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THE SECRET OF THE NORTH!

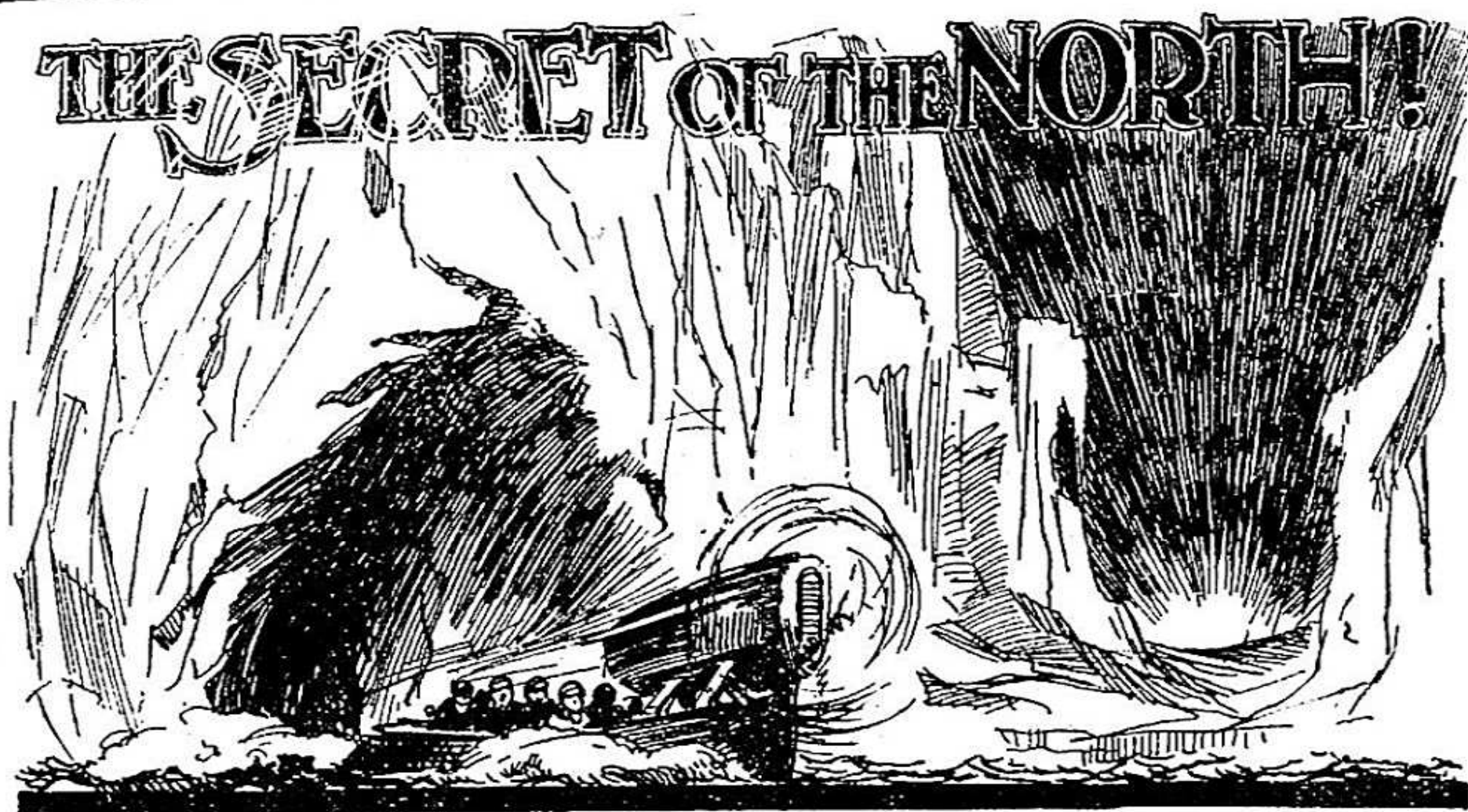
The Boys of St. Frank's in a powerful long complete yarn packed with laughter and thrills.

New Series No. 42.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.



The fugitive enemy galley was vanishing into the blackness of the great cavern. "I don't like it!" muttered Nipper, staring ahead. "Ease up, you chaps. I believe this is a trick to lure us into the cave and trap us!"



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

The Boys of St. Frank's make some amazing discoveries in this week's exciting long complete adventure story.

CHAPTER 1.

THE EVE OF BATTLE.

"**F**IVE bob!" said Willy Handforth crisply.

"Eh?"

"Five bob, my lad—and don't argue about it."

"What!"

"You're a good chap, Ted, but you're dense," said Willy, with a sigh. "I speak to you in the plainest of plain English, and all you can do is to goggle at me like a half-cured herring. Five bob!"

Edward Oswald Handforth slowly rose to his feet, and his expression was one of withering contempt as he gazed at his minor. All the other St. Frank's fellows up and down the long tables were grinning.

"You poor, pitiful young chimpanzee!" he said scornfully.

"That's not my fault—I'm your brother!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you calling me a chimpanzee?" roared Handforth.

"Not that I know of," replied Willy mildly.

"I thought you were calling me one. But why drag in the zoo? I asked you for five bob, Ted, and I want five bob. In fact, I shan't be satisfied until I've got five bob.

And unless you look jolly nippy, I shall make it seven-and-six!"

The leader of Study D breathed hard.

"You cheeky, nervy, young ass!" he panted. "Are you trying to make me look silly in front of all these chaps?"

"I get blamed for lots of things," said Willy, with a snort, "but isn't it a bit thick to accuse me of Nature's work?"

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Another word from you, my lad, and I'll make you smart!" roared Handforth, turning red.

"Good gad!" murmured Glenthorne. "I rather think that the dashed young bouncer is smart already. What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you ever hear such piffle?" hooted Handforth appealing to the general company. "What does my minor want five bob for? Anybody might think we were at St. Frank's, instead of stuck here thousands of miles from anywhere, and eight or nine centuries behind the calendar! English money isn't any good in Northestria, so what's the idea of this foolery?"

Willy sighed again.

"If you didn't argue so much, Ted, you'd be a fairly likeable sort of chap," he said patiently. "But why make all this fuss? I

want to go round the shops this morning, to buy some souvenirs, and I'm afraid my own cash won't be sufficient for all——"

"But English money isn't any good here," interrupted his major.

"That's all you know," retorted Willy. "I went into a shop yesterday, and the merchant was almost ready to empty his window for half-a-crown! These Northestrians are as keen as mustard on our money—whether it's currency or not."

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "I shouldn't be surprised if there isn't something in it! These people are naturally keen. I'm blessed if I don't do some shopping myself!"

"As much as you like, old man—after you've whacked out my five bob," said Willy. "Come on—smile nicely, and disgorge!"

Edward Oswald was so struck by Willy's suggestion that he handed over the five shillings almost mechanically. Willy shook his head as he took the money.

"This is easy," he said. "What a chump I was not to ask for ten. And now I've put the idea into his head; he'll go and blue all he's got!"

Dick Hamilton was smiling.

"You're lucky to get any, you cheeky young beggar!" he said. "But is it really true about the local shopkeepers? Are they keen on our coins?"

"Keen as mustard," replied Willy. "Money buys a lot here in the ordinary way, but for sixpence these Dunstane merchants will sell you a pair of shoes—and you can get a whole suit for half-a-crown!"

"What price a general shopping expedition?" grinned Tommy Watson.

"H'm! I don't want to throw a spanner into the works, but what's the good?" asked Nipper dubiously. "You fellows seem to think that we're going back to England soon."

"Of course we are," said Willy. "Term's started already."

"Yes, we shall be late," remarked Fullwood. "Our football will get rusty, and we shall miss the skating——"

"But, my dear idiots, you seem to have forgotten that we're bottled up in this oasis," interrupted Nipper. "We're in the Arctic Circle, we're hemmed in by soaring glaciers and mountains, and no rescue party can possibly reach us. On the top of that, it's the eve of battle—and the Gothlanders may be on their way to invade us at this very minute."

Somehow, the other juniors failed to be alarmed. They regarded the situation with perfect equanimity, and took it for granted that everything would come out all right in the end.

Yet Nipper's reminder was justified.

It was very doubtful, indeed, whether Lord Dorrimore's airship party would ever escape from this oasis in the wastes of the unknown Arctic.

They had only discovered it by a mere

accident, after the great dirigible had been whirled helplessly through the blackness of the Northern night, apparently to destruction. Just when the blizzards had seemed at their worst, the airship had entered a calm zone—and had fluttered down, crippled beyond repair.

They found themselves, to all intents and purposes, back in the Middle Ages—in a land of moated castles, walled cities, knights in armour, and where feudal lords held sway. And they found the peaceful Northestrians on the verge of being invaded and attacked by Kassker the Grim and his savage Gothlanders.

And what adventures they had had already!

The St. Frank's fellows had not only raided the enemy country, but they had taken command of a pirate galley, and had experienced many narrow escapes. Even now, the galley was waiting just off the beach, her crew of oarsmen ready.

For Northestria was divided from Gothland by an inland sea—a great lake which stretched for thirty or forty miles. While Northestria was by far the greater territory—and the richer—Gothland contained the more savage inhabitants. These brutal people were apparently the direct descendants of a lost line of the ancient Goths. The Northestrians, on the other hand, were sprung from Anglo-Saxon stock. English, indeed, was the universal tongue of this forgotten realm—a quaint form of English which was pleasant to listen to.

If Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had not taken command of their hosts' armies, Kassker would already have gained an overwhelming victory. He and his relentless hordes had been flung back, defeated and disorganised. And since then, Nelson Lee had done a great deal more for the protection of these peaceful people.

Although the feudal lords were the rulers of their own districts, all Northestria was loyal to the Princess Mercia. She, a sweet girl of only seventeen, was the appointed ruler, until the young Prince Oswy should come of age. Her chief adviser was Ethelbert the Red—and he was a kind of Prime Minister or Regent.

And now, according to all the information that could be gained, Kassker the Grim was ready to launch another attack. The whole of Northestria, from one end of the land to the other, was an armed camp. Soldiers were swarming up and down the entire coast, and a hundred and one preparations had been made to repel the savage invader.



CHAPTER 2.

NAVAL MANŒUVRES.

"Y Jove! Look at that!" said Reggie Pitt, coming to a halt.

He and a group of other Removites were strolling down to the lake front. The city of Dun-

stone—Northestria's capital—was built almost on the water's edge, the great wall, with its towering battlements overlooking the water.

Willy and his two chums of the Third had gone off on the projected shopping expedition. And Handforth, taking a tip from his minor, had dragged Church and McClure on a similar jaunt. There were plenty of shops in the city—quaint old establishments, each distinguishable by its sign, as in the olden days in England.

But Nipper & Co., with Pitt, Fullwood, and a few others, were more interested in the preparations for war. And, having passed out of the heavy gates, they now stared on to the lake.

"They're wonderful!" ejaculated Nipper admiringly. "The gov'nor's excelled himself this time!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie Glenthorne, screwing his monocle into his noble eye, and gazing lakewards. "I don't know what they are, laddie, but I must confess they look dashed businesslike."

Not far from the shore, two extraordinary craft were careering up and down, to the accompaniment of a terrific roar of motors with open exhausts. Hundreds of Northestrians were watching, rather awe-stricken. The strange vessels were twisting, turning, veering round, and performing the most remarkable evolutions—and all at high speed.

"Manœuvres of the Northestrian navy!" grinned Pitt.

"Our galley looks a bit sick now, doesn't it?" said Watson ruefully. "She was about the fastest thing on the lake, barring the motor-boat, but she'll be like a Thames barge compared to these speed merchants!"

The speed merchants in question were nothing more or less than the two main engine gondolas of the wrecked airship, complete with enormously powerful motors, air propellers, and everything. They had been fitted with cunningly devised floats, and were now undergoing their tests.

Nelson Lee was piloting one, and Lord Dorrimore the other. They were astonished at the nippy way these improvised craft answered their controls, and at the high speed they attained. Captain Waring, the airship's skipper, had had a lot to do with the actual designing of the floats.

"They ought to be jolly useful if those rotten Gothlanders come across the lake," said Nipper grimly. "They're both fitted with machine-guns, and they're like a couple of destroyers."

Curiously enough, this was the third "life," so to speak, of those gondolas. Having served their original purpose until the dirigible was wrecked, they had then been converted into tanks. But Nelson Lee considered that they would be of greater service on the water. So they had shed their wheels, and were now additional units of the Northestrian navy.

The juniors hurried down to the beach as the two noisy monsters veered round and

came shorewards. And they greeted Nelson Lee with cheers as he climbed down from the leading craft as it grounded on the beach.

"Jolly good, sir!" sang out Nipper eagerly.

"They haven't behaved so badly, young 'un," admitted Lee with satisfaction. "Much better than I expected, in fact. But what are you boys doing here? You ought to be in bed and asleep."

"We've had over six hours, sir," protested Pitt.

"You ought to have had twelve, after the adventures you went through yesterday," declared Lee, with a frown. "I don't want you to get up to any mischief."

"Well, I like that!" protested Nipper indignantly. "We're all bursting to help in the defence work, and you calmly call it getting into mischief! And was it yesterday when we raided Gothland, sir? Blessed if I can keep count of the time in this rummy country! We can't get used to this perpetual daylight, somehow."

The great oasis was everlastingly flooded with diffused radiance from the surrounding volcanoes. The glare from the craters flooded the high mists overhead; and this light, deflected into the basin, was almost akin to subdued sunlight.

Nelson Lee had ordered all the St. Frank's fellows to bed in the Royal castle, and they had obeyed. But now, after a good meal, they were intent upon being active again. The Moor View girls, of course, were with the Princess Mercia, safe in an inland retreat.

A shout went up when a lanky figure emerged from the second gondola.

"Old Browne of the Fifth!" said Fullwood. "There's a nerve! He's been cruising on one of these ripping new boats, and we've been left in the cold."

"Like his blessed cheek!"

William Napoleon Browne approached, smiling.

"Jealousy, brothers, is an unfortunate trait, and must be sternly curbed," he observed. "I would have you know that I am second engineer of this warship. If on active service, I shall probably manipulate a rifle in my spare time."

"Can't we be appointed, too, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"Sorry, young 'uns, but the space is limited," replied Lee dryly. "I expect to be the commander of one gondola, and my list of officers is complete—"

"Perhaps Dorrie will find us some places," said Pitt hopefully.

"Sorry, but I'm afraid Dorrie won't," said his lordship, as he joined them. "The fact is, I prefer the motor-boat—and Captain Waring is the commander of this floatin' jazz band. It's no good askin' him for any appointments, though, because the crew has already been chosen."

"Well, we've got our galley, anyhow," said Fullwood.

Nelson Lee looked at them rather grimly.

"If you boys are thinking of actively participating in a battle, you'd better put the idea right out of your heads," he said. "By a merciful providence, you are all alive and well, and I don't want you to take any unnecessary risks. These gondolas will probably be of great use in disorganising the Gothlander fleets, but that pirate galley of yours is a different proposition. I think I'll have a guard placed on her, so that you can't sneak off in her!"

Nipper stroked his chin.

"That's not a bad idea, sir," he said thoughtfully. "Sneak off, eh? H'm! I'll think about it!"

"You young ass, we'd run you to earth in ten minutes," grinned Lord Dorrimore. "You can't try those games——"

He broke off, staring. A figure on horseback was galloping up recklessly, and they all recognised Handforth. And it was quite easy to see that Handforth was desperate with excitement.

"What on earth's he been up to now?" growled Nipper. "I thought he went shopping?"

"So he did, but there's never any telling with Handy," replied Reggie Pitt. "I heard him telling Church and McClure that he was going to pay a visit to the airship, to get some money out of his luggage, I believe——"

"News!" roared Handforth, as he reined in his horse and leapt to the ground. "Marvellous news, you chaps!"

In spite of their disregard for Handforth's "surprises"—which generally turned out to be mares' nests—the fellows crowded round him.

"What news?" they shouted.

"Sparks has got in touch with the outer world!" panted Handforth, trembling with excitement. "The wireless is working!"



CHAPTER 3.

OVER THE ETHER.

"WHAT!"

"In touch with the outer world!"

"Good gad!"

"It's too good to be true!" exclaimed another.

Everybody was shouting at once, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore, after exchanging rapid glances, pushed the juniors aside, and closed upon Handforth. Lee was frowning.

"Look here, young man, if this is just one of your exaggerations, I'll tan you within an inch of your life!" he said darkly. "Don't you realise that it is a terribly vital thing? If you've got hold of a false report——"

"False report be blown!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Sorry, sir!" he added, with a start. "I—I—— Why, I've just come

from the wireless room! I was standing next to Sparks when he got the signals! He's in touch with an American cargo boat in the North Atlantic!"

"What?"

"It's a fact!" said Handforth quickly.

"Did the operator tell you this?" demanded Lee.

"He was so jolly excited, sir, that he shouted it out to everybody," said Handforth, delighted with the sensation he had caused. "I was in one of the cabins, when I heard him yelling."

"So you rushed to the wireless-room?" asked Nipper.

"Rather! And there was Sparks, sitting in front of his instruments, and his face was red with triumph," said Handforth eagerly. "I started speaking, but he waved his hand and roared out that he was in touch with a Yankee tramp. The very words he used, sir."

"I'll go along and verify this," said Nelson Lee firmly. "By James, Dorrie, if this is actually true, it means that we're in touch with the outer world at last!"

His lordship grinned happily.

"The end of our troubles, what?" he asked.

"I wish I could say 'yes,' old man," replied Lee, suddenly becoming grave. "It will be a splendid thing if we can only send word out that we are all safe and well. As for escaping from the isolated little realm, well——"

Lee broke off and shrugged his shoulders.

"I know," said Dorrie. "Somethin' of a problem, eh? Well, let's be thankful for small mercies. We'll dash along and see if Handforth's yarn is true."

There were plenty of horses handy, and within a few moments Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were galloping off. Both were startled by Handforth's piece of news—and both rather sceptical. For days the airship's wireless operator had been trying to establish communication with the outer world. But, so far—until to-day, at all events—he had only received confused, unintelligible signals.

The great airship had originally fallen a mile or two from the capital, in a peaceful valley. And there she was still, a mere skeleton of her former self. A great deal of the fabric had gone; large numbers of the metal girders had been ripped away, to be used for various purposes, and very little of the original craft was left except the big central cabins amidships, and the navigating department, in the forepart.

Here the little wireless-room was situated. Fortunately, none of the delicate electrical instruments had been injured in the crash. The engineers had rigged up a new aerial, one that was calculated to receive and transmit with full efficiency, but something had been wrong. No definite results could be obtained. And Nelson Lee believed that perpetual atmospheric disturbances round the outer edge of the great basin were responsible

for this negative result. Possibly, too, the volcanoes had a share in the failure.

Lee was so convinced that the wireless was a failure that he could hardly see how Handforth's story could be true. He was anxious, therefore, when he approached the wireless-room. Several of the airship's engineers were standing about, looking excited.

"Grand news, sir!" said one, as Lee came up.

"I can hardly believe that the report is true, Gunby," replied Lee.

"It's true enough, sir," said the engineer. "Sparks is nearly dotty in there, and he won't let any of us go near him."

Everybody knew the wireless operator as "Sparks," although, this, of course, wasn't his real name. It is doubtful if any of the airship officers or crew knew what the young man's name actually was.

"Gosh, I'm glad you've come, sir!" he said as Nelson Lee entered. "You, too, sir," he added, to Dorrie. "We've done it at last! I've just had a chat with an American cargo boat, and now I'm trying to get the old Wanderer. I think we're going to be lucky, too."

"You'd better let Mr. Lee come there," said his lordship.

Sparks was in no way offended, and he got up at once—knowing that Nelson Lee's knowledge was enormously greater than his own. The great detective was tense and expectant as he sat before the delicate instruments.

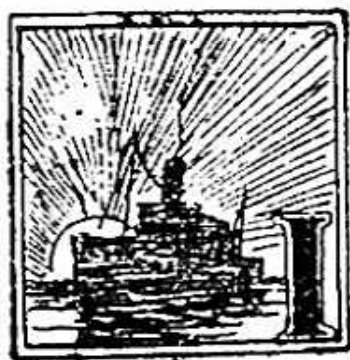
"What about this cargo boat?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"It seems that we were all given up for lost a fortnight ago," replied the young wireless man in a whisper. "Practically every boat on the Seven Seas was instructed to look out for wreckage, and to make reports, in case anything was seen of us. The newspapers have been full of our affairs for days past, and the whole of England is mourning you, sir, and Mr. Lee, and all the young people. Seems to have been a regular sensation."

Dorrie grinned.

"There'll be another now—as soon as they get the news of our adventures into the papers," he remarked. "By glory! What a relief it'll be, too, to the parents of all these youngsters."

And then the last doubt was set at rest, for Nelson Lee got into direct communication with the Wanderer!



CHAPTER 4.

THE BRITISH NAVY TAKES A HAND.

IN touch with the Wanderer! There was something magic in that report when it reached the ears of the St. Frank's fellows waiting outside in the open. They had followed Lee

and Dorrie post haste. And, the news having spread, practically all the boys were present, to say nothing of many of the airship men.

Even Willy & Co. had heard a rumour while shopping, and had just arrived at the wreckage, bringing Church and McClure with them. And every face was alight with eagerness and excitement.

"By George!" said Handforth. "What did I tell you? We're in touch with the Wanderer now, and that means that we shall get all the news. Old Captain Burton was bound to hear everything from England, and he'll pass it along."

Nipper shook his head.

"It doesn't much matter about the news on our side," he said. "The most important thing is for us to get our story across, so that your people will be partially relieved from their anxieties."

"Partially relieved?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"Well, they won't be particularly joyful—after they've got over the first relief of knowing that we're alive—to learn that we're all bottled up," replied Nipper.

"Rats!" laughed Handforth. "After mourning us for days and weeks, and now learning that we're alive, they won't worry about us being hemmed in here. Not likely! They'll move heaven and earth to send out rescue parties."

"My only hat!" murmured Tommy Watson dreamily. "Rescue parties!"

"They'll send an airship for us."

"Yes, rather!"

"Two or three airships, perhaps."

"A jolly old fleet, what?"

They were all talking at once, discussing the main possibilities. But Nipper felt compelled to remind them of certain uncomfortable facts. He didn't want them to raise their hopes too high.

"It's a great thing to be in communication with Dorrie's yacht," he said, "and we can be pretty certain that our people at home will make frantic efforts to send help. But you haven't forgotten that terrific battle we had, thirty thousand feet up, have you? This volcanic valley is entirely surrounded by terrible storms, everlasting storms; and if any airship tries to break through the encircling cyclones, it'll be doomed."

"We broke through, didn't we?" asked Do Valerie.

Nipper nodded.

"Yes," he said, with a significant nod at the wreckage.

"H'm! You mean we were smashed up?" asked Val.

"And if any other airship gets into this quiet zone, it'll arrive a crippled hulk, too," said Nipper. "That's the problem we're up against, you chaps. It's glorious to know that we can talk with England, but don't forget the real position."

"Couldn't they send out aeroplanes?" asked Pitt. "Some of those huge cross-Channel machines can fight storms that would wreck a dirigible."

