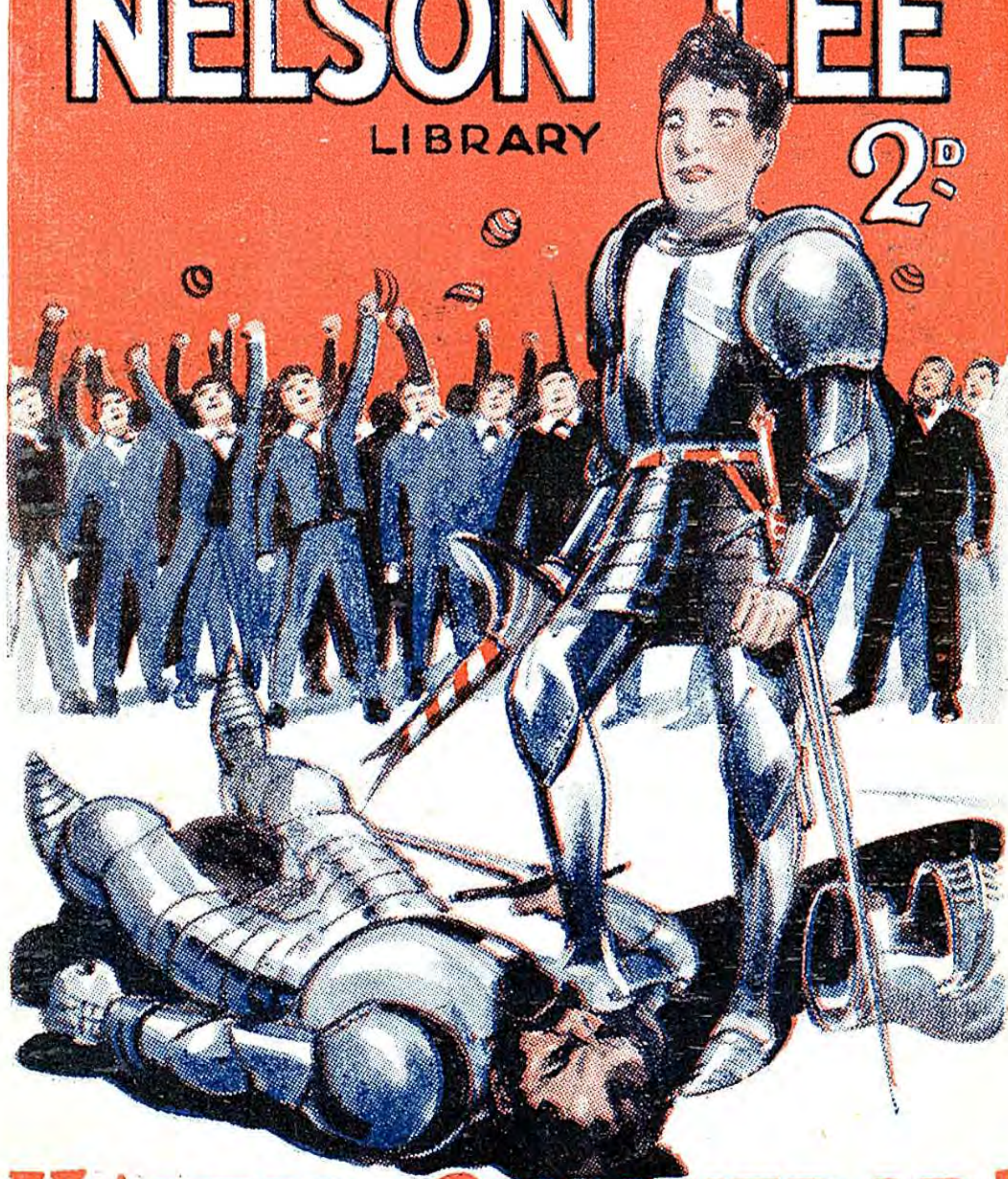


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HANDY THE CONQUEROR!

*Read the Exciting Adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's in
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New Series Nrs saw a wounded Northestrian officer come galloping out of the battle. He was swaying he neared the trio he pitched backwards and fell to the ground with a jarring crash.

HANDY THE CONQUEROR!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handy and the Boys of St. Frank's are in the thick of amazing events, vividly described in this week's rousing long complete story.

CHAPTER 1.

THE BATTLEFIELD!

AS far as the eye could reach the scene was an ever-changing panorama of movement. Columns of men, glittering in armour, were marching into position, with mounted officers in armour controlling the operations.

It was the Eve of Dunstane.

The great opposing armies were getting ready for battle. All knew that it would be decisive, that this coming clash would be a fight to the finish. And the fate of all North-estria hung in the balance.

Gazing down at that wonderful scene of colour and animation, one could not help being impressed by the vastness of the preparations. The impending battle looked like being a grim affair for both invaders and invaded.

The tenth century?

Well, hardly. Quite a considerable crowd of St. Frank's juniors were standing on a prominent hill-top, watching the great preliminaries on the plain below. Half a dozen

girls from the Moor View School were there, too, to say nothing of such celebrities as Mr. Nelson Lee and the genial Lord Dorrimore.

But even the St. Frank's fellows found it difficult to realise that they were actually living in the twentieth century—the age of aeroplanes, wireless, and talking films.

For no matter where one looked, the spectacle was irresistibly reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Great feudal castles, with encircling moats, were visible in the distance, and the great city of Dunstane could be seen below, down in the valley, with its towering walls and battlements. And everywhere the troops were massing significantly.

"It's wonderful—just wonderful!" murmured Irene Manners breathlessly.

"But the battle hasn't started yet," said Handforth of the Remove.

"No, but the scene!" went on Irene, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Isn't it just like the things we have read about in our history books? Oh, Ted, I hope we'll be allowed to watch when the battle begins!"

Edward Oswald Handforth frowned.

"Watch!" he repeated darkly. "What's the good of watching? My idea is to join in the scrap——"

"Cheese it, Handy," interrupted Church. "You spoke to Mr. Lee about it, and he told you pretty straight——"

"He tried to choke me off!" said Handforth indignantly. "Imagine it! My own Housemaster! Mr. Lee—a man renowned for his courage! Forbidding me to take part in the battle! Disgusting!"

Church looked very solemn.

"Well, you see, Mr. Lee wanted these Gothlanders to be smashed in battle, and not simply frightened off the field," he explained.

"Frightened?" repeated Handforth, staring.

Willy, his minor in the Third, shook his head.

"Your face, Ted, old son," he said gently. "Church is a polite chap, and he didn't like to be blunt. But just imagine the consternation among the Gothlanders if you got loose in their ranks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red, and bestowed a ferocious glare upon his minor.

"Are you saying that my face would frighten the Gothlanders?" he roared.

"That face would frighten a stone statue!" declared Willy. "Steady, Ted. You can't touch me, you know!"

"Can't touch you?" said Handforth thickly. "Why, you—you——"

"I'm absolutely safe," went on the Third-Former. "For one thing, I've got my fingers crossed, and for another thing, Irene's looking. You wouldn't bully your poor, helpless, delicate little brother in front of ladies, would you?"

Handforth controlled himself with an effort.

All the boys were wearing their ordinary clothes—even Handforth, who had at last discarded the suit of armour he had worn since he had been in the bodyguard.

"All right, I'll deal with you later!" he muttered threateningly.

"A sinister hint of forthcoming retribution!" said William Napoleon Browne, with a sad glance at Willy. "Alas, Brother William, I fear the future for you is not merely murky, but——"

"I'm not afraid of Ted!" grinned Willy. "He wouldn't hurt a fly. I can cheek him to my heart's content, and within five minutes he's forgotten all about it."

"One of these days, my lad, I shan't forget!" said Handforth gruffly.

"And then, Brother William, you will meet your Waterloo!" sighed Browne. "However, let us leave this painful subject, and concentrate our attention upon the spectacle below; the battle is almost due. Zero hour is at hand! Our friends are about to go over the top."

"But shall we be allowed to watch?" asked Tommy Watson anxiously. "Did you speak to Mr. Lee about it, Nipper?"

Dick Hamilton nodded.

"As long as the battle confines itself to the valleys below, we can remain here," he replied. "That's the great advantage of this mediaeval warfare. No big guns, no preliminary barrage, no artillery of any kind. It'll be all hand-to-hand stuff when it actually starts. Even the bowmen can't do anything unless they're at close quarters."

Nipper was quite right in this statement. There was no danger to the airship party, for they were a full mile from the nearest flank of the Northestrian forces. The massed soldiers held the lower valley, and the city of Dunstane was protected. The Gothlanders—Kassker's invading hordes—were further beyond. Right into the distance stretched the array of fighting units.

"Dear old boys, it's goin' to be a frightful affair," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, with a sober shake of his head. "Begad, everythin' will depend upon the result of this scrap."

"The fate of Northestria!" nodded Nipper.

His chums looked grave. If the Gothlanders took Dunstane, then Northestria would be a conquered land, and Kassker the Grim would reign supreme. There were no two ways about it. The fall of Dunstane would mean utter disaster, for the Princess Mercia would be deposed forthwith.

If, on the other hand, the invaders were well thrashed, Kassker's invading troops would have sacrificed themselves for nothing, and Northestria would be safe for all time.

This projected battle was not a mere step in the Gothlander war, but the vital turning-point of the campaign. It was a well-known fact that both armies would fight until a decision was reached.

"Yes, it'll be an anxious time for us," declared Nipper. "If Kassker gets whacked, all well and good. We shall have the satisfaction of seeing the remnants of his battalions scuttling back across the lake. But if Kassker wins——"

"Good-night, nurse!" murmured Browne.

"We shall all go in a swift procession to the chopping-block," said Ralph Leslie Fullwood, with a grimace. "That'll be the end of us if Kassker wins the scrap. I fancy this affair will be interesting."

Such thoughts as these were calculated to make the St. Frank's fellows rather serious, and they stood there watching with anxious eyes.

After the fashion of mediaeval warfare, Kassker the Grim—the overlord of all the Gothlanders—was leading his troops into action. Mounted on his great charger, Kassker was riding up and down, giving final instructions. Nelson Lee, through powerful binoculars, could see all these details.

This battle had been in preparation two or three days—a very deliberate affair—and Nelson Lee was mainly responsible for the disposition of the Northestrian armies.

And now the fateful battle was on the point of being joined.



CHAPTER 2.

AT BAY.

ORD DORRIMORE lighted a cigarette and shook his head.

"This sort of stuff is all very well, Lee," he said, "but don't you think we ought to join in? I mean, it seems an infernal pity to leave our machine-guns idle. We've got 'em, so why not use 'em?"

"I quite understand your feelings, Dorrie, but I thought this out very carefully before I decided," replied Nelson Lee. "Indeed, I consulted all the Northestrian generals, and they preferred to fight their own battle in their own way."

"There's the aeroplane, too," went on Dorrie regretfully. "She's in first-class fettle, an' I could swoop over these Gothland rats an' put them to flight——"

"Without bombs, old man?" asked Lee quietly.

"H'm! I'll admit we've run short of bombs," said his lordship. "In fact, we haven't got a single one, have we?"

"Not even a smoke rocket."

"Yes, but the 'plane would scare——"

"Nobody!" interrupted Lee grimly. "The inhabitants of this oasis have grown accustomed to our modern appliances by now, Dorrie, and the aeroplane, I am afraid, would have no vital effect on the battle. Apart from all that, it is far better for us to keep right out of this affair."

"Leave them to fight their own war, eh?"

"Exactly," agreed Nelson Lee. "It is, indeed, their own wish. Ethelbert the Red, who, after all, is the Regent of Northestria, was particularly anxious on that point. He feels that it would be no lasting victory if his soldiers beat the Gothlanders with our aid. He wants them to show Kassker the Grim that they are the better fighters, man for man. We have done our part, Dorrie, and now we can only watch."

Nelson Lee spoke gravely. For several weeks he had been working at high pressure, until, indeed, he was looking fagged and weary. There were haggard lines under his eyes, and his usual upright figure was inclined to droop a little. None of the fellows, with the exception, perhaps, of Nipper, realised how much vitality Nelson Lee had been putting into this campaign. He was badly in need of a rest.

Handforth, of course, was totally opposed to this policy of standing by and watching. He couldn't understand it. He marvelled that Lee and Dorrie did not join the fighting, and give permission for the boys to do likewise.

But Nelson Lee felt that he had done his part. It was he who had organised the Northestrian armies, he who had accepted the position of commander-in-chief. During the first attempt at invasion, the Gothlanders

had been dispersed owing to Nelson Lee's cleverly conceived tactics.

But the second invasion had been a success, in spite of a grim battle on the great lake. Nelson Lee, Lord Dorrimore, Captain Waring, and all the engineers of the wrecked airship, had fought valiantly in that engagement, and had done much to weaken the invaders' strength. But those hordes had landed in such numbers that nothing had been able to check them.

However, Kassker had failed in his main object. The city of Dunstane was still secure—held by the thousands of volunteers whom Nelson Lee had trained.

And now it was for the Northestrians to fight their own battle.

It was to be a clash of men, with supreme victory for the stronger. Nelson Lee was convinced that this was the only way. No lasting result could be guaranteed unless the Gothlanders were put to flight by the mediaeval methods which were the vogue in this strange lost world.

"A solid result, Dorrie, can only be gained by a genuine clash between the warring factions," commented Lee, as he lowered his binoculars. "It is up to them to settle this thing, and let us pray that the outcome is as we hope."

"So that we can still live, and get away from here, eh?" asked Dorrie.

"So that we can still live, at all events," said Lee. "As for getting away from here——" He broke off and shrugged his shoulders. "A problem, I'm afraid, old man."

Lord Dorrimore gave a strange, inscrutable grin.

"Things may not be so bad, after all," he said lightly.

Lee gave him a sharp look.

"What do you mean, Dorrie?" he asked.

"Oh, nothin'!"

"Look here——"

"Well, it may be somethin'," admitted his lordship reluctantly, "but never mind about it now. Everythin' will depend upon the result of this blessed fight, so let's sit tight an' watch."

Nelson Lee did not press him further. As a matter of fact, he concluded that Lord Dorrimore was merely displaying his usual optimism. It was a fact that the marooned adventurers were in wireless touch with the outer world, and Dorrie, perhaps, was counting on that. But Lee had grave doubts regarding any possible rescue.

He knew the insuperable difficulties of an expedition to the North Polar regions. There was some talk of the British Government sending out a fleet of powerful seaplanes. But what was the use? Lee knew that they could never conquer the perpetual storms which raged round this volcanic oasis—storms which possessed an unbelievable intensity, and which formed a barrier far more impregnable than solid rock. Tens of

thousands of feet up, these blizzards held full sway.

Lee was sombre as he stood there. So far as he could see, the result of this coming engagement would make little or no difference to the fate of Lord Dorrimore's party. On the one hand, it would mean death by execution; or, on the other hand, imprisonment in this oasis for life.



CHAPTER 3.

THE PRISONERS OF THE OASIS.

WHO could have foretold this extraordinary adventure?

Dorrie had set out in the great dirigible as a pure sporting venture—to go to the rescue of a fellow explorer, who had got lost in the wastes of the Arctic. But the dirigible itself had suffered an even worse fate, for after being crippled through the breakage of her mooring-mast, she had been whirled away in a storm, carrying the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls with her. And they had only been on board for a mere pleasure cruise of a few hours.

By something that was very akin to a miracle, the airship had been tossed about in the terrible storms, and literally pitchforked out of the violent atmospheric disturbances into this unknown oasis. Then she had sunk to the ground, crippled, and only Captain Waring's great skill had saved all on board from destruction.

Dazed at still finding themselves alive, the party had been further dumbfounded to discover that this enormous basin contained a limpid lake, fair lands of green, with forests and verdant valleys. And here dwelt, too, the Northeistriens—descendants of a long-lost branch of Anglo-Saxon stock. And beyond the lake, the Gothlanders—even more ancient in their ancestry. In the bygone centuries, perhaps, a volcanic disturbance had caused a channel to open, sweeping ships through. None knew exactly how these modern races had started, for the records were very skimpy.

The oasis itself was semi-tropical in climate, for there were many vast volcanoes encircling it. On every side the great peaks arose, until they joined the everlasting mists of the upper air.

It was a curious fact that no crater was visible, for the mists enshrouded the glaciers and the mountain-tops, while the glow from the molten craters was reflected upon the mists, resulting in a perpetual artificial sunlight in the basin.

Nelson Lee's fears were by no means groundless.

After many days of uncertainty—days of peril and excitement, during which the airship party had been compelled to help the Northeistriens for the sake of their own lives—the wireless had been restored. Direct com-

munication with the outer world was now possible. Fathers, mothers, and relatives in general, were now relieved. For over two weeks the airship had been given up as lost, with every soul on board. But the restored wireless communication had caused a great sensation throughout the world, and every effort was being made to succour the lost party. The British Government itself had taken the affair in hand, and the Navy was on the job.

But what, after all, could be done?

That was Nelson Lee's constant thought. The airship had only got through the barrier by a single chance in a million. Even supposing one or more of the rescuing seaplanes braved those storms, and won through? Could they ever get back? Lee was convinced that they could not, since they would land in the oasis wrecked or disabled.

No matter how Lee looked at the question, the answer was always the same. There was no prospect of deliverance.

"They're gettin' all keyed up now, old man," said Lord Dorrimore, as he watched. "The battle's on the point of— You're not listenin'," he added severely.

Nelson Lee started.

"No, I was not," he admitted. "Sorry, Dorrie. What were you saying?"

"Still worryin' about us gettin' away?" pressed his lordship. "My dear old sportsman, you shouldn't let these things prey on your mind. Do you realise that you're an absolute wreck? Good glory! You're a frightful sight, Lee! Wipe that ghastly furrow off your brow!"

Nelson Lee smiled rather wanly.

"I'm not thinking about myself, Dorrie—or of you," he replied quietly. "There are all these young people—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Dorrie, with a grin. "Look at 'em! They're worryin' a lot, aren't they? Gad! I've never seen a happier crowd!"

"They don't realise the real position—and that, of course, is all to the good," replied Lee. "They're irresponsible, Dorrie—and, upon my soul, you're just as bad as they are!"

"Worse!" admitted Dorrie, without shame.

"Yes, you hulking, overgrown schoolboy, you're worse!" growled Nelson Lee. "Man alive, can't you take the thing seriously for once? Don't you understand that we're liable to be bottled up in this mediæval world for the rest of our lives?"

Lord Dorrimore chuckled.

"I realise that the British Navy is sendin' out a fleet of giant seaplanes to scour the Arctic," he replied lightly. "We've had it officially over the wireless—"

"I'm not denying it; but what's the use?"

"A lot of use," said Dorrie. "When those seaplanes arrive—"

"When?" interrupted Lee angrily. "I hope to heaven you haven't been putting these ideas into the heads of the youngsters! It will be a tragic disappointment to them

when the days pass, and still there is no sign of rescue. Those seaplanes can't conquer Nature's barriers, Dorrie. These mountains rise for thirty thousand feet or more—north, south, east, and west. And you've had a taste of the blizzards that rage——"

"Exactly," said Lord Dorrimore. "I'm not denyin' that the seaplanes would have a bit of trouble to get over the rim of this basin. But what if there's a crack down the bottom of the basin—a crack wide enough for us to get out?"

Nelson Lee stared.

"Don't stand there, Dorrie, talking nonsense!" he said sharply.

"It's my natural form of speech, old man——"

"Hang it, you're an exasperating beggar!" snapped Lee. "You know as well as I do that there's no outlet, Dorrie. Why fool yourself? Those seaplanes will never——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted his lordship calmly. "Not so fast, professor! I've been holdin' somethin' back from you, but, in self-defence, I've got to cough it up. You were so busy on this battle stunt that I thought it advisable not to distract your attention. But, the fact is, I've made a bit of a discovery."

"Oh!" said Lee, without emotion.

"You might, at least, appear decently surprised!" exclaimed Dorrie. "You just stand there an' say 'Oh!' in a flabby sort of voice——"

"Sorry, Dorrie, but I haven't a great amount of faith in your discoveries," said Nelson Lee candidly. "In some ways, you're nearly as bad as Handforth. You're a hopeless optimist."

Lord Dorrimore nodded.

"I know it," he said calmly. "I glory in it. In fact, I wallow in it. Optimism, dear old man, is one of the greatest gifts of the gods. It enables a fellow to view life with cheerful complacency. All the same, in this particular instance, I've got somethin' a bit more substantial than my fatal optimism to rely upon. We were talkin' about a crack in the basin, weren't we?"

"Yes."

"Anybody might think we were discussin' a tea-set!" went on Dorrie, with a chuckle. "But about that crack. I've found it."

"You've—found it?" repeated Lee, staring.

"Absolutely!" said his lordship. "You may think I'm several kinds of a liar, but two days ago I took a trip out to the Arctic, had a look at the trackless snow, an' dodged back. Quite an excitin' little experience!"



CHAPTER 4.

A CHANCE OF DELIVERANCE!

NELSON LEE took hold of Dorrie's arm and gripped it.

"If you're just yarnin'——" he began.

"Good gad, no," said his lordship. "I

wouldn't fool about with a subject like this, Lee. It's an honest fact. Down at the far end of the lake there's a terrific tunnel, miles an' miles long. It leads straight through the mountains to the outer world!"

"And is this—this channel free?"

