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HANDFORTH THE RECKLESS!

HANDY HANGS ON!
Read all about it in this week's thrilling long complete yarn of the Boys of St. Frank's holiday adventures in China.

New Series No. 18.

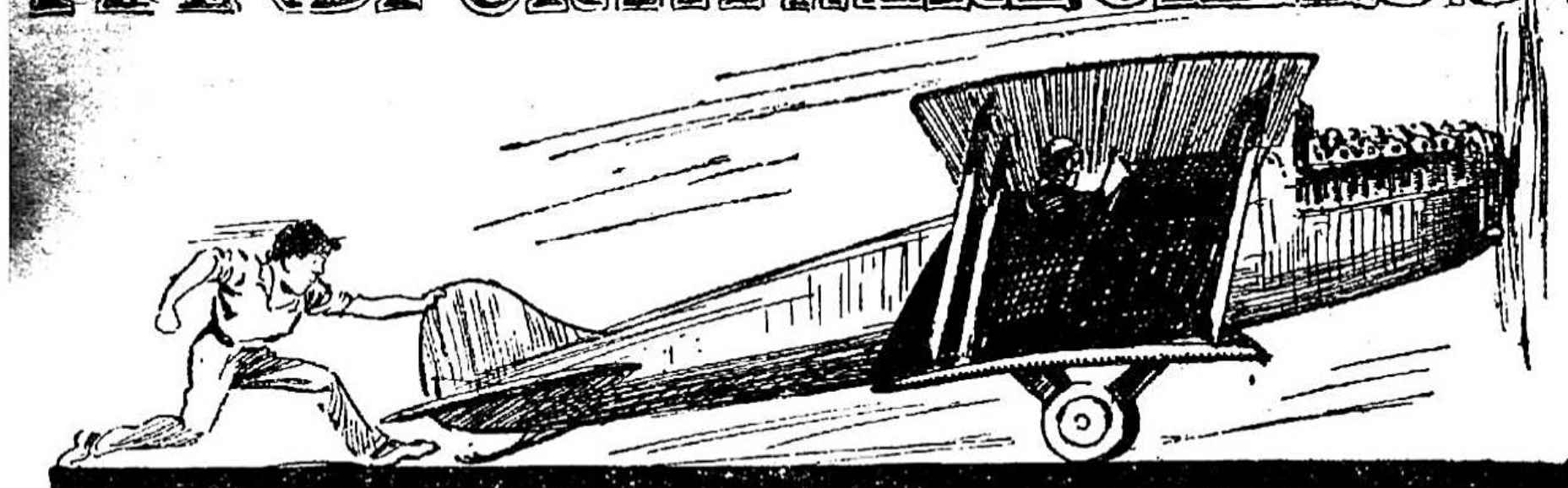
OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 4th, 1926.



Handforth and Lord Dorrimore checked as menacing figures came running from the mysterious entrance to the Chinese temple. Dorrie fired and the leading soldier pitched headlong. "We're in for it now!" gasped Handforth. They had to get into that temple, if they were to save Yung Ching!

HANDFORTH THE RECKLESS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handy meant to go with Lord Dorrimore to the Temple of Pao-Kang—and he managed it! This week's stunning long complete yarn of the Boys of St. Frank's in China is packed with real thrills.

CHAPTER 1.

NEWS OF VICTORY.

"THIS," said Archie Glenthorne contentedly, "is absolutely the stuff to give the good old troops. I mean to say, the jolly old lime juice with a chunk of ice bobbing about in the midst of the fizziness."

The genial ass of the St. Frank's Remove stretched himself luxuriously in the deck-chair and gazed up at the canvas awning, which afforded an excellent protection against the fierce morning sun.

"Yes, by Jove!" said Ralph Leslie, Fullwood of the Ancient House. "You wouldn't think we were in the midst of a bloodthirsty battle—not more than two hours ago! China has provided us with some excitement, anyhow."

"What-ho!" agreed Archie. "But now, laddie, home, what? I mean, off into the jolly old safety zone, and all that sort of stuff. The engine department is getting busy, and there's absolutely nothing to worry about. The anchor's weighed, what?"

Dick Hamilton paused as he was strolling along the promenade-deck.

"I don't want to be a sort of wet blanket, Archie, old man, but I shouldn't be quite so optimistic, if I were you," he remarked.

"Considering all the circumstances, we're amazingly lucky to be safe and sound. But we're still in China."

"Oh, rather!"

"We're still in the war area——"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "I mean, absolutely!"

"And our only prospect of safety is to continue up this river and enter the province of Hu Kiang—where Yung Li Chang has full control. We shall be safe enough there, that's one good thing."

"Yes, Yung Ching's father will welcome us with open arms," said Fullwood. "He ought to be pretty grateful, too, after all the dangers and troubles we've gone into for poor old Chingy. Who ever would have dreamed that we should go through all this excitement?"

Dick leaned against the rail and nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, it's a pity about Chingy," he said. "He's a Remove chap, and we naturally look upon him as one of us. And he's the only one absent. Our whole party is complete and intact——"

"And Chingy's in the hands of that fiend, Dr. Foo Chow, again," growled Fullwood. "What's the use? As soon as we rescue him, he's recaptured, and we've had all our work for nothing."

"And this time he seems to be farther from us than ever," said Dick. "I'm afraid he's completely beyond our help now. But his pater's armies are on the move everywhere, and Foo Chow's soldiers are getting the worst of all the fighting. The prospect's pretty good, on the whole."

"Good gad! I understood that we were about to slide gracefully into the offing without any more scrapping," remarked Archie Glenthorne. "Homeward bound, and all that sort of thing, what? Odds shocks and spasms! You're not absolutely telling us, laddie, that the ever open door has been slammed?"

Dick Hamilton grinned.

"No," he replied. "We're pretty safe now."

He left it at that, for he had no desire to disillusion any of the fellows who believed that the period of stress was over. It was better for them to be happy in mind.

But Dick was pretty certain that there would be many adventures before the *Wanderer* succeeded in escaping from this hot-bed of civil war. It would be serious enough if they reached friendly territory, and there was not even any certainty of this. At the present moment they were in Foo Chow's domain, and this was the enemy country.

The St. Frank's holiday party, happy and gay on Lord Dorrimore's yacht, *Wanderer*, had come to this part of the world without a thought of the stirring, perilous adventures which would befall them. They had been captured by Dr. Foo Chow and held prisoners. They had escaped. They had seized the *Wanderer*, and had been grimly attacked. The St. Frank's juniors had had more than their share of breathless adventures.

But they were still safe, and the whole party was generally as healthy and as cheerful as ever. And now civil war had broken out with dramatic unexpectedness, and the legions of Yung Li Chang were overrunning Foo Chow's country.

For Dr. Foo Chow, the cultured Chinese millionaire, this was a sheer disaster.

He had kidnapped Yung Ching from St. Frank's, and had brought him to China, for the sole purpose of forcing the surrender of his rival's coveted lands. And Yung Ching's father had answered by ordering a swift and deadly invasion. Foo Chow was reaping the harvest of his trickery.

And here lay the *Wanderer*, hundreds of miles inland, in the centre of a swiftly-flowing river, with rocky slopes rearing up on either hand. Down stream lay the city of Yang Fu—the enemy capital—with the open sea, and freedom, beyond. But in that direction Foo Chow had his strongest forces, and it would be folly, indeed, to go down with the current.

Up river, on the other hand, meant safety, for this wide stream led into the friendly province of Hu Kiang, where the Britishers would be welcomed and protected. There

was certainly no choice. Up river was the only route for Dorrie's yacht.

But while the St. Frank's fellows were contentedly discussing the situation, and wondering why a start was not being made, Captain Burton and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were holding a conversation in the skipper's cabin. And Ah Fong was there, too.

Ah Fong was a friendly Chinaman whose life Edward Oswald Handforth had saved. Ah Fong had sheltered Yung Ching, but the unhappy Chinese boy had been discovered, and had been retaken into captivity. And Ah Fong had been instantly sentenced to death, and Handforth had saved him at the last moment from being beheaded. The man was naturally grateful, and he could be trusted. His life was worth nothing if he left his white protectors, and he was willing enough to serve them.

By great good fortune he was in a position to serve them, too. For he knew this river like a book, and was acquainted with its tortuous channels. When there had seemed no hope, Ah Fong had come forward as a pilot.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie should have been in bed now, getting some very necessary sleep, for they had just passed through some very strenuous hours. But they both wanted to feel the *Wanderer's* engines throbbing beneath them before they placed their heads upon their pillows. And so they had waited for the up river journey to commence.

And then had come the surprise.

"You say, Ah Fong; that up river, him no good?" asked Nelson Lee, using a type of pidgin-English, so that the Chinaman should understand. "You say you no pilot up river?"

"Oh, it's all rot——" began Dorrie.

"Let him answer, old man," said Lee quietly.

"Him liver, muchee swift," declared Ah Fong. "Allee same good down stleam. Ah Fong know channels velly fine. Ah Fong takee big steamship down liver alle same chop-chop. Savvy?"

"You mean you'll take us down quickly, eh?" asked his lordship.

"Ah Fong good pilot," said the Chinaman candidly. "Me know allee ticks of cullent. Plenty water down liver. But up liver—no good. No go up liver. Plenty lapids."

"By Jove, rapids, eh?" said Lee, glancing at Captain Burton and Dorrie. "I was afraid of it, skipper. This river can't be navigable for ever, you know. We're up against a bad snag."

"We certainly are," agreed Captain Burton gruffly. "But can we be certain that this man knows what he's talking about? I'm never willing to trust a Chink far. He's probably like the majority of Chinamen, and has precious little appreciation of distances or measurements. These infernal Orientals haven't the faintest idea of accuracy. Candidly, I don't like trusting the yacht to him."

"Well, we can't do anything else," said Nelson Lee. "We're bound to take a chance of that kind, captain. Ah Fong says he has been a pilot on this river for years, and we're in such a position that we can only take his word. There's certainly nobody else who can—"

"Me good pilot!" broke in Ah Fong, catching some of the sense of the conversation. "Me allee same good friend. Young white master savee my son. He savee my family. He savee me. Ah Fong grateful. Ah Fong play no ticks. Me not bad man."

There was such a wealth of earnestness in the Chinaman's manner that it was impossible to question his sincerity.

"I'm sure he's trustworthy, captain," said Nelson Lee quietly. "And we should be mad to take the yacht up stream if he says the river is unnavigable."

"Are you suggestin' we should go down stream?" asked Dorrie.

"I'm sure I don't know what to suggest," replied Lee frankly. "This news is unexpected. We want to avoid the war zone. We've had more than enough fighting, and we're amazingly lucky to have escaped in safety as it is. If we take the yacht down stream we shall simply go full tilt into danger again."

"That means we'll stay here?" growled his lordship.

"Ah Fong go down river," said the Chinaman eagerly. "Yes? Me pilot steamship allee same now?"

None of them answered for a moment. The position was more difficult than they had imagined. According to Ah Fong, it was impossible to penetrate Yung Li Chang's province, as they had desired. This left but two alternatives. They could either remain where they were, or go down stream, into the heart of the war zone.

"Come in!" said Captain Burton, as a knock sounded.

Mr. Stewart, the first officer, appeared.

"An officer has just come aboard with some men, sir—wants to impart some news, or something," said Mr. Stewart. "There are quite a lot of soldiers in sight now, too—Yung Li Chang's men, I mean."

"Let us see this officer," suggested Lee.

The man was ushered in—a tall, refined-looking Chinaman, wearing the uniform of Yung Li Chang's army. He bowed with grave courtesy to the white men.

"His Excellency, my master, has commanded that news shall be imparted to you," he said in excellent English. "He desires me to express his gratitude and esteem, and would beg of an early meeting."

"We shall be delighted to meet his Excellency Yung Li Chang," replied Nelson Lee smoothly. "But this news of which you speak?"

"It is my happy task to inform you that the city of Yang Fu has fallen into our victorious hands," said the officer. "The accursed armies of Foo Chow are fleeing, and victory is ours. His Excellency awaits your

coming to Yang Fu, where his headquarters have been established."

Dorrie jumped up with delight.

"Well, this is good news, if you like!" he exclaimed. "Yang Fu, eh? That's down stream, Lee! Let's turn the old tub about, and see what Ah Fong can do in the piloting line!"



CHAPTER 2.

THE TEMPLE OF PAO-KANG!

LORD DORRIMORE'S enthusiasm was justified.

The Chinese officer's information was indeed welcome. For it ended all doubts regarding the progress of the conflict. Until now there had been no reliable news, only a mass of unconfirmed rumours.

Yang Fu had fallen!

That was significant enough. If Dr. Foo Chow's capital had been seized by the invading armies of Yung Li Chang, then there was no question that the war was progressing as the white men wanted it to progress. It meant that the down-river country was in friendly hands, and therefore safe.

"This information has gladdened us all," said Nelson Lee. "We are grateful to your honourable master for allowing us to know so promptly. We appreciate your own courtesy in waiting upon us with such expedition."

"Appreciation for my insignificant act is unnecessary," replied the Chinese officer gravely. "I am unworthy and but dirt in your presence."

"I take it that you are one of the Governor's trusted lieutenants?"

"I am honoured by the ridiculous title of General," said the other. "My unworthy efforts are absurdly over-rated. His Excellency has bestowed unmerited honour upon me."

"And may we know your name?" asked Dorrie, smiling.

The Chinaman looked slightly surprised.

"I am gratified that you should desire to know the name of such a mean personality as myself," he said gravely. "My paltry and meaningless name is Ling Soo Chin. I am entirely beneath your august contempt."

His listeners, of course, discounted most of this flowery self-denunciation, which was so characteristic of a Chinaman of culture and education. General Ling Soo Chin was a refined, youngish man, and Lee had no difficulty in guessing that he was one of Yung Li Chang's most valued officers.

"May we have the pleasure of your company during our journey to Yang Fu?" asked Nelson Lee. "We are sailing at once, and should be pleased if you and your officers accepted our hospitality."

"Such great honour is undeserved, but it would be boorish to refuse," said General Ling. "With great humility, I accept."

"I suppose you've been to England, eh?"

asked Dorrie curiously. "I don't want to sound inquisitive—"

"I am but your servant to command," interrupted the Chinaman. "For five years I was a foolish paltrion at the University of Oxford, where I was undeservedly accepted as the equal of my betters."

There was something quite delightful in this educated Chinaman's personality. He had some of the suavity of Dr. Foo Chow, but none of the latter's cunning. Lee and Dorrie liked him immensely already.

And there could be no questioning the authenticity of the news he had brought.

Foo Chow's armies were in full flight, and the capital had been seized. Foo Chow's defeat must have been very severe, or the invading commander-in-chief would never have made his headquarters in Yang Fu.

Here was a chance to go down river, and perhaps escape altogether from this heathen turmoil. It would all depend upon Yung Li Chang and the extent of his victory. Nelson Lee did not forget that rock barrier, far down the river, which shut off Foo Chow's domain from the outer world.

Before the *Wanderer* could reach the open sea she had to pass through a deep canyon, where in one spot a mass of rock, weighing thousands of tons, could be raised and lowered at will.

And there was another point to be considered. Yung Ching was in the hands of his enemies, and Nelson Lee had set his heart upon restoring the boy to his father. It now seemed that such a programme was out of the question. Lee recalled, however, that Ah Fong knew of Yung Ching's whereabouts.

While Captain Burton hurried off to see about the immediate down-river trip, Nelson Lee briefly explained to General Ling what had been happening. The Chinese officer was gravely concerned.

"We Orientals have strange methods, perhaps, but you will be interested to know that your information has already been imparted to the ears of my honourable master," he said quietly. "We know all. And is it necessary to emphasise that our gratitude is overwhelmingly proportionate? You have risked many dangers in the interests of our beloved Yung Ching. It is a sad fatality that his esteemed person should have been again seized by the curs of Foo Chow."

"You know where he has been conveyed?"

"That, indeed, is a point upon which our unworthy minds are unenlightened," said General Ling Soo Chin. "But our enemies cannot prevail for long—"

"If you will forgive the interruption, I think there is a slight chance that our pilot can supply some information," said Nelson Lee. "He is a man named Ah Fong, whom you saw when you were ushered in. A native of this province, but, to the best of my knowledge, as trustworthy as most of his class can be expected."

"My honourable master is aware of Ah Fong's history, and has already decided that the man shall be suitably rewarded when

peace is again with us," said the other. "If this man can supply information regarding our Excellency's superlative son, his reward will be beyond his dreams."

A minute later, Ah Fong was in their presence.

"Me go blidge," said Ah Fong, grinning. "Me wantee at wheel."

"Yes, I know—but just a moment, Ah Fong," said Nelson Lee. "You can go to the wheel presently. Bad soldiers come fetchee Yung Ching from your house? Savvy?"

"Bad soldiers takee honouable Yung Ching away," said the Chinaman. "Putee me in lopes. Chopec head off. Young white master comee chop-chop, and savee me."

"You know where Yung Ching taken?"

"Bad soldiers takee—Ah Fong listen," said Ah Fong. "Me die, so what matter? Me hear. They takee honouable Yung Ching many miles. Pao-Kang Temple. Top of mountain. Longee way. Muchee bad journey. As you say, forttee miles—maybe more. Honouable Yung Ching there, plisoner."

"You heard this?"

"Velly muchee sure," said Ah Fong eagerly.

"All right—you go bridge."

Ah Fong bowed and scraped his way out, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were looking thoughtful.

"That's twice he's told the same yarn, so it ought to be true," remarked his lordship. "Well, we'd like to fetch the poor youngster, General Ling, but I'm afraid it seems a difficult proposition."

"Have you not risked your valuable lives sufficiently?" asked General Ling. "It is now our duty to provide you with a safe escort out of this tumultuous country. My great and esteemed master is victorious, and he will dispatch a great army to secure the splendid person of our beloved Yung Ching."

"We'd like to join that army," said Dorrie promptly.

"No, old man—no!" put in Lee. "You mustn't think of such a thing. We must remain intact now—we must keep our party whole. There have been too many separations already, and now that we are all safely together, let us remain so. We can trust Yung Li Chang to rescue his own son. He has countless soldiers at his command, and is better fitted for the task."

"They are words of wisdom which my paltry tongue can do little to elaborate," said General Ling, nodding. "Let this question now be settled by my powerful master."

And it really seemed that there was no other alternative.

The holiday party could do little—if, in truth, Yung Ching had been carried off to that distant temple. Ah Fong had hinted at a mountain, and at difficult going. The Chinese soldiers were more fitted for that sort of travel than the white men.

In any case, nothing could be done until Yang Fu had been reached, and until a consultation had been held with Yung Li Chang.

A meeting with Chingy's father was imperative. It was the next item on the programme.

At least, so Nelson Lee assumed.

But Dr. Foo Chow had no intention of allowing his escaped prisoners ever to reach Yang Fu at all! Although his armies had been swept out of this district, and although he seemed utterly powerless to check the *Wanderer's* down-river journey, he was planning, even at that moment, to accomplish this end.



CHAPTER 3.

BOMBED!

WILLY HANDFORTH, of the Third, leaned negligently over the back of Irene Manners' deck-chair.

"Ted's awake!" he re-

marked casually.

"Then he oughtn't to be awake," said Irene, with indignation. "It's only just half-past two, and lunch hasn't been over for more than half an hour. It's ridiculous for Ted to be awake now."

"He's talking about getting up," remarked Willy. "Thought I'd give you the tip. He won't listen to Church and McClure."

"But what could I do?" asked Irene, in surprise.

"Weren't you going to nurse him, and place soothing hands

upon his fevered brow?" asked Willy, with a grin. "Wasn't there some talk of you sitting by his bedside and reading him gentle lullabys?"

Irene frowned.

"Don't be silly," she replied coldly. "If Ted needs nursing, we're all willing to take our turns—aren't we, girls?"

"Rather!" said the other Moor View girls.

"Then you'll have to buck up," said Willy. "If you waste any time here, gassing, the ass will be out. Church and McClure have exhausted themselves, trying to keep him in bed. He's an energetic fathead, you know. All we Handforths are full of beans."

Willy strolled off, and Irene rose to her feet. There was a very determined look on her pretty face. Edward Oswald Handforth was perfectly mad to think of getting up now. Nelson Lee had positively instructed him to sleep throughout the day, and not to turn out until he had had thirty-six hours' rest.

But the leader of Study D had other ideas.