Nipper merely shrugged his shoulders. He didn't like to point out that the most violent storm that ever raged round Britain's coast—the worst on record—was only a feeble breeze compared to the vortex of atmospheric disturbances which ringed this tiny Northern world.

Nelson Lee didn't appear for over an hour, and the waiting crowd gave him a great shout. Even if they couldn't see much difference in Lee's expression, none could fail to note the flushed excitement of Lord Dorrimore.

"What's the news, sir?"

"Be a sport, sir, and tell us!"

"Well, there's not much, but what there is sounds good," smiled Nelson Lee. "And there'll probably be other information later, if the wireless continues to function. I've got an idea that this may be only a flash in the pan. Perhaps there's a lull outside, a brief relaxation of the elements."

"No fear, sir; everything will be all right now!"

"What about our people at home, sir?"

"Captain Burton has sent us a message of joy," replied Nelson Lee. "Dorrie's yacht is still anchored at her base, and it seems that she has been joined by a number of destroyers of the British Navy——"

"Hurrah!"

"Now we shan't be long!"

"Don't cheer too soon!" warned Lee. "For all the help those destroyers can give us, they might as well be up in the moon! They have recently been scouring the seas, searching for wreckage."

"And it's here all the time!" grinned Handforth.

"Naturally, our messages out of the ether, after so many days of dead silence, have created a big sensation," continued Lee. "They had given us up as lost long ago."

"Did you tell Captain Burton exactly where we are, sir?"

"I did, and I understand that the British Government is also preparing a fleet of naval seaplanes to scour the Arctic."

"Seaplanes! Hurrah!"

"Odds guesses and surmises!" ejaculated Archie Glenthorne. "A fleet, what? Laddies, didn't I say so?"

"Absolutely!" grinned Pitt.

"This seaplane fleet was being prepared, I believe, as a kind of forlorn hope," said Lee. "The Government was anxious to discover some trace of us, in order to put an end to all suspense. Naturally, the knowledge that we are still alive will make an enormous difference, and the plans may be changed——"

"Won't they send the seaplanes, sir?" asked Church in dismay.

"I thought it fair to give a warning, after stating the exact position of this oasis, to the effect that no aircraft could ever hope to conquer the storms which rage round us," replied Lee gravely. "For the moment, nothing more can be done; we must wait

until our Government has learned of our plight, and perhaps some official messages will come in later. Until then we must be patient."

"Takin' it all round, my lads, it's thunderin' good news," said Lord Dorrimore cheerfully. "The British Navy is on the job, and I've always found that when the British Navy starts something, it finishes it!"



CHAPTER 5.

THE IRONY OF FATE.

AND then, just at this joyous moment, when everybody was wildly enthusiastic over the news, came a jar.

A Northestrian officer, galloping up at full speed, brought grave tidings. The man proved to be Wynwed the Jovial, whom the juniors knew well, since he had been in the princess' bodyguard. He was now a highly-placed officer in one of the many new Northestrian regiments.

"Cheerio, Wynwed!" yelled Handforth, waving a hand.

But Wynwed was far more alarmed than jovial now. He flung himself from his horse, and saluted Nelson Lee.

"'Tis reported that the enemy is astir, my lord," he said breathlessly. "Beshrew the dogs, but it seemeth another invasion is toward."

"I was expecting this," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "So the information that Handforth obtained yesterday was authentic! Kassker and his men are coming, eh? Well, I fancy we're ready for them!"

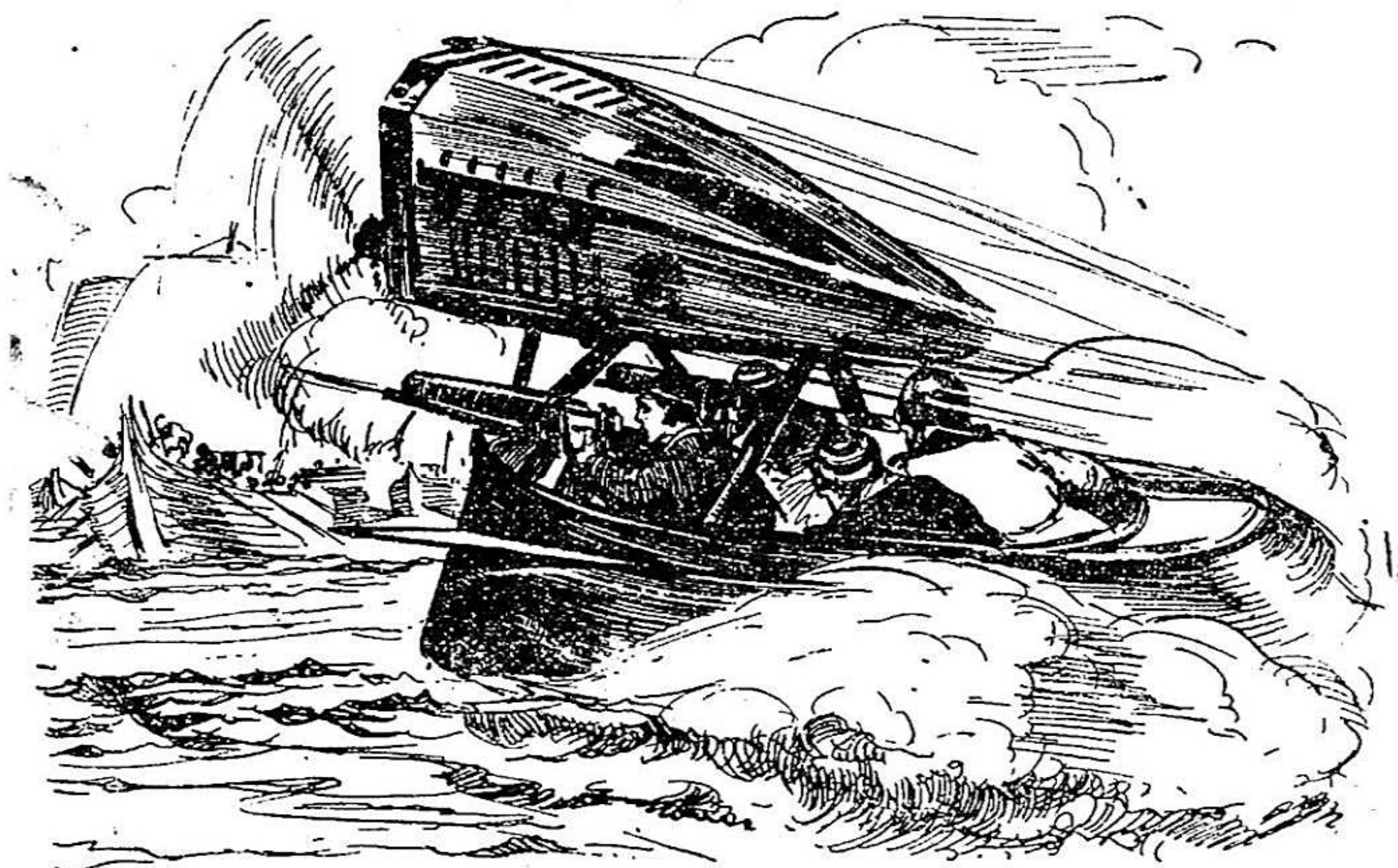
"Ready to tickle 'em more than they bargain for!" nodded Dorrie.

Wynwed the Jovial gave a great shout.

"Ay, my lords, ye are right!" he declared. "Northestria is no longer a land of sleepy-heads! I' faith, but I scarce recognise my own country these days! A wondrous transformation; and all due to thee, Lee of the Lionheart! By my soul, we'll keep these rats from overrunning us!"

"Go back to your position, Wynwed, and prepare your men all along your own section," said Nelson Lee swiftly. "Let the order go down the line that every man must hold himself ready for the great battle. Kassker the Grim will profit by his last experience, and make a much more determined attack now. Northestria's only chance is to keep the invader out."

Lee and Dorrie hurried off, forgetful of the good news they had recently heard, remembering only that they must fight Northestria's cause for their own safety. It was the irony of fate that this grave information should come at such a moment. For none of the members of the airship party could ignore the fact that they would be the first to die by torture should Kassker prevail.



The strange-looking craft sped over the water, with Nelson Lee at the helm, while Browne handled a machine-gun. Upon its speed and death-dealing weapons depended the fate of both Northestria and the boys of St. Frank's.

So, in helping the Northestrians to repel this savage invader, Nelson Lee was doing a double service. He was helping his hosts, and also striving hard to keep his own party intact. For Lee, of course, was in sole charge. It was Lord Dorrimore's party, really, but his lordship was such an irresponsible individual that he couldn't be entrusted with any affairs of gravity.

"The invasion!" said Dick Hamilton grimly. "So it's started, eh? Are we going to be out of all this excitement, you chaps?"

"Not likely!" said a dozen voices.

"We haven't even got time to think of the news that's just arrived," continued Nipper. "Unless we help the Northestrians to whack old Kassker, we shall be in a fine mess, particularly if the Gothlanders win."

"We shall be in such a mess that the movements of the British Navy will cease to interest us," said Reggie Pitt drily. "If once we get into Kassker's hands, he'll have our heads chopped off."

"He's more likely to burn us at the stake!" growled Watson.

"Well, chop or steak, it doesn't make much difference, from our point of view," replied Reggie. "No, I'm not talking about our next meal, but Kassker's next entertainment, if he gets the chance."

"Then you're an ass!" said Handforth coldly.

"That makes a pair of us, then—"

"We're going to smash these Gothlanders to smithereens!" roared Handforth aggressively. "Haven't we seen what they are?"

Kassker's armies are a mob of murderous, looting, thieving hooligans! It wouldn't surprise me to hear that they're cannibals, too! Are we going to be beaten by a mob like that?"

But before anybody could answer this question, Nelson Lee returned on horseback, and he brought with him a strong company of Northestrian mounted guards. Lee himself was looking a wonderful figure in his glittering chainmail and helmet. He had fitted himself admirably into this mediæval environment.

"What's the idea, sir?" asked Nipper, as the horseguards took up their positions round the airship wreckage.

"The old Titan must be protected at all costs," replied Nelson Lee. "She not only contains valuable stores—machine-gun ammunition, petrol, oil, and so forth—but there is the wireless, too. There is always the chance that Kassker may have spies at work, and—"

"Half a minute, sir!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "I've just got an idea!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

"Don't bother about your silly ideas now, old man!"

"Rats!" bellowed Handforth, rushing up to Nelson Lee's horse, and clinging to the bridle. "Just a minute, sir. How long will it be before the Gothlanders make their first attack—if they get over to this coast?"

"It will probably be several hours before any battle develops," replied Lee impatiently. "I am sorry, Handforth, but I

cannot stay now. I must get back to headquarters—"

"But supposing the invaders land on this bit of coast, sir?"

"In that case, things will be serious," replied Lee.

"And isn't there a strong chance that they will land, sir?" went on Edward Oswald keenly. "They're bound to make for the capital, and Dunstane is only a mile or two away. This section of country is liable to become a battlefield, isn't it, sir?"

"I am afraid it is," said Nelson Lee gravely. "That is one reason why I have brought these guards up—"

"But they won't be able to save the airship if there's fighting, sir?" said Handforth. "I don't suppose the beggars will effect a landing, but there's always a chance. Wouldn't it be a lot safer to shift the stores, and the wireless apparatus, and everything else, on to a ship?"

A yell went up from the listening crowd. "Dry up, Handy, you ass!" panted Church uncomfortably.

"One moment!" said Nelson Lee, a keen light coming into his eyes. "You suggest transferring the stores—petrol, wireless, and so forth—on to a ship, Handforth?"

"That's the idea, sir—that big one!" said Edward Oswald, nodding. "You've converted one boat into a kind of cruiser, haven't you? It's got two of the aero-engines fixed to it, and it's about the biggest craft on the lake. Wouldn't it be a good scheme to stow everything on board, sir?"

"Oh, the ass!" growled De Valerie. "Why the dickens doesn't Mr. Lee choke him off?"

"H'm!" murmured Nipper. "I believe the gov'nor approves of it! Perhaps it isn't such a dotty idea, after all!"



CHAPTER 6.

THE HEADQUARTERS SHIP!

HANDFORTH was encouraged to further excited words by Nelson Lee's thoughtful silence.

"Don't you see, sir?" he asked eagerly. "Those rotten Gothlanders are bound to make their biggest attack on Dunstane, and that means terrific fighting all round here. And if this place becomes a battlefield, what then? Supposing the Gothlanders gain the upper hand, even for an hour? They'll bust up this airship at the first chance, and then phut goes our petrol and wireless and everything!"

"By Jove, the chap's right!" muttered Pitt, nodding.

"But with everything on that ship, the Gothlanders won't be able to get near it!" continued Handforth. "See, sir? It's the biggest ship of all, it can travel pretty fast, and it's got machine-guns—"

"I must give you credit, Handforth, for suggesting a very practicable idea," interrupted Nelson Lee keenly. "Yes, I'll give

orders to have this scheme executed at once."

"By George!" breathed Handforth, aghast.

He was so accustomed to having his ideas flouted that Nelson Lee's warm approval rather bowled him over. But he rapidly recovered. Handforth had a way of resuming his normal equilibrium at a moment's notice.

"By George!" he repeated. "So you mean to adopt the wheeze, eh, sir? Well, of course, I don't want to brag, but my ideas are generally—"

"Hopeless, Handforth!" interrupted Lee gently.

"Eh?" gasped Edward Oswald. "His say—"

"They are generally hopeless, Handforth," repeated Lee. "And that is why I listened so impatiently just now. But this brain-wave of yours is one of the exceptions to the rule. It only shows that the dullest brain can sometimes evolve a brilliant achievement."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I like that!" protested Handforth indignantly.

"Only my joke, young 'un!" laughed Nelson Lee. "The very fact that I am adopting your scheme ought to show you that I value your wits. It will be far better to get all this stuff safely on board the Spitfire before any battle develops."

"Just what I thought, sir," nodded Handy.

"What is more, I shall go one better," declared Lee. "The ship shall become my headquarters—indeed, the headquarters of our entire party. No matter how the battle goes, we can then shift down the coast as we think fit. All our valuable instruments and stores will then be safe, no matter how the invaders progress."

"But will there be time, sir?" asked Nipper quickly.

"It all depends upon how many men are employed in the work," replied Nelson Lee. "I shall order an entire regiment to undertake the task, and I rather fancy that the feat will be accomplished swiftly."

Less than half an hour later, hundreds of men were passing between the wrecked airship and the lakeshore. For when Nelson Lee decided upon a policy, he lost no time in putting it into execution!

Handforth, of course, was very delighted with himself. He watched the operations with a fatherly eye, and apparently considered that he was now Commander-in-Chief.

"Well, you may look green, Handy, but, when all is said and done, you're true blue!" said Reggie Pitt drily. "How on earth did you get that marvellous idea? It must be this Northestrian air!"

"Rats!" said Handforth airily. "They come natural to me!"

"About one every five years on the average," nodded Pitt. "All the rest of 'em are duds—"

"You silly fathead!" roared Handforth,

turning red. "My ideas are all good! Every one of 'em! But it's only once in a blue moon that people appreciate me at my true worth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was such a lot happening that the good news from the Outer World had almost been forgotten. The enemy was on its way, and there would be no time to think of freedom and home during the next tense hours, apparently!

Under Nelson Lee's precise instructions, the stores from the Titan were quickly and effectively transferred to the Spitfire. This latter vessel had been renamed by Dorrie, and her new designation was appropriate—for her aero-engines were not only noisy, but their open exhausts spurted fire as soon as they were put into operation. In addition, she carried two machine-guns, and these instruments of death could spit quite a lot of fire when they chose.

The handling of the wireless stuff was undertaken entirely by the airship's engineers, with young Sparks anxiously superintending. But the change-over was safely accomplished, and the aerial was rigged up afresh on two special masts. To the immense relief of Sparks, his apparatus functioned perfectly as soon as he tested it on board the floating headquarters.

It had been a swift and dramatic change.

Everything that was highly prized was now safely beyond any possibility of destruction. Lee did not deceive himself. Kassker the Grim was launching a tremendous attack this time—a three-fold assault, if advance information was to be believed. All the Gothland armies were being hurled into the conflict, and it was only reasonable to assume that at least one of Kassker's armies would be successful. And that one might well be the army which threw itself upon the Northeastrian coast in the vicinity of the capital.

The Spitfire was as a fortress, for none of the Gothlander boats could compare with her in speed, and thus she could avoid all dangers. And her machine-guns rendered her impervious to a combined assault.

It was undoubtedly a wise move to have the wireless on board. Nelson Lee himself gave full instructions to his immediate officers. The Northeastrian armies were to operate independently, under their own commanders. These people could now be trusted to defend their own land against the savage invader.

Mr. Wilcox, one of the Titan's officers, was placed in temporary command of the headquarters ship, with orders to steer clear of all warfare, if possible. Nelson Lee took charge of one of the floating gondolas, and Captain Waring was placed at the controls of the other. Lord Dorrimore was more at home in the motor-boat.

These three vessels were setting forth to harass the enemy fleets while they were yet in mid-lake. Lee knew that invaluable service could be done by breaking up the Gothlanders' transports in advance, so that when

they landed their men, confusion would be created. The Northeastrian forces could be trusted to make short shrift of the isolated invaders.

As for the St. Frank's fellows, they had their own ideas!



CHAPTER 7.

THE SCHOOLBOY VIKINGS!

NIPPER was looking thoughtful.

"Well, everything seems to be going ahead," he remarked. "And everybody's bustling about and doing his bit—"

"Except us!" remarked Fullwood.

"Exactly!" nodded Nipper grimly. "Except us! Do you call that right?"

"No fear!"

"Absolutely not, laddie!"

"Where does the Remove come in?"

"Just what I was about to discuss," said Nipper coolly. "Where, my lads, does the Remove come in? Mr. Lee's gone off in one of the gondolas, Captain Waring has buzzed away in another, and old Dorrie has pinched the motor-boat. And we're left stranded on the beach, as it were."

"Neglected and forgotten!" said Reggie Pitt sadly.

"We're not going to stand it!" roared Handforth. "Did you notice old Browne? He had the nerve to go out with Captain Waring, in that gondola! Stevens, too! If those giddy Fifth Formers can go into battle, why can't we?"

Nipper's eyes were gleaming.

"It strikes me that the guv'nor overlooked us," he said cheerfully. "We can't blame him—he's got such a lot of things on his hands. Well, why shouldn't we go aboard the galley, and have our own smack at the enemy?"

"Hurrah!"

"Why not?"

"She's already for immediate putting out," continued Nipper. "Her oarsmen are all aboard, and they'll do anything in the world for us. They're former slaves, and we saved them from the pirates. So they'll serve us loyally. Hands up, all those who vote for putting out against the enemy!"

Every hand went up. Some fellows raised both.

"Good men!" said Nipper, grinning. "Then let's make a move."

"Hurrah!"

"By George! I must say you've got the right idea, my son!" roared Handforth approvingly. "As a matter of fact, I was just about to suggest the same thing myself—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So I was!" declared Handforth, glaring. "But I thought Mr. Cautious Nipper would start all sorts of objections! He's getting sensible in his old age! Must be the result of my influence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm still cautious, Handy, so you mustn't expect anything spectacular," chuckled Nipper. "We'll have our smack at the enemy, if there's a chance, but I've got my own policy. My scheme is to stand by in the galley, and then give chase to isolated Gothlander transports, after the fleets have been broken up."

"That's a good scheme!" said Fullwood, nodding.

"First rate!" chorused a number of others.

Handforth gave another of his expressive snorts.

"I might have known it!" he said bitterly. "For half a minute I thought that Nipper had learned some sense. But he's just the same as ever—just the same slow-coach! My idea is to dash into the enemy full pelt."

"That would be your idea!" said Church sarcastically. "And how do you suppose we should fare? We haven't got any guns on board the galley, and those Gothlander boats are swarming with archers. We should all get killed!"

Handforth grunted.

"Oh, all right—I'll say no more!" he snapped. "Nipper's the leader—goodness only knows why, but most of you fellows seem to back him up—so I'll dry up! I won't say another word."

"There are some consolations in life, anyhow!" murmured Pitt gratefully.

"What's that?" barked Handforth.

"Hallo! I thought you weren't going to say another word?" asked Reggie, in surprise.

"You fatheaded West House idiot——"

"Steady on, you chaps!" said Nipper briskly. "No House rows now! My hat! Anybody might think we were standing in the Triangle at St. Frank's, discussing a raid on the River House fellows!"

"Crumbs!" murmured Watson. "I wish we were!"

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montie. "What a frightfully priceless picture, old boy!"

Many of the other fellows looked wistful, and Nipper shook himself.

"I didn't mean to remind you of home like that!" he growled. "Cheer up! The British Navy's on the job, and all sorts of things might happen during the next day or two. In the meantime, let's give our attention to old Kassker!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with the Gothlanders!"

And all the St. Frank's crowd, brought back to the necessities of the moment again, hurried down to the beach, where, some half a mile further down, the great galley was anchored.

The fellows had already had several breathless adventures aboard this craft. She was a galley after the style of the grim vessels which operated, in olden days, in the Mediterranean. She was propelled by means of great sweeps, and required a full hundred men to operate these oars, in addition to her navigating officers and crew. This very galley had formerly been in the hands of

pirates, and had cruised about the lake, plundering and killing.

At the approach of the St. Frank's fellows, the hundred oarsmen aroused themselves, and many of their faces were looking eager. All these men had been saved from appalling slavery, and they were grateful to their young rescuers. There was scarcely a man there who wouldn't undertake any risk at the order of these youngsters. They were untrained as soldiers, and so they had been left aboard the galley, to serve as a crew, should the vessel be needed.

And she was needed now—not, however, by order of the Commander-in-Chief!



CHAPTER 8.

JOINING IN THE FRAY!

NIPPER and his eager followers were taking matters into their own hands!

As Dick had said, it was quite probable that Nelson Lee had overlooked them. The great detective had so many responsibilities on his head—so many different operations to control—that he had no time for the boys.

The need for decisive action was, indeed, acute.

Already the horizon was black with the dots which signified the vanguard of the enemy fleets. Kassker the Grim was utilising every ship and every man. Tens of thousands of trained soldiers were being hurled across the lake, to invade the rich lands of Northestria.

There was something rather epic in those three little motor craft going out to give battle to this imposing armada. But Nelson Lee did not expect to accomplish miracles. The two gondolas and the motor-boat were speedy, and they were armed with machine-guns. At the most, Nelson Lee thought it possible that these methods would create disorganisation. Thus, the invaders would land their hordes in isolated groups, and not according to the settled plan of campaign. The Northestrians would then have a better chance of driving the invaders into the lake.

Nipper pointed as he stood on the beach. "They're coming!" he said grimly. "Jove! Look over there!"

"Thousands of them!" nodded Handforth, with satisfaction.

"Kassker means it this time!" remarked Tommy Watson. "I only hope these Northestrian chaps will be able to keep 'em out! If not, there's going to be a horrible business during the next few days."

"Let's go and have a jab at 'em, anyhow," said Handforth impatiently.