"My dear man, it's a broad river!" declared Dorrie. "The tunnel itself is big enough to accommodate the old Wanderer throughout the whole length of it. I took the motor-boat up there, and nearly scared the life out of friend Sigbert, to say nothin' of freezin' his ears half off. But he promised to say nothin', an' he's kept his word."

"And this is true—really, honestly true?" breathed Lee.

"My word on it!" replied his lordship.

Nelson Lee was a changed man. In a moment the droop had left his shoulders, and his whole aspect was different. His eyes took on a new sparkle, and even the haggard expression seemed to disappear magically from his face.

"This is amazing—utterly amazing!" he muttered. "Why didn't you tell me sooner, Dorrie? Heavens above, why didn't you report this to me the instant you got back?"

"You were so infernally busy——"

"Busy!" snapped Lee. "What could be of more importance? The affairs of these Northeistriens may be vital—from their point of view—but they mean nothing to us. And we are responsible for these boys and girls——"

"You'll pardon me, but the affairs of these Northeistriens mean everythin' to us," pointed out Dorrie. "If they win, we shall still be safe. If they lose—good-bye heads! So I thought it just as well to let you carry on with the good work uninterruptedly. I'm a selfish beggar, you know—one of my faults. I can't bear to think of such a shapely head as mine bein' carved off——"

"When did you make this discovery?" broke in Nelson Lee.

"Two days ago."

"Two days!" muttered Lee, pursing his lips. "Good gracious, Dorrie! Two days! And nothing done!"

"That's all you know," said the sporting peer, with a grin.

"Why, what——"

"My dear, worryin' old pessimist!" interposed Dorrie. "I may be an irresponsible chump, but I'm not absolutely a fool. Although I said nothin' to you, I said reams and reams across the wireless. I got in touch with the naval people, an' told them of this discovery, an' everythin'. They're rushin' those seaplanes off at the earliest possible moment, an' they'll drop us a postcard as soon as they start."

Lee was slightly relieved.

"Forgive me, Dorrie, but I didn't realise that you had been so thorough," he said. "We must wireless the exact position of the tunnel outlet."

"By gad, of course!" said his lordship. "Frightfully careless of me to forget it!" He waxed indignant. "Hang it, Lee, what

do you take me for?" he went on warmly. "Do you think I wouldn't include a vital point like that?"

"You gave them the exact position, then?"

"Any more of these questions, an' I shall be reluctantly compelled to smite thee on the mazzard!" said Lord Dorrimore gruffly. "Hang it, I've been insulted right an' left! At any minute I expect a messenger from headquarters to come racin' up with the news that the seaplanes have started on their half-holiday. That'll be the signal for us to scoot."

"Scoot?"

"Absolutely," said Dorrie firmly. "I'm interested in this battle, but I'm more interested in gettin' back to the outer world. An' once we hear that the rescuers are on their way, we'll take the headquarters ship, an' make a bolt through that tunnel. We shall need to be outside, you know, with searchlights goin', an' all that sort of thing. The Arctic night isn't over yet, an' it's pretty dim out there."

"The Spitfire!" muttered Lee. "By Jove, it's a lucky thing we've got our wireless and our stores on board this ship! If it came to the point, we could all be off with less than an hour's notice."

Since the position had become so acute, Nelson Lee had made one of the Northeastrian vessels his headquarters. She was a comparatively big ship, fitted up with two auxiliary aero-engines, to say nothing of machine-guns. She was capable of making rings round any of the ordinary native vessels. There was accommodation for the entire party on board. Special cabins had been made for the girls, and even the boys had their own quarters. In the event of any sudden danger, Lee knew that he could get them all on board, and there they would be safe.

Even now the Spitfire was lying just off shore, down in the lake, in full view from this hill-top. For these watchers were standing on the high ground a mile or two below Dunstane, and from this point the sweeping country could be seen on one hand, and the wide expanse of the lake on the other. If danger threatened, Lee would order everybody on board.

"I was thinkin' about the old tub," said Lord Dorrimore, with a nod. "We can soon slip off once the news gets through. I've told Sparks to hang on to that wireless apparatus like a leech. In fact, I thought about padlocking him to his seat, an' nailin' the ear-phones to his head. Poor young beggar, he hasn't had any sleep for thirty-six hours, but he's game. An' that news might come through at any minute."

"I'll go and relieve him before long," declared Nelson Lee.

"That's what I was thinkin' about doin'," said Dorrie. "The last official message we had was to the effect that a dozen seaplanes were settin' off for a hastily prepared base in the north. Iceland, I believe. When they set out on the real flight, they'll give us the

tip, an' then we shall have to leave the rest to chance."

"This is great news, Dorrie—so great, indeed, that I cannot express my real feelings," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Perhaps you were right in keeping it from me till now—I should have been greatly distracted. Tell me of this tunnel. How did you find it?"

Lord Dorrimore went into details. He explained that the St. Frank's fellows had made the first discovery. But he, Dorrie, had ventured into the black tunnel in the motor-boat, and had pressed right on, hour after hour, until he had emerged into the freezing cold of the Arctic.

But if Nelson Lee expected the other members of the party to remain in blissful ignorance of the discovery, he was wrong. Somebody had overheard that conversation between Nelson Lee and Dorrie, and in a very short time a number of juniors were clamouring round, asking for details.

"Is it true, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "Is there a way of escape through the mountains?"

"Might as well tell them, I suppose," said Dorrie. "I'd no idea we should be overheard, Lee—"

"Perhaps it will be a wise move to be quite frank," said Nelson Lee. "Yes, boys, the story is true. Lord Dorrimore has found a way out—"

"Rot!" said Dorrie. "The boys found it first."

"Then—then that tunnel leads right outside?" asked Fullwood breathlessly. "My only hat! We thought there was something rummy about it, didn't we? You remember, you chaps! The water was like ice, and we guessed that it was flowing in from the Arctic."

"Hurrah!"

"A chance of getting out!"

In the sudden excitement, even the interest in the battle was waning. Until now, the young people had scarcely realised how anxious they actually were. But now that there was a positive hope, they knew the truth. They knew how homesick they were—how desperately anxious they were to get back to the old familiar scenes of England!



CHAPTER 5.

HANDFORTH MEANS BUSINESS!

HANDFORTH pointed eagerly.

"By George!" he ejacu-

lated:

"Yes," muttered Church. "The battle's beginning!"

They watched fascinatedly. Somehow they could scarcely believe that they were about to gaze down upon a life-and-death struggle—a grim, terrific battle for supremacy. It was more like a pageant—an affair of make-believe. Scarcely a sound disturbed the



"I'm going into the battle!" roared Handy, flinging his chums aside. Dazed and dizzy, Church and McClure sprawled on the ground, staring at Handforth in blank amazement. "Don't be a fool, Handy!" Church gasped. "You'll get killed!"

tranquil air. No bombardment—no crashing of guns. Only a kind of subdued murmur rising up from that long stretch of country lower down.

And Handforth's statement was correct. The opposing forces were about to hurl themselves at one another. And the Northestrians, apparently, were the first to take the offensive.

"Out with the invaders!"

That was the battle-cry which rang from thousands of throats as the soldiers of Princess Mercia charged to the attack. Handforth, standing on that hill-top, watched with gleaming eyes. His heart was beating rapidly.

"By George!" he murmured. "Come here, you chaps! Come aside!"

He dragged Church and McClure away from the others, and brought them to a halt against a clump of trees. He was looking flushed, but, for that matter, so were his companions.

"Now listen to me!" said Handforth impressively. "I'm going to have a word with you chaps——"

"About the wonderful news, eh?" said Church eagerly. "I say, just think of it! Isn't it too gorgeous for words? A chance of getting back home!"

"Home!" murmured McClure, holding his breath. "By Jupiter! It sounds too good to be true! I think we've all been fooling ourselves a bit, you know," he added. "We

haven't actually said anything, but we've felt it was all up with us—that we should never escape from this prison."

Handforth glared.

"Dry up!" he commanded sternly. "I brought you here to tell you something in secret, and you start gassing about home! This thing is important——" He broke off, and frowned. "Prison?" he went on, as McClure's final words occurred to him. "What do you mean—prison?"

"Why, this place, of course—this oasis!"

"It's not a prison, you ass!" said Handforth.

"Of course it isn't—not a place with barred windows, if that's what you mean!" growled McClure. "What a chap you are for taking everything literally! But isn't it a prison for us? Bottled up here with these rummy mediæval people, hemmed in by mountains and glaciers, and with everlasting blizzards——"

"Rats!" interposed Handforth. "Bottled up be blowed! I knew we should get out all the time—I never had the slightest doubt."

"We're not out yet!" said Church quietly.

"Yes, but Dorrie has found a way through the mountains!" put in McClure, with a little breathless chortle. "Besides, what about the British Navy?"

"Bother the British Navy!" roared Handforth.

"Why, you—you unpatriotic rotter!" gasped McClure.

"I didn't mean that!" said Handforth, fuming. "Jolly good luck to the British Navy! Those seaplanes will get through to us—so you needn't worry. I simply take the thing for granted, but there's no reason why you fatheads should keep interrupting me. I've brought you here to tell you a secret."

"Go ahead," said Church absently. "We're listening!"

"And you've got to pledge yourselves to silence!" continued Handforth grimly. "Understand? Unless you give me that pledge, I shan't tell you the secret!"

Church and McClure were rather off their guard at the moment. Their minds were filled with wonderful thoughts of home. They were troubled by uneasy doubts. Would the tunnel still be open? Would they be able to get safely through in the Spitfire? Would the seaplanes conquer the difficulties of the Arctic, and rescue them? And then, what about this great battle that was just starting?

What if the Gothlanders won? By Jove, that would be a pretty kettle of fish! With a prospect of rescue in sight, it would be hard lines, indeed, to be menaced by Kassker the Grim and his brutal soldiers! Supposing the Northeistriars were defeated—

"When you chaps have finished mooning into space, perhaps you'll give me some attention!" snorted Handforth indignantly. "What's the idea of standing there, looking like a couple of puppets?"

"If you call us puppies——" began Church.

"I said puppets, but the other word's just as good!" rapped out Handforth curtly. "Haven't I told you that I've got a secret?"

"Blow the secret!" retorted McClure.

"What?"

"I—I mean, let's hear it, then!" said Mac resignedly. "Anything for a quiet life, Handy! Shall we risk it, Churchy?"

"Might as well," said Church. "But get it over quickly!"

Handforth regarded them ferociously.

"You—you unfaithful rotters!" he said, with withering scorn. "I drag you aside on purpose to give you the straight tip, and all you can do is to insult me! But I'm not going to be dished by you chaps! I've made up my mind, and there's an end of it!"

"There can't be an end without a beginning!" said Church tartly.

"A beginning of what?"

"Your mind!" retorted Church, with relish. "We're fed up with you, Handy! We want to talk about this discovery of Dorrie's——"

"You—you——" With a great effort, Handforth pulled himself up, and his chums vaguely wondered why he refrained from lashing out. "All right!" he muttered. "I'll remember this—afterwards! But for the moment I'll overlook it—so pledge me your word that you'll keep my secret!"

"Oh, go ahead, then!" said Church. "We give you our promise."

"Carried!" agreed McClure, nodding.

Edward Oswald's eyes gleamed.

"That's a solemn pledge, then?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good!" said Handforth. "I wouldn't bother with you cuckoos, only I believe in taking precautions. There's just a faint possibility—a million-to-one chance—that something might happen to me."

"That's not a million-to-one chance—it's a certainty!" said Church, with conviction. "And unless you talk sense, something *will* happen to you!"

"It's only right that somebody should know the truth," continued Handforth. "So I'm taking you into my confidence. The fact is, I'm going to sneak off, and join in the battle!"

His chums started.

"You're going to do what?" yelled Church.

"I'm going to join in the battle!"

"Join in the battle?" gasped McClure, horrified.

"That's what I said!"

"Then you're mad—crazy—scatty!" said Church, with great alarm. "You don't mean this, Handy! You ass, you're trying to spoof us——"

"You'll see whether I'm trying to spoof you!" interrupted their leader. "You chaps stay here, and keep on talking—and look towards this little group of trees, as though you are chatting with me. I'm going to buzz down, get into the valley, and have a swipe at old Kassker!"



CHAPTER 6.

PLEGED TO SECRECY!

FULL minute elapsed before Church and McClure fully grasped the fact that Edward Oswald Handforth was in deadly earnest. And then, of course, their growing feelings of alarm changed to positive apprehension.

"Handy!" pleaded Church, all his thoughts of the rescuing seaplanes flown. "Handy, old man! You can't do a mad thing like that! For goodness' sake be reasonable!"

"I don't want to hear any silly objections——"

"But you'll be killed!" broke in McClure. "You can't join in a fight like this, Handy! These fellows are armed with pikes and lances and battle-axes, and things! They're in chain-mail armour—and heaps of them are mounted!"

"What of that?" asked Handforth coldly.

"What of it!" gasped Mac. "You won't last for more than five minutes, once you get into the battle! And what shall we do after you're dead?" he added indignantly.

Handforth waved an airy hand.

"Don't talk rot!" he growled. "My idea is to get straight into the thick of the fight—"

ing, and help these Northeistriens. I don't believe in being left out in the cold."

"But Mr. Lee expressly prohibited——"

"Exactly!" agreed Handforth. "That's why I'm going to sneak off on the quiet, without anybody seeing. Of course, there's a bare chance that I might get wounded in the battle——"

"A bare chance?" breathed McClure.

"Well, a thousand-to-one risk——"

"You—you crazy optimist!" burst out Church. "There's no chance about it at all—not a ghost of one! If you venture into this fight, you'll go under within a minute. And you won't be injured, as you so fondly suppose. You'll be killed!"

"Rot!" retorted Handforth, in no way impressed. "I've made up my mind, as I told you before, and the thing's settled." He gazed anxiously down into the valley. "By George! They're getting on with it!" he added. "Look at those horsemen dashing into the fight! I shall have to be going!"

With one accord his chums seized him.

"Not yet!" gasped Church. "You'll have to reckon with us, you hopeless idiot! Mac, shout with me! We'll yell for help, and bring the other chaps here. Then we'll put this lunatic in chains, drag him back to the ship, and bolt him in one of the holds."

"All right!" said McClure. "I'm ready!"

As they clung to Handforth they prepared to raise their voices in a united yell. But their leader stopped them with a single sentence.

"What about your pledged word?" he asked swiftly.

They suddenly felt limp, and relaxed their grip.

"Our—pledged word?" babbled Church.

"Didn't you give me your solemn word of honour——"

"But—but we didn't know!" interrupted McClure desperately. "You said something about a secret, but we didn't know you meant a dotty game like this!"

"That's not my fault—you should be more careful before you give your pledged word," said Handforth coolly. "Anyhow, you can't get out of it—unless you're a couple of dishonourable rotters!"

They looked at him utterly aghast. They had certainly promised him to keep quiet, and it was totally against their code of honour to go back on a promise.

"You—you tricky rotter!" said Church indignantly. "You knew what we should do, so you prepared yourself in advance. Under the circumstances we should be justified in going to Mr. Lee. It's to save your life, Handy—and we'd do anything for that!"

"I shan't be in any danger," declared Handforth confidently. "Just leave this to me, and join the others after I've gone. If they want to know where I am, just give a hint that I shall be back soon."

"But you won't be!" said Church desperately. "You'll never come back! Look down there!" he added, pointing. "My only

hat! The battle's in full swing—and the Northeistriens seem to be getting the worst of it!"

"All the more reason for me to go and help!" declared Handforth.

They stood watching. Some little distance away a crowd of other St. Frank's fellows were staring at the raging conflict, fascinated. There was something rather uncanny about this—standing here in perfect safety, watching a battle that was every bit as grim as Crécy had been.

The Moor View girls had gone, for it seemed to them that this scene, after all, was not a nice spectacle for them to witness. The battle was some distance off, but, nevertheless, the falling of men could be easily seen, and by now the air was becoming filled with the confused tumult of the conflict. It came up from the lower ground like an ever-growing murmur.

"Handy! You mustn't go into that!" begged Church. "Don't forget Mr. Lee's strict orders!"

"Think of Willy and Eva!" added McClure. "What will they say to us when they find out?"

For a moment Handforth hesitated, then he squared his jaw.

"Never mind what they say," he replied gruffly. "They'll alter their tone when I come back with shields and things as trophies!"

"My stars!" breathed Church. "He means it!"

"Of course I mean it!" snapped Handforth. "What about Umlosi? Isn't he in the battle?"

"Umlosi's different! He's a warrior by nature——"

"So am I!" declared Handforth. "By George, look at those soldiers in action! Isn't it enough to make you tingle? I can't waste any further time—I've got to get down to the battlefield!"

He was staring eagerly into the distance.

As far as the juniors could see, the Northeistriens army was marshalled into three lines. In the first there were four or five thousand men-at-arms, and a similar number of archers. Behind them, inclining towards the flank, waited the second line—an army every bit as big. The rest were reserves—waiting to join in the battle when required.

The Gothlander troops were much farther distant, and only a confused array could be seen.

The Northeistriens archers were already in the thick of the fighting, and the enemy's infantry were falling back. But the Gothlanders had their archers, too, and the whole battle was developing on desperate lines.

"Don't you see, Handy?" asked Church, with a gulp. "Look at the cavalry! They're just getting ready to charge! What possible hope can there be for you? You haven't even got a sword——"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Edward Oswald calmly. "It won't take me

long to pick up a lance—and if it comes to it, I've got my fists, haven't I?"

"Fists?" repeated Mac, dazed.

He and Church stood there, aghast at Handforth's insanity. But to argue with him was obviously out of the question. There was a gleam in his eye which could not be mistaken.

Church and McClure knew that gleam well—and never before had they seen it so dogged!



CHAPTER 7.

INTO BATTLE!

NELSON LEE had no suspicion that Handforth would even dream of going off on such a hare-brained adventure. And so the chums of Study D were left to themselves. The rest of the fellows were far too interested in the grim proceedings to give any attention to the trio near the clump of trees.

As for Nelson Lee, he had his own thoughts, too. For some little time he and Dorrie had watched the progress of the battle, and at last Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders and turned to his companion.

"We can't judge anything yet, Dorrie," he said quietly.

"No?" asked his lordship. "I rather thought the Gothlanders were gettin' the better of it. A frightful state of affairs, of course, but there's no sense in blinking the facts——"

"This battle will rage for hours," declared Lee. "We had better get back to the ship, and relieve young Sparks. I am anxious about the wireless, Dorrie. Everything may depend on that message from the naval authorities—and we cannot take any chances."

"Let's get aboard, then, and see if there's anythin' fresh," said Dorrie. "We can come back and have another look at the battle later."

"I think I ought to order these boys to the ship, too," said Lee, frowning. "There might be danger here——"

"Have a heart, old man!" interrupted Lord Dorrimore. "Look at 'em! Eatin' every movement! Let 'em stay here if they want to—there's no danger. They're naturally anxious to see how the fight goes."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "It'll keep them out of mischief, anyhow—and at this distance none of the dreadful details can be seen. It's a fascinating spectacle, Dorrie—horribly fascinating. I'll join you in a moment—after I've had a word with Waring."

Nelson Lee's word with Captain Waring was merely a brief warning. At the slightest sign of any danger, Waring was to order everybody to the ship immediately. If the scene of battle surged nearer, the order was to be given.

"We've got to be careful, Waring," said Lee. "For the first time since we arrived in this oasis, perhaps, our entire party is intact—and completely isolated from any of these natives. If there is any possibility of escape, we must go—and go quickly, too."

"I agree with you, sir," declared Captain Waring grimly. "We can't bother with the formalities of saying good-bye at a time like this. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good idea to get through that tunnel straight away—without seeing Princess Mercia, Ethelbert the Red, or anybody else. Let's clear while we've got the chance, sir."

But Nelson Lee shook his head.

"We shall still have the chance to-morrow, or even on the next day," he replied. "The Spitfire, you must remember, is capable of defying any of these Gothlander craft. The one precaution we must certainly take is to get our entire party aboard if danger threatens. On the lake, however, we can await official messages from home. It would be unwise for us to venture forth into the bitter cold of the Arctic before we had any certain news of the rescue party's start. Our ship is not equipped for below-zero weather, and we want to time our departure so that it synchronises, as far as possible, with the flight of the seaplanes."

Captain Waring looked dubious.

"I'm the last man to throw cold water on any hopes, but I'm infernally uncertain about this affair," he confessed. "We know what Arctic flying is like, Mr. Lee—and if those seaplanes start off into the unknown, it'll be several kinds of a gamble whether they ever reach us or not."

"I know that," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "But we're in just that position, Waring, where a gamble is our only possible hope. I'm off to the Spitfire now, to hear if any further news has come through. You won't forget what I said, will you?"

"You bet I won't!" said Captain Waring, glancing down at the battle zone. "Plenty of movement down there—they're fighting like demons—but there's no sign yet of any break-away. I'll round up all the youngsters, sir, and bring them along if there's any hint of danger."

Lee nodded, and joined Lord Dorrimore again.

"That was a pretty long word, wasn't it?" asked his lordship.

"Sorry, but we got discussing the general possibilities of rescue," smiled Nelson Lee. "Come along, Dorrie—let's hurry."

They went off, and Handforth, observing their departure from that distant clump of trees, gave a little chuckle of satisfaction.

"Good egg!" he murmured. "Mr. Lee's gone, and Dorrie's gone with him! Now it'll be easy!"

