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New Series No. 62.

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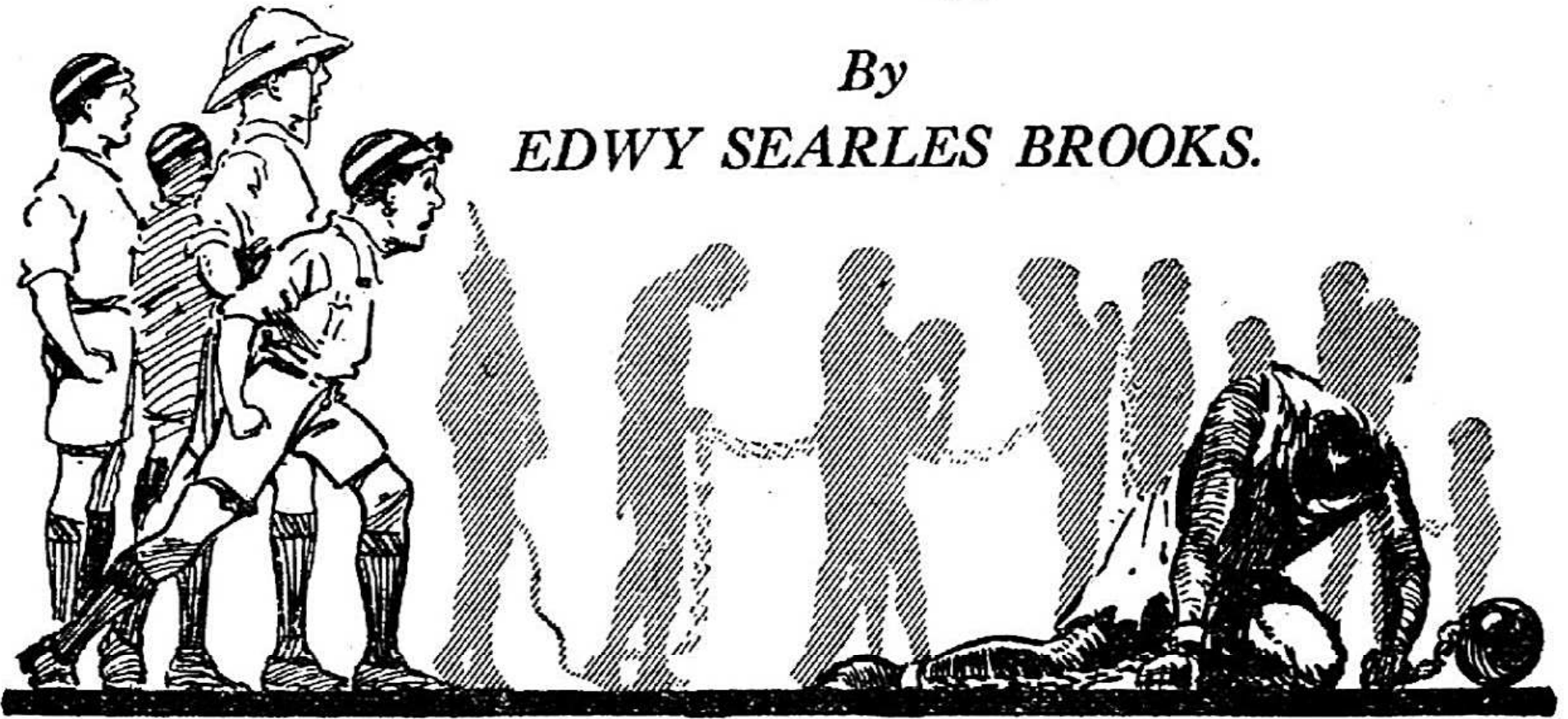
Handforth started to dash away, but the lion saw his movement, crouched, and then made its spring. There was something so awful in that spring that Handy's muscles seemed to petrify. He found it impossible to move; the whole sky seemed to be filled with that tremendous fawn-coloured body. And then, just when it seemed that the reckless junior was doomed to a terrible death, Dorrie pressed the trigger of his rifle.

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THE CONGO QUEST!

By

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.



A long complete full-of-thrills story of mystery and schoolboy adventure in the heart of the mysterious African jungle.

CHAPTER 1.

Alone in the Forest!

WILLY HANDFORTH, of the Third Form at St. Frank's, cheerfully threw a log on to the camp-fire and looked round at his companions.

"Well, this is a nice go, you chaps," he said. "Alone in the African forest! Deserted by all our giddy carriers, and with unknown dangers lurking on every hand."

"It sounds pretty lively!" remarked Nipper. "And the queer thing is, Willy, although you're speaking with alleged humour, you've pretty well hit the nail on the head."

"As the proverb says, brothers, there is many a true word spoken from the chest," said William Napoleon Browne of the Fifth. "I greatly fear that Brother William is quite contemptuous of all danger."

Willy Handforth nodded.

"When the danger comes, we'll be ready for it," he said. "What's the good of worrying about things that aren't here? Mr. Lee and Dorrie are pulling long faces, but, personally, I'm having the time of my life. The only trouble is, we haven't had any scraps with cannibals yet."

"But I take it that you live in hopes?" asked Browne benevolently.

"You never know your luck!" replied Willy.

Edward Oswald Handforth pushed forward and glared at his minor.

"All right—I heard you!" he said accusingly. "You bloodthirsty young bounder! Not content with coming up this 'debil-debil' river, you want fights with cannibals! Some chaps are never satisfied!"

"You're a fine one to criticise Willy!" said Church. "Only five minutes ago you were complaining because the carriers had bunked without giving us a scrap."

"Eh?" said Handforth. "Well, I'm different! Willy's only a fag, and, strictly speaking, he oughtn't to be on this expedition at all."

"Rats!" said Willy.

There were twelve St. Frank's fellows in the party, and they were all standing round the big camp-fire, discussing the situation. Overhead, the stars twinkled, and on every side except one the thick forest of the Central African interior mysteriously loomed. On the fourth side stretched the Kalala River, black, sluggish, and filled with its own mystery.

The boys were mostly Removites. The only exceptions were William Napoleon Browne of the Fifth, and Willy Handforth of the Third. The others were Nipper & Co., Handforth & Co., Archie Glenthorne and Johnny Onions, and Harry Gresham and Alec Duncan.

Irene & Co. were on the expedition, too—six girls, including Dora Manners, Irene's cousin—but they had retired to their tent, and were, presumably, asleep.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were standing near one of the other camp-fires, smoking and talking. They formed the final two members of the party, twenty all told. And there was not a single native porter to perform all the hundred and one duties of the camp, and to carry the endless impedimenta.

Less than an hour since the carriers had bolted.

Lord Dorrimore's party was going up into this mysterious region of the great Congo country in aid of Umlosi, the Kutana chief—Dorrie's staunch friend of many a tight corner. Indeed, the Kutana country was only a comparatively few days' march from this very spot.

While the boys talked, so did Lee and Dorrie.

"We've got to face the facts, old man," Nelson Lee was saying. "Our carriers have gone, and we're fortunate to have a few canoes left. We can, at least, get back to civilisation."

"But, man alive, what about Umlosi?" asked his lordship.

"What about these eighteen boys and girls?" retorted Lee grimly. "Much as I should love to go in Umlosi's aid, the thing's impossible. We can't do it, Dorrie. These eighteen lives are worth more than Umlosi's one. At dawn we've got to retreat."

"You know best, of course——"

"For Heaven's sake don't think I'm dictating!" interrupted Lee quickly. "This is your party, Dorrie, and I'm only pointing out that we're responsible for these young people. The Kalala River is unknown—unexplored—and every tribe for hundreds of miles round is afraid to come anywhere near. They regard it as a Ju-Ju region. They say it's bewitched. And, from what I have seen of the river, I can't wonder at their attitude. There's danger up this stream, Dorrie—ugly, hidden danger. Without native help, how on

earth can we proceed? Think it out for yourself."

Lord Dorrimore removed his pipe and slowly nodded.

"I'm not denyin' the truth of what you say," he growled. "Of course we've got to go back. It's deucedly rough on poor old Umlosi, though. The old beggar won't have anybody to help him now."

"We can't tell," said Lee. "We may be able to think of some other plan. For the moment we can only get back to the Sansissi tribe and deliver up their canoes. Then we can trek back along our own trail, after hiring those infernal Arkazoli carriers. They're bound to be hanging about in the Sansissi village."

Lord Dorrimore was thoughtful. All their canoes had been obtained from Bofebi, the Sansissi chief, and a day's run down the river would take them to the principal village of that tribe. Down there the country was free and open. But up here, where they were now camped, they were on the fringe of the unknown tract—that territory which was reputed to be controlled by demons and which was shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

CHAPTER 2.

Rough on Archie!



ORD DORRIMORE paused in the act of refilling his pipe.

"I'll leave you to tell the boys and girls," he said gruffly. "They'll be badly cut up, Lee. We voted not many hours ago, if you remember, and there was a unanimous decision for carryin' on."

"Yes, but our carriers have deserted since then, and that makes all the difference in the world," replied Lee. "Who will paddle the dug-outs? Who will carry them, in case of sandbanks or cataracts? We can't go on without the men, Dorrie."

"Of course we can't," agreed his lordship. "But I think I'll leave you to tell the youngsters. Personally, I haven't the heart to do it."

"We needn't tell them anything until the morning," said Lee. "In fact, we'll say nothing until we're just about to start. If they don't like it, they'll have to lump it. Our only course is to go back."

In the meantime, the St. Frank's fellows were firmly and finally deciding that their only course was to proceed. What did it matter about the carriers? It was a pity if they couldn't get along without a lot of discontented blacks!

"Umlosi was taken up this river by his enemies, and we've got to find him," said Handforth grimly. "There's nothing else to be said, my sons."

Nipper had a shrewd idea that the fellows would receive a shock in the morning, but

he said nothing. There was no sense in prolonging the argument now. Far better to get back to their blankets.

"Well, if we go on like this we shall talk all night," said Nipper briskly. "Let's get back into our tents, and leave the planning to the gov'nor and Dorrie. They'll know the best thing to be done."

"Rather!" agreed Tommy Watson, yawning. "We shan't get any sleep unless we turn in soon. We've had enough disturbances already."

"Bed, you chaps!" sang out Handforth.

There was a general move towards the tents. None of the juniors appreciated the real meaning of the carriers' desertion. Certainly it did not occur to them that the expedition must be abandoned.

"Buck up, Archie!" called Johnny Onions. "My hat! I'm blessed if the lazy beggar hasn't gone to sleep in front of the camp-fire!"

"Give him a dig," said Nipper. "He's a chump to go to sleep in that grass. He might be bitten by a centipede or a scorpion or something. Still, we mustn't be too hard on him—he was born sleepy!"

Archie Glenthorne, the dandy of the Remove, was reclining easily and gracefully in the grass, with a log for a pillow. At home he was somewhat fastidious in his choice of couches, but out here he had no fads.

"Wake up, Archie!" yelled Handforth, tossing a small log.

The object struck the sleeping junior on the chest, and he started into wakefulness. Then he sat up, a dazed, startled expression on his face; a moment later he gave a wild yelp.

"Good gad!" he howled, leaping to his feet.

Then he proceeded to dance round in a mad circle, shouting at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter with the fathead?" asked Handforth, staring. "I didn't hurt him! That log only caught him a small biff. Anybody might think he's being killed by the way he's yelling."

Johnny Onions, who had become Archie's close companion on this trip, ran up to his elegant chum.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked.

"Odds horrors and abominations!" shrieked Archie. "Kindly remove these foul creatures from my person, old thing! Good gad! I'm positively smothered in scorpions!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" shouted Onions.

He grabbed Archie, and held him still. Dozens of busy insects were clinging to the unfortunate junior's neck, face, wrists, and hands. Hundreds of others were running about over his person!

"Ants!" shouted Johnny, as the others came running up.

"Absolutely not!" howled Archie. "Odds absurdities and fiddlesticks! The blessed things are biting like a pack of Alsations!"

Absolutely pulling lumps out of me, as it were!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shake 'em off, Archie—they can't hurt you!"

"They're only ants, you duffer!"

"Not so much of the 'only,' you asses!" said Nipper, running up. "These black ants of Africa are frightful things! We'd better pull him away from this place, or we shall be smothered, too! They're miniature demons!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie feebly. "Ladies, I'm poisoned! The dashed abominations have laid me low!"

"Rats! You're not hurt!" said Handforth.

"Dash it, I ought to know, dash you!" protested Archie. "I'm not merely hurt, but I'm half-eaten!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other fellows were somewhat callous—not wittingly, but because they themselves had had no experience of these ants. They were fearsome brutes—enormously large, compared to the ordinary British ant. They could bite—and didn't hesitate to bite!

In fact, they were so fierce in this determination that Archie had to be whirled into one of the tents, stripped, and the ants were literally pulled off him. For they had dug their mandibles so powerfully into his skin that they had to be forced away.

Nelson Lee had come in, and he applied some soothing ointment.

"You needn't worry, Archie," he said. "I expect those little bites will smart for a bit, but I don't think you'll notice any ill-effects to-morrow. But let this be a warning to you. Look before you lie down!"

"Odds gad! Absolutely, sir!" said Archie with fervour. "These tropical beauties are all dashed fine, but it's a bit perpendicular when a chappie finds himself mistaken for Hill 60 by an army of these blessed ants! I mean to say, they absolutely rushed the defences, and took me by storm!"



CHAPTER 3.

Alarming News!

DAWN found the camp well astir.

As a matter of fact, neither Nelson Lee nor Lord Dorrimore had slept for more than an hour, and even this short spell had been taken in turns. Although the juniors had no thoughts of danger, their elders were not so sure. This territory was very uncertain.

However, nothing had developed during the remainder of the night, and as soon as dawn came Nelson Lee ruthlessly routed out the fellows, and advised them to make haste.

"We've got to be on the move within the hour," he said briskly. "Some of you can prepare breakfast if you like. We shan't be

able to have anything elaborate; something hot to drink perhaps, and a few biscuits.

"What's the hurry, sir?" asked Nipper curiously.

But Nelson Lee did not explain that they would soon be afloat, and going down-stream, instead of up. He wanted to avoid that disclosure until they were actually on the water.

Breakfast was hardly under way before the sound of paddles came from the river. Irene & Co. were preparing the breakfast, for they had indignantly taken this task away from the boys. Nelson Lee and Dorrie were down by the river, preparing the canoes for the forthcoming trip.

"Hallo!" said his lordship. "This doesn't look very healthy."

They stood watching the approach of a great number of canoes. Each little craft was full of blacks, and it was a significant fact that they were all armed with spears.

"The Sansissi!" muttered Nelson Lee.

"Yes, with that old blackguard, Bofebi, at the head of 'em," nodded Lord Dorrimore. "He's the get-rich-quick rascal from whom we hired these canoes. This looks like trouble."

Nelson Lee was wearing a grim expression.

"I rather fancy I can recognise some of our Arkazoli friends, too," he said. "Those men at the rear aren't of the same tribe as these in the forefront. They're our deserted carriers, Dorrie. Yes, there's M'toza, the Krooboy, too. It's too much to hope that they've come back to work. Their looks belie that supposition."

"I'm afraid you're right," growled Dorrie. "The beggars are looking ugly."

There was no doubt about it. Bofebi and his head men, who occupied the leading canoes, were by no means reassuring in aspect. There were no cheerful grins from these blacks—no respectful salutes, as was customary. They drew in towards the bank, grim and truculent.

"Well, Bofebi," sang out Dorrie, speaking in Swahili, the universal language of all the tribes. "This is an unexpected pleasure. We didn't hope to see you again just yet. What brings you?"

"Lord, we come with grave news," said the chief of the Sansissi, after he had landed. "My people are angry and troubled. You have come into the region of demons, and it is said that you will bring famine unto our lands by your action. These Ju-Jus are best left alone, master. Our wise men have warned us of the dangers."

"Your wise men have told you wrongly, Bofebi," said Lord Dorrimore. "Let not this foolishness continue. We caused you no harm, and our entry into the land of the demons will bring no evil to you and yours."

"Lord, you are wrong," said Bofebi, in an ugly tone. "My people are inflamed, and it is even said that the Arkazoli—our friends and neighbours—are no less angered. Many palavers have taken place, and all the vil-

lages for many miles round are gathering their warriors."

"But this is wrong, Bofebi," said Dorrie. "We will harm you not, and our mission is peaceful. What need for this gathering of warriors?"

"Danger may befall you, master, if you come among my people, or if you go into the country of the Arkazoli," replied the Sansissi chief. "We come peacefully, but we are ready for war. We come, too, to claim our canoes, which are our property."

Dorrie's jaw set.

"Bofebi, you are growing old, and in your old age, you are growing foolish," he retorted. "And your memory is bad. What of the big money I paid you for the use of these canoes? They are to be returned after the second moon, and barely one day has elapsed since—"

"Lord, my people say that the canoes must be brought back at once," interrupted Bofebi. "For if they enter this land of demons they will bring pestilence with them when they return. Thus, we must take the canoes now, before they become bewitched."

Dorrie gave Nelson Lee an eloquent glance.

"There's going to be trouble here!" he said gruffly. "Once these beggars get a crazy idea of this sort into their heads, they're as obstinate as a boatload of mules!"

"Try to reason with them, Dorrie," urged Lee. "If we lose these boats, we're in a bad fix!"

"Fix!" echoed his lordship. "It'll be good-night, nurse!"



CHAPTER 4

No Alternative.

BOFEBI had a very suspicious look on his face. He did not understand English, of course, and he probably imagined that Lord Dorrimore was talking against him.

"Lord, I wait," he said truculently.

"It is your place to wait," retorted Dorrie, in Swahili. "Since when have you become so impatient, you emptiness? I must have time to consider this talk of yours. It is even possible that I shall come down the river with you, and abandon this journey to the land of the demons."

"My head men and my people must have the boats as they are," replied Bofebi arrogantly. "We take them now, lord. If you and your people come, too, it will be bad."

"Bad!" roared Dorrie. "What talk is this?"

"There has been war palaver, and the Sansissi are prepared for battle," said Bofebi, with a fine show of boldness. "Our friends of the Arkazoli have told us much. They will return to their country, and we shall take our canoes. We wish for peace, lord, and so we wish you to hold back the guns,

and to let us depart without the shedding of blood."

"But you must take the canoes with you?"

"Lord, it has been so decided."

"And it has been so decided, my bold Chief, that we cannot use the canoes on their trip down the river?" asked Lord Dorrimore angrily. "You speak dangerous words, Bofebi. Do you dare to dictate to the white man?"

The black rascal recoiled slightly.

"It is the will of my people," he muttered.

"The will of your people is as nothing to my will!" snapped Lord Dorrimore. "You shall have your canoes when we have finished with them. Tell your head men that I have decided. Tell them, or let them see you tied to the nearest tree, and whipped!"

The Sansissi chief turned away, scowling.

"I hate makin' threats, but this is a very dangerous position," murmured Dorrie, turning to Nelson Lee. "Their game is an ugly one. They want their rotten canoes, but they don't want us!"

"In other words, the idea is to leave us here, stranded," nodded Lee. "Without carriers, without boats, and without stores—it's pretty certain that these robbers will take the canoes, loaded as they are—we shall be in a nasty predicament."

"Their confounded superstitions are responsible for this!" growled Dorrie. "We shall bring famine an' pestilence to their lands if we go back! Ye gods! What can you do with people like this?"

"There's only one way—and you know what it is," retorted Lee. "But I hope to heaven there'll be no fighting, Dorrie. If we kill some of these Sansissi, the whole country will be inflamed. There's no white post anywhere up here, and the prospect is too awful to imagine."

His lordship grunted.

"I can imagine it all right," he said. "They'll go crazy for a few days, wipe us all out, stick our heads on poles, and in about three months' time there'll be a buzz down at the official district headquarters. A few months after that they'll come with a punitive expedition, an' hang a few of these merchants, an' justice will be done. But that'll be a fat lot of consolation to us, won't it?"

Dorrie spoke lightly, but there was a great deal of truth in his words. Unless strong action was taken now, at once, the situation looked like developing into a serious crisis.

Normally, the Sansissi were peaceful enough, and so were the Arkazoli. They respected the white man's word, and obeyed. But now and again they were liable to get a bad attack of war-palaver—particularly when there were a lot of superstitious fears going about. This situation needed to be handled very delicately.

"Lord, my head men say that we must take the canoes now, and return to our land," said Bofebi, after a brief talk with his fellow rascals. "Our will is stronger than your will, and our numbers are stronger than your numbers."

"You talk bad talk, Bofebi," snapped Dorrie.

He took out his revolver, and the Sansissi chief scowled afresh.

"Fight not, master, for we have no wish to have the soldiers come to our town, and to hang our men——"

"And to hang you, eh?" interrupted Dorrie.

"Lord, let us go as we came," said Bofebi. "These canoes are ours, and we only take our own. Even now our journey up this devil-river may bring disaster upon our people."

A lot of excited shouting came from the rear, and Bofebi gave an expressive grunt. All his men were shouting and gesticulating, and they were obviously impatient and angry.

"They will not wait longer, master," he said.

"Tell them to wait until I have——"

But Lord Dorrimore paused. It seemed useless to talk further. The Sansissi were swarming round the canoes, and preparing to leave. They were not waiting till their chief gave the word. Or, perhaps, while pretending to palaver, Bofebi had given the word.

It was too late to talk. The Sansissi were acting!



CHAPTER 5.

Into the Unknown!

NELSON LEE caught hold of Dorrie's arm.

"Steady," he muttered. "Keep cool, Dorrie!"

