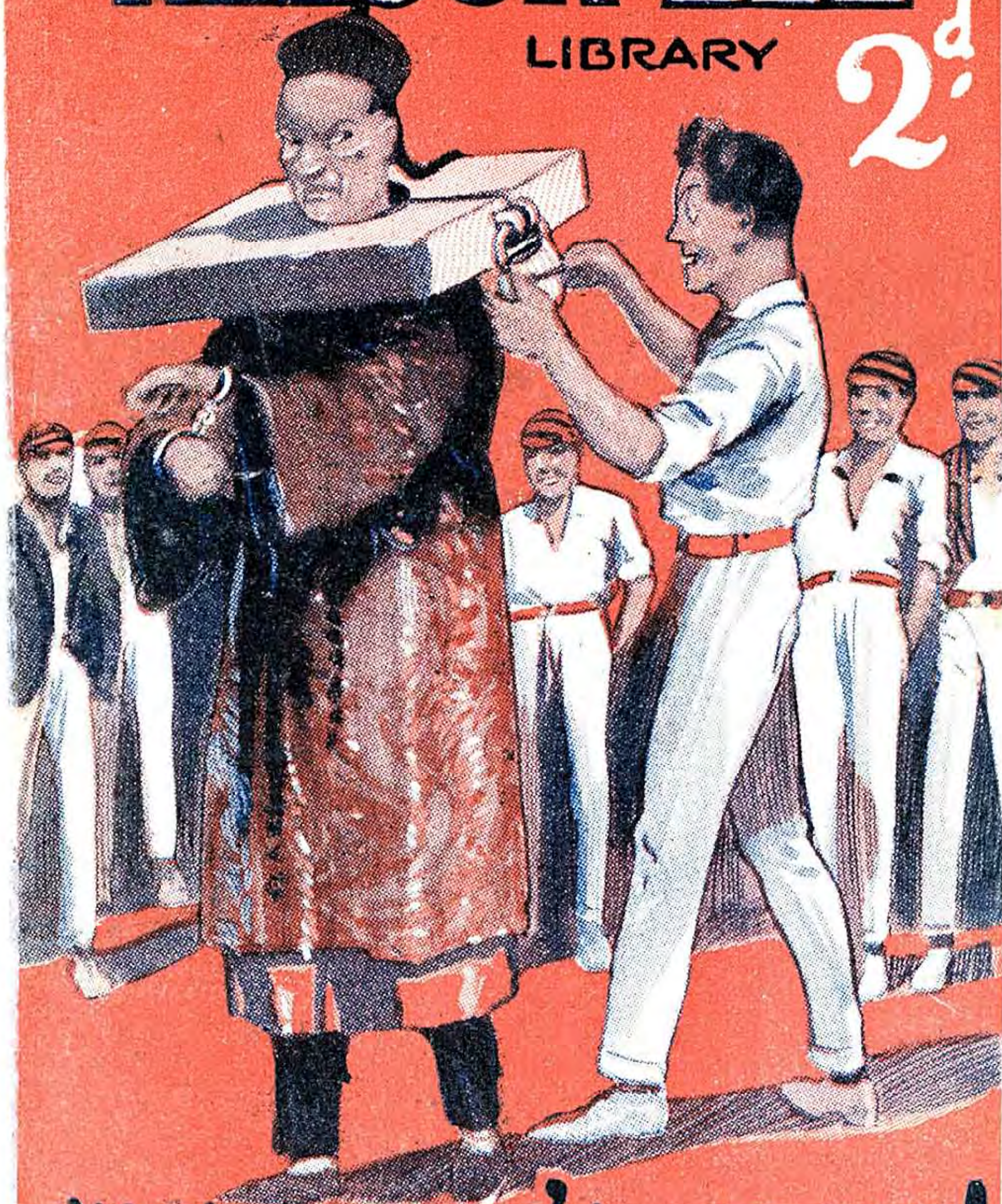


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S^t FRANK'S at BAY!

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New Series No. 19.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 11th, 1936.



"Look, there's Handforth!" Dick Hamilton gasped, and the three juniors stared blankly as they saw Handy stagger out of the den. The lanterns in the narrow, Chinese street lent a strange hue to his drawn face, and only his clutch on the side of the door saved him from falling.



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Foo Chow makes a final bid to defeat the Boys of St. Frank's in this long complete story. It passes from thrill to thrill to its stirring conclusion—start reading it now.

CHAPTER 1.

ARCHIE, THE PEACEMAKER.

PHIPPS halted in the doorway of the state-room and winced.

It was the quiet, lazy hour following luncheon, and Archie Glenthorne's valet had come to the state-room in response to a summons, brought by a steward. And as he stood there in the doorway, he perceptibly winced. And at the same time his manner became cold and frigid.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked Phipps.

"What-ho!" observed Archie Glenthorne, the swell of the St. Frank's Remove. "What-ho! So here we are, Phipps! You have trickled down, I presume, in answer to the young master's S O S?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Well, what about it, laddie?" asked Archie, as he drew himself up. "I mean, the general effect, and all that sort of thing. Not dashed bad, eh? In fact, priceless, what?"

"Quite so, sir," said Phipps woodenly.

"Good' gad!" protested Archie. "That is to say, odds Arctic blasts and blizzards! Every dashed word you utter, laddie, has

about ten icicles hanging to it! I mean to say, you're absolutely covered with frost as you stand there! What's the exact idea of this frightful chilliness?"

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said Phipps. "It was not my intention to hurt your feelings. But the necktie, if I may mention it——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie curtly. "I refuse to listen to any criticisms whatever. I refuse to hear your opinions! And that, Phipps, is absolutely that! What's wrong with the dashed necktie, anyhow?"

"But you just forbade me to pass any opinion——"

"This chunk of good old neck-wear actually belongs to Brent," explained Archie. "I thought it was somewhat juicy, so the dear old lad bunged it across, as it were. I mean to say, pretty ripe, what? A joyous assortment of colour, and all that. Why, dash it, I thought you would be dumb with joy at the very sight of it, old cheese! That's absolutely why I sent for you!"

Archie was distinctly upset. It was perfectly preposterous, the way Phipps always put the veto on anything bright and jazzy. The genial ass of the Remove had a weakness for startling colours, and he had never

been able to resist the temptation of highly decorative ties. Left entirely to himself, he would have outrivalled the gaudiness of a peacock.

The necktie in question was of bright blue, with curious orange and crimson ornamentations which somewhat resembled microbes, as viewed through a microscope. To add to the general effect, there were bars of green at regular intervals. In Archie's opinion, the thing was a dream. In Phipps' opinion it was a nightmare.

"Let me urge you, Master Archie, to remove the—the atrocity at once!" said Phipps firmly.

"The what, dash you?"

"The atrocity, sir."

"I mean to say——"

"There is no other word to describe it sir," said Phipps grimly. "I am rather amazed that Master Brent should own such a vile abomination. He has always revealed a certain amount of taste."

Archie started.

"Well, as a matter of absolute fact, the dear old lad was about to shove it through the porthole when I rescued it," he explained feebly. "A brand-new necktie, I mean! Said it affected his eyesight, and all that sort of rot. A present from one of his aunts, or one of those dear old souls. Anyhow, Alf kindly presented it to the young master."

"I am relieved to learn, at least, that Master Brent appreciated the horror of the thing, sir," said Phipps. "If I had my way, the manufacturers of these appalling conceptions would be sentenced to penal servitude. They are a menace to civilisation, sir."

"Who? The ties, or the good old manufacturers?"

"Both, sir."

Archie wavered. He had been slightly dubious from the very start, and his valet's firm attitude caused him to hesitate. After all, seen in a certain light, the thing was undoubtedly lurid.

"Oh, well, if you absolutely think——"

"I do, sir," said Phipps earnestly. "I might mention that Miss Marjorie has a wonderful taste in colour, sir. It would pain her exceedingly if she saw you in that riot of—of nastiness. I might add, sir, that my head is already beginning to throb."

"Good gad!" said Archie blankly. "Dear old Marjorie, what? Laddie, you're absolutely right. Why, the dear girl would simply expire on the spot. Away with the beastly thing, Phipps, and give me the mauve silk."

"Thank you, sir!" said Phipps gratefully. "But might I venture to suggest the smoke-blue in preference to the mauve?"

Phipps had his own way—as usual. At various intervals, Archie would attempt to assert his own authority, but it was very seldom that he prevailed. Sometimes he would remain obstinate for a few hours, but Phipps generally won.

And this afternoon Archie was certainly looking rather wonderful. His white flannels were spotless, and from head to foot he was a picture of immaculate perfection. Not that there was any particular reason for this display.

The St. Frank's holiday party was confined to the yacht, and there was a strict order in force, to the effect that nobody could go ashore. The city of Yang Fu stretched out in the afternoon sunlight, dusty and blistering with heat. And Lord Dorrimore's party lounged under the *Wanderer's* canvas awnings, or rested in the sumptuously appointed lounges and state-rooms.

There had been endless adventures during this sojourn in China, and even now the party was actually in the midst of a civil war. Until recently, Yang Fu had been the capital of Dr. Foo Chow's slave-ridden territory. But now it was in the hands of Yung Li Chang and his army, and the population appeared to welcome the change with joy.

Lord Dorrimore had brought his yacht to China with the main object of rescuing Yung Ching, of the *Remove*, from Foo Chow's clutches. This object had been achieved, and the boy had been restored to his father. But the *Wanderer* was in a somewhat doubtful position. Her escape down the great river, and her passage to the open sea, were still in question.

But, to the St. Frank's fellows, everything now appeared normal. They were just Dorrie's guests again, enjoying the many luxuries of the yacht. After their recent hardships and trials, it seemed that complete freedom was already with them.

Archie sallied out of his state-room in all his glory, and made his way along the carpeted corridor towards the main staircase.

"The good old engineers appear to be making repairs, and so forth," he murmured, as he heard thumps and thuds. "Steam-hammers, by gad! I mean to say, it seems dashed rummy——" He paused, puzzled, and stood listening. "Odds mysteries and riddles! The chappies appear to be mangling the old machinery in one of the state-rooms!"

The thuds were undoubtedly emanating from a private cabin, and Archie Glenthorne gave another start when he recognised which cabin it was. He moved forward, and drew opposite the door. That state-room was in the possession of the celebrated Handforth & Co., of Study D.

"What-ho!" remarked Archie sadly. "Trouble in the family, what? It appears that Handy is wrecking the happy home. Good gad! He'll sink the ship at this rate!"

Without warning the door of the cabin flew open, and Walter Church, of the *Remove*, dodged out. He came backwards, and didn't see anything of Archie—who only just stepped back in the nick of time.

"I say, dash it—— I mean——" he began feebly.

Church took no notice. He was a partial wreck, one sleeve being torn away, his collar

had vanished, and there was a significant puffiness in the region of his left eye.

"Chuck it, Handy!" he gasped. "Look here, you ass, chuck it——"

"That's just what I'm doing!" roared Handforth.

Whizz!

Something shot through the open doorway with terrific speed, and Church ducked with the adroitness of long practice.

Squelch!

Archie Glenthorne, not being so adept in the art of dodging Handforth's missiles, received a horrible mass of something in the very centre of his face. In Study D at St. Frank's, such incidents as this were of daily occurrence.

"Missed me!" said Church sourly.

"Gug-gug-gurrrrh!" moaned Archie, in absolute horror.

He dimly realised that he had been struck by an over-ripe fruit—and he had a vague idea that it was an ancient and defunct orange. But Archie wasn't worrying much about his face. That, after all, could be easily washed. But his immaculate clothing was utterly ruined in appearance.

Through a misty, watery haze of orange-pulp, he gazed down at himself. His shirt was a horrible mess, his jacket was stained and blobbed with sundry chunks of squelchiness, with a sundry pip clinging here and there. His beautiful bags were streaked and ghastly to look upon.

"Good shot, Handy!" exclaimed McClure from inside the cabin.

"Odds disasters and catastrophes!" Archie moaned. "I'm absolutely un-put! I mean to say, Phipps! S O S! Help! Rally round, dash it! Archie is positively in distress!"

"Who told that dummy to interfere?" demanded Edward Oswald Handforth curtly, as he came to the door. "Clear off, you fat-head! Can't we have a bit of an argument without you pushing in, and messing everything up?"

Archie was too staggered to reply.

"It's a bit thick, Handy!" protested Church. "You've ruined his appearance—and he was all smartened up, too. You might be a bit more careful with those oranges and things."

Handforth glanced at Archie and grunted.

"That's nothing!" he said. "No need to make a fuss over one or two silly stains. Nobody will notice 'em."

Archie seemed to come out of a dream.

"I don't wish to be frightfully unpleasant, but this is one of those dashed cases when a chappie needs to assert himself," he said coldly. "I might tell you that Phipps will give one look at me, and absolutely expire on the spot! I forgive you, old volcano, for this murky deed, but it's up to me to wade in with a few slices of homely advice."

"You can clear off, you funny ass——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie grimly. "The whole of this dashed country is in a state of

civil war, and we don't want the same beastly stuff in our own family circle, as it were. Be good enough to explain the trouble, and Archie will smooth the ruffled waters."

Upon the whole, Archie was singularly calm. But he was never a fellow to cry over spilt milk—and he was fortunate enough to possess any amount of spare suits. So he decided to curb his wrath, and settle this unhappy dispute.

He didn't know what he was biting off!



CHAPTER 2.

YUNG LI CHANG'S INVITATION.

RNOLD McClure appeared from the rear of the state-room, looking hot and ruffled, and rather fatigued.

"Take my advice, Archie, and clear off," he said wearily. "Look at us! I'd rather fight in a Chinese battle than argue with Handy! It's nothing, after all. We've just been persuading him to remain on board."

"And you can go on persuading!" said Handforth curtly. "I've made up my mind to go ashore, and you can all eat coke! We shall soon be starting back for home—and I mean to take souvenirs. I'm going ashore to buy 'em."

"But we're not allowed to go ashore!" howled Church, exasperated.

"I don't care——"

"You've got to care!" roared Church. "We've had enough trouble with you, you hopeless chump! You're always going off, and getting yourself into a mass of trouble! This time Mac and I mean business!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure loyally.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "Business, what? I mean to say, the good old persuasive stuff. Handy, old chunk of pepper, allow me to remark that these dear old scouts are absolutely on the mark. You can't go ashore as though we were anchored off Margate, or some frightfully decent place like that. Absolutely not! We're here, in the midst of China."

"Go hon!" said Handforth sarcastically.

"Absolutely!" repeated Archie. "I mean, here we are, in China. To be exact, we're simply surrounded with China. China, in fact, encircles us somewhat foully."

"There's no earthenware about, I suppose?" said Handforth.

"Oh, I say!" protested Archie. "Hardly the time, I mean, for these mould-encrusted jokes, what? Good gad! What with civil wars, and Chinese torturers, and—and—and you—— Well, there you are! Life, as it were, is becoming a mere round of frightfulness."

Handforth pushed back his sleeves.

"Are you classing me with a Chinese torturer?" he asked ominously.

"Absolutely not! At least, not exactly——"

"What!"

"After all, these Chinese torturer chappies have a certain limit!" said Archie stoutly. "They torture a lad for some time, and then desist. I mean, if they had Church and McClure in their good old clutches, they'd shove the half-nelson across them, and so forth, with several degrees of foulness."

"Well?" asked Handforth thickly.

"Well, there you are!" said Archie. "Or, to be exact, there it is. After a given amount of this treatment, the Chinese torturers would apply the good old brakes, and close the throttle, and take out the clutch. But with you, laddie, it's different. Why, odds persistence and perpetuity, you keep the poor chappies in a state of torture week in and week out. I mean, month out and month in, as it were. The years roll on, dash it, and still they suffer."

"Why, you—you insulting dummy——"

"No!" interrupted Archie firmly. "That is, absolutely not! I'm just pointing out a few of those frightfully interesting facts. You know, hard facts—made of cement, or something—— Concrete facts, laddie. That's the jolly old word!"

"Concrete may be hard—but it's pulp compared to this!" roared Handforth aggressively. "By George! I'll teach you to lecture me, you tailor's window-dressing!"

Crash!

Archie had the presence of mind to jerk himself slightly aside, but he caught the force of Handforth's punch on his left shoulder. He spun round like a top, clutched wildly at the air, and seized the only substance within reach. It happened to be Handforth's hair, and Archie caught a handful of it, and stuck to it. And as he sank dizzily to the floor, he nearly pulled Edward Oswald's head off. As this didn't happen, Handforth naturally went to the floor, too.

"Without wishing to be inquisitive, may I inquire if this is an imitation of a Rugby scrum, or merely a friendly chat?" asked William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, as he paused in the corridor. "Brother Horace, we appear to have arrived at a crucial moment."

Horace Stevens, also of the Fifth, shook his head.

"I'm surprised at Archie!" he said. "I didn't know he was in the habit of indulging in brawls. We'd better not associate ourselves with it, Browne, old man. Let's get up on deck——"

"One moment, Brother Horace," said Browne. "I am always a man of peace. I would like to settle this unhappy scrimmage."

"You'll have a job!" growled Church. "Handy's made up his mind to go ashore—and you know what's he's like when he's made up his mind. Wild bulls in a Spanish arena are like white rabbits compared to Handy when he's fixed his heart on something! Think of it! He's made up his mind to go ashore!"

"Yes, I have!" hooted Handforth, as he wrenched himself free from Archie's clutching grip. "And if you start interfering, Browne——"

"Never can it be said that a Browne interferes," interrupted William Napoleon. "A Browne may occasionally butt in, and a Browne has even been known to dispense free advice. But never does a Browne interfere. What is all this unhappy dissension? Why are there such rooted objections to Brother Handforth going ashore?"

"Look here, Browne, you're only making things worse——" began McClure.

"I realise, of course, that there is always a danger of Brother Handforth starting a riot or two," continued Browne. "And there can be no question that Brother Handforth will put the City of Yang Fu into a condition of semi-coma by the time he has finished with it. But why should he not go ashore if he so desires it?"

"Why?" snorted Church. "Because it's forbidden!"

"It grieves me deeply to contradict you, Brother Church, but surely you are in error?" asked the captain of the Fifth mildly. "Indeed, I have heard on the best authority that we are all at liberty to venture ashore as much as we please."

"What!" gasped the juniors.

"Indeed, I can safely inform you that this is no mere rumour," continued Browne. "It is officially guaranteed and sealed with the censor's approval. So let this argument cease—since there is no argument left. Did I not assure you, Brother Horace, that I would settle the scrimmage?"

Handforth was flushed with excitement.

"I say, is this honour bright?" he asked breathlessly.

"I can assure you that it is positively bur-nished," declared Browne. "Furthermore, his Excellency, Brother Yung Li Chang, has invited us to participate in a banquet this evening. There are wondrous times ahead, brothers. So let us rejoice in our new liberty, and make merry. Without exaggeration, I can say that Brother Horace and myself are now setting forth to paint the city crimson."

They strolled off, and Church and McClure glanced at one another with feeble sickness.

"All our trouble for nothing!" moaned Church. "And now Handy's going to crow, I suppose?"

"Of course I'm going to crow!" grinned Handforth. "Buck up, my sons! Wash yourselves and get dressed—and we'll buzz off. Let's go and have a good time! I'll forgive you freely for all your rot!"

Church and McClure had an idea that the boot ought to have been on the other foot, but it wasn't worth starting a fresh argument. So they dropped the subject, and prepared themselves for the trip ashore—if, indeed, it was really possible.

"What ho!" said Archie Glenthorne, holding on to the doorpost, and gazing down at his ruined clothing with acute consternation.



Church ducked as something whizzed out of the doorway—Archie Glenthorne wasn't so quick. He received the full benefit of the over-ripe and ancient orange fairly in the face. "Good shot, Handy!" exclaimed McClure, from inside the cabin.

