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THE
GORILLA-GOD'S MAGIC!

*Thrilling holiday-adventure yarn featuring the Boys of
St. Frank's in the heart of the mysterious Congo!*

New Series No. 66.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

August 6th, 1927.



Johnny Onions' hands were skinned and grazed, but still he tore desperately at the ropes that secured the hideous ju-ju to the pole. Down below the St. Frank's juniors gazed up anxiously. Would Johnny succeed in his dangerous task?

Johnny Onions to the Rescue!**THE GORILLA-GOD'S MAGIC!**

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

A breathlessly exciting long complete story introducing the Boys of St. Frank's, and Lord Dorrimore among the cannibals of the African jungle.

CHAPTER 1.

In the Hands of the Oturi!

ARCHIBALD WINSTON DEREK GLENTHORNE, of the Remove at St. Frank's, jammed his monocle into his noble eye and gave K'laba a nasty look.

"Kindly shift on!" he said severely. "I mean to say, dash it, I absolutely object to this arm-pinching and rib-tickling stuff. Buzz into the offing, you frightful chunk of frightfulness!"

K'laba, chief of the dreaded Oturi tribe, took no notice. He continued to feel Archie as though the unfortunate junior were a prize animal at a cattle show. And this was not altogether surprising, for K'laba, in addition to being the chief of the Oturi, happened to have leanings towards cannibalism.

He was an ugly enough savage at the best of times, but in his full war array—as at present—his aspect was positively fearsome. His body was daubed with evil-smelling pigments, his face was decorated with sundry savage adornments, and his eyes were glittering with sinister purpose.

He passed on from Archie to the next

prisoner, continuing his dreadful examination. Two torch-bearers accompanied him, and the flaring, lurid flames provided ample illumination.

Further afield, in a wide, ragged circle, were hundreds of other torches, and the African night was turned into artificial day.

And far above, the gorilla-god crouched on its swaying platform at the top of the Ju-Ju pole.

If there was one satisfactory feature in this terrible situation, it was the fact that none of Lord Dorrimore's companions were injured. All had been captured by the Oturi tribe, and all were unarmed. These cannibals had their own ideas!

There were twenty in the party—twenty captives!

For in addition to Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee there were a dozen St. Frank's fellows and six girls. Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were included among these hapless prisoners.

To escape from the enemy was quite impossible. Their weapons had all been taken away, and they were exhausted after a long and desperate fight. The Oturi, on the other hand, were fresh, and excited by their eagerness for blood and torture. They were

in great numbers. Five or six hundred of the brutes were in this very clearing, and the air was filled with the wild cries of the dancers.

The prisoners were at the foot of the Ju-Ju pole, and within the inner ring of the circle of torch-bearers, a hundred of the savages were dancing.

"Things look pretty lively my sons," remarked Nipper, with a wry grimace. "Well, we put up a good fight, didn't we? We kept them out at first, and polished off a few of the brutes!"

"I'm afraid the polishin' off of a few dozen is precious little consolation to us, dear old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "The rest of them seem frightfully chirpy, at all events. Do you know, I believe they mean to practice some of their blessed tortures on us?"

"Don't speak like that, Montie," growled Tommy Watson. "Of course they do. Isn't that obvious. We're in the cart this time—up to our necks!"

"Browne was just saying that we're fairly paddling in the soup," remarked Nipper. "But cart or soup—it's all the same. We're booked! And it's no good trying to kid ourselves otherwise."

Handforth, next in line, gave an expressive grunt.

"Why?" he asked fiercely.

"Why what?" said Nipper.

"Why should we look upon ourselves as booked?" demanded Edward Oswald. "While there's life there's hope! We've been in tight corners before, and I don't see the fun of throwing up the sponge."

Nipper shook his head.

"You never know when you're whacked, do you, Handy?" he asked gently. "It's one of your little ways, old man. But if you can kindly suggest any scheme for diddling the Oturi out of their feast, just trot it out! I'm not at all keen on figuring on the menu as the third or fourth course!"

"But you really don't think they mean to eat us?" asked Watson huskily.

"No, I don't think!" said Nipper. "It's a cert.!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Watson seemed startled. And yet he had known, for an hour past, what their ultimate fate was planned to be. Like most savages, the Oturi were in no hurry to finish off their victims. There were endless preliminaries, dances, and many other rites to perform.

It might be an hour, two hours, or even longer, before the actual denouement came. K'laba and his warriors saw no reason why they should kill their victims out of hand, and cut short these interesting celebrations. For once in their lives, the Oturi were enabled to indulge in a great orgy without fear of any consequences.

These savages possessed all the qualities of their forefathers. Unfortunately for them—but fortunately for sundry missionaries and traders—the present authorities were liable to put their foot down hard on any massacre of

white people. Even if the Oturi plundered the villages of another tribe, they were apt to receive punishment.

So it was very seldom, indeed, that they were able to let their brutality have full play. The cost was too heavy. K'laba had a liking for his own neck, and his head-men were equally fastidious.

But this present celebration was safe.

For had not Lorenzo, the slaver, guaranteed them complete immunity from punishment? They were, indeed, carrying out Lorenzo's orders. For the German-Portuguese half-breed was the absolute lord of life and death in these wilds in the heart of the Congo. K'laba believed that he was the chief of the Oturi—but Lorenzo was the brain. After all, K'laba was nothing but a tool.

And the news had spread throughout the Oturi tribe that they could indulge their cannibalism in perfect safety for once. Twenty white victims! And no questions asked afterwards! It was certainly an opportunity in a thousand.

And the Oturi did not want to get their pleasure over too quickly. The whole night was before them, and it was their way to prolong these celebrations.

The orgy was only just beginning, but the prisoners felt that it had been going on for hours. Was there any hope for them? In some vague sort of way, they felt there was. And yet how could there be?

CHAPTER 2.

Lorenzo Enjoys Himself!



THE situation had developed rather curiously.

Lord Dorrimore had merely come to the Congo region for some elephant hunting, and he had brought his schoolboy and schoolgirl friends with him. But they had accidentally penetrated the region beyond the Kalala River, and had discovered Otto Lorenzo's secret.

This man was a trader in rubber, with vast plantations, with factories, and even a power station that provided electricity. He employed nothing but slaves, and he treated them worse than the beasts of the field. Umlosi, the great Kutana chief—Dorrie's great friend—had fallen into the slaver's hands first.

After he had been rescued, the entire holiday party had been captured by Lorenzo. Then had followed a brief period of slavery, a revolt, and a desperate siege of the St. Frank's party in the power station. But they had found it impossible to maintain the defence against the Oturi.

Lorenzo had brought K'laba and his men into the affair, and these human demons had quickly shattered the defences, and had dragged the rebels out. And now they were awaiting their fate.

There was one slim hope. Perhaps this was why the boys and girls permitted themselves to believe that salvation might come. Umlosi was not with them. Two days earlier—at the beginning of the siege—he had stolen away, and Lorenzo had known nothing of his going.

Even now the slaver was unaware of the fact. In his gloating triumph, he had not noticed that Umlosi was missing—or, if he had noticed it, he possibly believed that Umlosi had died in the fight.

Actually, Umlosi had made straight for the Kutana country—which was not very far distant from the territory occupied by the Oturi. Umlosi had sworn to raise a great army of his picked warriors, and to march through the jungle to the succour of his friends. Were not the Kutanas the hereditary enemies of the Oturi? Was not one Kutana warrior worth a dozen of the accursed Oturi?

It was certainly a fact that K'lab's tribe never gave the Kutanas an opportunity for open battle. They knew that Umlosi's men were their masters.

Would Umlosi be able to bring his men in time?

That was the question which everyone of those prisoners asked. How dreadful it would be if the Kutanas arrived on the morrow, when everything was all over! And yet this was not merely possible, but extremely probable. It was the most likely contingency.

However, Otto Lorenzo knew nothing of this mission of Umlosi's, and so he had no fear of interruption. At last he would get rid of these troublesome slaves—these accursed British boys and girls who had caused him nothing but worry and expense! Gladly, he had permitted the Oturi to take charge of things, for he knew that the Oturi would make no mistake.

Lorenzo himself came through the circle of dancers, and approached the prisoners with all his usual swagger and arrogance. There was something repulsive in his very walk—something repellent in his whole make-up.

Bad as these blacks were, they were ignorant and savage. But Lorenzo was a white man, and it was he who had lured these tools of his on. His was the sole guilt, and as he advanced towards the prisoners, he looked like some evil monstrosity dressed in human clothing.

"If he comes near me, I'll smash him!" said Handforth fiercely. "By George! I don't care what happens to me afterwards—I just want to get one lovely swipe!"

"Cheese it, Handy," muttered Church. "They'll kill you!"

"Let 'em!" snapped Handforth.

"You silly ass——"

"They mean to kill us, anyway," went on Handforth obstinately. "It'll be all the better if I'm speared quickly, won't it. It'll save me from being tortured!"

"Handy, do listen——"

"Rats! If he comes near me, I'll smash him!"

Nipper took Handforth's arm, and gripped it.

"For once, old man, you've got to simmer down," he murmured quietly. "There are others to think about in this affair. If you attack Lorenzo, we might all be butchered."

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Well, wouldn't it be a mercy?" he said bitterly.

"In a way, yes—but there's an old saying that hope springs eternal in the human breast," went on Nipper. "You know what these curs are. They'll hold dances and revels, and it might be two or three hours before they decide to start the actual massacre."

"Two or three hours of torture," said Handforth fiercely. "Even if they don't touch us, it'll be torture—particularly for the girls."

"Yes, but two or three hours of respite, too," muttered Nipper. "And don't forget that Umlosi is rushing here with his warriors. In two or three hours——"

"You mean, they might come?" breathed Handforth.

"They might," said Nipper. "It's a million-to-one chance, but they might!"

"By George, you're right there!" said Handforth huskily. "And we mustn't do anything to goad these devils, eh? All right! I'll spare Lorenzo that slosh—but you don't know what it's costing me!"

"Good man!" murmured Church thankfully.

Nipper's argument was undoubtedly sound. In the midst of all these enemies, their only policy was to remain meek. They were in no position to resist. But they were all resolved to show a contemptuous front—to face the ordeal with scornful indifference. Never would they let Lorenzo or his savage friends gloat over them.

"Ah, my friends, this is sad—very sad," said Lorenzo, as he paused in front of the captives, and stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat. "You're in a nasty hole now, eh? Perhaps you'll admit that I'm not the kind of man to defy, eh?"

None of them replied.

"You're all dumb, no doubt," went on Lorenzo mockingly. "I don't wonder at it. And yet you don't seem frightened. Perhaps you don't know what's going to happen?"

"We can guess, you dirty rotter!" snapped Handforth, in spite of all his good intentions. "By George, I—I'll——"

"Handy!" muttered McClure.

"Oh, all right!" breathed Handforth thickly.

He clenched his fists with a helpless despair, but his commonsense warned him not to act. And Lorenzo, without knowing he was in any danger, advanced closer.

"I said I'd get the best of you, didn't I?" he went on harshly. "Nobody has ever defied me yet—and beaten me! They always come to a swift and unpleasant end. I'm afraid yours will be unpleasant enough, but it won't be swift. Oh, no! These Oturi have their own particular customs. They'll make it rather hot for you!"

He laughed loudly.

"Yes, rather hot!" he repeated, as though his words contained some jest. "In fact, infernally hot!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Beginning of the Ordeal!



LORD DORRIMORE stepped up to the slaver with clenched fists.

"You've got us in your clutches, Lorenzo, and let that be sufficient!" he said coolly. "We can still use our fists, an' if you do any more of this gloatin', I'll knock you down!"

Lorenzo laughed again.

"You are very bold!" he said sneeringly. "Do you know that knocking me down will cost you your life?"

"If it does, I shall go out knowin' I've somethin' serviceable as a last act," snapped his lordship. "I've warned you, you hound! Another word of gloatin', and I'll smash your face!"

Handforth gave a gasp.

"By George!" he panted. "Dorrie's doing the very thing I wanted to do!"

"Dorrie's a chump!" growled Nipper.

"If he can do it, so can I!" declared Handforth. "I say, let's all grab the brute, and —"

"No, boys—no!" put in Nelson Lee, hurrying up. "It'll do no good to attack this man. He needs a bullet through his black heart, but we can't kill him. Murder may be his game, but it's not ours."

"Besides, these blacks will get busy on us quite quickly enough without any goading," added Nipper.

"Exactly," muttered Lee. "I am sorry Dorrie has done this."

His lordship heard some of the words, and he took heed.

"Perhaps I'm an ass!" he said bitterly. "There's no sense in punching a hog, is there?"

Lorenzo showed his teeth in a snarling grin.

"Afraid?" he asked savagely.

"No, by glory!" roared Lord Dorrimore.

Crash!

With all his strength he drove his fist into the slaver's bloated face. After that taunt he had not been able to hold himself back. And when Dorrie hit out his victim knew all about it. Lorenzo, in spite of his bulk, went over like a pole-axed bull.

"Good man!" shouted Nipper enthusiastically.

"What?" gasped Handforth. "But you just said——"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Nipper. "What's the good of fooling ourselves? We all wanted to have that swipe at him!"

Lorenzo picked himself up, and backed away. He was shouting out some orders in Swahali, and two or three of the Oturi headmen were running to his side. But Lorenzo suddenly gripped himself, and dismissed them.

"I was going to tell them to kill you!" he snarled. "But why should I spare you the torture that is inevitably coming? No, I'll wait! You'll pay for this, Lord Dorrimore—you and your cubs! You think that you have a chance to live, eh? But I have given you all to K'laba! Do you know what that means?"

He laughed madly, and did not wait for any reply.

"It means that these Oturi devils are going to practice their tribal rites upon you," he shouted. "They saved my power-station for me, and this is their reward!"

He strode away, and Lord Dorrimore picked up a handful of dust and rubbed it over his tingling knuckles.

"My hand's a bit cleaner now!" he said, as he shook off the dust. "By gad! It'll surprise me if my knuckles don't break out in sores! That fellow is worse than a disease!"

"I can understand your fury, Dorrie, but it was an unnecessary effort," said Nelson Lee quietly. "It's no satisfaction to us to knock Lorenzo down. He's the responsible man. I know, but this affair has got beyond his control now. Even if he gave orders for us to be freed, he would be ignored. Lorenzo's power has its limits. These blacks are in such a pitch of frenzy now that they'll heed nobody."

"That's quite true," growled Dorrie. "Oh, well, we'd better wait and see what the game is. I suppose. It'll be somethin' pretty hideous, I've no doubt."

He glanced up at the gorilla-god.

The pole was all of seventy feet in height, with smoothed, polished sides. And at the very summit of it stood a great, crouching gorilla. It was only a dummy, of course—a real gorilla skin, no doubt, but filled with stuffing.

And this monster was the god of the Oturi.

They worshipped this horrible fetish. It was their Ju-Ju. The white victims were to be sacrificed to the gorilla-god! That much was already obvious.

And now the victims were beginning to display a fascinated interest in the course of the preparations. What was their actual fate to be? They were to be sacrificed—yes, but how? And who would be the first to go? These were questions which intrigued them.

"You know something about the Oturi, Dorrie," said Doris Berkeley, going up to his lordship. "You've been here before, haven't you?"

"Not actually," said Lord Dorrimore guardedly.

"But you know the custom of the tribe?" put in Irene Manners.

"Well, yes."

"Then what do you think they're going to do to us?" asked Doris.

"There's no tellin'," replied his lordship. "Hang it, girls, let's talk about something else!"

Dorrie knew, in his heart, that they were all to be burned in some way. Burning was the favourite method of the Oturi. Burning alive! But it was impossible to talk about it.

"Let's hope it'll be swift, anyhow," said Irene quietly. "I don't think it will—but there's no harm in hoping, is there?"

"We're all hoping—hard!" said Mary Summers.

Lord Dorrimore turned away, and his eyes were heavy.

"Gad, the pluck of these youngsters is staggerin'," he muttered huskily. "They know what's comin', Lee—an' yet they're keepin' their pecker up all the time! This sort of thing can't last. One of them's bound to crumple, an' then we might all go. Glory, that would be too awful!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"If I know anything about them, they won't break down, old man," he replied. "Heaven forbid that they should be enlightened, but they are all entertaining a hope that Umlosi might get here."

"I'm entertainin' that hope, too," growled Dorrimore.

"Then don't," said Nelson Lee. "Good gracious, Dorrie! Don't you realise that the thing's absolutely impossible? Remember the distance! At the earliest possible moment, Umlosi's warriors couldn't be here until tomorrow. You know that as well as I do. So why fool yourself?"

His lordship gave an obstinate growl.

"We may have miscalculated," he said stubbornly. "Umlosi knows the danger, an' he'll move heaven and earth to get here in time. I tell you there's a chance, Lee!"

Nelson Lee said nothing. He knew that Dorrie was wrong.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fire Circle.



"WHAT'S the game now?" asked Willy Handforth curiously.

The dancing had ceased, and the hundreds of painted warriors were rushing to and fro, evidently bent upon some new purpose. The majority of them were vanishing into the darkness beyond the torch lights.

"There's an alarm of some kind," said Gresham, with a catch in his voice. "Perhaps they've heard that Umlosi—"

"No, old man," interrupted Duncan. "There's no alarm. They're bringing wood, that's all—faggots and stuff."

"For fires!" muttered Harry Gresham huskily.

For well over an hour past, large numbers of the blacks had been tearing up the surrounding bushes. They had been chopping trees down, and now all this material was being dragged into the clearing.

There was an incredible amount of it.

It was mostly green wood, with the foliage still attached to it. Enormous piles were being made—piles so high that the scene beyond them was completely shut off. And the

piles grew all the time. They were being made on every hand—in every section of the circle.

"I can see the dodge now," said Nipper, nodding. "They're going to make a complete ring of this firewood. See how they're filling up the gaps? In less than ten minutes it'll be an uninterrupted circle."

"Good gad!" muttered Archie "Absolutely a circular bonfire, what? A dashed bonfire in one continuous ring, as it were."

"Yes, fifty yards across," said Nipper, "and we're in the centre."

They watched with a greater fascination than ever. The piles of wood grew bigger and bigger. Already they were mounting to a height of from fifteen to twenty feet. There was an incredible amount of inflammable material there.

And this was to be a bonfire.

The brain reeled at the thought of it. When fully alight, it would be a conflagration such as the boys had never imagined. But even now, with their fate staring them in the face, some of the fellows still hoped.

"But this won't kill us!" declared Church excitedly. "We're not bound, or tied in any way. And it's twenty-five yards from the centre of this ring to the bonfire."

"The heat won't affect us much at a distance of twenty-five yards!" said Watson, with gleaming eyes. "Think of it! Seventy-five feet! Why, we shall be safe!"

"We don't know what they're planning yet," growled Handforth. "They've built the bonfire at a respectable distance so that their rotten Ju-Ju shan't be burned. By George! I was thinking about making a rush for freedom, but that's knocked on the head now!"

"Yes, we're bottled up," said Nipper. "The circle's complete—and these dense masses of green wood are twenty feet high. Which-ever way we turn, it's the same. There's no escape from this ring."

Sir Montie scratched his head.

"Dear old boy, I can't understand it," he said, puzzled. "It's a mystery to me—it is really. Do these blacks really suppose that the flames will affect us?"

"You can bet they've tested the game!" said Nipper.

"But there's not a breath of wind, old boy," went on Montie. "It might be different if there was a high wind to blow the heat over us. But the night's absolutely still."

Nipper took his noble chum aside.

"There's no need to let everybody know," he muttered. "But you're crazy, Monty, if you think that we shall live through it."

"But, really, twenty-five yards—"

"The heartless demons!" panted Nipper. "That's just the fiendish cruelty of the thing! If this circle was only a third of the distance across, we should be finished in a very short time. Can you picture what it'll be like when this bonfire gets fully going?"

Sir Montie caught his breath in.

"You think it'll be frightful?" he asked.

"Just imagine it," replied Nipper shakily. "A bonfire, in one continuous circle, with the

flames roaring up in a solid, endless wall! Twenty-five yards, eh? Perhaps so, Montie—but have you ever stood twenty-five yards away from a blazing house or a burning haystack?”

“Not that I can remember, old chap,” said Sir Montie.