His lordship took a deep breath. He had just uncocked his revolver, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he withheld his fire. Every instinct within him urged that he should give these arrogant natives a lesson—and a grim lesson.

But Nelson Lee was right.

It was impossible for them to precipitate a battle. Two shots might be sufficient, with the natives in their present mood. And what could two men do against this savage horde? All these Sansissi were armed with deadly spears.

"We've just got to stand by and watch!" growled Dorrie. "Good glory! Did you ever know such impudence? Just you wait, old man! I'll make Bofebi and his gang smart for this later on. They needn't think they can get away with this kind of stuff! The hounds!"

"You don't seem to realise, Dorrie, that we're lucky," said Nelson Lee.

"Lucky?" repeated his lordship, staring.

"These blacks are just a little frightened of us," nodded Lee. "Otherwise they would have speared us long ago. Any interference on our part will precipitate a massacre. We must stand by and watch. We can't possibly risk such a thing."

And so they looked on while the Sansissi warriors climbed into the canoes, and paddled them away from the bank.

"Blessed if I can understand it," said Handforth, as he watched with the others. "They're

pinching all our canoes! Why doesn't Dorrie stop them? What is Mr. Lee up to?"

"We shall be in a horrible mess without those canoes!" said Church, in alarm.

"We shall be in a worse mess if we try to keep these brutes from taking them," said Nipper grimly. "They're in a nasty mood, and Dorrie doesn't like to incite them. He's thinking of us, I expect."

"Oh, rot!" said Handforth. "We're not afraid—"

"Of course we're not," said Nipper. "Dorrie's not afraid, either. But there must be a couple of hundred of these beggars, all told. What's going to happen to us if they go crazy for five minutes? Ten to one against! And most of us unarmed! Old Dorrie is doing the only thing possible—standing by and hoping that these rotters will go peacefully."

"But they're pinching our canoes!" repeated Handforth indignantly.

The wisdom of Nelson Lee's warning was eloquently proved five minutes later. The last canoe had been taken, and the whole crowd of Sansissi were preparing to depart. One of the men suddenly pointed to the water, and a chorus of wild shouts went up.

A dead thing of some kind had been seen, and it was taken as an omen. Almost with one accord, fifty of the blacks hurled their spears at the white party—and only the instability of their canoes prevented them from taking correct aim. The spears fell short for the most part, and the others went wildly astray.

But the action in itself was significant enough. If these men were pulling their spears without any provocation, what would have happened if Lord Dorrimore had attempted to use force? Without question, the whole party of twenty would have been wiped out in as many seconds. One flight of spears, and the thing would have been over.

As a rule, these people were easily controlled, but now and again they broke loose—and then it was madness to incite them. Both Lee and Dorrie had displayed remarkable strength in allowing these blacks to override them. It was a greater strength than the strength of courage.

"Well, we're still alive, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee, as the shouting natives plied their paddles. "We're in an unholy mess, but even that's better than being dead. Rather curious that we should have decided to turn back without telling the young 'uns."

"Why?"

"Because we snan't turn back now," said Lee. "We can't. Our only possible course is to go ahead—into this 'land of demons'—up the 'debil-debil' river. We can't go by water, but there's just a chance that we might be able to follow the bank."

"By glory, you're right!" said Lord Dorrimore, with a start. "There's no forcing a way through the forest in the rear. It's as tangled as a lot of barbed wire—choked with undergrowth, an' absolutely impassable."

"There's something else, too," said Lee. "Retreat would take us into the Sansissi

country—and both the Sansissi and the Arkazoli tribes are inflamed. A most unhealthy district, old man."

"Gad, so it is," said Dorrie. "I'd rather tackle the demons!"



CHAPTER 6.

On the Trail.

O there it was in a nutshell.

Retreat was out of the question for three reasons.

Dorrie's party could not go by river, since they had no boats. They could not go by land, since the forest was too tangled. And it would have been madness to retreat, even if one of the paths were open, for all the natives in that region were on the warpath.

Nelson Lee had decided that a retreat was essential—but Fate had laughed at this decision. The only way was to go ahead—to advance into the mystery land. So they would continue their search for Umlosi after all! It was the only chance of safety for themselves.

The boys and girls were by no means displeased when they heard it. They didn't quite realise, perhaps, the true nature of the situation. So far they had only seen respect and obedience from the African natives. The days of massacre were over—the blacks were obedient. It was hard to realise that most of this was only on the surface.

Nearer the coast the natives were certainly well trained—but here, in the interior, they were still near to the primitive, and they were liable to forget the punishment that would inevitably follow, no matter how remote the spot. A swift massacre, and then weeks of jubilation. And, later on, the price. But, as Lord Dorrimore had said, what consolation would that be to the victims?

"We're goin' straight ahead, boys," said Dorrie cheerfully. "These beggars have pinched our canoes, an' we haven't got any carriers. It's goin' to be a stiffish job, but I think we'll win through."

"Rather, sir!"

"We're not going to rest until we've found Umlosi!"

"Absolutely not!"

It was good to hear the enthusiastic voices. Irene and her chums were no less determined, and they were all eager to do their own bit. Within an hour of the blacks' departure, in fact, active preparations for immediate trekking were afoot.

"On the whole, we're goin' in the right direction," murmured Lord Dorrimore. "I don't believe these yarns of Ju-Ju and witchcraft. There's no supernatural danger ahead, Lee. An' we shall be safe once we get into the 'tagati' country."

"Safe from these Sansissi warriors, at all events," agreed Lee. "They won't dare to follow us there. It may even be our best course, although the other paths were still open. Without boats or carriers, what differ-



The Nubian, intending to crash the rifle-butt down upon Nelson Lee's head, swung the weapon behind him, causing it to hit the wooden case. At the same moment the case seemed to burst; a sheet of electric blue flame ran along the gun-barrel, and enveloped the Nubian from head to foot!

ence does it make, anyhow? One direction is very much the same as another."

"Well, it's one consolation to know that we've no alternative," said Dorrie dryly. "It saves us quite a lot of thinkin'. We've got to go ahead, so we'll go. An' that's all there is to it."

Handforth came up, looking eager.

"I've got an idea, sir," he announced.

"Take it away an' drop it in the river," said Dorrie. "I don't wish to be impolite, old man, but I've heard of your ideas before."

"But this is a good one!" protested Handforth, turning red as he saw some of the other fellows grinning.

"I'm afraid that's a prejudiced opinion," said Dorrie. "Still, let's hear it. Wait a minute, though—let me light a cigarette so that I can steel my nerves."

"Oh, chuck it, Dorrie!" said Handforth gruffly. "Look here, we've lost our carriers, haven't we?"

"Let's say we've mislaid them—it sounds better," nodded his lordship.

"My idea, sir, is for us chaps to take the place of the carriers," said Handforth eagerly. "They've deserted, so we'll step into the breach."

"Good man," said Dorrie. "But what about this idea?"

"I've just told you, sir."

"Oh, was that the idea?" asked Dorrie in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"Sorry!" grinned Dorrie. "I didn't cotton on. My dear, innocent youth! That's not an idea at all—that's an obvious fact. If we don't act as our own carriers, who's goin' to do the carryin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just like one of Handy's big ideas!" grinned Church. "We told him not to come and make an ass of himself, sir."

"If it comes to that, it doesn't seem as if there'll be much carryin' for anybody," remarked Dorrie. "Our late friends have bagged most of our supplies, the robbin' vagabonds! Perhaps it's just as well—because we should only have left the stuff here."

"That's just what I was thinking," said Nipper. "There are only twenty of us, and we can only carry a certain amount each. When we started on this journey, there were two or three score of porters with us, and we can't hope to shift the whole camp on our own shoulders."

"The trouble is, what shall we jettison?" asked his lordship, looking round. "I'm afraid it's goin' to be a ticklish business."

It was, indeed.

Many of the tents, although quite portable, were abandoned. It was simply impossible to take them. The departing Sansissi, in seizing their canoes, had also taken a great many of the stores. Fortunately, the main supplies of tea, sugar, and similar luxuries, were left. It

was a heavy task, dividing up all this essential baggage.

But at last the twenty loads were in readiness—for even the girls insisted upon carrying their share. They were indignant because Nelson Lee and Dorrie had prepared some absurdly light packs for them. They wanted to have things more equalised.

“Any more objections, young ladies, an’ we won’t let you carry anythin’ at all,” said Dorrie sternly. “Wait until you get on the trail. I don’t think you’ll do much grumblin’ after that.”

“We ought to carry out fair share,” said Irene firmly.

“Listen!” put in Doris, before anybody else could speak.

Faintly, on the hot morning air, came the almost imperceptible sounds of throbbing. It was a kind of steady beat, and it proceeded from far down river.

“It’s from the Sansissi country, sir,” muttered Nipper.

“Exactly,” said Nelson Lee, nodding.

And he gave Lord Dorrimore a swift, meaning look.



CHAPTER 7.

Drums of War!

NIPPER’S eyes gleamed. “It’s no good you two giving one another those significant glances,” he said. “You can’t keep this to yourselves—and I don’t think it’s fair that you should, anyhow. That throbbing is the sound of war drums.”

“War drums!” echoed Handforth excitedly.

“Good gad!” murmured Archie. “You mean these black chappies are absolutely whizzing out on the good old warpath? Tomahawks, and all that sort of stuff!”

“These Africans don’t use tomahawks, you ass!” said Handforth. “By George! They’re coming along to attack us—”

“Not so fast!” growled Lord Dorrimore. “They’re only strummin’ away at their confounded drums—makin’ signals from one village to another. It pleases them to play at these games.”

“I don’t think we ought to minimise the risk, Dorrie,” said Nelson Lee quietly. “The young people might as well know the truth—and the sooner we can get on the move the better. When these natives start their war drums it’s time to shift!”

“There’s real danger, sir?” asked half a dozen eager voices.

“Yes!” said Nelson Lee.

“There may be a bit,” admitted Lord Dorrimore. “But I’ve had a lot of experience of these niggers. The Sansissi might have a go at the Arkazoli, or vice versa—but the beggars would have to get pretty bold to attack a white party. Even if they come up river, they’ll probably hang back at the last minute, an’ content themselves by makin’ noises. Their bark is a lot worse than their

bite—unless they’ve a real cause for vengeance.”

“Such as what, sir?” asked Handforth.

“Well, if we had gone through one of their villages, an’ had shot down some of their women an’ children—well, they might come after us in earnest,” said Lord Dorrimore. “An’ they wouldn’t be satisfied until they had wiped us out.”

“Which we should deserve,” said Handforth firmly.

“Assumin’ that we had acted as I just said, yes,” agreed his lordship. “But I don’t remember slaughtering anybody in particular—Sansissi, or any other variety.”

“No, sir, but what about their superstitions?” asked Duncan. “Some of the Maoris in New Zealand are pretty superstitious, and they get all sorts of queer ideas. And the Maoris are civilised compared to these Africans. But I wouldn’t like to upset their superstitious beliefs.”

Nelson Lee agreed.

“There’s a great deal in what you say, Duncan,” he declared. “In certain circumstances, the superstitions of these savages may be far more dangerous than murder itself. The war drums are beating, and the Sansissi are undoubtedly on our trail. That makes an immediate move imperative. We’ve got to go forward—into the safety of the bewitched zone.”

“Safety, guv’nor?” asked Nipper.

“Well, it seems to me that that part of the forest will be healthier than this,” replied Lee dryly. “We don’t mind the demons—but we have a great dislike for fanatical blacks, armed with spears.”

And when they all took the trail, the mysteries of the unknown region did not seem to be so terrifying. It was highly important to get beyond reach of these warriors.

The younger members of the party couldn’t quite understand the thing. They had done the Sansissi no harm, so why should they be after their blood? They did not know that some of these interior tribes were more affected by superstition than by any other emotion. The white party had aroused their fury by persisting in this journey into the Kalala region, and they believed that disasters untold would befall their own land in consequence. It was utterly preposterous, of course—but to argue with them, or to attempt to reason with them, was out of the question. They were far more likely to reason with the points of their spears.

This camping spot had been chosen because it seemed to be the only clearing. For hours on the previous day, the travellers had come up this mysterious river, mile after mile, and had seen nothing but the dense, impenetrable jungle on either side.

And then, at last, this spot had been found. Any retreat was impossible, for the jungle was too tangled for anything less forceful than a war tank.

But by some strange providence the route into the interior was comparatively open. It was possible to follow the river bank, marching through coarse elephant grass, and skirt-

ing round great clumps of forest land and bushes. On the other side the jungle was as thick as ever. Across the river they could see it—dark, gloomy, and mysterious.

And, with every step they took, they went further and further into the land of the evil spirits.



CHAPTER 8.

The Hidden Peril!

HERE was no exact boundary line to this strange territory. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee only knew that the Kalala country

was taboo by the natives. For some reason unknown, the whole district had been labelled as a place of witchcraft, and not a man of the Sansissi or Arkazoli or Oturi—the three nearest tribes to this zone—would venture there for a ransom.

But it seemed that the blacks themselves had a sort of dividing line. They knew where it was safe, and they knew where it was dangerous. Dorrie's party had eloquent evidence of this that night.

They had pressed on with all speed, Lord Dorrimore leading the procession, and Nelson Lee bringing up the rear—both with slung rifles across their shoulders.

They had not much fear of savage beasts—but they were very wary of savage humans. Browne, Nipper, and one or two other juniors were provided with rifles, too.

On several occasions during that march Nelson Lee was aware of queer sounds from the rear. He said nothing, but he knew that the Sansissi were close at hand, following them up—keeping them within sight. But not a single glimpse was obtained of them. There was something almost uncanny in this grim stalking. There were probably hundreds of the blacks following along, but they dared not make an open attack. All their instincts urged them to wipe out these white people, but they were afraid.

All the same, it was a most harrowing experience, and towards evening Nelson Lee felt, rather than heard, that the blacks had fallen back. And when camp was finally made he felt certain that the Sansissi warriors had given up the chase.

All the same, there was an atmosphere of danger.

"The beggars have got behind, and that can mean only one thing," murmured Lee, as he found himself alone with Dorrie for a moment. "We're in the 'tagati' belt, old man. The brutes were afraid to follow us into it, thank Heaven!"

"Listen!" said Dorrie grimly.

They could faintly hear the sound of a curious howling, mingled with the beating of drums. The blacks had made their own camp some distance away—outside the bewitched region. And they were howling their

execrations, infuriated because they had been foiled.

"I'll bet they meant to attack us to-night," said Lord Dorrimore. "Now they're screechin' like a lot of jackals because we're out of their reach. All I can say is, thank goodness for this Ju-Ju! As a general rule, I don't like these Ju-Jus, but this one is a pal of ours."

They both affected a cheery, light-hearted air with all the other members of the party. Not that the boys and girls were deceived. They knew well enough that these pretences were adopted especially for their benefit. And they played the same game themselves, making out that they were in the highest of spirits.

The result was rather tragic. They all knew, in their own hearts, that they were playing a game, and yet they all kept it up. And at any moment they expected a sudden deadly rush from the surrounding bush.

But as the evening drew near, Nelson Lee became reassured. The camp fires were blazing, and the tents were erected. They all talked about getting supper ready, but nobody made the first move.

Dorrie, however, vanished after a time.

He had not been seen to leave, and it was half an hour before he appeared again. He was in a cheerful mood.

"Just been havin' a scout round," he said. "There's nothin' human within a mile of us. I managed to get to a piece of high ground, an' there's a smoke column three or four miles back along the trail. Those brutes have camped there, an' they're not likely to come. They're too afraid of leopards an' things, let alone the demons."

There was no pretence about Dorrie's tone now. He was really reassured, and Nipper and all the others breathed more freely. Irene & Co. went off to their duties of preparing the evening meal—for they had constituted themselves the controllers of the commissariat.

Half the juniors took axes, and fetched wood for the fires, so that there would be a plentiful supply for the night. Lee and Dorrie helped in this, too, and everything was now a-bustle.

There was a general feeling of security.

Let this be a bewitched region or no, it was fairly open, with no sign of enemies, and there was even a chance of shooting some fresh meat for supper. Dorrie had already had his eye on some duck, and he was getting his shot-gun ready.

There was still plenty of daylight left, for Dorrie believed in making camp in good time, so that supper could be disposed of by daylight. The sun was dropping behind the dense trees on the other side of the river, and a more peaceful evening could scarcely be imagined.

Somehow Dorrie's party was not feeling the hardship to any great extent. Things were going much better than they had expected.

Deserted by their carriers, left alone in the unknown forest, they were still full of determination to win through.



CHAPTER 9.

Willy's Strange Discovery.

MARY SUMMERS looked round as Willy dumped down a big bundle of freshly-cut wood. The fag was smaller and younger than any of the others, but he insisted upon doing his equal share.

"Be a sport, Willy, and fetch me some water," said Mary cheerfully. "We're just going to boil kettles, and we haven't any water."

"There's a riverful fifty yards away," said Willy. "All right—give us the bucket. I can't afford to refuse orders from you girls. You're in charge of all the grub!"

He went down to the river, and paused before wading out, interested in a crowd of monkeys on the other side of the stream. He was mentally comparing their qualities to old Marmaduke, his own pet monkey. These unhappy creatures came far down the scale.

"I suppose I'd better wade out for a few feet, and get some clear water out of that deep pool," he decided. "Pity there isn't a spring about here. I don't quite fancy this river water."

Willy was thinking of the dead things that had been seen during the previous day, while they had been coming up the river in the canoes. Neither Nelson Lee nor Dorrie could suggest any plausible explanation for those dead crocodiles and dead fish.

"Hallo!" muttered Willy. "What the—That's funny!"

He was standing knee-deep in the shallow water at the edge of the river, and he had completely forgotten his bucket. His legs were bare, except for canvas shoes on his feet, and the water was delightfully cool round his shins.

But he was aware of a curious sensation. From head to foot he was tingling.

His immersed legs felt as though millions of little pin-pricks were touching his skin. He wasn't numb, but he had a queer feeling of pins and needles in his lower limbs.

"Well I'm blessed!" he murmured. "What the dickens is the matter? There's something rummy about this water! My hat! I wonder if it's full of some queer kind of creatures?"

He backed out rather hurriedly, but not before he had filled his bucket. Ashore, he gazed searchingly at his legs, but could see nothing unusual. And the strange sensation had now gone.

"Must be microbes," he decided. "There are microbes in water, just the same as in the air, I believe. Still, it's jolly funny!"

He went on his knees, and stared closely into the clear water in the bucket. It was really surprisingly crystal, and there was no foreign object in it, beyond a couple of leaves. Not a single living thing—at least, nothing that was visible to the naked eye.

"Anything wrong with the water, Willy?"

The fag looked up, and found Nelson Lee approaching.

"I'm glad you've come, sir—you ought to know about this," said Willy.

"I think you'll know about it, too—all about it—unless you make haste," said Lee dryly. "Mary is getting very impatient."

"Oh, bother her!" said Willy, with fine indifference. "I just wanted you to test—H'm! That's strange, too!"

He had just plunged his hand in the pail, but there was no recurrence of that peculiar tingling. Obviously, the water was only so affected in the mass.

"Is that water for our supper?" asked Lee ominously.

"That's what I got it for, sir."

"Then be good enough to keep your paws out of it, young man!" said Nelson Lee. "In fact, you'd better toss that pailful back, and get another. Do you think we want to drink water after you've washed your hands in it?"

Willy grinned.

"Sorry, sir," he said. "I was only testing it."

"Indeed! Testing it for what?"

"Well, there's something funny about it," explained the Third-Former. "When I waded into the river just now I felt all sorts of pins and needles running up and down me. I was wondering if the water was full of live things."

Lee looked closely into the pail.

"I fancy your imagination is somewhat acute," he said. "There's nothing the matter with this water—barring the fact that you have polluted it with your hand."

"All right—you try the water in the river, sir," said Willy. "There's something the matter with it. We don't want to all get poisoned, do we? Perhaps it's bewitched, though. We're in the spooky belt, aren't we?"

"You'd better take that water to Mary—after you've changed it—and try not to be such a young ass," said Nelson Lee severely. "I didn't think you were so fanciful."

"I'm not, sir!" protested Willy indignantly. "I tell you there's something wrong with the water. If you don't believe me, feel it! Be a sportsman, you know!" he added. "Don't accuse me before you've—"

"You young scamp!" chuckled Nelson Lee.

He took two steps towards the river, bent down, and laughingly plunged his hand under the surface. Willy watched closely.

"Well, sir?" he asked.

"Well?" smiled Lee. "What's all the fuss about? You fill that pail again, and go about your duties."

Willy looked up at Nelson Lee in a rather

pained way. His sharp eyes had not failed to detect the swift, almost imperceptible start which Lee had given as his hand went into the water.



CHAPTER 10.

A Secret Investigation.

NELSON LEE turned away as though the subject was dismissed.

"Half a tick, sir," said Willy, with warmth. "What's the good of pretending that I'm blind? I saw you give a start just now! There's something wrong with that water, isn't there?"

Lee gave it up.

"Those eyes of yours are a bit too sharp, my lad," he said gruffly. "Look here, keep this little affair to yourself. Understand? Don't say anything to any of the others about what you felt in the water."

"Why not, sir? Is it something dangerous?"

"I don't know what it is, to tell you the truth," confessed Lee. "But you are quite right when you say that the river has a most unusual feel. There is undoubtedly something of a phenomenal character. But you needn't be afraid of poison, or living creatures."

Lee plunged into the river up to his knees this time, and Willy came and joined him. They could both feel the extraordinary tingling. It was as though the water were effervescent.

"Beats me, sir," said Willy. "Feels like lemonade!"