"I mean to say, wreckage and debris, what? Gaze upon the ruins, laddie! Take stock of your frightful handiwork!"

Handforth gave Archie a casual glance.

"I suppose you're going to make a fuss over a trifle?" he asked tartly.

"Good gad! A trifle! I mean——"

"Of course it's a trifle," interrupted Handforth. "Just a few splodges of orange, that's all. You needn't even change. There's nothing to worry about in one or two trifling stains."

Archie reeled off, completely at a loss for adequate words, and, with the help of Phipps, he proceeded to array himself in fresh triumphs of sartorial art.

In Study D—as Handforth & Co.'s cabin was popularly termed, since it so closely resembled that famous St. Frank's apartment—Edward Oswald was on the best of terms with his chums. The arguments were forgotten—the quarrel was over. Brisk preparations for going ashore were in progress. Church and McClure were only too glad to accept their impetuous leader in his new frame of mind.

"Ready?" asked Handforth, at length. "Buck up, my sons! And don't forget your cash—we've got to buy all sorts of souvenirs. Where's my jacket? Church, you fathead, where's my jae—Hullo! What the—Great pip!" he gasped. "Look at this!"

He had found his jacket, and he was gazing indignantly at a small splash of orange pulp on one of the lapels.

"Must have been done when you chucked

that squiffy orange at Archie," said McClure. "A kind of rebound, I suppose."

"But look at it!" hooted Handforth. "My jacket's ruined!"

His chums nearly fainted.

"You told Archie, five minutes ago, that he was making a fuss over a trifle, and his whole suit was spattered from head to foot!" said Church, staring. "Now you're making an awful fuss over one tiny spot!"

"But—but this is *my* coat!" roared Handforth.

"Well, if you feel that way about it, you can just imagine poor old Archie's sensations," grinned McClure. "Perhaps you'll have a bit of care next time."

Handforth stared at the stain reflectively.

"H'm! Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "I suppose it was a bit rough on Archie. Next time I see him I'll apologise."

And Handforth was as good as his word. Which, of course, put everything right with Archie on the instant, for the scion of the noble house of Glenthorne had never been known to resist an apology.



CHAPTER 3.

HANDFORTH & CO. ASHORE.

His Excellency, Yung Li Chang, smiled reassuringly.

"You need have no fear, gentlemen, that any

further dangers will beset you," he said im-

passively. "This delay is only brief, and at any moment I am expecting news of further victories. My armies are completing their great task, and the enemy is on the run. Dr. Foo Chow and his cowardly dogs stand no chance whatever against my victorious invaders."

"Well, it's cheerin' to hear you speak with such confidence," said Lord Dorrimore, as he took a fresh cigarette. "An' in the meantime we can regard Yang Fu as safe, eh? No possibility of hittin' trouble if we go ashore?"

"The city of Yang Fu is now entirely under my control," replied the great war lord. "Moreover, the population itself is delirious with happiness. It is not my habit to boast of my achievements, but I can safely claim that this entire territory is now freed from a hateful bondage. The people know it, and they acclaim me as their liberator. The last of Foo Chow's supporters have been banished or put to death. All are friends here now."

Mr. Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, I am quite convinced of that, your Excellency," he said thoughtfully. "And it is a great relief to know that the members of our party can go ashore without fear of treachery or danger. But we cannot overlook the grim fact that Foo Chow's men hold the canyon, which is the only way to the sea. While Foo Chow retains that grip, our yacht is helpless."

"That's frightfully cheerin'," remarked Dorrie.

"Have no doubt that my triumphant army will prevail," said Yung Li Chang. "I am well aware that the only passage to the sea lies through the canyon, where a vast rock barrier has been constructed—a barrier that can be raised and lowered by the strength of men. But ere long—perhaps even now—this last stronghold of Foo Chow's will be wrested from him."

"An' then we can think of sailin' for home?" asked his lordship.

"Yes. And although I shall regret your departure, I strongly urge it," replied Yung Li Chang. "This whole province will soon be under my supreme control. I have freed these people from the yoke of Foo Chow's slavery, and it is my wish to govern the territory with the same methods that I am now governing my own province. At any hour we may expect to hear the good news."

The Chinese conqueror rose.

"You will excuse me?" he asked smoothly. "I have urgent business to attend. Pray assure me that you will grace my banquet this evening, and it is my express wish that all the younger people should be present."

"That's jolly decent of you, your Excellency," said Lord Dorrimore. "You can count on us all bein' there. A theatre afterwards, you said, didn't you? That's toppin'! But don't your Chinese theatres carry on for a week or two at a time, in one continuous performance?"

Yung Li Chang smiled.

"Possibly you will be interested in the

novelty," he replied. "You will be at liberty to retire from the theatre at any moment you desire. And now, gentlemen, I must crave your indulgence."

He bowed himself out, and after he had gone, Nelson Lee and Dorrie glanced at one another. They were in the latter's luxurious state-room on the promenade deck, and nobody else was present there.

"You think it'll be O.K., old man?" asked his lordship.

"I'm doubtful, Dorrie—infernally doubtful," replied Nelson Lee, frowning.

"Why?"

"Because Foo Chow is a vindictive, revengeful fiend," replied Lee. "Do you think he'll let us escape from this hot-bed of civil war, if he can possibly prevent us? No. He'll strain every nerve and sinew to exact a terrible vengeance. My main fear is that he will destroy the canyon, and thus make it impossible for the *Wanderer* to ever reach the open sea."

"Well, of course, that'll be deucedly fearful, to have the poor old tub corked up in this river, but that won't prevent us from gettin' out of China," said Lord Dorrimore. "Why, Yung Li Chang will provide us with an escort, an' see us all safely up country, where we can discover a railway train, or somethin' thrillin' like that!"

Lee shook his head.

"It sounds too easy, Dorrie," he replied. "Foo Chow has been too quiet, and, frankly, I don't quite credit this story of his utter and absolute downfall. I have a persistent fear that he is preparing a coup. Not that we can do anything but trust to luck."

"Well, let's go on trustin'," smiled Dorrie, rising to his feet. "Yang Fu is quiet, anyhow, an' it's a relief to have things in a peaceful condition for once. The boys are gettin' ready for goin' ashore, by the look of it," he added, glancing through the open window. "It doesn't take long for good news to spread. I suppose it'll be quite safe to let 'em loose?"

"Quite," agreed Lee. "Otherwise I would never consent to such a step. Yung Li Chang's soldiers are in full possession of the city, and the people, too, are friendly towards us. The one fact that we are the personal friends of the liberator makes us safe. We are all regarded as almost sacred, including the boys and the girls. Oh, yes, we shall be quite secure."

Dorrie went out, and found practically all the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls eagerly waiting for the word to go down the ladder into the waiting boats. The yacht was lying in mid-stream, and as the river was broad, it was some little distance to the crowded shore.

"I say, sir, is it true?" asked Church eagerly, as he caught sight of Dorrie.

"Is what true, young 'un?"

"That we can all go ashore?"

"Absolutely official," smiled his lordship.

"All restrictions are over, thank goodness. What's the good of comin' on a holiday trip

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if we can't enjoy ourselves? But you'd better go easy with your money. These Chinese merchants price their wares accordin' to the looks of their customers, an' the native money in one street may be worth double its value in another. I can tell you that shoppin' in China is somethin' like a nightmare."

"How about gettin' our cash, Dorrie?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"Why, we've got plenty, Dick," put in Mary Summers.

"Plenty of English money, but we need native cash before we can buy anything," replied Dick. "These Chinese merchants won't accept any other currency but their own. At least, that's what I've always heard."

"An' you're probably right, although they might make an exception of us," smiled Dorrie. "You see, we're all in a special category. We're the personal pals of Yung Li Chang, the great war lord, an' that makes us frightfully important. But, to be on the safe side, you'd better get your money exchanged. General Ling Soo Chin has been appointed governor of the city, an' if you go to his office he'll give you all the cash you need in exchange for notes."

"Where's his office, sir?" asked half a dozen voices.

"You'll find it in full sight when the boats reach the landin' stage," replied Dorrie. "General Ling is a sportsman—as a matter of fact, he went to Oxford for some years, an' he knows his way about. He has promised to shove up a big board with the word 'Money' on the end of it. So you can't make a mistake. You'd better hire a few dozen coolies to carry the stuff. They'll swarm round you in myriads as soon as you get ashore. There's nothin' in the world like these Chinese coolies. But you'll soon find out."

Dorrie's advice was necessary, for none of the fellows or girls quite knew how to go on once they were ashore. The very fact that they could go freely was ripping enough, but

to be able to go shopping was simply wonderful. The girls were particularly eager.

"We'd better have a fixed time for coming back to the boats," said Dick Hamilton practically. "Five o'clock ought to be all right."

"Good," agreed Reggie Pitt. "That'll give us nice time to look round, buy a few things, and get back in good time for a cup of tea. Then we shall have comfortable time for dressing. This evening's banquet begins at seven o'clock."

"A jolly good programme!" was the general vote.

So two of the *Wanderer's* boats, well filled, soon put off, and delivered their human freight upon the landing stage. All the members of the party were eager and full of high spirits.

"Odds crowds and multitudes!" ejaculated Archie, as he adjusted his monocle and gazed round. "I mean to say, good gad! The whole dashed populace appears to have gathered at the fountain, as it were. I mean, we're simply surrounded by solid battalions of the lads of the village."

"Well, Dorrie warned us," grinned Alf Brent, Archie's chum.

"Yes, but dash it—I mean——"

Swarms of coolies were pressing round the party, all of them shouting at once, gesticulating and grinning. It was clear that they were seeking to be employed, and they regarded the holiday party with obsequious deference.

"This sort of thing is all very well, but cut it out!" said Handforth firmly as he pushed his way through the shouting coolies. "Come on, Mac! You, too, Churchy! Let's make for the curio shops first. I want to buy something for the mater."

"What about the money?" asked Church.

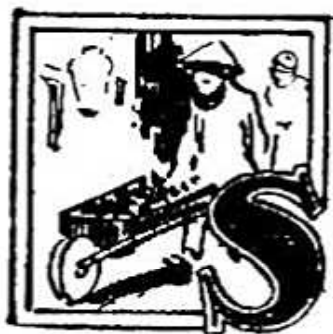
"I've got plenty of money," replied Handforth crisply. "Bags of it. My hat! We haven't had a chance to spend a giddy penny ever since we started on this trip!"

"Well, we're pretty flush, if it comes to

that," put in McClure. "But our English money isn't any good here, you ass. We've got to exchange it for cash!"

Handforth gave his chums a withering glance.

"If English money isn't good enough for these Chinks, they'll feel the weight of my fist!" he said darkly. "Just leave it to me!"



CHAPTER 4.

A QUESTION OF CASH.

OMEHOW, Handforth & Co. became separated from the other members of the shore party. Even the girls had disappeared among the throngs, escorted by their schoolboy companions. But for once Handforth did not seem to mind being parted from Irene Manners. His brain was full of other things.

The scene on the water front was animated in the extreme.

In addition to the crowd of coolies, there were endless children, and also the inhabitants of the quaint-looking junks and sampans. Here, on the river front, were any number of these primitive craft, each having its own little population. The air was heavy with sundry smells, none of them particularly pleasant; but this was no time to notice such details. The sun was beating down with tropical heat, and the dust was flying.

"There's the exchange office," said Church, nodding towards a building some distance away. "See the board? Better go and get our notes converted into cash, then we shall be on the safe side."

Handforth stared.

"Don't you call our notes cash?" he asked.

"Of course they're not cash!"

"Then what are they?" demanded Edward Oswald.

"Well, they're notes," said Church. "I suppose they'd be regarded as cash at home; but you don't seem to understand. This is a different kind of cash."

"I know—Chinese cash," nodded Handforth. "Well, these Chink merchants have got to accept English money, or I'll know the reason why! By George! If English money isn't good enough—"

"You—you hopeless ass!" growled McClure. "It's not a question of being good enough. These Chinese don't understand English money, that's all. They can't read our writing, and they'd look upon a pound currency note as a piece of waste-paper. If we're going to buy things, we shall have to use cash."

"Of course," said Church, nodding.

Handforth breathed hard.

"Of course we shall use cash!" he snorted. "You don't think I'm going to ask these merchants to let me have things on tick, do you?"

"You're looking at the wrong sense of the word," said Church, exasperated. "Cash—

cash! In China cash isn't plural, like it is with us. Cash is a coin. See?"

"A coin?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"We say we've got ten pennies, but the Chinese say they've got ten cash," explained Church patiently. "My only hat! I thought you knew all this! A Chinese copper cash is a rummy little coin with a hole in the middle of it. Haven't you seen the people carrying 'em about, on strings? There's a Chinaman over there now, with two strings of cash hanging over his shoulder."

Handforth looked, and started.

"I thought they were washers, or something," he said with a sniff. "You fathead! If you think I'm going to cart that sort of coinage about, you'd better think again."

"But you can't buy anything except for these cash," said McClure.

"These cash?" repeated Handforth. "Where's your grammar?"

"Oh, corks!" groaned McClure. "'These cash' is perfect grammar when you're talking about Chinese cash. Of all the obstinate cuckoos—"

"Oh, come on!" interrupted Church. "We'd better hire some of these coolies."

"What on earth for?" demanded Handy.

"To carry our cash, of course."

"Hire coolies to carry our money!" repeated Handforth, in astonishment. "Are you dotty? Can't we carry our own money?"

"Humour him!" said McClure despairingly.

"Eh?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Look here, Arnold McClure, if you start any of your rot—"

"You pig-headed, obstinate lunatic!" roared McClure. "Don't you know that twenty of these cash coins go to the penny? That means 240 for a shilling! How much money do you reckon to spend on this trip?"

"Oh, about a fiver!" said Handforth.

"Good!" said McClure grimly. "Then you can carry your own money—and I hope you'll enjoy it!"

"What the dickens—"

"You'd better have a few special pockets made," went on McClure, with heavy sarcasm. "For five quid you'll get twenty-four thousand copper cash—and the rate of exchange may be better than that."

"Twenty-four thousand!" echoed Handforth, staring. "Do you mean to say that in order to buy five quids' worth of things I've got to cart thousands of those washers about? You fathead! I'll use English money, and avoid all that giddy trouble. Come on!"

Church and McClure gave it up, and decided to give Handforth his head. He never learned except by experience! The other fellows were already providing themselves with the necessary cash, and coolies were carrying the ridiculous money about for them.

The problem of Chinese currency is serious enough in the great coastal ports where Europeans abound, but it was even more

difficult here, in the heart of Inner China, where English money was absolutely unknown. Chinese currency is nearly always an insuperable problem for the stranger. It would not be so bad if trading was carried on by means of money which represented a reasonable sum. But this is not the case.

Of course, the recognised unit in China is the tael, but there are endless varieties in use, and its purchasing value is different in almost every locality. Again, there is no such coin as the tael—it is merely a weight of silver. The average Chinese merchant would accept nothing but the absurd copper cash, so the Chinese shopper is always in difficulties regarding the carrying of his or her money.

McClure's assumption that a shilling was worth 240 cash was probably wrong; the chances were that it was worth half as much again, or double. Indeed, Chinese currency may be worth one price in the morning, and a totally different price in the evening.

Not that this mattered to the holiday party. The novelty of the experience was amusing enough, and not many of the fellows attempted to haggle or bargain with the merchants, who consequently reaped a rich harvest.

Handforth & Co. strolled into one of the hot, stuffy, narrow streets, where the sunlight was excluded by matting stretched overhead from roofs to roofs. In this particular street there were endless little curio shops. And in the next street, perhaps, there would be nothing but shoes, and in a street further on, nothing but fancy silks, and so on. In the big Chinese cities, each trade has its own particular street, and keeps to it.

"Good!" said Handforth, as he finished selecting a number of beautifully lacquered ornaments. "Just the things to please the mater. How much?" he added, turning to the portly merchant who presided. "What's the price?"

The Chinaman grinned, and spoke in his own language.

"He wants to see your cash," grinned Church. "We told you——"

"Well, here it is," interrupted Handforth, producing a number of currency notes. "How many do you want, old son? One—two? Here you are—take 'em yourself. Choose! Only don't grab the lot, or there'll be trouble."

The merchant shook his head vigorously, and made it quite clear that these oblong pieces of paper were useless to him. Handforth argued in vain.

"You—you blessed heathen! Isn't my money good enough?" Handy roared at last.

"It's no good—you've got to bring him the money he can understand, or there'll be a riot!" said Church uneasily. "When you're in Rome, you've got to do as Rome does."

"But we're not in Rome!" roared Handforth. "We're in Yang Fu!"

"Oh, help!" moaned Church, with a hopeless gesture.

"English money has always bought me anything I want—and I don't see why it should

be scorned here!" argued Handforth. "And you can't talk to this overfed heathen! He just sits there and jabbers. What's the good of coming out shopping, unless we can shop?"

In the end, Edward Oswald was reluctantly compelled to confess that he was wrong. Of course, he didn't put it in this way—he indignantly characterised the entire Chinese race as a set of lunatics. Then he marched his chums back to the river-front, and they went into Général Ling's "special office." And here they were successful in getting five pounds' worth of cash.

The actual amount was staggering, and the weight tremendous. To count those strings of queer little copper coins—which Handforth insisted upon calling washers—was impossible. But there must have been anything between 25,000 and 30,000! They were carried out by coolies, and deposited on one of the clumsy, cumbersome native wheelbarrows. These were about the only wheeled vehicles in the whole of Yang Fu, and even these had probably been copied from the Northern provinces.

"My only sainted aunt!" said Handforth, as he regarded the wheel-barrow. "Why, all those washers would be worth ten or twenty quid at home! Of all the dotty ideas—exchanging good English notes for this junk! Grab hold, you chaps!"

"Eh?" said Church and McClure.

"Grab hold. We're going shopping."

"But what about these coolies——"

"We don't want to be bothered with coolies," said Handforth firmly.

"Well, if it comes to that, we don't want to be bothered with this wheel-barrow!" snorted Church. "We can hire a dozen of these men for about fourpence! What's the idea of making Mac and I——"

"I don't trust these coolies—and we don't want to be watching 'em all the time," interrupted Handforth obstinately. "We'll take the wheel-barrow in turns—and you chaps can have the first shot."

So the populace of Yang Fu was treated to the sight of Handforth & Co. staggering along the crowded, uneven streets with a wheelbarrow laden to overflowing with money. And the shopping campaign began.



CHAPTER 5.

THE CITY OF REVELRY.

HURCH breathed a sigh of great relief.

"Thank goodness!" he said fervently. "There goes the last of that fearful coinage. I'll never come shopping in China again as long as I live!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure, with feeling.

They were both fed up—to use their own expression, fed up to the neck. They had been in street after street, and shop after shop, and all the while the sun was blazing

down pitilessly—the heat being merely intensified by the screens of matting overhead. For in these narrow alleys—they could scarcely be called streets—there was very little air; and what with the stagnant atmosphere, and the jostling crowds, McClure and Church were well-nigh exhausted. But Handforth seemed to thrive on the humid conditions.

"Got all the parcels?" he said, as they wended their way in the direction of the river-front. "Good man! We haven't got half the things we actually need—shopping in these poky little places takes an awful time."

"There's another day to-morrow," said Church casually.

"And there's a part of one left to-day," declared Handforth. "We'll get all these parcels on to the boat—"

"Good!" said McClure, with intense relief. "I thought you were going to say something else! It's nearly five o'clock, anyhow. Tea! Did you hear, Churchy? Tea!"

"I heard you the first time," said Church dreamily. "My goodness! I never realised how the idea of a cup of tea can get hold of a chap. I can do with a bath, too—a cold bath with the water somewhere about twenty degrees below zero."

"That would be ice, you ass," said McClure.

"All the better!" breathed Church. "I'd melt it in about ten seconds."

"When you chaps have finished gassing, perhaps you'll let me finish what I was saying!" said Handforth tartly. "We'll deposit these parcels in one of the boats, and then go and get another load of cash."

