

Rousing New Schoolboy-Adventure Series Starts To-day !

THE

NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

2^D



The KNIGHTS OF NORTHESTRIA!

The Boys of St. Frank's in the first of a stunning new series of adventure stories.

New Series No. 36.

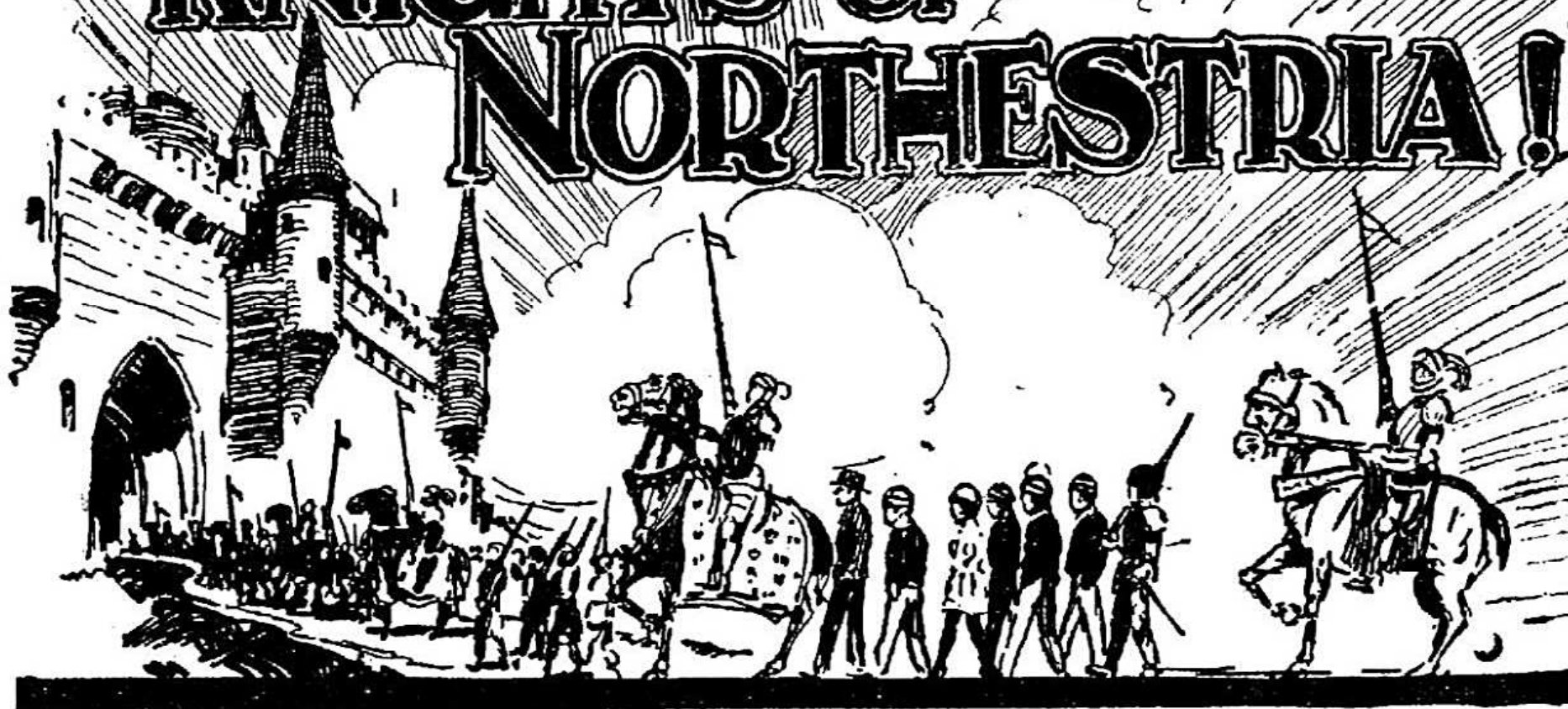
OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

January 8th, 1927.



"Shove me in the dungeons, would you?" belloved Handiorth. Before the officer had time to realise what was happening, he received a smashing blow on the jaw which sent him reeling backwards.

THE KNIGHTS OF NORTHESTRIA!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Off to the North Pole! Exciting new adventure series begins with this week's stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

LORD DORRIMORE'S LITTLE SURPRISE!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, spun gracefully round on his skates, gazing skywards in astonishment.

"Good gad!" he ejaculated. "I mean to say, what the——"

"Hi!" came a thunderous voice. "Out of it, ass!"

"Look out, Archie!"

The Genial Ass of the Remove was so fascinated by what he saw over the tree-tops that he did not even hear the warning shouts. And the next second Handforth crashed into him at full speed, and they both went flying.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other skaters were highly amused, for Archie was sailing on the ice on his back, his legs kicking wildly. And Handforth skidded full tilt into a heap of swept snow on his stomach, and half buried himself.

As he emerged, a number of St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls skated round, laughing merrily.

"I didn't see it, Ted!" remarked Willy Handforth, of the Third. "You might do it again, old man, just to oblige me!"

Handforth sat up, and shook the snow from himself.

"Who—who knocked me over?" he panted thickly. "By George! Tell me who it was, and I'll push him through the ice——"

"You silly ass, it was your own fault!" interrupted Church. "Archie was harmlessly looking into the sky, and instead of steering past him, you tried to knock him into the middle of next week. This is what comes of showing off before Irene!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth turned red, for Church had scored a bullseye. It was a fact that Handforth had been indulging in some "speed skating," on purpose to impress Irene Manners.

"All right, Walter Church!" he muttered fiercely. "Wait! Just wait, my lad! I'll make you sit up for——"

"Instead of uttering threats, old man, wouldn't it be better to dash over and pick up Archie's remains?" interrupted Reggie Pitt gently. "After that collision, it'll be a wonder if he's still alive."

This, of course, was pure banter, for the elegant Archie was already on his feet, attempting to recover some of his lost dignity. A tumble of that sort wasn't calculated to d/

much damage to anything except his composure.

"I don't wish to be too caustic," he said stiffly, "but I must be allowed to remark that this sort of thing is frightfully near the old edge! I mean, a chappie can't stand at rest, as it were, without another cove ramming him like a dashed rhinoceros, dash it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Archie was not likely to get much sympathy. It was a glorious morning—New Year's Day, in fact—and the party of St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls were thoroughly enjoying themselves on the lake. Snow lay everywhere, and the Norfolk air was crisp and frosty. It was a perfect winter's day, with a cloudless sky and scarcely a breath of wind.

They were the guests of General Gregory Bartholomew Handforth, D.S.O.—Handy's distinguished uncle. They had all enjoyed themselves to the full over the Christmas holidays, and it was generally voted that Handforth Towers was an ideal English mansion of the right sort. From the moment of their arrival, the guests had had one long round of pleasure under the general's hospitable roof.

And now the last few days of the visit were at hand. The party would soon be breaking up to go to their various homes—and, after that, St. Frank's again, for the new term.

"It was your own fault, Archie," laughed Marjorie Temple, as she helped brush some of the snow off the elegant junior's person. "Why did you stop like that—star-gazing at eleven o'clock in the morning?"

"Eh?" said Archie, with a start. "I mean, what? Absolutely nothing of the kind, old cheddar! I mean to say, old girl! The fact is, I was watching the dashed Leviathan of the sky, as it were."

"The which?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Absolutely!" declared Archie firmly. "A whacking great—What-ho! Observe, old darlings! There she sails!" he added, pointing. "Odds pictures and visions! A somewhat priceless sight, what?"

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"Oh! An airship!"

"Look—look!"

Now that the general attention had been drawn to the upper air, skating was completely forgotten. Until Archie had pointed skywards, nobody had noticed that great shining monster overhead. She was an airship of the rigid type, with enormous saloons compactly arranged flush with the keel, and with three independent engine gondolas—two in the rear, and a large one in front. And in the very nose of the airship was another compartment which was obviously the navigating cabin. She was gracefully drifting overhead on a faint breeze of the upper air. Her engines were silent, and she was two or three thousand feet high.

"Well I'm blowed!" gasped Handforth, staring upwards. "Where the dickens did that thing come from? Why didn't we see it before?"

"Because her engines are stopped," said

Dick Hamilton. "Nobody had any reason to expect a visitor of this sort. But what is she? She's flying the British flag, and she seems to be the latest thing in airships——"

"By George!" interrupted Handforth. "I'll bet she's one of those enormous dirigibles which have been built to fly to Australia!"

"Wrong, Handy," said a cheery voice. "She's mine!"

They all turned and stared at Lord Dorrimore, who had glided noiselessly up on his skates behind them.

"Yours, sir?" gasped everybody.

"Well, in a way," smiled the sporting peer. "Even if I don't actually own her, I've hired her. She's mine for the next month, at least. What's more, I shall be sailing within three days. This is her final trial, and to-day is Saturday. On Wednesday I'm off."

"Off!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "Where to, sir?"

"Oh, somewhere," smiled his lordship vaguely.

He was bombarded with questions.

"I thought so!" he said drily. "I thought you would all go half off your nuts with excitement. That's why I kept this little affair to myself—for fear of spoiling your quiet enjoyment under General Handforth's roof. It only proves that I'm getting wise in my old age!"

"But—but where are you sailing for, sir?"

"Do tell us, Dorrie!"

"Come on—out with it, sir!"

"You needn't look so envious," grinned his lordship. "I'm not planning to sail to any very delectable spot. If you must know, it's the North Pole!"

"What!"

"The North Pole, sir?"

Lord Dorrimore's announcement had only increased the excitement, and the famous sportsman was rather enjoying the little sensation. Dorrie was a very old friend, and he was celebrated for his unexpected dashes into various queer corners of the globe. This sudden airship trip was a bigger surprise than usual, however, for he generally sailed on his beloved steam yacht, the Wanderer.

And before any of the boys and girls could question him further, a low, powerful hum came from overhead. The airship's engines were being started again, and they all watched as she circled gracefully round Handforth Towers, and then set off in a southerly direction.

"I expect she's goin' back to Pulham," remarked Lord Dorrimore. "That's where she's stationed, you know—at the big airship depot. If the weather keeps fine, she'll hitch on to the moorin'-mast, and won't go back into her sheds again."

"And you've had this trip planned all the time you've been here, Dorrie?" asked Dick Hamilton accusingly. "And you didn't breathe a word to us?"

"Guilty, my lord!" chuckled Dorrie.

"Then it's too bad!" said Dick.

"Hear, hear!"

FREE THIS WEEK

MAGNIFICENT
METAL MODELS

of

FAMOUS FOOTBALL TROPHIES
GIVEN AWAY!



A great series of *free gifts* has been arranged for all readers of the "Boys' Realm." The first will be presented with every copy of this week's issue. It is a

Wonderful Model of the F.A. Cup, handsomely carried out in METAL.

The Boys'
REALM

Now on Sale.

Price 2d.

MORE FREE Gifts.

MORE MODEL TROPHIES
ARE COMING!

After the F.A. Cup the "Boys' Realm" will present a replica of the

FIRST DIVISION CHAMPIONSHIP CUP.

THE SECOND DIVISION CHAMPIONSHIP SHIELD.

F.A. CUP-WINNERS' MEDAL.

III. Div. (Northern Section) Championship Shield.

III. Div. (Southern Section) Championship Shield.

*Order your
Copy NOW*

"So it is, Dorrie!" chorused the girls.

"Here, steady!" said his lordship, backing away. "Haven't I already explained my reasons? I didn't want to spoil your Christmas holidays—"

"Oh, I've just thought of something else!" interrupted Dick Hamilton. "Pulham isn't much more than thirty miles away from here. I suppose you deliberately came to stay at the Towers, so that you could be near Pulham? You weren't just here for the Christmas vac. at all?"

"Both, Nipper, old man!" replied his lordship. "But I must confess that the Towers' close proximity to Pulham had a big effect. I've been over there two or three times during the past day or two, and you never suspected a thing! I was there yesterday, and arranged for this trial trip—"

"You artful bounder!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Guilty again!" smiled Lord Dorrimore.

"And you're making an airship flight to the North Pole?" said Irene Manners, looking at him with sparkling eyes. "Oh, how thrilling! Wouldn't I just love to go with you, Dorrie!"

His lordship's expression changed, and he became grave. All the young people were on the most intimate terms with him, and he was a man who detested any kind of formality. He was "Dorrie" to everybody.

"Don't make the mistake of thinkin' that this is goin' to be a pleasure trip," he said quietly, as he glanced at the airship as she vanished from view over the roof of the Towers. "No, it's a bit more serious than that. Surely you've seen the accounts in the papers—you've heard of the anxiety concernin' Dr. Hammerton Powell?"

"By Jove, yes, sir!" said Reggie Pitt. "Didn't he try to fly to the North Pole

about ten days ago—in a big four-engined aeroplane?"

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"One of the maddest things that any man ever attempted," he growled. "But Powell was always a reckless idiot—obstinate, too. Something like you, Handy—only, of course, in a milder degree!"

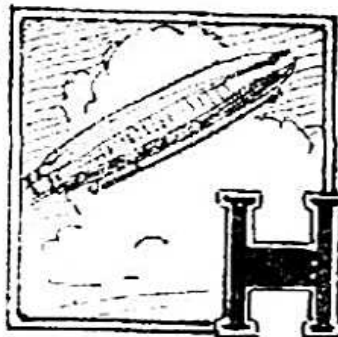
"Here, I say, sir—" began Handforth protestingly.

"Do you know Dr. Powell, sir?" asked somebody.

"One of my best pals," replied Dorrie. "A dare-devil explorer. He's been up Everest, he's twice tried to get to the South Pole, and now he's been idiot enough to start off to the North Pole in the middle of the Arctic night! I suppose he thought it would be a bit of an achievement. Nobody questions the sincerity of his attempt, but it was simply askin' for trouble."

"He's lost, isn't he, sir?" asked Dick.

"Yes, he's been missin' for ten days," replied Dorrie quietly. "I found this airship practically ready for sailin' over a week ago, and I got a few hundred people busy on her. If I start off on Wednesday, there may still be a chance—a slim one, but while there's life there's hope."



CHAPTER 2.

ANOTHER VISITOR, AND MORE
EXCITEMENT!

HANDFORTH was looking very concerned as he gave a last glimpse at the spot where the airship had departed.

"But how can there be any hope now,

sir?" he asked. "Dr. Powell must be dead—or he will be before you can hope to reach him."

"As I said before, there is a slim chance," replied Lord Dorrimore. "Dr. Powell's aeroplane was a huge one—in fact, the biggest machine of its type that has even been constructed. Even if two of the engines failed, the others would still be capable of bringin' her home. We all believe that Dr. Powell must have been caught in an Arctic blizzard, and forced down. If he crashed fatally, my own trip will be fruitless—but he may have wrecked the machine and still be alive."

"But how could he live in that cold, without food?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"The machine was provisioned for a month or five weeks," replied Dorrie. "Indeed, with starvation rations, Dr. Powell carried sufficient food supplies to last him an' his pilot and engineer six or seven weeks. So, you see, I'm not settin' out on a really hopeless quest. It is any odds that the machine came down intact, an' couldn't get up again. My idea is to cruise round the Arctic region, an' make a thorough search."

"I say, what a wonderful trip, sir!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "Wouldn't I just give a year's pocket-money to go with you!"

"Same here, sir!"

"I suppose there's no chance, Dorrie?" asked Dick Hamilton.

"Not the slightest, old man," said his lordship, shaking his head. "Why, you young bounders, what about St. Frank's? You're 'due back in a fortnight, aren't you? An' this search of mine will take at least a month. I'm establishin' a base up North, an' I shall make quick dashes into the Arctic wastes, an' in different directions, day by day."

Everybody was thrilled to the marrow at the thought of Lord Dorrimore's generous and humane rescue trip. This adventure was probably costing him a fortune, but this didn't worry him in the least. After all, he was a multi-millionaire, and his only thought was to hurry off to the succour of his old friend. An airship trip was the only possible method.

Skating was completely forgotten, and the juniors and the girls stood in groups, excitedly discussing the whole subject. But not for long. For they saw a motor-car drive up along the wide terrace, facing the Towers. And an enormous figure emerged.

"Somebody just arrived," said Handforth, shading his eyes, and staring. "Great Scott! Who the dickens can that chap be? He's more like a living mountain than a human being!"

Lord Dorrimore glanced round, and chuckled.

"It's nobody," he smiled. "At least, nobody strange. Don't you recognise our cheery old pal, he of the Murderous Spear?"

"My stars!" gasped Church. "You—you mean Umlosi?"

"The one and only!" nodded his lordship.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Fancy old Umlosi being here—in mid-winter, too!"

"Let's go and welcome him!"

There was a scramble to remove skates, and a few minutes later the whole crowd ran off the lake, and surged over the snow-covered lawns towards the terrace. They advanced upon Umlosi like an army.

"Wau!" shouted the gigantic African Chief, as he recognised them. "Greetings, young masters! Greetings, O maidens of my great white fathers!"

"Jolly pleased to see you, Umlosi!" roared Dick Hamilton, thumping him on the back. "This is a surprise—Great Scott! What the dickens are you wearing? You feel like a bale of cotton wool!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Off with that overcoat, Umlosi!" yelled Handforth indignantly. "Look at us! We're only just wearing our Norfolks—without any mufflers, or anything! You don't need to wrap yourself up like this!"

Umlosi backed away in alarm. He was Lord Dorrimore's faithful companion—had they not been at death's door, side by side, on many an occasion?—and he had come now to accompany his beloved "N'Kose" into the unknown wilds of ice and snow. Much as it appalled him to leave his native tropics, he had not been able to resist the call of adventure. Incidentally, Dorrie had assured him that the airship was as safe as a bullock-cart, and that the living quarters were electrically heated to such an extent that he, Umlosi, would only need to wear his scanty African costume. So Umlosi was chancing it—not, however, without many inward qualms.

• Motoring over the frost-bound English countryside was a different thing entirely—and Umlosi was looking more like a circus freak than an ordinary human being. He seemed to have grown enormously stout.

"Come on, Umlosi—off with that fur coat!"

"We want to see you properly, old man!"

"Nay, young masters, do thou cease this banter!" protested Umlosi. "These snows and cold winds are not for me. Would thou have me die of the trouble that eats away the lungs? I am from the hot forests of Africa, and——"

"Well, come indoors, and peel!" interrupted Dick briskly.

"He's so round, that he only needs rolling down this slope to make him into a snow-ball!" grinned Handforth. "Supposing we try it on? He deserves it for being such a molly-coddle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Before Umlosi could escape, the juniors were upon him. If he had chosen, he could probably have sent the whole crowd of them spinning away like ninepins, for he had the strength of a dozen men. But he only offered a feeble resistance, and the next moment he was being rolled down the long grassy slope from the terrace to the lower lawn. As he progressed, he gathered the snow, and he looked an extraordinary sight when he finally came to rest.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Umlosi!"

The black giant had practically vanished, and only a huge ball of snow was to be seen. The juniors pelted him unmercifully, and when he staggered to his feet and fled, they followed him, and gave him no rest until he was safely within the great lounge hall, where a log fire was blazing. Steam heat in the radiators added to the grateful warmth of the house.

"Now, Umlosi, you've got to unroll yourself!" grinned the juniors.

"Wau!" rumbled Umlosi. "You are even as mischievous as ever, my young masters! I fear, N'Kose, that the coughing disease will seize me, and I shall never go back to my beloved Africa," he added mournfully, as he looked at Lord Dorrimore. "Methinks I am doomed!"

"Rats!" said Dorrie. "The sooner you get out of that mountain of wool, the sooner you'll recover. Haven't I warned you against the dangers of overloadin' yourself with lumber?"

There was much amusement when Umlosi "peeled," for it was found that he had been wearing about eight or nine woollen overcoats, with an enormous fur over the top of them all. Further banter was stopped by the sounding of the luncheon gong, and everybody crowded into the stately dining-hall.

"Good news for you, boys!" thundered General Handforth genially. "Splendid news! Another fortnight of freedom, egad!"

"I wasn't going to tell them, general," smiled Mr. Nelson Lee.

"Eh? What?" roared the host. "Upon my soul! Sorry, Mr. Lee! Didn't know—didn't know! Egad, it doesn't matter, does it?"

The famous schoolmaster-detective laughed.

"Well, it's not vital, of course," he said drily. "I wasn't going to tell the boys until Tuesday—when, I think, they are arranging to leave this hospitable roof. But there's no harm done."

"What's the news, sir?" chorused the juniors eagerly.

"Well, I don't altogether agree with the general," replied Nelson Lee, with a serious expression on his face. "At least, I do not think you will call it good news to hear that two of the East House boys are down with diphtheria."

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"Hard lines!"

"They are boys who stayed at school for the vacation," continued Nelson Lee, a twinkle coming into his eyes. "You'll be glad to learn that both cases are mild, and that there is no danger. However, the Head takes a serious view of the outbreak, and the East House drains are being thoroughly overhauled, and it had been decided that a delay must occur."

"A delay, sir?"

"Under the circumstances, Dr. Stafford is anxious that the whole school shall be safe from any possible contagion," continued

Nelson Lee dryly. "Therefore, St. Frank's will not reassemble until two weeks later than the usual date. I am sure you will be grieved to hear this unhappy news—"

"Hurrah!" yelled the St. Frank's fellows enthusiastically.

"That's a rum way of showin' grief!" said Lord Dorrimore, with a chuckle.

"Two weeks' extra holiday!" roared Handforth with delight. "That means nearly a month from now! Practically the whole of January, my sons. Hurrah! I'm sorry for those two chaps, but I must say they're a couple of sportsmen! Jolly decent of 'em to go squiffy, and give us all 'an extra fortnight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

General Handforth laughed heartily with his guests.

"Young rascals—young scallywags!" he thundered, in that voice of his, which sounded like a blast of dynamite. "What did I tell you, Lee? I knew they'd be pleased to hear the news."

"But what about us?" asked Doris Berkeley indignantly. "The boys get all the fun!"

"No luck for us!" said Irene, with a toss of her head.

But Nelson Lee was smiling again.

"It seems that one of these affected boys was incautious enough to attend a Christmas party at the Moor View School," he explained. "So Miss Bond has reluctantly decided that her girls shall have the extra fortnight, too."

He couldn't get any further, for the girls were cheering and laughing with as much gaiety and joy as any of their schoolboy chums.



CHAPTER 3.

HANDFORTH'S LATEST.

HIS was indeed a morning of surprises—an auspicious New Year's Day!

First, the news that Lord Dorrimore was setting off on an expedition into the Arctic wastes which would later be famous as an epic of heroism and daring. Next, Umlosi had arrived—and now came the news that there would be no school for a whole month! The term wouldn't start until the last week in January, instead of in the middle of the month!

"By George!" said Handforth breathlessly. "No school for a month—and Dorrie distinctly said that this airship dash into the Arctic would only take a single month! What a chance—what a glorious opportunity!"

"I beg your pardon, Ted?" asked Irene.

Handforth started violently. He had been speaking to himself without realising it. And he found the girl's blue eyes upon him with mild surprise.

"Oh, nun-thing!" he gasped. "I—I was thinking!"

He was glad that she asked him no more. But as luncheon proceeded, Edward Oswald's expression became more and more flushed—his eyes were eloquent of inward excitement. Naturally, most of the talk at table concerned Lord Dorrimore's forthcoming trip into the wilds of the Arctic.

