for the enter-

tainment of the youngsters, it is my constant aim to give them a universal appeal. In other words, I strive to make my stories human. And any success I have achieved in that direction naturally tends towards their finding favour with readers who have left their boyhood, or girlhood, behind them.

But some of you will be getting impatient for your answers if I run on like this. So I'll use the next paragraph for this week's acknowledgements, and then get down to the individual replies.

Billy J. Benton (Hythe), R. Ballard (Blackheath), George F. Read (Sidcup), R. Paterson (Glasgow), "A Staunch Reader" (Hampstead), "Waterloo-ite" (Waterloo), Leonard Fry (Bathurst, N.S.W.), Frank Lynne (East London, South Africa), Marion H. Farero (Lima, Peru, South America), Ruth Harris (Camberwell), Cissie (South Woodford), Frank J. Bamber (Charlton), R. E. Grant (Cambridge Heath), "A Critic" (Gateshead), Cissie Doust (Birmingham), Eva Doust (Birmingham), Roy A. Ablewhite (Barnet), F. Langdon, (Camden Town).

There are several individual answers I want to give to writers of these last received letters. But, in common fairness to those whose letters have been waiting for some time on my postponed pile, I must go back and deal with the latter first. But I don't want any of you to run away with the idea that your letters have been ignored. If you're expecting a reply, just scan through this feature every week. You'll find it sure enough, sooner or later, provided, of course, you've brought up a subject likely to be of general interest.

But, before dipping into my arrears pile—starting, again in common fairness, with the earlier dated letters—I must give a special word of thanks to Billy J. Benton for the unique little St. Frank's League booklet which he has designed and duplicated. Billy, you deserve a Gold Medal right away. Such extraordinary enthusiasm and application as yours is rare. Hearty thanks for the copy, which I shall treasure highly. You shall have a longer reply from me in a later number, Billy.

You want to see the St. Frank's Magazine in Our Paper again, Edward M. Stainer. So do I. But, first of all, we want The St. Frank's League at least ten thousand strong. Then all League operations can commence with a vengeance, and the new Magazine can become the organ of the St. Frank's League. We haven't forgotten the Map, either, Edward—or "The St. Frank's Annual." But the first thing is to make the League a tower of strength. So let's all pull together. Everything else

you want, within reason, will speedily follow afterwards.

Everything comes to those who wait. That's what they say, don't they? Well, I expect it'll come true about your wishes, H. Longden and E. Tissott. One of these fine days, you'll find the St. Frank's boys in Australia, I hope. And probably you'll find the Moor View girls there also. Grateful thanks for your most interesting letter, boys.

You're another Australian reader, George Glover, expressing the same wish. So just glance at the last paragraph. And I hope these two paragraphs will catch the eyes of scores of others who have written me making the same suggestion. Don't run away, any of you, with the idea that your words have passed in front of dull eyes. I make mental notes of all your likes and dislikes, and if either have sufficient corroboration, my practical attention is given to your wishes as quickly as possible. Thank you, George, for recommending Our Paper, and securing a dozen new readers. You're the sort we want in our band of Organising Officers for the St. Frank's League. Can't you become one?

That's the style, Sinclair R. Dobie. You feel me beside you because you have a pile of Our Paper's issues there. That's exactly how I like to feel about all you readers. The closer we can get in touch with each other, the better I shall like it. The St. Frank's League will go a long way towards achieving this. So, hurry up and join, all you laggards. It need cost you nothing beyond a little trouble. And what's that, if your enthusiasm is as strong as so many of you lead me to believe? He who hesitates is lost. Do it now! I shall be ashamed of you if you wait long enough for me to wake you up by radio.