"Not at all a bad simile," agreed Lee. "Possibly there is some perfectly natural explanation. A mineral may be affecting—" He cupped his hand, and drank a mouthful of the water. "No, there's nothing wrong with it—no mineral taste."

A chorus of feminine shouts attracted their attention.

"Better take that water," said Lee. "And remember—say nothing."

Willy refilled the pail, and went back to the tents, much intrigued by Nelson Lee's interest in the river. In fact, he was so intent upon it that he turned a deaf ear to Irene & Co.'s complaints.

"Supper's going to be late now—because of your laziness," said Mary indignantly. "I thought I could rely upon you to do a thing properly, Willy. It's a pity your sister isn't here."

"Yes, we've missed Ena a lot," declared Doris.

"Ena?" said Willy absently. "You don't know what you're talking about! She's my sister, and she's a good sort, in her own way—but Ted and I thanked our lucky stars when she accepted an invitation to go to Venice with Uncle Gregory. Ena's a bit too much of a trial to Ted and me."

Willy was only speaking abstractedly, for his gaze was on Nelson Lee. The school-master-detective had fetched Dorrie, and they

were both standing by the river, talking earnestly.

"There's more in this than meets the eye," said Willy, moving off.

But he had more sense than to go near the river. He awaited developments from afar. Lee and Dorrie did not talk for long.

"It's no good askin' me, old man," said his lordship. "There's certainly a strange sensation in the water, but I'm no expert. I can't explain it."

"Have you ever felt anything like it in an African stream before?"

"Never."

"All right," said Lee. "We shall have to do a little investigating. There's a certain suspicion in my mind, but it's so fantastic that I don't like to say anything—even to you. I'll take a stroll upstream, Dorrie, and see if I can pot some fresh meat."

His lordship stared.

"But that's what I'm after!" he protested.

"I know that, but we'll change places, if you don't mind," said Lee. "You stay in camp, and look after the youngsters. And if there's any alarm, fire a couple of shots."

"Just as you like," said Dorrie good-naturedly.

And Nelson Lee made off, thinking far more of the river than of any possible "bag." Indeed, when a number of ducks flew overhead, he did not even notice them. He walked briskly, keeping as close to the river as possible. After going nearly half a mile, he thought he heard a twig crack at his rear.

He halted at once, his rifle ready.

"Steady, sir!" came a voice. "I'm not a rhino!"

Willy appeared from the undergrowth.

"What the— Upon my word, Willy, who told you to follow me?" asked Nelson Lee curtly.

"I did, sir!" said Willy. "I thought you might need some help."

"You young rascal! I'd no idea you were so expert in the art of stalking," said Lee. "I didn't hear a sound of you until a second ago."

"I'm a boy scout, sir," explained Willy.

"I can quite believe it," said Lee. "You're a terror, too. What do you think you'll see by coming with me, anyhow?"

"I shall see you have another look at the river, sir," said Willy. "If we had to depend upon your gun for our supper, we should go to bed hungry! You're thinking about that tingling sensation, aren't you?"

"I've an idea that you'll feel a tingling sensation very shortly," said Lee grimly. "And you won't feel it round your ankles either!"



CHAPTER 11.

Unaccountable!

WILLY was in no way abashed.

"Joking aside, sir, I'm right, aren't I?" he asked.

"You've come up here to have a look at the river in private?"

"Since you seem to know all about it, it would be idle for me to deny the matter," replied Nelson Lee. "Well, come along, young 'un. I don't suppose I shall be able to get rid of you now, even if I want to."

"Which, of course, you don't, sir," said Willy, as they walked on. "We made the first discovery together, so we might as well keep it up. You can't very well push me out of it. What do you suppose is the cause of the fizzy feeling, sir?"

"I'll give you my opinion after I have examined the river again," said Nelson Lee. "The going is pretty easy, so we can do another mile, I hope, before turning back."

"That'll make us late for supper," protested Willy.

But Lee ignored this objection, and they kept on. The detective secured one or two good birds, after all, and if they were too late for supper they would at least do for the morrow's breakfast.

At length, after another mile had been traversed, Lee decided to make another test. He had noted with curiosity that none of the forest animals came down to this river to drink. There were no marks along the banks—no spoor of any kind.

"It's very significant," he said, shaking his head.

He bent low down, and plunged his hand into the stream. Willy went further, and walked in, only to find that he was practically up to his waist.

"Whoa!" he gasped. "Great Scott! It's worse here, sir!"

"Much more noticeable, eh?" said Lee. "I agree with you, Willy. It's quite alive."

"But—but what is it, sir?" asked Willy, in astonishment. "If it wasn't impossible, I'd say that I was getting a mild electric shock."

"Impossible or not, my boy, that is exactly what you *are* getting," said Lee quietly. "This river is electrified!"

"You're kidding, sir!" said Willy, staring.

"No, I'm not. This water is charged with an electric current," went on Lee. "The voltage is not particularly powerful, but there can be no question that the electricity is present."

"But where does it come from, sir?"

"Up river somewhere."

"Yes, but where?"

"Now you're asking me a question that I cannot answer," frowned Lee. "But you can be quite certain that the electricity is here. We need not be electrical engineers to know that the current will be much stronger further up the stream."

"How do you get at that, sir?"

"Because the current is much more perceptible here than it is a mile and half lower down," replied Lee. "Further up river, it is probably quite powerful. A most unaccountable business. Electricity in an unknown African river! Why? How does it get here? What is the nature of its source? Intriguing questions, Willy!"

"It must be natural, sir, of course," said Willy. "If we were somewhere near St. Frank's, I'd say that the Bannington Cor-

poration had got a leak in one of its main cables. But there aren't any power stations up in this jungle!"

"The trouble is, we don't know what is up in this jungle," said Lee thoughtfully. "Ju-Ju, eh? Witchcraft, by James! And electricity is funny stuff! It's quite likely that the majority of these Sansissi and Oturi beggars have never even heard of it."

"What are you suggesting, sir?"

"Do you remember the dead fish that came floating down the stream?" asked Lee. "The dead crocodiles?"

"And that poor Kutana chap, sir—one of Umlosi's pals!"

"Yes, if it comes to that, human beings, too," said Lee slowly. "I rather fancy we know how these deaths occurred."

"But the current isn't powerful enough," suggested Willy.

"Not here—but it may be two or three hundred volts—perhaps treble that amount—at its source," said Lee. "The power naturally dwindles away at a distance. Water is a strong conductor of electricity, and electrified water can be absolutely deadly."

Lee was thinking of another body that had come floating down the stream—another of those unfortunate Kutanas who had accompanied Umlosi on his ill-fated mission. The first man had been alive, and had led the rescuers to hope that Umlosi was still capable of being rescued.

But the second unhappy victim had floated past—dead. And only Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore knew of the tragic occurrence.

"I don't like the look of it, sir," said Willy. "Electricity can't come out of the earth—not powerful enough to affect a whole river, anyway. I say, what kind of mysteries are there up this stream, sir?"

"I don't know, Willy," said Lee grimly. "I wish I did know."



CHAPTER 12.

Handforth Sleeps Alone.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH leapt out of his blankets, and hurled a scorpion through the open doorway of the tent.

"That's the third one!" he said fiercely. "By George! I shan't get any sleep to-night! There must be a nest of the beastly things here! We're lucky not to have been bitten!"

"Blow the rotten things!" said Church uneasily.

There was certainly a good excuse for their tone. Three enormous scorpions had come to light in their tent—and the African scorpion is not a particularly cheery bedfellow.

Handforth & Co. were rather unlucky. They didn't know that they had pitched their tent over a partially rotted piece of wood, the latter concealed in the grass. But if they had only made a close examination, they would have found that the scorpions had come from



The juniors halted in amazement as a party of blacks, all chained together, had suddenly come into view. "Slaves!" gasped Handforth. "By jingo!" Watson exclaimed excitedly. "Look at that last pair! Isn't one of them Umlosi?"

that spot. Old wood is one of their favourite haunts.

The rest of the camp was in repose, and except for the usual sounds from the forest there was no cause for uneasiness. There had been no further signs of human enemies, and the creatures of the wilds were in no way to be feared.

Lord Dorrimore was on guard, for he and Nelson Lee had decided that it would be most unwise for the whole camp to sleep. Some of the fellows had asked to be given their spells of guard-duty, but Lee had put his foot down. The more sleep the boys could get, the better.

So Dorrie was taking the first watch, and busying himself with building up the camp fires. Nelson Lee was asleep, and Nipper had made up his mind to be awake later on, orders or no orders.

"I'm going to clear out of here," said Handforth firmly, as he struck a match, and looked round. "I'll bet there's a scorpions' nest in this grass, somewhere."

"Chuck it!" said McClure, yawning. "You know what Mr. Lee said. You can't disobey orders. And it's impossible to sleep out in the open. You'll get bitten to pieces by the mosquitoes."

"I'll use that little store tent, on the edge of camp," said Handforth. "You chaps had better come, too——"

"Not likely!" said Church. "It's not a tent at all—it's only a kind of shelter. We should be stifled in there."

"Better go alone!" said Mac.

"That's just what I mean to do," replied Handforth.

He picked up his blankets, and vanished. Church and McClure were rather surprised. They hadn't expected their leader to take them at their word. It seemed silly. There weren't likely to be any more scorpions in the tent. Surely three had exhausted the supply?

Handforth made his way round behind the camp, and arrived at the little shelter without having disturbed anybody. He was feeling very pleased with himself. This was really a corking idea.

The other fellows were all sleeping near the fires, and, consequently, they got all the mosquitoes and moths and other queer insects of the night—all of them attracted by the blaze.

But here, on the very outskirts of the camp—beyond the range of the light—there weren't likely to be any insects. At least, so Handforth told himself. He crept into the shelter, among the odds and ends of stores, and rolled himself in his blanket.

"By George! This is the wheeze!" he told himself contentedly.

And he forthwith went to sleep, tired out after the long day's march. Most of the fellows had discovered that the humid climate made them feel excessively tired in a very short time.

Nobody had been told about the strange phenomenon of the river. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had kept this to themselves

—with the sole exception of Willy. He, as the original discoverer, could hardly be kept out of it.

But Lee had decided to do nothing until the morrow. They were going up river, anyhow, and they might be able to discover some explanation of the mystery.

For the present, the camp was peaceful.

Handforth was sleeping soundly, and Lord Dorrimore had settled himself near one of the camp fires, with his pipe. He knew nothing of Edward Oswald's change of quarters—or he might have had something to say.

About an hour later, Handforth awoke.

He didn't exactly know why he had been aroused out of his slumbers, and for some few moments he stared up into the blackness of the little tent, vaguely aware that he was hot, and that the air was close.

"You here, you chaps?" he whispered sleepily. "Phew! Pretty stuffy in here, isn't it? Who's closed the tent up?"

His chums, being about two hundred yards away, naturally failed to hear this plaintive grumble. But Handforth had overlooked the fact that he had changed his quarters.

"Wake up, fatheads!" he said, punching round him.

But he rapped his knuckles on a box, and this effectually awakened him. Then he remembered that he was alone. And this was peculiar, too, because he could distinctly hear somebody moving.

"My only hat!" he breathed, as a sudden suspicion came to his mind. "The Sansissi! They're creeping up, and we're being attacked! By George, if it comes to that, I can smell 'em!"

Without question, there was a most peculiar odour—a strange, animal-like smell. Handforth knew that the natives—to a white man—had their own peculiar "scent." But he had never noticed it quite so unpleasantly as this before.

Scrape, scrape, scrape!

He held himself tense. The beggars were working their way round the tent! He could hear them worming their way along the canvas. In another minute, perhaps, they would spring out upon the sleeping camp, and start a deadly attack!



CHAPTER 13.

A Near Thing!

HANDFORTH felt the responsibility weighing upon him.

The safety of the camp was in his keeping! Being on the edge, far from the fire, he was permitted to know of this coming attack. Even Dorrie, although on guard, had noticed nothing. Within the circle of firelight, he was naturally incapable of seeing what went on out here, near the edge of the forest.

Handforth took a deep breath.

Would he be in time? Would he be able to shout an alarm, and thus save all his com-

panions from destruction? Another thought came to him. What would happen to him after he *had* given the alarm? It was a thought which chilled him slightly. These enemies were not likely to let him get away!

However, his plain duty was before him. He must give the alarm at once, and risk the consequences, whatever they may be. Handforth was famous for his recklessness, and he had never been known to fail when it came to a question of pluck.

Steeling himself, he crept to the loose flap which covered the entrance, and leapt out in one bound, drawing in his breath in order to give vent to a wild shout of warning.

But he didn't utter it.

His vocal cords, in fact, became momentarily paralysed. He was rooted to the spot, utterly and absolutely scared.

The moon was shining, and there, five yards away from him, stood an enormous lion!

The brute was quite still, except for the lashing of its long tail. His eyes were gleaming in the moonlight, and, in all probability, he was just as scared as Handforth. But there was no certainty about this, and the junior thought that his last second had come.

Now he understood the meaning of that odour! The lion had been prowling around the tent, attracted, no doubt, by the scent of the bird which Nelson Lee had killed during the evening, and which had been placed here.

Not that Handforth wasted any time in thinking of why the lion had come. It was quite sufficient for him to see it there, facing him. A thousand thoughts flew through his mind at lightning speed.

Only a day or two before he had been grumbling because he hadn't seen any lions. This one glimpse had thoroughly satisfied him! He fervently hoped that the brute was satisfied, too. Handforth's anxiety for the company of lions had dwindled completely away.

And, really, his position was perilous in the extreme.

He had no weapon, however, and at his first move the lion would probably spring. As a general rule, these monarchs of the forest bolt at the sight of a human being, but there are exceptions to every rule. And Handforth's lion seemed to be preparing himself for grim work.

"Hi!" howled Handforth hoarsely.

He started violently. Until he had uttered the shout he hadn't known that he was about to make it, and he had startled himself. He startled the lion, too. It sprang back, raised its head, and emitted a devastating roar. Then it stood there, snarling nastily.

"Great gad!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore.

He had been musing over his pipe, but now he sprang up in a flash, his rifle ready. Dorrie was an old hunter, and his life had often depended upon his swiftness of action.

Swinging round, he ran out of the circle of the firelight, and in the radiance from the moon he saw that tense little scene.

"Hold still, young 'un!" shouted Dorrie, his heart in his mouth

The lion, disturbed by this interruption, turned, and gave vent to another nerve-shattering roar. And Handforth, finding himself still alive, rapidly recovered. He prepared to dash off.

But the lion was quicker.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Handforth's movement, and he swung round, crouched, and then made his spring.

There was something so awful in that spring that Handforth's muscles seemed to petrify. To move was impossible. The whole sky seemed to be filled with that tremendous fawn-coloured body.

Crack!

Dorrie's rifle spoke, and in the same split-second Handforth flung himself headlong to the ground, sideways.

There was a thudding crash, and the lion rolled over and over, limp and quivering—stone dead.

Dorrie's shot had killed the brute in mid-spring!



CHAPTER 14.

The Lurking Peril!

"A TIDY-SIZED beggar," said Lord Dorrimore, as he ran up and had a look at the carcase. "Handy, you young ass, what the deuce were you doing out here? Do you know you might have been killed?"

"Do I know it!" gasped Handforth. "Oh, my goodness! I thought I *was* killed! That was a marvellous shot of yours, Dorrie! Absolutely marvellous! You downed the beastly thing with one shot!"

"There wasn't time to take two," said Dorrie coolly. "There very seldom is when you're firin' at a chargin' lion. If your first shot fails, there isn't another! The lion wins!"

Nelson Lee came running up, and Nipper and several of the other fellows hastened round, attracted by the roaring and by the shot. The whole camp, in fact, was aroused.

"Good heavens!" said Lee, as he saw what had happened. "Is anybody hurt? Did the lion attack?"

"He sprang at me, sir," said Handforth shakily. "I don't know how I escaped, even now. The nearest thing I've ever heard of! I'm all shivery! My goodness! It's a funny thing I'm not dead!"

"It was pretty close," admitted Dorrie.

He explained the circumstances, and there were shouts of inquiry. Everybody wanted to know why Handforth had been sleeping in that spot, instead of with the others.

"There were scorpions in my blankets, so I shifted away," explained Handforth. "After this I'll keep to the scorpions! My hat! I've never been so scared in all my life!"

"Scared?" repeated Tommy Watson. "You scared?"

"Imposs., old boy!" said Archie.

"I tell you I was scared out of my wits, and I don't mind admitting it, either," said Handforth. "That beastly lion was standing right in front of me, and then he sprang! I expect my hair will be white in the morning!"

In the morning, too, Handforth would probably deny that he had been scared. But just at the moment he was unusually frank, and nobody thought less of him for his open statement. He would have been less than human if he had not been frightened by that experience.

"It only shows you, Handy, that you can't take liberties," said Church. "None of these forest things will attack as long as we're protected by the fires. But what do you expect, if you go sleeping right beyond the safety zone?"

Handforth was very shaky for half an hour, and he had no further desire for sleep. In fact, Nelson Lee permitted him to remain on watch for an hour, so that his nerves could have a chance of recovering.

The rest, after the excitement had died down, went back to sleep. It was now Lee's spell for watching, and he and Handforth sat by the camp-fire, alert and wakeful.

"I don't want another adventure like that, sir," said the junior. "It wouldn't have been so bad if I had had a rifle, or even a knife. But I had nothing! Do you think there are any more lions about?"

"Plenty," said Lee dryly.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"But you needn't think they'll bother us," went on Lee. "The one Dorrie killed must have been very hungry to make a raid like that. Let us hope we have no other enemies lurking about."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Nothing," said Lee absently. "At least, there's no need for me to tell you exactly what is in my thoughts. If you are feeling better, you had better go back to bed."

Handforth was curious. He remembered suddenly that Nelson Lee had been looking very closely and searchingly into the surrounding bush. He stared round himself, but could see nothing to alarm him.

Then suddenly he stiffened.

Was it imagination, or did he see a black form moving near the trees? He was aware of an uncanny impression that eyes were watching him. Not one pair of eyes, but many.

"I say, sir!" he whispered. "I was right, after all!"

"What do you mean—you were right?"

"When I first heard that lion I thought it was the Sansissi, gathering round for an attack," murmured Handforth. "I believe they're here, too! Look! Can't you see something moving over there, sir?"

Lee shifted his rifle an inch or two.

"Not so loud, young 'un," he said quietly. "I was hoping that you wouldn't see. Yes, there are figures moving about—and they're all round us."

"Oh, corks!" breathed Handforth, staring over his shoulder.

He failed to see any further indications of the enemy, and he wondered if Nelson Lee was joking. But a moment's thought told him that Lee would never joke on such a subject.

"If they're all round us, sir, why don't they attack?" he asked tensely. "And why are we sitting here like this, as though there wasn't any danger? Let's rouse the others and prepare to fight the beggars off if they attack!"

"No—let them sleep," said Lee. "If these blacks attack, there'll be absolutely no chance of saving ourselves, either awake or asleep. There's no need to cause unnecessary alarm. Knowing something of these blacks, I don't think they'll bother us."

"All the same, sir, it's a bit thick, isn't it?" said Handforth, as he stared round. "I thought these Sansissi rotters were afraid to come into this region?"

"I don't think they are the Sansissi," replied Lee. "Don't worry yourself, young 'un. These lurking forms won't come any nearer. I believe they're only just giving us a close look, to see who we are."

Nelson Lee's confidence was reassuring. He knew the methods of these tribes, and he had little or no fear that the unknown lurkers would pounce during the hours of darkness.

But he was uneasy about the morrow.



CHAPTER 15.

The Mystery Deepens!

THE next thing Handforth knew was that Church and McClure were shaking him vigorously, and that the damp coolness of the African dawn was over the land. The sky was filled with grey light, and another day was here.

Handforth had fallen asleep near the camp-fire, and Nelson Lee had rolled him in his blankets and had left him there. He now awoke, refreshed and filled with all his usual confidence.

"Come on, Handy!" said Church briskly. Handforth looked round, blinking.

"What about the enemy?" he asked.

"Which enemy?"

"During the night there were all sorts of lurking figures among the trees," said Handforth. "They were creeping round like shadows, and we expected an attack——"

"Rats!" grinned McClure. "You've been dreaming!"

"You've been having nightmares!" said Church.

"You silly fatheads!" roared Handforth. "Ask Mr. Lee."

"We're not going to make ourselves look so foolish," said Mac. "I say, Willy!" he added. "Your major thinks that we were surrounded by lurking figures in the night."

Willy, who was passing, paused and shook his head.

"There's no telling what Ted might think," he said. "When he isn't dreaming he's imagining things."

"Perhaps you'll say I imagined that lion?" shouted Handforth. "Perhaps you'll say I dreamed——"

"Lion?" said Willy. "What lion?"

Handforth staggered.

"Why, the one Dorrie shot, of course!" he gasped.

"Did Dorrie shoot a lion?" said Willy with interest. "I'm not surprised, of course—but he might have told us about it."

Handforth looked bewildered.

"You—you idiots!" he panted. "You're not telling me that I dreamed—— Oh, corks! And I thought it had actually happened! So there wasn't a lion at all?"

Willy went off, and Church and McClure grinned.

"He was only pulling your leg!" said Church. "You didn't dream about the lion, old man—he's still over by the bush, stone dead. You're lucky to be alive!"

Handforth waxed indignant.

"Trying to spoof me!" he said gruffly.

"That lion came for me like a charging battering-ram!"

"And you weren't scared a bit?" asked Mac.

"Of course I wasn't!"

"I thought so," said Mac. "Didn't we say that he wouldn't be scared this morning, Churchy? Well, we won't argue."