Handforth had only feared Nelson Lee's watchful eyes—for, in spite of his burning enthusiasm for the battle, which consumed

practically every other emotion, some instinct warned him that Nelson Lee would promptly veto the whole thing if he knew about it.

But Captain Waring was in charge now—and he appeared to be mainly interested in the progress of the battle. Now and again he would glance round casually, but Handforth was in no way perturbed.

"Well, so long, you chaps!" he said briskly. "I might as well go off now—no sense in waiting any longer. See you later."

They both held on to him.

"If you go on this mad trip, we'll never see you again!" said Church desperately. "Handy, you rotter, you've got to release us from that pledge! If you don't, we'll break it!"

"Break it?" said Handforth, aghast. "Your word of honour?"

"Anything to save your life!" shouted McClure.

"Rats!" roared Handforth. "Piffle! My life's in no danger! D'you think I'm afraid of these beastly Gothlanders? Lemme go, blow you!"

He wrenched himself free, and dived into the trees. An uneasy suspicion was disturbing him. Church and McClure would give a warning, in spite of their pledge, and prevent his going! As McClure had said, they would be justified in doing so under the circumstances.

So Edward Oswald took no chances—he dashed off. Within a moment he was through the clump of trees, and racing down the grassy slopes into the valley—well screened from all the other watchers.

Church and McClure were in a dreadful quandary. They hesitated for only a moment. If they shouted to the other fellows, precious time would be lost before the situation was appreciated. And by then, perhaps, Handforth would be out of sight. Handforth's chums reached the same decision simultaneously.

"Come on!" gasped Church. "We've got to drag him back!"

"Just what I was thinking!" muttered McClure. "Oh, the hopeless idiot!"

They burst into the trees, careless of whether they were seen or not, and raced down the slope in pursuit of their leader. At all events, they had kept their word—they had honoured their pledge. But they had made no promise to the effect that they would not drag Handforth back by force!

They ran madly, and they were only just in time, for Handforth was vanishing into a thick wood two hundred yards away to the left. And beyond this wood, the Northestrian second line was close at hand! Once through, Handforth would be in the heart of the battle!

"We've got to get him!" panted Church fiercely.

And they did get him, too! Before Edward Oswald had penetrated a dozen yards into the wood, two figures came charging on him from the rear, and as he spun round he

recognised his chums. They simply fell upon him and held him.

"Now, you madman, you're coming back to us!" said McClure harshly.

"What the— You silly idiots!" roared Handforth, in amazement. "Lemme go! I didn't tell you to come after me!"

"We know you didn't—but we're here," replied Church. "We'll give you your choice, Handy! You can either come back quietly, or we'll smash you to pulp and carry you back!"

"One or the other!" said McClure.

"Great Scott!" breathed Handforth. "Then—then you mean to prevent my going into battle, eh?"

"Yes, we do!" they declared, in one voice.

"Oh, all right!" thundered Handforth. "We'll see about that!"



CHAPTER 8.

IN THE THICK OF IT!

CHURCH and McClure had seen their leader in a determined mood on many an occasion, but never had they seen him so ferociously bull-doggish as he was now.

He gave one tremendous heave, and his chums were flung aside like ninepins. And Handforth stood there, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched.

"Come on!" he roared. "You're going to smash me to pulp, are you? We'll see about that, as I said before! I'm going into this battle, but I never expected to fight my own chums as a preliminary!"

"Be reasonable, Handy!" urged Church. "Think of Willy and your sister! Besides, Mr. Lee gave orders—"

"I'm ashamed of Mr. Lee!" interrupted Handforth bitterly. "He's a fine commander-in-chief! He plans out this campaign, and then avoids the fighting at the last minute!"

Church and McClure blazed up.

"You rotter!" shouted Church hotly. "You know as well as I do that both Mr. Lee and Dorrie were as keen as mustard on leading the troops—but Ethelbert was against it. He wanted this engagement to be fought out between the Northestrians and the Gothlanders alone. Mr. Lee only relinquished the active leadership under protest! Are you trying to make out he's a coward—you libellous, slandering bounder!"

Handforth recoiled from that scathing outburst.

"You're right!" he admitted. "I apologise. After all, Mr. Lee is one of the best in the world, and Ethelbert is the chap to blame! But I'm not taking any notice of it; I'm going into this fight!"

"It'll be all wrong!" urged Church. "These Northestrians don't want us to be mixed up in this battle at all. It's their own affair, pure and simple—"

"Besides, what about the princess?" put in McClure, his eyes gleaming. "What about the lovely Mercia? She's as keen as mustard on you, Handy, and she'd be awfully upset if you got hurt——"

"Stop!" roared Handforth furiously.

All unconsciously McClure had settled the issue. The very mention of the fair princess aroused Handforth to fever pitch. Ever since the party had arrived, Mercia had expressed wonderful faith in Handforth's prowess as a warrior. What would she say when she heard that her hero had taken no active part in the engagement?

"That's done it!" declared Edward Oswald. "I'm going!"

There was such a world of determination in his voice that Church and McClure waited no longer. With one accord they flung themselves at their obstinate leader, and he was nearly bowled over. And the next moment a terrific tussle was in progress.

It was over very swiftly.

Under ordinary circumstances, Church and McClure, combined, could deal very effectively with their hot-headed chum. But just now Handforth was a giant. He flung them off. Dazed and dizzy, Church crashed in one direction, and McClure in the other.

"I don't like doing it, but you forced me to it," said Handforth darkly. "I wanted to part friends—in case of accidents. But you've chosen otherwise, so you can go and eat coke!"

He swung off and vanished amid the trees. His unfortunate chums were too dazed to make any further move. They sprawled there, gradually recovering.

And Handforth pushed his way deeper and deeper into the wood, and emerged, at last, on the farther side. As he came out into the open again, he checked. He stood there, momentarily at a loss.

"By George!" he murmured breathlessly.

He had been impressed by the sight of the battle from the hill-top, but that view had been as nothing compared to the scene which now unfolded itself before his eyes. He was almost in the heart of the battle. The men were fighting in long, serried ranks not a couple of hundred yards from him. The Gothlander flank had worked round, and a desperate fight was in progress close by. The air was filled with shouts and cries. Lances were flashing, and arrows were hissing through the air in all directions. Two of them, indeed, hit the ground near Handforth, their force spent. But they reminded him of how close he was to the fighting.

And now, for the first time, he really hesitated.

Dimly he remembered what Church and McClure had said, and it seemed to him that their warning had been justified. What chance would he have here? He was unarmed, he was not even wearing chain-mail, and these Gothlanders were giant brutes who fought like savages.

But just at that moment Fate intervened.

A Northeastrian officer, a-glitter with dazzling armour, came galloping out of the confusion on his great charger. He was only a dozen yards from Handforth when he sagged in the saddle, and fell to the ground with a jarring crash. The horse reared up, and then turned. There was something rather pathetic in the way in which the animal walked up and sniffed at the fallen rider.

Handforth did not hesitate a moment. He ran forward and bent down over the fallen officer. He removed his great helmet with difficulty. A pale, drawn face was revealed.

"Hurt?" asked Handforth anxiously.

"'Tis naught—a mere arrow in the side," replied the other with difficulty. "The accursed dogs found a chink in my armour, beshrew them! 'Twould be a relief, good youth, if thou didst withdraw the vile thing."

Gently Handforth turned the injured man over, and he shuddered slightly as he saw the arrow-shaft protruding from a gap in the armour. Blood was oozing forth, too. With set teeth Handforth grasped the arrow, and withdrew it with a tug.

The officer gave a gasp of anguish and sank back unconscious. The sudden pain had been too much for him. Handforth, sickened, flung the arrow aside. And just at that moment he saw, out of the corner of his eye, Church and McClure emerging from the wood.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Come here—quick!"

The pair, bewildered by the close proximity of the fighting, ran up.

"Handy!" panted Church. "You can't stay here——"

"Help me to take this chap's armour off!" commanded Handforth. "He's winged—pretty badly, I think. Come on—no arguments!"

Church and McClure said nothing. They were ready enough to succour an injured man. With deft fingers they helped Handforth to remove the officer's armour, and within a few moments the unfortunate man was stretched out on the grass, as pale as death, and with blood still surging from that ugly wound.

"I'll leave him in your charge," said Handforth briskly. "There's a little pool in the wood—a spring. Get some water, bathe his wound, and make him as comfortable as you can. You fetch the water, Mac, and—— Not you, Churchy! I want your help!"

McClure went off, and Church prepared to help the injured man.

"No, I want you here," said Handforth curtly. "You can see about this poor chap when Mac comes back. Lend a hand with this armour."

Church stared blankly.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Put it on!"

"But—you don't mean——"

"D'you think I'm going to waste a chance like this?" said Handforth triumphantly.



Nipper and the others looked down at the masses of ice floating on the black waters. "The ice is getting thicker every minute," said Nelson Lee. "If we fail to get through now it means we shall be trapped—escape will be impossible!"

"Armour—lance—horse! Everything I need! By George, I'm sorry for this poor chap here, but if he had to be winged, I'm glad he was winged at this particular spot! It's my chance to go into the battle equipped in the right way!"



CHAPTER 9.

HANDFORTH'S AMAZING EXPLOIT!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH meant it, too!

"Think carefully, old man," said Church huskily.

"This chap was badly hit,

and the armour didn't protect him much, did it? If you go into the thick of the fighting——"

"Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "It was just a fluke—a chance in a thousand. Lend me a hand with this breast-plate. How the dickens do they wangle these silly things? I've a good mind to go off without bothering about the giddy armour."

"No!" gasped Church. "I'll help you."

He could see that his leader was obsessed, and no amount of arguments would turn him from his purpose. So Church helped, with eager hands, to fix the armour. If Handforth was really set upon going, he would stand more chance, if he was thus protected.

"Now the helmet!" said Edward Oswald at last. "By George! Of all the clumsy apparatus! Steady on, there, you'll have my nose off! Whoa! Easy, you fathead!"

Somehow he managed to squeeze the helmet on his head, and then he discovered that he could see perfectly, although the visor was closed. With clanking footsteps he strode across to the waiting horse, and with Church's assistance he mounted. And just then McClure came back, carrying some water in a big, cup-like leaf which he had pulled from the undergrowth. He paused, wondering why Church was talking to this impressive-looking officer in armour.

"Where's Handy?" he shouted anxiously.

"I'm here!" replied Handforth, pushing up the visor and revealing his face. "You chaps had better attend to that wounded man, and then bunk back to the rest of the crowd. I'll join you later on, after I've had my smack at Kassker's lot!"

He closed the visor again, wheeled his horse round, and galloped off into the thick of the fighting. He had no fixed idea as to what he should do. But he knew where the battle was hottest, and his one idea was to get there.

He had not even taken a survey of the general situation. If he had done, he might have been greatly encouraged. For, without doubt, the Northeistriens were slowly but

surely gaining the ascendancy. The tide of battle had turned, and the invaders were fighting desperately to maintain their ground.

The Gothlanders' first line had been practically cut to pieces, and the second line was now hotly engaged. Owing to superior skill, the Northestrian bowmen had succeeded in cutting up the Gothlanders' chief army of assault. Kassker's picked troops were strewn over the battlefield, dead or dying, and many others were in full retreat.

Triumphantly the Northestrians were pressing on.

And Kassker the Grim, seeing how things were going, was determined to put an end to this retreat. On his great charger, he was plunging into the thick of the fighting, urging his men on. As in the days of old, these overlords led their own men into battle.

Kassker was a prominent figure in his special armour. His great frame, too, could not be mistaken. And although arrows hissed about him, and many of them struck his armour, he still rode on.

It was more by chance than anything else that Handforth caught sight of the enemy chief. And Handforth gulped. He had seen Kassker before—during a raid into Gothland—and he knew that armour well. Quite apart from this, Kassker had contemptuously opened up his visor, and his evil face, with its short, black beard, was clearly visible. That beard had been long at one time, but Nelson Lee had clipped it during that eventful raid.

"By George!" breathed Handforth. "Kassker himself!"

He saw nothing of the turmoil about him. He gave no heed to the dangers. Here was Kassker, and, by an extraordinary chance, there seemed to be a channel through the human confusion. Handforth spurred his horse on instinctively, and he gripped his lance with a firm, fierce determination.

An opportunity to get to blows with Kassker himself!

That was the only thought that filled Handforth's mind now. He didn't seem to realise that the whole thing was due to sheer coincidence. How could he have known that Kassker would appear at this one particular spot? As events turned out, there was something providential in the immediate turn of events. And Edward Oswald Handforth's astounding luck did not desert him in this moment of stark peril.

For, without doubt, death was very near him then.

He didn't realise it, he didn't give the matter a thought. Here was Kassker, and that was enough for him! He was contemptuous of the hissing arrows, and as for the rest of the enemy, Handforth never saw them. He charged on, full tilt, and the next moment he found himself hurtling forward upon the supreme chief of the enemy forces.

All those about him momentarily checked in the battle. Kassker was leading a picked

regiment of lancers, and they were thundering down upon the Northestrian infantry with devastating effect. In this particular section of the line the Gothlanders were stemming the retreat.

But all paused as Handforth's great charger galloped up. A gasp rose from many throats, for it was clear that this unknown Northestrian officer was to give battle to Kassker. And at the last moment Handforth flung up his visor, and his face was revealed.

"By the bones of Offa!" roared Kassker. "A boy! Pah! I make short work of such!"

At the same moment, both he and Handforth charged. And if Edward Oswald had been close to death before, he was now on the very brink of it. He seemed to realise it, too. When it was too late, he knew that he was no match for this brutal warrior. His own lance was held clumsily, for he was no expert. Kassker, on the other hand, was coming at him with an inexorable purpose. His lance was ready for the death-thrust. Kassker was contemptuous of this boy who had dared to challenge him.

And it was at this critical moment that Handforth's luck revealed itself.

As Kassker's lance made its thrust, so Handforth's horse stumbled. The animal lurched sideways, and the lance shot harmlessly over the junior's head. But more than that. The Removite's own lance, quite out of his control, swept clumsily round, and caught in a portion of Kassker's armour as the two horses swept past one another.

A roar of consternation went up from all the watching Gothlanders.

For Kassker was knocked off his horse, and the lance snapped in two with a report like a pistol-shot. Handforth reined in, trembling from head to foot. At last he knew how foolhardy he had been. But it was too late to back out!



CHAPTER 10.

THE FALL OF KASSKER!

"By George!" muttered Handforth, aghast.

He had wheeled his horse round, and he saw that scores of Gothlander caval-rymen were practically upon him. They could have killed him on the spot, but Kassker's proximity saved him. None of those men dared act. They were startled, too, by the dramatic fall of their commander.

In the other direction, the Northestrians had rallied, and a mounted officer was thundering out his orders. Handforth dimly seemed to recognise the voice, and he glanced round and beheld Wynwed the Jovial.

Wynwed was in the act of snatching a bow from one of the Northestrian archers, and the next second an arrow was quivering on the string. Wynwed was taking aim.

Cursing horribly, Kassker the Grim had

got to his feet, and was mounting his horse once more.

"By my soul, this puppy shall pay!" he thundered. "Kill him, ye fools! Nay, hold! That will I do myself!"

He swung his horse round, and the animal reared up with a shrill whinny of agony as his rider's spurs gashed deeply into his flank. And Wynwed's arrow came hissing across the intervening space at that crucial moment.

The rearing of the horse saved Kassker for the moment, for the shaft struck the unfortunate animal, and once again Kassker was flung off. For the beast reared madly. With a bellow of excitement Handforth flung himself from his own steed and rushed up.

Crash!

Handforth's right swept round and caught Kassker full in the face just as he had pulled himself to his feet for the second time. Handforth had told Church and McClure that he might use his fists, but he had never really believed that such a thing would be possible!

Kassker reeled away, and the turning-point of the battle was decided. For Kassker's great charger, mortally hurt by that arrow, had reared for the last time. Kassker backed into the poor brute, and received the full weight of the horse as it crashed over.

There was a sickening sound of crumpling armour, and four of Kassker's close attendants rushed up, careless of death, and dragged the dying animal aside. A dead man was revealed.

Kassker the Grim had fallen!

There was something rather startling in the fact that here, in the thick of the battle, he should have been killed by his own horse—and mainly because of his ill-treatment of the unfortunate animal. Wynwed's arrow had merely proved the last straw, for the beast had already been maddened.

One glance at the poor animal was enough to convince anybody of this, for both his flanks were torn to ribbons by Kassker's savage spurs. And there lay the chief of all the Gothlanders, the life crushed out of him by the dead weight of that falling mass.

"By my faith!" gasped one of the attendants. "He is dead!"

Kassker dead!

The word passed from man to man, and the shout was taken up all over the field of battle.

Handforth, rather dazed, found Wynwed by his side, and the kindly Northestrian was deeply concerned.

"Get thee gone, good youth!" he urged. "'Twas a wondrous deed, but thy peril is great—"

"Kassker's dead!" gasped Handforth. "And I—I sloshed him on the jaw!"

"Ay, 'twas that blow which settled the issue!" declared Wynwed. "For as Kassker staggered back, so he fell. But let us not talk, or these words will be our last!"

Somehow Handforth got on to his horse again. But he didn't make any attempt to get out of the battle, although his enthusiasm had evaporated. At close quarters he could see the grim, ghastly nature of this field. Dead and dying were strewn everywhere, and the plucky schoolboy was horrified. He wanted to get away—to breathe the pure air of the hill-top—but he wasn't going to show the white feather.

And a complete change had come about, too.

Like a flame the news of Kassker's death had swept through the entire Gothlander army. Kassker's own cavalry, instead of charging to the attack, wheeled round and retreated. Without their leader they were a mere rabble. As they heard of Kassker's end, so they lost their courage.

And the Northestrians, quick to take advantage of the change, swept onwards along the entire line. Orders were being shouted by the mounted officers, and the men were eager to obey.

The enemy was on the run!

Down rushed the defenders, and the invading hosts were flung into further disorder. Before five minutes had elapsed the Gothlanders had ceased to be an army. As far as the eye could reach, the entire enemy line was in retreat, fleeing from their victorious conquerors.

Kassker was dead—and the Gothlanders had become a disorderly mob.

Kassker had held his men together by brute force—by an iron-fisted rule. And the sudden knowledge of his death was like the lifting of a sword from above their heads. Their desire to win had gone. And the Northestrian troops, sweeping upon them, proved too much.

The invaders were routed—fleeing madly.

On the hilltop the sudden, dramatic change had been noted by all. It had seemed to come all in a moment, without any reason. At one second the two armies were fiercely engaged, and then, like a miracle, the Gothlanders were running.

"Hurrah!" yelled Tommy Watson. "They're retreating!"

"Good gad! It's not a retreat, laddies, it's a dashed rout, what?" exclaimed Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, a jolly old stampede, as it were. Three priceless old cheers, old beans!"

They all watched, flushed with excitement.

And up the hillside, at that very moment, came Church and McClure. Handforth's chums had given the wounded officer over into the care of his friends, and they had been advised to get out of harm's way. They were safe, but their hearts were leaden.

"The Gothlanders are whacked!" said Church dully, as he turned and watched the great defeat.

"What does it matter?" muttered McClure. "Poor old Handy's gone!"

"It—it seems too awful!" said Church brokenly.

Not a doubt lingered in their minds regarding Handforth's fate. They had seen him charge into the thick of the fighting, and they had seen, in a confused sort of way, that affair with Kassker. Handforth had vanished amid the mix-up, and no sign of him had been seen since. It was only too clear that he had fallen during that crucial minute.

His chums knew that Kassker was dead—for the word had reached them clearly. Hundreds of voices had shouted out the message, and the reason for the stampede was clear to them.

But they didn't particularly care.

Handforth had gone—he was lost for ever. Later, perhaps, he would be picked up from the battlefield. And Church and McClure dragged themselves wearily up the hillside.

At last they broke through the trees at the top, and found everybody bubbling over with excitement and jubilation. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had returned from the ship at the first word of the retreat, and were watching with intense satisfaction.

"That's one point settled, anyway," Dorrie was saying. "Within three or four hours the whole circus will be over. Not many of those beggars will escape across the lake, I'll warrant."

"No, they'll be taken prisoners," agreed Nelson Lee. "Kassker's entire invading army, Dorrie—routed and cut to pieces."

"An' all your doing, old man."

"Nonsense!" frowned Nelson Lee. "I may have helped in the training of these soldiers, but——"

"That's all right!" grinned his lordship. "You didn't plan the whole campaign, did you? You didn't give the Northeastrian officers their full instructions, eh? You didn't—— Hallo! What's the matter with these chaps? They don't look particularly cheerful!"

He was regarding Church and McClure. Others had seen the dejected aspect of the pair, too, and a crowd was gathering round them. For the moment, the great scene below was forgotten.

"Anything wrong?" asked Nipper, as he seized McClure's arm. "Where's Handy? Where—— 'Mac!' he burst out, a sudden suspicion coming to him. "You don't mean to say that Handy——"

"Yes!" muttered McClure miserably. "He went into battle—and we saw nothing more of him! He's dead! The poor chap's been killed!"



CHAPTER 11.

HANDY THE CONQUEROR!

KILLED!"

"Handforth dead!"

"Great Scott!"

"Odds horrors and tragedies!"