"Under the cirs," explained Dorrie,—"I have persuaded Mr. Lee to come with me. He'll be free for a month, so there's nothin' to stop him."

"Oh, I say, sir!" burst out Dick Hamilton. "What about me?"

"This is no adventure for boys!" frowned Dorrie.

"But isn't the airship safe, sir?" asked De Valerie.

"As airships go, I should say she's the safest thing that's ever been built—in the dirigible line, at all events," replied his lordship. "She's absolutely the last word, an' her liftin' capacity is astoundin'. Her makers guarantee that she can withstand the hardest storm that blows, an' when it comes to accommodation—well, wait till you see her yourselves!"

"Oh! Shall we be able to see her, sir?"

"Of course," replied Dorrie, nodding. "Even if you can't come on this trip, there's no reason why you shouldn't come to the aerodrome, an' give her the once over, so to speak. You'll be interested in the cabins, an' saloons. Honestly, this airship is a revelation."

And Dorrie went on to describe the many wonders of this latest giant of the air. The living quarters, it seemed, extended right along the keel—saloons, cabins, kitchens, and even a bathroom! It was a true liner of the air.

The navigation-room was separated from the passenger section by a long passage, for the pilot and his assistants were accommodated in the very front of the great vessel. Even the engine gondolas were large enough for the engineers to live in. And there were all sorts of other wonders in connection with this craft, too.

"For example," said Dorrie, "I'm takin' no less than four whippet aeroplanes. Did you notice them? They're hooked on underneath, an' can be dropped off at any moment. An' the airship can pick them up again, too, by means of this hookin' arrangement."

"But who's going to fly them, sir?" asked Pitt.

"Well, I'm a bit of a pilot myself," admitted Dorrie modestly. "You see, while the airship can do her eighty miles an hour with ease, these little 'planes are really fast beggars—capable of two hundred, without full throttle. My idea is to unhook from the airship in favourable weather, an' make a few extra dashes, as it were."

"Oh, we'd give anything to be able to go, sir," said De Valerie enviously.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"It may sound very romantic, boys, but there will be many perils," he declared. "I have perfect faith in the airship, and under ordinary circumstances, you would be allowed to go on this trip. But the Arctic regions, at this time of the year, are treacherous. We cannot let you run into any dangers."

"How many people are going, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Only the officers and crew, and Dorrie and myself—"

"Good!" broke in Handforth excitedly. "And how many will the airship carry, sir? I don't mean including the officers and crew. How many is she built to carry in the passenger quarters?"

Dorrie chuckled.

"An artful question, you young bounder!" he grinned. "As a matter of fact, this airship has been built for passenger service—one of the fleet which has been mapped out for Empire work. She's the biggest craft of her kind that's ever been constructed. And her cabins and saloons have been designed to accommodate fifty passengers, in addition to the crew."

"Fifty!" breathed Handforth. "By George!"

"However, as we shan't be takin' fifty passengers, I'm makin' other plans to level up the weight," continued Dorrie calmly. "But you'll know all about it when you come along to Pulham, an' examine the airship for yourselves."

Handforth said no more, but his companions could easily see that he was inwardly excited. And as soon as the meal was over, Church and McClure dragged him into a quiet corner of the lounge hall, and dumped him into an angle-nook.

"Now, you ass!" said Church grimly. "What crazy idea have you got hold of? Out with it, Handy!"

"Come on, old man—you can't spoof us!" added McClure.

Handforth looked at them coldly.

"Crazy idea, eh?" he snapped. "You fat-heads, I've a brain-wave—the greatest and most marvellous idea of the year!"

Church nodded.

"That's easily possible!" he agreed. "The year's only fourteen hours old, so far!"

"It's the greatest idea that'll be thought of in a century!" retorted Handforth, suddenly becoming cool. "Do you realise that we've got a month to waste? St. Frank's is closed until the end of January, my lads! No school!"

"We know that!"

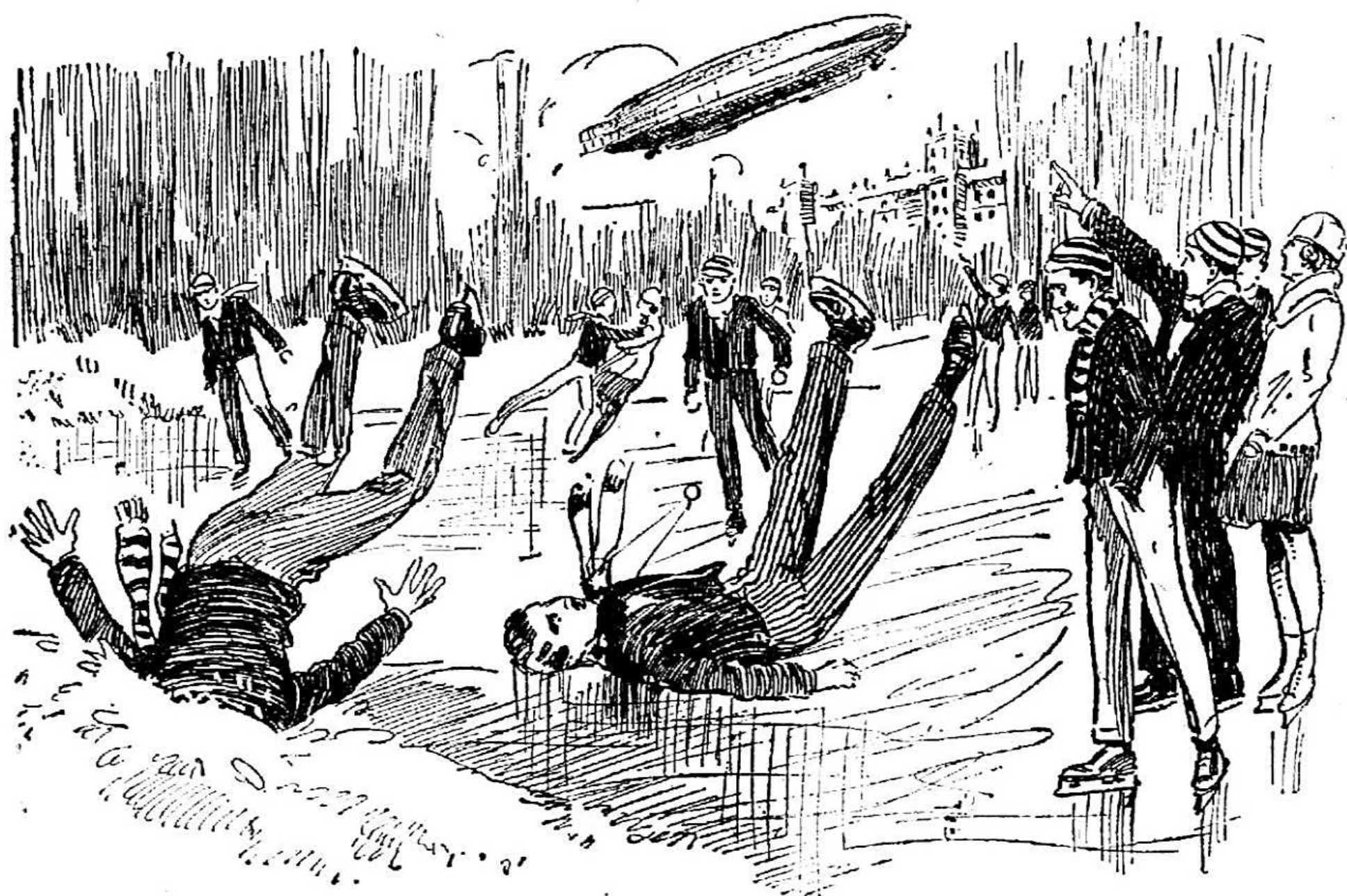
"And this rescue trip of Dorrie's will only take a month."

"Yes, but—"

"Therefore, why not go with Dorrie?" asked Handforth triumphantly.

"Who—we three?"

"No—all of us!" replied Handforth. "Nipper and Pitt and the girls and everybody! We shall be back within the month."



Attracted by the unusual sight of an airship, Archie failed to see Handy dashing towards him at full speed. The next second Archie was sent skidding over the ice on his back and Handy pitched headlong into a heap of snow. "Won't you do that again, old man?" asked Willy politely. "I didn't see all of it that time!"

and everything will be all serene! Isn't that a terrific idea? Why not go with Dorrie?"

His chums were not madly excited.

"I can think of a hundred reasons, but one's good enough," retorted McClure tartly. "Dorrie won't take us!"

"Then we've got to make him!" snapped Handforth aggressively. "Think of it! Accommodation for fifty passengers, and hardly anybody to go! All those cabins empty! Why, it's a sin and a shame!"

"But Dorrie told us we couldn't go——"

"That was before he heard the news about the extra fortnight's vac," argued Handforth. "That'll make all the difference. I'm going to put it to the chaps and the girls, and we'll hear what they say."

The chaps and the girls were easily found—out in the winter sunshine, in a large group on the terrace. To Handforth's dismay, he found that they had all thought of that brain-wave, quite independently.

"That's stale, old man," said Dick Hamilton gently, as Handforth blurted out his great scheme. "We've been talking about it for ten minutes. Why shouldn't we go? Both the guv'nor and Dorrie have the utmost faith in the airship, they reckon to be back in a month, and there's plenty of room for all of us."

"We're only just over twenty, including us girls," said Irene, nodding.

"Exactly!" said Handforth breathlessly. "That means there'll still be plenty of room

to spare. It's an absolute crime to let those cabins remain empty! My idea is to put it to Dorrie in such a way that he can't possibly refuse."

"It's a bright notion, old man, but it's late in the day," sighed Reggie Pitt. "We've just been talking to Dorrie, and he can only talk about the dangers of the Arctic, and the peril of the air!"

"Disgusting!" said Tommy Watson indignantly.

"Of course, he doesn't mean a word of it!" said Doris, her dark eyes full of wrath. "It was only a game to put us off! He was particularly cruel when he spoke about us girls. He wanted to know what we were thinking about, if you please! How dare we ask to join in a trip that might be a bit dangerous!"

Pitt chuckled.

"You mustn't believe him, Doris," he replied. "I'll bet he's full of admiration at the plucky spirit of you girls——"

"Plucky spirit—fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mary Summers. "It's only an adventure—a ripping bit of excitement. How can there be anything plucky in going up in that wonderful airship?"

"I'm going to speak to him!" declared Handforth grimly.

He went indoors, and found Lord Dorriamore talking with Nelson Lee.

"I agree with everythin', old man!" said his lordship, before Handforth could utter a word. "You can prove why you should all

come, eh? You know exactly why I should agree to it? Absolutely! But it'll save a lot of trouble, an' a lot of breath, if I put my foot down at once, an' say it's impossible."

"But—but—" began Handforth helplessly.

"As things stand at present, I've fixed Wednesday as sailin' day," continued Dorrie calmly. "But you'll all come over to Pulham early on Tuesday mornin', an' I'll escort you over the ship, an' show you all the gadgets. Isn't that kind an' generous of me?"

But Edward Oswald Handforth was too disappointed to make any comment. He wandered away with a wild, set expression in his eyes. Lord Dorrimore's tone had been final—but the obstinate Handforth had never been known to take "no" for an answer—and he wasn't going to take it now!



CHAPTER 4.

ON BOARD THE "TITAN."

CHURCH dashed out of bed, raced to the window, and pulled up the blind with frantic energy. He took one look out at the early morning, and yelled.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "Sunshine—and not a cloud!"

"Good egg!" ejaculated McClure delightedly.

Very seldom, indeed, had they torn themselves out of bed with such alacrity on a winter's morning, when there was no rising-bell or no compulsion. But this was Tuesday morning—and only a little after dawn. They were to motor over to the great airship station at Pulham, and see Lord Dorrimore's wonderful airship at close quarters. On the morrow she would be sailing—but the majority of the boys and girls had got over their first excitement by now.

The week-end had given them a chance to simmer down, and they were thankful for small mercies. It would be something, at all events, to be allowed the honour of going over the Titan—as she was called—before she sailed.

Dick Hamilton was grievously disappointed, and he had said a few strong things to his "guv'nor." However, Nelson Lee had survived them, and had advised Dick to remember that it would be most unfair to all the others if he alone were permitted to go. And Nipper, being a sensible fellow, had realised the truth of this statement.

But Handforth was as determined as ever.

Some of the others had noticed a subtle difference in him during the week-end. There was that strange glint in his eye—and a certain mysterious alteration in his manner. But they knew him of old, and took no notice.

This morning he took his chums into the secret.

"What on earth's the matter with you, Handy?" demanded Church, as he dressed. "When are you going to drop this mysterious attitude of yours? You remind me of a giddy conspirator—like Guy Fawkes, and his gunpowder plot!"

Handforth frowned.

"This isn't a gunpowder plot—it's something a bit more important than that, I should hope!" he said scornfully. "The other chaps have resigned themselves to being left behind, haven't they? Well, they can do as they please—but I shall have something to say to-day!"

"Will that be something new?" asked Mac tartly.

"I'm going on this trip, you ass!" snapped Handforth. "Yes, you can stare! I'm going—and if you've got any sense, you'll back me up!"

"My poor, hopeless lunatic!" said Church tenderly. "Is this what you've been looking so soppy about?"

"Soppy!" roared Handforth.

"Yes, soppy!" snapped Church indignantly. "So you've made up your mind to go to the North Pole, have you?"

"What does it matter which pole?" put in McClure. "And why does he want to go to it? He's there all the time—at the very top!"

Handforth started.

"Are you suggesting that I'm up the pole?" he demanded grimly.

"It wasn't a suggestion—it was a statement!" replied McClure deliberately. "Handy, you're mad! If Dorrie says that we can't go on this trip, we can't! There's an end of it! Why can't you accept—"

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Handforth icily. "Not so fast, my lad! Have you ever heard of such a thing as French leave?"

"Eh?"

"Dorrie may forbid us to go on this trip—but what about taking French leave?" went on Handforth breathlessly. "There you are, my sons—that's my idea! We'll go as stowaways! How's that?"

"Stowaways?" gurgled Church.

"Yes!"

"You—you don't mean— Ha, ha, ha!"

His chums found further conversation impossible. They sank back upon their beds, and yelled with laughter. And Handforth, after gazing at them with cold anger for a moment or two, rushed to the attack. They recovered with remarkable speed, and dodged into safety.

"Oh, Handy!" breathed Church at last. "What a scream you are, old man! Fancy stowing away on an airship! How big do you think it is—about twice the size of the Wanderer?"

"The Wanderer's a midget compared to the Titan!" retorted Handforth.

"Very likely—in bulk," said Church. "But one's a steam-yacht, and the other's an airship. It would be difficult enough to sneak on a ship as a stowaway—but do you realise

that the passenger accommodation on a dirigible is necessarily cramped? And do you realise that in order to sneak on board you've got to climb to the top of the mooring mast, pass all sorts of sentries, and then get into the airship through a passage in the nose, and——"

"Great pip!" gasped Handforth, turning pale. "I—I'd forgotten that!"

"Then it's a good thing I reminded you," said Church tartly. "You can't steal aboard an airship, over a gangway, or creep through a porthole! She's swinging on that mooring-mast, hundreds of feet from the ground."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"There's another way!" he said suddenly. "We're going over the airship to-day, aren't we? Well, when the time comes for us to come off, we'll stop behind—under the saloon table, or somewhere like that."

McClure looked excited.

"By Jupiter!" he said. "That's a brainy idea!"

"Wonderful!" agreed Church, staring. "You've hit it, Handy!"

And Edward Oswald beamed. He hadn't noticed an exchange of winks between his two chums. And they did not point out that they were liable to be missed after the visiting party had got to the ground. It saved quite a lot of argument to let him retain his dreams.

But there was no doubt that he actually meant it—and his sole thoughts, now, were centred upon going on the trip. To this end he stuffed his pockets with spare collars and ties, and even concealed two clean shirts and a set of underwear beneath his waistcoat, wrapped round him like bandages. One or two fellows noticed his bulky appearance when he came down, but he made some vague remark about the sharp frost, and the necessity of wrapping up well.

And so they started off.

General Handforth maintained quite a fleet of cars at the Towers, and four of them were sufficient to carry the whole party. They went into North Walsham, and on through Coltishall to Norwich, en route for Pulham. The journey would not take them much more than an hour.

"Let's hope it's as fine as this to-morrow, Dorrie," said Dick Hamilton, who was in the leading car with Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee. "There couldn't be better weather for the start."

"I think we shall be lucky," said the sporting peer. "The glass is set, an' there's every indication of a continuation of this cloudless weather. To my mind, it's a good augury, Lee, old man."

"Yes, it seems so," agreed Nelson Lee.

Pulham was reached without incident, and there were many necks craned from the windows of the cars as the visitors stared up at the great bulk of the Titan as she swung easily and gracefully from the tower-like mooring-mast.

The airship was wonderfully designed, with

the entire passenger quarters incorporated in the long, cylindrical body. So, too, was the navigation-room. Only the engines were housed in isolated gondolas.

The young people felt rather a pang of disappointment, however, when they saw only one or two men about. There was no bustle here—no active preparations for departure. It would probably be very different on the morrow, when the actual start was made.

"We shall have to come, of course," said Irene Manners firmly. "We're not going to let Dorrie go off without waving him good-bye!—I almost wish he had planned to go to-day, and then it would be all over."

"Yes," growled Reggie Pitt. "This is only prolonging the agony."

"Oh, look!" put in Doris. "Isn't that Browne over there?"

"The one and only Napoleon!" grinned Willy Handforth, nodding. "I spotted him a second ago. Stevens, too! And I'm jiggered if Boots and Christine of the Fourth aren't with 'em!"

The Towers guests crowded round the quartette. William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, was smiling with all his usual benevolence.

"Peace, brothers—peace, sisters!" he beamed. "I can well understand the overwhelming delight which fills you at unexpectedly encountering me. But let me urge you to keep calm."

"Who said we're delighted?" demanded Handforth tartly.

"There are some things," replied Browne gracefully, "which one takes for granted. Need I look twice at the eager grins of these brothers of the Remove? Need I take a second glance into the merry, dancing eyes of these sweet young ladies? I think I need!" he added. "For, when it comes to a matter of merry, dancing eyes, I must frankly confess I am susceptible."

"I think you're a bit touched," said Handforth coldly.

But Browne was only indulging in his usual banter, and the Remove fellows and the girls were glad to see him. It appeared that he and the other three were staying near Norwich, and they had come over, at Dorrie's invitation, to go over the airship, too. They had met him on the Sunday, or earlier, while he had been motoring through to the aerodrome.

"You must remember, brothers, that this is an auspicious occasion," said Browne. "We cannot allow the Fifth to be unrepresented."

"Or the Fourth, either," said Buster Boots, nodding. "Well, they seem to be getting ready round that mooring-mast. I suppose we shall go up in batches, eh? Let's dash there, and be in the first lot."

It was soon learned, however, that they were all to go on at once, for Lord Dorrimore had no fear of the passenger quarters being overcrowded. This airship had been built to carry over fifty—with comfort. So all the visitors could easily do their sight-seeing at

once. Besides, Dorrie had a little surprise in store—one which necessitated them all being on board at once.

"The fact is," he beamed, "I'm giving a little early luncheon in the dining-saloon. I want you to see how rippin' everything is. We'll pretend that we're really goin', and the stewards will take you to your cabins as though you had just come on board for a real trip. Let's have a bit of a lark."

And the visitors entered whole-heartedly into the scheme.

It was quite an exciting adventure, going up the inside of the mooring-mast, so many feet from the ground. They had imagined that it would be necessary to walk up endless steps, but there was a lift. And, at the top, a platform from which they could see far across the snow-bound countryside. And there was the airship—now looking startlingly big at such close quarters. A gangway was in position, leading from the platform into a neat doorway in the vessel's nose. And, above, the great attachment by which she was secured to the mast. There was scarcely a movement on the airship, for the breeze was very light.

And so they went in, just as though they were starting off on a real voyage. They went down a long corridor, near the end of which was a stairway, leading down into the navigation room. But this was not their domain. They went straight on into the body of the ship.

And there was a fresh thrill at every moment. For they came upon an imposing staircase—almost like that of a sea-going liner. And then they were in one of the lounges, with the saloon leading off, the tables already set for a meal. Further along were the cabins—neat, compact little state-rooms, exquisitely furnished with the lightest possible fixtures, but sturdy enough for all ordinary purposes. There were windows which looked directly out over the ground. Overhead was the enormous body of the vessel, but it in no way obstructed the view.

"It's amazing!" declared Irene Manners breathlessly.

"And we're not going!" groaned Mary Summers.

"Listen!" shouted Fullwood suddenly.

A low droning came to their ears. And the floor upon which they stood began to quiver slightly. They rushed to the window, and Doris caught a glimpse of the mooring-mast.

"We've broken away!" she cried. "Oh, Lord Dorrimore is taking us for a trip!"



CHAPTER 5.

DORRIE SPRINGS ANOTHER LITTLE SURPRISE!

LORD DORRIMORE was chuckling when a crowd of fellows came running up to him in the dining saloon. The great airship was swinging round now, and she had risen

so far that the mooring-mast could be seen far below, looking almost ridiculous from such an angle. The gigantic airship sheds had become strangely dwarfed, too.

"You old spoofer!" shouted Dick Hamilton, giving Dorrie a thump in the chest.

"Hi, steady!" gasped his lordship. "Just one of my little surprises!"

"Yes, I know!" said Reggie Pitt. "You're giving us a trip round, sir? I say, are you going to take us to Handforth Towers? It'll be fine to circle round, and——"

"Yes, I think we shall go right over the Towers," nodded Lord Dorrimore. "But we shan't do any circlin' round, young 'uns. The idea is to continue northwards, have a look at Scotland as we go, an' then carry on into the bleak an' frozen North!"

"You're only kidding, sir!" shouted somebody.

Dorrie sighed.

"That's all the reward I get!" he said sadly. "I planned this little surprise packet, an' nobody believes me!"

"But you're not sailing until to-morrow, sir!" protested Fullwood.

"That's rummy!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I thought we'd sailed already!" He chuckled, and looked round. "Fact, all of you!" he added drily. "This isn't just a joy-ride over Norfolk, but the actual start of the real trip!"

"And—and you're taking us with you?" shouted Nipper.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" grinned Dorrie.

"Oh, guv'nor!" said Dick, glancing at Nelson Lee. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Strict orders from Dorrie," smiled Lee. "He wouldn't let me!"

"Of course not," said his lordship. "When I plan a little surprise, I like to do it thoroughly. I'll bet this has taken some of the breath out of you, eh?"

Irene found her voice.

"But—but are we really going?" she cried, in alarm.

"Absolutely," nodded Dorrie. "You all pressed me so eagerly on Saturday that I thought you'd be pleased. An' I know that any kind of pleasure is the sweeter if it's unexpected. So here we are!"

Irene and the other girls were looking thoroughly startled.

"Oh, but—but it's too bad!" gasped Irene, in dismay.

"It's terrible!" said Doris, with equal alarm.

The juniors were so wild with delight that they could do nothing else but talk all at once. The fact which had knocked the girls almost sideways had not even occurred to the boys.

"You don't look particularly pleased," smiled Lord Dorrimore.