“It’s possible to stand it for a time,” went on Nipper. “But then, you’ve always got somewhere to retreat to. You’ve only got to back away and the heat is diminished. But what will it be like in this circle? If we back away from one wall, we shall get nearer the other.”

“Begad!”

“And before the bonfire has been burning for twenty minutes the heat inside this vortex will be too appalling for words,” went on Nipper. “Can’t you see? They’re not going to burn us at the stake, or put us mercifully out of our misery. The idea is to roast us gradually—to see our frantic efforts to get air, and—Oh, I can’t picture it!”

Montie was convinced at last. Words failed him. He knew that Nipper’s prediction would turn out to be right. The fact that the fire-circle would be so big was a matter for despair rather than hope.

Lord Dorrimore was pale with anguish.

“We know their game now, Lee,” he was saying. “The Fire Circle! It’s the old, old Oturi dodge! I thought it had been dead for generations. One hears of it as a relic of the past. And here we have these brutes practising the custom of their ancestors! You see, it’s in the blood. They civilise these blacks, an’ then think they’re tamed!”

“But you mustn’t forget that even the Oturi would never have dared such methods if it hadn’t been for Lorenzo’s goading,” replied Lee.

“Isn’t there some way to stop them?” demanded his lordship harshly. “Man alive! This thing can’t go on! It’s too horrible—too ghastly! Think of those boys—an’ the girls! I tell you it’s too utterly appallin’ to be carried through.”

“Steady, old man—steady!” murmured Lee anxiously.

“Sorry!” said the millionaire explorer. “I didn’t mean to get into a panic, Lee. It’s not myself I’m thinkin’ of—”

“I know,” broke in Nelson Lee. “If we could die and permit these youngsters to live—well, old man, we’d willingly die. But there’s no choice. We’re all in the same boat.”

Dorrie stared up at the crouching gorilla-god.

“That infernal fetish is the cause of it all!” he snapped. “These devils are just as superstitious as ever they were. If that gorilla suddenly toppled over, or somethin’ like that, they’d take it as a sign. They might even chuck up the whole game, an’ clear out. It’s surprisin’ what a little thing will set their superstitious fears to work.”

Lee looked thoughtful.

“We might shake the pole,” he suggested.

“If the effigy became dislodged—”

“No good,” interrupted Dorrie, shaking his

head. “They’d see the game, an’ they’d know that we had caused the thing to fall. That would only make them more fiendish than ever. They’d probably torture us worse, for havin’ the audacity to interfere with their Ju-Ju. No, it’s no good, Lee. Better not interfere with that horror!”

But Nelson Lee was still looking thoughtful.

CHAPTER 5.

No Hope!



THE time passed with interminable slowness.

The Oturi seemed in no hurry to get on with the deadly part of the programme. After the fashion of their kind, they were indifferent to the passage of time, and were in no hurry.

The savages could still be heard, but they had now all vanished from view. For the circle of fire was complete.

The prisoners were hemmed in within.

All sight of the outer world was cut off. And the result was rather curious.

It was comparatively gloomy within this circle. The reflected glare from the torches came over the bonfire, and they could hear the excited shouting and talking of the Oturi warriors. Now and again the bonfire would heave, showing that further supplies were being stacked against it on all sides.

And there was the uncertainty, too.

At any moment the captives expected to see smoke curling up, and to hear the crackling of the sap-filled wood. But these sounds did not come. So far the bonfire had not been ignited.

“I’ll bet they’re doing the thing thoroughly,” said Watson wearily. “They’re getting additional supplies ready—stacks of fresh wood, so that they can shove it on the bonfire when it begins to die down. They don’t want any mistake once it’s fairly alight.”

“I believe you’ve hit it,” said Nipper.

The girls were keeping mainly to themselves. And the boys avoided them—not because they did not want their company, but because they feared to answer the questions which the girls were certain to ask. Lee and Dorrie, too, were keeping apart. They were both so utterly haggard that they were hardly recognisable.

What could they do?

They were the responsible men of this party—and yet they were as helpless as the girls themselves.

“Why shouldn’t we do something?” asked Handforth grimly. “Even if it comes to nothing, it’ll be worth it. There’s nothing worse than idleness. It’s horrible, waiting here.”

“But what can we do?” asked Church.

“Well, why not force a passage through one of these giddy bonfires?” suggested Handforth. “If we go at it hard enough, we might



Lorenzo placed his hand on his smarting jaw—where Lord Dorrimore had struck him—and then faced the millionaire. "You'll pay for this, Dorrimore—you and your cubs!" he snarled.

make a tunnel through all this brushwood and stuff. By George! It's not a bad idea!" he went on excitedly. "Couldn't we do it?"

He had suggested the thing at random—just for something to say. But it suddenly occurred to him that it might be feasible.

"In one or two places, there aren't any torches," he went on tensely. "What if we tunnelled through all this wood, and then crept out into the surrounding bush? They'd light the giddy fires, and wouldn't know we were missing until——"

"Let's go and look!" suggested Church feverishly.

They ran to one section of the bonfire, and crouched down, examining the massed piles of wood at close quarters. And then their hearts sank. That one look was enough.

"Impossible. Handy," said Church dully. "Look at it! Nothing but thorn and tangled creepers, and jagged ends of branches. If we tried to push our way through here we should be torn to bits! We couldn't do it, even if we had axes."

Even Handforth had to admit it.

"No, they've made the thing pretty strongly," he growled. "Why there must be tons of wood and leaves here. Tons of it!

It'll take a terrific time to burn up. We shall be choked by the smoke before the fire even starts!"

"That'll be a mercy, anyway," said Mac.

"You're wrong, too," added Church. "There's no wind, and the smoke'll go straight up. I expect we shall be half suffocated, but there's no hope of being polished off by the smoke. A death like that wouldn't be so bad. But the other——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We're not going to die!"

"Oh, Handy!" muttered Church. "Why kid yourself?"

"I tell you we're not going to die!" insisted Handforth. "I know we're not!"

"How do you know?"

"I can feel it in my bones," said the leader of Study D, with supreme confidence. "Things will get a bit worse, of course. Then Umlosi will come. You wait! He'll turn up in the nick of time, with all his warriors, and these beasts will be wiped out!"

Church and McClure hadn't the heart to protest. Handforth's optimism was uncanny. It had always been like that. He was a fellow who never admitted defeat, and he

wouldn't hear of it under any circumstances. With death staring him in the face he was the same old optimist.

Even the failure of his tunnelling idea did not affect him. He was disappointed at first, but he soon recovered. And the way he went about cheerily chatting was wonderful to see.

Dorrie suspected that Handforth was only putting it on—just to keep up the spirits of the others. But in this Dorrie was wrong. Handforth was cheery because he calmly refused to accept the dreadful position at its face value. Like the celebrated Mr. Micawber, Handforth was waiting for something to turn up. And he was so certain about it that he began to inspire the others with his own optimism. Handy was several kinds of a chump, and he was the most exasperating fellow under the sun—but in a crisis of this sort he was worth his weight in gold.

"There's something pretty wonderful about that kid," said Lord Dorrimore breathlessly. "Old Nipper's a cool card, an' most of these youngsters are good plucked 'uns. But Handy is like a breath of fresh air. Sometimes I want to slaughter him, an' many a time I've felt like knockin' his head off. But he's all right in the main. One of the best. His good qualities don't come out until there's somethin' tragic in the air."

He turned round as he heard a shout, and then scowled. Otto Lorenzo was perched high in the fork of a distant tree. From that spot, he could look right down into the circle. A hush had come, and it had been obviously ordered by the slaver.

"Perhaps you will like to know exactly what will now happen?" shouted Lorenzo. "The fire is about to be lit—with fifty torches simultaneously. At a word from me, the torches will be flung."

If he expected his victims to show any fear, he was disappointed.

"But you needn't be frightened yet," he continued. "It will take an hour for these piles of fresh wood to burn up, and then another hour, perhaps, before the heat becomes too great. The Oturi are expecting quite a lot of amusement. It has always been found that people in your position run through the flames when the heat becomes too great. I shall wait expectantly for that moment!"

Not a sound came from the prisoners. A yell of defiance would only have amused the slaver, and the boys instinctively felt this. With commendable self-control, they remained contemptuously indifferent.

But the picture which Lorenzo had painted so crudely had flashed before every mind's eye.

When the fire reached a certain intensity, the victims would go mad with pain and despair. It was quite natural. And then, in their frenzy, they would try to dash through the flames.

What chance would there be of getting through? None! They would fall in the

midst of the white-hot mass, and the end would be swift.



CHAPTER 6.

An Idea!

HANDFORTH grunted.

"I'll have that slesh yet!" he declared fiercely. "Of all the inhuman brutes I've ever seen or heard of,

Lorenzo's the worst! I'll pound his face to a jelly before I've done with him!"

"You speak as though you'll have a chance!" said Church. "You ass, Handy! Haven't you just heard what he said?"

"Of course I have!"

"Then you must know that you'll never meet him again," said Church.

The lull had now passed, and the savages were making more noise than ever. To the relief of the prisoners, Lorenzo had got down from his perch, and there were no eyes staring into that death circle.

"That brute has put an idea into my head," said Doris quietly, as she stood with the other girls. "Why should we wait. Wouldn't it be better to run into the flames as soon as they blaze up?"

"Oh, it's wicked to suggest that, Doris!" protested Irene.

"Why is it?" asked Doris. "Why should we wait to be tortured?"

"We must wait—because while we're alive there's always a chance," replied Irene quietly.

"You're thinking about Umlosi," said Doris, shaking her head.

"Yes."

"He won't come," went on Doris. "If there was any possible chance of it, Mr. Lee would have given us some hope. But he's said nothing, and that's pretty significant, isn't it? Even Mr. Lee doesn't believe that the Kutanas can come."

The others were silent. There was a great deal of truth in Doris' argument. Nelson Lee had kept silent for the very reason that she had stated. He had refrained from mentioning Umlosi because he felt, in his heart, that the hope was a forlorn one.

There was now a period of waiting.

The slaver had mentioned something about the bonfire being lit, but the savages seemed to be in no hurry. It seemed that they were still indulging in their wild preliminary dances—carreering madly round the gigantic bonfire, getting themselves into a greater frenzy than ever.

There could be no doubt that Lorenzo was insane.

Brute though he was, he could never have condemned his victims to this torture if he had been in his right senses. Normally, perhaps, he was sane enough, but the recent events had driven him out of his mind temporarily. Furthermore, for ten solid hours he had been drinking—in preparation for this

very occasion. He had known, in his heart, that the thing would be revoltingly horrible, and he had deliberately soaked himself in spirits so that he should carry it through. Now, he was beyond all reason, and yet he seemed perfectly sober. His hard drinking had had no effect upon his speech, or upon his equilibrium.

"Hallo!" said Lord Dorrimore, after a while. "There's a different note now! Listen to the tom-toms, too! I rather fancy they're goin' to start the real fun!"

Nelson Lee nodded absently.

"Yes, it sounds like it," he said.

"What are you thinkin' about?" asked Dorrie curiously. "You've been absent-minded for the last ten minutes, Lee. An' why do you keep lookin' up at that infernal Ju-Ju?"

Nelson Lee looked at Dorrie squarely.

"There's an idea in my head," he replied. "It's only a wild notion, Dorrie, and I don't suppose for a minute that it will come to anything. But desperate ills call for desperate remedies."

"There's no question about the desperate ills," agreed his lordship. "We can take that for granted. But I must confess I'm confoundedly interested in the desperate remedy. Personally, I didn't think there was a remedy, desperate or otherwise. What's the wheeze, old man?"

"I can't tell you just yet."

"Why not?"

"Because it may be unfeasible, and I don't want to speak too soon," replied Lee. "But supposing that gorilla-god suddenly came to life?"

"Came to life?" said Dorrie, staring.

"Yes."

"Old man, you're wanderin' in your mind!"

"No, I'm not," said Lee quietly. "Supposing that gorilla came to life, Dorrie. What would happen to the Oturi?"

"What would happen to 'em!" said Dorrie. "You mean, what wouldn't happen to 'em? Why, good glory, they'd think the world had come to an end. If their filthy Ju-Ju gave a sign of some kind they'd bolt to the four quarters of the compass."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That's what I thought," he said.

"The strain's provin' too much," murmured Dorrie sadly. "But I never expected that you'd be the first to crack up, Lee. Hang it, I thought you had more strength than that! But you're absolutely off your nut! How in the name of all that's miraculous could that gorilla come to life?"

"It couldn't," replied Lee simply.

"Then what—?"

"Look, Dorrie, they're setting light to the bonfire," interrupted Lee, pointing. "An hour of grace—eh? I wonder if we shall have all that time? I hardly think so. It won't take this mass of wood longer than half an hour to blaze up."

Dorrie gave his companion a very searching glance, but he could make nothing of

him. And the bonfire claimed his attention now. At every point, the smoke was rising. The lurid glare of the torches had completely vanished, and the darkness was bewildering. Even the yelling of the savages had died down to a strange, uncanny murmur.

The torches had all been thrust into the bonfire. In every yard or two of that great circle the torches were doing their work. The bonfire was lighted simultaneously at every point. And the flames were naturally obliterated in the smouldering haze.

The hissing of the sap could be heard everywhere, with an occasional crackle as the twigs burst. It was a noise that increased with every minute that passed—an ominous, terrifying warning of what was to come.

Here were these helpless victims, hemmed in by the circle of fire, and just beyond were the hordes of cannibals.

Some was now rolling upwards in dense, choking masses. Wisps of it came into the circle, and set the captives coughing. But the great bulk of the smoke went straight upwards.

And Nelson Lee watched it with a great fascination.

CHAPTER 7.

The Screen of Smoke!



HERE was something impressive in that smoke. It was a great, solid bank, rising straight upwards whichever way the eye was turned. Everything beyond was utterly blotted out. And the gloom was so intense that the boys could scarcely see one another.

Looking straight up, they could see the grotesque figure of the gorilla-god, perched at the top of the pole. Now and again it was obliterated by the rolling smoke clouds.

"Well, it's started!" said Nipper huskily.

"We shall be all right," declared Handforth. "We're not dead yet, are we? If Umlosi gets here within half an hour—"

"Umlosi won't get here!" interrupted Church fiercely. "Why are you so obstinate. Handy? He won't get here! He can't get here! We're all doomed!"

Poor Church was nearly frantic, but he pulled himself together with an effort.

"Sorry!" he muttered. "I—I'm trying to keep calm, but—but— Why can't you accept the position, Handy? It only makes things worse when you keep hoping in vain!"

"I'm not hoping in vain!" replied Handforth stubbornly.

Nipper walked away from them. Something had told him to go across to the spot where Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were standing. He couldn't explain why, but he seemed to feel, instinctively, that there was something brewing.

And, surely enough, Nelson Lee was staring straight up at the smoke walls.

"They'll get worse than this, Dorrie," he was saying, in a low voice. "They'll get thicker yet—and the smoke ought to last for at least twenty minutes before the flames begin to break through. Spoke as thick as the densest fog! By James! I wonder!"

"What is it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"The poor man's nutty!" said Lord Dorri-more. "He's been goin' on like this for the last ten minutes. You needn't expect to get any satisfaction, either. He won't tell you anythin'."

"What is it, guv'nor?" repeated Nipper, clutching at Lee's arm.

"Nothing much," replied Nelson Lee. "I don't wonder that Dorrie is facetious. Now that I come to consider this idea, I can realise that it is very forlorn. Indeed, I cannot see that it could even be put into execution. It rests solely upon the fact that we are completely hidden from the enemy. This smoke is the factor in our favour."

"You see?" said Dorrie. "He talks in riddles."

"The smoke?" exclaimed Nipper. "In our favour?"

"Whatever we do within the next twenty minutes will be hidden from the enemy," replied Nelson Lee. "This great bonfire is circular, and we are in the centre of it. If we mean to act, we must act at once—while our movements are blotted out from the Oturi."

"Act?" said Dorrie. "What do you mean—act? If you'll explain what action we can take, I'll be mightily obliged. You're not suggestin' that we should make a bolt over a section of the bonfire before it gets fairly goin'?"

"I'm not suggesting that, Dorrie, because it's unfeasible," replied Lee. "The blacks are probably waiting for something of the sort, ready to throw us back. We can be quite certain that the whole fire is ringed by hundreds of savages."

"That's what I figured, too," said his lordship.

"But the events which take place here—inside the smoke circle—will be hidden," continued Lee. "Have a look at that gorilla-god, perched up there. Do you think the blacks can see it?"

"Not through this smoke," said Nipper promptly.

"Well, as there's no time to waste, I'll tell you what I was thinking of," said Lee sharply. "That figure is merely stuffed—a gorilla skin filled with dried grass, possibly. Anyhow, I believe that it could be easily dislodged from its perch, and flung down."

"Great glory!" gasped Dorrie. "You—you mean change places with the dummy? That's what you were getting at, is it?"

"Yes, that's what I was getting at, Dorrie," replied Lee. "If I could change places with the dummy, I could make a sign after the flames break through—always pro-

viding that the heat is not too intense and suffocating. In that case, of course, I should topple off, and that would be the end of the first of us!"

"Seventy feet!" muttered Dorrie, as he looked up. "You'd be safe for a fairish time, at all events. Gad! You could make a sign that would scare these niggers into the middle of next week! Imagine their terror if their precious Ju-Ju suddenly came to life."

"My goodness!" said Nipper eagerly. "Can it be done, guv'nor?"

"It's got to be done!" vowed Lord Dorri-more. "Now I know why old Handy has been so optimistic! Some instinct must have told him about this, Lee! Why, it's the road to salvation for us all!"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts!" said his lordship fiercely. "Umlosi and all his men won't scare these Oturi half so much as a sign from their gorilla-god. Their lives are absolutely ruled by superstitions! One movement from their Ju-Ju, and they'll forget their frenzy, they'll forget us, an' they'll be a mere rabble of frightened sheep."

"Oh, Dorrie!" said Nipper, catching his breath in.

"There's somethin' else, too," went on Dorrie. "We could work it up properly, an' make it more effective than ever. It only needs a little plannin'—"

"For Heaven's sake, calm yourself!" interrupted Nelson Lee harshly. "I wish I hadn't spoken of this idea, Dorrie! I've only raised your hopes for no purpose. I can't climb this pole."

"Can't? Why can't you?"

"Because, in the first place I'm no acrobat," replied Lee. "I might manage to get to the top, but I should never be able to balance myself on that fragile cross-bar. Don't forget the swaying. In addition to all that, the pole wouldn't stand my weight."

Nipper grinned with sheer excitement.

"I can soon settle that, guv'nor!" he said. "I'll go!"

"Your weight is more the mark, but you're not an acrobat, either, Nipper," said Nelson Lee. "You couldn't do it."

"I could try!"

"That's not the same as—"

"An acrobat!" shouted Nipper huskily. "Why, we've got the very chap here! What about Johnny Onions?"

Nelson Lee started.

"Onions!" he muttered. "By James! I'd forgotten him—"

"Calling me?" asked Johnny Onions, running up.

In fact, all the other prisoners came crowding round, scenting that there was something afoot. A curious wave of excitement went round, passing from one to the other.

"Johnny, there's some work for you!" said Nipper breathlessly. "There's just a chance that you might be able to save all our lives!"

"I?" gasped Johnny, staring blankly.
 "Yes, you!" said Nipper. "The guv'nor's got a marvellous idea—and all we need is an acrobat to put it into execution! Here's your chance to save us all!"

Johnny Onions gulped.

"I don't understand!" he panted. "You're off your rocker!"



CHAPTER 8.

A Perilous Enterprise!

JOHNNY ONIONS was bewildered.

True, he was an acrobat, but he couldn't for the life of him see how he could utilise his own peculiar talents now, at this desperate moment. He was staring at Nelson Lee open-eyed.

And Lee, in his turn, was strangely changed. Nipper's sudden reminder that Johnny was an acrobat made the scheme feasible.

Lee remembered that the agile Johnny had once been the star performer in his father's circus. Indeed, all the prominent St. Frank's fellows had been interested in that circus, too. Later, Johnny Onions had come to St. Frank's, and he had not allowed his muscles to get stiff. He had kept up much of his old training.