He had passed through some strenuous adventures just recently, and had even suf-

fered torture at the hands of Foo Chow. But he hated to be "coddled." The thought of lying in bed, after the fashion of an invalid, horrified him.

The *Wanderer* was now progressing down stream, although there was very little difference in the surrounding scenery. The yacht was still in the rocky gorge, and the landscape was confined to the frowning crags on either side. The rate of progress was so slow that one might have believed she was at anchor.

There was a reason for this. Ah Fong was on the bridge, acting as pilot, but there was no sense in taking him at his word. It was just as well to proceed cautiously at first, for there was no hurry. And it would be a very easy matter to run the vessel on to a hidden rock, or to send her aground in shallow water. As she slid slowly down stream, men were taking soundings at her bows.

But the throb of the vessel's engines felt fine. It was glorious to know that she was under the control of her captain again, that there was the ordinary routine in progress, and that the normal life of the party was going ahead as though there were no such things as wars and Chinese torturers.

So far, as the young people were concerned, the holiday adventure had resumed its placid course. It was better for them to believe that the perils were

all over, and Nelson Lee and Dorrie were hoping that they actually were over. If Yung Li Chang had gained complete mastery, there was every prospect of an early escape from this unsettled land.

Handforth had had a few hours' sleep the previous evening, and had again gone to bed in the early hours. He now considered that he was fully refreshed, and that it would be sheer laziness to remain below.

"It's no good, my lads, you can talk until you're blue!" he said, as he adjusted his tie. "I'm up, and I'm going to stay up! Do you think I want to be pampered and fussed over?"

"That's not the point," said Church. "You've had an awful time during the last two or three days, Handy, and you need lots of sleep. There's nothing to worry over now; Foo Chow's on the run, and we're among friends. Why not sleep in peace until tomorrow morning?"

"Think how fresh you'll be," urged McClure.

"I'm fresh now," retorted Handforth.

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"Where's my blazer? If you think you can keep me here by pinching my clothes——"

He paused, observing that the blazer in question was hanging over his left arm, where he had placed it a minute or two earlier.

"I'm hungry!" he went on. "Do you think I want to stick in bed, and eat arrow-root and slops of that sort? I need a decent meal! Anybody might think I was half dead, by the way you chaps talk!"

"Well, you were pretty exhausted, Handy——"

"I was tired," interrupted Handforth. "I've got one or two bruises, and there's a graze on my neck. But if I can't stand a few hurts like that, what's the good of me? Come on—let's go on deck. Come in!"

A tap had sounded on the door, and Irene Manners appeared.

"Oh, you're dressed!" she exclaimed, regarding him with stern disapproval. "You ought to be in bed, Ted! You'll only make things worse by pretending to be well——"

"But I am well!" growled Handforth awkwardly. "I say, chuck it, Irene! You can't spoof me that I'm ill! Everybody's trying the same dodge, and I'm just about fed-up with it!"

There was a great deal of truth in his complaint. Nobody could quite understand that he was virtually recovered. They took it for granted that he was pretending to be well, whereas, in reality, he was feeling thoroughly fit. His appetite alone told him that there was nothing wrong with him. And it was a bit thick when everybody cooed to him, and used soft, soothing language.

"Oh, very well," said Irene coldly. "If you mean to be obstinate——"

"Obstinate!" growled Church. "He's like a dozen mules!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"How many times have I got to explain that the Handforths are totally different to any other breed?" he asked grimly. "It takes ordinary people two days to recover from shocks that we forget in two hours! We're as hard as nails—we don't feel ordinary pain! Just shove me behind a cold chicken, and you'll soon see whether I'm fit or not!"

"I believe you mean it, Ted," smiled Irene, with relief.

"Mean it!" said Edward Oswald. "Come and watch me!"

He seized her arm, and marched her up to the deck. Church and McClure followed, shaking their heads. It was no good—they'd better let him have his own way, and suffer the consequences.

"Hallo! There's old Ah Fong on the bridge," said Handforth, as he glanced up. "H'm! We don't seem to have made much progress either. What's the idea of going at this miserable crawl? Half a tick, Irene!"

He ran along, and mounted the bridge ladder, where Ah Fong bowed obsequiously, and grinned from ear to ear.

"Young master lookee plenty fine!" he said.

"Young master feel plentee fine!" retorted

Handforth. "I say, Mr. Stewart, what about some speed? Hallo, Mr. Lee!"

He greeted everybody, and Nelson Lee smiled.

"Well, I must say that you have recuperated with extraordinary speed, Handforth, so I shall not insist upon your returning to bed," he said drily. "We are progressing slowly because Lord Dorrimore has a somewhat peculiar reluctance to rip the *Wanderer's* bottom plates off on a chance snag."

"Water plenty deep," said Ah Fong. "Allee same safe."

"There you are, sir," said Handforth. "You can trust Ah Fong—he's my pal."

"I have perfect faith in Ah Fong's friendliness, but we must test his piloting skill before we can increase our speed," said the school-master-detective. "You were pointing out a hilltop, Ah Fong?"

"There!" said the Chinese pilot, lifting a finger.

They were at a bend in the river, and, looking straight down the gorge, a glimpse of the flat country could be seen far beyond. In the clear atmosphere the view was visible for many miles, with some hazy mountains in the far distance.

"Pao-Kang Temple," said Ah Fong. "Him there."

"In those distant hills?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Him Temple at top this hill," said Ah Fong, indicating an isolated peak, which showed bluish and indistinct in the afternoon sunlight. "Many miles. Plenty jungle at foot. Bad livers—many alligators. Muchee bad going. Then through pass, with plenty locks. Allee same long time journey."

Handforth's eyes were gleaming.

"By George, that sounds good!" he said enthusiastically. "Did you hear, sir? Jungles and rivers with alligators! I say, let's get up a party, and go straight off to Yung Ching's rescue. He's a prisoner in that Pao-Kang Temple, you know."

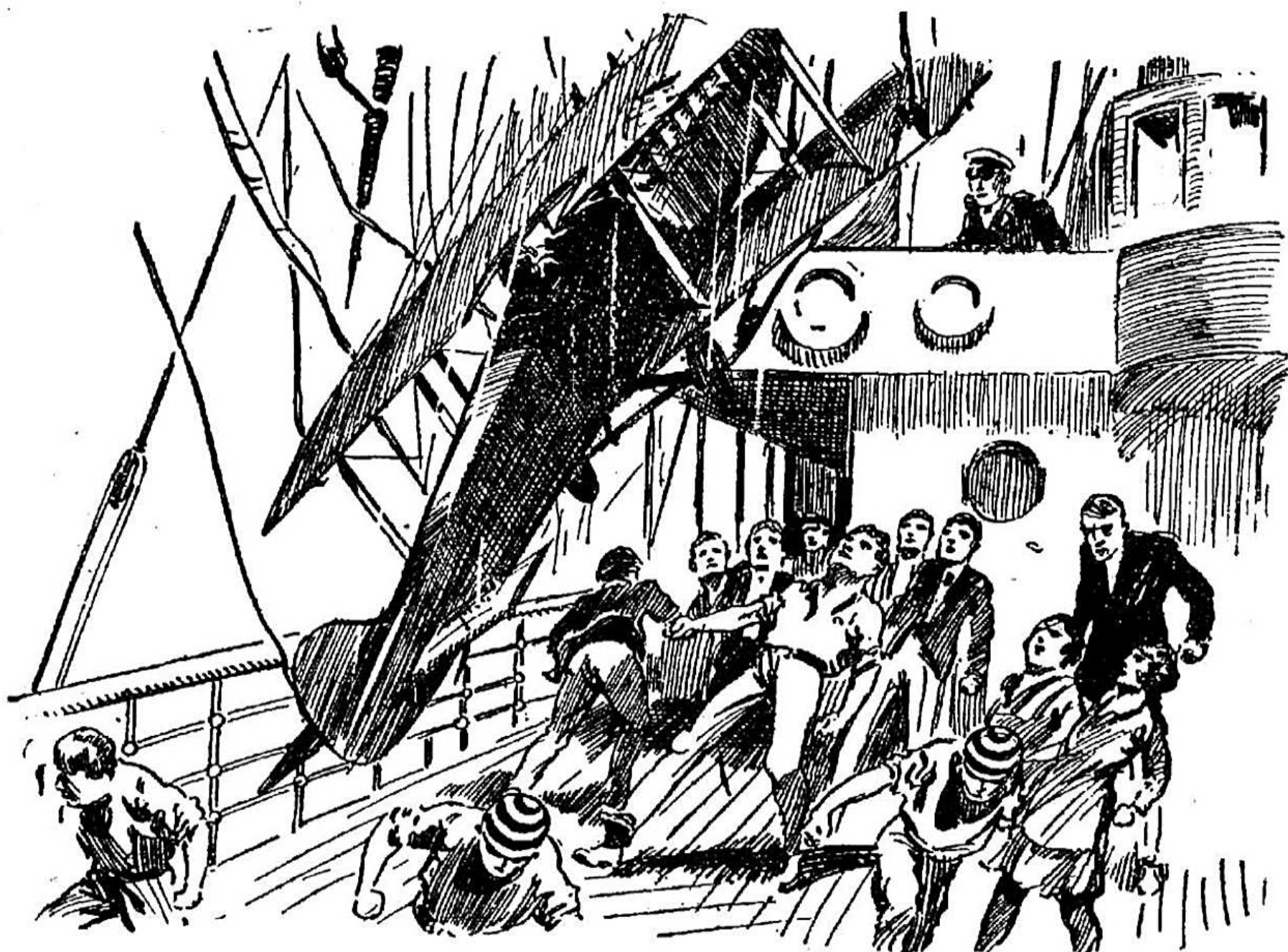
Nelson Lee regarded the junior severely.

"Upon my word, Handforth, haven't you had enough excitement yet?" he asked. "Even at this moment you ought to be in bed, and yet you talk about a trip to a jungle-infested district, where alligators abound! Are you never satisfied?"

"Oh, well, sir—— I mean, alligators!" said Handforth lamely. "I didn't know they had alligators in China; it would be rather ripping sport if we could rescue poor old Chingy from a place like that."

"Plenty bad Chinamen," said Ah Fong warningly.

"Exactly!" nodded Lee. "If we only had the alligators to contend with, Handforth, we might undertake this trip. But you can be quite certain that Foo Chow has placed his young prisoner in an inaccessible retreat. That rocky mountain, with its surrounding jungle, will be guarded by hundreds of men, and amid such surroundings a vast army will be needed to effect a rescue. We can't risk any such hazard, my boy."



With a sickening lurch the aeroplane fell. Tail foremost, it tore through the rigging and crashed to the deck of the yacht, barely missing the boys and the Moor View girls.

"But for Chingy's sake, sir——"

"Even for Chingy's sake, we cannot deliberately throw away valuable lives," interrupted Lee gruffly. "The boy's father will despatch a picked body of men for this work—men who know much more about the country than we do. No, Handforth, we have done our share, I fancy. Our main object now is to get out of China altogether, and leave Yung Li Chang to complete his victory."

"Why, are—are we making for the coast, sir?" asked Edward Oswald.

"That is the general idea."

Handforth flushed with eagerness. Somehow, the prospect of getting completely free from China had an exhilarating effect. And everybody else was feeling happy, too. There was a general air of optimism, and it was taken for granted that all the perils were over.

Handforth joined a group of St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls on the promenade-deck. They were all gazing up into the sky, and Willy Handforth was pointing.

"I can see it!" he said. "Look! That speck just against the white cloud. My hat! It's coming in this direction, I believe."

Edward Oswald stared upwards, shading his eyes with his hand.

"I can't see anything," he said. "What's all the excitement—— By George! An

aeroplane!" he added intently. "Good egg! Here's another proof that old Foo Chow has been smashed up. It's one of Yung Li Chang's machines, coming to escort us!"

"How splendid!" said Mary Summers lightly.

They continued to watch, and within a very few moments the speck had become a wicked-looking biplane—a fighting machine, with squat wings and a dumpy body. The droning of the engine could now be distinctly heard. The sun was glinting on the silvery planes.

"He's coming down!"

"By jingo, so he is!"

"Hurrah!"

The droning ceased, and the aeroplane came over the gorge at a height of about two thousand feet. But here the pilot ceased his descent, and opened up his engine again. He flew directly over the *Wanderer*, and many necks were craned.

"Look! He's dropped something!" shouted Church. "I saw something shine. There you are! I just caught a glimpse——"

He broke off as a whining sound filled the air—a sound that completely drowned the low drone of the aero engine. A startled expression came into Dick Hamilton's eyes, and he caught his breath in. But before he could utter a word, there was a fearful, devastating explosion from somewhere close at hand.

All the boys and girls staggered from the

force of it, and it seemed to them that the very stern of the yacht had been blown up. With dazed eyes and benumbed ears, they stood there, startled out of all speech.

And from the *Wanderer's* rear arose a cloud of reeking smoke.

"A bomb!" shouted Dick hoarsely at last. "I knew it!"

"A bomb!" muttered Tommy Watson in horror.

There was a rush to the rail, and shouts came from all parts of the decks. Overhead the aeroplane was circling, and was preparing to make another direct flight over the yacht.

"Then—then it's not one of Yung Li Chang's machines!" ejaculated Fullwood. "It belongs to Foo Chow! Great Scott! He's going to blow us to smithereens—and we're helpless!"



CHAPTER 4.

FOO CHOW'S DEADLY PLAN.

LORD DORRIMORE hurried up the main staircase, collarless, coatless, and with his hair in a tangle. He had been indulging in

a well-deserved nap, but that explosion had effectually awakened him. The *Wanderer* had shivered from stem to stern.

"What's happened, boys?" he asked sharply.

"It was a bomb, sir," said Buster Boots of the Fourth, who was nearest.

"Good glory! A what?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "One of those frightful things which come whizzing down from the good old atmosphere! I mean to say, this sort of thing's a bit murky, what? Bombs, dash it! I mean, dash it, bombs! A trifle near the good old limit, by gad!"

Lord Dorrimore stared up and caught sight of the high-flying aeroplane.

"By the Lord Harry!" he muttered. "So that's the latest dodge, is it? The unmitigated murderer! He failed to swamp the yacht with his hordes, so he's tryin' to blow us to fragments!"

Dorrie was furious. He hurried off and found Nelson Lee just descending from the bridge ladder. Everybody was on tenterhooks—for it was felt that another bomb would drop at any second.

"This is bad, Lee, old man," said Dorrie quietly.

"I never anticipated such a move," replied Nelson Lee, his anxiety acute. "And we can do nothing to avert the disaster, Dorrie. There's no anti-aircraft gun aboard, and he's altogether too high for rifle fire. We've just got to wait."

"Did that one hit us?"

"No; it fell well clear."

"I thought we were half-smashed up——"

"My dear Dorrie, the bomb fell nearly two hundred yards astern," interrupted Lee.

"Even then the concussion was tremendous. If that brute scores a direct hit, we shall be badly smashed."

"An' sunk!"

"I wouldn't say that," replied Lee. "Bombs of tremendous explosive power do surprisingly small damage. At the same time, a direct hit might easily shatter all our controls. And if a bomb explodes close to our water-line, we shall undoubtedly sink."

"Oh!" came a combined shout. "Here comes another!"

The whining sound, caused by the descending bomb, was unmistakable. Nobody moved. It seemed fruitless to seek shelter. But there were many pale faces during the next tense seconds.

Boom!

There was a blinding flash from the rocks, far up the side of the gorge. The concussion caused a great wave of air to sweep across the yacht, but the flying fragments of rock all fell short.

"Well, he's got a rotten aim," said Dorrie with relief.

"That is because he is flying so high," muttered Lee. "You see, he is circling again. We must expect another within a minute."

The abruptness of this new form of attack had come as a shock to all. Just when they were feeling secure—just when they believed that Foo Chow had done his worst—this fresh peril came from the air.

"I never dreamed the blighter had aeroplanes!" said Dorrie.

"I fancy this is the only one," growled Lee. "The bombs are probably improvised. That is one reason why an accurate aim is difficult. You remember how we searched Foo Chow's yacht in vain at the beginning of our adventures, Dorrie? Yung Ching was no longer on board, and I will venture a guess that he was brought to China in this very aeroplane. Foo Chow intends to take a terrible revenge!"

"The infernal hound!" snapped his lordship.

Nelson Lee did not wait to say any more. Mr. Stokes had come on deck now, and several members of the engine-room staff, too.

"Barry, hurry round, and take all the boys below," said Lee sharply. "Get your wife to look after the girls. Take them all down to the fifth or sixth deck—right below the ordinary quarters."

"I was just thinking about the same thing," said Mr. Beverley Stokes, nodding. "They'll be comparatively safe there in the event of a direct hit. But supposing a bomb holes us? We'll sink pretty quickly, you know."

"The possibility is a slim one, and we must take the risk," said Lee quickly. "Get these young people below at once."

Handforth, who had heard, began protesting.

"Can't we take our chance, the same as everybody else, sir?" he asked warmly.

"That aeroplane is only driven by a Chinaman, and he's got a rotten aim! Let's stay on deck and watch, sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"We don't want to be packed below, sir!"

"Rather not!"

"We're not funky—neither are the girls!"

"No fear!" said Doris Berkeley. "Oh, please, let's stop!"

Nelson Lee regarded the eager crowd sombrely.

"I admire your spirit, but I want you all to go quietly below," he said. "Remember that we promised your parents that you should suffer no unnecessary risks. And it would be a very unnecessary risk for you to remain on deck. Be sporting, and do as I ask without quibbling."

There was an instant response.

"Right you are, sir!"

"Come on, you chaps—let's get below!"

"Follow me!" roared Handforth. "If Mr. Lee wants us to get down, there's nothing to argue about. The first chap who objects will feel the weight of my fist! We shall be up again in ten minutes, anyhow. That silly idiot up there will never score a direct hit!"

They went crowding down, much to Nelson Lee's relief.

"You'd better go, too, Dorrie," he said quietly. "There's nothing you can do on deck—"

"When you've done talkin' drivel, I shall be obliged!" interrupted Dorrie coldly. "This is my yacht, an' I'm stayin' where I am. Where's that 'plane? Oh, yes, I see him! Comin' over again, eh? Who cares?"

His lordship spoke contemptuously as he glanced up. And although Nelson Lee was still looking deeply concerned, he was not acutely worried. He knew that if the airman secured a direct hit it would be a fluke.

From a height of two thousand feet, the *Wanderer* was a mere speck, and an almost impossible target. A trained war-bomber would find it practically hopeless to score any kind of hit. And this Chinese pilot was probably a mere novice.

"There's only the chance that he may get us by accident, Dorrie," said Lee. "From that height he is far more liable to drop his bombs either well in front of us, or behind us. We shall have cause for anxiety if he comes lower."

Dorrie nodded.

"He's doin' that now," he observed grimly.

Nelson Lee approved of this—for there was no sense in anticipating trouble. The chances were that no bomb would hit the *Wanderer*.

"Our mutual enemy is again revealing his fangs," remarked General Ling, as he joined Nelson Lee. "We are indifferent to his paltry efforts."

"Yes, he'll find it difficult to score a bull's eye," smiled Nelson Lee. "Hallo! Do you hear that? Here comes another!"

The whine of the descending bomb grew to a loud scream. Then, with a shattering report, the explosion took place several hundred yards ahead, right at the water's edge, where there were some concrete buildings—modern innovations of Foo Chow's.

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"Good!" he chuckled. "That's the way, old man! Bust up your boss's property, an' we shan't grumble at all. Good gad! What an aim!"

Scarcely any shock had been felt on the yacht, and the watchers on deck gazed at the dense cloud of smoke and dust which had arisen from the half-demolished building.

And then, suddenly, there was a curious report. A kind of long, bursting sound, more resembling a puff than an explosion. A lurid sheet of flame accompanied it.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nelson Lee. "Look at the water!"

"What is this sight which astonishes my mean vision?" asked General Ling. "The water itself is on fire, surely?"

So it seemed. Following that second explosion, the water near the rocky bank was flaming up. And the blaze was spreading with incredible rapidity. Right out into the centre of the river came the roaring mass.

"Petrol!" shouted Lee. "Don't you understand? That bomb smashed into Foo Chow's petrol store, and the whole supply has been released—probably thousands of gallons."

Lord Dorrimore grinned again.

"That airman's doin' fine!" he remarked. "As long as he doesn't—"

"Man alive, don't you realise that this might be disastrous for us?" shouted Lee. "Look at that conflagration? It's spreading with the speed of lightning! The whole river is afire."

