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THE
PERIL OF THE
KYPUR PASS!

A gripping long complete yarn of amazing adventure in
India, featuring the chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 123.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

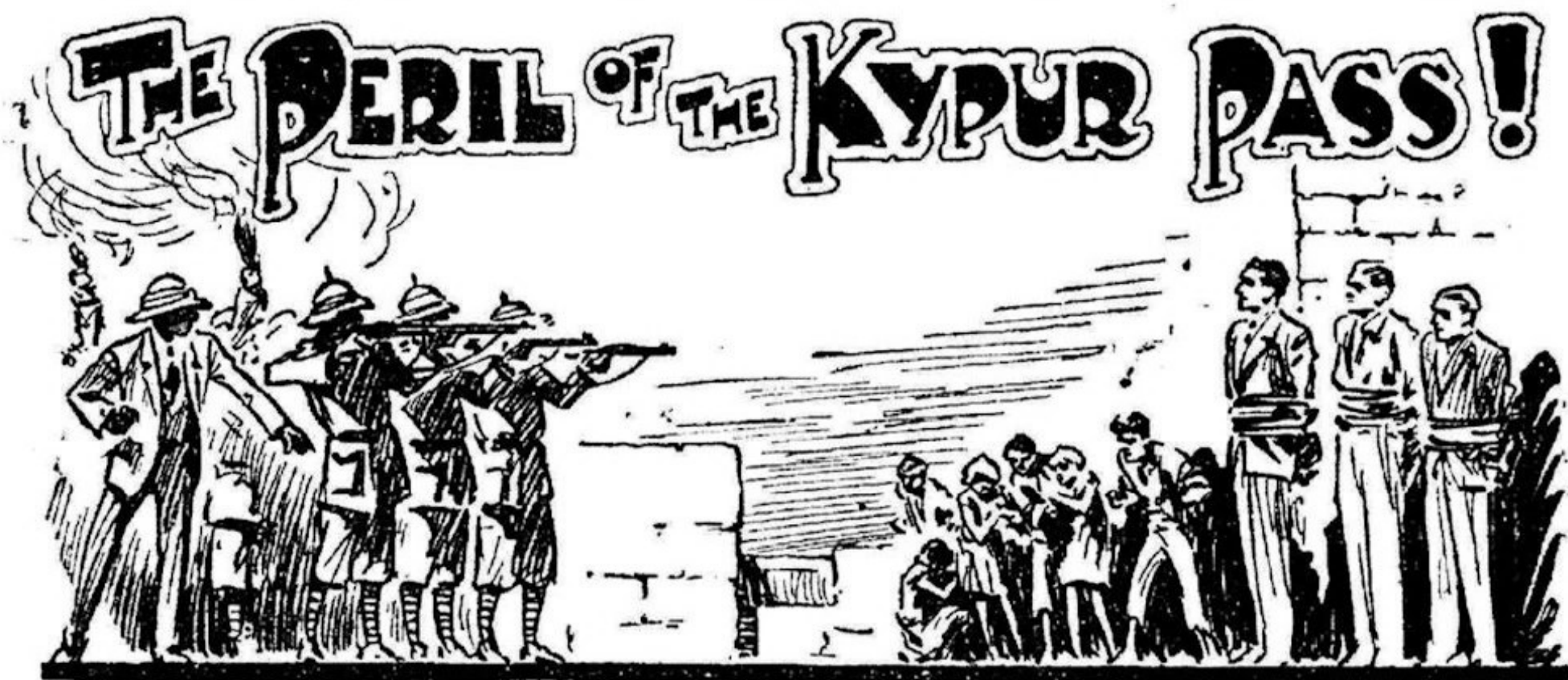
September 8th, 1923.



Standing on Archie's back, Vivian Travers was able to see through the slit-like window. Inside the room he saw Nelson Lee, two of the Moor View schoolgirls, the recumbent figure of Nipper and—yes!—the gloating, triumphant figure of the Ameer of Rishnir!

Thrilling Schoolboy Adventure in India !

A Yarn You'll Never Forget !



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

(Author of the St. Frank's stories now appearing in "The Popular," every Tuesday.)

Besieged in a fortress and surrounded by the Ameer's hordes, the St. Frank's party are in desperate straits. But still they are undismayed, for they know that rescue is on the way. Unfortunately for them the Ameer knows that, too, and so—the situation reaches a thrilling and dramatic climax in this gripping story. Start reading it now—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Hard Pressed !

CRACK! Crack! Crack!

Rifle shots sounded at random on the quivering, heated air. And Handforth & Co., of the St. Frank's Remove, who were standing in the shadow of a big stone wall, took no notice. They had grown so accustomed to this kind of shooting that they were indifferent to it.

"Phew! It's hotter than ever!" said Handforth listlessly.

"Awful!" muttered Church.

"Enough to roast a bullock!" said McClure.

After that, they fell silent again, since it was quite difficult to talk. The famous chums of Study D, in the Ancient House, were attired in rags and tatters of flannel trousers and cricketing shirts, which were stained, torn, and even blood-smeared. There was a large patch of court-plaster on Handforth's head, eloquent of battle, and Church and McClure were patched in one or two places, too.

And it was significant that all three of them were equipped with rifles.

Nipper and Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne strolled up, across the blazing patch of sunlight, and they were glad when they got into the shade.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "What price an ice-cream wafer just now, dear old fellows? Or a glass of lime-juice?"

"Stop that!" said Handforth glaring. "You funny ass! You don't want to torture us, do you?"

"Sorry!" said Travers. "I was only trying to be light-hearted."

He realised that he had chosen an unfortunate subject for his pleasantries. Drink, just now, was the one thought in everybody's mind. For water was so scarce that there was only a limited amount for the wounded. Nobody else could have a drop, no matter how maddening were their cravings of thirst.

It was a baking hot scene here, on the roof of the Kypur Fortress, tucked away in the rugged, rocky hills on the border of Kurpana, in North-West India.

The sun was blazing down relentlessly from a clear sky, and the rocks radiated the heat as though they were furnaces. The fortress itself was of stone, hot, barren, and dusty. There was not a green speck to be seen in any direction.

Nothing but rocks—mountains—crags.

All round the walls Indian soldiers were at their posts. They were subjects of the Maharajah of Kurpana. And the enemy, beyond the walls, were the invaders from Rishnir.

There was a fair number of St. Frank's juniors on that roof. A few others were inside, and here, too, were Irene & Co., of the Moor View School. Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee and Mr. Hobart Manners were talking at the moment with the maharajah himself. For this kindly, white-haired, old Indian potentate was a prisoner, too—beseiged in this outpost.

And in an apartment which had come to be known as the Red Cross room, there were numbers of wounded men, being tended by anxious eyed woman. All these latter had recently been servants in the Ameer of Rishnir's palace. Now they had been rescued from their slavery—only to be menaced by the horror of massacre.

Lord Dorrimore's party, consisting of Nelson Lee and Mr. Manners, and the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls, had managed to escape from the Ameer's clutches, and they had brought these women refugees with them. But they had only succeeded in getting just over the border into Kurpana, and now they were in this isolated fortress, fighting for their very lives.

For the Ameer's armies were surrounding them, and the battle had been in progress for two or three days.

On and off, the fighting had continued. Sometimes it was fierce, sometimes slack. At the moment there was a lull. Only a few rifle shots sounded now and again. The intense heat of the afternoon seemed to have taken all the energy out of the enemy, too.

"The great question is, shall we last out?" Handforth was asking. "There's no sign of the relief force, and things are getting worse and worse!"

"That's not like you, Handy, old man," said Nipper quietly. "You're always so optimistic."

Handforth shook himself.

"By George! You're right," he said, squaring his jaw. "Of course I'm optimistic. What rot! Fancy me asking if we shall hold out! We've just got to!"

"For the sake of the girls—and all those women!" nodded Travers. "Great Samson! What a horrible thing if the Ameer's soldiers broke in and captured us all! Ordinary common or garden torture wouldn't be in it. After the way we've defied the beggar during the past few weeks, he'd have no mercy on us!"

"Well, there's one consolation," said Nipper. "There'll be no question of torture for any of us. For if the Ameer's forces

break through, the whole thing will be over in a few minutes. We shall be put to death on the spot—and we shall die fighting!"

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, laddies, why this dashed pessimism? What about the good old army from Sakri? What about the British force from the frontier?"

"Where are they?" asked Church gloomily.

It was a question that could not be answered. It was difficult enough for the juniors to keep on talking, for their tongues were swollen, and their throats were so parched that their voices sounded unnatural. Yet they could not keep from talking, now and again. It was a relief—it was something to do.

"We can only hope for the best," said Nipper. "We're bottled up here in this fortress, and there aren't a hundred men on the active list now. Yet we've managed to defy the enemy, in spite of their thousands. It has been touch and go, now and again, but we've always beaten them back."

"When do you suppose they'll attack again?" asked Fullwood.

"This evening, I expect—when it gets cool," replied Nipper. "The last attack was in the early morning. But it'll be worse this evening—because we're more thirsty. And the heat of the day has been exhausting, too."

"But the longer they delay the better!" said Reggie Pitt. "The trouble is, we can't know anything. They've cut the telephone wire which communicates with Sakri, and yesterday they managed to get a direct hit with a shell which demolished the wireless. We're cut right off from the world!"

"But there are two forces hurrying to our relief!" said Handforth, with satisfaction.

"You mustn't forget that, you fellows. A native force from Sakri, with all the maharajah's best men. If that only gets here in time, there'll be a terrific battle in the hills, and the fortress will be relieved."

"Supposing it doesn't get here in time?" asked McClure.

"Well, there's always the possibility that the British force will turn up," said Handforth. "They're coming from the other direction—hundreds of good old Tommies!"

"They're coming, really, to teach the Ameer a lesson," said Nipper. "Of course, their main object is to relieve us first—but if they don't get here in time they'll avenge us. That's the general idea."

They tried to console themselves with the hope that the relief would arrive before it was too late. Yet, in their hearts, they felt such a thing could not be.

Before long, the Ameer's hordes would attack again. In the distance, they could be seen even now, large hordes of men moving about. They were waiting, before commencing the next grim attack.

The last one had been serious enough, for many men had fallen. The next one, which would probably take place in the evening, would be the deadliest of all; and with the garrison so depleted there was not one

chance in a thousand that the defenders could continue to hold these grim, battle-scarred walls.

This trip to India had been adventurous from the very start, and there was every likelihood that it would culminate in death for them all.

Yet their spirit was unimpaired. They was as staunch and as steadfast as ever.

CHAPTER 2.

The Legend of the Fortress!



V

IVIAN TRAVERS, as cool and collected as ever, smiled as he took stock of Archie.

"What's happened to the window, dear old fellow?" he inquired.

"Eh?" said Archie. "The which, laddie?"

"The window—the eyeglass."

"Oh, I see what you mean!" said Archie. "Absolutely! You mean the good old eyeglass? The fact is, laddie, I've smashed the dashed thing, and I'm as good as blind, dash it!"

Archie was acutely conscious of his dishevelled condition. He was the most dandified fellow at St. Frank's; and even now he had made an effort to make himself look fairly presentable. His grimy white flannel trousers were more or less pressed, and he had made painful efforts to repair one or two jagged rents. He was even wearing a silk tie, in spite of the intense heat, and his hair was as immaculately brushed as ever.

"Oh, well, let's get inside," said Nipper. "Phew! The heat's awful!"

A few of them followed his advice. He and Tregellis-West and Archie and Travers went down into the interior of the fortress. Not that it was really much cooler inside; the heat, perhaps, was more stifling, more confined. Yet the glare was less, and there was a sort of fictitious coolness.

In the commandant's room, Nelson Lee was standing near the door. The boys paused as they came opposite, and they would have passed on—for they saw that the mararajah himself was in there.

"It is quite all right, my dear boys," said the ruler of Kurpana. "You may come in, if you wish."

"Thank you, sir," said Nipper.

They entered, and sat down near the door. Lord Dorrimore was in there, too, and so was Kumah Bhat, the commandant.

"Getting fed up, eh, my sons?" asked Dorrie.

"More or less, sir," replied Travers. "If the relief is coming, I hope it'll come soon. Anything is better than this suspense."

"We must be thankful that we are still alive," said the mararajah gravely. "Our

plight might easily have been worse. Yet when the next attack comes, I fear we shall be defeated."

"It is as well to be prepared for the worst," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "We cannot overlook the fact that the Ameer's forces are growing stronger; and we know that he is grimly determined to wipe us out. So it would be idle to believe that we could continue our resistance. The early arrival of one, or both, of the relief forces will be our only salvation."

"Unless we could locate the big tunnel, eh, commandant?" said the maharajah.

"I do not understand, your Highness," said Kumah Bhat.

"Come, come!" chided the maharajah. "You are the commandant of this fortress. You have heard the story of the great tunnel, have you not?"

"It is but a legend, your Highness, without foundation or truth."

"That is as it may be," replied the maharajah. "But there has always been a story in connection with this Kypur Fortress. Have I not heard it since I was a mere boy?"

"What is it, father?" asked Hussi Kahn, of the St. Frank's Remove.

The maharajah turned to his son.

"It is a simple story," he replied. "As you may know, this fortress is thousands of years old. Not in its present form, perhaps, but there has been a fortress here for countless centuries. It is the guardian of the Kypur Pass. Not that it figures in that capacity just now," he added, shaking his white head. "Times have changed, gentlemen. They have changed greatly."

"But what of this tunnel?" asked Dorrie. "It sounds rather interestin'."

"The legend goes that there is a great secret tunnel somewhere beneath this fortress, leading to an exit beyond the Kypur Pass," replied the maharajah. "It is no ordinary tunnel, but an enormous structure, capable of accommodating an army. But since no living man has ever seen it, and since the story is, as the commandant has said, possibly a fictitious one, we need not discuss it."

"Couldn't we have a search for the tunnel, sir?" asked Travers, with interest. "It would be rather good if we could locate it, and then do a bolt."

"It's a fairy tale, young 'un!" said Nelson Lee. "Things like that do not come true in real life."

"But if we could find it, sir, we could escape—"

"Escape!" echoed Lee. "And how, my boy, do you suppose we could escape? Even if we found this legendary tunnel, and managed to get through it, we should only find ourselves in the open, and we should be in greater danger than ever."

"But not at night," put in Dorrie.

"There will be no chance for us to remain in this fortress until night!" said Lee, with conviction. "I hope I am wrong, but I have an impression that the Ameer will launch a

deadly attack on us during the evening, before darkness falls."

"And we shall drive the beggars off," said Dorrie, nodding.

"We may do so to begin with, but we must not fool ourselves," replied Lee. "Most of our men are exhausted, and we are all suffering agonies from thirst. Gentlemen, unless one of the relief forces arrives before this attack develops, nothing on earth can save us!"

There was silence, for all knew that Lee had spoken the blunt truth. There was no sense in mincing matters.

The sound of desultory rifle-firing came to their ears, muffled by the walls. But it was a reminder that they were besieged, and that enemy forces were all around them.

Nipper and Travers went out soon afterwards, and they found some of the other juniors on the battlements. The story of that tunnel had already passed from their minds. There were so many other things to think about.

"Anything happened up here?" asked Travers languidly.

"Nothing to speak of," said Handforth. "I gave Church a biff on the nose, two minutes ago, for being a fatheaded ass—that's all."

"You'd better keep your silly fists to yourself!" said Church tartly. "I only told him that he was a chump for being so certain of rescue. There's no chance for us at all! We all know that! We keep trying to fool ourselves, but we know jolly well that we shall get wiped out in the end!"

"I suppose it takes a certain amount of courage to say that," mused Travers. "Well, well! Let's hope that the afternoon goes quickly. This heat is too awful for words!"

Crack! Crack!

Distant rifle shots rang out again, but the juniors took not the slightest notice. Even when they heard the thud of bullets against the fortress walls, they were indifferent.

Somehow, these things seemed trivial and insignificant now. Two days ago they would have been startled; they would have been even alarmed. But they were growing accustomed to living in constant danger, and even the prospect of death had ceased to have any terrors.

For the agonies of thirst were upon them—and life itself was becoming intolerable!



CHAPTER 3.

Suspense!

SUFFERING acutely, the juniors were splendid in their calmness and pluck.

They had often read stories about people suffering from thirst in the Sahara Desert, or some such place where water was unobtainable. Now they were suffering a similar experience! And

they were finding it far, far worse than anything their imaginations had pictured.

The loss of the water supply had hit the little garrison hard. It was, indeed, the worst thing that could have happened to them in the way of misfortunes.

After the explosion of a shell, they had found that all their main stock of water had drained away. Only a few jugfuls remained, scattered about here and there in the various inner rooms of the fortress.

As far as the boys and girls went, there was no water at all. Neither was there any for the soldiers.

Perhaps, altogether, there were two or three pints now left, and this insignificant drop was reserved for the badly injured. The only hope of relief was from the sky. Rain! If rain came, then the agonies of thirst would be allayed.

But the sky was clear, cloudless, and the sun seemed to have become ten times hotter than usual. At this hour, in mid-afternoon, the excessive heat was maddening.

Everybody was listless. Inside, the girls kept themselves busy with the patients—even when there was nothing to do. But it took their minds from everything else.

The boys were restless. Some of them tried to sleep. Others went on the battlements and watched the distant hills. They longed for another attack. Anything to break this deadly spell. Inactivity was worse than anything else.

At first, the juniors had been forbidden from taking any part in the fighting. But Nelson Lee, who had seen that they were becoming half crazy with the suspense, had now allowed them to act as a kind of mobile force. They could, if they chose, take their places with their rifles; they could join in the defence in the event of a sudden attack.

What difference did it make? If the Ameer's soldiers broke in, they would all be butchered—every single soul! So it was far better to allow these boys to fight, so that they could go under like Britishers. They were all trained cadets, they knew how to use rifles, and they were as good marksmen as any of the Indian soldiers.

One of the wounded men, unable to take his place in the actual fighting, was stationed as a look-out. He stood there, with his arm in a sling, watching. His job was to report anything new, or suspicious. He was on the look-out, too, for the first sign of the relief force.

"This reminds me of a film I once saw," remarked Handforth, just for the sake of something to say. "It was rather a ripping film, too. A handful of British soldiers were besieged in a frontier fortress. Hundreds of yelling tribesmen were attacking, and the whole thing was pretty good."

"This is very much the same, Handy," said Nipper. "Only the tribesmen now happen to be trained soldiers, in uniforms. The Ameer of Rishnir is modern in his methods."

"And then, just when everything seemed lost, a cheer rang out!" went on Handforth dreamily. "There was a picture of a rocky

pass, with hundreds of British soldiers dashing through to the rescue. By George! They came tearing up, and they broke into the fortress and wiped the tribesmen to bits! Saved at the last giddy minute!"

"That was a film!" said Church dully.

"And it's going to happen to us, too!" nodded Handforth. "Don't you forget it, my lads! What's more, we shall probably be back in England in good time for the next term at St. Frank's!"

"St. Frank's!" said McClure huskily. "Don't fool yourself, Handy. We shall never see St. Frank's again!"

"Rot!"

"It seems years since we were there," remarked Castleton, as he tried to swallow. "Years and years!"

"And yet it was only a few weeks ago," said Nipper. "As a matter of fact, the summer holidays aren't over yet, not by a fortnight or more. Think of it, you fellows! If only the relief force would come, and we could get into the Wanderer of the Skies, we should be able to arrive back in England before the Autumn term begins."

"Yes, but we're living in a land of realities—not in fairyland!" said Harry Gresham gruffly. "Miracles of that sort don't happen nowadays!"

"Yet, if it does happen, we shan't regard it as a miracle at all," said Nipper. "That's just the runny part of it. We shall say that everything was perfectly logical, and that we never were in any actual danger!"

Handforth looked at the others out of his bloodshot eyes.

"The good old Wanderer!" he muttered. "Think of it! She's only just behind the fortress, as airworthy as ever. The only thing is, we haven't any petrol, so she's useless. By George! Why can't we do something? Why can't we think of some plan?"

"It's no good, Handy—we're helpless," said Church.

"But why?" insisted Handforth. "Out there, near the Kypur Pass, the Ameer's army has halted. Before going on, they mean to wipe us out. But there are plenty of big transports there, and it stands to reason that there'll be plenty of petrol, too. Why couldn't we make a sudden raid and grab a lot of petrol, and bring it back? Then we could fly off in the Wanderer of the Skies!"