"Onions, listen to me," said Nelson Lee tensely. "This bonfire is alight—and, with any luck, we have fully a quarter of an hour before the flames leap through. Until then, everything will be hidden by this pall of smoke. The fire is huge, and the wood is fresh, and full of sap. It will smoulder and smoke for a long time. We have a chance."

"Of what, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"Do you think you could climb this pole, Johnny?" asked Nipper quickly.

"Climb it!" said Johnny Onions. "I could climb it backwards!"

"The idea is for you to get to the top as quickly as you can, and dislodge the Oturis' Ju-Ju," continued Lee. "Tear it down, and let it drop. Then come down yourself."

"We'll tear the stuffin' out of the thing in two minutes," put in Lord Dorrimore. "Then you'll get into the skin, an' climb up again. An' here's the snag. You'll have to stand on that cross-bar at the top, balancin' yourself in a perfectly still attitude!"

There were many gasps of excited wonder.

"I'll try it!" said Johnny eagerly. "I'll do my best, sir!"

"Nobody expects you to do more than that, young 'un," said Lee. "The ordeal will be a very severe one. The pole is by no means steady, and even a trained acrobat—such as yourself—would find it difficult to maintain his equilibrium. Also, this heat from the fire is rising, and it may choke you. Don't do it unless you—"

"Why, there's no other way, sir," interrupted Johnny. "Stand clear from this pole! I'll soon have the rotten thing down!"

He did not want for any further discussion, but sprang to the pole, and commenced climbing up its smooth height like a monkey. All the others watched him with breathless interest. They took no notice of the dense smoke which was now making their heads heavy and dizzy. What was a little smoke compared to the horror that was to follow?

"Keep quiet, all of you!" warned Lee. "No cheering if Onions gets to the top in safety. We don't want to give the enemy any indication that we're active."

"All right! We'll keep quiet, sir," said Handforth. "By George! Why didn't I think of this stunt? And why didn't they let me climb up?"

"Hush!" warned Tessa Love, in an agony.

She was watching her boy chum as he neared the extremity of the immense pole. It was only possible to see him now and again, for the rolling masses of smoke kept blotting him out. There was no wind, but an eddy would now and again send the smoke drifting diagonally.

Johnny Onions was suddenly aware that his task was certainly dangerous—if not impossible.

Immense as that pole was, it felt very precarious at the top. He swayed dangerously; the smoke filled his lungs, and caused his senses to reel. And then, at last, he reached the very summit.

The conditions were better than he had expected.

The gorilla effigy was not merely fixed to the top of the pole, but was standing on a strong little platform, which was much bigger than it had looked from the ground.

Johnny cautiously hauled himself up, swung his leg over the platform, and wrenched at the dummy.

"Phew!" he muttered. "This is a bit of a job!"

The image was fixed by lengths of powerful cord, which were bound round the feet and wrapped repeatedly.

The junior had no knife on him, so he caught at one of the strands, and tore it asunder. Then another, and another.

But it seemed to him that the thing would never come loose. He was sure that the precious minutes were fatally speeding. Now and again, as he perspired at this task, he looked down, fearing that he would see the flames breaking through. But on every hand there was nothing but those rolling clouds of billowing smoke.

"He can't do it!" panted Nipper, as he stared upwards.

"Give him time!" said Dorrie. "Give him time! He hasn't been up there more than a couple of minutes!"

"It seems an hour!" said Nipper anxiously.

"I was afraid of this," muttered Lee, turning to Dorrie. "We have no knives—not one among the lot of us. The boy is

compelled to use his bare hands. And if the fastenings are very strong——"

"That's right—be cheerful!" said Dorrie gruffly.

At that very moment Johnny Onions was giving a little gasp of triumph. His hand was torn and bleeding from the whip-like cords, but he had not paused in his efforts.

And now the grotesque Ju-Ju was beginning to sag over sideways, unable to remain upright any longer. Two more cords went, and then the monster toppled completely over.

Johnny swung himself round in the nick of time, or he would have been swept off his perch. The dummy went over, was checked for a moment as the remaining cords pulled it up, and then these snapped.

The thing went hurtling down.

He tore the loose ends of cord away, and then climbed on to the platform. He thought it was a good opportunity to test it. It swayed considerably, but there was good foothold on that rough cross-bar, and it was easy enough for an acrobat of Johnny's skill to keep his balance.

"I believe we'll do the trick!" gloated Johnny. "Now we'll skid down, and see what's happening."

He took one last look at the scene, and was satisfied that the fire was still smouldering. At any moment, of course, it might burst into flame. When it did flare up, it would unquestionably come without any warning. There was no time to lose.

Down below, Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee were grabbing at the effigy. Just as Lee had suspected, it was a genuine gorilla skin, stuffed. There was nothing else. If only Johnny could get into this skin, the rest might be accomplished.

But even now Nelson Lee was filled with doubts.

"The trouble is, Dorrie, we have no tools," he muttered, as they worked. "And if we don't produce an effective substitute the beggars will guess that they're being tricked."

"We'll do it all right," said Lord Dorrimore confidently. "This skin is in pretty good condition, an' there's heaps of this twine stuff hangin' about. We can't sew Johnny in, but we can tie him in!"

"Oh, I wonder if it'll be possible?" murmured Irene.

"Don't you wonder any longer, old girl," said Handforth, pressing her arm. "It's as good as done already!"

that there would be no possible evidence.

"Good lad, Johnny!" said Lee, as the schoolboy acrobat prepared to don the skin. "You've done splendidly so far. But the real test is yet to come. This skin is heavy, and you'll be suffocatingly hot inside it."

"I shall be a lot hotter if I don't try the dodge, sir," Johnny pointed out.

"Cad, that's true!" said Dorrie.

"We'll cut a place just in the neck, near where your mouth will come," went on Lee. "We'll leave you plenty of room to breathe. Now, go carefully. The trouble will be to get these legs effectively arranged. They're only loose skins, and we shall need every inch of that twine."

At any other time the task would have seemed impossible. But with their lives at stake they worked feverishly. The knowledge that the flames might burst out at any moment and reveal their plot made them work with startling effectiveness and speed.

The main body of the skin was not opened, and Johnny wriggled into the space where the stuffing had been without much difficulty. He was nauseated by the smell, and at first he felt that he was going to suffocate on the spot. But then a gap in the skin was torn, so that his mouth and nose were free. The long hair would serve to hide that tell-tale breathing hole.

The arms and legs proved the greatest difficulty.

But by the use of much twine, and scraps of creeper hooked out of the bonfire, the job was done. Johnny, standing there in the gloom, presented a terrifying spectacle. He looked for all the world like a live gorilla.

"Marvellous!" said Dorrie enthusiastically.

"In this light—yes," muttered Lee. "But I'm afraid the effect will be terribly obvious in the full glare of the big bonfire. Our only hope is that the savages will be too busily engaged to pay much attention. And when the sign comes they'll be too terrified."

"They'll never see any difference, sir," declared Nipper. "But we shall have to work the dodge the instant the fires blaze out, or we shall be roasted."

"That, of course, is the plan," said Lee. "If we wait too long all our trouble will have been for nothing."

"Well, I'll go, sir," said Johnny, from his breathing hole.

"Good luck, my boy—and heaven guard you!" said Lee fervently. "Remember that all our lives depend upon your acrobatic skill."

"I shan't forget it, sir," said Johnny Onions huskily.

All the others murmured good cheer, and Johnny commenced the difficult climb. The sudden crackling of wood and a tongue of flame gave him added strength.

Time was getting short now!

The affair was resolving itself into a sort of race. Would the junior be able to get back to that high perch before the smoke cleared? It would clear suddenly—dramatically. Once the flames licked up, they

CHAPTER 9.

The Supreme Test!



WITHIN three minutes all doubts were set at rest. The stuffing had all been pulled out of the "god" and the boys had conveyed every scrap of it to the bonfire, so

would spread completely round the circle, and then the smoke would vanish.

As yet it still rolled up in choking volumes. The anxious watchers below divided their attention between the fire and the climbing figure. Every little burst of flame was regarded with anguish. But they needn't have worried. These were only preliminary splutters; the fire was gaining a tremendous hold in its heart, but would not flare up into full life for some minutes yet.

The savages, too, were aware of the coming change. They were shouting and dancing again, and the beating of the drums was recommenced. They knew that the Fire Circle would soon be a reality.

Johnny Onions never knew how he reached the top.

The pole was slippery, and his grip was precarious. It had not been so bad with his bare hands, but now he was terribly hampered. The extra weight, too, was well-nigh insupportable. And when, at long last, he pulled himself on to that swaying little platform he was as wet as though he had come out of a bath.

What with the terrible heat, the odour from the skin, and the choking smoke, it was a wonder that he kept his balance at all. His brain was reeling. But he set his teeth grimly, and swore that he would not fail in this test.

He took his stand on the lofty perch, and adopted the exact attitude that the original image had represented. He held that pose, and wondered how long he would be able to maintain it.

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne, as he looked up. "I mean to say, this is absolutely uncanny, old chappies. I'm dashed if I can tell the difference between the original and the understudy."

"It's marvellous!" said Handforth. "Poor chap! I wonder if he can keep it up, though? If he makes the tiniest slip, he'll come tumbling down on the top of us."

Johnny knew it, too.

His position was unenviable indeed! In the first place, that "platform" was merely a cross-piece of rough log, with a flattened top, about three feet long by ten inches wide. On the ground, any ordinary boy could have stood upon it with perfect ease.

But Johnny was seventy feet up in the air, and the pole, moreover, was swaying to and fro and from side to side. Never once did it cease. The swaying was nearly imperceptible from the ground, but Johnny was compelled to use every atom of his balancing skill to maintain his attitude. It was impossible for him to throw out an arm in case he lost his equilibrium. So his body was tense, his whole will concentrated upon the task of making himself look as though he were part of the pole itself.

And then, too, he was encased in that horrible skin, which robbed him of all delicacy of feeling and touch. But he was not indifferent to the great responsibility which had been placed in him. It behoved him to keep his balance in order to save his own life

—and the lives of all the others also depended upon his skill.

"The boy's doin' wonders," said Lord Dorrimore, as he stared up. "Confound it, why doesn't the fire break out now? It's infernally slow!"

"Unhappily, we can't have everything our own way, Dorrie," said Lee drily. "A few minutes ago we were anxious for the fire to keep on smouldering—but now we want it to blaze up. We can only wait, and trust to luck. So far luck has served us handsomely."

"An' I've got a hunch that it'll keep on the job," said Dorrie, nodding. "Now, I think you'd better do the talkin' when the picnic starts. We've planned exactly how to work it—"

"No, you're the man, Dorrie," interrupted Lee. "You know the language better, and these Oturi are acquainted with you personally, too."

"Don't you believe it," said Dorrie. "I'm rather more particular about my friends."

"I mean they have heard of you as a great hunter—"

"The very reason I want you to appear in this act as 'the magician,' " put in his lordship promptly. "They've heard of me—yes. But they've always regarded me as a harmless sort of nuisance. You're different. You're a stranger. If you work a few miracles they'll believe it. An' when it comes to the language, you can jabber in Swahili as well as I can. An' the Oturi understand that lingo. Your impressive voice an' your flashin' eye are further clinchin' points."

"Nonsense," growled Lee. "Still, I'll do the talking, if you like." He glanced up. "Let us hope that plucky boy maintains his balance. Everything depends on it. Imagine it, Dorrie! All our lives rest upon that youngster up there!"

"It's a solemn thought," said Dorrie. "But the fire's breakin' through now, so we shall soon know our fate, one way or the other. We do have excitin' times, don't we?"



CHAPTER 10.

A Terrible Ordeal!

THE flames licked up, and spread along the great circular bonfire with awe-inspiring intensity.

As the flames arose, so the smoke diminished. Beyond, through the leaping tongues, could be seen the wildly dancing forms of the Oturi warriors.

The height of the bonfire had greatly diminished now that it was well alight. Whichever way the captives looked, they could see the leaping figures of the painted cannibals through the flames. It was almost an optical illusion. They had the effect that the savages were dancing amid the flames themselves. With startling rapidity the fire was spreading and increasing.

If the view from within was awe-inspiring, it was even more so from without.

Lorenzo, for example, obtained a superb view of the scene from a hillock, two or three hundred yards distant. He was standing there with Popodos, his chief overseer, a Greek. And although Lorenzo was laughing with spirit-inflamed passion, Popodos was haggard with fear.

"It's all wrong, boss—it's all wrong," he was saying. "Gosh, you mustn't let this go on!"

"Hold your infernal tongue!" snarled Lorenzo. "The matter is out of our hands. K'laba and his men are in command, and it is too late for me to do anything. Let them be burned. Do I care?"

He pointed.

"Look!" he went on. "We can see them now!"

From the hillock the scene was demoniac indeed. The bonfire seemed to be one solid mass of flame, with the Ju-Ju pole sticking out of the heart of it. The figures of the prisoners could be seen there, too—moving about as though saved by some miracle from a fiery death. The flames distorted them until they looked fantastic and unreal.

Popodos shut his eyes for a moment. Hardened criminal though he was, this thing unnerved him. He had spent most of his life in New York, on the East River. For Popodos had been a hi-jacker—a class of criminal that preys upon the bootleggers. He had cleared out of New York, and had drifted to Lorenzo's plantations. But he had never anticipated such hideous "amusement" as this. But there was another reason for his haggard face and for his wild expression.

"Boss, you've got to stop it!" he said hoarsely. "It's all very well to fool yourself that the Government people won't hear of it. They will—sure! These blacks won't hold their tongues. They'll boast of burning twenty whites——"

"Shut your mouth!" interrupted Lorenzo harshly.

"They'll boast, I tell you!" shouted Popodos. "And what then? There'll be an inquiry. The Dicks will come along, and the Oturi will say that the massacre took place here. Gosh, we'll all be hanged as a result of this if you don't stop it!"

"You are a fool," said Lorenzo curtly. "Let there be an inquiry. Do I care? They come here, and I say I know nothing. You understand? Nothing can reach my plantations. I am too well guarded."

"You weren't too well guarded for these guys to get in," retorted Popodos.

"But I am too wise to let them get out!" said the half-breed cunningly. "No, my friend. They shall spread no stories. They have caused me trouble enough, and now we shall watch them go to their end!"

He stared with that same wild, insane look in his eyes. The fire was leaping up with great tongues of flame, and the Ju-Ju pole stood out in the lurid glare with its still, hideous figure at the top.

Within the fire circle the captives were beginning to feel the effect of the intense heat all round them. It came in suffocating waves—scorching, blinding and terrible. And yet the fire was only just gaining a hold!

What would the heat be like after another ten minutes?

"Well, aren't we going to start something?" asked Dorrie. "It's about time, isn't it?"

He looked at his companions—the boys in their torn shirts and ragged shorts, the girls in their sadly-soiled frocks. They were a dishevelled crowd, and they looked even worse than they actually were in this flickering glare from the surrounding bonfire.

Acting upon a general plan, they were standing quite still, as though resigned to their dreadful fate. The temptation to look upwards at Johnny was overpowering, but they mastered it. It might be fatal to display any interest in that supposed Ju-Ju.

Johnny himself was triumphant.

He had recovered his breath now, and his confidence had returned. He was finding that the task of keeping his balance was not so difficult as he had at first feared. His worst troubles were concerned with the heat and the drifting sparks.

Owing to the absence of wind, the air up there was not overpoweringly hot. Occasionally a waft of the direct heat from the surrounding fire would sweep over him with terrible effect. Any continuation of the heat would suffocate him.

He waited for Nelson Lee to act. Only a minute or two had gone by actually, but it seemed to Johnny that a full hour must have elapsed. Why didn't they do something below there? He could make his sign now, of course, but half the effect would be lost unless the frenzied savages were prepared for the "miracle."

The Oturi noticed nothing.

The gorilla-god was apparently unchanged. There it stood, on the top of its pole, fixed and motionless, and below were the sacrifices. For the Oturi the fun was just beginning, and they were dancing round the great fire in malevolent glee.

It wasn't an impromptu dance, either. There was order in the way the blacks were capering. Two hundred of them strong were progressing round the fire in a slow, methodical dance. Another two hundred were further out, but also in a circle, and dancing in the opposite direction. And all round stood the men with the tom-toms, beating monotonously.

In the Oturi villages this sort of thing, on a small scale, was commonplace. At intervals the blacks would hold a celebration, and helpless animals would be sacrificed to the local Ju-Ju. In just the same way they would be placed within the circle of fire.

But now the Oturi had human beings for sacrificing to their fetish. And white human beings at that! For them it was the greatest event of their lives. The Ju-Ju of the Oturi would smile kindly on their crops and on their families after such homage as this!



Protected by the hideous gorilla-skin, Johnny Onions took a huge jump and leapt through the flames. Outside the circle of fire the Oturi savages looked on in terrified amazement. To them it seemed that their god had come alive to show its disapproval of the sacrifice!

And then it was that Nelson Lee raised his voice.

CHAPTER 11.

The Challenge!



K'LABA was too old and too fat to take part in any of the dancing. He was standing apart, watching with the keenest enjoyment. All his life he had wanted to massacre some of these white people to his gorilla-god. And now his hour had come!

He was attended by many of his head-men, and there, too, was Obongo, the witch-doctor—the most powerful “wizard” in the whole Oturi country. He had come with the other blacks, and was in sole charge of the ceremonial parts of the programme.

“See!” said K'labá. “The white dogs cry out!”

Obongo looked, and his eyes narrowed.

“But they do not cry out as we shall presently hear them,” he replied. “They demand speech, it seems. These white men have wondrous ways, K'labá. Will you speak with them?”

“I will speak,” said the chief.

He pushed Obongo aside. The witch-doctor was a wizened, skinny individual with so much paint on him that his real appearance was completely hidden. He followed his chief towards the fire zone.

At a word from K'labá the dancing ceased, and Nelson Lee took the opportunity

to shout again, using the universally-spoken Swahili.

“Where is your witch-doctor, K'labá?” he shouted. “I have a mind to test my powers against his. Will you agree to this? Your witch-doctor is a man of pretence and boasts. He can do nothing but talk. His powers are feeble compared to mine.”

This was well calculated to enrage the Oturi Chief, for Obongo was celebrated for his mystic powers.

“Your words are bold, white man!” shouted K'labá savagely. “If your powers are so great save yourself and your companions from this fire, which is even now scorching and burning you!”

“That is your mistake, K'labá,” replied Nelson Lee mockingly. “I have such power that your fire harms me not, nor my companions. You think to burn us, but you are of much folly.”

“This is foolish!” shouted K'labá across the flames. “You are mad! You are as mad as all your white brothers. And you shall die! We, the Oturi, have sworn that you shall die.”

“But your great Ju-Ju has told me that we shall live,” replied Nelson Lee calmly. “Your god has spoken to me, K'labá. He is angry with Obongo for this sacrifice. He has told me that pestilence and famine shall descend upon your lands if it continues.”

Obongo, the witch-doctor, danced with passion.

“Do you hear, great Chief?” he screamed.

“I hear,” said K'labá. “This fool proclaims that he can talk with our god of gods. It is all false.”

"It is true!" insisted Nelson Lee. "If your witch-doctor has such powers as he would have you believe, let him make your Ju-Ju give a sign that he approves. Let him lift an arm. Let him move his body! Let him turn round at the top of his sacred pole! Can your witch-doctor do these things?"

"Your talk is mad talk," snarled Obongo, terrified lest there should be a demand for a display of these miracles.

"My talk is good!" retorted Nelson Lee. "For, if you cannot make your Ju-Ju give a sign, I can do so. My powers are such that I can even make your own god obey me. For am I not greater than he? At my command he must obey!"

A chorus of angry shouts went up from the crowds of Oturi warriors. To hear this white man assert that he had greater powers over their Ju-Ju than Obongo himself was calculated to enrage them. And this was exactly what Nelson Lee was striving for. The more he could inflame them, the greater would be their revulsion of feeling when he "proved" his miraculous powers over a stuffed dummy.

"If your power is so great, boaster, then walk through this fire to prove your magic," shouted K'laba. "Fool! You will be burned even as the moth that flies into the torch flame."