"It's not true!" shouted Willy, running

up and glaring fiercely at the two chums of Study D. "Where was Ted last? Why did you let him go? Why didn't you tell the rest of us——"

"One moment!" interrupted Nelson Lee quietly. "Church! McClure! Is it true that Handforth disobeyed my orders, and joined in the fighting?"

"Yes, sir," said Church unhappily. "We warned him before he went——"

"Then you knew of his mad enterprise, even before he ventured upon it?" asked Lee sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why did you not get these other boys to help you?" demanded Lee angrily. "You know what a rash, impetuous youngster——"

"But he pledged us to silence, sir!" broke in McClure, in self-defence. "He told us he had a secret, and he made us promise, on our word of honour, that we wouldn't give him away. But we thought it was only some of his usual rot—we never dreamed that he was planning to enter the battle!"

"It knocked us all of a heap, sir," said Church.

"Under the circumstances, you would have been justified in calling for help—to hold Handforth on the spot by force," said Nelson Lee gravely. "However, I cannot blame you for keeping your word—on the contrary, I admire you for it. Let me know the exact details."

They all crowded round, listening eagerly as Church and McClure described the recent events.

"He went into the thick of the fighting, sir, and we lost sight of him just about the time that Kassker fell," finished up Church, in a husky voice. "Of course, we were a good long way off, and we could only see the affair in general, but Handy didn't show up again, and then we came away. Everything was confusion and noise—and it was horrible, sir," he added, with a gulp. "I—I don't want to see it again!"

"Me, neither!" said McClure hoarsely.

"And Ted was in the middle of it?" said Willy Handforth, turning aside. "Who's game to come down with me?" he asked. "Who'll help me to find Ted on the battlefield——"

"I forbid anything of the sort, Willy," said Nelson Lee quietly.

"But it's all safe now, sir," urged Willy. "The fighting has passed on—the Gothlanders are in full retreat, and they'll be miles away by the time we get down——"

"That is not the point," broke in Lee. "I cannot allow any of you boys to go on such a mission. I will send a number of men down at once, and they will make a full search. Let us hope that Handforth is only wounded—although I fear that that is too optimistic a view. What a foolhardy boy! And yet, at the same time, what a proof of his spirit!"

"All these chaps have the same spirit,"

growled Willy. "I had it, too—only we're capable of holding ourselves in check. Ted's such an impetuous fathead that he needs chaining up at a time like this. Why didn't we think of it? Goodness knows, we've had enough lessons! He's always been the same!" Nipper shook his head.

"We're mostly to blame, you chaps," he said quietly. "We ought to have kept our eyes open. But we never imagined that Handy would be such a reckless ass— And you saw him right in the heart of the fighting, Mac?"

"Yes."

"You didn't actually see him fall?"

"Well, no."

"Then, begad, perhaps there's a chance," said Sir Montie. "We all know what a frightfully lucky chap he is——"

"Oh, what's the good of kidding us?" asked Church bitterly. "Haven't I told you that he was in the very thick of the battle? How could he have escaped? Be reasonable! How was it possible for him to have——"

Somebody gave a sudden shout.

"Look!" yelled the voice. "Who's this coming up the slope?"

Everybody ran madly to the top of the hill, where a good view could be obtained. A figure was ascending the long slope. But if any of the juniors had felt a momentary hope, it was quickly dashed to the ground. For this figure was in armour. He was obviously a Northeastrian officer—probably a slightly wounded man, who was coming out of the conflict.

"You idiot!" growled Fullwood, glaring at Jack Grey. "What did you want to shout like that for?"

"It wasn't me!" protested Jack. "De Valerie was the fellow who——"

"Wait a minute!" gasped Church, his face flushing. "Look! His walk! I'd be willing to swear——"

"Besides, that's just like the armour that Handy put on," broke in McClure. "By Jupiter! It can't possibly be—— Look! He's waving!"

"It's Handy!" yelled Church frantically.

"Hurrah!"

"Handy's alive!"

"All this fuss for nothing!" said Willy indignantly. "Just like Ted to give everybody a scare! We might have known!"

Notwithstanding his indignant tone, Willy was far more relieved than he would even admit. Everybody was rushing down to meet that approaching figure, and nobody had any further doubts. The fellow was Handforth—without question. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore glanced at one another rather grimly, and went down to meet him, too.

"Amazin'!" murmured Dorrie. "That's all I can say!"

They found a yelling crowd surrounding Edward Oswald. He regarded the fellows not only with astonishment, but with exasperation.

"What's all the fuss about?" he asked tartly.

"You're alive, Handy!" panted Church. "You're safe!"

"Of course I'm alive!" replied Handforth. "What else did you expect? Didn't I tell you that I should join you later? What's the good of me saying things if you don't take any notice?"

"But—but aren't you hurt?" demanded a dozen voices.

"Of course I'm not hurt, fatheads!"

"Yes, but you went into the thick of the battle——"

"What's that got to do with it?" broke in the leader of Study D. "How can anybody get hurt in this rig-out? I'm like a giddy sardine in a tin! I'm perspiring from every pore, and I can't unfasten the beastly stuff! For goodness' sake, lend a hand, you asses!"

There were many willing assistants, and Handforth was soon relieved of the cumbersome armour. Even if the juniors didn't see it, Nelson Lee observed that Handforth, in spite of his heat, was looking pale and haggard. He had none of his usual bluster.

"You disobeyed me, Handforth," said Nelson Lee sternly.

"I know, sir—and I wish I hadn't," replied Edward Oswald. "By George, I've had enough, sir! I—I didn't think it would be so ghastly as all that! War's horrible, sir!"

"Unfortunately, war is sometimes thrust upon us, whether we want it or not," replied Lee. "I think you have had your lesson, Handforth, so I'll say no more. To tell you the truth, my relief at seeing you alive is so great that I cannot find it in my heart to censure you."

Handforth looked grateful.

"Well, anyway, sir, Kassker's dead, and the battle's won," he said quietly. "I've done my bit—I turned the tide of the whole engagement, so I'm not grumbling."



CHAPTER 12.

MORE EXCITEMENT!

"YOU turned the tide?" repeated Nipper curiously.

"Of course I did!"

replied Handforth.

"Didn't I slosh Kassker

on the jaw?"

"What?"

"Great Scott!"

"You punched Kassker!"

Everybody shouted at once, and Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled. He wasn't at all surprised to hear this extraordinary piece of news. It was just the sort of insane exploit that Handforth would indulge in.

"You are serious, Handforth?" he asked.

"Rather, sir," replied Edward Oswald. "I went for Kassker, you know, and I thought

it was all up with me at first. But I biffed him off his horse with my lance——"

"Draw it mild, old son!"

"It's a fact!" retorted Handforth. "It was an accident, I'll confess, but I biffed him off, all the same! Then I jumped down, and caught him a beauty on the jaw—one of my special rights!"

"Good gad!"

"Handy, you're a living wonder!"

"And after that Kassker was killed," said Handforth sombrely. "I believe I was responsible, in a way. You see, that right of mine sent him staggering back, and his horse fell on him at the same moment—it was all over in a flash!" he added, with a shiver.

"Yes, but what happened——"

"I don't want to talk about it," interrupted Handforth. "I want to get to the ship—I want to have a bath. I'm going to change my clothes, and try to forget everything. That battlefield was too awful for words!"

"Handy the Conqueror!" said Reggie Pitt, with a chuckle. "He settled old Kassker, and if it hadn't been for that fluke the battle might have gone very differently. What a piece of luck!"

Everybody expected Handforth to brag—for, after all, he really had something to brag about. But the leader of Study D never did what people expected of him. He was utterly subdued. His adventures on the battlefield had sickened him, and he did no crowing.

Within half an hour the entire party was on board the Spitfire, joyous in the knowledge that the battle of Dunstane had been decisively won by Northestria. Umlosi had turned up by this time, too—wounded in several places, but perfectly happy. He had been in the thick of the fighting, and had done sterling work with his trusty spear.

News came that the majority of the Gothlanders had surrendered. The Northestrians were finding it difficult to cope with the prisoners. A few remnants of the enemy had escaped inland; but were being rounded up. The rout was complete in every detail. The savage Gothlanders were quelled for all time, and Northestria's menace was dead.

A meal was the first item on the programme now, and nobody grumbled at the rough-and-ready fare which was provided. This ship was not equipped with luxurious saloons, and everybody was obliged to rough it, more or less. But even Irene & Co. were cheerful. They rather enjoyed the adventure.

And now that the battle was over, and the peril at an end, every mind was full of other thoughts. What of the chances of escape?

Nelson Lee made an announcement during the meal.

"I have said nothing before, but I think you had all better know the truth now," he declared. "Three hours ago we had an official wireless communication from the British naval authorities. A fleet of giant

seaplanes is definitely setting out into the Arctic at once."

"Hurrah!"

"Then we're going to be rescued, sir?"

"The Navy's going to take us away from here!"

"We must not be too sure," warned Nelson Lee. "These seaplane pilots are brave men—they are risking their lives in this venture, for it is a very doubtful expedition. If we escape, it will be almost providential."

"Are they coming right into the oasis, sir?"

"I have warned them to make no such attempt," replied Lee. "The pilots have received definite instructions. When they get near the vicinity of this volcanic region they will fly low—in an attempt to escape the eternal storms which rage in the upper air. It is their only possible chance of reaching us. We are setting off down the lake now—within the hour. We shall attempt to make the passage through the long tunnel."

"We shall do it, too, sir."

"Rather!"

"Dorrie got through, so why can't we?"

"It doesn't follow, young 'uns," said Lord Dorrimore. "I was usin' the motor-boat, remember, an' I had a bit of a struggle against the current. It'll be touch and go with this old tub, if I know anythin'. Still, we'll have a good shot!"

"Couldn't the seaplanes find the outer exit to the tunnel, and then float through on the current?" asked somebody.

"That would be an unnecessary waste of time—we must go out to meet them," replied Nelson Lee. "This tunnel is only open once in every thirty years."

"Phew!"

"There can be only one explanation of the phenomenon," continued Lee. "The influx of water is undoubtedly caused by a giant geyser beyond the mountains. It is a geyser of the recurring type, and the warm flow only lasts for a few days."

"But it's a cold flow, sir," said Fullwood.

"Cold in comparison to the lake water—but very warm compared to the Arctic," replied Lee. "Out there everything is frozen solid, as you ought to know. But this recurring geyser causes a thaw, and the tunnel is then freed, and the water flows in. Unless we take advantage of this opportunity, it will not come again for twenty-five or thirty years!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Odds prospects and visions!" ejaculated Archie. "I mean to say, thirty years, what? Why, dash it, we shall all be sober blighters of forty-five or more!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to say, it won't be much dashed good going back to St. Frank's, then, what?" went on Archie, in dismay. "Chappies aren't allowed to go into the Remove at forty-five."

"We shouldn't want to leave, probably," said Tommy Watson. "By the end of thirty

years, we should all be married to some of these Northeastrian girls, and all our home ties would be here."

"By what I've seen of it, some of you would be more inclined to marry these young ladies here!" grinned Lord Dorrimore.

"What rubbish!" said Irene carelessly. "It's all talk, anyhow—because we're going to get free! I know we are—and in next to no time we shall be back at school, and this affair will seem like a dream!"



CHAPTER 13.

THE LEAVE-TAKING!

HOWEVER, there was no certainty of escape.

Optimism was one thing, but a hard fact was another. And it was a hard, concrete fact that the Spitfire would have a strenuous task in battling against the current through that long tunnel—a tunnel which went on for miles and miles, penetrating the very heart of the barrier range.

And even then there would be another doubt. What if they all got out into the open Arctic? They would be in the outer world, certainly. But they were not equipped for Arctic travel. Their ship could not progress beyond the thawed pool caused by the submarine geyser. As for getting over the snow, the very idea was impossible. They were hundreds of miles—perhaps thousands—from any outpost of civilisation.

The seaplanes knew the precise position of this hidden oasis; but there were a hundred and one uncertainties connected with such a flight.

However, it was of no use to make troubles before they arrived, so everybody was full of enthusiasm for the immediate operations. The ship was to make its attempt to get through the tunnel—and that was exciting enough for anybody. The rest could be left.

"Everythin' has turned out pretty good on the whole," Lord Dorrimore was saying, as he stood on deck with Nelson Lee. "We're all on this one ship, an' she's equipped with those two aero-engines. We've got stores aboard, an' if we can conquer that current, we shall be free. We can carry enough grub to last us for months, too. I'm not worryin', old man. We're bound to be found, sooner or later."

"If only those seaplanes get through, and we can meet them on the other side of these mountains, the issue will be settled within seven or eight hours," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Jove, it's a sober thought! Seven or eight hours! And then a journey of two days at the utmost—and then England! Isn't it too good to be true?"

"Seems like it—but I'm an irrepressible optimist," said Dorrie. "I've got a pretty strong idea that we'll pull it off. You an' your boys can get back to your precious school then."

"Where are we? What's the date?" asked Nelson Lee dryly. "Upon my word, Dorrie, if we do escape, we shall be at St. Frank's only a short while after the term begins. It seems incredible!"

"Wasn't the term started later, or something?"

"Yes," nodded Lee. "The school didn't assemble until three weeks after the usual date. It was originally only two weeks, but I've heard over the wireless that St. Frank's has only just gone back—and the whole school, naturally, is agog with excitement over our affairs. It'll be a good thing for everybody in general when we get back."

"What about these good people?" asked Dorrie. "Ethelbert the Red and Princess Mercia and the rest? I suppose you've told 'em that we're thinkin' of slippin' out by the back door?"

"I have already had a long consultation with Ethelbert, and he agrees, of course, that it is our best chance," replied Lee. "I think they are reluctant to let us go, but they made no attempt to hinder us. On the contrary, Ethelbert offers every help. He and the princess are coming at once to bid us good-bye!"

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to take a few of these Northeastrians out with us?" asked Dorrie, with a smile. "The princess, for example? She'd probably enjoy a look at London! Glory! Wouldn't she get a few surprises?"

But Lee shook his head.

"If those seaplanes get through, they'll have a full enough load, without any extras," he replied. "Quite apart from that, these Northeastrians are content with their own little world, and have no desire to venture out of it. Both Ethelbert and the Princess made that quite clear to me."

They made it even clearer when they came aboard, half an hour later, to bid the party God-speed. It was, after all, a very simple leave-taking, with no attempt at display. The majority of the Northeastrians were engaged ashore, and there was plenty of work for them.

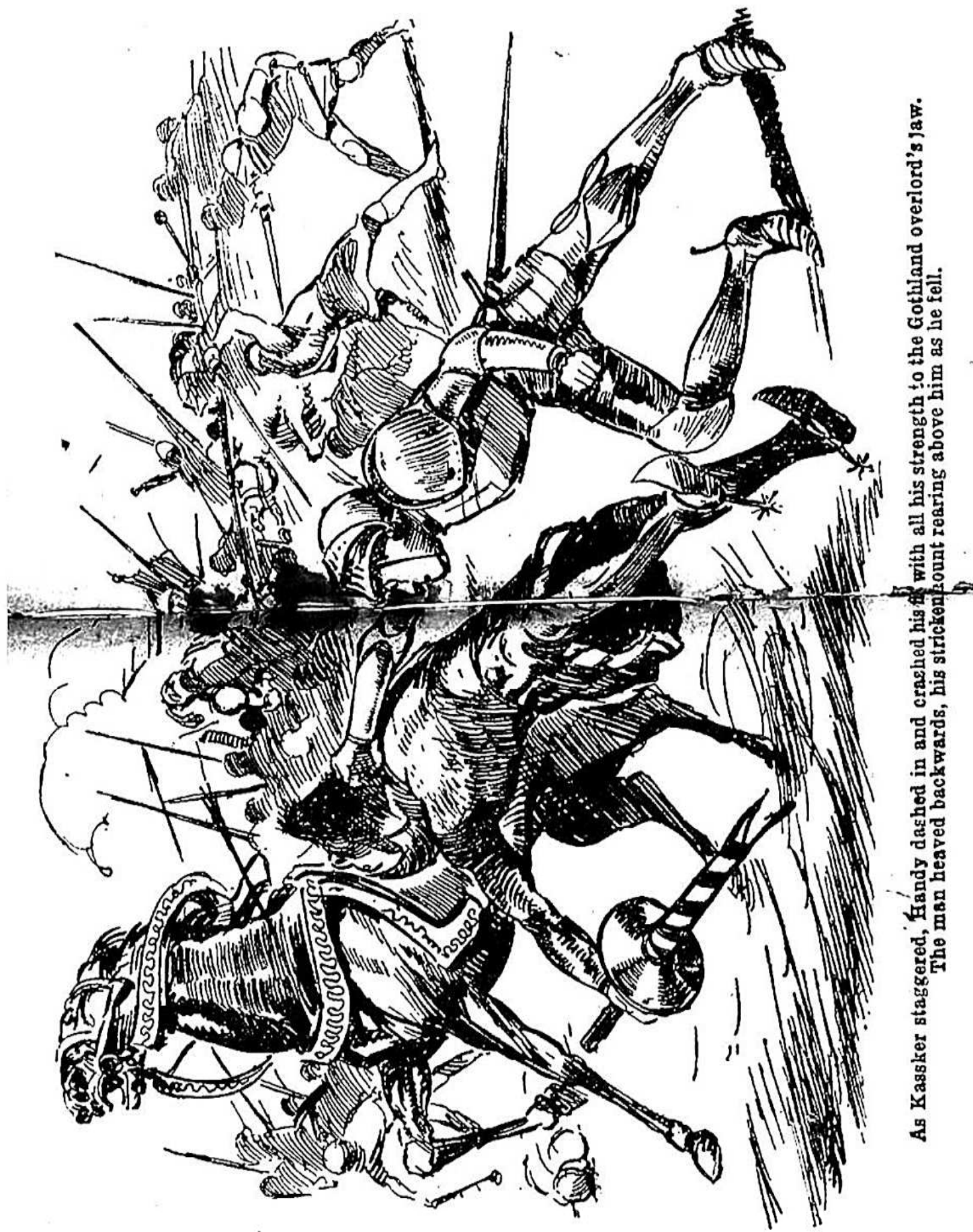
"'Tis well for ye all to take this opportunity while it lasts," said the young princess. "I trust that all will go well, and that your friends will win through."

"We like not your going, good people," said Ethelbert the Red. "I'faith, it is with the greatest reluctance that we allow ye to depart. Thou hast saved our country, Lee the Lionheart."

"No, that is quite wrong," declared Leo. "I helped, I will admit, but your own soldiers won this victory."

"Thy modesty is becoming, brave sir," smiled the princess. "Henceforth, our little kingdom will be safe. Kassker is dead, and the Gothlanders are for ever defeated."

"Ay, by my soul!" vowed Ethelbert. "Henceforward, Gothland will be a vassal state—held in constant subjection. A governor will be placed in control, and never



As Kasser staggered, Handy dashed in and crashed his fist with all his strength to the Gothland overlord's jaw.
The man heaved backwards, his stricken mount rearing above him as he fell.

again will those dogs be allowed to gain power. Our lesson has been severe—but we have learned it all the more thoroughly on that account. But for your help, good strangers, 'twould have been the end of us, I fear. So ye will well understand our reluctance to let ye depart."

"We go, at all events, with the satisfactory knowledge that your own troubles are over," replied Nelson Lee contentedly. "We leave you at peace—the war over."

"We'd like to take some of you back with us—to see our own world," put in Dorrie.

"We've seen yours, so why shouldn't you see ours?"

But the princess shook her head.

"Nay, I would not sanction it," she replied. "We have heard of the wonders beyond, but we desire not these things. Let us remain here, in our own domain. Should we depart, and like not the change, what then? Could we get back? I fear not. So it is well for us to remain, and to let ye go in peace."

And so, after a general leave-taking, the Princess Mercia and her Regent took their departure. They knew that Nelson Lee was anxious to waste no time, and they had no desire to hinder him. Already the preparations for setting off were well forward. The aero-engines were being tuned up, and there was activity everywhere.

The princess had seemed rather subdued in saying her good-byes to Handforth—much to the latter's confusion. The fair Mercia had rather a soft spot for the rugged Handy, and if she could have had her own way he would have remained behind.

"Phew! Thank goodness that's over!" murmured Edward Oswald as the Royal barge left the Spitfire's side. "She's a jolly ripping girl, but, all the same, those eyes of hers are a bit too powerful! When she looks at me I go all jellified!"

"For two pins, Ted, she'd send a squadron of soldiers and have you yanked ashore, and carried into the Royal castle!" said Willy impressively. "In fact, I think you ought to go below and hide yourself, so as to be on the safe side. Mercia's gone on you, and she's heartbroken to see you slipping out of her—"

"Dry up, you young ass!" interrupted Handforth gruffly.

"You've had a jolly narrow escape, my lad," went on Willy. "Not that it isn't a good idea," he added. "Why not stay here, Ted? Think of the alluring prospect! You can marry the princess, become King of Northestria, and rule everybody to your heart's content!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You funny young idiot!" roared Handforth. "Any more of that piffle, and I'll take you below and give you a good tanning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Ted!" grinned Willy. "I believe you're a bit cut up at parting from your



As Kassker staggered, Handy dashed in and c
The man heaved backwards,

lovely Princess Charming, too! Never mind—you can find consolation in Irene!"

But Willy thought it advisable to make himself scarce after that remark, for Edward Oswald was looking very dangerous.



CHAPTER 14.

INTO THE TUNNEL!