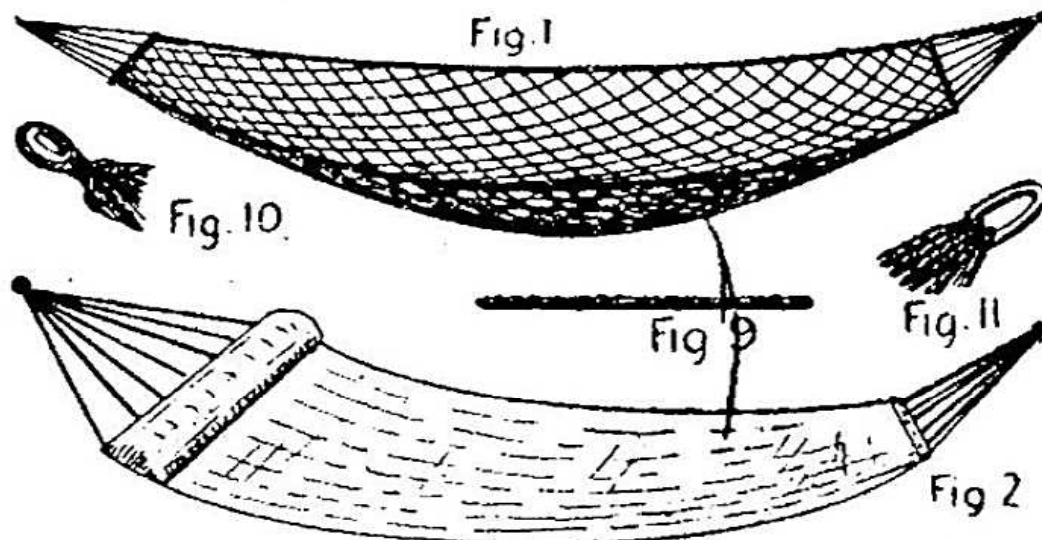
Your poems are very good, M. Williams. Have you joined The St. Frank's League yet? When you do, perhaps we can publish the poems in The St. Frank's League Magazine, which is due to appear in the near future. If so, you'll be paid for them, of course.

You ask if there will ever be a companion journal to Our Paper, featuring the Moor View girls, J. Owen. And you want to know if the St. Frank's juniors will also be in these Moor View stories if the latter should appear. Well, you ask rather more than I can tell you, J. Owen. But I've no doubt if there was a big demand for such a journal as you suggest, one would be forthcoming. Perhaps it might be led up to by a Moor View serial in THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY? How would that be? So far as I am concerned, I should be delighted to write the stories if there was any real indication that a majority wished for them.

HOW TO MAKE A HAMMOCK.

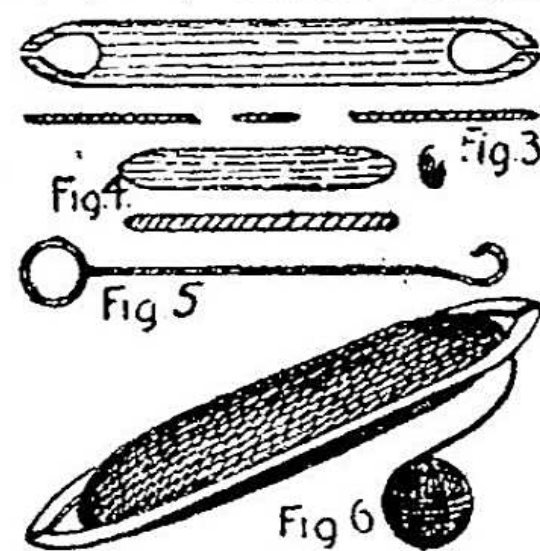
By DICK GOODWIN.

THERE are two kinds of hammock suitable for use in the garden; both are easy and inexpensive to make. For the netted hammock shown at Fig. 1, some string, a few home-made tools and a good stock of patience are necessary; for the canvas hammock at Fig. 2, a supply of suitable material, some wood and rope are required. The netted hammock has advantages over the other on account of lightness and portability, but it takes longer to make.



MAKING THE NEEDLE

The needle shown at Fig. 3 should be made of hardwood, 8 in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., the holes at the ends should be about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long and the opening $\frac{1}{8}$ in. wide. The wood must be smoothed up with fine glasspaper, this applies to the mesh stick, Fig. 4, which is 5 in. by 1 in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., rounded on sides and ends as shown.

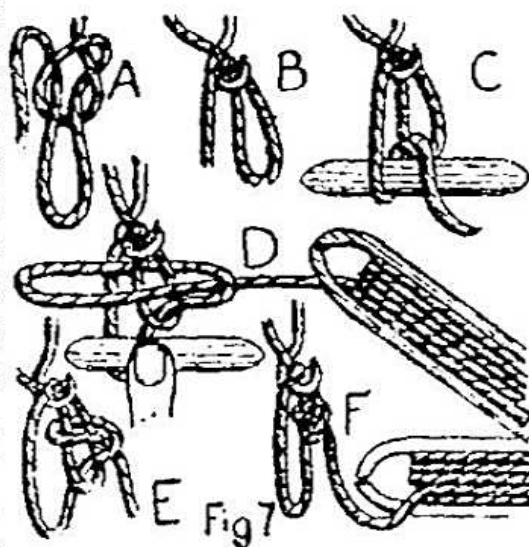


The net hooks, to support the work as it is being done, can be made of No. 10 S.W.G. galvanised wire to a length of 5 in., as at Fig. 5. Before beginning work, wind as much string as possible on the needle as at Fig. 6, place one of the hooks on a nail in a convenient position

and tie a knot on the free end, as at A, Fig. 7, forming a loop as at B. The method of netting is as follows.