This was no exaggerated statement. The flames had leapt right across to the other bank with staggering swiftness. The amount of petrol that had spread over the surface of the water was enormous, and it was all blazing, and sending lurid sheets up into the air. The river immediately in front of the yacht was an inferno.

And the vessel was going straight into it!

"Good glory!" ejaculated Dorrie, startled. "We'd better reverse engines, Lee! We shall have to give orders—"

"It's too late, Dorrie!" said Lee. "The gush of the petrol is this way, and perhaps there's a back current near the shore which causes this effect. Before we can stop, we shall find ourselves in the middle of that blazing sea. There's only one chance. We shall have to order full speed ahead."

"An' go through it?"



CHAPTER 5.

THE FLOOD OF FIRE!

UNQUESTIONABLY, the aeroplane was dropping lower. But even now, the pilot remained at a height of about one thousand feet.

The yacht, in the meantime, was continuing her course down stream as though nothing out of the common was happening.

"Yes!"

"You think we'll do it safely?"

"There's no time to think, or to come to any other decision," snapped Lee. "I don't suppose for a moment that petrol was fired deliberately, but we're in the midst of an unexpected danger."

He went off, and a minute later the engine-room telegraph clanged, and the propeller answered. The *Wanderer* swept down, through that nightmare of fire, at full speed.

Lee was wise in this decision—not that it was really his place to decide at all. For the *Wanderer* was in full command of Captain Burton. The skipper, however, was in full concurrence with Lee's plan.

To reverse engines would be fatal, for it would only result in the yacht being trapped in the midst of the flames. The current was strong, and even with the engines going full speed astern, the backward progress would be slight. She would just stay there, enveloped in the flames.

But it would be a different thing to go full speed ahead. There was a chance that the yacht would out-race the danger, and get clear of the blaze.

Lord Dorrimore was looking rather haggard as he watched. He shielded his face with his hands, for now the flames were all round, roaring up with triumphant force. It seemed impossible that the vessel could escape destruction by fire. She was in the midst of a flaming sea.

The reek of the burning petrol was suffocating, the heat was terrible, and it was almost impossible to remain on deck. Men ran for shelter, and those on the bridge could only crouch down behind the canvas, praying for the best.

Below, the other members of the holiday party knew nothing about this fresh peril until it was upon them.

"There goes another bomb," remarked Dick Hamilton, as the sound of the concussion came dully to them, in their refuge, far below. "Sounds farther away than ever."

"There's nothing to be afraid of," growled Handforth. "We had to come down, of course—just to please Mr. Lee. But it's all rubbish. It would be a lot better on deck watching the fun."

"Couldn't we steal up and have a look?" suggested Fullwood. "Mr. Lee won't know anything about it—"

"Better not," interrupted Dick.

"Well, let's get up to the next deck, and —"

"Can't go, young gents!" exclaimed a sailor breathlessly, as he hurried down from an iron ladder. "We shall be lucky if we ain't afire in five minutes."

"Afire!" echoed a dozen voices.

"That blamed airman has exploded a store of petrol, and it's spread all over the river," said the sailor. "We're in the thick of it now—flames all round us everywhere. You can't go on deck yet, young gentlemen, but you've got to hold yourselves ready for a dash. That's why I'm here. Maybe we shall have to abandon ship."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Abandon ship!"

"You—you mean the *Wanderer* might be lost?"

"Impossible!"

"I wish I could think the same, missy," said the sailor, as he glanced at Irene. "But it ain't so impossible as it might appear. We're going through a sea of flames, and if we don't get out quickly we shan't stand half-a-chance."

There were expressions of consternation. This piece of news had come upon the boys and girls as a shock. Indeed, some of them couldn't quite believe it. For they were far down in the yacht, away from all portholes. And there was no sign, here, of the peril that raged without.

"Oh, it's all rot!" shouted Handforth. "You must be exaggerating! Let's go and have a look—"

"I've got orders to keep you here, young gent.," said the sailor sharply.

"Blow your orders—"

Handforth paused abruptly as the *Wanderer* gave a lurching movement. Practically everybody was flung over. It was not particularly alarming, for nothing followed. There was no sign of rocking or swaying. But the sailor had gone suddenly pale.

"Crikey!" he muttered, aghast.

"What's the matter?" panted Church. "What's happened?"

"We're aground, sir—that's what's the matter!" said the sailor shakily. "Bust my skin! We're aground!"

"Oh, great Scott!"

"Aground in the middle of that sea o' flame," said the man, the horror plain in his eyes. "I reckon this is good-night, nurse, for all of us. Cuss that blamed Chinese pilot! He's done it a-purpose, I'll bet!"

"Ah Fong!" shouted Handforth. "You mean to say he's deliberately— Oh, rot! Ah Fong is a friend! He wouldn't do a filthy trick like that!"

"I don't trust these 'ere Chinks!" said the sailor gruffly.

All the boys and girls were filled with fresh anxiety. Although they heard this talk of fire, they had seen nothing of it. They were all anxious to hurry up on deck—out of this prison. It seemed a real torture to wait here, not knowing what was actually happening.

But the sailor was quite right.

The *Wanderer* had run aground!

Ah Fong, however, was in no way to blame. The vessel had been speeding through the flames blindly. There was absolutely nothing else for it, for the flames completely encircled the decks, and from one end of the yacht to the other there was a dense fog of murky smoke. Nothing could be seen ahead—not even the bows. Those on the bridge were shut off from everybody else, and the heat there was appalling.

The *Wanderer*, attempting to escape the danger, had made the position infinitely worse. For now she was aground, in the very heart of that river of fire.

CHAPTER 6.

DOING THEIR BIT.



EDWARD OSWALD HAND-

FORTH was like a cat on hot bricks. The uncertainty of the whole position affected him enormously,

and he gave no thought to Nelson Lee's wishes, or to any sense of reason.

All he knew was that he had to see this spectacle!

"We can't be messed about like this!" he shouted. "Besides, perhaps we can do something. Why the dickens should we stay here, idle, when there's danger? Come on, the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

"Let's go on deck!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was a rush, and the sailor could do nothing to stop it. But, to begin with, Handforth only ran to the deck above, which was above the water-line. He raced down the iron corridor to a store-room, and wrenched the door open. Then he started back, aghast. A great mass of noxious fumes assailed him. And where daylight should have been, at the porthole, there was nothing but a sheet of livid flame.

"We're on fire!" he gasped in horror.

"Great Scott!"

Dick Hamilton looked grim.

"There's a chance for us to do something!" he shouted. "Now then, the Remove, be ready! Two of us will man each fire hydrant, and get the hoses going. I don't suppose we can do much, but it'll be better than standing still. Come on! Let's all get busy!"

"Good! Anything's better than just watching!"

"Bravo, Dick! We'll all do our bit!"

Before another minute had elapsed, the juniors were running to every available fire point, and the hoses were got into action. The greatest necessity was on the saloon-deck, where the flames were licking fiercely through the open windows, into the saloon and into the luxurious lounges. If the fire got a hold here, the result would be appalling.

So far the flames were very deceptive. It seemed as though the yacht was on fire, but she was only scorched on the outside. The flames were pouring upwards from the burning petrol. Glasses were cracked, paint was blistered and burned, but there was no actual conflagration within the yacht. But the efforts of the St. Frank's fellows were needed.

For they succeeded in keeping the flames in check. Streams of water were directed at the open ports and windows—at the rail on the promenade-deck, where the flames were licking the deck planks. On every side the belching flames rose in solid walls, and it was a fortunate thing for all that the wind had completely dropped. The flames were rising straight, and providing the vessel sped quickly out of the zone, it might still be

possible to save her. But everything would depend upon the next few minutes.

Sailors had braved the flames with rare courage—rushing up the bridge ladder with a hose-pipe—with two or three hose-pipes. And while two men sent the streams of water in all directions, a third sprayed the captain and the pilot, and kept the bridge thoroughly soaked. The cool spray was grateful, indeed. It was this alone which made life possible during those awful moments. To Captain Burton it seemed as though his beloved vessel was a torch.

But he still carried on.

Clang, clang!

The engine-room telegraph rang out in answer to his commands, and the yacht's engines were racing with all their enormous power. Full speed astern! It was the only chance to get free.

The *Wanderer* had not struck a rock—this was a merciful fact—but had apparently dug her nose into a soft mud-bank. Had she been fitted with normal engines she could never have pulled off. But her power was enormous, and at last she drew out, and Captain Burton roared with relief.

"She's off!" he shouted. "There's still a chance!"

Clang!

Again the engine-room telegraph sounded, and this time the yacht went full speed ahead. The helmsman whirled the wheel at random. It was impossible to do anything else. It was ten chances to one against finding a clear channel, but there was no other course open. Amid the flames and murk, nothing whatever could be seen. A blind dash for safety was attempted.

"We're still afloat, Lee—we're still afloat!" said Lord Dorrimore, as he crouched with Nelson Lee in the chart-room. "We're off that infernal sandbank, an' we're goin' ahead! Glory! The flames are less now—or am I wrong?"

"They're less," said Nelson Lee quietly.

On the bridge it seemed as though a miracle had happened. The yacht, tearing along at an absolutely mad pace—a speed that would utterly wreck her if she struck the rocks—shot clear of the fire zone. It was as though she had just come out of a fog-bank.

The smoke and flames were left behind in a solid wall. They had raced out of the section of the river that was flooded by the burning petrol. And, by some providential chance, they were heading down stream, in the very centre of the river.

"Allee same good!" shouted Ah Fong, as he strained his heat-swollen eyes ahead. "We in channel. Keepee speed. Deep water. Allee lightee. We getee out of danger."

Captain Burton hesitated, with his hand on the telegraph. All his instincts were to check this insane rush. But a glance behind at that inferno made him hold his hand. As long as the yacht went faster than the current, all would be well.

"You know this channel?" he asked grimly. "Deep water," said Ah Fong. "Allee safe."

"I'll chance it for another minute," muttered the skipper.

The river was wide, and the rocky gorge was growing less wild. Ahead lay the cultivated country, where the river-banks became flat and grassy. And the yacht was simply racing along like a destroyer. At any ordinary time this progress would have been utterly insane.

Even as it was, Captain Burton could not restrain himself.

Clang!

He telegraphed to the engine-room, and the engines were reversed. The skipper had decided to proceed now at a more leisurely pace.

On the lower decks the St. Frank's fellows were gasping at the sudden change. Flinging their hoses down, they rushed to the scorching hot rail and stared. The sides of the gorge were flashing by, and the air was clear. The sunlight revealed the scorched and blackened yacht in all her pitiful state. Steam was rising from her sides in clouds, and her decks, too, were sending forth volumes of vapour.

"We're clear!" shouted Dick Hamilton. "And we're not on fire, either! Cheer, you chaps! We've beaten the flames!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old *Wanderer*!"

"My hat! Look back!"

Up river a dense pall of black smoke marred the entire view, and in the centre of it were reddish, licking flames. It was all too evident that the danger had been missed by a hair's-breadth.

Even now the sailors were working madly. In about eight different places the yacht was on fire, but only at isolated spots, where the flames had licked the woodwork into a blaze. By prompt measures the peril was quelled.

"Boys, you've done wonders!" declared Lee, as he hurried round. "Indeed, but for your efforts with these hoses, I doubt if we should have escaped. You held the flames in check at the most crucial moment. Well done, the *Remove*!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"And well done the Moor View School!" added Lee. "I see that you girls have been operating the hose-pipes, too. Bravo! I never dreamed that we should escape from this blaze. This trip seems to be one long succession of perils."

"But we always come out, don't we, sir?" asked Handforth. "But, I say, the poor old *Wanderer* is in a bit of a mess, isn't she?"

Lord Dorrimore had gone up to the bridge, and he was thinking exactly the same thing. The expression on his face was tragic.

"Good gad, what a ghastly sight!" he said sadly. "The old tub is still whole, but just look at her!"

There was every reason for his plaintive voice. The *Wanderer*, once so splendid in

her white paint, was now a scorched, blackened hulk. At least, so she seemed. Her decks were black with smuts and soot. From stem to stern she was a pitiful travesty of her real self.

"Yes, she doesn't look any too trim, but there's nothing to worry over, sir," said Captain Burton. "She's whole—and that's the main thing. All this is superficial damage. We're still fit for any sea voyage you like to mention."

Dorrie was only slightly relieved.

"But, gad, look at her condition!" he exclaimed.

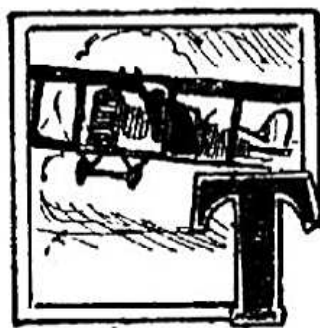
"She'll have a different appearance after the sailors have put in a few hours' work, sir," said the skipper. "I'm worried about her plates. It's quite likely that some of them will buckle near the water-line, and we may be leaking a bit. I shall be glad to have the engineer's report."

"Anyhow, we've got out of the mess for the time being," growled his lordship. "Aren't we going a bit too fast, though? We don't want to get on to another of those infernal banks. At this speed we shall pile her up if we hit anything."

"Water, him deep," said Ah Fong cheerfully. "Me good pilot. Allee same velly safe."

"Well, we shall have to take your word for it, I suppose," said Dorrie. "There's no chance of that fire comin' down on us again; it's practically burnt itself out now, in any case. And that infernal airman has cleared off. We've fooled him. He thinks we're a blackened lump of wreckage by this time, but we're only more or less scorched."

But of all the narrow escapes that the holiday party had had, this surely seemed to be the narrowest.



CHAPTER 7.

PERIL UPON PERIL.

TWENTY minutes later, all sense of danger had passed.

The superheated plates of the yacht had cooled, and, except for her blackened condition, she was completely out of peril. In the saloon, and in the lounges and reading-rooms, there were many evidences of the recent fire, where paintwork was scorched, and where decorations were marred. Near the windows, too, everything was swamped with water. But these, after all, were mere trifles compared to what might have happened.

The vessel was now going down stream sedately, and had now passed out of the rocky gorge. On both sides stretched green, cultivated lands, with belts of wooded country, and nestling villages. Ah Fong, by the side of the helmsman, was proving himself to be an able pilot.

"It's more than I can understand," declared Fullwood, as he stood on deck with some of the other fellows, looking at the



Just in time, Handforth's fist crashed to the jaw of the Chinaman. One moment later and the glittering dagger would have been sheathed in Dorrimore's back. There was danger at every turn in the Temple of Pao-Kang!

sailors at work. "I thought we should be a burnt-out shell by this time."

"We only escaped because we made a dash for it," said Dick Hamilton. "Our paint-work is messed up, and it'll take weeks to clean these decks properly. But we're all safe."

"And there weren't any casualties, either," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "I hear that one or two of the sailors are a bit blistered, though. Any of our chaps burned at all?"

"Only a bit scorched, here and there," said Church. "If you ask me, the Remove did well."

"And they wanted to bottle us up below!" said Handforth indignantly. "They can't keep the Remove down when there's any danger! I hope that beastly airman crashed somewhere."

"He's gone back to report his wonderful victory, I expect," grinned Tommy Watson. "He's probably telling old Foo Chow that we're all burnt to death, and that the yacht is a charred piece of wreckage at the bottom of the river."

"Even if he does, he can't be blamed," said Irene. "It must have looked a clear case of destruction to the airman, at that height. I expect we were just swallowed up in the midst of all those flames and smoke."

"Anyhow, he's gone," said Doris thankfully. "I hope they'll soon bring some tea round," she added. "I think we all need

something to buck us up, although we can't expect too much."

The feeling of relief was general. The airman had done his worst, and had gone back to report. That was the universal assumption. And Dorrimore had given instructions that tea should be served to the guests as quickly as possible, so that normal conditions would be resumed. Yang Fu would be reached within an hour, anyhow, and then there would be no time for tea. Everything in the immediate future was hazy. Nobody knew exactly what was going to happen.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea if we went down and had a wash," suggested Irene, with a laugh. "We're in a perfectly dreadful state. I hadn't realised it until now."

"A wash won't be much good," said Fullwood. "We all need complete changes, with a bath in advance. How about getting our swimming tugs, and going down to the big swimming bath?"

"Good idea!"

"It'll cool us off," said Dick Hamilton approvingly. "And—" He paused, glancing upwards. "Rummy!" he said. "I thought I heard—"

"That aeroplane again!" cried Marjorie Temple, in alarm.

"What!"

"It's true!" shouted Tommy Watson, pointing. "Look! There he is! Oh, the rotter! Not satisfied with nearly burning us up, he's come back to drop some more bombs!"

Handforth snorted.

"Aren't these Chinese ever satisfied?" he asked indignantly.

"I was half afraid of this, only I didn't like to say so," muttered Dick. "The beggar was just circling about, waiting to see the result of his handiwork. And now that he finds we're still intact, he's coming over to finish his work."

"And we shall be sent below again, I suppose," said Handforth disgustedly. "Well, I'm not going! I'm blowed if I'm going to be messed about like that! We'll stay here, and see what happens!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not scared!"

On the bridge, Lord Dorrimore was simply furious.

"Look at him, Lee!" he snapped. "I'm hanged if the cur isn't comin' back! Well, thank goodness there aren't any more petrol stores for him to let loose. An' there's not much chance that he'll hit us."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I'm not so sure," he said with concern. "This Chinese bomb-dropper is evidently a determined man. Perhaps he has received orders to destroy us, or suffer execution. Anyhow, he's a conscientious fellow, and he's apparently determined to get to close quarters."

They watched the wicked-looking machine as it manœuvred in the air. The pilot was gliding down to earth now, with his engine cut out. Having failed at long range, the man was planning to swoop low down. And Nelson Lee's anxiety was justified. For a bomb dropped at close range would be a serious menace.

Lower and lower came the aeroplane, until, indeed, he was no higher than two hundred feet from the ground. With his engine still switched off, he came gliding round in a steep curve towards the *Wanderer*.

"Rifles!" snapped Lee abruptly.

"Two minds with but a single thought!" said Lord Dorrimore. "By gad, the fellow's takin' a risk, isn't he?"

They fairly tumbled down the bridge ladder, and seized a rifle each. There was no time to order the boys and girls to get below. This fresh peril had developed in the space of seconds. Even now, the swooping aeroplane was within a hundred yards.

With his machine under perfect control, the pilot glided gently down towards the yacht, his intention being clearly to drop his deadly cargo, and then open up his engine, and swoop away.

"Oh!" murmured Irene, holding her breath.

"Look out!" said Dick, clutching at Mary's arm. "Hold still!"

They all expected— They knew not what. Certainly, the thing that did happen was totally surprising to all.

Crack! Crack!

Lee and Dorrie fired simultaneously. Just for one second the head of the pilot was visible as he looked out of the cockpit to

judge his position. From Dorrie's side of the deck he had nothing to aim at, but Lee caught a momentary glimpse of that head. He fired, and waited for the devastating explosion of the bomb.

But at that very second the under-carriage of the aeroplane fouled the tip of the *Wanderer's* mast. For a moment the 'plane hovered, and Lee caught his breath in. He expected to hear the engine roar out a bellow of defiance. But nothing of the sort happened.

"He's falling!"

"Quick! Stand clear, there!"

"Out of the way, you chaps!"

There were many shouts, and everybody made a blind rush away from the danger spot. The enemy aeroplane behaved in a very singular fashion. The engine remained dead, the propeller still. And as the under-carriage caught the top of the mast, the machine heeled slightly over to the left.

It seemed to stagger, and there was a loud snap as the tip of the mast broke. And then, slewing sideways, the machine reeled with a drunken movement, and stalled. With a sickening lurch it fell, tail foremost, tearing through the rigging, through the wireless aerial, to the deck.



CHAPTER 8.

HANDY WANTS TO GO!

NELSON LEE thought his last moment had come.

Indeed, there was scarcely a soul on that deck who thought anything else.

This machine had come over to drop bombs—so what would happen when it crashed on the yacht with its full load?

Instinctively Lee closed his eyes. He heard a crashing and rending of fabric, but the smash was not half so loud as he had anticipated. Tail first, the aeroplane hit the deck, and then toppled over, upside down.

For one full second there was a complete silence.

"Great Scott!" muttered Dick Hamilton, at last.

"The bombs haven't gone off!"

"Careful! Don't go too near—"

"Back, boys—stand back!" shouted Nelson Lee, running forward. "Mr. Stewart, bring some of the men! Quickly—quickly!"