"Nay, K'laba, such talk is mere evasion," replied Nelson Lee. "I will walk through the flames when it pleases me. My companions will also do this. But as we are in no danger, why should we hasten? Your witch-doctor is still reluctant to accept the challenge. And is not the reason plainly apparent? He cannot command your Ju-Ju, and so he contents himself with capering and screaming, like the deceiver he is. His powers are no greater than the powers of the meanest scorpion that crawls. If this were not so, why does he not command the gorilla-god to give a sign? Let your Ju-Ju answer your witch-doctor, and show that he approves of what you do."

Obongo screamed more madly than ever.

"They mock us—they mock us!" he shouted furiously.

K'laba looked at the witch-doctor strangely.

"And yet, Obongo, this white man has said that he can do greater things than you," he said. "Let us see your magic. Make the great Ju-Ju god show us that he is pleased."

Nelson Lee heard these words with a sharp sensation of hope. The Chief was falling into the trap! Truth to tell, K'laba was still uncertain. Much as he wanted to sacrifice these white people, he had a vague fear that punishment might follow. Lorenzo had assured him of immunity, but a doubt still lingered.

If the Ju-Ju gave a sign, all would be well.

And the time was now getting perilously short. The fire was growing hotter and fiercer, and the unhappy captives were beginning to feel the dreadful effects. By keeping to the very centre of the circle they

were still safe. The heat was tremendous, but not sufficient actually to scorch them.

But this could not go on for long.

Another ten minutes, perhaps, and then the flames would do their dreadful work, and all Nelson Lee's ingenuity would be of no avail. And yet for Lee to show any sign of haste might be fatal. It was essential that he should appear indifferent and leisurely.

"Dear old boys, I'm afraid it's goin' to fail," murmured Tregellis-West. "These frightful ruffians don't appear to be in any particular hurry, do they? An' the fire is gettin' slightly warm."

"If it's bad for us—think of Johnny," muttered Nipper.

"Begad, yes!" said Montie, involuntarily looking upwards.

"No, don't!" urged Nipper.

"He's all right so far," said Handforth huskily. "If he wasn't, these beastly blacks would have made an outcry. Besides, Johnny's liable to come tumbling down at any minute. It's a wonder he isn't suffocated. By George! I hope they put some speed on!"

High up on his perch Johnny Onions was waiting in an agony of tension. The wafts of suffocating heat were becoming more frequent now, and he experienced occasional periods of dizziness. Yet he clenched his teeth, and swore that he would not fail. Everything depended upon him! Every life was in his hands!

Through the quivering haze of heat he saw K'laba gesticulating at the witch-doctor. And Obongo, infuriated at being forced into action, was lifting both his arms upwards, and shouting at the supposed Ju-Ju.

It was a wild incantation. But Obongo knew, of course, that the effigy could never move in response to his commands. Had he not stuffed that gorilla skin with his own hands? Was he not always hoodwinking his fellow-tribesmen by his supposed magic? Obongo could not do the impossible, and he feared the result of this happening. If the Oturi lost faith in him, much of his powers would be gone for ever.

"See—see!" he shrieked at last. "The sign—the sign! Our god of gods has answered!"



CHAPTER 12.

Magic!

It was impossible for the captives to remain indifferent now. They all stared up, their hearts leaping, thinking that Johnny Onions had made a terrible blunder. For if he moved in response to Obongo's command, all was lost.

But the Ju-Ju had not moved a muscle.

It was a trick of the witch-doctor's. Experience had told him that if he said that a thing happened, his dupes believed him. Shouts rose from the hundreds of Oturi, but they were not enthusiastic.

Nelson Lee was quick to act.

"Lies!" he shouted. "Is Obongo so powerless that he must resort to deceit and deception? You have eyes, K'laba! And your eyes have told you that your Ju-Ju moves not. Obongo has confessed himself to be a trickster. He sees what none others see."

K'laba spun round upon the witch-doctor.

"The white man's talk is true talk!" he snarled. "The god moved not, Obongo. What folly is this? Is it that you attempt to deceive me, even as the white man tells?"

Obongo was nearly off his head with fury and fear. This wasn't the first time he had been in danger of swift annihilation. The Oturi would make short work of him if they realised that his powers were false. The fire was uncomfortably near. And Obongo had vivid recollections that his predecessor had helped to add to the flames. That had been several years ago, but the scene was still fresh in the witch-doctor's mind.

"I am the greatest worker of magic of all the Oturi!" he shouted frenziedly. "None can be greater than I! Would you heed this white man, who is even now on the point of death? His talk is but an attempt to befool you. And I—the great Obongo—say that these accursed whites shall die! It is the will of the Oturi god!"

A great shout of acclamation went up.

Johnny Onions heard it like the sound of a death knell, and all those trapped captives felt that the great scheme had failed, too. Obongo, the witch-doctor, had proved his power.

Lord Dorrimore gave Lee a hopeless glance. Then he started. For Nelson Lee was not looking like a beaten man.

"It's all up, isn't it?" muttered Dorrie.

"Not yet!" snapped Lee. "There's still time!"

"Glad to hear it," murmured Dorrie, shielding his face with a scorching hand. "Another two or three minutes of this and we'll be past hopin' for. Thank goodness, there won't be much more suspense, anyway. It's got to be over quickly now—one way or the other."

This was perfectly true. The heat was now so great that many of the prisoners were beginning to feel faint. Irene & Co. were bearing up wonderfully well.

All hope of Umlosi arriving in time was now dead. The only possible gleam of deliverance rested with Nelson Lee's ability to claim attention.

"Hold!" shouted Lee, in a powerful voice. "Obongo has claimed that the Oturi god has willed our death. But I can prove that your great Ju-Ju is entirely under my power. At a word from me, he will give a sign. A real sign, which all can see!"

"Lies!" screamed Obongo. "You can do nothing, boaster!"

"And yet—watch!" retorted Lee impressively.

He turned, and pointed upwards at the gorilla-god. All eyes were turned upwards, and Johnny Onions knew that his terrible period of suspense was over. He had remained still all this time, and now he was

about to obtain relief. It would be salvation for him to be able to come to life.

"Watch!" repeated Nelson Lee thunderously. "I will use my own magic words, and your god will understand, and obey. If he remains motionless, then will it prove that he desires our death. But if he gives the sign, let the Oturi beware—for there is no wrath greater than the wrath of a Ju-Ju who has been defied."

Lee suddenly leapt high into the air, and then struck a ridiculously theatrical attitude. He knew that this sort of thing was called for—no matter how absurd it seemed to civilised eyes.

"Hey, presto—biff!" roared Nelson Lee.

At any other time, these words would have evoked nothing but laughter among the boys. But they sounded impressive enough to the watching Oturi. They were magic words—fraught with power.

For, lo, the gorilla-god answered!

Almost as the command left Nelson Lee's throat, the Ju-Ju flung up his right paw. He drew himself up, and swung from side to side. And a great kind of screaming roar came from his mouth.

The effect was stupendous.

Obongo fell back, so frightened that he was powerless to speak, or to move another muscle. This Ju-Ju—that he knew to be made of skin and dried grass—was obeying the command of the white man!

And if Obongo was frightened, the Oturi warriors were nearly driven out of their minds with terror. They were awed and stricken. Screaming with terror, they prostrated themselves, grovelling in the dust before their infuriated god.

"See!" thundered Nelson Lee. "Is not my power supreme?"

He rushed towards the flames, at the risk of grievous hurt.

"Even your fire harms me not!" he went on contemptuously. "K'laba, I command your warriors to sweep this fire aside. It is my will! It is the will of your Ju-Ju! Listen! He commands!"

Johnny, nearly on the point of swooning, faintly heard. He decided on an unrehearsed effect. Indeed, he felt that his own life would be forfeit unless he did so. Another two or three minutes of this, and his senses would leave him, and he would fall—seventy feet to certain death.

So while his wits were still about him, he lowered himself from that perch, and came slithering like a streak down the smooth pole. The friction did not harm him, for the gorilla skin afforded protection.

"The Ju-Ju!" screamed a hundred voices. "He comes!"

The warriors, terrified, continued to beat their heads on the ground. Their god was coming down! Sure proof that he disproved of the sacrifice.

But Johnny hadn't finished yet.

He took a wild chance. That skin protected him. In his mind there was a fantastic idea. As he touched the ground, the St. Frank's fellows made to seize him, to congratulate him.

But Johnny leapt straight ahead, ran for the fire, and rose in a great jump.

Through the flames!

None of the others could have done this thing, for they would instantly have been blinded and so terribly scorched that death would have followed. But Johnny, in his gorilla skin, was protected, while the heat had so charred the tangled wood that it broke before him. And the effect of that leap was terrific.

The Oturi ran madly, terror-stricken.

On the other side of the fire-ring, K'laba was nearly demented with fright. He seized Obongo, who was near him, and flung him aside with such force that the witch-doctor rolled over and over.

"Let the fire be destroyed!" shouted K'laba. "Our god will bring plague and pestilence to our lands if we disobey! Let these bewitched whites be freed! They are of great magic."

A hundred men with great tree branches swept at the nearest point of the fire, beating it out, and sweeping aside the red-hot embers. Terrified as they were, they had sufficient wits for this.

Their god had commanded, and they dared not disobey. A minute ago they had screamed for the death of these white people. Now they were madly anxious to let them live!



CHAPTER 13.

The Escape!

LORD DORRIMORE caught Marjorie Temple as she swayed dizzily.

"Hold up, old girl—hold up!" he said urgently. "Gad, it's a wonder you haven't all swooned away. You're wonderful—amazin'! But do keep it up for a bit longer!"

"I—I'm all right!" murmured Marjorie bravely.

"Good man!" said Dorrie. "We've got to shift out of this like greased lightnin' in about two minutes—as soon as they've cleared a way for us. But if these blacks see any sign of weakness, they'll smell a rat!"

"Don't worry!" said Dorrie breathlessly. "We'll keep it up!"

"Rather!" sang out Handforth. "We're safe now!"

"Hurrah!"

They cheered huskily. Many of the St. Frank's fellows were on the point of swooning, too. But the tense nature of the situation kept them up. They weren't out of the wood yet!

The Oturi were fleeing in every direction. Many of them had got burnt in stamping out the fire, but they hardly felt the pain. Their god had commanded!

Nelson Lee swung round to them all.

"Come!" he shouted hoarsely. "Now is our chance!"

One section of that circular fire was missing, and there was a gap of about twenty feet. The ground itself was hot, and the flames from the rest of the fire were now roaring fearsomely, as though enraged at the prospect of losing their prey.

"Can we do it?" asked Dorrie breathlessly.

"We've got to!" snapped Lee.

He had no fear that the Oturi would molest them as they rushed out. Rather would the blacks flee from them in terror. Lee was anxious about Johnny Onions, for if he went too far with this capering the enemy would jump to the truth.

Fortunately, Johnny came running through the gap.

"We've done it!" he gasped out. "They've all gone!"

"Then let's clear out of here, too!" shouted Dorrie. "Now, then, all of you—one huge rush. Close your eyes, and put your hands in front of your faces. Altogether!"

They needed no second bidding.

The heat was now so fiery that they felt that their throats were cracked, and their skins blistered. But their relief at being saved from such a ghastly death was sufficient to give them new courage and added strength.

Indeed, such was the relief that they almost felt that their troubles were over. They were saved, and the immediate future was not a subject for pessimism.

But Nelson Lee felt differently.

They were still in Otto Lorenzo's domain, and these Oturi warriors were still there in their hundreds. If they learned of the way they had been tricked, their panic would go, and they would exact a terrible vengeance.

Even at the best, it could be only hoped that the party would again fall into Lorenzo's clutches. There was the remote chance, of course, that Umlosi would arrive with his warriors, but Nelson Lee did not count on this glad event. It seemed too good to come true.

As even as they ran from the inferno of fire Lee was trying to formulate some plan of action. To run at random would be fatal. They must make for some definite objective—there there might be a chance of holding out. Their plight was still desperate in the extreme.

In one rush, they went through that gap of fire. They could feel the burning heat radiating up from the white-hot cinders and ashes. The flames leapt upwards on either side, licking at them hungrily.

And then, in a flash, they were through—out in the cooler air beyond, where they could draw long breaths into their parched and suffocating lungs.

"Good business!" shouted Lord Dorrimore, and they all instinctively came to a halt, well beyond the flame zone. "We're out! An' that's that! Who said we were going to perish in the all-devourin' flames?"

Lord Dorrimore was now every bit as irresponsible as the boys, and it was fortunate for the whole party that he wasn't in charge.

But Dorrie knew his own failings, and he had never claimed to be a quick thinker when a crisis of this sort arose. He could act like a flash of lightning when it came to potting a rhino, or finishing off a lion, but Nelson Lee was the man of the hour now.

"Well, thank goodness, we're out of that!" said Nipper fervently.

"Yes, and I shall thank goodness when I'm out of this!" came a muffled voice from the gorilla-god. "Oh, crumbs! I'm nearly dead from suffocation!"

"Poor Johnny!" exclaimed Irene. "Quick, let's help him out——"

"Yes, yes!"

"Let's unfasten——"

"Just a moment!" interrupted Nelson Lee sharply. "Leave Johnny as he is—and keep away from him. Onions, move off, ahead of us—pretend to be leading a way through the bush. It is vital—and may make all the difference between life and death!"

"Glory!" gasped Dorrie. "I hadn't thought of that."

And so the unfortunate Johnny Onions was compelled to remain in the skin still longer. He obeyed orders, and went ahead of the others.

Nelson Lee was keeping his eyes keenly open. He feared nothing from the Oturi just yet. They had all practically vanished. K'laba and the witch-doctor were still in sight—beyond the fringe of flame on the other side of the bonfire. But they were still hopelessly terrified, and were not likely to cause any trouble. They had seen their Ju-Ju go off with these white people, and the spectacle had awed them. For did it not prove that the gods of the Oturi had deserted them, and had become a god of these bewitched whites?

Nelson Lee saw something else, too.

He saw Otto Lorenzo and two or three of his overseers running towards the Oturi chief. Lorenzo had not been deceived, and he would do his best to convince the shaking K'laba that the whole thing had been a trick.

"Let's hope the old ruffian is obstinate," muttered Lee anxiously. "Another hour of this confusion, and we might reach a safe sanctuary. Unless we do, Heaven help us all! There will be no second escape!"

By this time, they had reached the cover of the dense bushes and rubber plantations, and if any of the Oturi warriors were in that direction they did not show themselves. Indeed, they fled precipitately—in blind terror—at the very approach of these strangers, who had proved themselves to be full of witchcraft.

The horde of Oturi savages was no longer a menace. The brutes had failed in their cannibalistic intentions, and were now scattered. Otto Lorenzo was the chief enemy. He was as inexorable as ever, and he would not allow his prisoners to elude him if he could help it.

The adventures of this eventful night were by no means over!

CHAPTER 14.

Lorenzo Does His Best!



K'LABA quailed as the slaver came hurrying up.

"Fool, and son of a fool!" snarled Lorenzo, his voice quivering with rage.

"Your head shall come off for this, K'laba! I will appoint another chief of the Oturi! You are no better than a goat of the field!"

"Lord, such words are harsh words," said K'laba suddenly. "I have done what the Oturi god instructed——"

"There is no Oturi god!" interrupted Lorenzo harshly. "I am the ruler of your tribe, K'laba. You are chief because I make you so. Gather your warriors, and make them search for these white people!"

"Master, you ask too much!" protested K'laba. "My warriors will not obey such a command! Have not these white men proved their wondrous powers? Have they not made our god come to life and speak?"

"Fool!" repeated Lorenzo. "It is all a trick!"

"There can be no trick in what we see with our own eyes, lord," said the Oturi chief angrily. "Did I not witness this myself? Is not Obongo even now banging his head upon the ground, and praying to all the Ju-Jus to spare his miserable life? Think you that the Oturi will let him live after his failure?"

Lorenzo breathed very hard. He managed to control his towering rage. It was obviously impossible to use his ordinary arrogant methods with this frightened savage.

"K'laba, your blood is water," he said contemptuously. "You are frightened over nothing. Have I not said that you were tricked? Your god gave you no sign——"

"Lord, you were not here," growled K'laba. "I was! You did not see. I did!"

"I saw everything," said Lorenzo curtly.

"Then, lord, will you realise that my warriors have no thoughts but to leave this place of witchcraft, and get back to their own villages? The god has given the sign! It is enough!"

"What sign?" raved Lorenzo. "It was nothing! It was——"

"Should we disobey this sign, our lands will be visited by mighty storms," said K'laba. "Our people will be killed by disease and fever. Our crops will be so small that our children will die of starvation. All these disasters will come to pass if we ignore the sign of the gorilla-god. Therefore, lord, must we go!"

Lorenzo thrust out his jaw.

"You'll go when I order you to go!" he said fiercely. "And until I please to command, you will stay! My orders are that this party of white boys and maidens shall be brought back. They must be seized and held."

But for once the Oturi chief was defiant. Much as he feared Lorenzo, he feared his pagan god more.

"Lord, you ask too much," he said coldly. "My warriors will not obey. To touch these



The St. Frank's party were in a terrible predicament. If they stayed in the cave by the waterfall they would be drowned like rats. If they ventured from the cave they would fall into the hands of the waiting Oturi savages. What were they to do?

people means death! They are friends of the Oturi god—who has even now turned against us. Has not our Ju-Ju gone with these whites?"

"You obstinate fiend!" roared Lorenzo. "You have been tricked, I tell you!"

"Show me that I have been tricked, and I will believe you," said K'laba simply.

Lorenzo felt that he was up against a brick wall. He had had an experience of this kind before—more than once. He knew that nothing could be done with K'laba until proof of trickery was forthcoming. He turned aside, and scowled at Popodos, the Greek.

"We can do nothing!" he snapped. "This infernal rat won't be moved. We must capture those young cubs ourselves!"

"That won't be an easy task," said Popodos. "Our own men are just as frightened. Even the Nubians have run. They're as superstitious as the Oturi. You can never teach these heathen guys!"

"Have we no men?" rapped out the slaver.

"None who'll do anything to grab these white boys and girls," replied Popodos. "And as for finding them ourselves—well, it's a pretty hefty job. They've gone off into the plantations, and it's as black as ink in there. We're sort of fixed until daylight, boss."

Lorenzo, who looked upon himself as a supreme monarch, cursed. He was accustomed to having his orders obeyed on the instant, without question. Any delay infuriated him. And once again, it seemed, he was to be defied by these boys and girls.

"Who would have thought it?" he said fiercely. "A trick—the simplest thing you ever saw. And yet it worked!"

"They put it over good," said Popodos, not without a touch of grudging admiration. "Say boss, you've got to hand it to those guys. They're clever. Why, just when I saw that god coming to life I nearly threw a fit! I thought it was just bluff. But it wasn't!"

"How did they do it?" growled Lorenzo. "That's what I can't understand! One of those boys got into the gorilla skin, of course. But how? When? I can't understand."

"They must have worked the dodge while all that smoke was hanging around," said the Greek. "That was the only time they had, boss. Darned cute, eh? And then Lee comes across with all the magic junk, and gets by! You've got to admit—"

"I admit that we were fools to give them any chance," interrupted Lorenzo harshly. "We ought to have put them against a wall, and shot them! There's no chance of a mistake in that method!"

"Well, you wanted fun, and so did the Oturi," said Popodos. "You can't blame those guys for getting away after they made their chance. Not that there's anything to worry about. We shall round them up to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" shouted Lorenzo. "They shall be rounded up to-night—within the hour. It's proof that K'laba wants, eh? He shall have it! I'll show him how he has been duped, and then his warriors will search



The St. Frank's party were in a terrible predicament. If they ventured from the savages.

every inch of ground, and these dogs will be brought back."

"What can you do?" asked the other.

"I'll tell you," replied Lorenzo cunningly. "That boy in the gorilla skin cannot walk far. What will he do once he reaches the cover of the trees? He will throw the skin aside, eh? Very good! We shall find that skin, Popodos. When K'laba sees it he will know that he has been tricked. Even his thick brain will know the truth then. Come! Why did we not think of this before?"

Popodos made no comment. But he had many doubts. He wasn't at all sure that the skin would be found. Neither was he certain that K'laba would change, even if it was. That ruffianly savage was just as liable to insist that the gorilla-god had shed his outer form, and had travelled on with the whites. It was a difficult matter to convince the Oturi, once they had got an idea into their heads. They were the most obstinate and pig-headed of all the tribes.