Within an hour the expedition was practically ready to start again, for everything was hastened up. The morning was the best time for marching, before the sun attained its full intensity.

Nelson Lee said nothing to the others about those mysterious forms. Handforth did, but as nobody believed him, no harm was done. And then they all got on the march again.

It was hard going. The packs were heavy enough, in all conscience, and there was very little shelter from the blazing sun. And, further along, two or three miles up the stream, the nature of the country changed.

Thick elephant-grass, with razor-like blades, hindered the progress, and there were dense patches of thorn that had to be avoided. The jungle was getting thicker all the time, and it seemed that progress would soon be completely stopped.

"This won't do, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee, after another difficult mile had been advanced. "This bush is absolutely impassable. Look at that tangle ahead!"

Dorrie nodded. He had come up to the front of the column in order to hold a short consultation.

"We shall have to cross the river," he said. "There are some hills rising over in that direction, an' the ground doesn't seem to be so tangled. The jungle on this side is too good for us. Nothin' but thorn an' creepers an' tangled roots. It'll take us all day to cover another mile."

"The worst of it is our progress is more or less aimless," said Lee. "The only way to

travel in this country is by water—and that method is denied us. And yet I feel that we must be getting very near to the spot where Umlosi met with disaster."

"That's funny," said Dorrie. "I've got the same feelin', too. I believe we're right in the district—an' it'll be on the other side of this river. We shall have to cross it, an' push on into those hills."

"There's something to be done first," said Nelson Lee.

The river was two or three hundred yards away, almost hidden by a tangle of undergrowth. The other members of the party had been instructed not to go near the stream. Lee made his way to the water alone.

He took great care not to wade in, but he swung from the overhanging roots, and cautiously dipped his fingers in and out—a swift, lightning-like movement. A spasm ran through his entire frame.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he muttered. "It's as deadly as an electric cable!"

CHAPTER 16.

Scouting.



WITHOUT any electrical-recording instrument, it was impossible for Nelson Lee to form any accurate judgment of the approximate voltage. But he felt that he was not far wrong in assuming that the stream was charged with many hundreds of volts—possibly a thousand at its source!

What could it mean?

How was this river electrified? Why? Was it natural, or was there some reason for it—some sinister design? It was impossible to say. But the need for caution impressed itself very strongly upon Lee.

"H'm! So Dorrie imagines that we're all going to pursue our trek on the other side of this river, does he?" he mused. "I'm afraid there'll be no continuation of the journey until a little scouting work has been done. Before we enter this region, I want to find out what we're liable to let ourselves in for."

This was a sensible view. It would be very rash to continue blindly onwards into the land of mystery. For the forest on the other side of the Kalala River was the true "tagati" belt. Over there lay the country of the powerful Ju-Ju.

And here was the dilemma.

For Dorrie's party to retreat was impossible—or, if not exactly impossible, highly dangerous, owing to the inflamed Sansissi. To continue on the other side of the river was out of the question, and to penetrate the unknown country was dangerous. So what was to be done?

Clearly, there was only one answer. The party must camp here, and Nelson Lee would go scouting, with a view to determining the

precise nature of the country which was to be traversed.

Lee gave these points to Lord Dorrimore.

"Of course, it's the only thing to be done," agreed his lordship thoughtfully. "But there's one mistake in your scheme, old man. A bad mistake. In fact, a ghastly bloomer."

"And what's that?"

"I'll do the scoutin', an' you can mind the children!" explained Dorrie blandly.

"If it's all the same to you, I think we'll leave the plan as I originally suggested," said Lee. "And you'd better not let these fellows and girls hear you referring to them as children, or you'll be hurled into the river—electricity or no electricity."

"I was afraid you'd be infernally selfish," grumbled Dorrie. "Gad, I'd give a thousand quid to be first in that unexplored chunk of forest. But I daresay you're right—you generally are."

"With all due respects, old man, and with many regrets for your disappointment, I think you'd better let—"

"Good glory, yes," said Dorrie. "I was only jokin', you chump! I rather pride myself on bein' a hunter an' a scout, but I sink small compared to you, Lee. When it comes to a matter of observin' things, an' noticin' the tiny details, you've got me whacked every time! Go straight ahead, an' for goodness' sake take care of yourself. I hope you enjoy the swim. Personally, I think it'll be a shockin' affair."

Lee looked thoughtful.

"Rather too shocking, Dorrie," he replied. "I don't want to go down stream like those other dead things. No, I can sling a rope up, I think, and swing across to the opposite bank. In the meantime, you make camp here, and keep everybody away from that water. You know what the boys are—utterly reckless and daredevil."

"I know it!" said Dorrie. "I'd also like to mention that you've given me a pretty hefty job, lookin' after 'em. Still, we'll let it pass."

"If there's any possibility of hewing the wood—and there seems to be plenty of it about here—you might try to rig up a kind of bridge," said Lee. "It'll be something to keep the youngsters busy. And if I report a clear coast, we shall need a bridge of sorts. Anything'll do, as long as it bears the weight."

"Leave it to us," said Lord Dorrimore.

And in less than five minutes the packs were being unrolled and the stores were being set aside, and the camp was generally busy.

"Blessed if I can understand why we're making camp here," said Handforth. "Why not go on? At this rate, we shan't make any progress at all. It'll take us a week to cover twenty miles!"

"Mr. Lee knows best," said Church. "Leave it to him."

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie.

And these opinions were general. If Nelson Lee and Dorrimore thought a halt was necessary, it was good enough for the others. They were all aware that the whole situation

was doubtful, and that almost anything might happen. They pretended to be carefree and lighthearted, but there was a constant tension in the air.

And now there was an exciting topic to be discussed. Everybody knew about the electrified river, and it was a subject which led to endless discussion.



CHAPTER 17.

Nelson Lee on the Job.

BUT it seems so impossible," said Irene. "Where can the electricity come from? And how does it get into the river?"

"Oh, there's probably a geyser, or something, higher up the stream," said Handforth. "By George, that's it! It isn't an ordinary geyser, spouting hot water. It's an electric geyser—sending up thousands of volts of juice! We've made a tremendous discovery!"

"We only need to give him a little encouragement, and he'll believe it as gospel fact within five minutes," said Willy, with a grin. "When Ted gets one of his ideas, he looks upon it as an established fact, instead of a crazy spasm."

Handforth glared.

"If there isn't an electric geyser, what is there?" he demanded. "Now then, young Mr. Clever! Perhaps you'll tell us why the river is electrified?"

"Being clever—you said it, not me—I think it's safer to leave it alone," replied Willy. "This river is like a power cable, and I'm not cuckoo enough to start any guesswork. I leave that to you, Ted."

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

"I didn't say it—but you can accept the compliment, if you like," said Willy. "Let's forget about the river, and do some work."

"That's the style," said Doris briskly. "We might as well be preparing a meal while we're about it."

Handforth had turned, and was staring towards the river with startled eyes. Two figures were disappearing into the tangle of bushes, and one was carrying a long length of rope. Handforth gave a snort, and ran after them.

"Hi!" he gasped, as he came up.

"Thought so!" groaned Nipper. "I knew I shouldn't be able to slip away without you spotting me, Handy!"

"Where are you off to?" asked Handforth suspiciously.

"I'm going scouting—with the guv'nor," replied Nipper.

Handforth flushed with indignation.

"But when I asked to go, sir, you refused!" he said, looking at Nelson Lee. "I suppose I can come now?"

"Handforth, I think you'd better stay behind," said Nelson Lee. "I'm taking Nipper

with me in case of trouble. Dorrie must remain with the rest of you, so he can't be spared. If anything happens to we two, one of us may be able to get back."

"And there's an old saying that two's company," added Nipper.

"Yes, but——"

"Quite apart from all that, you can't be spared from camp, Handforth," went on Nelson Lee. "You mustn't think of such a thing. What will happen to the rest if danger arises, and you are not there?"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said. "I hadn't thought of that, sir!"

"But you must think of it," said Lee gravely. "You are needed in the camp, my boy. Remember Irene, and the other girls. Without your support, I tremble to think what might become of them. However, I am not harsh. If you prefer to come with us——"

"No fear, sir!" interrupted Handforth hastily. "I'd better help Dorrie to look after the camp. By the time you get back, we shall have everything snug—and if we're attacked, you can rely upon us to look after ourselves, and wipe up the enemy."

And Handforth went back, leaving Nelson Lee and Nipper grinning cheerfully.

"It's a shame to take the money, guv'nor," chuckled Nipper. "The way you can pull old Handy's leg is a crime! He was dying to come with us—but he swallowed every word, and he's gone back as happy as a dog with two tails."

"He has certainly gone back happy—but I doubt if a dog would be happy with two tails, Nipper," said Lee drily. "I imagine the unfortunate canine would be most embarrassed."

"Particularly if he wagged both tails at once, sir," said Nipper.

Somehow, they felt very cheerful. They had an instinctive feeling that they were near their goal. It could only have been instinctive, for there was no rational reason for this conviction. Umlosi had vanished mysteriously, and nobody knew the precise location.

And yet it was felt that he would soon be found. Both Lee and Nipper had a strong premonition that the forest on the other side of the Kalala River would give up its secret to them.



CHAPTER 18.

An Amazing Discovery!

EADY, guv'nor?" asked Nipper anxiously.

"Go ahead!" sang out Nelson Lee.

They had secured a rope to a strong overhanging tree-branch, and one after the other they swung across from one bank to the other. It was a ticklish bit of work, in case they swung short. Lee was

certain that a plunge into that stream would mean death.

They were on the other bank now, and the rope was tied to a handy bush. On the other side, Dorrie and several of the others had watched, and they waved a cheery farewell.

"If you're not back in a couple of hours, we shall come an' look for you!" sang out his lordship.

"I don't think we shall be as long as that," replied Lee. "But don't worry, in any case. If there's any sudden danger, we'll fire three shots into the air. You do the same."

And so they parted.

Cautiously, Lee and Nipper plunged into the thick forest, and found almost at once that they were climbing. The ground rose fairly steeply, and with a great deal of unevenness. It was hard going. Through masses of thorn, and entangled creepers, they forced their way. The hillsides were literally choked with the dense jungle.

"Well, we're getting somewhere, guv'nor," said Nipper at last. "But I'm more mystified than ever. There's no sign of any human beings at all. We haven't passed a native village, or even a solitary hut, since we left the Sansissi tribe. This region seems to be utterly wild."

"And yet appearances are very often deceptive," said Lee grimly. "For this doesn't seem like the purely primeval, does it?"

Lee was in advance, and quite unexpectedly he had pushed his way through a tangled clump of creepers, and had come out upon a well-defined path. It was trodden hard by long usage—recent usage—and it wound its way through the jungle like a snake.

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "This isn't a deserted path, guv'nor!"

"Exactly," murmured Lee. "No signs of human life, eh? I rather think you're wrong, Nipper. Here, you'd better take this."

He thrust his revolver into Nipper's hand, and unslung his own rifle. The forest pathway was so well-trodden, and so obviously used by a great deal of traffic, that somebody might be along at any moment.

"This is getting warm, sir," murmured Nipper keenly.

They took their bearings carefully, noting the exact position of this spot—so that they could find it again at short notice. Then they proceeded along the path, taking the uphill direction.

Suddenly, Lee stopped, and drew his breath in.

"What have you found, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"This is startling, indeed," replied Lee. "Look, Nipper!"

"A cigarette end!"

"An English ordinary, machine-made cigarette," went on Lee, in wonder. "No nigger ever smoked this, young 'un! Can it be possible that there are white men here? I rather think it is not only possible, but highly probable."

Feeling that they were on the verge of something big, they hurried on, but never once

relaxed their vigilance. And at last they reached the top of the ridge.

The path now sloped away down a long decline, winding off sharply to the right. Lee was about to walk on when he checked. He had caught a glimpse of something through a break in the trees on the other side of the path.

"The jungle is not so thick here," he murmured. "Perhaps we can get a glimpse of the valley if we break through here. There is certainly a considerable valley on the other side of this ridge, Nipper. Let us see if we can find a use for our binoculars."

They left the path, and broke through the tall clumps of bamboo which grew alongside. They trod down the young shoots, and finally emerged upon the steep hillside, with a clear break in the forest beyond. A vista of broken country was revealed—a deep valley, with many interesting objects in view.

The first and most notable object was a building. Not a native hut, but a long, red-painted shed, composed entirely of corrugated iron!

Lee and Nipper exchanged quick glances.

"Why, it must be a white settlement!" muttered Nipper.

"That much is obvious—but what kind of a settlement?" said Lee softly. "I am already beginning to have my suspicions. And we must expect to find enemies here, Nipper. Honest white men don't electrify their rivers, and cause their territory to be shunned as places of witchcraft. There's something very significant about all this."

He unslung his binoculars, and took a close look at the corrugated-iron shed. As he was doing so, a procession of men came into view round a dense clump of trees. They were much nearer than the shed, and Nipper could easily distinguish them with his naked eye.

"By James!" muttered Lee tensely. "I thought as much!"

Nipper caught his breath in. He could tell that the men were blacks, and it was obvious that they were being marched along in a double column, in charge of an armed guard.

But Nipper did not see what Nelson Lee saw. All those wretched blacks were chained together!



CHAPTER 19.

The Sudden Attack.

HEY seem to be prisoners, sir," said Nipper excitedly.

"Quick," said Lee.

"Look through these before they are out of sight."

Nipper took the glasses and levelled them. The gang of figures sprang into acute prominence. They were miserable-looking specimens, all of them, and they wore nothing but loin-cloths. They were chained together by their ankles, and Nipper could see the little puffs of dust which arose as the chains dragged on the ground.

The man in charge was dressed in boots, puttees, and shorts. He was wearing a red



Instead of proving an encumbrance, Umlosi discovered that the post chained to his wrist was a wonderful weapon of defence. Calling to the St. Frank's juniors to stand out of the way, he swung himself round, causing the post to whirl madly. Everything within radius of that terrible weapon was struck, and three of the guards were felled on the spot.

shirt, open at the neck, and a wide-brimmed hat. And Nipper could hardly believe his eyes when he saw that this fellow was carrying a heavy dog-whip, which he occasionally slashed in the air. Then they all vanished from range.

"My goodness!" said Nipper, lowering the glasses.

"Startling, eh?" said Lee, with a hard glint in his eyes.

"But what does it mean, sir?" gasped Nipper.

"Mean?" snapped Lee. "What can it mean, except one thing? Slavery, Nipper!"

"Slavery, sir?" said Nipper, in horror.

"Oh, but that's—that's impossible! Slavery in the Congo was abolished dozens of years ago. That sort of thing doesn't happen nowadays!"

"Considering that it is happening in front of our very eyes, I needn't make any comment," retorted Lee. "I half-suspected this, too! Only I thought it was too fantastic."

Nipper gave a sudden start.

"Umlosi!" he breathed. "Great Scott! Do you believe that he was captured by these men, sir?"

"No, I believe he was captured by the Oturi tribe," replied Lee. "You may remember that the Oturis are the hereditary enemies of the Kutanas—Umlosi's own people. And it struck me as a significant fact that large numbers of Kutanas have been mysteriously disappearing. But we have heard nothing of the Oturis disappearing."

"Yes, that's rummy, sir."

"On the contrary, it is very explanatory," said Lee. "I take it that the Oturis are acting as slavers. In fact, the Oturis captured Umlosi and his men and allowed them to live, and sold them into slavery. It's only a guess, but I believe it's near the mark."

"But two of them were killed."

"Perhaps there was a mishap in crossing the river," said Lee. "That is the only way I can account for it. They may even have tried to escape. We shan't know until we have seen Umlosi—and perhaps not then. But let us get back to the path."

"Are we going ahead, sir?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Yes. We might as well see all we can."

They retraced their steps through the bamboos, and got back to the path. The view from this hillside was limited, and Lee was anxious to obtain a wider field of inspection.

Slavery was a thing which made his blood boil, and the sight of those helpless creatures, chained together like victims of the Spanish Inquisition, had filled him with an intense indignation. Then and there he had resolved to probe the full facts of this infamy, and to take no rest until he had brought the slaver to justice.

For justice existed, even in this remote region. When the authorities knew of what was happening, they would take immediate steps to intervene. Slavery was not allowed in Africa by any government. Such methods were supposed to be obsolete. But here, in



Instead of proving an encumbrance, Umlosi's weapon of defence. Calling to the St. Frank the post to whirl madly. Everything within

this remote interior district, it was evidently flourishing.

Lee and Nipper had not proceeded far before they came to a kind of crossroads, where two other pathways criss-crossed this one. There was quite a maze of openings. And the central meeting spot was comparatively large, with a curious wooden structure in the centre, surrounded by roughly-made railings, as though to protect it.

"What's this thing, gov'nor?" asked Nipper, pausing. "Looks like one of those old-fashioned wooden pumps without a handle."

But before Nelson Lee could make any remark, he spun round. A sound had caught his quick ear, and he was just in time to meet a charge from two powerful blacks. Another one came behind, and they asked no questions. They simply hurled themselves at the two intruders.

"Don't shoot!" shouted Lee. "We don't want to be in the wrong. Besides, these men are unarmed."

There was no time for any further talk. The three blacks were not members of any of the Congo tribes. Lee judged them to be



the post chained to his wrist was a wonderful thing of the way, he swung himself round, causing the weapon was struck, and three of the guards not.

Nubians by their big frames and powerful limbs. Apparently they had been imported into the country, and were used as slave-guards. They carried nothing but whips, and were dressed in shorts and precious little else.

There was no mistaking their intentions. They attacked savagely, and Nelson Lee and Nipper clenched their fists, and gave battle. They had a feeling that these Nubians were mentally sizing them up—determined to take them alive, in order to add them to one of those chain-gangs!



CHAPTER 20.

The Secret of the Wooden Pillar!

CRASH!

Nelson Lee's fist seemed to meet something that was made of solid ivory. It was merely the head of one

of the Nubians, and the fellow scarcely noticed the tremendous blow.

"We'll never do it, guv'nor!" gasped Nipper.

And he was certainly right. One man was confining his attentions to Nipper, and the other two were attending to Lee. In less than half a minute the whole business would be over. It was inevitable.

But just then one of those unexpected little mishaps took place—one of those unprecedented chances that none can foresee.

While Lee was engaging one of his attackers, the other man decided to finish the fight with dramatic effect. And to this end he snatched up Lee's rifle, which the detective had flung aside in order to have his hands free—and swung it round, gripping it by the barrel.

"Look out!" shrieked Nipper, as he dodged his own adversary.

He was sick with fear, believing that Nelson Lee's head was about to be crushed by that murderous swing.

And then the thing happened.

The Nubian was so intent upon his object that he miscalculated his position. As the rifle-butt swung round over his shoulder, it struck the curious wooden structure in the centre of the clearing.

The result was staggering.

The wooden casing seemed to burst and fall in powder. And at the same second there was a sheet of blue flame—a terrible thing which ran along the gun-barrel, and, for a second, enveloped the Nubian from head to foot. He gave one screeching death-cry, and crashed lifeless.

The other two staggered back, their eyes starting from their heads. Then they ran, panic-stricken, down one of the paths. The whole affair had happened with such dramatic swiftness that neither Lee nor Nipper could hardly realise what had taken place.

"They've gone!" gasped Nipper, when he found his breath. "Great Scott! This—this chap's dead! I don't understand, sir!"

Lee was staring at the centre of the clearing, and he had also glimpsed his rifle, the barrel of which was burst and twisted.

"I don't think there's much mystery, Nipper," he said. "That wooden box was just a casing for this electricity control. As you can see, it's a sort of switch, connected up with a fuse."

"But the box seemed to burst, sir."

"White ants!" said Lee, nodding. "After their usual fashion they consumed every atom of wood except the bare shell. And it naturally fell to pieces at the slightest touch. White ants are the curse of this country in that respect—but we should be very grateful to them."

"Doesn't it just show you how much can depend on a little thing, sir," said Nipper breathlessly. "And I suppose the rifle hit the exposed cable, and the full current ran up the barrel?"

"Yes, he was electrocuted," said Lee. "This is proof enough of the power in that river, young 'un!"

"Why, you don't think——"

"Of course!" said Lee. "This is undoubtedly one of the cables which supplies the current to the river. But I shall be very much

surprised if the fuse hasn't blown, and put the cable out of action."

"Hadr't wo better do a discreet bolt, sir?" asked Nipper. "I'm game for any old thing, but it seems to me that the position might be pretty hot if we stay here. Those beggars didn't wait to ask any questions, did they?"

"They are obviously under orders to capture every stranger on sight," replied Lee. "Questions can be asked afterwards. Yes, we'd better make ourselves scarce while we're still safe."

But there wasn't time.

Even as they turned, trying to locate the path by which they had come—a difficult matter, as all the paths looked the same—the sound of running feet came to their ears.

"They're on us, guv'nor!" gasped Nipper.

They saw half a dozen men converging from two of the paths, and they turned quickly in the other direction—only to come face to face with another band. And before they could even assume a fighting attitude, they were surrounded—flung over—held down.

Vaguely, they wondered if they were going to be done to death on the spot. There was no chance of fighting for life against overwhelming odds like this.

There was a rattle of chains, and Nelson Lee felt something being clamped round his ankles. Nipper, too, was dimly aware of the same sensation. Then they were dragged to their feet, and placed in the middle of the guards.

Not a word was spoken.

The Nubians marched, and Nelson Lee and Nipper, chained together, were forced to go with them.



CHAPTER 21.

The River of Surprise!

LORD DORRIMORE looked at his watch, and pursed his lips.