It was a time of intense excitement for all.

The St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls could do nothing to help, and so they stood about on deck, watching eagerly, and discussing the prospects over and over again.

Every kind of argument was used. The optimists were constantly pulling the theories of the pessimists to pieces, and there were always fresh arguments arising. And while the younger ones were engaged in this pastime, Nelson Lee, Dorrie, and the airship engineers were hard at work.

The powerful motors were already roaring, and the ship was progressing steadily down



With his strength to the Gothland overlord's jaw, bearing above him as he fell.

the lake. At various points on the shore, crowds of Northeistrials would appear, shouting and waving their good-byes. But at Nelson Lee's own wish, none of the natives accompanied the party down the lake by water. He wanted the departure to be quiet. Northeistria had her dead and dying to attend to, and this was no time for celebrations.

Certainly, every possible step was taken to ensure success. Nelson Lee knew that a strong current had to be battled with, and he was convinced that the aero-engines would be inadequate.

But there were the two "gondola destroyers," and these were provided with the most powerful engines of all. They were just the gondolas from the wrecked airship, fitted with floats. They had been used on the lake for battling against the Gothlander transports—and had proved very effective, too. They were of service still, for now they were being utilised as tugs. The motor-boat, with Lord Dorrimore at the wheel, was deputed to lead the way. For the little craft carried a powerful searchlight, and this would serve to light the way during the tense journey through the tunnel.

"Why, it'll be easy!" declared Handforth, recovering a great deal of his usual spirits. "With our own engines, and these two gondolas, we shall whack that current to fits! What the dickens is there to worry about? Nothing, my sons!"

"Yes, we're buzzing along pretty well," said Church. "I think we shall do it all right."

The others were similarly confident.

The Spitfire was making splendid progress. She was churning through the water like a cruiser, leaving an enormous wake of foam in her rear. The air was filled with the roar of the four powerful motors, and the great hawsers were stretched taut as the tugs pulled the vessel along.

"We mustn't be too sure of ourselves, though," remarked Fullwood. "According to Dorrie, the current is terrifically strong—and this ship is a clumsy old hulk, at the best. Just a dead weight, remember. It'll be touch and go whether we get through."

"Rats!"

"Dry up, you croaker!"

Ralph Leslie Fullwood grinned.

"I'm no croaker," he replied cheerfully. "I'm only trying to point out that it won't be all honey."

Nearly all the members of the party were in a condition of acute anxiety, although they didn't like to admit it. They openly told themselves that there was nothing to worry about. And yet, privately, they worried enormously. For there were so many chances of failure.

Indeed, for every chance of success, there were ten against it. This venture into the unknown depths of the tunnel was nothing but a gamble. The fact that Lord Dorrimore had taken the motor-boat through counted for little.

For the motor-boat was a tiny thing, after all, whereas the Spitfire was a big, clumsily-built ship. It was more than likely that there were hidden rocks in that tunnel—shallows, perhaps, on which the vessel would go aground. One of a thousand things might happen to wreck the whole scheme. So the tense uncertainty was justified.

At the end of the lake the waters converged into a great gorge, with towering rocks on either hand. Down here, all was rugged and barren. The fair landscapes had been left behind.

The view immediately ahead was menacing. Rocks appeared to bar the way—vast, awe-inspiring masses of crag which reached up and up into the everlasting mists above. For thousands of feet they rose, like a threatening danger. And right at their base could be seen a black opening—ridiculously small from a distance. The gorge narrowed as it continued, and ordinarily there was no current here whatever. But now a strong flow could be felt, and it was coming from that tunnel exit. The waters of the Arctic were still pouring beneath the mountains—proof enough that the great geyser was still

in active operation. Proof that the way of escape was open!

"We'll never get through there!" said Mary Summers, as she stood, looking ahead. "That opening isn't big enough, surely?"

"It's bigger than it looks," explained Nipper. "We've already been in it, you know—we took our galley up there a few days ago. You'll be surprised at the size of that opening when we get there."

"We're slowing down, too," murmured Doris Berkeley, as she looked over the side. "We're only going at about half the speed now. Oh, what if the current is too strong for us?"

"Couldn't we all get into the gondolas and the motor-boat?" asked Irene. "We should get out like that——"

"The gov'nor won't hear of it," interrupted Nipper, shaking his head.

"But why not?"

"Because it might be fatal," replied Nipper. "Even if the worst comes to the worst, and the current beats us, we can drift back into the oasis—and although we shall be prisoners there, we shall at least be alive. But if we ventured out into the Arctic in the gondolas the situation would be pretty acute."

"Why?" Mary insisted. "Aren't the seaplanes coming for us?"

"They're coming—but there's no guarantee that they'll find us," replied Nipper. "In this ship we could live for several weeks, perhaps. We'd have lots of hardships, no doubt—but we could live. But what chance should we have in those flimsy gondolas, with the temperature far below zero? There's no accommodation in them, remember—they're all engines. No, unless we can take the ship through, we shall go back. So it's going to be a pretty anxious time."

Nelson Lee's decision was, after all, a thoroughly sound one. It would be sheer madness to take the party out into the bitter colds of the Arctic without a ship to accommodate everybody. The Spitfire was bad enough, in all conscience, since she was not equipped with the necessary kit for a prolonged stay in the frozen North. But, at least, the party would be able to live, and they would still have their wireless. If the first attempt to rescue them failed, there might be other expeditions sent out.

Lee was very worried over the whole problem, for he knew that brave men were risking their lives even now—intrepid naval officers were flying through the bitter cold, seeking that unfrozen spot near the mountain range which marked the position of the great geyser. Only the utmost skill in navi-

gation—the utmost daring—could carry those seaplanes through.

And there was always the vital question—could this ship win her way out into the open world?



CHAPTER 15.

TOUCH AND GO!

TENSE silence fell when, at last, the Spitfire drove steadily into the low cave entrance. But it was only a human silence, for the

engines were creating a shattering, nerve-racking din.

The noise echoed and re-echoed from the rock walls of the gully. And then, indeed, it seemed as though pandemonium had been let loose. For inside the tunnel the noise from the engines was almost unbelievably terrific. Ordinary conversation was out of the question. One could only make oneself heard by yelling lustily.

The procession moved slowly and laboriously along—the motor-boat leading, with its searchlight splitting the darkness ahead. Then the two gondolas, one a couple of lengths ahead of the other. And finally, the main ship, her own engines doing their little bit towards the conquering of the strong Arctic inflow.

The Spitfire had only just managed to scrape through the entrance—and even then the wireless masts had been dismantled for the purpose. But now there was no fear, for the rock roof sloped upwards, and was high overhead.

"By George! What a tunnel!" said Handforth, as he stared up. "It's just like a railway tunnel, only ten times as large! And we're moving, too—we're winning!"

"But doesn't the current get stronger farther on?" asked Church.

"I don't think so—Dorrie didn't say anything of that sort, anyhow," replied Handforth. "Once we're well into the mountains, the rest will be easy. We ought to be through in an hour or two."

"Rats!" said Reggie Pitt, as he put his mouth close to Handforth's ear. "Dorrie took two or three hours in the motor-boat alone—and we shall be lucky if we do the journey in a day!"

"A day!" yelled Handforth, staring.

It seemed an awful long time to him, but Pitt was probably near the mark—for there was little hope of accomplishing the journey in under nine or ten hours. The Spitfire was only moving sluggishly, although all the engines were being driven at their utmost power.

In the gondolas, the engineers were stripped to the waist, perspiring freely, and working hard to keep the motors in perfect trim. Lord Dorrimore had, perhaps, the easiest task, for he went ahead in the motor-

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boat, and found it necessary to use only half throttle.

Most of the girls had fled below, attempting to seek relief from the nerve-shattering noise. The whole air quivered with the tumult, for the tunnel caused the explosions from the open exhausts to hit back with deadly effect.

"Most of you boys had better get below, too!" shouted Nelson Lee, as he came upon a group of fellows. "You'll be deaf for a week—"

"That's all right, sir—we don't mind," roared Nipper. "We want to stay. We're all anxious to see how we progress."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

Nelson Lee said no more. After all, it made little difference, for the noise below was nearly as acute. Even the girls came up on deck again, finding it impossible to rest.

"We've just got to see everything that's going on," explained Irene, as she joined Handforth. "Oh, Ted! Do you think we shall do it? Do you think—"

"Do it?" laughed Handforth. "Of course we shall! And when we get outside we shall probably find the seaplanes waiting for us. Don't forget, this is the age of marvellous aerial navigation! And the British Navy is on the job!"

But Irene shook her head rather doubtfully.

The time went on—an hour elapsed. Then two hours—three hours. And still the procession moved ever onwards beneath the vast barrier range. It was monotonous—tantalisingly, maddeningly monotonous. There seemed to be no change whatever. The tunnel was all the same—black, grim, and forbidding. And still the procession penetrated deeper and deeper, and so far there had been no hitch.

The great engines were working with amazing accuracy, and every member of the airship's crew knew that they were solely dependent upon any one of the motors. For should one of them fail, the others would be insufficient to pull the load.

So far, there had been no snag. Men were taking soundings constantly, and the depth of the water was satisfactory. Not once had there been any indication of a shallow, or of a submerged rock. And the Arctic flow continued to swirl past in a black, silent flood.

Some of the time was filled in by eating. The juniors offered to prepare a meal for everybody in general, and a good hour was spent in making sandwiches, the girls being the chief workers in this enterprise. The fellows did their share after the sandwiches had been made.

But they all knew that it was a false kind of diversion. Their thoughts were constantly with the great problem, and although they remained below, they wanted to be on deck, watching.

"How much longer?" asked Tommy Watson hoarsely. "We seem to go on for ever, and there's no sign of an end!"

"We've only been in the tunnel for just over four hours," said Nipper.

"Begad, old boy, it seems like four days!" said Tregellis-West. "I've had a few frightful experiences, but this is the frightfullest! Nothin' but suspense all the time."

"What was that?" shouted Handforth abruptly.

"Great Scott! We bumped against something!"

"We're aground!"

There was a rush, but when the fellows arrived on deck, they found nothing different. One of the officers was looking very grave, however.

"It was a near thing that time!" he said, when a number of juniors pressed round him. We hit a ledge, I believe, on the star-board side—just scraped off by a piece of sheer luck. It's so infernally difficult to steer the confounded ship."

"Do you think we shall get through, Mr. Wilcox?" asked Pitt.

"We've got to get through," replied the officer simply.

And then came another alarm. Ice was floating down! Great jagged lumps of ice! The whole tunnel was becoming filled with the floating fragments!

"I don't like this!" said Nelson Lee, as he stood staring overside, with Nipper close to him. "It's a bad sign, young 'un. I hope to heaven we get out before there's too much of it."

"You think we'll get jammed up, sir?"

"It's possible—even probable," replied Lee. "Dorrie's having quite a job, I believe, to force his little motor-boat through it. We didn't reckon on this. There was no sign of it when Dorrie came through a few days ago."

"What does it mean, guv'nor?"

"You needn't ask me that, Nipper—you know what it means," replied Lee. "The geyser is petering out, and the waters are freezing again. In such an atmosphere, it won't take long for the flow to cease altogether. There's a danger here that I had not contemplated at all."

"We might be forced to abandon the attempt, eh, sir?"

"We might get jammed up, and slip between the frying pan and the fire," said Nelson Lee grimly. "We assumed that we should be able to get back into the oasis if the current proved too strong. But what if the ice jams us in? We shall be able to move neither forwards nor backwards. We shall be trapped in this tunnel!"

"Phew! That's a lively prospect, sir!" whistled Nipper.

"Say nothing to the others—there's no need to alarm them unnecessarily," warned Lee. "By Jove, the ice is getting thicker every minute!" he added, his face looking aged with anxiety. "And if we fail it means thirty years before we get another chance—perhaps never! And perhaps it means being trapped in this vast tunnel!"

Lee muttered this to himself, and Nipper did not hear. He, like the other fellows,

was staring down at the black flood, and watching the ever-increasing masses of twisting, turning, floating ice.



CHAPTER 16.

THE EVERLASTING ICE!

NOTHER hour of suspense.

The ice had thinned out a bit by then, and the adventurers were beginning to get fresh hope.

Perhaps there was no need for any alarm. Perhaps the geyser was in full operation again.

But the atmosphere gave the lie to this supposition.

For it was cold—penetratingly cold. Gradually the temperature had been dropping, and now, indeed, freezing point had been well passed. The air of the tunnel was bitter. Ice was beginning to form on the Spitfire's sides, and the juniors were surrounded in a kind of steam as they breathed. Every scrap of available clothing had been put on. But still they stood about, staring always into the unknown blackness of the tunnel ahead.

The light of Lord Dorrimore's motor-boat continued to rip the blackness, but it only penetrated a short distance. Beyond that the darkness was mysterious and almost terrifying. At times the roof of the tunnel

would slope lower, and the procession would only just be able to scrape through.

And now and again the tunnel would become narrow, and only the most careful navigation averted a disaster. But still the engines roared, and the ship was hauled steadily onwards.

And a new sound was added to the din from the exhausts. There was a continuous splintering and grinding of ice as it was hemmed in between the ship's side and the rock walls.

"How much longer?" asked Church unhappily. "We seem to go on and on, and there's never any change. I'm getting nervy, Mac! The ice is getting worse again now—thicker than ever!"

"Don't worry," growled Handforth. "We're nearly through."

"Somebody said it would take another three or four hours—"

"Don't believe it!" interrupted Handforth, frowning. "Can't you feel the frost in the air? The temperature's pretty well at zero already. And that means that we're near the open."

"It means that we're nearer—but that's a different thing," put in McClure. "We've got miles to go yet— By jingo! Did you feel that? We're getting jammed up in this beastly ice!"

They stared overboard anxiously.

The ice was indeed thicker than ever, and was piling up ominously as the vessel con-

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tinued her course. At times the hawsers would twang with a queer, significant sound. The Spitfire would lurch onwards unwillingly. The ice was beginning to pack up and bar the progress of this strange string of boats.

There could be only one explanation.

The recurring geyser was getting to the end of its present activity, and was again becoming dormant. The ice was beginning to form on that outer lake, and in a very short time the freeze-up would be solid. It would be touch and go whether the party could get out.

And it would be a dreadful climax to the adventure if they were all hemmed in here, for there could be no return to the oasis. Frozen up in this mass, even the motor-boat would be as useless as a riddled hulk. And then what chance of escape would there be? Even if the seaplanes arrived, there would be nobody to rescue.

But Nelson Lee thrust this thought grimly aside as it occurred to him. He couldn't believe that such tragedy would signalise the end of their journey. For, according to all his calculations—based on Lord Dorrimore's report—the tunnel exit should now be very close. The atmosphere told this, too. There was a distinct air current now, amounting to a real wind. It was blowing down the tunnel, and it was cuttingly bitter.

"Dorrie's waving!" said Nipper, as he stared out into the distance ahead. "Look, guv'nor!"

"Yes, I have seen," replied Nelson Lee tensely.

The motor-boat could be distinctly noted beyond the straining gondolas. And the figure of Lord Dorrimore, outlined against the gleam from the searchlight, was visible. Dorrie was standing up in his boat, waving frantically.

"It's a warning!" ejaculated Handforth. "By George! The ice is all packed up, and we can't move! That's what it means! Dorrie's trying to tell us——"

"No!" yelled Church. "The tunnel's getting wider. Look! Can't you see? The ice isn't jammed so much here either. The tunnel's getting wider, I tell you! We're near the exit!"

"Don't be an ass!" roared Handforth. "It'll be hours before we get near the exit."

"Half an hour ago you said we were nearly through!"

"Eh? Did I?" said Handforth, with a snort. "Well, I expect I was right, but you needn't get so excited——"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted McClure. "Let's watch!"

It seemed that Lord Dorrimore's signal was indeed a token of good tidings. For, as the gondolas surged onwards, they drew apart, proving that the tunnel was a great deal wider here. It continued to open out, and then, at last, there was no further doubt.

A bitterly cold wind was whistling over the deck, and everybody instinctively knew

that the end of the tunnel was close at hand. And then the searchlight suddenly went out, and a darkness shut down.

"Oh!" exclaimed Irene. "Why has Dorrie done that?"

"We're through—we're through!" yelled a dozen voices.

Far ahead, a dim, uncertain light could be seen—a greyness amid the surrounding black. And everybody knew that that dim twilight was coming from beyond, from the open air. At this time of the year there was no full daylight in the Arctic, and all was dim.

It was curious that the volcanic fires from the great craters above did not reflect down. They seemed to concentrate all their light into the great oasis. It was a phenomenon of the mists which always hung over that enormous basin. Out in the open, the volcanic fires were lost in the vast emptiness of the upper air.

"We're through!" shouted Handforth excitedly. "By George! Didn't I say we should do it? I never had any doubt about it, like some of you pessimists!"

Everybody seemed to go mad with joy ten or fifteen minutes later. For the great gondolas, tugging at their charge, passed under a frowning rock, and emerged under the glorious sky. At least, it seemed glorious to all these temporary exiles. Not so long ago they had almost lost hope of seeing a real cloud again. In the oasis there had been nothing but the upper mists.

"It's snowing!" shouted Fullwood.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old honest snow!"

The cheering became wild. And the terrible din from the engines seemed to be utterly dissipated now. They were still roaring, but after the echoes of the tunnel the noise was like a mere murmur.

"Steady on, you chaps!" said Nipper grimly. "Not so much of this cheering!"

"But we're out!" gasped Tommy Watson. "And it's snowing!"

"I know it's snowing, but that's nothing to gloat about," replied Nipper anxiously. "What about the seaplanes? How are they going to find us in this smother?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Watson, with a start.

"It's real Arctic weather—that's all," went on Nipper. "Just our luck, of course! We're out, but we're not out of the wood! If this snowstorm continues, those seaplanes will never get near us! We're out of the oasis, and we're free of the tunnel. But is there any chance of us getting picked up?"



CHAPTER 17.

WAITING!

THE wave of wild excitement soon died down. The weather was bad, and that might mean the death-knell of all their hopes. That fleet of naval seaplanes had

started out—should be here by this time. But what possible chance was there of ever seeing them?

If the pilots had already encountered this storm, they would have turned back, knowing the utter impossibility of going on. For the visibility was practically nil. From the decks of the Spitfire, scarcely anything could be seen but a smother of whirling snowflakes.

A sort of twilight reigned overhead, and there were signs of ice on all sides. But these vessels were floating in water, and the pack-ice was floating about uneasily, as though disturbed by under-water currents.

Not one of the engines had been stilled. The party was going onwards—progressing as far as they possibly could, in order to get away from the deadly mountain range. It rose up behind them—a vast mass of ice, reaching upwards into the smother.

"Those seaplanes may have met with disaster already," said Pitt anxiously. "They were going to fly low as soon as they got to this latitude. And imagine the danger here, with scarcely any visibility! Flying low, they would crash into those mountains before they knew they were near them!"

"It would make no difference, even if they flew high," said Nipper. "These peaks rise for thirty thousand feet or more, and the aeroplanes couldn't get to that height in this sort of air. The engines wouldn't work—the cold would be too intense."

"But what can we do?" asked Watson despairingly.

"Just nothing," replied Nipper. "We're out, and let's be thankful for that. We've done our part, and now everything depends upon the Navy."

For a full hour the voyage continued. The mountains had long since been left in the rear. Lord Dorrmore's searchlight, sweeping round in all directions, revealed nothing but the black water and the pack-ice. In many places there were great clear spaces, hundreds of yards in extent—just plain water. The open sea appeared to stretch for mile after mile. It was a sure enough proof of the geyser's enormous size.

Its strength was sufficient to thaw the ice, and to convert a large expanse of the ordinarily frozen Arctic into an open sea. But once the geyser lost its effectiveness, the freeze-up would be swift and dramatic. It was losing its effectiveness already.

But Nelson Lee knew well enough that the temperature here was extraordinarily high. It was freezing hard, but, according to all records of this latitude, the thermometer should have been a great many degrees below zero. But the coldness was no greater than that of an ordinary bitter day in temperate zones.

And then at last the engines ceased.

Miles had been covered in the open, for the current was lacking here, and the Spitfire had made good progress. But the ice was now becoming so thick that the end of the journey was reached. Into the distance ahead lay no water, but the everlasting ice of the

Arctic. The limit of the geyser's zone had been reached.

Lord Dorrmore came on board, stiff and blue with cold. Every engine was quiet, and the sudden silence was uncanny. The wind was whistling and the myriad snowflakes were whirling down. But everything seemed deadly silent.

"Well, old man, we've done it," said Lord Dorrmore, as he gripped Nelson Lee's hand. "All the same, I don't think a great deal of this snow. A bit of a dirty trick, eh?"

"I'm worried, Dorrie—terribly worried," muttered Lee.

"I don't wonder at it," said his lordship. "Thinking of those seaplanes, eh? A fat chance they'll have in this blizzard!"

"We can only wait," said Nelson Lee quietly. "Let us pray that the weather will clear. The geyser is losing its power, and I venture to predict that within forty-eight hours the temperature here will be down to normal, and the ice as solid as ever."

"That's cheerin'," said Dorrie, with a grimace. "I distinctly told the Navy that there was plenty of water for their 'planes to alight on. What the deuce will they do if there's nothin' but ice?"

"They'll be able to land, but I'm afraid they'll never get off again," replied Lee. "This weather has upset all our calculations. Unless those seaplanes can arrive within twenty-four hours—"

He broke off significantly.