The others did not reply. It seemed unnecessary. For Handforth's suggestion was fantastical—impracticable. Even if a party went out, and was lucky enough to return, they would still be helpless. For it would be impossible to get the heavily-laden metal monoplane into the sky from this rocky ground.

And Handforth could have saved himself from all this scheming. Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore had turned over a hundred plans in their minds, and all of them had come to nothing.

They knew that there was only one slim chance for them. If they could hold out, all well and good. It was for them to keep the flag flying until relief arrived.

So the hours dragged on until the sweltering afternoon had changed to hot, sultry dusk.

During those hours the agonies of thirst had increased a hundredfold. One or two of the women had become half demented, and were hysterical. More than one of the juniors felt like standing boldly on the battlements, so that an enemy bullet could get him. Anything to be relieved from this appalling torture.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners could do nothing. They went about silent, anxious-eyed, in an agony of anguish for these suffering boys and girls. To sympathise with them was out of the question, for such tactics would only increase their tortures. It was far better to remain silent.

The desperate little garrison continued to stick it, and now they were all praying for the next attack to commence, so that they should have something to take their minds off their tortures of thirst. They wanted to fight—to fling themselves madly into the conflict.

Their wish was soon to be granted!



CHAPTER 4.

The Evening Attack!

BOOM! Boom!
"They're beginning again—thank goodness!" said Handforth, in a croaking voice.

Two guns had spoken from the distance, and the whine of the shells could be heard, increasing in intensity until the sound became a scream.

Crash!

One of the shells hit the wall of the fortress, at one of the corners. There was a shower of splinters, but nobody was hurt.

"Good egg!" said Nipper fiercely.

And, strangely enough, all the others felt happy, too. Action—action! It was all they had been longing for.

It had long since been apparent that the Ameer's forces had no big guns here, in the hills. Their artillery was evidently old-fashioned and inadequate. A good many of the shells that dropped near the fortress failed to explode, and when they did happen to explode they were practically harmless, unless they scored a direct hit.

At times, shrapnel would hiss overhead, and a soldier here and there would get struck. But none of these wounds was very serious.

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth tensely. "Look out there, my sons! They're coming in swarms! Now we're going to have some fun!"

All the juniors were on the battlements, ready with their rifles. It was impossible for them to remain inside the fort. They wanted to be here, in the open, so that they could see what was happening. And, too, they were

determined to throw themselves into the thick of the fighting as soon as it began in earnest.

Handforth was quite right; there were hundreds and hundreds of the enemy soldiers advancing on the fortress. They were coming from all directions. This was to be a massed attack, and as the defenders watched these preparations, they knew instinctively that this was to be the end.

The previous attacks had been formidable, but by comparison with this one, they seemed insignificant. Nothing could save them from being overwhelmed now.

They took a kind of fierce delight in preparing themselves for the coming onslaught. The relief force was forgotten; they had taken it for granted that help would never come in time. So they would fight on, and continue fighting, until oblivion.

Even Nelson Lee was aware of a curious change in his point of view. Earlier, he had been agonised at the thought of these innocent boys and girls being sacrificed in this remote hill fortress. But now his thoughts were different. He had seen their sufferings, and he had come to the conclusion that it would be idle to hope for relief that evening.

So it would be better, he told himself, if the enemy made their big attack now, so that they could all be wiped out and freed from this torture. Rescue was so remote as to be impossible. Why, therefore, prolong the agony? They were Britishers, and they would go under gamely.

Nelson Lee had half hoped that the Ameer would call off the battle. For the tyrant of Rishnir must know by now that a British force was on its way, and his position would be hopeless indeed if he butchered these British subjects.

But the Ameer was evidently so enraged, so exasperated, that he cared nothing for the British authorities. He was going on with his warfare, and he was egotistical enough to think that he could escape the consequences.

Crash-crash!

It was a new sound, and the defenders soon discovered how it had been caused.

One or two small field guns had been brought up close, and they were firing point-blank at the outer walls of the courtyard. Clouds of dust and smoke were arising, adding to the confusion. This was evidently a preliminary to the infantry attack.

Crash! Bang! Crash!

Again and again the explosions sounded, and the air became thick with flying fragments of stone. Clouds of dust and smoke rolled over the fortress, and it was difficult to see exactly what was going on. Now and again the walls could be seen—jagged, broken, and partially demolished.

"They mean it this time, old man!" said Nelson Lee, as Lord Dorrimore joined him. "It's going to be a quick affair, I believe."

"The quicker, the better!" said his lordship bluntly.

"Yes, I agree," nodded Nelson Lee. "Hitherto the Ameer's soldiers have suffered

heavy losses while climbing the outer walls. But this time the walls are being razed. That will make all the difference. The enemy will soon come swarming in in their hordes."

"Well, we'll have a pretty good scrap, anyhow," said Dorrie. "By glory! Look at 'em out there!"

He pointed. Through the smoke they could see beyond into the masses of rock and crag which surrounded the fortress. Soldiers could be seen massing in thick formation. They were getting ready for the big attack. They were preparing to rush as soon as the walls were demolished.

Crash! Crash!

Still it went on, and now the defenders were suffering more acutely than ever, for the dust, getting into their dry, parched throats, wellnigh choked them. Water! If only they could obtain a little water!

"Are you ready, you chaps?" shouted Handforth feverishly. "They're coming soon! St. Frank's for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

"Don't forget! We've got to fight, and fight, and fight!" shouted Nipper. "Up, the Remove!"

"Bravo!"

The St. Frank's crowd had taken possession of one section of the battlements, and they were determined to sell their lives dearly.

Nelson Lee looked at Dorrie with gleaming eyes.

"They're good lads, Dorrie!" he said. "By Jove! They've got the right spirit!"

"You bet they have!" said his lordship.

"And some of the confounded arm-chair critics at home are mad enough to say that British youth is decadent! Rot! When they're put to the test, the young 'uns are as plucky as ever they were!"

"They're coming now!" said Lee keenly. "I shall be over in this corner, Dorrie, with the machine-gun. Good-bye, old fellow—in case!"

They clasped hands, and Dorrie nodded.

"So-long!" he said cheerily. "But, somehow, I don't think it'll be the end just yet. I'm an optimist, Lee. Confound the Ameer and all his hordes! We're British—and we're not going under!"



CHAPTER 5.

In the Thick of It!

"LOOK out! Here they come!" shouted Handforth exultantly.

"Hurrah!"

"Let 'em have it!"

"Absolutely!"

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

In their own section of the battlements, the juniors fired steadily. A few weeks earlier, they would have been horrified at the thought of shooting at men like this, but now it was different. They were defending their lives, and they were holding the flag.

Nelson Lee finished his examination of Nipper, and when he looked up his face was grave. "Is—is his wound serious, sir?" asked Mary breathlessly. "Serious—yes," replied Lee. "Unless an immediate operation is performed Nipper will die!"



There was no longer any doubt about the intensity of the attack.

Nearly all the surrounding walls were down—demolished. The Ameer's soldiers were swarming over the ruins, coming onwards to the fortress in ever increasing numbers. Many of them were shot down, but it seemed to make no difference. Their places were taken by those behind, and they swept relentlessly onwards, like the tide of the sea.

In less than a minute they were at the very walls of the squat stone building, scrambling up like cats, bringing short ladders, rearing them, and mounting them.

The air was filled with wild cries, with the rattle of machine-guns and the crackling of rifles. Dust floated everywhere, and it was wellnigh impossible to keep any sort of order.

It was a case of every man for himself, and the St. Frank's fellows soon found themselves separated. Nipper, with Tregellis-West on one side and Watson on the other, was battling desperately at one particular corner. It was a hand-to-hand struggle now.

Handforth was doing tremendous work a little farther away, using his rifle as a club. Again and again he swung his weapon round, and men fell.

"Come on, St. Frank's!" he thundered. "Never say die!"

"Hurrah!"

"They're in, you fellows!" panted Nipper. "It'll be all over in a couple of minutes now!"

"Begad!" gasped Sir Montie. "There's somethin' frightfully queer about it all, old

boy—there is, really! Half a dozen of these Indians could have killed me during the last minute, but I'm not touched!"

"Hi!" howled Tommy Watson. "Leggo, you rotters! Here, you fellows! They're grabbing me—they're——"

Watson broke off as he went down, literally smothered by four or five of the enemy. Yet, strangely enough, they did him no harm. They merely held him down, and rendered him helpless.

Nelson Lee, on the other side of the battlements, had noticed the same thing. These soldiers of the Ameer were swarming into the fortress, but they were holding their fire—holding their swords. There could be no doubt that they had strict orders to make prisoners of the defenders. There was to be no unnecessary killing.

It was a surprise—for Nelson Lee had not dared to hope for anything so good.

Then the truth struck him in a flash.

The Ameer had no desire for these enemies of his to be killed in battle. He wanted them alive, so that he could wreak his fiendish vengeance on them. But, by so doing, he might defeat his own end! For the relief forces were on their way, and if they only arrived in time—

The scene was utterly confused. Pandemonium reigned. The defenders were intermingled with the enemy, and at times it was impossible to tell one from the other. Men were struggling to and fro, and the air was filled with gaspings and shoutings and other cries.

Boom!

A shell screamed from out of the distance. "Not just yet!" panted Nipper, as two enemy soldiers came at him. "I've still got my gun, and——"

Crash!

The shell exploded in mid-air, only a few yards away from the spot where Nipper was standing. He went over like a ninepin, and the enemy soldiers were killed on the spot. Tommy Watson and Tregellis West were stunned and deafened by the shock, but they had apparently come to no real harm.

Nipper was lying face upwards between two of the dead soldiers. He was still—his face was pale. Reggie Pitt and Harry Gresham, happening to be near at the moment, looked at him in horror.

"What happened?" gasped Gresham.

"That shell!" said Pitt. "Poor old Nipper! He's down—dead, I believe! Look here!"

Reggie tore the remnants of Nipper's shirt back, and an ugly, bleeding wound was revealed in the Remove skipper's chest. A fragment of shell had struck him, apparently in the heart.

"Quick!" said Reggie Pitt. "He may not be dead yet. Let's carry him down! These brutes haven't got actually into the fortress yet. There may be a chance!"

Somehow, amid the confusion, Pitt and Gresham half-carried, half-dragged Nipper down into the "Red Cross Room." They found Irene Manners and Mary Summers and the other girls working frantically. Wounded were coming in every minute, and the Red Cross department was getting overwhelmed.

"Oh, it's Nipper!" cried Mary huskily, as she beheld her boy chum.

"It's all up with him, I fancy!" said Gresham dazedly. "Hit by a shell. Dead, I think!"

He and Reggie went out again. But, before they reached the scene of conflict, they ran into Nelson Lee. The latter was bleeding from an ugly cut in the head, and his face was smothered in grime. His eyes were bloodshot, and when he spoke his voice was thick and almost unrecognisable, owing to his swollen throat and tongue.

"Nipper!" he said, seizing Pitt by the shoulder. "Somebody told me that Nipper is dead, and that you carried him——"

"He's with the girls, sir—they're attending to him!" said Pitt. "Poor chap! That shell——"

Lee did not wait. He staggered on, careless of the shrieks and cries that sounded from all round. Nothing mattered to him at this moment—except that he wanted to get to Nipper.

To save the fortress was impossible; he knew that the enemy were already in partial possession. And he had been relieved by the knowledge that there was no massacre. The enemy had received orders to capture the defenders of the fortress—not to kill them.

And here was Nipper—a victim of a stray shell!

It was an appalling thought, and Nelson Lee was in a fever of anguish. He found Nipper being bandaged, and one look was sufficient.

"He's not dead!" said Nelson Lee tensely. "No—not yet! But he's in a bad way. Good heavens! A nasty wound—an ugly, ugly injury!"

There and then, while the conflict still raged, Nelson Lee made a careful examination. The girls, acting as nurses, hovered round him. But they could do nothing to really help.

Nelson Lee's knowledge of surgery was profound, and his face was almost grey after he had finished his examination.

"Is—is it serious, sir?" asked Mary breathlessly.

"Serious—yes," said Nelson Lee. "Unless an immediate operation is performed, Nipper will certainly die!"



CHAPTER 6.

'Twixt Life and Death!

NELSON LEE had suddenly become cool and collected, and when he spoke his voice was keen and businesslike. It almost seemed that the thickness had gone out of it.

"I want two of you girls to help me!" he said crisply. "Only two—and we must get out of this crowded room."

"We'll help, Mr. Lee!" said Mary breathlessly. "Irene and I!"

"Yes, yes!" said Irene.

"Carefully, now—carefully!" warned Lee. "You take his feet, and I will carry his shoulders. Come!"

They went out of that packed apartment, with its close, antiseptic-soaked atmosphere. They went down one of the dark, stone passages, and presently they were in a little kind of store-room.

There was a rough trestle in the centre, and Nelson Lee utilised this for an operating table. He laid Nipper along this, and then he glanced round.

"A light!" he said. "Get me a light!"

"But we don't know——" began Mary.

"Get me a light!" repeated Nelson Lee. "I don't mind how you get it—but a light is imperative!"

Both the startled girls hurried away, and they returned within two or three minutes, carrying a flickering, smelly lamp. Lee took it, and hung it on a hook against the wall. The yellow rays fell slantingly on the patient.

"That will do!" said Nelson Lee. "Stand by, in case I need you. It is a thousand pities there is no water. Poor boy—poor boy!"

He looked down at Nipper's face. There was no sign of consciousness. Nipper, in fact, was hovering 'twixt life and death. His injury was grave.

"Can you save his life, sir?" asked Mary tremblingly.

"I do not know—but I am going to do my best!" replied Nelson Lee. "There is a fragment of shell—a tiny scrap—in this wound. It is lodged near the heart, and unless it is removed septic poisoning will rapidly develop, and then quick death will be certain. Even if I am successful in the operation, the boy may yet die. But we must do our best."

"Oh!" murmured the girls.

They, like Nelson Lee, had completely forgotten the conflict outside. They were indifferent to the occasional whining of the shells, the sudden crashes as the shells hit one of the walls. They took no notice of the shouts and the noises.

Nipper's life was at stake—and they were trying to save him.

It was an impressive scene, in the dimly-lit store-room. Outside were the grim sounds of battle, but in the store-room Nelson Lee was cool and calm, setting about his task as collectedly as any surgeon in a well-equipped hospital.

And yet his instruments were terribly crude.

Fortunately, he had a good supply of anti-septic and anæsthetic. He was handicapped by the lack of water, but he made no further complaint. He was trying to save the life of his faithful young assistant, and nothing else mattered.

Just as he was commencing, two ragged, grimy figures appeared in the half-open doorway. They were Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson.

"Somebody told us that Nipper's here!" panted Watson. "They said he was dead—"

"Boys, you must go!" interrupted Nelson Lee sternly.

"Oh, sir! Is—is Nipper—"

"He is still alive, but he has been badly wounded!" replied Nelson Lee. "There is a remote chance that I might be able to save him—but it is only remote, and I must have complete quietness. Go, my boys!"

"Can't we help, sir?" asked Sir Montie.

"No! Please go! These girls are giving me all the help I need."

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West turned away, their hearts sick, their own agonies overlooked in their anxiety concerning their chum.

"He'll die—I know he'll die!" murmured Watson miserably. "Nothing matters now, Montie! We're finished—finished!"

"Cheer up, dear old boy!" breathed Montie. "Things might be a lot worse—they might, really."

This was true enough.

They had been bundled into this stone passage by some of the enemy soldiers. Indeed, the Ameer's men were crowding everywhere now—inside the building. They had gained an entry at one point, and they were flooding into the fortress.

Tregellis-West and Watson, instead of being butchered, had been pushed roughly

into this passage and left. It was becoming more and more clear that the Ameer's officers had given orders that none was to be killed.

It was totally different with the maharajah's own warriors. They had been fighting on until the very end, and they had been shown no mercy. Man after man had fallen. Originally the garrison had numbered something like a hundred and twenty men and fifteen officers. But now the total was reduced so terribly that there were scarcely ten living.

But nobody knew exactly how the battle was going.

Some of the juniors were still on the battlefield, fighting. Others, like Tregellis-West and Watson, had been made prisoners and disarmed. The whole affair was in a condition of muddle. It might take an hour before any sort of order was restored.

The gloom of the night was now settling down over this grim scene. The stars were beginning to twinkle, and there was still no sign of rain. The guns were now silent, and there was scarcely the crack of a rifle to be heard. Hand-to-hand fighting had been the order of the hour, and even this was fizzling out. The defence was shattered, and the Ameer's soldiers were pouring into the fortress in greater and greater numbers.

And there, in that store-room, Nelson Lee, with his sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, set about the delicate operation. He was indifferent to every sound; indeed, he did not even hear them. It was as though he were isolated from his fellow-beings.

Carefully, gently, he applied his instruments, and Nipper, mercifully, knew nothing. He was still unconscious, still hovering between life and death.

Mary and Irene helped all they could. They stood by with lint and antiseptic; they waited with pale, anxious faces and troubled eyes.

In a way it seemed fantastic. Here was Lee, trying to save the life of one schoolboy. Yet outside, perhaps, a dozen of them had been cruelly butchered!

But a life was a life—and this particular life was dearer to Nelson Lee than any other.

So the operation progressed, with Lee silent and calm; with Irene and Mary watching and helping; and with Tregellis-West and Watson outside, suffering untold agonies of suspense.



CHAPTER 7.

Good Old Archie!

HANDFORTH leapt to the top of the wall, swinging his rifle round as desperately as ever. He apparently bore a charmed life, for he did not even get hit. He was not aware of his tiredness or of his parched, swollen throat.

"Come on!" he shouted defiantly. "You rotters! We're not afraid of you!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" gasped Church. "They're not trying to kill us! We couldn't believe it at first, but we know it now! There's no sense in standing up there—"

"Come down, Handy!" urged McClure.

Handy came down, but not in the way his chums expected.

He gave a sudden gasp, and his left leg crumpled under him. He crashed back to the roof of the fortress, and groaned as he rolled over.

"My leg—my leg!" he said groaningly.

"He's been hit!" ejaculated Church.

A moment later they found that Handforth had a bullet wound just below the knee. It looked a very nasty injury, for it was bleeding badly, but possibly it was less serious than it appeared.

Church and McClure, on the whole, felt pleased.

"Come on!" panted Church. "Down with him—to the Red Cross room!"

"Hi! Leggo!" ejaculated Handforth. "I—I'm all right! It's only a graze! I—"

He tried to struggle to his feet, but he found that he could not put any weight on his left leg. Moreover, he had bruised himself considerably in his heavy fall. He discovered, to his dismay, that he was weaker than he had thought possible. The deadly strain had begun to tell, and this injury proved the culminating point. He almost crumpled up.

Church and McClure managed to take him down for first aid, and there was something paradoxical in the fact that they pushed past any amount of the enemy soldiers on their way. But nobody interfered with them.

Handforth's chums were now quite certain that they were glad. Their leader was hit in the leg, and it was by no means a serious wound. Whereas, if he had remained active, he would probably have got himself killed.

A few of the St. Frank's fellows were still in the thick of the fighting, in other parts of the fortress.

For example, Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne were cut off in one of the far corners, and they were desperately holding the battlements here, firing regularly, and doing a good deal of damage. They did not know that the majority of their companions had been taken prisoners, that Nipper was badly hit, and that the enemy was sweeping through the fortress in victory.

"Carry on, old man!" urged Travers, as he took a glance at Archie. "It's just getting exciting now. Here they come—another swarm of 'em! By Samson, I'm tired of this game, anyhow. Let's make a finish to it!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "But I rather think the good old enemy will do the finishing business, laddie! Sundry platoons are now about to do their worst!"

But Vivian Travers was not listening. His rifle was empty, and he had no more cartridges. He squeezed his way through the narrow stone aperture, and then dropped down right amongst the enemy. He recovered

his balance and dashed forward, using his rifle as a club.

"We'll go out in a blaze of glory!" he said coolly. "Come on, my beauties!"

Crash!

Travers fell forward, heavily struck by a rifle stock. He was hit before he could do any damage, and he sagged down and rolled limply over.