USING THE MESH STICK

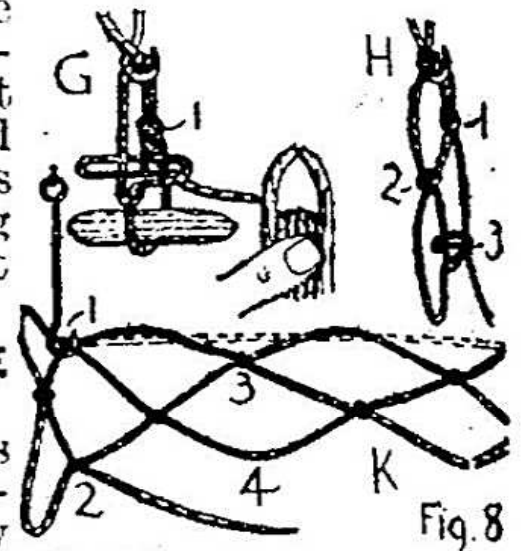
Place the mesh stick under the loop with the string under it and pass the needle through the loop, pulling the string tight. This operation is shown from the back at C, the thumb being in front, and the first finger at the back, holding it quite firmly. The next stage is to pass the point of the needle behind the loop and, with a turn of the right wrist, form a loop and carry the



needle in front of the original loop and behind the string as at D. The knot so formed should be tightened, as at E, the string being held firmly in the left hand.

FORMING THE MESHES

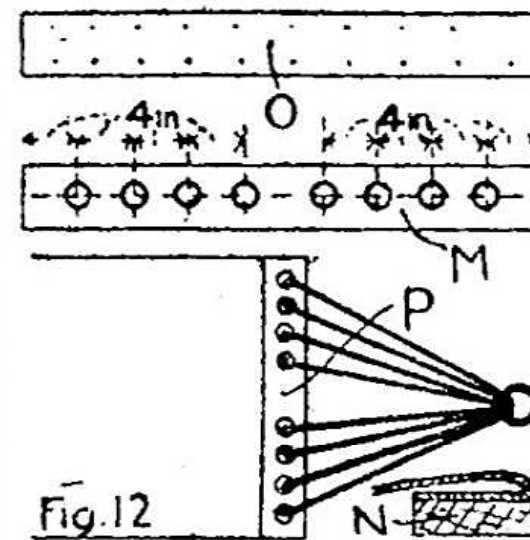
One finished knot is the result of the operation, which is now continued below, as at G, Fig. 8, the distance of the new loop being gauged by the mesh stick, this being continued until 35 or 40 loops have been made. The next row of meshes should be made as at H, the method of continuing the work is to open out the chain and place the last mesh but one on the hook, the first knot made being untied. Form a mesh as at 2, place the mesh at 3 on the hook, and form another mesh as at 4, and continue right along.



SUPPORTING THE MESHES

Instead of hanging each mesh on a hook as the work progresses, time can be saved by running a stout cord through the meshes, as indicated by the dotted lines at L; both ends of the cord should be securely fastened and the length stretched as tightly as possible.

To complete the hammock, cords are run through the outside meshes, two wooden stretchers, as at Fig. 9, with grooved ends, are threaded through the ends and the side cords, and others from the stretcher are gathered together and secured to a thimble, as at Fig. 10, or a ring, as at Fig. 11.