"What!" gasped his chums.

"A smaller load this time—about three quid's worth," said Handforth. "There are one or two things I spotted as we came along—"

"But—but we've got to be on board by five!" interrupted Church, in alarm. "Orders, you know, Handy!"

"Blow orders!"

"And we've got to get dressed for the banquet—"

"Blow the banquet!"

"Irene will expect you to escort her—"

"Blow Irene!" said Handforth firmly. "Eh? I—I mean—"

"If that's all you think about her—"

"You fatheads, you trapped me into saying that!" roared Handforth. "Irene, eh? Oh, well, I did promise to escort her to the banquet, didn't I? H'm! I suppose we shall have to leave the rest of the shopping until to-morrow. All the same, I don't see why—"

But at this moment, much to the relief of Church and McClure, they encountered Tom Burton and Jerry Dodd and Fullwood and Buster Boots and a group of other juniors. Handforth's chums managed to acquaint the fellows of their leader's wavering intentions—and he was forthwith hustled into one of the waiting boats before he could fully make up his mind.

Once on board, however, he resigned himself to the inevitable—particularly as he suddenly realised that a dip in the swimming-bath would be a most agreeable preliminary to tea in the lounge.

"By George, we'll make that water boil if we all jump in at once!" he said, as they prepared for the plunge. "And we can get those other souvenirs and things to-morrow—"

"If we're allowed ashore," remarked Dick Hamilton.

"Eh? You silly ass—"

"Well, there's a doubt about it, Handy," said Dick. "Haven't you heard the good news? It isn't absolutely official yet, but some messages have come in to the effect that Foo Chow's army is completely routed—and that the canyon has fallen."

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth. "The canyon's fallen?"

"Yes!"

"And you call that good news?" roared Handforth, in alarm. "Why, if the canyon's fallen, we shall be bottled up here for good—"

"I don't mean it's fallen literally, you chump!" grinned Dick. "I've never known such a chap for taking things literally! The canyon's fallen—which means to say that Foo Choo and his army have been whacked. They've been driven out, and the river is clear for us to reach the sea."

"I say, is this true?"

"It's ripping news!"

"Absolutely, laddies!"

There was a loud buzz of excited comment.

"Don't count on it too much, though," added Dick Hamilton warningly. "I've told you that it's not official—but Mr. Lee is satisfied that it's true. And we're making all preparations for a start down the river at dawn."

"Dawn!" said Handforth, with a start. "What about my shopping?"

"Oh, I'd forgotten that!" said Dick. "Of course, I shall have to tell Captain Burton to delay lifting the anchor until you're ready."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Handforth was so animated at the thought of starting the trip for freedom at dawn that he forgot his shopping expedition. Without question this latest item of news was cheering.

But could it be relied upon?

It was so difficult to believe anything that was not actually before their eyes. Only the previous day an official report had come in, positively stating that the rocky canyon had fallen absolutely into the hands of Yung Li Chang's victorious army. It was an established fact—a positive truth. And then another report had completely knocked it on the head, for it was only too obvious that Foo Chow had recaptured that all-important pass.

What guarantee was there that a similar catastrophe would not happen now? Victories



"How much do you want?" asked Handforth, extending a sheaf of pound notes to the Chinese merchant. "Help yourself—only don't take the lot!" The merchant shook his head vigorously. He didn't understand English money. "You—you blessed heathen!" Handy roared. "Isn't my money good enough for you?"

in a Chinese civil war are very different from victories in any other war. They are liable to be turned into defeats at an hour's notice.

"I'm sure I don't know what to believe, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee, as they discussed the news. "If only we can accept this latest report as authentic, our troubles are practically over. But I can't help fearing that Foo Chow is keeping something up his sleeve."

Lord Dorrimore laughed.

"I'm inclined to think you've got a bee in your bonnet about Foo Chow," he replied. "It all depends upon his sleeves, anyhow. If he's wearin' native costume, he might have anythin' up it, from a revolver to a cannon!"

"I wish you'd be serious, old man!" growled Nelson Lee. "It is all very well to be easy-going, but Foo Chow is not a man tamely to give up the fight, and let us escape. He blames us for his disasters in the field. He knows that he can never recapture his lost territories—and so he will concentrate upon revenge."

"Wise words, Umtagati, my father!" rumbled a voice.

They turned, and found Umlosi with them. The huge African chieftain—Lord Dorrimore's most faithful companion in many a fight—was looking solemn and troubled. And yet there was a certain gleam of anticipation in his dark eyes.

"Hallo, here's Old Moore, with his almanack of predictions," grinned Lord Dorrimore. "We can always trust you to make some gloomy prophesies, Umlosi, old son. What is it this time? Rivers of gore? Dead an' dyin' strewn in heaps?"

"Thou art pleased to be amused, N'Kose!" growled Umlosi. "But methinks thou wilt regret thy levity ere long. The words of Umtagati are wondrously chosen."

"Go up one, Lee, old scout!" smiled Dorrie.

"It is well that we should prepare for fighting," went on Umlosi, his manner becoming mysterious. "For have I not had my dreams? Have I not seen disaster? Take no heed of these yellow dogs and their promises of safety, Umtagati."

"But they are our friends, Umlosi."

"And yet that cannot alter their nature," said Umlosi shrewdly. "Mayhap they are friendly—'tis not for me to question their sincerity. But they are yellow, even as those whom we regard as enemies are yellow. I have seen strange things, my master. Let us not celebrate ere the victory is won."

"Somethin' in that," admitted Dorrie, nodding. "He's got these Chinese taped, anyhow. It is a bit of a job to get at the truth, an' no mistake."

He turned, and looked at the city—which was becoming more and more animated as the evening approached. Revelry was afoot.

The entire population was bent upon a great celebration. And Dorrie wondered if all this was but a false index of the true situation.



CHAPTER 6.

NO BANQUET FOR HANDFORTH!

DANGER seemed to be a very remote possibility, however, when Yung Li Chang's guests went ashore from the *Wanderer* soon after six-thirty. The yacht was brilliant with light from stem to stern, and, seen from the promenade deck, the city of Yang Fu was like a dreamland paradise.

The soft Eastern night had fallen, warm and rather mysterious. And from every part of the city there came the glow of coloured lanterns, and without cessation there were the spitting detonations of exploding crackers.

The whole city was celebrating. Seen in this light, with only the native paper lanterns to illuminate the streets, the place was very wonderful. And the very idea of warfare seemed ridiculous.

"I'm half sorry we're going to this banquet," said Doris Berkeley, as she and the other girls stood at the top of the ladder, all looking radiant in their summery evening frocks. "It would be ever so much more jolly to walk about the streets, enjoying the mysteries of the East."

"It sounds very romantic, but I'd rather enjoy the mysteries of a good dinner," said Ena Handforth practically. "Perhaps you won't be so keen when we get ashore, Doris. These places always look better from a distance, you know."

"Yes, I suppose they do," admitted Doris. "Ready? It's our turn to go down into the boat."

Mrs. Beverley Stokes, of course, was in charge of the girls. Yung Li Chang was preparing to break all the rules of Chinese etiquette in honour of his British guests. For, of course, in China, the presence of ladies at a banquet is regarded as nothing short of outrageous.

But for the sake of these distinguished visitors, the great Chinese War Lord was prepared to sacrifice his native custom. After all, his own son was a pupil of St. Frank's, and he was more or less Westernised. Quite a number of local mandarins, however, would probably be rather shocked—although they would never dare to query the decisions of their supreme ruler. For Yung Li Chang was nothing less.

Captain Burton had been invited, but he had gruffly declined, preferring to remain in charge of his beloved yacht. Not an officer or a member of the crew was leaving her deck. Somehow, in spite of all these friendly surroundings, the Britishers could not help feeling that treachery might be afoot somewhere. Their host and his retinue were above

suspicion, of course, but Yang Fu was a very big city.

To walk to a banquet in China is not to be thought of, even if one's host lives only a hundred yards away. And when the *Wanderer's* party reached the landing-stage, a glittering array of sedan-chairs was in attendance, all with their gorgeously arrayed carriers. The ladies were accommodated first, and Handforth felt that the whole thing was very much of a swindle. He had been anticipating a pleasant walk with Irene through the lantern-hung streets.

"Well, they won't get me into one of those silly boxes!" he said firmly. "In fact, I'm not going to the banquet at all."

"We shall miss you, Handy," said Church carelessly.

"Still, we wouldn't think of persuading you," added McClure.

"You needn't try to persuade me—and you won't miss me, either!" retorted Handforth. "You're coming with me, my lads. Blow the banquet! I vote we slip off on our own, and do a bit of exploring. There's heaps of the city we haven't penetrated yet."

"But we've been invited, Handy," urged Church. "It would look awfully bad if we didn't turn up."

"They'll never miss us," declared Handforth promptly.

"And we're going to the theatre afterwards—"

"Oh, well, that's a different thing!" said Edward Oswald. "We can easily show up in time for the theatre. But the banquet—no!"

"But, my dear chap—"

"The banquet—no!" repeated Handforth, with an air of finality. "My hat! I'm surprised that you chaps should be keen on the feed. I haven't forgotten the last Chinese banquet we attended."

They stared.

"You mean that feast at old Ah Fong's place?" asked Church.

"Yes, I do!" said Handforth coldly. "My only aunt! Stewed rat! Botted slugs! Dried cockroaches! Ooooh! It makes me writhe to think of that horrible feed! And we enjoyed it, you know—we ate all that ghastly stuff without knowing what it was until afterwards!"

Church and McClure winced.

"Don't!" groaned Mac. "The very thought's enough."

"And yet you want to go to this other banquet!"

"You silly chump, this'll be totally different!" snorted Church. "Do you think Chingy's pater would put all those insecty dishes in front of us? This feast is going to be something special—something gorgeous. Why, Fatty Little has been in a kind of trance for hours—just dreaming about it."

"Well, I'm not Fatty Little—and I'm not dreaming!" said Handforth firmly. "What's more, I'm not going to take any risks. Once bitten, twice shy! You can't catch an old bird in the same trap twice!"

"But look here, Handy——"

"It's no good—I'm not listening to your rot!" interrupted Handforth. "You gluttons! All you can think about is grub! It'll be ten times more interesting to explore the city. We may come across a mystery or two, and I want to go to a few shops, too. We'll have a look round, and then get some of that silly money, and do some buying."

In the thick of the crowd, Handforth managed to push his chums away from all the other members of the party. So it wasn't until the guests were actually sitting at Yung Li Chang's table that Handforth & Co.'s absence was noticed.

That sedan ride through the streets had been rather novel. The carriers were experts, and swung their burdens along with no apparent effort. And the streets were a riot of colour and life. The lanterns were hanging in festoons everywhere. There were myriads of them, of every conceivable size and colour. Some of the richer inhabitants had decorated their houses with gorgeous silken lanterns, and the gay scenes were eloquent of general rejoicing. And all along the route crackers were being let off—for there is never a festival or a rejoicing in China without an everlasting supply of crackers and other fireworks. The Chinese love nothing better than an endless din.

The banquet was being held in a kind of palace that Dr. Foo Chow had built for his own use—but which now, of course, had been appropriated by his conqueror. In some ways the building was less primitive than the other edifices of the city, but it was still picturesque in its purely Chinese atmosphere.

The entire roof-space was aglow with endless lanterns, and the tables were laden with the most wonderful dishes that the Chinese chefs could concoct. But Handforth need not have worried himself. The meats were above reproach, the fish was fresh from the river, and the sweetmeat confections were bewildering in their variety.

And the banquet progressed with complete harmony. The local mandarins, having got over the shock of seeing young ladies at the table, soon entered into the spirit of the affair. And Handforth & Co. were completely forgotten—except by Nelson Lee.

"Confound the boy!" he murmured to Dorrie, when he got the chance. "I'm always uneasy when Handforth slips off like this. He means well, but he has an extraordinary facility for finding trouble."

Lord Dorrimore grinned.

"He can't be in any danger here," he smiled. "There's nothin' to worry about, old man—all the natives are friendly in Yang Fu."

"Very possibly; but I would like to know where Handforth is, and what he is doing," replied Lee. "We are proposing a start down the river at dawn—and we don't want those boys to cause any delay. Yung Li Chang has received positive information that the canyon is held by his own soldiers."

Soon afterwards, Lee found an opportunity of whispering to Dick Hamilton.

"You're going to speak about Handy, sir," said Dick.

"Yes, I am, young 'un," murmured Lee. "As soon as the banquet is over—before we go along to the theatre—I would like you to get some of the other boys and make a quick search for Handforth. You'll probably learn something at once. If possible, bring him back with you."

"Leave it to me, guv'nor," promised the Remove skipper.

In the meantime, Handforth & Co. were certainly enjoying themselves. Even Church and McClure had forgotten their resentment, and were taking a lively interest in the quaint street scenes, and the animated panorama.

These pictures of native life were fascinating.

Apparently it was a feasting day for all—a celebration of the city's unexpected liberation. And wherever Handforth & Co. went they found revelry in progress.

In many of the more humble streets, where there was not sufficient room in the houses for the guests to sit, the feast was held out in the street, tables being crowded with diners, noise going on endlessly, and the Chinese lanterns overhead casting a subdued glow over all. Incense sticks were burning everywhere—as a protection against evil spirits interrupting the feast—and the air was heavy with the pungent, dreamy odour.

"Jolly good idea, burning these joss-sticks, or whatever they are," remarked Church. "They act as a kind of fumigator, and most of the other smells are drowned. My only hat! These Chinese believe in enjoying themselves! There's not much room left for the traffic!"

"What do they care about traffic?" asked Handforth. "Why, it's a common thing for a Chinaman to build a chicken house, or something, in the middle of the road. They always do things backwards in this giddy country! If we want to shake hands with a chap, he shakes hands with himself instead! They're a rummy crowd, on the whole."

The chums of Study D had no necessity to go hungry.

Again and again they were invited to the native tables, the hosts expressing themselves eager to dismiss all their other guests if necessary. The juniors had their choice, and partook of various tit-bits at different tables as they continued their exploration. But they took great care fully to ascertain the nature of their food before devouring it.

Wandering away from the most animated scenes, they found themselves in a narrow alley, where only a few lanterns were glowing. They didn't know it, but they had come round in a circle, and were only a short distance from the main holiday party.

A big lantern was hung over a narrow doorway, where a Chinaman stood impassively on guard. His manner changed as the school-boys paused, and he bowed with humble politeness.

"You come in, most honourable excellencies?" he asked softly.

"By George! This is the theatre, I'll bet," said Handforth. "Come on—let's go and have a preliminary scout round. Why should we wait for the rest of the chaps?"

"But it may not be the theatre——" began Church.

"Rot!" interrupted Handforth. "Let's go in and see, anyhow."

The Chinaman offered no objection as they entered, and, having passed through a swing doorway, they pushed aside some hanging silken curtains, and found themselves in a strange-looking apartment, where the air was heavy with a curious haze. McClure gave a sudden start.

"Let's get out of this!" he muttered. "It's an opium den!"

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"An opium den!" he repeated. "I say, what luck! The very place I wanted to find! Now we'll see the genuine article!"



CHAPTER 7.

IN THE OPIUM DEN.

CHURCH and McClure were very uneasy, and the latter bitterly upbraided himself for having spoken. Handforth might not have guessed the truth, and perhaps they would have all gone out without any further investigation. There was nothing attractive in the place, but the very mention of an opium den had done the trick. Edward Oswald was keen upon a full tour of inspection.

"Let's get out!" repeated McClure, tugging at his leader's sleeve. "We don't want to stop in this beastly place, Handy! Even in China an opium den isn't a nice place to be in. Really decent people don't visit——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Handforth. "We're not opium smokers, are we? We're just here to see things at first hand. There's nothing like it. If you don't want to stay you can jolly well clear out!"

"They may offer us opium!" muttered Church.

"All the better," said Handforth coolly.

He was deliberately egging his chums on, and they dimly realised this. But, at the same time, they had a fear that he would carry things too far. He had a strange habit of neglecting any danger signals.

They stood there, just inside the entrance, and took stock of the place. The light was very dim, but it was quite sufficient to reveal the beautiful decorations on the walls—the lacquered woodwork, the polished floor with its sumptuous rugs, the cushioned divans.

"It's a swindle!" said Handforth at last. "This place isn't a den at all! Of all the rot, you know, calling these luxurious shows 'dens'! Why, it's more like a club!"

"What did you expect to find—a place with bars all round it?" asked Church impatiently.

"Your idea of a den seems to be based on what we've seen at the Zoo! A den can be the most expensively furnished place in the world—it all depends on what goes on in it!"

"Hallo!" Handy exclaimed. "Here comes a chap with refreshments, or something. Jolly hospitable, these Chinese, I must say."

An elderly Chinaman had appeared from behind some curtains, and he halted in front of the three juniors with a little tray. The tray contained opium pipes, and all the necessary impedimenta for smoking the harmful drug.

"Let's go!" said Church uneasily.

Handforth was about to suggest the same thing, but such a move was now quite impossible. It was purely a matter of custom for him to oppose any proposition put forward by his chums.

"No fear!" he said promptly. "We'll try the stuff!"

"What!" gasped McClure. "Look here, Handy, you fathead——"

"A few puffs won't hurt us," said Handforth stubbornly. "What's the good of coming to an opium den if we don't give it a fair trial?" He nodded to the withered attendant. "Allee samee yes! Smokee pipee!"

It was his tone and his attitude that informed the Chinese of his desire. A curious-looking affair was prepared. It wasn't like a pipe at all, but there was no question about the opium. This was soon burning and sending up tiny wreaths of pungent smoke.

"Handy!" gasped Church. "Don't touch——"

"Mind your own business!" growled Handforth.

He walked towards one of the dimmest corners, determined to spoof his chums very thoroughly. He hadn't the faintest intention of smoking any of this ghastly stuff, but it was a ripping idea to kid Church and McClure.

They impatiently refused the invitations of the attendant, and stood there, nonplussed. They didn't want to start an actual riot in this place, but they felt like seizing Handforth and hurling him out into the street on his neck. There was only one dubious point. Could they do it?

"Let's grab him!" said McClure grimly.

"It's the only way!" murmured Church. "But the silly ass might resist, you know. I think we can chuck him out, but it'll take five or ten minutes, and then we shall have half Yang Fu on the scene! It'll end up in a general civil war. You know what Handy is once he starts."

"Well, let's try tact," said McClure, with rare common sense. "We'll pretend to be indifferent, and he'll follow us like a lamb."

"Go out, you mean?"

"Yes!" said Mac, in a low voice. "Ready? Good! Oh well, we'll be going," he added loudly, with an assumption of complete carelessness. "We'll leave Handy here, and wait for him outside."

"That's the idea," said Church, with the same casual tone. "Rather a good stunt of Handy's to test the stuff on his own; but there's no need for us to wait. Come on, Mac."

Handforth was just settling himself on a corner divan, and he started. This wasn't what he had desired at all! He stared indignantly at his chums as they made a move towards the curtained exit.

"Well, my hat!" he muttered. "The—the callous rotters! They're going to leave me here, and they don't care a toss! They think I'm smoking opium, and they're going to leave me flat!"

The ruse was evidently working. Long experience of Edward Oswald had taught his chums that the very best way to persuade him was to pull his leg. Violence of any kind had never been known to succeed.

"I'll make 'em sit up for this!" said Handforth darkly. "I'll just stay here for a couple of minutes, and then go out and wipe up the street with 'em! I'll teach the fatheads to leave me in the lurch!"

"Allee same Ingleesh boy," came a murmur near him. "Velly good. Me Wong. knowee you on yacht."

Handforth turned and stared. Until this moment he had had no idea that he had blundered on to somebody else's divan. But the corner was certainly dark and dim. What Handforth had mistaken for a heap of cushions was really the huddled-up figure of a Chinaman. Moreover, the fellow

was surrounded by a haze of opium, which arose in curling wreaths from his pipe.