Lord Dorrmore had brought the motor-boat close alongside the main ship, and the searchlight was kept going all the time, pointing upwards into the sky. The idea was obvious. The searchlight was a guide to the rescuing 'planes, should they come. But there was scarcely one chance in a thousand in such weather as this.

"All you young people had better get some sleep," said Nelson Lee, addressing the St. Frank's fellows and Irene & Co. "There's accommodation for you below, so take my advice—"

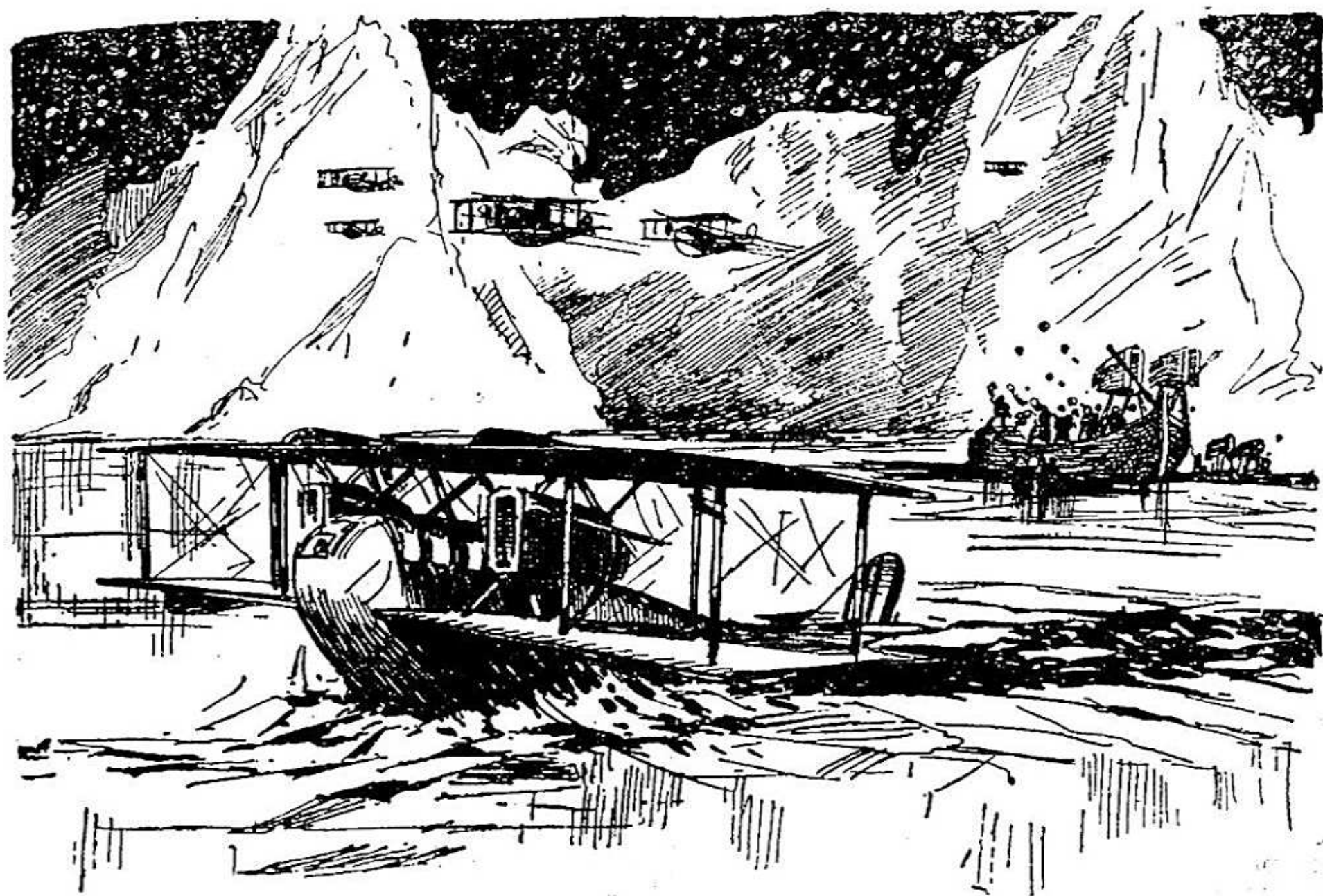
"But we can't sleep, sir!" protested Handforth.

"Not a wink, sir!" added several of the others.

"I know differently," replied Nelson Lee drily. "You think you won't be able to, but you will. After our recent experience, we all need a rest, and there's no hope of help coming yet. Even if the seaplanes started they must have turned back, for they could never hope to find us in a snowstorm like this. So get below, and turn in."

"The gov'nor's right," said Nipper, looking at the others. "We're all fagged out. How long is it since we had any sleep, anyhow? Over twenty-four hours! But there's been such a lot of excitement, what with the battle, and the journey through the tunnel, that we've been kept up by a false sort of energy. A good sleep will do us no harm, even if it's only for three or four hours."

The other fellows realised the truth of Nipper's words, and they soon began to discover that they were indeed fagged out.



There was a crackle of ice as the first seaplane landed. From the stranded boat came a volley of cheers, as those on board saw the other great 'planes swooping down—their rescue from the Arctic wastes was near at hand.

The tension was over now, and a reaction set in. As there was no prospect of rescue until the snowstorm abated, there was no reason for remaining awake.

And before half an hour had elapsed, nine-tenths of the party was slumbering heavily. Even Lee consented to take a nap. A few men were left on the watch, with orders to give a general call at the first sign of anything hopeful.

Nelson Lee only had an hour, and then he sent Lord Dorrimore down. He stood on deck, well wrapped up, more anxious than he knew. There could be no return now, for the pack-ice had probably jammed in the tunnel, and the entrance to the little Lost World was sealed. The adventurers had escaped, but there was no certainty of real freedom. Their fate would be appalling indeed if they were left here, in the grip of the unknown polar regions.

Nipper was the first of the juniors to awaken. All the fellows were sleeping in a kind of general dormitory, a part of the vessel's hold which had been rigged up for them by the Northeastrian carpenters. There were bunks all round, and every one was felled.

Nipper sat up and listened. Everything was still, except for the occasional tramp of feet overhead on deck. Nipper was heavy-eyed—an unusual condition for him, for he was generally very wide-awake at once. He

yawned, and got out of his bunk. Like all the others, he was fully dressed.

"Watch stopped!" he muttered as he pulled it out. "How long have we slept, I wonder? Feels like an hour—or two, at the most. Perhaps I'd better turn in again—Why, hallo, Dorrie!"

His lordship had appeared in the doorway. "Oh, you're not all dead, then?" asked Dorrie.

"Dead?"

"Well, you've slept long enough, you young sluggards," said his lordship, with a grin. "I've been down several times to have a look at you, but I was too soft-hearted to shake you up."

"How long have we been sleeping, then?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Oh, not long—only about twenty-eight hours!"

"Twenty-eight hours!" yelled Nipper. "You're joking!"

"Honest fact!" said Dorrie. "Of course, I'm not surprised, after all you went through. There you are—that yell of yours has awakened the others now! That means good-bye to our peace and quietness."

"Twenty-eight hours!" ejaculated Nipper. "Over a day and a night! But—but hasn't anything happened?"

"Nothin'—if you're referrin' to our bein' rescued," replied Lord Dorrimore. "But we're still livin' in hopes—an' the prospects are getting brighter every minute."



CHAPTER 13.

SUSPENSE I

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH sat up and blinked.

"I say, it's a pity you fellows can't go and jaw somewhere else!" he complained. "I haven't been to sleep for more than half an hour——"

"You fathead, we've all slept the clock round!" interrupted Nipper.

The juniors were startled into full wakefulness when they heard the surprising truth. Many thought that Lord Dorrimore was pulling their leg, but practically all of them discovered that their watches had stopped—a sure proof that they had slept the clock right round.

"What do you mean, Dorrie, about the prospects getting brighter?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Well, the weather's cleared, for one thing——"

His lordship wasn't allowed to get any further. There was a rush, and everybody crowded up on deck. Shouts of excitement went up, for there was now a vast change. The air was crystal clear, and, as bad as the visibility had been before, it was now good. It was not light—only a kind of semi-twilight pervaded the whole region.

Overhead the sky was dazzlingly brilliant, with many stars twinkling like miniature searchlights. One could see into the distance for miles, and on every hand there was a great, rolling vista of ice and snow. Hunks of it rose here and there, and the scene was startling in its vastness. All round the ship, however, the surface was different.

The effect of the submarine geyser was still apparent, although it was quite obvious that the phenomenon was losing power. The water was covered with thin ice, but so thin that a stone thrown upon it would have broken through. The air was freezing, but the water itself was still warmed by the hot flow from far beneath.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tommy Watson. "It's all clear now—not a breath of wind, or anything! But what about the seaplanes?"

"Any news, sir?" shouted several voices.

Nelson Lee was on deck, and the boys surged round him.

"Yes, there is some news," he replied. "Good news, on the whole."

"Oh!"

"Good news?" repeated Dorrie. "First I've heard——"

"It's only just come through," broke in Nelson Lee. "We've got the wireless going, boys, and although we've had some difficulty in getting messages over, we've succeeded at last. The naval seaplanes have started out to our rescue."

"Hurrah!"

"Then everything's all right, sir?"

"No, I won't say that," replied Nelson Lee. "We shall still be in a state of uncer-

tainty and suspense, for there can be no guarantee that this weather will last, or that the pilots will get to us. As before, we can only wait."

"But did the seaplanes set out when they promised, sir?"

"They set out, but turned back," replied Nelson Lee. "Blizzards were encountered, and two of the machines were disabled, although, fortunately, not until they got back to their base. The rest waited for clear weather, and have now started out on a second attempt."

"Oh, good egg!"

"How long will they take to get here, sir?"

"It is a great distance—not less than six hundred miles," replied Nelson Lee. "The naval authorities have established a hasty kind of base at the furthest possible point north—not far distant from Spitsbergen, I believe. The aeroplanes set out from this base an hour ago, and they are fast machines, capable of over a hundred miles an hour."

"So they'll be here in less than four hours!"

"Oh, my goodness! Is it possible?"

"Possible!" roared Handforth. "Of course it is! Six hundred miles is nothing to a modern aeroplane. What about the great world flights that have been made? We're as good as saved!"

"Let's give three cheers——"

"One moment, boys," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I hate to throw cold water on your enthusiasm, but you must not take too much notice of Handforth. A six hundred mile flight would be nothing in Europe—but this is a very different proposition. Although the weather is clear here, it may be snowing hard two hundred miles away. In fact, it is quite safe to assume that blizzards are raging in almost every point of the compass. These regions are treacherous, and we must not be too certain. Quite apart from the weather, we must remember that the pilots of these seaplanes have nothing to guide them except the compass. As they fly, there are no landmarks—no known spots to guide them. Moreover, they are flying in semi-darkness. Our single searchlight is the only beacon we can supply."

Nelson Lee's words had a very sobering effect. It seemed very easy to assume that rescue would come—but cold fact is a different thing from theory. It was quite on the cards that the searchers would encounter thick weather, would be taken from their course, and compelled to abandon the venture.

So it can be easily understood that those anxious watchers on the Spitfire kept their eyes turned to the sky—not seeking the coming aeroplanes, but looking for the first sign of a change in the clear weather. The weather, in all truth, would settle their fate. For even if it kept fine, and the aeroplanes arrived, the dash back to civilisation would in itself be fraught with doubt.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!**FIRST YARN OF A GREAT NEW SERIES!****"THE DELUGE AT ST. FRANK'S!"**

Flooded out!

That's the situation in which the Boys of St. Frank's find themselves next week!

They are cut off from everybody else by floods about ten feet deep.

There is a deluge, the bursting of a dam, and a whole heap of other excitement—as well as loads of fun!

This opening story of a tremendous new series of yarns is absolutely great. Make sure of reading it.

Another vivid instalment of our stirring new serial—

"THE BURIED WORLD!"

There are startling happenings in next week's rousing chapters.



LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER NEXT WEDNESDAY!

SPREAD THE NEWS!

The vast barrier range could be seen now, several miles distant. The glaciers rose upwards into the night sky like towering sentinels. Their summits were invisible, and in many places the mountains were like sheer precipices, rising for thousands of feet. What would be the fate of an aeroplane flying into them during thick weather?

The girls were out now, too, and they were equally amazed to find that they had slept for over twenty-four hours. And everybody was ravenously hungry. Their long sleep and the cold air were twin causes of this healthy appetite.

Although there was no possibility of the seaplanes appearing for several hours, the fellows rushed over their food, and got up on deck again at the earliest possible moment. They wanted to be the first to see those machines coming out of the sky to rescue them.

Until now they had not appreciated what real suspense meant. The time dragged amazingly. It seemed that hours had passed, and yet only a bare twenty minutes, perhaps, had actually elapsed. And so they kept talking, in groups, and watching the sky, and

consulting the time. And the weather, mercifully, remained clear.

There was not a breath of wind, and the visibility was of crystal clarity. The conditions, indeed, could not have been better for such a project. And hopes began to soar higher and higher as the hours dragged on. Four—five!

Five hours, and the seaplanes had started out an hour earlier. The suspense was becoming acute now. Those machines had been in the air for six hours—they were overdue! If they were coming, they might appear now at any moment. Every eye was watching.

But not a speck appeared in the dim sky. The scene was one of utter desolation, and as the hours had passed, so the cold had increased. Fellows spoke in hushed voices, as though afraid to talk aloud.

"They've missed us!" muttered Church, as he clutched at Handforth's arm. "Over six hours, and not a sign of them! They must have encountered a storm, and they've been blown out of their course!"

"Rats!" growled Handforth. "They'll come!"

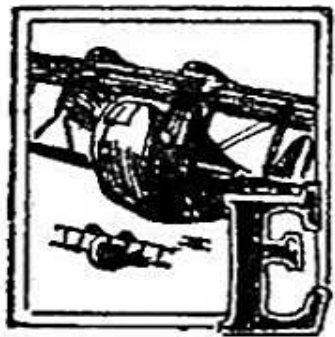
"But they ought to have been here——"
 "Never mind, that—I tell you they'll come," insisted Handforth.

But although he spoke confidently, his heart was growing heavy. The others were all silent. Six and a half hours! And still no indication! The searchlight was piercing up into the sky, as though mocking them. And the still, cold air was without a breath of wind. On every part of the decks the groups were standing, watching and waiting. The suspense was getting worse and worse every moment.

"Listen!" muttered Nipper suddenly. "Oh, listen!"

"What do you mean?" whispered Tommy Watson.

"Can't you hear it?" said Nipper, clutching his arm. "A kind of throb on the air! Listen! There it is again!"



CHAPTER 19.

OUT OF THE SKY!

EVERYBODY had heard Nipper's words, and all ears were strained.

"There's nothing!" said Church, with a gulp. "I can't hear a sound! It must have been your imagination, Dick! There's no throb——"

"There is—there is!" insisted Nipper tensely. "Can't you keep quiet? Listen, I tell you! I can hear it again——"

"By George!" gasped Handforth. "So can I!"

But the others listened in vain. They could hear one another's breathing, and an occasional creak from the old wooden ship. But out from the vast distances they heard nothing.

"Marvellous what the imagination can do!" muttered Dorrie.

"It was no imagination, old man," breathed Nelson Lee.

"Good glory! You mean——"

"Nipper's right—I heard the throb myself, distinctly," whispered Lee. "Hush, Dorrie! Now! Do you hear?"

Lord Dorrimore caught his breath in. Faintly, vaguely, a throb came to his ears—so indistinct that it seemed unreal. It faded, and then came back again in a sort of cycle. And this time it seemed to beat on the air. It was more of a sensation than an actual sound.

"They're coming!" yelled somebody hysterically.

"Hurrah!"

"It's the engines!"

A swift outburst, and then another tense silence. Nelson Lee, glancing at the faces round him, felt a little tug at his heart. What if the aeroplanes should miss them, after all? Such a thing was by no means impossible. Lee had seldom seen such poignant anxiety as he saw now on these strained faces.

"It's getting louder, sir!" said one of the officers.

"Yes, but they're miles away yet—twenty or thirty miles, I should say," replied Lee softly. "Sound carries an immense distance in this clear air. But we've made no mistake—this sound is caused by aeroplane engines."

"They're gettin' nearer, too," said Lord Dorrimore. "Just listen to that! Queer how the hummin' seems to sound in circles, as it were, and then reverses. I suppose it's caused by a number of engines together eh?"

Nobody answered him. The throbbing was now so pronounced that it filled the very air. It changed into a drone—a distant, continuous drone. It grew louder every second, but still there was no sight of anything in the sky. Lord Dorrimore had leapt down into the motor-boat, and was flashing the searchlight to and fro. He kept up the movement continuously, signalling the position.

"They're coming!" shouted Handforth. "There's no spoof about it, you chaps! Oh, my goodness! They can't miss us now—it's impossible! Why can't we see 'em?"

"They're miles off yet," said Nipper. "And we can't see anything in this semi-twilight. Oh, for a sight of good old sunshine!"

"Oh, for a real, honest rainstorm!" sighed Tommy Watson. "If I ever get back to England, I'll never go abroad again as long as I live!"

"Look!" yelled De Valerie excitedly. "Look! There's a light!"

"Where?"

"Over there—in the sky!" yelled Val. "Can't you see it? Two of them now! The seaplanes——"

"By jingo, yes!"

"Look! Lights in the sky!"

"Hurrah!"

"They've spotted our searchlight, and they're coming!"

"Three cheers for the Navy!" cried Irene.

Everybody felt like dancing madly. Indeed, many of the fellows capered round with frenzied joy. And Nelson Lee made no attempt to put a stop to this form of madness. He knew how the juniors had been tried, and this sudden relief had to find an outlet. Truth to tell, he rather felt like dancing himself.

"Thank Heaven, Dorrie!" he said fervently. "I was hoping for this all the time, but I dared not count too much on it. We're saved, old man—they'll be here in a minute."

"Good old Navy!" said Dorrie warmly.

Every doubt was set at rest. The lights in the sky were twinkling brightly now, and the drone from the engines of the seaplanes had turned into a low, musical roar. They were less than a mile away, and not more than a thousand feet up. And then, all of a sudden, it seemed, the machines were overhead.

"Six of 'em!" gasped Church. "Look at 'em wheeling round! Six whacking great

Service seaplanes! Oh, I've never seen anything so gorgeous in all my life!"

The six great seaplanes were flying in formation, and the leader wheeled round and shut off his engine. The others followed his example, and a moment later all the machines were planing gracefully down. Lord Dorrimore had turned his searchlight upon the great stretch of thin ice, for that open water had now frozen over.

The seaplanes were of the latest type—monster machines, each driven by two enormous engines. Their long, graceful bodies could distinctly be seen. They did not carry floats, but were boats in themselves—immense flying-boats.

"This means England again!" shouted Handforth joyously. "England, you chaps—within a week, too!"

"Good old St. Frank's!"

"Oh, crumbs! What a thought!"

"And blow Northestria and the Gothlanders, and all their giddy works!" went on Handforth. "We had some fine times there, but I want to get back to the old country! Look! They're coming down!"

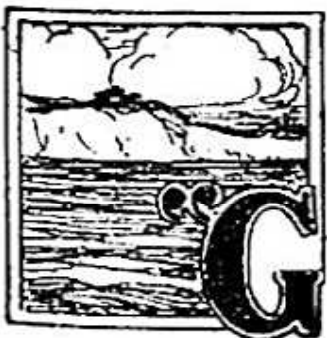
Every eye watched with intense interest. The seaplane pilots were cautious. Before venturing to land, they skimmed over the surface of that thin ice, taking close observations. Five of them opened up their engines again, and soared away in wide circles.

"They're careful, Dorrie, and I don't blame them," said Nelson Lee. "But they'll break through this ice easily and without damage. Once the leader has come down, the others'll soon follow."

Lord Dorrimore nodded. He had left his searchlight in charge of one of the other men, for he wanted to be on deck, to join in the general enthusiasm. And he gave a nod of satisfaction as the leading seaplane skimmed to the surface of the ice, and touched.

There was a tinkling crackle of the ice, and the graceful boat broke through, and a surge of water hissed up on either side. A minute later, the seaplane was swinging round, and taxiing towards the Spitfire. The other seaplanes came down, and within five minutes all of them had alighted.

The tension was over, and nobody had any voice left for cheering.



CHAPTER 20.

HOMEWARD BOUND!

"GOOD old Navy!"

A chorus went up as the first pilot came aboard. There had been considerable delay, but at last the motor-boat had forced itself free from the ice, and had fetched the pilot from the nearest seaplane.

"This is a happy moment for all of us, gentlemen," said the pilot, as he shook hands warmly with Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-

more. "All safe and sound, eh? Well, we've got plenty of room for you?"

"If it's a joyous moment for you, old man, you can imagine what it is for us," said Lord Dorrimore genially. "We're just dyin' to know how you managed it. Are you in charge of this squadron, by the way?"

"Well, in a way," replied the other. "I'm Commander Stanton, and—by Jove, Waring! How are you, Waring? Haven't seen you for months! Good man!"

"Why, it's dear old Stanton!" shouted Captain Waring joyously.