The galley was lying a couple of cable's lengths out from the shore, but there were plenty of small boats handy, and the juniors were soon on board. They were greeted with many shouts of eagerness from the oarsmen.

"Look here, you fellows," shouted Nipper, addressing the former slaves. "The Gothlanders are coming over, and we want to cruise out on the lake, and watch the battle from there. Are you game to stick to the oars?"

"Ay, young lord!" shouted one. "'Tis for thee to command!"

"Good!" said Nipper. "I'm not proposing to go into battle, because we're not equipped for hard fighting. But there's just a chance that we shall be useful. And with you fellows at the oars, we're faster than any of the enemy craft."

"Give but the order, young lord!" came a chorus.

Handforth sniffed.

"Not proposing to go into battle!" he mimicked sarcastically. "Just a chance that we shall be useful! My only hat! Are we girls, or something, that we can only watch? My idea is to smash into——"

"We know all about your ideas, old man," said Pitt gently. "They're bloodthirsty."

"My ideas are marvellous!" roared Handforth.

"Exactly, my poor old dreamer——"

"Mr. Lee says they are!" hooted Handforth triumphantly. "What about the headquarters ship? Wasn't that my idea? What about shifting all the wireless into safety? Wasn't that my——"

"Grab him, and chain him to one of the oars!" interrupted Nipper darkly. "Why should we put up with this noise?"

Half a dozen fellows jumped to obey, but Handforth backed away down the deck.

"All right!" he snapped. "I'll be calm, but only with an effort! It makes me boil to see our chances being frittered away! It makes me go hot all over——"

"That's not surprising, Handy," grinned Pitt. "Anybody who was boiling would naturally be hot all over."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Funny, aren't you?" grinned Handforth aggressively. "By George! It makes my blood run cold to think of——"

"Hallo!" said Fullwood. "He's soon cooled down!"

Handforth turned aside with disgust as a shout of laughter went up. He was amazed—pained—wounded. These fellows didn't seem to realise the urgency of the occasion. Here was the enemy, coming over in a great armada, and they were laughing and joking as though everything was normal.

Handforth wanted to hurl himself into the thick of the fighting. But Nipper was determined that the galley should keep well out of it. Nipper was one of the pluckiest fellows alive, but, fortunately, he did not share Handforth's rashness. And it would have been literally suicide to send that unarmed galley into the heart of that fleet.

Under Nipper's orders, the galley was soon under way, her great oars sweeping regularly in and out of the water, glistening and gleaming. These ex-galley-slaves were masters of their craft!

"This is something like!" remarked Church, as he leaned over the bulwark, staring out over the lake.

"Something like what?" asked Handforth disgustedly.

"Well, I mean——"

"Look where we're heading!" went on Handforth with a discontented growl. "Straight down the lake, skirting the North-eastrian coast! If I were at the wheel, I'd go straight out——"

"Impossible!" said McClure. "This galley's got a tiller!"

"What do I care whether it's a tiller or a wheel or a paddle?" snapped Edward Oswald. "If you're going to start quibbling, Arnold McClure, I'll biff you overside. I'm fed-up! Understand? Fed-up to the neck!"

His chums wisely left him alone. Handforth's war-like spirit was so fiery that he never could resign himself to a policy of caution. If he had been left entirely to his own devices during the past few weeks he would have been dead long since. All the same, nobody could deny that his luck was phenomenal. Where giants feared to tread, Handforth would stroll with utter indifference and come out whole.

The galley maintained its distance from the shore, the oarsmen wielding their great sweeps with uncanny skill and precision. By Nipper's orders, they were causing the galley to cruise easily; and Nipper himself, at the cumbersome tiller, was keeping the vessel on a course down the lake.

"What's the idea?" asked Reggie Pitt curiously.

"Those fleets seem to be thinning out down this way," replied Nipper, nodding out towards the oncoming Gothlanders. "I don't mean to be trapped among a couple of dozen enemy transports! Let's satisfy ourselves by going for an isolated one, if we can catch it. As long as we're doing our bit, we shall all feel comfortable."

"All except Handforth!" smiled Reggie.

"He doesn't count," replied Nipper dryly. "He seems to think this is a picnic, and that we're out for fun. But it's a pretty grim business, and, personally, I'm rather keen on coming out alive, so that I can get back to old England and St. Frank's."

"And so say all of us!" agreed Pitt fervently.



CHAPTER 9.

THE ATTACK DEVELOPS.

ASKER THE GRIM, the overlord of all the Gothlanders, was making his greatest bid for victory.

Every able-bodied man had been pressed into his service, and, indeed, there were thousands of men in the enemy ranks who were far from able-bodied. Kassker's idea was to gain a lightning vic-

tory by sheer weight of numbers. His savage myriads would swarm over Northestria and gain the upper hand during the first onslaught. Such was Kassker's scheme.

According to all his information—supplied by numerous spies, who had swarmed in Northestria until Nelson Lee had rounded them up—the subjects of Princess Mercia were sleepy and unprepared. Originally, the invasion would have been easy, and Kassker's first onslaught could never have failed.

But he had learned, then, that these strangers from the outer world had brought about a great change in Northestria. No longer were these people unprepared! But even Kassker did not realise the full extent of the transformation.

He calculated according to his own training experiences. It had taken him many months to get his own armies into shape. Indeed, for years Kassker had been preparing.

So what could these Northestrians do in a mere week or so? Kassker and his generals were contemptuous. True, the Northestrian armies were new and untried, but Kassker was overlooking one vital fact. These men, although freshly trained, although peace-loving people, were about to fight for the salvation of their own country. Their valiant spirit would more than make up for their lack of training.

And the whole manhood of Northestria had arisen to this great call. Up and down the lake, from end to end of the country, the defensive armies were waiting. Many of them were entrenched, for Nelson Lee had instituted a series of defence-works similar to those employed in the most modern warfare. They were methods that Kassker had never heard of.

So this vast armada, as it swept across the lake, did not arouse such consternation as Kassker fondly believed it would. The Northestrians saw, and they prepared themselves to fight to the last drop of blood.

And these motor-craft were taking a hand, too.

The great gondolas, with their enormously powerful engines and light floats, were skimming over the water under perfect control. And they dashed up, sending volleys of lead broadside into the leading enemy ships. The flights of arrows which came in return were useless, for they all fell short. The machine-guns had the better of the argument every time.

As Lee had hoped, the formation of the fleet was broken. In their efforts to escape from these harrassing foes, the Gothlander craft veered off erratically. There were collisions and other confusing incidents. Fearlessly he drove again and again into the heart of the armada, his excessive speed rendering him safe. The motor-boat shot through like a streak of lightning, spitting lead from the machine-gun in a continuous, shattering fusillade.

Nipper had given orders for the galley to

go farther out upon the lake, much to Handforth's satisfaction.

"We're safe enough," said Nipper. "All these enemy ships are overloaded with men. Look at them! Low down in the water, and packed to suffocation! Kassker's sending half his population across, by the look of it. We can steer clear of these tubs with ease."

Reggie Pitt was watching through binoculars.

"By Jove, Dorrie's a reckless bounder!" he muttered fearfully. "I thought it was all up with him just now. He went tearing between two of the biggest transports, and a collision looked certain. But there he is, skimming round again, ready for another shot!"

Handforth gazed enviously.

"I wish I was with him!" he muttered. "Some chaps get all the luck!"

"Mr. Lee and Captain Waring aren't doing so badly, either," remarked Pitt. "By Jove, those gondolas are pretty nippy! They haven't got the speed of the motor-boat, but they're handy enough!"

As time went on the battle developed.

The three motor craft kept to their settled policy—that of disorganising the armada. The ships were broken up already, many of them sheering off in all sorts of odd directions. But nothing could disguise the fact that the fleet still continued to progress. The enemy was getting nearer!

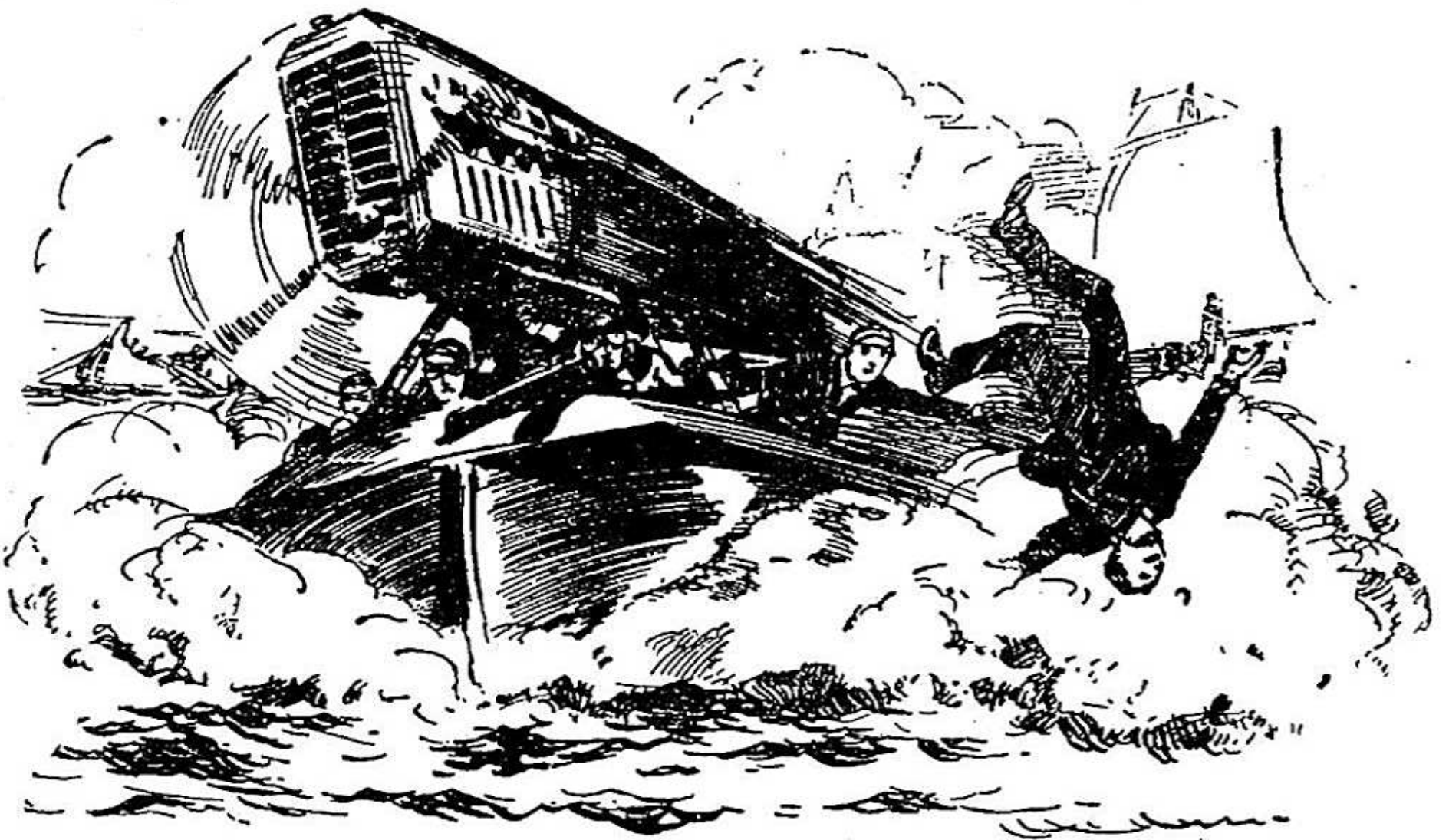
It could now be seen that there were three distinct armadas, so to speak. The largest—probably under Kassker's direct command—was making for the Northestrian capital. The others were spreading out on either side, with the intention of attacking the coast simultaneously, many miles distant. In this way it would be impossible for the Northestrians to concentrate their forces at the one spot. Kassker was certain that two of his armies, at least, would force a landing.

But for the combined work of Nelson Lee, Dorrie and Captain Waring, the invasion would have been easy. These three men made an enormous difference. While yet many miles from the goal, the Gothlanders were badly cut up and disorganised. And now the Northestrian Navy was coming into real action!

From hidden creeks and bays, from river-mouths and coves, many ships appeared. They swung out grimly, ready to fight the enemy on the water. Lee had pressed every ship into service, and they contained Northestria's picked archers.

All this the juniors could see.

They watched, fascinated. There was something breathless in this great spectacle. Surely no schoolboys had ever before been eye-witnesses of such a battle at close range! But they were in no danger, for this was a naval engagement without big guns or torpedoes, or any of the other deadly devices which are characteristic of modern warfare.



The gondola swerved violently to bring its guns on the Gothlander galley. So sudden was the lurch of the fast-moving vessel, that Browne was flung off his balance. He toppled over and plunged headlong into the water!

As long as the galley kept its distance, it could watch at close quarters with impunity.

"I say, let's make a dash into 'em," suggested Handforth eagerly. "Let's join in at the death, anyway!"

"The death?" repeated Nipper, staring.

"Yes; these rotters are nearly whacked——"

"Don't kid yourself, Handy," interrupted Nipper grimly. "The battle has hardly started yet. What we have seen is nothing—just the preliminary skirmish. The Gothlanders are going to land, and this war looks like being a deadly one."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "Kassker's dogs can't do much harm!"

"We're not talking about his dogs; we're talking about his armies!" retorted Nipper gruffly.

"You silly ass——"

"Anyhow, things are only just beginning," said Nipper. "We're not dashing into any fray, old son, unless there's a sudden need for it. You'll have to be satisfied with standing by and watching."

But Edward Oswald Handforth wasn't satisfied at all.



CHAPTER 10.

A SURPRISE FOR BROWNE.

UNLESS there's a sudden need!" murmured the leader of Study D. "H'm! What does that mean, exactly?"

"It means what it implies, and no more," growled Nipper.

"Well, there's a sudden need now——"

"Rats!" said the Remove skipper. "I'm in charge here, and I'll tell everybody if there's a sudden need for dashing into action. For example, if we saw one of these North-eastrian ships getting the worst of things, with no other help near at hand, we'd butt in. That's what I mean by 'sudden need.' At the moment, Handy, I'm quite content to watch."

Handforth turned aside and gazed at Church and McClure ferociously.

"Disgusting!" he said, taking a deep breath.

"Well, you needn't shrivel us up with that look!" protested Church.

"I wish I could shrivel up Nipper!" snapped Handforth. "He's a good chap, but he's obstinate! By George! If there's one trait in a chap's character I hate more than anything else, it's obstinacy! In fact, I'm not sure that I don't hate the chap myself, too!"

"You must loathe yourself, then, old man," said McClure.

"Eh?"

"Nothing!" said Mac.

"You—you insulting rotter!" roared Handforth. "Are you trying to tell me that I'm obstinate?"

"Oh, don't bother——"

"Answer me!" thundered Handforth.

"Oh, preserve us from this blight!" moaned McClure fearlessly. "Anybody might think we were having an argument in Study D, instead of watching a developing battle! By Jove! Look at those two North-eastrian ships there!"

He pointed, and Handforth stared eagerly. "What about 'em?" he rapped out. "They're not engaging!"

"Well, we can look at 'em, can't we?" grinned Church. "Anything to escape from your idle chatter!"

"Idle chatter!" Handforth nearly burst a blood-vessel. "Why, you—you——"

"Hurrah! There goes one of them!"

Handforth turned at the cry. Far away, three of the Gothlander transports had collided, owing to some feverish activity on Lord Dorrimore's part. And one of the ships, badly holed, was sinking. Even as the juniors looked, she heeled over and took the plunge.

"By George!" said Handforth. "It's a real naval action!"

"But why don't they use the aeroplane?" asked Jack Grey. "That whippet machine is in good order, and two or three of the airship officers are trained pilots. I can't understand——"

"There aren't any more bombs," explained Nipper. "I heard the gov'nor speaking to Dorrie yesterday. The airship didn't start out on a war-like expedition, you know, so her supplies of ammunition were limited. If Dorrie wasn't such a thorough chap, insisting on being prepared for any emergency, there wouldn't even have been a machine-gun or a rifle on board. This affair proves the wisdom of being ready!"

"Talking about ammunition," said Pitt. "What about the machine-guns?"

Nipper frowned.

"I'm worrying," he admitted. "I know for a fact that there aren't very many rounds left. They're using them all up now, in one burst, I think, when they'll be most effective. If the Gothlanders gain the upper hand to-day, I'm afraid things will be pretty rocky in Northestria."

Nelson Lee was thinking exactly the same thing, and he had already warned his machine-gunner to conserve every possible shot. The weapon was not brought into action until it was certain to be effective. Nelson Lee gave the word from time to time, as he brought his strange craft round to a position of advantage.

Captain Waring, in charge of the other gondola, was adopting very similar tactics. These two craft were behaving magnificently. The floats had been scientifically constructed, and gave the gondolas not only high speed, but wonderful stability.

On any "sea," however, they would have been more or less useless. This lake was always placid, always smooth. So the floating gondolas had been practicable. Each one contained the pilot, the gunner, and three or four others armed with rifles.

William Napoleon Browne was prominent in Captain Waring's gondola. Browne was a crack shot, and he had pressed Nelson Lee so urgently to be employed that his plea had prevailed. Now he was justifying his selection.

Leaning out of a rear window of Waring's gondola, he was taking sniping shots at the enemy ships. Browne was mostly aiming at the brutal officers, who could be distinguished by their ornate headgear, or the helmsmen. Stevens of the Fifth was there, too, although he was not personally active. Horace Stevens was a peaceful, slow-going sort of fellow. Only one subject was calculated to thoroughly arouse him—the stage. This battle thrilled him, but he wasn't exactly enthusiastic about it.

"We progress, Brother Horace, we progress markedly," observed Browne, as he cheerily turned. "The fleets are disorganised, ships sail in every direction but the right one. Somehow I have an idea that Brother Kasser regards our scientific tactics as a raw deal."

"We haven't beaten the hounds yet," said Stevens.

"No," admitted Browne. "An illuminating remark, brother, and one that I entirely endorse. However, we have but started on this campaign, and we must not be too impatient."

The gondola gave a giddy, swerving lurch.

"Whoa!" gasped Stevens. "That was a nasty one!"

"Fear not!" said Browne calmly. "Brother Waring is at the wheel, and we can trust him to—— But what is this? I can see that my trusty aim is required."

A shattering rattle had broken out as the machine-gun sent a hail of bullets into a Gothlander ship which had been selected for attack. The gondola swept past, and the enemy sent up yells of rage and fear.

Browne fired twice in rapid succession.

"Bullseyes, Brother Horace," he observed. "If you will now watch closely you will see another masterly display."

But Stevens was somewhat staggered by that "masterly display" which could hardly have been what Browne intended. The gondola swerved round again, and so violent was the lurch that Browne executed an unrehearsed act.

He was leaning well out, and the unexpected jar took him off his balance. His long body toppled over, and Stevens made a wild grab at his legs.

But it was too late!

William Napoleon Browne plunged down and vanished amid the foaming wake of the swiftly-moving craft!



CHAPTER 11.

SUDDEN NEED!

EGGIE PITT pointed.

"I'll bet that's Mr. Lee's gondola!" he said. "Look at the way it's attacking that Gothlander galley!"

Phew! I thought he was going to capsize just then, the way he spun round."

"It's Captain Waring's," said Nipper, who was looking through a telescope at the distant action. "I can see old Browne at one of the rear windows——"

"Let's have a look!" said Watson eagerly.

"Just a minute!" went on Nipper. "That boat isn't one of the ordinary transports. It's a big galley, very much like this one. I'll bet it contains one of Kassker's big men. A kind of special boat, capable of making circles round those transports."

"That's why Captain Waring is attacking it, I expect; there's nothing like going for the heads!" agreed Pitt. "If only the commanders can be sent to the bottom, the whole fleet will be in disorder."

Nipper gave a sudden shout.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Browne!"

"What about him?" asked a dozen voices.

"Poor old Browne!" shouted Nipper hoarsely. "He's overboard!"

"Good gad!"

"Overboard!"

"Yes; he overbalanced when the gondola gave that awful lurch just now," continued Nipper, his voice full of pain. "I say, what a tragedy! Old Browne, you know—one of the best!"

Handforth gave a tremendous roar.

"Isn't this a sudden need?" he shouted excitedly. "You were talking about us going into action if there was a sudden need——"

"All right; keep calm!" snapped Nipper. "You won't need to egg me on if I can see half a chance of being useful. I say! Great Scott! He's swimming! Old Browne's still alive!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, but he can't last!" went on Nipper. "That Gothlander galley is only just behind, and they're bound to plug him with arrows—— But wait a minute! Well I'm blessed! He's climbing on board!"

"On board the enemy galley?" asked Pitt, staring.

"Yes!"

"Then he's done for!"

Nipper continued to watch, and, although he was inwardly excited, his hand was perfectly steady. He held the telescope without a tremor. At the same moment he gave orders to the oarsmen to work at full speed. The galley swept onwards, blades flashing, foam streaming in her wake.

"We're going into action?" asked Handforth breathlessly.

"We're going to save Browne, if we can!" retorted Nipper.

"Hurrah!"

"Don't cheer!" continued Dick. "I don't suppose there's one chance in a thousand, but—— They've got him! He managed to get on board, but they've dragged him down now, and there's no sign. They've probably killed him out of hand."

But the Schoolboy Vikings wanted to be absolutely sure, and so they gave stern chase. There was no more sight of the unfortunate William Napoleon Browne, and the enemy galley was swinging off, and isolating

itself from the rest of the fleet. No doubt there were many dead and wounded on board, as a result of the gondola's attack.

And Browne, as a matter of fact, was very much alive.

After falling into the water, he had realised that his only chance was to climb on board the enemy galley. The gondola had practically vanished, travelling at high speed. Captain Waring, indeed, at the controls, was totally unaware of the disaster. And it was a tragic feature of the affair that Stevens could do nothing to enlighten him. That rear compartment of the gondola, where Browne and Stevens had stood, was not connected with the main control room. So Stevens, to his horror, was compelled to watch, and could do nothing to make Waring turn about.

Browne knew this, and he also knew that there were strange monsters in this limpid water. Incidentally, there were other monsters in the enemy galley, so there was very little to choose. However, Browne clutched at the galley instinctively as it swept by him, and as he pulled himself over the clumsy bulwark, he expected a pike or a battle-axe to deliver a death-dealing blow.

Indeed, several members of the enemy force raised their weapons, but a commanding voice rang out.

"Hold!" it thundered. "Spare this youth! Mayhap he will be of use to us. He is one of these accursed strangers——"

"Were it not better to slay him, my lord?" asked another.

"Nay! Let him live!"

The man with the commanding voice was Attawulf the Terrible—one of Kassker's most influential generals. The schoolboys had been right in surmising that this galley was a special craft.

Browne regarded his captors with all his usual complacence.

"But why this reprieve, brother?" he asked mildly.

"I talk not with vermin such as thou!" snarled Attawulf. "Take this youth, and bind him. Place him prominently, so that all can see. His presence may, perchance, protect us from further attack."

"A brainy scheme, brother," said Browne admiringly. "Needless to say, it has my entire approval. But let me disillusion you. The vessels of my friends can sweep up and kill you all—and my presence will not deter them——"

"Away with him!" interrupted the Gothlander general.