The enemy soldier who had struck him turned, and Archie, who was watching, could clearly see the glint of savagery in the man's eyes.

"Good gad!" breathed Archie, in horror.

For the Indian had reversed his rifle, and was about to drive his bayonet into Travers' still body. This man, at all events, was disobeying orders. He was fevered by the lust of battle, and his only desire was to take life.

"What-ho!" ejaculated Archie. "Nothing doing, old thing!"

As the soldier was about to strike, Archie flung himself over the battlements and shot down. He landed on the man's shoulders, and they both went crashing over. The bayonet-blade missed Travers by a mere inch or two, and shivered metallically as it struck the stones.

"You frightful blighter!" panted Archie as he wriggled to his feet, and drove his fist forcibly into the dazed soldier's face. "I mean to say, take that, dash you! You poisonous—"

A stray bullet came out of nowhere, clipped Archie on the right temple, and he seemed to see a blaze of vivid fire, which was immediately superseded by a dense, impenetrable blackness. He felt himself falling, falling—Unconsciousness came, and he sprawled awkwardly over the senseless form of Travers.

At the same moment the enemy soldier who had caused this little drama fell backwards, hit between the shoulders by a bullet from another of the defenders.

It had all happened in less than a minute, but there was something extraordinarily fateful in this brief encounter.

Crowds of the Ameer's soldiers came pouring across the yard, and no notice was taken of Travers or Archie. It was assumed that they were dead. In the gloom it was impossible to tell friend from enemy. Confusion still reigned supreme.

And there lay the two St. Frank's fellows, both of them only slightly hurt, yet both of them temporarily senseless.

Travers was merely stunned, and not seriously so. Archie was knocked out by that sharp blow on the temple, but he was not likely to remain unconscious for long. Still, the facts remained. They were both sprawling here in the dust and smother, and both of them had every appearance of being dead.

The night came on, darker and darker. The sounds of strife were lessening, and rifle-shots were now few and far between. Gradually, relentlessly, the Ameer's soldiers were taking full possession of the fortress.

(Continued on page 14.)

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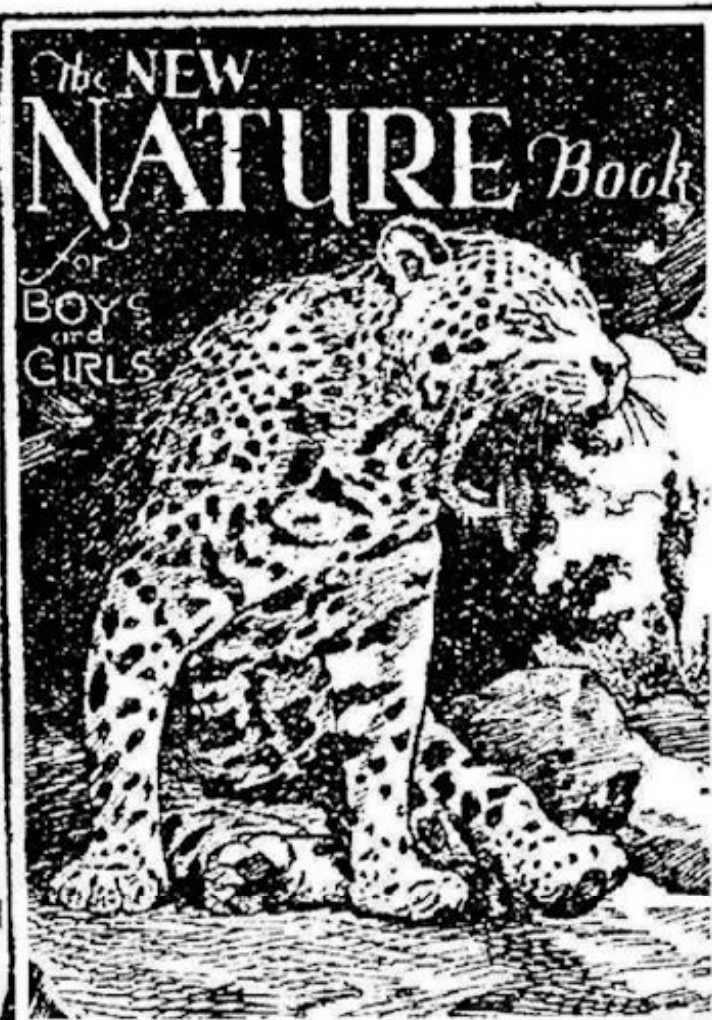
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(Continued from page 12.)

The last stand had failed.

The plucky little handful of defenders was now overwhelmed, and the enemy were in possession. And there was still no sign of the relief force. The worst had happened, or, at least, the enemy had prevailed. Perhaps it would have been better if every living soul in that fortress had perished during the struggle!

For to be taken prisoners was the worst fate of all, considering that the fiendish Ameer of Rishnir was their captor!



CHAPTER 8.

The Ameer Arrives!

LORD DORRIMORE shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, Manners, it's all up!" he said

wearily. "What an infernal nuisance! We've been in the thick of it for an hour, and yet we're still alive!"

"Would you rather be dead?" asked Irene's father.

"Wouldn't you?" retorted Dorrie. "We're prisoners, old man—prisoners of the Ameer! Can't you realise what it means?"

"Torture?"

"What else?" grunted his lordship. "Torture of the most vile kind! Hasn't it been clear to you that these soldiers have been ordered not to kill us? No, no! The Ameer does not want to be deprived of his devilish pleasure. Death would have been far preferable to the fate that awaits us!"

Mr. Manners breathed hard.

"If they harm a hair of my daughter's head——" he began harshly.

"Don't, old fellow!" said Dorrie. "What's the use?"

Mr. Manners groaned, and he and Dorrie continued to look about them with listless eyes. It had been difficult enough to talk, for their brains were reeling and they were suffering tortures from thirst. During the height of the fighting they had forgotten it, but now that the excitement was over they were aware, in a tenfold degree, of their sufferings.

The battle was over.

The Kypur Fortress was entirely in the hands of the Ameer's men. Dorrie and Mr. Manners, like everybody else, had been disarmed. Enemy officers were giving orders,

placing sentries and guards, and gradually making order out of disorder.

The unhappy maharajah and his two sons were locked up in one of the dungeons below. Practically all the native defenders had fallen during the fight. A good proportion of them were injured, and were being roughly tended.

Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners were standing against the wall in one of the bigger rooms of the fortress. A good few boys were there, too, the majority of them half asleep, or only semi-conscious because of their sufferings. Several were missing altogether.

Flickering lights were gleaming, and there was something eerie and sinister about the whole scene.

A man came into the room—an officer, dressed in neat, clean uniform. Obviously, he was not one of the officers who had been engaged in the fighting. It seemed that he belonged to the Ameer's staff.

"Do you speak English?" asked Dorrie, catching this man by the arm.

The officer turned, and stared haughtily.

"So, my fine Britisher," he said, in very excellent English, "your resistance did not last so very long, eh?"

"Never mind that!" replied Lord Dorrimore. "We put up a good scrap, anyhow. You needed a few thousand men to smash us. I want to tell you that water is badly needed here——"

"Water?" repeated the officer, with an amused glint in his eyes. "So we understood! And do you think, my good friend, that you will get any water?"

"For heaven's sake, man, don't talk in that tone!" put in Mr. Manners. "We're not thinking of ourselves, but of the wounded. There are men going mad with agonies. You will not deny water to the wounded and dying?"

The staff-officer merely smiled.

"It is not for me to say," he replied. "His Illustrious Highness, the Ameer, will shortly be here. Then, gentlemen, you can make your representations to him. At the moment, our orders are that no water is to be given to any of the prisoners."

"You hound!" said Dorrie furiously.

For a second, the officer half pulled out his sword; then he laughed again, and moved on, giving instructions to his men.

"The devils!" said Mr. Manners. "There is plenty of water to be obtained. In common humanity, they must bring a supply for the wounded, and for the women and girls——"

"Why speak of humanity in the same breath as the Ameer?" put in Lord Dorrimore. "Don't you understand that the beggar's main idea is to make us suffer? The more we need water, the less chance there is that we shall get any!"

Their attention was attracted by moans from two of the St. Frank's fellows a little further along the wall. One of them was Castleton, of the West House, and another was Alec Duncan. They were both inclined to be delirious. Their faces were almost unrecognisable.

"We must have water, sir!" said Russell, in agony. "These chaps are dying! They can't last much longer—"

He broke off as another figure appeared in the big doorway. And the figure was flanked on either side by richly-attired officers.

"The Ameer!" muttered Russell.

The newcomer walked slowly into the room. He was tall, upright, and immaculately clothed. His clean-shaven face was smooth, his eyes contained a glint of amusement. The Ameer of Rishnir had now arrived—after the cessation of hostilities. There was no longer any danger, and so he had come.

"We meet again then, Lord Dorrimore!" said His Illustrious Highness, as he bowed mockingly to Dorrie and Mr. Manners. "Dear me! You appear to be in a pitiable condition."

"Never mind our condition!" replied Dorrie grimly. "Water is needed for some of these boys, and for the wounded. Surely you will see that they are supplied?"

"Am I so fond of these boys that I am to pander to their petty wants?" retorted the Ameer sneeringly. "At my palace they were well cared for. You were all well cared for. Did I not give you the run of my place, and did I not treat you as my guests?"

"Yes; with the stated intention of killing us when you had grown tired of our company!" said Mr. Manners hotly.

The Ameer shrugged his shoulders.

"You were foolish enough to despise my hospitality," he said. "Now, my friends, you must make shift for yourselves. But where is the commander-in-chief? The inimitable Mr. Nelson Lee? You cannot tell me that he fell during the fighting?"

They did not attempt to answer him.

"Not that it makes much difference," continued the Ameer smoothly. "At dawn, gentlemen, you are all to perish. Am I not lenient? I am to allow you one more night of life."

"What are you going to do with us—burn us at the stake?" asked Dorrie bitterly. "Or is that too kindly?"

"You will see, my friend!" replied the Ameer. "For the present you are to be thrust into the dungeons of this fortress. At dawn, you will be brought out, and then you shall know what your fate is to be."

"And the women—and the young girls?" asked Mr. Manners, in a hard voice.

"They, too, will be served in precisely the same way," replied the Ameer. "You are British, and you have defied me. I am the supreme ruler of Rishnir and Kurpana. My word is law! Those who defy me shall die!"

"And those who defy the British Government get it in the neck, too!" said Lord Dorrimore, with equal mockery. "You are having your triumph just now, you black-hearted hound, but there will be a day of reckoning for you over this business!"

"Fool—fool!" snarled the Ameer, losing his control for a moment. "Do you think I care this for the British Government?" And he snapped his fingers contemptuously in the air. "Do you think I am in fear? I am the

monarch of this vast domain, and those who thwart me are put to death!"

He drew himself up, laughed harshly, and strode out.



CHAPTER 9.

The Threat!

MARY SUMMERS clasped her fingers feverishly as she looked down at Nipper's pale, calm

face.

"Is—is it all right now, Mr. Lee?" she asked, in a whisper.

"We cannot tell yet," said Nelson Lee steadily. "I have done everything in my power, and now Nature must do the rest. Happily, he has a splendid constitution, and I really do think there is a chance for him."

"Oh, it would be dreadful if he died!" said Irene.

There was just the four of them in that little store-room, with only the flickering light from the ill-burning lamp to illuminate the scene. Nipper was quite unconscious, and the operation was over.

He was now freed from the immediate danger of septic, for Nelson Lee had cleaned the wound with an antiseptic and had removed the tiny scrap of shrapnel. The detective was preparing to dress the wound.

"It is a thousand pities we have no water," he said regretfully. "I almost wish that the enemy would take the fortress, for that would mean salvation for some of these injured souls."

"We don't know what's been happening!" said Mary, in a voice of wonder. "But everything seems quiet now. There are no more shells, and no more shouts and cries. What do you think it means, Mr. Lee?"

"It means, no doubt, that the attack is over."

"And that the enemy has won?"

"I do not think that there is any uncertainty on that point," replied Lee, as he bent over Nipper. "The fight was going against us when Nipper was hit, and only a miracle could have saved the fortress. Yes, I think we have lost."

"Perhaps some of the other boys are dead, too!" said Irene sombrely. "I wonder—perhaps Ted—"

"It will do no good to worry yourself," said Nelson Lee. "Anything might have happened. Before long we shall see. As soon as I have finished this task—"

The door opened, and the Ameer strode in.

"Well!" he said smoothly. "So here you are, my excellent Mr. Lee."

"Oh!" murmured Mary and Irene, backing away from that gorgeous figure.

"You will pardon me," said Nelson Lee steadily. "I cannot leave my task."

The Ameer stood watching, his eyes glinting. Nelson Lee had not moved a muscle; he had given one glance at the Ameer, and

had then continued his work as though this visit had been anticipated. Yet Lee knew, in that second, that things must have gone very badly with the defenders.

For here was the Ameer himself, in all his glory.

"There is no end to your accomplishments, Mr. Lee!" said the tyrant of Rishnir. "I did not know that you were a surgeon."

"I am not."

"A mere amateur, eh?" said the Ameer. "Yet I do not doubt that you are highly skilled. I take it that you have been performing an operation on this boy?"

"I have."

"Splendid!" nodded the Ameer. "And yet, my dear Mr. Lee, need you have troubled?"

"There was a life to be saved, and it was my duty——"

"Do you not think it would have been better to let this boy die?" interrupted the Ameer, with a vicious note creeping into his voice. "Some deaths are preferable to others, are they not?"

"Oh, but you don't understand!" burst out Mary. "This—this boy is more than a son to Mr. Lee! He was hit by a fragment of shell, and he would have died——"

"I quite understand!" said the Ameer, nodding. "But my point is apropos, nevertheless. Why go to all this trouble, Mr. Lee, when every person of British blood is to die at dawn?"

"I take it that the fortress has fallen?" asked Lee.

"It is in my hands entirely," said the Ameer. "But have no fears for your young boys and girls. A few of them, I believe, have perished, but the majority are still alive. However, when dawn comes——"

"You would not mercilessly slaughter the injured?" asked Lee fiercely. "This boy is even now hovering between life and death! I have performed an operation, yes, but there is no certainty that it will be successful. Much will depend upon the next few hours. Water is necessary——"

"I am afraid there will be no water available for any of my prisoners," interrupted the Ameer serenely. "There is water at hand, I will grant. But I do not choose to——"

"But for the injured!" broke in Lee. "Look at this boy! Look at his swollen lips—his disfigured tongue! He is unconscious, I know, but——"

He broke off, and he compressed his lips.

"It is useless!" said the Ameer. "My mind is made up! Not one of you shall touch a single drop of water. If you suffer during the few remaining hours of life, so much the better!"

"Oh, you brute—you brute!" cried Mary, her eyes flashing.

"So you still have spirit, eh?" said the Ameer, turning to her. "I like to see it! Perhaps I may not be so harsh with some of these young ladies, Mr. Lee. I may extend my mercy——"

"You infernal hound!" said Nelson Lee furiously. "Who are you to talk of mercy? Be careful what you do! The greater your crimes, the greater will be your punishment!"

The Ameer scowled.

"Let me repeat that at dawn you will perish!" he said. "I am making no pretence about my own feelings. I shall enjoy your sufferings, Mr. Lee! You have defied me continuously, and——"

He broke off, as he observed a glint in Nelson Lee's eye.

"No, no!" he went on, shaking his head. "Do not have any false hopes, my good sir. This delay will not avail you. There will be no relief by dawn!"

"No?" said Lee quietly.

"Your eyes betrayed you, my friend!" sneered the Ameer. "It occurred to you, did it not, that the maharajah's army from Sakri might possibly get through before dawn? It struck you that the British force would arrive in time to save you. Rid your mind of these delusions. Let me tell you that I am supreme—my armies are all conquering. There can be no rescue for you—no salvation!"

And there was something in the Ameer's tone that hinted at even greater revelations!



CHAPTER 10.

In the Darkness!

DAKNESS—silence.

Outside, under the stars, all was still and quiet. After the storm, the calm.

Amidst the scenes of destruction and death, the exterior of the fortress was deserted. There were not even any lights; there were no guards.

At the front there were a number of soldiers, but towards the rear everything was deserted and quiet. Grim forms were lying about here and there. One or two of them groaned occasionally, but nobody came.

The dead and the dying were left just as they had fallen.

A figure stirred slightly, and then became still again. After a few minutes there was a further movement, and this time it was more certain. The figure sat up, and proceeded to blink.

"For the love of Samson!" it muttered. "What on earth—— Hallo! I don't seem to remember—— Well, well!"

Vivian Travers gradually came to his senses. He was aware of a terrible ache in his head, to say nothing of an awful sensation of bigness in his tongue. His throat felt on fire, and his breathing was rendered difficult.

But he was certainly alive.

"Now, let me see!" he muttered, holding his aching head. "Where am I? What's

wrong here? I'm all tangled up somehow. I don't seem to get hold of the right hang— Wait a minute, though—wait a minute, dear old fellow! Well, well!"

He remembered then. It all came back to him clearly. He had jumped down, and then unconsciousness had come to him. It seemed fairly certain that one of the enemy soldiers had managed to get in a blow before he, Travers, could do so. And, judging by the pain in his head, that blow had been at the back of the skull.

Travers was struck by the quietness, and he knew, without much thought, that the fortress had fallen. It was now in the hands of the Ameer. That much was clear.

He tried to move, having it in mind to get to his feet. Then he found that a form was sprawled over his legs, and he shuddered. A dead soldier was lying across him—

"I'm wrong!" he murmured. "By Samson! It's Archie!"

In the faint starlight he could now see that the form was not that of a dead soldier, but of Archie Glen-thorne. And Archie was strangely still. Was it possible that— Travers' heart gave a leap as he detected a faint movement in Archie's limbs. The genial ass of the Ancient House was coming to himself!

This was a surprising, gratifying discovery.

"What-ho!" mumbled Archie, after a few minutes had elapsed. "I mean to say, don't do it, Phipps! Absolutely not! Dash you, take the beastly thing away!"

"Quiet, old man—quiet!" urged Travers in a whisper. "It's all right. Don't excite yourself!"

But Archie was still unaware of his surroundings. He appeared to think that he was at St. Franks, and that Phipps, his faithful valet, was with him.

"Old horrors and rubbish!" he breathed. "Take the blighting thing out my dashed mouth, Phipps! I won't have these sponges pushed down the good old throat!"

Archie's throat, no doubt, was badly swollen, and he was in a kind of nightmare.

But Travers took no notice. A startling thought had just occurred to him.

"Wake up, Archie—wake up!" said Travers excitedly. "We've been left for dead, and we might be able to gain some advantage from this!"

For Travers, in a flash, had seen the possibilities.

Archie came to himself after another two or three minutes had elapsed.

"Good gad!" he said. "Travers, what? I mean to say, how dashed funny! And I



Finding Travers' weight heavy on his shoulders, Archie shifted his foot. Next moment the entire ground caved in under him, and he and Travers went tumbling down amidst a smother of dust.

thought— Eh? But, laddie, where are we?"

"I don't know how you got here, Archie, but it's as clear as daylight that we have been left here for dead!" said Travers. "See! There are other figures lying about. They haven't troubled to move any of them. But we're not dead—we're alive! And that will give us a chance to find out the lie of the land."

Archie remembered everything then. His main sensation was one of relief. He had, after all, saved Travers from that bayonet. But Archie never thought it necessary to

explain to his companion why he was there. Incidentally, Travers never knew that Archie had saved his life—and Archie kept that secret quite to himself.

"The scheme, at the moment, seems fairly obvious," murmured Archie. "I mean to say, water, what? If only we can trickle away somewhere, and seize a few thousand gallons of the good old liquid stuff, we shall be able to enjoy ourselves. Personally, I could imbibe the entire contents of a dashed water-cart!"

"We're both horribly thirsty—and we're groggy, too," said Travers. "But before we do anything else, we'd better find out how things stand. The fortress has fallen, and I expect it's completely in the hands of the Ameer's men. But there'll be no harm in having a squint through one of these windows, just to find out what's doing. Are you game, old fellow?"

"Game for absolutely anything!" replied Archie. "Whoa! The good old ground appear to be rising up against me. Swaying, and all that sort of thing. How frightfully ridic."