A CANVAS HAMMOCK

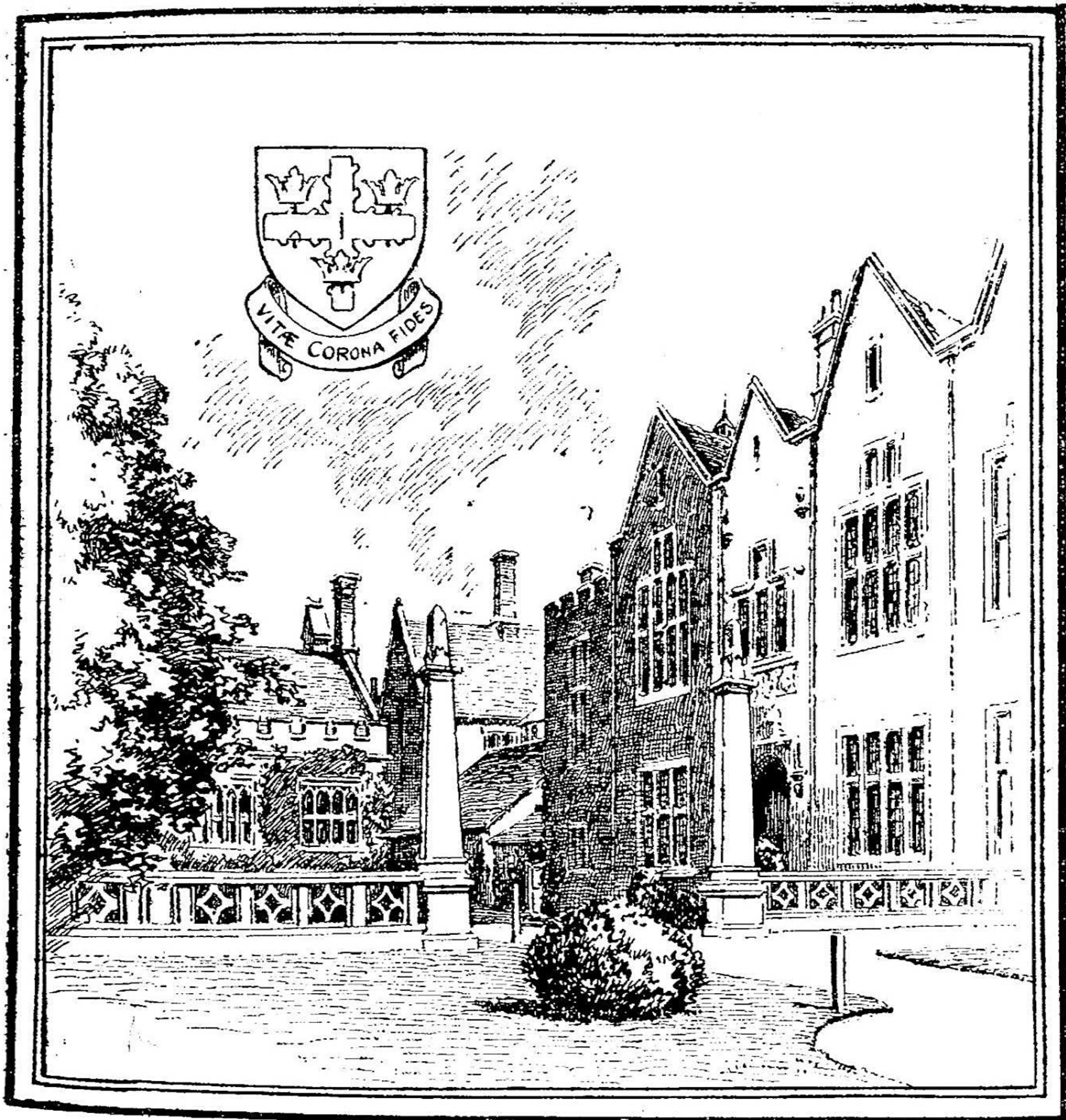
To make the canvas hammock, procure three yards of striped holland, 42 in. wide, two lengths of wood 42 in. by 2 in. by 1 in., two iron rings, and some line or stout cord. First mark out the two lengths of wood and bore $\frac{3}{4}$ in. holes, as at M, Fig. 12. Next place one end of the material on one of the lengths, folding the end under, as at N, and then securing it with tacks, as at O. Turn the material over to cover the wood and then pierce through to the holes and attach lengths of cord, as at P.

FORMING THE PILLOW

An 18 in. strip is cut off the other end of the material and then the other strip of wood is nailed on in the same way. The cut off strip is now sewn along the edges, and at one end to form a bag, which is filled with some suitable material, preferably curled horse hair. The pillow so formed is tacked to the top wooden strip after the ropes have been secured, as at the other end. When not in use, the hammock can be rolled up on the padded end and stood upright.

OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special Sketch by Mr. Briscoe, for "The Nelson Lee Library," of
COLCHESTER ROYAL GRAMMAR SCHOOL



The Royal Grammar School at Colchester is one of several ancient grammar schools founded in this country during the Tudor regime. Part of its revenues are therefore derived from earlier 14th century chantries. Many famous men have been educated at

this school, and in recent years the number of boys has increased very rapidly. This is ascribed to the excellent results in examinations combined with the moderate school fees.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

(All communications to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4.)

My dear Leagueites and Readers,

Our circle of friends is growing larger every week, and it now includes a good few from Canada and South Africa, and will be followed very shortly, I expect, by several more from Australia and New Zealand. Here's a hearty welcome to them all.