"But—but what about our things?" asked Doris, aghast.

"Things?"

"We can't wear anything but the clothes we're standing in!" burst out Irene. "We

didn't bring anything—not even an evening frock, or another pair of shoes! Whatever shall we do?"

"Surely you can manage for a month?" asked Dorrie mischievously.

"A month!" shrieked the girls.

"Well, say three weeks," amended Dorrie.

"It won't be much longer."

But they were still filled with utter consternation. The joys of the airship trip meant nothing to them in this dreadful moment. Being girls, they had promptly allowed their thoughts to flash to the one dreadful fact that they had come unprepared—without a stitch of clothing except that which they stood in.

"There's another thing!" said Irene. "Our people will nearly die of shock when they hear that we've been carried off—"

"That's good!" chuckled Dorrie. "Carried off! Once aboard the lugger, by gad! It's next door to kidnappin', isn't it?"

"Dorrie, you're a rascal!" said Nelson Lee severely. "Don't take any notice of him, girls—he's only teasing you. If you go into your cabins, you'll find as much clothing as you need—and all the other little things which you may require on a month's trip. I'm sure Lady Handforth knows all your little individual fancies, and she superintended the packing of your trunks, and they left the Towers early this morning. You were in such a hurry to get away that you never noticed the depleted conditions of your wardrobes. I may tell you that Lady Handforth and her maids were up nearly all night—just to please Dorrie's little whim!"

Handforth's mater was hostess at the Towers for the Christmas holidays, General Handforth being a bachelor.

The girls' expressions changed.

"Oh, then—then we're all right?" asked Irene breathlessly.

"As far as I know, you're all fixed up—the boys included," smiled Lord Dorrimore. "I wrote to all your people individually on Sunday, and got sheaves of telegrams on Monday, so that there's nothing to worry about. All your people know where you are, and they've all given permission. I thought it better to arrange everythin' on the quiet, so that it would come as a nice little gift from the gods."

"Good old Dorrie!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're off to the North Pole!" roared Handforth. "Three cheers for Dorrie!"

"Steady—steady!" interrupted his lordship. "Not so fast, Handy! I didn't say you were goin' to the Pole, did I? Oh, no! I couldn't expect your parents to agree to a proposition like that!"

Handforth looked dismayed, and the others ceased their excited talk, too.

"Then where are we going, sir?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Well, I think you know the good old Wanderer, don't you?" asked Lord Dorrimore. "She's lyin' at the farthest possible point North, an' I'm going to use her as a base. We shall fly straight to the yacht, an'

then you'll all occupy your usual state-rooms, an' have a good time."

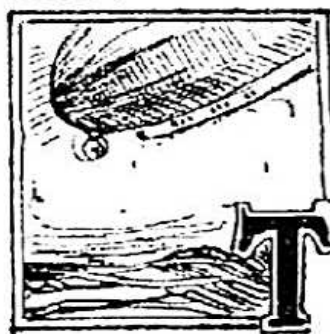
"But—but how can you transfer us to the Wanderer?"

"Easy," smiled his lordship. "You see, I've had a special mooring-mast rigged up, an' we shall simply hitch on, an' you'll all disembark. Good glory! You mustn't expect that you're goin' to the North Pole! Isn't there any end to your greed, you young beggars?"

But the juniors were thoroughly satisfied—and so were the girls, particularly after they had rushed to their state-rooms, and had found an ample supply of their personal belongings.

They were going on the airship to Lord Dorrimore's base—the good old Wanderer—and they would be on the spot when the Titan came back from her various dashes.

So everything was quite satisfactory. Not a single member of that excited party dreamed of the startling events which lay in store!



CHAPTER 6.

NORTHWARD HO!

THE rest of that day was a long period of one thrill after another.

The airship had passed over Handforth Towers, and the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls had seen many waving hands. After all, this trip was not regarded as anything perilous. It wasn't much different to a short sea voyage, for the passengers would soon be on the Wanderer. If there were any perils to be encountered, they would only be risked by strong men.

The airship was as steady as a railway train. There was hardly the faintest suspicion of motion, and scarcely any vibration. She sailed steadily onwards, and life on board was very much like that of an ocean-going yacht.

From the windows, one could look straight down upon the ever-changing landscape, and although this was exciting enough for a while, Handforth's restless spirit soon grew rather bored. His brain was at work again—and in the same strain as before.

"What's that queer thing hanging down the port side, for'ard?" Church was asking, as he stood looking out of one of the saloon windows. "Do you see it, Handy?"

"It's one of the hitched-on aeroplanes, of course," said Handforth.

"No, I don't mean that," said Church. "This other thing—nearer."

"How should I know?" said Edward Oswald. "Look here, I've heard that Dorrie expects us to reach the Wanderer by about dawn to-morrow. He's going slowly all the way—in fact, at under half-speed—as the skipper doesn't mean to take any chances. Besides, it wouldn't be any good getting to the base before daylight, anyhow."

"But we needn't bother about that now," said McClure. "Come and have a look at

this thing hitched to the airship, Handy. It looks like a boat, but that's silly. It can't be a boat——"

"And why not?" inquired Lord Dorrimore, as he came to a halt near the window. "If it'll satisfy you in any way, young 'un, let me inform you that that object is a specially constructed motor-boat."

"But what's it for, sir?"

"To keep us afloat, in case we drop into the water!" said Dorrie solemnly. "You young ass! What do you think a motor-boat is for—except to ride in? I've come prepared for every emergency, an' that little craft might come in very handy in a tight corner. Not that we're expectin' any tight corners," he added, smiling. "This ship is safer than the old Wanderer."

He strolled off, and Handforth drew his chums away from the window.

"Come to the cabin," he said softly.

"What on earth for?"

"Because I tell you to!" retorted Handforth. "Any objections, my lads, and I'll punch you on the nose!"

So they humoured him, and went to the cabin.

"It's jolly decent of Dorrie to take us all as far as the base, and to dump us all on the Wanderer," said Handforth. "And it may satisfy some of the chaps. But it won't satisfy me."

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Church. "What's the trouble now?"

"There's no trouble, but we've started on this adventure, and we're going to carry right through with it," declared Handforth. "I'm trying to think of some way in which we can stow ourselves away—instead of going down to the yacht with the rest!"

"There's no satisfying some people," said McClure crossly. "You ought to be boiled, Handy! Dorrie acts like a brick, and he gives us a whacking great surprise, and even that's not enough for you!"

Edward Oswald waved his hand.

"We've got to be on the spot when Dr. Hammerton Powell is rescued," declared Handforth firmly. "Don't you realise, you chumps, that I'm going to write up a whole record of this trip? And how can I make it complete without including a description of the actual rescue scene?"

"Oh, all right," said Church promptly. "If you want to stow yourself away, go ahead and do it. Mac and I know when we're well off, and we're not going to take a hand in this rot!"

"Not likely!" agreed McClure.

They went out, and left Handforth alone. There were times when his little ways palled upon them. And it was certainly thick to suggest stowing themselves away, after Dorrie had been so jolly decent.

When darkness came, they had lost sight of the earth for some little time, owing to ground mists. Or perhaps they had been over the sea—none of the juniors could tell. And now there were electric lights gleaming everywhere, and one had the impression,

more convincing than ever, of being aboard ship.

The saloon and the lounges were warmed, and extremely cosy. There were magazines to read, and there was even the wireless to listen to—for there were several loud-speakers installed, and it was easily possible to pick up 2-LO, 5-XX, or almost any other station.

And dinner was served exactly as though they were on solid earth, instead of cruising through the night sky at a height of seven or eight thousand feet—where the temperature was below zero. Without any question, this airship was the last word in scientific construction.

As the Titan was expected to reach her base soon after dawn, all the guests were advised to get to bed early—as, of course, they would be required to be all ready for disembarkation, together with their belongings.

"Why, it's hardly a trip at all!" said Reggie Pitt, with a grin, as they prepared to retire. "Before we know where we are, we shall have travelled right up into the Arctic region, and we shall be on the Wanderer. It's pretty marvellous, when you come to think of it."

"By Jove, rather!"

They were all ready for bed, although there was too much general excitement for sleep. A rumour had got round, too, that the wind had strengthened considerably, and that they were actually fighting a minor gale. But there was no difference in the going of the great airship, except for an occasional quiver, and perhaps a little downwards dip, which caused a queer sensation in the pit of the stomach.

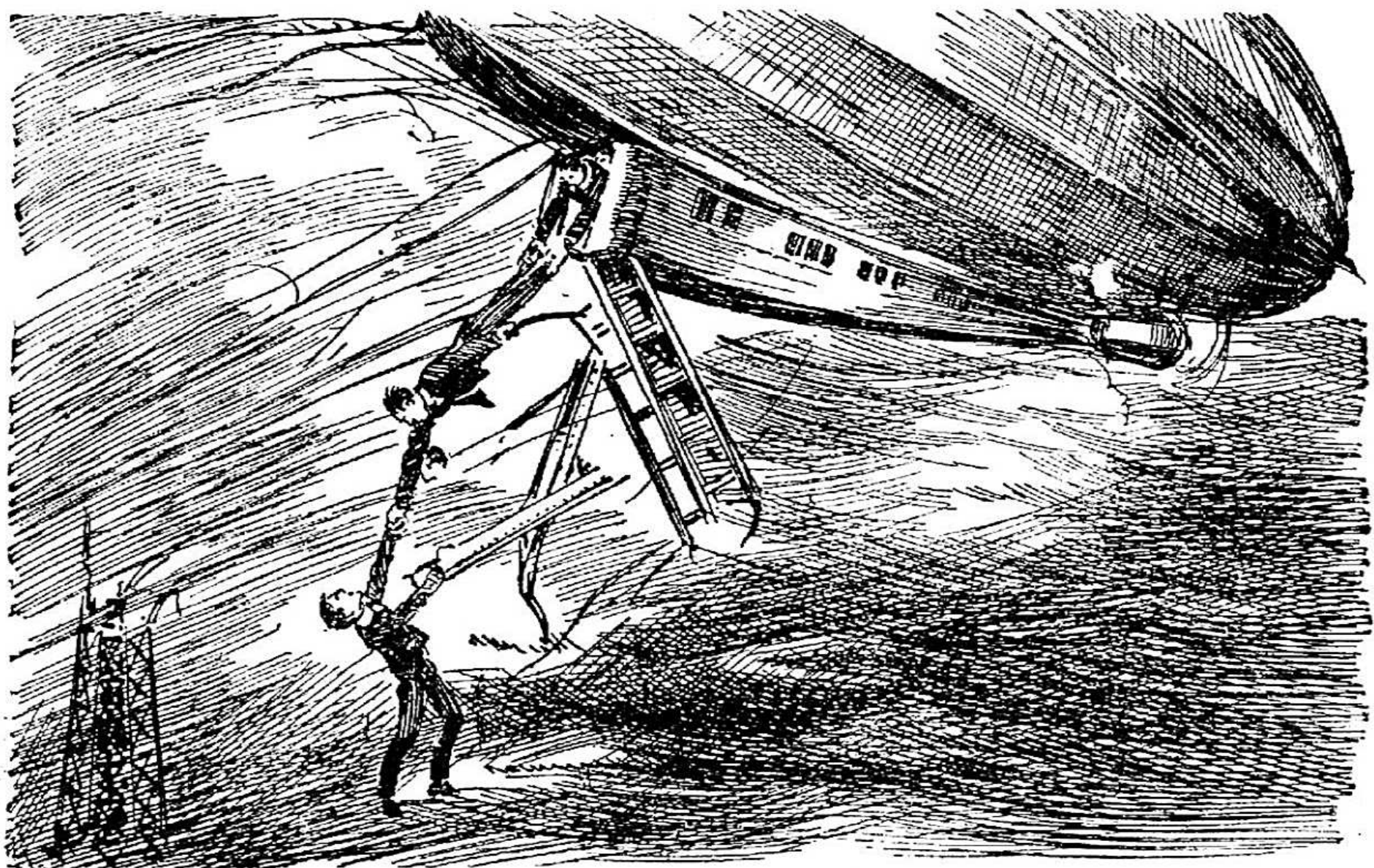
Lord Dorrimore, having seen all the young people off to bed, mounted the main stairway, and passed along the corridor which led up and down the whole length of the vessel. It was electrically lit all the way, and somewhat resembled a Tube subway, only much smaller. It went right into the distance, and even Dorrie had to pause and pucker his lips.

"Gad!" he muttered. "When will they come to an end in these things? It seems half a mile to the end of this passage—an' yet here we are, thousands of feet up in the air, swingin' merrily on against a young hurricane!"

He walked on, and after quite a lot of exercise, he arrived at the navigation room, in the very front of the great vessel. He descended a narrow staircase, and found himself in a little wonderland which the juniors had not yet seen.

The control room was quite big—and Captain Waring, one of the most skilled airship pilots in Great Britain, was at the wheel. Another officer was watching the instruments, and was in constant telephonic communication with the engineers in the far-off gondolas.

"Hallo, Lord Dorrimore," said the skipper, glancing round. "Everything trim for the night?"



Handforth grabbed the Remove skipper's wrist and hung on. Handy's feet were dangling in mid-air and he was swung to and fro as the runaway airship went hurtling before the storm—then his school-chum began to haul him back.

"Yes, the officer has just been round, an' I think all's well," smiled Dorrie. "How are we goin'? Shall we hitch on at dawn, do you think?"

Captain Waring, who was a man of about forty, stroked his chin as he glanced at a fearsome assortment of dials.

"I'm not so sure," he replied. "The weather's not what it was, sir. We're hitting a nasty cross-wind just now, and we're already several points off our course. Once the wind gets strong enough, you know, we can't do anything else but go a bit astray. Still, there's nothing to worry about. We're doing fine, on the whole—although our speed is much less."

Lord Dorrimore glanced at the dials.

"What's this?" he asked. "This indicator pointing to 27? That's not our speed, is it?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"But, hang it, aren't the engines workin' properly?"

"Not a trace of a misfire," smiled Captain Waring. "But when we're heading into a forty-mile-an-hour gale, it just takes forty miles an hour off our speed. Every yard we travel, we're forcing our way against the wind. She's behaving beautifully, sir—never piloted a steadier craft. You can sleep comfortably."

And Dorrie took the skipper at his word, and when he went off to his own state-room he tumbled into bed and went off to sleep without the slightest qualm. He was justified, too, and he did not awaken until a steward brought his tea in the morning. It was day-

light, and the airship was forging on her course, although no higher than a thousand feet.

"It's some time after dawn, isn't it?" asked Dorrie.

"Over three hours, my lord," replied the steward. "We're having a bit of a fight against the gale, it seems. Steady, sir! Can't take any chances with a teacup just now!"

Dorrie had placed it on the bed, but the next moment it tipped over, and crashed to the floor. The Titan, with a sideways lurch, had dipped downwards in a giddy swerve, only to right herself during the next instant.

"By the Lord Harry!" said Dorrie. "She's gettin' tricky!"

"Been like that this last three hours, my lord," said the steward.

And when Dorrie turned out, he found everybody else up, and lining the saloon windows. Staring down upon the sea, they were interested in the curling foam, and the big waves. The air, too, was filled with the whistling of the gale. It was apparent to everybody that the airship was battling valiantly.

"How's everybody?" asked his lordship genially. "Any cases of sickness?"

"No fear, sir!" went up a chorus.

"Anybody getting windy?"

There was a general laugh at this question, for the thought of danger had not occurred to anybody. Was it not a fact that this airship had been constructed to battle against any gale that could possibly blow? Most of the passengers, indeed, were enjoy-

ing the fight. It was more interesting than a cruise through still air.

Some of them were rather disappointed. They felt that it was a swindle to fly so close to the sea, when there were heavy banks of clouds overhead. How much better it would be to go right up into the upper air, and to look down upon the sunlit clouds.

But there was a reason for the skipper's move.

"There's land over there, sir!" shouted one of the juniors, pointing. "Yes, by jingo, and there's a ship anchored in that bleak-looking bay."

Dorrie pulled out a pocket telescope and levelled it.

"Thought so!" he said with satisfaction. "The Wanderer! We shall just have time for breakfast, an' then we shall have to hitch on!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Wanderer!"

"We're not so very late, after all," said Dick Hamilton. "Will you make any flight to-day, Dorrie?"

"I don't think so," replied his lordship. "I just had a word with one of the navigation officers, an' it seems that the weather is gettin' a bit dirty. So we shall probably hook up the old gas-bag, an' wait for clearer conditions."

"Still, she's done wonders, sir."

"You're right, Nipper—she has," said Dorrie. "Still, we can't expect too much of her, you know—and there'll be no sense in startin' off in a smother like this. We need clear weather for our job, if we're goin' to spot poor old Powell an' his aeroplane."

"I suppose the weather will be worse further north?"

"That's what the captain says, anyhow," nodded Dorrie. "Well, let's hustle over breakfast—we don't want to be ordered out before the meal's half over."

And everybody sat down in the dining saloon, and the Titan, at reduced speed, and dropping lower and lower, headed for her temporary mooring-mast.



CHAPTER 7.

DISASTER!

ALTHOUGH the breakfast-table was the scene of light chatter and laughter, everybody felt that there was a certain tension in the air. Nobody said anything, but there were very few who missed that sensation of thrilling uncertainty.

For the great airship was now fighting hard—making attempt after attempt to secure a hold on the mooring-mast. Again and again, the St. Frank's fellows had caught a glimpse of the Wanderer just below. Again and again the airship had manœuvred for posi-

tion, only to be forced out of it again by the caprice of the gale.

It was snowing now, too—enormous flurries sweeping down and blotting out everything.

It seemed that the wind had veered round, too—and was increasing in violence with every minute that passed. But there was not the slightest feeling of apprehension. It was only like a sea-going vessel, attempting to force her way into harbour against an unfavourable sea.

And then, at last, came a complete change.

The vibration in the saloon ceased, but the rocking of the airship increased—until, indeed, it was getting difficult to keep one's cup and saucer from falling off the table.

"What's happened now?" asked Church, rather fearfully.

"Engines have stopped!" murmured Handforth.

"Do you think there's anything wrong?" asked Irene steadily. "Oh, but that's impossible! I don't believe for a minute——"

One of the airship officers appeared, and saluted Lord Dorrimore.

"Everything ready, sir," he announced.

"We're on the hook!"

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "I don't mind admittin' I was scared stiff!"

The young officer grinned.

"We've had worse tussles at Pulham, sir," he said calmly. "It was a bit more difficult here, though, on account of the mast being unstable. The yacht is rocking a bit, and it was tricky work for a few minutes."

"Then we're all right?" asked a dozen eager voices.

"Right as ninepence!" smiled Dorrie. "An' this is where we disembark."

"It's pretty wonderful how they managed to get her hooked up," said Handforth.

He seemed to have an idea that the airship had pushed her nose against the mooring-mast, and had engaged an enormous hook into a correspondingly big "eye." In reality, of course, the Titan had dropped cables, and these had been secured, the airship being hauled into her anchorage by steam winches.

Church and McClure haunted their leader like a shadow during the next five minutes—for they had no intention of allowing him to play the part of stowaway. In fact, they dropped a hint to Dick Hamilton and one or two of the others that Handy was inclined to be obstinate, and the unfortunate Edward Oswald had no chance whatever of putting his plan into execution—if, indeed, he had ever formed any actual plan.

Perhaps he had abandoned it on hearing that the airship was to remain at her anchorage all day. That meant that Lord Dorrimore and all the others would spend their time in the yacht, so there wouldn't be much fun in staying behind in the airship entirely on his own.

"You boys had better lead the way," said Nelson Lee briskly, as they all crowded round the main saloon. "It'll be pretty cold out-

side, so you've got to wrap up well. Go straight below, is my advice."

"An' good advice, too," said Dorrie. "It's snowin' like old boots, an' I don't think you'll be particularly charmed with the temperature. But you asked for this cheery little trip, an' you've got it!"

"Why, it's wonderful, sir!" declared Pitt.

So a move was made without any further delay.

"You first, Handy!" said Dick Hamilton politely. "You shall have the place of honour, and be the first to go down the mooring-mast.

Handforth beamed.

"Good man!" he said. "Glad you realise my importance!"

Dick grinned as Handforth turned his back. The idea, of course, was to see Edward Oswald safely off the airship, so that he couldn't get up to any of his little tricks. And they went along the interior gangway, and at last reached the doorway in the nose. It was open, and a bitterly cold wind was shooting straight in—for the airship, swinging at her moorings, was directly facing the powerful gale.

"By George, it's a wind all right!" gasped Handforth, as it caught him between the teeth.

He could see two or three of the yacht's officers standing on the platform at the top of the mast, ready to receive the passengers as they came off. It was not such a high mast as that at Pulham, of course, but it was of very much the same design, except that the platform was exposed, and that there was no lift. Above the platform rose the steel girders, which finished in a point—the airship's nose being drawn up close.

As Handforth hesitated in the doorway a great flurry of wind came shooting down, and the Titan swung sideways, and her whole enormous body quivered. She slewed round, and at the same moment there came a series of startling metallic cracks from the mast. The officers on the platform stared upwards, aghast.

"Go on, Handy!" said one of the other fellows. "Afraid to cross the gangway?"

"You hopeless ass!" roared Handforth.

He strode out of the airship, and at that very moment the disaster took place.

It seem to Handforth that the gangway beneath him—the only thing which joined the airship to the mooring-mast—was smashing to splinters. A girder of heavy metal swung down, and narrowly missed him. He caught hold of it, hardly knowing why he did so. But that very action saved his life.

For the gangway dropped away from under him, and he was left hanging in mid-air. Dick Hamilton, standing in the open doorway, felt his heart nearly stop beating.

"Handy!" he gasped, in horror.

But there was no time for him to take any action. As the great airship swung round again, hit by another squall, the entire top of the mooring-mast came away with a series

of reports like gunfire. The platform was mercifully left intact, although the Wanderer's men had an extraordinary escape. The airship drifted away, borne with terrific speed by the gale.

The cable sang madly, and then snapped with a truly fearsome sound. The wreckage of the mast-top was hanging down, held by the loose cables. And to one of the broken girders Handforth was clinging!

He swung there, with death at close quarters.

The topmost girders had broken away from the mast, and were still attached to the nose of the airship—with Handforth in deadly peril. At any moment he might be jolted off—to fall into that icy sea, from which there could be no rescue!



CHAPTER 8.

ADrift!

DICK HAMILTON gave no thought whatever to the airship's plight, or to any possible danger to himself. Edward Oswald Handforth

was just below him—clinging to that swaying girder! He turned, and found Church and McClure near him, their faces as pale as chalk.

"Quick!" he shouted. "Hold my feet!"

"But Handy—he—he dropped——" began Church.

"He didn't!" roared Nipper. "He's just below here—but he can't last for more than a minute in this cold! Hold my feet, I tell you!"

"Oh!" muttered Church, with a choke in his throat.

Dick flung himself full length, and while the other juniors eagerly clutched his feet, and held on for dear life, Dick swung face downwards from that doorway in the airship's nose.

Handforth was below him, swinging about madly.

"Catch hold!" gasped Dick. "Handy! Grab!"

And Handforth, who knew that this was his only chance of life, released one hand from the broken girder, and caught at the Remove skipper's wrist. He held tight, and a moment later he was holding with both hands.