Somehow they managed to get to their feet, and then they discovered that they were not so helpless as they had feared. Perhaps the cooling air of the night had served to revive them. And they tried to forget their agonies.

Comparatively near to them, a little slit-like window could be seen in the wall of the fortress. It was some little distance from the ground, but a light was showing through it.

They crept nearer and nearer, and were pleased by the fact that nobody interfered with them. Officially, they were dead.

"Now, one of us has got to climb up, and have a squint through that window!" said Travers, in a low voice. "Who's it going to be, Archie? Shall I get on your shoulders, or will you get on mine?"

"Absolutely!" said Archie readily.

"Which shall it be?" asked Travers softly.

"Yes!" murmured Archie.

Travers gave it up, and he instructed Archie to bend down, and then he proceeded to climb on to his shoulders. After a moment or two, he succeeded in getting a hand-grip between some of the rough stones. Then he pulled himself higher and higher, until his head was on a level with that slit-like window.

He looked in, and his eyes became larger.

There, in full sight, were Nelson Lee and the Ameer of Rishnir! The flickering light of a quaint lamp illuminated the scene. A little further off, two of the Moor View girls were standing, their faces pale, their eyes filled with scorn and indignation.

And there was a form on the little trestle in the middle of the room—the form of an injured junior.

"Well, well!" breathed Travers. "We now know one thing for certain. The Ameer is on the premises, and, judging by all appearances, he seems to be master of the ceremonies!"

CHAPTER 11.

Something Worth Hearing!



YOU will be foolish in the extreme, my dear Mr. Lee, if you count upon any help reaching you before dawn," the Ameer was saying. "Nothing can save you and your companions from the fate that I have ordained."

Travers made a grimace.

Those words, which had come to him quite clearly, told him much. So they were all to be executed at dawn! This was certainly a handy piece of information, particularly as he and Archie were already supposed to be dead. There might even be a chance of their escaping the Ameer's devilry.

"You are very confident," came Nelson Lee's voice. "But there is such a thing, your Highness, as over-confidence. History is full of such examples."

"But history, in this case, will be silent," said the Ameer gloatingly. "There will be no report of this affair at dawn, Mr. Nelson Lee. No word of it will ever get beyond the borders of my own domain."

"I make no appeal to you on my own behalf, or on behalf of Lord Dorrimore or Mr. Manners," said Nelson Lee steadily. "But when it comes to these boys and girls—"

"They shall be treated in precisely the same manner," interrupted the Ameer. "You are all British—and therefore, in my eyes, you are all vermin."

Nelson Lee squared his shoulders.

"Do not say that again—or it is possible that I shall knock you down!" he said grimly.

"And in attempting to knock me down, Mr. Lee, you will die!"

"That may be so much the better!" replied Lee. "But I warn you! I am your prisoner, but I am not afraid of you!"

"That," breathed Travers, "is the stuff to give him!"

The Ameer shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you would like to know why I am so confident?" he went on, still in that same mocking tone. "Then let me tell you something, Mr. Lee. My main army has intercepted Rao Kahn's relief force from Sakri. That relief force is now cut to pieces."

"Oh!" came a murmur from Irene and Mary.

"It is no longer a force, but a rabble!" said the Ameer, with satisfaction. "And my army is progressing triumphantly towards the Kurpana capital. Before many days have elapsed this entire country will be in my possession. It may further interest you to know that the Kypur Pass is heavily ambushed."

"I am not interested in the slightest," replied Lee coldly.

"But you will be when I tell you more!" pursued the Ameer, taking an evident delight in this interview. "My soldiers are hidden in the darkness of the pass, and at both ends the pass is mined—heavily mined, Mr. Lee. At a touch from a button, these explosives will be fired."

Travers could not quite see the drift of all this, and Archie, at that moment, gave a little jerk, and Travers nearly toppled to the ground. But after a few moments Archie became steady again, and Travers relieved him somewhat by clutching harder at the sill of the little window.

"Carry on, old thing—carry on!" came a murmur from Archie. "I skidded slightly, but all is well now."

Suddenly the Ameer bent forward, and he looked at Nelson Lee with glittering, triumphant eyes. Travers' only regret was that he was not within that store-room, so that he could blacken those hateful eyes.

"Now, Mr. Lee, I shall tell you something that *will* interest you!" snarled the tyrant of Rishnir. "It has come to my knowledge that a considerable relief force, entirely composed of British soldiers, is on its way to this fortress!"

"I have been aware of that fact for some time!" replied Lee steadily.

"But you were not aware, were you, that this strong British force is even now within a few miles?" said the Ameer. "Yet such is the case! And in order to reach this fortress, the accursed British must come through the Kypur Pass. I have taken measures to allow these British soldiers a clear, uninterrupted journey through a section of my country. They have been treated with honour, with civility. They have been led to believe that the Kypur Pass is free. And they, being British, will not dream for one moment that I should dare to lift a hand against them."

"Well?" rapped out Lee.

"This strong relief force will enter the Kypur Pass during the night!" said the Ameer. "You were quite right, Mr. Lee, in allowing a gleam to come into your eyes a little while ago. It is quite true—the relief force is almost here. It will enter the Kypur Pass without a suspicion, and then, after every man is within those rock fastnesses, one of the mines will be exploded. There will be no way of escape. And immediately afterwards the second mine will be exploded. Your relief force of British soldiers will be bottled up in the mountains."

"You hound!" said Lee, in anguish.

"And then, being helpless, they will be massacred!" shouted the Ameer, roaring with laughter. "Yes, my friend—massacred! Every one! Every soldier and every officer! Not one will be allowed to escape! That will be the fate of the hundreds of men who have come to your rescue! And at dawn you and your accursed companions will die a death of a thousand agonies!"

The man had changed into a fiend. His face had become distorted, and his eyes burned madly. This was the hour of his triumph! Not only was he going to take his

revenge on these Britishers who had defied him, but he meant to slaughter the entire relief force!

And Nelson Lee was horrified—since he knew that he could do nothing to avert the tragedy.

But outside, in the darkness of the night, two juniors were crouching. One of them had heard everything. And Providence, in an extraordinary way, was about to show them the road to salvation!



CHAPTER 12.

The Tunnel!

IVIAN TRAVERS was aware that his heart was thumping heavily.

It was rather a wonder that he did not give himself away; for, cool though he was, he could have shouted aloud with anger now.

A score of fantastic ideas flashed through his head. He and Archie were free! They were believed to be dead! Would it not be possible for them to get to the Kypur Pass, to creep through, and to give a warning to the oncoming British soldiers?

And then, in the next moment, Travers knew that such a thing would be impossible.

Neither he nor Archie knew the way. Once they left this fortress, they would be lost amongst the rocks. And even supposing they *did* reach the pass, by some miracle, how could they get through? It was ambushed, and they would be seen. Moreover, it was many miles, for it was necessary to take a long detour.

The actual distance from the fortress to the pass was not very great. But it was impossible to go direct, owing to the intervention of many rocky peaks, absolutely impassable.

While Travers was thinking in this way, the unfortunate Archie was suffering acutely. He had been in a very unstable condition at the first, and Travers' weight proved rather too much for him.

But Archie was a fellow who did not believe in complaining, and he had suffered in silence, minute after minute.

He attempted to ease himself, and he thought that he might be able to do this by getting a firmer foothold. He shifted his left foot, and placed it on a ridge of stone, near the wall. There was a litter of broken masonry here, for, earlier in the fight, a shell had struck the ground with devastating force at the base of the wall.

"What ho!" breathed Archie. "That's slightly better, what?"

But it didn't really seem to be. For as he allowed his full weight to rest on that leg, he felt the stone giving way. He tried to recover himself, but it was too late.

And then an extraordinary thing happened.

Without the slightest warning, the entire ground caved in under Archie, and he and Travers went tumbling down, amidst a smother of dust. They seemed to slither for yards, accompanied by boulders and rocks and stones. They were bewildered and dazed—and not a little bruised.

For a moment or two, indeed, it seemed that they dropped sheer. Then, with a jarring thud, Archie pulled up short, and Travers bumped violently into him. They sprawled over, gasping and choking.

"Good gad!" gurgled Archie. "I mean to say, a dashed earthquake, what?"

"Just a minute, dear old fellow!" came a painful murmur from Travers. "Be good enough to shift your confounded boot out of my ear! For the love of Samson! What's happened? Where are we? One moment I was looking through that window, and the next moment I came down into the depths."

"Don't go down in the mine, daddy, as it were!" mumbled Archie, as he tried to pick himself up. "Odds pains and agonies! I rather believe, laddie, that my right foot has been left somewhere on the road. I can't feel the dashed thing!"

Travers managed to sit up, and he was astonished to find that he was not particularly hurt. Everything was as black as ink, except for a patch of dimness above.

"We've fallen into a hole of some kind," he muttered. "Just a minute, Archie! I believe I've got— Yes, here they are! Matches, by Samson! Would you believe it?"

He pulled out a small silver box from his trousers pocket, and struck a match. His main object in doing this was to discover what manner of hole it was they had fallen into. He also wanted to see how they could get out.

Actually his thoughts took quite another turn.

For as the match flared up Travers found himself looking into a great black space, like an enormous cavern. It stretched away widely, dipping down into the very bowels of the earth.

And in the flaring of the match Travers could see that this was no natural cavity, but a man-made structure. The walls were of stone, old, dusty. They were, indeed, incredibly ancient. They reminded Travers of Roman workmanship.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" he murmured. "A tunnel! A whacking great tunnel, dear old fellow!"

"Oh, rather!" groaned Archie.

The match went out, and Travers found himself trembling all over. He was usually a very cool fellow, but for once in his life he felt madly excited. A thought had occurred to him, something had come into his mind, hammering fiercely upon his brain—a recollection of something he had heard earlier.

He took two or three steps forward. Then he struck another match, and his heart, if anything, thumped more heavily than before.

"For the love of Samson," he ejaculated

hoarsely. "It is! Archie, dear old fellow, it is!"

Archie, who had joined him, and who was looking about in a bewildered way, gave a feeble protest.

"Is *what*, laddie?" he asked.

"It's the tunnel!"

"The which?"

"The tunnel!"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "I can see, dash you, that it's a tunnel."

"But it's *the* tunnel!" insisted Travers.

"What-ho!" said Archie listlessly. "I'm frightfully sorry, old bean, but I'm afraid I don't gather the trend. Absolutely not! What, I mean to say, does it matter if it's *the* tunnel, or any other tunnel?"

"Weren't you with us when the maharajah was talking to Mr. Lee?" asked Travers keenly. "Listen, Archie! The old boy was saying that there was a legend connected with this old fortress."

"A legend?"

"Yes," said Travers. "The commandant scoffed at it, but the maharajah was insistent. He said that there was a tunnel, leading from the fortress to a spot beyond the Rishnir entrance of the Kypur Pass. A direct tunnel, you understand, going right underground, connecting this fortress with the open beyond the mountains."

"Good gad!" said Archie, without in the least comprehending.

"And the maharajah was right," said Travers. "The old boy knew exactly what he was talking about. But I don't suppose the tunnel would ever have been discovered if it hadn't been for the shell-fire. One of those shells hit the ground and weakened the roof of the tunnel, just where it passed underneath. And your weight did the trick. We fell through, and here we are!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "Here we positively are, laddie! And now that we're here, dash it, what next?"

Travers was positively quivering.

"You don't understand, dear old fellow," he said. "The Ameer's own guns have provided us with a solution to the whole problem! That fiend has opened the way for us to save every soul in the garrison!"



CHAPTER 13.

The Great Adventure!

ARCHIE GLENTHORNE was hopelessly bewildered.

"Dear old tea-pot, I rather think I'm a bit dense," he said feebly. "The good old brain is slightly addled. I mean to say, I don't understand what you mean, dash it!"

"You'll understand in a minute, Archie!" said Travers. "This is the legendary tunnel—the tunnel that the Ameer knows nothing whatever about! That's a big point

to remember. The Ameer knows nothing whatever about this tunnel!"

"So you said, old thing."

"And we're supposed to be dead," continued Travers. "That's another point. And, as we're supposed to be dead, there'll be no search for us. We shan't even be missed."

"But I mean, look here——"

"If this tunnel is open all the way through, we can get out," said Travers tensely. "We can reach the open ground, on the other side of the Kypur Pass. That means, Archie, that we shall be in time to warn the British force."

"What British force?" asked Archie wonderingly.

"Great Samson!" ejaculated Travers. "Of course—of course! I heard everything the Ameer was saying, but you didn't. I'd forgotten that, Archie, dear old fellow. How ridiculous!"

In a few words he explained to Archie what he had overheard through the window, and then naturally Archie was in a better position to appreciate the possibilities.

"It seems frightfully awful!" said Archie. "I mean, this blighter of an Ameer, threatening to do all these dashed massacres, and so forth. Of course, it may only be a spot of bluff——"

"It's no bluff, Archie," said Travers grimly. "The Kypur Pass is mined, and if that British force goes into it, it will be wiped out."

"Like a sum off the blackboard, what?"

"Yes, wiped out!" repeated Travers. "And then what hope will there be for any of our pals? They'll all be executed at dawn!"

"In the cold, grey light," nodded Archie. "I rather suppose we shall figure in that scene, too?"

"Not unless we're discovered," murmured Travers. "And I half believe that I should like to be discovered if we can't do anything to help. We don't want to be the only survivors, Archie. And we shan't be, either. We're going to pull this thing off, dear old fellow. We're going to save the whole crowd!"

"Then it seems to me that we ought to be up and doing," observed Archie stoutly. "It's a case, old boy, of bracing the sinews and gathering up the good old tissues. Absolutely! In other words, lead on, Macduff!"

"Wait!" said Travers. "We can't go on into the darkness. We shall have to think of some wheeze."

"That's for you, old onion," said Archie. "When it comes to thinking, I'm absolutely as useful as a watermelon. Good gad! What a thought! Watermelon, what? Sundry trickles of juiciness——"

"Dry up, you fathead!"

"Imposs., laddie!" sighed Archie. "A chappie can't dry up when he is already dried. Dash it, the good old tongue is simply a chunk of leather. Absolutely a chunk of leather, including the hobnails. When I lick my lips, it feels as though some blighter is treading on my face!"

It said much for the spirit of these two juniors that they were able to speak so lightly and so frivolously. They were each suffering intense agonies, but their excitement was such that they were buoyed up with hope. They were keyed to a tremendous pitch of efficiency. They forgot their aches and pains; forgot their injuries.

They were rather awed by the tremendous task that was before them.

They, of all the garrison, were the only living souls who could bring succour to the main body. The salvation of the entire party was in their keeping! There was no certainty that they would succeed, but at least they could try. And while there was life, there was hope!

"Listen, Archie!" said Travers, after a brief pause. "We don't know exactly what the time is, but it can't be very late. If this tunnel is open, we ought to get to the exit, near the Kypur Pass, in about an hour. If it isn't open, there'll be nothing more to be said. The chances are that the tunnel will be caved in in several places, and that we shall find our way barred. But I'm not going to believe anything like that until we see it with our own eyes."

"The fact is, old optimist, you're a frightfully good sort of tonic," said Archie. "One of those dashed chaps who are full of beans. A genius, what? I mean, I couldn't have thought of a thing like this——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Travers. "Look here! We've got to climb out of this tunnel again—back into the fortress yard."

"Eh? I mean, what?" said Archie, startled. "Isn't that slightly leg-before-wicket, old dear? I mean to say, don't you think there's liable to a be a small spot of trouble?"

"It can't be helped," said Travers. "We must have light!"

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie. "Oh, rather! I see what you mean. Light, what? The good old illumination, so to speak?"

"It would be a crazy thing to start on this journey with only a few matches," continued Travers. "Well, in the yard of the fortress, growing close to the wall, are a lot of mountain bushes. They're all dead—dried up with the sun. But I noticed them earlier in the day—rough stalks and creeper-like shoots. They've been dead for weeks, and they must be as dry as tinder."

"Torches, what?" asked Archie keenly.

"Yes, torches," said Travers. "Come on! Let's get out of this, and gather as much of the stuff as we can. Then we can dodge back again, make a few rough torches, and set off."

"We've got to remember, old darling, that the lives of the others are in our hands!" murmured Archie sagely. "We, so to speak, are chosen ones, what? I mean, if we fail, the balloon goes up!"

"We mustn't fail, Archie!" said Travers, his voice vibrant with intensity. "We can't fail! It isn't even to be thought of! If this tunnel is open, it's in our power to save hundreds of lives, including our own. And



The battle raged desperately. Handforth was doing tremendous work, using his rifle as a club. Again and again he swung his weapon round, and men fell. "Come on, St. Frank's!" he thundered. "Never say die!"

the longer we stand here talking, the less chance we shall have of success!"

"In other words—tally ho!" said Archie brightly.

Somehow, they managed to climb up the broken rocks and stone, and they succeeded in getting out into the yard of the fortress once more. Everything was just the same. The stars glinted down upon that grim scene, and here and there, in the building, lights could be seen. Round here, at the rear, there were no guards—no watchers.

Travers and Archie got to work, and within five minutes they had finished. Then, like shadows, they dropped back into that tunnel—which was unknown to all save themselves.

If the Ameer should discover it before they got back, and cause this end of it to be blocked up—

But Vivian Travers refused to allow his mind to dwell upon such a hideous possibility. A great and growing conviction was upon him that Providence had provided them with a lever that they could wield to the ultimate undoing of the Ameer, and the salvation of the entire St. Frank's party.



CHAPTER 14.

Through the Tunnel!

FIRST RATE!" said Travers enthusiastically.

"As good as some of Brock's finest!" declared Archie with conviction. "But I rather think, laddie, that we'd better not lose much time. These dashed things are inclined to burn somewhat rapidly."

They were back in the tunnel, and they had spent a good half-hour manufacturing crude torches. This task had been accomplished in the darkness, and, in all the circumstances, the two juniors had done extremely well.

They had made seven torches altogether—rough, whiskery things, bound together by toughened, sun-dried creeper. Travers had applied a match to one of them, and it was now burning steadily, and giving a good light. Trails of smoke were pouring from it, too.

They were some little distance up the tunnel—for Travers had no wish for the flare to be seen by anybody outside the fortress. They had penetrated so far that there was little risk of this.

"Come on!" said Travers briskly.

They set off almost at the double, quite unconscious of their sore and blistered feet. As they proceeded their hopes grew apace. They could see that the tunnel was, indeed, an

enormous one. It towered above them, and stretched ever onwards into the darkness. Now and again they came to a spot where the stones were loosened, and where they were littered about on the floor of the tunnel. But, for the most part, the ancient structure was in a splendid state of preservation.

And it was straight—as straight as a die! It penetrated the mountains in a direct line from the fortress to the Pass.

For the first two or three hundred yards it had sloped downwards in a long decline. But now it was level, and the flickering gleams



The battle raged desperately. Handforth was doing he swung his weapon round, and men fell.

from the torch only penetrated a few yards into the Stygian darkness.

"It looks rather good!" said Travers, during a short pause while they lit the second torch. "That one has lasted us pretty well, Archie. Do you believe it now? Do you believe that yarn about this tunnel leading to the Pass?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "I mean to say, seeing is believing, what? Here we have the dashed thing!"

Archie swayed as he spoke, and Travers looked at him keenly.

"Feeling bad, dear old fellow?" he asked.

"Good gad, no," said Archie. "I mean to say, certainly not. Absolutely not! The good old tissues may be slightly wilting, but—but—"

He swayed again, and would have fallen, but for Travers' hand. He made a strange, choking sound in his throat. But, with another big effort, he pulled himself together.



work, using his rifle as a club. Again and again Frank's!" he thundered. "Never say die!"

"It's nothing!" he breathed, with a gulp. "A sort of dizziness for a minute. Dash it! How frightfully ridic."

Travers was feeling exactly the same. If there was any pause, his senses began to reel. It was only by keeping on, and keeping on, that they were able to hold up.

"Water, as it were!" said Archie faintly. "If we only had a drop—Sorry, dear old boy! I didn't quite mean—But hadn't we better do some trickling?"

He shook himself free from Travers' grip, and a moment later they were hurrying onwards again. They both felt better now they were on the move. The light of their torch showed them the tunnel black in front of them. Then suddenly Travers' heart gave a leap. It wasn't black further on! There was something in the way—some obstruction—

"For the love of Samson!" said Travers fearfully.