"I don't mind admittin' I'm gettin' a bit anxious,"

he said. "At least, I'm uneasy. I'd like to see those two back again."

"They haven't been gone much more than an hour, sir," said Willy.

"Yes, I know that—but I can't help worryin', can I?" growled his lordship. "I've got a feelin' that there's somethin' dangerous on those slopes beyond the river."

"I think we can trust Mr Lee to look after himself," said Willy, with confidence. "They'll be all right, sir."

"Gad, I wish I had your tranquil mind," said Dorrie.

He looked round the camp, and he had every cause for satisfaction. All the fellows were busy—cutting wood, and constructing a rough-and-ready bridge. It was being so made

that it could be lowered across the river when completed. There were plenty of ropes in camp to facilitate this method.

The girls were hard at work in the camp kitchen, making a supply of bread in readiness for the evening meal. Everything, in fact, was going along fine.

There hadn't been a sign of danger, and Dorrie found himself with very little to do. He was itching to go off into that unknown territory, but his duty told him to remain here.

Handforth looked up as Dorrie came to the place where the bridge was being made. As usual, Handy had been directing the operations, and nobody had been taking any notice of him.

"About time they were back, isn't it, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, give them another hour," said Dorrie carelessly.

"That'll make about four!" said Handforth, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "We've been at work for over three—"

"It feels like three, I daresay," interrupted Dorrie gently.

"Why not get up a rescue party?" suggested Handforth eagerly. "Let's get across the river and go off in search—"

"Nothin' doin'," interrupted Lord Dorrie, shaking his head. "I'll admit I'm pretty anxious, but our job is to stay here."

He walked off, and Handforth looked hard at Church and McClure.

"By George!" he said. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"Why, Dorrie says he's anxious—and when Dorrie admits a thing like that, you can bet he's worried stiff," said Handforth. "How about getting up a rescue party of our own—just the three of us? Supposing we sneak off without telling the others?"

"That'll be easy—considering that all the others have heard your gentle whisper!" grinned McClure.

"Yes, chuck it, Handy!" said Gresham. "We've got to stay here and build this bridge."

"Absolutely," said Archie, who was working as strenuously as any of the others. "Kindly shove another log across, Handy, old bird. I mean to say, you chappies seem to be slackin' in the most frightful way."

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth.

It was something unusual for him to be accused of slacking by the champion slacker of the Remove. But the accusation happened to be right, and Handforth applied himself to his work with greater energy than ever. But he paused again five minutes later.

"I say, Irene!" he sang out. "Go easy, there!"

Irene Manners was walking towards the river, and Handforth was not the only one who looked at her in an anxious manner. Doris and the other girls called to her, too.

"It's all right—I'm only going to fetch some sticks," she called cheerfully. "There are lots of dry ones here, and we need some special

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heat. That new wood you fellows chopped is too sappy."

She went on, and there was a certain amount of bravado in her action. Handforth abandoned his job, and hurried towards the river. And Irene pushed on through the thick undergrowth.

And then, suddenly, she screamed.

There was no pretence about that cry. She had found herself in a marshy patch, and almost before she could realise it, something moved in the thick grass at her feet.

Coils of horror rose up—an enormous python!

She gave that one scream, and ran. Irene had plenty of pluck, but this great snake was enough to terrify the bravest. The girl was unarmed, too, and there was no way in which she could defend herself.

She ran blindly, tripped, and then went staggering over the edge of the river bank—which appeared with startling abruptness through the long grass—and before she could check herself, she toppled over.

Splash!

The horrified juniors and the other girls heard that sound with utter consternation. It meant only one thing. Irene had fallen into the river—that deadly stream—

But nobody paused to think. They ran madly, and the python was not even seen. More alarmed than Irene herself, probably, the creature had slithered off through the grass, vanishing into the dense jungle.

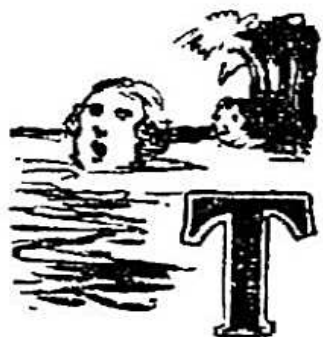
And there was Irene, struggling in the water!

"Come on!" roared Handforth.

Without hesitation, he dived headlong in, careless of any possible danger, and thinking only of pulling the girl out. Church, McClure, and two or three others, acted in precisely the same way.

Splash, splash, splash, splash!

They all went in together—and discovered, with some amazement, that the river was comparatively safe. Their limbs tingled painfully, and they felt the electricity shooting through and through them. But the current was ridiculously weak to what they had expected.



CHAPTER 22.

To the Rescue!

THE explanation was simple—although, of course, none of the members of Dorrie's camp knew what it was.

That dramatic little incident in the mystery country had brought about this effect—that incident when the Nubian had been killed by electricity. A fuse had blown, and the main cable was put out of action. Thus, the full current was unable to reach the water. It was curious to realise that the attack upon Nelson Lee and Nipper had indirectly saved Irene Manners' life—and perhaps the lives of Handforth and several others

"Hang on me!" gasped Handforth, as he swam towards the startled girl. "Don't try to swim, Irene—"

"I—I'm all right!" she panted. "Oh, I thought I was going to be killed for one dreadful second!"

"This electricity isn't much," said Handforth. "It tingles a bit, but nothing to hurt. Mr. Lee must have been spoofing us."

Handforth was confining all his attention to the girl, and rather to his surprise he found that she urgently needed his help. The current looked sluggish enough, but it was very deceptive. It pulled tenaciously, and tended to drag the swimmers into the centre of the stream. It was as much as Handforth could do to fight his way back to the bank.

Lord Dorrmore had arrived by now, with the others. They stood on the bank, amazed and alarmed.

"Come on out of it—quick!" shouted Dorrie. "Good glory! I thought I should find you all dead. Isn't this water pretty murderous?"

"It's all right, sir—only a bit tingly," gasped Handforth. "By George! The current's strong, though!"

Doris and Marjorie had torn down a long stick of bamboo, and were holding it out. In fact, those on the bank were so keen about Handforth and Irene that they hadn't noticed what was happening to the other fellows who had jumped in.

They were having a stiff fight.

There were four of them—Tregellis-West, Watson, Church, and McClure. Archie Glen-thorne, Johnny Onions, Browne, Willy, Gresham, and Duncan, were still on the bank, helping to rescue Irene.

And within a minute she was hauled safely out, and Handforth pulled himself up after her.

"Thank goodness!" said Dorrie. "That's two of you, anyway. I wonder why the current is so much weaker than Lee led us to believe? I didn't test it myself, but—Hullo! This way, you young asses!" he shouted, staring across the stream. "Come back!"

The other four swimmers were edging towards the opposite bank.

"We can't!" gurgled Church. "The stream's too strong!"

"We're being carried over here against our will!" shouted Watson. "My hat! It's about five times as strong as the Stowe!"

"Then get ashore over there!" shouted Dorrie. "Whatever you do, get out of the water!"

If the river had been entirely unelectrified, the swimmers might have beaten the force of the water. But the continuous tingling in their limbs robbed them of much of their strength, and they were compelled to do the best they could under the circumstances. And they could only fight towards the opposite bank.

At last, they managed to pull themselves out.

"Phew! That was a stiff business!" panted Watson.

"It ~~was~~, dear old boy," said Sir Montie, as he tried to regain his breath. "An' it strikes me, begad, that we shan't be able to get back. The current is flowin' over towards this bank."

"There are two currents, blow them!" said Church. "That electricity is pretty stiff, although it wasn't strong enough to hurt us. But I've still got pins and needles all over me. What the dickens are we going to do now?"

"I've got it!" said Watson eagerly. "We're over the river now! Let's do a bit of exploring!"

"Good egg!" said McClure. "We'll have a look for Mr. Lee and Nipper!"

"Begad! That's not such a bad idea!"

They were all agreed. They could see that Irene was safe, and that Handforth was out of the water, too. And as they couldn't very well get back until the bridge was finished, they might as well utilise the time by looking for Nelson Lee and Nipper.

"Hi!" came a shout from the other bank.

"It's all right, Handy—don't worry about us," said Church. "We're safe enough."

"I can see that, fathead!" shouted Handforth. "Why don't you come back?"

"We should never do it—the current's too powerful."

"Rats! You've only got to try——"

"We'll wait until you get the bridge across," interrupted Watson. "In the meantime, we're going to have a look for old Nipper and Mr. Lee."

They turned towards the thick clumps of bamboo which grew near by, and prepared to vanish—before Lord Dorrimore could stop them.

Handforth glanced round at Irene, and saw that she was being led away by the other girls. Lord Dorrimore was there, too, concerned for her well-being.

And Handforth flushed with indignation.

"Did you hear that, Browne?" he demanded, looking at the others with him. "Did you hear what those fatheads just said, Archie? They're going after Mr. Lee, and we're left out in the cold? Come on!"

And Handforth plunged recklessly into the river again, and swam towards the other bank. He wasn't going to be left out of this adventure!



CHAPTER 23.

The Chain Gangs.

WILLY looked at Browne with a grin.

"Well, if Ted's gone, I might as well go, too," he said carelessly.

"Let me urge you, Brother William, to reconsider——"

But Browne might as well have addressed the thin air. Willy had already dived in, and he reached the opposite bank at the same time as his major. Church and McClure were just helping their leader out, and they were looking none too pleased. For once, they had expected to have an easy hour of it. But it

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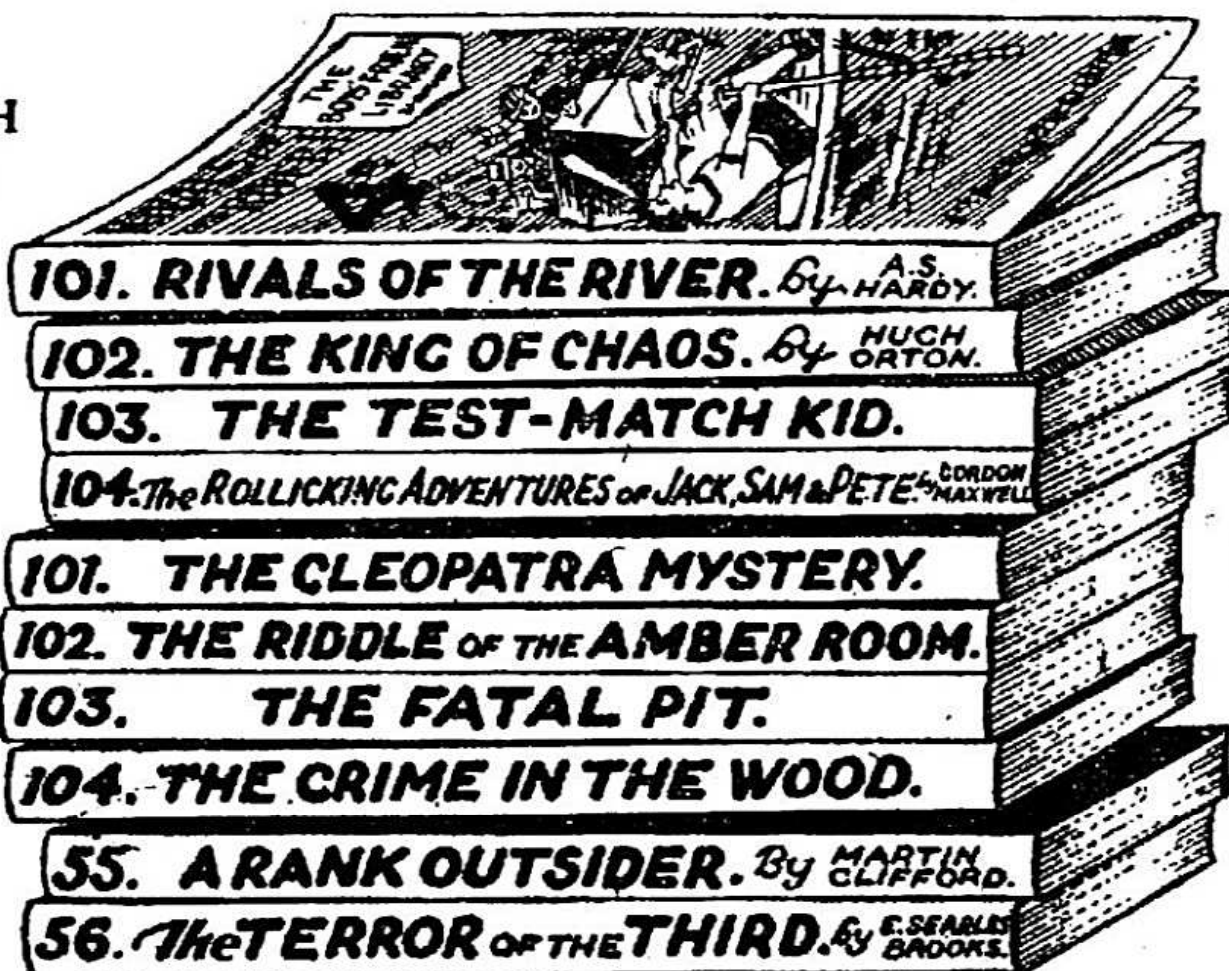
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was a difficult task to escape from the volcanic Handy.

"Thought you'd give me the slip, eh?" he spluttered, as he scrambled out of the water. "By George! That 'fluence is pretty strong, even now! But it's all rot to say that the current is dangerous. There's not enough juice in that river to charge a torch battery!"

"Why the dickens did you come, Handy?" asked Church gruffly. "We got over here by accident, and that was a different thing. There are only three or four fellows left in camp now, and if anything happens——"

"Rats! It's more important to find Mr. Lee!" said Handforth firmly. "We're not going to be left out of that game, are we? We want to do some exploring, too. And here's the chance. I shall be jolly glad to get out of my minor's way, if it comes to that."

"You'll have a job!" said Church tartly.

Handforth jumped as he saw that Willy was practically by his side. Until that moment, he hadn't known that his minor had followed him.

"You young rotter!" he roared. "Who told you to come? What's the idea of coming, anyhow?"

"As a rule, Church and McClure could look after you alone, but I think they'll need some help to-day," said Willy calmly. "I thought I'd better come to make sure, Ted."

Handforth was indignant, but he had no time to say all the things that were on the tip of his tongue. For Lord Dorrimore was coming back towards the river, and the six juniors felt that it would be just as well to make themselves scarce before they were ordered back.

So they vanished into the bush.

The camp was now left in the sole charge of Browne, Archie Glenthorne, Johnny Onions, Gresham, and Duncan. Lord Dorrimore was highly indignant when he discovered this, but it was only assumed. In his heart, he felt that he would like to accompany the explorers. But his duty bound him more than ever to the camp now.

The six juniors were climbing the bush-covered hills with difficulty, and it was mere chance which led them to strike the trail recently made by Nelson Lee and Nipper.

Willy was the first to notice it.

"This is pretty lucky," he said keenly. "Look here, you chaps! The grass is all trampled down—and the thorn-bushes are sliced away."

"Somebody's been here!" said Handforth excitedly.

"Yes, it looks like it, Ted. I was just saying——"

"Cannibals, perhaps! By George! We'd better go easy——"

"If you let Mr. Lee know that you called him a cannibal, he won't be very pleased!" interrupted Willy, grinning. "You silly chump, this is the trail that Mr. Lee and Nipper left."

Handforth grunted:

"You young ass!" he growled. "I thought we'd found something important!"

"And so it is important," said Watson. "My hat! It's the very thing we *did* want to find! Because we can go ahead now, and follow the exact tracks of old Nipper. Come on!"

"Begad! I'm feelin' frightfully excited," said Montie. "We might even be able to help, in case of trouble. It's a frightfully lucky thing we struck the trail—it is, really!"

In due course, they reached the trodden path, and were filled with fresh wonder and animation. Here was a discovery, indeed! Almost exactly the same as Lee, they decided to push through the trees, and have a look at the valley, before taking to the path.

And luck was with them.

They went further down the hillside, as Nelson Lee and Nipper had done, and they suddenly halted, staring in astonishment. Not three hundred yards away, a party of blacks had suddenly come into view, emerging from a belt of forest land.

"Slaves!" gasped Handforth. "Look at 'em! All chained together, and guarded by chaps with whips! Of all the——"

"By jingo!" interrupted Watson, pointing. "Look at that last pair—those two who are chained together, apart from the others! Isn't that big one Umlosi?"

"Begad!" breathed Montie tensely. "You're right, old boy!"

Here was a startling discovery, indeed! They had found Umlosi himself—chained to another man, and obviously a slave! Before their very eyes, he was led towards a hut, and thrust into it, and the door was closed.

Handforth took a deep, deep breath.

"Never mind, Mr. Lee!" he said grimly. "We've got to get old Umlosi out of that hut—now! Who's game for the job?"

"All of us!" echoed the others.



CHAPTER 24.

Mr. Otto Lorenzo!

NELSON LEE and Nipper were freshly startled at every turn.

Roughly chained together, they were being marched straight down into the valley, and the vista which was revealed to their eyes filled them both with wonder.

For here, cultivated fields stretched out on all sides. There were great belts of trees, and the very character of them offered Lee an explanation of this mystery.

"Rubber!" he murmured, as he nodded towards the trees. "Look, Nipper! Miles and miles of rubber plantations! I think we can understand why these slaves are in captivity."

"But I thought rubber was an ordinary commercial product, sir?" asked Nipper. "There's no need to employ slaves on the job in order to make a profit."

"But with slave labour, the profits are trebled," murmured Lee. "I am rather keen to see the owner of all this property!"

His wish was granted sooner than he had expected.

The ground was practically level in the valley, and the path soon widened into a fair-sized road. They passed all manner of huts and sheds, and they were constantly being stared at by groups of blacks—mostly women and children.

In the distance, they could see rising hills, with a powerful waterfall, sparkling in the dazzling sunlight. And near this waterfall there was a building, too—a fairly big building, with a corrugated-iron roof. Lee immediately guessed that it was a power-station. Here was the source of the electricity.

Much nearer, surrounded by graceful palms and highly decorative bushes, stood a picturesque bungalow. It occupied a large area, and was provided with spacious verandas and big sun-blinds. It looked very restful and comforting to Lee and Nipper, after their many days in the unexplored bush.

But they could not forget their chains.

There was one hope which filled both their minds. Perhaps this place was not what it actually appeared to be. Perhaps they would be released as soon as the owner saw them. His men, no doubt, had chained them up in ignorance, and they would be released, with many apologies, after they had reported.

But Lee, at all events, realised that this hope was a slim one. There was something very sinister and grim about this whole adventure.

Straight to the bungalow they were marched by their captors, but instead of being led into the building, they went straight past. And then they saw that there were some long sheds beyond, with heavy doors, and with barred windows. Nipper's hopes began to droop.

"Hey!"

A coarse shout came from the veranda, followed by some loud orders in a lingo which Nelson Lee failed to understand. It was certainly not Swahili. The guards understood, and Lee and Nipper were marched back, and taken up the palm-bordered path to the long veranda.

A man was lounging there—reading a newspaper in a spacious deck-chair. He thrust the newspaper aside, and rose to his feet. He was a big man, bronzed, and brutal in aspect. There was something swarthy about him, and his eyes were closely set. He was dressed in riding breeches, and a cotton shirt open at the neck.

Again he spoke—and the guards fell away, leaving the two prisoners at the foot of the veranda. The man looked at them closely, his face expressive of anger and resentment. But he did not seem surprised. He evidently knew of their coming.

"English?" he rapped out, suddenly.

"We are two members of a party, bound for the Kutana country," replied Lee steadily. "I take it that you are the owner of all this property?"

"What if I am?" asked the other.

"Surely you must realise that this treatment of harmless wayfarers is a little unusual?" asked Lee. "I would suggest that you give orders for these chains to be immediately removed."

"So you'll suggest orders to me, will you?" said the other, with a sneering laugh. "Perhaps you don't know whom I am? My name is Lorenzo—Otto Lorenzo."

Lee and Nipper did not seem to be impressed.

"It conveys nothing, eh?" snarled Lorenzo. "Perhaps not! But it soon will! All those who enter the Kalala territory soon learn to fear the name of Lorenzo! I shall not order those chains to be removed, my English friends. I shall order others to be affixed. Stronger chains. Thicker chains. Chains that will hurt!"

Lee flushed.

"This is an outrage!" he said quietly. "I do not know whether you are joking, Mr. Lorenzo, but——"

"We shall see!" interrupted the half-breed. "Personally, I think it is a wonderful joke. You may not appreciate it as I do. All who enter this territory become slaves. I am quite impartial. Englishmen are not so valuable to me as niggers, but I am easy to please!"

"You—you insulting rotter!" shouted Nipper fiercely.

Lorenzo laughed, and turned aside. And Nelson Lee and Nipper were dimly filled with consternation.

CHAPTER 25.

To Umlosi's Rescue!



"HOLD on!" said Willy Handforth.

The other five juniors were about to commence their rush down the hillside towards that hut, where Umlosi had been imprisoned. They were determined to make a grim attempt to rescue him. And Handforth, very impulsive, was all for making a swift, open rush. The others were so excited that they agreed to this rash plan.

"Hold on!" said Willy again. "Don't be so hasty, you chaps."

"You dry up!" said his major. "There's no time to lose——"

"It's a bit thick that I should be compelled to pull you up," went on Willy. "I'm the youngest member of the party, and it seems to me that I'm the only one who's got a cool head. You Remove asses! You'll only get yourselves collared if you make an open rush!"

"It's the only possible way!" said Watson impatiently.