Lorenzo knew full well that this delay was fatal to any immediate recapture. The



ayed in the cave by the waterfall they would
ld fall into the hands of the waiting Oturi
to do?

Oturi were scattered up and down the valley, and they were frightened. Even the slave-guards—the Nubians—were in no better condition. Dorrie's party would naturally take every advantage of the situation.

CHAPTER 15.

The Sanctuary!



"WATER!" cried Irene. "Listen! Oh, it's water!"

"Good gad!" murmured Archie. "I'd give a fiver for a dashed thimbleful!"

I mean to say, I always thought that a good old brew of tea was the only liquid in the world. But water, dash it, is the fluid for Archie!"

They were in the midst of a thick clump of tangled thorn bushes, mimosa and rank grass. Lee, perhaps, was the only one who knew exactly where he was. The others were content to accept his guidance.

"I don't know where we are, but we're here," said Lord Dorrimore genially. "What's the exact idea, Lee? Are we working to a programme or just wandering about aimlessly? Anyhow, we've shaken off those savages! An' that's all to the good!"

"We're working to a definite plan, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "I am cutting straight across these two plantations—with this scrap of forestland in between—with the idea of reaching the waterfall! In fact, we must reach it. But a brief rest here will help."

A rest, indeed, was essential. Irene & Co. would never admit that they were on the point of dropping, or that they were any weaker than the boys. They were truly modern girls, and had modern ideas; yet, in their hearts, they knew well enough that they were essentially weaker.

The fact that water was close at hand was gratifying. They all went to the little stream and refreshed themselves. After that ordeal in the fire-circle they had become utterly parched.

But they were all relieved to find out—rather to their surprise—that none of them were actually burnt. Their faces and hands were tender and red, but they had escaped in the nick of time.

"What about Johnny, sir?" asked Nipper anxiously, as he went up to Nelson Lee. "The poor chap is sprawling in the grass, nearly suffocating. Can't we get him out of that skin? It weighs a hundredweight, and he can't get any air!"

"I think it will be safe for him to emerge now," said Lee. "Yes, we must get him out."

While the others lounged about, in every conceivable attitude of repose, Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore helped the unfortunate Johnny Onions out of the gorilla skin.

"Don't think we are heartless, Johnny, for keeping you in this atrocious thing so long," said Nelson Lee. "But it was essential. We had to make the Oturi believe that——"

"That's all right, sir—I guessed it," put in Johnny. "It's all right. I shall be as right as rain within five minutes. Phew! What a glorious thing to get a breath of fresh air again! That—that skin is—well, horrible! I thought I should have died at first. Thank goodness everything went off all right!"

"By glory! You did wonders, young 'un!" said Lord Dorrimore enthusiastically. "How on earth you managed to keep your balance on the top of that sugar-stick beats me hollow! You're not an acrobat—you're a genuine wizard!"

"We all owe you our lives, Johnny," said Nipper.

"Oh, I say," protested Onions. "Chuck it! It was Mr. Lee's idea, wasn't it?"

"Don't let's argue on that point," put in Lee drily. "Let us be thankful that we have escaped. And now let us do all we can to find a safe haven."

"Yes, I suppose we'd better be movin',"

said his lordship. "These blacks might change their minds, an' start searchin' for us."

"There is one thing to be done before we leave this spot," said Lee. "We must bury the skin."

"Bury it?" said Dorrie.

"Yes, bury it."

"Not a bad idea," admitted his lordship, as he caught a waft from the gorilla skin. "In fact, a thunderin' good idea. Gad, that boy's a hero! Pah! Of all the abominations!"

"But why bury it, guv'nor?" asked Nipper curiously.

"Because we don't want it to be found—that's why," replied Lee. "That would be a calamity. As long as these Oturi think that their precious god has deserted them, they will remain terrified. Their superstitions are strong, and we need not fear any further attacks. But if this skin is left lying about, and they find it, it won't be long before the whole bestial horde is after us once more."

"Then buryin' it is a good suggestion," said Lord Dorrimore. "You're right, Lee, old man. Amazin' how you think of all these things. It's a good thing you're in charge!"

Burying the skin was not an easy task. The grass was thick and tangled, and, moreover, there were no tools. With only their bare hands with which to scrape up the earth, it took the best part of ten minutes before even a shallow depression was hollowed out.

"We daren't remain any longer," muttered Lee. "If we put the skin here, and well cover it, smothering grass on the top, it is the most we can do. I am getting very worried!"

"But we're fairly safe now, aren't we, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, in a low voice.

"Safe!" echoed Lee bitterly. "I wish I could agree with you, young 'un. We cannot venture into the open forest. That would mean disaster. Our only course is to hide until Umlosi and his warriors come. And there is no telling when that will be. To-morrow—the next day—Who knows? A safe sanctuary is our only possible hope of salvation."

"But where ean we find such a place?" asked Nipper. "When we had possession of the power-station, it wasn't so bad, but——"

"Come with me," interrupted Lee. "There is just a possibility that there may be a spot. There will be no comfort—no food. But I rather think we shall be secure."

The detective would say no more at the moment.

All the others were roused from their brief rest, and the cautious journey across the valley continued. They were all the better for their brief rest. And they declared, in fact, that they were now ready for anything. Handforth was all for making a bid for complete liberty.

"Why not have a shot at it?" he asked eagerly. "Why not get across the river, and then go straight into the Sasissi country? After that we can work our way down to civilisation."

"Mr. Lee says it's impossible," muttered Church.

"Rats! We ought to try it!"

"Do you think you know more than Mr. Lee, you ass?"

"Well, no," admitted Handforth. "But he's too cautious. I'm a chap who believes in taking a chance. Let's make a bold bid for freedom, and trust to luck."

"It's a jolly good thing that Mr. Lee takes no notice of reckless fatheads like you," said McClure gruffly. "Look at the way he saved us to-night! Only through caution, too!"

And Handforth had to admit it. After that he didn't say much more about making a bid for liberty. He seemed to realise the impossibility of such a thing.

The first essential was to find a place where they could rest—where they would be safe from these endless enemies.

And at last they emerged from a belt of trees, and found themselves near the river bank, where a deep waterfall plunged and roared. They now knew that they were some distance above the power-station—that historical corrugated iron building which they had held against all attacks for so long.

"Now," said Nelson Lee, as they gathered round him, "this will be our sanctuary—if we are lucky. I believe there is a cavity beneath the face of this waterfall—a cave, or cavern. It can be reached by passing between the descending water and the rock face. But the passage may be too difficult. You must all remain here while I make a preliminary investigation."

"Behind the waterfall!" said Tommy Watson breathlessly. "By jingo, we shall be safe there!"

"Yes—if we can get to the cavern," said Nipper softly.

And that, after all, was rather a big "if."

CHAPTER 16.

Tracked!



TTO LORENZO was so agitated that Popodos was filled with curiosity. As they pushed their way through the heavy undergrowth preceded by four great Nubians with lanterns, Lorenzo was positively shaking with fear.

They had managed to round up these slave-guards, and had knocked some sense into them. And now they were following the trampled tracks which had been recently made by Dorrie's fleeing party.

Popodos could not quite understand Lorenzo's attitude. If it came to that, he had never been able to understand his employer. At times he was more or less crazy.

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And since these white people had disturbed his peace he had been crazy all the time.

Popodos was a cold-hearted blackguard himself, but even he had been appalled by Lorenzo's savagery and lust for revenge.

"What's the idea, boss?" asked the Greek. "No need to be scared, is there? We're on their track—we'll soon round them up."

"You fool!" muttered Lorenzo. "Don't you realise the danger? These accursed Oturi may turn on us. Us, do you understand?"

"Turn on us?" repeated Popodos, with a start.

"Yes! And I don't wonder that your voice shakes!" said the half-breed. "These devils are all right as long as we can control them. But they believe that their god has gone over to those boys and girls, and they're mad. We suggested the bonfire, and we shall get the blame for what has happened. Now do you understand?"

"No, I don't!" snapped Popodos. "Where do you get that 'we' stuff? It was your blamed idea——"

"That is nothing!" interrupted Lorenzo. "We are both in this together. And so is Krotkin, the electrician. If the Oturi turn on us, we shall all be killed. That is why we must prove to K'labá that he has been tricked. Our very lives depend on it."

The Greek was certainly startled.

"But how can we make that mule of a heathen believe anything?" he asked. "Say, he's got a head like a chunk of granite! He won't listen to reason, boss! We'd best think——"

"Thinking will do no good!" broke in Lorenzo. "We must find these accursed captives, and show K'labá that they are fleeing in terror."

The Nubians, in front, suddenly gave startled shouts, and one of them was pointing into the bushes.

"A lion—a lion!" they were shouting.

"A lion be hanged!" rapped out Lorenzo. "Lions don't come into my plantations. The electrified rivers protect me——"

"They're not electrified now, boss," put in Popodos quickly.

"No!" admitted Lorenzo. "I had just remembered. But even so the lions would not come. While the power-station is out of action, and the rivers harmless, there is always the chance that some of the wild creatures can get in. A leopard, perhaps—or gorillas—or any such animal."

Whatever beast had disturbed the Nubians, it had apparently gone, for they were now pushing on again. But only for a few yards. They suddenly came to halt, shouting excitedly—indeed, in tones of fear.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Lorenzo harshly.

He strode up to the blacks, his eyes glittering with anger. Then, suddenly, he gave a hoarse cry of excited relief. Almost at his feet was a shallow excavation, with earth lying everywhere. And a hideous gorilla's head stared at him, with a mass of fur trailing from it.

"The skin!" he exclaimed exultantly. "The gorilla skin! I knew we should find it. Popodos! Didn't I tell you so?"

Popodos turned the thing over with his foot.

"Yes, boss, and I don't think we're far behind those guys, either," he said quickly. "They were trying to bury this thing when we disturbed them. I guess they're only two or three hundred yards ahead."

But in this Popodos was wrong. He assumed that the Nubians had seen a human form, and not a wild animal at all.

Luck, however, had deserted Dorrie's party for the moment.

The gorilla skin had been buried fairly well, and the chances were that Lorenzo would have passed the spot without suspecting anything. But some creature of the wild had scented that odoriferous skin, and had scraped the earth away, pulling the skin out of its hole. Nelson Lee had not anticipated any such misadventure as that.

"We'll go back!" said Lorenzo quickly.

He gave orders to the Nubians to carry the gorilla skin. But Popodos was all for pressing ahead, on the track of the fugitives.

"I tell you we're right behind them, boss," he urged.

"What does it matter?" said Lorenzo.

"Let us be behind them! They cannot get far. They are half dead with that fire, they have no food, and there is no escape from this valley. First, we will convince K'laba. Then his rage will burst forth, and he will bring all his warriors on the track. This disaster will soon be remedied, Popodos!"

Lorenzo was excited at the prospect. The possibility that his own skin was in danger

had unnerved him. He was terribly frightened lest a horde of Oturi should pounce upon him.

This fortunate misadventure did not take place, however, and Lorenzo still lived. He found K'laba near the remains of the dying fire. Obongo, the witch-doctor, was squatting all to himself, waving his arms, and uttering the most mournful wails. His incantations were blood-curdling to listen to.

"Make the fool stop his noise!" snapped Lorenzo harshly. "I'm not in a mood to put up with this tomfoolery!"

"Lord, Obongo laments the disaster which has befallen his tribe," said K'laba. "The Oturi god has gone from us——"

"Well, here it is back again!" interrupted Lorenzo, turning, and snapping out an order to the Nubians. "Here's your precious god!"

The gorilla skin was dropped at K'laba's feet, and he stared at it dazedly. Even Obongo ceased his wailings—proving that he hadn't been very sincere in them—and he came across to the spot. He jabbered excitedly.

"Yes, you can look!" sneered Lorenzo. "This is your Ju-Ju, Obongo. Look at it closely, K'laba. Did I not tell you that you had been tricked? One of your white captives wore this skin, and made you believe that he was more powerful than your own god!"

"Lord, is this thing possible?" asked K'laba.

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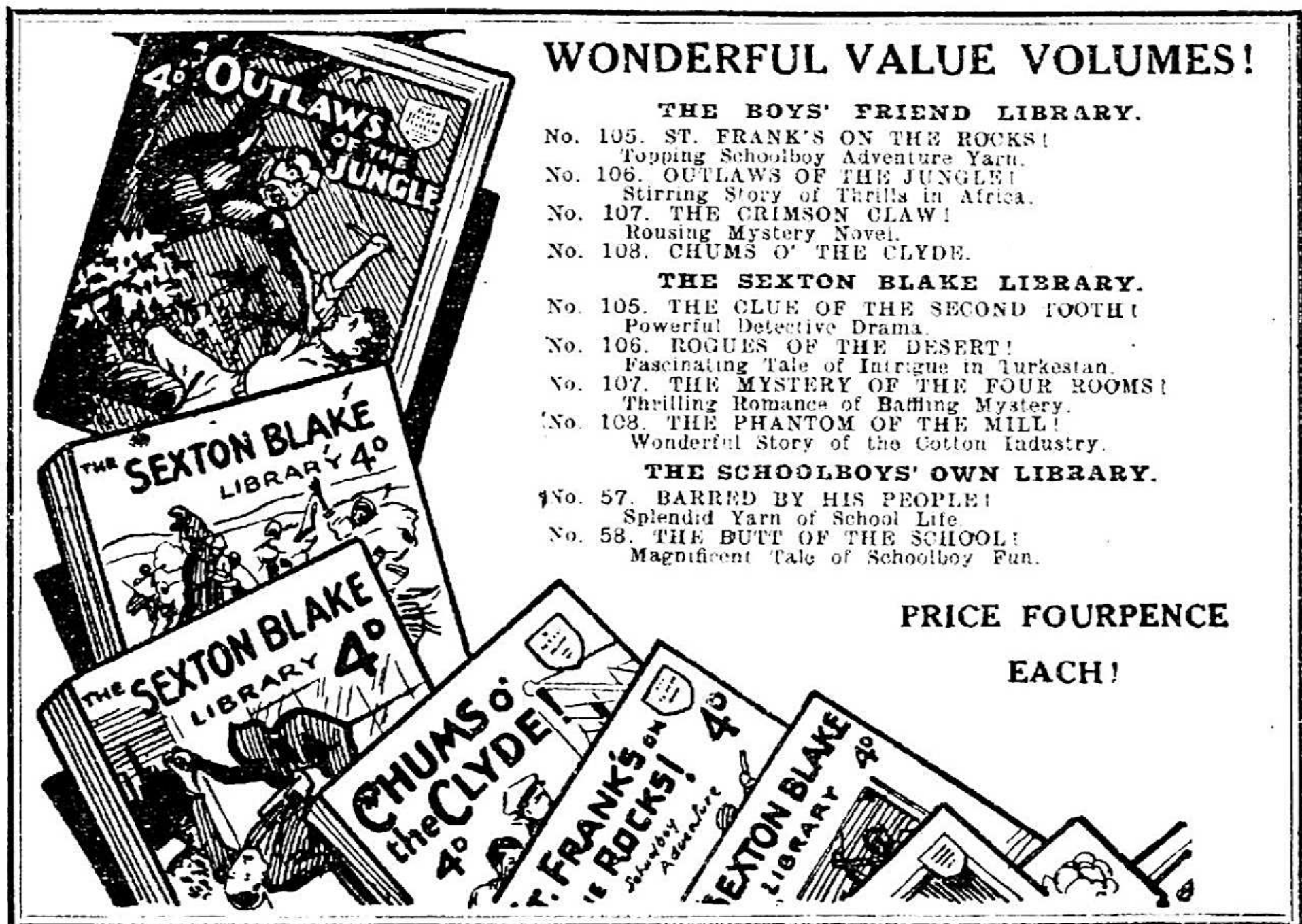
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"It's not only possible, you dolt—it has happened!"

"And yet, lord, I doubt," said the chief, gazing fascinatedly at the gorilla skin. "Is it not more probable that the great Ju-Ju has cast his outer skin in defiance of us? Is it not so? Our god has gone to these white people, whom we were bent upon killing. Our destruction is certain. We are a doomed tribe!"

"Put those fool ideas out of your head," growled Lorenzo. "Look at this skin. Look at it, I say! Here are the cords, still round the legs! K'laba, these white dogs have desecrated your great Ju-Ju! Tell your warriors! Let them be revenged for this sacrilege!"

And at last K'laba began to realise the truth.

He and all his warriors had been tricked! Obongo knew it, too, and before long he was excitedly demanding the lives of the tricksters. The Fire Circle would not serve now! Tortures beyond description should be the penalty!

K'laba raised his hand.

"Let my warriors be told!" he said, his voice vibrating with intensity. "We will seek out these desecrators, and show them our strength! The Oturi shall not be defied!"

And within half an hour the scene was pandemonium. The warriors, in groups of ten, fifteen, and twenty, were answering the call—collecting to the sound of the drums. And when they learned the truth they shrieked for vengeance.



CHAPTER 17.

Behind the Waterfall!

NELSON LEE heaved a deep sigh of relief. "It's possible!" he muttered exultantly. "By James! And by no means difficult, either. Here we shall be safe! For this entrance can be held against a thousand!"

Lee was quite alone, and he stood within a curiously-shaped rock cavern, the back of which was in pitchy darkness. But near him was a wet and slippery ledge, and beyond it a wall of roaring water came hurtling down. Lee was behind the waterfall.

He had discovered that the ledge was easily negotiable. In places it narrowed to a mere eighteen inches, and it was slippery and treacherous. But these were advantages. How easy to guard such a path! Only one man at a time could come along it! So the Oturi hordes were not to be feared, once the party had entered this retreat.

Nelson Lee had suspected the presence of this cavern, because it was one of his habits to use his eyes.

The moon was shining now—shining

directly upon the face of the waterfall. And some of the rays came filtering through the falling water. Enough, at all events, to impart a dim, ghostly radiance to that rock path. As for the cave, Lee did not know how big it was, and he made no attempt to find out. That could come later.

With extreme caution he retraced his steps along the wet path. One slip, and he would plunge down fifty or sixty feet, to be pounded to death on the rocks at the base of the waterfall.

But he was surefooted, and the distance to the river bank was short. He emerged at last, and found Dorrie and all the others gathered on the rocks near by.

"Well?" went up a number of inquiries.

"Yes, there is a cave," said Lee. "We can— But listen! What is that?"

"The drums!" muttered Dorrie. "The Oturi drums!"

On the air came the sound of the beating tom-toms. It had been heard for some little time now, and there was only one explanation.

"We are none too soon!" said Lee grimly. "They know that we tricked them, and they are getting themselves into a frenzy again. They'll be after us, Dorrie, and they'll have no difficulty in following our trail. Thank heaven for this haven!"

"Well, let's get into it, sir!" said Nipper eagerly. "How are we going? Will you lead the way?"

"Yes, and you, Dorrie, will bring up the rear," said Nelson Lee. "Now, remember, boys and girls, that the ledge is narrow. In parts it is treacherous. Take every step with caution, and— What the— Quick, Dorrie! Look out!"

Lee darted forward, and dragged Lord Dorrimore aside just as a black form came shooting out from the neighbouring bushes.

"N'Kose!" came a hoarse voice. "'Tis a friend, my master!"

"Great gad!" ejaculated Dorrie. "Who's this?"

The figure came up—a great Zulu, naked except for his loin-cloth. Obviously he was in a very exhausted condition.

"M'zuma!" said Lee quickly. "Umlosi's great friend!"

"I bring tidings, Umtagati!" panted the man. "For many hours have I run, neither eating nor resting. For did not Umlosi urge me to lose no time? 'Tis fortunate, N'Kose, that I should hear thy voice, and find thee by chance. 'Tis a good omen, methinks."

"But what's your news?" asked Dorrie eagerly.

"Wait!" said Lee. "Let us get into the cave first. We can hear the news afterwards. These Oturi may suddenly leap out. And they are armed, whilst we are not."

And so, thrilled by the dramatic and unexpected arrival of M'zuma, they went along the slippery ledge in single file, holding hands tightly and tenaciously. If one slipped, then the others could save him.

The advent of M'zuma had filled everybody with fierce joy—with burning curiosity.