He thought, in that dreadful moment, that the tunnel was caved in, and that further progress would be impossible. But a minute later he was relieved. The tunnel was only partially smashed. There was still a large opening, through which he and Archie were successful in passing. And then, beyond, they encountered the most amazing surprise yet.

Travers, holding his torch above his head, peered eagerly into the great tunnel. He wanted to see if there were any further falls. But no; it stretched on and on. And there, only ten or fifteen yards ahead, was a gleaming, scintillating trickle, running from one side of the tunnel to the other.

Water!

Vivian Travers made a strange sound in his throat, and at the same time Archie cried aloud—a croaking, plaintive sound.

"Water, laddie—water!" he said desperately.

"It can't be!" panted Travers. "It's a mirage, dear old fellow! I can't believe—"

"But listen!" breathed Archie, in the intensity of his joy. "Listen, hear it!"

"Great Caesar! You're right!"

They dashed forward as though they had suddenly become mad. Falling on their hands and knees, and allowing the blazing torch to drop to the ground, they dipped their hands in the water. It was a stream—a natural spring, trickling across the tunnel. And in that first touch they knew that the water was fresh and pure. They would not have cared if it was semi-poisonous.

"Go easy—go easy!" exclaimed Travers, in alarm. "Oh, Archie! I've read about this sort of thing! You'll kill yourself if you drink too much! Just wet your tongue first—only wet your tongue!"

"Good gad! I—I—"

"I know it will cost you a tremendous effort—but it might be fatal if you drink deeply."

The temptation was wellnigh irresistible. Yet, by a strong effort of will, they managed to check themselves. They dabbed their dripping hands upon their mouths, upon their

swollen tongues. The relief was so intense, so enormous, that they nearly went crazy with the joy of it.

Water—life-giving, wonderful water!

Never in their lives had they realised the glories of water. And as the precious liquid was absorbed into their parched and aching bodies, they felt stronger. They became clearer-minded, and more resolute.

After a time, they were able to drink a little. Again and again they plunged their heads into that stream, and when they stood up after two or three minutes of it, they felt re-born.

"Archie, dear old fellow," said Travers quietly. "I didn't like to say it before, but I knew perfectly well that we should never have got through without water. We were both on the point of collapse. This has saved us. And it seems to me that it's a proof that we shall win through!"

"Nothing is going to stop us now!" replied Archie steadily. "We're going on, old thing—on and on. And, dash it, I don't care if it snows! I mean to say, I feel that I could push a dashed bus over! I feel like that Kruschen chappie, who leaps over tables and things. Absolutely!"



CHAPTER 15.

Through!

THAT water had made all the difference between failure and success.

The two juniors now felt not only revived, but strong. Actually, they were still very, very groggy after their adventures. But, by comparison with their former condition, they were now like giants.

They had drunk very little—only sufficient to revive them. If they had given way to their natural inclinations they would probably have been writhing on the floor of the tunnel in acute agony. For too much water would have been serious.

They had no handkerchiefs on them, but they ripped their shirts off, and soaked them in the water. Then, bare to the waist, and with their soaking shirts in their hands, they continued onwards, after having lit another torch.

Occasionally, they dabbed the moist cotton to their lips, and sucked some of the moisture.

It helped them to keep on. And now, too, they were filled with an ever-growing conviction that they were to succeed in their task.

They had forgotten the possibility of the tunnel being blocked. They refused to believe that any such tragedy would bring ruin to their plan.

But the tunnel seemed to go on everlastingly.

At last, they came to their final torch, and Travers was serious. He even went to the length of dampening this torch, in the hope of making it burn slower. But he had to be careful, since too much dampening would smother it altogether.

"It can't be much further now, Archie—it can't!" he said repeatedly. "And yet, confound it, we never seem to get to the end."

But Archie was full of confidence.

"After what's happened, laddie, you're not going to tell me that we shall come a cropper," he said. "Absolutely not! If the good old torch fizzles out, then we'll stagger on in the darkness. Who cares?"

"That's the spirit, dear old fellow!" said Travers, nodding.

They went on, and then, for the first time, they came to a turn in the tunnel. Until now, it had been direct. They were full of hope, for this sudden turn seemed significant. Perhaps the exit would be just beyond.

But when they rounded the bend the tunnel continued endlessly onwards.

They were running now, running as hard as they could manage. The torch was getting perilously short. After it had burnt out they would have nothing. Travers only possessed two matches, and these, of course, would not last them a minute.

Travers waited until the torch almost burnt his fingers. Then he was compelled to drop it. They ran on, seeing by the light of the last flickering flame that rose from the stub.

At last the flame died out, and they were in pitch darkness.

"That," said Archie, "has torn it!"

"We can't help it!" muttered Travers. "Come on! It's the only thing we can do now. We've got to carry through with it, Archie. Let's hope there aren't any pitfalls."

"I expect there'll be dozens!" said Archie. "I mean, isn't that just the way of things? While we had the light, there were none. But now that we're in the darkness, we shall find ourselves diving into sundry gullies and crevices."

But he was wrong.

They felt their way onwards, keeping to the side of the tunnel, and walking on blindly. It was much slower now, since they felt completely baffled. They lost their sense of direction. And, if by chance they left the wall, they were in danger of going back on their own tracks.

It was bewildering, maddening.

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Then, just when they were fearing they would fail, Travers uttered a cry of joy. Somewhere in the distance, in the intense blackness, they saw something. And the very fact that they could see was significant. A little patch—a kind of dull, grey blob.

"What is it?" asked Archie breathlessly.

"The sky!" said Travers. "Can't you see? It's the sky—it's the end of the tunnel!"

"Sundry cheers and various shouts of triumph!" said Archie. "In other words, old bean, good egg!"

That final lap, so to speak, seemed endless. But at last they reached the exit. They came out upon a rough, rugged mountainside. They could feel the cool night air beating upon them, and, overhead, the sky had vanished behind a grim bank of threatening clouds. Rain, in fact, was beginning to fall.

But the two juniors hardly noticed it.

They were trying to get their bearings. They seemed to be in a wild wilderness.

But after their eyes had grown accustomed to the changed conditions, they saw that they were high up on the hillside, and the black entrance to the Kypur Pass was a little to their left. Stretching away into the mysterious distance was a rude track, leading down to the plains, lower.

And they beheld some curious red points of light on that track. There seemed to be myriads of them, almost like fireflies. The two juniors were puzzled. It seemed to them, too, that they could hear a strange, rhythmic thudding. Then, after a moment of further bewilderment, Travers jumped to the truth.

"Look, Archie!" he ejaculated, pointing. "What an ass I was not to think of it before. It's the relief force!"

"Good gad!"

"The British troops!" said Travers, in a voice of exultation. "Can't you hear the tramping of their feet? Listen! They're on the march! They're just about to go into the Kypur Pass!"

"Odds narrow squeaks!"

"And those little points of fire we can see are their cigarettes and pipes," said Travers shrewdly. "Where would the British Tommy be without his 'fag' on the march? Look! There are hundreds of them, stretching right into the distance! It's a big force, Archie!"

"Well, laddie, wouldn't it be a bright scheme to dash down and warn them?" asked Archie. "I mean to say, there's going to be a dashed pile of trouble unless we get busy. We shall only be just in time!"

Like possessed beings they went scrambling down the rocky hillside, fearing lest they should be too late. Yet they need not have worried. The Ameer's ambush would surely wait until the entire force had got into the fastnesses of the sinister Pass.

And, as yet, none of the soldiers had entered the trap.

Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne had arrived in the nick of time!



CHAPTER 16.

To the Rescue!

HALT!" A long line of weary, khaki-clad Tommies, bronzed and tanned by the Indian sun, came to a halt. A keen-faced young officer was staring at two ragged, wild-looking figures. They had come unexpectedly from the darkness, and they had spoken, to the officer's amazement, in English.

"What's this?" said the officer. "Who on earth are you?"

"My name's Travers," said one of the figures. "I belong to the party of St. Frank's fellows that has been besieged in the Kypur Fortress. This chap is Archie Glenthorne, one of my chums."

"Absolutely!" nodded Archie.

"Great Scott!" said the officer, removing his cap and scratching his head. "Hold on a minute, kids! Where's the major? We can't—"

Another officer came hurrying up.

"What's wrong here, Lieutenant Benson?" he asked sharply.

Lieutenant Benson saluted.

"Two English youngsters, sir," he replied. "Just came up to us out of the darkness." The major gave the pair a keen, suspicious look.

"Things are bad at the fortress, sir!" said Travers earnestly. "The Ameer of Rishnir is there. He's going to kill everybody at dawn, and he's set a trap for you in the Kypur Pass. We came to warn you!"

"Nonsense!" said the major. "What ridiculous idiocy is this? There's no danger in the Kypur Pass! They wouldn't dare to interfere with—"

"But it's true, sir!" urged Travers. "You don't undersand! The Ameer is mad with rage, and he's reckless. There's an ambush in the Pass, and both ends of it are mined. The plan is for you to get into it with all your men, and then you're going to be massacred."

"That sounds interesting!" remarked Lieutenant Benson, with a whistle.

"These boys must be half crazy!" said the major gruffly. "There cannot be any truth in this wild story."

But after he had heard all the facts—after Travers and Archie had gone into every detail—Major Howard changed his tone. That story had a ring of conviction about it, and he could now tell, by looking closely at the two juniors, that they were well-nigh dropping from exhaustion.

"As I live, I believe the boys are right!" said the major amazedly. "And this—this infernal Indian upstart has had the nerve to mine the Pass? There'll be trouble over this, lieutenant!"

"Trouble for the Ameer," said Lieutenant Benson, nodding.

"You mustn't lose any time, sir!" said Travers, as he rocked on his heels. "The only way is to go through that underground tunnel. Two or three hundred men are needed—all the whole force, if you can do it. There aren't many hours before dawn, and it would be absolutely awful if you get there too late!"

"We shan't be too late, young 'un!" said the major briskly. "Come! I want to have a look at this tunnel you speak about. There's no immediate hurry, so you needn't get flustered. There are several hours before dawn. We haven't entered the Pass yet, so we are not in danger. And if any of these Indians try their tricks with us we'll soon show them what we're made of!"

The reaction for Travers and Archie was tremendous. Now that their mission was accomplished, and that they had saved the British force, they were on the point of dropping. Indeed, after they had indicated the tunnel entrance, and had given the major a few more details, they completely collapsed.

But it didn't matter now.

Their task was over, and they were able to sleep. Where they slept they did not know, except that they were taken off by

some of the British soldiers and placed on some piles of blankets.

For an hour or two after that there was much activity on these rocky hillsides. Rain was now falling steadily, and visibility was reduced to a few hundred feet. This, in a way, was providential, since the Ameer's look-outs, in the Kypur Pass, would be unable to see what was going on beyond the entrance.

And in the fortress, the hour of fate was drawing near.

None of the prisoners slept. They were, in fact, all out in the open in the steadily-falling rain. There had been an effort on the part of the Ameer's soldiers to stop them, but they could not be checked.

Some of the St. Frank's fellows, at first, had heard the rain, and they had forced their way out and had gained some measure of relief from their appalling thirsts. Then had come the girls, and the women, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners. The guards were powerless. They could, of course, have shot the prisoners in an endeavour to enforce obedience, but they had been ordered to let them live.

"Rain—glorious rain!" said Handforth. "Nothing else seems to matter now!"

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"But it will be dawn before long!" said Church, with a shiver. "Where's everybody? Some of the chaps are missing, aren't they?"

"I expect they're dead!" said McClure huskily.

They were all quite hopeless. The Ameer had let everybody know that the British force was to be massacred, and that the other relief force from Sakri had been cut up. They were isolated, helpless.

The Ameer had planned to let them go to their deaths still thirsty, but the Ameer, for all his power, had been unable to prevent this merciful rain. And it helped to strengthen the courage of the prisoners.

It was a strange, impressive scene outside the fortress. On one side were the women from the domestic staff of the Idar Palace. They were all grouped together, some of them hysterical, some brave and calm. The St. Frank's fellows were grouped together, too, and Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore were standing by the trestle upon which lay the form of Nipper.

Nipper had recovered consciousness now. He was well covered, but his face was gaining the rain, and at times Nelson Lee bent over him, and allowed him to suck moisture from a wet rag. But Nipper was very weak—very ill. He felt no pain, however, for the local anæsthetic that Nelson Lee had applied was still having its effect.

"Is there no hope, guv'nor?" he whispered. "Where are all the other fellows? What's been happening?"

"Hush, young 'un!" said Lee. "We are prisoners, and the Ameer is determined to do his worst. We are unarmed, and can do nothing in reply. We must suffer bravely."

It wanted half an hour to dawn when the Ameer himself appeared, cold, stern, grim.

"It is as well, gentlemen, that you have come out into the open!" he said, as he approached Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore. "It has saved my soldiers the trouble of bringing you out. Here, in this yard, the last scene of this drama is to be enacted."

CHAPTER 17.

The Ameer's Madness!



THE Ameer of Rishnir was changed now. There was no mocking note in his voice. He was grim and

ruthless. It seemed to Nelson Lee, too, that he was worried. Perhaps the rainfall had upset him; perhaps he had heard disturbing news from his armies.

"We are at your mercy!" said Lee contemptuously. "To start any fight in these circumstances would be merely to indulge in a brawl. If you intend to kill us, we are powerless to resist."

"I am well aware of that!" replied the Ameer. "Within half an hour dawn will be here, and with the first light in the sky you will answer for your insolence. I am

the Ameer of Rishnir and Kurpana, and all those who defy me suffer death!"

His egotism was astounding. He seemed to think that he was the lord of creation.

"Reports have come to me that the British force is nearing the Kypur Pass!" he continued, turning viciously to his victims. "I had rather expected that the massacre would have taken place before this. But perhaps there has been a slight delay. At any moment now, however, the explosions may be expected."

"What explosions?" asked Dorrie.

"Have I not already explained?" said the Ameer. "When these explosions take place, it will mean that the British relief force has been trapped in the Kypur Pass. The soldiers will be bottled up amidst the rocks, and my men will shoot them and bomb them and wipe them out of existence."

Boom-boom!

It was a loud, long, rolling explosion from out of the hills, and it was immediately followed by a second, even more intense and awe-inspiring. The very ground shook, and the Ameer turned and looked gloatingly into the blackness of the night. He thrust out a hand, and pointed.

"You heard?" he shouted. "The explosions! The Kypur Pass is closed! And those sounds meant the annihilation of the relief party that was coming to your rescue!"

"You inhuman fiend!" shouted one of the St. Frank's fellows wildly.

"And it means, Rao Kahn, the end of your power in Kurpana!" continued the Ameer, turning with fierce triumph to the Maharajah of Kurpana.

"In that, Ali Rajen, you make a mistake!" replied the maharajah, with dignity. "It is your intention, now, to murder my sons and myself, but my people will never submit to your tyranny and autoeracy."

"They will submit to everything that I ordain!" replied the Ameer. "I am the lord of these mountains—the monarch of all India!"

The maharajah looked his contempt.

"Your ambitions, Ali Rajen, have turned your head!" he said coldly. "You have allowed your dreams to become nightmares. When it is too late you will awaken. My sons, Goolah and Hussi, are ready to die at your foul hands. And I am just as ready."

The Ameer went nearer, and now his evil face could be seen in all its distorted madness. Soldiers had been bringing flaring torches, and the picture was one that the St. Frank's fellows were never likely to forget! That grim yard, with dead still lying about, with wreckage and ruin on every hand; and with the rain pouring steadily downwards on those drenched and bedraggled prisoners.

"No, Rao Kahn!" snarled the Ameer. "You are unduly optimistic in thinking that you and your sons are to be put to death at dawn. I am reserving you for a better purpose. You are to be dragged in chains into Kurpana, surrounded by my victorious soldiers!"

"You will do a bold thing!" said the maharajah, with gleaming eyes.

"It is well!" retorted Ali Rajen. "I am a bold man, and bold actions are characteristic of me. You and your sons, Rao Kahn, shall be dragged in chains into the very heart of Sakri, and before the eyes of your own people you will be put to death."

He turned suddenly, and swept a hand into the air, in a gesture embracing the boys and girls and the others.

"These carrion will die at dawn—within twenty minutes of the clock!" he continued feverishly. "They have caused me enough trouble! Now they are to pay the penalty!"

"Why don't you get it over?" shouted Handforth furiously. "If you talk about it so much, you may be too late!"

"Foolish boy!" replied the Ameer. "Too late? Your relief forces are cut to pieces ere this! There is none who can stay my hand now!"

He glanced upwards, and a cry escaped him.

"The dawn!" he gloated. "The dawn is nearly upon us!"

He gave some orders to his officers, and the unfortunate Maharajah and Goolah Kahn and Hussi Kahn were seized, and taken into the fortress. Then the soldiers grouped the prisoners into various bodies. The St. Frank's fellows were placed in one position; the Moor View girls were stood separate; Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and Mr. Manners were singled out in front of all the others. The crowd of frightened women were left where they stood, huddled against the fortress wall.

The Ameer leered at Nelson Lee and his two companions.

"It is you, gentlemen, whom I have selected for the opening of this entertainment!" said the tyrant of Rishnir. "As the first streak of dawn appears in the sky, you will be shot. The others will watch, and, perhaps, they will be terrified by what they see."

"They are British—and they will not be terrified by the sight of death!" said Dorrie curtly.

"Death?" laughed the Ameer. "Oh, no, my friend! You do not think that I am going to kill you so easily? You will be shot—but not killed!"

They were silent, and everybody else listened in horror.

"My men will shoot at your feet—at your legs—at your arms!" said the Ameer madly.

"Your limbs, my friends, will be shot to pieces, but your bodies will remain intact! And there you will lie, until the sun rises high, and until you perish in abject agony and torture! Such is my decree!"

But for Church and McClure, Handforth would have run forward, and he would have flung himself at the Ameer, in spite of his injured leg. Most of the other fellows wanted to do the same, but they knew how futile such a move would be. Indeed, they might only make things worse all round.

It was Harry Gresham who noticed the slight difference in the sky, even in spite of the glaring, flickering blaze of the many torches.

"The dawn!" he said fearfully.

The Ameer spun round, and he pointed into the sky.

"Yes, the dawn!" he shouted, his voice croaking with excitement and insanity. "The dawn!"

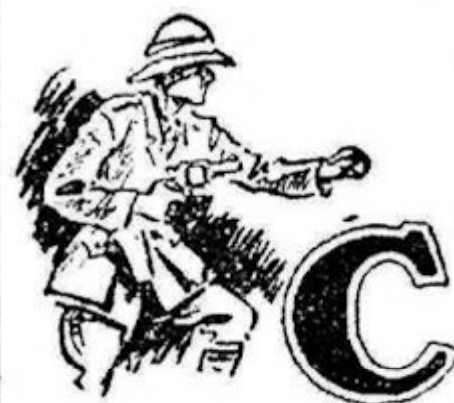
He turned to his officers, and spoke rapidly. Nelson Lee gripped Dorrie's hand, and then Mr. Manners.

"Not a cry!" muttered Dorrie. "We mustn't make the slightest sound, you fellows. Don't give him that satisfaction."

Nelson Lee was sick with horror—not at the fate that was outlined for himself, but because this dreadful thing was to be done before the eyes of these boys, and, worst of all, before the eyes of these young girls. It was intensified by the knowledge that they were to suffer the same fate afterwards.

"See!" shouted the Ameer. "My soldiers are raising their rifles! The dawn is here, and the curtain will now rise on the entertainment for which I have long awaited!"

A dozen of the Ameer's soldiers raised their rifles, and there were a series of ominous clicks as they fingered the triggers!



CHAPTER 18.

The Surprise

CRACK! Crack! Crack!

Rifle-shots rang out sharply and clearly.

Irene & Co., who had closed their eyes

so that they should be spared this terror, sobbed with anguish. They could picture what was happening to Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore and—

Screams rang out; loud, maddened cries. Then followed the clatter of rifles on the stone, and the shouting of startled men.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Look!" shouted Handforth amazedly. Zurrerrrrrrh!