Handforth's own opium had long since gone out—he hadn't touched it, of course. He wouldn't have sampled it for an offer of fifty pounds. But he was already aware of a curious giddiness—a kind of dreamy sensation, as though he were floating in mid-air. And yet it was only a vague sense.

"Hallo!" he said. "Who the dickens are you?"

"Me Wong."

"Wong?" said Handforth, looking harder. "My only hat! Aren't you one of old Foo Chow's beastly attendants—one of his personal guards?"

"Him Foo Chow no more good," mumbled the Chinaman. "Him lost face."

"Lost his face?" gasped Handforth. "By George! In battle, do you mean?"

"Him lost face—no more gloat man," explained the Chinaman. "But Foo Chow ticky. Him plepare tlap for white man. Wong knows. Allee same badec."

Handforth could make neither head nor tail of this rambling statement, uttered, as it was, in almost incomprehensible pidgin. The fellow was obviously rambling, soaked as he was in opium. The name "Wong" seemed vaguely familiar to Handforth, although there were so many names of a similar sound that it really meant nothing. But a scar on the Chinaman's cheek identified him as one of Dr. Foo Chow's trusted henchmen.

The former war lord had now "lost face" to such an extent that he was dirt, and beneath the contempt of his own servants. They had deserted him, and this man was one who had been with the holiday party during their captivity.

Handforth wondered if he was dreaming all this. Somehow it seemed so vague and unreal. There was a faint draught in the corner, and the fumes from Wong's pipe were drifting round Handforth's face. Unconsciously, he was inhaling the noxious fumes. And having never breathed the smell of opium in his life before, it had an instantaneous effect. He did not feel sick or unwell in any way, but he was aware of a curious, increasing exhilaration.

"Rummy!" he muttered. "I must be dreaming, or something."

He bent closer to the Chinaman, and the man spoke again, the opium fumes curling round Handforth in the same persistent way.

"Great Scott!" breathed Edward Oswald, as he listened. "You—you

mean— The we mustn't go down the river?"

"Allee same bad," mumbled Wong.

Handforth leapt off the divan, his eyes gleaming—and he fell to the floor. The words that he had heard were burning into his brain, over and above the effects of the opium. Indeed, he had no idea that he had inhaled any opium, for he had not touched his own pipe, and he knew that it was out. Why, hang it, he had only taken the thing just to spoof his chums!

He picked himself up, and a wave of nausea came over him. The whole place seemed to be going round in circles, and when he regained his feet the effect was even more startling. It seemed to him that he wasn't standing on the floor at all. Instead of something solid beneath him, there was nothing but spongy airiness.

But dimly he saw the curtained exit, and he made for it in a dazed, befuddled condition. How he reached it he never knew, but at last he clutched at the curtains, and tumbled through towards the outer exit.



CHAPTER 8.

A TALL STORY.



UN to earth!" said Dick Hamilton briskly.

"Absolutely!" murmured Archie Glenthorne.

"Two of the dear old lads, at all events. But the principal chappie appears to be slightly missing."

"They'll know where he is," said Reggie Pitt.

Half a dozen Remove fellows had just entered a narrow, dimly-lit alley. And Church and McClure were to be observed some distance down it, disconsolately leaning against a doorway, underneath a lantern.

Dick Hamilton & Co. had been lucky. Coming out in search of Handforth, according to Nelson Lee's wish, they had spotted Church and McClure within the first five minutes, which was more than they had ever expected. They surrounded the pair at once.

"Where's Handy?" demanded Dick.

"In here!" growled Church. "Thank goodness you chaps have come! We can all go in and yank him out now. Mac and I daren't try it on our own—the ass would have started a riot!"

"Come on—let's fetch him!" said McClure eagerly.

"But what's he doing in there?" asked Reggie. "What is the place, anyhow?"

"An opium den."

"A which?" ejaculated the Remove skipper. "I mean to say, good gad!" protested Archie, in horror. "Odds lunatics and maniacs! The chappie hasn't been absolutely mad enough to penetrate an opium den, what? I mean, dash it—"

"He's in there now," interrupted Church. "What's more, he's sampling the stuff!"

"I don't believe it!" said Dick.

"I tell you he took a pipe, and went to a divan—"

"That was only his rot," interrupted Hamilton. "He was just trying to spoof you, my lads. I know Handy better than that. He wouldn't touch opium for a fortune. He may be an ass, but he's not an imbecile."

Before they could make any further comments, Handforth himself appeared. He reeled out of the doorway dizzily, and stood there clutching at the air. The juniors stared at him with consternation and dismay, and Dick Hamilton's words seemed disproved on the spot.

Edward Oswald's face was somewhat greenish, but perhaps the tinted radiance from the Chinese lanterns had something to do with this effect. Anyhow, he was not himself. He looked properly befuddled.

"Look, there's Handforth!" exclaimed Hamilton.

"Air!" they heard Handy mutter. "Gimme air!"

"You've got it!" said Dick grimly. "You—you hopeless ass! Come on, you chaps—

pull him along, and get him out of this alley."

"I told you he'd been sampling the stuff," muttered Church. "Thank goodness he came out in time. What next will the idiot be up to?"

They succeeded in forcing him out into one of the more open spaces, but it was necessary to direct his steps, for he was unsteady and giddy.

"We'd better keep this quiet, Handy," said Dick sternly. "You wouldn't like Irene to know that you'd been opium smoking, would you? She'd never speak to you again—"

"Eh?" mumbled Handforth. "Why, you—you hopeless idiot! What the dickens— By George! Wong!"

"What?"

"Wong!" said Handforth, with a violent start. "Quick! Where's Mr. Lee? Where's Dorrie? Foo Chow's set a trap, and everybody on the *Wanderer* is going to be killed!"

"Great Scott!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"We're all going to be crushed to pulp!" said Handforth, looking round excitedly, the pupils of his eyes strangely dilated. "The *Wanderer's* going to be pushed under the river, and all of us drowned!"

"Poor chap!" said Dick. "He's certainly suffering from the effects of opium! Handy, you reckless cuckoo! I gave you credit for more sense! Do you mean to say you actually smoked that ghastly stuff?"

Handforth passed a hand over his brow.

"I—I don't seem to remember," he muttered. "But I'll swear I didn't touch that giddy pipe! Smoke opium? You silly rotters! Do you think I'd touch the horrible muck? Of course I didn't! But—but my head seems all mixed up—"

He paused, frowning. It was quite obvious that he was all in a muddle.

"There was a Chinaman in there—a chap named Wong," he went on. "We've seen him before, I think. Anyhow, he knows about this trap. We mustn't sail in the yacht! If we go, it'll mean death!"

"Was there a Chinaman with Handy?" asked Dick.

"Not that I know of," said Church. "He went to one of those divans, and I believe he was all by himself. But I wouldn't swear to it—"

"Of course he was by himself," added McClure impatiently. "He must have taken a puff or two of that opium without realising it—and this is the result. It's just the effect of the opium smoke. He's been having delusions."

"I tell you it's true!" growled Handforth feebly.

"Well, give us some details," said Reggie Pitt.

"Absolutely," added Archie. "Details, laddie. Those jolly little things which count, as it were. Proceed to trot out the absolute facts."

"Details?" repeated Handforth vaguely.

"Yes."

"I—I don't seem to remember——" Handforth paused, and shook himself. "It seems funny, but I can't get the hang of it now," he added. "Was there a Chinaman there, or did I imagine it? Blest if I know!"

"Well, if *you* don't know, it's pretty certain that there was no Chinaman at all," said Dick Hamilton. "Come on, we'd better take you along to the theatre. The others have got there by this time, I expect."

"But—but I want to give a warning——"

"My dear old ass, you've been dreaming," said Dick soothingly. "As a matter of fact, Chingy's father has received confirmation of that first report, and it is now definitely known that the canyon is safe. The rock barrier is in the hands of Yung Li Chang's troops, and our last possibility of danger has gone. So you can forget those hallucinations."

Handforth scratched his head.

"It's rummy," he said slowly. "Jolly rummy! In fact, thundering rummy!"

"What-ho!" said Archie. "Rummy, what?"

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Church. "What else could Handy expect, when he goes messing about with opium? I'm ashamed of him!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"So I am!" said Church, glaring. "I thought you had more common sense, Handy. You ought to be boiled for doing a thing like that."

"You—you gibbering maniac!" roared Handforth. "Do you think I smoked the beastly stuff? I was only doing it to spoof you! I thought I'd give you and Mac a scare. I didn't touch the stuff."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said McClure sceptically.

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Well, we won't argue," interrupted Dick Hamilton, with a grin. "The opium pipe was alight, and I expect the fumes curled up and got into your nostrils, Handy, old man. We believe you. But let this be a warning to you, old chap! Let this be a grim and unforgettable lesson!"

"You drivelling chump——"

"Opium is pretty rotten stuff," added Dick solemnly. "We've saved you in the nick of time, Handy. You ought to fall on our necks and sob out your gratitude. We rescued you from the downward path—that awful path of drugs which leads to misery and the gutter!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I mean to say, well put, if you know what I mean!"

"It's always better to nip these drug fiends in the bud," said Reggie Pitt. "Once they get too far along the road, there's no pulling them up. Imagine the result if we hadn't discovered Handy's secret vice in time!"

"You set of babbling jackasses——"

"Picture St. Frank's!" said Pitt. "Church and McClure searching the Ancient House from attic to cellar—searching for Handy! Searching, mind you, with hollow eyes and stark fear in their hearts. And where do they find him in the end? Where?"

"If you don't stop, you blithering idiot——" "Where?" demanded Pitt grimly. "Down in the deepest cellar, in a secret corner, soaked in opium! Not merely smoking the stuff, but eating it by the handful! That's what happens to these poor victims in the end."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we've saved you from this, Handy!" said Pitt kindly. "No, don't trouble to thank us. We're generous in that way—— Whoa! Steady you chump! You nearly biffed me that time!"

Handforth was lunging out with indignant exasperation. The other juniors yelled with laughter, and held him firm. By this time the last of the fumes had been cleared from Handy's system. The fresh air had done its work.

Dick Hamilton and the others were quite convinced that Handforth had merely been affected by the fume-laden atmosphere of that den. But it was a splendid opportunity to pull his leg.

"Well, let's get to the theatre!" grinned Dick, at length. "Are you quite sure about that Chinaman now, Handy? Or has he disappeared with the fumes?"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Handforth gruffly. "I refuse to say another word!"

"Good!"

"I won't speak to you at all!" went on Handforth curtly. "As a matter of fact, I believe I imagined a lot of it. Anyhow, I can't seem to remember properly. And if any of you tell Irene or the other girls about this——"

"Don't trouble to invent any threats, old son," grinned Church. "We shan't say anything. We'll keep your guilty secret. After all, we're all liable to have our moments of weakness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth gave it up as a bad job, and agreed to accompany his companions to the native theatre. The sooner this opium business was forgotten, the better!

CHAPTER 9.

THE CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE.



WHEN they arrived at the theatre, they found the other guests had been installed in the best boxes, and the performance was

in progress.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We've missed the beginning!"

"You needn't let a trifle like that worry you," chuckled Dick Hamilton. "The play's probably been going on for about a week, and there might be a faint hope of it finishing when the new term starts at St. Frank's."

Edward Oswald sniffed, considering this to be a very indifferent jest. He didn't know that Dick was speaking the literal truth.

More by luck than anything else, Handforth found himself in one of the boxes which already contained his sister, his minor, Irene Manners, and one or two others. Handforth was so pleased at being placed next to Irene that he forgot to be annoyed by the presence of Willy and Ena.

"You haven't missed much," remarked Willy. "Some chap was murdered just now, and he stood up, and went out. Then they did a lot of jabbering, and the dead man's now playing another part. But where the dickens have you been all this time? Why weren't you at the banquet?"

"Mind your own business," said his major severely.

"Ted!" protested Irene.

"Well, he shouldn't be so inquisitive," said Handforth. "How's everything going? Enjoy the feed? What's the show like?"

"It seems a terrible lot of nonsense to me," confessed Irene. "And these stools aren't any too comfortable, either. And I believe that—that things are crawling about all over the walls," she added uncomfortably.

"Things?" repeated Handforth, glancing into the dark recesses of the box.

"We haven't seen 'em—but we can hear 'em," said Willy, grinning. "Mice, perhaps."

"Mice!" cried the girls, in one voice.

"I thought that would do it!" chuckled Willy.

"Any more of that rot, my lad, and I'll biff you out!" said Handforth darkly. "Don't take any notice of him, girls. How can we watch the play if we keep on talking like this?"

Handforth took stock of his surroundings, and he wasn't particularly impressed. He was such a matter-of-fact fellow that he probably expected to find a theatre on the conventional lines of an English place of amusement. But this Chinese "theatre" struck Handforth as being a kind of barn, and the boxes were quite different to what he had expected, too.

There was quite a good audience in the main part of the building—although why the people should take such an interest in the play was beyond Handforth's comprehension. The stage was only feebly illuminated, there was no scenery worthy of the name, and the actors appeared to believe that noise was the only essential for a successful performance.

The noise was certainly terrific. When the actors weren't shouting, they were uttering death agonies, and executions appeared to be constantly on the programme. There was no lack of action, either, although none of the visitors could understand what on earth it was all about. They would probably have been as much in the dark if they could have understood the language.

"About half an hour of this will satisfy our desire for Chinese theatres for ever," remarked Dick Hamilton, while another execution was being staged. "My goodness! Look at the chap who's just been beheaded!"

"Begad! The thing's a frightful farcel!" remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

The "beheaded" actor, having finished his part for the moment, had got up, and was now at the edge of the stage, drinking tea! But none of the native audience appeared to regard this as unusual.

"It's all rot!" said Handforth, as he watched. "Do they call this thing a play? Do they call—"

"Oh!" breathed Irene. "What was that?"

"What was what?"

"Something just fell down from the ceiling, I believe," whispered Irene. "It glanced off my arm, and I heard it fall to the floor. Oh, please! I—I've a dreadful feeling that there are lots of crawly things about!"

"We'll soon see," said Handforth briskly.

He suddenly remembered that he had an electric torch on him, and he pulled it out and switched it on. The beam of light struck upwards at an angle of the wall and the shoddy-looking ceiling.

"Oh!" gasped two or three of the girls.

There was every reason for their dismay. Quaint little creatures were fairly dancing all over the walls and ceiling—creatures which made the girls shudder. They were on their feet in a moment.

"It's all right—they're only lizards," said Willy, grinning.

"Lizards!" gasped Ena, aghast.

"Perfectly harmless, sis," said Willy. "You needn't be scared. I've handled lizards dozens of times. I'll get you one down if you like, and you can hold it—"

"Don't you dare!" panted his sister fiercely.

"Phew!" whistled Willy. "I don't like the look of these merchants, though. Let's have that light here, Ted. By jingo—scorpions! Ugly-looking beggars, too, all ready to sting! Look at their giddy tails!"

"Scorpions!" said Irene, in a feeble voice. "Then—then it must have been a scorpion that fell on my arm just now! Oh!"

"Yes, that's about it," agreed Willy, without the slightest repugnance. "I say, what a chance! Who's got a matchbox or something? I'll collar one or two for my tropical collection. It doesn't matter about the lizards—"

"It doesn't matter about the scorpions, either," said Irene, with a shudder. "Oh, Ted—please take me out of this place at once! It's perfectly terrible!"

Handforth was rather indifferent to insects.

"Oh, but we haven't seen the play yet!" he protested. "We might offend the local big-wigs if we go out before the end."

"Yes, we shall have to wait a bit," said Winnie Pitt shakily. "But I'll never come to a place like this again as long as I live!"

They took no further interest in the play—for they all feared that a scorpion, or something equally dreadful, would fall into their hair, or down their backs.

The play was an extraordinary business, anyhow, and meant nothing to the honoured

guests. As far as they could make out, a marriage was being celebrated on the stage, and there were so many actors in the scene that the stage was packed with jabbering members of the cast. Nobody seemed to have any set lines, and the action was interminably dragged out.

The holiday party was infinitely thankful when Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and a number of Yung Li Chang's officers were seen to be departing. This was a signal for the others, and five minutes later they were outside where their sedan chairs were waiting in readiness.

"Oh, for the glorious comforts of the good old *Wanderer*!" sighed Lord Dorrimore, as he emerged. "Ye gods and little fishes! Of all the holes on the face of the earth! I don't want to say anythin' detrimental, but this theatre is about the last word in Chinese torture that I can imagine."

Every other member of the party felt the same. And the very thought of the *Wanderer* was soothing. The cool lounge, the wide decks, the comfortable state-rooms, the yacht's library—all so purely British. It would be like heaven after such a taste of Chinese life!

And there was the further joy of knowing that the morrow, when they awoke, the vessel would be steadily steaming down-stream towards the open sea—towards real civilisation and home! In fact, as soon as the St. Frank's fellows got on board they could talk of nothing else.

"Well, this sample of primitive China is enough for me," said Dick Hamilton, as he joyously indulged in a liberal ice-cream in the lounge. "At dawn we start for home!"

"We feel like being home already," said Mary Summers, with a breath of intense relief. "Fancy! Half an hour ago we were in that terrible theatre, and now we're sitting here, eating good old British ice-creams! And to-morrow we start off for England! School again!"

"Football!" murmured Reggie Pitt dreamily.

"Oh, my hat!" said Handforth. "The new term at St. Frank's—with plenty of footer! Chuck it, you chaps! We're not out of China yet—and I'm not sure that we shall get out, either. Don't forget what I told you."

"Rats!" said Tommy Watson. "There's nothing to keep us here now—and old Foo Chow is whacked. It'll be a straight run to the coast, and then a quick voyage home. Doesn't it make you feel good?"

"Hear, hear!" said the others enthusiastically.

And at the same time, Yung Li Chang was having a last word with Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee, Barry Stokes, and Captain Burton.

"It is unnecessary to tell you, gentlemen, that I leave my son in your care with perfect confidence," the Chinese War Lord was saying. "It is better that he should return to England. He will be safe now, for with the routing of Foo Chow this territory will

be peaceful. And my son needs to complete his education where there is no possibility of trouble."

"Your son will be given the same measure of protection as any of the other boys," said Nelson Lee. "We are thankful to leave your country in such happy circumstances, your Excellency. We came here as prisoners, we have met with strange and perilous adventures—but we depart with the knowledge that complete peace will soon settle over the land."

"An' we're jolly happy about it," agreed Dorrie, nodding.

There was no question as to this point. Even as his lordship spoke, he and his companions could hear the light laughter of the younger members of the party. The yacht would sail for home at dawn!

What was there to worry about now?



CHAPTER 10.

THE FROWNING CANYON.

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE sat up, blinked, and then started.

"What - ho! Tea, by gad!" he said happily.

"Phipps, laddie, this is absolutely the finest moment of the day! Kindly shove the old brew under the young master's face department, and then retail the latest bulletins. I mean to say, what of the morning, and all that sort of thing?"

Phipps placed the tray on the bed.

"We are well down-stream, sir," he said contentedly.

"Eh? Odds happiness and joy!" said Archie. "Now you come to mention it, I can feel the good old throb of thingummies as they drive the what-d'you-call it! We're absolutely on the move, Phipps?"

"Yes, sir."

"We've started on the jolly homeward trip?"

"Precisely, sir."

"With all our troubles behind, what?"

"I trust so, sir."

"Eh? I mean to say, what?" said Archie, starting. "Good gad! The young master doesn't exactly care for that doubtful note, Phipps. I mean—you trust so? Odds doubts and suspicions! Is there any chance of more frightfulness?"

"Until we are actually out of China, sir, I shall not breathe comfortably," replied Phipps, with a slight touch of grimness in his voice. "To tell you the truth, sir, I do not trust any of these yellow men."