"I like not the looks o' yon galley!" muttered one of the other officers. "Northestrian, by my bones! It cometh swiftly!"

Nipper, indeed, had commanded his men to use every ounce of their strength. For Browne, alive, was now visible. And the juniors were easily able to guess the reason for his preservation. He was there to protect his hosts! Dead, he would be useless; but alive, he was of value.

And then commenced a stern chase.

Attawulf's galley fled down the lake, de-

serting the rest of the fleet. For Attawulf the Terrible had rather a fondness for his own skin, and he feared this pursuer greatly. He assumed that it contained those deadly weapons which spat death. Little did he imagine that the pursuing galley contained only schoolboys, with not a single weapon between them!



CHAPTER 12.

INTO THE GREAT GORGE!

HANDFORTH was now in his element.

Action! Just what he wanted! In his exuberation at this sudden turn of events, the warlike Edward Oswald was positively grateful to the luckless Browne for having overbalanced so opportunely. He quite failed to take Browne's own feelings into account.

"Faster—faster!" he shouted. "We're not gaining!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" growled Nipper. "These oarsmen are taking orders from me, please. Besides, can't you see that they're using every effort already? That enemy galley is lighter than ours."

"They're heading straight down the lake, away from all the other ships," said Reggie Pitt. "By jingo, I believe they're scared of us."

"Of course they're scared!" said Handforth.

"But why should they be?" went on Reggie. "We haven't got so much as a popgun or a peashooter! We can't attack them, even if we do get to close quarters."

"But we can ram them!" snapped Handforth. "Anyhow, we've got to rescue old Browne—that's settled. We can't leave him on this enemy ship, can we?"

"Nobody knows what's going to happen," replied Nipper. "Browne's all right so far—I can see him clearly. Those Gothlanders probably think that we've got machine-guns and rifles on board. That's why they're bunking from us."

"You've hit it!" nodded Willy. "Our best plan is to let 'em keep thinking it! The more we chase 'em, the more they'll run!"

Attawulf the Terrible was hardly proving himself to be a capable and efficient general. Merely for the sake of his own skin, he was making a bolt for safety, leaving the transports he was conveying to fend for themselves. Naturally, those same transports were thoroughly at a loss, and the majority of them broke formation, and fell easy victims to the Northestrian vessels.

Attawulf had learned to fear the death-dealing weapons of these "stranger people" who had befriended the Northestrians. As Reggie Pitt put it, it was fairly obvious that Attawulf had no stomach for a fight. He didn't want to try conclusions with his pursuers.

Further and further down the lake went

the fugitive and its grim follower, and for more than an hour there was scarcely a yard of difference between the two craft. The enemy was steadily maintaining his lead, and all the efforts of the pursuers were of no avail. Handforth was fuming all the time, and the rest of the juniors were keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. There was something exhilarating in this stern chase.

But for the fact that Browne was on board the enemy galley, the schoolboys might not have maintained the pursuit—for they could not give battle, even if the Gothlanders flung down the gage. It would be their turn, indeed, to flee. But Attawulf and his crew did not realise this!

"We've left practically everybody else behind," remarked Nipper, as he glanced round. "There's not a sign of the other ships now, except for one or two dots in the far distance. These beggars aren't making for Gothland, either."

"What's their game?" asked Fullwood. "Why are they going down in this direction?"

"I don't know," replied Nipper, puzzled.

"Then I do!" said Handforth. "They're bunking from us—they're just going at random, and——"

"I wish I could believe that, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "But I can't help having a little misgiving that they're trying to lead us into a trap. They're cunning brutes, these Gothlanders."

"What trap could there be down there?" asked Handforth sceptically.

"None that I can think of—but this part of the oasis is all new to us," replied the Remove captain. "We shall have to go cautiously, and be ready for action at the first sign of a trick. I don't like the look of those rocky gorges ahead. Jove, look at those mountains, too! Don't they tower up?"

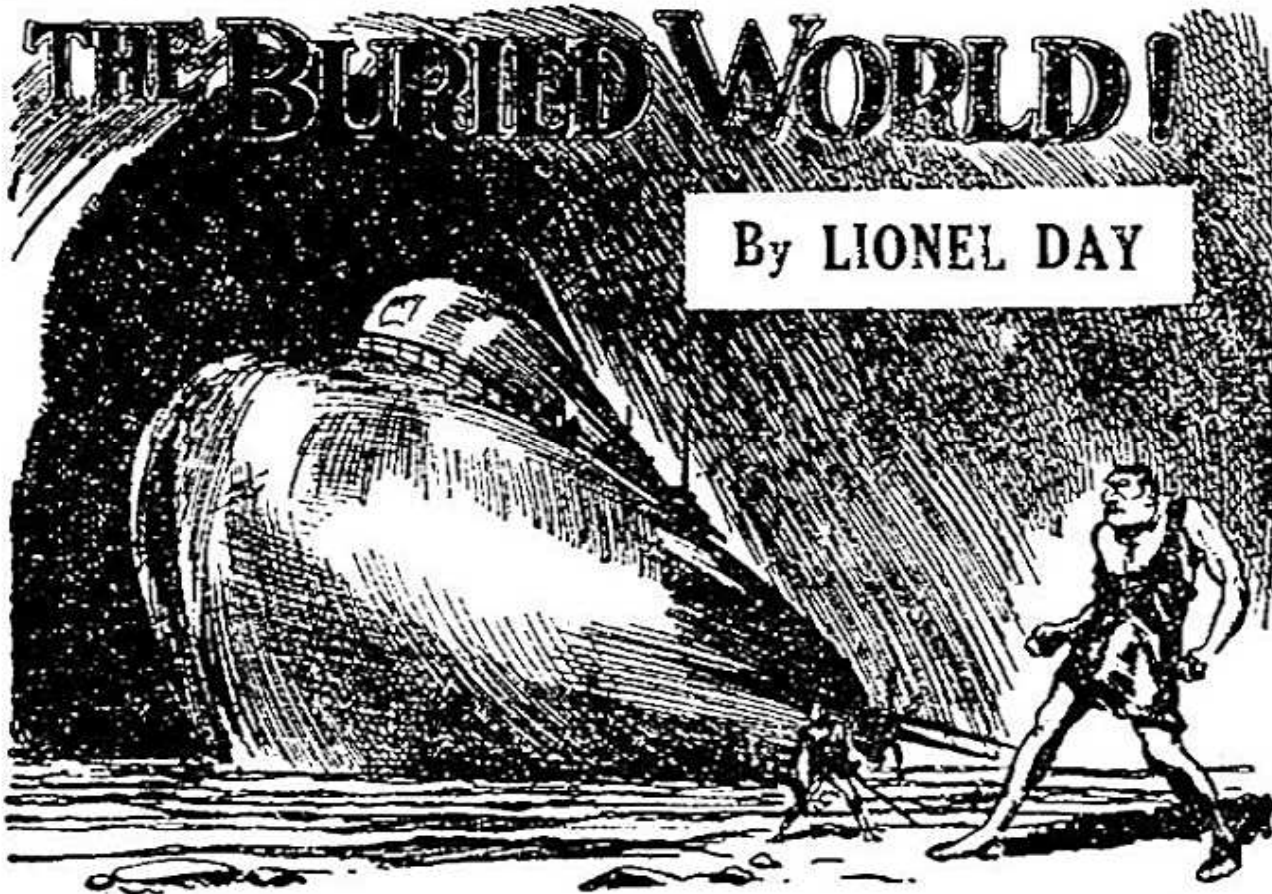
They were getting down to the lower end of the great lake, where the jagged rocks and cliffs came down to the water's edge, and where the glaciers, far above, could be seen towering upwards into the everlasting mists. It was an awe-inspiring sight. While the broad shores of the lake were rich with fertile lands, this narrowing end of the lake was nothing but a barrier of rock. Just as the lake itself divided Northestria from Gothland, so did these mountains of rock divide the two countries at either end of the long stretch of water. No enemy forces could get round into Northestria by land, for the mountain barriers were impassable.

And the enemy galley was speeding straight for a great gorge which wound its way inwards between the menacing cliffs. It grew narrower, and Nipper noticed that the speed of the boat was much less. The oarsmen were toiling manfully, but the galley laboured.

"There's a pretty stiff current here, coming down this gorge," declared Nipper, as he looked overside. "It's getting faster and faster, too. Why are they leading us up here? I don't like it, Montie."

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"Dear old boy, neither do I," said Tregellis-West, adjusting his pince-nez and inspecting the frowning crags. "A frightfully unpleasant sort of place, begad! If it wasn't for old Browne, I'd suggest turning back—I would, really."

"We can't desert Browne," muttered Nipper. "Look ahead, there! Isn't that a tremendous cavern? This swift current seems to be flowing out of it."

"It's a mile away," said Pitt. "The enemy is making for it, though—I say, is it my fancy, or is the air a bit chilly?"

"It's not fancy, Reggie," said Nipper, with a keen look. "I've noticed the drop in temperature, too. I can't understand it. Why should the atmosphere be cooler? It ought to be warmer, with all these rocks hemming us in. There's something about this spot I don't quite like."

Handforth fairly danced with impatience. "I say, this is all rot!" he protested. "What's the good of a chase like this? We're not gaining a yard on them! Hadn't we better help the oarsmen, and put on a bit of extra speed?"

"Occasionally," said Nipper, "your brain functions, Handy."

"Look here, you ass——"
"It's a good idea!" put in Nipper. "Volunteers wanted!"

There were plenty, and a minute later, practically all the juniors had dropped into the seats, and were pulling at the great sweeps, and helping the perspiring men. A more rapid stroke was now possible, and the

result was soon seen, for the schoolboy galley slowly but surely began to overhaul the fugitive.

"Are we gaining?" yelled Handforth, as he pulled.

"Yes, keep it up, old man," sang out Nipper.

Handforth, as he toiled, felt that the whole thing was wrong. The idea was his, and, naturally, he should have been in command, instead of acting the part of a galley slave! But it was something to know, at all events, that the enemy was being overhauled.



CHAPTER 13.

THE WILES OF ATTAWULF!

NIPPER was keenly on the alert for treachery.

Vaguely he suspected a trick here, but he couldn't possibly see how it was going to be worked. The enemy galley was still nearly half a mile ahead, so there could be no immediate peril. This great gorge was narrowing all the time, and further on—under a mile distant—the waters of the lake vanished into a vast cavern-mouth—a cavern which was several hundred yards broad, the roof towering seventy-five or eighty feet from the water's edge. It was a great opening in the base of the stupendous cliff.

The cliff itself rose sheer—a monstrous, overpowering thing of rock which reached

upwards for untold thousands of feet. The very proximity of these rocks seemed to dwarf the two galleys. Amid such surroundings of grandeur, they looked like little toy vessels.

But, although Nipper was ready for any move, he knew that he was still safe. He was taking no desperate risk. For they were proving that they could beat the enemy when it came to a matter of speed, and there was still plenty of room to manœuvre. The current, however, was growing more and more difficult. Notwithstanding the great exertions of the oarsmen, the speed of both vessels had slowed down astonishingly. It was as much as they could do to equal the speed of the current.

"I don't like it!" muttered Nipper grimly.

The enemy was vanishing into that great cavern!

The fugitive galley was visible for just another minute, and then it became swallowed up in the blackness of the cavity.

Nipper did not give any order to relax speed. But he was very doubtful about venturing within the cavern. Out here, in the open, he was ready, but the advantage would be all with the enemy, if the schoolboys continued.

"I thought so—it's a trap!" muttered Nipper, with a nod. "They want to lure us into that cavern, and they're probably lurking just inside, ready to smother us with arrows. Thanks all the same, my friends, but there's nothing doing!"

He gave another look at the black cavity in the distance, and then turned to the oarsmen.

"Ease up, you chaps," he said briefly.

The men were only too ready.

"Hey, what's the idea?" demanded Handforth, staring. "You fathead! Just when we're gaining——"

"Can't help it, Handy—I'm not going into a blind trap like this," retorted Nipper curtly. "These Gothlanders are simply trying to get the advantage over us, and I'm not having any."

"My hat!" shouted somebody. "They've gone!"

"Vanished!"

"Into that cavern, too!"

"Good gad!"

Most of the fellows were astonished. They had been toiling at the oars, and had known nothing of the enemy vessel's manœuvre until now. The Schoolboy Vikings crowded up on to the decks, and stood staring. Meanwhile, their galley remained almost motionless, the men moving the sweeps just sufficiently to enable them to keep level, in spite of the current.

The air here was so perceptibly colder that everybody noticed it. The chilling effect seemed to be coming from that cavern, and the water itself had a different look about it. Nipper was very curious.

"This beats me!" he said frankly.

"We ought to press on——" began Handforth.

"I'm not talking about the enemy galley now," interrupted Nipper. "I think I can see through their game. I'm referring to this chilliness. Why does it come out of the mountain? And, if it comes to that, where is all this water coming from? It's not one of the ordinary mountain rivers. You can tell that by the very nature of the inflow——"

"Why bother?" asked Fullwood. "We want to know what's happened to that beastly galley. Don't you think it would be wise to venture right into the cavern?"

"Wise? It would be suicide!"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "I vote for pressing on——"

"Dry up, Ted—Nipper's right!" interrupted Willy.

"What?"

"Of course he's right, chump!" said Willy curtly.

"Are you calling me a chump?"

"My hat! He's got to argue at a time like this!" snapped Handforth minor. "Can't you understand that these beastly Gothlanders are expecting us to go in after them so that they can let loose their arrows? Or perhaps they mean to ram us out of the darkness——"

"By Jove!" breathed Nipper, with a start.

"What's wrong?" asked Pitt.

"Ram us!" said Nipper. "Perhaps I was wrong about the trap. Perhaps Willy's explanation is right! If they're going to sweep down and ram us—— Pull hard, men!" he added urgently. "Swing round——"

"Look!" yelled Watson.

They all stared, astonished. The enemy galley had suddenly come into sight, speeding out of the mouth of the cavern almost magically. Coming down with the help of the current, and with all her oars flashing, the Gothlander was making a terrific pace. She came along like a destroyer.

And she was steering straight for the schoolboys!

"I feared something like this!" shouted Nipper anxiously. "I knew there was a trap, but I couldn't quite see—— Pull, men! Pull for your lives! She'll be on us in less than a minute!"

Attawulf was a cunning rogue. He had planned this trap deliberately, and there was every chance of success. With his vessel's great speed, he could steer her perfectly, and she would answer the helm on the instant.

The schoolboys' galley, on the other hand, was labouring clumsily against the current, and, to make matters worse, she was practically broadside on, her oarsmen making frantic attempts to swing round to the current.

But it seemed that they would be too late. The enemy was rushing down, bent on destruction.



CHAPTER 14.

TOUCH AND GO!

HAT Attawulf was attempting to ram his enemy was obvious.

He had little fear of his own craft being sunk by the impact. With his great speed, he would crash clean through the other ship, and, moreover, the bows of his galley had been especially made for ramming purposes. The Gothlander chief was certain of success.

Browne, still a helpless victim, watched with a pained expression on his face. He was bound hand and foot, and, for the moment, his captors were paying no attention to him. Their gaze was fully occupied elsewhere.

"Alas, brothers, I deplore this exhibition of rashness!" murmured the Fifth Former. "While being grateful for your services on my behalf, I did not expect you to actually commit suicide! I fear there is a crash coming. Already I can detect the touch of the butcher's axe! For, assuredly, as soon as these unfortunates are sent to the bottom, my head will be sacrificed. A tragic fate for Napoleon!"

Browne, however, was not quite so pessimistic as his murmured words implied. He watched with acute anxiety. Would the schoolboys be able to avoid this deadly peril? The issue would be known in less than twenty seconds.

Attawulf himself was at the great tiller, and he was ready to swing the rushing galley round if the victim attempted to avoid the impact. — But even Attawulf was not ready for Nipper's surprise move.

Just when all hope seemed over—when the collision appeared to be inevitable—Nipper yelled out to his men to back water. They had been prepared for this, and obeyed on the instant. At the same second, Nipper and four other juniors swung the tiller round with all their strength.

Nipper relied on the current, and it served him well. The nose of the galley turned on the second, and the clumsy craft spun round. Attawulf attempted to make a counter move, but there was no time.

Amid a splintering crash of woodwork, the two galleys grazed sides. The great sweeps were smashed to matchwood, and many men were badly shaken, and some slightly injured. But the schoolboys' galley had swung round in the nick of time, and the enemy thundered past in a swirl of foam. The vessels had bumped, but the ramming enterprise had failed. Already the Gothlanders were speeding away, unable to check their progress in that swift current.

"Great Scott!" gasped Nipper. "That was a near one!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, mopping his noble brow. "Odds shaves and close calls! I thought we were rammed, laddies!"

"We ought to have been, too," said Reggie

Pitt. "Hanged if I can understand how we escaped. By jingo, Dick, old son, that was a smart move of yours."

Nipper grunted.

"Never mind about it being smart—we never ought to have been in such a position," he rapped out. "We'd better have a look at these men—some of them are hurt. All our oars on the port side are smashed, too—"

"Hi!" yelled De Valerie. "Look there!"

He pointed excitedly, and there was a general shout. It was a shout of amazement, not unmixed with joy. A figure was clinging desperately to a half-broken sweep—the figure of William Napoleon Browne!

"Greetings, brothers!" he called up, with all his usual coolness. "Pray don't hurry, but I have a slight inkling that this oar is slipping."

"Old Browne!" roared a dozen voices.

"Grab him, you chaps!"

"Hold out one of those other oars!"

"That's no good!" snapped Nipper. "He's pretty well helpless!"

Without waiting another second, Nipper took a header overboard, and with a few strokes he reached Browne's side. It was as much as he could do to fight against the current and keep in close proximity to the galley. Browne was clinging to that smashed oar very precariously, for his arms were bound, and he had very little freedom of movement. If those bonds had been tightly drawn, he would never have survived. By a wonderful stroke of luck, he had clutched at the oar during the crucial moment.

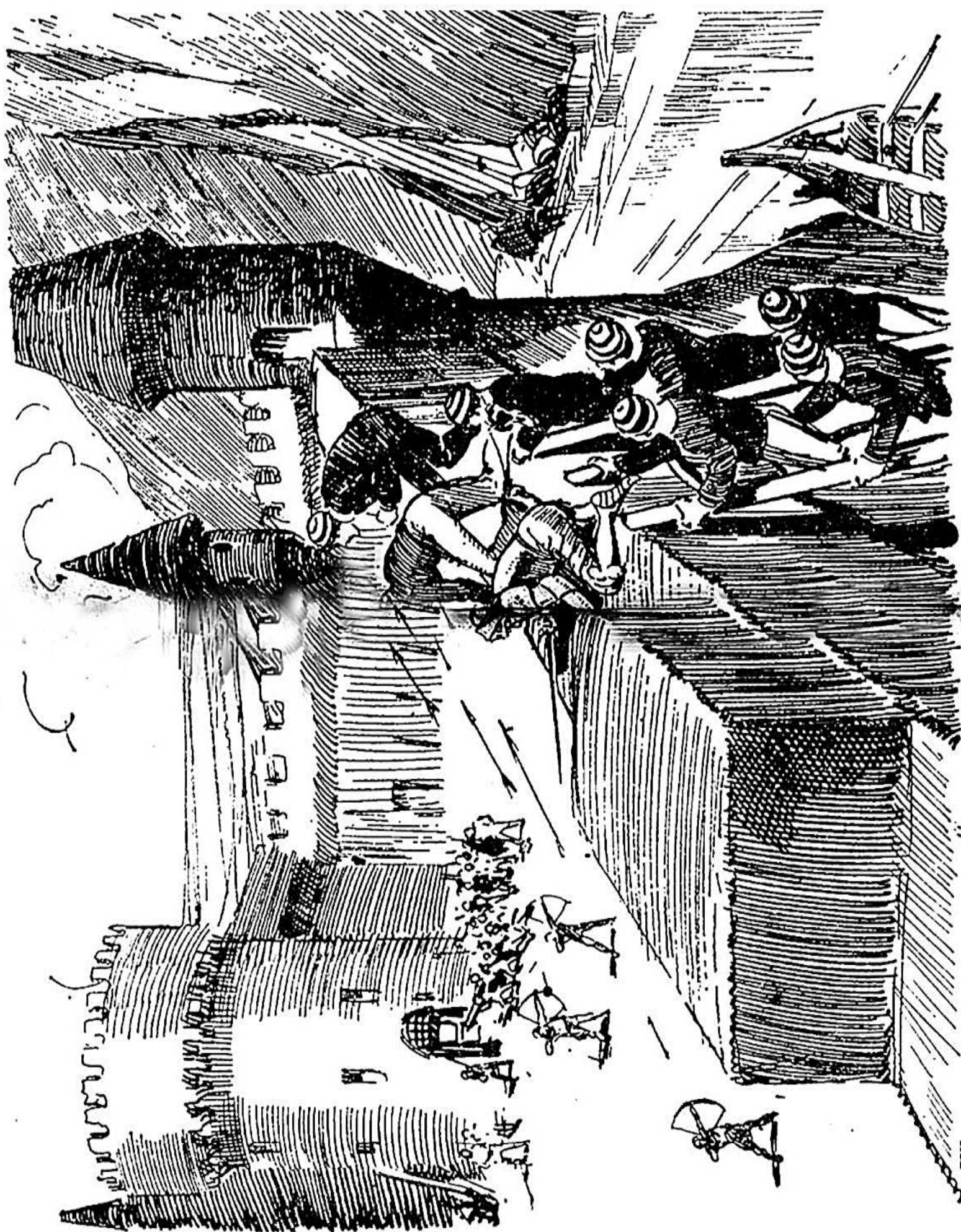
"By Jove, Browne, this is too wonderful for words!" gasped Nipper, as he helped to support the lanky Fifth Former. "We had given you up for lost."

"Unless we are rapidly hooked in, I fear we shall both be lost," replied Browne. "Ah, our valiant friends are moving, it seems. Correct me if I am wrong, but is this water approaching zero, or is it my fancy?"

There was no fancy about it. The water was extraordinarily cold, and there was something else which gave Nipper a veritable shock. He said nothing about it at the moment, for he was giving all his attention to Browne.

Willing hands drew them in, and dragged them into safety. The galley was now drifting down the gorge, and some of the confusion was righting itself. The enemy was already far distant, and a glance proved that Attawulf was speeding away as fast as his oarsmen could take him. Having failed in his attempt to destroy the schoolboys, he was not risking a second encounter. And the juniors, for their part, were content to let the Gothlander go. For Browne was now with them, and that was really all that mattered.

The Fifth Former's bonds were soon cut, and he stood there, calm and composed. Nothing, apparently, could shake the lanky senior's equanimity.



"Down, you chaps! Duck!" cried Nipper, as he and the other juniors scrambled to the top of the wall. In the Castle courtyard hundreds of enemy soldiers were warning. As Nipper's urgent command was obeyed, the men let loose a flight of arrows at the crouching schoolboys.

"But how on earth did you manage to do it?" demanded Pitt.

"A comparatively simple matter," replied Browne. "Another fellow, perhaps, might have failed; but we Brownes, as you have reason to know, are of a different breed. Our motto——"

"Never mind your motto," broke in Handforth. "How did you escape?"