"Up!" shouted Dick Hamilton. "Steady, you chaps—pull!"

Even now the peril was still deadly, for those broken girders were swinging to and fro in the most alarming manner—crashing into the airship's nose, rending the fabric, and doing other damage.

And, from somewhere far astern, something else had happened during this minute of tense peril. Nobody knew what it was, but they had heard a splintering crash, and they felt certain that some further disaster had

happened. As a matter of fact, the great airship, swung helplessly round at the moment of the accident, had collided with the mooring-mast. With engines silent, she had been unprepared for any manœuvring. And the gale was veering round from one point of the compass to another with bewildering rapidity. The mooring-mast had not only shattered the propellers of the starboard engine gondola, but had half demolished the gondola itself. By amazing luck the engineers had already left it, as their work was over.

Handforth was gradually hauled up into safety. As Dick Hamilton was dragged higher and higher, Reggie Pitt and one or two other juniors crowded in the doorway and bent over—hardly realising the dreadful peril they ran. A sudden lurch, and they would pitch out to certain death.

But pluck won in the end, and Handforth found himself in that rocking subway, and somebody had sufficient presence of mind to close the door, and to push over the locking catch.

"Handy!" breathed McClure. "We—we thought——"

"Never mind what you thought!" panted Handforth. "By George! What about me? What about what I thought? Nipper, old man, put it there!"

He gave Dick Hamilton's hand a warm clasp.

"That's all right, Handy!" said Dick, smiling.

"You saved my life——" began Handforth huskily.

"Don't be an ass!" growled Dick. "What else do you think I could do, when I saw you flopping about down there, like a spider clinging to a twig? Handy, old man, I thought it was all up with you."

"Quick!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "Let's rush him back amidships! We want to find out what's been happening! Most of the others have gone back already——"

"Look out!" yelled somebody.

From close quarters there had come a shrieking of rending metal, and they hardly knew what to expect. It was that debris, hanging loose at the nose, crashing against the airship's girders and fabric.

With all speed, they raced down the long subway, and hurried down the staircase into the saloon. There was a rush for the windows, but nothing could be seen but thick mists. The entire airship was surrounded by an impenetrable fog, and she was tossing about to the accompaniment of creaking metal and straining woodwork. The air was filled with the noises of her torture.

"We're in the clouds!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, who was looking anxious. "The captain, I think, has succeeded in getting us several thousand feet high, but we're still adrift. Handforth, I am glad to see you alive! I hear that you were——"

"That's all right, sir," said Handforth shakily. "Only a bit of a mess up for a

minute. Nipper pulled me back! By George, he's a brick!"

"Do you know exactly what's happened, sir?" asked Nipper quietly.

For a moment Lee hesitated.

"There is no reason why I should withhold the truth," he said at length. "The mooring-mast broke, and the gale swung us round. As you know, our engines were all still. For it was assumed that the ship was safely anchored. I don't know for certain, but I believe the starboard gondola has not only been smashed, but I fear she has torn adrift, and has damaged two of the aft balloonettes."

"That's lively, sir," said Dick seriously.

He looked out of the window, and knew that they were all in deadly peril. And this thing had come so suddenly—so unexpectedly. Five minutes earlier, there had been no hint of danger, with plenty of laughter and gaiety. And now—— They were adrift—crippled.

And then Lord Dorrimore burst into the main saloon, his face aflame.

"The starboard gondola has gone!" he shouted, his voice quivering with uncontrolled fury. "Heaven knows what damage was caused before she fell off——"

"But what about the engineers?" cried Irene, in horror.

"They're safe!" shouted Lord Dorrimore. "But, by all the saints, somebody shall suffer for this! Where are the fools who are responsible for that flaw in the mooring-mast? By Heaven, I'll prosecute them——"

"Don't Dorrie," muttered Lee. "What's the use?"

"I'm furious!" thundered his lordship. "There was no danger—the ship was in perfect control, and but for that bad workmanship, there would have been no disaster. By gad! How were we to know? These boys and girls? I promised—— And here, because of some faulty workmanship——"

"But it was the storm, Dorrie," put in Dick Hamilton.

"The storm be hanged!" said Lord Dorrimore savagely. "That mast was guaranteed to hold the ship in a tornado! A fine guarantee!" he added bitterly. "If I'd only known—if I'd only guessed——"

But Lee succeeded in calming him. Dorrie was one of the most genial persons alive—until he was aroused. It was only on very, very rare occasions that he gave way to any show of temper—and even then only under acute provocation.

"I know—I know!" he said at length. "It's no good rappin' on, Lee, old man. But think of it—after all the plans I'd made! Where are we now? Adrift in an Arctic blizzard—an' gettin' further and further northwards!"

"But we can't be, Dorrie!" put in Dick. "We've been coming northwards all night—and we were fighting against the gale——"

"It's veered round since then," interrupted Lord Dorrimore quietly. "That's the infernal

trick of it! We're driftin' in a north-westerly direction—further an' further into the Arctic Circle. Our only chance is to fight the storm, and to hobble back to civilisation."

He was silent, and nobody else felt like speaking just then.

They were all thinking the same thing—but in this hour of disaster they were calm and cool. Nobody gave way to panic. There were pale faces, and there were anxious eyes, but even the girls remained perfectly level-headed.

That the airship was in grave danger needed no telling.

The passengers could feel the violent throbbing beneath them, and they knew that her remaining engines were at work. But the balance of the whole craft was upset, and, in any case, with two of her most important engines crippled through the loss of that gondola, there was a fear that the others would be ineffective.

And what of the other damage?

It was soon reported that the wreckage at the nose had dropped clear, and was no longer a menace—but before falling adrift, it had torn the fabric, and one of the forward balloonettes was losing gas. And it seemed that the steering-gear was fouled, too.

The danger was indeed considerable.

"Upon my word, you've taught me a lesson in composure, young 'uns," said Dorrie, after a while, as he looked at the calm-faced boys and girls. "Here have I been gettin' frightfully excited, an' you look as though we were out for a morning's picnic!"

"It'll be a nice little picnic, sir!" said Pitt, with a grimace.

"Well, anyhow, keep a stiff upper lip—an' I'll run along to the navigation room, an' see what's doing," said his lordship briskly. "Don't be too worried—I don't suppose there's any actual danger. Our plans have gone west, of course, an' we may have to land in Russia, or Norway, or Canada, or somewhere! Goodness knows where we're driftin' for, to tell the truth!"

"Anyhow, we're still afloat—and that's something!" said Handforth.

"By jingo! Rather!"

Then followed an anxious wait. The passengers spoke very little, but they all had a feeling that something fresh might happen at any moment. And when something fresh did happen, it was hardly likely to be of a cheering character.

Umlosi was there, and his great frame seemed to be shrunken. His face was of a dirty greyish colour, and he was obviously terrified. While the girls were bravely composed, this great warrior of a hundred battles was visibly shivering in his shoes! Umlosi would fight a dozen men, and face death—of that sort—without a qualm. But this adventure in the air turned his blood to water.

"Wau, young masters!" he rumbled, as he found several of the juniors round him.

"Wau! I like it not!"

"If it comes to that, old chap, I think we all like it not!" said Dick drily.

"Are we not at the mercy of the great winds?" asked Umlosi. "Are we not as a feather in the storm, blowing hither and thither, and liable to descend into the cold and merciless seas? I would that N'Kose had abandoned this madness ere he started out! 'Twas indeed a folly!"

At that moment, Dorrie himself returned.

"Well, there's not much news, but what there is is cheerin'," he announced to the eager listeners. "The for'ard and port engines are workin' fine, and we're holdin' our own, more or less. We're risin', too—ten thousand feet already."

"Hurrah!"

"That's good, Dorrie!"

"We're maintainin' an even keel, an' there's apparently no loss of gas," continued his lordship. "So all we've got to do is to keep our spirits up, an' hope for the best."

"But are we actually beating the storm, Dorrie?" asked Nipper.

"Well, no," admitted his lordship. "To tell the honest truth, young 'un, we're driftin' deeper an' deeper into the Arctic wastes, an' there's every appearance that the blizzard will get worse."



CHAPTER 9.

THE UNCANNY LIGHT!

ORD DORRIMORE had a piece of other news, however, which was very welcome.

"Fortunately," he said, "the wireless hasn't been affected, and we're in communication with the Wanderer all the time."

"By George, that's good hearing!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly.

"We've told them that we're still safe, and that we're doin' our best to back against the storm," continued Dorrie. "They report that one man was hurt, but not very seriously. The top of the moorin'-mast is a wreck, an' the weather's getting worse."

It was good to hear that, in spite of their predicament, they were still in continuous communication with civilisation through the Wanderer. Somchow, it made them feel that things were not so bad. And by now, too, the Titan had settled down to a steady, plugging motion. Her officers and crew had got her under partial control, and were using every ounce of their skill and wits to save her and her passengers from destruction. Captain Waring was a man of varied experience, and none could be trusted better than he.

A change came after half an hour.

Everybody knew that the airship was racing along at a great speed—being blown almost sideways by the raging gale. Her engines were only serving to keep her steady, and to save her from getting com-

pletely out of control. With her steering gear damaged, and practically half her engine-power gone, she was at the mercy of the elements.

They were rapidly being blown further and further into the Arctic Circle, and as they went, the blizzard increased in violence. Lord Dorrmore was beginning to understand why the ill-fated Dr. Hammerton Powell had met with disaster. If he had encountered a storm like this, what chance would he have had—in an aeroplane? Be it never so large, it could not hope to fight such a cataclysm of the Arctic elements.

The change was not apparent in the motion of the great airship, but in what the anxious watchers could see from the windows. It was growing darker, and now they were rising clear of the cloud banks, and getting well above them. Overhead was the sky, starry and balefully cold. The sun had practically vanished, although it was not the hour for night-time, according to their watches. It was a kind of twilight, with the clouds visible below, in rolling, uneasy masses.

Perhaps they were in a different current, for it seemed that they were racing the clouds with incredible speed. But in all the vista, no matter which direction they gazed in, there was nothing to be seen but a great, desolate vista of waste.

Northward—ever northward!

That was the startling truth, and it was idle to attempt to keep it away from the boys and girls.

"It's jolly rummy, when you come to think of it," said Reggie Pitt soberly, as they went to the windows again, after a meal. "We all wanted to go with Dorrie into the Arctic—and here we are!"

"Perhaps Handy's satisfied!" remarked Church, not without bitterness.

"You howling ass, I didn't say I wanted to come like this, did I?" asked Handforth. "But there's nothing to worry about. There's enough grub on this airship to last a fortnight, and if we're drifting all that time we shall go all round the world! It's my opinion, we'll go right over the Pole, get over Alaska, or somewhere like that, and then land on the West Coast of America, in California."

"That wouldn't be so bad," said Fullwood. "We should be able to have a look at Los Angeles, and say 'How do you do?' to Charlie Chaplin! My hat, Handy, what a chap you are for getting marvellous ideas."

"Well, you never know," said Handforth tartly.

"That's just it—we don't!" said Dick Hamilton.

The one comforting fact was that the Titan maintained her great height. Her crew, after an exhaustive test, found that practically no gas was escaping. She remained buoyant, and so her extraordinary voyage continued. The hours went by, but nobody could think of sleeping. It was an effort even to eat. The majority of the passengers wanted to crowd at the windows all

the time, watching for some sign which would herald the end of this nightmare.

There were constant changes now.

During one hour they would be above the clouds. Then they would find themselves enveloped in dense mist, with a sensation of almost dead calm. The engines would be heard throbbing steadily, and the straining of the great girders would grow less. And then, in a moment, another Arctic storm would hurry down, and seize the airship in its clutches, and whirl it further and further into the unknown smother of blackness.

Nobody knew what the time was—nobody cared. But it seemed that many hours must have passed when the real crisis arose. By now it had been apparently established that the airship was indeed a mistress of the elements. In spite of her crippled condition, in spite of the hundred-and-one disadvantages, she was still plugging on, practically whole, weathering the many dangers. She had proved herself to be a masterpiece of the constructor's art.

But then came the revelation.

After a period of semi-calmness, the Titan was caught up like a feather, and tossed about so madly that everybody thought their last minute had come. The air was filled with the groaning and creaking of the straining metal, and occasionally a shrill snap would occur—deadly proof of the enormous strain.

At times the floor of the saloon would be level, then it would abruptly tip downwards, heel over, and rise acutely. In the navigation chamber, this movement was even more pronounced, and the captain and his officers realised that they had lost control. Indeed, they had to clutch madly at anything in order to save themselves from destruction.

The airship was being tossed about in the most fantastic way, and Captain Waring grew more and more amazed—and, incidentally, more and more startled at the airworthiness of his craft. Although he was expecting her to smash into fragments in mid-air—to break her back and disintegrate—she remained whole.

"I can't understand it, Dorrie," panted Lee, as he clutched at the guard-rail in front of one of the windows. "This is no ordinary storm—the air is simply tortured. What in the name of wonder is happening?"

"Don't ask me!" replied Dorrie. "Why aren't we all dead? That's what I'm puzzlin' over, by glory! Phew! It's getting infernally hot in this saloon!"

"I've noticed that, sir, too!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" breathed Dorrie. "Hot! An' if my calculations are right, we're far up within the Arctic Circle! What does it mean, Lee? Man alive, we ought to be stiff with cold, in spite of the electric heat!"

Lee frowned.

"I certainly can't understand it," he replied. "We're within the Arctic Circle, Dorrie—that's an established fact. And to

"think of the air being warm here is not only fantastic, but sheer madness——"

"Look!" shouted Dick Hamilton. "What's that, sir?"

He pointed out of the window, and for a moment the others caught a glimpse of a strange, eerie light flickering in the distance. It was a golden glow, almost like sunlight, but in a moment it was lost as the airship whirled into another mass of impenetrable mist.

"That was queer, wasn't it?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"It seems to me there's something even queerer!" said Lee grimly. "Look at the windows, Dorrie! They're steaming!"

"Steamin', by glory—on the outside, too!" shouted his lordship. "The interior heat can't be responsible for that, Lee! But how—— Gad, look there! There's that light again! Can you see it?"

For a moment there was dead silence.

While the airship tossed in her agonies, her passengers crowded at every available window, watching with wide-open eyes. Again the fog had cleared, and now the amazed adventurers could see a glow filling the whole horizon ahead—a glow which was akin to powerful sunlight, and it filled the entire distance. Wreathing masses of vapour were whirling in every direction.

There was no gale here—that was apparent.

Yet the airship was still being tossed about as though giant hands were playing with her.

"Air pockets!" muttered Lee. "It is probably caused by abrupt differences in the temperature. It's hotter and hotter! And——"

"Look!" shouted Lord Dorrimore huskily.

His was not the only cry. The airship was turning dizzily, her nose lifting, and then diving downwards again. Nobody could give even a guess at her height. Such a thing as earth seemed ridiculous—and the sea had become a forgotten quantity. They were just in the air—in a new world.

And immediately below them was something which filled them with amazement and dread. But no, it wasn't immediately below—it was miles away—but well beneath them. A boiling, impossible mass of white-hot fire! The radiance from it was filling the air with a dazzling glow, and it seemed to those perspiring watchers that they were being drawn into the deadly furnace!



CHAPTER 10.

AMAZING DISCOVERIES!

THE saloon was like an oven. The heat was so stifling, in fact, that afterwards they wondered how they had lived through that

period. But at the time they were so staggered by the astounding sequence of events that they were only subconsciously aware of the dreadful heat.

And almost as swiftly as they had caught sight of that boiling mass of white-hot fire, so it vanished. The vapour was around them again, but now there was light—brilliant, white light, which was the nearest thing to sunlight that any of them had ever seen.

And they were apparently getting clear of that volcanic vortex—for it was obviously the boiling crater of the most gigantic volcano that human eyes had ever rested upon. The rising heat had served them well, in reality—for the Titan soared upwards and upwards at an incredible speed, practically pitchforked into the upper air by the very heat which had menaced her.

And then all became calm. The pitching ceased, and once again the airship was forging onwards with droning engines. There was not a creak of metal, not a trace of straining. But it was noticed that the air was becoming difficult to breathe. One or two of the girls were laughing half hysterically, and the juniors felt the same effect. It was almost as though they were getting light-headed. They could feel, too, a strange, acrid taste in their mouths.

"What—what does it mean, sir?" asked Nipper helplessly.

"Heaven may know, my boy, but I don't," replied Nelson Lee huskily. "We are within the Arctic Circle—in the Polar regions. And, as every schoolboy knows, the Spring Equinox does not begin until March—and that heralds the coming of the Arctic 'day'—a day which lasts for half a year. It ought to be dark here now—or dim, continuous twilight—week in and week out."

"And yet it's dazzling, sir—like midsummer in England!" breathed Reggie Pitt. "I'm—I'm getting a bit windy, sir!"

Clive Russell gave a shrill laugh.

"Gee! I think we're all windy!" he admitted, his eyes rather wild. "I guess we shall wake up soon!"

"But—but it's all impossible!" roared Handforth rebelliously. "How can there be this heat near the North Pole? And—and this light!"

"Keep cool, young 'uns!" said Lord Dorrimore. "I'm goin' along to the navigation room now. I'll try to find out what's doin'. We're on an even keel, by the look of things."

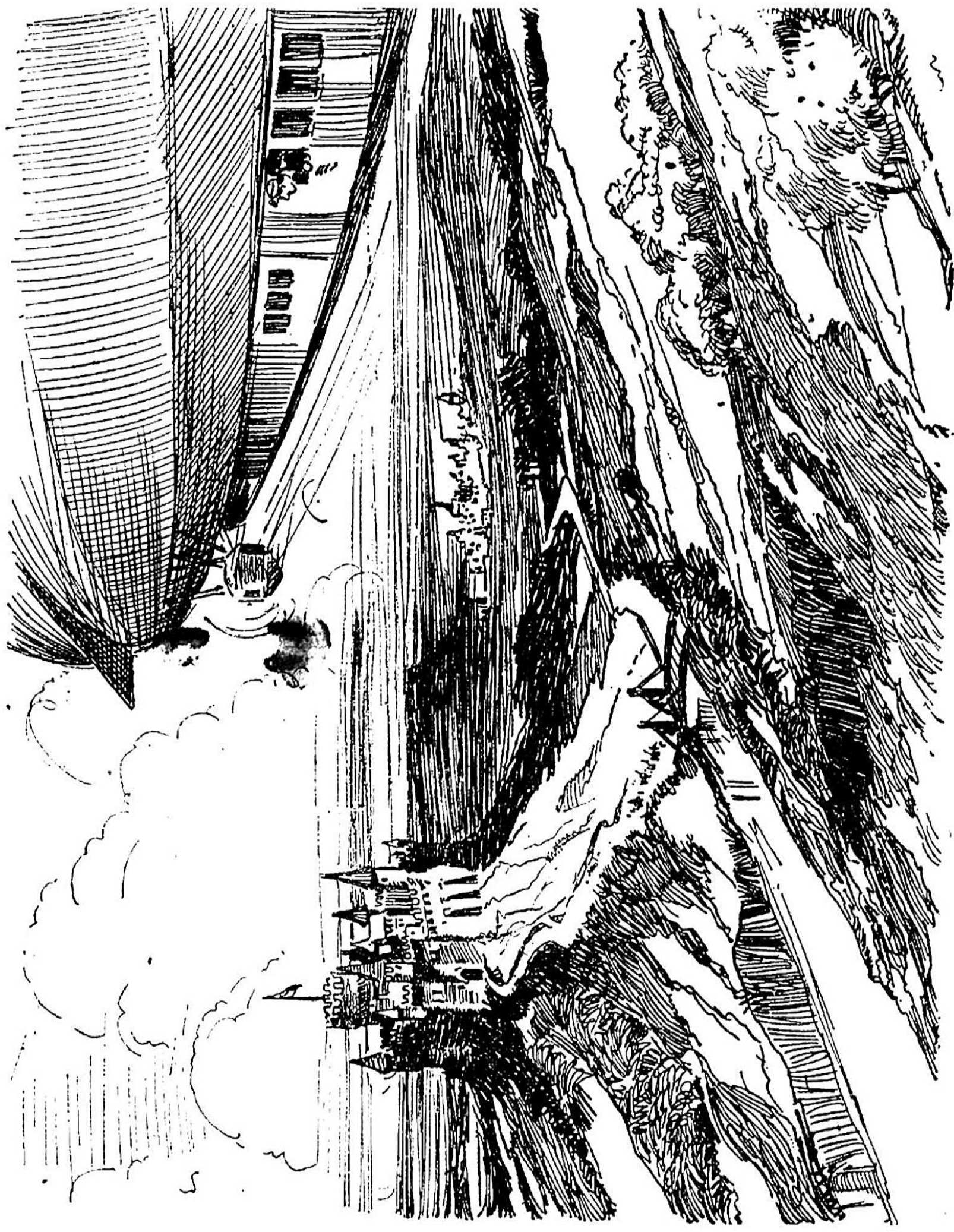
He hurried off, and when he got into Captain Waring's presence the latter was looking like a dazed man.

"It's no good asking me what's happened, sir," he said dully. "I think I must be going mad, or something. My instruments tell me that we're not many hundred miles from the North Pole—and here we are sailing through something which looks suspiciously like tropical daylight!"

"How's the airship?" asked Dorrie breathlessly.

"Still whole—praise be to her designers!" said the skipper. "But several of our balloonettes have burst, by what I can see—that heat was too much for her. We're losing gas now, and we're dropping."

"You mean we're likely to crash?"



As the great airship drifted lower, a strange building was clearly revealed. "Great pip! It's an old Norman castle!" yelled Handforth. "Like the giddy old Tower of London, with turrets, a keep, and—by Jove!—a moat and drawbridge!" The St. Frank's party seemed to have dropped suddenly into the Middle Ages.

"No—it's only a slow descent," replied Captain Waring. "And I'm increasing it, too—I'm tipping her nose downwards deliberately. I want to get out of this cloud-bank if I can. Man alive, we're nearly fifteen thousand feet up, even now!"

"The mist's thinning, sir!" said one of the officers.

They crowded to the great observation window, which provided a clear view of everything ahead of the airship, and below her.

The officer was right. The wreaths were thinning. The Titan, nose tilting downwards, was plunging steeply, her engines still working well. And as she grew lower, so the mists cleared. There was dead calmness now, and the heat, too, had grown less fierce—although it was still tremendous. The electrical switches had already been snapped off, for there was no need to aggravate the discomfort by continuing the artificial heating.

"Look! I caught a glimpse of the earth just then!" said the officer, pointing.

"Earth!" shouted Dorrie. "I can see nothing!"

"But I saw it, sir——"

"You mean snow, don't you?" demanded Dorrie. "There's nothin' but snow up here. Gad, we're in a mess! Once we're landed, we shall never be able to take off again, an'——"

"It wasn't snow, sir," interrupted the young man. "Either I'm mad, or I saw green! A pale kind of patch—green country——"

"You're mad, Wilcox!" said the skipper curtly. "There's nothing like that here. Confound this mist! Once we're out of it, and at a lower level, we might be able to take stock of our damage, and patch things up a bit. Thank heaven for this calm!"

Dorrie hurried back amidships, to report the good news—for it was good news, indeed, to know that the airship was still more or less under control, and that the loss of gas was not serious. But as he entered the saloon he had no opportunity of speaking. For Handforth was shouting at the top of his voice.