"Oh, but dash it!" protested Archie. "I mean, Yung Li Chang—"

"There can be no question that Master Ching's father is above suspicion, sir—but I am afraid I cannot say the same of his officers and soldiers," replied Phipps. "Until we are in the open sea, I shall feel a slight



Handforth bent closer to the Chinaman, the noxious fumes of the opium den made Handy's head feel light and strange. He listened as the man muttered his story of Foo Chow's dastardly plan. Handforth gasped: "You—you mean—we mustn't go down the river?" "Alee same bad!" mumbled Wong. And down river was the only possible route by which the Boys of St. Frank's could return to civilisation!

trace of uncertainty. Not that I have any wish to alarm you, sir——"

"Oh, absolutely not!" interrupted Archie. "I mean, perish the good old thought! You absolutely shove the wind up the young master in sundry gusts, and then say that you have no wish to alarm me! Why, dash it, I shall be expecting treacherous Chinamen to dive out from under the old bed!"

"On the *Wanderer*, sir, we are quite secure."

"Oh, well, in that case there's nothing to worry about!" declared Archie, as he finished his tea. "We will now attire ourselves in gorgeous raiment, Phipps. Be good enough to produce the good old fawn flannels."

"I was about to suggest the white, sir——"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie firmly. "Fawn, or nothing!"

"If you insist, sir——"

"I insist with chunks of emphasis!" declared Archie stoutly.

Half an hour later he appeared on deck, spotless in white flannels.

"Lazy bounder!" said Handforth, as he eyed Archie up and down. "We've been up for hours! I suppose you don't want any breakfast?"

"Odds disasters and catastrophes!" ejaculated Archie. "Is the good old feeding time expired?"

"No—the gong's going to sound in about a minute," retorted Handforth. "But you don't deserve any breakfast for being so jolly late. We're homeward bound, my lad! And don't forget that I'm piloting the ship!"

"We're not likely to forget it!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "You've reminded us of it twenty times this morning already."

Archie adjusted his monocle, and surveyed Handforth wonderingly.

"Pardon the old incredulity, laddie, but I absolutely fail to follow the trend," he remarked. "I mean to say, how, as it were, can you be piloting the good old yacht from the promenade deck? I always thought the pilot chappie wangled the good old wheel!"

"Ah Fong's wangling the wheel," said Handforth carelessly.

"Absolutely."

"And I'm the chap who found Ah Fong," said Handforth.

"Eh? I mean what?"

"And I'm the chap who pushed the chopper aside when Ah Fong was about to be executed," went on Edward Oswald. "If it hadn't been for me, we shouldn't have had a pilot. Therefore, I'm piloting the yacht."

"Well, of course—I mean—— If you put it like that, of course!" said Archie dubiously. "At the same time, old laddie, I don't quite follow——"

"What does it matter, anyhow?" asked Church. "Ah Fong is a good chap, and he's piloting us safely down the river. In fact, we're going to keep him on board, and take



Handforth bent closer to the Chinaman, the and strange. He listened as the man muttered: "You—you mean—we mustn't go down the river was the only possible route by w

him to England. Handy's thinking about keeping him on as a kind of valet."

"That's the idea," agreed Handforth, nodding.

"As for the poor chap's family, Handy hasn't thought about 'em," went on Church, grinning. "They've been left in Yang Fu, safe and sound."

"Oh, well, of course, we shall have to do something about the man's family," agreed Handforth, scratching his head. "We couldn't very well have the whole family at St. Frank's with us. Leave it to me. I'll come to some arrangement with old Fongy. He's my slave, don't forget."

Archie shook a warning finger.

"Always remember, laddie, that these Chinese blighters are somewhat bursting with treachery," he said. "I mean to say, they'll bite the good old hand that feeds them, and all that sort of foulness. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if we suddenly found ourselves bashing on to the good old rocks."

Handforth snorted.



...es of the opium den made Handy's head feel light
... of Foo Chow's dastardly plan. Handforth gasped:
"Allee same bad!" mumbled Wong. And down
... of St. Frank's could return to civilisation!

"Don't be an ass!" he said. "Ah Fong is as trustworthy as a faithful dog. He's an exception to the rule. Mind you, there's trouble coming soon—the yacht's going to be sunk. We're all going to fight for our lives. Some of us might go under in the struggle."

"Words of cheer, what?" asked Archie mildly.

"It's just as well to realise these things," said Handforth. "Old Fongy is safe—we can rely on him. But don't forget my warning. Don't forget what I heard in the opium den last night."

"You mean, don't forget what you dreamed?" chuckled Pitt. "Chuck it, Handy! Ah Fong's all right, and we're booked for a clear voyage down-river to the sea. And there goes the gong for breakfast! Who'll be at the table first?"

Any kind of race, of course, was hopeless—since Fatty Little, of the *Remove*, was a certain winner. He always made a point of

hovering near the saloon door, at least fifteen minutes before the gong was due to sound.

Lightheartedness was the order of the morning.

Everybody was in happy spirits, and the very fact that the yacht was gliding steadily down-stream created a general feeling of confidence. Ah Fong, the friendly Chinaman, was proving himself to be a man of worth. His statement that he knew the river channel by heart was no idle boast. He was piloting the *Wanderer* with masterly skill.

There was not much to please the eye now, for the sweeping valleys and cultivated fields had gone. During the early morning the yacht had slipped down the river between belts of woodland, flower-decorated meadows, and picturesque villages.

But now another tract of rocky country was being penetrated. The crags rose sharply on either side, gaunt and forbidding. The morning sunlight beat down upon rocks on every side. And the yacht was gliding steadily onwards, deeper and deeper into the steep-sided gorge.

In the distance, these sides became absolutely sheer, until the course of the river lay through a canyon—a sinister place where the rocks towered up in sheer precipices, shutting out the sunlight, and where a kind of perpetual twilight reigned.

The *Wanderer* went smoothly down into this canyon.

In spite of the general high spirits, there was a falling off of laughter and conversation as the yacht went deeper and deeper into the formidable gorge. The very grandeur of the place had an awesome effect. What would happen if some of those rocks collapsed? The vessel would be crushed like an eggshell.

But there was really no fear of such a disaster. For this canyon had existed for centuries, and the river was taking its normal course. The juniors could well believe that in the winter-time—in the rainy season—the gorge became a roaring, seething rapid.

The effect from the promenade deck was impressive. One could stand there and gaze upwards at the sheer rock walls. Near the water's edge, on both sides, were ledges—narrow, treacherous pathways, worn by countless feet throughout the ages. For when the river was navigable, the junks came constantly up and down. Those ledges were necessary, for the up-river trip was one long, continuous struggle against the current—men laboriously hauling on ropes, pulling the clumsy craft along.

Ah Fong's services were scarcely necessary here, for the water was deep from cliff to cliff, and would remain deep until the gorge was left behind, some miles further along.

This was the crucial spot.

Just ahead the river seemed to come to a dead stop. It looked like a cul-de-sac—a blind end. The canyon was completely barred. But this was only a false impression, for that massive weight of solid rock could be raised, leaving a kind of tunnel for the yacht to pass through.

Nelson Lee had feared that the defeated Foo Chow would destroy this barrier, jamming it for ever in its lowered position, so that no shipping could possibly hope to get beyond to the free stretch which led to the sea.

But Foo Chow had been unable to adopt this plan. His armies had been too hard-pressed. And now the vital gorge was in the hands of the conquerors. Complete freedom was just ahead.



CHAPTER 11.

THE ROCK BARRIER.

McCLURE nudged Handforth, and grinned.

"What about your wonderful vision, old man?" he asked carelessly.

"Eh?"

"What about your predictions of disaster?"

"We're not through this gorge yet!" retorted Handforth.

"But, my dear ass, we're going through all the time," said McClure. "And look at Yung Li Chang's soldiers! Swarms of them! Are you still trying to make out that there's a possibility of failure?"

Handforth was ever obstinate.

"Yes, I am," he growled. "How do we know that everything's what it seems? Foo Chow may have an army ready—he may pounce on Yung Li Chang's troops before we're through the gorge. And then where shall we stand? They've only got to topple a few hundred boulders down from the top of this canyon, and they'll sink us!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help, Handy!"

"All right—wait!" said Edward Oswald darkly.

Of course, he hadn't the faintest fear that his alarming predictions would become true. But Handforth clung to his theory that there would be danger.

Both Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were on the bridge, and they and Captain Burton were looking confident, but serious. In some vague way they could not help feeling slightly uncertain. Not until this river was left behind would they be quite easy in their minds.

"Nothin' to worry about now, but I shall be infernally glad to see the last of this country," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "We shall be through this gorge in another hour—Hullo! They're raisin' the barrier for us. Stout lads! We've got to admit that Yung Li Chang is a man of his word."

There were swarms of soldiers in view, and their distinctive uniforms were reassuring.

They were the troops of Yung Li Chang, the conquering invader. But even Lee shared Handforth's suspicion. Would Foo Chow choose this moment to make a last desperate attack, and so involve his white enemies in a catastrophe?

On both sides of the gorge the soldiers were beckoning the *Wanderer* on, shouting directions to the pilot. And now, only a few hundred yards ahead, the vital barrier was in sight.

An immense mass of rock, weighing thousands of tons, was being raised, sliding up the sheer sides of the canyon like a lift in a shaft.

Incredible as it seemed, this extraordinarily primitive apparatus was operated by hand. No hydraulic pressure was used. That fearsome mass of rock was being raised by manpower alone. There were literally thousands of ropes, with thousands of men pulling on them. And their combined strength was sufficient to raise the rock inch by inch.

The majority of these straining men were hidden, owing to the steep nature of the cliff faces, but a few could be seen at the edge, pulling and wrenching. And the barrier was being raised higher and higher.

"We shall do it nicely," said Captain Burton, nodding. "These fellows are pretty good when it comes to a matter of judgment. They'll have the barrier raised high enough for us to get through when we arrive there."

Already the barrier was so high that a tunnel was visible. And, after all, the yacht would soon be through. That overhead weight of rock was only about twenty yards long, and the *Wanderer* would be beneath it, and out into the open canyon again, within a very few seconds. But the rock was not yet quite sufficiently high to allow of the yacht's masts to pass safely beneath.

"Thank heaven this ordeal is nearly over," muttered Lee. "Honestly, Dorrie, I have been fearing some treachery ever since we left Yang Fu. Within a couple of minutes we shall be beyond this barrier, and then the rocks soon slope away, and we shall be in safe water."

"Man alive, what on earth is there to bother about?" asked his lordship. "Even if Foo Chow makes a last desperate attack, he'll be too late now. Yung Li Chang's men are here by the thousands. By gad, these Chinamen appear to be as plentiful as ants! I never saw anythin' like it!"

"They are rather too plentiful for my liking," growled Lee. "One never knows which side is going to prevail! A decisive victory is difficult to imagine, Dorrie. The other side has a surprising habit of recuperating, and delivering a heavy counter-attack. A Chinese civil war is unlike anything else on earth."

Dorrie grinned.

"Well, cheer up," he said lightly. "Here we go!"

The yacht was just entering the tunnel-like space. The mass of rock had come to a halt.

ANSWERS

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and the passage lay clear. Crowds of Chinamen were on the ledges, grinning and shouting friendly farewells.

"Now we're all serene!" said Dick Hamilton, as they watched. "Another couple of minutes, and we'll be through."

"Isn't it exciting?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"Yes, supposing that rock should suddenly fall?" asked Handforth. "By George!" he added, with a start. "That's the wheeze!"

"The wheeze?"

"Yes," gasped Handforth. "What that chap was telling me in the opium den!"

"Opium den?" repeated Irene, in surprise.

"Handy didn't want us to tell you, but he's let the cat out of the bag himself," grinned Dick. "He went into an opium den last night—"

"But listen!" panted Handforth, quite pale. "Don't you see? They're going to suddenly drop this awful amount of rock on us, and sink the yacht!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors and the girls laughed him to scorn.

"Hi! Where's Mr. Lee?" roared Handforth. "Where's the captain? Go back! Full speed astern! We're going right into a trap!"

Half a dozen fellows seized him, and held him firmly.

"You hopeless ass! These soldiers are Yung Li Chang's men!" said Church.

"How do we know?" snapped Handforth. "We haven't seen 'em—"

"I say, it's a pretty horrible thought, but there might be something in it," interrupted Dick Hamilton, with sudden gravity. "Not that we can do anything. We've got a lot of way on us, and we couldn't reverse engines—"

He broke off and lurched forward with the rest of the crowd. Two or three of them, in fact, fell headlong. With a curious grinding sound, the *Wanderer* had hit against something, and there was now a creaking and straining of metal.

"We've struck!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"We've hit something!"

On the bridge, the captain had turned white. Lee and Dorrie glanced at one another significantly, and both felt that same sense of acute peril. The *Wanderer* was now immediately beneath the rock barrier, only her bows protruding into the open beyond the tunnel-like space.

A number of shouts came up from the fore'deck, and, at the same time, the soldiers along the ledges changed their attitude. Instead of grinning and shouting friendly farewells, they were yelling with fiendish ferocity.

"There's a chain stopping us, sir!" shouted Mr. Stewart, the first officer, as he came running up the bridge ladder.

"A chain!" snapped the skipper.

"A huge cable, stretching from one side of the gorge to the other," panted Mr. Stewart.

"It's strong enough to hold a battleship. It's a trap, sir, and we've steamed right into it!"

Captain Burton set his teeth.

"They haven't got us yet!" he muttered.

His hand flew to the engine-room telegraph, and he swung the lever over to "full speed astern."

Clang—clang!

Back came the answering signal, and almost immediately the *Wanderer's* propellers began to churn with their full force. The vessel quivered from stem to stern, and the waters of the gorge became a creamy mass of foam. Slowly the yacht drew back, forcing her way against the swift current.

At any moment that mass of rock might fall!

Nobody spoke. The situation was too tense. The trap was obvious, and the only possibility of escape, it seemed, was to back out. But surely these fiendish Chinese would never allow it? They had but to release their hold on those thousands of ropes, and the barrier would come crashing down, with devastating, deadly effect.

The thought of such a catastrophe would be stupendous. The yacht could never withstand the shock. She would be driven completely under in one awful dive, and everybody on board would perish.

But the rock overhead remained immovable.

And the truth became known. There was a clattering and clanging of metal astern. Another giant cable had been pulled taut, just level with the water's surface. The yacht was hemmed in between two immense chains, unable to go forwards or backwards.

And, at the same time, the rock began slowly to descend!

CHAPTER 12.

TRAPPED!



STUNNED for a moment, the holiday party could only stare dumbly upwards.

The rock was moving—it was coming, slowly but surely, downwards. How long before the mass fell sheer, crushing everybody to instant death?

Lord Dorrimore found his voice at last.

"Good glory!" he breathed. "Is—is there no way out, Lee?"

"Hush, old man!" muttered Lee. "We were fools to take anything for granted in this land of treachery. I'm afraid we're utterly helpless."

"But—but the soldiers—"

"The soldiers!" broke in Lee bitterly. "What does it matter whose soldiers they are? They are intent upon destroying the yacht, and murdering every soul on board. They may be either Yung Li Chang's troops, bought over by the enemy, or they may be Foo Chow's troops, wearing deceptive uniforms."

"That's about it!" said Dorrie hotly. "The treacherous curs! An' they sent reports to Yang Fu that the pass was in safe hands! Gad, can't we go full speed ahead again, an' smash that cable?"

"Captain Burton is already trying that scheme," said Lee.

Indeed, it seemed the only possibility now. There was no time to give any warnings—there was no time to think of any possible damage to the *Wanderer's* bows. She was sent forward with all the force of her powerful engines.

Crash!

With a shrieking and straining of metal, the yacht pulled up dead. That great chain cable had held, and an ugly, livid gash was ripped into the steelwork of the *Wanderer's* bows.

"It's impossible, gentlemen," said the captain harshly.

And yet the great rock still hovered overhead. There was something diabolically refined in this form of torture. Instead of death coming swiftly, it was being prolonged. The rock barrier was only descending at an imperceptible rate—coming down so slowly, indeed, that no motion at all was visible unless one watched with concentrated attention.

The meaning of this was obvious.

Foo Chow had no desire to let his victims die with merciful swiftness. His whole idea

was to give them the appalling anguish of watching their doom descend upon them. Inch by inch the rock was being lowered, and there was no way of escape.

"I knew it!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Didn't I keep warning you? You said I'd been dreaming—but that fellow in the opium den gave me the tip!"

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Lee?" groaned Church.

"Because I thought it was a dream myself until now," replied Handforth gruffly. "I thought I'd been having delusions and things. What's the good now? It's too late for us to do anything."

"Look!" whispered Irene. "It's coming lower!"

"Oh, can't we escape somehow?" cried Mary Summers. "It—it seems so awful to stand here and wait for that rock to fall!"

"The best thing we can do is to remain calm," advised Dick Hamilton. "If there's any chance for us, the captain or Mr. Leo will give orders. Let's wait, and show them that we can keep cool in an emergency."

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's all keep calm."

The terrible acuteness of the situation was sufficient. Nobody had to be urged to keep calm. With death literally hovering over them, everybody on the yacht was deadly cool. At any second the blow might come—at

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any moment those thousands of taut ropes might be loosened, and the enormous rock would come smashing down upon the decks, crushing everything and everybody to pulp.

On the bridge, Nelson Lee's brain was working rapidly. He was watching the rock, judging how long it would take before this creeping death became an actual fact.

"Look, old man!" said Lord Dorrimore. "The bows are just free of this overhangin' rock, and perhaps we can all escape in boats. It's an infernal pity to abandon the poor old tub, but——"

"It's no good, Dorrie," interrupted Lee. "There's no escape that way."

"But we can lower the boats, anyhow," insisted his lordship. "Hang it, we shall be doin' somethin'——"

"The first boatload of us to leave the vessel's side will be riddled with machine-gun bullets in less than a minute," broke in Lee grimly. "Good heavens! Do you think that Foo Chow would leave us such a loophole?"

He pointed down the canyon, ahead, and Dorrie could see that which Lee had already observed. Half concealed among the rocks—many of them twenty and thirty feet above the river—were soldiers. Now and again a gleam would come. There were weapons there—machine-guns.

Nothing had been forgotten in this trap of death.

The scheme, in fact, was fiendishly complete. The *Wanderer* had been lured beneath that raised section of rock by cunning devices—by making the white men believe that they were surrounded by friends.

But, once there, the yacht was held, unable to advance or retreat. That dead weight of rock could have been sent hurtling down at once, crushing everything beneath it. But this did not suit the vindictive bitterness of Dr. Foo Chow.

He wanted something slower, something more diabolically ghastly.

And so that rock was descending inch by inch, so that the victims could have a full understanding of their impending fate. There was something characteristically Oriental in the plan.

To leave the yacht would be death in an even more certain form. There was no question as to this point. If any boats left the *Wanderer*, and attempted to emerge into the open, a hundred snipers would pick off every occupant in the space of ten seconds. If the boat succeeded in getting further down it would be riddled by the machine-guns.

And it was just the same up-stream.

And if the boats merely crossed to the rocky ledge opposite the yacht the situation would be no better, for those attempting to escape would be crushed by the falling rock.

To remain under that rock was death—to emerge was death.

"Look!" muttered Lee, pointing.

He handed Lord Dorrimore a pair of

binoculars, and pointed to the crags out beyond. And through the glasses Dorrie could see heads behind almost every projecting rock—he could see rifle-barrels gleaming.

"Can't we shoot the hounds?" he asked furiously.

"What chance have we got?" said Lee. "At the first sign of shooting they will dodge into cover. They are picked snipers. I should imagine. At the first attempt to escape we shall be shot down."

"But, hang it, we must do *something*!" shouted Dorrie.

Lee turned away, breathing hard.

He was thinking of the younger members of the party—he was thinking of the way they had all come through the turmoil of peril and adventure. And now, with freedom actually in sight—this!