"What about those thick trees over to the left?" asked Willy, pointing. "We've only got to work our way round them, and we shall come behind the very hut where Umlosi went into. Don't forget it's broad daylight. It might take us a quarter of an hour longer,



Cra-a-sh! With shattering force the heavy log of wood smashed against the corrugated iron, which buckled up and collapsed completely. "Hurrah!" yelled the St. Frank's juniors triumphantly. Nelson Lee and Nipper were almost free!

but won't it be worth it? If we show ourselves we shall probably be pounced on!"

"Rot!" said Handforth gruffly. "We shall be too quick for that."

But the others were cooled by Willy's tone, and they realised the commonsense of his warning.

"Yes, we'd better work round behind the trees," said Church.

"Begad! It'll be a lot safer," said Sir Montie.

"There's something else, too," went on Willy. "One of us ought to stay here, on the watch. If anything happens to the rest he can dodge straight back to Dorrie, and bring help."

"Perhaps you'll stay on watch?" asked Edward Oswald tartly.

"If nobody else will—yes," retorted Willy. "But I think we ought to draw lots. We might as well be fair."

"That's true enough," said Watson. "And it'll be better to leave somebody on watch. I'm game."

Half a dozen thick twigs were at once pulled, one being shorter than the rest. And

as luck would have it, Willy drew the short one.

"All right—I'm satisfied," he said gruffly. "You fellows buzz off—and, don't forget to be cautious. I'll watch from here, and if I see anything alarming, I'll hurry for help."

The others rushed away, led by Handforth. They were so excited by all these discoveries that they hadn't had much time to think. But they knew that poor old Umlosi was in chains. They knew that this place was worked by slaves. And they instinctively felt that their own liberty would be endangered if they were caught.

So Willy's suggestion was adopted, and the five worked their way round the woods, under cover of the trees, and took no rest until they found the hut immediately in front of them. The rear of it was backing on to the trees themselves, and it did not look particularly strong.

The would-be rescuers had already realised that their caution had been necessary. For in the distance they had caught glimpses of other chained gangs, and they had seen men with whips and rifles. But, so far, there

had been no alarm. The Removites' activities had not been suspected.

"This ought to be easy!" murmured Handforth, as he crept up towards the hut. "These boards look rotten. Come on—there's a split here. Grab hold, somebody!"

The rear wall of the hut was built of coarse weather-boarding, and it was in a bad state of repair. One or two heavy heaves, and two of the boards came away. A black cavity was revealed.

"Umlosi!" whispered Handforth tensely.

A startled gasp came from within.

"Wau! Is it the voice of thou, young master? Do I dream, or—"

"You're not dreaming, old man," said Handforth. "We've come to rescue you. Cheer up—we'll have you out of here in two ticks!"

They all climbed through the opening, and as soon as their eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light, they could see that Umlosi was alone. He had been parted from his fellow slave, and was now chained up singly. Great iron cuffs encased his wrists, and the chains were heavy.

"What of N'Kose, my father?" asked Umlosi. "I am of much amazement. For did I not believe that I was beyond all aid? 'Tis wondrous to see ye again!"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Handforth. "Dorrie is all right, and so is Mr. Lee. By George! Now I can understand why a chap of your strength couldn't smash down those flimsy boards!"

For Umlosi was chained to a great post in the very centre of the hut. It was impossible for him to move a yard in any direction, and those chains were so short that he could not even sit down.



CHAPTER 26.

The Escape!

THE St. Frank's fellows were horrified. For Umlosi's plight was utterly terrible. They had imagined him to be in a serious fix, but his real predicament made them recoil.

The unfortunate Kutana Chief was a ghost of his old self.

It seemed that his wounds had not even been tended, and he had lost a great deal of blood. There was an ugly, awful place in his chest, and his scalp was badly scarred. His wrists, too, where the cuffs had grazed, were swollen terribly.

"I am of much weakness, my young masters," said Umlosi sadly. "I, Umlosi, the Chief of all the Kutanas! Wau! My vengeance will be dire when my day comes! I am even as a child, unable to smash these paltry chains. Canst thou not imagine my rage?"

"Poor old Umlosi!" said Watson huskily.

"He doesn't need our pity," growled Handforth. "We've come here to help him. The first thing is to get these rotten chains off."

"That's easier said than done, old boy," murmured Sir Montie. "In fact, I'm afraid

we can't do it. We haven't a file, or a tool of any sort. I say, how frightful!"

There was reason for Montie's tone. To smash these chains was impossible, and it seemed, even now, that nothing could be done to help the enslaved Umlosi. And, at any moment, too, some of the guards might return.

Umlosi himself had not been able to break his bonds. Under ordinary conditions he might have done so, for his normal strength was tremendous. But he had been greatly weakened by his sufferings, and by a bout of fever which had followed. His strength had been sapped away. But his spirit was as strong and as undaunted as ever.

And his joy at seeing the St. Frank's fellows knew no bounds. Their arrival had come upon him as a complete surprise.

"I'll tell you what!" suggested Church suddenly. "Let's pull the post up!"

"Oh, don't be an ass—" began Handforth.

"He's right, Handy!" put in Watson. "It's the only way! We can't smash these chains, but the five of us might be able to force this post out of the ground. We're pretty strong!"

"Thou art imbued with a wondrous idea!" exclaimed Umlosi. "For if the post is loosened, I can well carry it—and thus steal off with thee to thy camp. 'Tis a likely way!"

Even Handforth could see it now, only he regretted that he hadn't thought of it himself.

Without delay, the juniors commenced operations.

The post was fairly big, and it was deeply imbedded into the hard ground. With all their force the five schoolboys heaved against it. If it smashed, all the better.

They could feel the post giving slightly. They worked round to the other side, and heaved until the perspiration was running from them. And, at last, their efforts were rewarded.

"It's loose!" gasped Handforth. "Now, then—all together! Let's try to lift it out!"

They exerted their strength, and the object was achieved. The post came reluctantly out of the ground, and Umlosi was free. True, he was still encumbered by that five-foot length of wood, but the weight was comparatively slight. To carry this post was child's play, in spite of his weakened condition.

"Now, then—we'll get back!" panted Handforth. "We can't stop for a breather, even. Are you ready, Umlosi?"

"Ay, master!" said Umlosi eagerly.

"For goodness' sake, go easy, Handy," said Church. "We don't want to spoil everything now that we're on the last lap."

One by one, they crept through the hole at the back of the hut, Umlosi going first. And when he stood up, he found that he could carry the post over his shoulder without trouble. It could easily be cut free from him later, after camp had been reached.

But they were to find that this luck was too good to last.

They had reached the foot of the hillside, and were preparing to get back to that upper path—where Willy was waiting on watch—when a sudden shout arose.


~~~~~ NEXT WEDNESDAY! ~~~~~

## "IN THE CANNIBALS' GRIP!"

**Captured by cannibals!**

The St. Frank's party are faced by a man-eating tribe of the mysterious Congo, and by the menace of terrible slavery.

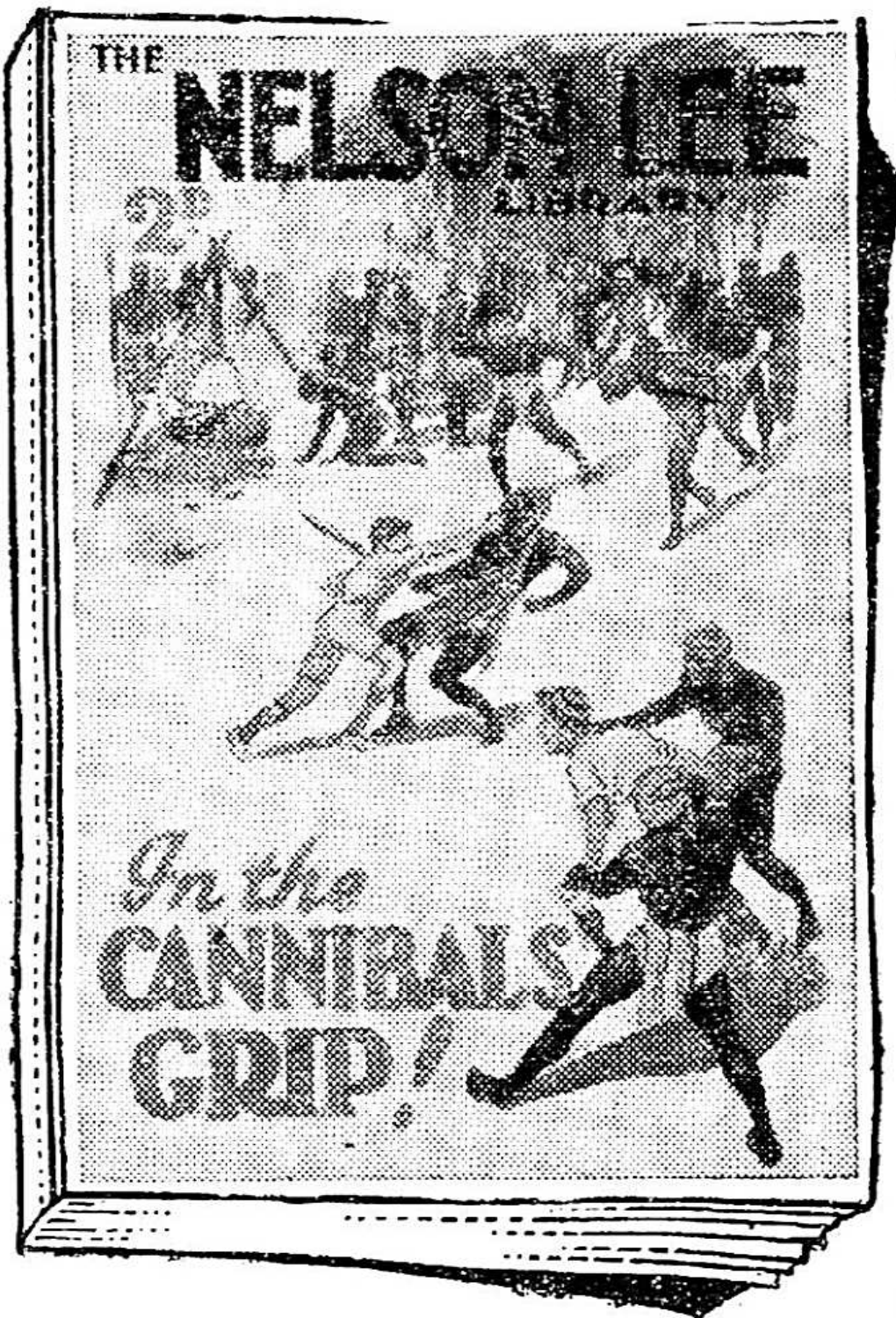
When the danger is at its greatest, Willy Handforth proves his courage—and so does his brother.

Next Wednesday's great story is full of realistic thrills and rousing excitement. You will vote it the best, so far, in this grand series.

Another rollicking instalment of:

## "BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!"

Archie Glenthorne made no mistake when he said he could write. There is a whole string of chuckles in next week's chapters of this unusual yarn.



~~~~~ ORDER TO-DAY! ~~~~~

Two gigantic blacks came running up, shouting at the top of their voices.

"Run for it!" roared Handforth.

And they ran. It was no longer necessary to keep to cover. They broke out into the open—cutting straight across a clearing. From above, Willy could see the whole exciting incident.

And he saw a dozen men swarming up from all directions. He saw Handforth & Co. and Umlosi surrounded, and they fought madly.



CHAPTER 27.

A Forlorn Hope!

LIKE a caged tiger, Dorrie paced up and down the river bank, staring across into the mysterious depths of the bush-covered hills.

Not a word had come from beyond. First, Nelson Lee and Nipper had gone, and then six of the juniors. And since then everything had been quiet and still. What had become of them?

The other members of the party, under Browne's leadership, had just finished the rough-and-ready bridge, and the crazy thing had been heaved into position. It chiefly consisted of a long, supple tree trunk, with a sort of crude hand-rail, to serve as a safeguard. But it rested firmly on either bank, and offered a means of safe crossing.

Dorrie wanted to test it—to go over and look into those jungle depths for himself. But it was impossible for him to leave camp. There were six girls there, and only a mere handful of boys.

And then Willy came—like a thunderbolt. He shot out of the undergrowth, his shirt torn, and his face flushed, and his eyes blazing with excitement.

"Hi!" he yelled. "Rescue!"

"What's wrong?" shouted Dorrie.

"Quick, sir! We've found Umlosi!"

"What!" roared Browne, and all the others.

"Hurrah!"

"Don't cheer yet!" shouted Willy. "My major and the other chaps have got him, but they've been attacked. For goodness' sake, come and lend a hand! We've made a path here, and we can get back in two or three minutes. Come on!"

Even Dorrie did not hesitate now.

Here was danger—real, tangible news. Handforth and the other juniors had found Umlosi, and were being attacked! It was no time for hesitation.

Dorrie turned.

"Ready?" he sang out. "Come along—all of you! No! One had better remain behind with the girls. We shan't be more than a quarter of an hour, at the most!"

Archie Glenthorne was left behind—not because he volunteered, but because he happened to be asleep in one of the tents. His non-inclusion in the rescue party was a pure accident.

The others, hurrying across the precarious bridge, gave no thought to the water beneath. And yet that water was now charged with death-dealing electricity. A new fuse had been fitted by this time. Happily, the fellows didn't know of the risk they had taken.

They reached the other side in safety, and Willy wasted no time in talk. He turned, and raced up the jungle path—now a well-defined trail. It was fortunate that the path was so clear.

For every second was of value.

Back there, in that valley, Umlosi and the boys were in desperate straits. Fully a dozen of Otto Lorenzo's powerful guards were attacking them, and it seemed rather strange that they should still be on their feet. For there were only five juniors, and Umlosi was in chains.

But Providence has a way of adjusting these things, and the very method of Umlosi's captivity now came to his aid, and to the aid of the others.

Quite suddenly, Umlosi realised that the post was a wonderful weapon of defence, rather than an encumbrance. The attackers were not fighting to kill, but were only intent upon securing their victims.

"Stand clear, young masters!" thundered Umlosi. "Methinks I can gather my strength sufficiently to defeat these dogs!"

And then they saw what his object was. Dodging aside, still beset by the Nubians, they watched. Umlosi swung himself round, and that post went whirling out like a huge pendulum.

Crash! Thud!

Everything within the radius of that whirling weapon went over like a ninepin. Three of the guards were felled on the spot, and the others scattered. The strain on Umlosi's wrists must have been frightful, but in the excitement of the moment he did not even notice any pain.

As the guards scattered, so he followed them up, and it seemed that his ruse would turn the tide. But the odds were still too heavy.

One of the brutes managed to hurl his whip, and the butt of it, by mere chance, struck Umlosi across the eyes. Momentarily blinded, he staggered, and during that moment he was flung to the ground, and held.

Handforth and the others rushed to his assistance, but they, too, were beaten. The valiant Edward Oswald went down, dazed and

half-stunned. Church was already knocked out, and the rest were unable to escape.

It seemed that defeat was absolute.

But Willy's great effort had evidently been in time, for just at this precarious moment, when all seemed lost, the reinforcements arrived.

Reaching that narrow path on the high ground, Willy had forced his way through, and the first glimpse had told him that the battle had been fought and lost. For Umlosi was stretched on the ground, held down, and Handforth and the others were in the hands of the enemy. Even then, chains were being prepared.

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie. "It's about time we arrived on the scene! All together, you fellows—let's make a dash for it!"

And they literally fell down the hillside to the rescue.



CHAPTER 28.

The Turn of the Tide!

NIPPER groaned.

"It's no good, guv'nor—it's no good!" he said despairingly. "Oh, my hat! They're all down! I suppose they'll be brought here in chains, too! It—it seems too fantastic to be real!"

Nelson Lee made no comment.

They were curiously placed. In fact, they occupied an end compartment of one of those corrugated-iron sheds. And, curiously enough, the window overlooked the long end of the valley, and they could see, far away, a group of moving figures. Nipper had just lowered his binoculars.

Nothing had been taken from the pair except their weapons, and they had been thrust into this shed, apparently pending more permanent arrangements.

Their thoughts concerning Otto Lorenzo were volcanic. The whole thing seemed so mad. It was as though they were in the midst of a nightmare. But there could be no question of its stern reality.

They had stumbled upon a great territory, surrounded by protected rivers, where this half-breed scoundrel produced rubber by slave-labour. And so the intruders had been imprisoned. They must never return to civilisation, and spread the story of this slavery!

Through the glasses, Lee and Nipper had seen the exciting fight between Handforth & Co., and the guards. The window at which they stood had no glass, but it was protected by a heavy metal grille. There was no way of escape.

And just when they had entertained hopes of Handforth & Co.'s success, the worst had happened. The schoolboys had been defeated, and were now laid low. Everything seemed to be going wrong.

But this assumption was premature.

For just at that minute Lord Dorrimore and the reinforcements were tumbling down the hillside to the rescue. Matters were be-

coming hot in the extreme, and the pace was getting rapid.

Lord Dorrimore was not the kind of man to take half-measures. He knew that the situation was critical—so critical, indeed, that there was a chance that they would all lose their liberty. He even suspected that Nelson Lee and Nipper had already fallen into the hands of these unexpected enemies.

But there was no time to think of that now.

Dorrie, who was leading, with Browne by his side, beheld something which told him that drastic action was necessary. Handforth was up again, and fighting desperately. Somehow, the valiant leader of Study D had managed to make another effort.

But it seemed that his recklessness was to cost him his life.

For at the very moment that Dorrie caught sight of him, one of the Nubians was swinging the butt of his rifle round, intent upon felling the junior to the ground.

Dorrie halted, and his own rifle went to his shoulder.

Crack!

The range was long, and Dorrie had to fire on the second, almost without aim. But the result was startling. The Nubian brute dropped his rifle with a scream of agony, and fell writhing.

"Oh, good shot, sir!" shouted Gresham.

"Come on!" panted Dorrie hoarsely.

He had only injured the man in the leg, but he had half an idea that more drastic methods would be necessary. But that one shot had had more effect than he realised.

The other guards, seeing their companion drop, wounded, were filled with consternation. This fresh attack had come from an unexpected quarter, and they swung round to meet the new enemy. And Lord Dorrimore and the boys swept up like a charge of infantry.

"St. Frank's to the rescue!" yelled Duncan excitedly.

"Hurrah!"

"Come on!" howled Handforth. "You're just in time!"

"Oh, good egg!" gasped Willy. "Ted's still all right!"

And then there was no time for conversation. The fight went on with renewed fierceness, and the odds were now in favour of the invaders. For Dorrie and the other boys made all the difference.

Umlosi, too, had managed to get to his feet. The presence of his beloved "N'Kose" seemed to have a magical effect upon him. He gave one shout of joyous welcome, and then continued the fight as though he had regained all his old strength. It was an extraordinary exhibition.

But even now it seemed to be touch and go.

The whole valley had been aroused—this particular section of it, at all events. Other guards were running up, and Lorenzo himself was hastening to the scene.

The slaver, no doubt, had received full information concerning the approach of the holiday party. It was even possible that his agents had bribed the chief of the Sansissi, the wily Bofebi, to take the canoes back, and

to leave the party no alternative but to force their way onwards through the forest.

And Lorenzo seemed to know that his victims would fall into his hands. His lack of surprise, upon seeing Nelson Lee and Nipper, had been very significant.

But even the German-Portuguese half-breed must have been surprised at the grit and determination displayed by these British school-boys. He had evidently expected nothing of the sort.

And so he was now calling his men from all quarters, and it seemed that the end was near. Many of the chained slaves, however, were affected by this general excitement, and the net result was astonishing.

For, in three different places, the slaves revolted.

CHAPTER 29.

The Raid!



EVERYTHING was taking place with bewildering suddenness.

The slaves, finding their guards withdrawn, made blind rushes for the forest belts, failing to realise that these attempts at escape would inevitably fail. Without organisation—and in broad daylight, too—the dashes for liberty were foredoomed to failure.

But they served the boys well.

For Otto Lorenzo, confused by all this excitement and rebellion, lost his head. A mile away, a gang of two hundred slaves were running amok, and Lorenzo forgot all about this handful of St. Frank's boys, and he yelled to his guards to follow him.

Thus, the main force which threatened Lord Dorrimore was diverted.

"We've still got a chance, you chaps!" shouted Dorrie. "Put your backs into it! We'll beat these curs yet!"

"Hurrah!"

"The battle is won, N'Kose!" boomed Umlosi.

They were far more exhausted than they imagined, but never for a moment did they relax their efforts. And the remainder of the Nubian guards, thoroughly disorganised, fled. The field of battle was left in the victorious hands of the boys.

"We've done it!" panted Church dazedly.

"Yes, and we've got to thank Willy, too," said Mac. "Good old Willy! He brought old Dorrie and the others in the nick of time!"

Lord Dorrimore was shaking Umlosi by the hand, and patting him on the shoulder, and generally greeting him. And the Kutana Chief was almost speechless for once. His emotion was touching.

"I thought never to see thy face again, my father," he murmured. "'Tis well. We have beaten these jackals, and now it would be wise to retreat from this accursed land. But we will come later!" he added darkly. "Waul I will bring my picked warriors——"

"Exactly," said Dorrie gently. "But let's

talk about that later on. The great question is, has anybody seen Lee? Or Nipper? Does anybody know what's happened to them?"

There was a loud chorus. Nobody had seen the pair.

"Then it's certain they're locked up somewhere," said his lordship. "If they were at liberty, an' on the prowl, they would have heard this shindy—an' we all know that it's a deuce of a job to keep Lee out of a fight. What the thunder are we to do?"