They clasped hands. Commander Stanton was a youngish man—clean-shaven, with a broad, humorous face. He was well wrapped up to protect him from the Arctic cold. As he looked round, his eyes were filled with mild astonishment.

"What kind of an old tub do you call this?" he asked. "I've seen a few queer craft in my time, but this beats everything!"

"She's a Northestrian ship," explained Lord Dorrimore.

"Northestrian, eh? We've heard all about your marvellous little world, gentlemen," said the commander. "Caused something of a sensation, too, I can assure you. I'd give anything to have a look into it."

"I'm afraid you're too late," said Nelson Lee. "The tunnel is sealed up again, and before long all this ice will be as thick and solid as the rest of the Arctic wastes. You might be able to get into the oasis at the end of another thirty years, but I even doubt that. Changes may occur in the glaciers by then, and I fear those lost races are eternally bottled up again."

"It seems like a yarn," declared Commander Fenton. "Too fantastic to be true, but I'm not presuming to doubt your word, to say nothing of the evidence of my own eyes. We're only too thankful to be here, and to carry you all back to safety. You'll leave all this stuff here, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm afraid we can't take it," replied Nelson Lee dryly. "Yes, we shall have to abandon everything—but that, after all, is a small matter. Our lives are safe, and nothing else matters much."

"We had a deuce of a job to get here," said the pilot. "We struck a storm half-way along, and were blown pretty well fifty miles out of our course. In fact, we were thinking of turning back when the air cleared, so we pressed on. We saw your searchlight nearly twenty miles away."

"Let us be thankful that you saw it at all," said Waring.

"It was only by chance at that!" replied the commander. "As a matter of fact, we were heading off in a westerly direction, and one of my pilots signalled. After that, of course, we came straight along. I don't like to hustle you, gentlemen, but the sooner we're off the better."

"We're entirely in your hands now, commander, and we'll obey any order," said Lee promptly. "I agree with you that there

must be no delay. The Arctic weather is too uncertain."

"That's a fact!" agreed the pilot. "I've done some difficult flying in my time, but this has been the worst." He gazed at the newly-disclosed water. "But this beats me!" he added. "I was wondering how on earth we could land; I didn't really believe that there could be water up here. What's the meaning of it? We're right in the ice zone."

"Submarine geyser," explained Dorrie. "The thing's cooling off, too, an' with the temperature somewhere near zero, your 'buses will all be frozen in unless you take off pretty quickly."

"We're going now, as soon as you're ready," said the commander.

And after that there was a great bustle for a full hour. The entire party was divided into six groups, and an equal number of passengers was placed on each seaplane. These giant flying boats were provided with ample accommodation, and they were by no means overloaded.

The Spitfire, the gondolas, and the motor-boat were abandoned to freeze in, and to be smothered slowly in the eternal ice. More than one member of that party felt a little pang of regret, but there was no help for it. Those craft had served them well, and their duty was done. To save them was out of the question.

But in the new excitement, the St. Frank's fellows soon forgot. On board the seaplanes they found new wonders. Every vessel was equipped with sleeping accommodation—not that it would be needed—and there was a plentiful supply of concentrated food, too. Handforth & Co. found themselves in one of the long cabins with Nipper and Tommy Watson and Archie Glenthorne. All the rest were distributed among the other machines—the girls having one which also accommodated Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-more.

And in the crisp air, the rescuing seaplanes took off—one after the other. The pilots knew only too well that any delay would be fatal. Once the ice formed again, the aircraft would never be able to rise. Even as it was, they experienced difficulties.

Heavily-laden, they skimmed over the ice-bestrewn water, and took off with only a meagre margin of safety. But as long as they got into the air, nothing else really mattered.

And then off they went—climbing higher and higher, and getting into formation. Gazing down from the cabin windows, Nipper looked rather regretfully at the deserted Spitfire.

"Good old tub, she brought us out of the oasis, anyhow," he said. "She's done her bit. One day, perhaps, explorers will find her, and wonder how she got there—"

"Talking about explorers, what happened to the poor chap that Dorrie set out to rescue?" asked Tommy Watson.

"Why, didn't you hear?" said Nipper. "He was found weeks ago—soon after we got lost in the oasis. He's safe, and we're homeward bound! Almost before we know where we are, we shall be back at St. Frank's!"

"Tea in Study D, eh?" said Handforth dreamily. "By George, and football! House rags, and all the rest of it! I haven't often longed to get back to school, but this time I'm just dying for it! Good old St. Frank's! Won't we have some fun this term?"

"Better than fighting the Gothlanders, eh?" said Church.

"I vote we forget the Gothlanders," growled Handforth. "The oasis is sealed up now, and as far as the world concerns, it doesn't exist. Let's talk about St. Frank's!"

And so they went on through the Arctic air—speeding homewards, with the throb of the giant engines sounding like music in their ears, and then, almost before they realised it, the base was reached. Real daylight came as they got farther southwards.

As for the journey back to England, little need be said. It was accomplished, at Nelson Lee's wish, by air. And well within a week the entire party had arrived home.

Then followed interviews with newspaper representatives, and hosts of other people who wanted to know more about the strange inhabitants of the Arctic oasis.

They were lionised and fêted out, while their photographs appeared in all the papers.

Every newspaper was filled with the record of the amazing exploit, and there were many joyous reunions when the St. Frank's fellows were welcomed by their anxious parents.

As for Northestria and the hidden oasis, the whole affair began to seem like a dream. Before that week was out, many of the juniors were dimly wondering if they had really passed through those stirring adventures. It seemed incredible that the mediæval land could really exist.

But it did exist, and now it was hemmed in again by the endless blizzards, and by the cruel ice of the Arctic. As far as the St. Frank's fellows were concerned, they were by no means anxious to make a return trip.

They were strong, healthy youngsters, and so were the Moor View girls. They all liked plenty of excitement and adventure—but it was the general opinion that they had had their full share of both!

And all their thoughts were now turned to St. Frank's again—to boxing and football, and similar matters of really vital importance!

THE END.

(Next Wednesday a stunning new series of St. Frank's stories begins. Don't miss the first yarn: "THE DELUGE AT ST. FRANK'S!" Order your NELSON LEE LIBRARY in advance!)



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. Letters which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer.
E. S. B.

BEFORE I acknowledge any of this week's letters, I want to thank Alan B. Bresnahan for his nice hand-painted Xmas Card, and also for the little booklet on "Steamboat Holidays on the River Murray." You've made me quite keen on a trip up the Murray, Alan, old son, but don't you think it's a bit too far out of the way for me? I mean, by the time I reached Australia, I expect I should be pretty well tired of ships for some time.

But I suspect Alan B. had a secret motive in sending that booklet of information. He, like lots of you other Australian readers, probably wants me to write a series of St. Frank's yarns, describing the adventures of Nipper & Co. in Australia. As I have never been lucky enough to visit the Antipodes, and as you Australian readers are so jolly critical, I have never plucked up enough courage to take my characters "Down Under." If I could be sure of lenient treatment (in case of minor errors) I might have a shot at it one of these days. But at present I hae ma doots. I expect I shall now get more information from you Aussies than I can cope with! Never mind. I haven't made any promises, have I?

Now, there are two questions from Kitty Lill to answer. She ought to have had these answers last week, but there wasn't sufficient room. 1. Why are the Moor View girls, Willy Handforth, William Napoleon Browne, and Horace Stevens not in the "MONSTER LIBRARY"? That's easy. Because none of these characters had been introduced into the St. Frank's stories at that particular period. Don't you realise, Kitty Lill, that the yarns in the "MONSTER" deal exclusively with Nipper & Co.'s earlier adventures? And thus your second question is answered. Why does Nipper write the "MONSTER"? Because at that time he was personally recording the adventures. Since then he has dropped it.

Now for this week's letters: Leslie Richards (Margate), Douglas L. White (Greenhithe), Len. G. Waterman (Chingford), Robert Mant (Ilford), Guy Cartwright (Wimbledon), E. Andrews (Penge), Nipper III (Fulham), H. Knibb (Bath), G. L. A. D. (Folkestone), Rene Martin (Balham), Paolo Zuccarelli (E. Grinstead), Charles Daniel (Worcester), Reginald James Lock (Gunnislake), P. F. F. Fairclough (Liverpool), A. H. Griffin* (Southampton), George Mackenzie (Burghead), R. Burnett (Southport), F. Jones (Walthamstow), J. S. Ricketts (Hayle), H. G. (W.I.), Fred. J. Potter (Biggleswade), W. Holmes (Glasgow), George Bacon (Lambeth), Robert Hamilton (Saltecoats), R. H. W. (Abingdon), Michael O'Brien (Limerick), H. Hocks (Westminster), Gordon E.

Raulence (Bath), Miss L. Cotter (W.I.), David James Benjamin (Sydney).

Some of you fellows seem to think that the N.L.L. is a newspaper, and you expect a reply within a week of writing. Of course, that can't be done. As I have many times said before, Our Paper goes to press several weeks in advance of publication date. So if any of you write, in response to my printed invitation above, you mustn't expect an acknowledgment right away. You'll notice, too, that I suggest that you should indicate your age. The fact is, it often happens that I don't know whether my correspondents are small, middling or big, and I am even in a fog occasionally as to whether they are masculine or feminine. And it is so helpful if I can obtain a mental picture of those who write to me.

Talking of pictures, I hope you don't imagine, by any mischance, that the stiff-looking gentleman sitting between a paste-pot and some bulky volumes, portrayed at the top of this page, is supposed to be me. Well, it is supposed to be me, I imagine, but don't take it as a portrait. Don't let your mental picture of me take that shape. Lots of you have asked for my photograph, but you don't know what risks you are taking. However, since you have asked for trouble, I feel inclined to let you have it. If any of you are still misguided enough to want my photograph, I'll send you an autographed one, free, gratis and for nothing in return for one of yours. Many of you have already sent me one, and the more who send, the better I shall be pleased. So let's be really chummy, and make an exchange of it. You'll have the worst of it everytime, so I should worry!

So you want me to wedge in a bit more of Tom Burton, do you, Douglas L. White? I'll try to, but so many of you want these minor characters of mine featured in different ways. I can only promise to bring Tom Burton in occasionally.

If you want to arrange Football Matches, for your team, Robert Mant, join the St. Frank's League, and then put your request to the Chief Officer. He'll deal with it. It might be a good idea for you to play teams that consist only of League members. But that is for the Chief Officer to arrange, after you have done your part.

Edwy Searles Brooks

Our Magazine Corner.

THE KLONDYKE

All about that Romantic and Adventurous Region where Poor Men have Become Rich in a Single Day.

The Far, Far North.

THE northern end of the Rocky Mountains separates the basin of the Mackenzie River from that of the Yukon, whose upper waters are in Canada.

It was here that many years ago great quantities of gold were found. And the place has been organised as a separate territory under the name of Yukon.

This vast stretch of land has provided a most fascinating chapter in the annals of adventure. It is a land of huge mountains and wide lakes, of glaciers, and roaring torrents.

There are tremendous, far-stretching forests of fir and pine. Trackless wastes of moor and swamp turn during the greater part of the year into an unbroken surface of snow. Wild and fierce animals abound.

The climate of this vast region is such as might dismay the heart of the stoutest adventurer. In winter it is of the greatest severity. In the summer, which is of short duration, great clouds of mosquitoes and gnats assail the traveller by day and night.

The Great Gold Rush.

This desolate tract of land was almost unknown up to the end of last century. A little gold had been discovered there, but the prospect of successful mining seemed very unlikely.

Then in 1897 began the great Klondyke boom. The Klondyke is the name of a tributary of the Yukon River.

At once a tremendous rush began from both Canada and the surrounding American "diggings." Many of the new-comers were "tenderfeet" or "Chee-chacoos," as they were called in the slang term. Many of these men, though quite inexperienced in mining, had extraordinary luck.

The conditions under which these first adventurers worked were, of course, appalling. Horses could not live in the cold climate, and reindeer had not yet been introduced.

The only animals that could be used were dogs, which were fastened to sledges.

A Land of Peril.

Even when all perils were averted and the hardy adventurers arrived at last at their destination, the conditions were terrible. The first thing to do was to get some kind of dwelling. One can easily imagine that it was not easy to build a house in those desolate wilds.

They would, therefore, have to run up some kind of hut. The greatest difficulty was found in trying to keep warm. And the raging blizzards that swept the valleys were

liable at any moment to blow down one's scanty lodging.

As to the intensity of the cold, it was said that men had to shave off their beards, otherwise their beards would freeze during the night to their bedclothes!

Water, too, for most of the year could only be got by thawing the ice and drinking it before it froze again.

Toiling Through the Winter.

It was not everyone who could make a "grub-stake," that is, enough to live on, always hoping for a "home-stake" which would allow him to return home rich. Many a poor fellow "pegged out" in the hard, snow-bound land. But occasionally a tender-foot would strike gold at once, and in a day he would become a wealthy man.

Yet those that remained went on. And their number was increased every day by others anxious for the sight of gold. Through the long winter they toiled at loosening the surface of ice-mud felted with tough moss. And after the top layer had been torn away they could thaw out the ground by means of great fires.

As time progressed the original camps of the miners turned into huge towns. Other kinds of men were attracted. Rogues, swindlers, and toughs of every description arrived to prey upon the toilers.

Gambling dens, saloons and dance halls sprang up on all sides. But with them arrived other amenities of civilisation. Churches were built, and schools for the children. And with all their faults, the miners were mostly honest.

The Canadian Mounted Police soon arrived on the scene, and the carrying of firearms was forbidden. The arrival of the police was at first resented. But in time the miners saw that police protection was for their own good.

Native Tribes.

Besides the snow and the wild beasts, there were other dangers for the early adventurers.

White men were not always welcomed by the Eskimo tribes. Far from it. The natural greed of the Eskimos constituted a perpetual menace to the traveller.

Besides the Eskimos there was also a hostile Red Indian population. Bands of nomad Redskins wandered from one place to another, often robbing and killing.

Altogether the Klondyke, though a much duller place to-day than in the early days, is very much more healthy for those who are caught by the lure of gold.

This Powerful New Serial Starts To-day!

THE BURIED WORLD!

By LIONEL DAY



**GET GOING ON THE FIRST EXCITING CHAPTERS OF OUR
GREAT NEW ADVENTURE YARN!**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

THE SECRET OF WIDGERY DENE.

JIM MAITLAND sat curled up luxuriously in front of the kitchen fire immersed in the book he was reading. After the Latin and mathematical works in which he had kept his nose steadily for the past year, it was a great relief to read a good rattling adventure story again; for the nightmare of the London Matric was over now, and the grammar school, where he had won a scholarship, had allowed him two days' holiday.

From the little shop, with which the kitchen sitting-room communicated, came his mother's voice talking to a customer.

"He ought to be locked up—that's what he ought to be, Mrs. Maitland," the customer was exclaiming in indignant tones. "He's just a swindler! They say he's never paid a single shilling of rent for Widgery Dene since he's been there. And the money he owes about the place runs into hundreds!"

Jim Maitland let his attention wander from the exciting episode he was reading to the discussion going on in the jolly little shop, with its bow bottle-glass windows, and its pleasant smell of bacon and tea and spices and sweets.

"It's a shame, that's what it is," his mother's voice retorted. "I suppose I've got to consider myself one of the lucky ones. He only owes me a matter of sixteen shillings odd!"

"Lor, Mrs. Maitland, you been robbed too? I thought you were the only shopkeeper in the place that hadn't been caught."

"He came in, a matter of two months ago. I was just getting Jim's dinner ready at the time. He banged on the counter so loudly that I dropped what I was doing and ran into the shop, thinking maybe it was a fire. And there he was standing with that big bushy beard of his, and that funny look in his eyes, that made me think he was mad."

"Got any tinned meat and eggs?" he snapped at me—just like that! Luckily for me I only had three tinned tongues in the shop and two dozen eggs. He told me he would take the lot. I made a parcel of them and handed them over the counter, of course, expecting that he would pay. He just snatched up the parcel. 'Put it down to Mr. Stanislaus Cripps, of Widgery Dene,' he says, glaring at me, and then without another word stamps out of the shop."

"He's just a swindler, that's what he is, Mrs. Maitland. And what's he doing up at Widgery Dene? That's what everybody wants to know. He surrounded the place with them twelve foot wire-meshed railings—must have cost him hundreds of pounds if he ever paid for them—and nobody's had a look inside the place since he's been there. It's a fair sight up at Widgery during the day time, they tell me, with solicitors' clerks walking round trying to serve him with summonses, and all the tradesmen in the place hanging about hoping to get speech with him."

The customer's voice sank to a nervous whisper as if she were embarking on a ghost story.

"And at night, Mrs. Maitland! I don't know whether you've ever seen it, but sometimes there's great sheets of flame go up quite sudden, and there's always such a clanging and knocking. Some of the old folks say it's witchcraft, but, of course I don't hold with those sort of stories these days——"

"Whatever he's up to, I wish he'd pay my account," Mrs. Maitland exclaimed. "I can't afford to have folk robbing me like that."

Jim heard the tinkle of the bell attached to the door as the customer passed out into the street. He sprang to his feet and entered the shop.

"What's this about Mr. Stanislaus Cripps, mother?" he exclaimed.

Jim was tall for his age, and as he stood there with his firm set jaw and his handsome face, it was clear to see that he regarded himself as his mother's protector. Mrs. Maitland smiled up at him with pride in her eyes.

"He owes me an account for sixteen and five-pence halfpenny, Jim, and from what I hear there doesn't seem much chance of my ever being paid."

Jim slipped one arm about his mother's waist.

"If you think I'm going to let you be swindled, mother, when I'm about, you're jolly well mistaken. Give me the account and I'll take it up on my bicycle to Widgery Dene."

"But everybody in the place is trying to get money out of him, Jim, and there's whole hosts of tradesmen from London wanting their money as well. He'd never give you a chance of seeing him."

But Jim was not to be deterred from the plan he had formed.

The fact that the task he had set himself might be a difficult one only whetted his determination. Since his father's death, two years before, he was the only man in the house, and it was his duty to stand by his mother and see that she wasn't imposed upon by such people as this swindler up at Widgery Dene. Ten minutes later, with the account in his breast pocket, he was pedalling his bicycle out of Stagmore.

Widgery Dene stood in a fold of the hills four miles away—very fertile farming land, but one of the loneliest spots in the county. As Jim turned the corner of the street and plunged into the darkness of the country road, he glimpsed for a moment out of the corner of his eye the lighted bow window of his mother's shop. Little did he dream of all that was to happen to him before he saw those lights of home again. It was a stiff climb; but with his head over the handlebars, he pushed his machine steadily up hill. In half an hour, very hot and breathless, he halted on the outskirts of Widgery Dene.

There was the old farm house. A mass of shadow without one single light burning in any of its windows. Jim peered at it through the bars of the great iron gate which he found to be locked. A stillness as of death seemed to brood over the place. For the first time he was conscious of a certain eerie sensation as if cold water were trickling down his back. It was so dark and the old house looked so ghostly.

He pulled himself together with an effort. He had come there to protect his mother's interests. It was up to him to see that she wasn't swindled.

He tried to climb the gates, only to find that a fringe of ingenious spikes at the top made it absolutely impossible. But there must be other ways of getting into the premises and obtaining his interview with Mr. Stanislaus Cripps. He began to walk along the wire-meshed railings that had been erected in sections all round the property. They were twelve feet high and they were protected, like the gates, by spikes. To

climb over them was impossible. But he was not going to give up the task he had set himself. There must be a way of getting into Widgery Dene.

Beyond the fence was a belt of beech trees, some two hundred feet wide, which completely shielded the farm from observation. He had covered nearly a mile in his vain search for an opening in these defences when suddenly he halted. Just above his head a branch of one of the beech trees thrust itself out over the top of the fence. Near the fence itself it was well beyond his reach, but farther away it drooped to within six feet of the ground. A look of excitement crept into Jim's eyes as he made his way to the spot immediately under this extremity. Bending a moment, he sprang upwards and caught the thin end of the branch. It nearly broke in his fingers. Very gingerly he worked his hands along until they gripped a stouter portion of the branch. The flexible piece of timber swung upwards as he jumped from the ground, and the next instant he was moving hand over hand towards the railings, suspended between Heaven and earth. A shove with his foot on one of the spikes, and he was over the top of the fence. The next instant his arms were about the trunk of the tree and he had slipped to the ground.

He was inside Widgery Dene; he had accomplished the task which had defied all the duns and solicitors and clerks who had been besieging the place for weeks. Now all he had to do was to find Mr. Stanislaus Cripps himself.

It was very dark in that belt of beech trees, and he was conscious again of a cold shiver running up and down his spine. He must not stay there, he told himself, letting himself be frightened. He was going to get that sixteen and five-pence halfpenny. With his heart beating a little irregularly, he groped his way through the belt of beech trees. Now for the first time he saw the great forty-acre meadow which formed part of the farm. It stretched there before him, a beautiful level expanse of grass land. Faint wisps of mist were rising from the ground shrouding everything in a delicate mysterious beauty. He glanced to his left, intending to take his direction to the house, but even as he did so a little breath of wind tore that veil of vapour, and opened up before his eyes something which made his hair stand on end and the blood suddenly turn to ice in his veins.

It was something the like of which he had never seen before. Something so unfamiliar, so utterly unexpected, that for a moment panic seized upon him, and every instinct he possessed called on him to turn and run. Only his dogged will and courage kept him standing there, with every nerve and muscle tense.