When they were on the point of emerging from this land of treachery and death, they were faced with the worst peril of the whole expedition. It was a solemn, alarming thought.

And nothing could be done. The trap was such that they must just wait and watch. Even that was better than inviting a massacre. For Nelson Lee was absolutely correct when he declared that it would be certain death for any boat to emerge from this tunnel-like space.

He thought of other possibilities. Would they stand a chance if they dived and attempted to swim for safety? A few, perhaps, might reach a point lower down the river with life still within them. But this would be worse than the death that now threatened!

Since Dr. Foo Chow had taken such measures to annihilate his enemies, it was certain that he would have other men down the river. And the exhausted swimmers—if any were rash enough to attempt the dive—would be captured and tortured.

No matter how the situation was looked at—no matter which angle was viewed—the end would be the same. Death! The beaten and revengeful Chinese War Lord had sworn to massacre every member of the *Wanderer's* party and crew. That fact stood out with appalling clarity.

But even now the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls could hardly realise the terrible helplessness of their elders. They were inwardly scared, but they remained outwardly courageous and calm. It seemed too utterly absurd to suppose that there could be any actual danger!

So far the yacht was untouched—unharméd. Everything was going on in just the ordinary way. From one of the ventilators came the rich odour of cooking. A steward was wheeling a tray-wagon round the promenade deck, with iced drinks and ice-cream. There was every indication of normal serenity.

But that rock-barrier relentlessly descended—fraction by fraction!

CHAPTER 13.

A CHANCE IN A MILLION.



WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE silently gripped the hand of Horace Stevens.

"Brother Horace, in case!" he murmured softly.

"Oh, I say!" protested Stevens. "Don't rot—"

"I can assure you that I am in deadly earnest," replied Browne steadily. "Let us shake, Brother Horace, and pray that the end will be swift."

The other Fifth-Former stared with startled eyes.

"Oh, but—but, I mean— You don't actually think—" He paused, and gulped. "Great Scott, Browne! It can't be the end!"

"Much as I would like to reveal my customary optimism, I fear there is no ground to indulge in such hope," replied Browne quietly. "As you see, Brother Horace, we are hovering perilously on the brink of the ox-tail. Let us make peace with our souls."

The Fifth Form skipper was in deadly earnest. Hopeless optimist though he usually was, he could see absolutely no loophole of escape here. The position was absolutely clear-cut.

A little further along the deck, Willy Handforth gave his major a rather twisted sort of smile.

"Looks like something nasty this time, Ted," he said quietly. "Are you there, sis? What a dirty trick, you know—just when we were expecting to get clear. But life's always like that—coming along and cracking you one unawares!"

"Oh, Willy!" murmured Ena helplessly.

"Cheer up, sis—we're all together, and that's one thing," said Willy.

Handforth gave a violent start.

"You—you young ass!" he panted. "Are you trying to make out that we're doomed, or something? Rats! I don't believe it! We're all going to escape from this awful mess."

"How?" asked Fullwood quietly.

"How?" roared Handforth. "What's the good of asking me riddles? I don't know how—but it's got to be done. I should like to know how the dickens they'll get on at St. Frank's without us?"

There was something about Handforth's outburst which silenced all the others. His supreme confidence in their ability to escape was remarkable. Not for an instant was he willing to accept the possibility that they would never see St. Frank's again. The very idea struck him as being impossible.

"Can't we stop this rock coming down?" he demanded loudly. "Can't we get some girders, or something, and fix them up, so that it can't reach us?"

"Cheese it, Handy—"

"It's no good making a fuss, old man."

"Let's take it quietly," advised Dick. "We don't want to give Foo Chow the satisfaction of hearing any commotion—"

"Is Foo Chow here?" demanded Handforth, looking round glaringly, as though he expected to see the Chinese War Lord on deck. "By George! I'd like to get my hands on him. I'd like to smash him up for this. We can't stand here and simply do nothing!" he added excitedly. "Let's lower one of the boats and make a dash for it. Come on! Any action's better than nothing!"

A number of juniors followed Handforth along the deck, but Umlosi came along, and pulled them up.

"It is the wish of Umtagati, my master, that thou shouldst remain calm," he rumbled. "This form of warfare is bad, my young masters, and I am even more overwrought than thou."

"Can't we smash into the rotters, Umlosi?" demanded Handforth.

"Wau! Is not that my great wish?" said Umlosi gruffly. "But how is it possible for us to fight the enemy when the enemy keeps out of arm's length? They are but reptiles and insects! These yellow sons of dogs are but skulking carrion!"

The giant African spoke in a voice that was almost broken-hearted. He was essentially a man of action—a man who liked a battle to be fierce and grim. He always wanted to get to grips with the foe. But here such a thing was impossible—for the main foe was an enormous mass of rock, weighing thousands of tons, which was slowly and surely descending.

What could be done against such an enemy?

The yacht was in such a position that her crew could do nothing. Her guns were useless, and all the Chinese were well out of rifle-shot range. The yellow men were relying upon that relentless rock.

Not that the white men were taking things idly.

Even at this moment several members of the crew were feverishly manufacturing an improvised bomb. This was Nelson Lee's idea, and the object of it was to blow the barrier-cable apart. If only an explosion of sufficient strength could be obtained, that enormous chain might yield.

But such a bomb could not be made in a minute—or even five minutes. And there was always the danger of precipitating instantaneous disaster by such an explosion. At the very best, it would only be a desperate resort.

At the sound of the report the thousands of soldiers at the ropes would probably relax their efforts—and that rock would hurtle down to complete its work of destruction.

Already the *Wanderer's* mainmast was on the point of smashing. The descending rock was within two feet. Orders were given that all the young people should be advised to go below. But the young people thought differently. Their frame of mind was such that they could not leave the decks.



Lord Dorrimore's revolver dropped from his hand as he clutched at his wrist. "That's funny!" he said blankly, "I'm hit!" Handforth dared the bullets that were whipping along the deck and raced to Dorrie's aid.

They retreated, however, from the immediate danger zone.

"Oh, let them stay!" muttered Lord Dorrimore, as he saw that Nelson Lee was looking worried. "What's the difference now? We're all booked, old man. It might be a bit quicker if we're on deck."

Lee was staring at the rocky wall of the canyon on the starboard side. It was about twenty feet from the end of the bridge to the rock, and down below the water was swirling by rapidly.

"What is it, Lee?" asked Dorrie acutely.

He could see that the detective was gazing at the rock fully ten feet below the edge of the descending mass. Dorrie looked at that great barrier, and could see the slow, insidious movement as it crept lower and lower. He boiled. Why couldn't Foo Chow give the order to let the thing down swiftly? This delay was the cruellest form of torture.

"What is it, Lee?" repeated his lordship.

"By James! I wonder if it would be possible?" murmured Lee, his voice trembling. "It's only a chance in a million, but at a time like this, even a straw is better to grapple at than nothing."

Dorrie forced himself to be calm.

"What, exactly is the idea?" he asked steadily.

Nelson Lee pointed.

"Do you see that ledge there?" he asked tensely.

"Yes."

"Do you see that crack in the rock wall extending upwards—in an irregular line?"

"Why, good gad, yes! But I don't understand—"

"Well, Dorrie, there's a similar crack about five feet further on!" exclaimed Nelson Lee. "Don't you see how closely this towering mass of rock fits? Supposing we could force that loose portion of rock outwards, and wedge it there with crowbars—wedge it so that it protrudes?"

Dorrie stared.

"Old man, you're mad!" he said quietly. "You mean get up to that ledge, an' then lever out the loose rock? Why, it couldn't be done in the time! An' even if it could, what would be the use?"

"It might mean our salvation," replied Lee.

"Man alive! You're not pretendin' to yourself that that little slice of rock—weighin' less than a ton—would stop this mountain?" asked his lordship, aghast. "Your mind's goin' wrong! This descendin' rock would crush that wedge into powder!"

"It wouldn't, Dorrie—it would jam the

whole infernal contrivance!" snapped Lee tensely.

"I tell you you're dreamin'. The very weight of the rock——"

"Precisely! The very weight of it will make our plan effective!" interrupted Lee. "If we can only get those levers to work in time! Don't you know, Dorrie, that the greater the weight, the more certainty of an immovable jamb? If only we can wedge this descending mass, it's own weight will fix it absolutely solid. But our fate will rest upon seconds!"

Lord Dorrimore was utterly incredulous. It seemed impossible to him that any such scheme could work. Perhaps Nelson Lee was equally hopeless—but, at least, it was something to do—it was something to take the mind off the appalling danger.

A minute later a buzz sounded among the St. Frank's fellows.

"Look at Mr. Lee!" exclaimed Reggie Pitt, pointing. "My hat! What's he up to? There's something on the go, you chaps!"

"Oh, look!"

Nelson Lee was standing at the extreme end of the bridge, and he was in the act of throwing a rope. With a swish, it went curling across the intervening space, and the loose noose dropped over a rough projection of rock. In a flash it was drawn taut. Lee fastened the end to the bridge-rail.

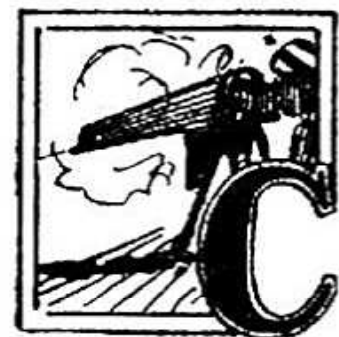
"We shall have to chance the yacht drifting, and snapping the rope!" he said quickly. "Where are the men? Where are they? There's not a moment—— Good! Give me one of those crowbars!"

Four men had come running up with heavy crowbars. Each one had a rope tied round it, so that the bar could be slung across the shoulders. Lee was soon swinging out, hand over hand.

"Hurrah!"

"There's something in the wind!"

"What did I tell you!" roared Handforth excitedly. "We're not finished yet! While there's life there's hope, my sons! St. Frank's for ever! Down with these beastly Chinese murderers!"



CHAPTER 14.

FIGHTING AGAINST SECONDS.

RASH!

With a report that was like a minor explosion, accompanied by a rending of wood, the *Wanderer's* mainmast snapped like a twig.

"Look out, there!"

There was a wild rush for cover. Fortunately, only one or two sailors happened to be in the danger zone at the moment, and they succeeded in getting safely out of the way. With terrific force, the smashed fragments of the mast thudded down, crashing into the deck, and smashing headlong through one of the skylights

The destruction had commenced!

In the excitement of watching Nelson Lee's mysterious act, nobody had seen the bending mast—bowed outwards by the relentless weight of the descending rock. That descent was continuous, and had been going on during every tense second since the yacht had been trapped.

This, indeed, was the very crux of the enemy's plan. To give their victims slow, lingering torture before the actual death blow was dealt! But was Dr. Foo Chow over-reaching himself? In order to satisfy his desire for torture, was he providing his intended victims with a loophole?

Nothing on earth could have saved them at the first moment of being trapped—and nothing on earth could save them now if that rock was suddenly released. But it was descending as slowly as ever. This was Foo Chow's plan. First the masts, then the graceful funnel, then the bridge, then the deck-houses—and so on, fraction by fraction, until everything was smashed and splintered and twisted into hopeless wreckage!

How much better to see that proud yacht slowly demolished than to witness one mere swift blow! It was as certain as the sun was shining that Foo Chow himself was watching from a distance—gloating over the success of his cunning.

But no member of the enemy could see what Nelson Lee and his helpers were doing!

It was gloomy under the rock, and from the outer canyon, only the bulk of the *Wanderer* could be seen—with that descending death-weight creeping nearer and nearer.

"He's across!"

"Bravo, Mr. Lee!"

Although there were many shouts, they were subdued. There was something too acute in this situation to allow of raised voices. Even the shouts were hushed.

Nelson Lee had reached that ledge—a tiny hollow in the face of the rock wall, with a jagged slit close by it. Another man was already swarming outwards over the rope. And Lee, with every ounce of his strength, applied his crowbar to the cracked rock.

Now for the fateful second!

The chances were that the section of rock would merely crack off, and descend into the water. But there was a chance in a million that this would not happen—a chance that it would remain slanting outwards, fixed at such an angle to the face of the cliff that it would form an immovable wedge.

"Am I dreaming?" breathed Lee huskily.

His crowbar had shifted perceptibly. The leverage was enormous, and Lee was exerting every ounce of his strength. Only a foot or two above his head the rock was coming lower, sending splinters of crag down continuously. But, unless the rate of descent increased, there might still be time.

Crash—crash!

The yacht's second mast was splintered like a match-stick—deadly enough proof that the rock was still coming down. Two men were hit by flying fragments, one of them badly

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

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gashed. The funnel would be the next victim. This wouldn't dramatically snap, but it would crumple slowly—buckling and bending as the dead weight exerted its full force.

And now that the peril was so close, the watchers stood there, fascinated. There was something deadly in watching this slow, relentless descent of the rock. Nelson Lee did not relax his efforts for a moment. With every sinew straining, he wielded his crowbar, and inch by inch the loose rock was forced outwards.

Two other men had joined him by this time, and although the ledge was cramped, they succeeded in adding their own strength to that of the master. Glancing upwards, Lee caught his breath in.

"It'll catch!" he muttered breathlessly. "This rock will foul the lowering bulk above. But will it hold?"

Such a thing seemed preposterous. For if these men, with their puny strength, could force the portion of rock out by means of crowbars, what would these thousands of tons do? Obviously, they would push the rock

back into its original position, as though it weighed no more than a fragment of down.

But there was a difference.

The crowbars were forced behind that rock, and loose fragments of rock, too, had been cracked off. For the main section to go back into its original position was impossible. But surely the powerful weight would crumble everything to fine powder?

"It's the best we can do!" said Lee curtly. "Better get back, men—it will be fatal to remain here for another minute."

"You first, sir!" said one of the sailors.

"No, no!" retorted Lee.

It was no time to argue. One by one, the sailors went back along the rope, hand over hand. The rock was so near now that it was already slowly fouling that projecting fragment.

"Hurrah!"

"Mr. Lee's coming back!"

"But what's the good of it?" asked Handforth. "They've only moved a tiny chunk of rock. It can't help us! By George! Why shouldn't we make a quick rush for the

boats, and chance the bullets? Anything's better than waiting here—while that rock comes down to crush us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's chance the boats!"

"Hold on!" said Dick Hamilton grimly. "There seems to be some activity outside—in the open. Look at the way those men are shouting and waving their arms. I'll bet they're making signals, telling the others that the gov'nor has been monkeying with the rock!"

"My hat! It looks like it!" said Pitt breathlessly.

A good deal of excitement was in progress outside. Men were pointing, others were shouting, and during all this dramatic turmoil, Mr. Stokes appeared on deck, with two or three other men. They were carrying a clamped metal case, and there were coils of electric wires attached to it.

"It's a tin-pot sort of thing, but it'll certainly explode when the current is switched on," said Barry Stokes tensely. "I'm only praying that it won't explode before we can get it outside!"

"Good man!" panted Dorrie, as he ran up. "The bomb, eh? By the Lord Harry! We might make a dash for it, even now! Foo Chow's slow-motion business may be the saving of us all!"

The explosive charge was indeed a hurriedly contrived affair. Nobody knew how it would expend its force. Perhaps it would blow upwards, and fail in its object altogether, and shatter the yacht's bows. Perhaps it would explode harmlessly in the water, and do no damage to anything.

At such an acute time as this, it was only possible to test it, and to pray that it would be successful.

Mr. Stokes and the men hurried forward. A rope-ladder was slung over the bows, and a sailor nipped down. The *Wanderer's* prow was hard against the chain, for the current was forcing her. Her stern was slewed round, and nearly touching one of the rock walls.

The man commenced to fix the improvised bomb to the chain-cable by means of wires. Heads were craned over the rail to catch a glimpse of his activities. Everybody was filled with a new, wild hope. Was there a possible chance?

The Chinese were forgotten.

Nobody thought of those signals and the shouts. Would the bomb be effective? Would it succeed in shattering that chain? And, if such a miracle happened, would the yacht be able to slip out of this death-trap?

It was the latter possibility which seemed utterly and positively remote.

For the Chinese hordes at the ropes would hear the explosion. The watching officers would see what had been done, and before the yacht could possibly glide free of that rock it would thunder down. So there seemed little or no possibility of escape.

But that one slim chance—that forlorn hope—gave everybody courage.

The bomb was fixed, and the men came swarming up the rope ladder. Shouts were passed along, and Nelson Lee now held a switch in his hand. But the wires were not yet connected to the electrical circuit.

"Hurry!" commanded Nelson Lee urgently.

"Look! Look!" screamed somebody, pointing upwards.

The very thing that all had feared was actually happening!

That deadly weight of rock was no longer creeping down imperceptibly; it was falling—falling to the accompaniment of a shrieking and grinding as the upper portion of the yacht was caught in the fearful descent.



CHAPTER 15.

BY A HAIR'S-BREADTH!

It happened in a flash—in a brief, split second. But so much occurred during that insignificant period of time that it seemed prolonged.

Crash—splinter—crash!

Surely the *Wanderer* was utterly doomed? There was every indication of absolute destruction. That falling rock pressed down with the strength of a sliding mountain. The yacht's graceful funnel was caught, crumpled and twisted into debris like a child's toy.

Captain Burton, on the bridge, uttered a hoarse shout—a shout that he was convinced would be his last. The rock roof was just over his head—falling, smashing down—

And then, accompanied by a fearful grinding of crags, magnified a million times by the tunnel-like nature of the spot, the air became filled with flying splinters. And Captain Burton wondered if this was death. He was crouching low, below the bridge-rail.

A miracle!

The rock was still, hanging there with not a foot of clearance between its rugged massiveness and the rail of the bridge. It was even impossible to stand upright. The rock roof was right down upon the *Wanderer*, as though resting upon the mangled remains of the funnel.

But this, of course, was an impossibility.

Actually, the rock had jammed. When almost on the point of performing its deadly work, the gigantic mass had become fouled. And there it remained, fixed, wedged, and—still.

Nelson Lee's desperate ruse had worked! But even Lee did not know why. That projecting portion of crag, so small in itself, had held up the whole diabolical project. But Foo Chow himself was to be thanked for this salvation.

By a sheer stroke of irony, Foo Chow had saved every one of his victims!

Had he allowed that rock to descend by the same slow progress as at the beginning, the projection would gradually have been crushed and powdered. It was the swift

descent which had caused the jamb to take place.

The *Wanderer* was saved!

When only a foot of space remained between that movable roof and the bridge, the fixture had occurred. And now these thousands of tons of matter hung suspended, as solid as the canyon itself.

There was still the chance that the Chinese hordes might tug and pull until they partially freed the rock, but it was a very slight one. And there was that bomb, too! If only the chain could be torn asunder now——

"We're safe!" shouted somebody. "We're still safe!"

"The rock's fixed!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"We're saved!"

"Three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Not only the St. Frank's fellows, but the Moor View girls and many members of the yacht's crew joined in the cheer. Pent-up feelings were released in that tremendous shout of joy.

What did it matter about a crumpled funnel and shattered masts? The yacht herself was still whole, still floating. Foo Chow's devilish plan had failed. And if only the chain could be smashed——

"Ready?" shouted Lee, his voice sharp with acute anxiety.

"Yes, sir! The wire's fixed!"

"Stand clear, there!" yelled Mr. Stewart.

Nelson Lee pressed the switch over, and held his breath.

Boom!

The explosion was thick and muffled, and the sturdy *Wanderer* trembled through every deck and through every plate. Her bows heaved slightly, and a dense, pungent mass of smoke rose reekingly and spread over the decks. Several men ran madly to the bows, and looked over.

"The chain's still holding, sir!" came a yell.

"Just our luck!" said Lord Dorrimore, with a grunt.

"But she's weakened!" came another shout. "One of the links is broken, and she's twisted, too——"

"We'll try her!" muttered Captain Burton.