"I could foresee that an exceptionally shapely head would soon be severed from a pair of fine, manly shoulders," said Browne coolly. "Had this galley been destroyed, it is no mere guesswork to predict that a promising member of the Browne family would have been destroyed also. Imagine the consternation throughout the length and breadth of England! A Browne decapitated! Picture the expressions of horror——"

"You hopeless ass!" growled Pitt. "We're asking you——"

"Exactly!" said Browne gently. "Well, brothers, upon seeing that a crash was apparently inevitable, I preferred to take a chance. And so, at the crucial moment, I hurled myself overboard. It was careless of my hosts to take their eyes off me, for you can never know what a Browne will be up to! It has been truly said that we are an impetuous tribe! However, to continue. I leapt—I plunged—I grabbed. And, having grabbed, I firmly secured the half-nelson upon the one thing which seemed solid. And thus you found me. Precisely why I am alive, I cannot say. Strictly speaking, I ought to have been mangled to shreds amid the splinters. But is not the Browne luck almost as proverbial as the Handforths'?"

"If it's all the same to you, Browne, allow me to call you a spoofer!" growled Pitt. "There wasn't much luck about it. You dived in, and deliberately clung to that oar. Congrats, old man! One of the smartest pieces of work I've ever seen!"

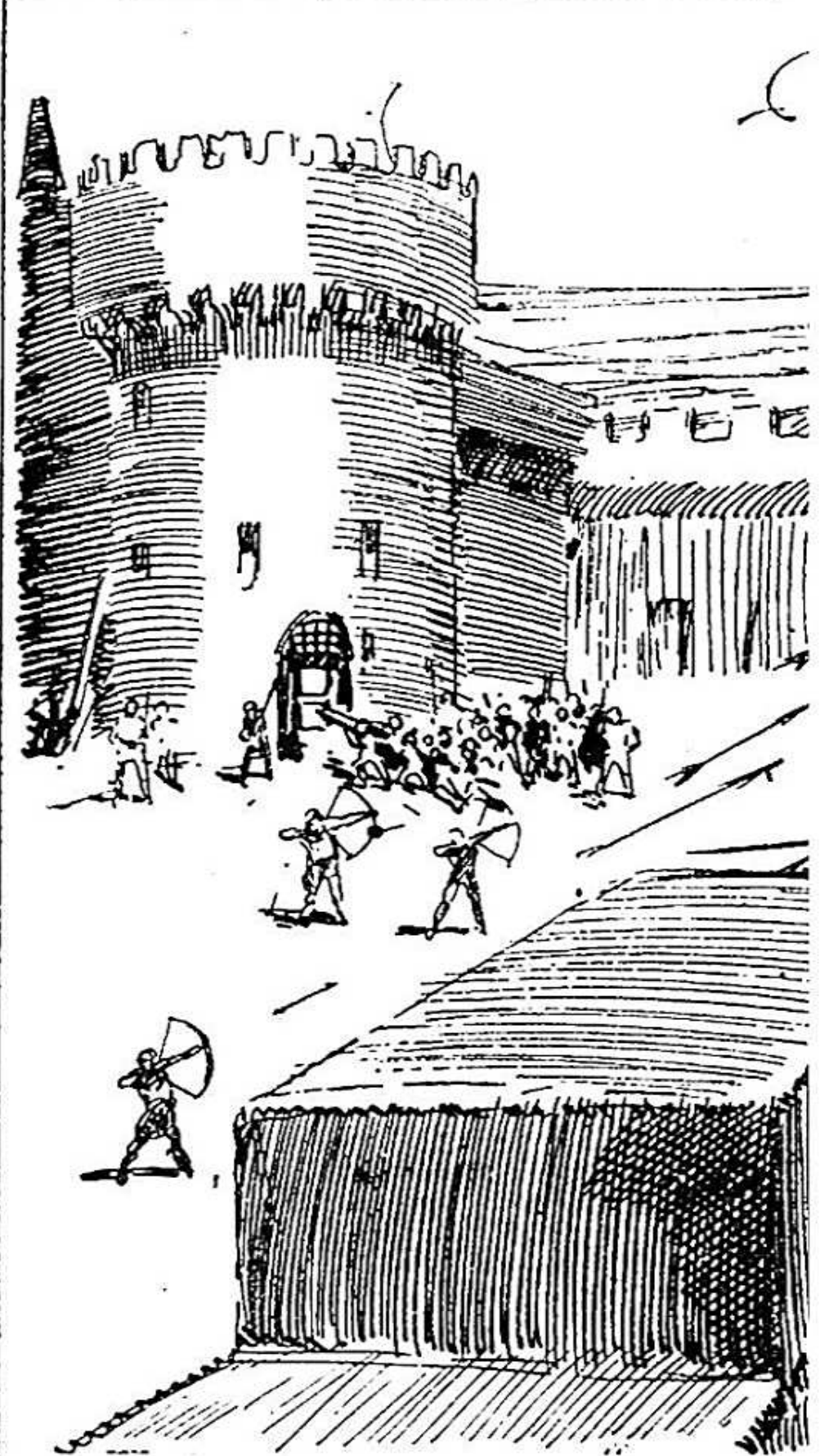
But Browne shook his head.

"In that, Brother Pitt, you are quite wrong," he denied. "By far the smarter piece of work was Brother Nipper's dexterous wangling of this galley. But why continue this discussion? We are all out of the soup—we live. And Brother Nipper has a strange, far-away expression in his eye. May I venture to guess the workings of that massive brain?"

"I am puzzled, Browne—jolly puzzled!" replied Nipper.

"About the water, no doubt?" asked Browne.

"Yes!" said Nipper, staring. "About the water!"



"Down, you chaps! Duck!" cried Nipper. In the Castle courtyard hundreds of enemy soldiers the men let loose a fire.

"The water's salt!" said Nipper.

"Salt?"

"Yes, salt!"

"Anything startling in that?" asked Handforth sarcastically. "Why shouldn't the water be salt?"

"You apparently have failed to perceive the significance of this trifling fact, Brother Ted," said Browne gently. "And let me point out that we are not concerning ourselves as to why the water shouldn't be salt, but why it should be! As far as our own experience goes, we have hitherto regarded this lake as being distinctly fresh."

"By jingo, yes!" said Reggie Pitt.

"But it's salt here—and cold," said Nipper, shivering. "Frightfully cold. It's the current, of course—the inflow from that big cavern. I don't want to get any silly ideas, but I'd wager my shirt that it's seawater!"

Browne nodded.

"In making such a wager, Brother Nipper,



CHAPTER 15.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CAVERN!

HE two regarded the non-plussed Handforth.

"What's wrong with the water?" he asked.

"What's all this mys-

tery——"



ner juniors scrambled to the top of the wall.
As Nipper's urgent command was obeyed,
crouching schoolboys.

you are not risking a great deal," he said drily. "You are undoubtedly right. I have tasted sea-water on many occasions, and I can personally vouch for the genuine nature of this sample. The sample, I may add, consists approximately of five quarts. It is now safely aboard, down in the hold!"

Browne held his middle and made a wry face.

"Never mind about the water you swallowed—that's unimportant," said Dick.

"To you, brother, possibly—but not to me—"

"Salt water!" exclaimed Handforth excitedly. "What can it mean? Sea-water! And flowing into this lake! By George! We ought to explore this cavern—we ought to—"

"If there are sufficient oars left, we'll have a shot at it," interrupted Nipper. "I believe we've got some spare sweeps on board, haven't we? We'll try to force our way up

against the current, and get into that cavern."

Everybody was filled with exciting thoughts—thoughts which none cared to put into words. Sea-water! And here it was, flowing swiftly and steadily into the lake. What could be the meaning of this phenomenon? It could not have been in existence for long, or the whole lake would have become tainted by the salt.

By this time, the oarsmen had cleared away most of the wreckage, and the galley was shipshape again. Down one side she was badly splintered, but no severe damage had been done, and she was still capable of being controlled.

"The Arctic!" said Handforth abruptly.

"Eh?"

"This water's flowing in from the Arctic!" said the leader of Study D, his eyes gleaming. "Don't you understand? This river isn't just one of the mountain streams, but an influx from the open sea!"

"A plausible theory, brother, but somewhat susceptible to question," said Browne. "To the best of my knowledge, the Arctic hereabouts, at this time of the year, is one solid slab of ice."

"That's right," said Pitt. "Everything's frozen up in this latitude. And this water isn't exceptionally cold—"

"In that I venture to differ," said Browne.

"Not cold in the Arctic sense, I mean," continued Reggie. "If it were, you'd have been numbed to a state of helplessness during the first second or two. People who fall into water in these latitudes are as good as dead."

"It's no good discussing a problem that we can't solve," said Nipper. "We'll try to get into the cavern, although I'm not very hopeful."

He proved to be right, for the galley, with many of its oars missing, could not force its way up the gorge against the current. The men tried hard, but the effort was too great for them. The struggling vessel could only maintain her position, at the best. No progress was possible. The yawning mouth of the cavern remained tantalisingly ahead.

"The only thing we can do is to turn back, and report the affair to Mr. Lee, when we get the chance," said Nipper, at length. "Easo up, men! We'll swing her round, and then you can take a rest. We'll float down on the current."

Handforth frowned.

"What rot!" he protested. "Here we've got a chance of exploring—"

"Be reasonable, old man," interrupted Church. "It's no good jibbing against the thing like this. If we had an engine on this galley, it would be different. As it is, we can't fight this current. It's got us whacked. We ought to be jolly thankful that we're all alive!"

"That's true enough," admitted Handforth soberly. "I thought we were all going under when that galley swept down on us. But, I mean to say—salt water! What the dickens can the explanation be?"

They were all agog with excitement, and eager to report their discovery to Nelson Lee. But this could not be done at once, for they had come a great distance away from the scene of the other activities. Indeed, they had hardly realised the true distance, until they now went back on their tracks. Full three hours had elapsed before they saw a familiar landmark. They were skirting the Northestrian coast all the time, and were filled with new misgivings. There were hosts of ships further along, clustered against the beaches for miles. Every bay and inlet was filled with them.

Was the invasion a success? It was a disconcerting thought, and they were now anxious to know how affairs had been developing. By great good fortune, they espied the low, rakish motor-boat in the distance, and they were further delighted when the motor-boat came speeding towards them.

As it approached, the power was cut off, and the figure of Lord Dorrimore could be seen at the wheel.



CHAPTER 16.

DORRIE'S THEORY!

DORRIMORE was accompanied by a Northestrian officer, and the juniors saw that both of them were looking rather grave.

It was unusual to see such an expression on Dorrie's care-free face.

"Where on earth have you boys been to?" he shouted, as he looked up at the galley. "Do you know that we've been worryin' ourselves sick about you? Mr. Lee's tearin' his hair——"

"We chased a Gothland galley," explained Nipper, leaning over the bulwark.

"Then you ought to have known better," retorted Dorrie.

"But Browne was a prisoner on board it, and we've got him here," explained Nipper.

"Gad! You seem to find all the excitement that's goin' about," said his lordship. "That makes a difference, of course. Are you all right? Anybody hurt, or anythin'?"

Nipper gave a brief account of what had happened.

"All I can say is that you're infernally lucky!" commented his lordship, at last. "There's one thing I can't quite get the hang of, though. How in the name of all that's wonderful did Browne get aboard that enemy boat?"

"A trifling matter. Brother Dorrie," said Browne. "Captain Waring was thoughtless enough to tip me out of his own craft, and

I was picked up by the enemy. Being, as you know, a Browne, they hesitated to kill me——"

"They kept him on board as a safeguard against an attack, I fancy," put in Nipper. "Anyhow, we're all safe. Dorrie. What's been happening? It's hours since we started off on this affair——"

"Enough's been happenin'!" snapped Dorrie. "Those confounded Gothlanders have landed!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then the invasion's a real thing!"

"Tens of thousands of the vermin!" said Dorrie, frowning. "A terrific battle is developin', I understand. The Northestrians couldn't keep 'em out, but they don't mean to take this thing lyin' down. You boys had better keep on board that ship until we know somethin' more definite. You're comparatively safe there, anyhow."

"There's something we want to tell you, Dorrie," called Nipper. "There's a rummy current in that gorge."

"Where you followed the enemy galley?" asked Lord Dorrimore.

"Yes," said Nipper.

And he explained about the swift current and the saltness of the water. Dorrie listened with growing interest, and the Northestrian officer by his side became quite excited.

"By my faith, this is strange news!" he said huskily. "A cold current with water of much saltness! By St. Guthrie! 'Tis the famous Flow!"

"The which?" asked Dorrie.

"The Flow!" replied the Northestrian. "Not in my lifetime have I known this, but wondrous stories did my father tell——"

"We'll have a chat about this in a minute!" interrupted Dorrie. "All right, boys, you'd better do as I say, and keep on the lake," he added. "I'll remember what you've told me about that current. Perhaps Mr. Lee will suggest an explanation. He's keen on things of that sort."

With a wave, his lordship started up his engine, and then the motor-boat glided off. Lord Dorrimore was rather startled by what he had just learned, and he wanted to have a talk with his companion, who seemed to know something of this queer phenomenon.

"Now then, Sigbert, old man," said the sporting peer, as he headed his craft down the lake. "What's that you were saying about your father?"

"In our history, the Flow is well known," replied the Northestrian officer. "During the past hundred years, the strange event has happened but thrice."

"About every thirty-five years, roughly?" asked Dorrie. "Haven't any of your scientific johnnies taken exact records?"

Sigbert smiled.

"Thou art jesting," he replied. "We of Northestria accept these wondrous things without much disturbance of mind. 'Tis known that the Flow comes but twice, perchance, in a man's lifetime."

"How do you know when it comes?"

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"In my father's time, it was heralded by a wondrous coldness of the air," said Sigbert. "Many creatures of the water were cast up on the beaches, dead. And then 'twas discovered that the water itself had become as brine. And with these things came floods. For the whole lake rose, incapable of contending with such an inflow. My father has oft spoken of that miracle."

"And how long did it last?"

"Twelve days—possibly longer."

"And then?"

"Why, then the strange happening passed," replied Sigbert. "Gradually, the lake became normal, and the air warmer. And so 'twas soon forgotten."

"And this happens about three times in a hundred years?" mused Lord Dorrimore. "H'm! It's pretty rummy, old man. How do you know that this Flow, as you call it, is a sort of regular thing?"

"Did not my father learn of it from his own father?"

"The story has been sort of handed down, eh?" said his lordship. "That seems to prove that it's a periodic stunt. And all this cold water flows through that big cavern at the bottom of the lake?"

"Always it flows there."

"Salt water—flowing through that great cavern," said Dorrie, pursing his lips. "Why on earth haven't you ever tried to explore, and find the explanation?"

The other shrugged.

"We have not been curious," he replied, smiling. "I faith, there is another reason—sufficiently excellent. There are none strong enough to force a boat against the strong current. Many have tried, I do believe, but have always been beaten."

"What about when the Flow isn't on?"

"At such times—and that meaneth, as thou wilt realise, most of the time—our people have been afraid," confessed Sigbert. "'Tis said that the cavern extends for miles—many miles—into the mountains. And all is dark there. Some have penetrated deeply, but have returned, with fear in them. And none have discovered whence the water arises. In ordinary times, there is no Flow, and the level is such that boats have gone aground. So, you see, 'tis a problem."

"Yes, I can appreciate that," nodded Dorrie. "And when the Flow was on, you couldn't get any of your boats to beat the current? Well, this little tub is a different proposition! I've a good mind to have a shot at this thing myself!"

"Dorrie, of course," said Handforth. "I'll bet a quid he's gone off to that cavern!"

"Anything criminal in that?"

"To explore it!" said Handforth darkly.

"Supposing he has?" asked McClure.

"Gone off to explore that cavern—without us!" said Handforth, with rising indignation. "We discover the place, and Dorrie calmly leaves us out in the cold!"

"Be reasonable, old man," argued Church. "He couldn't very well take the whole crowd of us out on that motor-boat, could he? If he does explore the place, and discovers anything exciting, he's bound to tell us later."

"H'm! I suppose we shall have to be satisfied with that," grunted Handforth. "Look at him—putting on speed! Nearly out of sight already! I was thinking about going with him, but he was too quick for me."

Handforth turned his attention to other quarters, staring round in every direction, as though looking for fresh excitement. As it happened, his gaze rested upon something interesting.

A big, heavily-laden ship was just in view, round a secluded inlet. She was some distance from the shore, but her inactivity was rather significant. Handforth frowned as he looked.

"An enemy boat, I'll bet!" he said. "One of the transports that got isolated from the fleet, I suppose. How about making a few inquiries? If she's a Gothlander, we can get some excitement."

Nipper shook his head.

"I think we've had enough excitement for the time being," he said. "Still, if everybody votes with you, Handy, I'm game. We're out to do our bit against the enemy. But I was rather thinking of taking a run up to Westwold."

"Westwold?"

"Yes, up the big river three or four miles farther along the coast," replied Nipper. "The princess is in the castle there, to say nothing of Irene & Co. I thought we'd go along and see if they were all serene."

"Of course they are," said Handforth firmly. "They're as safe as houses up there, and we needn't bother ourselves. Too jolly tame, making all that trip for nothing!"

"You'd see Irene," said Church. "D'you call that nothing?"

Handforth frowned.

"Girls are all very well in their way, but this is no time to bother about girls!" he said firmly. "There's serious business afoot—Northeastria's invaded—and we haven't had our smack yet. It might be a good idea to run up the coast to Dunstane, and see how things are going there. I'll bet that all the excitement is developing round the capital."

"You're probably right there, old man," agreed Nipper. "According to all the early signs, Kassker hurled his main forces on the coast near Dunstane. But we're a good many miles from that spot, so we'll have a look at this ship in the inlet, and see what she's up to."



CHAPTER 17.

MORE ADVENTURES!

HANDFORTH stared down the lake rather absently.

"The bounder!" he murmured. "The awful twister!"

"What's the matter with you, Handy?" asked Church. "Who's an awful twister?"

The others agreed, and the galley changed her course. The juniors weren't particular as to where they went, so long as they found some excitement. They felt rather out of touch at present. This section of the coast was quiet, and the whole lake, as far as they could see, was deserted. During their hours of absence, the invaders had either landed or had been sent back to their own country. It was difficult to get any definite information, although Lord Dorrimore had hinted at grave doings.

"Hallo!" said Pitt keenly. "She's moving!"

There was no doubt about it. The other ship was getting under way, and was making straight for the shore at the lower end of the bay. It was becoming more and more evident that she was an enemy ship. And seeing the galley's deliberate approach, she had taken fright.

The juniors were instantly alert.

"Full speed ahead!" roared Handforth. "Let's take a tip from those rotters who tried to smash us in the gorge. Let's ram this beggar!"

"Hear, hear!"

"She's an enemy ship!"

"Steady on, you chaps," protested Nipper. "We're not going to take any chances of that kind. She's an enemy transport, and if we deliberately smashed into her we should sink ourselves. By Jove, though, she's bolt-

ing, sure enough. And there's no exit from this bay!"

"We're forcing her ashore!"

The excitement grew as the galley swept along in chase of the enemy. It was now fairly clear that the ship had been hiding there, hoping to avoid any such encounter as this. Like Attawulf the Terrible, her commander apparently believed that the galley was dangerous.

"We shan't have time to overtake her," said Fullwood. "She's going straight ashore, and— There you are! She's gone aground already! My stars! Look at the men pouring out!"

The transport had rammed straight into the steep beach, and now men were swarming over her side, dropping into the water, and plunging ashore in a kind of panic. They were expecting the galley to close in on them. Their experience out in the open lake had unnerved them—they knew what to anticipate from these deadly foes! Hundreds of men were deserting the ship like rats.

"We've done a fine thing!" roared Handforth. "Instead of capturing this beastly gang, we've driven them ashore, on to North-eastrian soil! Whose idea was it to chase this ship? Where's the idiot who suggested it?"

"He's not far off!" growled Reggie. "I have a faint recollection that you mooted it first, Handy."

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"Eh? I—I—" Handforth turned red. "Oh, well, how the dickens was I to know that the cawards would bunk like a lot of rabbits, and beach their beastly ship? Let's go ashore and round them up!"

"An entirely unnecessary performance," said Browne languidly. "Behold, brothers! We have done good service, after all. This, I imagine, will be well worth watching—although, I fear, gory."

"By George!" yelled Handforth. "The Northeastrian soldiers!"

"Hurrah!"

The galley, now close in shore, was swinging slightly round, having accomplished its purpose. This bay was a quiet one, and the thick wood descended almost to the edge of the beach. The juniors had expected to see the enemy troopers disappearing among the trees.

But they never got the chance.

For, without warning, the beach became alive with running figures—men in chain-mail, men with heavy battle-axes and pikes. For that wood had been swarming with Northeastrians, and they were swooping down upon the foe!



CHAPTER 18.

STARTLING NEWS!

"URRAH!"

"They're trapped—and we've driven them into it!"

It was an unexpected turn, for, two minutes earlier, there had been not the slightest sign of a defender. Nipper had been rather puzzled at this, for he knew full well that Nelson Lee had placed the Northeastrian troops down the entire coast, in readiness to repel the invader.

The ensuing battle was swift, and, in Handforth's opinion, disappointing. For the Gothlanders surrendered without a fight almost, and were all taken prisoners. If the positions had been reversed—if these were Northeastrians invading Gothland—there would have been no quarter. A massacre would have taken place before the eyes of the schoolboys.

But the Northeastrians were not such brutal savages. They had no desire to take life wantonly, and when the enemy threw down their arms, they spared them. Within half an hour the prisoners had all been marched away, and a guard had been placed over the captured ship.

"That's a bit of a nerve, isn't it?" asked Fullwood, with a chuckle. "Isn't that ship ours, really? We drove her ashore, and she's our prize."

"Of course!" agreed Handforth promptly. "I'll take a crew on board, and command her—"

"Rats!" said Nipper, laughing. "We'll all stick together on this galley, my lad! As for the transport, these chaps are welcome

to her. We've been of some use, it seems—although, goodness knows, it was a fluke!"

"All these prisoners are ours—"

"Exactly, Handy, but we don't want to bother with them," said Church soothingly.

"There's an officer coming out in one of the boats, by the look of it," he added. "Perhaps we shall be able to get some news."

"Old Wynwed, by George!" roared Handforth, as he recognised the figure in the approaching boat. "Wynwed the Jovial!"

The juniors gave their Northeastrian friend a cheer as he came alongside the galley in the small boat. The whole beach was now filled with men.

"By St. Attalus, thou art welcome, goodly knight!" grinned Reggie Pitt, looking over the bulwark. "What of the battle? Is aught toward?"

Wynwed chuckled.

"I' faith, but thou art mimicking me, good youth," he said dryly. "Thy own speech is serviceable enough, methinks. I greet ye all, comrades! 'Twas a bold effort, this, of yours. My men were awaiting amid the trees, but feared that the enemy would skulk away."

"Just one of those pieces of luck, Wynwed," said Nipper. "We didn't know you were there, and we only chased the transport on the spur of the moment. What have you done with all the prisoners?"