A machine-gun commenced to spit and roar, and the Ameer's soldiers fell in dozens. In the flaring torchlights, scores and hundreds of new figures were to be seen. They were up on the battlements, beyond the broken walls, amongst the rocks outside. They seemed to be everywhere.

And they were khaki-clad figures, with steel helmets. Their faces were bronzed, but they were the faces of Britishers.

"Oh, look—look!" panted Harry Gresham. "It's the relief force!"

"Hurrah!"

"We're saved—saved!"

"It's the British!"

Nelson Lee thought that he was going mad for a second. He found Lord Dorrimore clutching his shoulder. Mr. Manners, near by, was as pale as death.



The two exhausted juniors gasped as they saw the gleaming stream ahead of them. "Water, laddie—water!" croaked Archie Glenthorne desperately. And as they saw that it was indeed water, they dashed forward madly.

"Is this a dream?" muttered Irene's father hoarsely.

"No, Manners. An apparent miracle has happened," said Nelson Lee, in a steady voice. "The British relief force has arrived, in spite of everything! Thank Heaven!"

The Ameer had spun round, his face had changed to a grey colour, and his eyes were wild with alarm and fear.

"The British!" he snarled. "But—but—Dogs—dogs! How did they get here?"

He heard bullets singing past his ears, and he turned. He ran. He, the Ameer of Rishnir, the monarch of these mountains, turned and ran like a coward. With one leap he cleared a pile of broken masonry, and he vanished into the gloom of the rainy night.

But hardly anybody saw him, for everything was now confusion and disorder. The Ameer's soldiers, taken utterly by surprise, were not in a fit condition to fight. A few of them tried to fire their rifles, but they were surrounded. And from beyond came the further sounds of conflict.

Crash! Bang! Zurr! Crash!

Intermingled with the rattling of the machine-gun came the steady, devastating explosions of hand-grenades. Shrieking and yelling, the Indians were in full flight.

Before they knew it, the St. Frank's fellows and the Moor View girls were surrounded by British soldiers. In the excitement of the moment, Irene & Co. were hugging their rescuers—and these rescuers were in no way opposed to the treatment. The juniors could hardly believe the evidence of their senses, and they were hysterical with joy.

So complete was the rout that not a single member of the party was hurt. Scores of the Rishnir soldiers fell, and the others were fleeing. Into the night they bolted, and that war-scarred little fortress was once again held.

"Gad, Mr. Lee, it was touch and go, though!" said Major Howard, after the first excitement was over, and after he had been informally introduced to Nelson Lee and the others. "We couldn't believe it at first, of course. We thought those youngsters were trying to fool us."

"What youngsters?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Oh, of course you don't know!" said the major. "Two of your boys got to us, and gave the alarm. Incidentally, they saved us from being annihilated in the Kypur Pass."

"Two of our boys!" ejaculated Lee, in wonder. "Do you know their names?"

"Travers is one, and a queer, cheery sort of youngster named Glenthorne," replied the officer. "Poor beggars, they were nearly all in when they arrived——"

"By the Lord Harry!" shouted Dorrie. "And we thought that Travers and Glenthorne were dead!"

"They were very far from dead when we found them," said the major. "Or, to be more exact, when they found us. Tired, certainly—wearied to the point of exhaustion—but by no means dead. One of the pluckiest things I've ever heard of."

"Did you hear that, you fellows?" yelled Reggie Pitt excitedly. "We were saved by Travers and Archie! They did the trick! They got the warning through!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Archie!"

"Where are they?" roared Handforth. "We want to congratulate them——"

"Then you'll have to wait!" said Lieutenant Benson, as he faced the excited crowd. "The two youngsters are dead asleep, many miles from here. They're on the other side of the Kypur Pass."

"And those explosions we heard, sir?" panted Fullwood.

"Heaven alone knows!" said the lieutenant. "It's no good asking me. We've been too busy. We've been coming through that tunnel, and it seems that we only just arrived in time. I tell you plainly, kids, I thought it was all up with you."

Nobody wanted to hear any details. The main facts were enough. Vivian Travers and Archie Glenthorne had got through; they had carried the warning. And, in consequence, the Ameer had been foiled.

Nobody seemed to know what had happened to the Ameer, either. He had simply vanished into the night with his soldiers. But one thing was positively certain.

The Kypur Fortress was now safe from any further molestation. It was in the hands of an immensely strong British force.



CHAPTER 19.

Good News!

LATER on the sun rose, dispersing the rain-clouds, and it was a kindly sun, shining down upon a scene of contentment.

Wonderfully good news had come through. A strong body of the maharajah's troops arrived, and this, as Lord Dorrimore remarked, was only to be expected. Since they had been saved, anyhow, it was quite natural that another rescue party should turn up! It was just the way of things in this topsy-turvy world!

This big force of Kurpana soldiers brought the most heartening tidings for the maharajah. The story of the cutting up of the main Kurpana army was a lie. Perhaps the

Ameer had accepted it as a truth, but it was a pure fabrication.

For the opposite was the case.

The Ameer's troops themselves had been overwhelmed, and the maharajah's men were triumphant. To cap everything, a remarkable tale came from the Kypur Pass.

It seemed that several regiments of the Rishnir army had marched into the Pass, knowing nothing of the trap, and the men in ambush, taking them for the British, had fired the mines, and had annihilated their own comrades. This, indeed, was poetic justice!

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



The rest of the Ameer's soldiers appeared to be on the run everywhere. Several thousands of them were still in Kurpana, but they were not likely to stay there for long.

Not that the St. Frank's fellows or the Moor View girls knew anything of this.

Within an hour of the rescue they were asleep. Water—glorious water—had been supplied to them, and they had then succumbed to their over-powering tiredness.

And they all slept for thirty-six hours straight off.

Some of them awoke before this period was over, only to go back luxuriously into their slumbers. But the majority required to be awakened.

They found that a great transformation had taken place.

The British Tommies had been busy, and the fortress was neat and tidy. There was not

a sign of the former strife. The dead had been buried, and the injured were cared for in special tents. Everything was now orderly and precise. It seemed that preparations were being made for a big march into Sakri, the capital of Kurpana.

The St. Frank's fellows were rather astonished to find that they awoke in tents. They did not remember how they had gone to sleep, and even the events of that fateful night seemed more like a dream. They were now located in a number of tents, and even their clothing had been washed and repaired and made presentable.

"THE RIVER HOUSE RAIDERS!"

Feeling in fine fettle after their Indian exploits, Nipper and his cheery chums are looking forward to some stirring times and plenty of fun when they arrive back at St. Frank's. They are not to be disappointed. For Hal Brewster and Co. of the River House School have decided that they're going to lead the Removites a merry dance this term.

They start by chucking Handforth out of a railway carriage. Naturally Nipper and Co. are not going to stand for this. It was only a jape—Brewster is a thorough sport—but, nevertheless, the Remove has been insulted! The Remove must be avenged!

And thus "war" is declared between the two schools.

Don't miss reading this topping school yarn next week, boys. It's the first of a grand new series.

"THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!"