What was it, he asked himself, as he heard the blood pounding in his ears? It was like some great balloon used on an airship, and yet it wasn't a balloon. It lay there on the grass a thing of shimmering silver. It was quite two hundred yards long. At its centre it bellied out enormously, standing quite three hundred feet high, but so beautifully was it constructed, so finely had it been tapered down to what looked like needle-points at either end, that the vastness of its bulk did not immediately dawn on Jim's senses.

He stood there petrified, staring at this amazing object which for all its size, seemed to lie upon the grass like a bubble. He became conscious of another object, looking absurdly small moving just below the centre of the structure. It was a man, and he had no need to be told that that man was Mr. Stanislaus Cripps. The sight of him had an instant effect upon Jim. He forgot the eerie terrors by which he had been possessed. He remembered only the object which had brought him there. One hand went to the breast pocket of his coat where he had placed that

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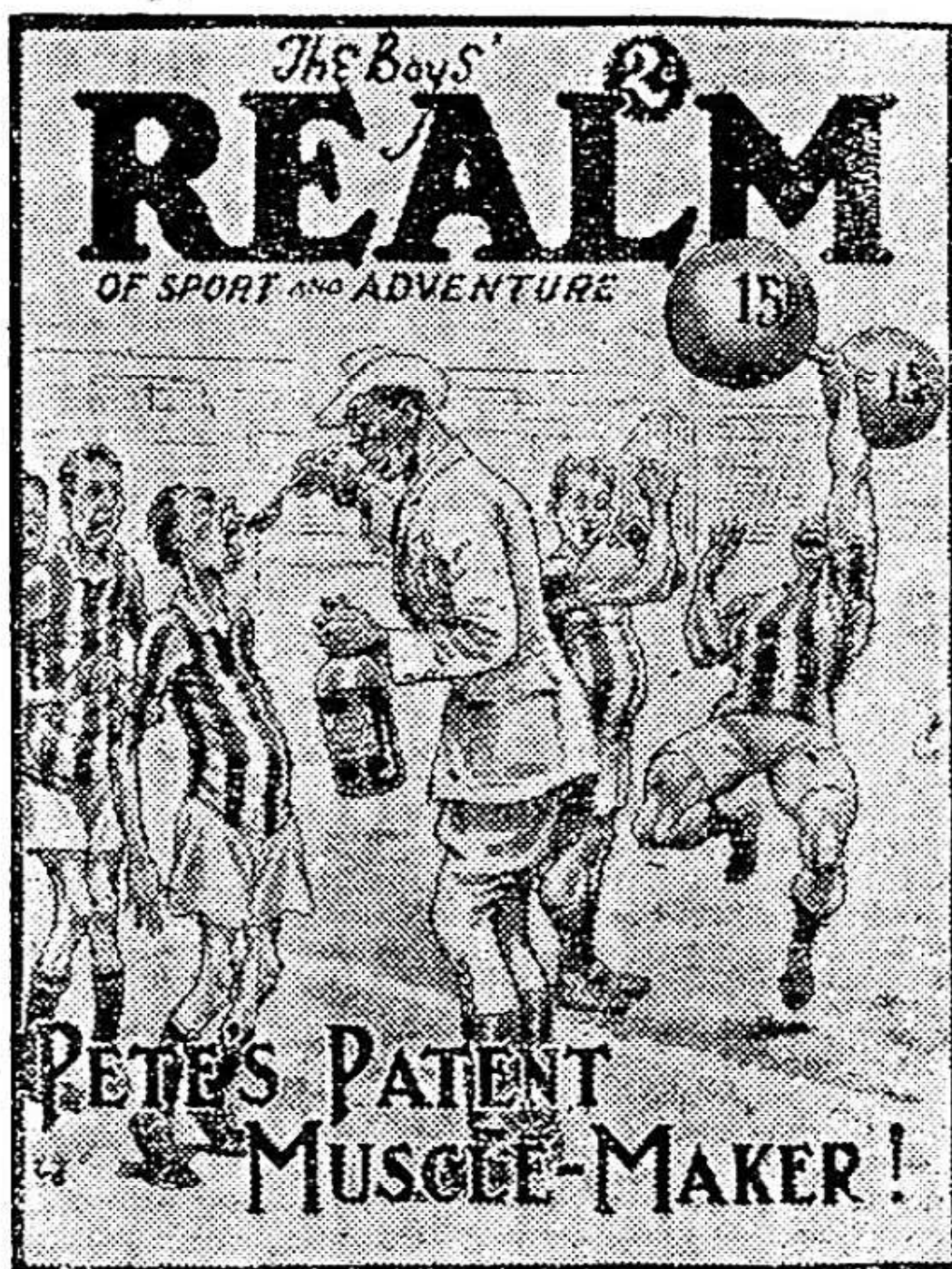
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account for sixteen and fivepence-halfpenny. He was going to have that money out of Mr. Stanislaus Cripps.

He began to walk rather timidly across the grass, but as he drew nearer that vast glittering structure his coolness returned. He kept his eyes fixed upon Mr. Stanislaus Cripps. Now he could see that the man was loading a number of cases through an aperture in the shimmering structure. It was a kind of door he saw as he approached to within a few yards. So busily was the man occupied that he never heard the boy's footsteps on the grass. Jim came right up behind him as he was thrusting the last case through the doorway. He was pausing to wipe his forehead with his handkerchief, as if exhausted with the effort he had been making, when Jim touched him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir, but this is a little account of my mother's that I should be glad if you would settle as it's been owing for a long time."

Never was Jim to forget his first sight of Mr. Stanislaus Cripps' face as he turned swiftly. He glimpsed a fiery red beard that had been so long untrimmed that it hung in a cascade over his abnormally broad shoulders; he saw a row of great yellow fangs as the man's lips opened in an animal-like snarl. He found himself looking into a pair of bloodshot eyes aglow with an almost demoniac fury. And then the next

moment a great hand shot out, palm open, and he was lying on his back in the grass.

"Boy, do you think I will allow a paltry account to stand between me and my destiny? Away, you tradesman's huckster! Go back to those who sent you, and tell them that it should be their pride and privilege to support Stanislaus Cripps."

The voice was the loudest voice Jim ever remembered to have heard. It was like the bellow of a bull. He scrambled to his feet, half dazed. The man had not used his fist but had simply pushed him down with the flat of his hand.

"You've got to pay the sixteen and fivepence halfpenny you owe mother. I'm not going to see her cheated by a common swindler."

Mr. Cripps' only reply was to thrust out that great hand again and push him back on the ground. But though he was shaken by the violence of this second fall, Jim's blood was up now. He twisted, and crawling on all fours tried to clasp his hands about the man's ankles. Even as he did so he heard a bellowing laugh and was just in time to see Stanislaus Cripps slip through the aperture in that mysterious gleaming structure. It flashed into Jim's mind then that the man intended to secrete himself in the interior of that huge silvery hulk, and so avoid the payment of his just dues. He did the only thing he could think of. If the man was

going in there, he would go in after him. With a spring he caught the edge of that aperture with his fingers—it was curiously cold and metallic to his touch—and pulling himself up stumbled head foremost into the dark interior. Even as he did so he heard a click, and looking round he was just in time to see a little square of grey light diminish and vanish. The door had closed.

But he was inside—and inside with Mr. Stanislaus Cripps, and he took courage from that fact. But where was Mr. Stanislaus Cripps? All about him was impenetrable blackness. He stood still and listened, not daring to move from the spot where he had fallen. Faintly there came to his ears the sound of footsteps above him. He groped with his hands in the darkness. His fingers touched something which he presently found to be the first step of a flight of stairs. Very gingerly he drew himself to his feet.

And at that moment the darkness about him vanished in a blaze of light. He could see above him a ceiling constructed of that same silvery material as the outside of this mysterious contrivance. The floor all about him was piled with barrels and cases. So much he glimpsed, and then turned his attention to the stairs at the foot of which he was standing. They led upwards in a spiral. Somewhere above there was Mr. Stanislaus Cripps. He must follow him. He began to climb the stairs. They ascended unendingly, so it seemed to him, passing from one floor to another. Some of these floors were divided into compartments opening out of a corridor. But he paid little attention to his surroundings in his determination to find his mother's defaulting creditor. He must have ascended nearly three hundred feet, he reflected, when the spiral stairs came to an abrupt end in an apartment some twenty feet square. As his eyes came to a level with the floor, he was able to see Stanislaus Cripps who was standing in front of a curious switchboard arrangement, that Jim thought might be some kind of wireless set. On his right were a number of dials, the hands of which were slowly revolving. On the other side were several levers.

All the savagery—all the demoniac rage had vanished from his face now. He stood there staring at those dials and smiling, and despite the red wildness of his beard and the tangled disorder of his hair, that smile made his face almost pleasant. Jim nerved himself for the struggle which he realised was approaching. Still standing on the stairs—for they afforded a ready line of retreat in the event of Mr. Cripps showing any more violence—he broke in upon the other's strange reverie.

"I'm still waiting for that sixteen and five-pence halfpenny you owe mother."

Stanislaus Cripps seemed to drag his eyes away from the faces of those mysterious dials with difficulty and to direct them on the boy.

"Boy," he exclaimed. "Boy! You here still, with your impertinent requests and impudent demands. Why, I left you on the grass in Forty Acre Meadow."

There was no anger in his voice—Jim noticed that at once and took courage.

"If you thought I was going to leave you until I'd got the money you owe mother, you were mistaken, sir," he exclaimed boldly. "You'd better let me have it and then I won't bother you any more."

Stanislaus Cripps made a sudden scooping movement of his arm like someone catching a fly, and before Jim could duck he was caught, lifted off his feet, and dragged into the room.

"Do you know where you are, boy?" Stanislaus Cripps demanded, looking down into his face.

"I'm in Widgery Dene, and I'm waiting for the money you owe mother."

The man grinned, and then as if he had been

the handle of a tap, turned Jim about with one twist of his powerful hands.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed.

"That" was the top of a table covered with a white substance and illuminated in some mysterious way by a curious apparatus in the ceiling. Over this white surface there streamed a series of shadows which for a moment Jim was unable to comprehend.

"Well?" said the voice of Stanislaus Cripps. "Are you so ignorant, boy—has your disgusting tradesman's life so blunted your intelligence—that you do not comprehend what is written so plainly there?"

Jim flushed. It was very annoying to be spoken to like that, especially when he was a grammar school scholar and had done so well in the London Matric.

"It looks like a very bad cinema picture of the land taken from an aeroplane," he exclaimed.

It had dawned upon him suddenly what it was like. In that stream of shadows that was passing across the surface, he could distinguish woods and hills and valleys, that rushed by in a never-ending flow.

"Not so very bad, boy! But you aren't looking at a film reproduction; you're looking at the real thing. That is the earth over which we are passing at a height of two thousand feet."

Jim twisted round and stared up at him, lips agape. The man, as if reading the unspoken question in his eyes, grinned.

"Remember, boy, I never asked you to come. You're a stowaway. I ought by rights to drop you overboard and thereby rob the world of some future greedy grocer. But I won't—not just yet anyway. Now you are here, you must stay. There can be no putting back for the convenience of an insignificant trifle like you. I am bound on a voyage such as no other man has ever undertaken. At this moment we are travelling at three hundred and fifty miles an hour. Before another dawn breaks, we shall be three thousand miles away from Widgery Dene."

Jim could only stare back at him dazedly.

"This big silvery thing, sir, is it an airship?" he stammered.

Stanislaus Cripps laughed aloud.

"An air ship, a frail futile thing made of silk and filled with explosive gas. No, boy—this is a vessel which I built myself, capable not only of navigating the air, but of plunging down into the very deepest depths of the ocean. This is the greatest invention of the age—the Flying Submarine."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

BOUND FOR THE PACIFIC.

STANISLAUS CRIPPS, in spite of the fact that he had been addressing Jim in the most contemptuous terms, began now of a sudden to speak to him as if he were an audience at a scientific lecture. For the better part of an hour he talked like one who had been bottled up for months, and at last finds himself free to explode. Much of what was said was beyond Jim's comprehension, but here and there he managed to gather a few facts.

The Flying Submarine was constructed of a metal, composite in its character, which Stanislaus Cripps had invented. The property of this metal was that it was harder than steel, and yet was of a specific gravity less than that of the air.

"I found it months and months ago. The secret is mine and it shall die with me. I have no intention of having it exploited by financiers."

As far as he could understand—for not only his explosive method of talking but his occasional use of very long scientific words made it more than difficult to understand—Jim gathered that

The basis of this peculiar metal that was stronger than steel but lighter than air, was a certain kind of clay deposit that was found in very few places. Widgery Dene happened to be one of those places. Jim gathered that Stanislaus Cripps, though quite penniless, was not to be deterred from the development of his invention by lack of funds. By the same combination of bluff and bluster that had secured the tinned meats and the eggs from Mrs. Maitland's shop, he had obtained the lease of the premises without paying a farthing. He was going to allow no one else to handle his invention and make money out of it. For two years he had lived at Widgery Dene on credit, ruthlessly robbing every tradesman he could find, running up enormous bills everywhere and all the time working on his invention. He gloried in his dishonesty.

"I have made the world pay toll to my genius, boy!" he said. "Now, at last, my work is completed. To-night I am flying over the world at a speed never yet dreamed of. To-morrow I will sink to the bottom of the ocean."

Still, as if Jim was the audience at a scientific lecture, he began to explain the use of the apparatus by which he was surrounded.

"This controls the engine," he remarked, touching a switch. "Its motor power is derived from the combination of two chemicals which produce a high explosive gas. This communicates with the air reservoirs, which occupy seven-eighths of the whole space of the ship."

He launched out into technical details. Jim, listening with all his ears, gathered in a general way that the buoyancy of the ship was effected by the simple process of emptying the air reservoirs. The casing of the ship being lighter than air, the huge structure immediately displaced an amount of air greater than its own weight and, by the same law that makes a vessel float in water, caused the Flying Submarine to ascend to any desired height.

"If I create a perfect vacuum in the reservoirs, the vessel should ascend to the very confines of the atmosphere, and there float like a boat on the surface of the sea. Only one crude invention have I borrowed from the clumsy aeronauts of to-day. My ship is driven through the air by a propeller in the bows."

He stuck both his thumbs in the frayed arm-holes of his waistcoat and threw out his great chest.

"As I have attempted to explain to you in the few remarks I have made, my vessel is in essence a flying submarine. We descend to the surface of the water, and then plunge beneath it. The air-reservoirs that give us our buoyancy when we wish to fly are then filled with water.

The enormous strength of this metal I have invented enables me to subject those reservoirs to great pressure and so to sink to what depth I wish. We will now, with your permission, inspect the engine-room—one minute, though!"

He glanced at the white surface of the table over which those shadows were still streaming—the mirrored picture of the world over which they were flying.

"Look, we are just clearing the coast of Brittany. There is the Bay. By to-morrow we shall have touched South America. By the day after we shall have begun our great exploration of the submerged continent that lies hidden beneath the waters of the Pacific."

For the first time since this amazing lecture had begun, it ceased to hold and rivet Jim's attention. He thought of his mother waiting for him in the little kitchen sitting-room behind the shop, and the supper she would have prepared for him.

"But I don't want to go to the Pacific. I only came to get the money you owed mother. You have no right to take me out of the country."

Stanislaus Cripps stared at him with eyes that seemed to look right through him without seeing him. He was still the scientific lecturer addressing an audience.

"We will now, with your permission, pass to an inspection of the engine room. Perhaps you will have the goodness to step this way?"

Without waiting for Jim he bolted down the staircase. For a moment the boy stood irresolute. If only he had understood enough of what had been told him to turn the ship about and make for home again!

As the thought of that flashed into his head Jim found his hand straying towards one of the levers. Could he risk it? As he stood there irresolute he heard heavy footsteps. Cripps was returning. His chance would be gone for ever in a matter of moments. And as that idea printed itself on his brain his hand touched the lever!

The result was startling! At once the whole ship gave a violent lurch. Then it started to drop earthwards like a stone. At the same moment Cripps came stumbling into the room.

"Great heavens!" he roared. "What has happened? We are dashing headlong to destruction!"

(What will happen now? Has Jim sent the vessel to its doom, or is there a chance for him to escape? Next week's great chapters will tell you. Make sure of your copy of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY by ordering now!)

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ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 65.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

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SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.) hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me..... (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

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THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE

THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT

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This is Definite.

Next week full details of the Silver Medals will be given in this feature—a matter of great interest to all members who have qualified for this award. I know this bit of news will be received with acclamation. Look out for next week. The Silver Medal marks a new and noteworthy advance in the history of the S.F.L.

Edge Hill S.F. Club.

P. Young, 122a, Wavertree Road, Edge Hill, Liverpool, is good enough to send me particulars of this club. It has set an example worth following. The list of rules is excellent. I should like to print the lot, but space forbids. The rules are all right, and the sub is small—sixpence per week, which goes to games and incidental expenses. The balance sheet is most satisfactory. Congrats to President Young and his efficient helpers.

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Calling the Tune.

Here is a bit of a problem, but, like pretty well every difficulty, it can be settled by a dash of the co-partnership spirit. It concerns a club started in a Midland town. One fellow showed himself most keen, and as cash is plentiful his way, he usually footed the bill. Now a certain amount of jealousy has sprung up, as it was bound to do. One or two of the forward spirits don't care about being ruled, but the fellow with the "rod" sticks to it that as he pays the piper he select the tune. The mistake is to let the finances of a club to rest on the shoulders of one member. There must be a balance. I think the fellow with the long pipe should realise this, also that his chief endeavour, by a whip-round, to share of the expenses.

Back Numbers.

For weeks past I have received requests about the old copies of the "N.L.L." Readers tell me they want to revive old Nipper memories. My answer to them is: Read the "Monster." There you will find most of the popular series republished in complete volume form.

CORRESPONDENCE.

A. J. Southway, Beaulieu, Queen's Road, Farnborough, Hampshire, wishes to hear from any reader who is interested in autographs, also from readers overseas.

Jack H. Watts, 135, Pasadena Avenue, Highland Park, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A., wishes to correspond with readers about sports.

J. Balchin, 80, Winn's Avenue, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wishes to correspond with members in his district who would like to join his football club.

Thos. G. Mercer, 1, Sweden Grove, Waterloo, nr. Liverpool, would be glad to hear from readers.

Harold G. Dell, Field View, Parsonage Barn Lane, Hampshire, desires members for his club and readers for his magazine.

F. Nash, c/o the Point Tobacco Stores, 6, Maryland Point Station, Stratford, London, E.11, wishes to correspond with readers.

Edge Hill, Liverpool, wishes to hear from members who are willing to join his club.

H. Meek, 9, Fitzhamon Embankment, Riverside, Cardiff, would like to hear from League members and readers so as to form a club. A large, well-equipped headquarters is ready.

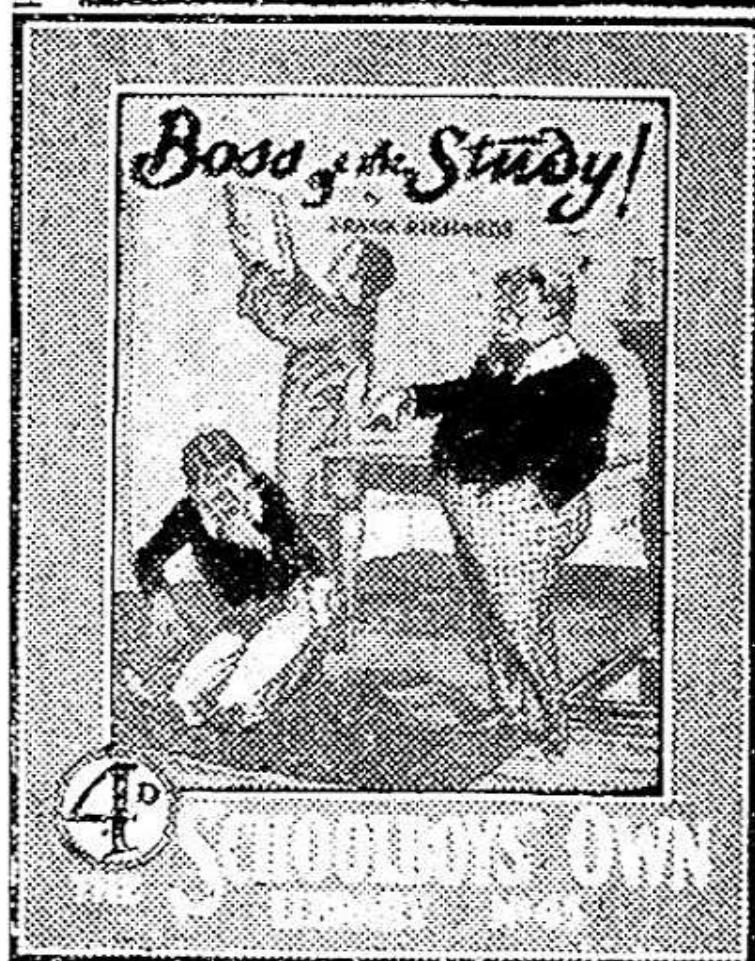
G. Goodwill, 2, Mansfield Street, Portland Place, London, W.1, wishes to correspond with readers and to buy back numbers of the "N.L.L."

M. L. Newman, 28, Westside Road,

Town, London, N.W.5, wishes to hear from readers interested in amateur journalism with a view to starting a magazine.

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