"There it is again!" he was yelling. "Trees! A forest! I tell you I saw—— Oh, rats! This mist keeps——"

He broke off, the words failing on his lips. Dorrie stood there, staring.

"Green!" he murmured. "Could young Wilcox have been right?"

His own voice seemed to hit back at him, and this brought him the realisation that there was a dead silence in the saloon. Everybody was staring out of the windows—and the silence had been occasioned by dumb-founded amazement.

At last the airship had dropped below the level of the mists. She had fallen out of them just as she would drop from a cloud-bank. She was still between eight and ten thousand feet high, but now the earth was visible below—clearly, dazzlingly visible in air of crystal purity.



As the great airship drifted lower, a strange b castle!" yelled Handforth. "Like the by Jove!—a moat and drawbridge!" The

And it was no waste of Arctic snow that the voyagers looked upon, but a great, sweeping vista of green countryside! The green was curiously pale—almost like that of hot-house plants. But there were forests visible—fields, rivers, and hills and valleys. And there, right in the dim distance, a sea, or a lake, its blue waters stretching away into the infinity of the horizon.

And then the vocal cords of the watchers lost their paralysis. A score of shouts broke out at once.

"Land! Oh, look—look!"

"But it can't be true! We're in the Polar regions!"

Nelson Lee ignored the babel, and turned to Dorrie.

"It's no good lookin' at me, old man," said his lordship helplessly. "It's more than I can understand!"

"But are we actually in the Arctic Circle?"

"So the skipper swears," declared Dorrie.



revealed. "Great pip! It's an old Norman of London, with turrets, a keep, and—seemed to have dropped suddenly into the

"Personally, I should say we've 'dropped into the region of the Amazon——"

"This is a place that no man on earth has ever seen!" interrupted Lee grimly. "There's no such delicate green as this on the Amazon, Dorrie! By James! Look at the colour of it!"

Lord Dorrimore passed a hand over his brow.

"Unless it was absolutely impossible, I should imagine we had left the old earth, and dropped on to some other planet," he muttered. "What about the sun, Lee? This light! Where does it come from? It's not sunlight—an' yet it's nearly as strong!"

He stared outwards, and as they were dropping lower and lower, so they could see the pall of mist above them—that pall which they had dropped through. It now hung overhead like an enormous luminous roof. There was something extraordinary in its appearance. As far as the eye could reach,

the whole upper sky seemed to be filled with the sun-like radiance. And below lay the delicately green-tinted landscape

"No, it's not sunlight, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "You remember that raging cauldron of molten fire we caught sight of? It seemed close, but I'll guarantee it was between fifty and a hundred miles away! A gigantic volcano! Outside there are the Arctic snows—the everlasting cold of the Polar regions. But the enormous heat from that super-volcano is the cause of these vaporous mists. The luminosity spreads for hundreds of miles, and thus provides the light. Perhaps there are other volcanoes, too."

"Can't we open some of these windows?" shouted his lordship suddenly. "What's the air like? Let's find out! We're gettin' lower every minute! An' unless we do something, I shall go crazy!"

They eagerly unfastened the sealed windows. They were hermetically secure, so that no trace of the outer air could enter. But now the fastenings were thrown back, and the windows dropped into their slots.

Cooling air now came in, to relieve the stifling atmosphere of the saloons. But it was not an icy blast—but a dry, equable air of moderate temperature. Every window was treated in the same way, and the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls leaned out, staring downwards.

The captain had shut off his engines, and the great airship was drifting and getting lower and lower as the time went on. She was now not much higher than a few thousand feet, and that landscape was becoming clearer.

Reggie Pitt pointed.

"Knock me on the head, somebody!" he panted. "But is that an old-fashioned stone castle down there, or am I just going off my rocker?"



CHAPTER 11.

INTO THE MIDDLE AGES!

"CASTLE!" yelled Handforth. "An old Norman castle—with towers and turrets and keep, and everything complete!

Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Then—then this place is inhabited!"

"Oh, it's too impossible!" said Irene breathlessly.

"And look over there!" shouted somebody. "There's a whole town over there—right in the distance!"

It certainly seemed that this was a fact, and there was no question about the castle almost immediately beneath. And now that one had been seen, there were others visible—quaint old places with moats and drawbridges. It was as though the St. Frank's party had dropped back into the period of the Middle Ages. Here, beneath them, was a picture of what Britain might have been like in mediæval times!

There were roads—wooded parks and great stretches of pasture land. Cattle, too—cattle peacefully grazing, with dotted villages and the tiny figures moving about which told of human presence.

"Can't you explain it, sir?" asked Dick Hamilton helplessly, appealing to Lee.

"I am afraid that I cannot," replied the schoolmaster-detective, shaking his head. "We are thankful at being alive, Nipper—for I can truly confess that I never believed for a moment that we should escape death in that terrible vortex of Arctic blizzards. And yet here we are—in a new world!"

"Looks more like an old world to me," said Reggie Pitt.

"But here is the point—this is a world that we know nothing of," continued Lee. "In spite of all our knowledge—all our progress—all our exploration, no man of our own great world has ever set eyes on this place!"

"But—but can you explain it, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"I am afraid you are asking too much—although there must obviously be a scientific solution," replied Lee. "This is no miracle that we are gazing upon, of course—it is a freak of Nature."

"Think, man!" urged Lord Dorrmore. "You're a masterpiece at this sort of thing! What do you offer as an explanation?"

Nelson Lee was looking puzzled.

"Well, judging by what I have seen, it seems possible that this place is a kind of oasis," he said, pointing out through the open window. "You see the great mountain ranges on every side—with their summits changing into glaciers, and vanishing into the everlasting mists. It matters not in which direction we look, we see these encircling peaks. We have been pitchforked over the rim of this basin, so to speak, and are comparatively safe. Indeed, we are perfectly safe from any further Arctic storm. This is a haven of refuge—a place of continuous calm, with a ring of raging elements surrounding it. He continued to point.

"We must have passed over fifty miles of country already—and there is that great lake ahead—itsself fifty miles from shore to shore, if I am any judge," he went on. "And there, I believe, is more land—perhaps of an even greater extent than this."

"The oasis must be two or three hundred miles across, then?" ejaculated Pitt.

"No less!" agreed Lee, nodding. "I imagine there must be not one gigantic volcano, but many. Looking at the thing from a scientific point of view, the heat is concentrated within this enormous basin—the volcanoes providing constant light, by means

of reflection. See! The entire pall of mist is luminous, providing the oasis with a false daylight."

"And a false heat, too!" said Lord Dorrmore quickly. "Why, it's almost sub-tropical, Lee! Gad, look at the people down there! They're gettin' excited, by all appearances!"

They were drifting still—drifting over towards the great lake. And below them they could see figures running in hundreds. They were too high up to see the mode of dress, or the type of people that lived here. But those Norman castles were significant—for they were of the real European type, of which many are still standing to this day.

"It's beyond me," said Dorrie helplessly. "Why hasn't this place been discovered? Didn't Peary get to the Pole, didn't Commander Byrd fly over it? Others, too, I believe—"

"On the face of it, it seems remarkable that such a place as this could have been missed," interrupted Nelson Lee. "But it is not so very puzzling, after all. Arctic explorers are generally prone to stick to well-established routes, Dorrie. And, even if this basin is five hundred miles from end to end, and an equal distance broad, it is only a fragment of the whole Polar region. And you must remember the terrible storms we passed through—storms, I am convinced, which are raging just beyond the rim of this oasis continuously—everlastingly, caused by the sudden difference in temperature. Here we are in the centre of the area, and at peace. But, encircling the oasis, is that raging chain of cyclonic blizzards. No explorers on foot could or would venture into it—and thus men like Peary saw nothing whatever of this undreamed-of land. And any airman who has flown over the Pole, or in the region of the Pole, has been kept away by the same reason—the violence of the storms. We, being adrift, could not help ourselves, and were sent hurtling into this place over the top of the protecting mountain ranges, whether we wanted to be hurled or not."

"Then it looks pretty cheerful for gettin' back again," smiled his lordship.

"Back!" echoed Lee. "Man alive, we'll never be able to fight our way through those blizzards again! Let us be thankful that we are safe—and, at least, our wireless is intact, and there is no reason why we should not be in constant communication with the outer world."

"Gad, that's true!" agreed Dorrie excitedly. "An' we've made the discovery of the age, Lee. Great glory! I've always wanted to make a name as an explorer—but this will beat everythin' in the world's history!"

Some of the half-dazed wonderment was beginning to fade from their eyes now. Nelson Lee's shrewd, cool theory had brought everybody back to realities—for Lee had made this impossible thing not only possible, but probable.

ANSWERS
Every Saturday. Price 2d.

Indeed, his theory was probably very near the mark.

The whole affair was a scientific phenomenon—one that, in itself, made it impossible for any explorer to penetrate into this hidden land. At different points over the landscape, bubbling pools were to be seen—evidence of boiling hot geysers. It was volcanic influence which was keeping this oasis warm and fertile.

The surrounding peaks were like sentinels, being mostly volcanic, they kept out the cold of the Arctic.

And the air within was like a pocket of warmth, kept constantly mild by the volcanic heat in the earth, and the reflected heat and light from the luminous mist-clouds overhead.

And those encircling hot airs and gases, always rising, probably formed a complete barrier to the true Arctic weather. There was a fog-belt round the basin like a continuous chain. And these violent atmospheric extremes were the cause of the terrific storms through which they had passed. Such storms were not periodic, Lee believed, but continuous—an everlasting battle between the heat and the cold, which had perhaps gone on for thousands of years.

And that, of course, would explain the non-discovery of this land. For it was a simple fact that the storm-walls were an impassable barrier. By some freak of Nature, the Titan had probably been drawn into a kind of vortex, and had then been whirled past the central zone of ferocity. In a way, she had been literally pitchforked into the calm area.

"By George!" shouted Handforth. "If we can still send wireless messages to England, we shall be able to tell everybody about this place. And they'll get up rescue parties—"

"Let us think of our position at the moment, my boy," interrupted Lee quietly. "We have plenty of time to make plans for the immediate future. Our one problem, now, is to land safely."

Everybody looked at him sharply.

"Why, sir, is there a chance we might be in—danger?" asked Nipper.

"I am afraid there is," replied Nelson Lee. "Danger from two sources."

"Two, sir?"

"You must all know that bringing an airship to earth is a delicate and dangerous operation, when there are no willing hands on earth to assist," replied Lee grimly. "It takes hundreds of men to do it without a mooring-mast. In other words, boys, we shall have to land, and chance it. And the airship is not even airworthy now. I am giving you this warning so that you may be well prepared. I don't want to alarm you, but you must be ready to obey orders—any orders—without a second's hesitation."

"All right, sir!"

"Trust us, Mr. Lee!"

"I am sure I can—all of you, including the girls," replied Lee, smiling. "I do not know what Captain Waring's plans are, but we can be sure that he will take the best possible steps under the circumstances."

"You mentioned two dangers, old man," said Dorrie.

"I did," replied Lee. "There is a danger from these people below us. This airship is probably a demoniac monster to them, and we may have a great deal of difficulty in making ourselves understood—of assuring them that our coming is friendly. We must take nothing for granted—but must be ready to act."

None of the young explorers, however, took much notice of Nelson Lee's timely words. They were too enthralled by everything they saw. It seemed to them that there could be no possible danger. The airship was drifting steadily on an even keel, and she appeared

to be under perfect control.

And what sights there were to gaze down upon!

By this time they were down to within three thousand feet, and some of the juniors had dashed off, and had secured binoculars.

"It's like fairyland!" breathed Irene Manners, as she gazed through the glasses. "There's a whole city on the lakeside, over here—with an enormous castle on the hill in the centre."

"Yes, Renie, you're right," said Pitt eagerly. "And can you see those horsemen? Great Scott! They're all in armour, or chain-mail! They've got lances, too!"

GIVEN AWAY THIS WEEK!

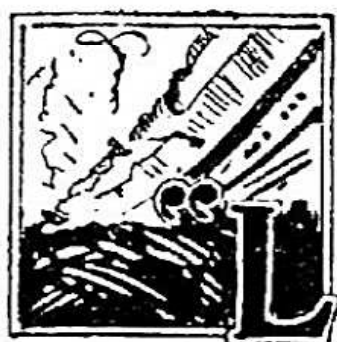


WITH THE
BOYS' REALM
Full details on page 5.

"It's like England in the time of Boadicea!" roared Handforth.

"You ass!" said Church. "They didn't have Norman castles in Boadicea's time! You've got mixed, old man. It's more like William the Conqueror's period. But—but I know I shall wake up in a minute, so what does it matter?"

But they didn't wake up—for all this was no dream, but an actuality!



CHAPTER 12.

THE LANDING.

"LOOK!" said Doris, as she levelled her own glasses. "Oh, Reggie! Just look at these men! What terrible-looking brutes!"

"They're not particularly handsome, are they?" asked Reggie. "By Jove, I've seen a few ruffians in my time, but these beggars are an awful-looking crowd!"

"They're like Russian brigands!" said Handforth.

There was no doubt about it. The inhabitants of this extraordinary country were fierce, savage-looking men. Through the glasses, the juniors could see them—those horsemen, on the ground below. Most of them were looking upwards—their faces full of amazement and fear. There were other

inhabitants, on foot—and these latter were not dressed in armour, or chain-mail, but in simple garb. And it was curious that their clothing should remind the watchers of pictures they had seen depicting scenes from the history of England during the Middle Ages.

And all—mounted men and others—were burly, coarse-looking brutes. Most of them were full-bearded, and their faces were expressive of everything that was savage and violent.

"The gov'nor was right!" muttered Dick Hamilton, drawing in his breath. "I'm afraid we should be in a bad fix if we fell into their hands! They wouldn't even give us a chance to explain——"

"If!" echoed Watson. "There's not much 'if' about it. We've got to land some time, and we're bound to fall into their hands. Oh, corks! What a lively prospect! We shall drop out of the frying-pan into the fire!"

Handforth bristled.

"We can fight, can't we?" he demanded fiercely.

"That won't do much good," said Church, shaking his head. "Look over there! By jingo, there must be thousands of men—and they all seem to be soldiers, too! And look at all the ships drawn up on the beach of the lake. Hundreds of them! They all use paddles, though."

Handforth grunted.

"We can fight for our lives, can't we?" he

POPULAR BOOKS FOR READERS OF ALL AGES!

THE Boys' Friend Library (New Series.)

No. 77. THE TEAM THAT WOULDN'T TRY.

An Exciting Story of the Footer Field and Adventure on the Coalfields. By JOHN W. WHEWY.

No. 78. GENTLEMAN JIM!

A Superb Yarn of Racing and Mystery. By JOHN GABRIEL.

No. 79. THE THREE GOLD FEATHERS.

A Topping Long Complete Adventure Tale. By HAMILTON TEED.

No. 80. THE FIVE MILLION DOLLAR PALS.

A Thrilling Yarn of Peril in the Far North. By JOHN ASCOTT.

THE Sexton Blake Library (New Series.)

No. 77. THE TERROR OF TANGIER.

A Wonderful Tale of Intrigue and Detective Work in Morocco, introducing Dr. HUXTON RYMER, MARY TRENT, GEORGE MARSDEN PLUMMER, etc.

No. 78. WHO KILLED CARSON?

A Story of Baffling Mystery and Clever Deduction. By the author of "The Mystery of Hanging-Sword Alley," etc., etc.

No. 79. THE MAN WHO DROVE ON.

A Fascinating Tale of Mystery and Detective Work in Birmingham and London. By the author of "The Bloodhound's Revenge," etc.

No. 80. DEAD MAN'S SHOES.

A Story of Thrilling Adventure in England and France. By the author of the popular Dr. FARRARO Series.

THE SCHOOL- BOYS' OWN LIBRARY

No. 43. THE SCAPEGRACE OF THE SCHOOL!

A Stunning Book-length Story of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

No. 44. THE DEVICES OF DICKIE DEXTER.

A Story of Dickie Dexter and the Chums of St. Katie's. By MICHAEL POOLE.

NOW ON SALE!

PRICE FOURPENCE EACH!

demanded. "By George! What about guns? You've got a revolver, haven't you, Dorrie?"

"I've got an 'automatic,'" admitted his lordship. "And so has Mr. Lee."

"Umlosi's got his spear——" began Pitt.

"Wau!" rumbled Umlosi, his eyes shining with battle. "I smell a fight, N'Kose!"

"You would!" snapped Dorrie. "You'd smell a fight two hundred miles off, you bloodthirsty old beggar!"

"Methinks this land is better than the regions of everlasting snows," said the African chief gloatingly. "For do I not behold warriors? Is there not the odour of battle in my nostrils? Wau! 'Tis well, my father! If there is fighting to be done, I, Umlosi, will lead the attack!"

Lord Dorrimore smiled grimly.

"You may lead it, Umlosi, but I'm afraid it wouldn't last long," he replied. "After one look at these fellows down here, I've come to the conclusion that we'd better be friendly with 'em. We've got some machine guns on board—fitted in those whippet aeroplanes—but I hope to Heaven we shall never have to use 'em! If we start any fightin' in this place, our number will be on the board!"

"We've got to land first, Dorrie," said Dick Hamilton, with a glance round. "And as far as I can see, we're going to land in the lake!"

"Imposs, dear old boy!" protested Archie. "I mean, isn't that somewhat Irish? We can't absolutely land in water, if you gather the old trend! Besides, what a frightfully mouldy thing to do!"

"It would soon end our troubles—that's one thing," said Reggie Pitt. "If we go into the lake, these cabins and living quarters will be submerged at once. But I don't think the skipper can do anything else. It's a matter of Hobson's choice."

"Yes, the steering-gear is on the blink," agreed Russell. "We can't turn back, and we're getting lower all the time. Gee! It's begining to look serious!"

The juniors had suddenly become alive to the danger. By this time the airship had dropped to little more than fifteen hundred feet, and was drifting continuously over the wide expanse of the lake. The land was receding in the rear, with its castles and its towns and its men in armour.

Were the explorers doomed to drop into the lake, and thus perish?

Until now nobody had considered the possibility. But the juniors and the girls exchanged startled glances as they noticed the inevitable drift of the helpless airship. They could see right down into the water—and it was surprisingly clear. Even the elusive forms of great fishes could be seen, shooting about in the limpid depths.

But interest in the scene had gone.

It was suddenly realised that Nelson Lee's warning had been timely—that there might be stark danger ahead. Somehow, the young adventurers had taken it for granted that they could land. After their awful experience

in the blizzards, this calm air seemed perfectly safe.

But what if the airship dropped into this inland sea?

It was no pool—for it seemed to be about double as wide as the English Channel! And although they could see the opposite shore in the far distance, it was obviously impossible for anybody on land to see it. From the ground viewpoint, this lake must resemble a great sea.

"Hallo!" shouted De Valerie. "The engines are going!"

"Hurrah!"

"They're getting her under control!"

"Do not jump to hasty conclusions, brothers!" said William Napoleon Browne gravely. "We must hope for the best, but, at the same time, we must prepare for the worst."

However, most of them were thrilled by the sound of the throbbing engines. It proved, at least, that the airship's captain was doing something to mitigate the danger. The truth was, the airship was leaking badly. And, even now, half the members of her crew were preparing to throw everything overboard of a heavy nature. By cunning use of the engines, and the elevator controls, the vessel's nose was tilted upwards, and an effort was made to rise. It was partially successful, and the Titan struggled onwards and upwards, sluggishly resisting this attempt to deny her the rest that she had earned.

Captain Waring knew, even if the others did not, that it would need every ounce of his skill to avoid death in addition to destruction. The latter was certain—for no power on earth could save the airship from crashing. But her nose was pointing across the lake, towards the opposite shore. If only her pace could be hastened, and if only she could be kept afloat, there was a chance of getting her to earth on dry land. And that might mean safety for her precious human freight.

And then commenced the fight.

Men were working feverishly on the steering gear, and this was partially restored. The airship could now be certain of her direction, and as she forged ahead, the far distant shore of the lake came steadily nearer. But all the time she was dropping—slowly, but unquestionably she was dropping. Only a matter of six or seven hundred feet now separated her from the surface of the lake. Would it be possible to get across that great stretch of water?

"It's going to be a near thing!" muttered Dick Hamilton, his face pale and his eyes anxious. "In fact, we shall never do it unless she's lightened. The gas is escaping all the time, and she's just a dead weight."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Let—let's dash into the cabins and grab the beds and things!" roared Handforth. "Let's chuck everything overboard we can!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, you chaps!"

It was rather curious that Handforth should get that idea, for just then Nelson Lee himself came hurrying along from the navigation-room.

"Boys! There's a chance!" he shouted.

"Hurrah!"

"It is just possible that we may succeed in reaching the other shore—but only if we jettison everything of a movable nature," went on Nelson Lee urgently. "The crew are starting already—they are scrapping the electric dynamos, and everything of a similar nature. All hands to the pumps!"

"There you are!" yelled Handforth. "What did I tell you?"

There was a quick rush. And during the next five minutes the scene was an astonishing one. Beds were wrenched from their fastenings in the cabins, dragged to the windows, and flung overboard into the water below. The furniture of the saloon itself was torn down and sacrificed.

It seemed a terrible waste—but it was a case of life or death.

That airship was a new one—everything was perfect. But all had to be destroyed in an attempt to save the passengers and crew. And the effect was noticeable from the very start.

As each batch of stuff went overboard, so the great airship rose, and before long she was nearly two thousand feet high again. But still she sank, immediately the jettisoning ceased. But now they were almost half-way across the great stretch of water, and they hardly had time to take stock of several rocky islands which jutted up hereabouts. There were ships in one or two of the coves, and men among the rocks, too. But the airship, travelling fast, soon passed these islands and left them well behind.

"It's all right, boys—ease off!" shouted Lord Dorrimore, as he ran along. "The skipper says he can make it now—better not lighten her any more. The lower we sink the better, as long as we can get to the land."

"Right you are, sir—but we're ready to tear up the floors, if you give us the word!" shouted Handforth.

They all watched with intense eagerness.

The captain's task was a difficult one indeed. As everybody knows, it requires the utmost skill to bring such a huge dirigible to earth. But when the dirigible is disabled and sinking from lack of gas, a crash is absolutely unavoidable.

The captain's task was to engineer this crash in such a fashion that no lives would be lost. Not only the lives of those on board, but the lives of the people who lived in this strange land. For it would be an ill omen if they killed a number of the natives in bringing the airship to earth.

As for the passengers, they could now do nothing but wait.

"By jingo, look at the land here!" shouted Dick Hamilton, as he leaned out of a window and pointed to a rolling vista of countryside ahead. "We thought the other side was

good, but this is heaps better! Look at these moated castles! Look at the great town, nestling on the lake-shore! And the roads, and the cultivated fields!"

They could see it all—in the near distance. The crippled airship was down to six hundred feet again, and within half a mile of the shore. It was obviously Captain Waring's intention to bring the Titan down on the beach itself. But he was defeated in his object.

When the great vessel arrived over the beach, she was still three hundred feet in the air, and drifting onwards like some disabled monster. Her size now seemed terrific. So near to the ground, and doomed for a crash, there was something absolutely terrifying in the aspect of her. Over the house-tops she glided, and now the watchers could hear the shouts of men and the screams of women.