Further gripping chapters of this ripping adventure serial.

~~~~~ORDER IN ADVANCE!~~~~~

One of the first things to do, of course, was to congratulate Archie and Travers, who had now returned to the fortress. These two juniors found themselves surrounded, immediately after there had been a general wash and a preliminary exercise.

It was found that they were all stiff and sore, but these effects wore off rapidly. Their long sleep had put new life into them. Their tongues were no longer swollen, and their throats felt normal. In fact, the recovery was almost complete.

Even Handforth's leg had not troubled him much. He limped a bit, but he scoffed at the idea of being kept in bed.

"I can't believe it all, you know," said Reggie Pitt, shaking his head. "Everything is so—so usual. All these Tommies about, and everything so orderly. And we don't even know how it all happened yet."

"We've got to ask Travers about that—and Archie!" said Handforth. "Come along, Travers, my lad! Trot it out! We want to hear every single detail!"

"Dear old fellow, you'd be bored stiff!" said Travers, with a chuckle. "There was nothing in it, really—nothing at all!"

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "I mean to say, we had the best of it, when you come to think of all the dashed details. That water, for example."

In the end, they were compelled to go over everything that had happened. Then, of course, they were congratulated, and thumped on the back, and congratulated again. Long before the ordeal was over, they were regretting that they had made any statement.

Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore joined them after a while, and it was good to see that famous pair looking so cheery and bright.

"Is there any further danger, sir?" asked Fullwood.

"Danger?" smiled Nelson Lee. "None whatever! You seem to have overlooked the fact that we are now in the care and under the protection of the British Army."

"Good old Union Jack!" said Travers languidly.

"The Ameer's armies are on the run everywhere," said Nelson Lee. "Kurpana is practically cleared of them, and a very large British force is marching into Rishnir, with the object of taking complete possession of Idar."

"And the Ameer, sir?"

"The Ameer has rather mysteriously disappeared," said Lee thoughtfully. "Nobody quite knows what has happened to him. It is certain that he is in flight, but if he returns to Idar, he will soon find himself under arrest. It is, of course, certain that he will be banished and robbed of all his powers."

"He ought to be executed!" said Handforth bluntly.

"With regard to casualties, Nipper is the only serious case," continued Lee. "All you other boys seem to have escaped with only a few minor hurts. And the girls, naturally, are now as bright as ever. If you care to go into the fortress, you will find them enjoying a good meal."

"I rather think we could enjoy a good meal, too, sir!" said Pitt, with a grin. "But what about Nipper. How is he?"

"Yes, sir," chorused the others. "How's Nipper?"

"Better—and out of danger!" said Lee.

"Here, I say!" protested Dorrie. "That's hardly adequate enough, Lee, old man. Nipper is not only better, but he is positively chirpy. He's well on the road to recovery, and if everything goes well he'll be himself within a week or two. By glory! That must have been a pretty marvellous operation you performed, Lee!"

"Oh, good egg!" said Watson fervently. "Nipper's getting well again. Isn't that great, Montie?"

"Begad, it's almost too good to be true!" said Tregellis-West happily.

There was nothing but good news, wherever they went.

All the trials and troubles were over; all the danger was past. Yet, just before they had gone to sleep, everything had seemed as black as darkness. There had been no gleam of hope, no ray of promise. And now—security!

"What about our people?" asked Gresham eagerly. "I suppose our people in England have been told that everything is all right, sir?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"The news of these recent happenings has been flashed all over the world," he replied. "I dare say the newspapers at home have had the most startling headlines. All our names have been prominently before the public. In all probability, our photographs have been displayed in the pictorial dailies!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I dare say they've made a frightful mess of us!" remarked Travers. "But that's one of the penalties of fame, dear old fellows. However, there is one consolation. It will be a nine days' wonder, and when we get back to England we shall be just common or garden schoolboys again."

As they were strolling around the fortress, they noticed a large number of Indians working on the plateau, towards the rear. There were hundreds and hundreds of these men—ordinary Kurpana civilians—and they were working under the orders of the military.

"What's all this, sir?" asked Handforth, in wonder.

"A considerable space is being levelled, and the work is now practically done," replied Nelson Lee. "Before very long, Dorrie and I are to fly off in the *Wanderer of the Skies*."

"Fly off, sir!" ejaculated Pitt. "But—but where to?"

"Back to Idar—to rescue the rest of those unfortunate Britishers on the great crag!" replied Nelson Lee quietly.

man to forget them. It was true that a very big British force was marching towards Idar, but it would take several days to get there. In the meantime, those prisoners of the crag might well be slaughtered in the Ameer's insensate rage.

Nelson Lee would have flown off earlier but for the fact that it had been impossible to get the great metal monoplane into the air. The rocky ground was too rough, too dangerous.

And so continuously, day and night, a vast number of Indian workers had been employed. Army mechanics had made repairs and adjustments to the machine, and she was now as air-worthy as ever.

"You're going to fly back to Idar, sir!" said Handforth eagerly. "By George, that's topping! Shall we be able to go, too?"

"No, young man, you will not," said Lee. "Lord Dorrimore and I will be the only passengers. You seem to forget that we shall have a very heavy load to bring back."

"Oh, yes, sir—all those men!"

"Exactly, Handforth—all those men!" said Lee. "And we shall not descend here, of course, but we shall fly right on to Sakri."

"And what about us, sir?" asked Pitt.

"You will march towards Sakri in the meantime," said Lee, smiling. "Preparations are being made now for a very early start. I am hoping that we shall be able to leave for England after a day or two."

"Good old England!" said Travers. "The weather may not be quite reliable at home, but, by Samson, it takes a lot of beating!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Three cheers for England!"

It was one round of happiness for the St. Frank's fellows. They found Irene & Co. radiant after a long sleep. There was such a general feeling of untold relief that at time they could hardly believe that there was now no further danger. They half expected to hear sudden news that a big enemy force was on its way. They found themselves listening for the crackling of rifles, and for the sounds of strife.

But all that was now over.

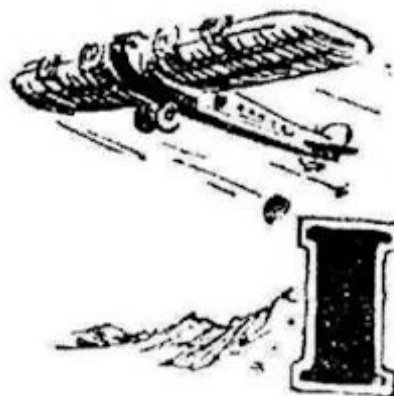
The maharajah and Goolah Kahn had already left. They had gone under escort to Sakri. Hussi Kahn insisted upon remaining behind with the other St. Frank's fellows, and here he was, happy and contented, more thankful than he could say to these Britishers who had saved his father and his brother from disaster.

When the *Wanderer of the Skies* took off, Nelson Lee and Dorrie were quite alone. There was no difficulty in getting into the air, for the machine was now lightly laden. With her engines running all out, she was suddenly released, and, in spite of her enormous size, she fairly leapt into the air.

Cheers rang out from the boys and girls, and from the soldiers.

The *Wanderer* circled round several times, mounting higher and higher, and then she set off over the mountains, into Rishnir.

"The boys did not seem to realise that we are really going on a dangerous mission.



CHAPTER 20.

Nelson Lee's Mission!

IN all the excitement, the fellows had forgotten the Crag of Idar.

But Nelson Lee's words reminded them. They remembered how they had flown off, out of the Ameer's clutches; they remembered that a large number of men had been left in charge of the Ameer's palace, stoutly declaring that they would hold it until rescue came for them.

They were the British "menials" in the Ameer's service. They were the men he had induced to come to Idar, under false promises; the men who had been little else but slaves ever since their arrival.

When the *Wanderer* had flown off, there had been no room for those unfortunate outcasts. But Nelson Lee was not the kind of

Dorrie," said Lee, after a while. "I was glad of that. We don't want to give them any further anxieties."

"Are we going on a dangerous mission?" asked his lordship.

"I rather think so."

"Oh, well, we've had so many dangerous missions lately that we're gettin' used to 'em!" remarked Dorrie. "But, personally, I don't quite get the hang of it. Where does the danger come in?"

"Idar is still in the hands of the Ameer's soldiers," said Nelson Lee. "When we land on the Crag, it is quite possible that they will use every method in their power to destroy us."

"They tried before—and they failed," said Dorrie contemptuously. "Don't you believe it, Lee! There'll be no danger!"

But, of course, Nelson Lee was quite right. It was a very risky thing to go back to the Crag. Yet it had to be done; and it was only possible to go by aeroplane. For all those British men were in the palace, still besieged. The only way to reach them was to land directly on the great roof-garden of the Ameer's palace.

Nelson Lee was satisfied, however, that there would be no delay. The men would be waiting for them—watching. Everything would be in readiness. With luck, the machine would be able to get away again with its load in under a quarter of an hour, and it was not likely that the enemy would be able to perform much "frightfulness" in this limited space of time.

The journey itself was uneventful.

Flying at a height of several thousand feet, the trusty Wanderer sped over Rishnir, and eventually the great Crag could be seen rising from the ground in the far distance.

It was like an enormous pencil of rock, jutting upwards from the centre of the city. And there, perched on the top, was the white marble palace of the Ameer. It glinted in the sunshine, a gem of architecture. Indeed, the place was a marvel of the East.

"Everything seems to be all right," remarked Dorrie, as they drew closer. "The palace is still there, anyhow. They haven't destroyed it durin' our absence. It's still intact."

"The Ameer was not fool enough to wreck his own palace," said Nelson Lee. "He probably thought that he would win triumph after triumph, and then he would be able to march victoriously back to Idar, and settle with the 'accursed Britishers' who were still holding out on the top of the Crag. But things have gone differently, and the Ameer is in flight. Idar, no doubt, is in a state of panic, with everything in disorder."

"Well, we shall soon know," replied Dorrie.

As they flew over the outskirts of the city, Nelson Lee, who was piloting, shut off the engines. The huge monoplane planed down, and approached the Crag.

As they swung round, banking gracefully, they could see that the roof-garden was still clear. Nothing had been altered. The place was just as they had left it, and they could see men standing all round the marble parapet, waving excitedly.

"Good business!" said Dorrie. "They're still there, Lee! See 'em? I'm glad—thunderin' glad! I've been thinkin' about these men quite a lot, and it's fine to know that we shall be able to take them off, after all."

Under Nelson Lee's skilful hand, the Wanderer dropped gently, touched the roof-garden just beyond the edge, ran forward, and then came to a standstill under perfect control.

The landing on the Crag had been effected in safety—and now came another surprise.



CHAPTER 21.

The Cage!

"By the Lord Harry!" ejaculated Dorrie sharply.

For, to his startled amazement, he now saw a number of the Ameer's soldiers running towards the stationary aeroplane from all sides of the great roof.

"It's a trap, Dorrie!" said Lee huskily. "Good heavens! Why didn't we take greater care?"

"Start her up again!" roared Dorrie. "Quick, man! We can get off before they can touch us!"

They knew those hated uniforms—those distinctive uniforms of the Ameer's troops. It seemed that there were hundreds of soldiers on that roof, and they were all swarming round.

In a vague kind of way, Nelson Lee was aware that most of the men were looking eager and excited—and, indeed, pleased. Then, just as Lee was about to set the engines roaring again, he checked.

"Well I'm hanged!" he said wonderingly.

For he now saw something else. Many of the British prisoners were running side by side with the soldiers! They were mingling with them, shouting eagerly, and waving their welcome.

"There's something queer about this, Dorrie," said Lee, with relief. "These soldiers aren't hostile! Can't you see? They're on the friendliest possible terms with the men they have been recently fighting."

"By glory!" ejaculated Lord Dorrimore. "You're right! And now that I come to look at 'em closely, they're not even armed! They haven't got a rifle or a sword among the lot of them!"

He and Nelson Lee opened the door, and got out of the great machine. Cheer after cheer rang out as they appeared, and they were cheers of welcome. Yet, when they

descended to the turf of the Ameer's once-perfect tennis-lawn, the Indian soldiers stood respectfully back, and shouted with acclamation.

"Hallo, Smith!" said Dorrie genially.

Smith, the wizened little valet—the man who had been on the Crag longest—had come running forward. His lined little face was alight with eagerness and satisfaction.

"I knew you'd come, gents—I knew you'd come!" he said breathlessly. "Some of the fellers were sayin' that you'd forget us. But I knew better, I did!"

"I should hope you did, too!" smiled Nelson Lee. "I gave you my promise, didn't I?"

"You did, sir, and that was good enough for me!" said Smith. "You've come, ain't you, to take us off the Crag?"

"That is the general idea," replied Lee, smiling. "We want to convey you to Sakri, and from there you will be able to take the train to the Central Provinces, and special arrangements are being made, I believe, for you to be conveyed home to England."

"All of us, sir?" shouted several of the other men.

"Yes—all of you, if you wish."

"Hurrah!"

There was big excitement, and Smith, who was the spokesman, could hardly contain himself.

"Crikey, sir, a few things have been happenin' here since you left!" he said. "We've heard all about that affair at the Kypur Pass—leastways, we've heard all sorts of tales. You've been havin' a hot time, ain't you?"

"Deucedly hot," said Dorrie. "And you, on the other hand, appear to be fraternisin' fairly liberally with the enemy."

"They ain't the enemy any longer, sir," said Smith. "There's been a revolt in Idar. A regular revolution."

"So I imagined," said Lee.

"It come after the news of the Ameer's defeat got here," continued Smith. "As soon as the people knew that he had been beaten, and that the British was in the country, and that the Ameer was in flight, there was a reg'lar to-do. Pretty near half the Idar garrison revolted, and the others wasn't long in comin' to the same opinion. The people themselves rose up, too, and pretty near every member of the Ameer's Government was dragged out an' lynched!"

"And serve 'em right, too!" said one of the other men. "They was as bad as the Ameer himself!"

"We was glad we wasn't down there, to tell the truth," said Smith soberly. "We could see enough from up here when we looked down. Blood everywhere—with all the people goin' fair mad. Thank goodness, it's over now. The city's pretty quiet, and all the soldiers and the people can talk about is the comin' of the British. They want 'em here, sir—they want 'em badly."

"The people are not angered at the thought of the British forces coming?"

"Angered, sir?" said Smith, staring. "Lor' bless your life, they look upon it as their salvation! The Ameer has been a tyrant so many years that they 'ardly know what liberty is. There's a complete change of feelin' now. They want to be under British protection, sir, and the people themselves are sound enough. Nothin' wrong with 'em. I know 'em—I've lived in India long enough. Anyhow, the Ameer 'as shot 'is bolt!"

Nelson Lee looked at the man sharply.

"Do you know anything about the Ameer?" he asked. "Do you know what has happened to him?"

Smith and some of the other men looked in wonder.

"Why, gents, 'aven't you 'eard?" asked the valet.

"We have heard nothing."

"Then come and have a look here, sir," said Smith, with a curious note in his voice. "If you want to know what's 'appened to His Snaky Highness, I'll show you!"

They walked across the roof-garden to the marble parapet. And, arriving there, Smith pointed downwards.

Nelson Lee and Dorrie found themselves looking at a queer, crude iron cage, which was hanging out from the Crag some distance below. It was a square cage, composed entirely of strong iron bars, and it was slung from a kind of derrick. It dangled on a long chain, and it swayed slightly as the wind struck it.

"There's something inside!" said Dorrie, with a suspicion of the truth dawning on him.

"You've 'eard tell of this cage before, haven't you, gents?" asked Smith. "There's more than one British life been lost in it, owin' to that devil! A torture cage—that's what it is! For no reason at all, the Ameer would put men in it, and leave 'em there, to die of thirst, and then to rot in the sun!"

"And what is that figure now sprawling motionless in the cage?" asked Nelson Lee. "Are you telling me, Smith, that it is the Ameer himself?"

"It *was* the Ameer, sir!" replied Smith. "But it ain't now!"

CHAPTER 22.

'Good-bye to India!



ORD DORRIMORE turned aside, sickened.

"I've seen quite enough!" he said

quietly.

"He's quite—dead?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Been dead this six or seven hours, sir," said Smith. "Lor, his ravin's was horrid to listen to at first. But not one of us had any pity for him," he added stubbornly. "No, not one! His shrieks and cries was music in

our ears—and I'm not ashamed of sayin' it. I'm a kind'erted man by nature, but that demon deserved all he got!"

"How did it happen?" asked Lee.

"Simple enough, sir," said the valet. "The Ameer, it seems, came straight to Idar after his defeat at the Kypur Pass. The durned fool thought that everything would be the same as usual. But, instead of that, he comes straight in just after the revolt has started."

"Phew!" whistled Dorrie. "They grabbed him, eh?"

"As soon as it was known he was in the city, he was hounded out!" replied Smith. "Crikey! You never saw such a lot of maniacs. His own soldiers, too—not the civilians. The ordinary people wanted to tear him to bits, but the soldiers had a better idea. They put him in the cage!"

"But how did they get him up here?"

"Why, we helped, of course," said Smith defiantly. "You ain't blamin' us, are you, sir?"

"I think not, Smith," said Lee, in a quiet voice. "By that time, no doubt, you were already on friendly terms with the people?"

"Lor bless you, sir, they had the big lift workin' again, and we went down into the city, and we was treated like lords."

"And the Ameer was given some of his own medicine," said Nelson Lee, pursing his lips. "Dorrie, I think I'm very much the same as Smith. I feel no pity for this tyrant. The country is well rid of him."

"He deserved everything," replied Lord Dorrimore.

"And the situation is now quite altered," said Lee thoughtfully. "Smith and his companions are in no danger, and the British are marching towards Idar. There is really no necessity to take any risks. It would be unwise, in the circumstances, to load all these men into the aeroplane."

"I was thinkin' the same thing," said Dorrie.

"And it *would* be a risk," continued Lee. "We might possibly get off safely, but we should take a big chance. Do not forget how close it was when we flew away with the boys and girls. With only two of us aboard there will be no difficulty at all—we can fly off just as soon as we like."

Smith and his companions were perfectly content. They knew that the British were coming, and they had no immediate desire to leave the palace. They felt that they might just as well stay on here as to go to Sakri. For, from now onwards, Idar and the whole province of Rishnir would be under British protection.

So it came about that the Wanderer of the Skies took to the air again only an hour later. And once more it contained Nelson Lee and Dorrie, without any passengers.

The St. Frank's fellows and all the others were very astonished when the Wanderer appeared out of the sky over the fortress, and proceeded to land. This was in contradiction of what Nelson Lee had told them.

Then came another pleasant surprise for the boys and girls. They were informed that, instead of marching to Sakri, as arranged, they were to fly there in the Wanderer.

The original party was made up—exactly as it had left England, with the single difference that Hussi Kahn was now with the boys. The great plane took off without trouble, and it flew steadily towards Sakri.

The landing there was a triumph.

The reception was tumultuous. The people seemed to go mad, and they cheered the distinguished visitors, and made a huge fuss of them. For they realised that the British were the saviours of their country. But for their intervention, the Ameer would have conquered them, and placed them under his tyrannical sway.

The whole party was entertained and feted by the maharajah, in the latter's sumptuous palace. Never had they had such a wonderful time.

During their brief stay in Sakri, they heard that Rishnir was now almost fanatically pro-British in spirit. The people were fervently in favour of British rule.

In future, it was felt, the whole province would be loyal. The Ameer was dead, and the country was rid of its curse.

The voyage back to England was a period of wonderful enjoyment for every member of the St. Frank's party.

How different it was from the voyage out!

There was now no immediate hurry—no frantic chase. The journey was taken in short stages, stops being made all along the route—in Arabia, Egypt, and many European countries.

During this trip home, with its steady, sedate progress, Nipper continued to get better and better. In fact, by the time England was reached—when, finally, the Wanderer of the Skies came to earth at Croydon Aerodrome—Nipper was no longer an invalid in bed, confined to his bunk. He was up again, and his cheeks wore their old colour, and his smile was cheery.

England! It was glorious to be back on that bright September day, and it was wonderful to be welcomed by hosts of parents and brothers and sisters—to say nothing of crowds of newspaper men and photographers.

But it soon quietened down, and it was surprising how rapidly the fellows got back into the old way of things.

They were able to spend quite a few days at home with their families before the time arrived for them to go back to St. Frank's.

And when the day of the new term came, their adventure in Rishnir seemed like a long-forgotten dream!

THE END.

(Next week finds the cheery chums of St. Frank's back at school once more. They have some stirring times, too, for the rivalry between St. Frank's and the River House School, always keen, flames out with more intensity than ever. Look out for "The River House Raiders!" next Wednesday.)



E. S. BROOKS

BETWEEN OURSELVES!

OUR AUTHOR CHATS WITH OUR 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: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, LONDON, E.C.4.



R. N. MORGAN

HOW'S this for an idea? From this week onwards we're going to have the above heading on this page. In one corner you can see my dial, and in the opposite corner you'll see a reader's dial. Of course, you'll have to suffer my features every week, but there will always be a different reader's photograph printed, week after week. Readers from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa—and, in fact, from all quarters of the world—will have their turn.

So, if you want to see your face on this page, send your photographs along to me. There's no guarantee that you in particular will be selected for appearance on this page, for it will largely depend upon the quality of the photograph—but, in any case, you'll have the somewhat doubtful consolation of receiving my autographed photo in return.

I want your photographs, as you know; and, if you don't want to see your face in print, you mustn't let this scheme deter you from sending them. Only readers who expressly give permission for their pictures to be reproduced will gaze out from this page.

Oh, and by the way. I've got thousands of photographs in my albums, and if any of you readers who have sent me these would like to see yourselves opposite to me at the top of this page, just drop me a special line and say so. But you'll have to take your chance whether *you* are selected.

I am not one of those people who think that Australia is "all bush"—Ella Rowlands (Ballarat East). You see, although I have never been to Australia, I get so many letters from you Aussie readers, and such eloquent descriptions of the country, that it is impossible for me to have any false impressions about your splendid land. It is one of my ambitions to pay a visit to Australia; but

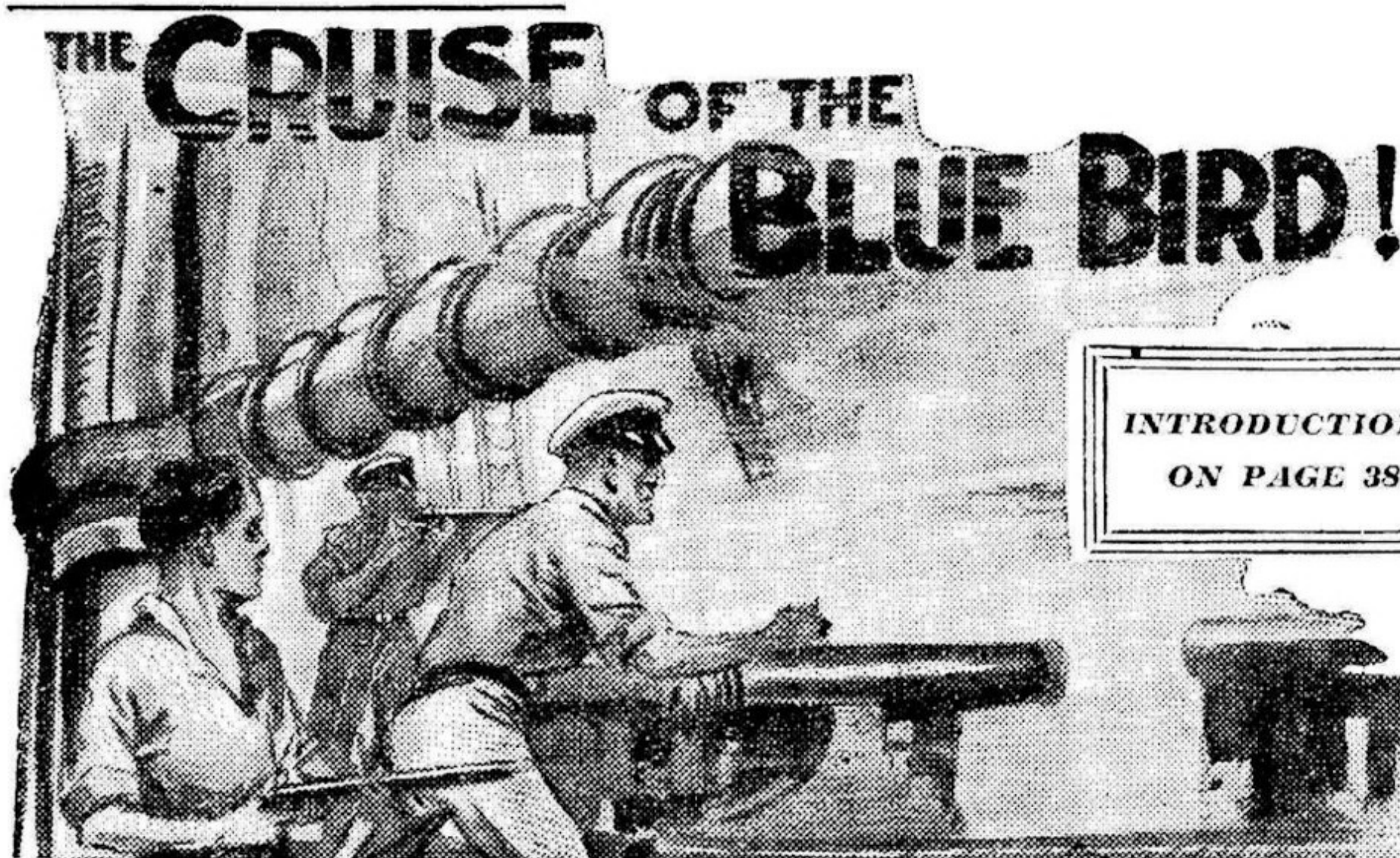
the trouble is you're such a dickens of a way off.

How can I regard you as a new chum—Elaine (London Docks, E.1)—when you tell me that you have been reading the St. Frank's yarns for six years? I prefer to regard you as an old chum. Now, about the St. Frank's League coupon. You needn't bother about finding a friend for the second coupon; any introducee will do. That is to say, you can hand the second copy of the Old Paper to a perfect stranger, and as long as he—or she—signs the coupon, all will be well. And I don't think you'll have any difficulty in getting such a signature. You see, the idea is to introduce the Old Paper to a new reader, and it is really all the better if this new reader is a comparative stranger—or, indeed, a complete stranger. Such an individual is far less likely to know anything about the Old Paper.

I dare say you will be able to get hold of the copy of the Old Paper which introduces Willy Handforth, if you advertise—E. J. H. (Adelaide). The story is called "Handforth Minor," and it appeared in No. 386 (Old Series) of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY—the date being October 28, 1922. I am assuming that you are a member of the St. Frank's League, which entitles you to a free advert, you know.

When you suggest that the early adventures of Nipper & Co. should appear in the Old Paper instead of a serial—J. J. Potter (Biggleswade)—you evidently don't know that the early adventures of Nipper & Co. are already appearing every week in "The Popular." So if you want to read them it will only be necessary for you to give in your order at the newsagent's.

ATTACKED BY CONVICTS!



INTRODUCTION
ON PAGE 38

By COUTTS BRISBANE

The odds are all against Captain Manby and his intrepid crew in their fight with the scoundrelly Frenchmen, but the skipper is of the never-say-die type and he refuses to be beaten.

The Lurking Peril!