The fresh tension was over. No death-dealing explosion had come, and the enemy airman had only brought disaster to himself. The St. Frank's fellows, crowding back, watched breathlessly.

Nelson Lee and Mr. Stewart and two men approached the machine, and Lee carefully removed four wicked-looking bombs from the rack, a fitting which was housed on the under-carriage. One by one the bombs were carried away.

"Overboard with 'em!" said Dorrie curtly.

"No!" shouted Lee. "Good heavens,

Dorrie, they might go off on contact with the water! Take them below, Mr. Stewart, and lock them in the magazine. Be very careful not to touch the detonators."

"Trust me, sir," said the first officer.

Lee breathed a sigh of relief after Mr. Stewart had gone.

"Another narrow squeak, Dorrie," he said.

"We're gettin' used to 'em!" said his lordship. "Nothin' on earth will give us heart failure after these experiences, old man. But why in the name of all that's uncanny are we still alive?"

"I imagine the pilot made a grave error of judgment," said Lee. "He allowed his engine to stop, and the propeller ceased revolving. Just when he wanted the power to rise, he had none. So he fouled the mast, and here's the result."

"But why didn't those bombs explode?"

"Because the crash was comparatively light—only the tail is shattered," replied Nelson Lee. "See, the main planes, the engine, and the propeller are all intact. She fell upside-down, too, so the bombs never came into contact at all. We were certainly born under a lucky star, Dorrie."

"Well, let's get the pilot out, an' shove him in irons," said his lordship gruffly. "I expect he's injured, though."

This did not seem very probable, for the machine had simply toppled over gently after the tail had crumpled up, and it was far more likely that the pilot would be uninjured in the cockpit.

While the juniors still hung back, a number of sailors lifted the machine, and the pilot was dragged out—a smallish Chinaman with a cunning, repulsive type of face. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore gazed down at him, and then exchanged significant glances.

"By glory, Lee," muttered his lordship. "That was a good shot of yours!"

The pilot was stone dead, with a rifle-shot through his head!

"This explains things rather more lucidly," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Well, I'm not sorry, Dorrie. It was either his life or ours, and but for the accuracy of my aim, we should all have been blown to atoms by now, including those boys and girls."

"Yes, you saved us right enough," agreed Dorrie soberly. "You saved the old yacht from bein' sunk, too. Gad, how on earth did you score a bullseye with scarcely any aim? I always knew you were a crack shot, Lee, but this beats everythin'!"

The detective did not feel like conversation. He knew well enough that his shot had proved the salvation of them all. The pilot, dead, had been unable to release his bomb from the rack, or open up his engine. So the collision with the mast had been inevitable.

It was the reward of recklessness. The man had been insane to swoop down so low. Perhaps he had been contemptuous of the Britishers' aim.

If so, he had received a deadly lesson.

"All clear now, boys," said his lordship, as

he glanced round. "Nothin' to worry about. The danger's over."

"What about the pilot, sir?" asked Handforth.

"He's been taken below."

"But we wanted to chuck him in the river, sir," said Handforth indignantly. "I say, let's go down and yank him up and pitch him—"

"One moment, boys," interrupted Lee. "The pilot is dead."

"Oh!"

The juniors' expressions changed.

"Sorry, sir," said Handforth awkwardly. "I—I didn't know."

"We've all got to thank Mr. Lee for our lives," Dorrie thought it advisable to say. "You heard our rifle-shots? Well, Mr. Lee got the beggar. That's why we're still breathin'."

"But perhaps your shot killed him, sir," said Boots.

"No—I never saw the poor devil."

"Three cheers for the guv'nor!" shouted Dick Hamilton excitedly. "He's saved all our lives, you chaps!"

"Don't give those cheers, boys—we don't want a lot of fuss," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I appreciate your motives, but let us be thankful that we have been saved, and remain calm. We are quite safe now, and there is very little danger of further attack."

"Well, let's get the machine righted, and have a look at her," said Dorrimore diplomatically. "I'm hanged if she isn't British! One of our latest machines, too, Lee! Of all the infernal impudence, bombing us with one of our own aeroplanes!"

The machine was so small that a dozen men soon completely lifted her, and set her right-side-up on the deck. It was then seen that the damage was comparatively trivial.

The entire front of the aeroplane was unharmed. A good deal of battering had occurred to the tail, but the engine, the petrol tank, the propeller, and the main planes were perfect. Even the fuselage was unharmed, except at the extreme rear, where the tail skid, the elevator and the rudder were jumbled up in a tattered mass of wreckage.

"Nothin' much the matter with this boat," said Dorrie, as he inspected her with the eyes of an expert. "With a dozen of our men working on her, she could be fit for the air within a couple of hours. An' I could take her aloft, too. Gad, I'd rather relish a joy-ride."

His lordship was not only a big game hunter, an explorer, and a motor racer, but he was an expert aeroplane pilot, and had frequently flown his own machine in such competitions as the Aerial Derby.

"Yes, she could easily be patched up," agreed Lee, nodding.

"How about repairing her, then, and making a flight over Foo Chow's headquarters?" asked Handforth eagerly. "I'll go with you, sir, and drop some bombs as a reprisal."

"You're full of great ideas, Handy!" grinned his lordship.

"Then it's a go?" asked Edward Oswald eagerly. "Good! I say, sir, you're a brick—"

"Whoa! Steady!" gasped Dorrie. "Not so fast, young man!"

"But you said—"

"I said nothin'," growled his lordship. "An' it distinctly is *not* a go. It's like your blessed nerve to talk about flyin' over Foo Chow's headquarters an' droppin' bombs!"

"Well, doesn't he deserve them, sir?"

"He deserves plenty of 'em; but perhaps you can tell me where his headquarters are?" said Dorrie blandly.

"Oh, my hat! I never thought of that!"

"You wouldn't!"

"Still, we can easily find the way," said Handforth, who never gave up hope. "If you can get the machine repaired—"

"By the Lord Harry!" broke in Lord Dorrimore, his eyes suddenly gleaming. "An idea! Lee, old man, a real brain-wave! Yes, we'll have this machine repaired at once, so that I can have her taken ashore as soon as we get to Yang Fu. Then I'll get her into the air."

"Just for this—joy-ride?" asked Nelson Lee.

"No! To fly to the Pao-Kang Temple!" said Dorrie.

"H'm! It sounds quite adventurous, but I shouldn't decide on anything until we have had a conference with Yung Li Chang," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "You mean that you'll fly to that Temple, and rescue Yung Ching, eh?"

"Absolutely."

"Don't be too optimistic, Dorrie," said Lee, shaking his head. "That Temple is probably well guarded, and you'll have to find a landing place, and even then it will be difficult to locate— No, old man, it's impracticable. Even if you got into the place, you'd find the machine seized by the time you got out. And we don't want to lose our host."

Lord Dorrimore was not easily quelled.

"Well, we'll say nothin' more about it for the moment," he remarked cheerfully. "But we're goin' to have the machine repaired at once, so that it will be ready soon after we get to Yang Fu. I shall want five or six expert men, and I'll superintend the operations myself."

"Go ahead, then," smiled Lee. "It will keep you amused."

As a matter of fact, the city of Yang Fu was within sight already. The river was broader here, and the *Wanderer* was steaming sedately down in mid-stream, looking rather like a battered war hulk, with her scorched paintwork, her cracked ports, and heat-twisted rails. In fact, she was a very disreputable-looking ship, but these scars were all honourable ones.

"Did you hear what Dorrie was saying about flying off to fetch Yung Ching?" asked Handforth, as he took Church and McClure

aside. "He's going to fly off to that Temple soon after we get to Yang Fu. Well, I'm going to smuggle myself aboard, and go with him."

Church and McClure stared at Handforth, aghast.

"You madman!" ejaculated Church. "You can't do that! I shall tell Mr. Lee—"

"You—you giddy sneak—"

"I don't mean that, but I'll stop you from doing anything of the sort!" said Church anxiously. "I've never heard of such—"

"Oh, I don't know," put in McClure. "If Handy's so set on it, why should we interfere? Let him do as he likes, Churchy."

"Eh?" said Church, staring. "Oh!"

He had just seen a slight movement of McClure's left eye.

"Let him do as he likes," repeated Mac. "It's a ripping idea. When Dorrie starts off on the trip, Handy's only got to stow himself into the cockpit, and it'll be simple. Of course, he'll have to trust to luck that Dorrie doesn't see him, although it might be a bit difficult."

"Why difficult?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, it's a single-seater machine, and Dorrie might accidentally sit on you," explained McClure blandly. "Still, if you're so keen on stowing away, we wouldn't dream of interfering. Would we, Church?"

"Not likely!" grinned Church.

Edward Oswald started.

"A single seater!" he ejaculated. "Oh, my hat! That rather messes up the stunt— Wait a minute, though," he added, staring at the machine. "There's another seat at the back—with a canvas covering over it. By George! You're wrong, you asses! It's a two-seater, after all!"

"What?" bleated McClure.

"And that covering will just come in handy, because I can smuggle aboard and hide myself as easy as winking," said Handforth triumphantly. "Not a word, my lads! It's all settled, and nobody must know anything until after I've gone."

He walked off, full of bubbling enthusiasm.



CHAPTER 9.

HIS EXCELLENCY. YUNG LI CHANG.

CHURCH and McClure were left rather blank.

"He means it!" said Church. "You fathead, what the dickens did you

agree with him for?"

"I was only having a bit of fun. I thought there was only one seat in the aeroplane," growled McClure. "But you needn't worry. He'll never be allowed to smuggle himself in that second cockpit. We can't sneak to Mr. Lee or Dorrie, but we can give the other fellows the tip. And if Handy tries to act the giddy ox, we'll all jump on him."

"Yes, that's a good idea," nodded Church.

"Let's pretend we've forgotten it, and go and have a look at the scenery. Hallo! We're practically in Yang Fu already. Look at all the people on the roads. Plenty of excitement here, by the look of things."

There was no lack of interest in the scene.

As the *Wanderer* glided down to her anchorage—which General Ling Soo Chin was indicating—the rails were crowded with the youthful guests. The city of Yang Fu lay before them, and the river itself was packed with masses of junks and all manner of other native boats. And the place was teeming with life.

The boys had seen Yang Fu from the river before—when they had passed up stream, captives of Dr. Foo Chow. But the picture had been very different then. The city had been full of life just the same, but there had been a sort of depression overhanging the whole city.

Now there were smiling faces by the thousand—waving arms, too. The population, it seemed, was not particularly depressed because their city had fallen into the hands of Yung Li Chang. Quite the contrary was the case. The whole of Yang Fu seemed to be delirious with joy.

And the coming of the white men was also greeted with gladness—probably because the people knew that they had been the captives of Foo Chow, and because they were the friends of their new war lord.

"Well, I hardly expected this," remarked Dick Hamilton, as he watched the animated scene. "It only shows what a devil Foo Chow is. His very people are mad with joy because he's been beaten. And they know what a fine man Yung Li Chang is, too. They would much rather be under his rule."

"That's about the size of it," agreed Reggie Pitt, nodding. "I don't see why we shouldn't go ashore, you know. The whole situation is changed now. There's no danger."

"Unfortunately, the gov'nor may hold different opinions," said Dick. "We mustn't expect to go ashore to-day, anyhow—and perhaps we shall be on our way to the coast by to-morrow. There's no telling."

By this time the *Wanderer* had eased up her engines, and the anchor had been dropped. She was moored in mid-stream, and strings of boats were coming out to her, many of them merely occupied by curious natives.

On deck the gang of mechanics were busily making the repairs to the damaged aeroplane,

according to Lord Dorrimore's orders. And they were setting to work in a businesslike way. There was little doubt that the machine would be ready within an hour or two.

A gong sounded, announcing tea.

"Now, boys and girls, I want you to have your meal comfortably, and then amuse yourselves afterwards," said Nelson Lee, as he encountered a group of the youthful guests. "Yung Li Chang is coming aboard almost at once, and we are to have a conference. He is a very important man, and much may depend upon the result of this interview."

"Won't he stay to dinner, sir?"

"Very probably. I shall advise Lord Dorrimore to invite him, at all events," said Nelson Lee. "Remember, nobody is to go ashore in any circumstances. Handforth, have I your solemn promise that you will stay on board?"

"I suppose so, sir," said Handforth reluctantly.

"That is hardly a promise, young man."

"All right, sir—I promise."

Nelson Lee was quite certain that none of the others would attempt to get away. Edward Oswald Handforth was always the doubtful one. And Lee went off to Lord Dorrimore's state-room, satisfied. He found his lordship resplendent in a new white suit.

"Must look decent, you know," remarked Dorrie apologetically. "Mr. Yung Li Chang is a

great mandarin—the governor of a vast province—to say nothin' of bein' a powerful war lord."

"I am afraid he will have to put up with my present appearance, for I think he is coming now," said Nelson Lee, as he glanced out through the doorway. "I am very anxious to meet him, Dorrie. Perhaps we shall learn some definite information concerning Foo Chow's armies. Our concern, you must remember, is to get out of China as quickly as we can."

A few minutes later the great man appeared, escorted by General Ling Soo Chin and several other high officers.

The Governor of Hu Kiang was a tall, upright Chinaman, clad in a simple, but dignified uniform. He was slightly elderly, clean-shaven, and his eyes were grave but kindly. There was a vast difference between this Oriental and the man whom he had routed.

The introductions were soon over, and it was found that Yung Li Chang spoke perfect English, and he did not indulge in the self-

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depreciation which was such a characteristic of General Ling. Yung Ching's father was thoroughly European in his views and methods. The fact that he was a great lover of Britain was obvious, or he would never have sent his son to England to be educated.

"Really, gentlemen, I hardly know how to choose my words," he said, after the preliminaries. "You have risked terrible dangers in order to protect my unfortunate son from the devilries of Foo Chow. There are no adequate words that will express my heartfelt gratitude."

He spoke in a musical, well-modulated voice—the voice of a kindly, benevolent man.

"I am afraid that appearances are somewhat deceptive, sir," said Lord Dorrimore, smiling. "We came East in search of adventure more than anythin' else. an' I rather think we found some. What we have done for your son was insignificant, an' we have no reason to boast, in any case. The poor boy is still in the hands of that Foo Chow hound."

"A fact which in no way reflects discredit upon yourselves," said Yung Li Chang gravely. "I would like you to know that I am not a man of violence. For twenty years I have sought to keep my people in peace, and have done everything in my power to banish poverty and to make the Province of Hu Kiang a prosperous, self-supporting territory. In a great measure, I have succeeded."

"The people of Yang Fu appear to welcome your advent here," smiled Lee.

"They are quite good people," said the Chinaman. "I have every reason to believe that they hate Foo Chow, and that they will welcome a change of ruler. Foo Chow has only himself to thank for the present disaster. He threatened to torture my son, and I invaded his province. It is my intention to sweep through the whole of this land and stamp out the blight which Foo Chow has caused."

"And Foo Chow himself?"

"He has fled with the remnants of his army," replied the Governor of Hu Kiang. "You may rest assured that he will soon meet the fate that he is destined for. My friends, I appreciate your efforts on behalf of my son, and my gratitude is beyond computation. But, in all seriousness, I advise you to leave China as quickly as possible."

"Well, we shan't be exactly sorry to go," said his lordship.

"Foo Chow is still at liberty, and he still has considerable power," continued Yung Li Chang. "And I know that he has sworn to destroy you all. That is his fixed intention."

"Cheery blighter!" growled Dorrie.

"This quarrel is mine, and I will deal with Foo Chow," said Yung Li Chang. "As for my son, I have every hope that he will be restored to me unharmed. But that is a matter for the fates to decide."

"You are aware of your son's prison?" asked Lee.

"General Ling has informed me that my unhappy boy is incarcerated in the Pao-Kang Temple," said Yung Li Chang. "I shall despatch an army of picked men to the place at once, and wrest him from his captors—if the gods are willing."

"How far is the temple?"

"A distance of forty miles," said the Chinaman. "But that, I am afraid, conveys a false impression. A part of the distance penetrates tiger-infested jungles and fever-laden swamps, where crocodiles abound. And the temple itself is perched on the mountain-top, amid well-nigh impregnable surroundings. For that reason, I beg of you to suggest no expedition to the spot. My soldiers are more fitted for such laborious travel."

"Well, this is where I come in," said Lord Dorrimore smoothly. "I've got a suggestion to make, your Excellency."

"I am honoured to listen to your words."

"Well, we've got an aeroplane aboard here," said Dorrie. "Foo Chow tried to blow us to eternity, but he failed. An' we have seized this machine. I propose a flight to the Pao-Kang Temple at once—this afternoon. I will be the pilot, and I will do my best to return with your son."

The Chinaman gravely shook his head.

"While being deeply appreciative of your generous suggestion, I urge you to abandon such a scheme," he said quietly. "Let my own soldiers undertake this mission, sir. Were you to perish in this valiant attempt, I should never forgive myself for sanctioning the effort."

"But——"

"I beg of you to respect my wish," said Yung Li Chang gravely.

There was such an air of finality in his tone that Lord Dorrimore bit his lip. It was abundantly clear that the Chinaman had no faith whatever in the success of an aeroplane rescue.

CHAPTER 10.

DORRIMORE'S DESPERATE VENTURE.



BUT Lord Dorrimore was not so easily shaken off.

"Forgive me for bein' so persistent, but there are one or two questions I should like to ask," he said calmly. "The distance, your Excellency, is a matter of forty miles?"

"Yes."

"An' the way is difficult?"

"Very difficult."

"Have you any idea how long your army will take to reach the temple?"

"Perhaps a day—twenty-four hours," replied Yung Li Chang. "There will be fighting, and even after they have reached their objective there will still be fighting."

"I realise that it will be no easy task to rescue my son."

Dorrie nodded—rather grimly.

"Just as I thought," he said. "Twenty-four hours! An' this aeroplane, your Excellency, can cover the same distance in just over ten minutes! Ye gods! Ten minutes, and I'm there!"

Yung Li Chang slowly stroked his chin.

"One is indeed made to pause in wonder," he said. "Ten minutes is a brief spell of time, Lord Dorrimore. But you will be one man against a horde. That is why I am so reluctant——"

"I am ready to chance it," growled his lordship. "An' don't forget the advantages, sir. Foo Chow will get wind of your advancing army, an' before they can get anywhere near the temple, he will have had your son removed. What then? You will have the same trouble over again—an', in the meantime, that cur will probably put the poor boy to the torture. No, by gad, I'm goin' on this flight as soon as the machine is ready."

"If you insist——"

"I'm most frightfully sorry, but I do insist," said Dorrie firmly. "Let me point out somethin' else. The chances are that Foo Chow knows nothin' of the aeroplane's capture. When I fly to the temple, he an' his troops will think that it is his own man returnin'. An' that will give me a big advantage."

"That is certainly right," said Lee, nodding.

"With all humility, I must point out that it is certainly wrong," said Yung Li Chang imperturbably. "News has a habit of traveling very fast in China—irrespective of the telegraph. And here, in Yang Fu, Foo Chow even has the telegraph, gentlemen. You may be certain that he will know of the aeroplane's capture, and he will consequently know that it is being piloted by an enemy when it flies over the temple."

Dorrie was in no way disturbed.

"Oh, well, it makes very little difference!" he said. "I'll carry those bombs, an' drop one or two before I land—just to scare the general assembly. You needn't worry about me in the slightest, your Excellency. I'll tell you what. I will promise not to land unless I can see a good chance of success. Let me go on a scoutin' expedition, to ferret out the lie of the land."

Yung Li Chang shrugged his shoulders.

"As you wish," he said. "I can see that you are determined—and a determined man is an obstinate man. Forgive my frankness. My well-considered advice is for you all to leave this troubled country as soon as you can."

"We thank you, your Excellency, and we will undoubtedly leave China at the earliest possible moment," said Nelson Lee. "For the present, however, we will wait until Lord Dorrimore returns from his trip. And we should all be highly honoured by your

presence at dinner this evening. Lord Dorrimore has requested me to make this invitation on his behalf."

"Absolutely," nodded his lordship.

"I am highly honoured, and I should be a boor if I refused," smiled Yung Li Chang. "I am happy to accept, and to know that you are carrying on in so normal a fashion in these times of stress."

"Good!" said Dorrie briskly. "Then that's settled. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go an' see how the repairs are gettin' on. I'm keen on this flight, and I've got a hunch that it will pan out well."

He bustled out, and was soon with his mechanics.