Somehow, the captain just managed to tilt the Titan's nose upwards, and with a drunken roll she answered to the call, and forged a hundred feet further into the air. But then she began to sag back again. The danger for the moment was over, however, and she had cleared the city, and here a hill rose up, and it seemed that the crash was now certain. Indeed, for a moment, the startled passengers thought that they were going to be sent to destruction on the walls of a great castle which surrounded the hill-top.

But again the captain's skill saved the situation, for the airship swung lazily round, and skimmed past the castle wall with only a bare yard or two to spare. It was thrilling—exhilarating—but the excitement was of a tragic sort. It was touch and go.

Beyond lay a valley. And this proved a blessing indeed. For, with the ground dropping away, there was now a little air-room. And this valley was grassy, without houses or trees. It was, perhaps, three or four miles inland. And in every direction stretched the wooded, fertile country, with cultivated fields everywhere.

Only one or two glimpses of the people had been seen, but they seemed to be of a very different type to the bearded brutes on the other side of the oasis. Most of them were fair, and they bore no signs of savagery. But the voyagers had only obtained the merest glimpses. They were thinking of their own danger.

And a very real danger it was, too. Once the airship crashed, she would naturally drag along on her keel, and that meant the destruction of the saloons and cabins, and the death or frightful injury of those within. By a brilliant piece of strategy, Captain Waring avoided the tragedy.

At the last moment, when the ground was only twenty feet below, the nose of the airship tilted acutely upwards. The tail ground into the earth, and there was a tearing and shrieking of metal and fabric. Then, with a lurching, rolling motion, the great bulk of the airship swung over on to her side. Those within the passenger cabins were flung into violent heaps.



"We come from England," explained Nelson Lee, "and we desire only peace with your people." "Enough! Thou art from Gothland," said the officer sternly. "'Tis a knavish trick of Kassker's and thou shalt suffer for it. Thou art all prisoners, and will resist at thy peril!"

With a broken back and a crushed stern, the Titan settled down, and lay there, sprawling over the fair grassland, a pile of littered, pitiful wreckage.



CHAPTER 13.

SAFE—BUT WHAT NOW?

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH fought for breath. To move was impossible, for not only were Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley sprawling over him, but there were others in the tangled heap. Over half a dozen of them had been flung into that corner, and for a moment they were too dazed to move.

The saloon was tilting over, and a great crack had developed in its side. But the actual crash had been comparatively mild, and nobody was suffering from anything worse than bruises and scratches.

"Oh, help!" gurgled Handforth. "I—I'm flattened!"

Gradually, the foremost juniors picked themselves up and struggled out of the mass. They helped the girls up, and everybody was astonished to find that they were still alive and whole.

"Oh, Ted!" breathed Irene, as she hopped about, clutching on to one of the other fellows. "We must have nearly killed you!

I believe my ankle's twisted, but I seem to be all right otherwise."

"Don't—don't mind me!" gurgled Handforth, as he struggled up. "I'm all right, except for about five broken ribs, and——"

"Oh!" cried Doris. "Are you hurt, Ted?"

He flushed.

"Sorry—I was only kidding," he said, with a wry smile. "I think I'm all right, really."

By this time Nelson Lee had struggled in, and there was an expression of thankfulness upon his face. Lord Dorrimore appeared from the other corridor, and although blood was streaming from a gash on the side of his face, he was smiling.

"Gad, I thought we were all goin' to Kingdom Come that time!" he panted. "But we're on dry land, an' we don't seem to have come to much harm."

"Climb out as quickly as you can, and don't stop for anything!" urged Nelson Lee. "Boys, help the girls out, and don't lose a second!"

"Right you are, sir!"

"Quickly—quickly!" shouted the school-master-detective.

They rather wondered at his urgent tone, for it seemed to them that the worst danger was now over. But Nelson Lee's acute anxiety was not without reason. If there was one deadly peril to be feared, it was—fire!

Nobody knew what happened to the other part of the airship. At any moment there might be an explosion—just a spark, and

then the great petrol tanks would be alight. Even now the air was reeking with gas fumes, escaping from the torn and battered envelope.

And Lee was well aware of the fact that the enormous petrol tanks—contained within the body of the airship—were over three parts full of spirit, for the great vessel had used comparatively little.

So it was necessary to get everybody out, and well away from the wreckage, in a matter of seconds, if possible. For the smallest fire would mean an appalling explosion, and not a single life could avoid such a catastrophe.

And so it became a scramble. Through the open windows the juniors let themselves down, helping the girls at the same time. These latter were rather independent, and did not wish to be helped. But the St. Frank's juniors were not to be denied, and Irene & Co. found many willing assistants.

From other parts of the vessel, the officers and crew were escaping.

Dorrie had feared that many had perished, but the captain's masterly manoeuvre had saved every life. The front part of the great airship, a hundred yards away, had settled over a knoll, and the two forward gondolas, although partially wrecked, had not been utterly destroyed. One or two men were injured, but not a single life had been lost.

"We all owe you our lives, captain," said Lord Dorrimore, as the commander came up, anxious about the passengers. "It was one of the cleverest bits of—"

"Don't give me credit for anything, sir," said Captain Waring, in agony. "By heaven! Credit!" he added bitterly. "Look at her!"

There was such a world of torture in his voice that Lord Dorrimore could say no more. The captain was looking at his proud vessel—that great ship which had sailed so valiantly from Pullham, not much more than twenty-four hours ago—Twenty-four hours! It seemed like days—weeks!

And now she lay there, mercifully saved from fire and explosion, it is true, but a poor, crippled mass of wreckage. There was something rather appalling in the look of her. Her enormous size was staggering. She was stretched over the grassland in a great, straggling mountain of jagged girders and torn fabric.

Captain Waring thought nothing of his superb piece of airmanship. His thoughts were for the craft that he had commanded, and that he had brought to earth, a mere hulk.

But he should have congratulated himself, instead of being stunned by this destruction. Indeed, there was every reason for congratulation.

Every life was safe, and the petrol tank, containing thousands of gallons of unused spirit, was intact. Astonishingly enough, too, two of the whippet aeroplanes were unharmed, and they hung there from the great, distorted body, looking curiously small. Even the motor-boat was still clamped on, and had come to no damage.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea, captain, to get those aeroplanes free, and to pull them away?" asked Nelson Lee, as he came hurrying up. "As the gas escapes, there may be a movement of the great body, and it would be a pity to have them crushed and destroyed. They may be useful."

"By glory, you're right!" said Dorrie. "Quick, men!"

Many willing hands helped, and although it was a difficult enough task, the two uninjured aeroplanes were freed from their grappling hooks, and wheeled well clear. The other two were partially destroyed—and, in any case, held down by the wreckage.

And in the meantime, the St. Frank's fellows were looking about them. At close quarters, this strange land was even more wonderful than it had seemed from the air.



CHAPTER 14.

ANOTHER AMAZING SURPRISE!

DICK HAMILTON laughed rather ruefully.

"Well, it's just one excitement after another!" he said. "I wonder what's going to happen next? We escaped the storm, we escaped being drowned in the lake, and we escaped death here. After this, I shan't be surprised at anything!"

"It's wonderful, Dick," said Mary Summers, looking about her with wide-open eyes. "I—I can't believe that it's really true. Look at those trees over there! And this grass! It's not like our grass!"

"No, it's not so green—it's more delicate," said Reggie Pitt, bending down and pulling up a handful of blades. "My hat! They're so tender, too! And look at the sky! The light isn't coming from the sun, but from every part of the sky at once!"

They stared upwards. They knew, of course, that high above, at thirty thousand feet, there were dense masses of that luminous mist. They had come through it—and they knew! But from the ground, the appearance was quite different. It didn't look like this—it seemed to be a pure golden sky, radiant from horizon to horizon. The light on the ground was soft and diffused, and practically no shadows were cast. And now and again it seemed to flicker slightly, but so imperceptibly as to be almost unnoticeable.

"Yes, this light is caused by those volcanic fires," said Dick, nodding. "It's diffused over the entire basin, from end to end. But how can they have rain? How can this vegetation grow and flourish? By Jove, it beats me!"

"I expect there'll be somebody along soon," said Handforth, unconsciously clenching his fists, as he looked over the hill towards the great castle they had so narrowly avoided. "But, hang it, there's nothing to fear. These people ought to make national heroes of us!"

"And so they will!" declared De Valerie. "We're from the outside world, and they'll

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"HANDFORTH THE BOLD!"

Handforth is a helpless captive in a strange land—he *doesn't* think!

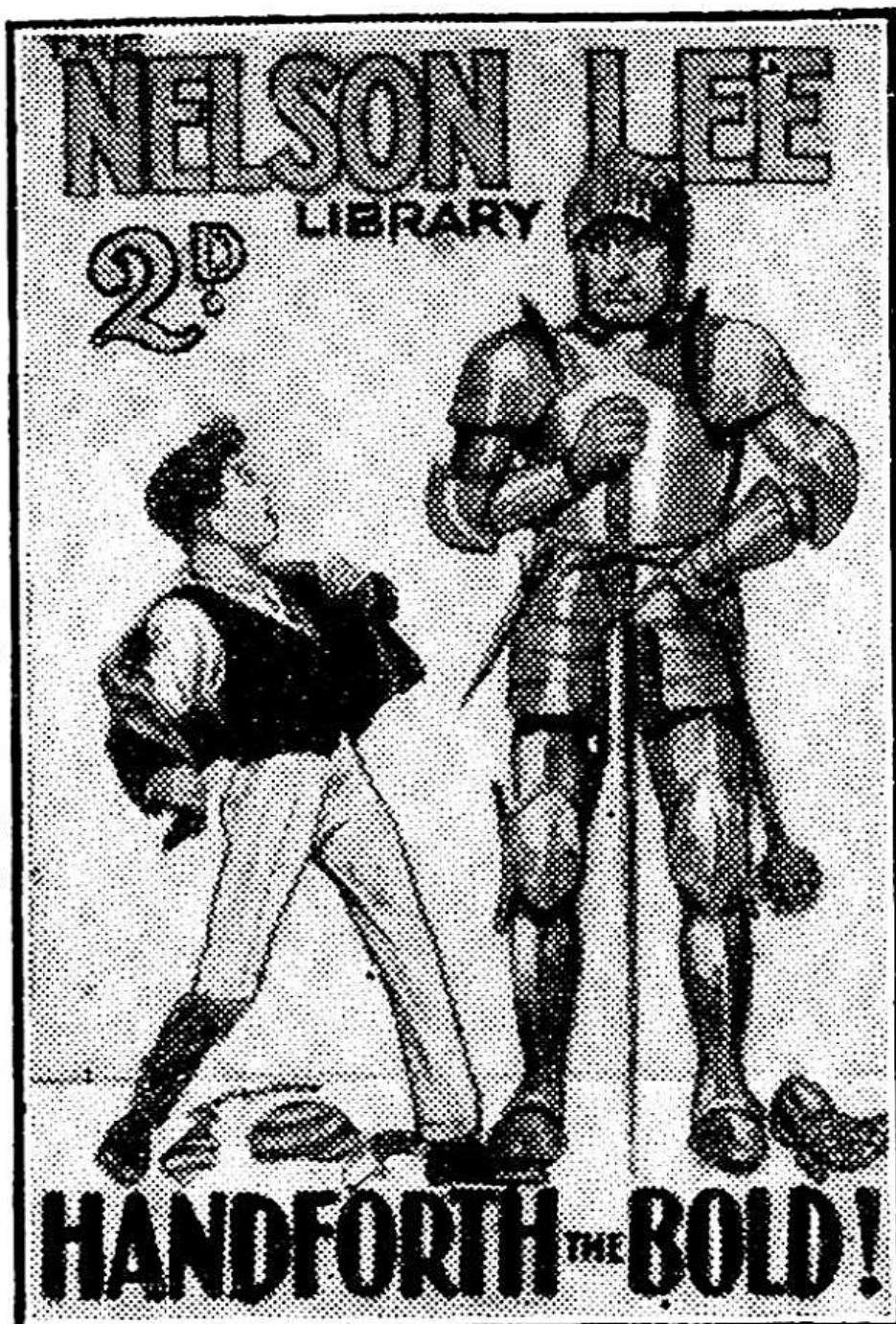
No rotten dungeons for Handy—and if some of these blessed Northestrians don't change their tone there'll be trouble.

There's trouble—chunks of it!

Don't miss the next story in this brilliant series of amazing adventure yarns.

"SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!"

Another smashing instalment of our fine War Story next Wednesday.



The Northestrians find Handy a handful. He always likes to tackle someone bigger than himself. Look out for this cover next Wednesday.

ORDER IN ADVANCE!

probably fête us, and give us the time of our lives. But who are they? And how did they get here?"

Everybody was asking these questions.

But there was one thing which needed no asking, and which needed no reply. They were on solid ground again, and safe! That was the one miraculous fact. As to getting out of this newly discovered country, and returning to normal civilisation—that was a point which had no importance at the moment. They were all thankful enough to be spared.

"The wireless?" Lord Dorrimore was asking. "Where's Sparks? Is there any chance of seeing if the wireless is still effective? By glory, it would be good if we could pick up the Wanderer, an' tell her——"

"The operator is just going in, sir, to have a try," put in one of the officers. "But I'm afraid the aerial is hopelessly damaged——"

"But the instruments?" demanded Lee sharply.

"Well, I think they're pretty well intact," said the officer. "And an aerial, after all, is a small matter. We can rig one up——"

A loud, concerted yell came from a group

of juniors who had ventured up the slope, and everybody turned.

"Look out!" shouted somebody. "Here they come!"

The group of juniors came running back, having no wish to be cut off from the main party. Not one of the adventurers could explain why, but they all felt that there was an element of danger in the air.

And that feeling appeared to be well justified.

For something happened now which was hardly calculated to give these enforced visitors a sense of security. Horsemen appeared—not a mere dozen or so, but hundreds of them. They came galloping over the hill-top in superb formation, and everybody stood there, staring in wonder and admiration. There was something very fine about this approach—and something menacing, too.

"By jingo!" breathed Dick. "William the Conqueror's army!"

The illusion was complete. These horsemen came sweeping down, and they were all glittering with armour and chain-mail. The horses were dressed in the fashion of the twelfth or thirteenth century, and as the

great body of men came thundering across the green sward, many of the horses shied, and were only held in check by the determined efforts of their riders.

It was noticed that these soldiers were entirely surrounding the wrecked airship. More and more came, forming a circle from which there could be no escape.

"This looks rather serious, Dorrie," murmured Lee.

"Serious?" said his lordship. "Man alive, it's too wonderful for words! I think I'm in the middle of a film crowd! Is it possible that these people——"

He broke off, for several of the natives were riding up, and they drew rein, and dismounted with a jingling of spurs and chain-mail. There were two of them, and they were obviously the officers in command. These men were very different from those on the other side of the lake.

Indeed, they seemed to be of different blood altogether. There was nothing severe in their presence, although they were stern enough. Two of them wore fair, well-trimmed beards, and the other was clean-shaven. They stood there, fine figures of men, looking more like Saxons than anything else. The adventurers watched breathlessly.

"We are peaceful!" said Nelson Lee, striding forward, with his hand upraised. "We enter your country——"

"It's no good, old man," muttered Dorrie. "They can't understand English."

But the foremost officer took a step forward, and made a gesture of stern anger.

"What lies are these?" he asked in a grim voice, his words being in English, but with a peculiar, indescribable accent, or brogue. "Thou art from Gothland! Ay, and what devil's work is this?" he added, indicating the wrecked airship with another gesture. "Is't possible that Kassker thinks to befool us?"

"Good gad!" breathed Lord Dorrimore, aghast.

Even Nelson Lee was hardly capable of speaking. This man was using English! Quaint, old-fashioned English—such as one never heard nowadays, but of the type that one would imagine the people had used in the bygone centuries.

"You speak English?" asked Lee, in amazement.

"English?" repeated the other. "I know not the word! Enough! Thou art all prisoners, and will resist at thy peril——"

"Wait!" shouted Lord Dorrimore. "We are friends! We have come from the outer world—from over the endless snows. We only desire peace with you and your people. There's no need for any violence——"

"Fool!" thundered the officer. "Thinkest thou this pretence will avail thee aught? Thou art from Gothland! A knave's trick of Kassker's, by my soul! Thou comest in this wondrous craft, and dressed in strange raiment. But Kassker shall suffer, the dog!"

"We've never heard of Kassker, and we don't know what on earth you're talking about," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Again let

me assure you that we are anxious to be on friendly terms with you and your countrymen. We are amazed that you should speak our own language——"

"'Twere better to be amazed that thou shouldst speak ours," interrupted the other curtly. "Enough of this parleying! Thou art prisoners all! Thy words are strange, for it seemeth that by these wiles and tricks thou art pretending to be—that which thou art not. We Northeistriens are not such poltroons, thou knave!"

He turned and shouted, holding up his hand.

The horsemen closed in, and Leo quickly turned to the boys.

"Don't resist, young 'uns!" he shouted. "We're prisoners, but I don't suppose this will last long. When we have an opportunity to give full explanations, we shall be safe. For the present, do everything that these men order."

"They speak English, sir!" shouted Handforth, in amazement. "Hi, you!" he added, turning to one of the officers. "How the dickens is it that you speak English? Oh, it's got me beaten!"

And, in fact, the general surprise was so great that hardly anybody had anything to say. They could only stare at these horsemen, and listen to their quaint words, with a dumb kind of wonder. Even Handforth's ready eloquence was cut short, and he found himself at a loss.

And almost before they knew it, they were being marched out of the valley.

The horsemen had closed in in two double columns, and there was no possible escape. In fact, it was out of the question to argue, for the thundering hoofs of the horses made conversation difficult.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were in the forefront, and then followed the Moor View girls, the St. Frank's fellows, and then the officers and crew of the airship. The captives made a long procession.

"Lee, old scout, be a pal," pleaded Dorrie. "Be a sportsman! What in the name of all that's marvellous does it mean?"

But Nelson Lee was as mystified as the others.



CHAPTER 15.

THE PRISONERS OF THE CASTLE.

LORD DORRIMORE nudged his companion.

"Beaten, Lee?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I am, Dorrie," replied Nelson Lee. "I've had a few surprises in my life, but when that man spoke to me in English, I was nearly bowled over. And he didn't seem to know it was English—that's the remarkable part of it!"

"He talked about Gothland," said Dorrie. "And didn't he make some reference to Northumbria?"

"I fancy he said Northestria," replied Lee. "Gothland!" he added thoughtfully. "H'm! That's infernally queer, Dorrie. Gothland implies the land of the Goths! But—but it's preposterous!"

"Goths!" breathed Dorrie. "My history's a bit creaky, but weren't they a tribe of blighters who hobnobbed with the Vandals and the Huns, and suchlike gentry? About umpteen hundred years ago?"

"You're a bit vague, Dorrie, but you're not very far off the mark," replied Lee. "And, by all accounts of the Goths, they must have been a savage lot—something like those people we saw on the other side of this oasis. And this officer referred to Gothland! It's a puzzle, and no mistake!"

"An' they speak English!" said Dorrie. "That's a corker!"

"Of course, there's only one possible explanation," went on Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "These people must have come here, originally, in the eleventh or twelfth century—perhaps earlier, or perhaps later. In the Middle Ages, at all events. And these present-day people are their descendants."

"But, hang it, they look as if they've walked out of a history book!"

"Heaven knows how they got here, or why they got here," continued Lee. "But there's one certain fact, Dorrie—they're pure descendants of old English stock. Anglo-Saxon, at all events."

"Then what's the idea of grabbin' us?"

"They distrust us—that's why," muttered Lee. "We've had no chance to give any explanation. They think we have come from just the other side of the lake—By Jove, I'll warrant that the two peoples are of different blood, and opposed to each other. And we are taken to be—"

But at this point Nelson Lee was cut off abruptly, for one of the horsemen jabbed him violently with his lance, and this was obviously a signal for him to stop talking.

Lee obeyed—not because he was afraid, but he had no desire to offend these strange people. His curiosity, indeed, was even greater than his apprehension. He could not believe that any real harm would come to them.

The juniors were forbidden to talk, too. Some had started, but they were soon silenced. The horsemen were all of the same type—fine, strong-looking men, with an Anglo-Saxon type of countenance. They were white, but their complexions were curiously transparent. There was hardly any colour in their cheeks, and there were other indications of their peculiarities—owing, no doubt, to their birth and rearing in the strange atmosphere of this valley with the false twilight.

And by this time none of the captives were even anxious to speak, for there were many sights to witness. They were on a road now, with the horsemen making two continuous columns on either hand. And they passed a great Norman castle, with its drawbridge, and its quaint, picturesque towers. People were

looking out—lackeys and other servants—quaintly-dressed women, with startled, half-frightened eyes.

And the further they went, the more people they encountered. The road was crowded. Sightseers flocked, and it was more and more reminiscent of the old England of the history books.

Yet, in spite of the general sense of unreality, not one of the captives could ignore the fact that they were passing through a real experience. They felt that there would be some explanation forthcoming. They were not altogether surprised at being made prisoners. But they wanted to face somebody who really mattered—somebody who would listen to them, and accept their explanation of their coming.

They were now getting into the city—that quaint city they had scarcely noticed as they had passed over, hardly doing more than scrape clear of the roofs. Their own peril had been so great at that time that they had seen practically nothing.

And from the ground, everything was so different.

They could view the scene now as it really was—and that vague impression was on them still—the feeling that they were suddenly thrown back for centuries, and thrust into the heart of mediæval England.

The picturesque houses, the dress of the people—everything, in fact, tended to lend colour to this extraordinary sensation.

It was obvious that the whole community was in a fever of excitement. The appearance of that airship had caused consternation and fright at first, but the capture of the entire party had restored a certain measure of calm. And now there was not one smile to greet the captives—nothing but angry, hostile stares—intermingled with overwhelming curiosity. They found themselves marching through packed streets, where there were inns, and curious shops—each with their signs hanging outside. It was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

And then, over a cobbled open space, in the very centre of the town, where massive gates led into a wide, imposing courtyard, the captives were marched.

Beyond the courtyard stood another of those castles—with towers, turrets, and everything that reminded one of Norman times. Here, too, the people were crowding, watching with the same air of awed excitement.

And this was just one town! There were scores of miles of country beyond—hundreds of miles, indeed, where, no doubt, there were other towns. This was no small community, but a veritable nation. From end to end, from one range of icy mountains to another, this vast oasis was half as big as England itself! That was the staggering fact which the newcomers could hardly grasp. It was a great country—a live, virile race of people!

In fact, things had happened in such crowded succession that the adventurers were almost too bewildered to appreciate all they

saw. They were dimly aware of the reaction, too. They had had no sleep during those tense hours in the airship. Many of them were bruised and hurt—hurt more than they would admit. And now came this march—this bewildering succession of wonders. Thirsty and hungry, and bodily weary, they were physically incapable of much resistance.

Not that any resistance would have been availing.

The horsemen now fell back, and foot soldiers took their place. The most surprising fact of all was that there was no air of general amazement. The newcomers were only treated to hostile looks—almost as though they had been expected. The natives were curious in their glances, and full of staring inquiry—but on scarcely any face was there an expression of wonderment or amaze.