He reached for the engine-room telegraph, the handle of which was only just below the overhanging rock. The skipper was crouching all the time, and Ah Fong, the pilot, was near by—a ghastly colour with fright, but still sticking to his duty.

Clang-clang!

Full speed ahead! The yacht's propeller commenced plunging in the water, converting the river into foam. And then, with a shrieking rasp of snapping metal, the great barrier-chain came asunder.

"She's gone!"

"The chain's broken!"

But the shouts were scarcely heard in the terrific commotion from above. It seemed as though a million demons were screaming at the same moment. The wreckage of the funnel was scraping along the rock roof, and

the noise created was stupefying in its intensity.

But one thing was proved—the *Wanderer* was moving!

Foot by foot she edged out of the terrible zone of death. Captain Burton was at the wheel now, and, in answer to his touch, the vessel swung slowly and majestically round, so that her stern cleared the rock wall. She went further and further out into the open canyon.

"Hurrah! We're out!"

"Saved, by George!"

"Down with old Foo Chow!"

There was such a burst of delirious excitement and joy that everybody went momentarily off their heads. Lord Dorrimore grabbed Nelson Lee's hand, and nearly tore his arm out of his socket. Handforth seized Irene in a fever of happiness, and kissed her.

"Sorry!" he gasped. "I thought you were my sister!"

"Oh, Ted!" breathed Irene.

"Absolutely!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, here we are, sliding out under the good old azure! Foo Chow and his beastly foulness are somewhat biffed in the optic!"

The yacht was now completely clear, and her engines were shut off. She had quite sufficient way to take her onwards in safety. She was a pitiful wreck, with her masts reduced to splintered stumps, and with her once graceful funnel now a crumpled heap of debris. Fumes were pouring out and spreading over the decks in the most suffocating way.

But who cared?

By a hair's-breadth the vessel had succeeded in scraping out of that trap. And from overhead came a tumult of voices as the countless Chinamen were urged to strain at the ropes. They were only just realising that it would now be too late.

Crack-crack! Zurrh! Crack-crack!

Intermingled with the sharp rifle reports came the deadly rattle of machine-gun fire. A bullet or two spattered thuddingly against the *Wanderer's* plates. The enemy, foiled in the original purpose, was firing upon the yacht.

"By glory! We can answer this sort of stuff!" roared Dorrie.

"Everybody get below—at once!" shouted Nelson Lee urgently. "There's no need for us all to face this hail of bullets!"

"We want to see the fun, sir!" yelled an excited junior.

"Get below—all of you!" commenced Lee harshly.

Whether they wanted to or not, they were hustled into safety, for the lower decks of the *Wanderer* were now virtually secure. But Handforth managed to stay on deck.

The yacht's machine-guns were soon at work, and streams of bullets were sent spurt-ing along the rock paths and up among the crags, where the snipers were hidden. The commotion was terrific.

"They're bunkin'!" shouted Dorrie contemptuously. "Of all the infernal scum——"

He paused, a surprised look coming into his face. His revolver crashed from his right hand, and his arm hung limp.

"That's funny!" he said blankly. "I'm hit!"

"Dorrie, old man—" began Lee.

"It's all right—only a nasty hole through the forearm," said his lordship lightly, as he rolled up his sleeve. "H'm! Pretty sight!"

His arm was bleeding seriously, the bullet having passed clean through, miraculously missing the bone. Handforth saw it, and came running up.

"Downstairs—and be quick about it!" snapped Lee. "There's Handforth—you ought to be below, my lad! Help Lord Dorrimore below! Get some of the boys to patch you up, Dorrie—they're experts in first aid. Hurry!"

"Hang it, I'm stayin' here—"

"You're doing nothing of the sort!" interrupted Lee. "You might bleed to death unless you're quickly doctored. Don't argue, old man, for goodness' sake!"

Dorrie went below with Handforth without another word, and Umlosi looked out to the shore, spear in hand, a picture of utter misery and wild fury. All these enemies, and he couldn't get his spear at work!

The shattering din continued, but most of it came from the yacht's own machine-guns. The Chinese were fleeing, scrambling up the rock face of the canyon with miraculous agility. And the *Wanderer*, now under perfect control, was gliding on her course down-stream.

But even now the final excitement had yet to come!



CHAPTER 16.

THE LAST OF DR. FOO CHOW.

WILLY HANDFORTH chuckled.

"Clever chap, Ted," he said, with approval. "I didn't know you were so

jolly smart!"

"Who, me?" asked Edward Oswald, staring.

"Yes."

"You spoofing young ass—"

"Fact!" interrupted Willy. "The way you

kissed Irene was a treat, but it was brainy to say that you thought she was sis!"

Irene Manners' pretty face was red.

"It was just in the excitement," she said hurriedly.

"That's what makes it all the cleverer," agreed Willy, nodding. "My hat! You surely don't think Ted would kiss Ena on purpose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can imagine a few miracles—such as stopping that rock barrier from falling—but I can't imagine a miracle like Ted kissing sis!" said Willy firmly. "Whoa! Hi! What the— Steady, Ena, you chump!"

Ena Handforth was setting about Willy with grim effect, and everybody else was yelling with laughter. There was so much relief that the slightest thing was sufficient to

make everybody shout. The

Wanderer was safe! And she was proceeding down the gorge on her voyage homeward bound!

And it soon became safe for the younger members of the party to go on deck again. That section of the canyon guarded by rifles and machine-guns was left in the rear. Dorrie had been hit in the arm, two sailors were laid low, and two others were slightly wounded. But, mercifully, there were no deaths.

On the bridge, Nelson Lee had a telescope in his hand, and he was staring back along the great gorge—to that spot where the

lowered rock-barrier looked like the entrance to a tunnel. Lord Dorrimore, his arm bandaged, had come up again.

"It is Foo Chow!" said Nelson Lee.

Through that telescope he could see clearly. The figures in the distance were brought up close—brought into sharp relief. And on the rock ledge stood Dr. Foo Chow himself—a tattered and travel-stained figure. But there was no mistaking the defeated war lord.

"Yes, I can see Foo Chow," said Lee. "We can well imagine his feelings, Dorrie. The cur! I marvel at the fact that we have escaped his deadly—"

"Hallo!" interrupted Barry Stokes. "Look there!"

He pointed. A puff of white smoke had shown high up on the rocks, quickly followed by another and another. Three dull reports came echoing down the canyon.

"If that's not artillery fire, I'm a Dutchman!" said Dorrie.

"Yung Li Chang's army is counter-attacking!" said Lee, nodding.

"Pity they couldn't do a bit of it earlier, an' save us all this trouble!" said Dorrie, with a sniff. "We're only half a yacht!" he added, glancing up at the shattered wreckage.

Puff! Puff!

Other shells were exploding among those rocks. And then Nelson Lee caught his breath in a quick gasp. He could see men running everywhere. Numbers of officers were urging Dr. Foo Chow to hasten away. But the Chinese millionaire stood there, staring down the canyon at the departing yacht. Again he had been foiled, and he seemed stunned.

But that which had caused Lee to gasp was something else.

Two shells had exploded simultaneously overhead. And, curiously akin to slow-motion photography, the whole top of the canyon was falling away! Thousands of tons of rock were collapsing.

"By James!" breathed Lee huskily.

He could see Dr. Foo Chow, and then he couldn't see Dr. Foo Chow. There was nothing but a mass of smoky powder and great cascades of foam. The spot where Dr. Foo Chow and his officers had been standing was gone—obliterated.

"Good gad!" breathed Dorrie. "The whole gorge has caved in!"

"Yes, and Foo Chow is dead," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Look, Dorrie."

His lordship took the telescope and looked. The haze had cleared. Piles of rock were fouling the canyon, and the river was now rushing there with the speed of tormented rapids, owing to the sudden restriction of space. The fact that the river was still flowing was a good sign. For a dam at that spot would have reduced the level of the water in the lower reaches, and the *Wanderer* might have grounded.

"H'm! Nothin' but rock!" said Lord Dorrimore. "Millions of tons, I should say—an' Foo Chow is underneath the lot. Well, Lee, I've seldom known a man to be in a more fittin' position."

"I've got to agree, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee quietly.

They could now see swarms of figures—hordes of Chinamen. There could be no doubt that Yung Li Chang's real soldiers were giving battle to the enemy. The last picture of this tumultuous region was one of battle.

Dorrie took a deep breath.

"Well, do you think anythin' can happen to us now?" he asked. "Are we likely to meet any more snags?"

"I rather fancy we have got to the end of our excitements," replied Lee fervently. "Foo Chow is dead, and without a leader his soldiers will be a mere rabble. I think we can assume that these provinces will now be peaceful."

"I don't care if they're as peaceful as an English village on a Sunday afternoon," re-

torted Lord Dorrimore. "I'm a chap who likes a bit of excitement, but China would give me a pain if I visited it again. Give me somethin' quiet—like a trip into the unexplored regions of the Amazon, with only a few cannibals to deal with."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"I didn't know they grew cannibals on the Amazon," he said drily.

"Well, they're a pretty lively lot, those aboriginal Indians, anyhow—although I prefer 'em any day to these primitive Chinese," snorted Dorrie. "How about gettin' below, an' seein' about some breakfast? Or is it lunch? Hanged if I'm not mixed up about the time."

The reaction after the peril was marked. Now that there was no more danger, everybody felt utterly listless. But there was a quiet contentment within every heart.

Edward Oswald Handforth kissed the tips of his fingers, and waved his hand.

"Good-bye—and good riddance!" he said severely.

He and a number of other juniors were leaning over the starboard rail of the *Wanderer*. The yacht was in the open sea, heaving gently to the swell—a motion which caused universal satisfaction. And away in the distance was a blur on the horizon—the last sight of the coast of China.

"And now—home!" said Dick Hamilton brightly. "It's pretty marvellous, when you come to think of it. With our engines, we shall be able to make such speed that we'll get back to England in time for the new term at St. Frank's."

"St. Frank's!" sighed Reggie Pitt. "I say, won't it be great to see the dear old place again?"

The homeward voyage was now started in earnest.

The *Wanderer* was scarcely herself, although a kind of twisted funnel had been rigged up to do service until a big port could be reached. She was scorched and blackened from her experience in the river of fire—she was mastless, and her wireless was out of commission—but, in the main, she was the same old, lovable *Wanderer*.

And the holiday party, feeling thankful that they had escaped from China with whole skins, were keen upon enjoying the quiet voyage home. Their impressions of China were grim ones.

It is possible to visit China and come away with pleasant memories. But this particular trip had been so fraught with peril and warfare that not a single member of the party felt the slightest inclination to make another trip to the land of the Dragon.

THE END.

(By the time next Wednesday rolls round the Boys of St. Frank's will be back at the old school. A rollicking new series begins with: "HANDFORTH'S BAD BARGAIN!" Next Week!)

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, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Any enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

Requests For The Badge.

AS I knew would be the case, there has been a rush for the Badge. Luckily, I was well prepared for the demand. You can picture the willing "man of letters," otherwise the postman, staggering in with sacks of requests. I would give a thumb-nail sketch of the splendid fellow, but there's no room.

The Badge rally has been terrific. You need not pity me because of the extra work involved. Bless you, I like it! Every letter I get shows me more clearly how badly we wanted a Badge. One gratified member bursts into poetry—"Three times three for the Nelson Lee," etc.

I wish I could quote a few of the compliments to hand. Members of the S.F.L. do speak their minds! Another eager correspondent is also lyrical. He forwards me a yard of verse about the Badge and the Empire, and introduces "a cricket-playing wombat who hopped hot-foot in to the combat."

Write for the Badge!

I will remind you again how to get the Badge. All you have to do to get the Badge is to send a request for it to the Chief Officer, quoting your League number, and enclosing a stamped addressed envelope addressed to yourself. Send your request to:

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Do It Now!

You will wear the Badge at work, in camp, in the office, and the warehouse. And other fellows will ask you, "What have you got there?" They always do—and they will get jolly interested when you tell them what the St. Frank's League is, and what it is doing here at home in the old land, and far away overseas, where the cheery emblem means just a bit more to the wearer than here, for it speaks to him of the home country.

But I am not going into that matter now. Let it stand that the Badge concentrates in

its little circle the best there may be in life. I know one can talk till the moon turns to green cheese, and the cow loses its tail, but the fact is there; life is not just having dinner, doing a spell of work and turning in for forty winks. There are what they call at the theatres all the "extra turns"; there are jobs to be done in pal-helping. I was going to say such jobs don't get paid for; well, they may not be on the wages' list, but I fancy they get dabbed down on another list somewhere.

And the good old St. Frank's League stands as far as any organisation may do, for the duties in this other department of life.

Thank You!

It is up to me to thank all chums who have backed me up. It is you who got the League swinging along. Let the palms go to those who merit them. Chums all over the world had told me time and again that we had got to have a Badge.

So send in and secure yours. Better to be sure than sorry. Not that the supply will give out, but play the game by your button-hole.

Plain As Piecrust.

A. Hammonds, 2, Compton View, Harchills, Leeds, tells me that the O.O.'s in Leeds are all too far away from where he lives to suit his purpose. What's more, he wants to join a club. What is he to do?

I am not going to ask any O.O. to move to meet requirements. What my chum should aim at is to start his own club. His interesting letters shows clearly enough that an O.O. is wanted in his district. What's the matter with the job? Why should not he weigh in as Organising Officer?

Football Notice.

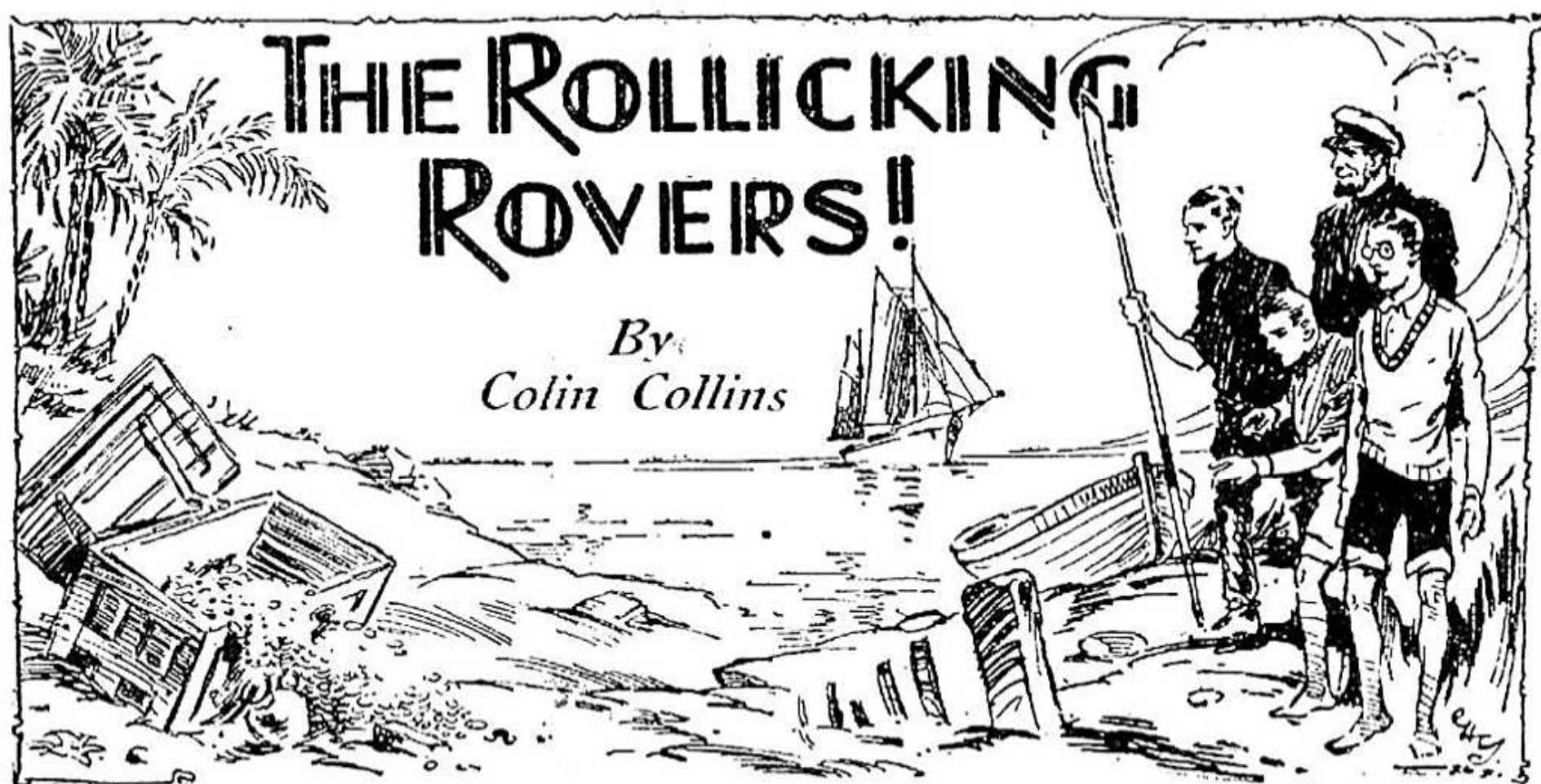
George H. Mason, The Cottage, off Station Road, Colwyn Bay, North Wales, would be glad to hear from secretaries of clubs near Colwyn Bay. He can promise a good, hard game from his club team.

THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM

will be found on Page 42.

If you haven't joined yet—join to-day!

Round the World for a Fortune—Story of a Great Treasure Hunt!



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. The treasure turns out to be only a box of books, which in disgust the boys deposit in the hold of the Saucy Ann. They now turn their attention to Monteblanco, a cannibal-infested country in the Congo, where, according to Old Digby's diary, they will find the treasure. Strange happenings during the voyage indicate that Foxey is hidden aboard—but you must read all about that in the exciting chapters below.

Foxey Suspected Aboard!

A GLORIOUS morning, with a cloudless sky, a cooling breeze and the sun not very high. The Saucy Ann was bound for Monteblanco.

The adventurers tumbled out of their bunks and came on deck. The first thing they heard was Ben stamping up and down in the saloon, using bad language.

It was early for bad language. They ran in to see what was the matter.

"I told yer this ship was harnted, I told yer!" Ben cried, pointing to a book on a shelf. "Didn't ye see me last night leave that there diary of yer uncle's lying on that there table? And look where it is now! And there ain't no Foxey to be playing tricks on us this voyage!"

"We certainly left it on the table," said Bob. "Did anyone come in here during the night?"

Nobody had entered the place (no one but Foxey, who was not there to confess).

"As I said afore, this 'ere ship is harnted!" Ben declared fiercely. "And it ain't no Spanish ghost this time—nor Foxey—it must be your uncle!"

The boys were inclined to laugh at this idea of the owner of the Saucy Ann haunting his old ship.

"Nonsense!" laughed Bob, with a wink at the others.

"Anyway, we're going to Monteblanco, aren't we?" said Goggles.

They all agreed; and Ben, grumbling, went about his day's work.

After breakfast Goggles gave many stealthy winks at his cousins, and jerked his head in an odd way, which they took to mean that he wanted a private conference. At last the boys all got together, while Ben and Dummy were busy.

"What's up, Goggles?" they asked anxiously.

"The moving of that diary! It really was moved, and somebody did it," he said solemnly.

They agreed, and all looked puzzled.

"We don't believe in 'speerits,' do we?"

"No," they agreed again.

"Then doesn't it occur to you that there's somebody else aboard besides ourselves?"

"You mean——"

"Yes, Foxey!"

"Great Scott!"

"He must have boarded us, after all, and probably he's snug in his hole now, secure in the idea that we should never look into it."

"Shall we tell Ben? And if we do, what will happen?" asked Fatty, thrilling at the thought of what would happen to the murderous ruffian when Ben—and, more important still, Dummy—found out.

"No, Foxey only wants to go with us and get in first," said Bob thoughtfully. "Let him be."