"Fine!" he exclaimed, as he eyed their handiwork. "Nearly finished?"

"She's ready, sir," said one of the men.

"You'll get a tenner each all round for this," said his lordship genially. "You've put in some good work—an' quick work. I'm hanged if I would ever know that she had been damaged."

He examined the repaired tail closely, and then leapt up into the cockpit and tested the controls. They operated sweetly.

"Now we've got to get her ashore," he said, pursing his lips. "That's goin' to be a bit of a bother, eh? We must have a take-off—an' there's too much litter about these decks."

"Mr. Stewart is making all preparations," said one of the men. "He's commandeered a raft—a native affair, but pretty strong. And he thinks we can get the machine safely down on to it."

"Splendid fellow!" said Dorrie. "I shall have to raise Mr. Stewart's salary! Where is he? Hi, Stewart! Everythin' goin' on all right?"

His lordship was full of enthusiasm, and he bustled about with the excitement of a schoolboy. The first officer was perspiring freely as he helped with the preparations. The native raft that had been secured was a rudely constructed affair, but it was the very thing for the purpose. An aeroplane of ordinary size could never have been safely lowered from the *Wanderer's* deck.

But this little scouting biplane was ridiculously compact.

And there were many hands to help in the task—including those of the St. Frank's fellows. This was a job they could assist in with perfect safety. They were to be allowed to go ashore, too, to help in the "get-off."

"That's when my chance will come—as soon as we're ashore!" murmured Handforth, as he and his chums watched the raft being poled across. "I've had a look at that spare seat, and the cover is easily detached."

"Oh, rather!" said Church carelessly.

The aeroplane had been lowered with complete success, and was soon ashore. A small army of Yung Li Chang's soldiers were keeping the curious crowds back, and there was a small bare space just here, which Dorrie declared would be suitable for the take-off.



Handforth gritted his teeth as Foo Chow stamped on his fingers. If he lost his hold Handy would crash to the black depths of the chasm below. With the empty automatic in his hand, Lord Dorrimore stared aghast—could he do nothing to aid Handy?

"It's infernally small, but if I get a flyin' start I shall be all right," he said. "That's the best of these high-powered machines—they can leap straight up into the air if you give 'em full throttle at once."

"The boys are going to hold you back, eh?" asked Lee.

"That's the idea—an' we shall probably need some of the men, too," said Dorrie. "My plan is to race the engine all out, an' then somebody will give the order to let go. The bus will simply jump into the air, an' I shall be off. Gad, I'm lookin' forward to this adventure."

"You'll have to be careful, old man," said Lee, troubled. "You mustn't take any unnecessary risks. My advice to you is to confine the flight to a scouting trip. Yung Li Chang's soldiers are better equipped for the actual rescue."

"I'll see how the land lies," promised Dorrie vaguely.

In the meantime, Church and McClure were plotting.

"Of course, we can't let the fathead try on that dodge of his," Church was saying. "We'll pretend to forget all about it, and then when he makes a move, we'll tell the others. That's just to be on the safe side."

"We shan't need to take any action," grinned McClure. "Do you think he'll have the faintest chance of getting in that spare seat, you chump? With Dorrie and Mr. Lee looking on all the time. Poor old Handy! It'll be a scream when he tries to sneak on board the aeroplane. The best thing we can do is to say nothing. He's bound to give himself away."

So when the party went ashore, in one of the *Wanderer's* own boats, the rest of the fellows knew nothing about Handforth's enterprising little scheme. They were only too glad to assist in Lord Dorrimore's departure.

They knew that he was going to scout for Yung Ching, and this alone was enough to make them eager. Dick Hamilton was privately concerned, for he knew Dorrie's tendency to take enormous risks. He had also noted that the aeroplane was provided with three or four bombs, and he had seen Dorrie put a loaded revolver into his pocket.

When they were all ashore, Dick caught Dorrie's arm.

"You're not really going to land, are you?" he asked.

"If you don't ask questions, you won't be disappointed with vague replies," said his lordship cheerfully. "Sorry, old son, but I haven't the faintest idea what I'm goin' to do yet. All depends upon circs."

"A fat lot of satisfaction in an answer like that," grunted Dick.

"Well, I warned you," smiled Dorrie.

He was called away, and for the next ten minutes there was a deal of minor excitement while the engine was being tested. The fall



Handforth gritted his teeth as Foo Chow stamped crash to the black depths of the chasm below. With aghast—could he do

had done no damage whatever, for the powerful motor ran sweetly and truly. The tanks were filled, and the last detail was attended to.

Lord Dorrimore took a look round. The ground was fairly smooth—a stretch of the foreshore without a blade of grass, where the ground had been trodden flat by countless feet. A short distance away there were some small native sheds, and the river bank lay on one side, and a line of soldiers on the other. Dorrie knew that he would have to clear those sheds in order to get up safely.

But it would be quite possible if he took a flying start, under full throttle. The engine was now ticking over, and he gave a last glance at the *Wanderer*, and sighed. Seen from the shore, she was a pitiful travesty of



his fingers. If he lost his hold Handy would
empty automatic in his hand, Lord Dorrimore stared
g to aid Handy?

her former self—blackened, blistered, and
scorched from stem to stern. But nothing
could alter the fact that she was the same
dear old yacht.

His lordship turned to the aeroplane, and
grinned.

Edward Oswald Handforth was carelessly
examining the cockpit, and a crowd of other
juniors were gathered round. They were
chipping him unmercifully, and Handforth
was worried.

He couldn't quite see how he could get into
that second cockpit without being spotted.
He had already advised everybody to look at
the *Wanderer*—as though something startling
was happening in that direction—but the ruse
hadn't worked. Church and McClure watched
with perfectly callous amusement.



CHAPTER 11.

HANDFORTH HANGS ON!

WELL, I'll be off now," said
Lord Dorrimore briskly.
"When you've quite done,
Handy, old man, perhaps
you'll let me get into the
how-d'you-do?"

"Eh? Oh, rather, sir!" gasped Handforth,
glancing round. "Do—do you want to get in
here?"

Dorrie nodded.

"I generally pilot a 'plane from the cock-
pit," he replied. "It doesn't look well, sittin'
astride the tail-strut!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, Handy—get down, you ass!"

"But—but—" Handforth paused, and
tugged at the covering over the spare cockpit.
It was fixed by means of spring buttons, and
one of them came unfastened as he tugged.

"Good gad!" said Dorrie. "So that's the
game, is it? You're anglin' to be taken along
as a passenger, eh? Upon my bally word,
Handforth, you're just about the limit!
Nothin' doin', young 'un!"

Handforth was crimson.

"But I'd planned it, sir!" he gasped. "I'd
got it all fixed—"

"The deuce you had!"

"I—I mean—"

"Cheese it, Handy," said Dick Hamilton.
"This isn't a joy-ride—you can't delay every-
thing with your rot! Come down!"

"Then—then I'm going to be swindled!"
roared Handforth indignantly. "I'd planned
to smuggle myself in this spare seat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors fairly yelled at Handforth's dis-
comfiture, and at his cool assumption that
such a trick could have been possible. Greatly
flustered, he climbed down, and allowed Lord
Dorrimore to slip into the cockpit.

"Frightfully sorry, old son, but it can't be
done," smiled his lordship, as he glanced out.
"You hang on with the rest, an' be satisfied
with that. I'll take you for a spin when things
aren't quite so rocky. I'll see you again in
half an hour, anyhow."

Handforth was too disappointed to make
any reply, and the chippings he received from
the others only made him all the more reck-
less. He had half a mind to make a dash for
that spare seat, even now, for he had set his
heart upon going on this trip. It was just the
type of adventure that appealed to his reck-
less spirit.

But there was no opportunity, and it seemed
that he would have to give the project up as
utterly hopeless. The fellows were already
clinging to the struts at the back of the main
planes, and Dorrie was opening out the
engine.

"Hang on tight!" he roared, above the
crackle of the exhaust. "Grip like grim
death, an' don't forget to let go the instant I
raise my hand. Keep your eyes on me, all
of you!"

"Everybody let go when Lord Dorrimore raises his hand!" shouted Mr. Stewart, as an added warning. "Don't forget!"

The juniors clung with all their strength, their flannels flapping wildly about their legs as the terrific draught from the whirling propeller shot past the under-carriage. The roar of the exhaust increased, and the powerful engine settled down to a full-throated bellow. Dorrie's experienced ear listened keenly for the faintest trace of irregularity in the firing.

Handforth was clutching firmly to the left-hand upright strut at the extreme wing-tip. He had both his hands round tightly, and he held with all his strength. The others were doing the same, all along.

"Those in the middle duck as you let go!" bellowed Nelson Lee. "Drop flat, and keep flat!"

It was a necessary reminder, for the men in the middle positions would have to keep clear of the tail as the machine darted forward. The boys were only allowed to hang on to the wing-tips, where they were perfectly safe.

Church and McClure were gripping the trailing edge of the lower plane, next to Handforth, and they couldn't help grinning as they saw their leader's expression of disgusted indignation. It was just like the old ass to imagine that he had ever had a chance!

All eyes were upon the cockpit, and suddenly Lord Dorrimore's hand shot up.

"Now!" roared Nelson Lee and Mr. Stewart, in one voice.

The juniors released their hold as one man, and the aeroplane ran forward, gathered speed, and fairly leapt off the ground. It was a clean, beautiful take-off—the work of an experienced pilot.

"Splendid!" said Lee, as he looked up. "I've never seen— Good heavens! What— Who—who is that—"

"It's Handforth, sir!" shouted Church desperately. "Oh, my hat! He didn't let go!"

"Oh!"

"He'll be killed!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Look! He'll drop! He can't hang there—"

Everybody was talking at once, but everybody ceased in almost the same breath. There was something dreadfully tragic about this. Edward Oswald Handforth was up in the air with Lord Dorrimore, after all!

But he was hanging for grim life to that upright strut at the wing-tip, his legs dangling. He swayed to and fro as the aeroplane circled over the river. Lord Dorrimore had no suspicion of the truth, and he was calmly making a series of circles over the *Wanderer*, in order to gain height. His attention, naturally, was on his instruments and on the view ahead. As for Handforth, he just hung there

desperately. And the 'plane was getting higher and higher every moment. To drop now would mean instantaneous death.

Those below watched in dumb agony.

How long would this drama last? Handforth himself was hardly able to think. The wind tore past him with such speed that he flapped outwards from the 'plane like a piece of rag. But he still clung tightly, and his wits were gradually returning. He appreciated the deadly peril of his position.

He did not know whether he had done this deliberately, or whether it was a pure accident. Certainly, he had had no fixed intention of retaining his grip on the strut when the signal had come. He had made up his mind to go on this trip, and that was all.

The rest had been a mere blunder.

Without actually knowing it, he had forgotten to let go, probably because his mind was full of his disappointed thoughts. And then, once he felt the machine moving, he gripped harder, too startled to do anything else. And now he was six or seven hundred feet up.

A surge of victory swept through him, in spite of the perilous nature of his position. He was in the air, after all! And then, in that way so characteristic of him, he became perfectly cool and collected. What was there in this affair, anyhow?

Danger? Rot! Hadn't he seen these stunts being performed in the pictures? And if those chaps could do them, so could he! Why, it was nothing to walk along the planes, and perform tricks while the machine was in the air. He had seen it done lots of times.

And so, with calm deliberation, he exerted himself, and hauled himself upwards, until he succeeded in getting one knee over the edge. In another moment he was standing on the lower plane, still clutching to the strut, but higher up, with the wind shooting past him until his breath was nearly taken away.

Lord Dorrimore still kept in this locality. He wasn't quite satisfied with the balance of the machine. For some reason it was tipping towards the left wing, and his lordship did not want to start off on the actual flight until he had gained a better understanding of the peculiarity. He didn't like that dip—

"Good gad!" he gasped, staring.

Quite unconsciously he had glanced towards the left wing tip, and there stood Handforth! He not only stood there, but he was deliberately making his way along the wing towards the cockpit. Clutching at the wires and struts, he was apparently in no way perturbed, either.

"Great guns!" muttered Lord Dorrimore. "Of all the mad, hare-brained, fatheaded young monkeys! How in the name of mystery did he— Great Scott! He must have hung on after the others had let go!"

Dorrie was appalled at the sheer recklessness of the dodge, for he naturally assumed that Handforth had done it deliberately. For it was just the sort of thing that Handforth

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would do! From first to last, it smacked of the Handforthian foolhardiness.

"Here we are, sir!" sang out Edward Oswald, as he clutched at the edge of the cockpit.

"You priceless young jackanapes!" hooted Lord Dorrimore.

Handforth leaned over, tore off the detachable cover of the spare seat and calmly climbed in. It was easy. With the machine flying on a level keel, the steadiness of the motion was astonishing. Handforth had no difficulty whatever in slipping down into the seat. He grinned cheerfully as Lord Dorrimore turned and indignantly glared.

"Right-ho, sir!" roared Handforth. "Off we go!"

The words just faintly came to his lordship above the song of the engine. He let out an exclamation of pure helplessness.

"Well I'm hanged!" he gasped. "If this kid isn't the limit!"



CHAPTER 12.

WAITING!

"He's safe! He's safe!"

"Hurrah!"

"He's pulled himself up!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Oh, we thought he was going to be killed!"

A rousing cheer went up from every throat as it was seen that Handforth had pulled himself upon the lower plane, and was in the act of dropping into the spare seat. The machine was now circling at a quarter throttle, and comparatively slowly, six or seven hundred feet from the ground. At this height, the watchers could see with perfect distinctness in the clear air.

"That boy will be the death of me one of these days!" said Nelson Lee grimly, as he turned to Mr. Stewart. "Upon my soul! Who could have possibly guessed that he would do a thing like this?"

"Perhaps he was taken off by mistake, sir."

"Not a chance of it," growled Lee. "It's just the thing Handforth would do, and I never ought to have let him leave the yacht. The only safe way to deal with that youngster is to keep him chained up!"

"But he's safe, sir!" said Dick Hamilton breathlessly.

"Yes, and if Dorrie is sensible, he'll land again," said the detective. "He surely won't go on this flight and take Handforth with him."

"I'll bet he will, sir—he's just as bad as Handy when it comes to recklessness," said Dick.

"Then he'll hear from me pretty strongly when he does return!" said Nelson Lee fiercely. "Thank heaven the boy is safe, that's all. He's done nothing but give us fright after fright since we got here!"

"And yet he always manages to come out on top, sir," grinned Dick. "Hang it, you can't help admitting it. He's a proper caution."

"Lummy, you're right there, young gent!" remarked one of the sailors, who was standing by. "I never see such a mivvy! As soon as he gets out of one dose of hot water, he dives head-fust into the next! A corf-drop, sir, that's what he is—a bloomin' corf-drop!"

In the meantime, the "corf-drop" was having a little argument with Lord Dorrimore, who insisted upon descending at once.

"You can't do that, sir!" roared Handforth, above the subdued note of the engine. "You'll never be able to land."

"I'll land if I want to," snorted his lordship.

He glanced over the edge of the fuselage, and grunted. The ground from which he had arisen was strewn with Chinese soldiers and natives. And every other speck of land was covered with people, too. There wasn't a landing place within two or three miles.

"It's no good, sir—you've got to take me now," said Handforth coolly. "I say, be a sport, Dorrie! I didn't do this on purpose—"

"Don't make it worse by fibbin'," growled his lordship.

"Honest Injun, sir!" said Handforth. "I just clung on to that strut, and—and—well, I suppose I forgot to let go. And now I'm here, can't I come along to help you in rescuing Chingy? Two of us are better than one, sir!"

"I'm goin' to land!" insisted Dorrie. "I'm goin' to put you off!"

"What about those bombs?" asked Edward Oswald.

"Bombs?"

"In the rack, sir."

"Good glory!" said Dorrie, with a start.

"Unless you make a marvellously smooth landing, you'll blow us both to bits!" said Handforth triumphantly. "It's no good, sir—you've got to take me!"

"You cunnin' young blighter, I suppose I have!" said Dorrie, his face slowly breaking into a smile. "Gad, I'm not sure that you don't deserve to come, on the whole! You've got the right spirit, my lad! All right—let's go!"

He opened the throttle wide, and the powerful engine responded with a rattling roar. Up and up went the aeroplane, and then Dorrie set the course in a bee-line for that distant mountain-top, forty miles away.

Below, the St. Frank's fellows and everybody on the *Wanderer* was watching intently.

"They're off!" ejaculated Church. "Dorrie's taking Handy with him, after all! I knew he would! The bounder! I'll bet he's wangled it! Anybody can get round Dorrie."

"But—but supposing—"

McClure paused, catching his breath in.

"Supposing they get killed, or something?" put in William Napoleon Browne, of the

Fifth. "I beg of you, Brother McClure, not to suppose anything so ridiculous. We may take it as an axiom that where Brother Handforth goes, there goes luck! His presence on the aeroplane will ensure complete success to the mission."

"You ass, Handy always bungles things!" growled Church.

"I will admit that Brother Handforth is, without question, the World's Worst Wangler," said Browne gravely. "But, at the same time, in all justice, we must acknowledge that he is also the World's Weirdest Wonder. In some grotesquely uncanny fashion, he meets death on equal terms, and always gives it the go-by. He will return in one whole piece."

"It's all very well to talk like that, but I shall be jolly anxious until that machine comes back," said Church worriedly. "Thank goodness, that chap's alone—that's one thing. I was expecting him to fall from that strut every second. Look! They've nearly gone!"

He pointed, and the aeroplane was now a mere speck in the haze of the late afternoon.

"Well, we shan't have to wait long, that's one thing," said McClure. "That 'plane is a racer, and it can get there and back in about twenty-five minutes. I don't suppose Dorrie will land, now that Handy is with him. So they'll just do some scouting, and come back. Half an hour will see them here."

And this was the general impression.

Even Nelson Lee had ceased to be worried. He was convinced that Lord Dorrimore would

confine his activities to a preliminary inspection of the position. Indeed, there was no certainty that Yung Ching would be there yet, if he was being taken there at all.

They only had Ah Fong's information to rely upon, and the Chinese boy had been recaptured during the previous night. By rushing him through that difficult country at full speed, it was only just possible that he would be in the new prison. So Dorrie would certainly act with caution.

Before McClure's half-hour was up, all the boys were back on the *Wanderer*, and here some good news was awaiting them. Dick Hamilton heard it from Nelson Lee, and he at once imparted it to his chums, and to the girls, who were all on deck, watching for the return of the aeroplane.

"The plan is to make a start for the coast, either to-night or at dawn," said Dick. "You know that canyon we came through on the way up?"

"You mean where the rock barrier had to be lifted by thousands of men?" asked Doris Berkeley.

"Yes," said Dick. "Well, all that territory is in the hands of Yung Li Chang's soldiers, so the *Wanderer* can pass. The gov'nor's as pleased as Punch about it."

"Then—then it means that we can go straight down to the sea?"

"Exactly—and be absolutely free," said the Remove skipper.

"Begad! This is rippin' news, dear old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Mr.

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Lee was worryin' about that barrier, wasn't he?"

"Rather," said Dick. "It was the one point he felt uncertain about. Foo Chow's power is practically non-existent beyond those rocks, and so we shall be able to get away without any trouble. I hope to goodness that Dorrie and Handforth get back safely."

McClure glanced at his watch.

"They ought to have been in sight five minutes ago," he said, with deep concern. "There's no sign of 'em—nothing! And they can't be circling about all this time. I say, supposing they've landed? Supposing they've been collared by Foo Chow's men? Supposing they've been killed——"

"Supposing you dry up?" growled Reggie Pitt. "There's no sense in making a lot of rambling guesses. There are a thousand reasons why they may not be here. Let's give them an hour, anyhow."

"But that machine only takes thirteen or fourteen minutes——"

"It may be further off than we think," said Reggie. "A Chinaman never knows proper distances. And we can't tell by just looking over that mountain-top. It may be sixty miles for all we know."

But everybody continued to watch the sky anxiously.

The news that the rock barrier was in safe hands was one of the most cheering items that had come to hand ever since the yacht had been recaptured. Everything seemed to be going with beautiful smoothness now. Dr. Foo Chow had failed in his effort to destroy the holiday party, and it seemed that he had shot his last bolt.

As for Yung Ching—well, Lord Dorrimore and Handforth were fairly busy!

"



CHAPTER 13.

THE TEMPLE OF THRILLS.