"They are being taken inland, to the great camp where all such rats are held," replied Wynwed with a frown. "Myself, I would slay them all! I believe not in this policy of mercy."

"You bloodthirsty old rascal!" said Pitt severely. "And we've always looked upon you as a jolly sort of chap! What's the news from the battle-front? Hast heard whispers of what is afoot?"

"A murrain take these accursed dogs!" growled Wynwed.

"They were rats just now, but we'll let it pass," said Reggie. "What's the reason for this sudden frown?"

"The enemy hath landed in strength," replied Wynwed angrily. "'Tis said that many thousands are engaging our first army near the capital. A grim battle is developing, we hear. And 'tis also said that Kassker the Grim is with his troops. 'Tis ill news."

"It might be good news," replied Nipper. "If Kassker's hordes are beaten in this battle, there'll be a decisive end to all the fighting. You can't expect to whack the enemy without a big struggle, Wynwed."

"I fear thou art right, wise youth," agreed Wynwed, nodding. "We have to thank Lee the Lionhearted for our readiness. There are many willing fighters in Northeastria these days, and the enemy, never fear, will regret this madness. But much ill may befall ere the dogs are flung back."

"You must expect a lot of trouble—"

"Ay, but 'tis rumoured that her Majesty herself is menaced!" said Wynwed, his tone anxious.

"The princess!" shouted a number of juniors. "In danger!"

"Ay, so we hear."

"You hear?" said Nipper sharply. "From whom?"

"Word hath come along the coast," replied Wynwed gravely. "We know not the real truth of it."

"But the princess is safely protected in Westwold Castle!" exclaimed Nipper. "How can she be in any danger?"

"And Irene & Co.!" shouted Handforth. "They're with the Princess! If she's in danger, they must be in the same fix! Let's take the galley, and rush up the river, and see if we can help—"

"By my soul, a goodly suggestion!" interrupted Wynwed quickly. "'Tis said that two enemy ships have forced their way up the river, and that they are even now menacing Westwold Castle."

"It must be a yarn!" declared Nipper. "Isn't that river impregnable? We have been told that none of the enemy could possibly penetrate—"

"But amid the excitements of the fight it seemeth that a trick was perpetrated," said the Northeonian. "Many troops were drawn aside by a ruse, and while the battle raged, so these accursed ships passed the danger zones—"

"That's enough!" yelled Handforth. "It's true, you chaps! These cunning Gothlanders have got up the river, and they're trying to capture the princess! Who's for making a dash to the rescue?"



CHAPTER 19.

WHAT HAPPENED AT WESTWOLD.

YNWED THE JOVIAL had not been talking idly.

The danger at Westwold Castle was acute. Up and down the coast, many

miles inland, the enemy forces had penetrated. The landing had not been so successful as Kassker had planned, for a great many of his soldiers had gone ashore in isolated groups, instead of en masse. The majority of these groups had been quickly overcome by the defenders.

But nothing could alter the fact that the Gothlanders were invading Northeonia in strong force, and nobody could tell, in the present confused state of things, what successes the enemy had achieved. The battles were only just developing.

But how those two enemy transports had gained access to the Westwold river remained a mystery. Somebody had apparently blundered, and blundered criminally. For the young princess had been placed at Westwold because this particular castle was regarded as an impregnable retreat.

Indeed, so secure was it believed to be,

that the princess' bodyguard was only small. Nobody had believed it possible that the enemy could reach this spot. It was a fastness among the rocks, only approachable from the river—and this was effectively guarded. There was a road across the mountains, but this was so difficult that none would take it.

How, then, had those ships got by?

Only by treachery or negligence. And Nipper rather favoured the latter theory. These Northeonians, after all, were new to warfare, and might easily have been led away by a cunning ruse. Not that it much mattered now; little good could come of making surmises. The main thing was to get to the spot and see if the story were actually true.

And so, while the galley set forth on its mission, Westwold Castle was besieged. Five hundred strong had surrounded those grim old walls, and were even now making grim, determined attempts to scale them and gain access. The commander of this force had conceived the idea of capturing Princess Mercia and her brother, the young Prince Oswy. The rest could be put to slaughter.

And it seemed that this deadly scheme would succeed!

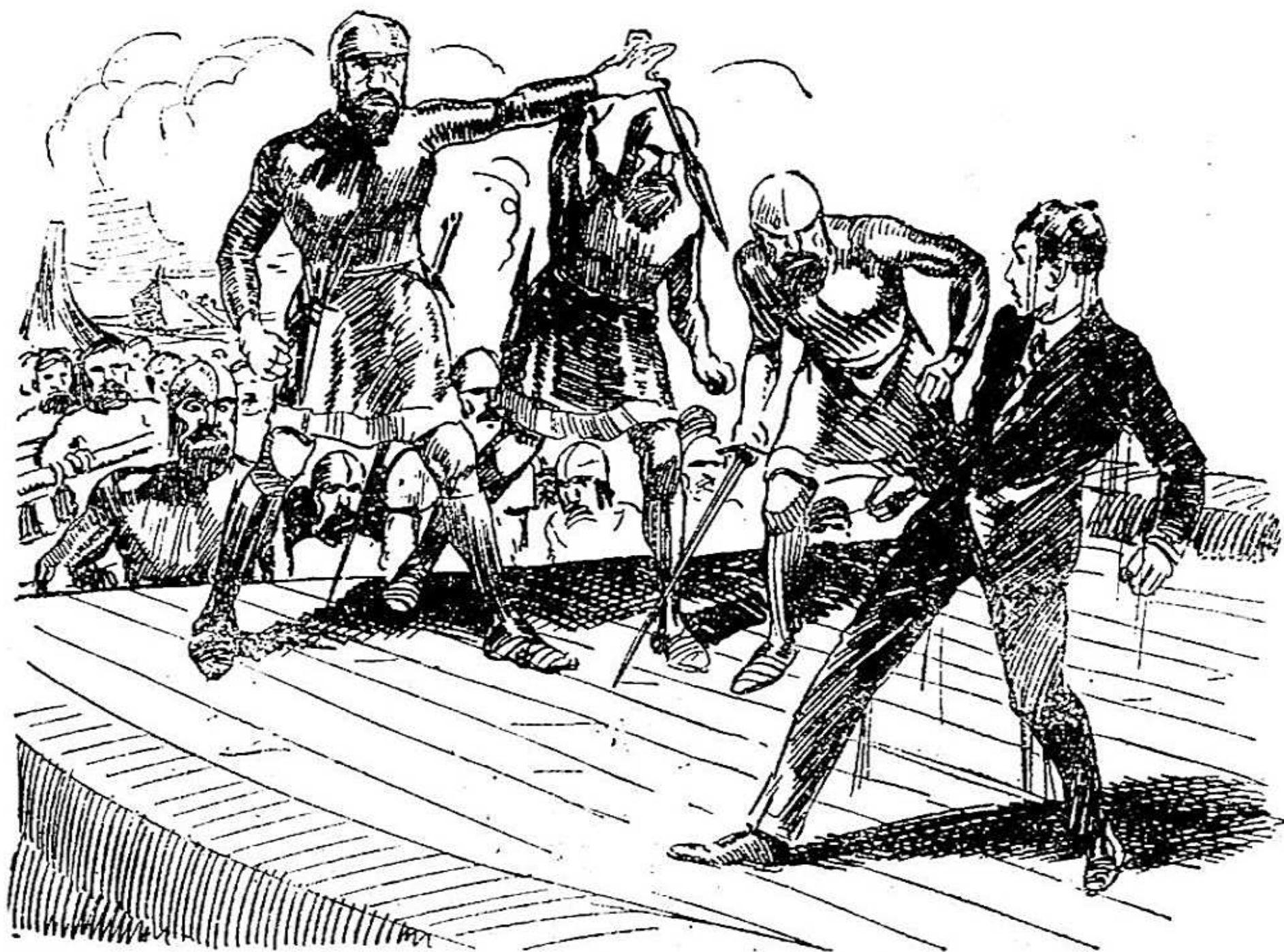
The situation was curiously suitable for such a purpose. The river, some miles inland, flowed directly past the castle walls, and on every side there were impregnable rocks—which formed as great a hindrance to the Northeonians as to the Gothlanders. A rescue force could only come from the river; and the enemy commander was not fearful of this, for he knew that the main battle had developed many miles farther up the coast. Moreover, he believed that it would be possible to achieve his grim object with little or no delay.

Westwold Castle was a quaint, picturesque pile, perched there like some castle in a fairy book, with towers, battlements and gables. The surrounding wall was of a serviceable height. But on this side, where the river flowed, there was a possibility of forcing an entry.

The water was deep, and boats of quite heavy draught could anchor alongside the wall. The two enemy transports were there now, and hundreds of men were at work, while the rest gave battle to the defenders.

From every position of advantage the Northeonians were sending their arrows down upon the enemy. But the Gothlander archers were busy, too, and it was death for any man to appear openly on top of the wall. On the decks of those ships men were constructing rude scaling ladders.

They had not come prepared with these, and so a delay was inevitable. But once these brutes succeeded in overrunning the castle there would be little hope. To escape by the mountain path was impossible, for word had come that fierce fighting was in progress beyond.



Two Gothlanders raised their weapons and made at Browne as he stood, dripping, on the deck of the galley. "Hold! Let him live!" came the commanding voice of Attawulf. "A brainy scheme," commented Browne. "Needless to say, it has my entire approval!"

This, then, was the situation, a totally unexpected one for all concerned. The young Princess Mercia was quite calm, mainly, perhaps, because of the example set her by Irene Manners and her girl chums of the Moor View School.

"If 'tis decreed that we shall die, of what use to fear?" said Mercia simply. "But I believe not this terrible thing. My soldiers will protect me."

"There ought to have been hundreds of men here, not a handful," said Doris Berkeley, with a frown. "I can't understand it. Mr. Lee told us that everything would be quiet here——"

"But how was he to know that these ships would come up the river?" interrupted Irene. "I think there must have been a traitor. The river was defended by lots of troops, and they were drawn off somehow—led into an action somewhere else. And these ships came up unhindered."

The girls were standing on a small balcony, overlooking the wall. They could see little from here, but they could tell, nevertheless, that the position was growing more acute. The Northestrian soldiers below were alarmed. Many had been hurt, some killed; and almost continuously arrows were falling over into the courtyard. And from beyond the wall

came a continuous clamour, a tumult of sound which could not be mistaken.

Miles away, Ethelbert the Red—the princess' chief adviser—was fondly assuring himself that his Royal charges were safe. Nelson Lee was of a similar opinion—and no blame could be attached to him, since he had taken strong measures for the princess' protection. The fault lay elsewhere.

"Is there nowhere we can hide?" asked Doris practically. "What if these brutes capture the castle? Can't we get out?"

"There is no way, except the mountain road," replied the princess. "The river is the only certain path, and that is held by the enemy. Should we take the mountain road, the Gothlanders will overtake us——"

"But can't we lock ourselves into the dungeons?" suggested Doris. "We could hide——" She paused, and shook her head. "No, that would only be playing the enemy's game. They would soon drag us out."

"Look! They're coming!" murmured Irene.

All the girls felt a sudden thrill. The top of the wall was swarming with Gothlanders—powerful men in chain-mail, men armed with battle-axes and flashing swords. They came up in continuous numbers, and spread out along the battlements of the walls. The

Northestrians were driven back, for they were hopelessly outnumbered, and all seemed lost.



CHAPTER 20.

ST. FRANK'S TO THE RESCUE!

THE galley came up the river with a powerful flashing of oars, and with groups of anxious St. Frank's fellows standing about on the decks. The current of the stream was sluggish, and offered little resistance to the sweeps.

There was nothing to make the juniors feel cheerful. Frowning rocks looked down upon them from either side, and in every direction the scene was rugged and barren.

The river twisted and turned, and every fresh view was more sinister than the last.

Westwold Castle could not be more than a mile ahead now, hidden there among the rocks—an inland fortress which had been deemed the safest haven in all Northestria for the princess. And yet the Gothlanders had penetrated!

Nipper was sure of this now, for the galley had passed up the river unchallenged. Yet there should have been many soldiers on guard, ready to ask what this galley required. The very fact that these guards were missing proved that something of an alarming nature had taken place.

"There's going to be fighting up here," said Handforth firmly. "We ought to prepare ourselves for the battle, you chaps. I'm going below to fix on my chain-mail! You'd better come, too, Church."

"No, thanks," said Church. "I feel freer as I am. I don't want to be encumbered with a lot of heavy chains and things. Besides, how can we engage in hand-to-hand fighting with these Gothlanders? Be reasonable, Handy!"

"Are we going to let those girls be captured without putting up a fight?" roared Handforth, glaring.

They didn't argue with him, and he stamped below to the main cabin of the galley. The juniors had used this vessel for some days. They had patrolled the lake as scouts, under the pretence of being pirates. And the cabins contained stores, food, and so forth.

Handforth went over to a corner and pulled out a number of odds and ends with impatient haste. He knew that he had thrown his chain-mail down somewhere.

"By George!" he ejaculated abruptly.

He beheld two curious-looking objects in that corner. At first glance they looked like heavy rockets. In a way, they actually were rockets.

"Smoke bombs!" breathed Handforth. "Maroons, by George!"

He was rather startled, and a moment later he grabbed the maroons and rushed

up on deck with them. During their earlier adventures on the galley, Lee had supplied the juniors with these rockets to be used in case of emergency. When fired, they soared to a tremendous height, exploding with a high-pitched, shattering crack, accompanied by dense bursts of smoke. As signals they had proved invaluable; indeed, it was these rockets which had brought succour to the juniors when all hope had seemed dead.

"Look at these!" shouted Handforth, as he burst into view.

"Rockets, aren't they?" asked Nipper. "Where did you find them, Handy? I didn't think we had any left!"

"They were in a corner, among a lot of lumber!" replied Handforth. "They might be useful—"

"No might about it!" interrupted Nipper. "Good man! Keep them handy, and have them fixed—here, Reggie, you'd better take charge of them," he added. "It might be a good idea to get them ready to explode at a moment's notice."

"Rather!" said Pitt. "I'll use two of those broken sweeps. Leave it to me, Dick—I'll fix 'em up. You mean we can signal for help? Or perhaps we can use the rockets to scare the enemy?"

"That's more like it," said Nipper, nodding. "These things explode with a terrific crash, although they're not particularly dangerous."

"I wouldn't like one to explode near me!" said Watson.

"If it comes to that, neither would I," replied Nipper. "But it would only make you stone deaf for a bit, and half choke you with the fumes. The explosion wouldn't do much harm, except to scorch you a bit. Still, in the absence of any real bombs, they'll probably be useful."

The galley had just turned another bend, and a chorus of shouts went up when the immediate view was beheld. Almost before they realised it, they were right on Westwold Castle. There rose the walls, and against them were those two Gothlander ships, with the scaling ladders—rough, crude affairs—fixed in position. A few men were on the decks—but only a handful, at the most. And they were staring in alarm at the approaching galley.

"They've done it!" gasped Nipper. "Look! Empty ships—and those ladders! The curs have got over the wall, and they're in the castle!"

"Oh, my goodness! What about the girls?"

"And the princess?"

"Full speed!" yelled Handforth. "Let's rush these beggars here, and then climb those ladders! St. Frank's to the rescue!"

"Hurrah!"

The rest, wildly excited, were ready to brave any dangers. Had they paused to think, they would have hesitated. For they must have realised, then, that this enterprise was akin to courting death. But they only thought of the princess' peril—and the peril of their girl chums.

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Look out for this cover next Wednesday, and don't forget to ORDER YOUR COPY IN ADVANCE!

SPREAD THE NEWS!

The galley swung alongside the first enemy ship, and the juniors leapt. In another moment they were rushing for the ladders, and swarming up them. There was no fight here, for the Gothlanders had fled. They did not like the look of this determined body of young strangers!

"Come on, everybody!" shouted Nipper. "It's for the sake of the girls!"

"Hurrah!"

They reached the top of the wall—a wide, ample space. Further along, bodies were lying just as they had fallen. But the juniors took little heed. Something hissed past Nipper's head, and he rapped out a sharp command.

"Down!" he shouted. "Duck, you chaps! Arrows!"

They managed to get a glimpse of the castle courtyard. Men were swarming there—hundreds of them. They were smashing down the castle doors, intent upon gaining an entry. As yet, they had failed. But what could these few schoolboys do against such a savage mob? The very idea of a fight seemed madness.

Arrows were flying over the top of the

wall in scores, and it was fortunate for the fellows that they obeyed Nipper's urgent command. The battlements protected them so long as they kept down.

"What about these rockets?" yelled Pitt eagerly. "I say, Nipper, hadn't we better loose them off?"

"Yes—one at a time!" replied Nipper. "We'll see what effect the first one has—and instead of sending it up in the air, we'll direct it downwards, into the courtyard. We can't hope to beat this horde in a hand-to-hand fight—they'd have us whacked in twenty seconds."

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "Let's dash down, and show these brutes what we're made of! We can't mess about with those rockets—"

But Church and McClure, fearful of what Handforth might do, seized him and held him down. And Reggie Pitt applied a match to the first maroon. It was already fixed to a long length of wood. Pitt had made no mistake in bringing these smoke-bombs along with him.

Zzzzzh!

A trail of hissing sparks shot out, and then

the maroon went off with a roar, and fell down into the courtyard, leaving a train of sparks and smoke behind it. It struck a number of men, and they fell back. Then the rocket hit the ground, rebounded, and slewed round wildly, scattering a number of other men. Already there was a sign of panic.

And then— Boom!

It was a peculiarly penetrating, shattering explosion, like a clap of thunder at close quarters, ear-splitting and deadly.



CHAPTER 21.

SUCCESS!

THE result was absolutely staggering.

Immediately following the explosion, which left a feeling of utter deafness

in the ears of all the juniors, a vast, billowing cloud of acrid smoke rolled across the courtyard with unbelievable density. It blotted out the panic-stricken figures of the Gothlander soldiers, and continued to roll on like a pall.

But men were flying everywhere—fighting to get out of one another's way.

And yet there was absolutely no danger!

If a high explosive bomb had fallen, the moral effect could not have been greater. Not a man was injured, not one of them was even scorched—but that terrific explosion, followed by the pall of smoke, had done the trick.

"Hold on!" shouted Nipper. "Don't fire the other one, Reggie!"

"Isn't it necessary?" asked Pitt.

"I don't think so—but we'll hold it in reserve, anyhow," replied Nipper. "By Jove, look at them! What a piece of luck it was, finding those maroons!"

"Yes, that was my doing!" said Handforth promptly.

"That one alone has turned the tables!" continued Nipper swiftly. "And now it's up to us to take advantage of the panic. Come on, you chaps! These Gothlanders haven't got an ounce of fight left in them!"

What followed was almost as startling as the result of the explosion. The Gothlanders, probably believing that their last moment was near, were racing up their improvised ladders to the top of the wall. Once there, they did not give battle to the juniors, but flung themselves headlong into the river.

The vast majority of them went hurtling down, many falling on the decks of the ships, with serious results. Others, encumbered by their heavy armour and chainmail, sank before they could pull themselves out of the water. It was a complete and absolute debacle.

And all caused by one signal rocket!

True, it had been fired at a crucial moment, and fired, too, in such a way that it had seemed a thousand times more deadly than it actually was. Even among modern

soldiers, accustomed to shrapnel and hand-grenades, the effect of that maroon explosion would have been telling. But to these Gothlanders, who knew nothing of such explosives, it had driven them mad with panic.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth indignantly. "There's nobody left for us to fight! Look! A group of Northeistrians have come out into the courtyard, and they're polishing off the remnant of the enemy! They haven't even left us a couple!"

"I rather think we've done our bit!" said Nipper.

"Hear, hear!"

"We're not all such fire-eaters as you, Handy, thank goodness!"

Elated by their unexpected success—for, in their hearts, many of the fellows had expected a deadly encounter with the enemy—they hastened down the ladders, and reached the courtyard. They were just in time to greet Irene & Co. and the princess as they came hurrying out.

"Oh, you living marvels!" cried Irene delightedly. "We saw you from one of the windows, and knew that we should be all right."

"Trust St. Frank's to butt in at the right moment!" said Doris.

"Good old Ted!" chimed in Ena Handforth. "I'm a bit surprised to see you alive, to tell the truth!"

They all talked at once, and there were many chuckles when the princess expressed fear at the maroon.

"It was nothing much, your Majesty," said Handforth, grinning. "Only a smoke-bomb. It sounded pretty bad, but these high walls made it twice as noisy as it really was. Anyhow, it scared off the enemy, and that was the main thing."

The princess regarded him with those dazzling eyes of hers.

"Once again, bold Handforth, thou hast saved me!" she muttered. "What can I do to repay thee for these wondrous services? Gentle youth—"

"Oh, I say!" protested Handforth, in sudden alarm. "Cheese it! I—I mean, these other fellows were in it just as much as I was. Nothing to make a fuss about, your Majesty!"

Handforth always grew alarmed when the princess gave him one of her special smiles. The fact that she had a particular liking for him frequently caused Handforth to go weak at the knees. To his great relief, Nipper changed the subject.

"Your Majesty, I'm going to ask you to come on board the galley," he said firmly. "After what's happened, I don't think you are safe here."

The fair Mercia inclined her head.

"Thy wishes will be heeded," she said simply.

"And what about us?" asked Irene.

"You'll come, too, of course," replied Nipper. "You see, Mr. Lee has established a headquarters ship—one of the biggest ships of Northeustria, fitted with aero-engines."

lots of other gadgets. I'm going to put you safely on board the Spitfire—that's her name—under the gov'nor's wing. We can't let you risk any more misadventures of this kind. These rotten Gothlanders have gained a strong hold, and the invasion is a reality."

"My poor country!" murmured the princess, in distress.

"Don't worry, your Majesty—your armies will drive the brutes out," declared Nipper confidently. "But at the moment, the lake seems to be the safest spot. And you'll all be secure on the Spitfire."

The rest of the juniors were in hearty agreement with Nipper's decision, and less than an hour later, the galley was off again, after another triumphant adventure. The two Gothlander ships had fled with their depleted crews, but they didn't escape. Out in the lake, they encountered a trio of Northestrian ships, and their fate was swift.



CHAPTER 22.

INTO THE UNKNOWN!

LORD DORRIMORE, in the meantime, was having quite an adventure of his own.

He was exceedingly interested in this Northestrian story of the "Flow." It intrigued him. And he was determined to make some close investigations before he did anything else.

"We'll have a shot at this wonderful cavern of yours, Sigbert, old man," he declared, as the motor-boat skimmed speedily over the lake. "We're getting near the gorge now, and we shan't be long before we're—"

"But stay!" protested the other. "You would venture this alone?"

"Not alone—you're coming with me."

"Ay, but i'faith, 'tis a risk!" protested Sigbert.

"I thrive on risks!" said Lord Dorrimore genially. "The doctor ordered me to take two after every meal."

Sigbert shook his head. He could not understand the workings of this "mad-brain," as he privately dubbed the reckless Dorrie.

"There's somethin' rummy about this flow of salt water," continued his lordship keenly. "It comes at periodic intervals, and causes a flood. It lasts for nearly a fortnight, and it goes as suddenly as it appears. A geyser, or I'll eat my necktie!"