It was as though some trick of fate directed him. For even as he was asking the question, a glint of light caught his eye from one of the corrugated sheds in the distance. It was almost like a flash—a signal. And yet, in reality, that glint had merely been caused by the sun falling on Nipper's binoculars as he levelled them.

Dorrie's own glasses, which were still slung round his neck, were levelled. He could hardly believe his eyes. For he saw a window with a metal grille across it. And behind it were the faces of two white people! It was too far off for Dorrie to distinguish the actual features, but he saw a hand wildly waving.

"Gad, this is uncanny!" he shouted. "They're over there—in that shed! I'll never refuse to believe in luck again!"

"Can you see them, Dorrie?" asked Watson. His lordship lowered his binoculars.

"A mile, at least!" he muttered, measuring the distance with his eye. "Boys, shall we chance it? Shall we make a raid?"

"Yes!" roared the others.

"Good men!" said Dorrie, with gleaming eyes. "But look here—we can't all go. Two of you must get straight back to camp with Umlosi. You, Willy, and you, Browne. You're the eldest, and you can take charge of things until the rest of us get back."

"Leave it to me, Brother Dorrie," said Browne promptly.

His lordship's decision was wise. Much as Umlosi wanted to come on this raid, he would only be an encumbrance. For his recent effort had cost him dearly. His wrists were bleeding and appallingly swollen.

Without waiting for another moment the rescuers ran off. Would those rebellious slaves keep the enemy engaged long enough to ensure the success of the raid?

It was all a matter of chance. Seconds were of importance now, and nobody knew what the end would be.



CHAPTER 30.

Success and Disaster!

RASH! Crash!

With shattering force, the heavy log of wood smashed into the wall of corrugated iron. It buckled and

groaned, protesting in the most ear-splitting fashion.

"Once again!" shouted Dorrie. "All together, boys!"

Cra-a-sh!

The mass of corrugated iron buckled completely up, and collapsed.

"Hurrah!"

Almost bathed in perspiration, the juniors dropped that heavy log, which they had picked up on the way, and rushed to the opening. But before they could get there Nelson Lee and Nipper had appeared, and were worming their way through the debris into the open.

"Thanks, Dorrie!" sang out Lee. "Quick work!"

"I think we shall have to do some quicker, if we're to get away from here," retorted Lord Dorrimore.

Everybody was vaguely aware of a sensation of wonder. Here they were, in the very heart of the enemy's quarters—within sight of his very bungalow—and yet they were not being attacked.

Although they were nearly dropping, they didn't waste a moment. With Nelson Lee and Nipper in their midst, they ran for the path that would lead them back to the river.

And they reached the path, and they got to that clearing where the electricity control stood. For just a moment Dorrie paused, and he emptied the contents of his revolver into the thing. There were many blinding flashes, and a cloud of smoke.

"That's put the infernal thing out of action for a bit, anyway," snapped Dorrie.

They ran on, turned off at the break in the jungle, and went helter-skelter down the trail towards the river.

Panting and gasping, they reached the river at last, breaking through the dense masses of thorn and mimosa and bamboo.

There lay the camp.

The tents, and the lazily-smoking camp fire, and the obvious signs of cooking! It was a sight of sights. The bridge was in position, too, but there seemed to be no sign of Irene & Co. But Umlosi was there—and William Napoleon Browne and Willy Handforth were there. And they came running up, frantic.

"There's something happened!" shouted Willy, as the new arrivals began to cross the stream. "The girls have gone!"

"What!"

"We've looked everywhere—we've shouted until we're hoarse, brothers," said Browne, his face pale and haggard.

Five minutes later the others, were well across the treacherous stream, and they were scouring the camp with panic-stricken haste.

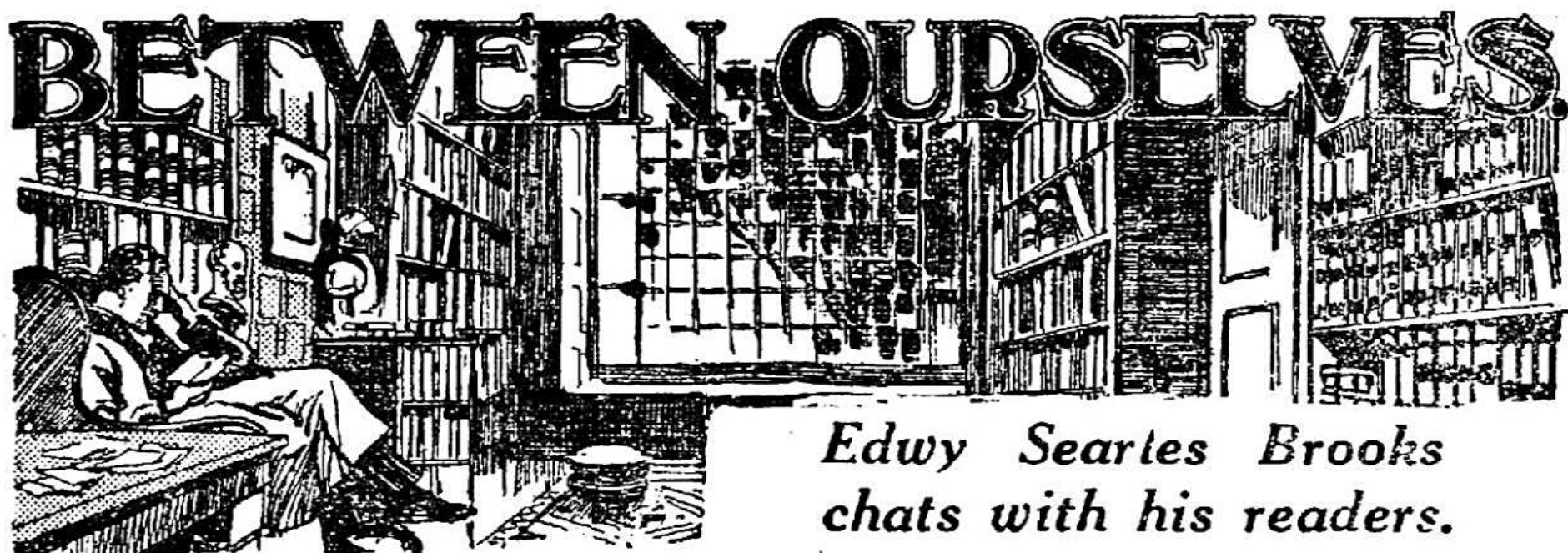
"It's my fault!" said Lord Dorrimore tragically. "You left me in charge, Lee, and I came away—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Lee. "Under the circumstances, Dorrie, you acted right. If you hadn't come away, all the rest of us would have been put in chains."

The fellows gazed at the dense tangle of the surrounding tropical forest, and they were filled with apprehension—for there was absolutely no sign of the girls!

THE END.

(How had Irene & Co. been lured away? You will know in next week's rousing yarn, "IN THE CANNIBALS' GRIP!" Order your copy of the N.L.L. NOW!)



*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 the sender's name. Communications which indicate writer's age are naturally easier for me to answer. My photo exchanging offer (mine for yours, but yours first, please!) is open indefinitely. Acknowledgments of letters appear on this page about six weeks after their receipt by me.—E.S.B.

What on earth is the good of me telling you things?

* * *

I don't know how many times I've written it in these columns, but I'm going to write it again now. Every letter that is addressed to me, and every letter that I get from you readers, is *treasured*, and stored away in my files. Sometimes I am quite astonished to find several letters in one batch, concluding with words such as these! "Hoping that this will be read before it is put into the waste-paper basket." I never put any of your letters into the waste-paper basket, no matter how critical they may be, or no matter how badly scrawled. I really DO want you to believe that I like having your letters, and that when I get them, I keep them and value them.

* * *

There's another point, too. At regular intervals I get letters from readers containing words of this sort: "Of course, I don't believe that your replies in 'Between Ourselves' are genuine. They're all spoof—just made up to deceive us." Naturally, all you good fellows—of both sexes!—who have seen my replies to your letters in these pages will know that these accusations are unjust. But there must be many thousands of others who still have a suspicion that "Between Ourselves" is a fake.

* * *

Well, you disbelievers, there's an easy method for you to find out. Just write to me, and give me some question of general interest to discuss, and you will get your reply on this page. You'll get it in a few weeks after you have sent me your letter. Don't expect a reply the following week,

because that's impossible. And even if your letter contains *nothing* of general interest, you'll have your name printed in acknowledgement. When you come to think of it, it's a bit thick on me, you know, for so many of you to regard me as a spoofer.

* * *

And now I think I'd better get on with this week's batch of letters, so I'll jot down the first list of acknowledgments.

* * *

Jacob Whitboy (Beaconsfield, S.A.), P. Young* (Liverpool), "Regular Reader" (Dundee), Fred W. Boyce (Bristol), W. S. Sutton (Liverpool), G. L. A. Drake (Folkestone), Paolo Zuccerelli (E. Grinstead), Dora Cantor (Krugersdorp, S.A.), A. Culph (Geelong, West Aus.), Ray Allen (Cheslyn Hay), J. R. Wilkinson* (Edmonton, Alberta), H. McMahon (West Broken Hill, Aus.), S. G. Thornton* (Longreach, Aus.), Donald A. Smith (Ashburton, N.Z.), Alison Ackroyd (Brighton), Charlie Jones (Stafford), Betty Sharpe (Pinner), Mrs. Alasdair McInnes* (Dunedin South, N.Z.), C. Voight (Carlisle), Phyllis Donoghue (Sydney, N.S.W.).

* * *

That's the style, Jacob Whitboy! You say that you are introducing as many new readers as possible. More power to your elbow, old man! Of course, we want to keep all the old readers, but we want new ones as well. The more the merrier! If everybody is as enthusiastic as you, our circulation will soon increase by leaps and bounds.

* * *

Thanks, P. Young, for your offer to send me your Club news. Yes, certainly; I should

be very interested to hear from you—as frequently and as lengthily as you like!

You are a member of Percy Young's club, aren't you, W. S. Sutton? I am going to take the liberty of printing a few words from your letter—for the benefit of other readers. I want them to see how valuable a St. Frank's League club can be. The more of these clubs there are, the better for everybody. You celebrated your birthday by a special sort of club party, didn't you? And here are your words: "If it had been the previous year, I shouldn't have had such a good time, as I hadn't many friends then. But since I joined the club I have found quite a number." That is the 'bit that I wanted to let the other readers see, old man. Since you joined the club, you have found many friends. That's fine! Let's have lots and lots more clubs, so that you can all gain new friends.

* * *

I agree that your letter is of general interest, "A Loyal Supporter" (G. L. A. Drake), but you are too late. This year's summer series is already under way, as you know without my telling you. And I think it is rather too early for us to discuss the next summer series, don't you?

* * *

A Scouting Series, eh, Dora Cantor? Well, we did have one series featuring the St. Frank's Boy Scouts, some time ago, but perhaps it's time for another. It really depends upon the general opinion. I know there are lots and lots of Scouts about, but there are also lots and lots of boys and girls who are *not* scouts. I wonder if another Scouting series would be universally liked?

* * *

I'm sorry you had trouble in getting your copies of the Old Paper, Donald A. Smith. Perhaps the irregularity is due to shipping troubles, or something like that. But I really think that you would be more certain of your copy if you subscribed direct to the Publishers. Then your weekly copy would be sent by post, and I do not think there would be much chance of it failing to arrive. Why not try it for three months and see? The subscription rates are at the back of each copy, you know.

* * *

Of course, a stickyback will do, Alison Ackroyd! Any reader can have my autographed photograph in return for one of theirs. And a stickyback will completely satisfy me—as long as the back isn't sticky when it arrives! That's meant to be a joke, but you needn't sneer at it. I know it's feeble.

* * *

Yes, Charlie Jones, please send me that copy of your school mag, as you offered. I would very much like to see it.

Reg. Ward, G. Farr, C. Sweetman, D. Ward, W. Avey and T. Townrow (Brighton), Norman Milsom (Hull), "Aussie En Route" (Regent Palace Hotel, W.1), "Tut" (W.C.2), "Champagne" (Newmarket), M. Hall (Spitalfields), "Jocko" Clark (Liverpool), W. Hyde (Dorchester), Ethel Bowes (Sunderland), Alec Henderson (Southampton), H. S. Watson* (Sheffield).

* * *

I can't give any definite date about the Sectional Map, Reg. Ward, etc., but a new Portrait Gallery will soon be a feature of the Old Paper. The Ancient House and the West House stand side by side, and are actually joined. On the other side of the Triangle, the Modern House and the East House are joined also, facing the others.

* * *

Thanks for your very interesting letter, "Aussie En Route." *Yes, please keep on writing!* I would love to give you a longer reply, but I fear that my space is nearly up. Three and a half months' back numbers—from, say, No. 56—would cost about 3/4, including postage. If you write to me again while you are still in England, I wish you would give me your full address—and name. Then I might be able to send you some definite information as to how to get these numbers quickly.

* * *

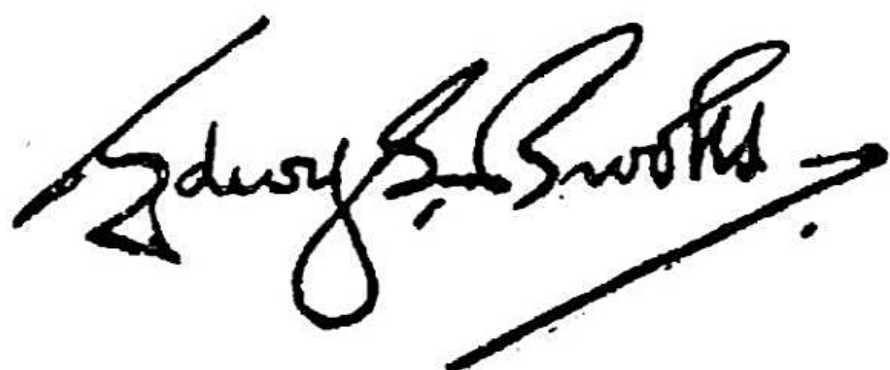
There are 45 juniors in the Remove, "Tut"—23 in the Ancient House, and 22 in the West House.

* * *

Now and again I get plaintive letters from readers, saying that I haven't put their names and addresses in the "Correspondence Wanted" list on the League page. So I want to make it quite clear that I am not the Chief Officer, and that it is of no earthly use writing to me on such subjects. Quite a lot of readers seem to think that they can have their names and addresses published even though they are not members of the St. Frank's League. This, of course, is all wrong. Only League members are eligible. But League members must not think, by this, that they can write to me and state their wishes. No. Please write to the Chief Officer himself, and he will do everything that is necessary.

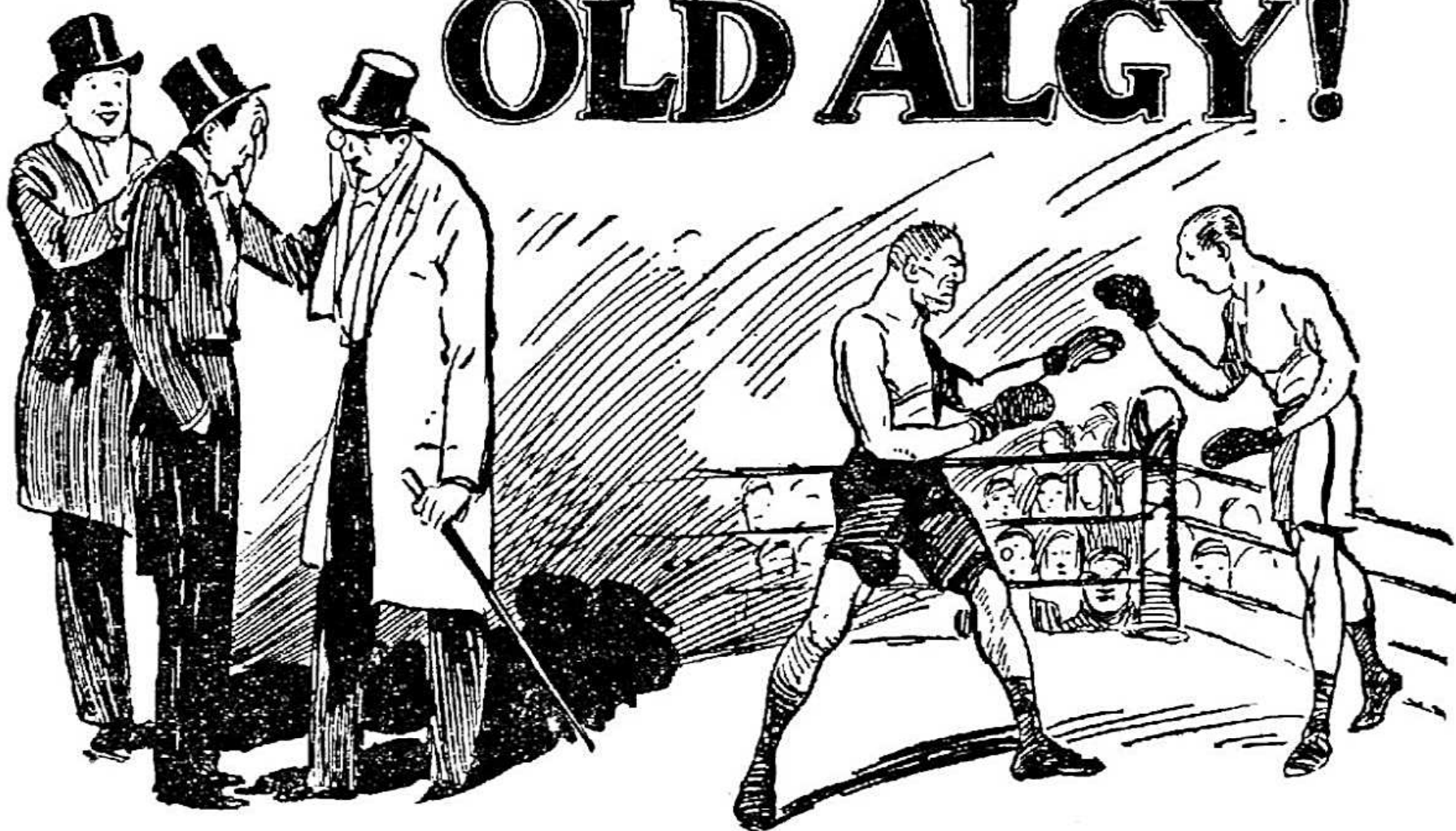
* * *

What do you fellows think about Archie's effort—it starts on the opposite page?



Novel New Serial!Start It To-day!

BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!



This yarn has been penned by the Genial Ass of the Remove. It is exactly as he wrote it, save for small errors in punctuation and spelling, which have been corrected by the Editor and by Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks.

Chapter 1.

A Bolt from the Good Old Torquoise!

OF course, old Algy was a frightful chump, really. One of those chappies with all sorts of empty space in the upper story. But a stout lad, for all that, if you know what I mean.

The tragedy of old Algy's life came one sunny July afternoon, while the dear old bean was lolling contentedly in his rooms, thinking of this and that, and nothing in particular, and waiting for his man to rally round with the good old brew. And then—zing!—it arrived.

I'd better explain that Algernon Fitzpercy was one of those lads with absolutely nothing to do. Or, if he had anything to do, he never did it. A slacking sort of blighter, in other words.

After he finished absorbing knowledge and was flung on to the world, he had a frightfully keen idea of becoming one of those motor salesman chappies. He thought it would suit his own peculiar type of temperament. It was all right as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough.

You see, old Algy got a job all right, but on the first dashed day he took out one of those super sports models, and considered it a ripe scheme to try it out along the good old Mall. Well, of course, when he was lugged up before the good old beak, he was relieved of five of the best, and this sort of put a damper on old Algy's enthusiasm.

Incidentally, he busted up the good old sports model, and the firm decided to potter along without the lad's assistance.

And after that old Algy decided that life was rather good on his uncle's allowance. You see, his Uncle George was some big

chappie in the city—one of these business men, if you know what I mean. Algy had always relied upon his Uncle George, and the old boy was still coming up to the scratch like a good one.

And so, I mean, things just drifted on. Algy's apartments in the West End were pretty good, although not particularly expensive, as chambers go. Still, they suited the dear boy, and he was happy enough to jog along, roughing it with only the aid of a man, taking most of his meals at the good old club, and having a high old time with the boys at irregular intervals.

In a nutshell, old Algy was one of the laziest blighters under the good old sun, and he had grown so accustomed to slacking that he became absolutely flabby. And, mark you, this was rather tragic in its way—because old Algy had been several kinds of a sports demon at his school. A great man at cricket, boxing, and all that sort of stuff.

And then, as I say, the good old bombshell exploded.

It was the day that the cheery old allowance was due to arrive. It always buzzed along in the form of an invitation from Algy's bank, saying that the draft had trickled in from Uncle George.

But this time Algy had the very dickens of a shock. The letter came from the bank all right, and Algy opened it with his usual chirrup of contentment. But then, after one horrified perusal of the foul thing, he quivered all over, and wilted back in his chair like an underdone jelly.

In a manner of speaking, there was plenty of reason for the old lad's horrified condish. Because, don't you see, the bank manager—in that curt, frightful way that bank managers have—had intimated that no draft had strolled in.

To be more exact, and in other words, old Algy realised that there was no cash available. The bank manager further intimated that Uncle George had cut off the good old supplies. The fount had ceased to flow. Or, rather, no more golden eggs from the goose. Not that I mean to call Uncle George a goose. Absolutely not! But I rather fancy that you'll gather the trend.

And, of course, the whole position was frightfully foul. And that, I mean, is putting it mildly. It was not merely foul, but blue round the edges, and positively mottled as well, forsooth—as they say in the good old classics.