Some of the letters I have received from O.O's and F.M's throw an interesting light on what difficulties and prejudices our champions of the League have to face when introducing the "N.L.L." and the League to their friends. One writer complains that some of his chums thought the League was "only a kid's game." Without wishing to offend these chums of my correspondent, my answer to them is that when they are a little older themselves and get to know more about the League than they do at present they will realise that the St. Frank's League is not quite the same as playing at marbles; it is an institution that has a definite purpose, and every one of its members is in dead earnest. Both Mr. Brooks and myself have thousands of letters from readers of all ages and from all over the United Kingdom and the Colonies whose enthusiasm for the League and the great benefits it confers upon all English-speaking lads would do our young critics good to read.

Another correspondent says that his friends regard the League merely as an advertising stunt for the N.L.L. For that matter, one might as well say that Mr. Brooks' stories are also merely advertising stunts for the N.L.L., or that Mr. Jones' sketches are advertising stunts for Mr.

Brooks' stories. To quote another example, some people might say that Jack Hobbs' recent attempt to equal W.G.G.'s record of centuries was merely an advertising stunt to draw 20,000 people to the Oval.

Of course, it does happen that the League advertises the N.L.L., and vice versa, but that is not the sole object of the League. The idea of the League came into existence from the natural desire to promote a feeling of fellowship between ourselves as well as among our readers. By this means, we get to understand each other more than ever, and through the organisation of local clubs in various centres, both the author and I can obtain opinions and suggestions by a casting vote for improvements in the Old Paper, which would not have been possible without the League. Thus it will be seen the League is going to be of great service to the N.L.L., and every reader who joins will be doing something towards making his paper as near perfect as he and his fellow-readers would like it to be.

Therefore, it is the duty of every reader who has the interests of his paper at heart not to delay any longer in applying for membership of the League. We have still a large number of members to enrol before the 10,000 minimum required is reached. And remember, if you will all make up your minds to qualify this week we can begin starting the local clubs immediately.

Next week I hope to publish a reproduction of the Bronze Medal—actual size.

Your sincere friend,

THE CHIEF OFFICER.

SOME ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE

- (1) Getting to know your fellow-readers from near at home to the most distant outposts of the Empire.
- (2) Joining local sports and social clubs affiliated to the League.
- (3) Entering for competitions run for the benefit of members.
- (4) Qualifying for various awards by promoting the growth of the League.
- (5) Opportunities for contributing short articles, stories, and sketches to the League Magazine.
- (6) Space for short notices and free adverts. for members in the above Magazine.
- (7) Advice on choosing a trade or calling in life, on emigration to the colonies, dependencies, or abroad.
- (8) An employment bureau for members of the League.
- (9) Tours to interesting places in England and on the Continent, camping-out holidays, and sea-trips, specially arranged for members of the League.

AS SIMPLE AS A B C.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from TWO copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C by running the pen diagonally across both Sections. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms are needed, and these must be taken from copies of the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the

forms are sent in. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided the forms are taken from the latest issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY at the time when the forms are sent in.

These Application Forms can be posted for $\frac{1}{2}$ d., provided the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

IMPORTANT.—Complete and post off this form before the next issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY is on sale. It then becomes out of date and useless.

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 11. Sept. 5, 1925

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

Being a regular reader of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare myself to be a staunch supporter of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and that I have introduced Our Paper to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR BRONZE MEDAL.

I, Member No.....(give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This leaves me.....(state number, or, if none, signify with a dash) introductions to make to entitle me to a Bronze Medal.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY," which I will read with a view to becoming a regular reader of this paper.

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

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There's not the slightest reason why **YOU** should not get one of these. All you have to do is to collect the Free Football Coupons which are appearing in the four September issues of the **BOYS' REALM**. The twenty readers who collect the most coupons will receive footballs absolutely free.

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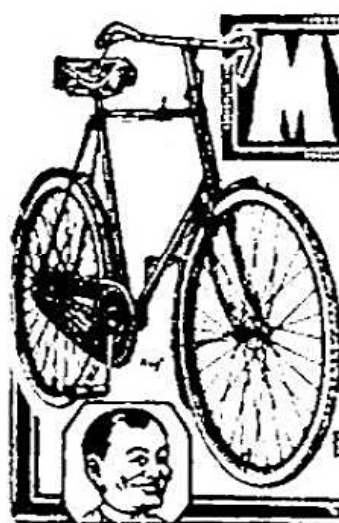
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