"Oh, we can't do that!" cried Fatty. "Besides, we don't know yet, for certain, if he's there."

"We can find out," said Bob. "One of us must get a book, and lie on top of his trap, and—listen. We're bound to hear him moving."

The prospect of this raised their spirits—and a spirit of mischief as well.

"Oh, the blighter!" chuckled Fatty. "What a lark if we screwed him down!"

"Or made his snugger a little—er—uncomfortable! What about it?"

"I'll get a book and do the listening," Fatty volunteered. And the others, being called away at that moment to assist Ben, he rushed to the cabin bookshelf, got a book, and spread himself on the top of the neglected trap.

By lying flat, and on his side, and putting his ear close to the boards, Fatty, in fifteen minutes, announced to the others by mysterious, joyous, excited signs that the Rat was below.

Fatty's Snake!

F OXEY, otherwise the Rat, was doing a snooze in his narrow quarters—and snoring. The place was a hollow section of the ship between the hull and the hold on the port side.

It has been explained that the old trading vessel had been converted by Digby into a passenger and pleasure yacht, and a considerable part of the old hold had been covered over by the building of the saloon and deck cabins. Only a small trapdoor now gave entrance to the useless hold, which was, at the moment, loaded with ballast and used as a storage place for lumber.

The wall of the hold formed one side of Foxey's lair; the ship's plates (rather damp) the other; the deck was its roof. It was one of those closed hollows in a ship useless for anything on account of its darkness. Foxey had got into it through the deck and made it his own.

The boys, thrilling with glee at their discovery, sat on Foxey's old hiding-place and talked loudly for the benefit of the listener below; having taken care to wake him by stamping noisily immediately above his head.

"We ought to clean out this old hole where Foxey used to hide," said Fatty loudly, stamping his heel.

Foxy heard, rolled over, and felt for his knife. A cold sweat broke out on his brow. Exposure seemed certain.

"No need to do that," said Bob, talking very loudly. "Better get some screws and fasten it down securely, curse the blighter! He's at the bottom of the sea now; we want to forget him!"

Foxy heaved a sigh of relief, but began to squirm at the idea of being screwed down. It would be only one degree better than buried alive.

"We needn't screw it down yet," said Goggles, with a wink at the others. "We may need the space to hide uncle's treasure in, when we find it. Nice and snug and secret, eh?"

"Not big enough," said Fatty, very loudly. "But, I say, I've a fine idea. What a lovely place to keep that snake of mine in!"

"Snake!" they all cried very loudly.

"Snake!" gurgled Foxey, his yellow face white with terror.

"Yes, didn't you know I had a snake on board? It's a beauty! Don't tell Ben; he'd never allow me to keep it."

"What sort of snake—a big one?" asked Bob.

"Ra—ther! As thick round as my arm, and as long as—ever so long. I brought it aboard at Teredos."

"Where is it now?" asked Goggles, in a loud, hoarse whisper.

"In a big sea-chest in the hold—only place I could think of that was safe."

"Poisonous?"

"Ra—ther! It'll die shut up for long in that chest; but if we could just lift this trap and slip it down—at night—when Ben was busy—Foxey's old hole is the very place for it!"

"You'd better hide it quick, before Ben hears about it, my lad," said Bob. "How do you propose to handle it, if it's poisonous?"

Fatty was unable to reply for laughing, but clapped his hand over his mouth to stifle his mirth. That set the others off; and Ben, coming along at the moment, paused awhile and stared at them with his head on one side.

He passed on; and Fatty, lying on his chest, and with his face close to the trap, gurgled out:

"What would he say if he knew what we'd got hidden from him—what *would* he say?"

"Ah, what **WOULD** he say?" echoed the others; and they had to choke themselves to avoid another explosion.

"When Ben goes for his afternoon nap, we'll go down and fetch the snake," said Fatty, "and let it down. Eh, what?"

Foxy gave a low groan of terror, almost loud enough to be heard above.

"With a man, it goes for his neck and ties itself round—like a comforter," continued Fatty. "When I first brought it aboard I was thinking—about Foxey!"

Foxy pricked up his ears and listened hard, with his face pressed to the underside of the trap.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY—PRICE TWOPENCE

"Why thinking about Foxey?" they asked loudly—very loudly.

"Well, at that time I was hoping he might return to the ship."

"Foxey is a dead and goner!" cried Bob.

"He is, or he will be," groaned Foxey to himself, if that blamed old snake is let loose down here."

"We'll all come back here at midday and have a consultation," said Fatty.

They scrambled to their feet with a lot of stamping, and covered the trap with loose rope, in case Ben, seeing it, might get it into his head that the Rathole needed clearing out.

— — —
No Peace for Foxey.

L EFT in peace, but with no peace, and fluttering with horror, Foxey began to crawl round and round in his hole like a rat in a trap.

"I must get out of this—I must get out!" was the continual thought, and he whined it aloud in his misery. There was very little time—only till midday, when Ben took his

nap. Those young devils might bring the poisonous thing along with them next time they came!

His hands went clawing the walls, and he fingered the boards on the side that he knew formed the wall of the hold.

Ha! He had found an axe.

His spirits rose. Boards—an axe—the dark and empty hold. The way was clear! He must make a passage through.

He started in with his axe and gave one wild thud, forgetting the need for silence and caution.

The thud went through that part of the ship, and Dummy, as sensitive to vibration as another man to sounds, gave a great start, and fear distended his eyes. He leaped about at the wheel, making strange noises.

"What was it—a rock?" gasped Ben, coming to Dummy's side.

There was a sound of hurrying feet, and Foxey cowered in fear, cursing himself for a fool. But the bustle overhead died down when soundings had been taken, and many, many fathoms recorded.

"Something floating hit us," Ben decided.

"Or—it's our speerit knocking as a warning," he added gloomily.

"More likely something hit us," said Fatty. "Certainly the spirit moving something, or somebody."

Foxy was working more gingerly now, prising out a board with the corner of his axe, and grunting and panting, but every movement stealthy and silent. He then heard footsteps overhead.

"They're coming—they've got it!" He moaned and collapsed.

"Yes, Fatty, old son, it's a very fine snake, but as it is sleeping peacefully, I don't think I'd disturb it yet."

Foxy sobbed his relief, and drew the back of his hand across his dripping brow, falling flat from exhaustion, and thankful enough for the respite.

"While it's asleep it is surely the best time to tackle a snake!" cried Fatty irritably.

"I tell you no—it's too dangerous!" replied the scientific one. "The sanguinosis comatosis is famous for the swiftness of its movements. It darts. Its fangs go like an arrow shot from a bow. It only wakes up at the smell of its prey."

"Now, what time exactly shall we bring it here?" asked Fatty. "Better decide now."

"After dark," suggested Fatty in a joyous, gurgling whisper. "Snakes can see in the dark—their eyes shine like a cat's!"

That was too much for Foxy, he attacked his work again, heedless of voices above, gouging out lumps of wood with the corner of his axe, but not gouging out much more than chips.

Having allowanced out their second dose of torture—which was to last till darkness—they went away to devise new agonies for the rat below, careless of what the effect might be.

Foxy worked like mad for an hour or more, and then, in desperation, gave another mighty blow which sent a shudder through the ship's timbers.

Dummy danced at the wheel, and made sounds like a dog fight. Ben jumped, too, and ran about the deck, looking at the boards.

"It's the heat, Ben," said Goggles casually. "Ships often crack like that in the heat." He guessed it was Foxy squirming below.

"Don't tell me it's the heat. How many ships have you heard crack like that, I'd like to know?" roared Ben. "It's speerits knocking in broad daylight. It's a warning, I tell you. The ship is harnted!"

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you it is. That was your dead uncle. That was his way o' knocking, I reco'nised it! We'd better turn about and make for home!"

"Nonsense, Ben!"

"He don't want us to go on!"

"Well, we want to, and that's the end of it," said Bob sharply.

"There, listen!" cried Ben, when another crack sounded faintly. "It's in the hold! And it's in the hold as your uncle's box o'

books is! He's knockin' on the lid o' the box to tell us somethink. He's sayin' 'No, no!'"

"Absurd!"

"And I've heered as when speerits raps, just one rap means nothink, only just 'take notice.' But two raps is 'NO.' Them raps spells words."

"And three raps spell 'yes,' I suppose?" cried Fatty.

"That's so," said Ben, all ears, and his finger up to command silence.

"Well, there's another cried Fatty. "And that's three, and it means 'YES.' We've got to go on. YES!"

The boys were laughing at Ben, but they decided among themselves it would be better to go and walk about over Foxy's trapdoor, to warn and hush him to silence.

Meanwhile, Ben prowled to and fro in the saloon, muttering to himself:

"Three raps, three raps! The old man is knocking on that box. P'r'aps there's summat in that box he wants me to see. Maybe it's another diary. I'll go down and look. But I won't be larfed at by them kids. I'll go quiet, and lift the lid by myself—if I dare."

Foxy took the hint when the boys walked over his head and loudly told one another that Ben was hearing things, and threatening investigation.

By this time Foxy had loosened one board; prising and leverage would do the rest. Before night—and the coming of the snake—he would have a hole big enough to enable him to crawl through into the hold—and into safety. As well hide there as anywhere else; no one would enter it till the end of the voyage.

But the snake might crawl through the hole after him!

No; the boards could be put back, and the hole stopped up. The snake might have the old hiding-place, which was getting insufferably hot as the ship sailed ever southward to the equator, and Foxy would hide and live in the more capacious hold.

— —

The Clue to the Treasure!

BEN wandered about the deck whistling, and behaving like an artful schoolboy; he was watching for a chance, when the lads weren't looking, of getting down into the hold to the box of books, to answer the spirit call.

As he lifted the hatch and let the light into the dark hollow there was another knock (from Foxy's axe). Down went the hatch, and Ben jumped away in fright.

Afraid of the dark in broad daylight! Yes, that was it. And he was ashamed.

"That was four raps," he whispered. "Four! What does that spell—'COM E.' Now, then, my lad, no knocking of the knees, the guv'nor's callin' yer; don't be skeered of the old man!"

He lifted the hatch again and peered down, then flung it back gently. The ray of light warned Foxey. There was just time to replace the cracked boards and hold them so that they gave him eye room to peep and watch.

The light beam came down straight from the sky on to the box of books at the bottom, the box Foxey knew only too well.

Ben descended by the iron ladder and came to rest beside the "haunted" chest, and put out a hand to touch it. He feared some other hand might come into collision with his—but it was daylight, and courage was returning.

He turned back the lid and stood and surveyed the guv'nor's "rubbish"—his silver and brass and copper souvenirs—with sad resignation. Foxey's eyes bulged as he watched, for he saw, in those articles, a solution of one of his troubles—the way to raise money at the next port. They would sell and never be missed. And a man must have money.

Foxey's eyes also roved round the half-lighted hold, for a sight of that box with the snake in it. He could see several boxes, but all were bound and corded, or gaping without lids. He devoutly hoped the boys had not already hoisted it up. If they came with the snake now he would be caught between two fires; the snake above, and Ben in the hold.

Ben was intent on his task. He removed the metal ware, and then the gold-threaded cloth, and came down to the top layer of books. These he took out one by one, reading their names aloud—all of them novels of adventure and travel—but no diary. This was the first layer.

He looked at the next, and found that the volumes below were of a different kind, bound in boards and studded with metal and mother-o'-pearl, some in thick hides and vellum.

"Oh, these is his collection stuff!" growled Ben.

He opened one, and stared at the absurd, ancient black lettering and illuminated pages. Some of the pages threatened to crumble at his touch. They were all in a foreign tongue.

"Bah, only stuff he couldn't read, and gave sovereigns and sovereigns for, and he couldn't understand a word of what they was all about!" growled Ben in scorn.

He lifted out a few more, then flung them back in disgust.

"Bah! If the guv'nor had had his way he'd have turned this ship into a blessed museum. And what was he a-knocking for? To tell me to take care of his precious rubbish? I wonder what the lingo o' this one is? Spanish, I believe. Anything in Spanish allus took his fancy. Ah, well, we'll take care of 'em; and Mr. Goggles can make a glass case for 'em when we get the treasure, and the world is ringin' with the story o' what we've found."

Ben sadly replaced the "rubbish," and closed the box lid.

Rubbish!

Dear me! There are books which—
But more about that presently.

Another Visit to Foxey's Lair.

AS soon as Ben had closed the hatchway of the hold, and all was again dark, Foxey crept through, taking with him a few useful things, including some tins of food and his axe.

Fortunately for him, the hatch was left unfastened, and he would only have to climb the iron ladder at night to get on board, with as much ease as from his secret trap. There was, perhaps, more risk of discovery.

The boys, having given their prey a little rest from torture, returned to the secret trap, and did a little more prearranged talk for the rascal's benefit. None of which he heard, for he was now safely away in the hold.

Something was dumped on top of the trap, and the voices were very loud.

"There, now we've got a step nearer—our snake is ready as soon as Ben settles in his cabin," said the voice of Bob.

"Heavy, isn't it?" cried Fatty, with a great grunt of weariness. "Phew, it weighs as much as a man."

"Let's have a squint," cried Goggles, bending down over the box (it was really a box of bottled beer). By Jove, it's a stunner! This is the sort of snake that kills elephants, isn't it?"

Foxey was busy in the hold, collecting empty boxes to make him a cubby house in which he would be much more comfortable than in his prepared hiding-place, and heard nothing of their talk.

"What a pity Foxey isn't in his hole," sighed Fatty. "He would have loved a little playmate like this."

Apparently Foxey was scared into silence, for they could hear no sound of bumping, or squirming, or spirit knocks!

"You said it was as thick as your arm, Fatty!" cried Bob. "It's as thick round as your stomach, and that's no walking-stick. Which end of a man do you think it would tackle first for strangling?"

"His head," replied Fatty decisively. "But, for swallowing, I should say—his boots." Then, in a whisper: "No sound from below! Do you think he's fainted?" he asked, with his ear close to the deck.

"Great Scott, what's this in this box?" cried Goggles, leaping away from the imaginary snake chest with very real alacrity. "Why—ants! Hundreds of 'em—thousands of 'em—millions!"

The box, taken on board at Teredos, had brought with it a colony of the most vicious crawlers, terrible things to encounter, in your bed, for instance. The boys gave them a wide berth till Fatty noticed that the little

(Continued on page 43.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION

FORM No. 48.
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, and Membership Badge.

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.

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If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.



(Continued from page 41.)

"monsters" were crawling on the deck and making for the nearest crack—the edge of Foxey's secret trap.

"Stir 'em up—and let 'em go!" whispered Goggles.

With great care, and no more talking, they directed the trek of the ants from the box to the crack, until the very last one was down and out of sight. And what a swarm! They danced with glee at the thought of what would happen to the enemy below.

That was enough torture for Foxey—for the present.

"Leave the snake in its box till it is dark!" cried Bob loudly, and they all walked away, tramping very noisily, like marching flat-foots. At intervals they came back and talked to the box of bottles, as if to the snake. But not a sound from Foxey. The joke was wearing rather thin. And Foxey was very comfortable now, thank you.

When evening came they were faced with the simple fact that they had no snake; and that Foxey might creep out under cover of darkness and murder them all—or be murdered by Dummy.

"I say, you chaps!" said Bob at last. "I suppose those ants weren't of the poisonous variety—they couldn't have done anything serious?"

"Some ants are dreadfully poisonous!" Goggles declared, knowing nothing at all about it.

"It's not very sporting of us," observed Bob gloomily, staring hard at Fatty.

"Was Foxey sporting?" asked Fatty aggrieved. "He's a common or garden villain, and a dirty rascal; and—a would-be murderer," Fatty insisted.

"All the more reason that Ben should be told. He'll never forgive us about those spirit knocks if we don't own up, and tell him Foxey is aboard. The blighter might bore a hole and sink the ship—and us!"

"I think we must tell Ben."

"And have Ben murdering Foxey, and Dummy, too—if they get scrapping about who's to put out Foxey's light."

"Ben will be reasonable if approached properly. We must tell him gently. Leave it to me," said Bob.

"How are you going to break it gently?" asked Fatty scornfully.

"Come and see!"

Ben Learns the Truth!

THEY all sauntered over to where Ben was leaning against a rail, cutting a quid from a coil of tobacco, and stood round, and looked at him.

"Well?" growled Ben. "Have you come to 'pologise?"

"Apologise? What for?"

"Larfin' at me about them knocks."

"The knocks were knocks all right," said Bob. "Now, listen, Ben. I've got a harder knock for you than any one of those—a real knock out!"

"Oh! Want to fight me? What are you all gettin' at, standin' round me like this?"

They laughed uneasily; but Bob made a start with:

"Ben, suppose somebody told you Foxey was alive and kicking, what would you do?"

"Call him a liar!"

"We never saw him put out of the way by those rascals"

"No need, I know their little ways!" growled Ben.

"Suppose they pitched him into the sea?"

"That's most likely what they did," replied Ben.

"Foxey can swim; you're forgetting that, aren't you?"

"So can sharks."

"But this ship wasn't far away from the dhow, and a man can sometimes dive and dodge a shark. Foxey could swim below water and he might have come right alongside us without our seeing him, and have crept aboard while we were passing down the water barrels."

"He might, but he didn't; he wouldn't dare," said Ben.

"He might dare facing you and Dummy rather than be swallowed by a shark," said Bob.

"He would prefer the shark—it would be safer and quicker," snarled Ben.

"Well, prepare yourself for unpleasant news, Ben. Foxey is aboard this ship, and in the old place, under that coil of rope!"

Ben drew himself up to his full height and expanded his chest, then clenched his fists.

"If you young lads think as you're being funny," he began.

"We're not—we're serious—we all know it's true!" interposed Goggles.

He saw that they were in earnest.

"Have you seen him?" demanded Ben.

"Not actually—with our eyes—but by a process of deduction—"

"De—what?" roared Ben.

"He means we've heard him," murmured Fatty soothingly. "It's true, old chap."

"You mean them knocks?" demanded Ben, with growing scorn.

"Yes. Foxey is in the old hole. We'll take you there and haul him out. But you've got to make a promise, Ben—treat him gently."

"You mean it?" yelled Ben, starting to life and glaring at them to make sure they were in earnest. "You mean he's aboard this ship—alive?"

(Continued on next page.)



(Continued from previous page.)

"Yes—but—what are you going to do to him when we get him out?"

"Do to him?"

"Yes."

"Why—KILL HIM!" yelled Ben.

"Then—then—then he isn't there!" cried Fatty, in alarm.

"Where is he?" roared Ben, whipping out his knife as he got level with the concealed trap. "Open it! Have him out!"

"No, no, Ben!" pleaded Goggles, barring the way in his alarm.

"Open, I say!" Ben yelled at Fatty, who was nearest the trap.

Slowly the trap was lifted, and Fatty called:

"Come out, 'Foxy, and quietly, and nothing shall happen to you. Do you hear—come out!"

Bob and Goggles came closer, very cautiously, and peeped down into the silent, gloom-filled hole.

It was empty!

"Why—there's nobody there!" they cried in chorus.

"It's empty—it's empty! But we heard—knocks—and bumps—and—"

"Speerits—as I told yer!" cried Ben. "Who's the fool now—you or me?"

"What we heard was—rats—I suppose!" sighed Goggles, "and we imagined the rest." The others nodded.

And Foxy settled in his nice new quarters for a quiet sleep.

(And Foxy had fooled them again, just as they were nearing Montblanco, where excitement in plenty awaits the treasure hunters. But you must read all about it next week.)

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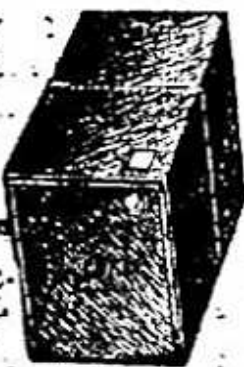
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Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian magazine post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 11/- per annum, 5/6 for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Co. (Canada), Limited.