And yet the adventurers might have expected it. For had they not come from the great outer world—the world which these people obviously knew nothing of? But no! It really seemed that they were mistaken for something else.

"Look!" muttered Reggie Pitt, as he glanced at Jack Grey. "These soldiers, Jack! Archers, by jingo!"

"I've noticed it," said Grey, nodding. "It reminds me of Robin Hood and his merry men! But I'm past being surprised, Reggie. The whole affair is too marvellous for words! We thought we were going to be dashed to pieces in the frozen wastes of the Arctic, and we get this!"

Immediately ahead of them a cumbersome drawbridge was in position, and after they had been marched over it, they passed under a great archway, and then into a low, dark doorway. And here they were hustled into single file, and forced to go down a flight of narrow, circular steps. And at intervals down these steps, men were standing, holding flaring torches.

"Great Scott!" muttered Lord Dorrimore. "Are we bein' taken down into the dungeons?"

"It seems like it," muttered Lee. "But I am worried, Dorrie. We can put up with this sort of thing, but those girls are absolutely unprotected. There's not even a maid with them, or an elderly lady to chaperone them—"

"But, my dear Lee, they're modern girls!" interrupted Dorrie dryly. "An' they were only goin' as far as the yacht, you remember. Gad, how long was that? A week, or a month?"

"Don't ask me," replied Lee.

Still they went down the stairs—deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. There was no possibility of resisting. The soldiers were everywhere, escorting them down, and refusing to speak if they were spoken to. Evidently they had received stern orders.

And at last a tunnel was reached. Along this they went, and suddenly Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, and several others were thrust through a low doorway. They found

themselves in utter darkness. The door closed with a dull, heavy thud, and great bolts were shot home.

"That sounds cheerful!" said Lord Dorrimore, out of the darkness. "Are you there, Lee?"

"Yes!" muttered Lee. "Who else is here?"

He pulled an electric torch out of his pocket and flashed it on. Then he saw that they were alone, and they consisted of seven men—Lee, Dorrie, the wireless operator of the Titan, and four members of the engineer's crew. The dungeon was a grim, sinister place, similar to those which still exist beneath the Tower of London.

"Well, this is a go, sir!" said Sparks, in amazement.

"Never saw anything like it!" said one of the other men. "What does it mean, sir?" he asked, appealing to Lord Dorrimore. "I thought we were lucky to escape being killed, but I hardly expected to be flung into a dungeon, like a condemned schemer of the gunpowder plot!"

"Well, anyway, we're alive," said Lord Dorrimore philosophically. "An', by gad, that's more than I expected to be by this time."

Nelson Lee said nothing. He was thinking of the Remove fellows—of the other boys—and of the Moor View girls. What was happening to them all?



CHAPTER 16.

THE TORTURE CHAMBER.

THE juniors, having seen Nelson Lee and Dorrie and the other men pushed into the dungeon, expected to be treated in the same way themselves. And they were filled with consternation.

Just ahead of them were the six girls, and the thought of Irene & Co. being flung into a noisome dungeon filled the juniors with indignation and anger. Handforth, indeed, wanted to take action on the spot.

"Why wait for these rotters to shove us behind bolted doors?" he hissed. "Let's make a fight for it now! We've got to get these girls out—"

"Shut up, Handy!" muttered Pitt. "What's the good of getting out? They'll only drag us back again. And don't forget they can understand what you're talking about—even if their English is different."

"But—but we can't stand this!" panted Handforth desperately.

One or two little exclamations from the girls made him pause. They were not being thrown into dungeons, but had passed out of the stone passage, into a great chamber—a vast, grim apartment, with many men standing there, with flaming torches.

(Continued on page 41.)

London Besieged!Powerful War Serial!

SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By

ROGER FOWEY

THE ENEMY AT LONDON'S GATES!

JACK BENNETT and his two school-chums, TOM LEE and BUSTER KIRK, fall into the thick of the fighting around Cliff House School when Germany invades England in a War of Revenge. The enemy forges across Kent—aided by a spy named Stutz, a master at the school—while other grey hordes sweep across Essex and attack London from the north. After carrying out a desperate mission for General Marlowe, the chums reach an aerodrome near the Edgware road, and become mixed up with the British troops retiring from the heights of Harrow, Mill Hill, Edgware and Bushey Heath. With a party of fifteen young Australian soldiers, led by a big fellow named Jason, the chums try and defend a wireless station, but are

driven out by the enemy. They retire down the Edgware road with the other troops, and a big stand is to be made on the south side of the waters of the Welsh Harp. If the enemy gets past, they will have London at their mercy. The chums and the Aussies volunteer to hold the bridge across the Welsh Harp, while engineers mine it preparatory to blowing it up. All the retiring troops cross the bridge, and the chums are left at the barricade with their companions. As they are waiting for the enemy, Jack asks the officer: "Do you think our troops will be able to hold them?" The officer fingers his machine-gun, and his face is white when he meets Jack's gaze. "No," he says.

(Now tuck into this week's smashing chapters.)

Behind the Barricade!

FOR long seconds Jack remained staring at the pallid features of the officer, then he exclaimed:

"Do you mean that you think the Germans will get across here and break through our line on the other side of the lake—that they'll actually reach London?"

For a moment or so, the officer fingered the grip of the black, deadly Lewis gun that thrust out between the sandbags before him.

"I don't like to say it—but I believe they will," he said. "I was up at Canons Park when the enemy came down from Brockley Hill—I've never seen so many men! Guns and tanks and machine-guns—I tell you, boy, the country the other side of Edgware is stiff with Germans. And every man that we could rush has gone to the south of London to try and hold them there. The Huns know it! We're weak here—but, by heck, we'll make 'em fight before they pass!"

He fell silent. Jack remained staring up the cleared slope of the long hill before him. Towards the top it was cluttered with wrecked

carts and motors, 'buses and lorries, limbers and—right in the centre—the sunlight gleamed on the broken windows of a derelict tram.

Not a thing moved in all that wreckage. The whole world seemed to be still and waiting—save for the muttering growl of guns to the right and the occasional snarling scream of a shell overhead.

Behind him, Jack could hear the sappers on the low-built bridge calling to one another as they worked with mad haste, trying to finish mining the bridge before the enemy came on the scene.

He saw Buster grinning at him from where he crouched behind a pile of sandbags. The fat junior also had a Lewis gun; Tom knelt at his side with a huge pile of round ammunition drums, and two reserve guns standing by in case Buster's should go wrong.

"All right, digger!" Jason yelled from the other side of Jack's chums. "The dust is goin' to fly in a bit!" the Aussie called cheerfully. "Glad we managed to rustle some grub first—I'll say I was hungry!"

He grinned merrily over the coarse brown of the sandbags, and at his side the sun gleamed on the chisel steel of the bayonet he had clipped to the end of his rifle. His coppers were all cheerful, talking to one another—and all the time their keen eyes ranged the slope before them for the first sign of the enemy.

Behind the bridge which the chums had volunteered to hold, troops were racing into the trenches, while gunners sweated to get their weapons into position.

Time passed, and still there was no sign of the enemy. Jack heard planes winging high overhead, but he did not look up at them. He could hear shells from enemy guns exploding in the waters of the Welsh Harp—crashing with a queer, muffled sound and sending great founts of water spraying to the sky. He wondered how much longer they would have to stop there, whether the engineers would finish and let them get across the bridge before the enemy arrived; he wondered—

A grey stooping, swift-moving figure appeared at the top of the hill, to show for a moment and then to be lost amidst the tangle of wrecked vehicles. All the Australians saw him at the same moment.

"Hold your fire!" The officer's crisp voice snapped along the barricade as rifles lifted. "Don't give yourselves away, lads—let 'em get close before you shoot. Ah, there are some more!"

Jack caught the flash of sunlight on a bayonet, and he made out three more men. Then, very distinctly, he saw the sun shine brightly on field-glasses which one of the enemy scouts was using to spy out the land ahead. The man, Jack judged, was lying along the side of a broken ammunition limber that had smashed half across the pavement. The glasses winked and flashed with every movement the man made.

The officer leaned across.

"Think you could get that chap?" he asked.

"He hasn't got his sun visors over the lenses—aim just below the flash!"

Jack pushed the muzzle of his rifle forward—not for nothing had he been the best shot in the Cliff House Cadets! His cheek cuddled down to the sun-warmed stock, and his thumb snubbed back the safety-catch. The wing-guarded foresight tipped up into the V of the backsight as the barrel steadied; his finger pressed gently on the trigger; he caught his breath, tensed his whole body and—

Crack! The rifle kicked against his shoulder as he fired, and a faint haze of blue smoke whipped from the muzzle. Automatically, his hand went to the bolt and he ejected the empty cartridge—while his straining eyes glimpsed a smudge of grey heave upwards from the broken limber, quiver for a moment against the blue skyline, and then plunge sideways.

"Got him!" exclaimed the officer.

"Good shot, digger!" growled big Jason. "That was a—"

His voice was drowned as a British field-gun spoke from its embrasure in the railway embankment on their right.

Wung-g-g-g!

Two more crashed out on its heels.

Wung-g—wung-g-g-g!

On the crown of the hill, there came three gouts of red flame, and then three whipping spurts of white smoke that flung high, with black debris edging the woolly plumes. The chums saw little grey figures running madly amidst the tangle of vehicles, to disappear over the broken edge of the skyline.

The defenders were still watching, with their weapons ready, when—

Zow-ow-ow-ow-w-w-w!

It was the flight of a giant shell somewhere over their heads, travelling towards the British

lines. So thunderous was its flight that they all turned instinctively to look, and even as they turned they saw black earth and blacker smoke shoot upwards from where the Edgware Road dipped over the next rise.

It was the biggest shell-burst the chums had ever seen, but they had no time to watch it.

Zwee-e-ee! Cr-r-rash!

A shell smashed into the buildings on their right. Jack saw smoke, a heart of flame—saw the roof splitting and slates skimming madly. The front of the building seemed to dissolve into dust and bricks spumed outwards. The smoke was whisked away on the breeze, and he got a misty vision of the building with the front swinging violently on their hooks, and a chair torn half away; he saw a room, with two pictures was hanging precariously over the hole at the front. Plaster dropped from the ceiling in a queer little white stream.

Hand to Hand Fighting!

Z WEE-E-E-EE! Cr-r-rash—spang-g-g-g!

Instinctively, Jack ducked as a second shell hit the road bare yards in front of the barrier. Through the jarring shock of the explosion, he heard the tearing, hideous whine of steel fragments ripping the air above his head, and something flicked open a sandbag between himself and Buster, letting its contents dribble slowly out.

He became conscious of an odd sound somewhere near him—a sort of hissing whining noise that made him think of bees. He heard one of the Australians cry out suddenly: "Oh—!" short and sharp. Another man exclaimed:

"Len's hit—machine-gun bullets! Keep your heads down—they've got us spotted! Where'd it get you, Len!"

The officer suddenly ducked along the back of the barricade, and Jack heard him say quickly:

"All right, old man—it's got your right shoulder! Think you can stand—you can? That's it! Now double back over the bridge while you've got the chance—you can't do any good here! Tough luck— Now, then, go along, Aussie! I know you want to stay, but we'd have to look after you, and you can't do much. Get back, there's a good fellow! Over the—"

That was all Jack heard. Another shell smashed to the road, screening his gaze with dust and smoke. When it had cleared away, he sighted grey figures pouring down the hill, ducking behind the vehicles that cluttered the road—running out, and darting on—Germans!

Buster shouted something, then the air became vibrant with the shattering chatter of his machine-gun, with the drum spinning round on the top as he poured a hail of lead into the advancing figures.

Jack snuggled down, then picked up the bayonet that he had set on the sandbag at his side, and, reaching forward, snapped it home to the muzzle of his gun. A second later, and he was firing as fast as he could press the trigger. Grey figures were running madly down the hill, some hugging the towering hoarding at one side of the road, others leaping in and out of the hedge opposite. He saw some pause and drop, saw others jump high into the air, some just checked and then sank slowly to the ground.

Back of him, the field-guns in the embankment were raining a hail of shells. Bursts tore the ragged ranks of the grey horde, shells wrecked vehicles that were already shattered, scattering the debris. From the barricade, nickel-sheathed lead founted in a solid stream.

Jack's ears were filled with the stammering roar of machine-guns, so that he could not hear the snap and crack of his own weapon. Twice the air shuddered and he was deluged with earth

from enemy shell-bursts, and at the second time the officer at his side ceased firing.

"I'm—hit!" Jack heard him gasp, then he knocked against the boy as he dropped. Jack paused to look down at him; the officer's face was twisted with pain, and one hand showed red as he clutched the side of his head.

"Carry on!" he said, as Jack bent over him. "Carry on—I'll be all right in a—minute!"

Jack propped his rifle against the bags and stepped to the machine-gun the officer had been using. He emptied the drum on the weapon, and snapped home another one. The gun shuddered and jarred against his shoulder as he fired anew—and now grey-clad men were storming over the clear space before the barricade. Many fell, the rest rushed on.

Jack could see them shouting as they came. He sighted one big fellow with bombs around his waist, and saw him pause to throw. Jack swung the muzzle of his weapon on him, and the fellow dropped. The machine-gun cut a swathe in the advancing ranks—and still they came on!

The field-guns had ceased firing. They feared to hit the defenders. The Germans had stopped trying to shell the barricade, they left it to their charging infantry.

Jack reached for a fresh drum of ammunition, and it was passed to him by the officer. At the same moment, a sergeant of engineers came running up from the bridge.

"Five minutes, sir—five minutes!" he shouted above the mad uproar. "Hold 'em for five minutes, sir, and we can do it!"

The thinned ranks of the enemy were bare yards from the barricade now. Jack saw the officer stagger to his feet, and the sunlight slashed on his sword as it ground against the grips of his scabbard.

"Cold steel!" Jack heard his yell. "Come on, Australia—up, the Aussies!"

He leaped to the top of the sandbags. Jack swung his gun in a sweeping movement as his forefinger pressed on the trigger. The firing about him ceased. He had a vision of khaki figures plunging upwards—then the Aussies were over the other side of the barrier, racing to meet the enemy.

Jack grabbed his rifle, and jumped with them. He saw Buster with his eyes glittering, and his face white, a rifle thrusting before him, running just behind the officer. Tom was there, with Buster—and then Jack forgot everything else as he saw the grey ranks coming at him.

He saw a big German fling his bayonet forward, watched the officer ducked, and saw the flash of his sword as the cold steel licked in. The German's rifle clattered to the stone setts as the man fell—and then the thin khaki line was at grips with the grey horde.

Jack found a man coming at him. With a mad slash he turned the jabbing bayonet aside and then jerked his own weapon forward. He saw the steel glide against the leather equipment that the man wore—and then the bayonet fell off!

He had clipped it insecurely. He saw the man's gleaming, gloating eyes as the fellow swung round at him again then Jason's leaping figure showed, big and vengeful, his weight back of his rifle-butt as he dashed at the man.

The fellow went down, yelling. Jack clubbed his rifle, and he smashed the butt at another German. He caught the fellow at the side of the head, and he crumpled up.

The Aussies were standing shoulder to shoulder, fighting like madmen—thrust and parry, lunge and jab, cold steel licking with chilly tongue at the enemy. The grey forms broke and fell before that British barrier—rallied and charged again.

The thin brown line gave a little. Jack found himself whirling his rifle about his head, hitting with all the strength of his arms, shouting madly.

Tom was near him with a revolver kicking in his hand as he picked off man after man. The officer was a couple of yards in front of anyone else, revolver in one hand and sword in the other—shooting and stabbing, roaring fiercely.

The attack faded. Grey forms ran back, staggering out of the fight.

"Back to the barricade—back! Before they get machine-guns on us!" One of the Aussies yelled the warning, and Jack paused to fling an arm about the officer as he staggered towards the sandbags.

"Got it again—somewhere!" the officer gasped. "Chest, I—think!"

An Aussie came to Jack's assistance. Tom helped, smoking revolver in one hand. They lifted him across the bags, and they laid him on the road at the far side. Jason pillowed his head on a sandbag, then ripped open his tunic to look at the wound.

"No good," the officer smiled up at him. "I'm—done, boys! Hold out—don't let 'em pass you! Don't let them—pass!"

Zwee-e-e-ee! Cr-r-rash!

A shell gouged the road between the barricade and the bridge.

That shell-burst was the gallant officer's requiem. He had passed out ere the last slashing shell-splinter had dropped to earth.

The Doomed Tank!

WHEN Jack looked again to the Edgware Road, he saw that the tramlines and upturn road-surface were littered with still grey forms.

From out the wrecked vehicles up the hill, hidden marksmen poured a wicked fire at the barricade. Bullets thudded and smacked against the sandbags—but the barricade was just high enough to prevent them ranging on the engineers working at the bridge behind.

"We can't hold 'em again!" Jason roared the words in Jack's ear. "We'll try—but they'll be too many for us! We'll— Here they come!"

Once again the enemy started an attack. And once again the defender's machine-guns tore holes in the field-grey ranks, withering the assault ere it had barely begun. That first attempt had told the enemy that death was almost certain even if they reached the jagged, brown-faced barricade—and the attack was, in any case, merely a feint.

With a suddenness that was startling, the end of the great wooden hoarding that stretched up one side of the road began to bulge outwards. Jack saw posters rip as the wood behind them splintered—and then the pointed nose of an enemy tank stubbed through!

A tank! They could not withstand that! It would lumber to their flimsy barricade and stamp it flat, while the land-craft's flaming guns would mow them down!

It slumped forward through the broken wood-work, slithered down the short, steep slope, sent the wooden fence at the bottom cracking and splintering, and then lumbered across the pavement to the road.

"The guns'll get it!" Jason yelled. "Stand by—the guns'll stop him!"

Right after his words came the sound of a shrill whistle from the bridge behind. The engineer sergeant was standing in the middle of the bridge waving both arms for them to return, while the gunners on the embankment aligned their weapons on the lumbering shape of the tank—and the grey hordes poured out from their hiding-places and began again to tear down the road.

"Back—they've finished the bridge!" Jason yelled. "Come on, coppers—out of it!"

"Keep low!" Jack shouted, as he grabbed his

rifle. Then he was speeding back with the rest, dodging round shell-holes, running madly. Little slivers of granite spurted in front and around him—bullets hitting the road as he ran. He saw an Aussie pitch forward and fall; two of his mates helped him up, and they ran on.

The bridge was long. More men fell as they raced across it. From the trenches at the far side, troops opened fire on the Huns now storming over the barricade.

The little, war-worn group cleared the bridge and reached the cross-roads beyond it. In a shell-hole, three engineers were crouched, watching. As he saw them, Jack stumbled, tripping over a smashed waggon wheel that lay in his path and he went down. Buster cried out as he saw him go, and both he and Tom pulled up.

"You hit, Jack?"

"No—no! I'm all right! I only——"

"Dive in here—quick!" One of the engineers yelled to them and beckoned madly. The three scrambled into the big shell-hole. "We're just going to blow!" the man said. "And we'll have that tank!"

The hand of one of the engineers was poised on the ebonite plunger of a big switch; wires ran from it to the black shapes of batteries; more wires ran out towards the bridge.

Jack saw the tank in advance of the Germans. It lumbered on to the bridge; a shell burst in front of it, and the prow dipped to the hole in the road, then the thing came on.

Guns were roaring everywhere now. The lake was lashed and stirred by falling shells; the railway embankment was red with gun-flashes and blue with wafting smoke from hot muzzles.

On the tank came—half-way across the bridge with infantry sheltering behind its mighty sides, then——

"Let 'er go!" yelled the engineer at Jack's side.

The brown hand plunged down on the black switch.

Who-o-o-om-m-m-m!

It seemed to Jack and his chums that the roadway across the Welsh Harp dissolved into smoke and stupendous sound. They ducked, and they heard fragments of debris splattering down all round them, while the rolling echoes of the mighty explosion boomed and thundered above the crashing notes of roaring guns.

For what seemed minutes they crouched there. Stones and earth plugged at them from out of the sky, and they felt the earth shake as something struck the roadway with a clanging, crashing sound that rang high above all else.

When the hail of debris had ceased, they looked up. Where the road had been, brown water swirled in mad eddies. Far out across the lake, a wall of water was receding, and on the distant banks it was leaping angrily.

Smoke hazed everything, but through it the chums could see only a single buttress standing where the bridge had been—a smoke-hung tooth of shattered stone about which the water slapped and heaved.

And on the broken road—bare yards from them, and squarely across the tram-lines—was a great mass of grey-painted steel. The half of an iron-cross showed as it lay, and one edge carried the shattered remnants of riven mechanism.

"That's the tank," said the engineer grimly. "Must have copped that little lot fairly—there's a good half o' one side lyin' there!"

He laughed grimly, then methodically commenced to gather up the batteries and the switch. "Better nip out of this lively, mates," he said. "Jerry ain't goin' to be pleased about us blowin' up that bridge. This won't be healthy when he gets some guns up here!"

The chums took the hint. They doubled along the highway in the direction which the Australians had taken. They found them standing in a

group in the shelter of a smashed bus at one side of the road.

"Thought you was hit or something!" Jason exclaimed, as they came up! "There isn't many of us left now, digger!" and he grinned grimly at Jack. "Some Red-Cross men have just taken my coppers what was wounded—only six of us now, and we were fifteen strong when we met you by that wireless station. None of 'em are seriously hurt though! Say, the way that bridge went up was a marvel—did you see the tank. Busted all to glory, and——"

He broke off as a staff officer strode up to them. Jack saluted smartly, and the officer lifted a hand to the peak of his red-banded cap.

"Are you the fellows who were on that barricade?"

"Yes, sir!"

He stood a moment, looking from the lean, brown-faced Australians to the three lads from Cliff House School.

"Report to headquarters at once. You'll find H. Q. in a bus garage just the other side of the hill behind us. Did you lose many men in that affair?"

"Only the officer, sir—the rest were wounded," said Jack. "They've been taken to a dressing-station."

The Spy in the Smoke !

THEY moved on in obedience to the officer's order, and as they went the battle woke all about them. A ditch at the side of the road had been turned into a communication trench, and along this the little party wended its way.

They could see enemy bullets striking sparks on the granite setts between the tram-lines, while shells burst in the buildings on either side of the road. Back of them, the enemy were swarming down the hill, taking cover as they came, while their guns were getting into action with deadly swiftness.

The continuous shock and smash of explosions made conversation impossible; back of it all was the jarring rattle and clatter of rifle fire from the trenches, as Britishers blazed across the water at the enemy.

The ditch ended just beyond the brow of this hill, and they climbed out to the road. Only shells could reach them here, and Jack saw some bursting amidst the buildings beyond him. Dead ahead was a railway arch, and on it he saw three anti-aircraft guns, all firing fiercely at some target in the sky.

The road itself was almost empty, save for an occasional lorry-load of troops which came roaring past them, to stop ere it reached the crown of the hill, when the men tumbled out and raced away. Dimly, Jack wondered why there were not more troops. He had expected to find enormous reserves behind the actual firing line; yet there was nothing in sight. It was true that men might be sheltering in the houses on his right and the buildings which lay before him; but, in that case, why should lorry-loads of men be rushed up the hill with such desperate haste?

They found the garage. Two sentries challenged them from where they stood in the shelter of broad, concrete door-posts. An officer behind them heard Jack say that they were from the barricade, and the sentries were ordered to pass them through.