LORD DORRIMORE was well satisfied with the behaviour of the aeroplane. The engine was running perfectly, and the machine answered her controls as though she had never been injured. The mechanics had made a fine job of the repairs.

Dorrie made no attempt to travel on full throttle. Although the engine was in perfect condition, he had no fancy to overtax it, for any slight defect might mean death. This was not like flying over a peaceful tract of the English countryside.

The 'plane was flying at about a thousand feet, and after twenty-five miles of cultivated land had been passed over, the scenery became more wild—more tropical. Dense forests lay below, and Dorrie did not care to think of a forced landing here. Only one or two open spaces were visible, and these were swampy sections of ground, covered with rank vegetation. Dark pools were visible, too, and

it was easy to believe that alligators lurked here.

"Cheery lookin' spot, eh?" shouted Dorrie, as he glanced round.

"Yes, it's sort of Indian jungle," said Handforth. "Isn't that rummy, sir? I always looked upon China as a temperate sort of place."

"Then you always looked wrong!" retorted his lordship. "We're not so far from Burma, you know, when it comes to a matter of distances. But we're soon gettin' into different country now."

There were eight or ten miles of the swampy jungle, and then the hills rose sharply, and Dorrie felt it advisable to rise somewhat. Otherwise he would be only a few feet from the ground at the top of the rocky mountain. Indeed, if he had kept at exactly the same height, he would have collided with it.

The Pao-Kang Temple was visible all the time—a building which was perched high up amid the rocks at the very summit. A more isolated spot could scarcely be imagined, and an inspection of that jungle, and the craggy nature of the mountain passes, was an eye-opener. An army itself would have difficulty in reaching the Temple if there were determined men to bar the way, for every rock provided a sniping spot.

"This is the only safe way to come, sir!" shouted Handforth. "I'm wondering how we shall manage to land."

"Then you'd better stop wonderin' at once," said his lordship. "There's nothin' to wonder about, because we're not goin' to land."

Handforth caught the words as they were flung back into his face by the whistling wind. He stared blankly.

"Not going to land!" he shouted.

"Not unless the engine fails, or somethin' cheery like that."

"But what about Yung Ching, sir?"

"I'm frightfully sorry for Yung Ching, but I happen to be responsible for your safety, an' not for his," retorted Dorrie. "I'm goin' to see you safely back to the yacht, an' we're only doin' a bit of reconnoitring work now. Yung Ching's father will do all the rescuin' that's necessary."

"Oh, I say, that's too thick, sir!"

"All the same, that's my programme—an' I happen to have the whip-hand, my lad," said Lord Dorrimore grimly. "You've got to go where I take you, an' if you don't like it you can lump it! You've done all the stunts you're capable of this trip!"

And Handforth had to be satisfied with that. He felt swindled. He had taken it for granted that Dorrie was going to land. He had pictured himself fighting desperately with hundreds of Chinamen—he had seen them fleeing from his mighty blows, in his mind's eye. And now they weren't going to land at all! Why, the thing was a perfect hoax!

By the time Handforth came to this conclusion, Dorrie had shut off the engine until it was just ticking over, and was gliding down

towards the Temple, which now stood revealed as a half-ruined building of great antiquity. So far as Dorrie could see, there were no indications of any human presence, and he was forced to come to the conclusion that Ah Fong's information had been wrong. It was just as well to know this, since it would save Yung Li Chang's army from making a useless expedition.

Dense trees surrounded the flat summit of the mountain, and the Temple stood in the very centre of an open space. This was quite good for landing purposes—better than Dorrie had anticipated. The ground looked rank with coarse mountain grass, but it seemed smooth enough.

Twice he circled, and wondered if he should land, after all. He knew that he would be able to get into the air again, for there was quite a long run. It might be a good idea to explore this place—

And then, as he was circling again, several figures emerged from the dense trees. They had hardly got into the open before they paused and stared upwards. Until that moment they had had no knowledge, probably, that an aeroplane was above them, for the engine was almost silent now, and the trees were rustling with a fairly stiff breeze.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Dorrie.

"Chingy, sir!" bellowed Handforth, pointing.

"Absolutely!" said his lordship.

He swung round at the last moment, and a touch on the throttle sent the machine slightly upwards again. But during that moment, at a height of no more than two hundred feet, they recognised Yung Ching, the little Chinese boy of the St. Frank's Remove!

He was held between the two leading figures, and there were four others in the rear.

But no more!

That was the point that Lord Dorrimore grasped with sudden ecstasy. In a flash he realised the truth. Dr. Foo Chow had not sent an army up here, after all, but only Yung Ching, in company with a few trusted guards. Or, if the army was coming, it was still a long way off. But Dorrie dismissed this. The very nature of the ground convinced him that there was no great body of men. There was just a handful to deal with!

When the machine came round again, Yung Ching was being led into the dark arched doorway of the Temple. He vanished, and the other four men stood out there on the open ground, watching.

"Can't we do something, sir?" shouted Handforth desperately.

"Yes, by glory, we can!" replied his lordship.

"We're going to land?"

"Yes!"

"Hurrah!" yelled Edward Oswald. "I knew you'd be a sport, sir! By George, we can wipe up these beastly Chinks, can't we? They're only a miserable lot of cowards, and there are only six."

"Look out—I'm going to drop one of these bombs, just to give 'em a scare," said Dorrie grimly. "It may make all the difference. They'll probably bolt for their lives, an' leave us to deal with two only—those beggars who went in with Chingy. Anyhow, we'll have a shot at it."

"Oh, good man!" panted Handforth.

He was fairly quivering with excitement. for until a minute ago he had taken it for granted that Lord Dorrimore was resolved to stick to his earlier plan. But Dorrie found it absolutely impossible to do so.

Circumstances alter cases.

And having seen Yung Ching down there, before their very eyes, with only a few men to guard him, it was imperative that something should be done—now, while the opportunity lasted. Such a chance as this might never occur again. And how glorious to return, with Chingy rescued!

Besides, that piece of ground was just asking them to land upon it. Lord Dorrimore couldn't resist the temptation to enter into this stirring adventure. Come what may, he had to land.

"Now we're goin' to make 'em sit up!" he roared gleefully.

He circled again, but well over the mountain side. Then he pulled the lever which released one of the bombs—indeed, at that moment he decided to release the others, too, in quick succession. They would cause a fine cannonade. And he wanted to get rid of them, too. He had no fancy to blow himself up when he landed.

Boom! Crash! Boom!

One after the other, the bombs struck the mountain side and exploded with devastating reports, and the aeroplane shot upwards at an acute angle, as though in triumph. Dorrie caught a glimpse of those four men running like rabbits—not into the Temple, but into the thick trees, scuttling as fast as their legs would carry them.

"Good!" he gasped. "We've done the trick!"

The ruse had worked exactly as he had intended. Those Chinese soldiers were fooled into believing that the bombs were directed at the Temple itself, and that the next batch might be successful. So they gave the old building a very wide berth. They did not know there was no second batch. And Dorrie had purposely dropped the bombs well clear. He did not want the old pile to collapse through the concussion, burying Yung Ching amid the debris.

"Hold tight!" shouted his lordship. "Be ready to jump!"

With his engine shut completely off, he glided down at an acute angle—steeply, perilously. Edward Oswald caught his breath in, dumb with horror. For a second he believed that Dorrie had lost control of the machine, and that it was nose-diving to destruction.

But the sporting peer knew what he was doing—he was an old hand.

Down—down!



With Chingy clinging on his back, Lord Dorrimore flung himself across the opening. Both would be hurled to death if Dorrie failed. It was a mad, desperate hazard, with Handy's life dependent on the result of that reckless leap.

And then, when it seemed to Handforth that nothing could save them from instant death, Dorrie suddenly "flattened out." Only a few feet from the ground, obeying Dorrie's judgment perfectly, the aeroplane stalled. Then, with a lurch, it landed, dropping sheer for the last foot or two. The under-carriage was strained, but no damage was done, and the machine had undergone no risk through racing along the unknown ground.

But only a pilot with the greatest possible skill and with nerves of iron could have done it. Dorrie had taken a chance, and it had come off. But, to a man of his ability, the chance was only a slim one.

"Out of it!" he snapped. "We'll make one rush, young 'un!"

"You've left the engine running!" panted Handforth.

"I know I have—she's just tickin' over," rapped out his lordship. "She's all right like that—ready to burst into life at a touch. Come on—if we're smart, we'll have him in two minutes! What a life!"

They leaped to the ground, and raced towards the arch-like entrance, the Temple seeming altogether bigger and more impressive from the ground level. And then, just as they were about to enter, some figures appeared.

Two—three—five—seven—
"This," hissed Lord Dorrimore, "has done it!"



CHAPTER 14.

THE BOTTOMLESS CHASM.

LL his calculations were upset.

Instead of two men, there were seven—and goodness knew how many more besides! He had assumed that the Temple was empty, and the assumption had been wrong. There was still time to leap back into the machine and get off. But Dorrie wasn't the kind to back out once he had started; neither was Handforth.

"Smash 'em, sir!" yelled Edward Oswald.

But Lord Dorrimore was intent upon something far more drastic. Two of those soldiers were already levelling their rifles, and Dorrie's automatic was in his grip.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Deliberately, and with deadly aim, he fired. Three men fell, yelling and writhing—not fatally injured, but totally disabled. Dorrie had no relish in taking life, but he was determined at all costs to prevent these brutes from taking Handforth's and his owl.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Again he pulled that deadly trigger in quick succession. Two other men fell, and two more ran, shouting and shrieking, into the trees.

"Now!" panted Dorrie.

They ran into the entrance, and found themselves in dense gloom, after the brightness of the sunlit afternoon. The interior of the Temple was not completely dark, however. Slits high up in the walls admitted a sombre light, and after the first few seconds the eyes of the invaders grew accustomed to the gloom.

Two figures loomed up from the shadows.

"Hands up!" snapped Dorrie curtly.

A rifle-shot rang out, deafening in the confined space. Handforth heard something drone past his left ear. The next second the man who had fired that shot fell with a moan of anguish.

"We're in the thick of it now, but we're goin' through with the thing!" said Lord Dorrimore gruffly. "Stick to me, young 'un—for heaven's sake, don't stray away. Our only chance is to keep together—"

"Just a tick, sir!" roared Handforth.

Crash!

Out of the corner of his eye he had seen a figure leaping from a recess—a figure with a wicked-looking dagger in its grasp, and that blade had been aimed at Dorrie's back.

The brute caught the full force of Handforth's fist on the point of his chin, and his neck doubled back with such a jerk that he crumpled to the floor in a limp heap, the knife clattering on the stones.

"Thanks, old man," said Dorrie warmly. "Quick work!"

They hurried forward, and no further enemies seemed to be there. Dorrie was worrying about the aeroplane, and he was in a fever to get out again. Those brutes out there might smash the propeller, or do something else to disable the fragile craft.

"Chingy!" roared Handforth. "Chingy, old man!"

"Old man!" came a dozen echoes, one after the other.

The effect was most eerie, and the two intruders stood there, their hearts beating rapidly, their senses acutely on the alert. From somewhere at the rear of the Temple came a muffled sound.

"Handy! I'm here!" it came. "I'm——"

"It's Chingy!" gasped Handforth. "Come on, sir!"

They pelted down the paved floor of the Temple, and found themselves in a curious little annexe at the back, where the walls narrowed to a mere passage and led slopingly downwards. And here the light was dimmer than ever. Dorrie's anxiety increased, for they were getting further away from that aeroplane, with its ticking engine.

It seemed to his lordship that minutes had passed already, whereas not more than fifteen seconds had elapsed since they had made their dash. And now, suddenly, they checked. A steel blade had shot out from the darkness,

missing Lord Dorrimore's chest by the fraction of an inch.

Crack!

The automatic sent forth a spurt of fire, and an immense Chinaman, armed with a sword, sank down. Dorrie never knew how he had pulled that trigger so speedily. Another figure came out of the gloom, and his lordship thrust the gun forward grimly.

"Hold on, sir!" screamed Handforth. "It's Chingy!"

"Me here!" panted Yung Ching. "Much thanks! Oh, I'm velly pleased you here, Handy. Quick—we go!"

"Grab him!" breathed Lord Dorrimore. "And now—run!"

They didn't wait to see if there were any other enemies to be dealt with. They rushed back across the floor of the Temple. Yung Ching was with them! They had arrived in this isolated Temple at a providential moment, just as the young prisoner had been brought there. But for that fact, any attempt at rescue would have been madness. Even as it was, it seemed even odds that they would perish in their efforts to get him away.

Lord Dorrimore was half-pushing, half-carrying Yung Ching. And Handforth was tearing on ahead, having made up his mind to leap into the aeroplane first, and help in hoisting the rescued boy up. According to recent events, speed would mean everything during the next few seconds.

And then an extraordinary thing happened.

The solid stone flooring of the Temple, just in the arched entrance, silently and utterly vanished. There was something demoniacally horrible in the dramatic suddenness of it.

And it happened just as Handforth was about to run through into the open. He tried to check himself, but was unable to do so. But Lord Dorrimore saw it in time, and yanked himself back.

"Steady, Handy!" he gasped.

In a flash his lordship knew what it meant. This was no caving in of the floor, but a deliberate trick. That section of the floor was made to swing downwards, and somebody had operated the secret mechanism so that they would all three plunge to some ghastly fate.

"Oh!" gurgled Handforth.

With all his strength he had attempted to check his rush, but it was too late. At full speed he might have cleared that chasm in safety, but now his pace was reduced, and the result was inevitable.

He plunged down, and Dorrie's heart went cold.

At the last second, however, Handforth clutched. The weight of his body had carried him across the chasm, and his clutching left hand managed to grip the edge of the stonework. The sudden wrench nearly pulled his arm out of its socket, and he felt that nothing on earth could save him. But he instinctively knew that it would mean death to drop.

In some way he got his other hand to that stonework, and clung there. Down below, in the abyss, there was nothing but utter black-

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ness. A tiny sound came up—the sound of rushing water. It was so faint, so mysterious, that Handforth shuddered. His mind could not conjure up the actual depth of that abyss.

Five hundred feet—a thousand feet—no, it seemed like ten miles, judging by that mysterious whisper of distant water. And there he clung, holding on to life by mere fingertips.

"It's all right, Dorrie!" said Handforth, trying to keep his voice steady. "Don't worry—I'll be out of this in two ticks! Now then, my lad—steady—steady! Inch by inch is the idea."

"No, my young friend, I fancy not!" said a familiar voice.

Dr. Foo Chow himself emerged from a kind of crevice in the archway. He was like a transformed being. He was no longer the refined, cultured Chinaman Dorrie had known on the yacht, when Foo Chow had pretended to be the host.

He was scarcely like a human being at all. His yellowish face was marred by dust and perspiration, his hair was tangled, his eyes

were wild. His features were contorted into a fiendish expression of insane hatred. His defeat at the hands of Yung Li Chang had apparently converted him into a hunted madman. There was something horrifying in his very aspect.

"You have come to your deaths this time!" he snarled. "I have no time to waste on politeness, no time to bother with elaborate methods. Down, you young white dog—down!"

With an animal-like snarl, he stepped forward, and trod heavily upon the knuckles of Handforth's left hand. Then, with his other foot, he stamped upon Edward Oswald's other fingers.

"Go it!" panted Handforth, clenching his teeth. "You won't make me drop, you cowardly brute! Why don't you shoot him, Dorrie?"

Foo Chow started back.

He was startled by those words, and he was startled by Handforth's amazing display of courage. His fingers were battered and bleeding, but he still clung there. On the

other side of the chasm, Lord Dorrimore took deliberate aim at the yellow fiend.

He pressed the trigger. A click followed—and the automatic was empty!



CHAPTER 15.

TOUCH AND GO.

R. FOO CHOW uttered a harsh laugh.

"It will be my turn this time, Lord Dorrimore," he said. "My own revolver

is not in such a parlous condition as the one you hold. I should have preferred to see you plunge into this bottomless pit, but——"

"Parlous, eh?" roared Dorrie. "Is it?"

Whiz!

With unerring aim, he hurled the empty automatic across the chasm. It was such a swift action—such an unexpected move—that the Chinaman had no chance to even dodge. Crash! The heavy weapon struck him in the very centre of the forehead, and he pitched forward.

For one tense second Dorrie thought that Foo Chow was to suffer the poetic justice of a plunge into that dreadful abyss. But he fell sideways, and lay there just on the brink, still and unconscious.

"Good shot, sir!" said Handforth steadily.

"Good gad, Handforth, you've got some pluck!" muttered Dorrie. "Hang on there, old man! I'll be with you in a second or two. Don't make any attempt to pull yourself up—you'll never do it."

This seemed a rash promise of Lord Dorrimore's. The chasm was wide—a great gap in the floor—and his lordship was on the other side. Yung Ching plucked at his arm, and Dorrie turned. The eyes of the Chinese boy were glittering.

"Me stay!" he murmured. "You go—help Handy. Me lemain here."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" rapped out Lord Dorrimore. "Quick—on my back!"

"You jumpee?"

"Yes; and it'll be touch and go whether we get across," said his lordship. "But if you go, young 'un, so do I. We're all in this together, don't forget. We all escape together, or we all die together. One or the other."

"You velly good fiend," said Yung Ching quietly.

But without a second's hesitation he leapt at Lord Dorrimore's back. He had sense enough to know that he could never jump that chasm himself. And he doubted whether Lord Dorrimore could do it unhampered—let alone with a burden on his back. Nevertheless, Yung Ching did not hesitate. Although he felt that he was going to his death, he obeyed without question.

"If you're in the habit of prayin', young 'un—pray now!" muttered Dorrie. "This is

probably our last moment. But we'll do our best."

He ran back, listening at the same time for the sound of any other enemies. But it seemed that they had exhausted the supply. This leap that Lord Dorrimore contemplated was an appalling thing—a task that bordered on the impossible. But the only way to safety lay across that abyss. There was no other exit from this temple.

"Hang on for your life!" said Lord Dorrimore tensely.

He ran. With the speed of a trained athlete, he simply hurled himself at that death opening. And he judged his take-off with extraordinary accuracy. For his very last stride carried his right foot to the edge of the chasm. And with that foot on the edge, he gave himself a tremendous impulse forward.

Yung Ching closed his eyes. He fully expected to end all things now. But Lord Dorrimore cleared the terrible opening in that magnificent leap. His foot touched the other side, well clear of Handforth's clutching fingers. Together Dorrie and Yung Ching hurtled headlong on the stones. Over and over they rolled, and Dorrie was on his feet again in a flash.

He didn't even glance round to see if the Chinese boy was hurt. What did it matter if he was? Handforth was on the point of dropping! Even during the course of the leap, Dorrie had glimpsed the junior's agony-tortured face. He was still hanging there, but he was at his last ebb.

"All right, old man!" breathed Dorrie. "I've got you!"

His strong fingers closed over Handforth's wrists, and at the same second the Removite's grip relaxed. He became limp—a dead weight in Lord Dorrimore's strong grasp. But he was still in possession of all his senses. It was only a momentary weakness—a swift reaction.

"Thanks, Dorrie!" breathed Handforth. "I was nearly gone, you know."

"A miss is as good as a mile," said Dorrie cheerfully. "Come on! Slowly does it."

"Me help!" said an eager voice at his elbow.

"Good lad!" said Dorrie. "Grab him!"

A second later Handforth was staggering clear of that black abyss, and a wave of sickness overcame him. He stood there, pale and haggard, and Dorrie listened. Faintly to his ears came the purring of the powerful aeroplane engine. So far, the machine was still safe!

Handforth shook himself and glanced at his fingers. They were bruised and bleeding—the tips of two fingers being crushed.

"The cur!" he panted, his sickness going as a wave of fury swept over him. "I wish we could take the brute with us, Dorrie."

"I'd like to pitch him down this chasm of his, but I don't happen to be of a murderous

nature," said Lord Dorrimore gruffly. "We've got to leave him where he is—we can't kill a man in cold blood. Come on!"

They hurried out, and their hearts leapt with relief when they saw the rakish-looking aeroplane still standing where they had left it. A figure or two appeared among the trees, but vanished as quickly as they had come.

"They're still about, the yellow vermin!" muttered Dorrie. "Our only hope is to get off at once. You take Chingy with you, Handforth."

"Why haven't they grabbed the machine, sir?"

"Because they're afraid of it, I expect—most of these soldiers are mere peasants, and I expect the aeroplane frightens them," replied Lord Dorrimore. "That's one of the things we've got to be thankful for. In with you!"