For surely the arrival of Umlosi's friend could only mean that the Kutanas were near!

The Kutanas near!

It was a thought which made the senses reel. For the Kutanas were friendly. They were a dignified, trustworthy tribe. Were they not Umlosi's own people? And were they not, moreover, under British administration? Once these stalwart warriors arrived, the Oturi rabble would be beaten. And Otto Lorenzo would be wiped out, too.

"Umlosi's coming!" said Handforth jubilantly. "By George! Didn't I tell you so all along? Didn't I say that there was no need to worry? We're as safe as houses now. There's really no need to go into this giddy cave that I can see."

Nevertheless, they were all thankful to enter. Nobody tried to penetrate it in case of dangerous pitfalls. There was ample room in the front of the cavern, with the ledge just near them. The wall of water tumbled down like a screen, a yard beyond the face of the ledge. The roar from below was thunderous and continuous.

"Thank Heaven!" said Nelson Lee fervently. "Here, at least, there is only one path of approach, and that can be easily guarded. Now we have secured a measure of safety."

"An' M'zuma will tell us his news," said Dorrie.

"I come with tidings that Umlosi's great army is pressing onward with all speed, N'kose," said the Kutana head-man. "There are a thousand strong—the picked warriors of my country. But they are yet a day's march distant."

"A day's march?" said Lee sharply.

"I fear so, my master," said M'zuma. "I have journeyed fast to seek ye out and bring ye the news. By the next nightfall, perchance, Umlosi will be in the Kalala Valley."

"By the next nightfall!" said Dorrie ruefully. "Glory! That's a long time, M'zuma, old man. A deucedly long time!"

"A lot can happen to-morrow," said Nelson Lee, in a low voice. "Our great advantage is that neither K'laba nor Lorenzo know that the Kutanas are coming. They will exert all their strength to the task of dislodging us. Can we hold out for twenty-four hours? Can we guard this retreat for that time?"

"We've got to, guv'nor," said Nipper fiercely. "We've escaped so far, and Umlosi and his men are coming. We've just got to hang on until they arrive. There's nothing else to think."



CHAPTER 18.

Lorenzo's Cunning Move.

DORRIE clapped Nipper on the back.

"That's the spirit, old hoss!" he said enthusiastically. "Never say die,

eh? We've held out so far, an' we'll stick it

until we're the winners. Hang it, it would be silly to go under now!"

"You can be certain we'll do our best, Dorrie," said Nelson Lee. "The food questions, thank goodness, is of no importance."

"No importance, sir?" said Handforth. "I'm starving!"

"In that case I'm afraid you'll have to starve until to-morrow night," replied Lee drily. "We know that Umlosi's army is on the way, and there is a probability that it will arrive by nightfall to-morrow. Even if that view is optimistic, and the Kutanas don't come until the following dawn, we shall still be a long way from starvation. And our lives are far more important than a missed meal or two."

"With regard to water, I think we shall have plenty," said Lord Dorrimore, with a grin. "We've only got to hang our heads out, an' we can get all we want. So if we can protect this bally place we're as safe as houses. An' by gad, isn't it toppin' to be cool for once?"

"I think most of the chaps are asleep," said Nipper.

This was true enough. Nearly all the St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls were slumbering already. They weren't so much tired as mentally exhausted. Now that a measure of safety had been secured, the tension was over. They felt utterly worn out.

Even M'zuma, giant though he was, was snoring loudly. The poor fellow had evidently been penetrating the forests for many hours, and he had faithfully obeyed Umlosi's command, and had spent no time in rest, and had not even paused for food.

"I think you can do with a sleep, Lee, old man," said Dorrie casually. "You turn in, an' I'll keep guard. Surprisin' how dry this cave is a little way in. There's no spray at all."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"There's no rest for you or I, Dorrie," he said. "Let the young ones sleep, by all means—but we've got work to do."

"Work?"

"Yes."

"What kind of work?" asked his lordship, in surprise. "We can't build any defences here, can we? We've no machine-guns, or rifles, or anythin'."

"But we've got rocks," said Lee pointedly.

"Oh, rather," agreed Dorrie. "Plenty of rocks. Tons of rocks. Give me a few pounds of dynamite, or an ounce of nitro-glycerine, an' I'll break off a few chips to use as ammunition."

"I'm not thinking of ammunition," said Lee. "And there's no need for us to break off any chips. It may interest you to know that I am leaning against a regular pile of loose fragments. Many of them are pretty weighty, and it'll need all our strength to move them."

"Exercise?" asked Dorrie politely.

"No, you old ass," said Lee. "The entrance to this cave is only three feet across, it's nothing more than a crevice, really, with



In a rush, the St. Frank's party dashed at the gap in the hedge of fire. The flames leapt upwards on either side, licking at them hungrily. And then they were through—out into the cooler air beyond! Saved!

the ledge outside. If we shift these boulders, and jam them hard, we shall construct a very serviceable barrier."

"You're full of brainy ideas," said Dorrie admiringly. "An' then, if any of these Oturi come nosin' along the ledge, they won't be able to get in?"

"I'd like to see them try to get in!" said Lee. "Immediately outside this entrance the ledge is only a foot wide, and that makes it impossible for anybody to get any purchase. I rather think we shall be safe, Dorrie. My only worry is about M'zuma."

"Why worry about him? He's safe enough."

"He ought to be off while the darkness is still here," said Lee. "He ought to meet Umlosi, and tell him of our predicament. Otherwise how will Umlosi know?"

"We might tell him," suggested his lordship.

"You will persist in being jocular," growled Nelson Lee. "Umlosi might take all his men to the other end of the valley, and, not knowing what has become of us, he won't even search. And we can't see anything through this waterfall."

"No, an' we can't hear anythin', either," agreed Lord Dorrimore. "Why not wake M'zuma up an'— H'm! I'm not so sure, though. Wouldn't it be a bit mean?"

"That's the very reason I let him sleep, Dorrie," said Lee. "I haven't the heart to send him out in this exhausted condition. He needs to have all his wits about him—for if the Oturi trapped him his shift would be

short. However, it will probably be in good time if we send him out to-morrow night, as soon as darkness falls."

And so they set to work with the loose pieces of rock. And while the others slept, they perspired at their task, building up a formidable barrier. As they had no reason for emerging—for twenty-four hours, at least—they wedged the rocks in very securely.

And, all unknown to them, the Oturi were gathering in their hundreds on the river bank.

No trouble had been experienced in tracking the fugitives down. They had travelled hurriedly, without making any attempt to conceal their trail. Even if they had made such an attempt, it would probably have been useless, for the Oturi were noted for their trackers.

And the enraged warriors were gathered on the river bank near the waterfall—just below it—shouting and dancing and acting with mad frenzy. For they believed that their victims had escaped them completely. The trail led right into the river, and there was no way of crossing here. There was nothing but a boiling cauldron of foam.

But Otto Lorenzo was under no misapprehension.

"You see, my friend?" he said, as he stood near the waterfall with Popodos. "So that is where they have hidden themselves? That is where they are skulking!"

"I don't get it," said Popodos.

"Ah, you have not been here many years!"

"Which is true, too," said Popodos, nodding. "Ask me if I know Pell Street and

Canal Street and the Bowery, and I'll tell you some. But this darned waterfall isn't in my line."

"Behind this fall there are several caverns in the rock," said Lorenzo savagely. "They have retreated into one. How did they know? They're clever, Popodos—confoundedly clever! Curse them, they're beyond our reach. K'laba and all his devils can't get at them now."

"Then they are clever," nodded Popodos.

"I must see K'laba—I must tell him," went on the slaver. "There is only a tiny ledge, and not more than one man can pass along it at a time. But I am patient, Popodos. Sometimes I can be very hasty—but now I am ready to be patient. The Oturi shall camp here—some on this side of the river, some on the other."

"You mean you'll get them when they come out?"

"That is the plan, my friend."

"Maybe they won't come out."

"No?" said Lorenzo softly. "You think they won't want food? Starvation is a terrible death, Popodos—a slow, gnawing death. For days, perhaps, they will remain hidden. Then they will get to the end of their endurance, and will venture out for food. One only—or perhaps two. What matters? We will take them as they come out. I am patient. Sooner or later they must come—or die of starvation. In either case, the victory is mine!"



CHAPTER 19.

A New Danger.

IF Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore could have heard Lorenzo's words, they would have taken heart. Indeed, they would have shaken hands in congratulation at this decision. For while it seemed so admirable to Otto Lorenzo it seemed infinitely more admirable to the fugitives.

For they knew that Umlosi and his thousand Kutana warriors were on their way, and due within twenty-four hours. But Lorenzo didn't know it. He said that he was a patient man. He fondly believed that he had weeks of time to spare, if necessary.

As Lorenzo stood there, he recovered all his sanity. That temporary madness of his had gone. For at last he had gained the upper hand—completely and absolutely.

The Oturi should camp here, and watch the slippery rock path behind the waterfall—watch it day and night, ready to pounce upon their prey when it appeared. Lorenzo knew that he could trust K'laba and his men to do this.

And with the coming of dawn, Lorenzo would reorganise his own slaves. A hundred of them would be set the task of repairing the power-station. Before nightfall, his plantation would be working as usual. He would regard the siege of the waterfall as a light amusement. He would come occasionally to

hear how the starving wretches were faring. He would ask if they had been seen, or if any of them had been captured.

"Yes, Popodos, we've got them nicely," said Lorenzo, as he lit a cheroot. "It was very kind of them to bottle themselves up so tightly. Look at the trouble they have saved us."

"I suppose there's no other way out of that cave?" asked Popodos.

Lorenzo shook his head.

"Rock—solid rock," he said. "The cave itself is only ten feet deep, and they must be fairly uncomfortable."

"I thought you said there were two or three caves?"

"But only one suitable as a retreat," replied Lorenzo. "I have been in it. A curious place, my friend. When the river runs smaller it is a death-trap."

"How do you make that out?"

"At present the water comes over the edge with sufficient force to carry it well beyond the ledge," replied the slaver. "But in the height of the dry season the volume is less. Then it has much less force. And so, Popodos, the water floods down the rock face, and fills that cave. You see? These carrion are lucky to have the river as it is."

"Lucky?" repeated the Greek. "Haven't you queer ideas of luck? These guys would be better drowned out of hand. Starvation is a sight worse than drowning."

Lorenzo was thoughtful as he pulled at his cheroot.

His plan did not quite appeal to him so much now. And yet it was a splendid plan—from the point of view of the fugitives, if they had only known of it. Lorenzo meant to leave them in peace, and that would mean their salvation.

Unhappily, the slaver was thinking, and his evil brain evolved an alternative plan.

"I am a patient man, Popodos," he murmured.

"So you said, boss."

"But why be patient when there is no need of it?" went on Lorenzo. "Why have these infernal blacks in this valley any longer? They will only devour my stocks of food. I would rather be rid of them—send them back to their own dirty villages. Why not drive these rats out of their hole at once? Or, at least, with the coming of the dawn?"

Popodos started.

"But didn't you say it's impossible?" he asked.

"I thought so then—but I have another idea," said Lorenzo cunningly. "I thought of it when I was telling you about the filling of the cave when the river runs low. What if we fill the cave, Popodos? How will that do? We will drown them in their trap—or force them out into the hands of the Oturi. Isn't that better?"

"Couldn't be done," said the overseer briefly.

"But it can be done," declared Lorenzo. "It shall be done! Come with me. I will show you."

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE SCHOOLBOY EXILES!"

Cut off from all white folk, their fate dependent upon the result of a battle between two tribes of blacks!

Penned in a valley, with millions of tons of water swamping down on them!

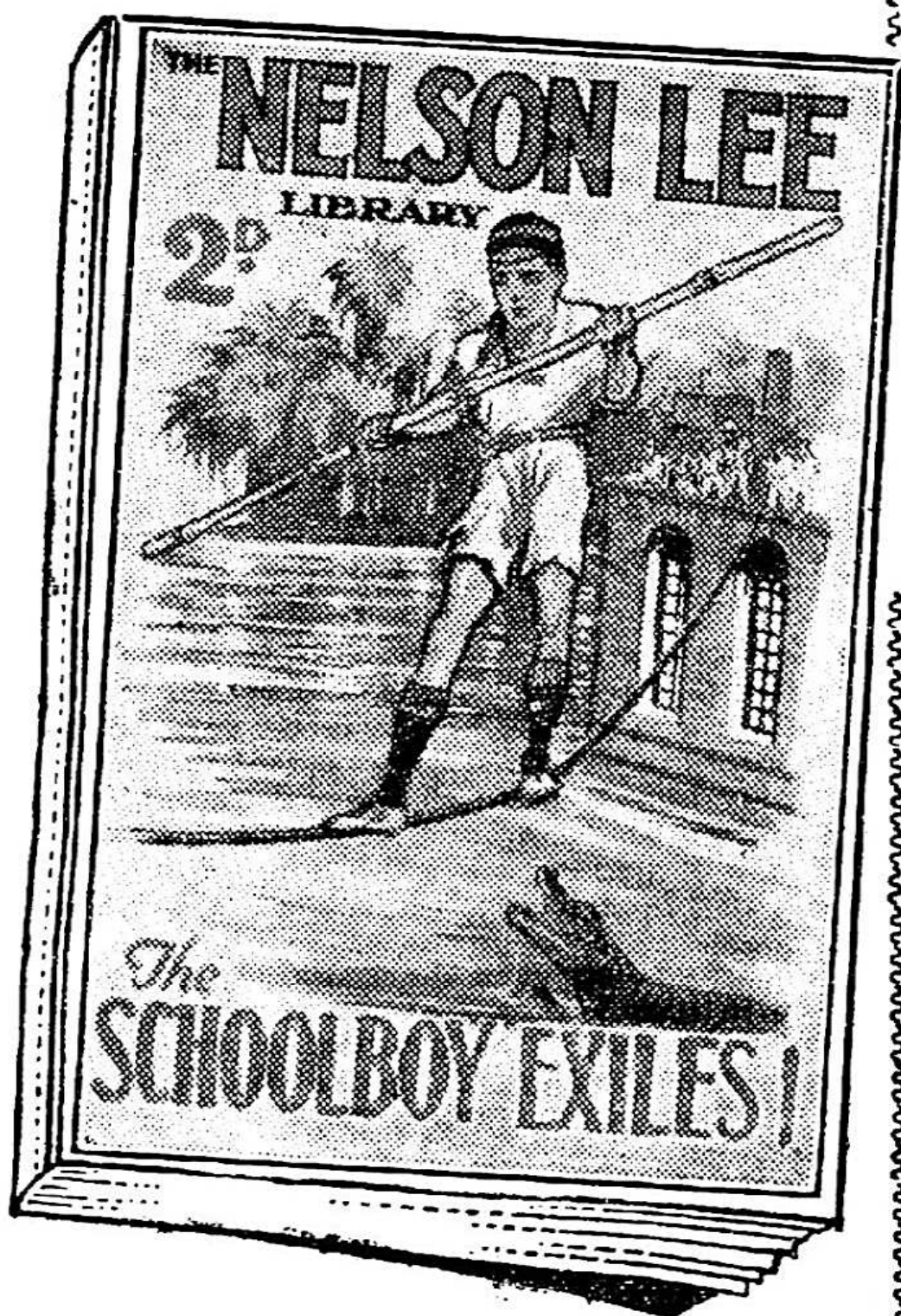
Marooned on the roof of a building which may collapse at any moment!

These are only a few of the amazing thrills which the boys of St. Frank's experience in next Wednesday's vivid long story. Don't miss this yarn, the last of the present series. Important announcement of a great new set of stories will be made next week.

STARTLING NEW SERIAL!

"TRACKETT GRIM'S GREATEST CASE!"

Specially written by Edward Oswald Handforth with the object of going one better than Archie Glenthorne! You will thoroughly enjoy the opening chapters of Handy's astonishing effort.



ORDER IN ADVANCE!

They climbed the steep rock path which led to the upper reach of the river, above the waterfall. It was a laborious climb, and fully half an hour had elapsed before Lorenzo called a halt. He pointed out across the smoothly-flowing river. It was comparatively narrow here, and by no means deep.

"There!" said Lorenzo.

The moonlight was streaming on to the water, and the African night was almost as bright as day.

"I don't get it," said Popodos, shaking his head.

"Here we have great boulders," said Lorenzo. "You see them? Big masses of rock on both banks."

"What about them?"

"We have hundreds of savages," said Lorenzo. "Why should they be idle? One hour—two hours—well, perhaps three. Within three hours, my friend, the Oturis can build a very serviceable dam across this river. What will the result be? The volume will be reduced, and the water will flow down the face of the rock at the fall. It will pour into the cave, and our rats will pour out."

Popodos grunted.

"Cunning devil!" he muttered under his breath.

"The dam will only be temporary, of course," went on Lorenzo. "When the object has been achieved, the blacks will remove the obstacles. Otherwise the water pressure will be insufficient for my power station. I mean to get these cubs out of their burrow—and this will do it! Oh, yes! This will do it very effectively, my friend! There are three alternatives!" He held up his hand, and ticked them off on his fat fingers. "They may either be drowned in the cave, or they may be swept out into the smother of the rapids, or they may take alarm before it is too late, and escape along the ledge and run into the hands of K'laba. What matters which? One will be as good as the other."

And Lorenzo, who was obsessed by this new scheme, put it into execution at once. He gave his orders to K'laba, and fully two hundred of the Oturi warriors were set to the task of damming the upper reach of the river. If there was any overflow, owing to this move, it would do no damage to Lorenzo's property. And the obstruction would be re-

moved from the stream as soon as the purpose was served.

Now, indeed, the situation was likely to be desperate!

Umlosi and his men were not due until the following nightfall—and Lorenzo meant to drive his victims out of their retreat by dawn! Again they were in terrible peril!



CHAPTER 20.

The Drums of Fate!

PLASH-splash-splash!

"Strange," muttered Nelson Lee anxiously. "Why is this water coming down? An hour ago there

was no sign of it."

He was standing behind the rock barrier which he and Dorrie had so laboriously built. His lordship was now sleeping, and Lee was the only one awake. He judged that it was very close to dawn, and he would welcome his spell of slumber when the time came.

Lee had been feeling very placid during the past hour.

Much had happened that night to turn the tables in their favour, and now it seemed that safety was assured. Here they were secure, and within twenty-four hours the Kutanas would sweep the Oturi enemy out of the valley.

So Nelson Lee felt that the time of stress was over. He pondered over the splendid behaviour of the boys and girls. He rather feared that they would suffer greatly later as a result of that dreadful ordeal. But then he reflected that they were strong and high spirited. Perhaps it would not have lasting effect.

And in the midst of these musings he had become aware of a curious splashing. He had taken very little notice at first. But then spray had filtered over the rock barrier, and was striking his face. He gazed out upon the wall of falling water. And, with a sudden start, he realised that it was nearer.

It only just cleared the lip of the ledge.

"The volume is less," he murmured, with concern. "But how can that be? These streams do not vary to that extent within the space of two or three hours. This is bad—very bad!"

All his calculations were upset. If things grew worse the water would soon pour down upon the ledge itself, instead of missing it, and that would mean that the foam would surge back into the cave—for the floor sloped downwards inside that crevice. The place would become flooded.

Splash-splash-splash!

It was certainly growing worse. Now and again an eddy would strike the ledge with full force, and the foaming water would swish across the rock, and surge against the barrier.

"What's wrong, guv'nor?" came a voice.

"Hallo! You awake, Nipper?" said Lee.

"About a pint of water fell into my face just now, guv'nor, and then I found I was sitting in a pool of it," said Nipper. "What on earth's happened?"

"I don't know," said Nelson Lee, his voice acute with anxiety. "But it seems that our haven is not so ideal as we supposed. If this goes on, Nipper, we shall be driven out."

"Driven out!" gasped Nipper.

"Or drowned like rats in a trap."

"But if we're driven out we shall walk right into the hands of Lorenzo and his rotten Oturi!" ejaculated Nipper, aghast. "And that'll be even worse than being drowned. Oh, crumbs! Are we starting on a fresh picnic now? I rather thought we'd had enough for one night."

"It's no longer night, young 'un. The dawn is here."