"A geyser?" repeated Sigbert, puzzled.

"One of those merry things which bubble up hot water every now and again," explained Dorrie. "You've got plenty of them in your country. But, of course, there are geysers and geysers. I take it that this beggar is a pretty hefty one. He must be, to cause such a widespread disturbance. An' he functions, apparently, about three times every century. He takes a lot of moving, but once he starts he evidently means busi-

ness! There's a famous geyser called 'Old Faithful'—as regular as clockwork. This joker appears to belong to the same family."

Lord Dorrimore's theory was an astute one. He knew that this whole region was volcanic, and it was just the district to harbour geysers of all types. Perhaps there was one far beneath the mountains— But how could that be? Salt water—sea-water—could not come from such a source.

Dorrie, with vague wonder within him, set forth on this present mission with boyish eagerness. In his bones, he felt that he was on the verge of a tremendous discovery. A discovery that might have startling consequences.

But he did not allow his thoughts to run loose. It was no good getting all sorts of high hopes, only to have them smashed to fragments against the rock of hard fact. Perhaps this tunnel would lead nowhere! In all probability, the rocks would close in, and forbid of any exploration.

So Dorrie kept an open mind. And he opened up the engine of his motor-boat, and raced up that frowning gorge. Before long, the effect of the current was felt, for the fast little craft slowed down. Even so she still made rapid progress.

"'Tis wondrous, indeed!" declared Sigbert. "Our own vessels, manned with expert oarsmen, could scarce beat against this swift flow. And yet thy craft makes light of it."

"I've got a good reserve of power, too," nodded Lord Dorrimore, with satisfaction. "The old tub is goin' like a dream, an' there's no risk, anyhow. If the engine fails, we shall just drift back. It's easy."

"Within this cavern, darkness prevails—"

"Don't you worry about that—it won't prevail for long," smiled his lordship.

"We've got a pretty little searchlight on this boat. Just an ornament until now—an' everythin' has its uses, sooner or later."

The Northestrian officer was freshly amazed soon afterwards, for as the boat plunged into the great cavern entrance, so Dorrie pressed a switch. The searchlight blazed out, and turned that great cave into a dazzling palace of light. The rocks stood out clearly, and even Dorrie was astonished. The roof domed above, vastly high, and the speeding stream came tumbling along from out of the very bowels of the mountain range. It reminded Lord Dorrimore of a railway tunnel on a gigantic scale—for it was twenty times larger than any man-made tunnel.

The boat was making great speed, even now. In spite of the current's strength, a steady twenty miles an hour was maintained—for this little craft, in still water, could go like an express train. Silence fell upon the two as they penetrated deeper and deeper into the mysterious unknown.

Mile after mile!

Dorrie felt his heart beating more rapidly. His pulse was quick and excited. The deeper they went into this great tunnel, the colder became the air. And there was no sign of a snag—no narrowing of the way.

"I fear greatly!" confessed Sigbert, after

a long silence. "No man has ever penetrated thus far—"

"Then you'll be making history," interrupted Lord Dorrimore grimly. "We've started on this business now, old man, and we're going through with it. Nothin' is goin' to stop me except a barrier of solid rock!"

For Dorrie was wildly excited. He didn't like to admit it, but his blazing eyes and his quick pulse told him the truth. What mysteries were there ahead? And would this amazing tunnel never end?

On—always on!

And not a single snag to stay the progress. Occasionally, the roof of the great tunnel would grow lower, and sometimes Dorrie's heart would almost miss a beat as the rocks closed down. But then they would open up again, always revealing a clear and unhindered passage.

And the cold grew intense.

The unfortunate Sigbert was shivering—not merely from cold, but from fear, too. He was no coward, but this adventure was turning his blood to water. Never in his life—never in the life of any Northeastrian—had such a temperature as this been experienced! It was something beyond his ken!

"If you're feelin' chilly, you'd better slip down into the cabin," suggested Dorrie, through clenched teeth. "It's a poky hole, but the warmth from the engine—"

"Nay, I will stay," interrupted Sigbert huskily.

His curiosity was beginning to get the better of his fear, and he was staring at the distance ahead like a man in a trance. This adventure was exciting, even to Dorrie—but to Sigbert it was an epoch-making event.

The motor-boat was slower now, proving that the current was stronger. Even so, the sturdy little craft seemed to be flashing past the glistening walls of rock. The waters were black and inky, and the air was icily cold. The further they went, the colder grew the temperature.

Would this tunnel never end?

Lord Dorrimore told himself repeatedly that his imagination was running riot. But he could swear that there was a curious tang in the air—the smell of the sea! And yet how could this be possible? In this region, in the frozen North, there was no open water.

And yet—

Dorrie stared ahead, his face grim and set, his eyes gleaming. At any moment he expected—Truth to tell, he hardly knew what to expect.



CHAPTER 23. DORRIE'S AMAZING DISCOVERY!

THE fact was incontrovertible

The motor-boat was passing right beneath the great barrier mountains.

Lord Dorrimore remembered how they

towered up for thousands and thousands of feet—an utterly impassable barrier. Even the notorious Mount Everest—the highest known peak—was a mere hill compared to this vast range, with its fearsome glaciers. No living man could ever conquer such heights.

But here Dorrie was speeding beneath this incredible mass of rock and ice! Hour after hour! Two hours had already sped, and still the motor-boat continued. It seemed unbelievable. Over forty miles had been covered—forty miles of this extraordinary tunnel.

And what could be beyond? The Arctic? If so, it would be a frozen waste—a solid mass of ice, where open water was unknown. Yet where was this rushing stream coming from? Dorrie's mind was beginning to stagger. He could not form any feasible idea.

And then, almost without warning, he detected that something was different. The air was much colder now, and Dorrie's hands were almost frozen to the wheel. His limbs were numb—his ears felt as though they were on fire. And now the great tunnel was a dazzling picture of wonderful icicles, hanging down in great festoons. They sparkled and scintillated in the powerful searchlight.

There was a wind—a distinct, cutting breeze! Dorrie's heart nearly stopped beating again. What could this wind portend? Only one thing, surely!

Then Dorrie's breath refused to come. He gasped as he stared. The motor-boat had passed out—had left the tunnel behind! Fields of ice and snow were dimly visible in the gloomy distance. And on every side of the boat stretched black masses of rippling water.

"Great gad!" muttered Dorrie.

He stared—he stared unbelievably.

For overhead he could see the sky—the deep, black sky, with stars! Stars! A great lump came into Lord Dorrimore's throat. He hardly expected to see such stars again. But there they were, gazing down upon him from the purple sky.

"Ye gods!" he croaked. "We're outside—we're out in the open!"

Sigbert was speechless. This thing was beyond him. In all his life he had never set eyes on such a wonder as a twinkling star, because of the mists!

But Dorrie knew the truth now, and it overwhelmed him. Automatically, he closed the throttle, and the motor-boat skimmed along under its own momentum. A high wind was blowing here, and the air was like a knife-edge. Glancing back, Dorrie could see the glaciers rising, tier after tier. And far, far up the icy peaks. But ahead there was this vast expanse of water—unfrozen! And in the dim distance, ice.

An open lake amid the freezing air of the Polar regions?

Dorrie leaned over the side of the boat, and plunged his hand into the water. He withdrew it sharply, and took a deep breath.

"A geyser!" he muttered. "But, by the Lord Harry, what a geyser!"

The water was cold, but not icily cold. Dorrie could bear his hand in it easily. Somewhere, far below, there was a submarine geyser. He was convinced that his theory was correct, and this geyser, operating, by some freak of Nature, only once in every thirty odd years, caused the ice to thaw, and caused this great open lake to form. And the overflow found its way through the great natural tunnel directly into the oasis beyond.

Suddenly Lord Dorrimore's brain cleared, and he grinned.

"An outlet!" he said exultantly. "Good glory, Sigbert, an outlet! Don't you understand?"

"I am bewildered—I am afraid!" muttered Sigbert.

"I don't wonder at it," said Dorrie sympathetically.

But he spoke almost mechanically, for his thoughts were busy. He remembered that glorious message which had come through on the wireless. The British Navy was preparing a great fleet of seaplanes to reach the Arctic!

Those seaplanes could never cross those barrier mountains, but here, outside—Dorrie caught his breath in, and refused to allow his thoughts to go further. Until this minute he had not dreamed how dearly he longed to get back into the great world—and away from this unreal atmosphere of the Middle Ages.

"Come on!" he said hoarsely. "We've done our work! At least, we've done everything possible this trip. How long did you say before the freeze-up comes? Twelve days! Gad! They'll have to get a hustle on!" he added anxiously.

Sigbert did not know what Lord Dorrimore meant, but he asked no questions. Dorrie opened up the throttle, and the motor-boat spun round, and headed from the great opening amid the ice. It was like a scene from fairyland—a mountain of ice, with a black opening in the midst of it—an opening which was encrusted with icicles. The motor-boat plunged in.

"Now we shan't be long," said Lord Dorrimore.

With the current to help them, and with the engine roaring, the boat fairly tore back down the tunnel. In fact, Dorrie was compelled to half-close the throttle, for the speed was too great to be pleasant.

But it was a triumphant return, and as the little craft penetrated further and further, so the air became milder. The effect upon Sigbert was marked, for he began to talk—just as though he had become unfrozen. Lord Dorrimore listened like a man in a dream. He was busy with his own thoughts.

And then the engine gave a splutter, and petered out.

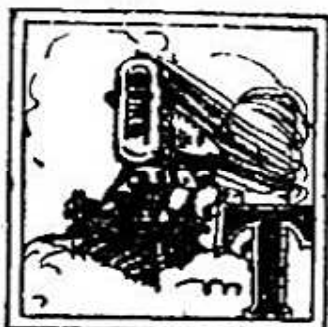
"It's all right, I was expectin' it," said Dorrie lightly. "No more juice. But we can sail down on the current, and I've never used petrol to better advantage."

"But what of these wonders?" asked the Northestrian. "We are now returning into

the land I know—where there is light, where there is warmth. But what of these marvels—"

"I want you to swear to me, Sigbert, that you won't breathe a word of this," said Dorrie impressively. "As a personal favour I want you to keep it dark. Don't say anythin' until I give you the tip."

The bewildered Sigbert gave his word, and Dorrie believed him. All the same, the Northestrian was like a man in a trance.



CHAPTER 24.

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM!

"HAT looks like Dorrie's motor-boat," said Reggie Pitt, staring.

The galley was well out on the lake, proceeding leisurely towards the Spitfire, which could just be seen in the far distance. But in the opposite direction, at far range, a speck could be seen. Nipper used his telescope.

"Yes, it's Dorrie," he said, puzzled. "But he seems to be just drifting. It doesn't matter, anyhow, because one of the gondolas is coming along. The gov'nor, I'll bet."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"Anxious to find out what mischief the infants have been up to!" he said, with a chuckle. "Well, we shall be glad to see him—because he can tell us how things are going ashore."

The gondola, with its skimming floats, approached like some monstrosity from another world. As Nipper had suspected, Nelson Lee was at the wheel, and he brought the queer craft to a standstill, twenty feet or so from the drifting galley.

"No need to look worried, sir, we're all intact!" sang out Nipper.

"So I see," replied Nelson Lee. "I was anxious about you."

"We've been doing our share, sir," grinned Nipper. "We've chased two or three Gothlander boats, and we've rescued her Majesty and his Highness the Prince, and Irene & Co.—"

"Steady—steady!" interrupted Nelson Lee. "You seem to have been having a whole batch of excitements! Perhaps I'd better come on board, and hear—"

"Won't it do when we get to the Spitfire, sir?" asked Dick. "We're as hungry as hunters, and we're pretty tired, too. We thought it would be safer to bring everybody along to the headquarters ship—"

"You did quite right, according to all that I can hear," replied Nelson Lee. "There are many startling rumours going the rounds, and I am thankful, indeed, to see her Majesty alive and well."

"What of the invasion, sir?"

"I can tell you little more than you know already," replied Lee. "The Northestrian

(Continued on page 41.)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with his readers.



*NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed to EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Every letter will have my personal attention, and all will be acknowledged in these columns. Letters of very special merit will be distinguished by a star, thus *, against sender's name.*

E. S. B.

LAST week I forgot to acknowledge the photographs which were sent to me by Ralph Richards and Tom Treadwell. Thanks, R. R. and T. T., for them. I need hardly tell you that they have already been placed in that special album of mine which I keep for readers' photographs.

Now I come to think of it, didn't I promise to give a few words to three of you chaps whose letters were acknowledged last week? Chorus from R. G. Scott, Kenneth Smith, and Terence Sullivan. All right—all right! I know you're fed up with waiting. I'll polish you off straight away, and you'll have to make things right with all the readers who get left out in the cold this week, owing to insufficiency of space.

Now, Kenneth Smith, you want to know when the first stories of Dick Goodwin are coming out in "The MONSTER Library," don't you? I expect this will be stale news to you, but they're out already—in the January number.

Surely you've made a mistake, Terence Sullivan? What do you mean by saying that I have never given a hint as to the exact whereabouts of St. Frank's? You know, as well as I do, that St. Frank's is situated about a mile from Bellton, three miles from Bannington, and that the River Stowe flows past the bottom of the playing-fields. If you can't find these places on your map of Sussex, don't blame me. I think the people who make maps must have been a bit careless! Talking about maps, you want to know why I haven't prepared our own special sectional map, and then you accuse me of being lazy. All right, Terence—just come and try my job for a week, and I think you'll get a new idea of what laziness is. If you want to know more about the map, look up what I said last week. With regard to your two questions, here are the answers. 1. St. Frank's is not only founded on a real school, but it

is a real school—as far as I am concerned. And I hope that all you readers take it for granted that St. Frank's is real, too. 2. The title of the story in No. 112 was "Nipper at St. Frank's."

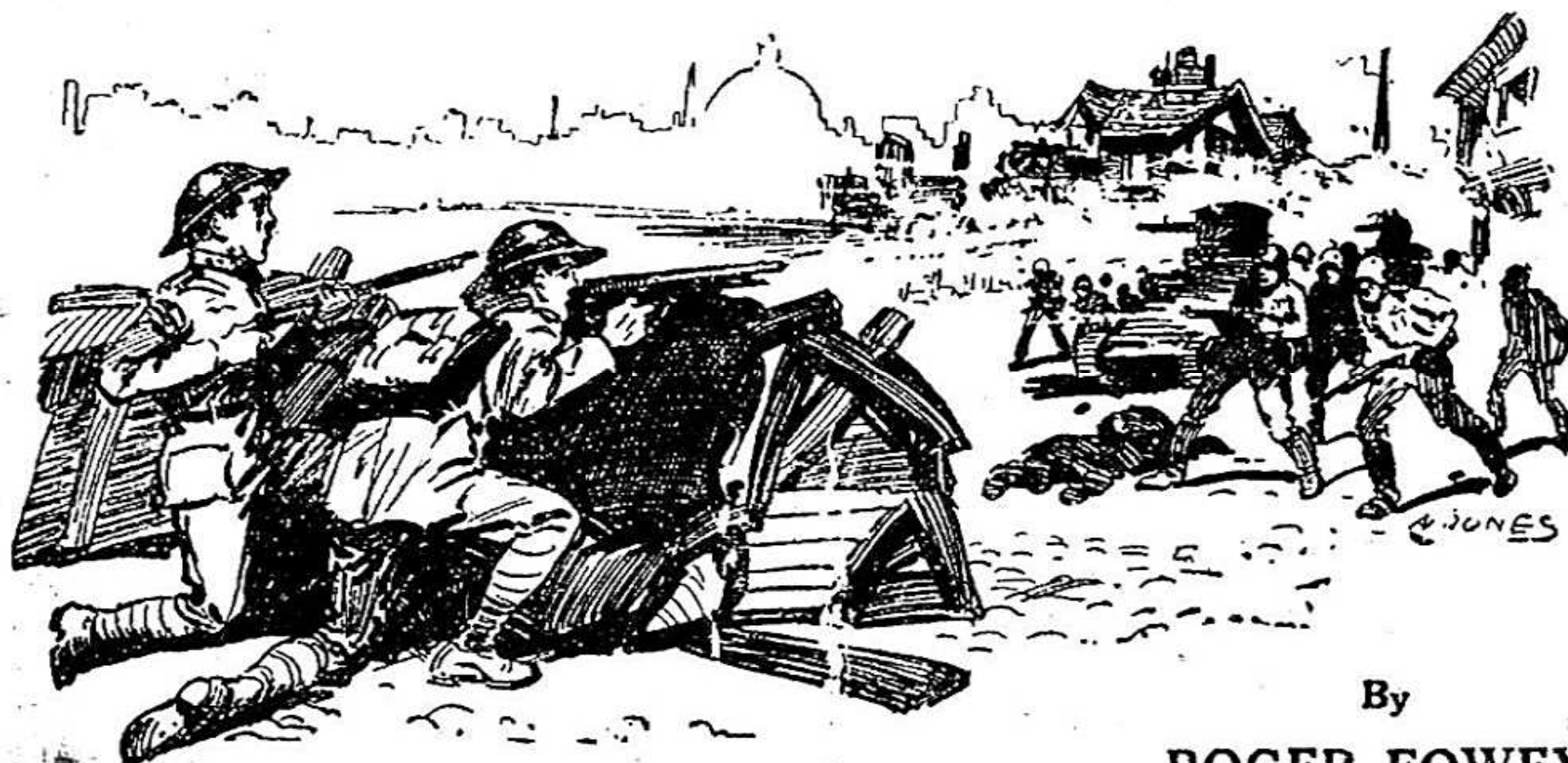
There you are! I knew what it would be. I've been so long answering you three fellows that there's hardly any room for anything else. Anyhow, I'll acknowledge all letters to hand, and if any of them need comments, I'll refer to them again next week.

Paolo Zuccarelli (I don't think!—E. S. B.), (East Grinstead), Herbert Blogg (S.E.1), Pat W. Malaghan (S.E.17), Sidney Smith (Scartho), W. R. Nelson (Shepherd's Bush), Mollie (Twickenham), Leslie Turner (Elland), Charles N. Smart* (Erdington), Ernest A. West (Tauranga, N.Z.), Frank Ernest Palmer (Swindon), W. H. Holmes Lardner (Sydney), R. S. J. A. Gleeson (Limerick), David Pearson* (Burton-on-Trent), Alan B. Bresnahan (Caulfield, Vic.), W. A. Waldron* (Tuam), Kitty Lill* (Grimsby), Raymond Anoot (Eltham), Chapman Lowrie Wilson (Leith), Stanley Cubin (Ilkley), R. K. Butler (Cowley, Oxon), Henry Goodall (Ryd Lewis), An Interested Reader* (Clevedon), R. E. Long* (Brighton), A. Hammond (Leeds), E. Barlow (Bundaberg, Queensland), F. Young* (Edgehill, Liverpool), Arthur J. Southway* (Farnborough), Lawlake (Limerick), B. Davies (Molbourne), George Burgess* (Selsey), Frank J. Bamber** (Charlton), William Bishop (St. Neot's), William R. Allsopp* (Dudley).

Edwy Searles Brooks

*The Rout of the Enemy!**Thrilling Concluding Chapters!*

SONS OF THE MEN OF MONS!



By

ROGER FOWEY

THE ENEMY IN LONDON!

Jack Bennett and his two school-chums, Tom Lee and Buster Kirk, are involved in the thick of the fighting when the Germans invade England in a War of Revenge. The enemy is greatly assisted by a spy named Stutz, who was a master at the school; when the chums are brought before him at the enemy headquarters in Lord's cricket ground, he condemns them to death, but they manage to escape and eventually make their way back to the British lines, taking with them a number of enemy documents which they have managed to take from the German Headquarters' staff. These papers will turn the

tide of battle in favour of the British. General Marlow, in charge of the British forces, has just planned a smashing counter-attack of which the enemy knows nothing and which will smash the German onslaught. When the chums appear with the papers, he holds up the attack until the documents and despatches have been translated. The papers are handed to Captain Chester to decipher; while he is on the job an officer comes into the room. The chums recognise him as Stutz, the spy—they fling themselves at him, just as he draws a revolver and blazes full at Captain Chester!

(Now read the conclusion of this magnificent war yarn.)

The Last of Stutz!

THE terrific report of the revolver half stunned Jack as he flung himself at Stutz again. He had a glimpse of Captain Chester reeling back, the German despatches still clutched in his hand, then Buster flung all his weight at the spy, while Tom dived low and collared him at the knees.

Stutz came down with a crash to the floor, and once again his revolver exploded, the bullet ploughing a great gash along one of the shell-shattered walls of the room.

"Hold him—keep him down!" gasped Jack. Then he reached with both hands for the smoking weapon.

Stutz was struggling like a madman; before either of the staff officers could come to the assistance of the chums, he flung them off in an access of mad strength and half came to his feet. Jack saw the reeking revolver thrusting forward—pointing to General Marlow this time.

He tried to grab at the weapon, but Stutz placed his left fist under the lad's jaw, thrust him back, and—

A streak of flame slashed before Jack's very eyes. He heard the thunderous, smashing report of an automatic pistol blazing close against his head. Half blinded, he reeled away, cannoned into Buster, and they both crashed to the floor.

For what seemed an age he lay there, with his brain spinning, completely deafened and unable to see anything because of the light that had seared across his eyes. He became conscious of hands under his shoulders, lifting him up, then he got a misty vision of what had happened.

One of the staff officers had shot Stutz in the very instant that he was firing at the general. The officer had thrust his weapon in front of Jack's face—the only way in which the man could be certain of hitting Stutz and not Jack.

General Marlow was standing calm and grim by his table. Stutz was sprawled full length on the floor—dead.

Captain Chester was in one corner of the room, a bloodstained hand clasped to his left shoulder, when Stutz's first bullet had got him.

"I'm sorry—hope you're all right!" The staff officer's voice came faintly to Jack's ears. "I

let fly right in front of you. Put your weight on me, boy you'll—"

"It's all right, sir!" Jack drew himself up, and stood grinning a little as he swayed on his feet. Buster and Tom came one to either side of him, and drew him towards the clear air that came through the broken windows at one side of the room.

In a few minutes Jack was himself again, and by that time orderlies had taken Stutz from the room.

"He was shot—shot dead," muttered Buster. "Gosh—he's gone! It doesn't seem possible, does it? But the bullet took him right at the side of the head—it was awful!"

"I can see him taking us for French in the form-room now," said Tom. "An' now he's—dead!"

"He must have been a brave sort of chap—from the things he did," commented Jack. "I mean, if you consider that this is British General Headquarters, and he was a German—and had the nerve to come here. Gosh, he must have been brave!"

Neither of them thought about the time when Stutz had callously ordered that the three of them be taken out and shot because they refused to betray what they knew of the movements of British troops. The only thing they thought of was the bravery of the enemy spy.

On the other side of the room, Captain Chester was sitting in a chair. His tunic had been slit up and a rough field dressing showed at his wounded shoulder. He was poring over the despatches which the three chums had brought, dictating translations to an orderly who stood by him.

All around were General Marlow and the rest of his staff, waiting to learn the full value of the papers before final orders were given for the British advance.