They needed no urging. Handforth leapt up, and Yung Ching was lifted by Dorrie, and a moment later the two boys were squashed tightly into the little cockpit. Dorrie settled himself in the driving seat. He was aware of the fact that the figures of the enemy Chinese were creeping round in ever-increasing numbers. During the last few minutes they had been coming up the mountainside, out of the belts of trees. It would seem that the escape was to be only by a hair's-breadth, after all. For these brutes had rifles—and they were already beginning to fire.

Crack, crack, crack!

Dorrie had little fear that a bullet would hit any of them—these yellow men were the worst shots imaginable. But his heart nearly stopped beating when he thought of what might happen if a stray bullet hit a blade of the whirling propeller.

There would be one splintering rip, and the very driving force of the machine would be wrecked. For of what use was the engine without the air-screw? One bullet would be enough to shatter it into a thousand fragments.

Dorrie was troubled by other thoughts, too—all crowding into his mind at once. This machine was a single-seater—the second cockpit had been improvised. With only the pilot aboard, it could get off the ground quickly. But now there were two passengers, and the space was limited, for there were trees everywhere. Even the ground was an unknown quantity, for the grass was so thick that it was impossible to detect humps and dips. It was one thing for the fugitives to reach the aeroplane—it was quite another thing for them to get into the air.

Crack, crack, crack!

The rifles were spitting more viciously than ever, and Dorrie kept calm with difficulty. He opened the throttle wide, and the powerful engine, hot from so much running, answered instantaneously. There was no splutter—no choking. To this hot engine the trio probably owed their lives.

With all the power of which it was capable, the motor sent the propeller revolving with terrific power. The aeroplane shot forward, bumping badly. Lurching over until the right wing-tip nearly scraped the ground, the machine was on the point of rising when the wheels touched a hump. The nose shot up, and for a moment Dorrie feared that they were about to stall. It was only the enormous power of the motor that saved them. His lordship swung round, banking with perilous steepness. Would they clear those tree-tops? They were in the air now—and the rifle bullets from below were futile. Round they swung, dipping downwards. The wing-tip touched the foliage, and at the same second Dorrie swung the rudder hard over.

With every stay wrenching at its socket, with every wire twanging, the powerful machine was literally forced out of the spin, and it veered round over the roof of the Pao-Kang Temple, and assumed an even keel. By sheer skill Dorrie had got them into the air, and in another moment they were shooting away across the mountainside—safe now, since the ground dropped away, and they were gaining height with every second. His lordship eased the throttle slightly and took a deep, deep breath.

"All serene, behind there?" he asked steadily.

"Oh, Dorrie, how did you do it?" shouted Handforth. "I—I thought——"

"Never mind what you thought," interrupted Dorrie lightly. "I wouldn't like to tell you what I was thinkin'. But if ever an aeroplane was near crashin', this one was. Just fool's luck, young 'un—nothin' else!"

Edward Oswald came out of his semi-stunned condition.

"Then—then we're safe, sir?" he asked dazedly.

"In about twelve minutes we'll be back at the yacht."

"And we've got Chingy!" breathed Handforth.

"Yes, we've got Chingy!" smiled Dorrie. "Who says we can't do things on our own, my lad? What about his sceptical Excellency an' his raidin' army? We've done it in better speed, haven't we?"

"I—I can't believe it, you know," said Handforth happily. "In fact, I can't remember quite what happened, sir. There was that awful chasm, and Foo Chow—— But how on earth did you get across, sir? You were on the other side of that black hole of Calcutta——"

"Never mind about that now," broke in Lord Dorrimore. "This conversation is a bit too difficult to carry on. We shan't have any voices left if we keep on yellin' like this. Yung Ching, we're taking you straight to your father."

The Chinese boy was not very demonstrative, but his eyes were expressive of his deep, fervent gratitude.

"All same safe now," he said, smiling. "They no catchee me again. My honoulab'ly

father pushee Foo Chow off the map. Velly good. All same pliceless. Me velly, velly happy."

"And so say all of us!" murmured Handforth dreamily.



CHAPTER 16.

GOOD NEWS.

CHURCH was looking positively haggard.

"Something's happened!" he said, for the fifteenth time. "I tell you

something's happened!"

"Don't, old man!" muttered McClure. "We're all half-dotty with anxiety, but there's no sense in getting the wind up. Can you see anything yet? Can you see any sign?"

"No—nothing!" muttered Church.

Their eyes were strained and painful from long gazing into the burning sky. They were looking at that tiny speck which would mean the return of the aeroplane. Over an hour had passed, and the deck of the *Wanderer* was filled with anxious people.

On the bridge, Nelson Lee and Captain Burton and Barry Stokes were searching the distant horizon with binoculars. Over an hour had passed! What could it mean? Why was Lord Dorrimore still absent? What had happened? From one end of the yacht to the other, that same tense anxiety was quivering.

"Oh, there's Ted in the machine, too!" Irene Manners was saying. "Why did he go? Why was he so foolish—"

"Cheer up, old girl!" murmured Willy. "I'm happy enough. It would be a different thing if Ted was alone—but Dorrie with him. My hat! We can trust old Dorrie, I suppose? They'll turn up soon, and they'll probably bring news about Yung Ching, too. There's nothing to be windy about."

"You can't fool me, Willy," said Irene, looking at him very straightly. "You are just as worried as I am. It would be a different thing if the aeroplane had gone to a definite landing ground. But there's nothing but a mountain range over there, and perhaps—"

"What's the matter with Mr. Lee?" broke in Mary Summers. "One of those Chinese officers have gone to him, and he's looking dreadfully upset. He doesn't usually show his feelings, either."

"Let's go and ask!" suggested Willy.

He hurried off without waiting for any of the others. It was something to do, anyhow—better than staring into the sky. He met Mr. Stokes at the foot of the bridge ladder.

"Any news, sir?" he asked.

"About the machine—no," replied the young Housemaster.

"Any other news, sir?"

"Well, yes—there's no reason why you shouldn't know," said Barry Stokes, with a sigh. "Things appear to be going badly, Willy. Perhaps it is a case of cause and

effect. We have just heard something very unpleasant, and it may be connected with Lord Dorrimore's strange absence, too. A report has just come in that Foo Chow's army has made a grim counter attack in the hills."

"Well, sir?" asked Willy breathlessly.

"Foo Chow has again secured the mastery of the canyon, at the rock barrier," said Mr. Stokes. "The battle is continuing, but, for the moment, Yung Li Chang's army is defeated. This means, of course, that our free passage to the sea is barred."

"That bit about cause and effect, sir," said Willy. "You mean that Lord Dorrimore might have met with trouble in the hills?"

"I do," replied Mr. Stokes. "True, the direction is different, but Foo Chow's army is spread all over the southern area. We can only hope—"

"Yes!" came a shout from Captain Burton. "I can see it, Mr. Lee!"

Willy leapt.

"See what?" he shouted. "Are they—"

He stood there, staring up at the bridge. Both Nelson Lee and Captain Burton were gazing through their binoculars, steadily and intently. Then Nelson Lee turned, and every trace of anxiety had left his face.

"Look out, everybody!" he sang out cheerfully. "She's in sight!"

"Hurrah!"

It was a tremendous cheer from every throat, a cheer which released the pent-up anxiety of the last half-hour. All eyes were strained towards the south, but, so far, nothing could be seen.

"Are you sure, sir?" shouted Church. "We can't see anything—"

"Yes, there!" cried Mary Summers. "Oh, look! Can't you see it? That speck, just against the little white cloud! They're safe! They're coming back! Oh, weren't we silly to be so worried?"

"Didn't I tell you that everything would be all right?" asked Willy. "We can always trust old Dorrie."

Nobody had any difficulty in seeing the speck now, for it was growing larger and larger with every moment. The aeroplane was shooting towards Yang Fu at something like two and a-half miles a minute, and as it approached, Lord Dorrimore could not resist making a number of joyous evolutions. Then he settled down to a long, gliding descent, with the engine shut off.

The machine swept over the *Wanderer* at no greater height than five hundred feet, and the roar of cheering was deafening. Then, gracefully swinging round, Dorrie repeated his former manoeuvre.

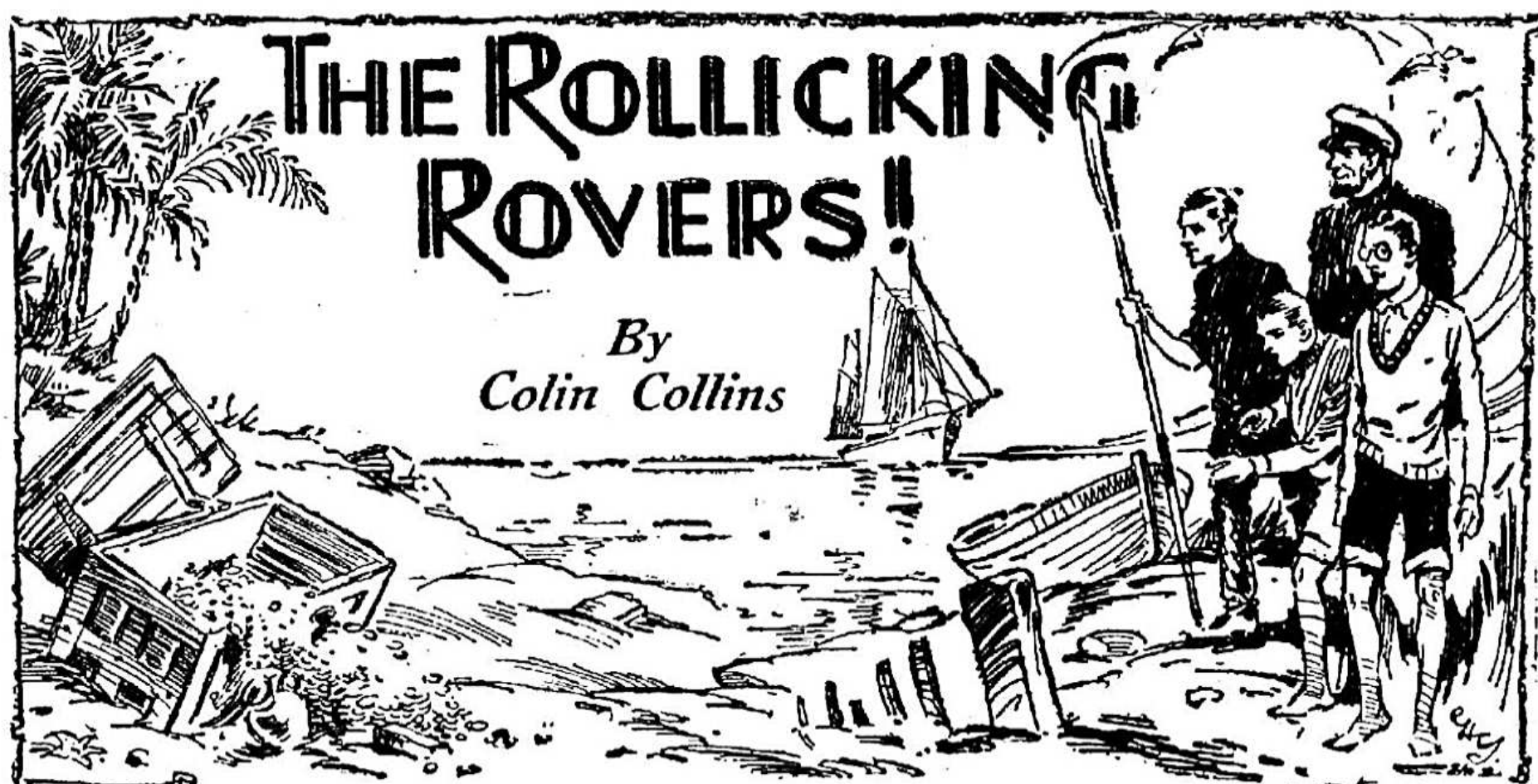
On that small space of ground, just near the river bank, he landed. The soldiers had cleared the way, but Dorrie took no chances. He brought the aeroplane to earth so skilfully that it hardly ran forward a couple of yards. Just a feathery touch, and the thing was done.

"Hurrah!"

The cheers came across from the yacht in volumes. Boats were already putting out,
(Continued on page 41.)

Stirring Adventure!

Begin this Yarn Now!



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

BOB DIGBY, HAROLD DWYER, and FATTY VOSS are left a large fortune, to be divided equally between them. The fortune is left them by their uncle, Silas Digby, and the wealth is hidden in a chest which he has buried somewhere during his travels round the world. They have no clue to the whereabouts of this fortune, but enlist the aid of BEN TOPPET, the skipper of the Saucy Ann, who tells them of a chest concealed beneath a tree in their uncle's garden. They dig up the chest and find that it contains documents, a mummified head and hands! The papers are examined, and it is decided to accompany Ben on the Saucy Ann in a world quest

for the lost treasure. But they are shadowed by FOXEY JOHNSON, a crafty rascal, who conceals himself on board. The Saucy Ann proceeds to Teredos, where a box of valuables had been left by Old Digby. Foxey slips ashore, and, in league with a rascal named Barker, obtains the box and makes off with it in a dhow. The Saucy Ann gives chase. Martin is murdered by the crew of the dhow, who examine the box and find that it only contains books. They decide to surrender these for food and water. Foxey has, in the meantime, boarded the Saucy Ann.

(Now read on.)

The Box of Books.

THE desperate men peeped into the supposed treasure chest.

Was ever such trash? A box of books! Were ever men asked to risk life and limb and prison and death for such a mad freight?

A cunning story was concocted after more consultation, worked out in every detail.

The coveted box of white man's trash could be brought on deck, already roped for hauling on board the Saucy Ann, but they would not fling up the rope until water and food had been lowered.

At dawn the dhow was seen to be flying a white flag and drifting idly on the faint breeze towards the Saucy Ann.

"What's the meaning of that?" cried Ben. "Are we going to be boarded? Is it a trap and a trick?"

"There are only three men standing up, and they keep holding both hands above their heads," said Bob, using the glasses.

"That means surrender," volunteered Fatty.

"Let 'em come nearer, but keep well under cover," Ben advised.

"Well, if they wanted to be shot they couldn't be asking for it better," said Bob. "Ah, they're making signs and lolling out their tongues! One of them is waving a rope and pretending to wind it round the other. And there's something near—it's a box!"

"The chest—the chest! They're going to give it up!" shouted Ben in glee.

"They want food and drink—they're thirsty souls. They can't have run out of water yet."

"One of them is holding up a leather water-bottle," said Goggles.

"Then they have run out of water, they have!" chortled Ben, doing a little dance of joy. "Can you see Foxey or the other blighter?"

"No sign of them."

"Be careful, then," Ben warned. "They're drifting our way fast."

No need for glasses now. The native sailors were clearly seen, and were obviously friendly, and making their meaning understood. At last they came actually alongside, and one of them flourished a rope.

"Where are the others?" Ben roared down.

One of the sailors wound a rope round his mate and pointed to the hold below, then fought the air with his fists, making it clear that there had been some sort of fight.

"By Jove, they've got Foxey & Co. in irons, or bound and battened down below!" Goggles guessed. "And they want water all right; they keep on shaking the empty skin and holding it upside down."

"Run below and get a keg of fresh water and see if that is what they're after," said Ben, and Fatty bolted below.

When the keg was exhibited the sailors went mad with delight at being understood. They flung the rope of the coveted chest on board the Saucy Ann. Ben caught it and held on. So did the men, signing like bargaining niggers that the keg must be lowered before they let go.

It was all too natural and carelessly done to be a ruse to trap the Saucy Ann to surrender water; and the absence of the white men made things easier.

Up came the heavy chest with four pairs of hands hauling. It swung and bumped rather badly, but at last landed on board. Bob and Fatty, in their joy, flung tins of bully beef and biscuits into the dhow.

The coloured men caught the missiles expertly and waved their thanks as the two boats drifted apart. They fell upon the water and the food, letting everything else rip; and the crew of the Saucy Ann fell even more eagerly upon the corded chest, tearing the ropes from it while the vessel steered herself and twisted in the breeze, going wherever the little puffs cared to take her.

The first cry of alarm and warning came from Ben.

"She's been opened, the padlocks is broke! Is this another box o' stones, I wonder! I'm sorry for 'em if it is."

"We'd better look inside," Bob suggested.

He lifted the heavy lid, and the sun glinted on the top row of treasures.

"Yes!" he yelled, and danced like a maniac.

"Let's look--let's look! Yes!" the others chimed in, and they all let go a wild "Hooray!" Ben came back, to stare down—and doubt.

"Them's the sort of things he was allus collecting. The house at home is chock full of 'em. Look underneath. Ah, I remember his showin' me that cloth! He bought it off a nigger king in exchange for a 'arf-crown musical-box what played 'Swanny River' and 'Bluebells of Scotland' both at once, 'cos the barrel had got shifted. Look underneath that there cloth."

Fatty gingerly turned up the corner, expecting to see golden Spanish doubloons lying packed like beans in a bottle.

What they saw was—the covers of books!

"Books!" he groaned. "Books! This really is a box o' books! Oh, oh, oh—"

"Books, do you say?" yelled Ben. "Only books! Nothing but books!"

They choked in their rage and disappointment, and Ben, in his anger, slammed down the lid of the box so violently that Fatty got his fingers caught, and was only saved from having them smashed by the opal ring stolen from the dead Spaniard's hand that now circled one of his fingers.

So, after all their thrills, they had struck a false trail—once more!

The disappointed group wandered away from one another, walking like men nursing a terrible grief. Their hopes had risen so high. And now they were no nearer the treasure than when they set out. They had been fooled thrice; first by bully beef tins, then by stones, and now by books—just books! In fact, it was just what the diary had said—a box of books—just what they were told to expect to find housed with Madame Rima.

What man in his senses would leave a fortune in the hands of a couple of foreign friends for years and years, especially in the Isle of Teredos, where it might have been stolen, or lost—or sold!

Why didn't they think all that at first? Why, indeed? That was what they were all asking themselves, and kicking themselves for now.

"What fools we've been," each was telling himself. But presently, when they were calm and gloomy, they all confessed to each other that it was the most natural thing in the world that they should have made this blunder.

"Oh, what asses we are!" laughed Bob.

"You are, and that's the rights of it!" Ben declared, not quite knowing whether they were laughing at him.

"Well, well! What's the next step?" cried Bob. "Where to now?"

"Back to Teredos, to explain why we bunked," said Ben, "otherwise, we'll be black-listed and searched for, like as not. Is that a gunboat out there? No, it ain't. But it might be. Come on, someone take the wheel, or we'll be drifting sideways on to that sank-bank."

It was necessary to avoid getting marooned in this deadly sea; so they gave up all thought of sleep until well off the treacherous shallows, when they tacked back slowly to Teredos.

The box of books was taken to the hold and lowered into darkness—with a few curses—there to await their return to England, some time, some day, when their quest was ended.

* * *

What a pity they didn't trouble to look below the top row of books!

Foxy Thinks of the Diary.

LYING in the harbour of Teredos, awaiting the return of Dumb Dummy from hospital, the Rollicking Rovers recovered their spirits.

Disappointment over the box of books was forgotten, and all were taking a much-needed rest before coming to a fresh decision—where to go next in search of the phantom fortune.

Peace had been made with the port officials, who were told of Barker's flight and theft, and they promised to seize the dhow on its return and call the fellow to account.

But the dhow made no return. The murdering crew of three—all that remained—deemed it wiser to turn pirates and steal the boat and plunder along the shore, seizing native canoes and stealing their cargoes of pearls or fish or food, as necessity demanded.

Foxy knew there was hope of greater things. The crew of the Saucy Ann had got that diary, and the diary seemed to tell them things. Although the treasure—the actual treasure—was not yet located, that book did point the way to things and places where something was found every time. They had not found what they sought, but Foxy was as hopeful as the others that very soon the diary would direct them to the real thing.

In his hole below deck, with much time to think, Foxy had tried to remember every instance of this sort. East African waters had been a favourite trading area of Captain Digby. All down the coast he had wandered in and out, buying and selling, dealing and locating rich finds of timber, rubber, coral, pearls, and oil.

"Now there was the visit to Montebianco, down the Congo way," muttered Foxy to himself. "I wonder whether Ben remembers that, and what the diary has to say about it?"

"White Meat Mountain, us sailors used to call it, 'cos that's the niggers' own name for it. So many white men was took with it and drawed there by its shining stones, hoping they was diamonds, that the cannibals was just choked with white meat, and the place is littered with white men's bones.