Nipper stared over the barrier, and could see a certain greyness in the wall of water. Lee was watching the wall anxiously. A quick decision was necessary. If the flow was really diminishing, a swift move would have to be made. For before long that rock ledge would not only be awash, but perilous in the extreme—for there would be insufficient room between the rock and the falling water.

If Nelson Lee could have seen what was happening on that upper reach of the stream, he would have understood. In the grey dawn, hundreds of K'laba's men were constructing the temporary dam. More than six of the blacks had already been swept away—to perish in the rapids below. But Lorenzo cared nothing. And K'laba took no notice. He did not hold life very dear.

And as that dam grew, so the volume of water decreased. But Lorenzo's scheme was more difficult than he had first believed. For two or three hours there was no perceptible difference in the flow. And even after a change had become apparent, it was very gradual.

Full daylight had come before any perceptible difference was noticeable. Noticeable, that is, from the river bank. Within the cavern, the difference was startling.

All the fugitives were now awake. For the floor of the cavern was now awash with two feet of water. The barrier at the entrance had already been demolished, and the spray was surging in, and the situation was growing more and more critical every minute.

"There's only one explanation," said Nelson Lee hoarsely. "This is no natural phenomenon. Lorenzo is at the bottom of it."

"I'd like him to be at the bottom of the river!" growled Dorrie. "But how can he have anything to do with this extraordinary affair? Hang it, the brute can't control the rivers!"

"He's making a dam," declared Lee. "It's the only explanation. He is reducing the flow so that we shall be forced out of this cave. Good heavens, Dorrie, he means to get us! The man's a fiend!"

"The water's already coming on the ledge, sir!" said Nipper tensely. "Before long we shan't be able to get out of here at all."

Nelson Lee took a swift look. His jaw became set. There was just sufficient room to squeeze along that precarious ledge, and only just. Any further delay would be fatal. In order to save their lives, they must go. And that would mean losing their lives! A cruel paradox.

However, no matter what awaited them beyond, there was no alternative but to escape. Even the thought of the murderous Oturi was weaker than the desire to live. They would not have been human if they had elected to remain there, to drown like rats in a trap.

"We must go!" said Lee curtly. "Once again it seems that we shall fall into the hands of these demons. But we can do nothing else. Another five minutes of delay and we shall be trapped. Come!"

Nelson Lee himself led the way. And just as they had originally come along the ledge, so they went. But more than once there were moments of deadly danger. Before they reached the end of the ledge they heard the water hurtling down upon the rock where they had just been standing. They had escaped in the nick of time!

"We'll make a fight for it, Lee!" shouted Dorrie. "By the Lord Harry! We'll go under like men this time! Why prolong the agony? Let's get it over an' done with!"

"Oh, why couldn't Lorenzo have waited until to-morrow!" muttered Watson. "Then Umlosi would have been here, and——"

"Don't!" said Nipper huskily.

"We're not dead yet!" came Dorrie's voice, from further down the line. "Perhaps the blacks will delay again, and——"

"It's too much to hope for," said one of the others.

And then they emerged into the dazzling sunlight of the fresh morning. To all intents and purposes, the waterfall was as powerful and as thunderous as ever. But Otto Lorenzo had achieved his cruel purpose. He had forced his victims out—and into the hands of the waiting Oturi!

For there they were—hundreds of the painted savages, just across the rocks. They lined the bank, and at sight of their victims

they set up a wild series of triumphant cries.

This was the end!

"Come! We must get away from this fall!" shouted Lee, above the water's tumult. "We must face the inevitable——"

"I say, sir!" yelled Nipper. "It means death to walk into the Oturi's hands. Why shouldn't we jump into the rapids? We shall be swept down. We're all good swimmers. Some of us might escape——"

"It's a desperate idea," muttered Lee. "But it's better than the other. We shall, at least, have a chance of life!"

"Look!" shouted Watson excitedly.

The Oturi were strangely perturbed. Their jubilation a minute ago had gone. And then, as though by a miracle, the whole horde of them took to their heels—running madly.

Dorrie rubbed his eyes.

"I'm dreamin'!" he said huskily. "Wake me up, somebody!"

They all climbed helter-skelter over the rocks, and reached the place where the savages had been standing. Yes, amazingly enough, they had gone. This was no trap. But what could it mean? What was the reason——

"Hark!" said Nelson Lee tensely.

Even above the continuous sound of the waterfall, there came another sound. The insistent beating of drums. The throbbing was borne on the wind, and it came in curious wafts.

"N'kose—N'kose!" shouted M'zuma, his eyes gleaming. "Dost thou not recognise the sound? The Kutana drums! Small wonder these dogs of Oturi fled! The Kutana drums! Umlosi is here!"

"But—but you said they were a day's march away!" gasped Dorrie.

"My father, they must have sensed our need," said M'zuma quietly. "What else? They sped more quickly than I hoped for. 'Tis well! We are saved!"

"Saved!" babbled a chorus of voices. "Oh, my hat!"

They cheered madly, frenziedly. Umlosi and his Kutana warriors had arrived in this valley of peril!

THE END.

COMING NEXT WEEK!

DON'T MISS IT!

Their Fate
in the
Balance!

Make sure of reading
this grand concluding
yarn of the Boys of
St. Frank's in Africa!



Thrills
in
Plenty!

Order your copy of
next week's N.L.L.
NOW!

OUT ON WEDNESDAY!

PRICE TWOPENCE!

Our Magazine Corner.

THE LONSDALE BELTS

A Short History of the Famous Trophies and their Notable Holders.

Presented in 1909.

One of the most prominent figures in the whole world of sport to-day is the Earl of Lonsdale, and there is nothing this popular aristocrat would not do for the betterment of sport. He has been an earnest worker in the cause all his life.

Boxing he has always had an especial fondness for, and it was in 1909 that he presented to the National Sporting Club the famous Lonsdale Belts, which may be regarded as symbolising the professional boxing championships of Great Britain.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that a man who is champion of England or Britain at any weight also holds the Lonsdale Belt. The reason for this is that a championship may be fought for anywhere, while in order to become the possessor of a Lonsdale Belt, it is necessary for a boxer to fight under the auspices of the National Sporting Club.

Similarly, in the event of a champion, who is the holder of a belt, being beaten for his title outside the Club, he has to return the belt. The National Sporting Club authorities then decide who are the legitimate contenders for it, and arrange a contest accordingly.

Valuable Belts.

Each belt is valued at £200, and this amount has to be deposited at the Club by the holder as security until such time as he wins it outright or returns it to the authorities.

Three years is the time limit, and if at the end of this the holder is still the undisputed possessor of the belt it becomes his own property. It is also possible to gain the right to keep it by winning three championship contests under the control of the N.S.C. It is not necessary for these fights to be consecutive, any three will do, and in this respect our ex-bantam-weight champion, Jim Higgins, set up a record.

His first battle for the bantam belt was against Harold Jones, of Ferndale, whom he defeated in 13 rounds on February 23rd, 1920. Next he met and overcame Bill Beynon in November of the same year, and his third win was against Kid Symonds. The time he took to perform this feat was well within one year and nine months, and he thereby set up a record which has not, so far, been equalled.

A Boxer's Record.

The young Leeds boxer, Joe Fox, is also the proud owner of a bantam Lonsdale Belt, which he secured as his own property by defeating Joe Symonds in June, 1917, having previously met and

outed Jim Berry and Tommy Harrison in belt contests.

It is worth noting here that young Joe Fox is the only boxer who, having won the belt in one class, passed on to a heavier weight and was successful in gaining a step towards a second one.

Before leaving the bantam weights, mention must be made of Digger Stanley, who was the winner of the first belt given in this class. His successes were not as in previous cases consecutive, as he was defeated in his third contest by Bill Beynon over twenty rounds, but he turned the tables on this opponent four months afterwards, thereby securing the belt for his own.

Jimmy Wilde.

Lonsdale Belts are given at the eight weights from fly to heavy, and three is the biggest number that has been won outright in any class.

Jimmy Wilde has the distinction of being the only winner in the fly-weight division, while Jim Driscoll in the feathers class was the first boxer to make a belt his for keeps. A defeat of Seaman Hayes in six rounds and two wins over Spike Robson in fifteen and seven rounds respectively being the road by which the "incomparable Jim" attained his desire in the New Year of 1911.

There was no new belt in this division until 1920, when Tancy Lee carried off that which had been provided after Driscoll's success.

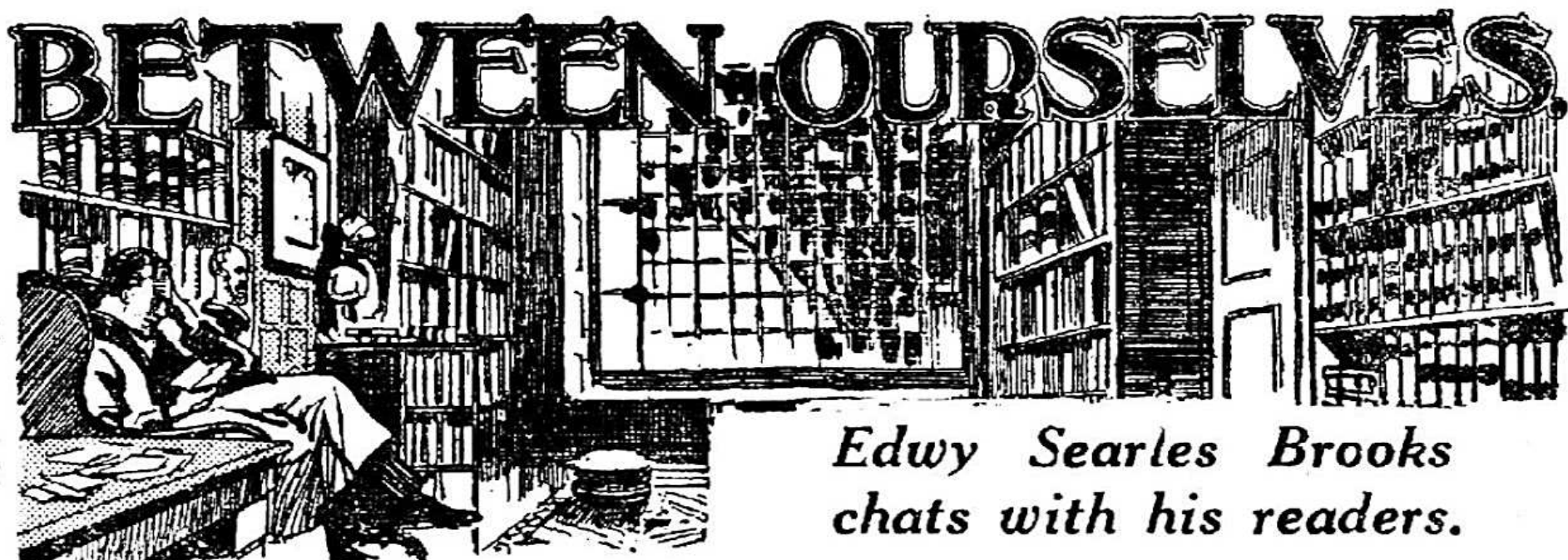
The list of winners who have obtained their belts by virtue of three actual victories in the ring would not be complete without some reference to Johnny Basham, one of the finest boxers among the welter-weights we ever had. Pat O'Keefe as a middle-weight, like Dick Smith, won his belt in his fourth fight under N.S.C. championship rules.

Freddie Welsh and Billy Wells.

The only boxer of the light-weights who has succeeded in annexing the trophy is Freddie Welsh. It became his own property as there was no legitimate challenger for his honours forthcoming within the specified time of three years.

The same happened to Bombardier Billy Wells, who is, as you have no need to be told, a heavy-weight. He defeated Iron Hague and Packey Mahoney, and then no one else worthy to be matched against him could be found. So that was how a new heavy-weight belt came to be put up.

Strangely enough, Wells was the first to fight for it, and as he won his contest against Dan Voyles he made his right to the first belt doubly secure.



*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. But please note that the acknowledgments cannot appear for at least six weeks after the letters reach my hands. 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 exchange offer (mine—autographed—for yours, but yours first, please!) is still open.—E. S. B.*

BEFORE acknowledging this week's batch of letters, I want to comment upon a few which have been left over from previous weeks. If I don't do this I know I shall get all sorts of sweet things said about me. I think you're first. Ernest Fairlamb. You tell me that you have a pal named R. Lee, and that every week you pass on the Old Paper to each other. Why not buy a copy each, and then pass them on to non-readers? In other words, give your copies to different chaps every week, and perhaps some of them will become regular readers, too, buying their own copies. Your supposition that I don't hear much from South African readers is quite wrong. I have letters from every part of the Union—and the more that come the better I like it!

While appreciating the compliment you pay me, Arthur Lloyd, I would like to point out that you are rather off the rails. You say: "You must have a jolly fine brain to have written as long as two years, at least." My dear old chap, I am guilty of writing these St. Frank's stories in Our Paper for over ten years. Still, there's life in the old dog yet. In fact, just between you and me and the ink-pot, I feel like a two-year-old still.

Thanks for your nice remarks, "E.C.F." I feel like quoting a few words: "I think that your tales are jolly good, and never once have I had cause to complain, so I think it is up to us chaps who enjoy these yarns to rally round the banner and make these slanderers feel ashamed of themselves. I hope you will put this in the Old Paper, so that I can feel sure of support from your other readers." Of course, he is referring to that celebrated letter from Messrs. Marlow, Tibby & Co. I don't think those merry gentlemen really meant to slander me, "E.C.F."

Reginald Quarrell* (Yeovil), Frank L. Havers (Norwich), Clifford G. Leavy* (Brisbane), Terence Sullivan* (Cambridge), Richard Dunn* (Clapton), Jack Bennett (Leicester), P.C.B.* (no address), R. A. Lambourn (Shinfield), Frank George* (Taunton), Phyllis Donoghue (Sydney, N.S.W.), Alec Corrighan (Liverpool), John Wilson (London, S.W.8), "Born Tired"* (Pietermaritzburg), Violet Twynning (London, S.W.1), Jack Fuller (Oldham), Beatrice Goodwin (London, N.5), A. H. Stainsby (Manchester), R. Dawkins (London, W.10), H. Foord (London, S.E.), W. H. Pizzy* (London, S.E.1).

Thanks, Reginald Quarrell, for those drawings and the poem. The drawings are quite good, and I have put them in my special album—and there they will stay, unless you want them back. Yes, I do manage to get a holiday sometimes—but only, of course, by doing a lot of work in advance. What would you say to me if I calmly went off on the spree, and forgot to write the St. Frank's story for a few weeks? I suppose I am more or less of a slave—but I will say that it is a very enjoyable slavery, for I thoroughly revel in writing these school stories, you know. I've got so used to it by this time that I shouldn't know where I was without my St. Frank's characters all round me.

There isn't a bookmaker in Bellton, Jack Bennett, but Jonas Porlock, the landlord of the White Harp, is never averse to taking a bet from the young scallywags of St. Frank's. Yes, of course you can write to me again—and the more you write, the better I shall be pleased.

Right you are, P.C.B. I shall have to think about Nipper and Pitt and Fullwood getting

motor-bikes. I wonder how it would be to have a series, some time in the future, with a motor-cycling interest?

* * *

Girls are just as eligible for the St. Frank's League as boys, Phyllis Donoghue. So buck up and join! You would be surprised if you knew how many girls *are* members of the League.

* * *

Thanks, "Born Tired," for your very nice criticism. I feel like quoting some of your letter, so that some of my readers can show it to parents who are opposed to my simple tales. "In my opinion you are quite right in keeping on writing the class of stories you do at present. There is nothing wrong with them. They have a polished style, and the grammar is always perfect. I have read practically every boys' publication on the market, and have no hesitation in saying that the Nelson Lee Library is the best. To give weight to my convictions, I may say that I am on the staff of one of the biggest newspapers in Natal, and I come into contact with all sorts of stories, so I am in a position to know a good story when I read one." That's very handsome of you, "Born Tired."

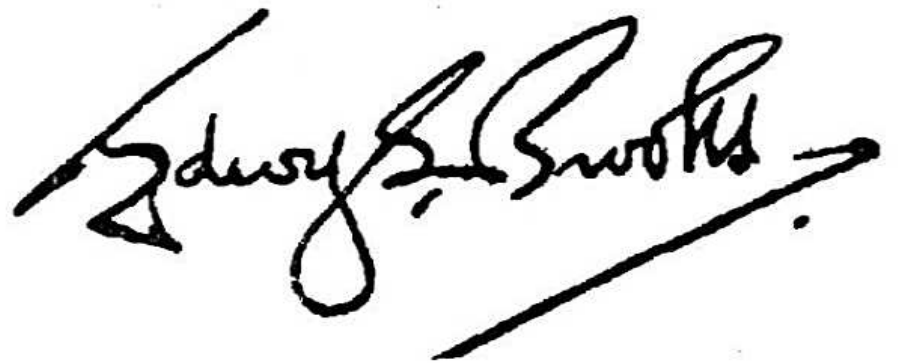
* * *

Fullwood has been reformed for quite a time now, R. Dawkins. The change in him was brought about, mainly, by his friendship with Clive Russell, the Canadian junior. At first Fullwood resented Clive's honest, well-meant intentions, but gradually the former cad began to realise the error of his ways, and Clive's influence at last did the trick.

I quite agree with you, R. Foord. You say "will you let all readers know that I advise them all to get your photo." As you all know by this time, you can have my autographed photo if you send me a snapshot of yourself first. I'm not at all particular about these snapshots. Any old thing will do, you know. My albums are made to take every kind of size.

* * *

I don't think you'll get many readers to agree with you, W. H. Pizzey. You say this: "Then there is he who, in my humble opinion, is the one big blot in your stories. Willy Handforth, a super-athlete—considering he is only supposed to be 14 years of age—a person with the intelligence of a Prime Minister, and with the dominating power of a Napoleon or a Mussolini, a wonder worker with animals, and insufferable cheek which no schoolmaster or brother would tolerate. I have always regarded you as a very keen student of human nature, but I think you are right off the rails in your portrayal of a pair of brothers as you depict them in the Handforth brothers." We are all entitled to our opinions, of course, old man, but I have always prided myself that the Handforth brothers are the most human and natural of all my schoolboy characters.



GOOD NEWS FOR ALL READERS!

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Concluding Chapters!

BUCKING UP OLD ALGY!



By ARCHIE GLENTHORNE.

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK:

Algernon Fitzpercy receives a great shock when his Uncle George tells him that he will have to earn his own living.

He goes to the Blackfriars Boxing Palace with his two special friends, Lord Bibbington—known as Bibbles—and the Hon. Eustace Caxton, to see the fight between Young Algy, an unknown boxer, and Liverpool Luke.

Young Algy is unable to fight, and Algernon

Fitzpercy takes his place. He does quite well—so well that Bill Huggins—the injured boxer's manager—offers to train him. Algy accepts, but is dismayed when he learns that the training quarters are situated at Barton Priory, for that is where his stern Aunt Martha and Uncle George live! Later on, Algy is matched to fight Chewing Gum Sid at the London Sporting Club.

(Now read on.)

Algy Prepares to Do his Stuff!

THE London Sporting Club was one of those priceless sort of places where all the nobs gather round and mingle and mix. I mean to say, when it comes to a matter of high-class boxing, there's absolutely nothing to beat the London Sporting Club.

And there, on a certain memorable night (as the novelist chappies put it), the cream of the boxing fraternity foregathered and duly performed the hobnobbing. In other words, a good old championship fight was on the programme. Young Algy v. Chewing Gum Sid, the Elastic Leather-pusher from Oshkosk, Mich. Or he may have come from Kalamazoo, Ind. I'm not sure which—although it doesn't really matter. As a matter of absolute fact, I'm not quite certain

that I've got the good old States in their correct order. But Mich or Ind., who cares? I mean, it behoves the good old pen to flow on to more important things.

Well, there it was—this priceless scrap between Young Algy and Chewing Gum Sid. A sort of international business, if you follow me. Chewing Gum Sid had come across from America with a somewhat hefty reputation. According to all his pals and buddies (whatever these weird blighters were), Chewing Gum Sid was the kangaroo's instep. I don't absolutely know what that implies, but I dare say these American lads will gather the trend.