They moved through the wide doorway; the concrete underfoot was slippery and black with oil that had been dropped by passing vehicles. In the broad open space beyond was set a table at which stood the General in command of operations with his staff.

The chums and the Aussies stiffened as they approached the table, and the officer who had

WONDERFUL FREE GIFT THIS WEEK!

Wonderful Free Gifts For All Readers!

The first of a Magnificent Series of Free Gifts is given away with this week's stunning issue of the **BOYS' REALM**. For full details see page 5 of this issue.

A SMASHING NEW PROGRAMME!

"Pete's Restaurant!"

Jack, Sam, and Pete again in a story which is one big laugh from start to finish.

"THIS WAY FOR CHINA!"

Opening story of a new Series of stories of the Raggies o' the Rambler—in China!

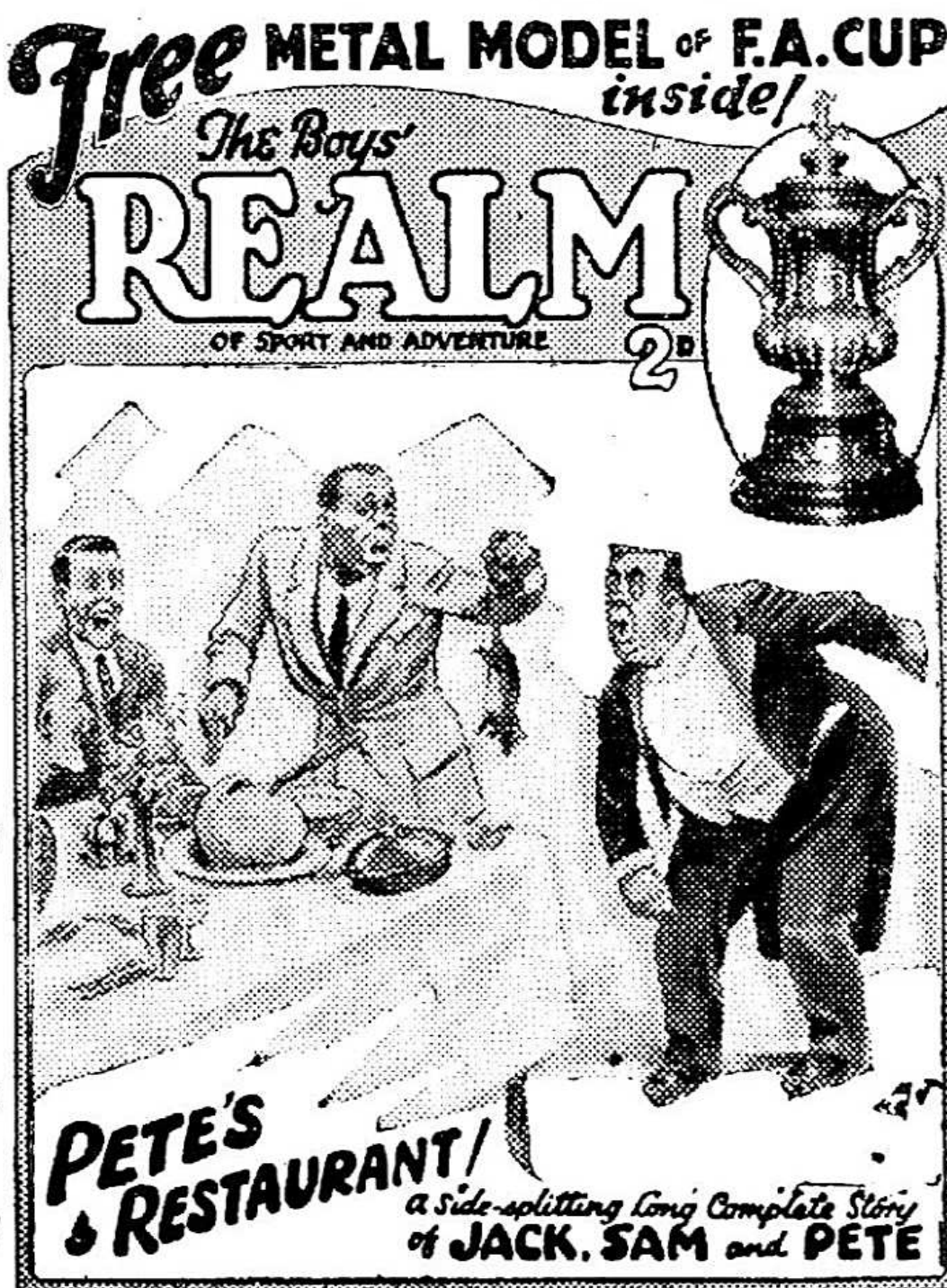
"ALL FOR THE ALBION!"

Opening chapters of a rousing new Cup-Fighting Serial.

"GINGER—FOR PLUCK!"

Another new Footer Yarn by an old favourite—Robert Murray!

More Free Gifts Coming!



OUT ON WEDNESDAY. THE BOYS' REALM. PRICE 2d.

preceded them saluted and informed the General that they had come to report.

The grey-haired, steely-eyed man looked up at them, then he stiffened to a salute.

"Well done!" he said. "A gallant defence—and your homeland will be proud of you, Australians. I thank you."

That was all—but it was enough. That the man who was barring the gateway to London could pause long enough to thank them for what they had done, was honour enough. Jack's heart was beating swiftly as he turned with the rest and made for the door—and their ranks parted as a man dashed in.

His clothing was smothered with dirt and dust, his eyes were wild and there was blood on his face and hands. He staggered a little, and would have fallen had not Jack and Buster caught him.

"Where's General Hamilton?" he gasped. "Where—Ah!" He tried to stand upright, but he failed, and a gesture of the commandant's hand sent Jack and his chum towards the table, supporting the officer between them.

The man was a signaller; they could tell that from the tiny, blood-smirched flags sewn to one sleeve, while the blue and white band about his arm marked him as a headquarters despatch-rider.

He saluted as he reached the table, then sagged heavily against the chums.

"You're getting—false reports, sir! It's the same thing as has been—happening all along. Somebody ordered a retreat at Finchley and the—the enemy have got to Highgate Hill!"

"Highgate!" gasped the general, and every man of his staff riveted his gaze on the drooping figure between Jack and Buster.

"Yes, sir!" The signaller drew himself up a little and he leaned forward, one hand on the table.

"They've advanced from Mill Hill—they're in Golder's Green now, sir. They've flung forward to Hampstead Heath, and now they're coming across from there—enfilading you, sir!"

The General stared at him, eyes wide. The despatch-rider went on.

"They've got advance tanks—in Finchley, sir! The enemy has turned with Golders Green as a pivot, and they're advancing this way—his right flank is resting on the North Circular Road. He'll nip you if you try to retreat down the Edgware Road, sir—he's trying to drive you out over to Wembley and Willesden—to cut you off from London!"

The thunder of battle slammed into the big garage, and, even as they listened, it seemed that a new and nearer note came from the east side of the broad highway outside. The staff-officer who had ordered Jack and the rest to report to H. Q. suddenly came tearing in—racing across the concrete.

He slithered to a halt, saluted, and gasped:
"Enemy advancing on our right flank, sir—
tanks enfolding our trenches level with the North
Circular Road. Heliograph reports enemy at
Hampstead Heath—they're on three sides of us,
sir! By heaven, we're trapped!"

"Trapped! he hanged!" gasped the General.
"We can't—"

He broke off. From the chattering telegraph
instruments at one side of the garage, a bare-
headed signaller came running; in his hand was
a flimsy carrying a message which had just come
over the field line.

"Message from Whitehall, sir—decoded!"

The General read it aloud.

"Your retreat cut off. Withdraw from Welsh
Harp. Endeavour to fight your way through
Cricklewood and Finchley to prepared line of
defence at Maida Vale. Make your own H.Q.
Marble Arch if possible. If you cannot get
through, withdraw westward, but keep in touch
with enemy."

The order seemed to stun the group of staff
officers, and then Jack heard General Hamilton
mutter:

"There's treachery somewhere—black treachery,
and—"

He broke off, and his grey eyes flashed
suddenly as he roared: "Gentlemen, we'll disobey
orders! We'll stand and fight to the last! We
can hold them, and—"

His voice was lost in a sudden burst of sound
from above.

Jack got a glimpse of shattering glass in the
roof. The fraction of a second later, it seemed
as though the back of the big building gave
place to one mighty sheet of searing flame. He
had a momentary vision of the General and his
staff scattering like leaves before a gale, then
burning air struck him with searing touch.

Something caught his head with numbing force.
Through his brain shot a single, flashing
thought: "I'm hit—this is the end!"

Then he was picked up, whirled over and flung
down—down—down in an abyss of roaring black-
ness that gave to silence and unconsciousness.

Jack lay, a huddled and twisted figure where
he had been flung against one wall. Trailing
smoke filled the big hall, and as the wind wafted
it away, broken forms showed through the haze—
scattered shapes about a mighty shell crater
at one end of the place, and every one of them
lying as still and as silent as Jack and his chum.

From the front of the building, a dim-seen
figure came climbing swiftly down an iron ladder
set against one wall—descending from the vantage-
point at which he had been concealed.

As he reached the ground, he staggered from
the shock of the terrific explosion, then he stood
looking at the crumpled shapes before him.

He wore the uniform of a captain in the British
Army—but his square-shaped head was that of a
German. He peered about him, then bent to
where Buster lay on the floor near Jack.

The boy's eyes opened, he blinked as he stared
dazedly upwards. He sighted the crouching figure
of the spy, and his eyes widened.

"Stutz!" he gasped. "Stutz!"

(That shell has smashed the British Head-
quarters, and but few of the General's staff can
have escaped. Without a leader, the British must
be routed—the enemy will be in London within
a matter of hours, shelling the Houses of Parlia-
ment and Trafalgar Square! Order next Wednes-
day's NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance, and
make sure of reading the next instalment of this
thrill-packed yarn.)

**JUST
THE
BOOK
YOU
HAVE
BEEN
LOOKING
FOR!**

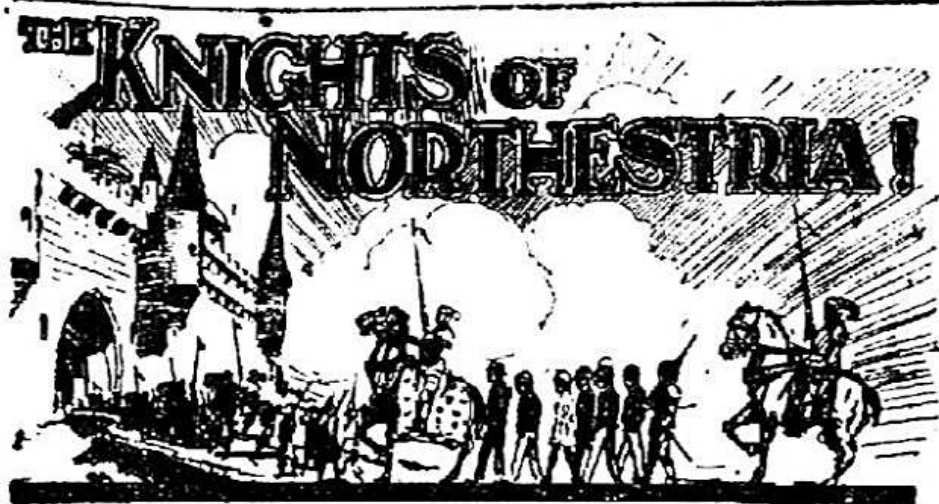


This topping long
yarn of Schoolboy Fun
and Adventure at St.
Frank's is a story that
you will thoroughly
enjoy. Get a copy
to-day—it appears in

**THE
MONSTER
LIBRARY**

No. 14.

A 6/- VOLUME FOR ONLY 1/-



(Continued from page 34.)

And the reason for Irene & Co.'s gasps was apparent.

In some respects, this underground chamber was like something that the juniors had seen in the Tower of London. Again they were reminded of that grim old place.

"Oh, goodness!" murmured Church. "The torture chamber! They're going to shove us into dungeons, and then bring us out, and torture us!"

"It's a pity the aeroplane didn't crash, and kill us all!" said McClure huskily. "And look! They're taking the girls away along another passage!" he added, in alarm. "Oh, this is a fine business!"

Handforth had come to a halt.

"By George!" he shouted thickly. "Are we going to stand this?"

Ahead of them stretched two tunnels—and while Irene & Co. were forced along one of them, that particular entrance was barred by armed soldiers, and the juniors were being forced into the other.

"They've taken the girls away somewhere!" roared Handforth furiously. "Come on, you chaps! We've got to rescue 'em! Up, St. Frank's!"

"Hurrah!"

In a moment the fellows were on Handforth's side. And before the soldiers could be aware of any attack, they were swept out of the way, and the St. Frank's juniors rushed pell-mell down the tunnel, to rescue Irene & Co.

Handforth, in advance, reached a corner, and caught a glimpse of a slim leg just disappearing into an arched doorway. Then came a loud thud, and by the time Handforth arrived, the heavy door had closed, and they were shut off.

"Quick! They've gone through here!" yelled Handforth, throwing his weight against the heavy door. "All right, Irene! We're here, girls!"

A rush of feet came from another tunnel, and a dozen powerful men put in an appearance. One of them seized Handforth, and held him firmly.

"Thou puppy!" he growled menacingly. "Is't death thou seekest? The wenches will come to no harm yet awhile. 'Tis for the Princess Mercia to pass sentence——"

"The Princess Mercia!" shouted Dick Hamilton, pushing forward. "Who's she?"

"Yes, who's the Princess Mercia?" demanded Handforth.

"Silence!" thundered the man, who was evidently an officer. "What uncouth words are these? Thou speakest our language, and yet thou speakest it not! Away with them!" he added, turning to his followers. "Into the dungeons!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"You can shove the others in the dungeons—but not me!" he bellowed. "By George! Just try it on, you fatheads! Up with your fists, blow you!"

Crash!

Before the officer knew what was coming, he received a crashing blow on the jaw. He staggered back, and three of his men fell upon Handforth, and the other juniors went almost sick when they saw that swords were flashing.

"Stay!" growled out the officer. "Kill not the hot-head—yet! 'Twas her Majesty's order that none should die. But yet will I remember this blow!" he added grimly.

Handforth, struggling violently, was dragged away.

Without any further talk the juniors were hustled into a great dungeon, and locked there. They did not worry so much about their own plight—but they were filled with apprehension for the six helpless girls.

Beyond there a number of sombrely-clad women had taken charge of the six school-girls, and although they were promptly locked within a dungeon, they were, at least, in a part of this underground prison which was evidently reserved for women.

As for Handforth, he was untamed. He resisted every inch of the way, and he was placed in a dungeon entirely to himself.

"You rotters!" he panted, as his captors prepared to leave.

He saw that the men had paused in the doorway, and he made a rush. And out came his famous fists. Crash! Biff! In quick succession he landed two beauties, and the startled soldiers fell upon him, uttering strange oaths.

"'Tis the chains he needs!" snapped one.

In spite of Handforth's continued resistance he was forced back into the dungeon, and heavy chains were clamped round his ankles and arms.

And then the soldiers went out, slamming the door, and thrusting the bolts home. Every member of the exploring party was a prisoner, but Handforth was specially honoured by being placed in chains!

They had set out from England peacefully, and with no thought other than that of an Arctic trip. And here they were—thrust, abruptly and sensationally, into a novel sort of world—where everything was centuries old. They were in the Middle Ages—and they were helpless captives!

THE END.

(Look out for "HANDFORTH THE BOLD!" the next story in this enthralling schoolboy-adventure series. Order your copy of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 60.

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.

These Application Forms can be posted for 1d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

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.

The New Year.

LAST week I had something to say about this inexperienced stranger—1927 to wit. We cannot say honestly as yet that we know anything about him, a ha'porth of good, one way or t'other.

It is like meeting a new fellow. His trousers are nicely creased, and his tie does not hit you bang in the eye. But it is only after rubbing shoulders with a chap that you really understand him. After a bit you find out if he is one of the shove-everybody-else-out-of-the-way sort, or a jolly, civil-spoken individual.

What we all can do, however, is to show this newcomer that he is welcome if he means to try, and, as you may have noted, this trying business is a neat, mutual arrangement. We all have to pull our weight. Some

fellows are bulky and turn the scale at 12st. 8lb. They want putting at the end of the line.

Now, an excellent book of rules for playing the game, and making a New Year a thumping success is to be found in the programme of the St. Frank's League. If you stick like the best glue to the principles of our League, take it from me that you are doing your best for (1) the world at large; (2) your noble self.

What About It?

So let's make this New Year a thumping success, chums. Speaking for the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, I can say that there is a topping programme of the finest yarns for the coming twelve months. The N.L.L. is doing its bit, same as we all mean to do ours!



Correspondents Wanted



G. E. Relton, 62, Billington Road, New Cross Gate, London, S.E.14, wishes to hear from football clubs who will play his team.

Leonard M. Finch, 21, Bushway, Becontree, Essex, wishes to correspond with a London member interested in wireless.

E. A. Stuart, 54, Prince Regent's Lane, Plaistow, London, E.13, wishes to hear from readers who are interested in acting, as he is forming a dramatic club, so as to produce a play based on life at St. Frank's.

Patrick Bell, Imperial Hotel, Thames, New Zealand, wishes a London reader to tell him something about London.

Miss Doris Harman, 20, Villiers Road, Oxhey, Watford, Herts, wishes to correspond with members overseas.

Arthur Rivlin, "Ardwyn," Radyr, Glam, S. Wales, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere who are interested in stamps.

Ernest S. Blake, 197, Leucha Road, St. James Street, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wishes to correspond with readers in Australia.

Jack Brooke, 4, Bedford Terrace, Sheepscar Street, Leeds, wishes to correspond with readers.

Gilbert Graham, 5, Waverley Place, Stranraer, wishes to correspond with readers overseas.

Harry K. Norman, St. Ecgwin, Hucclecote, Glos, nr. Gloucester, would like to hear from readers anywhere in the British Isles. All letters answered. Readers overseas also asked to write.

Albert G. Watts, 9, Clifton Road, Kingston Hill, Surrey, wishes to hear from members of the League in his district.

Archie Luke, 8, Paradise Place, Plymouth, wishes to correspond with overseas readers. Has back numbers of "Monster" and "N. L. L."

F. Clark, 61, Church Street, St Peter's, Broadstairs, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers overseas, especially in Canada; also some in England interested in rabbit keeping.

H. Jeffers, Coolmore, Carrigaline, Co. Cork, Ireland, wishes to correspond with readers.

A. H. Horrocks, Green Bank, Green Lane, Ashton-upon-Mersey, Cheshire, wishes to correspond with members who are interested in railways, especially the L. & N.W. section of the L.M.S.

Edwin Evens, 2, Harrison Street, Stoke, Devonport, Devon, wishes to correspond with readers; all letters answered.

Alan F. White, 22, Trevelyan Street, Wayville, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a member in England interested in pigeon racing.

S. W. Boughton, 33, North Gate, Newark, Notts, wishes to correspond with readers, also to join a club in Newark.

V. Denton, 43, Middle Street, The Avenue, Southampton, wishes to hear from members in Hants.

A. S. Gibson, Florence Street, Mentone, Victoria, Australia, wishes to exchange stamps with readers anywhere



SEXTON BLAKE

—the world's most popular detective.

He appears every week with Tinker, his boy assistant, in a brilliant, adventuresome story in the

UNION JACK

Ask to see this week's issue—

Out on Thursday - 2d.

FREE! 200 FREE!!

200 magnificent stamps, including 10 fine unused Colonials, a further over 50 unused, and fine 140 beautiful stamps. This is a really marvellous offer not to be repeated. Send p.c. only requesting approvals.

Lisburn & Townsend, London Rd., Liverpool.



HEIGHT COUNTS in winning success Height increased—health and physique improved. Wonderful results. Send for particulars and our £100 guarantee to Girvan System, A.M.P. 17 Stroud Green Road, London N.4.

300 STAMPS FOR 6d. (Abroad 1/-) including Old India, Nigeria, New South Wales, Gold Coast, etc. W. A. WHITE, Engine Lane, LYE, Stourbridge

1/6 THE BULLY BOY 1/6

20 Shot Rapid Repeater Action Pea Pistol. Fires a pea 25 feet at the rate of 100 a minute. A regular Pocket Lewis Gun!—Bright, nickel finish, each in box with ammunition. A better shooter than you have ever had before! Send 1/6 and don't miss our latest quick-irer! Colonial postage 9d. extra. Send postcard for list.

L. BISHOP & CO., 41, Finsbury Sq., London, E.C.



FREE 100 DIFFERENT STAMPS—War, Revolution and Peace Issues, and Metal Watermark Detector, to genuine applicants for Approvals—R. WILKINSON, COLWYN BAY

CUT THIS OUT

"NELSON LEE" PEN COUPON. VALUE 3d.

Send 5 of these coupons with only 2/9 (and 2d stamp) direct to the **FLEET PEN CO., 119, Fleet Street, E.C.4.** By return you will receive a handsome lever self-filling **FLEET FOUNTAIN PEN** with solid gold nib (fine, medium, or broad), usually 10/6. Fleet price 4/1, or with 5 coupons only 2/9.



JOIN THE ROYAL NAVY AND SEE THE WORLD.

Boys are wanted for the Seaman Class (from which selections are made for the Wireless Telegraphy and Signalling Branches) Age 15 to 16 years.

MEN also are required for
SEAMEN (SPECIAL SERVICE) ... Age 18 to 25
STOKERS ... Age 18 to 25
ROYAL MARINE FORCES ... Age 17 to 23

GOOD PAY. ALL FOUND. EXCELLENT CHANCES FOR PROMOTION.

Apply by letter to the Recruiting Staff Officer, R.N. and R.M., 5, Suffolk Street, Birmingham, 121, Victoria Street, Bristol, 13, Crown Terrace, Downhill, Glasgow, 30, Canning Place, Liverpool, 55, Whitehall, London S.W.1, 259, Deansgate, Manchester, 116, Rye Hill, Newcastle-on-Tyne, or 6, Washington Terrace, Queen's Park, Southampton.



DON'T BE BULLIED

Send 4d Stamps for Two Splendid Illus. Lessons in Jujitsu; the Wonderful Japanese art of Self-Defence without weapons. Better than boxing or any science invented. Learn to take care of yourself under all circumstances; and fear no man. Monster large Illus.

Portion for P.O. 3/9. Send Now to "YAWARA" (Dept. A.P.), 10, Queensway, Hanworth, Feltham, Middlesex.

£2,000 worth cheap Photo. Material. Samples catalogue free. 12 by 10 Enlargement, any photo 8d.—**HACKETT'S WORKS,** July Road, Liverpool.

MAGIC TRICKS, etc.—Parrots 2/6, 5/6. Ventriloquist's Instrument. Invisible. Imitate Birds. Price 6d. each, 4 for 1/-.—**T. W. HARRISON,** 239, Pentonville Road, London, N.1.

FINE COLLECTOR'S OUTFIT FREE (inc. Mag. Glass, Mounts, Superb Packet Stamps, Duplicate Book, etc., etc.) to GENUINE Applicants for Approvals sending postage.—**B. L. CORYN,** 1r. Island Wall, Whitstable.

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.