The sound of the battle raging along Oxford Street came clearly into the room—the rattle of rifle-fire, the chattering of machine-guns, the thudding crash of bombs and the tearing whine of flying shells.

In the rooms above, field wireless operators were standing by their instruments awaiting orders. Everywhere along the battle-front, commanders were just holding the enemy—waiting.

Half an hour passed. The chums remained where they were, because they did not know what else to do. They thought that the General might have some further use for them, and judged that perhaps it was best for them to stay. Finally, Captain Chester seemed to have completed his scrutiny of the German despatches.

Two of the staff officers pinned to the far wall a huge map which showed the whole of south-east England. General Marlow stepped before it and considered the situation as it was shown by short coloured ribbons tacked to the big stretch of canvas. He had just stretched out his hand to indicate something, when an orderly came flying into the room with a slip in his hand. He saluted and handed the paper over. The general read it, then he smiled grimly.

"The Naval concentration is complete, gentlemen," he said. "Two fleets of enemy transports have been captured. All the destroyer and light cruiser raids on enemy submarine bases ordered this morning were successful. Landing parties have captured and held the bases which the enemy established on the east coast. Admiral Neill has completed his organisation of troops and naval ratings cut off in Kent, and is now ready to attack the enemy's southern armies in the rear!"

A subdued cheer rose from the staff officers. The chums cheered, too; they were not quite sure of what it all meant, but it sounded as though something big had been accomplished. They all

knew that huge British forces had been cut off just north of Dover when the enemy had advanced simultaneously from Dungeness and Whitstable, joining up along the Wye Valley; apparently these forces were now ready to counter-attack, which meant that the German armies in the south of London were in a very tight corner, especially if their retreat to the sea was cut off.

"I shall order our men between Aylesbury and Hertford to move south-east," said the general. "The troops at Wormwood Scrubs will advance north-east and join up to turn the enemy's flank. Our men lying in the east of London must move north to cut off the Hun line of retreat—we shall have them surrounded by nightfall, gentlemen! Now for— Ah, I forgot you boys!"

He turned to the chums, and they jumped to attention as he went on:

"This is not the time to speak of the good work you boys have done—that will come later. I shall not forget it, and you will all receive your due rewards. For the moment there is nothing that you can do. You may, if you wish, remain here and get a little rest with the orderlies or—"

"We're not tired, sir—we'd sooner be doing something. We'd like to be in at the finish."

"Let them go up with G.H.Q. observation squadron, sir," suggested the officer who had shot Stutz. "They won't be in any danger—and it's just the thing to suit them."

"Would you like that?" asked the general. "We have a small squadron of big observation planes in Hyde Park—you could stow on one of them and see what's going on! I'll give you a chit if you'd like to go."

"We should, sir!" exclaimed Jack eagerly.

Five minutes later and the three were hurrying in the direction of Hyde Park, Jack bearing a chit signed by the general himself. Before they left, it was explained to them that the duty of the squadron was to fly in the rear of the fighting, and to report the progress of the British troops under the immediate control of General Headquarters—the Guardsmen and special corps of infantry and machine-gunners.

These reports were studied beside those which came from the battle-front itself, and the aerial squadron was a swift means of keeping an accurate check on the situation.

They found the squadron parked near the Serpentine—it consisted of seven big biplanes—and they reported to the youthful captain in charge of it.

The End in Sight!

"THE general says I've got to shove you aboard one of my 'buses and let you see what's to be seen," grunted the captain as he scanned the chit. He stared at the three war-worn figures. "Who the dickens do you three think you are to be singled out for special treatment? An' what does he think my squadron is—a lot of blessed charabancs, or something? Sixpence all along the battle-front!"

The three shuffled uneasily. The captain was a decent-looking sort of chap, but he was plainly annoyed.

"We won't come if it's any bother," said Buster.

"Bother! Orders are orders, my lad. If the O.C. says you're to go then you go—but why he says it beats me! Anybody 'ud think you three were Lee Kirk and Bennett from the way this chit reads. I'd be proud to take you up if you were—but I don't suppose you've ever heard of 'em! Three o' the smartest lads in the big scrap, they are!" he exclaimed. "They keep on blowing up at H.Q. with information an' all

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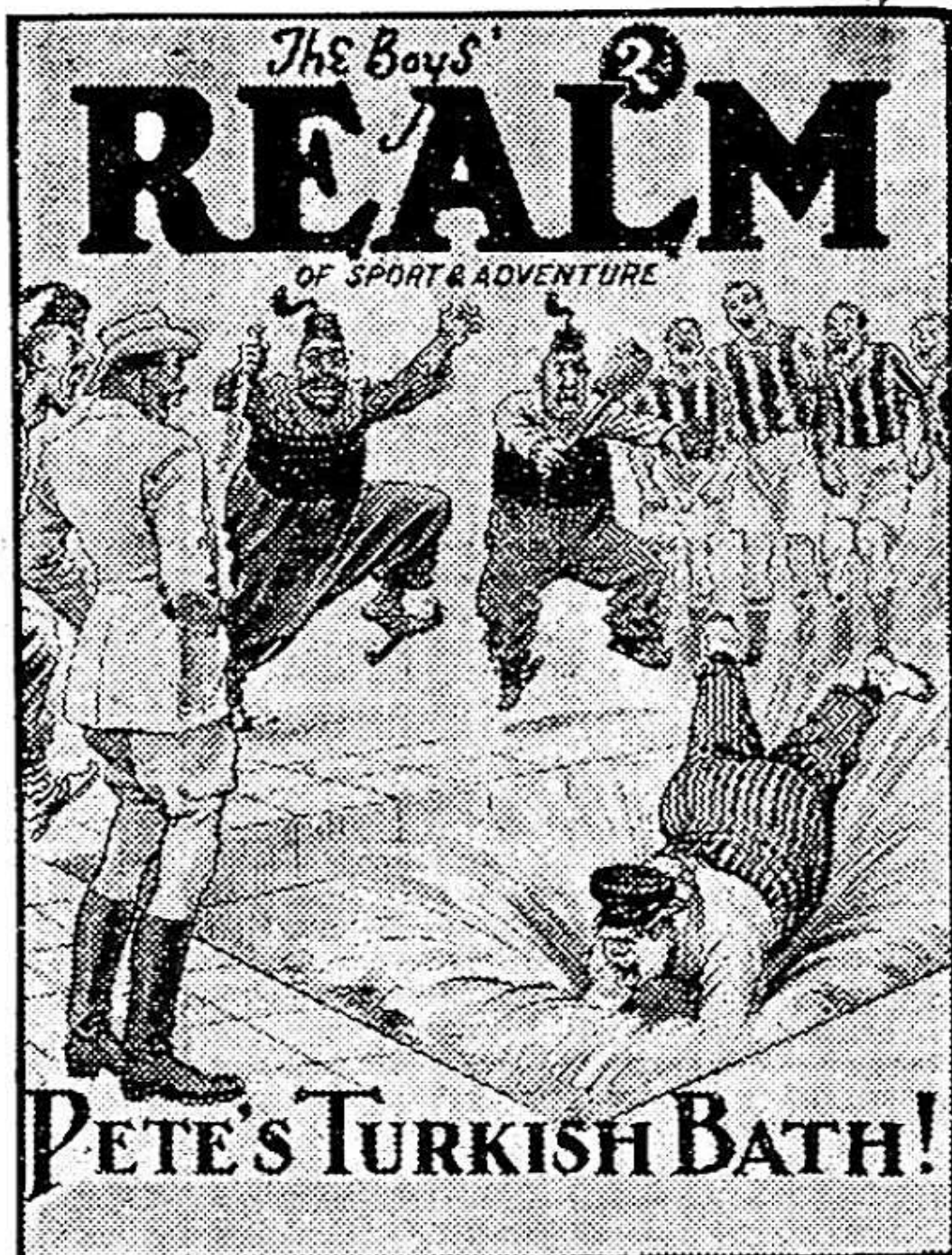
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sorts of things—put out that nest o' big guns down at Chillen Quarry! They did some good work at Edgware—one of the staff was telling me about 'em!"

"Was he?" asked Jack.

"Yes, he was!" grunted the captain. "What unit are you? Cadets, eh? Cadets—and I've got to take a bunch of baby soldiers aloft. What's your names?"

"I'm Bennett," said Jack. "This is Buster Kirk and that's Tom Lee!"

The captain stared at them. He said nothing, but a slow flush spread beneath his tan; then he stuck out his hand to Jack.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "I apologise for my rudeness."

"Oh, you didn't mean anything!" Jack said quickly, as he shook hands. "Of course, we must be an awful nuisance, and—"

"I'll show you how much of a nuisance you are. You'll come up in my machine, and—Yes!" He spun round to an orderly who came running across the grass. "H.Q. chit, eh? Thank you. Carry out observation work as already ordered," he read aloud. "That's what I've been waiting for—there's my 'bus. Hop in—we're off!"

He pointed to where a big machine stood gleaming and shimmering in the sunlight, with

the red, white and blue circles on fuselage and wings all colourful and glowing.

There were six other machines beyond it, each with a crew of seven men—two observers, two wireless operators, two machine-gunners and a pilot. The squadron commander ordered the chums in, and they tucked themselves away well to the rear of the fuselage, where they could peer down through the unsplinterable glass port-holes in the floor.

"You're not heavyweights, so you won't make any difference to us," said the captain, as he climbed in after them. "I take it you all want to keep together instead of being split up among different machines. Are you all fit, sergeant?"

Mechanics spread out along the wingtips and the tail. The twin engines roared, and the chums saw the pilot settling himself down in his seat behind the glittering instrument board. The sliding door in the fuselage was closed, cutting off much of the noise from the engines; then the machine began to glide over the grass, and in a few moments they were in the air—lifting swiftly up into the blue.

Up they went—up and up in great sweeping spirals, with the other 'planes moving near them, until their own craft flattened out and sped forward while the others left and shot away to their own appointed places along the fring-line.

Because the engines were mounted on the lower

'planes, and because the cabin was sealed against the direct passage of air, it was comparatively quiet, and talking was easy.

The chums realised that their being allowed to accompany the squadron was a concession on the part of General Marlow—a sort of recognition of what they had done. What they did not realise, however, was the fact that he wanted to keep them out of danger; he had seen enough of them to know that they were prepared to do anything that he asked—and that if he didn't ask them then they'd find something to do themselves.

He knew too, that in a little while the battle-front would probably be chaotic; there would be very desperate fighting which could have but one end. They had already played their part, and there was no reason to expose them to further danger.

Looking down through the observation ports, the three saw Hyde Park getting smaller and smaller. They saw troops moving in extended order towards the Bayswater Road, and 'planes winging into the air from the green patches.

They saw guns spurting flame and smoke, then they sighted Oxford Street—a long line of broken buildings above which hung the haze of battle. Apparently their 'plane had been posted to a position commanding Oxford Circus, and soon the machine was above the spot. It was then that the chums observed their escort of no less than four fighting 'planes, winging above them and ready to beat off any enemy machines.

It was evident that Headquarters had already issued orders for the general attack, for even as their machine soared above the Circus, they saw half a dozen tanks appear from out the mouth of Regent Street, crush down the barrier which the British had been holding, and then waddle forward, with all their guns firing.

More and smaller tanks followed them, blazing at the windows from which the Germans were firing. Then came wave upon wave of khaki-clad figures, who went storming into the buildings.

In every street leading northwards from the main thoroughfare other tanks were rolling, all followed by those khaki dots—swift-moving and vengeful.

The 'plane containing the three chums kept wheeling and circling, while the two wireless operators poured continuous reports into the mouth-pieces strapped to their chests.

"There's something doing over to the left there!" Jack exclaimed, nodding through one of the side ports.

"That's Wormwood Scrubs," exclaimed Tom. "There's a terrific army that way—Gosh, you're right, there is something doing all right!"

Apparently a terrific barrage was pouring from guns concealed in the open grass-land over that way, but just what was happening the three could not gather because buildings blotted out everything. One of the wireless men, however, was getting news in return from headquarters during the moments that he himself was not taking reports from the squadron commander.

"We're advancing from the Scrubs like a house-afire!" he told the chums. "We've got 'em running already, and—What's that, Dick? Eh—what?" He listened a moment, then turning to the trio again, grinned broadly as he went on: "Reserves have cut across the Lea marshes and Enfield; they're fighting to cut the enemy communications and have pretty well done it!"

The chums watched the battle below—what they could see of it. It was hard to realise that the little, running figures in the streets were men, and that the tiny spurts of smoke meant death-dealing shells hurtling at the enemy. Now and again a big area would be blotted out as one of the British fighting machines bombed entrenched enemy guns, and always ahead of them there was continuous fighting in the air.

For an hour the trio crouched on the floor of the 'plane and watched, then the friendly operator suddenly cheered.

"We've got the whole bunch running to escape being surrounded!" he exclaimed. "Our men have come down from Hertford and Aylesbury and have nearly linked up with the eastern forces—the Germans are running like mad through the narrow neck left to 'em! They're nearly bottled up!"

Down below, the battle had pressed far beyond Regent's Park. That big stretch had been recaptured with ease, because the enemy battle-front was thin and was badly backed by reserves of men. The Huns had pressed so far and so fast that they had nothing with which to hold the areas they had captured. Their line, also, was extended—and it was into this trap that the British command had deliberately led them.

The shorter the front on which an army fights, the stronger are the forces he can employ to hold his line, for the simple reason that men are concentrated. The Germans, however, had been so eager to advance that they had spread their men on a greater stretch of front than they could adequately hold. That, coupled with the capture of their troop transports by the British Navy, had weakened their defence, so that their recent swift advance had been merely a hasty walking into a trap set for them.

So now, once the enemy line was broken, there was nothing to stay the British advance beyond it. Besides all that, the Germans were wearied with long marching and no rest, and they rolled back as swiftly as they had come forward.

In a little while the streets below the machine in which the chums flew became filled, not with running Britishers, but with khaki-clad reserves hastening forward on motor-lorries—the enemy front was shattered, and strong parties of men were clearing up the enemy, capturing great bunches of prisoners and marching them towards a great concentration camp at Hyde Park.

By dusk the fighting had diminished to a desultory firing out on the open stretches of ground beyond Hampstead Heath, while the Hertford Army linked up with the Wormwood Scrubs forces and those battalions in the east of London, and swiftly closed in on the Huns who, that very morning, had talked of establishing their General Headquarters in Buckingham Palace.

With the coming of darkness, the observation 'plane swept back to Hyde Park and landed. The chums returned to headquarters, and there they learned the full story of the German defeat.

The Highest Honour:

IT was an exultant orderly who told them all that had happened.

"It isn't a defeat—it's a rout!" he exclaimed. "We've got 'em licked so hard that they're just chucking down their arms and surrendering. They were disorganised because of the way we bombed their H.Q. at Lord's—a lot of the staff got hit, or something, so they hadn't got any proper leaders. Anyway, we surrounded all the Germans in North London, and there won't be any more fighting that way by the morning!"

"What about down south?" asked Tom. "There's an awful lot of Germans down there!"

"There were," grinned the orderly, "but there ain't now. The boys from Dover joined up with the naval landing parties at Whitstable and sort of swept sideways at the Germans. They drove 'em down the Wye Valley and across the north downs—smack into a bunch of Devon and Cornish and Sussex troops that have been sitting down there nice and comfortable, waiting orders to advance.

"But those Huns didn't even put up a fight. They found that their retreat to the coast was cut off, and most of 'em gave it up and surrendered. Up on the east coast a lot of troops have come down from the north, and they're busy mopping up Essex—all the Germans in England by the morning will either be prisoners or else dead. They can't get out, because the Navy's seeing to that; no reserves can get across, because the Navy's seeing to that, as well!"

"What'll we do—send an army across and smash them?" asked Buster. "That's what we ought to do—give 'em a taste of what we've had!"

Buster's idea was the same as that of many others who had fought in the war—but there was no need to take so drastic a step. Only absolute surrender prevented the complete annihilation of the enemy troops, and the Germans knew when they were beaten.

Not in a day was the enemy assault finally subdued, but it did not take long to round up the last of the enemy soldiers. After that the grim threat of a British invasion of Germany took all the heart out of the German War Lords, and they capitulated.

There came a day when three tanned-featured boys stood looking at the shell-shattered ruins of a school on the south coast. They gazed at the gaping holes in the ivy-clad walls, at the shell-craters in the playing fields, and the smashed trees.

It was here that the first shots of the war had

been fired. It was here that they themselves had first come to grips with the enemy.

On the breast of each was a little splash of colour—the deep crimson of the medal-ribbon belonging to the highest honour which any British soldier can attain—the V.C.

"I suppose they'll rebuild the school," commented Tom.

"There are some whacking great shell-holes in the playing fields," Buster observed. "They'll take a bit of filling up. It won't be bad to start kicking a football about once more though, will it?"

"It won't. Jack and Tom agreed.

They stood there, gazing at the ruin of the old school, and thinking of the day when they would be back there again.

Three youthful, sturdy figures who had played their part in the war, just as their fathers had fought against the German menace years before—had battled grimly in the great retreat from Mons.

Three boys who had received the highest honour that their country could give its warriors, now thought no longer of war—but of the school reopened, and the playing fields repaired, and of the rousing thud of a boot on a football.

(That's the end of this popular serial, but there's a new one starting next week. It is entitled "THE BURIED WORLD," by Lionel Day—a thrilling yarn of breathless adventure. Look out for an extra long first instalment of this stirring story next week—and order your NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance!)



(Continued from page 35.)

forces have been hotly engaged for many hours, and nobody knows exactly how the position stands. Get along to the Spitfire at once, and remain on board."

"You might have a look at Dorrie, sir," called out Handforth.

Nelson Lee promised to do so, and while the galley continued her way, the gondola sped down the lake, and, after a brief delay, took the motor-boat in tow. Dorrie had been quite vague—merely stating that he had run out of petrol.

His lordship was keeping his great discovery to himself.

An hour later, Lee was standing on the deck of the headquarters ship, and he was looking relieved.

"How on earth those boys managed to escape disaster I don't know, Dorrie," he said. "But they're all on board now—and there they'll stay! There'll be no more escapades!"

"All the same, they're a parcel of bright lads!" grinned Dorrie.

"They've been wonderful," admitted Lee. "Have you heard all the details of their exploit at Westwold Castle? All the girls are with us now, and that is another cause for satisfaction. Our main party is intact, Dorrie—and all on this one craft."

"I expect we'll get in touch with the Government authorities soon," said his lordship dreamily.

"You seem pretty confident, old man," Lee observed.

"My dear fellow, I'm positive!" beamed Dorrie.

He strolled off, and Nelson Lee did not care to press him. Boats were coming out, and these boats brought news. Grave news—but, on the whole, good. The enemy advance was checked, and the capital was safe. The Gothlanders had been unable to take Dunstane, and they were massing for a great battle in the open country beyond. Incidentally, the wreckage of the ill-fated airship was in the very heart of the invaded territory—proof enough that the removal of the precious wireless instruments had been warranted!

And while the tired St. Frank's fellows slept, and while Nelson Lee held consultations with the Northestrian generals, Lord Dorrimore haunted the wireless room—waiting for definite news from home.

THE END.

(More thrills await the Boys of St. Frank's and their companions in next week's exciting complete yarn, entitled: "HANDY THE CONQUEROR!" Make sure of your copy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY by ordering in advance!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 64.

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 numbers, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

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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.

Silver Medals.

THERE will be a particularly interesting announcement in this column very soon concerning the Silver Medals. I have received a great many letters about the new award, and I can well understand that some little impatience has been felt regarding the new Medal. But it is all right. See next week's thumping fine issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. It will have definite news about these medals.

The Mercantile Marine.

A Merthyr Tydvil chum wants to join the Merchant Service, and asks me how he should proceed. I suggest he applies to Messrs. Devitt & Moore, 12, Fenchurch Buildings, London, E.C.3. He could also get information from the Sailors' Homes and Red Ensign Club, Well Street and Dock Street, London, E.1. Of course, the fellow who is keen about the sea—and physically fitted for the life—will generally find a friend ready to give him a lift.

Tinfoil.

A letter that struck me as pretty special blew in this week from Hayle, Cornwall. The writer said he had suggested to a neighbour that hospitals could be helped by means of the tinfoil ("silver paper") which gets thrown away as of no value. This material really has a definite value, and if it is sent in fair-sized parcels to the Ancient Order of Druids, 70, High Street, Clapham, London, S.W., that splendid organisation will see to it that the hospitals benefit by the disposal of the stuff.

Handy For Ever!

I do not reckon that the mighty Nimrod, Handforth, to wit, really comes into this League column, but so many of my chums bring in cheery remarks about the yarns in their League letters that it is up to me to thank them for their compliments to the trusty fellow concerned. Therefore, on behalf of E. O. H. I just wish to say that Handforth is booming steadily. Watch out for surprises.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Keith Buckley, 22, Robinson's Road, Auburn, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to hear from readers in England or America; interested in sports and camping.

Miss Dorothy Coward, 232, London Road, Newbury, Berkshire, wishes to hear from girl members in her district.

Colin Elwes, 134, Woodside Lane, Pitsmoor, Sheffield, wishes to correspond with readers.

L. Ross, 14, Grove Park, Camberwell, London, S.E.5, wishes to correspond with a reader in the United States concerning anything in general, but especially about films.

L. Starley, 35, Clare Road, Maidenhead, wishes to exchange 38 back numbers of the "N.L.L." for the Dr. Karnak series and Nos. 121, 447, 483.

Harry, c/o J. O'H., 179, Grundy Street, Poplar, London, E.14, wishes to hear from readers. All letters answered.

League members, age 16 upwards, living in Poplar area, wishing to form a St. Frank's League Club, should write Jack O'H., 179, Grundy Street, Poplar, E.14.

Harry Rhodes, 86, Trammere Road, Earlsfield, London, S.W.18, wishes to hear from readers in his district who would help to form a St. Frank's League Sports Club (football and cricket).

W. C. Ricketts, Penmare Villa, Hayle, Cornwall, wishes to hear from readers willing to exchange books.

J. S. Ricketts, 5, Caroline Row, Venter-league, Hayle, Cornwall, wishes to hear from readers willing to exchange books.

Eric Bourne, 25, Wentworth Street, Paddington, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere who are keen on stamps.

Thomas G. Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, nr. Liverpool, would like to hear from members. He has back numbers of the "N.L.L." and the "Monster Library."

Percy Young, 122a, Wavertree Road, Edge Hill, Liverpool, wishes to hear from members who are willing to join his club. He has back numbers of the "N.L.L." he is willing to sell.

Will all former members of the Bethnal Green Butterfly Club please write to Miss Alice Trehew at the old headquarters of the club?

C. Goldstein, 148, Queen's Park Road, Brighton, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; interested in photography, stamp collecting, autographs, and sports.

Louis Van Luyek, 129, Drabstraat, Contich, near Antwerp, Belgium, will be pleased to hear from members who know a little French or Flemish. Picture postcards only, please.

R. Dyson, the Gables, Avison Road, Cowlersley, Milnsbridge, Huddersfield, would like to hear from members who are interested in natural history. All letters answered. He wants "N.L.L." Nos. 1-132.

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