Anyhow, Young Algy wasn't Young Algy at all. What I mean is, Young Algy was really *our* Algy—old Algy Fitzpercy, the priceless egg from Piccadilly. The real Young Algy, as I have taken pains to describe

in previous tomes, was incapacitated with various injuries. And so Algy was taking his place. And Bill Huggins, the trainer, was by way of being a happy man.

There he was, in the dressing-room, patting old Algy on the shoulder, feeling his biceps, and jabbing sundry knuckles into his thews and sinews.

"Is this absolutely necessary?" asked old Algy, pained.

"You're in fine shape, young gent," said Bill proudly.

"I absolutely fail to understand what my shape has to do with the dashed matter," said Algy, somewhat peeved. "I mean, Bill, old turnip, kindly be decent. It's hardly the thing to jab a chappie in the good old muscles, and to——"

"That's all right, young gent," said Bill, grinning. "I'm proud of you, sir! Under my training, you've come on marvellously. Well, I mean, it takes a frightful lot to surprise me, but you've absolutely done it. Not three weeks ago you were a flabby wastrel——"

"Oh, I say!" complained Algy.

"A flabby wastrel!" said Mr. Huggins stoutly. "Why, good gad, you were little better than a chunk of raspberry jelly!"

Algy winced.

"Be a sport, Bill, and forget those days," he said. "Times have changed. Several epochs have elapsed since then. Old Algy is now fully repaired and reconditioned. The carburettor has been cleaned, the magneto is positively bunged up with beans, and all the various bearings have received the prescribed treatment from the grease gun. In other words, Algy is waiting at the post, champing at his bit."

Well, of course, this doesn't pretend to be an accurate account of that good old conversation. Just an idea of it, if you understand. And the fact remains that old Algy was a different sort of chappie nowadays. Absolutely. The old languor had gone—the old soppy look had completely faded out of those sheep-like eyes. Instead, Algy was bristling with muscles. They stood out of his arms like molehills on a meadow. Dashed surprising. There was Algy, with his eyes sparkling frightfully, his face aglow with confidence. The prospect of meeting Chewing Gum Sid did not alarm him in the least. To tell the absolute truth, the old boy was positively itching to get into the arena.

And out there, in the aforementioned arena, the lads of the town were gathered in evening-dress, and what not. There were three particularly interesting blokes in the crowd. Interesting, that is, from our point of view. Of course, there isn't time for me to introduce you to the whole gang, but these three are well known to all of us, what?

"I mean, Algy's Uncle George, for one—and then there was Bibbles, and old Eustace.

As a matter of fact, these three coves had come together, and they all lounged back in ring-side seats. They had come to see poor

old Algy annihilated. At least, that is what they supposed they would see. Bibbles and Eustace were absolutely wobbly with apprehension. But Uncle George, for some reason, was a bit more confident.

"There's good stuff in Algy!" he declared, glaring at Bibbles. "You youngsters make me tired! You seem to think Algy is going to be eaten up!"

"Well, I mean!" protested Bibbles. "This chappie, Chewing Gum Sid——"

"He can chew gum—but he won't chew Algy!" declared Uncle George. "I don't think that Algy will win—but, by gad, if he only puts up a good show I'll take him into my office, and give him a permanent job!"

So it seemed that old Algy was in for something pretty juicy, if only he put a few hefty, half-nelsons across Chewing Gum Sid!

A Surprise for Uncle George!

RIGHT at the start of this spasm, I want to make it perfectly plain that I'm no lad for describing a boxing match. Absolutely not. I can watch a boxing match with the best of them, but when it comes to describing the good old mill, Archie goes down to the bottom of the class. All the same, I'll do my best. And what chappie can say more than that?

Chewing Gum Sid was the first of the gladiators to come forth, and to receive the acclamations of the populace. There were sundry shouts of "atta boy," and similar remarks—evidently uttered by various foreigners in the congregation.

And after the excitement had flattened out a bit, old Algy came tottering in. His appearance was a bit of a shock for Uncle George—and several kinds of a worse shock for Lord Bibbington and the Hon. Eustace Caxton.

For they had all expected to see old Algy wilting at the knees. They had rather anticipated a vision of the poor old boy, glassy-eyed and somewhat rabbitified.

Instead, they saw a robust blighter, bulging with muscles, and bristling with sinews. Old Algy was absolutely bunged full of pep. His arms looked like pillow-cases, filled with half-bricks. I mean to say, absolutely knobbly. And it was a dashed fact that his jaw had grown larger. Or perhaps it was only Algy's way of holding it. It sort of stuck out, and hit you.

"Why, dash it, the old lad is no more like himself than Bill Huggins is like a human being!" said Bibbles, aghast. "And I'm dashed if he doesn't seem to be enjoying himself!"

"Wait until he catches sight of Uncle George!" murmured the Hon. Eustace. "I mean, that'll be something of a stab in the midriff for him. It'll rather put him off his stroke, Bibby. We tried to keep Uncle George away, didn't we?"

And just then Uncle George stood up, and sent forth a rhinoceros-like bellow.

"Bravo, Algy!" he said enthusiastically. "Good lad—good lad! Bravo, boy!"

And various old codgers in the offing gave Uncle George a choice assortment of cold glances. Not that Uncle George cared.

As for Algy, he beamed upon Uncle George, and waggled one of his gloves.

"What-ho!" he observed. "So here we are, Uncle George, what? Jolly pleased to see you in the orchestra stalls!"

"Well, I'm dashed!" said Eustace. "The old boy absolutely seems to like it!"

"Beats me!" said Bibbles, shaking his head.

After that the referee chappie made all sorts of announcements to the customers, and some enthusiastic johnny sounded a gong.

Well, I mean, that started the fight.

In other words, the first round was on the go. And I may as well say at once that poor old Algy was considerably battered in that first round. What-ho! Unless you read this jolly carefully, you'll rather gather that I'm talking about rounds of bread-and-butter. But absolutely not. What I mean to say is, Chewing Gum Sid got frightfully busy in the first minute, and before old Algy knew where he was, he wasn't. I believe I can put it better than that, if you'll give me half a minute.

The fact is, Algy was so frightfully braced about his own robustness that he rather under-estimated the prowess of this lad from Oshkosh, Mich. And, well, there it was. The Chewing Gum laddie was all over him.

By the time the end of the round came, old Algy was slightly battered. And then the good old gong sounded, and a couple of beefy blighters grabbed Algy by the back hair, yanked him upside-down, and proceeded to pour spongefuls of water down his neck. A most frightful proceeding—I mean, not merely undignified, but fairly ghastly all round. Not that Algy seemed to mind much. In fact, he came up for the third time, and absolutely asked for more.

It seemed that this cold water business revived him a good deal. At all events, when the next round started, Algy had not the measure of his opponent. That's the right term, I believe. And there he went, dashing round the ring like a kangaroo. Algy meant business this time.

Round the ring he went, with Chewing Gum Sid on the defensive—

Just a minute! It strikes me that there's something wrong with that good old expression. I mean "dashing round the ring." I can never understand why it's called a ring. Anybody might think it was a blessed circus! Well, think of it for yourself. There it is—an absolute square, with ropes on all four sides of it. In that case, how the dickens can it be a ring? It's so frightfully silly.

However, to get on with the doings.

The second round was Algy's. Positively, it was Algy's. At least, so everybody believed. When the gong sounded, Chewing Gum Sid was lying on his back, making noises like an aged sea lion. And Algy was

standing over him, waiting for the lad to get up—so that he could strike him over again. So, on the whole, I think I can safely say that it was Algy's round.

And things looked distinctly promising for the dear old boy!

Algy, the Champion!

I DON'T know if I'm expected to describe all these rounds, punch by punch, and jab by jab, but, anyhow, I'm not going to do it. A bit too much of a ripe proposition.

So we'll skip about half a dozen rounds, and dash straight into Round 9. I might mention, in passing, that the battle had been going very heftily. Sometimes Algy was doing most of the good work, and sometimes Chewing Gum Sid seemed to be on the point of winning the contest. But Algy always came up smiling, and the cold-water treatment, during the various intermissions, worked wonders.

In fact, I'm beginning to have a frightful amount of faith in cold water. Jolly wonderful stuff, when you come to think of it. I mean, just look at the way those professional footballer chappies revive in the middle of a match. One of the opposition sloshes a player in the shin, and down he goes, while the referee blows a blast on his whistle. Then out comes the trainer, with a whacking great sponge. You've seen the sort of thing, what? Splash goes the sponge into the poor old chappie's face, and in two ticks he's playing again, absolutely cured. It strikes me the cold-water sponge ought to be shoved on to the injured shin, but it always goes straight into the centre of the visage. A rummy sort of plan, but I'm dashed if it doesn't always work.

However, we're not talking about football. I rather fancy we left Algy in the central spasm of Chapter 9.

The contest, of course, was a fifteen-round one, but it never got to this point. Because, don't you see, in Round 9 Algy had an idea that he had had enough. And in Round 9, too, by some sort of coincidence, Chewing Gum Sid got the notion that he would finish Algy off with one swipe.

Well, it was all right getting the notion. That was tophole, as far as it went. But it didn't go very far. Sid got the notion, but before he could put it into practice Algy had given Sid such a kosh on the solar system that he measured his length on the boards, and asked for mother. Only an expression, of course—because Sid didn't actually do any measuring. He wasn't marked off into inches, or anything like that. But he was marked in sundry other ways. One of his ears, for example, was standing out like a banana leaf. His nose—by no means presentable at the best of times—had now become a sort of spreading complaint over the rest of his radiator.

And the referee chappie was indulging in a counting exercise. Not that it was a sensible proceeding, for Sid was so distinctly "out" that the good old ref. could have counted up to a couple of thousand without any effect from Sid.

And after that old Algy was proclaimed the winner, amid various bursts of enthusiasm from the congregation.

"Well, I'm dashed!" said the Hon. Eustace, gazing at Bibbles in wonder. "The dear old boy has done it!"

"Absolutely!" said Bibbles. "He's beaten this other chappie all over the shop. I never thought old Algy had it in him. I mean, what a lad!"

As for Uncle George, he was already in the ring, and he was clapping Algy on the back, shaking his hand, and generally behaving as though he had gone off his rocker.

In due course, Algy found himself in the dressing-room, and Uncle George was buzzing about like a whacking great bumble-bee all the time. There he was, grinning all over his visage, as pleased as the dickens, and jolly proud, too.

"Algy, my boy, you've done wonders!" he declared. "I never thought you had such pluck! No, Algy, I never thought you could do it! I'm proud of you, my boy—and I shall show my appreciation in a very substantial way!"

"That's all right, Uncle George!" said Algy brightly. "I'm not altogether sure that I shall require any of the appreciation. I take it that you are suggesting a cash bonus of some kind or other?"

"Not exactly," said Uncle George.

"Because, if so, I might remind you that I shall soon be in close contact with five hundred of the best," said Algy. "Not so dusty, what?"

"You deserve it, Algy!" declared Uncle George. "But still, five hundred pounds won't last you very long, particularly if you go back to your old habits."

"Wait!" said Algy, pausing in the middle of massaging his manly form. "The old life, Uncle George, is gone for good. I mean to say, it was a pretty potty sort of proceeding, anyway. How can a chappie enjoy life when he's slacking all the time? How can he live when he's dead? That is to say, how can he feel the joy of life surging through his veins when he's little better than an octogenarian snail?"

And at this moment Algy gave Bibbles and Eustace a somewhat straight glance. The poor chappies wilted perceptibly, and soon after that they oozed away. For, strictly speaking, they were slackers of the very worst type—just as bad as Algy himself had been.

"I'm deuced glad to hear you talking like this, Algy," declared Uncle George. "It shows that you've got the right spirit, my boy! This boxing enterprise has given you a new outlook upon life. As soon as you are ready, you must come with me, and I'll take you home to supper."

"Oh, rather!" said Algy. "That's frightfully decent of you, Uncle George!"

"Your Aunt Martha will be there," said Uncle George casually.

Just for a moment, Algy winced, and then he pulled himself together, and laughed with large quantities of nonchalance.

"Aunt Martha?" he repeated. "Oh, rather!"

And the dear old boy didn't seem to be scared in the least!

All Sereno!

THAT was the rummy part of it. Or it wasn't rummy, when you come to think of it.

Right from the start Algy had been doing everything in his power to keep his secret from Aunt Martha. Down at Bill's training quarters, Algy had gone half off his nut trying to avoid Aunt Martha—trying to keep the news from her that he was training as a boxer. The fact was, he was frightened out of his wits of the old dragoness.

But now he didn't seem to care a toss.

When Uncle George took him home in triumph, Algy met his aunt, and grinned amiably into her face. What was more to the point, he clapped her on the back, and didn't care a dash.

"Just come from the London Sporting Club, Aunt Martha," he observed gaily.

"What?" said Aunt Martha, with a start. "Algy! What do you mean? Are you telling me that you have been to that disreputable place where they have boxing?"

"Absolutely!" said Algy, nodding. "Only, of course, it isn't disreputable."

"Algy!" barked Aunt Martha. "Are you daring to contradict me?"

"I'm merely trying to point out, old lady, that boxing is one of the finest sports under the good old sun!" said Algy. "It may interest you to know that I was boxing there myself to-night. In fact, I won the good old championship."

"You did *what*?" bleated the tall female.

"I rather thought that would give you a jab under the middle rib," said Algy, nodding. "But it's a fact, Aunt Martha. Here I am—champion! Absolutely! And if you don't believe me, ask Uncle George!"

"The boy is quite right," said Uncle George, looking at Aunt Martha with a cold, calculating eye. "And it is about time, my dear, that you realised that boxing is a clean, manly sport. Just look at the difference in Algy. If you want to be convinced that boxing is good for the health, look at Algy!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Algy.

"Look at him, Martha!" said Uncle George sternly.

Aunt Martha looked—and, dash it, she had the decency to rally round and cast aside the cobwebby prejudices.

"I must confess, Algy, that you are a changed being," she said. "There is no

longer that stoop in your shoulders—that slouch in your walk. Your eye is clear, your complexion is good. Upon the whole, you are much healthier in body and mind. And boxing has done this?"

"Oh, rather!" said Algy, nodding. "Boxing and training for it, don't you know."

"Well, Algy, perhaps you have been right all the time," said Aunt Martha, climbing down with phenomenal meekness. "I cannot possibly disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes. And did you know, George, that the boy was training as a boxer?"

"Of course I knew!" said Uncle George, beaming. "And I let him go on with it—because I knew how much good it would do him. He needed bucking up—and, by gad, he's bucked up! I'm proud of him!"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Algy, embarrassed.

"And, what is more," said Uncle George. "After you have had a week's holiday, Algy, I am going to take you into my business. You have proved yourself to be a man—and not a weedy nincompoop. You shall have your reward. You shall enter my business, and your salary shall be double the amount of your previous allowance. And if you progress well I shall not hesitate to better your position."

"That's frightfully decent of you, Uncle George," said Algy, flushing with large assortments of pleasure. "I mean to say——"

"Enough!" interrupted Uncle George. "You're a good fellow, Algy, and I might as well tell you now that I stopped your allowance deliberately. I stopped it, not because I couldn't afford to pay you, but because I felt that you had a great deal of good in you. It only needed bringing out."

"And now," said Algy, "it's brought, what?"

And the dear old boy was frightfully bucked.

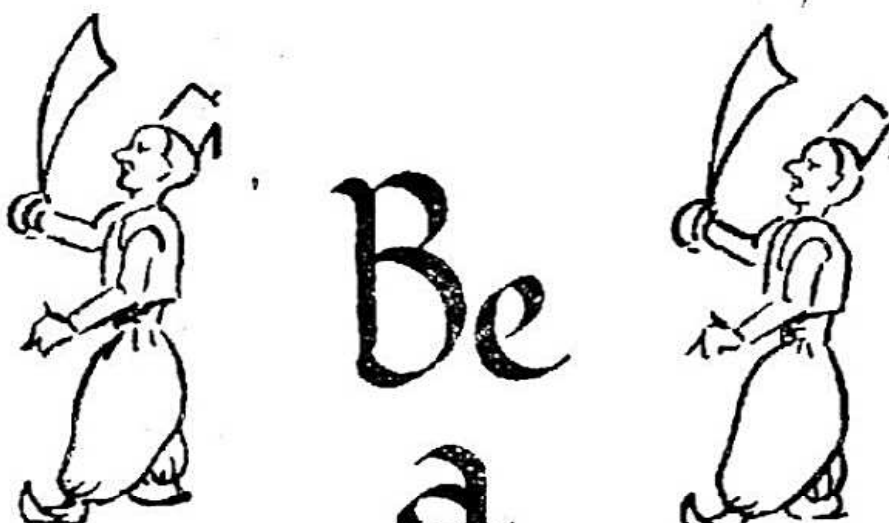
And it just shows you. In the old days, Algy had been absolutely afraid to walk half a mile. In the presence of his Aunt Martha, he was as scared as a frightened infant. But this boxing business had absolutely strengthened him bodily and mentally. He could now do a ten-mile walk as though it were going from one side of a room to the other. He could talk to Aunt Martha as though she were the dashed scullery-maid.

And there you are—there it is. When a chappie is a slacker and a waster, sponging on his good old relatives, he absolutely hasn't got a soul of his own. But when he's bulging with health, and full of energy for work—well, he jolly well feels that he can face the world with tons and tons of confidence.

And that's exactly what happened to old Algy. Absolutely!

THE END.

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HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 78.

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.

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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.

Spins On The Jigger.

A LONDON reader inquires about a few short trips for a day or half a day. I suggest he takes Burnham Beeches for one outing. He can also see Stoke Poges, where Gray wrote his famous Elegy. There is good country about here.

My correspondent should take the Bath Road to Slough. For Stoke you turn to the right midway down Slough High Street. For the Beeches go straight on to the end of the town, passing over the Great Western Railway, Windsor Branch line, and turn up to the right by an inn called the Three Tuns. This takes you through Farnham Royal and Farnham Common to the Beeches. He should not miss a jolly little village called Wexham.

Interesting Country.

In the same district lies Denham, which is worth seeing. All these are half-holiday spins with a ride back in leisurely fashion in the long daylight evening.

The country just west of Uxbridge is charming. You reach Uxbridge either via the Bath Road, and thence to the right through Yiewsley and Cowley, or direct along the Uxbridge Road. The district between these two arterial roads is interesting, and fairly direct ways can be found by which you can turn off the Bath Road at Longford—the London side of Slough—and take a green track across country. Parts of this are not suited for the wheel, but the glimpse of real country is worth getting.

Attractive Shepperton.

Then South-west Middlesex offers good scope. Take the Staines Road from the Bell at Hounslow, and break away through Ashford. You can find your way to Littleton and Laleham down to Chertsey Bridge, and the routes are all serviceable, and very little frequented. Here you find the market gardens at their best.

Shepperton is attractive, and you can have your ginger-beer and sandwiches down by the river to the music of the water at the lock.

Away From Motorists!

If you find yourself at Chertsey there is a very good programme before you if time permits. Over into Surrey there are excellent lanes not much noticed by the motorist. The day trip might be via Twickenham and Hampton Wick—this road hugs the river all the way practically to Kingston Bridge. Once over that bridge you have a good run through to Hook, Leatherhead, Dorking and Horsham.

The Woods of Oxshott.

Another way is to proceed by the Dittons. Cross Hampton Court Bridge, pedal past Imber Court, get into Esher, cross the pretty High Street of Esher, and turn sharp round by the Bear Hotel. This road takes you through the lovely woods of Oxshott.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

John McDonald, 262, Oxford Street, **Swansea**, wishes to get in touch with members in his district, and also with the nearest Organising Officer.

Hugh Skillen, 2, Homewood Road, Church Road, **Mitcham**, Surrey, wishes to correspond with stamp collectors.

George Hodgson, 70, Scalby Road, **Scarborough**, wishes to correspond with readers anywhere; all letters answered. He has back numbers of the "N. L. L." for sale.

A Cooper, 10, Fairlawn Road, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19, wishes to hear from readers.

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.

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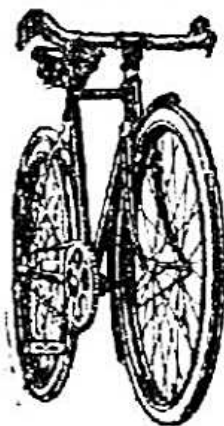
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