"That was where him and me once hid a ton o' mother o' pearl shells under a heap o' stones, and he put a stake on it with a dead man's skull a-top, same as the natives do when they collect the bones after a war feast and offer 'em to their gods. Coming across a heap of that sort would send any white man runnin' a mile, thanking his lucky stars there wasn't an arrow in his back and a pot waiting for him.

"If I remember right, he finished that mound hisself and wouldn't take me with him. And there it is to this day, I reckon, 'cos he was took qucer that year and never went back. No nigger would touch it, and no white man, neither. I wonder if Ben remembers, and what the diary book says about it?"

"I've got to get a squint at that old diary by myself," Foxy decided. "I could do nothing alone, but if I could set them on to it, the four of 'em, and as soon as anything was discovered, just give a word to them niggers that white meat was wanderin' around, they'd all be wiped out and cooked, and me and Dummy able to go back home with what they find, and nobody to say a word agin' my character but Martha."

Montebianco.

BY an odd chance, on that very night when Foxy was thinking about the diary Ben Toppet and the boys had the diary out in the saloon, and were digging into it for clues.

Goggles, with his spectacles adjusted, was reading out likely clues one by one, while Ben pulled at his pipe and the others puffed at cigarettes. Every few moments Ben was called upon to explain some of the items.

"What does this mean, Ben? It's double-Dutch to me!" grumbled Goggles, slowly reading out the following entry.

"Left more at Montebianco. Pick it up later. Put a whitened skull on top for safety. Montebianco safer than bonded warehouse. If you want to hide anything,

put it where everybody can see it, then nobody troubles to look. Left Foxy and Ben aboard while I finished the job. Trust nobody, that's my motto. It'll be there safe till the crack o' doom, and I'll come back when it suits me."

"Seems to me it's clear enough. He left something there," said Bob. "What about it, Ben?"

"So far as I can recall, he never left anything at Montebianco 'cept a heap of shells."

"Why did uncle go there—to trade?"

"No, he was allus nosing into them sort of places, as I've told you afore, like a dog with a bone to hide; any sort of place where no white man was likely to go."

"Ah!" they all cried, once more keen on the scent of mystery.

"I never rightly did understand that load of shells," said Ben thoughtfully, "and, to tell

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BRONZE MEDALS

(Particulars on page 40.)



the truth, I thought as it was just a bit o' camouflage, as you might say, and the shells was only collected just to make a heap to cover something else—more valuable."

"How far away is this Monteblanco mountain?" asked Bob.

"About three weeks," answered Ben.

"Well, oughtn't we to get a move on?" asked Bob.

"It's for you gents to say," sighed Ben. "It's terrible dangerous."

The more they thought about it the more obvious it seemed. But a decision to go in search of the buried treasure was too weighty to settle off-hand. They adjourned to bed, and lights went out. The diary was left in the saloon for consultation on the morrow.

An hour later Foxey slipped aboard and crept about, gathering all he wanted from the stores and taking food and drink below.

He was eager for a glance at the diary; he must know what the old gov'nor had put in it about Monteblanco, his last place of call before Teredos.

Later Foxey vanished into his hiding-place, and wondered whether he could not escape on the morrow and look out for a vessel going south to the Congo, and sign on. An expedition of one.

It was only a dream, for, in the morning, he heard the others walking about and actually discussing Monteblanco.

It gave him thrills, for he was the only living person who knew exactly where that mound was. And a lucky chance was going to take him to the very spot!

He resolved to remain where he was.

The interest in the diary of everybody on board had communicated itself to the stow-away. Foxey regarded this book as full of magic, and had gone to great lengths to get it into his possession.

What he read in it did not enlighten him much; but when he heard them talk of the diary, and what it said about Monteblanco, Foxey wanted to read it, too.

Impossible to get at it by day; only at night could he crawl out of his lair. And at night, in harbour, there was no watch. Dumb Dummy had come back restored to health, but still very sore from his wound, and still more sore against Foxey, for whom he cherished the hatred of a madman. Unable to express his sentiments in words, Dummy could, nevertheless, nurse his grievance, and promise himself revenge if Foxey again crossed his path.

Ben told Dummy by signs—and some writing on a slate he kept for the purpose—that he believed Foxey was dead and at the bottom of the sea. Dummy only shook his head.

What would he have done if he had known that the rascal was in his old hiding-place, only a few yards from the wheel.

Foxey himself cared less about being found out than he should. At worst, they could not murder him; and he was used to hard knocks and hard words. The "young gents" would

keep Ben within proper limits; and the worst they could do was to make him work, or drop him off at the next port.

He preferred sleep to work, and lived, like the rat he was, out of sight by day, and very wide awake at night. In harbour it was easier to get about at night than when someone was at the wheel, and a watch being kept.

In the middle of the night, before the Saucy Ann set sail for Monteblanco, Dummy was dozing at the wheel, and, being deaf, heard nothing. Foxey slid from his hiding-place and got to the saloon—no longer the captain's cabin since Barker's gun had shot a hole in it. Here he found the coveted diary lying open on the table.

With great care he shaded a light and read the entry that had excited the boys. That reference to himself as the only person who assisted in the making of the mound confirmed his suspicions. The Saucy Ann was actually bound for Monteblanco. But it would take them days after arrival to locate the exact spot which he, Foxey, could find in half an hour. First come first served. The first one there would have all the advantage.

He recalled the marking of the mound—how the captain had engaged the services of a number of savages to carry the shells and make a heap, all working till nightfall. And how, after nightfall, the captain had gone off alone in a canoe, returning no one knew when.

The heap, when Foxey again saw it, was a different shape, a steep cone, with a stake on it and a white, bleached human skull on the top of the stake, upon which queer crosses were cut. It looked like a dozen other "barrows," or mounds of human remains, which dotted the hillside, for this was a sort of cemetery of the Bangalas, the local tribe. And they only buried bones, not flesh.

The Bangalas are cannibals who file their teeth into points. Ben had told the boys blood-curdling stories of these people in the old days before they were curbed by the gradual policing of their vast territory by the Belgians.

When the boys were told of these things they shuddered, and then thrilled with rage as well as horror. That such things could go on in this world without suitable punishment seemed unbelievable. Yet it had gone on for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

"Your uncle sailed these waters in 1880, before Stanley," Ben told them. "He had a wonderful way with niggers."

"Shall we have to fight them?" asked the boys.

"It depends," Ben replied. "The place where we're going is one where there's nothing of any use to Europeans 'cept ivory and bananas, and I reckon it's about same as it was in the old days. But white men is treated respectful—when there's enough of 'em. Two or three wanderin' alone has a way o' disappearing."

"Terrible thieves they are," Ben continued.

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"but they have a short way with thieves of their own. You'll sometimes pass a dead native tied upright to a pole, the body of a thief put up as a warning to others.

"Oh, you'll see some funny things out there! They has the queerest way o' catching birds, the rummiest I ever saw. They hang long ropes formed of creepers from the trees on the edge of the forests to poles stuck in the ground about fifteen or twenty yards off. Hanging from these are rows of loops, dozens and dozens of 'em, made from finer creepers—snarles in which the birds are caught as they fly past, same as rabbits are snared in a burrow. The place is full of lovely birds, and palms with scarlet flowers, and jungles blooming like a blessed hothouse, orchid forests, lakes and cataracts, and pools swarming with hippos."

"I thought it was only a lonely, barren mountain," Bob observed.

"Only a mountain?" cried Ben. "That's Montebianco. I'm talking of the lower Congo, and the river jungles and places we'll have to get through to reach the mountain.

Montebianco is about the only bit o' bare land you'll see. The rest is more like fairy-land than anything you ever seed in a picture book, trees so high they make a man feel he ain't no taller than a walking-stick, and creepers looping from top to top as thick, and thicker, than the thickest ship's cable.

"And the natives?" asked Goggles.

"The Bengalas are the finest and laziest rascals you ever saw. But there's all sorts. And there's pigmies, whole tribes of 'em, and none of 'em more than four feet six. Your uncle once, when he was hard put to it to get rid of 'em, threatened 'em with a giant—that was me. And when I came walking among 'em, not one higher than my waist, I made as if to tread on 'em, and they fled like a lot o' rabbits."

"And the thunder, and the lightning, and the rain!" continued Ben, enlarging on the marvels of the Congo, for the benefit of his open-mouthed listeners. "I do believe as a man could be drowned standin' up in a shower o' rain in them swamps. I've seen a
(Continued on page 41.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 47.
SECTION
A
READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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 that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE 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 the Membership Number assigned to me.

SECTION
B
MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

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 makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

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."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

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. 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, bearing the same number, are needed. 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 that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for $\frac{1}{2}$ d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

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You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

HANDFORTH THE RECKLESS!



(Continued from page 34.)

and all the St. Frank's fellows were included. They weren't going to miss this! It was simply impossible to hold them back, and this time the girls insisted upon going ashore, too.

Landing, they ran forward, and saw Lord Dorrimore and Handforth just in front of the aeroplane. Edward Oswald had both his hands bound, but otherwise he was himself.

"Oh, you awful rotter!" gasped Church, rushing up.

"You boulder!" shouted McClure. "We thought you were going to be killed!"

"When I clung to the 'plane?" chuckled Handforth. "My dear chaps, that was nothing! Dorrie and I have been having a bit of excitement. Hallo, Mr. Lee! Sorry I disobeyed orders, but I was carried up before I knew it!"

"Well, Handforth, as you are back safe and sound, we'll say nothing about it," said Nelson Lee. "Dorrie, old man, you've given us a rare fright. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Oh, we had a bit of a dust-up with Foo Chow an' his myrmidons," replied Lord Dorrimore coolly. "A pretty hot affair, all round; but we enjoyed it. We had quite a lively time in that Temple."

"Did you land, then?" demanded a dozen voices.

"Well, we didn't exactly fly into the

Temple," grinned his lordship. "Oh, Handy, we nearly forgot! What about Chingy?"

"By George, yes!" grinned Handforth. "Hi, Chingy!"

Yung Ching appeared in the cockpit, and waved cheerily.

"They've—they've got him!" gasped Dick Hamilton.

"Of course we've got him!" grinned Handforth. "What did we go for?"

"Bravo!"

Everybody was cheering and talking.

"Dorrie, you rascal, I half-suspected something of this sort," said Nelson Lee warmly. "But how in the name of all that's miraculous did you do it?"

"It's a long story—I'll tell you later," said his lordship genially. "For the moment, have a look at this."

Yung Li Chang himself had come forward, and father and son met—for the first time during this period of stress and turmoil. There was nothing spectacular in the greeting, but, in their own Chinese way, the pair were fervent.

"Gentlemen, of what use to employ paltry, meaningless words?" asked Yung Li Chang quietly. "You have restored to me my only son, therefore I am your slave for all time. For me, this is the happiest day of my life. I can say no more, and I crave your indulgence."

But even now, with Yung Ching restored to his father, the issue was still in doubt. There was no certainty that the St. Frank's holiday party would escape from the vengeance of Foo Chow!

("ST. FRANK'S AT BAY!" is next week's grand concluding yarn of the Chinese series. Look out for important announcement of new series next week!)



(Continued from page 39.)

bunch o' trees torn up by the roots in a tornado, and pitched into the river like a handful of weeds."

"Glorious!" gurgled Fatty.

"I've seen the Saucy Ann nosing her way in and out among the pools just shovin' aside the hippos.

"Take my advice, young, sir, don't you go searching for experience in them parts. You won't have to look for it; it'll get up and hit you in the face all the time. Keep to the open river—it's miles wide—and don't nose in until we see Montebianco's top above

the forest fringe, then pop in and pop out afore them niggers sees Mr. Fatty."

They laughed at this; but Foxey, who had had a few narrow squeaks in the old days with the captain, was not nearly so eager, and could think of no way of getting to the treasure mound alone with any prospect of getting away with his plunder unaided.

"I'll let 'em find what they finds," Foxey decided at last as he shut the open book, "and I'll get what they brings away if I has to knife the lot and scuttle the bloomin' ship!"

He replaced the book on a shelf.

In the morning, when Ben came to have another look at the diary—which he had left wide open overnight—he stared to find it moved and closed.

On inquiry, he was told that nobody had been in the saloon, and nobody had touched the book after he left it on the table—yet it was closed and on the shelf!

"I allus said this ship was haunted," shouted Ben. "And it ain't Foxey this time!"

(Many strange incidents occur on the voyage to Montebianco, but you must read all about it in next week's thumping instalment!)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.



NOTE.—If any reader writes to me I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will be acknowledged in these columns, and if of very special merit will be starred.

E. S. B.

I am quoting a few letters this week, which indicate more than anything else what my readers think about the Old Paper. I have many more letters written in the same strain. These will be acknowledged in due course. I can't promise next week, as I am very busy planning out a new series, but perhaps the week after. Now I can begin, I think.

Here goes: "I have been a N. L. L. reader for a long time now, and I may say that my brother, aged 25, and even my mother are great N. L. L. enthusiasts. I am greatly interested in school life, being a junior master in a private school, and I indeed think you have got the life of a schoolboy off 'pat.' I still cling on to the N. L. L., and many of my friends are also great readers. For Heaven's sake, don't die too soon, for I shall not have anything to fall back on!" I give this extract as a proof that schoolmasters quite approve of me. I can assure my reader that I heartily agree with his last sentence, and I hope he won't have to fall back for a very long time.

* * *

Another reader says: "During the last month or two it has been my wont, as the old Latin jossers, Pliny and the rest, used to say, to go through my old series, reading them over again; and two facts about them, I think, explains their popularity and appeal. At least, it has always been these two that attracted me most, and I have read the old paper since I could read; it was the first paper I ever read, and I still read it to-day with the same keen delight and whole-hearted appreciation that I read the first copy. The first striking fact about them, the fact that raises them above the average school story, is the actual, living personality of each individual character. How well every idiosyncrasy and lovable characteristic is portrayed. Archie—languid, foppish scion of the noble house of Glenthorne, generous to a degree, and with a heart of gold, the genial ass of the Remove. Handy—blustering, impulsive, ram-headed, always direct

and straight to the point. Pitt, Hamilton, Willy, Sir Montie, Dorrie, Umlosi, and the rest, all vibrant with life; merry, rollicking schoolboys—and overgrown boys in the case of Dorrie and Umlosi. And the second point is about the plots, every one of which is strong, though one or two are rather out of the ordinary; but this in no wise detracts any of the charm from the stories, for, as you so aptly put it, who wants to read of ordinary, prosaic happenings?" Well, I don't deserve such eulogistic praise as this, but I don't think this reader lacks sincerity. His enthusiasm is obvious—from the very fact that he possesses sufficient courage to read my stories twice.

* * *

What about this one: "There was a time when my father would not let me read the N. L. L. He classed it as a 'Deadwood Dick.' However, I soon made him change his opinion. It happened that he had been taken ill. He asked me to read to him, so I picked up a N. L. L. and started reading him a story out of a 1922 issue, entitled 'When a Boy's Down.' My father was immensely pleased with the story, and asked me what the name of the book was. He was very surprised when I told him that it was a N. L. L." Some of you, whose parents object to your reading Our Paper, might show the above with advantage. Of course, you needn't wait until your father is ill, or anything drastic like that. Take a chance and show him now.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

(All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Lond., E.C.4.)

The St. Frank's League Badge.

THIS week I want to remind all my chums that the St. Frank's League Badge is ready and waiting for all members. I don't think myself that any reminder is needed, for the countless supporters of the League have been waiting for this moment for some time. The fact that the Badge is a reality and can be secured by the very simple little formality of writing in for it is the great thing.

What you have to do to get one of these very handsome and striking Badges is to send in your application, quoting your League Number, at once to

THE CHIEF OFFICER,
THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE,
GOUGH HOUSE,
GOUGH SQUARE,
LONDON, E.C.4.,

marking your envelope "Badges" in the top left-hand corner. Enclose a stamped addressed envelope with your letter, and in due course you will receive the Badge, and I have not a doubt but that you will be proud of it, and hasten to show it to your friends. As you will see, I have done my part. Now that the finishing touches have been put to this Badge scheme, I am inclined to look back at the numberless letters that reached me in the past all to the same effect—"Why not have a League Badge?"

Well, at last the Badge has arrived—materialised, as it were, out of the country whence good ideas get carried out.

Don't forget the few brief instructions I have given. It will save trouble all round if these details are faithfully observed. A three-halfpenny stamp on the enclosed envelope, and the word "Badge" written on the letter you send—or, rather, on the envelope. There is not much more to say about this matter. I have made things clear.

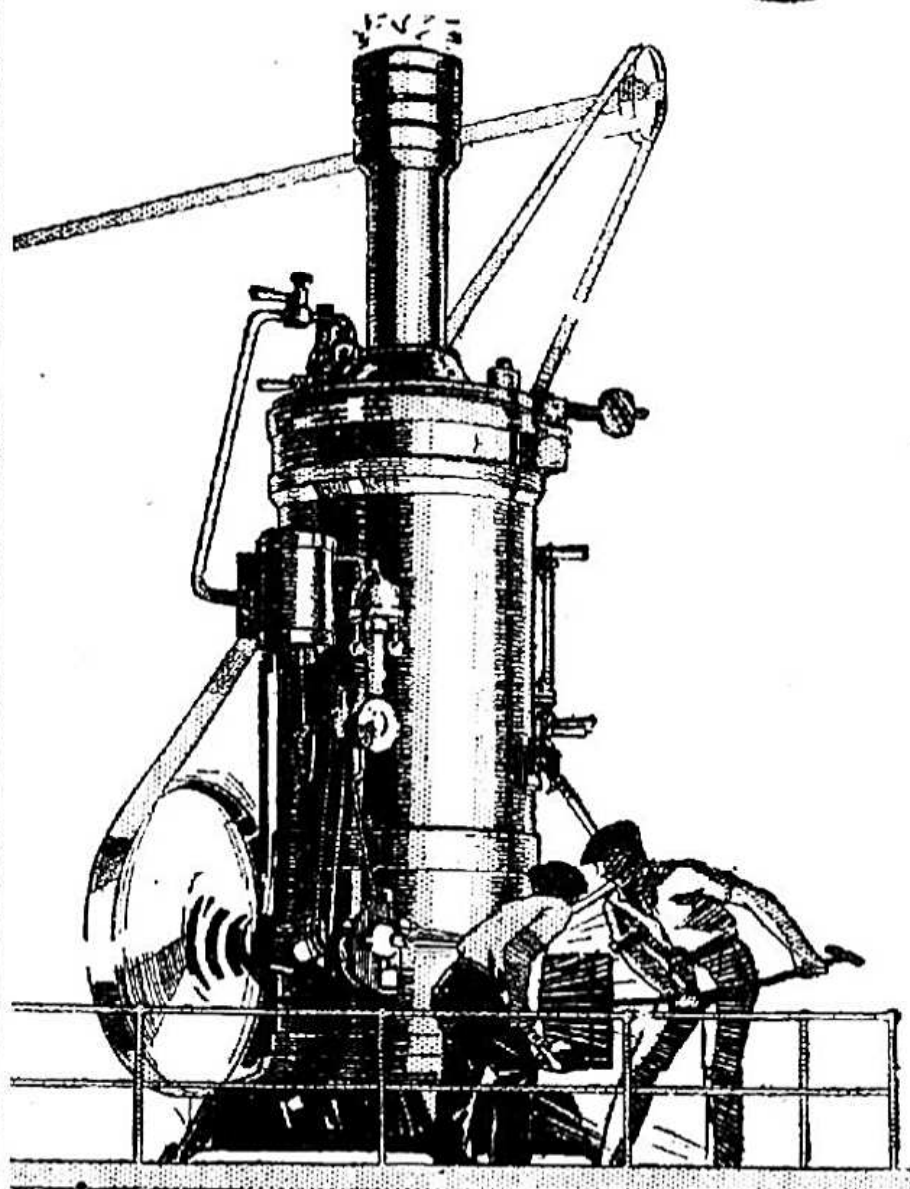
There is nothing to pay for this splendid Badge, and in the next few weeks we shall see the cheery little insignia popping up all over the place.

It will take some time, I know, for all the thousands of overseas members to get equipped, but all that will come. The big thing is that we have got the Badge—and it is a good Badge. It is one worthy of the St. Frank's League.

So send in straight away for yours.

As you can see, chums, space is very limited this week, or I would have something to add concerning the numerous letters I have received.

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Manager, THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY, The Fleetway House,

Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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