Here was old Algy, with sundry merchants howling for cash on the doorstep, and his balance at the bank was just about nil. In fact, less than nil, for that blighter of a bank manager had given him a jolt by remarking that there were several odd quids overdrawn. So old Algy's feelings can be imagined.

Well, there you are. After about twenty-four hours of stunned silence, Algy gave one yelp, and leapt out of his chair. Something had to be done. And it rather seemed to old Algy that the brightest scheme of all would be to buzz round to Uncle George's office,

and ask the old boy, face to face, and man to man, what the deuce it meant.

So Algy groped his way out into the hall, and buzzed.

Chapter 2.

Out Into the Cold World!

UNCLE GEORGE was one of these big, beefy blighters. He spent most of his time in the good old city, dodging into the Stock Exchange, holding conferences with merchant princes, and so forth. In other words, a tolerably busy lad.

When old Algy arrived, he found Uncle George surrounded by sundry secretaries, and as soon as these had been dismissed Algy put the whole thing to his uncle in bold, concise terms.

"I mean to say, Uncle George," he exclaimed. "What about it?"

"Well, Algy, this is rather a surprise," said Uncle George, completely ignoring the old boy's plaintive bleat. "You are improving, young man! It is many months since you came to see me in my office. Now, let me see, the last time——"

"Absolutely," interrupted Algy. "But what about the good old allowance, Uncle George?"

"Ah, the allowance!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I think you had a birthday a month ago, didn't you, Algy?" asked Uncle George reminiscently.

"Absolutely!" said Algy. "A birthday—exactly," and he wondered what the old boy was driving at.

"And that birthday increased your age—you are older than you used to be, Algy," said Uncle George relentlessly. "You are old enough, and big enough, and strong enough, to earn your living, Algy. I don't mind telling you that you're a slacking young blighter!" he added, or words to that effect.

"Oh, I say!" protested Algy. "The fact is——"

"The fact is, Algy, I have recently met with some very severe reverses," said Uncle George. "I cannot truthfully say that I am ruined. But it has become necessary to institute many economies. And I am afraid, my boy, that I can no longer continue your allowance. From now onwards you must earn your own living."

"Great gad!" said Algy, falling back in his chair, and looking about as energetic as a green fly. "You're not absolutely telling me, uncle, that the cash department has been definitely closed?"

Uncle George nodded.

"Definitely closed," he said.

"But, I mean, all sorts of lads are howling for their money," said Algy. "I was relying upon my allowance——"

"You'll have to earn the money," inter-

rupted Uncle George. "My dear boy, I cannot give you money when I haven't got it. Things have gone very badly with me, and you must brace yourself, and face the facts. As I said before, you are young and strong, and you can easily earn your living, if you only pull yourself together."

Old Algy didn't remember much after that. Somehow or other, he dragged himself out of Uncle George's office, and found himself out in the cold, cold world. The blow had fallen. No more allowance! The thing was a most frightful blow to old Algy's system. The poor chappie was positively stunned.

In this condition he wandered home to his rooms, and for about four hours he sat in one chair, staring at the opposite wall, his eyes glassy, his whole expression as miserable as the dickens. The future was blank. Work stared him in the face.

Absolutely! There it was—work!

He could see that foul word printed on every square inch of the opposite wall. And, as I may have hinted in volume one, old Algy and work were not even acquainted. In fact, they had never been introduced to one another. Complete strangers, if you follow me.

And then, just at that juncture, as it were, in blew old Bibbles and Eustace. Two of the good old lads. To be exact, Lord Bibbington and the Hon. Eustace Caxton. Two of the very best, really—two of Algy's lifelong pals.

"What-ho!" observed old Bibbles, as he thumped Algy on the back. "Feeling a bit pipped, old top?"

"Absolutely!" moaned Algy.

"Then come along with us," said Eustace. "You haven't forgotten the appointment for to-night, Algy?"

"Appointment?" repeated Algy unseeingly.

That is to say, he gave Eustace a glassy stare, and he spoke more or less mechanically. He was still in the throes of the bad news.

"Yes, rather," said Eustace. "Didn't we arrange to go down to see Young Algy at the Blackfriars Boxing Palace? He's your namesake, laddie, and we can't afford to miss the match. It looks like being a corker."

"Oh, rather!" said Algy feebly. "At the same time, kindly leave me out. I can't go into the details, dear old comrades, but a blow has fallen. I'm in the most frightful hole, and——"

"That's nothing new!" interrupted old Bibbles briskly. "Come along, Algy, this boxing match will put you on your feet again. Grab him, Eustace—he's too lazy for words. If he won't come of his own accord, let's drag him out."

"Oh, rather!" said Eustace.

And poor old Algy found himself lugged out of the chair, and once again he went out into the cold world. Little did the old lad realise the frightful significance of this trip!

Chapter 3.

The Good Old Plot Thickens Somewhat!

It must be explained frankly and without prejudice that the Blackfriars Boxing Palace was a pretty frightful sort of hole. Of course, there was nothing absolutely wrong with it—nothing, that is to say, shady. But it cannot be denied that the spot was the gathering place for all sorts of sundry merchants with scrubby chins and a curious habit of wearing chokers instead of the good old linen.

Algy had been there once or twice, and he had rather enjoyed the novelty of the experience—being something of a lad when it came to boxing. And Bibbles and Eustace were, of course, regular habitués of the frightful place. Perhaps I had better confess at once that these two lads had absolutely put their shirts on Young Algy.

This latter chappie, by the way, was spoken of as being a likely competitor for the Lightweight Championship honours. A cheery sort of young cove from Portsmouth, to be precise. Absolutely nothing wrong with him, of course—a sportsman to his finger-tips. It appeared that Young Algy was to meet a hefty merchant from Liverpool that evening, and the fight was by way of being a big contest.

Well, under the circumstances, old Algy couldn't work up much enthusiasm. He didn't care a brass farthing whether his namesake won or lost. As a matter of fact, he didn't possess a brass farthing, or a copper farthing, either, if it came to that. For old Algy was broke—absolutely skinned. The failure of his monthly allowance had left him flat.

However, Bibbles and Eustace knew nothing of this. They merely thought that old Algy was down in the dumps over some trifle or other. They knew him. Quite frequently they trickled round, and found him mooning about, worrying over nothing.

"This fight will do you all the good in the world, Algy, old boy!" said Bibbles, as they buzzed along in Bibbles' car. "It will abso-



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lutely brace you up to the nines. They say that Young Algy is a cert winner. A fifteen-round contest, don't you know, and Liverpool Luke doesn't stand an earthly."

"Oh, absolutely not!" said Algy, without the slightest interest.

He felt decidedly peeved. Why did these blighters want to drag him off now? It was a perfectly foul thing to do. He wanted to be left alone—he wanted to brood in silence and solitude over his sorrow. He wanted to think—to map out his jolly old future. But he didn't see much chance of mapping in a ringside seat at the Blackfriars Boxing Palace. From his previous experience of the place, he rather felt that the evening was going to be a wild one.

However, old Algy was an easy-going sort of cove, in his own way, and it never occurred to him to object. So he just sat in Bibbles' car, and let his pals do as they liked with him.

And just then, while they were buzzing down the Blackfriars Road, a pretty mouldy sort of thing took place. You see, old Bibbles thought that Algy could do with a thump on the back, to wake him up, and that was the cause of it. Bibbles delivered the thump all right, but in doing so he wangled the good old steering-wheel rather too much to starboard, and the next second there was a pretty hefty sort of crash.

It seemed that a taxicab was overtaking them at the moment, and Bibbles barged right into it. Well, there it was. The taxicab did a sort of somersault, and ended up on its side, with two indignant-looking merchants climbing out of the wreckage.

Strangely enough, Bibbles' car was hardly hurt, and old Bibby himself was full of concern and worry, and he was more or less frightened, too. He wasn't on the very best of terms with the police, having had his licence blotted pretty frequently.

And it didn't make matters any better when he discovered that the chappies in the taxicab were none other than Young Algy and his manager! Absolutely! Just one of those jolly old coincidences, as it were. And what was more, Young Algy had hurt himself pretty considerably. At least, so it seemed, judging by his frantic remarks. And there was no question that his right hand was in a somewhat gory condition, having come off second best in a little argument with a slab of broken glass.

And Young Algy's manager—a stout, loud-voiced cove named Bill Huggins—was absolutely unique in his language. He called Bibbles so many things that he came to the end of his stock, and had to use them all over again.

The end of it was, Bibbles shoved Bill Huggins and Young Algy into the car, and drove them to the boxing palace. This, of course, was after the police had taken all particulars, and had caused all sorts of delays. And by the time the little party arrived at

the boxing emporium it was frightfully close to the hour for the big match.

And there was Young Algy with a cut hand, a bruised leg, and a distracted manager. It was a pretty frightful sort of position, for the place was packed to the good old roof with enthusiasts, and they were already yelling for Young Algy and Liverpool Luke. Something, it seemed, would have to be done.

Chapter 4.

Old Bibbles' Brainwave!

WELL, there it was—one of those frightful things that the writer chappies refer to as a dilemma.

What, in fact, was to be done?

There was Algy Fitzpercy in the dressing-room, supported by Bibbles and Eustace. They had just come along to hear the worst about Algy's namesake. They heard other things, too—from Bill Huggins. But they thought it better, on the whole, to forget these.

"It's no good, Bill—I can't go into the ring to-night," said Young Algy, as he looked at his bandaged hand. "The fight's off."

"It beats me!" said Bill* mournfully. "The first time you've had a real chance, Algy, these swell blokes come along and mess it up!"

"A chance?" said old Algy, blinking. "Who, me?"

"No, not you!" snorted the manager. "I was talking about Algy, here!"

"Oh, rather!" said old Algy. "Same name, what? Liable to lead to confusion, and all that sort of thing."

"You see," explained Bibbles, "his name is Algy, too."

"I don't care what his name is!" snorted Bill Huggins. "Here's my man here absolutely helpless, and this was to be his first big fight. Why, he's not even known in South London here."

"Really?" said Eustace. "That's frightfully interesting."

He gave a sympathetic glance at Young Algy, whose right hand closely resembled a leg of mutton, wrapped up ready to be taken away from the shop.

"I mean to say, hard lines," remarked Eustace.

"It's no good cussing at you young gents any more," went on the manager. "It doesn't lead anywhere. Young Algy is out of the running, and it'll be weeks before he's fit again. And what about the crowd out there? What am I going to do to pacify them?"

"Some sort of speech seems to be indicated," suggested Eustace.

"Speech be blowed!" growled Bill. "What's the good of a speech to that crowd? Like as not they'll swarm into the ring and lynch me!"

WILLY ON THE WARPATH!

WILLY HANDFORTH made a terrific stir when he first appeared at St. Frank's! It is some time ago now, but his adventures are well worth reading. They are told in the splendid volume of which a small reproduction of the cover is opposite. The cover is in colour, but you will easily be able to recognise it on the bookstalls. If not, ask your newsagent to show it to you. It is now on sale in

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"Yes, that's a possibility, of course," said Bibbles. "You never know with these crowds. Excitable sort of coves, one way and another. I was just thinking——"

He broke off, and a gleam came into his eyesight.

"By gad!" he went on, turning to Algy. "Algy, old boy, the very thing! You'll fight against Liverpool Luke!"

"Eh?" said Algy with a start. "What?"

"You'll take Young Algy's place!" said Bibbles enthusiastically. "You've got the same name—so there won't be any deception on the public! Nobody in South London knows Young Algy, so they'll accept you without question! How's that for a brain-wave, what?"

"Absolutely rotten!" said Algy coldly. "Why, you frightful chump, you don't suppose——"

"But, my dear old lad, it'll save the situation!" interrupted Eustace. "It's a marvellous stunt of old Bibby's! You can box, too—at least, you could when you were at school. And, after all, we're responsible for the poor chappie being hurt, aren't we?"

"Absolutely not!" said old Algy indignantly. "It's pretty frightfully thick if you try to blame me——"

"Look here!" interrupted Bill Huggins. "Is this true? Can this young gentleman box?"

"Oh, rather!" said Bibbles and Eustace, in one voice.

And there it was, don't you know. Poor old Algy was let into the cart properly. His whole dashed record came out on the spot—

how he had whacked two or three hefty merchants at his school during his last year. Old Bill drank it all in, and he got more and more excited.

"Yes, by thunder, it's an idea!" he said at last. "Nobody knows Young Algy in this district, and if the fight doesn't come off, this crowd will tear the building to pieces. You're just about the weight, my lad, and these young gents say that you're a good boxer. You'll be knocked out, of course, but it'll mean a matter of fifty quid for you, in any case——"

"Knocked out?" repeated Algy, jumping about a yard into the air. "Fifty quid?"

Fifty quid! It suddenly occurred to the old lad, with a frightful spasm of hope, that fifty quid would be pretty useful to him just now. Not that he was able to think very clearly on the subject. For there was Bill Huggins, tearing old Algy's clothes off, and getting him ready for the ring!

What with one thing and another, it rather seemed that old Algy's hour had come. I mean to say, here was a chance for him to strike out and do big things.

At the same time, it rather seemed that it would be Liverpool Luke who would do most of the striking!

(Next week we shall have a frightfully thrilling account of the good old scrap between Algy and the lad from Liverpool. I mean to say, look out for it. Next week's spasm of this story will absolutely be an instalment with a punch!)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 76.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| SECTION

A | READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Membership with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge. |
| SECTION

B | MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit. |
| SECTION

C | NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY." |
| (FULL NAME)..... | |
| (ADDRESS)..... | |

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership: Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms fill in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. **Member Applying for Bronze Medal:** It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at the bottom of

the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered, you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, provided that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver or gold medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when the League reaches the required number of members, they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver or gold one, according to the number of introductions with which they are credited.

These Application Forms can be posted for 1d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow-members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

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If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.



THE CHIEF OFFICER'S CHAT.

All LETTERS in reference to the League should be addressed to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4. Enquiries which need an immediate answer should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.

All Over the World!

THANKS go to a Newent pal, who says he is struck more every day by what the S.F.L. is doing among the youngsters (and the older folk) all over the world. "We all read the old paper at home," he adds.

Without a doubt it appeals to everyone, once its principles are understood. No door is closed. It means something good to all.

The Air Force.

B. W., of Ballindalloch, wants to join the Air Force. He must apply to the Air Ministry, Adastral House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

Ventriloquism and Chapeaugraphy!

A Kent chum and his friend are good at entertaining. The art of knocking a hat into different shapes and making oneself look like Napoleon or Charles Dickens, or any other celebrity, is well known to them. The partner who writes to me is good at the ukelele-banjo. What they want is a job. They will have to advertise or apply to a theatrical agency. I shouldn't wonder if they get a summer engagement as a start.

A Gloucestershire Gardener.

A chum at Newent suggests gardening as a prime hobby, and I quite agree with him. It is easy to say that anybody can learn gardening; I doubt if it is so; but there are plenty of fellows who, once they took up this pursuit, would be keen enough and find scope for ideas.

Irish Weather.

Here's a grouse from cheery old Erin, and yet the grouse season does not start for some weeks. "Mac" says the rain in Southern Ireland is disgraceful. Well, I have tramped round the land from which St. Patrick expelled the snakes, great and small, and I liked the weather. The showers keep things pleasant. Mac should forget the weather, or go in for watercress and lilies. Ireland does get rain, and we like her for it. As the old tag puts it:

"When the glass is low, oh, very!
There'll be rain in Cork and Kerry.
When the glass is high, oh, lork!
There'll be rain in Kerry and Cork."

HOW TO GET YOUR SILVER MEDAL.

All holders of BRONZE MEDALS who have qualified for SILVER MEDALS (see instructions on Application Form on opposite page) and wish to exchange their medals for the higher award should send their bronze medals, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, to the Chief Officer, the St. Frank's League, c/o the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4. The SILVER MEDALS will then be sent to them.

Cross-country Kit.

T. S. writes from Hereford asking what kind of shoes he wants for cross-country runs. They should be light, studded ones.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

John Frankham, 3, Eva Street, Rushholme, Manchester, is forming a cycling club.

Peter Smith, 56, Napier Road, Southsea, Hants, wishes to hear from readers anywhere interested in stamps and coins.

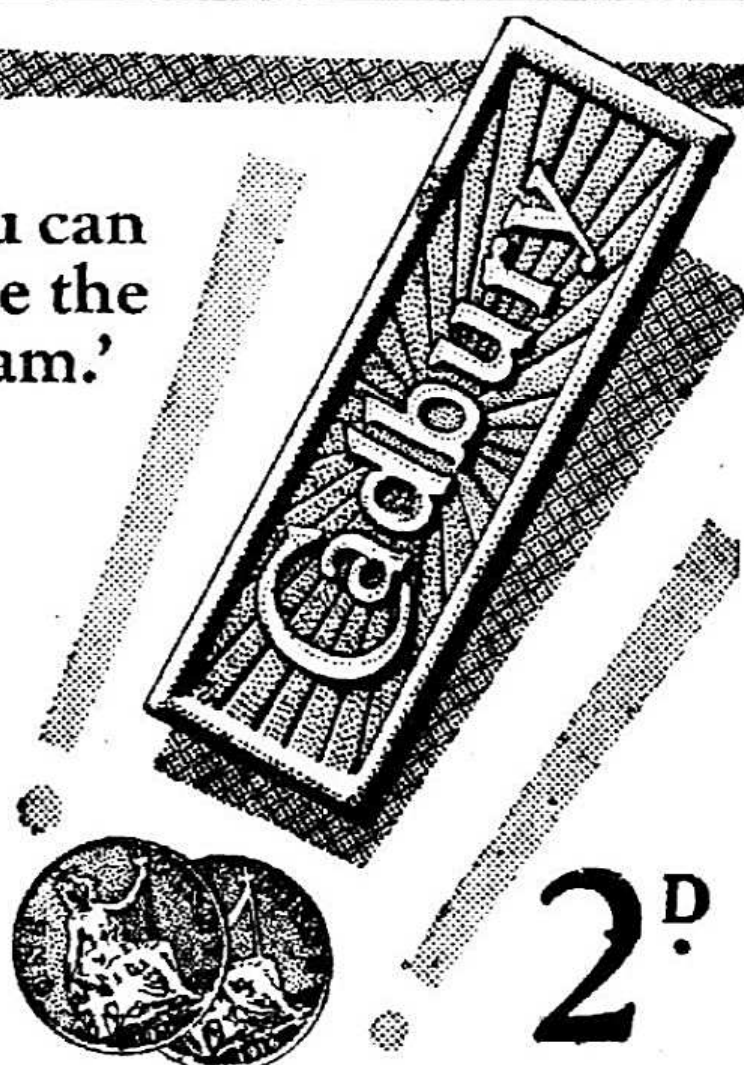
Thomas Thornton, 13, Haigh St. West, Burley Road, Leeds, wishes to hear from a reader in Birmingham.

Ron Hugo, 8, View Street, Subiaco, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere.

James A. Evans, 45, Clementson Road, Crookes, Sheffield, wishes to form a club among members in Sheffield. All letters answered.

(Continued on next page.)

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CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

(Continued from previous page.)

Peter Egbert Klein, Jr., c/o Customs, Knysna, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to hear from readers.

Louis Van Luyck, 79, Stryderstraat, Edemgem, near Antwerp, Belgium, wishes to correspond with a stamp collector in India.

Henry Cathcart, 177, Bernard Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow, S.E., will exchange boys' papers for N.L.L.'s published between 1919-24.

Eric W. Barber, 281, Lincoln Road, Peterborough, wishes to exchange Nos. 11-17 Monster Library for early numbers of the N.L.L. from Nos. 1 to 40.

Eric Hatton, The Hollies, Snarestone, Burton-on-Trent, wishes to hear from readers who have back numbers of the N.L.L. (old series).

Chas. F. H. Brown, 200, Hoe Street, Walthamstow, London, E.17, wishes to correspond with readers in New Zealand.

W. Douglas-Willan, Rosemallow, Houghton, Hunts, would like to hear from the nearest League club to him.

J. F. Smith, 90, Penrose Street, Walworth Road, London, S.E.17, wishes to hear from readers who are willing to exchange stamps.

A. C. Cleeve-Sculthorpe, Errington P.O., Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, asks Frank Sheath, Chelsea House, Brighton, to write.

J. J. Hoser-Cook, 21, Rook Street, Poplar, London, E.14, would like to hear from Ido Inglett, of Lenglea, Malta; George Evans, St. Lambert, Quebec; Jack H. Watts, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.; B. Heytman, Singapore. Also from readers anywhere.

Desmond Richardson, 22, Astil Street, Stapenhill, Burton-on-Trent, wishes to hear from readers in Blackpool.

C. T. Browne, 74, Victoria Road, Lower Edmonton, London, N.9, wishes to purchase in good condition Nos. 1-155 of the N.L.L. Name price. Also Nos. 502, 503, 565, 514, 524. All letters answered.

B. Peters, 32, Wynn Street, Edgbaston, Birmingham, wishes to hear from readers in his district.

W. Matthews, 173, Junction Road, Upper Holloway, London, N.19, wishes to hear from readers in his district. He is a keen stamp collector.

H. McMahon, 50, Long Street, West Broken Hill, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from readers in America, Canada, India, Tasmania, and Africa; also from a London reader who could tell him something about London.

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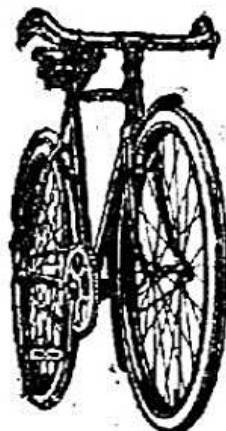
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