SAVAGELY Benoist ordered the trio who had gone ashore to tumble into the boat.

"Let them go. We can get them later. The ship is ours. There is Cauchet beckoning to us. No noise, no shouting, and no more shooting," he commanded.

A few minutes later the boat shot alongside the Blue Bird.

"Get aboard and lie down on the deck," ordered Benoist, "and don't move until I give the word. And next time shoot straight. We must not leave the captain alive. Though a fool, he is formidable. Have you the mate, Cauchet?"

"I gave him one on the head. He is tied up, and will come to himself presently."

"Put a man beside him to gag him when he comes to, if it is necessary. Any men left?"

"No. There were only two. We settled them."

"A pity, perhaps. Still, we can work the ship through the reefs with the motor, and after that we can get a crew, I dare say, from some island. Now, silence. We await the brave captain."

"But the Chinaman—and that boy? The little brat must have escaped," snarled the

man with the wounded hand, coming forward. "We left them tied securely, and the sharks should have had them by now. Have you seen the other?"

"No. No matter. The captain is our game."

"But the boy and the Chinaman on the reef will warn him as he comes up. You are a fool, Benoist!"

Benoist whirled on him, and his face was no longer the benevolent mask that he had worn heretofore, but the face of a wild beast.

"Another word from you, and I will kill you like the dog you are!" he hissed. "One cannot expect everything to go entirely right. We have the ship, we have the shells and the pearls, which alone are worth enough to set all of us up for life. We will get water aboard and go away as soon as possible—after we have settled with this captain. Get down, some of you, and finish stowing that shell. Haul up the boat. Make ready in every way."

After taking a pair of binoculars from the cabin, Papa Benoist scanned the farther end of the lagoon, waiting for the return of Manby.

The Warning!

CAPTAIN MANBY had mustered the crew so soon as they had had breakfast. He detailed two of them to remain aboard with Mr. Sinclair. The others, provided with saws and axes, and food enough for a midday meal, crowded into the cutter. He had been about to follow when Ah Moy, looking as bland and inscrutable as usual, slid to his side.

"Pleasee, cap'n, them Flenchee man comee?" he asked.

"Yes. Some of them will be bringing shell aboard presently," replied Manby.

"No likee Flenchee man. You no takee allee man, leavee shlip. Mebbe Flenchy man takee shlip. Keepee man with rifle alongee here."

Captain Manby laughed heartily. He knew the Chinaman disliked the French very heartily. He had been in trouble in the Marquesas and had been fined for some petty offence, and ever since detested the very name of Frenchman.

"Come, come, Ah Moy, they're not so bad as all that! If they took the ship, what would they do with it? Don't be absurd!"

"You waittee," murmured Ah Moy, and slipped across to the chart-room, where the arms were kept. He returned with two rifles, bandoliers, and several boxes full of cartridges. "You takee," he insisted.

"But we're going wood-cutting. One doesn't shoot trees," replied Manby, greatly amused. He liked Ah Moy and remembered the incident of the pearl with gratitude, otherwise he might have called him to order for this unheard of breach of discipline.

"How did you get these? Is the arms chest unlocked?" he added crisply.

"Me gettee key. Cleanee, oillee to dlay. You takee, pleasee, cap'n."

"Oh, very well!" growled Manby. "Pass them down to me. Keep the chest locked. And see that the water tanks are cleaned. We shall take in water to-morrow. Mr. Sinclair, keep an eye on those Frenchmen and see that none of them stray into the cabins. We know, by experience, that one at least is not beyond temptation, and there may be others as light-fingered. We'll be back early in the afternoon."

With that he dropped into the stern-sheets and the boat rowed away, passing the

French beach where men were beginning to load shell into the boat.

"All ready for you aboard!" he called, with a wave of the hand, as he passed.

In a few minutes the boat had passed the curve of the lagoon and the schooner was hidden from them. It slowed to allow the captain to inspect the timber growing along the waterside. Presently he spied some young trees that would serve his purpose, and swung in to the beach. Soon axe and saw were busy.

When a sufficient quantity of trees had been felled, trestles were improvised and the men set to sawing the trunks lengthways into battens of suitable thickness. The Kanakas were all handymen with tools, and the work progressed quickly enough.

Suddenly, over the noise made by the rasping saws and the gay chatter of the men, came the sound of a shot. Then another. Captain Manby held up his hand, commanding silence. There had been little shooting since the Blue Bird came to the lagoon. They had all been too busy, and, barring a few shots that the boys had taken at big fish, no rifle had been fired.

What did it mean?

Manby had no sort of apprehension of any danger to the ship. He had accepted Benoist's story as truth, for he had had no reason to doubt him. But, knowing Ah Moy's antipathy to the French, his first thought was that the Chinaman might have started a row with them. Then he dismissed the notion. Ah Moy was discreet. He would never provoke a fight in which he was certain to get the worst; and Mr. Sinclair would certainly put a stop to any sort of trouble before it could develop.

There was only one thing to do. He must go back and make certain.

"Cutter's crew away!" he ordered. "The rest of you carry on."

The cutter's regular crew—six men—dropped their tools and got aboard. The boat began to move, gathering way, when there came a crashing amidst the light bush a little way up the lagoon, and even as a fresh burst of rifle-fire came echoing along the water, a figure decked with trailing creepers, and shedding leaves in a shower, burst out upon the beach, shouting inarticulately. It was Jack.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is bound for the Malea atolls, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain is successful in finding this unknown island; and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number of French castaways. They appear to be very friendly, but several incidents

cause Captain Manby to be suspicious of them. Meanwhile, the native's story proves to be correct; the adventurers find many valuable pearls. Jack and Ned are captured by the Frenchmen. They escape, but not before they have learned that their captors intend to capture the Blue Bird and its valuable cargo. Ned attempts to warn those on board the schooner of the impending peril, but is too late. Meanwhile, Captain Manby and the majority of the crew have gone on a wood-cutting expedition. The Frenchmen—whose leader is a man named Benoist—intend to kill them as they return to the schooner.

"Pull in!" snapped Manby, and swung the boat's head for the beach. Jack panted down to the water's edge as the bows grounded.

"Oh, father—the French—are—convicts—and they're going to take—the ship! They caught—Ned and I—and tied us on a rock—on the other side—for the sharks—to eat!" he gasped out. "Ned has gone—aboard—to warn—Sinclair. They're shooting. I'm afraid—they must have—got the Blue Bird!"

"What?" roared Manby. "Convicts?"

"Yes. They boasted of it. They were being taken to Noumea and they murdered the crew. And they murdered Pascal and Voisin because they were afraid that they would tell us. And they tied us to a rock for the sharks to eat, but one of them cut

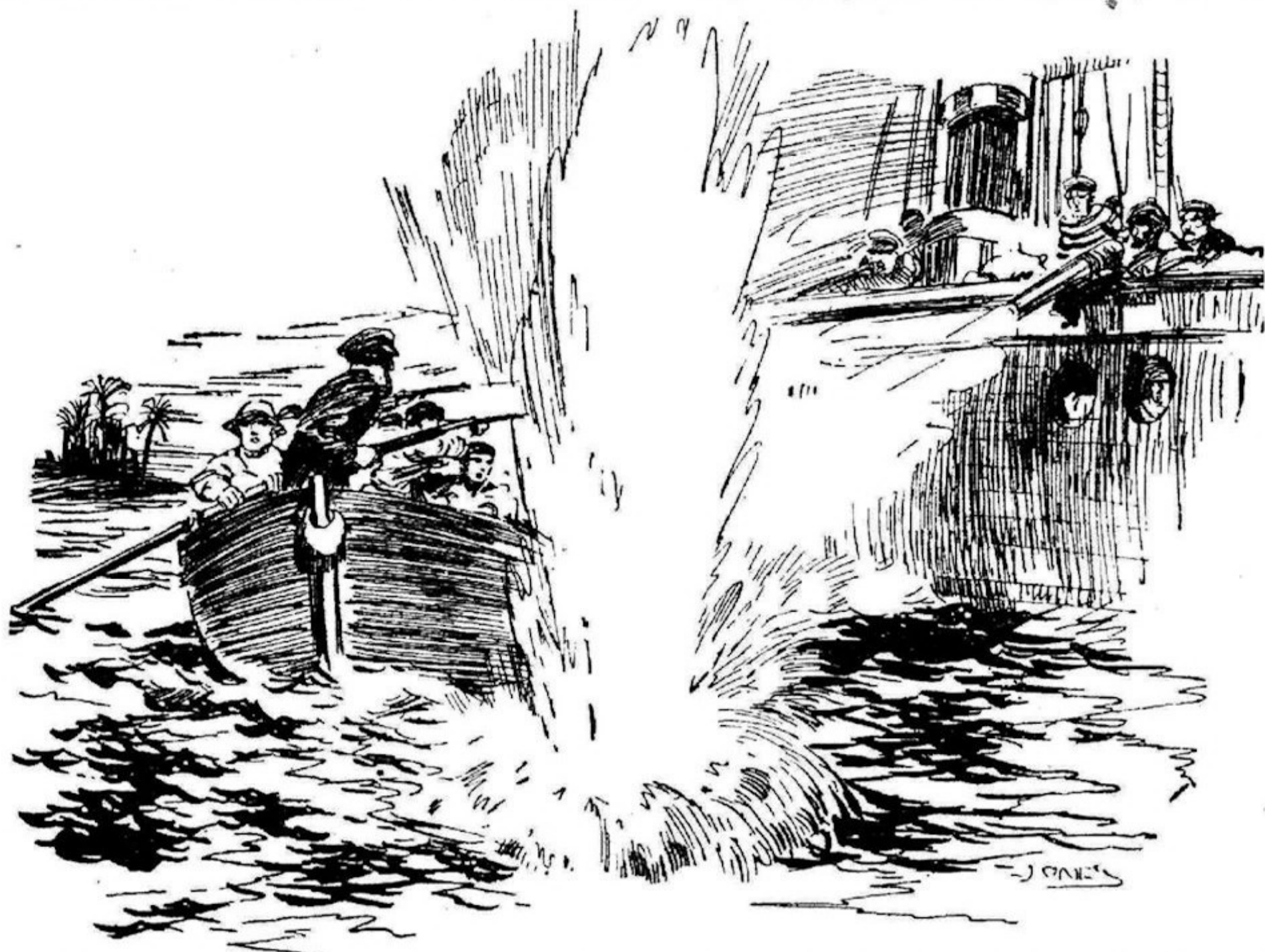
But I'm afraid not. Two rifles against twenty, perhaps, and the advantage of being aboard the ship."

He shook his head. He realised that the odds were too great!

Ned's Plan!

THE boat curved round the bend that had hidden the schooner from view. There she lay, with everything apparently normal. No one was visible on the deck. For an instant Captain Manby's spirits rose. Perhaps the gang had all gone below to loot and look for drink. Perhaps a bold stroke might retake the ship. Perhaps—

They had passed the gateway of the



Only just in time did Captain Manby give the order for the boat to be swung round. A couple of seconds later the gun fired, missing the boat by inches.

the rope a bit and I got loose and unfastened Ned. He's gone aboard, and I'm afraid he'll be killed and—"

By this time Jack had clambered aboard, and the boat was backing off the beach.

"Give way, men," said Manby quietly, and steered up the lagoon. "They are well armed, I suppose? And now they'll have the ship's arms. We're in a deuced tight place, my boy. What a blind fool I've been! Poor Sinclair! I suppose they've scuppered him."

"I think they meant to keep him to navigate, father."

"Yes, I suppose they would. There's a chance yet, if we can only surprise them.

lagoon and were spinning steadily towards the Blue Bird, close to the reef. Up rose two figures upon chunks of coral, waving their arms and shouting. They were Ned and Ah Moy.

The pair had made haste as best they could over the rough coral, carrying their load of rifles between them, stooping low to avoid being seen from the schooner, peeping down the lagoon at intervals. They had seen the boat coming and, from the top of the reef, had been able to see what Captain Manby couldn't—that the convicts were lying on the schooner's deck with their rifles ready to deal death to the boat's crew as soon as it should come within easy range.

"Stop!" shouted Ned. "Don't go any further. They're waiting for you. They've got rifles. Take us aboard. We have half a dozen here. Look out!"

He dropped flat, as did Ah Moy. Papa Benoist had seen them, seen the boat check suddenly, seen his nice plan spoiled. The range was long and his fellows no marksmen, but he gave the word to fire. A scattered volley rang out as the convicts lined the rail and let drive.

Most of the bullets fell short, a few went high, one or two splashed alongside the boat, but none found a billet. Ned slid up his sights and emptied his rifle in reply, and though he didn't score, he drove the murderous gang away from the rail.

Then the pair picked up their burden and stumbled down to the boat.

"Six rifles, and a lot of ammunition. Ah Moy had them on the reef, sir," explained Ned.

"Thlinker mebbe Flenchee man no good man. Puttee rifles ashore, when gettee key," supplemented Ah Moy. "Killce one man with sword. Walkee."

He knelt down and polished the gleaming blade of his sword with a tuft of dry grass.

"I think they knocked Mr. Sinclair on the head, and there were screams. I'm afraid they killed the men in the hold, uncle," said Ned.

"The unspeakable dogs!" growled Manby. "Ah Moy, you're a fine fellow! We're in a bad hole, but we'd be in a worse if you hadn't thought of doing that. Eight rifles all thanks to you. Come aboard."

He glared towards the schooner. Another shot was fired from her, and this time the sighting of the rifle had been corrected, and the bullet sung close to his head.

"About ship! Pull starboard. Back port. Now, all together."

The boat moved away, and though more shots were fired they all went wide. When they were at a safe distance, Manby stopped once again, and looked at his lost vessel.

Fortune had smiled upon him during the past weeks. He had taken pearls enough to make him wealthy. Now the smile had changed to a frown, and it seemed as though he were utterly beggared. His face flushed, he brought his hand down on the thwart with a bang.

"No, I'll be hanged if I let them get away with it without having a jolly good try to retake the Blue Bird!" he cried. "But it's pretty certain that we can't hope to do much at once. If we try to row up to the ship, they're bound to get half of us before we can come alongside. They seem to be putting sacks along the scuppers, filled with shell, most likely. They'll be able to shoot from cover. Well, we'll do the same. Give way, men."

"What'll you do, dad?" asked Jack.

"Build up a bulwark of timber and a sandbag or two in the bows high enough to shelter the crew as we pull in, then try to rush them. With the axes and the men's

knives, we should do well enough at close quarters, but getting there is the trouble. Hold hard! We may as well have that dinghy."

They were abreast of the French beach. The dinghy in which the boys had rowed ashore that morning, lay on the beach. The boat put in, and dropped the boys, who, shoving off the dinghy, followed in its wake. At the point beyond which was the working party Manby bade the pair halt.

"Stay here and keep an eye on those fellows. Signal me if they come this way. Take your rifles. Fire a shot if you see anything that looks like an attack."

The boat containing the captain and his men went ashore, and work was begun upon her at once. Meanwhile Ned told Jack of his lively experiences.

"If Ah Moy hadn't taken those rifles ashore, we'd have been killed," he said. "That fellow seems to think of everything. I say, what are they doing on the Blue Bird? Is that the gun?"

"Yes! They're putting bags round it. If they get one fair shot at us with that——"

He said no more, but shook his head. The Blue Bird's signal cannon had already shown its deadly efficiency at short ranges at Graden Island. If the convicts only loaded it with old iron, they might play havoc with the boat and her crew when she approached to attack.

"If we could only shoot that man Benoist, we'd have a better chance, I believe," said Ned. "He's the brains of the gang. If you think it over you'll see that. He did all the talking, he kept them in some sort of order so that they shouldn't give themselves away, he planned this. Why, if those fellows who grabbed us had only carried out his orders and knifed us right away instead of tying us on the reef, the whole thing would have been settled now. Uncle and the boat's crew would have been shot down as they came alongside, and they could have done as they liked."

"Yes, it's all very well to say shoot him, but how? We can't get near enough, and we're too low in the water," objected Jack.

"Yes, but if you were to put me ashore over there on the reef, I think I could climb up amongst the rocks and wait till I got a shot at him."

"But they'd see us landing. They'd see that only one of us went back in the boat and be on the look-out."

"Then I'll go to-night, if we don't manage to take the ship."

"Oh, we'll do it all right," said Jack, but his tone wasn't over confident. "Besides, you remember what Mr. Sinclair said. The reef is dangerous at night. He spoke about a thundering big sort of octopus, a bigger beggar than the one we fought in the lagoon. He said that sometimes it comes out and crawls about nabbing crabs, or anything else. Better not try."

"Well, we'll see," muttered Ned. "Look! They're putting off in their boat."

"They're going for water," remarked Jack. "I can see barrels, and that little cistern we keep aft. There's a freshwater stream about opposite the ship, just where you went in to-day."

"The time to attack 'em would be when they're ashore. If we could get some men hidden up before they make a second trip—"

"They're too artful. See, they've sent two fellows ashore to scout. I'm afraid it wouldn't work. And they can easily get aboard long before our boat could reach the ship."

"Yes." Ned was forced to admit the truth of this. "If we don't retake the ship I'll go on there to-night and be ready to pot that beast in the morning," he said doggedly.

The Attack!

AN hour passed, during which the French boat made several trips to and fro with water. And all the while Captain Manby and his men worked with haste on the shield or bulwark they were erecting in the bows of the cutter.

It was merely a sort of box of planks, sawn from the green wood, and filled with bits of the age-hardened lava which cropped out of the soil. Though this might not altogether stop a bullet at close range, it would at least take all the ginger out of it. In this screen Manby arranged a couple of loopholes. Thus he and one of the boys would be able to keep up a steady fire as the boat was rowed towards the schooner.

This ready, he signalled the boys to come round the point out of sight of the enemy, and took them aboard the cutter.

"Now, you fella listen," he said to the crew. "I lie here in bow and shoot from one hole. One of these boys shoots from the other. You fella got rifles, not row, but be ready to shoot. You other fella row hard. When I give the word, you stop row, fella with rifles stand up, shoot hard at fella on schooner. Then you all go up and use your axes and your knives. *Savee?*"

"*Savee,*" came back the chorus.

"Very well. Now, will you take a loophole. Ned? You're rather a better shot than Jack, and we have no ammunition to waste. Tuck in. Ready, boys, and when I tell you to row hard, put your backs into it. Give way!"

The cutter moved forward, swung about the point and headed for the schooner. The boat containing some of the Frenchmen was ashore, but at once a shot was fired, and a few moment later she put off, returning aboard in haste. Captain Manby and the boys could see her crew tumbling up in quick time. He caught the glint of steel flashing about the deck, and ground his teeth in fury. The convicts had armed themselves with the ship's cutlasses, and they had the remainder of the rifles at their disposal. If they but fought half as well as Benoist had

planned, they were certain to hold their own, for all the advantage was with them.

"Row, men!" roared Manby, as a rifle flashed from the ship, and a bullet splashed alongside. "Now, Ned, try 'em at six-fifty."

It was about the extreme effective range of the Winchesters, so the shots fired did but drop alongside the schooner. However, the boat, driven by willing arms surged forward, and a few moments later the marksmen had the satisfaction of seeing a man spring up and reel back from behind the breastwork of bags along the schooner's rail.

Five hundred yards. Four hundred. Bullets were splashing the water and thudding in the bulwark. Though the range was shorter the precision of the convicts wasn't good, for the two marksmen in the boat were sending a deadly hail of bullets smashing into their defences.

Three hundred yards. Two hundred. One hundred.

"Ready, you men with the rifles?" cried Manby, and, reloading, fired rapidly. A moment later his voice rose to a yell. "Star-board, hard over! Fire, men!"

The boat sheered over. Why? Manby had seen the brass muzzle of the signal gun suddenly appear in a gap left for it in the line of bags. Only just in time did the boat veer out of the direct line of fire, for the gun roared a couple of seconds later and splashed a fountain of water high in the air under the stern, missing the boat by inches.

"Into her!" yelled Manby, and she came round again. "*Blaze away!*"

The six men with rifles fired with a will, browning the schooner's rail with bullets. There was no effective reply. Another moment and the whole crew would have been swarming aboard, but at that instant came a terrible and daunting surprise.

Something dangling at the end of a line swung outboard, dropped through the air into the water alongside the boat, and exploded with a smashing roar. It was a dynamite cartridge. Benoist had found the case, and, fitting one to an electric detonator and connecting it with the battery, had reserved it till the last moment.

He had intended that it should drop into the boat, in which case the stern would have been blown clean away. Only his hurry had spoiled his intention in part. But, even as it was, it did damage. The stroke oar screamed and fell over the thwart. Big Timo, who was steering, collapsed to the blast of the explosion, the other men standing up were thrown down in wild confusion. The boat's planking, strained by the explosion, gaped aft, and water poured in.

The moment in which success might have crowned the attack was lost, for the convicts had rallied. There was a rattle of shots from above, two more of the captain's men dropped, one dead, the other sorely wounded.

There was nothing for it but to retreat.

"Back water!" roared Manby. "Back for your lives!"

(Look out for another exciting instalment next Wednesday, boys.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 98.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me; and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME)

(ADDRESS)

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave 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, 5, Carmelite Street, 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, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver 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 they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for 3d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

You can write to fellow members living at home or in the most distant outposts of the Empire.

You are offered free advice on choosing a trade or calling, and on emigration to the colonies and dependencies.

If you want to form a sports or social club, you can do so amongst local members of the League.

You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE!

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers: send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Back to St. Frank's.

GOOD-BYE to India!

After what must have been the most exciting holiday they've ever experienced, the St. Frank's chums are now on their way back to England—and St. Frank's. The famous Idar Crag, the fortress near Kypur Pass—scenes of many a grim struggle—the Ameer of Rishnir, all are but memories of the past; never-to-be-forgotten memories.

Next week the boys will be at St. Frank's once more. Lessons, sport, "rags," japes—those will be the things to occupy the minds of Nipper and the other cheery Removites. Old Handforth will be as obstinate as ever; Church and McClure will once more go about with black eyes and thick ears. Oh, yes, everything will soon resume its normal aspect at the old school!

Japes there will in profusion, especially. The River House School are going to see to that. Hal Brewster, Ascott, Glynn, and the other River House stalwarts mean to give the St. Frank's fellows a lively time this term, and you can bet that Nipper & Co. will not be backward in retaliating.

Such is the main idea of the grand new series of yarns which start next week. Edwy Searles Brooks has written them in his old lively style; real school-adventure stories with plenty of fun. Just what you want, eh?

Then look out for the first yarn next Wednesday.

Interesting News!

And, by the way, do all of you know that the adventures of the St. Frank's fellows also appear in our grand companion paper, "The Popular"? You didn't! Jumping snakes! You've been missing a treat. These stories, written by Edwy Searles Brooks, deal with the early doings of the St. Frank's stalwarts. You'll do well to get a copy of "The Popular." It contains four other features, and a Birthday Club scheme, whereby readers stand a chance of securing "Holiday" and "Hobby" annuals free. Altogether it's a splendid twopen'orth!

The Great Jules Verne.

This year is the centenary of Jules Verne, the famous French writer. He was born in 1828. Perhaps this circumstance explains an inquiry to hand from a reader who asks how many books Verne wrote. Candidly I have no idea, but I have read plenty of his wonderful romances. It is to be doubted whether Jules Verne himself kept count. He was one of those magic writers who appeared to be always in the vein.

He was born at Nantes, celebrated for a lot of crimes in the Revolution, but he lived the best part of his life in the quiet old city of Amiens, where he imagined half the scientific marvels which since his day have come to pass. Some say that Verne was a disappointed man because he was not taken seriously, but, anyway, he was read by millions all over the world, and is being read now. There is not a library up and down this country minus its selection of translations of the thrilling tales of Jules Verne, and they are worth reading now, although cruising in the air has become quite an ordinary affair, and steering one's way through the depths of the ocean just a matter of routine. But you can read the Frenchman's impressions and be thrilled, for there is

(Continued on next page.)



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

real imagination therein, and the spirit of the picturesque.

You can voyage with the sinister Captain Nemo down and down in the green profoundness of the sea, where the master fiend of the ocean, Davy Jones, holds high revel, and inspires fresh legends of the fury and lash of the storm; you can seek the company of the intrepid Captain Hatteras on his Polar investigations, or step into the magic balloon which sailed serenely over the waters of Lake Tchad in Africa's heart. Jules Verne lived for his work, and he visualised the scientific triumphs which were to come decades after he had passed on his way.

Not Nice To Know.

Amongst a batch of queries and requests for advice is a complaint from a Birmingham chum, who says he has a pal of the most unpleasant type—a regular grouser and as mean as old boots. The meanness is evidenced by a desire to disparage everybody. The fellow can see no good in anyone, bar himself, I take it. Your growler always fancies he is perfect, and is only restrained from admitting as much by a mealy-mouthed mock modesty, which is ever more atrociously offensive than swank.

Well, some people are like that, and I don't for the life of me see what's to be done about it. Perhaps they grow wiser as the years roll on and it's to be hoped so. It is such a waste of time, this sniggering, sneering, would-be satirical scoffing business, and while spoiling any odd chances the individual in question may have in life—and he does not merit one chance—it tends to

create a spirit of discouragement with others. And what we all of us want to remember is that we are here to help others all the while. This is a full-time job.

Learning French.

A correspondent in Yorks asks about French books. He is busy learning French, but so far he has only secured two books of the "Good Little Georgie" kind. He wants something better, and I don't blame him. He should write to Messrs. Hachette, of 16, King William Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, and ask for their catalogue. Besides that, he should get hold of a French newspaper like the "Matin" or the "Figaro" and study the columns. He would learn more that way than he could possibly do from the phrase books, though these help if some special request has to be made.

Autumn Holidays.

Some of us are bound to take our holidays in the autumn, but I do not admit myself that pity is called for. Of course, it was pretty sweltering working on through the dog days in a stewing office, but it is often the case that a holiday in the country in the fall is second to none.

For then Nature is taking a rest. There have been big rains—real rains, with the water coursing in rivers down the sides of the lanes, and washing the face of the countryside. The woods smell sweet, and there is magic in the air. Nature is full of promise. No sooner is one summer done with than Nature carries over the account and prepares for the glory of another, and it is in the miracle of preparation that the thrill is found.

It is a restful time, old autumn, with newer tints in the skies, and with the woods of beeches and maple and ash brave in their resplendent colouring of bronze and gold and crimson. Welcome the autumn holiday, especially if you can take it on tramp.



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